

1 **New approach for low-cost TLS target measurement**

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30 **Abstract**

31 The registration and calibration of data captured with terrestrial laser scanner instruments can
32 be effectively achieved using signaled targets comprising components of both high and low
33 reflectivity, so-called contrast targets. For projects requiring tens or even hundreds of such
34 targets, the cost of manufacturer-constructed targets can be prohibitive. Moreover, the details
35 of proprietary target center co-ordinate measurement algorithms are often not available to
36 users. This paper reports on the design of a low-cost contrast target using readily-available
37 materials and an accompanying center measurement algorithm. Their compatibility with real
38 terrestrial laser scanner data was extensively tested on six different instruments: two Faro
39 Focus 3D scanners; a Leica HDS6100; a Leica P40; a Riegl VZ-400; and a Zoller+Fröhlich Imager
40 5010. Repeatability was examined as a function of range, incidence angle, sampling resolution,
41 target intensity and target contrast. Performance in system self-calibration and from
42 independent accuracy assessment is also reported. The results demonstrate compatibility for all
43 five scanners. However, all datasets except the Faro Focus 3D require exclusion of observations
44 made at high incidence angles in order to prevent range biases. Results also demonstrate that
45 the spectral reflectivity of the target components is critical to ensure high contrast between
46 target components and, therefore, high-quality target center co-ordinate measurements.

47

48 **Key-words**

49 Terrestrial laser scanning, contrast target, target measurement, registration, self-calibration

50

51 **Introduction**

52 Structured targets are essential equipment for terrestrial laser scanner (TLS) data capture. They
53 are routinely used to facilitate the transformation of multiple scans of large, complex
54 environments (Hullo et al., 2015) into a common co-ordinate system. A minimum of three—but
55 preferably more—non-collinear targets should appear in each scan. The rigid body
56 transformation parameters for each scan can be estimated in closed form (Horn, 1987) from
57 the observed (in scanner space) and independently-surveyed co-ordinates of the target centers.
58 Structured targets are also used for calibration to estimate instrumental systematic errors.

59 Large arrays of up to 200 structured targets have been demonstrated to be versatile for TLS
60 system self-calibration (Lichti, 2007; Reshetyuk, 2010).

61 TLS systems usually include a set of fabricated targets that may be monotone spheres or
62 planar discs with a checkerboard pattern, so-called contrast targets (Fig. 1). Spheres are
63 generally advantageous in that they are omnidirectional. Although a set of 10-12 spherical or
64 planar targets may be sufficient for scan registration on many projects, many more may be
65 required for very large projects and self-calibration. The purchase of 100 to 200 pre-fabricated
66 targets can be prohibitively expensive, so a low-cost alternative is needed. Paper contrast
67 targets are inexpensive and many can be printed from manufacturer-provided templates onto
68 A4 or Letter size sheets. However, paper targets are not rigid and are strongly affected by
69 humidity changes over time, leading to target deformation. Thus, they are essentially
70 temporary, disposable targets not well suited for a permanent calibration facility setup.

71 As noted by Ge and Wunderlich (2015), the details of target center measurement
72 methods are not provided by the instrument manufacturers. Accordingly, several researchers
73 have reported contrast target measurement algorithms. Lichti et al. (2007) report using circular
74 black-and-white paper targets for TLS self-calibration, specifically the Surphaser 25HS. Its basis
75 is a plane fit of the 3D target measurements using orthogonal regression followed by a 2D circle
76 fit to edges detected in a resampled image. The method reported by Chow et al (2010) builds
77 on this algorithm for testing of the Trimble GX scanner.

78 Ge and Wunderlich (2015) report a method for 2x2 circular checkerboard target
79 measurement. They also first perform a plane fit for the target data, favouring the 2.5D
80 parameterization $z=f(x,y)$. Next, the return signal intensity values are classified by robustly
81 estimating an intensity threshold. Line fitting and subsequent line intersection are performed to
82 estimate the target center co-ordinates. They report the performance of their method at
83 different resolutions and distances for one scanner, the Leica HDS7000, over on a calibration
84 track. Laser tracker data serve as the reference for accuracy assessment. All analyses are
85 conducted in Cartesian co-ordinates. An algorithm for 2x2 circular checkerboard target center
86 estimation is also described in Liang et al. (2014) but results for only three targets are
87 presented.

88 Rachakonda et al. (2017) report two methods for the measurement of 2x2 square
89 checkerboard contrast targets in support of TLS instrument calibration described in detail by
90 Muralikrishnan et al. (2015). The target area is first manually cropped from the point cloud. This
91 is followed by circular mask cropping of the target and generation of a 2D image of the target
92 area. Lines defining the boundaries between the target components are identified by Canny
93 edge detection, extracted with the Hough transform and then intersected. Their 2D images
94 comprise both intensity and spatial co-ordinates as dependent variables, so interpolation is
95 used to determine the center co-ordinates in their first method. In their second method, the
96 scanner data are first artificially densified by cubic interpolation. Their methods are compared
97 with three commercial software packages in terms of repeatability with 25 targets. The
98 maximum incidence angle tested was 50°.

99 The aim of this work was to develop and test a new, low-cost target design and
100 measurement algorithm. The targets comprise a Compact Disc (CD) mounted on a dark
101 background. CDs were chosen due to their ready availability, rigidity and low cost. Based on the
102 method reported by Lichti et al. (2007), it features several key improvements including the use
103 of known CD dimensions for target segmentation, a rigorous method for deriving the 2D image
104 resolution that preserves information content and an iterative target segmentation process to
105 exclude unwanted background points from the plane fit. Moreover, extensive testing has been
106 performed to thoroughly examine algorithm performance. Six different TLS instruments were
107 tested over a dense target field. Repeatability was assessed in detail with multiple datasets
108 captured from different locations. Performance was examined as a function of several
109 variables: range (up to 10.5 m), incidence angle (up to 80°), sampling resolution, target intensity
110 and target contrast. Performance in system self-calibration and an independent accuracy
111 assessment are also reported. As a result of the testing regime, recommendations are made
112 about the suitability of the proposed target design and measurement algorithm for each
113 scanner.

114

115

116 **Target Measurement Algorithm Description**

117 Pictured in Fig. 2, the custom-built TLS target features a Compact Disc painted matte white and
118 bonded to a rigid, matte black cardstock board (200 mm x 200 mm x 2 mm). This design
119 provides high contrast between the foreground and background components. CDs are
120 manufactured with a spindle diameter of 15 mm and an outside diameter of 120 mm. These
121 known dimensions are used in several steps of the measurement algorithm.

122 The first step is extraction of the target area from an acquired point cloud. In this work,
123 a circular region around each target was manually extracted (Fig. 3), though there is high
124 potential to automate this process to a great degree for a calibration target field with known
125 co-ordinates. Each individual target area is identified automatically from a text file of the point
126 cloud of all cropped targets. The target co-ordinates are translated to their centroid then fit to a
127 plane using the eigenvalue decomposition of their 3x3 covariance matrix (Shakarji, 1998). Note
128 that at this stage, both foreground CD and background samples are included in the plane fit.
129 The data are transformed from the scanner-centric xyz system to the target-centric uvw system
130 defined by the eigenvectors: the u and v axes lie in the best fit plane and w is orthogonal to it
131 (Fig. 4).

132 The next step is to create a uniformly-sampled intensity image of the target area from
133 the irregularly-spaced samples in the uvw system. The selection of the sampling interval for the
134 image is critical so as to preserve information content. To this end, the convex hull of the target
135 point cloud is constructed. The mean point spacing is computed as the square root of the
136 convex hull area normalized by the number of point cloud samples. This assumes that point
137 spacing within the target plane is homogeneous and isotropic. The irregularly-spaced 2D points
138 are resampled using bilinear interpolation to produce an intensity image having sampling
139 intervals in u and v both equal to the mean point spacing.

140 Canny edge detection produces a binary image of edge points. To exclude unwanted
141 edge points, only those lying between the inner spindle and the outside radii are retained. A
142 closed-form, least-squares 2D circle fit of identified points on the circumference of the CD
143 (Förstner and Wrobel, 2004) is then performed (Fig. 5). Note that the known outer radius of the
144 CD is not used as a constraint in the circle fit; the estimated radius is instead compared with the

145 known value as a quality control measure. Experiments were performed to determine the
146 Canny edge detector high and low thresholds and the standard deviation. In the end, the
147 default MATLAB values of 0.3, 0.6 and 1.41, respectively, were chosen to be used for all
148 datasets. Changing the parameters could influence edge location around the circumference,
149 and hence estimated radius. However, the center location of the circle fit was not influenced
150 due to the high-contrast, symmetric target design within the parameters (range and incidence
151 angle) of the experiment.

152 The estimated circle center $(u_c, v_c, 0)$ is transformed back into the xyz scanner-centric
153 system to obtain the target center co-ordinates in, (x_c, y_c, z_c) . A known source of systematic
154 error in the measurement of the center position of circular (Ahn et al, 1999) and spherical
155 (Luhmann, 2014) targets in central perspective images is target eccentricity. However, since the
156 circle fitting is performed in the target plane in object space rather than in a projected intensity
157 image plane, the resulting measurements are free from any target eccentricity error.

158 Since the plane fit was performed using both foreground and background points, which
159 lie in different planes due to the CD thickness, the center estimate is biased. Thus, a second
160 iteration of the entire process is performed to produce a more accurate target center. The
161 estimated target center and known CD radii are used to exclude all central and background
162 points from the plane fit operation; only points on the CD surface itself are included. Finally, the
163 incidence angle is estimated from the center position vector and best-fit plane normal from the
164 second iteration.

165

166 **Experiment description**

167 Experiments to test the new target design and center measurement algorithm were conducted
168 in a 10 m x 9 m x 4.3 m calibration room (Fig. 6). Two hundred (200) custom-built CD targets
169 were mounted with high-bond adhesive tape on the walls, the floor and the ceiling of the room.

170 Data were collected with several different instruments from different manufacturers:
171 two Faro Focus 3D scanners; a Leica HDS6100; a Leica P40; a Riegl VZ-400; and a Zoller+Fröhlich
172 (Z+F) Imager 5010. Two datasets were recorded with each Faro instrument and the HDS6100
173 scanner. Room temperature ranged between 20 and 22°C for the experiments that took place

174 over the course of one month. The data capture settings varied depending on instrument, but
175 the following general principles were obeyed: level compensation was used where available
176 and high resolution and high quality data were collected.

177 Scans were captured from three nominal locations within the room: two in corners, at
178 least 1.2 m from each wall; and one in the center. The scanner height above the floor was 1.25
179 m. At each location the instrument tripod was affixed to a spider mount which in turn was
180 affixed to the floor so as to prevent movement of the assembly during data collection. Three
181 scans were captured at each location. The instrument was rotated by 120° for each successive
182 scan by removing it from the tribrach and manually rotating it. An extra scan was captured at
183 one of the instrument locations for one of the Focus 3D datasets.

184 The high redundancy and strong geometric design of the scanning network permitted
185 the use of a number of quality assessment methods. Repeatability could be assessed since
186 multiple point clouds were captured with each instrument from different locations and with
187 different orientations. Algorithm performance was assessed in terms of plane fit precision,
188 circle fit precision and estimated radius as a function of several variables:

- 189 • Range, ρ : from 1 m to 10.5 m;
- 190 • Incidence angle, β : 0° to 80°;
- 191 • Target sampling resolution, Δ_x : 1 mm to 13 mm; and
- 192 • Target intensity, E .

193 The precision of plane and circle fits was measured by the root mean square error (RMS) of the
194 residuals.

195 A least-squares, free network self-calibration adjustment was also performed for each
196 dataset following the procedure described in (Lichti 2007). The objective was to determine
197 whether the target measurement algorithm introduced any systematic error source in addition
198 to instrumental biases that may exist. Self-calibration is an effective tool for this purpose. Given
199 a highly redundant dataset, a minimally-constrained datum, strong first order network design
200 and a properly constructed stochastic model, the estimated residuals from such an adjustment
201 can reveal whether the data are corrupted by un-modelled systematic errors. Additional
202 parameters (APs) that describe known instrumental systematic errors were estimated in the

203 adjustment. The choice of which APs from the set proposed by (Lichti 2007) to include for a
204 particular instrument was made with the aid of graphical and statistical analyses in order to
205 model all systematic effects but avoid over-parameterization. Starting from the case with no
206 APs, the model was built stepwise, adding a single AP and re-running the adjustment at each
207 trial until all instrumental effects were compensated. Once the instrumental error modelling
208 was complete, the residuals from the final adjustment were analyzed for systematic trends that
209 may be introduced by the target algorithm.

210 Target reconstruction accuracy was assessed by comparing the TLS-determined target
211 co-ordinates with independently-surveyed co-ordinates. Sixty-one (61) of the targets were
212 surveyed with a Leica TS30 total station from four different locations in the room. Direction and
213 zenith angles were observed with the cross-hairs tangent to the CD targets on two faces. Scale
214 was defined by a 0.9 m Leica scale bar ($\sigma = 0.02$ mm). The co-ordinate precision from free
215 network adjustment was 1.1 mm in both X and Y and 0.3 mm in height at the 95% confidence
216 level. Co-ordinates from two TLS cases were compared for each dataset, no APs and final AP
217 set, in order to quantify accuracy improvement. A rigid body transformation was estimated for
218 each dataset to ensure that the surveyed and TLS co-ordinates were in the same system for
219 direct comparison

220

221 **Experiment results**

222 Many results were generated in this investigation. In order to provide a concise description of
223 the outcomes, only representative results as well as anomalous findings are presented for all
224 cases.

225

226 ***Target contrast***

227 The two sides of the black board used for the target background are slightly different. Though
228 difficult to discern with the naked eye or by touch, one is slightly rough and the other is slightly
229 smooth. The differences in their reflectance spectra measured by spectroradiometer (ASD
230 FieldSpec Pro FR; Fig. 7) are very pronounced. The spectrum of the slightly rough side is
231 effectively constant over the 500 nm to 2500 nm range, whereas the slightly smooth side is

232 non-uniform. Some targets were constructed with the rough side facing outward, while others
233 were built with the smooth side facing out. In general, the smooth-background targets
234 exhibited poor contrast for all instruments. Examples are shown for the P40 and the VZ-400
235 (Fig.s 8 and 9, respectively). Many outliers existed in the data as a result. The outliers can be
236 identified relatively easily with the contrast ratio, C , defined as

$$C = \frac{\bar{E}_{fg} - \bar{E}_{bg}}{\bar{E}_{fg} + \bar{E}_{bg}} \quad (1)$$

237 where \bar{E}_{fg} is the mean foreground (white CD) intensity and \bar{E}_{bg} is the mean background (black
238 cardstock) intensity. Systems that provide negative intensity measures can be accommodated
239 with linear transformation of the intensity values.

240 As can be seen from the examples in Fig. 10, the lower-quality, smooth-background
241 targets are easily identified from the plot of plane fit residual RMS as a function of contrast. A
242 simple thresholding operation is sufficient to remove the low-contrast targets. For all
243 subsequent analyses, only the rough-background observations are analyzed.

244

245 ***Performance as a function of range***

246 Performance as a function of range is first assessed by analyzing the RMS of range residuals
247 from the plane fitting. Examples from the second Focus 3D scanner and the Leica P40 dataset
248 are shown in Fig. 11. Two observations can be made from the Focus 3D and P40 results. First,
249 there are many outliers in the data, identified by the rectangles. The cause of these outliers will
250 be discussed shortly. Second, the overall trend of the plane fit precision is slight degradation
251 with range, which is expected. The results from the other scanners follow similar patterns.

252 The quality of the circle fit, as measured by the RMS of co-ordinate observation
253 residuals (Fig. 12), and the estimated target radius (Fig. 13) were also analyzed. The HDS6100
254 results show two trends. The linear trend between 2 m and 8 m represents biases caused by
255 observation at high incidence angle, which is analyzed in the next section. The constant trend
256 component shows that, apart from the biases, circle fit precision is independent of range. The
257 Imager 5010 results show similar behaviour. No range dependence is evident in the Focus 3D
258 results, which is also true for the other scanners' datasets.

259

260 ***Performance as a function of incidence angle***

261 For all datasets, the plane fit residuals in the range direction follow the theoretical behaviour as
262 a function of the secant of the incidence angle, β (Soudarissanane et al., 2011). The many
263 outliers observed as a function of range in Fig. 11 for the Focus 3D and HDS6100 occur at high
264 incidence angles (Fig. 14).

265 The circle fit (Fig. 15) and radius estimates (Fig. 16) present perhaps the most interesting
266 results thus far. The Focus 3D and VZ-400 scanners exhibit a slight improvement in circle fit
267 precision, while the P40 precision is independent of β . In contrast, the circle precision for the
268 Imager 5010 (and the HDS6100, not shown) degrades at high incidence angles. All radii
269 estimates are constant and slightly biased relative to the expected 60 mm CD radius as a result
270 of the chosen edge detector parameters, though only by up to about one half of a millimeter.
271 The Focus 3D and VZ-400 radii are systematically larger and the former increases at high
272 incidence angles. The other three scanners' radii are systematically smaller with the Imager
273 5010 (and HDS6100) radii becoming unreliable above about 60°. The cause of this effect is
274 described in the self-calibration results section.

275

276 ***Performance as a function of resolution***

277 For all datasets, plane fit precision exhibits a linear trend as a function of sampling resolution,
278 which is expected, in addition to the aforementioned outliers. Two examples are shown in Fig.
279 17: a Focus 3D, which features a large range of sampling resolutions (approximately 1 mm to 10
280 mm) and the Leica P40 for which the range is lower (1 mm to 4 mm). No dependence exists in
281 circle fit quality in these or other datasets except for the HDS6100, which shows incidence
282 angle effects.

283

284 ***Self-calibration results***

285 The final degrees-of-freedom (dof), the number of APs and the before- and after self-
286 calibration residual statistics are reported in Table 1. The dof are higher for one of the Focus 3D
287 datasets due to the tenth scan. The dof are lower for the HDS6100 and Imager 5010 due to

288 exclusion of observations above the reported incidence angle (β) threshold, which is explained
289 shortly. For the P40 and VZ-400, the dof are much lower due to two factors: exclusion of
290 observations above the reported incidence angle threshold and exclusion of the
291 aforementioned poor quality targets.

292 All APs estimated model physical effects; no empirical model terms were necessary. The
293 estimated APs for range included the rangefinder offset and periodic range error terms. For
294 horizontal direction, the estimated APs included the collimation axis error, the trunnion axis
295 error and non-orthogonality of the horizontal angle encoder and the vertical axis. Finally, the
296 elevation angle errors included the vertical circle index error and the vertical circle eccentricity
297 error.

298 In some cases, the Faro instruments in particular, the addition of the APs yielded
299 considerable improvement to the RMS of the angular residuals. In other cases, the addition of
300 the APs yields only small (sub-millimeter or a few arc seconds) improvement to the RMS of the
301 residuals. However, all model trends that were visible in graphical representations of the
302 residuals and are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

303 All datasets except those from the Focus 3D exhibited a range bias as a function of
304 incidence angle (Fig. 20). This is particularly interesting given that the Faro datasets featured
305 systematic increases in target radius with incidence angle. The bias is non-existent when the
306 incidence angle (β) is low but is readily apparent for angles greater than 60° or 65° , depending
307 on the instrument.

308 Graphical analysis of the targets gives insight into the cause of the range bias. Fig. 21
309 shows the intensity image for two targets observed at high ($\beta > 75^\circ$) incidence angles. Each one
310 exhibits a bright fringe on part of the CD circumference on the side closest to the scanner. This
311 high intensity leads to detected edges pixels that are displaced toward the scanner and, in turn,
312 biased center co-ordinates. The derived range to the target is therefore systematically short,
313 hence the positive residuals from the self-calibration adjustments. The reason for this
314 behaviour is not known, but could be due to multipath reflection from the edge of the CD if not
315 completely painted. Further investigation is required to ascertain the exact cause. In the
316 meantime, the practical solution to overcome the problem is to exclude observations above a

317 suitably-chosen threshold, which was followed for the self-calibration adjustments except for
318 the Faro datasets.

319

320 **Accuracy assessment**

321 The RMS of co-ordinate differences are reported in Table 2. All datasets exhibit accuracy
322 improvement as a result of including the APs, with the exception of the Imager 5010. All
323 accuracy measures are sub-millimeter and are within the precision of the targets, except for
324 Faro #2 for which accuracy is slightly lower. Thus, it can be concluded that there is no bias
325 introduced by the target design or center measurement algorithm at the millimeter level.

326

327 **Conclusions**

328 Structured targets are essential for TLS registration and system calibration. A new low-cost
329 target design and center measurement method has been presented and its performance
330 examined as a function of a number of key variables. Several phenomena were observed from
331 the results and conclusions can be drawn about the suitability of the target design and
332 algorithm for each instrument.

333 The Faro Focus 3D data can be considered compatible with the CD-based target and
334 measurement algorithm. No range biases were introduced and there was no need to exclude
335 data above an incidence angle threshold. However, an additional test was conducted in which
336 observations with incidence angle greater than 65° were excluded. No significant changes to
337 the self-calibration results were observed. Data from the other scanners can also be considered
338 compatible. However, observations above a critical incidence angle should be excluded in order
339 to prevent range biases to the target center caused by the CD edge illumination phenomenon
340 shown in Fig. 21. In addition, the spectral reflectivity of the target materials should be observed
341 to prevent collection of data with poor contrast.

342

343

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349

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386

387 **Table 1.** Self-calibration adjustment results for all datasets.

Scanner	dof (with APs)	# significant APs	β cut-off ($^{\circ}$)	RMS of residuals—no APs			RMS of residuals—with APs		
				ρ (mm)	θ (")	α (")	ρ (mm)	θ (")	α (")
Focus 3D #1 Dataset 1	4403	7	N/A	1.5	53	33	1.1	24	21
Focus 3D #1 Dataset 2	4967	7	N/A	1.3	47	34	0.9	22	20
Focus 3D #2 Dataset 1	4423	5	N/A	1.1	31	32	1.0	25	24
Focus 3D #2 Dataset 2	4381	5	N/A	1.0	36	42	1.0	25	25
HDS6100 Dataset 1	3590	4	60	0.5	19	20	0.4	17	17
HDS6100 Dataset 2	3566	4	60	0.5	19	19	0.5	17	16
P40	2102	1	65	0.5	19	19	0.5	18	19
VZ-400	1959	3	65	1.0	24	23	0.9	23	23
Imager 5010	3276	0	65	0.6	24	19	-	-	-

388

389 **Table 2.** Accuracy assessment results for all datasets.

Scanner	RMS of co-ordinate differences—no APs			RMS of co-ordinate differences —with APs		
	X (mm)	Y (mm)	Z (mm)	X (mm)	Y (mm)	Z (mm)
Focus 3D #1 Dataset 1	1.4	1.5	0.5	0.9	0.9	0.3
Focus 3D #1 Dataset 2	1.2	1.4	0.5	0.6	0.7	0.4
Focus 3D #2 Dataset 1	1.6	1.5	0.5	1.2	1.1	0.4
Focus 3D #2 Dataset 2	1.7	1.7	0.7	1.4	1.4	0.4
HDS6100 Dataset 1	0.8	0.7	0.6	0.5	0.5	0.4
HDS6100 Dataset 2	0.9	0.9	0.4	0.8	0.7	0.3
P40	1.2	1.0	0.7	0.8	0.7	0.6
VZ-400	1.1	0.9	0.4	0.8	1.0	0.6
Imager 5010	0.9	0.8	0.5	-	-	-

390