Products: R&S®FS300/R&S®SM300

Measuring the Nonlinearities of RF Amplifiers Using Signal Generators and a Spectrum Analyzer

Application Note

A typical application for signal generators and spectrum analyzers is measuring nonlinearities of RF amplifiers. This application note discusses the basics of nonlinearities and describes the nonlinearity measurement using the R&S Smart Instruments™ RF Signal Generator R&S®SM300 and Spectrum Analyzer R&S®FS300.

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Contents

1 Overview

A typical application for signal generators and spectrum analyzers is measuring the nonlinearities of RF amplifiers such as compression point, harmonics, intermodulation products. This application note discusses the basics of nonlinearities and describes the nonlinearity measurement using the R&S Smart Instruments™ RF Signal Generator R&S®SM300 and Spectrum Analyzer R&S®FS300.

2 Nonlinearities – Basics

Compression

The output power of an amplifier typically exhibits a linear correspondence to the input power as it changes (see Figure 1): the gain, i.e. the output power/input power quotient remains constant (see Figure 2). If you successively raise the power of the input signal, starting at a certain point the output power no longer corresponds exactly to the input power. There is an increasing deviation, the closer you come to the amplifier's maximum output power: the amplifier compresses.

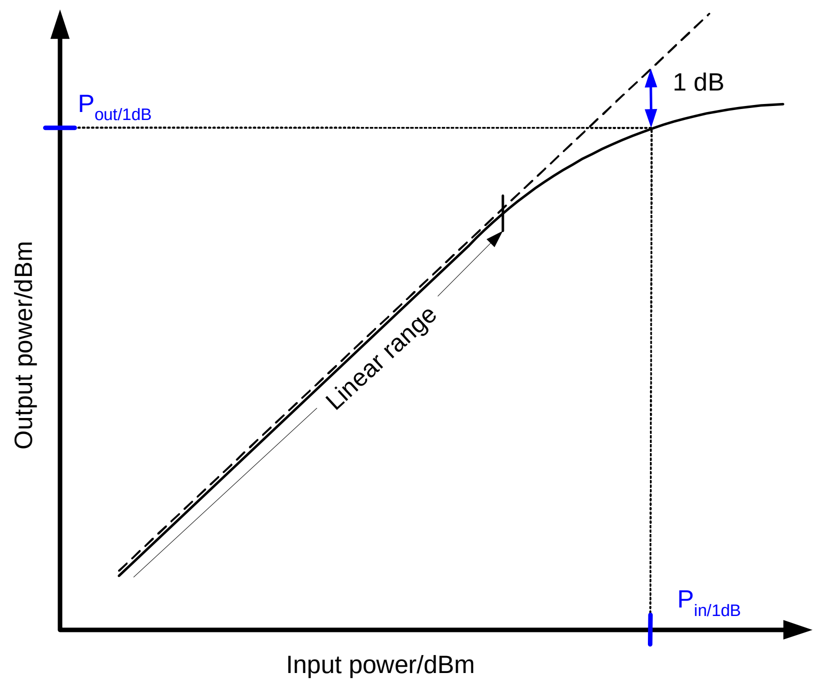


Figure 1: Definition of the 1 dB compression point at the amplifier input ($P_{in/1dB}$) and at the amplifier output ($P_{out/1dB}$)

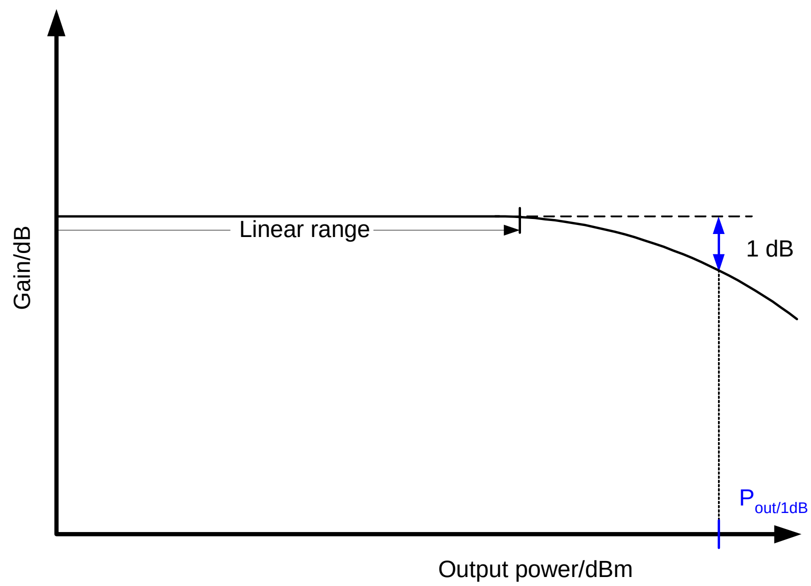


Figure 2: Gain versus output power and definition of the 1 dB compression point at the amplifier output ($P_{out/1dB}$)

The 1 dB compression point specifies the output power of an amplifier at which the output signal lags behind the nominal output signal by 1 dB. A linear gain, i.e. a gain with a sufficiently low driving signal, would yield the nominal output signal. The difference in the level of the output signal to the nominal output signal can be at least qualitatively explained by the overproportional in harmonics with a high driving signal.

To prevent the power of the harmonics from corrupting the measurement result, the output power must be selectively measured. The amplifier compression is best measured by using a setup with a signal generator and spectrum analyzer as subsequently described in chapter 3. If you want to use a power meter instead of the spectrum analyzer to measure the power, a suitable lowpass or bandpass must be connected ahead of the power meter to eliminate the effect of the harmonics on the result.

Compression measurements can also be performed with network analyzers using the power sweep function.

Nonlinearities

An ideal amplifier can be viewed as a linear twoport and transfers signals from the input to the output without distorting them. The power transfer function of such a twoport is as follows:

$$P_{out}(t) = G_P \cdot P_{in}(t) \quad \text{(equation 1)}$$

where $P_{out}(t)$ power at output of twoport

$P_{in}(t)$ power at input of twoport

G_P power gain of twoport

The connection to the input and output voltage is as follows:

$$P_{in}(t) = \frac{1}{R_{in}} \cdot v_{in}^2(t) \quad \text{(equation 2)}$$

and

$$P_{out}(t) = \frac{1}{R_L} \cdot v_{out}^2(t) \quad \text{(equation 3)}$$

where R_{in} input resistance of twoport (for simplification, assumed real)

R_L load resistance of twoport (for simplification, assumed real)

$v_{in}(t)$ voltage at input of twoport

$v_{out}(t)$ voltage at output of twoport

The voltage transfer function of the linear twoport is as follows:

$$v_{out}(t) = G_v \cdot v_{in}(t) \quad \text{(equation 4)}$$

where G_v voltage gain of twoport

For the sake of clarity, the voltage gain is examined in the following.

In practice, ideal twoports are only possible using passive components. For example, resistive attenuators are assumed to be ideal within wide limits. Twoports that contain semiconductor components – such as amplifiers – exhibit nonlinearities. A nonlinear transfer function can be approached mathematically by a power series (Taylor series). The following formula is used:

$$v_{out}(t) = \sum_{n=0}^{\infty} a_n \cdot v_{in}^n(t) = a_0 + a_1 \cdot v_{in}(t) + a_2 \cdot v_{in}^2(t) + a_3 \cdot v_{in}^3(t) + ...$$

(equation 5)

where $v_{out}(t)$ voltage at output of twoport

$v_{in}(t)$ voltage at input of twoport

a_0 DC component

a_1 gain G_v

a_n coefficient of the nonlinear element of the voltage gain

In most cases, it suffices to take the square and cubic component into account, which means that equation 5 only has to be developed up to n = 3. The effects of the nonlinearities of a twoport on its output spectrum depend on the input signal.

Single-tone driving – harmonics

If a single sinusoidal signal $v_{in}(t)$ is applied to the input of the twoport where

$$v_{in.}(t) = \hat{V}_{in}.\sin(2\pi f_{in,1} \cdot t) \quad \text{(equation 6)}$$

and

$$v_{in.}(t) = \hat{V}_{in}.\sin(\omega_{in,1} \cdot t) \quad \text{(equation 7)}$$

and $\hat{V}_{in}$: peak value of $v_{in}(t)$

$f_{in,1}$: frequency of $v_{in}(t)$,

$\omega_{in,1}(t) = 2\pi f_{in,1}$ (angular frequency)

this is referred to as single-tone driving. By inserting equation 7 into equation 5, it can be demonstrated that harmonics of the input signal having the frequencies $f_{n.H} = n \cdot f_{in,1}$ are produced by the nonlinearities (see also Figure 3):

$$v_{out}(t) = a_0 + a_1 \cdot v_{in}(t) + a_2 \cdot v_{in}^2(t) + a_3 \cdot v_{in}^3(t) + \ldots =$$

$$a_0 + a_1 \cdot \hat{V}_{in}(t)\sin\ (\omega_{in,1} \cdot t) + a_2 \cdot \hat{V}_{in}^2 \cdot \sin^2(\omega_{in,1} \cdot t) + a_3 \cdot \hat{V}_{in}^3 \cdot \sin^3(\omega_{in,1} \cdot t) + \ldots..$$

Applying the trigonometric conversion:

$$\sin^2(x) = \frac{1}{2}(1 - \cos 2x) \text{ and } \sin^3(x) = \frac{1}{4}(3 \cdot \sin x - \sin 3x)$$

to the square and cubic component yields:

$$= a_0 + a_1 \cdot \hat{V}_{in}(t) \cdot \sin\ (\omega_{in,1}t) + 0.5 \cdot a_2 \cdot \hat{V}_{in}^2 - 0.5 \cdot a_2 \cdot \hat{V}_{in}^2 \cdot \cos(2\omega_{in,1}t) +$$
$$+ 0.75 \cdot a_3 \cdot \hat{V}_{in}^2 \cdot \sin \omega_{in,1}t - 0.25 \cdot a_3 \cdot \hat{V}_{in}^2 \cdot \sin(3\omega_{in,1}t) \ldots\ldots$$

$$= a_0 + 0.5 \cdot \hat{V}_{in}^2 + (a_1 \cdot \hat{V}_{in} + 0.75 \cdot a_3 \cdot \hat{V}_{in}^3) \cdot \sin\ (\omega_{in,1}t) - 0.5 \cdot \hat{V}_{in}^2 \cdot \cos(2\omega_{in,1}t)$$
$$- 0.25 \cdot \hat{V}_{in}^3 \cdot \sin(3\omega_{in,1}t) \ldots\ldots$$

(equation 8)

Note:

The 2nd harmonic $(2\omega_{in,1})$ is phase-shifted by 90° with respect to the fundamental, since the following trigonometric relationship applies: $\cos(x) = \sin(\pi/2 - x)$

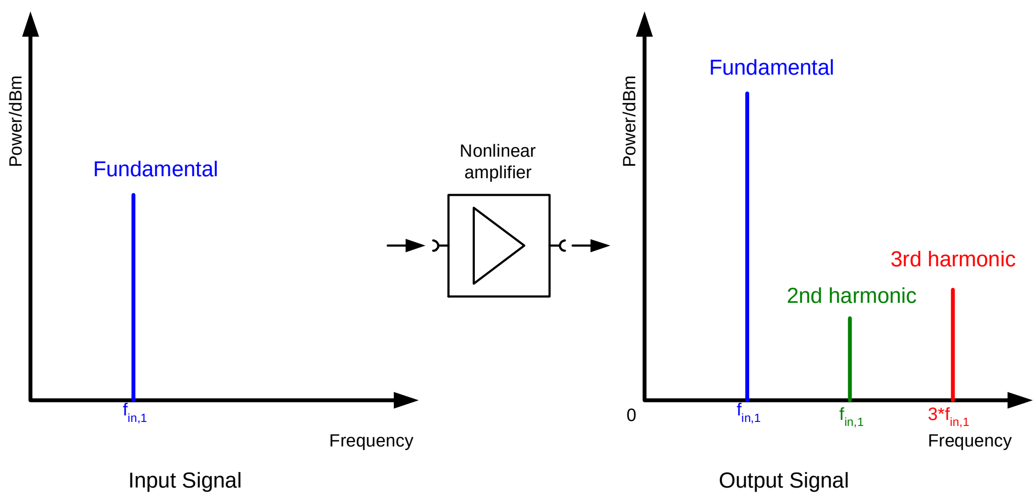


Figure 3: Spectrum before and after a nonlinear twoport

The levels of these harmonics depend on the coefficients a_n in equation 2. But they also depend on the order n of the particular harmonic and on the input level. The levels of harmonics increase overproportionally with their order as the input level increases, i.e. changing the input level by Δ dB changes the harmonic level by n · Δ dB.

Data sheet specifications of this type of signal distortion are usually limited to the 2nd and 3rd harmonic, for which the level difference a_{kN} to the fundamental at the output of the twoport is specified. Such specifications apply only to a particular input level P_{in} or output level P_{out} that must also always be specified.

A level-independent specification using the 2nd harmonic intercept (SHI) point is more favourable for comparisons.

Definition:

The SHI_{in} or SHI_{out} point corresponds to the fictitious input or output level at which the 2nd harmonic of the output signal would exhibit the same level as the fundamental at the output of the twoport. The fundamental is assumed to be linearly transferred (see Figure 4).

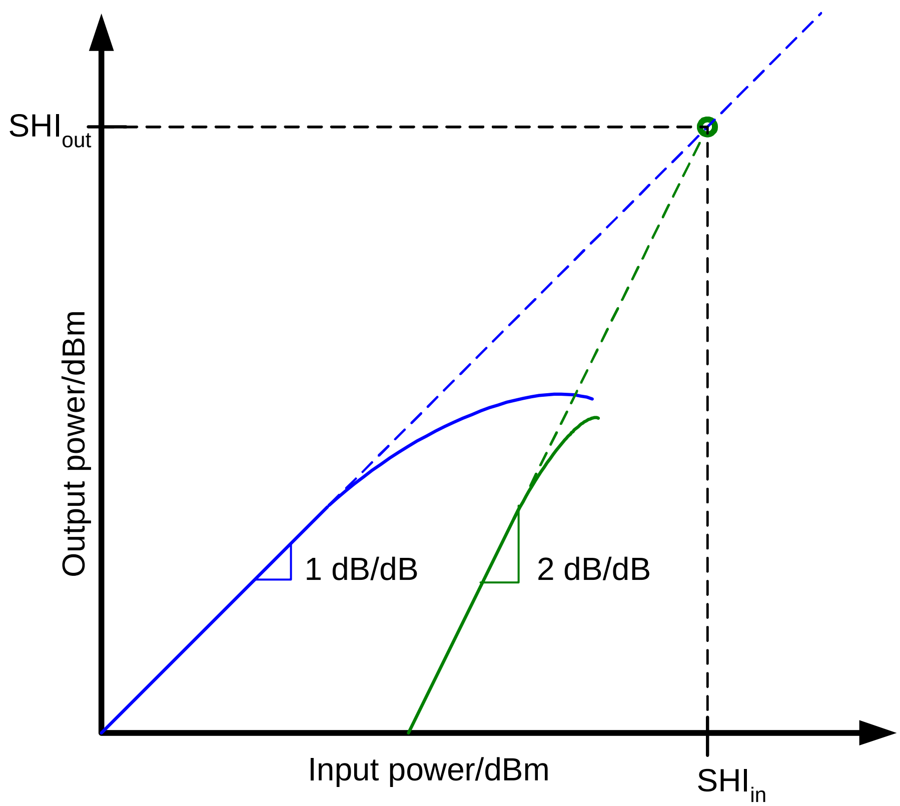


Figure 4: Graphical definition of the 2nd harmonic intercept (SHI) point at the twoport input (SHI_{in}) and at the twoport output (SHI_{out})

In practice, this point can hardly ever be reached, since the twoport, as shown in Figure 4, compresses already at low input levels. The intercept point can be referenced to the input as well as the output level and is referred to as the input or output intercept point, respectively (called SHI_{in} or SHI_{out} here).

Assuming the input level P_{in} and the harmonic ratio a_{k2} of the 2nd harmonic are known, this point can be calculated as follows:

$$SHI_{in} / dBm = a_{k2} / dB + P_{in} / dBm$$ (equation 9)

If SHI_{out} is referenced to the output, the following applies:

$$SHI_{out} / dBm = SHI_{in} / dBm + g$$ (equation 10)

where g: power gain of twoport, in dB.

or also:

$$SHI_{out} / dBm = a_{k2} / db + P_{out} / dBm$$ (equation 11)

if the output level is taken as the reference.

Example:

At 0 dBm input power and 30 dBm output power (gain g = 30 dB), an amplifier has a harmonic ratio of 30 dB (K2).

SHI_{in} = 30 dB + 0 dBm = + 30 dBm, referenced to the input

or

SHI_{out}= 30 dB + 30 dBm = + 60 dBm, referenced to the output.

Two-tone driving – intermodulation

Two-tone driving applies a signal $v_{in}(t)$ to the input of the two port. This signal consists of two sinusoidal signals of the same amplitude.

The following formula is valid for the input signal:

$$V_{in.}(t) = \hat{V}_{in,1} \cdot \sin(2\pi f_{in,1} \cdot t) + \hat{V}_{in,2} \cdot \sin(2\pi f_{in,2} \cdot t) \qquad \text{(equation 12)}$$

where $\hat{V}_{in,1,2}$ peak values of the two sinusoidal signals

$f_{in,1}$, $f_{in,2}$ signal frequencies

Inserting equation 12 into the nonlinear transfer function according to equation 5 yields at the output of the twoport, among other things, the intermodulation products listed in Table 1. The angular frequency ω is always specified, where $\omega_1 = 2 \cdot \pi \cdot f_{in,1}$ and $\omega_2 = 2 \cdot \pi \cdot f_{in,2}$.

The new frequencies produced are a result of the following trigonometric conversions:

$$\sin^2(x) = \frac{1}{2}(1 - \cos 2x)$$ 2nd harmonic

$$\sin^3(x) = \frac{1}{4}(3 \cdot \sin x - \sin 3x)$$ 3rd harmonic

$$\sin(x) \cdot \sin(y) = \frac{1}{2}\cos(x - y) - \frac{1}{2}\cos(x + y)$$

2nd order intermodulation products

as well as:

$$\sin^2(x) \cdot \sin(y) = \frac{1}{2}(1 - \cos 2x) \cdot \sin(y)$$ and

$$\cos(2x) \cdot \sin(y) = \frac{1}{2}\sin(2x - y) + \frac{1}{2}\sin(2x + y)$$

3rd order intermodulation products

Description	***Formulas***	***Comment***
DC component	$a_2 \cdot 0.5 \cdot \left(\hat{V}^2_{in,1} + \hat{V}^2_{in,2}\right)$	
Fundamentals	$a_1 \cdot \hat{V}_{in,1} \cdot \sin(\omega_1 t)$ $a_1 \cdot \hat{V}_{in,2} \cdot \sin(\omega_2 t)$	
2nd order harmonics	$a_2 \cdot 0.5 \cdot \hat{V}^2_{in,1} \cdot \cos(2\omega_1 t)$ $a_2 \cdot 0.5 \cdot \hat{V}^2_{in,2} \cdot \cos(2\omega_2 t$	-6 dB in comparison with 2nd order intermodulation products
2nd order intermodulation products	$a_2 \cdot \hat{V}_{in,1} \cdot \hat{V}_{in,2} \cdot \cos(\omega_1 +$ $a_2 \cdot \hat{V}_{in,1} \cdot \hat{V}_{in,2} \cdot \cos(\omega_2 -$	
3rd order harmonics	$a_3 \cdot 0.25 \cdot \hat{V}^3_{in,1} \cdot \cos(3\omega_1 t$ $a_3 \cdot 0.25 \cdot \hat{V}^3_{in,2} \cdot \cos(3\omega_2$	-9.54 dB in comparison with 3rd order intermodulation products $(20\log(0.25/0.75) = -9.54 dB)$
3rd order intermodulation products	$a_3 \cdot \hat{V}^2_{in,1} \cdot \hat{V}_{in,2} \cdot 0.75 \cdot \cos$ $a_3 \cdot \hat{V}_{in,1} \cdot \hat{V}^2_{in,2} \cdot 0.75 \cdot \cos$ $a_3 \cdot \hat{V}^2_{in,1} \cdot \hat{V}_{in,2} \cdot 0.75 \cdot \cos$ $a_3 \cdot \hat{V}_{in,1} \cdot \hat{V}^2_{in,2} \cdot 0.75 \cdot \cos$	

Table 1: Intermodulation products up to max. 3rd order with two-tone driving

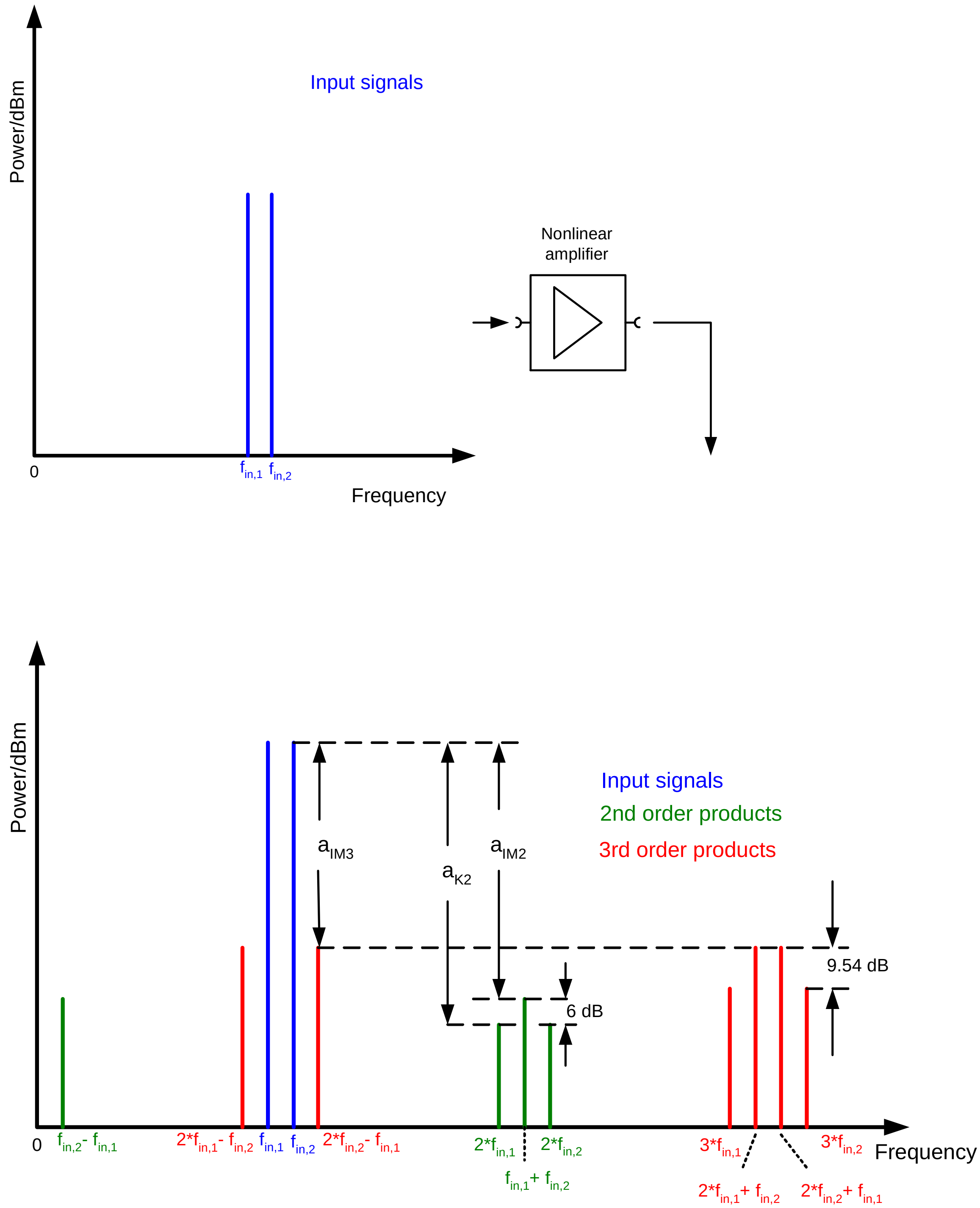


Figure 5: Output spectrum of a nonlinear twoport with two-tone driving for intermodulation products up to max. 3rd order

Besides generating harmonics, two-tone driving also produces intermodulation products (also referred to as difference frequencies). The order of the intermodulation products corresponds to the sum of the order numbers of the components involved. For example, for the product with

$2 \cdot f_{in,1} + 1 \cdot f_{in,2}$ the order is 2 + 1 = 3. Table 1 takes into account intermodulation products only up to the 3rd order.

The frequencies of even-numbered intermodulation products (e.g. 2nd order) are far away from the two input signals, namely at the sum frequency and at the difference frequency. They are in general easy to suppress by filtering.

Some of the odd-numbered intermodulation products (the difference products) always occur in the immediate vicinity of the input signals and are therefore difficult to suppress by filtering.

Depending on the application, products of both even- and odd-numbered order can cause interference. In the case of measurements on cable TV (CATV) amplifiers where a frequency range of more than one octave is to be tested, harmonics as well as intermodulation products of an even-numbered order occur in the range of interest.

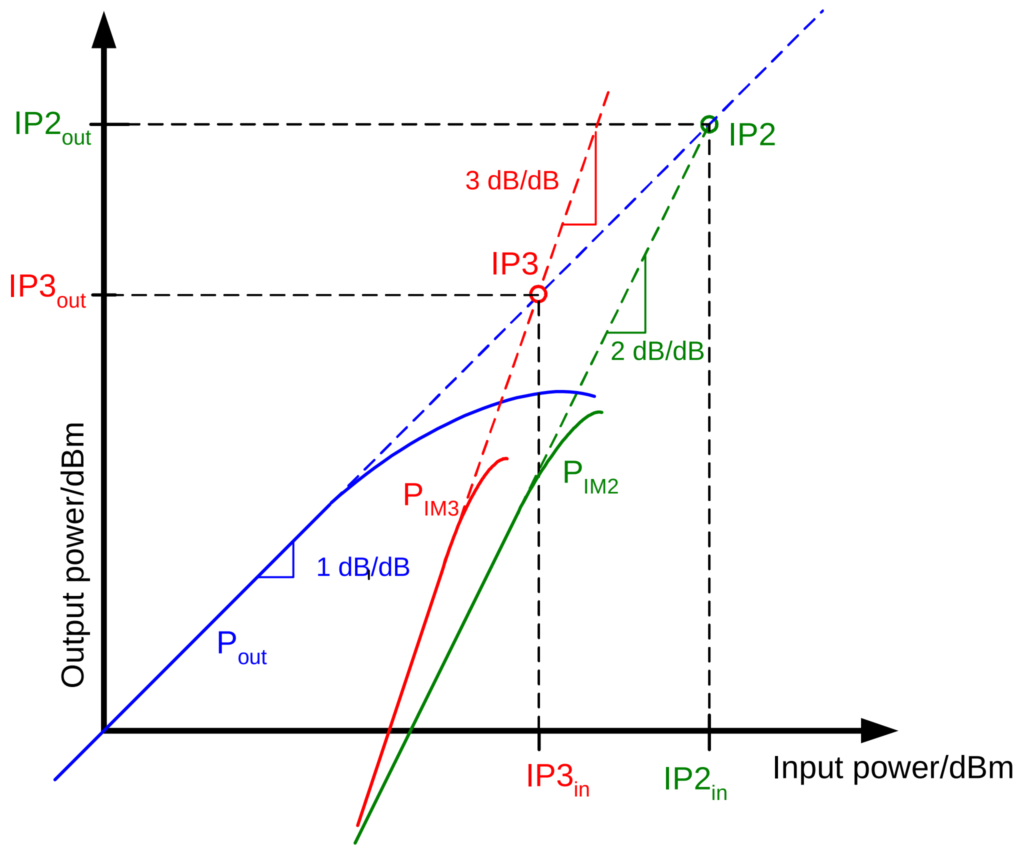


Figure 6: Graphical definition of 2nd and 3rd order intercept points at the input ($IP2_{in}$, $IP3_{in}$) and at the output ($IP2_{out}$, $IP3_{out}$) of an amplifier

As with higher-order harmonics, a level change of the two sinusoidal carriers at the input by Δ dB causes the level of the associated intermodulation product to change by n · Δ dB. Specifications regarding the level differences between intermodulation products and the fundamentals of the sinusoidal carriers thus always require that the output level of the amplifier be specified, for otherwise no statement can be made about its linearity.

Therefore, here too it is advantageous to calculate the nth-order intercept point. The following formula applies to the nth-order intercept point referenced to the input:

$$IPn_{in} = \frac{a_{IMn}}{n-1} + P_{in}$$ (equation 13)

where IPn_{in} nth-order input intercept point, in dBm

a_{IMn} level difference between intermodulation product of nth order and fundamental of input signal, in dB

P_{in} level of one of the two input signals, in dBm

In most cases, the intercept points of the 2nd and 3rd order are specified (see also Figure 6). They are abbreviated as IP2 or SOI (2nd order intercept) and IP3 or TOI (third order intercept), respectively.

Definition:

The 2nd order intercept point $IP2_{in}$ or $IP2_{out}$ corresponds to the fictitious input or output level at which the 2nd order intermodulation product would exhibit the same level as the fundamental at the output of the twoport.

The 3rd order intercept point $IP3_{in}$ or $IP3_{out}$ corresponds to the fictitious input or output level at which the third order intermodulation product would exhibit the same level as the fundamental at the output of the twoport.

In both cases, the fundamental is assumed to be linearly transferred (see Figure 6).

The following formulas apply, respectively, to the **2nd and 3rd order input intercept points**:

$$IP2_{in}/dBm = a_{IM2}/dB + P_{in}/dBm$$ (equation 14)

and

$$IP3_{in}/dBm = \frac{a_{IM3}}{2}/dB + P_{in}/dBm$$ (equation 15)

The output intercept points can be calculated from the input intercept points (or, vice versa, the input intercept points from the output intercept points) by adding the gain (g) of the twoport (in dB).

The following formulas apply, respectively, to the **2nd and 3rd order output intercept points**:

$$IP2_{out} / dBm = a_{IM2} / dB + P_{in} / dBm + g / dB$$ (equation 16)

or

$$IP2_{out} / dBm = a_{IM2} / dB + P_{out} / dBm$$ (equation 17)

and

$$IP3_{out} / dBm = \frac{a_{IM3}}{2} / dB + P_{in} / dBm + g / dB$$ (equation 18)

or

$$IP3_{out} / dBm = \frac{a_{IM3}}{2} / dB + P_{out} / dBm$$ (equation 19)

2nd order intermodulation products with two-tone driving as well as the second harmonic with single-tone driving are the result of the square component of the nonlinear transfer function.

Between **SHI** and **IP2** exists a fixed correlation that is derived from the coefficients from Table 1 (factor of 0.5 of the 2nd order harmonics vis-à-vis the 2nd order intermodulation products):

Second harmonic intercept (SHI) point :

$$SHI / dBm = IP2 / dBm + 6dB$$ (equation 20)

Therefore, in data sheets most of the time only IP2 or SHI is specified, rarely both values simultaneously. Intercept points are specified almost always in dBm.

3 Brief Presentation of the Measuring Instruments Used

The practical implementation of different linearity measurements is described on the basis of the RF Signal Generator R&S SM300 and the Spectrum Analyzer R&S FS300, briefly presented in the following.

RF Signal Generator R&S SM300 9 kHz to 3 GHz

The R&S SM300 is a favourably priced signal generator for applications in the 9 kHz to 3 GHz frequency range. The instrument features a broad scope of functions, good technical characteristics and compact design. The R&S SM300 offers an immense range of applications — whether on the lab bench, in service or as a flexible measuring instrument in automatic production systems.

Condensed data of the RF Signal Generator R&S SM300:

Frequency range: 9 kHz to 3 GHz (RF), 20 Hz to 80 kHz (LF)

Frequency resolution: 0.1 Hz

Modulation modes: AM/FM/PM/pulse/IQ

Level resolution: 0.1 dB

Level uncertainty: <1 dB (for levels >–120 dBm)

Level range: –127 dBm to 13 dBm

Single-sideband (SSB) phase noise: <–95 dBc (1 Hz) (at f = 1 GHz, ?f = 20 kHz)

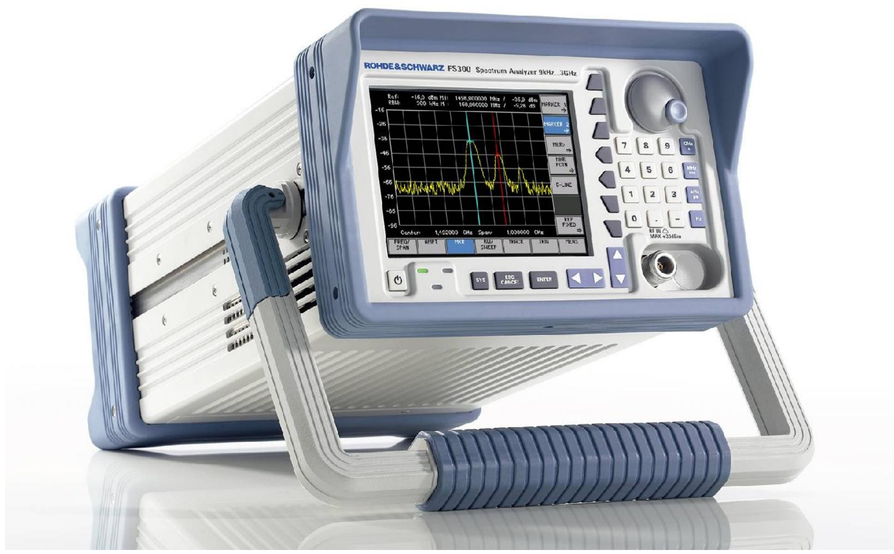
Harmonics: <30 dBc

Frequency sweep, level sweep

Remote control via USB interface

Spectrum Analyzer R&S FS300   9 kHz to 3 GHz

The R&S FS300 is an economical spectrum analyzer with a frequency range of 9 kHz to 3 GHz. Owing to its modern, digital frequency processing technique, it offers high measurement quality at a favourable price. Whether on the lab bench, in service or as a flexible measuring instrument in automatic production systems, its range of applications is universal.



Condensed data of the Spectrum Analyzer R&S FS300:

Frequency range: 9 kHz to 3 GHz

Resolution bandwidths: 200 Hz to 1 MHz (1, 2, 3, 5 sequences)

Video bandwidths: 10 Hz to 1 MHz (1, 2, 3, 5 sequences)

Displayed average noise level: <–110 dBm, typ. –120 dBm (300 Hz)

Intermodulation-free range: <–70 dBc at –30 dBm input level

Maximum input level: 33 dBm

SSB phase noise, 10 kHz offset: <–90 dBc (1 Hz)

Markers: normal, delta, noise

Level uncertainty: <1.5 dB

Bright TFT colour display with 320 x 240 pixel resolution

High picture refresh rate

Remote control via USB interface

4 Practical Implementation of Linearity Measurements

Compression measurements

Test setup:

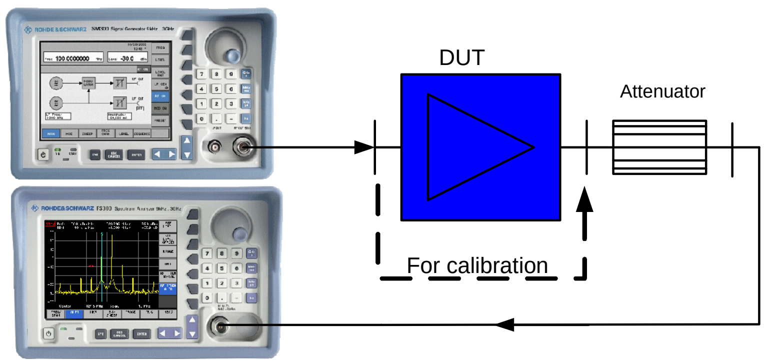


Figure 7: Test setup for compression measurement on amplifiers. For calibration, the DUT is bypassed.

Figure 7 shows the test setup for compression measurements on amplifiers using a signal generator and a spectrum analyzer. The signal generator feeds the amplifier input. To protect the spectrum analyzer input against overloading, the amplifier output is connected with the spectrum analyzer input via a suitable attenuator (depending on the amplifier's power).

To calibrate the test setup, disconnect the DUT and connect the generator output directly to the attenuator. On the spectrum analyzer, enter the deviation of the analyzer's level display from the level set on the generator as the *Ref Level Offset*.

If you now connect the DUT in between, the correct output power of the amplifier is displayed on the analyzer, and the difference in the levels displayed on the generator and the analyzer is equal to the DUT's gain. The effect of the cable attenuation from the power attenuator to the analyzer is eliminated.

Example:

The 1 dB compression point on an amplifier is to be verified at 824 MHz. The gain is 25 dB, the 1 db compression point +15 dBm. A 20 dB attenuator is inserted ahead of the analyzer input.

For calibration, connect the generator output to the analyzer input via the 20 dB attenuator.

Calibration:

SM300	*SYS:PRESET*
	FREQ 824 ***MHz***
	LEVEL -5 dBm ***ENTER***
	RF ON

FS300	*SYS:PRESET*
	FREQ/SPAN:CENTER 824 MHz ***ENTER***
	SPAN 100 MHz ***ENTER***
	⇨AMPT:REF LEVEL -20 dBm ***ENTER*** *(default state)*
	⇨MKR:MKR1:PEAK

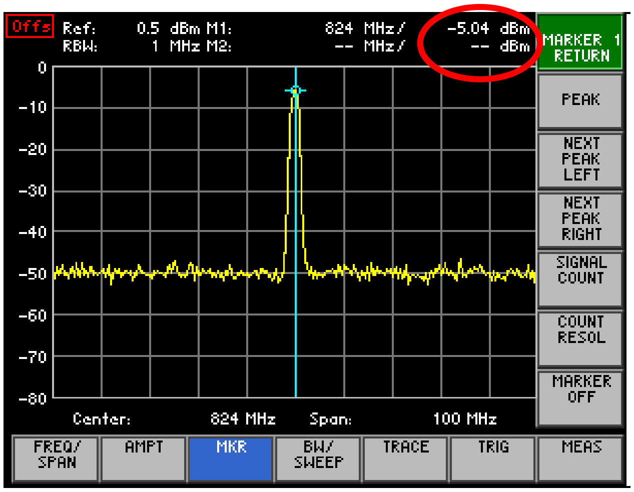
Now enter the difference of the power set on the generator (P_G) to the power measured with marker 1 (P_{M1}) as the *Ref Level Offset*.

Ref Level Offset x = $P_G - P_{M1}$

Example:

P_G = -5 dBm, P_{M1} = -25.5 dBm → Ref Level Offset = -5 – (-25.5) = 20.5 dB

FS300	⇦AMPT:REF LEVEL OFFSET x dB



The marker display now reads -5 dBm +- 0.1 dB, i.e. the power set on the generator. Before looping in the amplifier, reduce the generator power and set the reference level on the analyzer to +25 dBm.

SM300	*LEVEL -20 dBm* ***ENTER***

FS300	*AMPT:REF LEVEL 25 dBm* ***ENTER***

☞ *Now connect the amplifier output with the attenuator and the amplifier input with the generator output. Increase the generator in steps of 1 dB, and read off the MKR1 level on the analyzer each time.*

Generator level/dBm	Analyzer MKR1/dBm	Generator level/dBm	Analyzer MKR1/dBm
-20	5.3	-12	12.7
-19	6.3	-11	13.6
-18	7.2	-10	14.3
-17	8.15	-9	14.9
-16	9.0	-8	15.4
-15	10.0	-7	15.8
-14	10.8	-6	16.2
-13	11.8	-5	16.4

Table 2: Example of the measured values for the output power versus the input power of the amplifier. The generator level was increased at 1 dB increments and the marker 1 level was read off with each increment.

Using a spreadsheet analysis program you can now easily display the output versus the input power, or the gain versus the input power, and read off the 1 dB compression point (+14.3 dBm at the output, -10 dBm at the input); see Figures 8 and 9.

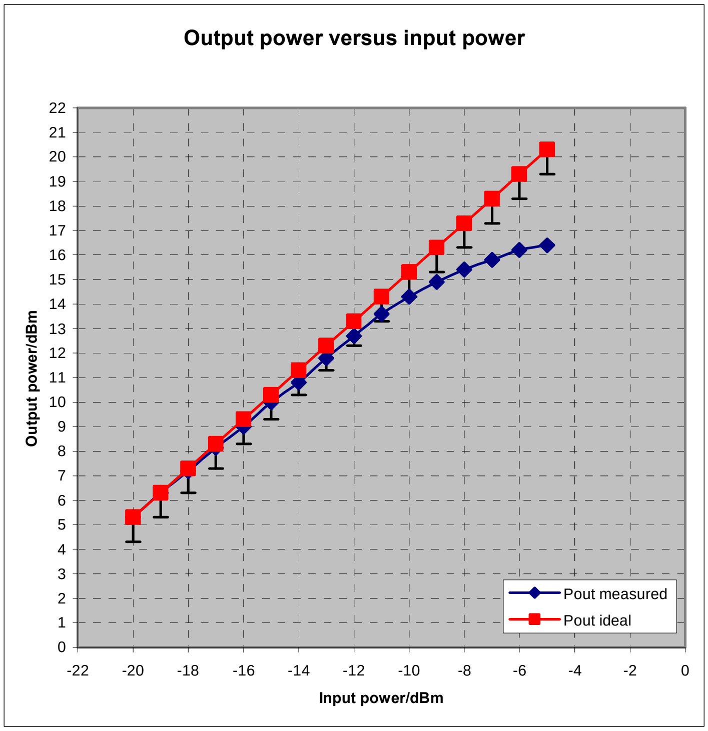


Figure 8: Graphical display of the measured values (Table 2). The 1 dB compression point is the intersection point of the 1 db error indicator of the ideal trace with the measured trace ($P_{in/1dB}$ = approx. -10 dBm, $P_{out/1dB}$ = approx. +14.3 dBm)

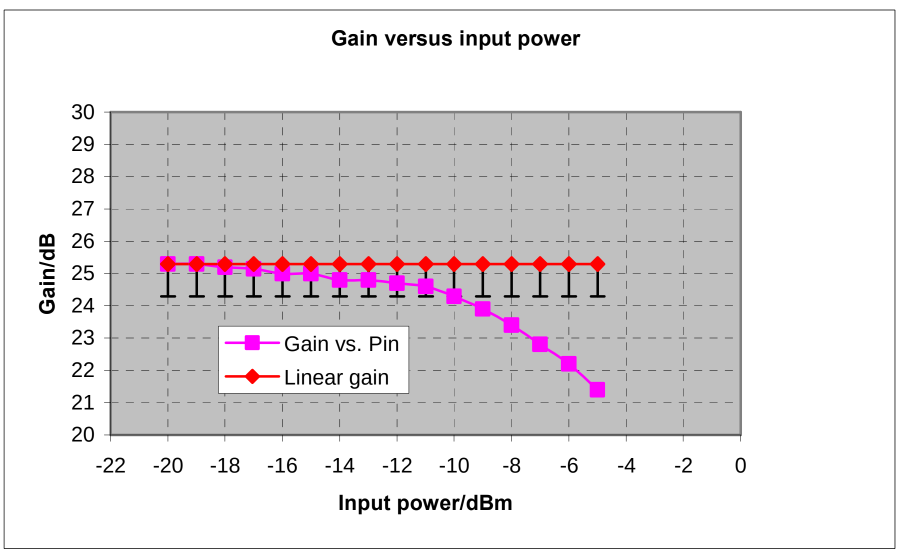


Figure 9: Evaluation of the measured values (Table 2), gain versus input power. The 1 dB compression point ($P_{in/1dB}$) is the intersection of the 1 db error indicator of the ideal trace with the measured trace (approx. -10 dBm).

Harmonic measurement K2, K3, ... Kn

Test setup:

Figure 10 depicts the typical test setup for a harmonic measurement on amplifiers. An additional lowpass filter at the generator output is used to suppress the harmonics that are generated on the generator itself and corrupt the measurement result.

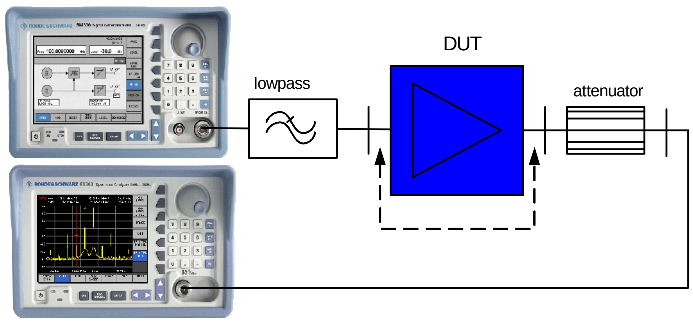


Figure 10: Test setup for harmonic measurement on amplifiers. A lowpass filter at the generator output suppresses the generator's own harmonics.

Lowpass filter:

The cutoff frequency and the slope of the filter are selected such that the fundamental is within the filter's passband but the harmonics are sufficiently attenuated. The harmonics of <-30 dB specified for the signal generator are then further suppressed by the filter attenuation (the 2nd harmonic to approx. -60 dB in Figure 11; the filter attenuates about 30 dB in this example) and the measurement range is accordingly expanded.

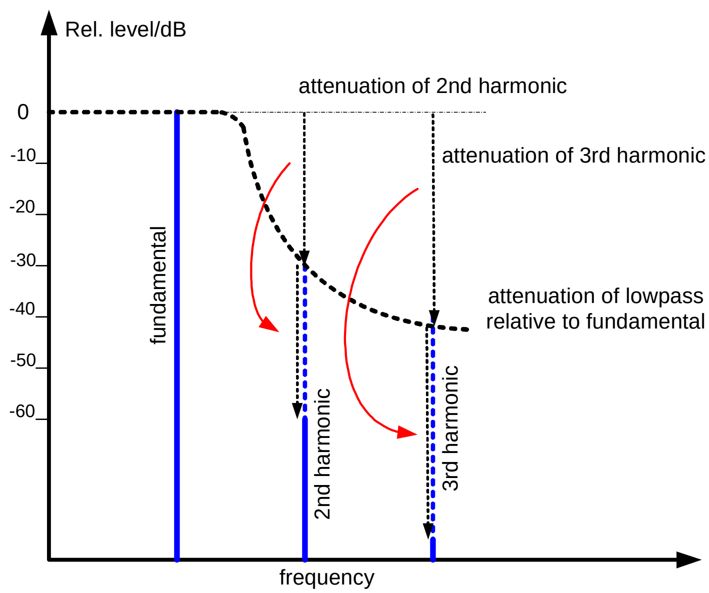


Figure 11: Lowpass for suppressing the harmonics of the signal generator. The harmonics are suppressed by the attenuation of the lowpass.

The dynamic range of the spectrum analyzer for the harmonic as well as the intermodulation measurement is limited by the analyzer's nonlinearity, which results in the generation of harmonics or, with two-tone driving, intermodulation products. It is also limited by the analyzer's display noise. The effect of the spectrum analyzer's nonlinearity is mainly determined by the level at its input mixer. This makes it necessary to keep the level at the mixer as low as possible, i.e. to switch on a high attenuation on the analyzer or to insert an external attenuator.

The display noise of the analyzer depends directly on the attenuation ahead of the analyzer's input mixer and is lowest when there is as little attenuation as possible – at best none at all – ahead of the mixer. The resolution filter used also has a quite significant effect on the display noise, but it also affects the required sweep time and thus the measurement speed. For detailed explanations and formulas, refer to [1].

If you set higher requirements on the dynamic range, it is generally not advisable or not even possible to display the complete signal with harmonics in one sweep: either the dynamic range is not wide enough or the sweep time becomes unacceptably long if the resolution bandwidth (RBW) is reduced. For this reason, the fundamental and the harmonics are measured in separate sweeps. The following example uses a span of 10 MHz and an RBW of 10 kHz, which results in a sweep time of 310 ms with the R&S FS300 and represents a good compromise between the dual requirements of having a wide dynamic range and acceptable measurement speed.

Reference measurement:

For the harmonic measurement in separate sweeps, perform a reference measurement on the fundamental: place marker 1 on the fundamental and activate the REF FIXED function. Now you can change the frequency and level setting as desired and, using marker 2 (relative), still display the level of the desired harmonic relative to the previously measured fundamental.

Some relevant characteristics of the Spectrum Analyzer R&S FS300 with regard to measuring harmonics:

Harmonics:

For the R&S FS300, harmonics are specified at =–60 dBc at a level of -40 dBm and 0 dB input attenuation.

(This yields, according to equation 9, an SHI_{IN} of: 60 db - 40 dBm = +20 dBm.)

Thus, if you wish to ensure that the harmonics generated by the R&S FS300 do not exceed 60 dB, its level at the input mixer must not exceed -40 dBm.

In its default state, the internal attenuator of the R&S FS300 is set to Auto Mode Normal, and the analyzer sets the attenuation in increments of 2 dB according to the reference level and the reference level offset such that the level at the input mixer is nominally -36 dBm; the level is thus 4 dB higher than that required for the desired dynamic range of 60 dB.

An appropriate manual setting of the analyzer attenuator is advisable, i.e. an attenuation that is 4 dB higher than the RF ATTENUATION MODE AUTO NORMAL setting.

Display noise caused by wideband noise:

The displayed average noise level of the R&S FS300 is specified at =–110 dBm, typ. –120 dBm, at 300 Hz resolution bandwidth and 0 dB input attenuation. Increasing the attenuation increases the noise level. Increasing the bandwidth increases the noise level according to the following formula:

$$10 \cdot \log(\frac{RBW / Hz}{300 Hz})$$

Example:

A measurement is made with 10 kHz bandwidth:

The noise level then increases nominally by $10 \cdot \log(\frac{10000 Hz}{300 Hz}) =$ 15 dB, from typ. -120 dBm to -105 dBm.

Note:

This idealized situation applies if the noise display of the analyzer is due exclusively to noise ahead of the resolution filter, e.g. to input noise. Noise in the signal path following the resolution filter (e.g. the noise of the A/D converter), however, cannot be influenced by the resolution filter. With the R&S FS300, the noise display at 10 kHz is therefore only about 8 dB worse than it is at 300 Hz.

Example of harmonic measurement K2, K3:

The harmonic ratio (2nd and 3rd harmonic) of a mobile radio power amplifier is to be measured at 824 MHz and an output power of +27 dBm. The amplifier has a nominal gain of 30 dB. A power attenuator with 20 dB attenuation is used. (Note: The R&S FS300 is designed for input levels up to +33 dBm, so the attenuator would not be absolutely necessary.)

SM300	*SYS:PRESET*
	MAIN:FREQ:824 ***MHz***
	LEVEL -5 dBm ***ENTER***
	RF ON

FS300	*SYS:PRESET*
	AMPT:REF OFFSET 20 dB)*

	REF LEVEL: +30 dBm

*) You obtain a more exact display of the output power by performing a calibration as described on p. 19 under Calibration.

☞ Increase the level of the signal generator using the step keys until the level at 824 MHz reaches the desired 27 dBm. To do this, first select the 1 dB position with the ◀ ▶ key and then increase the level by pressing the ▲ key. Subsequently press ◀ ▶ to select the 0.1 dB position and fine-tune the level using the ▲ ▼ keys.

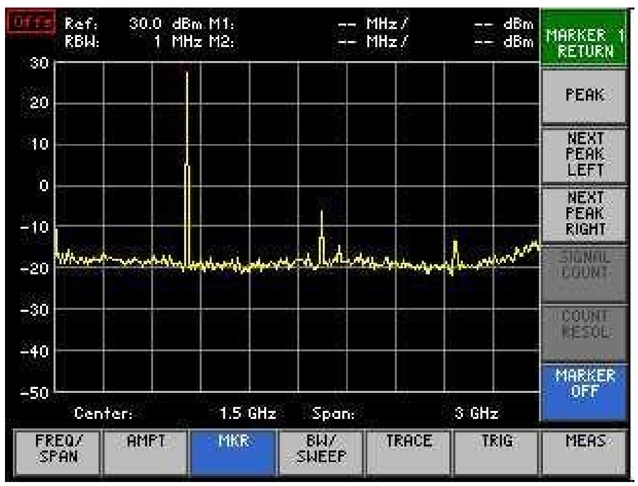


Figure 12: Overview measurement of the harmonics in one sweep. The fundamental and the harmonics are displayed at the same time. The dynamic range is limited, since the resolution bandwidth (RBW) cannot be sufficiently reduced.

Reference measurement:

For the harmonic measurement in separate sweeps, perform a reference measurement on the fundamental: place marker 1 on the fundamental and activate the REF FIXED function. Now you can change the frequency and level setting as desired and, using marker 2 (relative), still display the level of the desired harmonic relative to the previously measured fundamental.

FS300	*FREQ/SPAN:CENTER 824* ***MHz***
	SPAN 10 ***MHz***
	BW/SWEEP:RES BW MANUAL 10 kHz ***ENTER***
	MARKER:MARKER 1:PEAK: MARKER1 RETURN

	REF FIXED:REF FIXED ON: FIXED RETURN

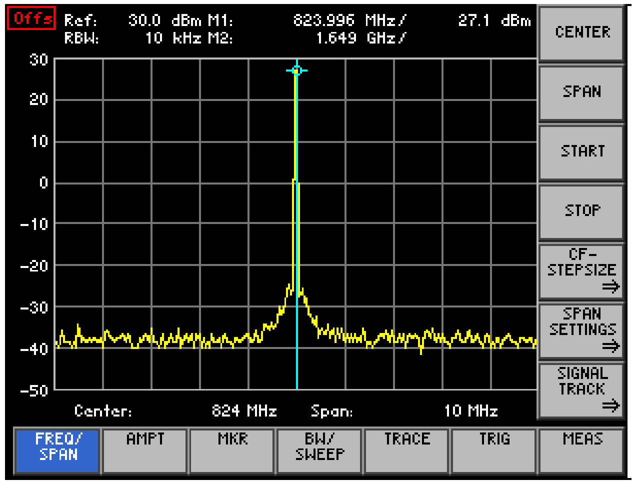


Figure 13: Reference measurement for measuring the harmonics in separate sweeps. Due to the small span, the resolution bandwidth (RBW) can be reduced to e.g. 10 kHz to extend the dynamic range, without the sweep time becoming unreasonably long.

To measure the ratio of the 2nd harmonic to the fundamental, place marker 2 on the harmonic.

FS300	*FREQ/SPAN: CENTER 1648* ***MHz***
	MARKER 2:MARKER 2 PEAK: MARKER 2 RETURN

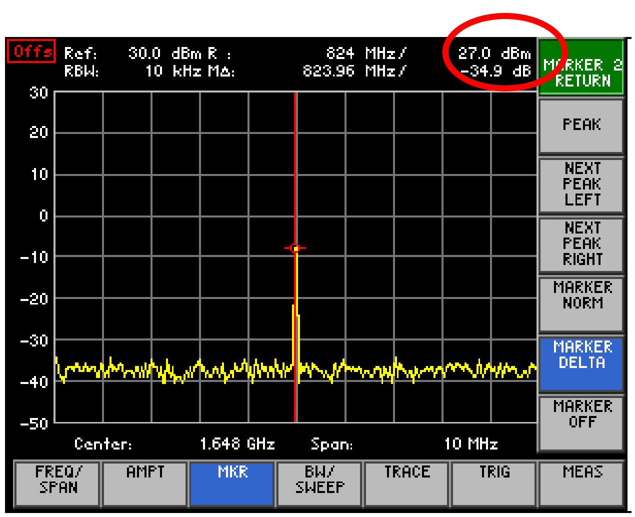


Figure 14: Measurement of the 2nd harmonic with -34.9 dBm at 1648 MHz using marker 2 as delta marker. The reference is the 27 dBm level of the fundamental at 824 MHz.

Proceed analogously to measure the 3rd harmonic:

FS300	*FREQ/SPAN: CENTER 2472* ***MHz***
	MARKER 2:MARKER 2 PEAK:MARKER 2 RETURN

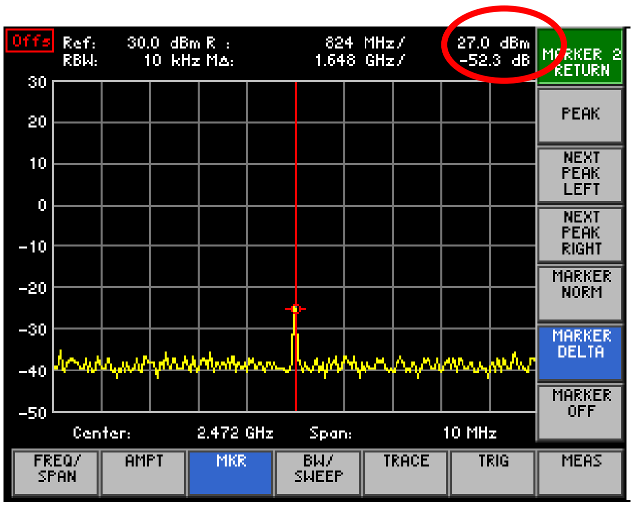


Figure 15: Measurement of the 3rd harmonic with -52.3 dBm at 2472 MHz using marker 2 as delta marker. The reference is the level of the fundamental at 824 MHz.

Tip:

To test whether the measured values for the 2nd and 3rd harmonic are not generated or affected by the analyzer, increase the attenuation of the input attenuator by 10 dB.

If the measurement results remain unchanged or deteriorate (due to the increased noise influence), influence from the analyzer can be ruled out.

However, if the measured ratios improve considerably (by approx. <1 dB), the nonlinearity of the analyzer has already had a significant effect on the measurement results.

Calculating the intercept point K2 (SHI):

The measured values for the output power (27 dBm) and the 2nd harmonic ratio (34.9 dBm) are used to calculate the output intercept point of the amplifier according to equation 11:

SHI = 34.9 dBm + 27 dBm = 61.9 dBm

Intermodulation measurements

Test setup:

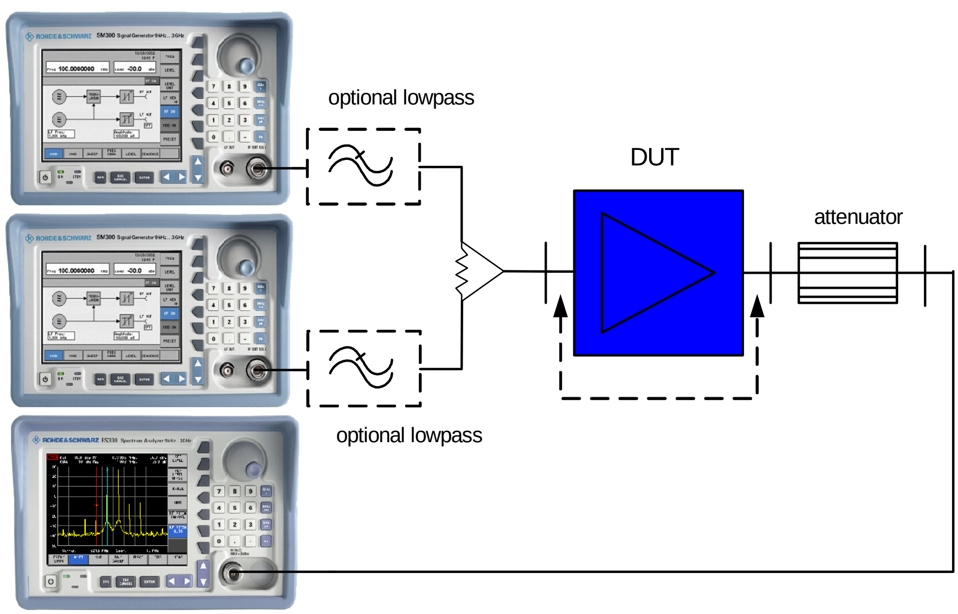


Figure 16: Test setup for intermodulation measurement on amplifiers. The two generators are interconnected via a power combiner. The optional lowpass filters are used to eliminate the effect of the generator harmonics.

The test setup for the intermodulation measurement on amplifiers is depicted in Figure 16. Two generators that each generate a single-tone signal with the desired offset (e.g. 1 MHz) are interconnected by means of a power combiner. There are basically two kinds of power splitters: purely resistive power splitters and hybrid power splitters. Hybrid models (e.g. from Mini-Circuits, type ZFSC 2-2500) have the advantage of lower attenuation (nominally 3 dB compared with nominally 6 dB of a resistive power splitter) and better isolation of the two inputs (typically 20 dB compared with 6 dB of a resistive power splitter). A disadvantage, however, is the limited frequency range – therefore a suitable type must be selected for the particular application.

The optional lowpass filters are used to suppress generator harmonics, which may otherwise corrupt the measurement results (by mixture products from the harmonics occurring at the d2 and d3 intermodulation products to be measured).

Dynamic range

(see also p. 23)

The dynamic range of the intermodulation measurement is limited by the intermodulation generated by the test setup itself and by noise.

Intermodulation:

- Intermodulation of the two generators due to insufficient decoupling of the two outputs. This occurs especially at high levels, when there is only little or no attenuation at the output. Using isolators can improve this. Isolators ensure further decoupling (typ. 20 dB per isolator), without significantly attenuating the output signal.
- Intermodulation in the spectrum analyzer depends on the driving signal: the higher the level at the input mixer of the spectrum analyzer, the higher the intermodulation products. The level of the d3 intermodulation products increases by three times the dB value of the level increase, the level of the d2 intermodulation products by two times the dB value.

Noise:

- Besides the input noise of the spectrum analyzer, the measurement of d3 intermodulation products near the carrier is also affected by phase noise. The phase noise of the generator used combines with that of the analyzer at each measurement frequency. See also [1], p. 139 ff.

Some relevant characteristics of the Spectrum Analyzer R&S FS300 with regard to measuring d3 intermodulation products:

d3 intermodulation products:

The intermodulation-free range of the R&S FS300 is specified at –70 dBc at a level of 2 x -36 dBm. According to equation 15, this corresponds to an input intercept point IP3 of -1 dBm at the input mixer. If you wish to ensure that the IP3 intermodulation products generated by the R&S FS300 do not exceed 60 dB, the level per signal must not exceed -31 dBm.

In its default state, the internal attenuator of the R&S FS300 is set to Auto Mode Normal, and the analyzer sets the attenuation in increments of 2 dB according to the reference level and the reference level offset such that the level on the input mixer is nominally -36 dBm; the level is thus 5 dB below the permissible value for the desired dynamic range of 60 dB. A manual correction (reduction) of the attenuation by 4 dB to 6 dB is permissible.

Display noise caused by phase noise:

The value specified for the R&S FS300 is -90 dBc/1 Hz at 10 kHz from the carrier. The value for the R&S SM300 is -95 dBc/1 Hz at 1 GHz and at 20 kHz from the carrier. With a carrier offset of 1 MHz as described in the following measurement examples, however, the phase noise at 1 MHz from the nearest signal is relevant. A typical measured value for this is -108 dBm/Hz as the sum of the combined R&S FS300/R&S SM300 phase noise at 824 MHz in the following measurement example.

Display noise caused by wideband noise:

See also pp. 23/24. The displayed average noise level specified for the R&S FS300 is =–110 dBm, typ. –120 dBm, at 300 Hz resolution bandwidth and 0 dB input attenuation. Increasing the attenuation increases the noise level. Increasing the bandwidth increases the noise level according to the following formula:

$$10 \cdot \log(\frac{RBW / Hz}{300 Hz})$$

Example:

A measurement is made with 10 kHz bandwidth:

The noise level increases nominally by $10 \cdot \log(\frac{10000 Hz}{300 Hz}) =$ 15 dB, from typ. -120 dBm to -105 dBm.

In the following Excel spreadsheet (Figure 17; see also [1], p. 149), the different contributions of d3 intermodulation products, phase noise at 1 MHz, and wideband noise for the R&S SM300 and R&S FS300 combination were added up. You can see that the optimal dynamic range of approx. -63 dB is attained with a level of approx. –36 dBm at the R&S FS300 input mixer.

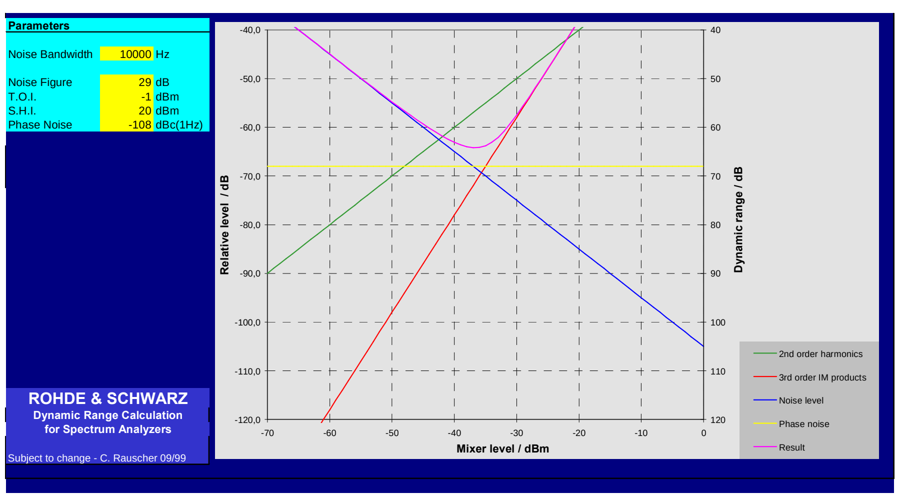


Figure 17: Dynamic range of the R&S FS300 taking into account thermal noise, phase noise and 3rd order intermodulation products (noise figure = 29 dB, IP3 = -1 dB, phase noise = -108 dBc/Hz, noise bandwidth = 10 kHz)

Example of d3 intermodulation measurement:

The 3rd order intermodulation ratio on a mobile radio power amplifier is to be measured with a two-tone signal of 824 MHz and 825 MHz (1 MHz frequency offset) and 27 dBm output power per signal. The amplifier has a nominal gain of 30 dB. A power attenuator with 20 dB attenuation is used.

Calibrating the test setup:

In order for the intermodulation ratio to be determined at the correct (input and output) power, the test setup must be calibrated. First the path attenuation from the generator outputs to the combiner output is determined and corrected using the generators' level offset function. Subsequently the path attenuation from the input of the power attenuator to the analyzer input is measured and corrected using the analyzer's level offset function.

☞ *Connect both generators (SM300_1, SM300_2) to the combiner as shown in Figure 16. Connect the analyzer directly to the combiner output using a cable that is as short as possible.*

SM300_1	*SYS:PRESET*
	MAIN:FREQ:824 ***MHz***
	LEVEL -5 dBm ***ENTER***
	RF ON

FS300	*FREQ/SPAN:CENTER 824.5* ***MHz***
	SPAN 10 ***MHz***
	AMPT:REF Level 0 dBm ***ENTER***
	BW/SWEEP:RES BW MANUAL 10 kHz ***ENTER***
	MARKER:MARKER 1:PEAK: MARKER1 RETURN

SM300_2	*SYS:PRESET*
	MAIN:FREQ:825 ***MHz***
	LEVEL -5 dBm ***ENTER***
	RF ON

FS300	*MARKER:MARKER 2:NEXT PEAK RIGHT:*

	MARKER2 RETURN

Marker 1 now indicates the level at 824 MHz on the combiner output, marker 2 the level at 825 MHz. Enter the difference of the measured levels ($P_{M1,2}$) to the level displays on the generators ($P_{G1,2}$) as the level offset and then reset the generator level to -5 dBm.

Level offset SM300_1 = P_{MKR1} – P_{SM300_1}

Level offset SM300_2 = P_{MKR2} – P_{SM300_2}

Example: marker 1: -9.7 dBm

Level offset SM300_1: -9.7 dBm – (-5 dBm) = -4.7 dB

SM300_1	⇨⇨⇨ *LEVEL:LEVEL Offset*
	MAIN:FREQ:825 ***MHz***
	LEVEL –x dB ***ENTER***
	⇦⇦⇦*MAIN:LEVEL -5 dBm*) does not function at present!*
	⇦⇦⇦*MAIN:LEVEL*⇧⇧⇧⇧*ENTER* *(*

SM300_2	⇨⇨⇨ *LEVEL:LEVEL Offset*
	MAIN:FREQ:825 ***MHz***
	LEVEL –y dB ***ENTER***
	⇦⇦⇦*MAIN:LEVEL -5 dBm*

The powers set on the generators (-5 dBm) should now be applied to the combiner output and measured by the analyzer with markers 1 and 2.

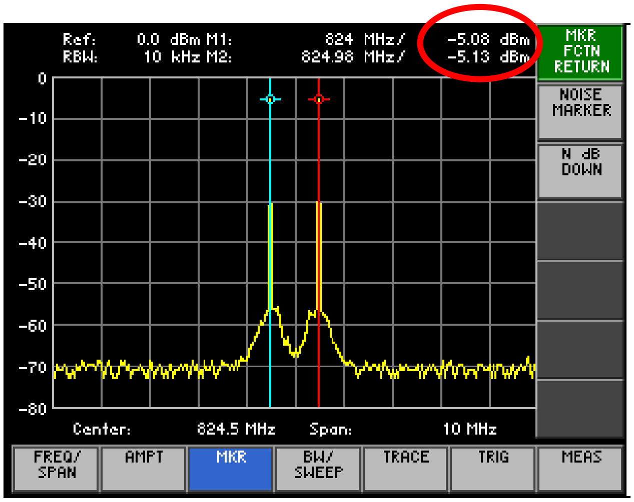


Figure 18: Level on the combiner output after the correction of the generator output level by the path attenuation

☞ *Now connect the combiner output to the analyzer via the power attenuator and read off the measured value of marker 1* (P_{M1}).

Now enter the difference of the power set on generator SM300_1 (P_{SM300_1}) to the power measured with marker 1 ($P_{MKR\ 1}$) as the *Ref Level Offset*.

Ref Level Offset x = P_{SM300_1} - P_{MKR1}

Example:

P_G = -5 dBm, P_{M1} = -25.5 dBm → *Ref Level Offset* = -5 - (-25.5) = 20.5 dB

FS300	⇦AMPT:REF LEVEL OFFSET x dB

The R&S FS300 now displays the power at the combiner output and at the attenuator as depicted in Figure 18.

If the amplifier to be measured is subsequently connected between the combiner and the power attenuator, the level displays of the two generators show the input power of the signals at 824 MHz and 825 MHz. Markers 1 and 2 on the analyzer display indicate the amplifier's output power applied to the power attenuator. The level settings of the two generators are then changed such that markers 1 and 2 display the desired power (+27 dBm in this example) at which IP3 is to be measured:

☞ Loop in the amplifier to be measured between the combiner and the power attenuator. Increase the level of each of the signal generators using the step keys until the levels at 824 MHz and 825 MHz reach the desired +27 dBm. To do this, first select the 1 dB position with the ◂ ▸ keys and then increase the level by pressing the ▴ key; if necessary, press the ◂ key to select the 0.1 dB position and fine-tune the level.

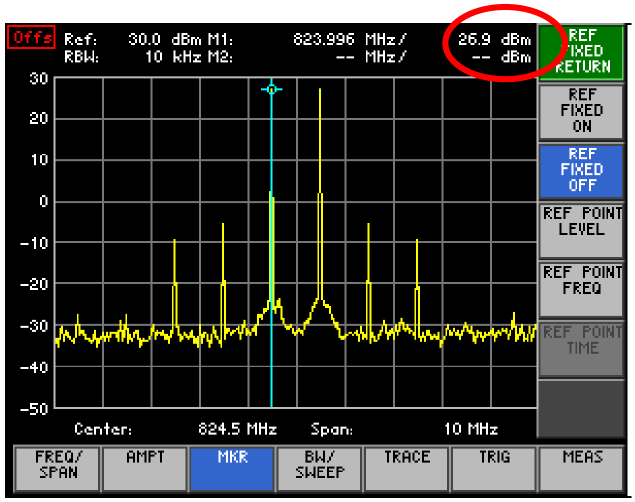


Figure 19: The amplifier to be measured now supplies +27 dBm output power at 824 MHz and at 825 MHz

Now place marker 2 on e.g. the lower d3 product and switch to relative display.

FS300	⇨MARKER 2:NEXT PEAK LEFT
	MARKER DELTA

Marker 2 now displays the level of the lower d3 intermodulation product relative to marker 1 (power at 824 MHz).

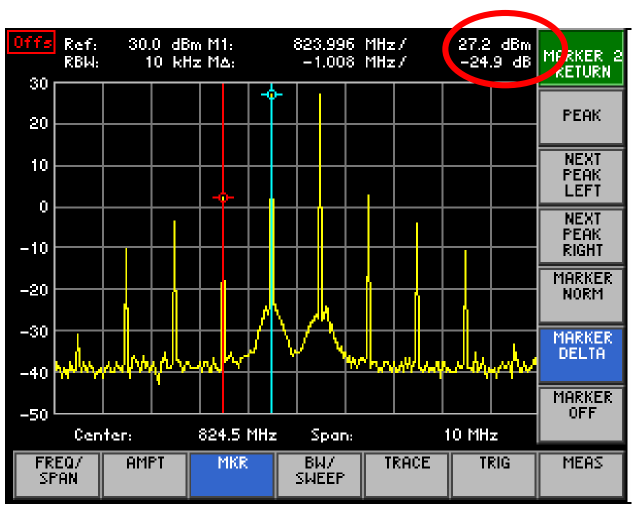


Figure 20: Marker 2 (red) is used to determine the lower d3 intermodulation product relative to marker 1 (blue) for –24.9 dB

To check whether the analyzer may already be corrupting the measured d3 intermodulation product, its input attenuation is increased by 10 dB. Subsequently the level display of marker 2 is compared with the previous display.

FS300	*AMPT:RF ATTEN MANUAL ⇩ ⇩ ⇩ ⇩ ⇩* ***ENTER*** (press the ⇩ key five times)

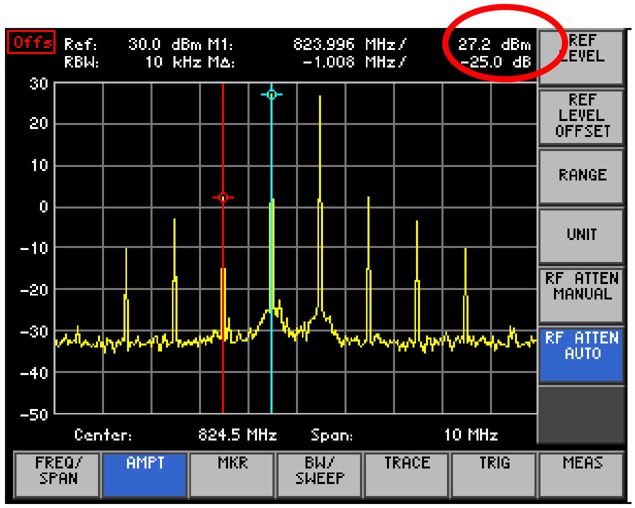


Figure 21: After having increased the input attenuation by 10 dB, there is virtually no change to the level of the intermodulation product (-25 dB). The measurement is valid!

Calculating the d3 intercept point:

The d3 intercept point at the output of the amplifier is calculated using equation 19:

$$IP3_{out}\,/\,dBm = \frac{a_{IM3}}{2}\,/\,dB + P_{out}\,/\,dBm$$

= 12.5 dB + 27 dBm = +39.5 dBm

5 References

(1) Christoph Rauscher (Volker Jansen, Roland Minihold), Fundamentals of Spectrum Analysis

(2) Data sheet RF Signal Generator R&S SM300/*PD 0758.0180.31*

(3) Data sheet Spectrum Analyzer R&S FS300/*PD 0758.0297.31*

6 Additional Information

Please contact TM-Applications@rsd.rohde-schwarz.com for comments and further suggestions.

7 Ordering Information

Instrument		
RF Signal Generator R&S®SM300	9 kHz to 3 GHz	1147.1498.03
Spectrum Analyzer R&S®FS300	9 kHz to 3 GHz	1147.0991.03

Rohde & Schwarz offers a wide range of signal generators and spectrum analyzers that are also ideally suited for the described linearity measurements. For more information, visit our Internet site: http://www.rohde-schwarz.com

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