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Federal Institute of Metrology METAS

# Best Measurement Practice in VNA Measurements - Hints for the Practitioner

VNA Tools II course  
Juerg Riefenacht

28-30.10.2014



## Once upon a time... in a National Metrology Institute...

The HP 8510C was the state of the art in VNA metrology and representing the best accuracy and performance!

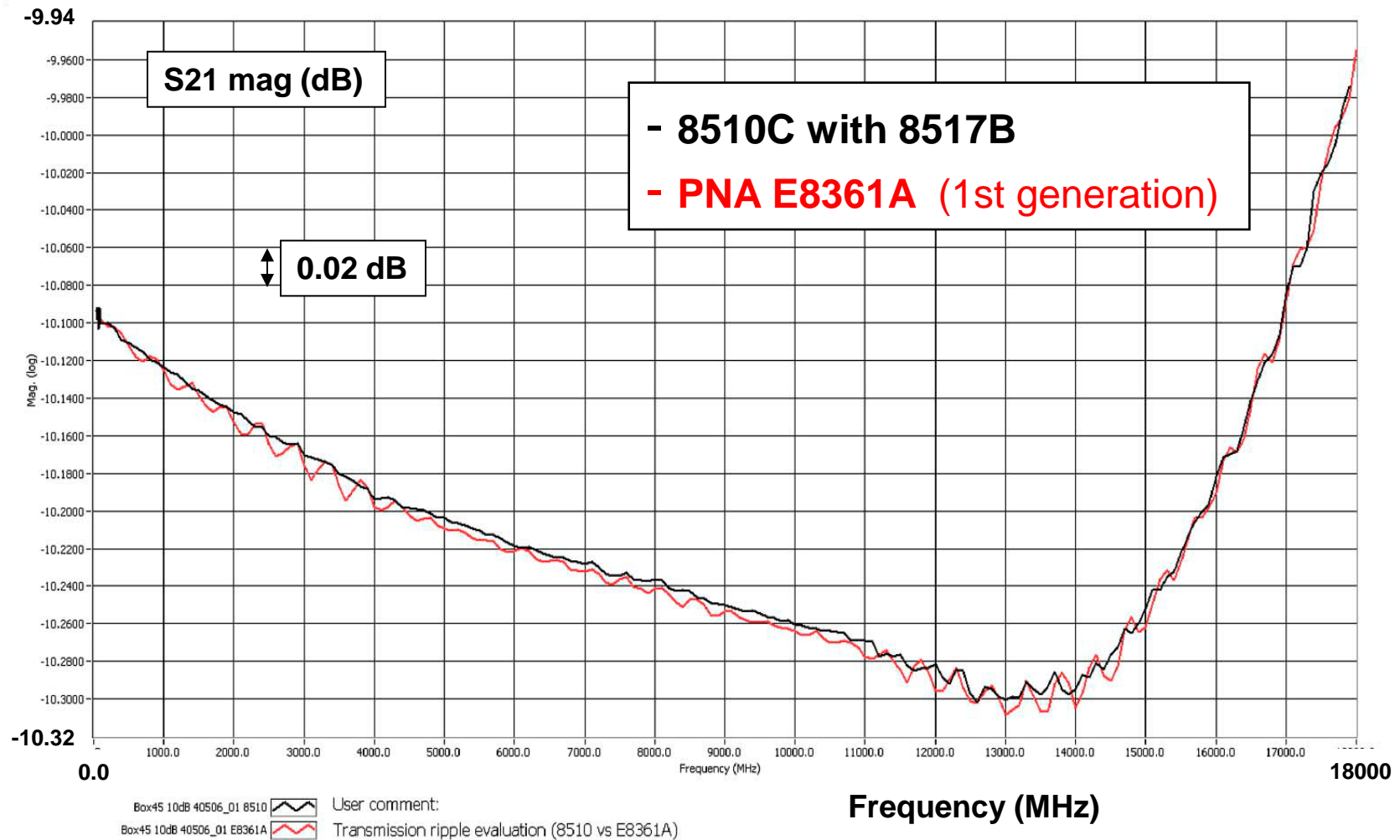




# New VNAs: S21 measurement ripple of a Type-N 10 dB atten.

**New VNA accuracy issue:**  
Using exactly the same set-up on both VNAs:  
- cables  
- port adapters  
- cal kit and standard definitions.

**Why is more ripple present?**



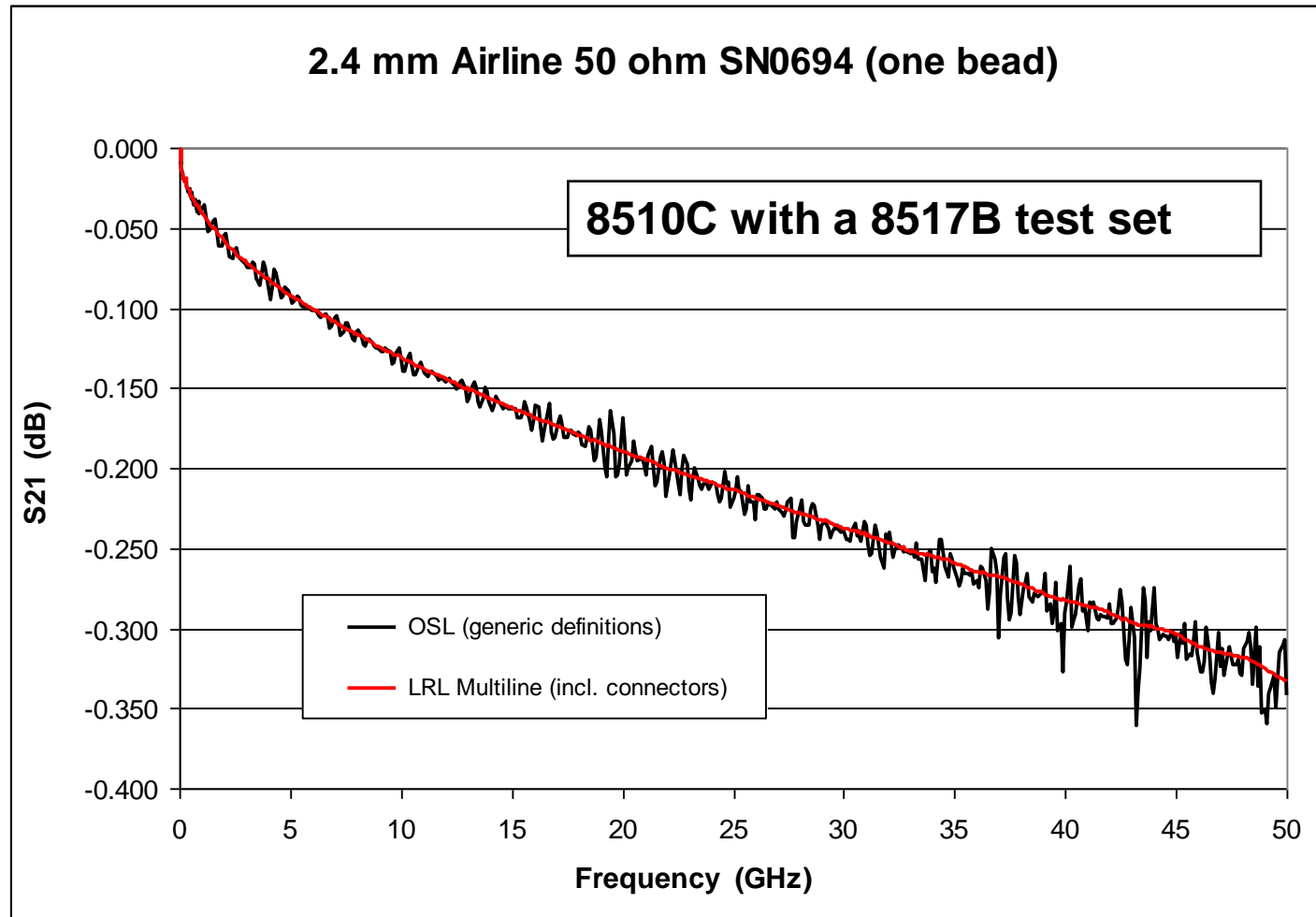


# Introducing the systematic connector effects in the calibration standard definitions: The S21 ripple disappeared!

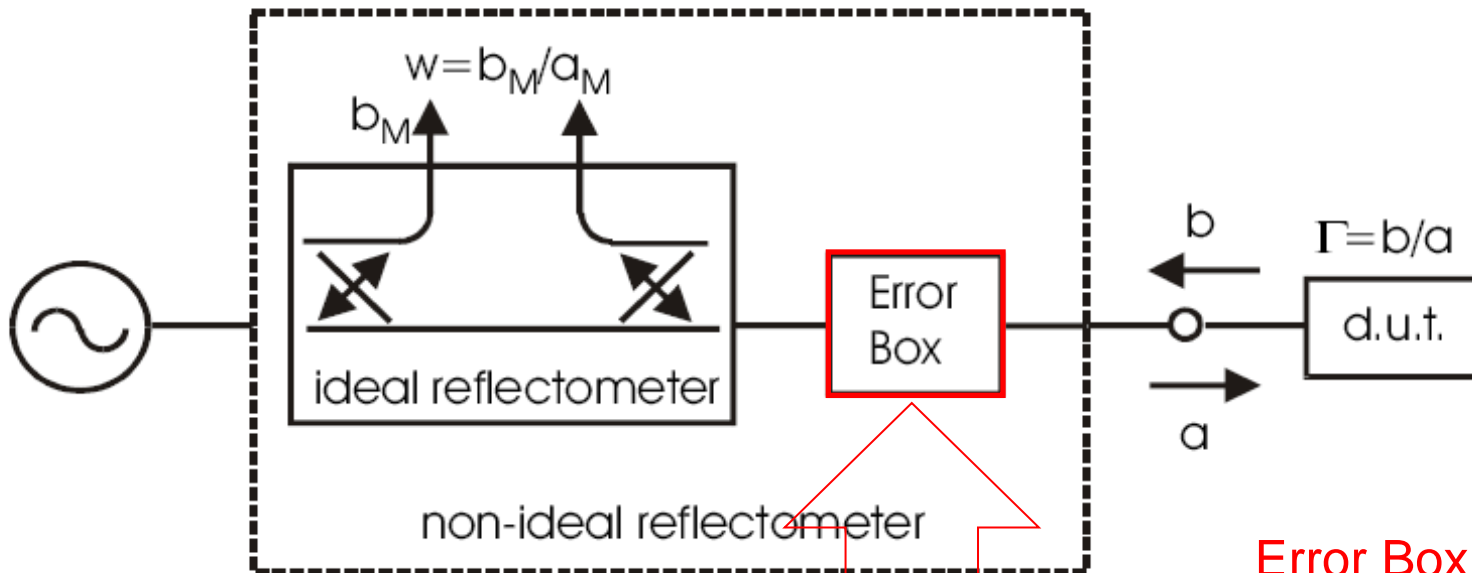
## Improved accuracy:

Including the connector effects in the cal standard definitions allows to determine a more accurate reference plane!

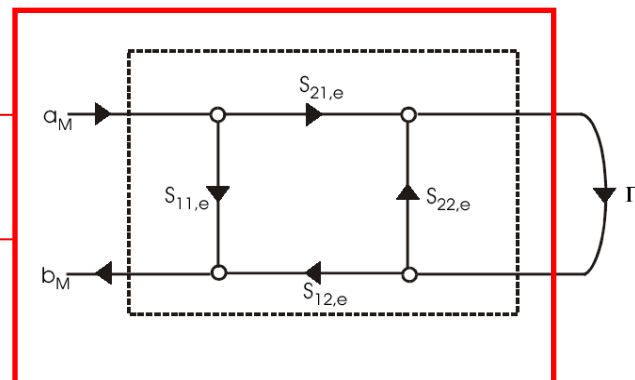
*This results in a more accurate calculation of the:*  
**- tracking terms and**  
**- match terms**



# Error box model of the VNA (one port): *minimize the impacts!*



Error Box:



- *VNA hardware and used measurement setup.*
- *Cal standards: stability and traceability.*
- *Used calibration method.*
- *Operator (settings, handling, meas. order).*



## Best VNA measurement practice topics:

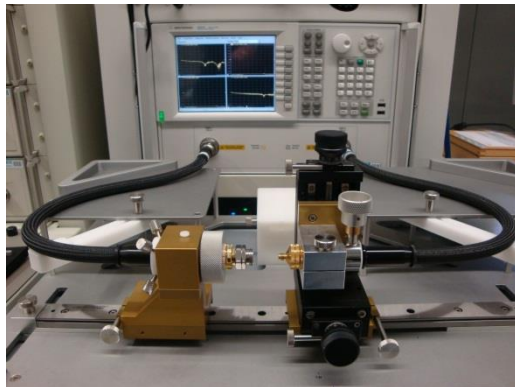
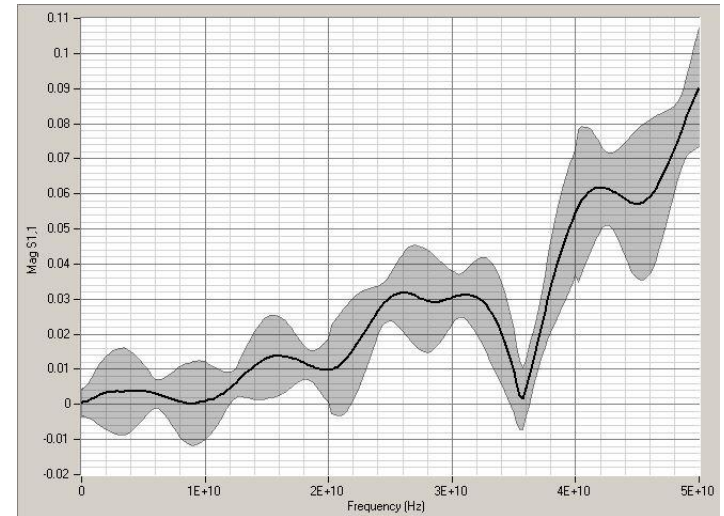
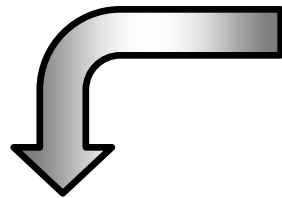
- How to identify the dominant error sources?
- VNA measurement setup (**pimp my VNA**)
- Accuracy and S-parameter traceability chain
- Mating techniques and connector handling hints
- Practice and experience



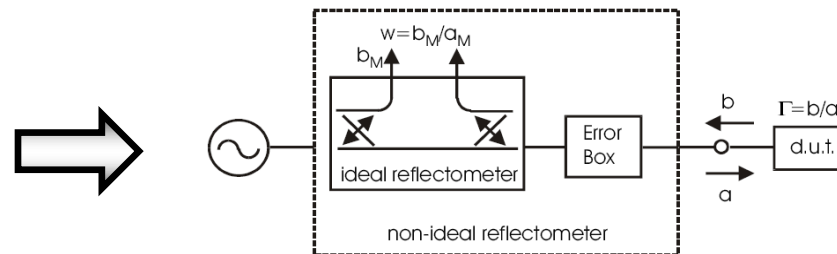
# 1<sup>st</sup> Topic

- **How to identify the dominant error sources?**

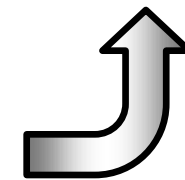
Basic influence parameters with uncertainties



VNA measurement model



S-parameter data with uncertainties





# GUM compliant VNA uncertainty budget per frequency point

**Uncertainty budget:  
S11 mag (lin) @ 18 GHz**

Frequency: 18000.000 MHz, Parameter: S1,1 Mag

Id | Flat | Expand All | Collapse All | Copy

Value: 0.027857122    Std Unc: 0.004077626    U95: 0.008155251

Description	Unc Component	Unc Percentage
+ Calibration Standard	0.003991850	95.837
+ Connector Repeatability	0.000750441	3.387
+ VNA Drift (correlated)	0.000057534	0.020
+ VNA Experiment	0.000342641	0.706
+ VNA Linearity	0.000090873	0.050
+ VNA Noise		

**Uncertainty budget:  
S21 mag (dB) @ 18 GHz**

Frequency: 18000.000 MHz, Parameter: S2,1 Mag (dB)

Id | Flat | Expand All | Collapse All | Copy

Value: -19.643053515    Std Unc: 0.023153010    U95: 0.046306019

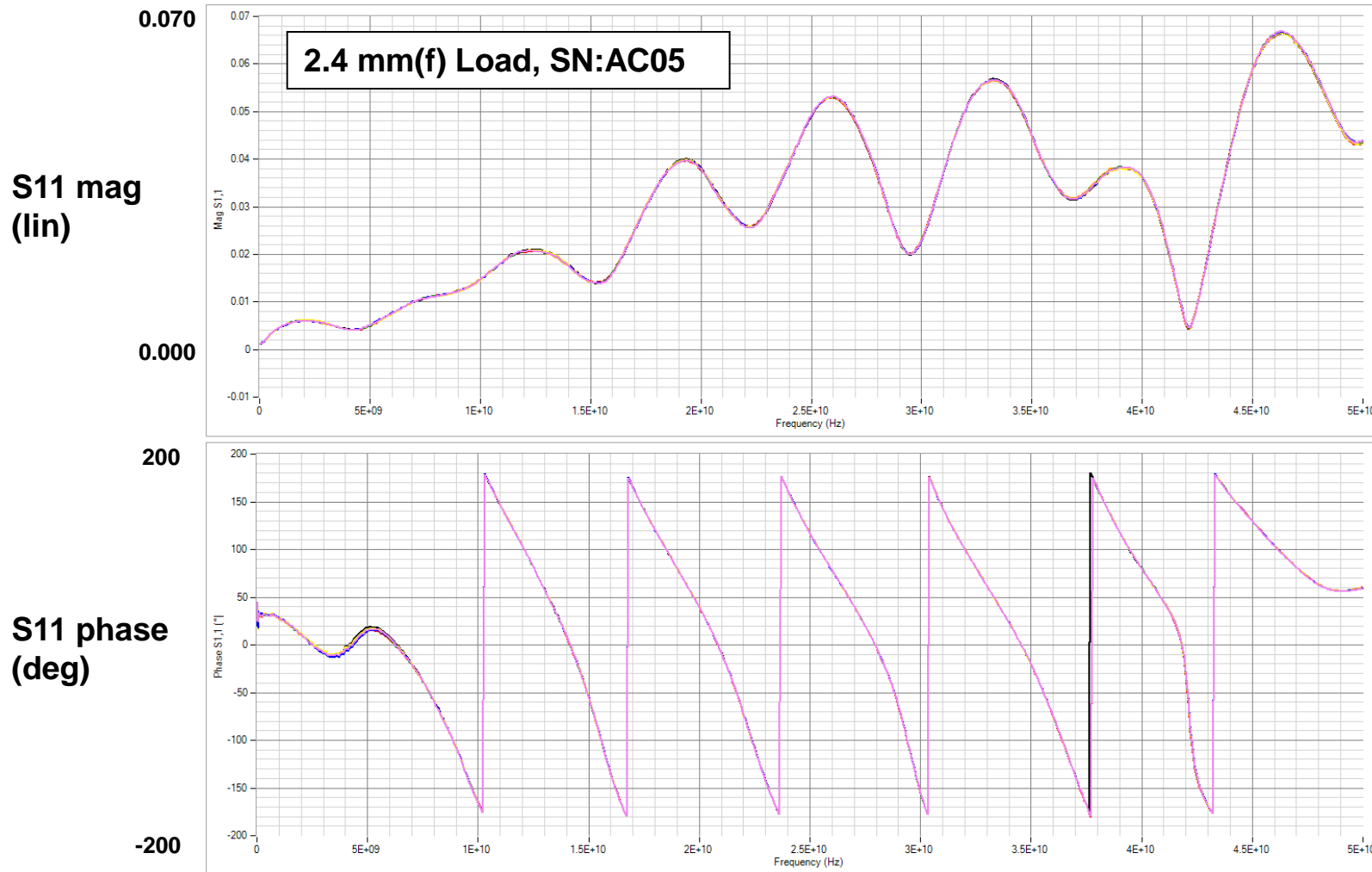
Description	Unc Component	Unc Percentage
+ Cable Stability	0.021226167	84.048
+ Calibration Standard	0.005521731	5.688
+ Connector Repeatability	0.000660716	0.081
+ VNA Drift (correlated)	0.001998454	0.745
+ VNA Experiment	0.000042428	0.000
+ VNA Linearity	0.007076452	9.341
+ VNA Noise	0.000716812	0.096





# VNA uncertainty budget over all frequencies: **no unc.**

- S11 of a load measured at 8 different connector orientations

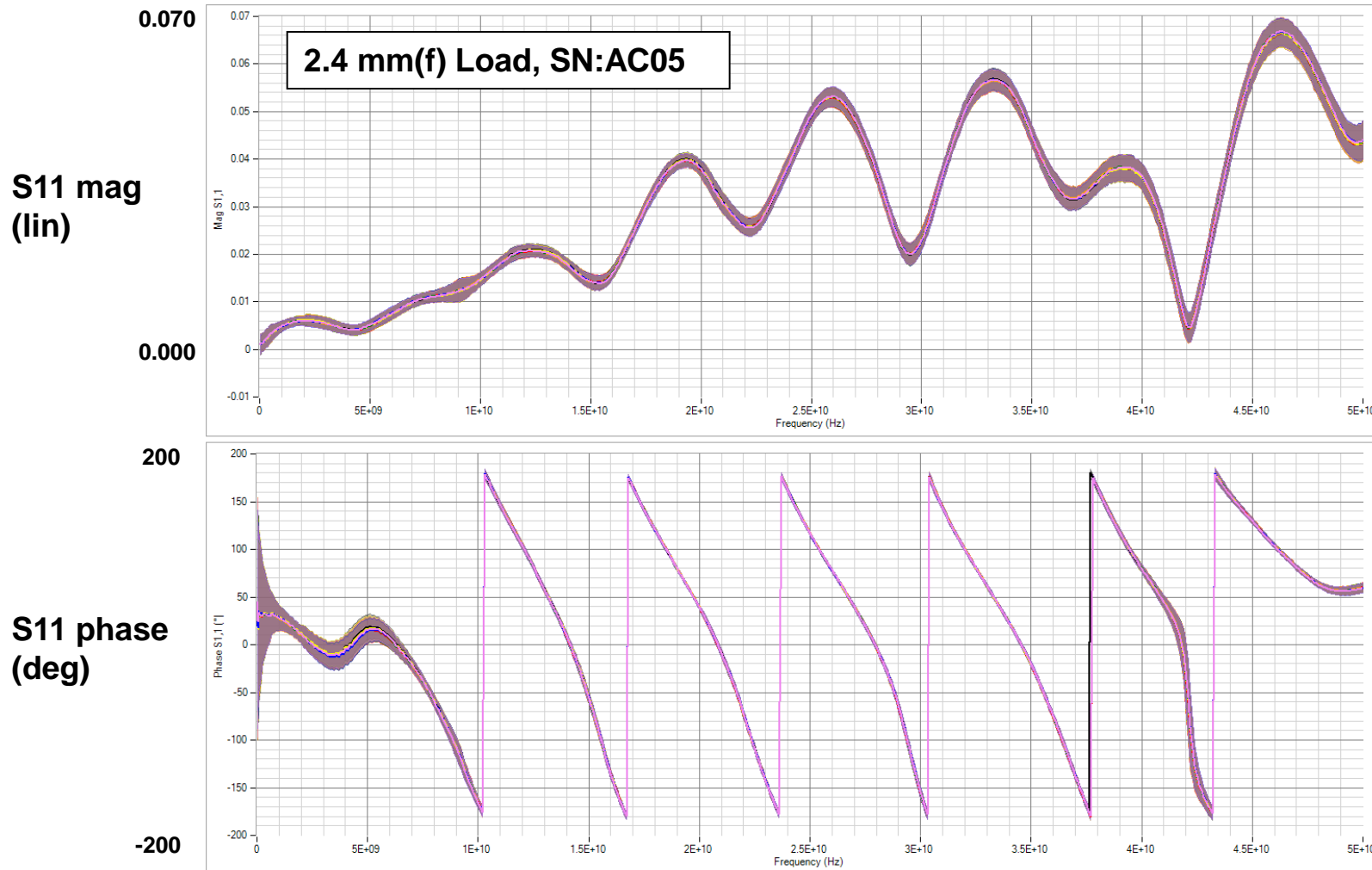


**First example:**  
DUT showing a good repeatability behaviour when measured at 8 different connector orientations.



# VNA uncertainty budget over all frequencies: with all unc.

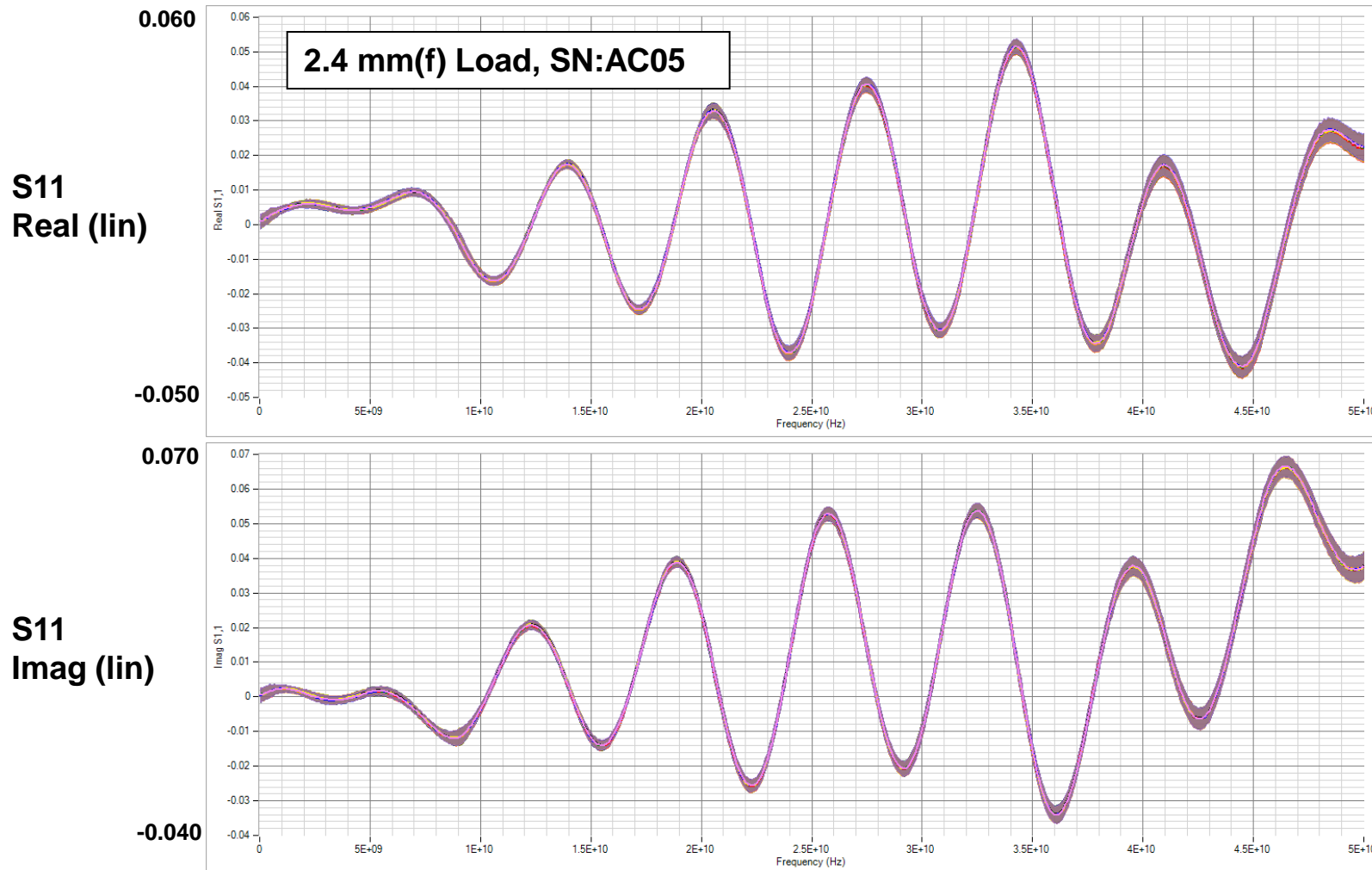
- S11 of a load measured at 8 different connector orientations



**First example:** DUT showing a good repeatability behaviour when measured at 8 different connector orientations.

# VNA uncertainty budget over all frequencies: with all unc.

- S11 of a load measured at 8 different connector orientations

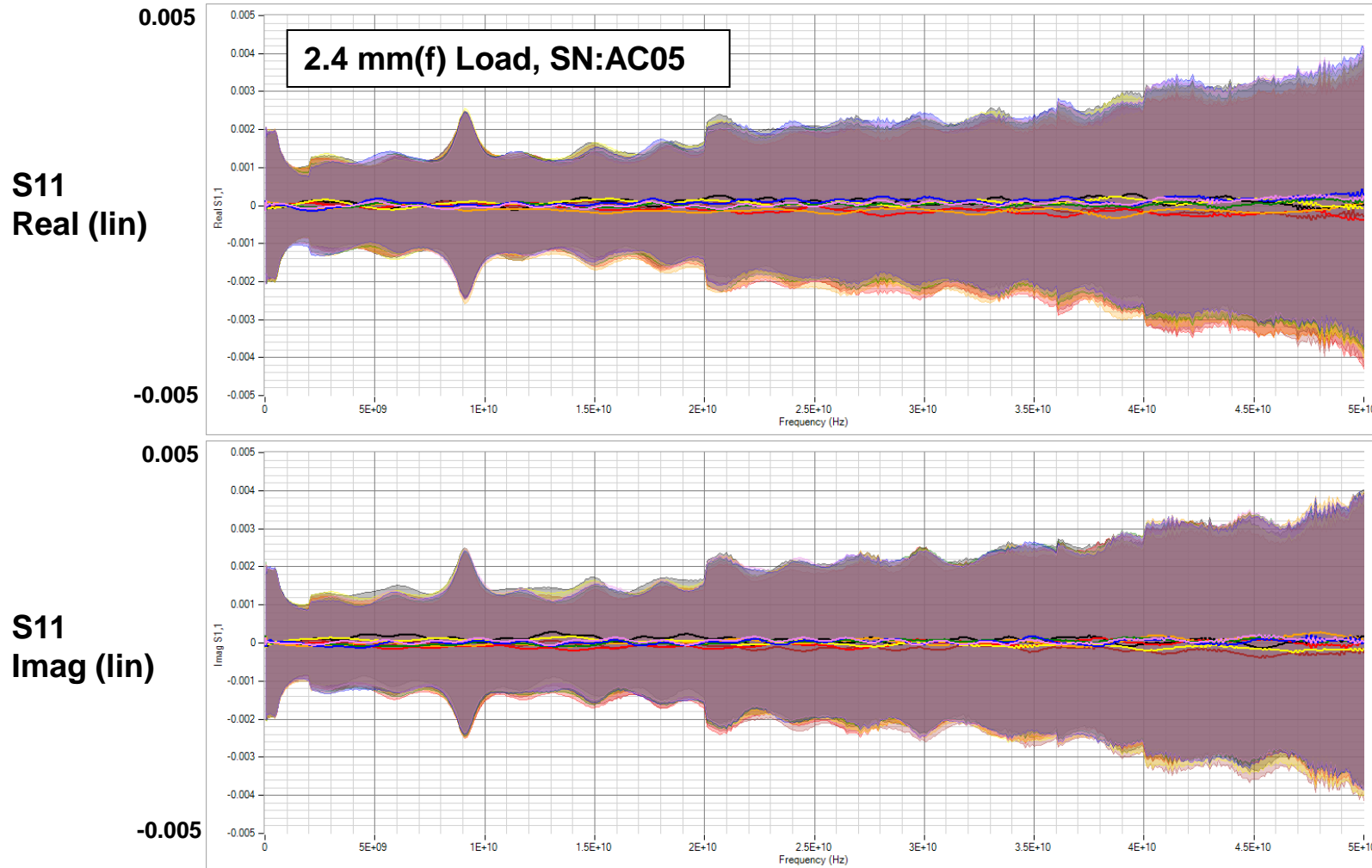


**First example:**  
DUT showing a good repeatability behaviour when measured at 8 different connector orientations.



# VNA uncertainty budget over all frequencies: **with all unc.**

- S11 normalized to the mean value (all influence parameters)

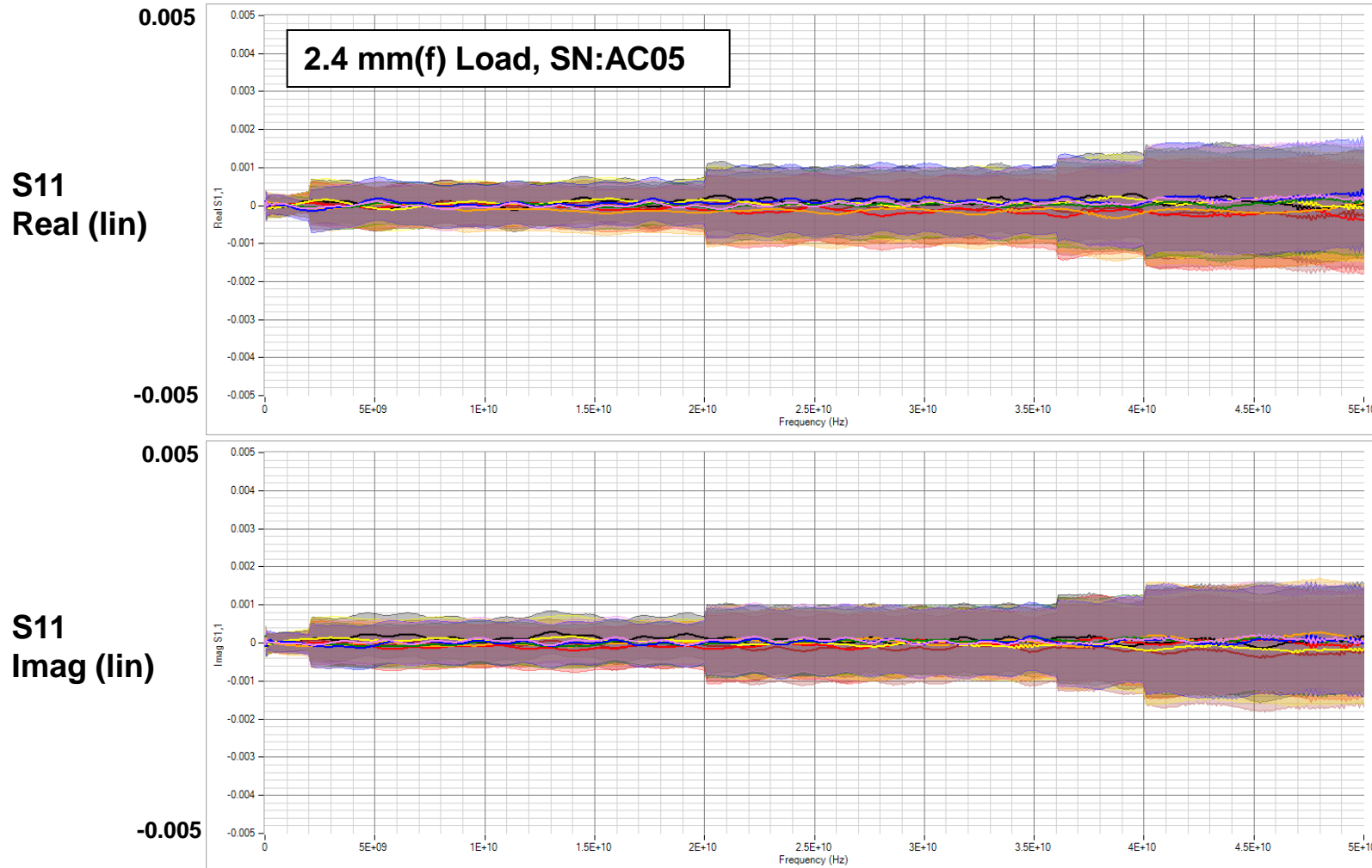


**First example:**  
DUT showing a good repeatability behaviour when measured at 8 different connector orientations.



# VNA uncertainty budget over all frequencies: **single unc.**

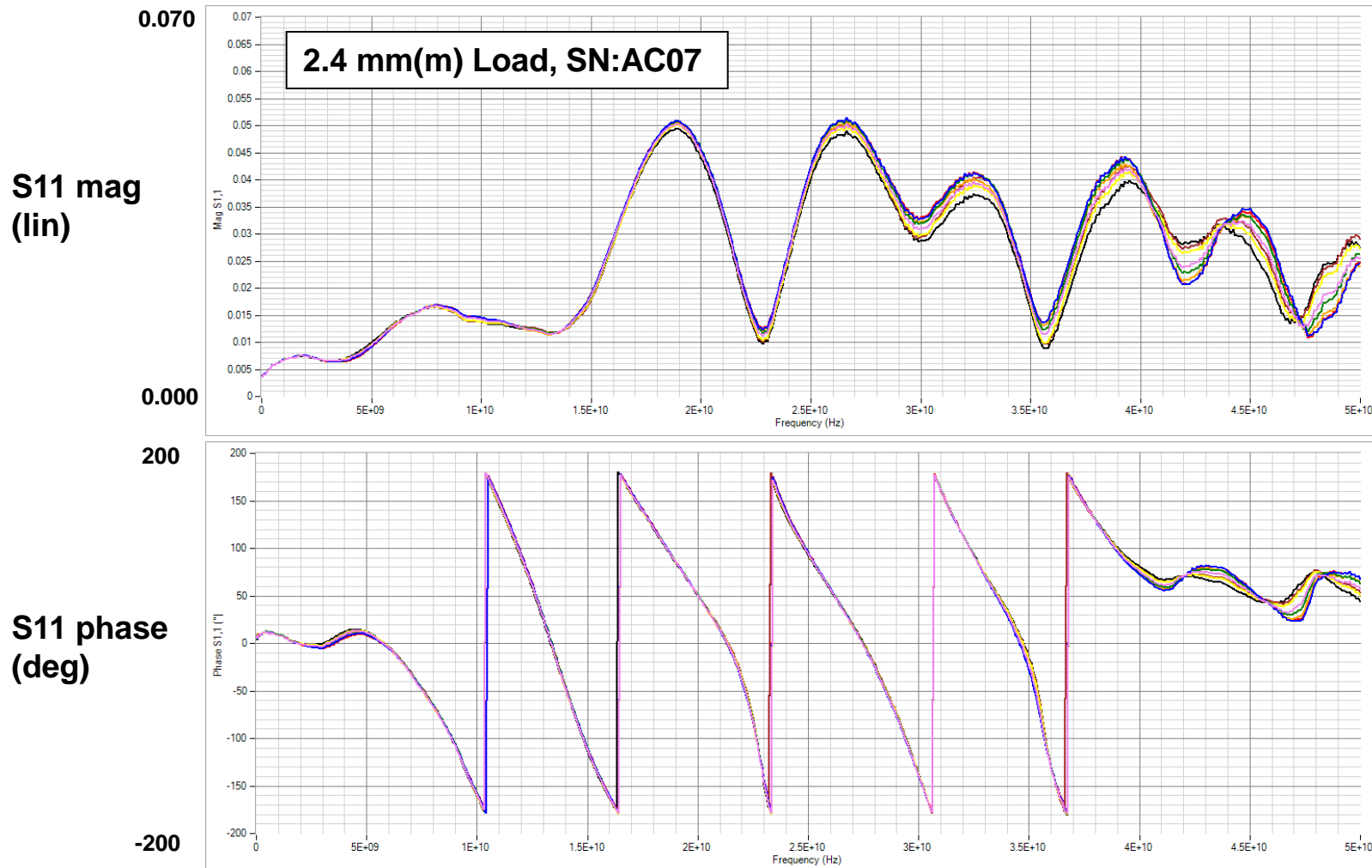
- S11 normalized to the mean value (connector repeatability unc. only)



**First example:**  
DUT showing a good repeatability behaviour when measured at 8 different connector orientations.

# VNA uncertainty budget over all frequencies: **no unc.**

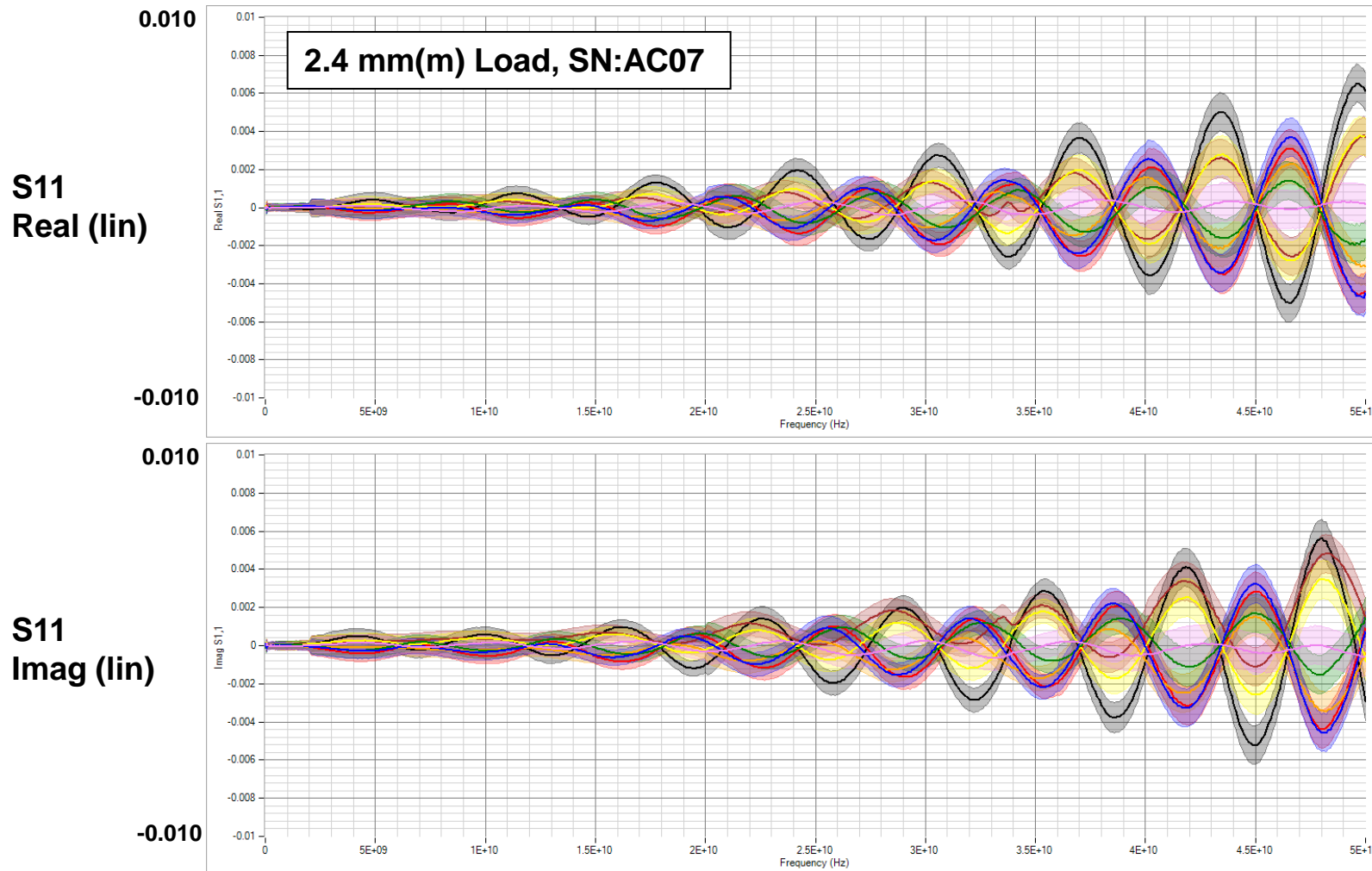
- S11 of a load measured at 8 different connector orientations



**Second example:**  
DUT showing a bad repeatability behaviour when measured at 8 different connector orientations.

# VNA uncertainty budget over all frequencies: **single unc.**

- S11 normalized to the mean value (connector repeatability unc. only)

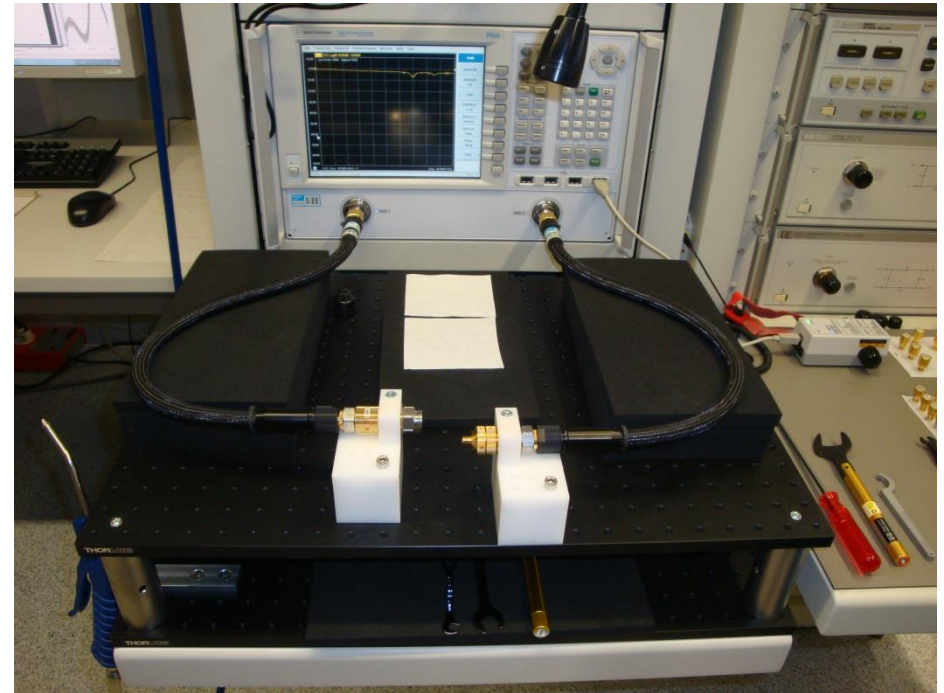
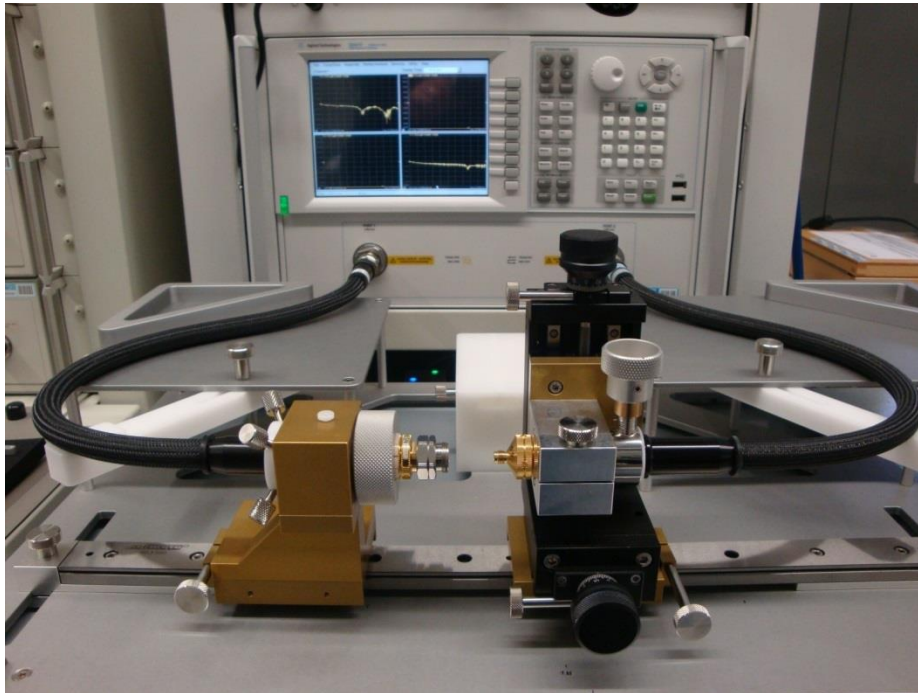


**Second example:**  
DUT showing  
a bad repeatability  
behaviour when  
measured at 8  
different connector  
orientations.



## 2<sup>nd</sup> Topic

- VNA measurement setup (**pimp my VNA**)

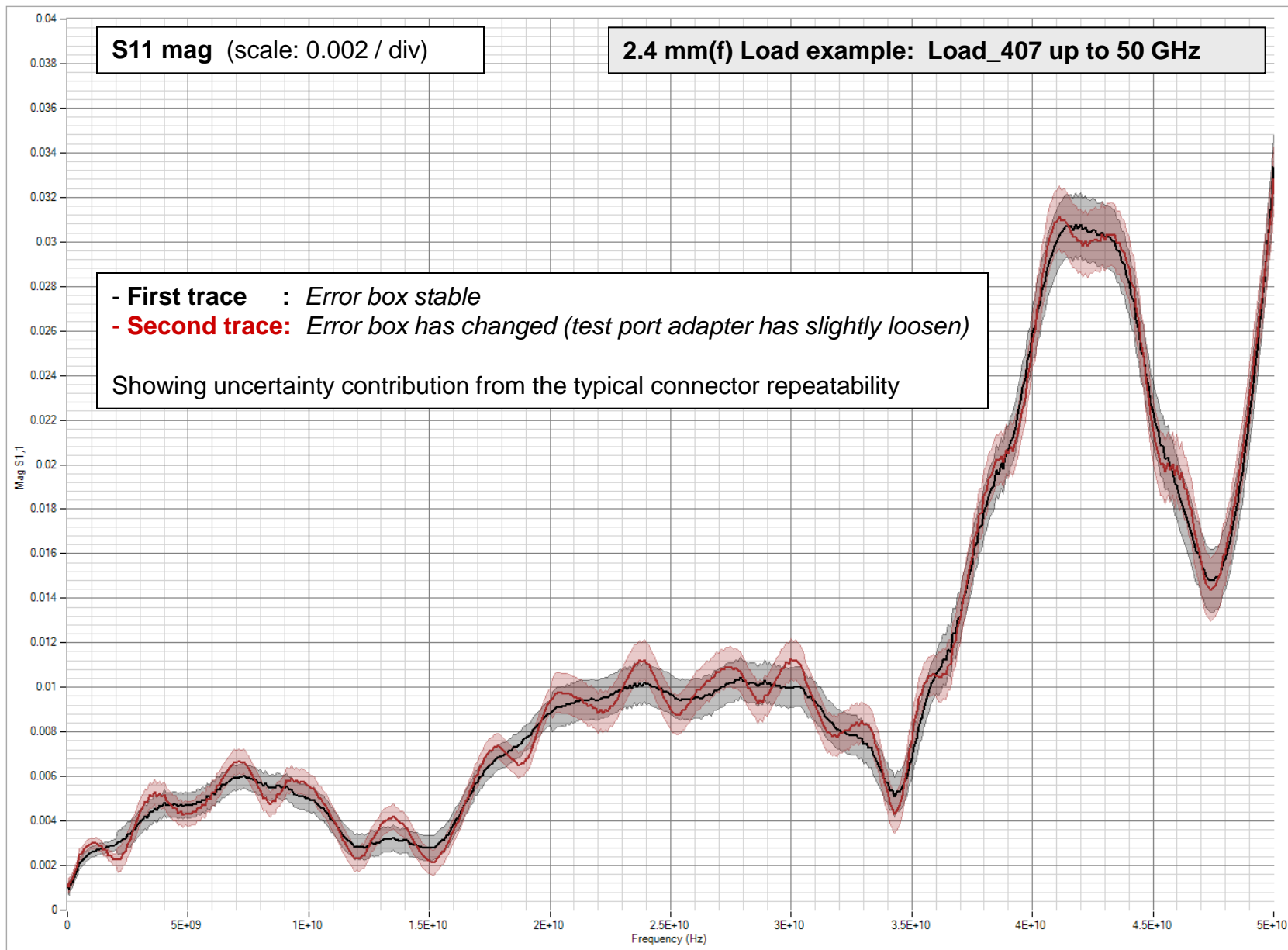






# VNA architecture, performance and settings

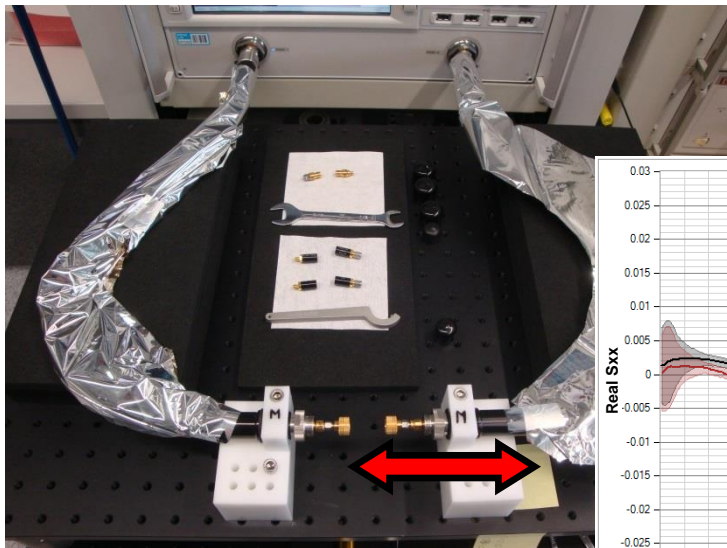
- **VNA hardware**
  - **4 receiver architecture** (possible to measure the switch terms).
  - **VNA errors** (note: it is not possible to error correct for all VNA errors)
    - **Systematic** (directivity, tracking terms, match terms, ...),
    - **Random** (noise floor and trace noise),
    - **Drift** (S-parameters, switch and error terms)
- **VNA box performance**
  - **Raw match performance, receiver ratio linearity, S21-S12 symmetry** (specifications).
  - **Metrology grade VNA (option): drift, raw performance, symmetry, temperature monitor.**
  - **Additional thermal isolation of the VNA** (box mounted in a rack cabinet).
- **VNA settings**
  - **Source power** (receiver compression, DUT effects).
  - **Frequency resolution** (better information using more frequency points).
  - **Sweep time versus accuracy** (sweep types: swept vs. stepped sweep, frequency list).
  - **VNA accuracy**: reduce the IF BW instead of averaging.
  - **Avoid to stay in the HOLD mode** (VNA dependant, *VNA Tools II*: use measurement series).



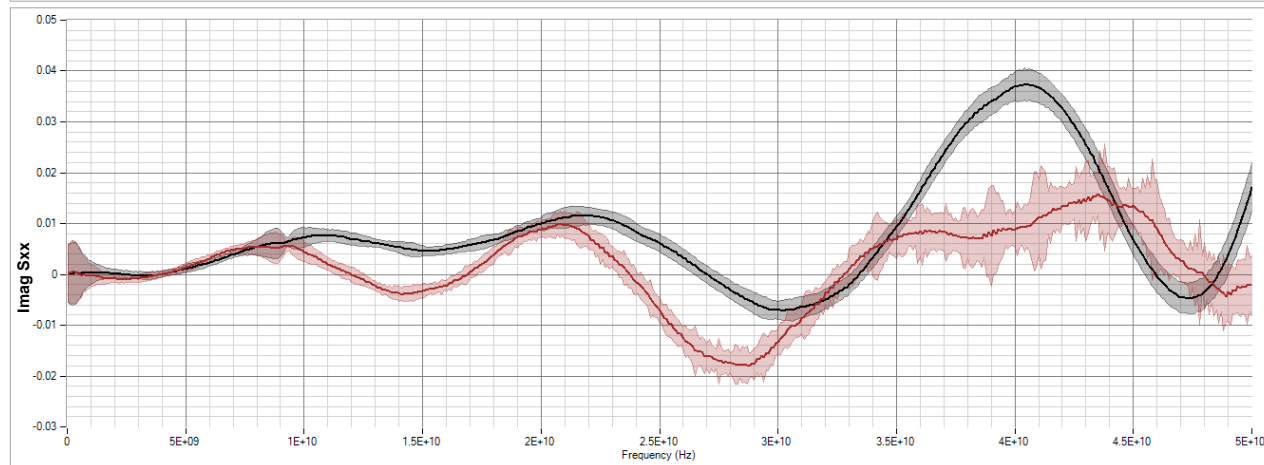
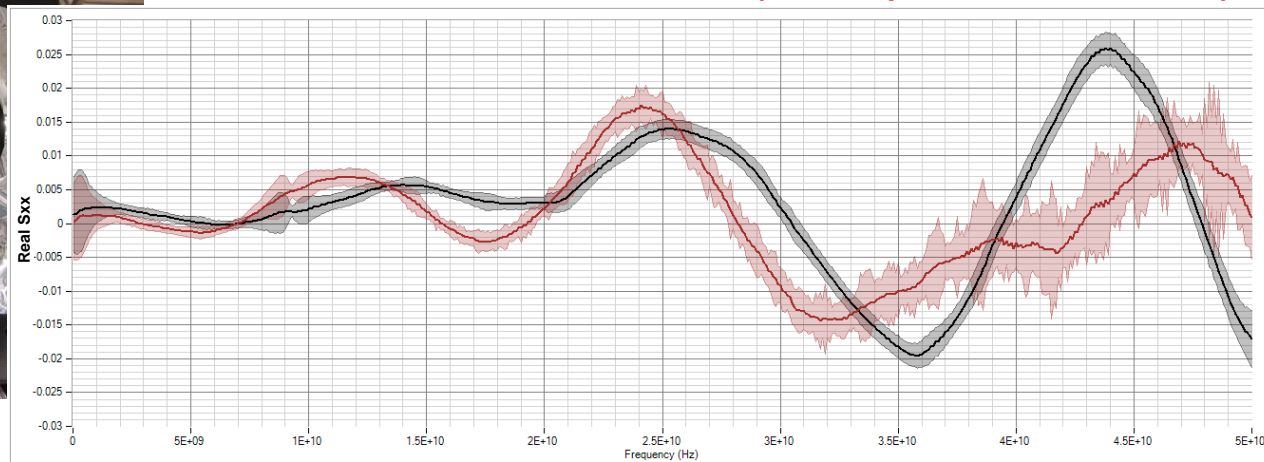
## VNA test port cables (goal: to minimize the cable effects)

- **Test port cable styles**
  - Semi-Rigid versus flexible cables.
  - Short versus long test port cables.
- **Test port cable layout**
  - **Avoid: an unsupported cable setup, cable twisting, minimize any cable movements.**
  - **Commercial breadboard based fixture with clamps and foam pads support.**
  - **Special cable fixtures** (most important: mechanically not over-determined → flush mating).
  - **Thermal isolation** (thin rescue blanket foil, foam, etc.).
- **Practical cable handling hints**
  - **Respect the natural bending of the cable** (adaptive fixture design).
  - **Install the cables on the previous evening** (time for the thermal and mechanical settling).
  - **Or if the needed time is not available: first warm up the cold cable connector interface.**
  - **Each cable has a settling time.**
  - **Some cables are showing hysteresis effects** (mechanically and thermally).
  - **Using cables or perform the measurement direct on the VNA test ports (adapters)?** (thermal effects: sensitive load designs, change of the dimensional properties → phase)
  - **Cable storage boxes: avoid any stress to the 'cable – connector interface' section.**

# VNA test port cables (fixed port: female or male?)



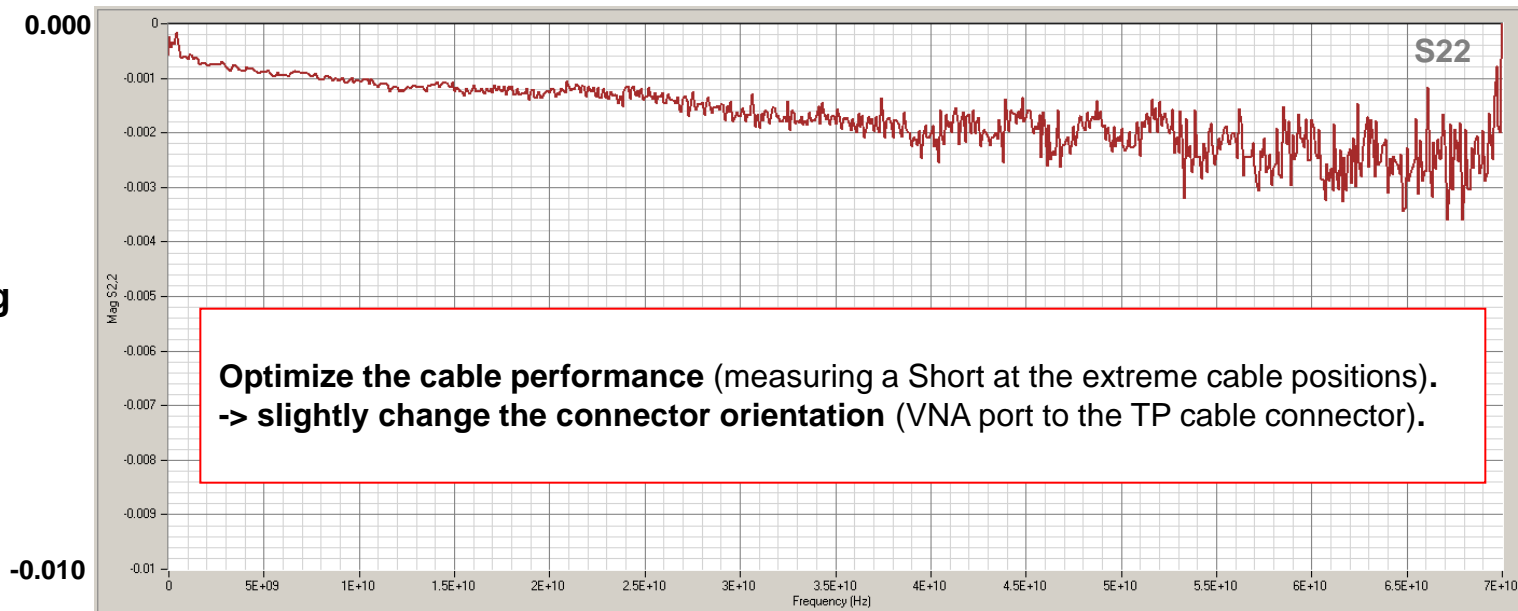
**Black trace** : female load measurement (using a fixed port).  
**Red trace** : male load measurement (the test port cable was moved).



**Optimise the cable layout for minimal cable movements.**



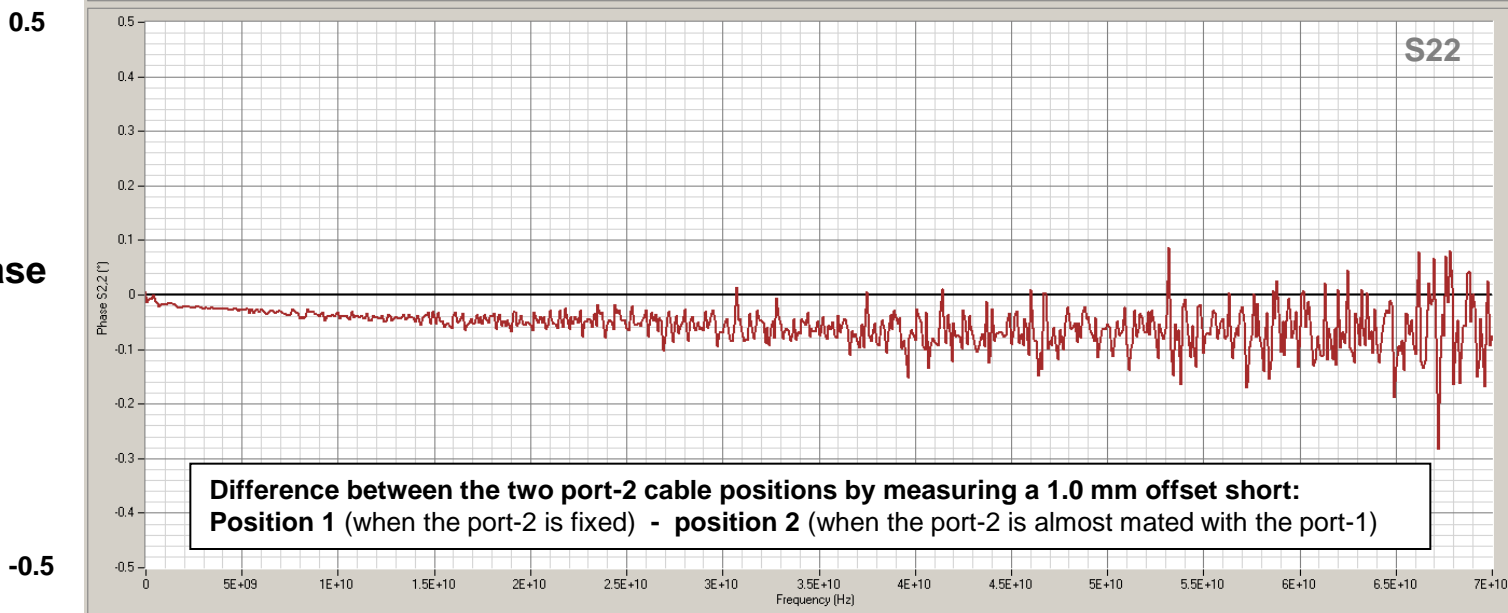
**S22 mag  
(lin)**



**raw data  
normalized  
to 1st trace**

**Note:**  
raw data versus  
error corrected  
data?

**S22 phase  
(deg)**



# VNA test port adapters (goal: to improve the repeatability)

- **Test port adapter styles**
  - Metrology versus lab precision type adapters.
  - Slotless versus slotted type.
- **Important features of a **best** test port adapter**
  - Mechanical specification: pin-depth, pin diameter, no eccentricity, surface finish.
  - **Select a pin-depth which avoids to provoke the unpredictable near field effects.**
  - Shows a good repeatability behaviour → low connector orientation sensitivity.
  - Does not change the characteristics of a cal standard or DUT (e.g.: nominal pin diameter).
- **Practical test port adapter handling hints**
  - Always clamp at least one Test Port (TP) side (keep the VNA error box stable).  
TP clamping: be careful with multistage adapters (centre conductor not from one piece).
  - **First run a TP repeatability test using a short (the open is less stable) → burn in effect.**
  - Check the repeatability behavior of each possible connection pair.
  - Be careful with mechanical compatible connector families:  
Example: 2.92 mm vs K, 3.5 mm and SMA, etc.
  - Cleaning of the connector interfaces → most important for the small connectors.
  - Use a dielectric disc to control the center conductor position of a beadless airline.



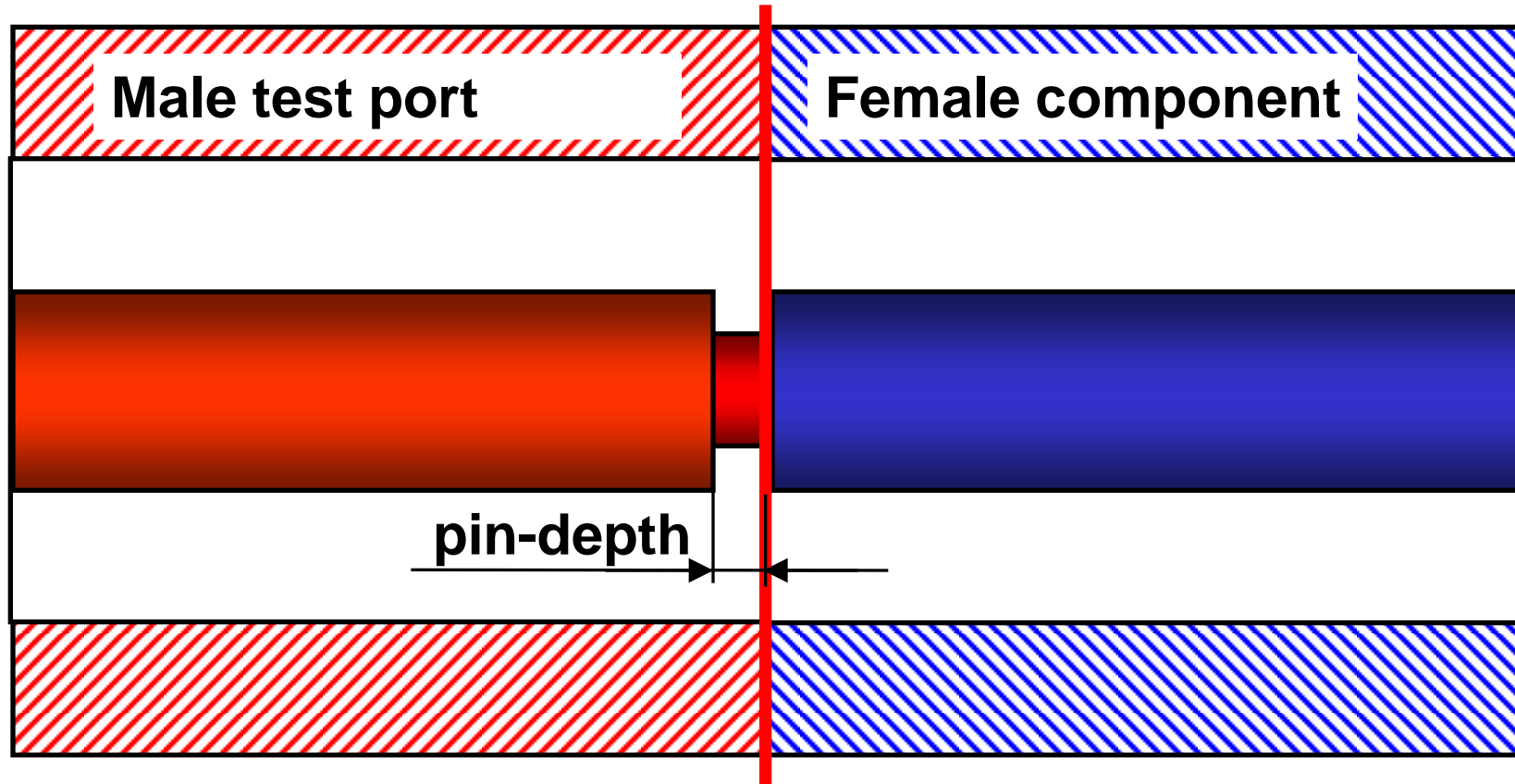
## Calculated minimal distances to avoid near field effects

based on the Agilent connector blue prints:

- **1.0 mm (slotted) : 5  $\mu\text{m}$**
- **1.85 mm (slotted) : 5  $\mu\text{m}$**
- **2.4 mm (slotless) : 15  $\mu\text{m}$**
- **2.92 mm (slotted) : 10  $\mu\text{m}$**
- **3.5 mm (slotless) : 15  $\mu\text{m}$**
- **Type-N (slotless) : 12  $\mu\text{m}$**

**General: a slotless design needs more distance!**

## Tolerance on component side allows a flush pin-depth value



**Conclusion:** minimal gap must be realised at the test port side!

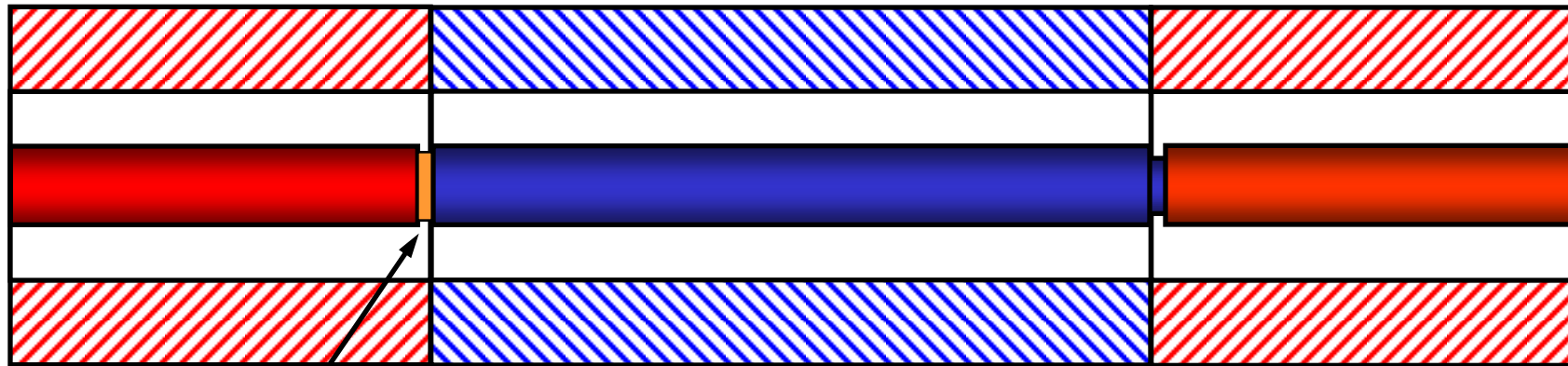


## TP1 mounted with Kapton disc to avoid near field effects and to control a flush centre conductor position

3.5 mm(m) TP1

3.5 mm beadless Air Line

3.5 mm(f) TP2

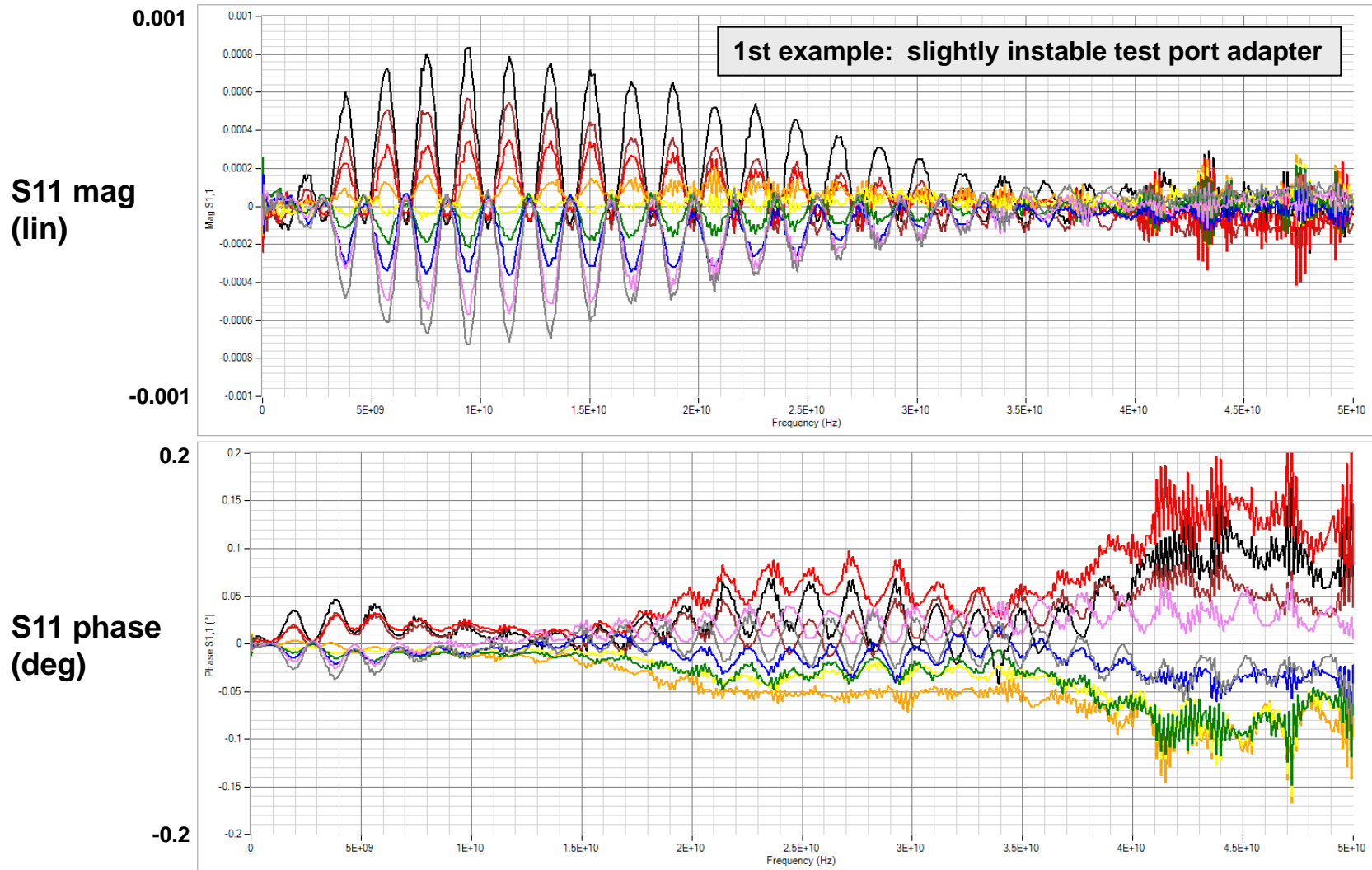


**Kapton disc sizes used at METAS: 12.7  $\mu\text{m}$  or 19  $\mu\text{m}$**

**Example:** optimal CC pin-depth recession for the 3.5 mm line system = 15  $\mu\text{m}$



# 2.4 mm(f) test port adapter repeatability test using a short

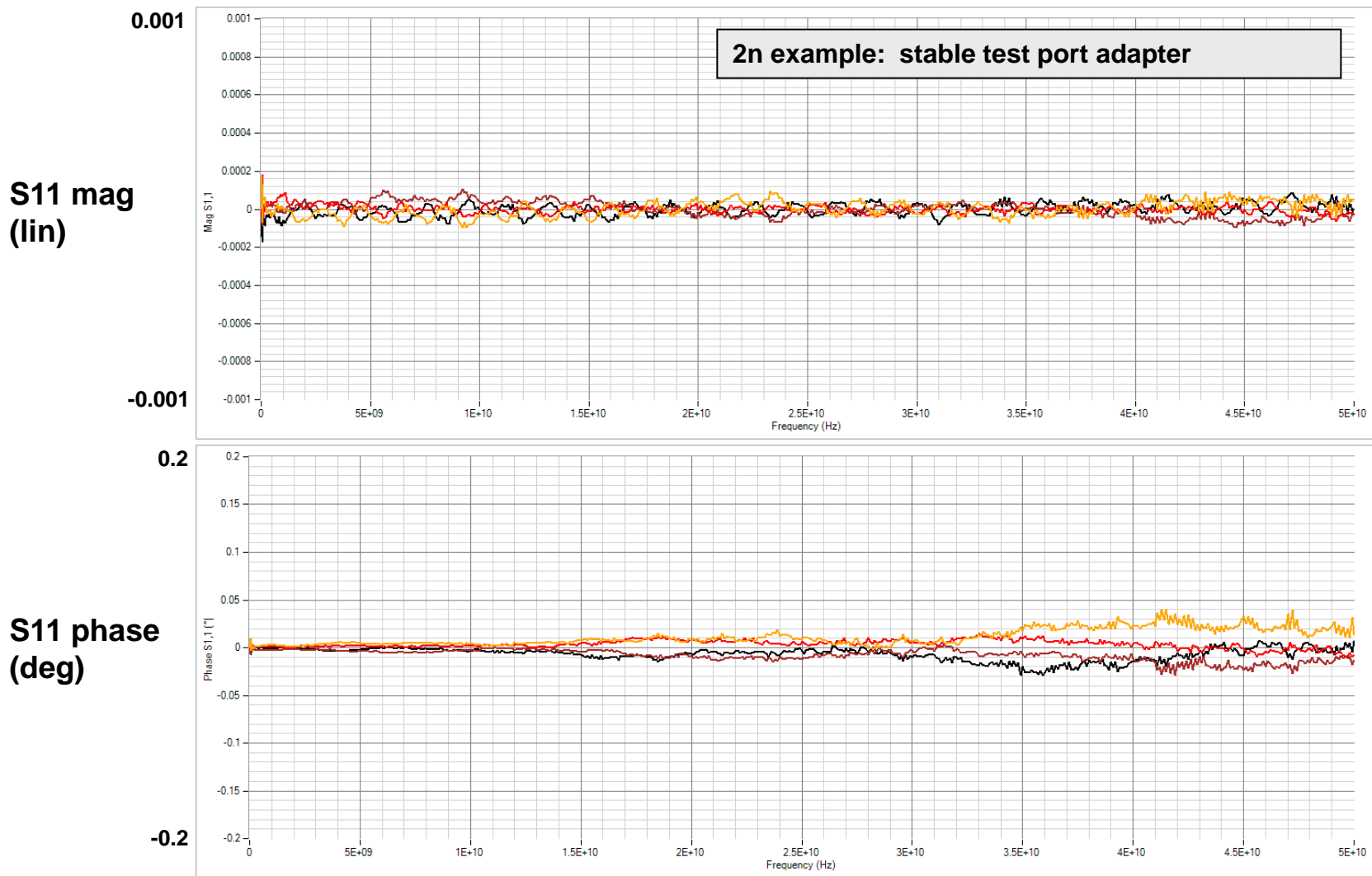


*raw data  
normalized  
to mean*

**First:**  
Evaluate the test port repeatability by measuring a Short at different connector orientations!



# 2.4 mm(f) test port adapter repeatability test using a short



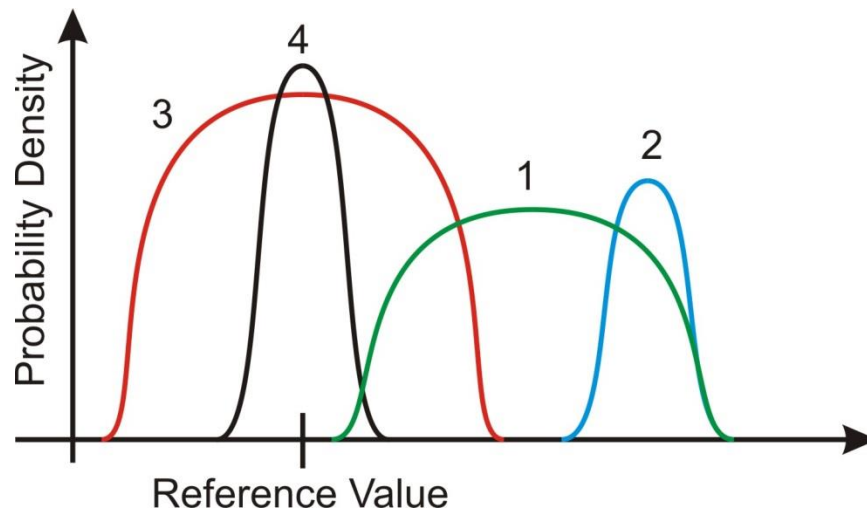
*raw data  
normalized  
to mean*

**First:**  
Evaluate the  
test port  
repeatability  
by measuring  
a Short at  
different  
connector  
orientations!

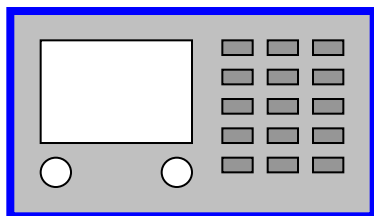
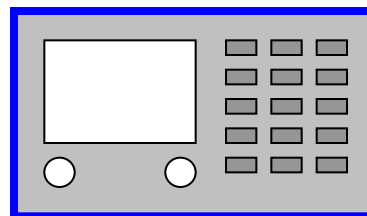
## 3<sup>rd</sup> Topic

*inaccurate*: using a non-traceable calibration kit  
*imprecise* : unstable VNA hardware and set-up

- Accuracy and S-parameter traceability chain



1. **inaccurate and imprecise**
2. **inaccurate but precise**
3. **accurate but imprecise**
4. **accurate and precise**

**VNA 1****VNA 2****Cal Kit 1** (generic and/or polynomial data)

**Open:** polynomial data (C-terms)  
**Short:** polynomial data (L-terms)  
**Load:** assumed to be perfect  $50+j0$  ohm

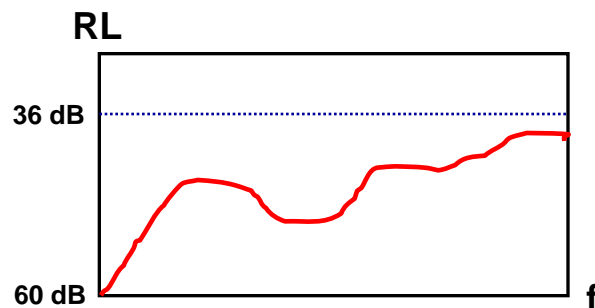
**Specs:** O / S: phase deviation from nominal  
Load: RL better than 36 dB

**Cal Kit 2** (data base data with unc.)

**Open:**  
**Short:**  
**Load:**

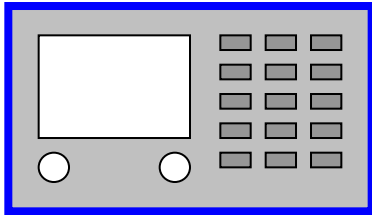
VRC		VRC f(frequency)		
freq	freq	freq	real	imag
1	1	1	1.23	3.47
2	2	2	1.23	3.47
3	3	3	1.23	3.47
4	4	4	1.23	3.47
5	5	5	1.23	3.47

As an example: assumption that we have two identical loads in both calibration kits.

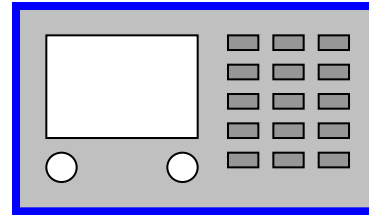




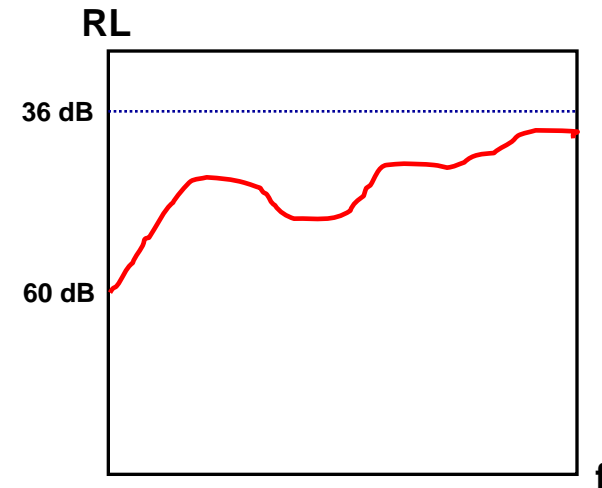
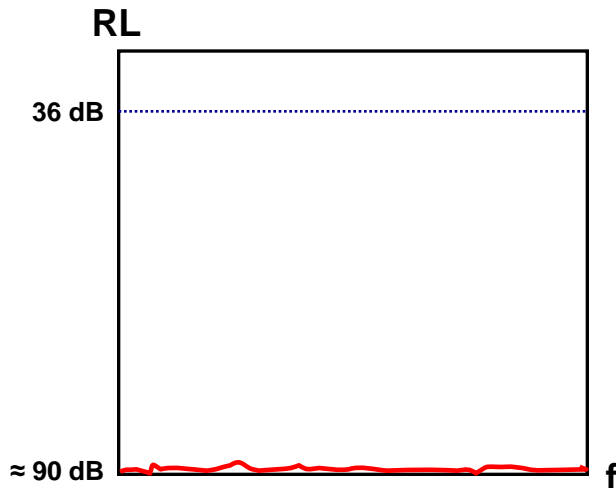
VNA 1



VNA 2

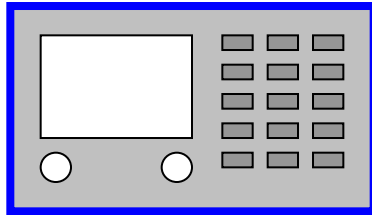


**1st step:** Perform a One Port cal and measure directly the used cal load (without a new connection)

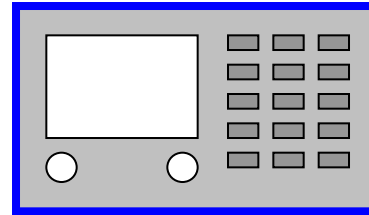




VNA 1

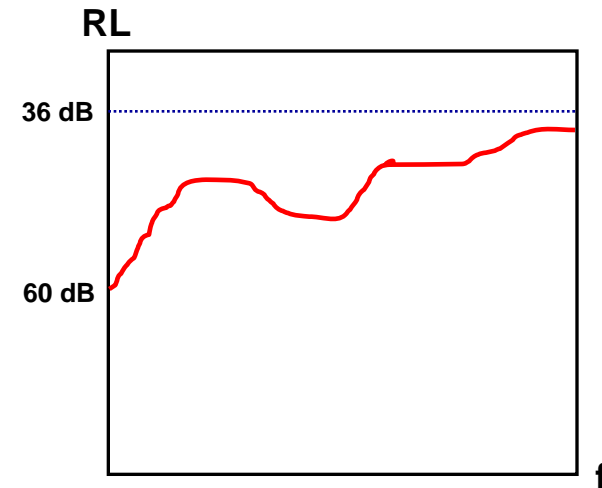
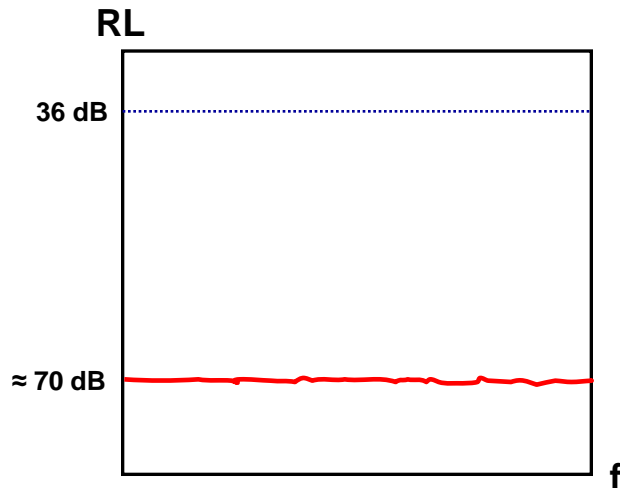


VNA 2



Traceability?

**2nd step:** Re-measure the used cal load (new connection – now including the connector repeatability)



# How to further improve the accuracy in VNA metrology?

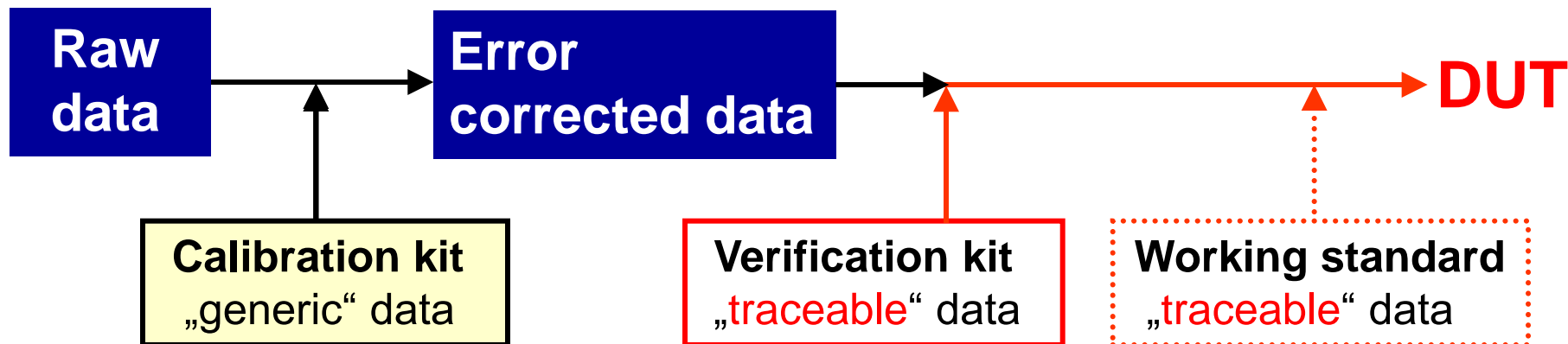
- **Start with traceable calibration kits - not with the verification kits!**
    - Use the best known standards for the VNA calibration (cal or verification standards).
    - A verification standard must be: appropriate, transferable, repeatable and stable.
  - **GUM compliant uncertainty calculation process**
    - Identify the input quantities with their uncertainty definitions.
    - Define an appropriate VNA measurement model.
    - Uncertainty propagation through the defined VNA measurement model.
  - **Still widely used in VNA metrology**
    - EURAMET/cg-12/v.01 (formerly: EA10/12): *Guidelines on the evaluation of VNA*:
    - Starts after applying the 'VNA calibration' by analysing the residuals.
    - Only for magnitude (no phase information) and uses outdated or wrong assumptions.
    - Airline based ripple assessments (ignoring connector effects and line losses).
- **HF-Circuits (WP5): New guidelines on the evaluation of VNA and the uncertainties**



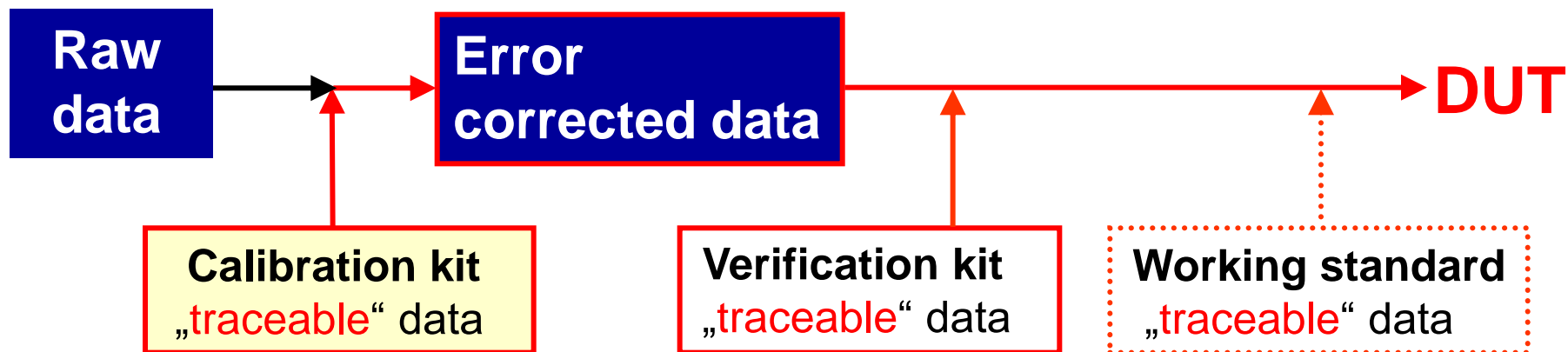


## Traditional VNA calibration approach:

Traceability



## Direct “traceable” VNA calibration approach:





# Accurate and traceable calibration kits and methods

- **Primary coaxial calibration standards**

- **Beadless airlines**
- **Flush Shorts and Offset Shorts**
- **Offset Opens?** Only accurately calculable using an air dielectric design - but issues with small coaxial families:  
Near field coupling and the control of the center conductor position (longitudinal and angular).

**Accuracy:** mechanical characterisation, material knowledge, modelling capabilities, handling.

**Issues** : beadless airlines (position of the CC), determination of the propagation constants.

- **Traceable characterized coaxial calibration standards**

- **Offset Opens**
- **Offset Shorts**
- **Loads**

**Accuracy:** quality of the uncertainty information, short and long term stability (design), handling, avoid center conductor coupling effects (use appropriate test ports).

**First selection criteria:** showing a good connector orientation repeatability behaviour!

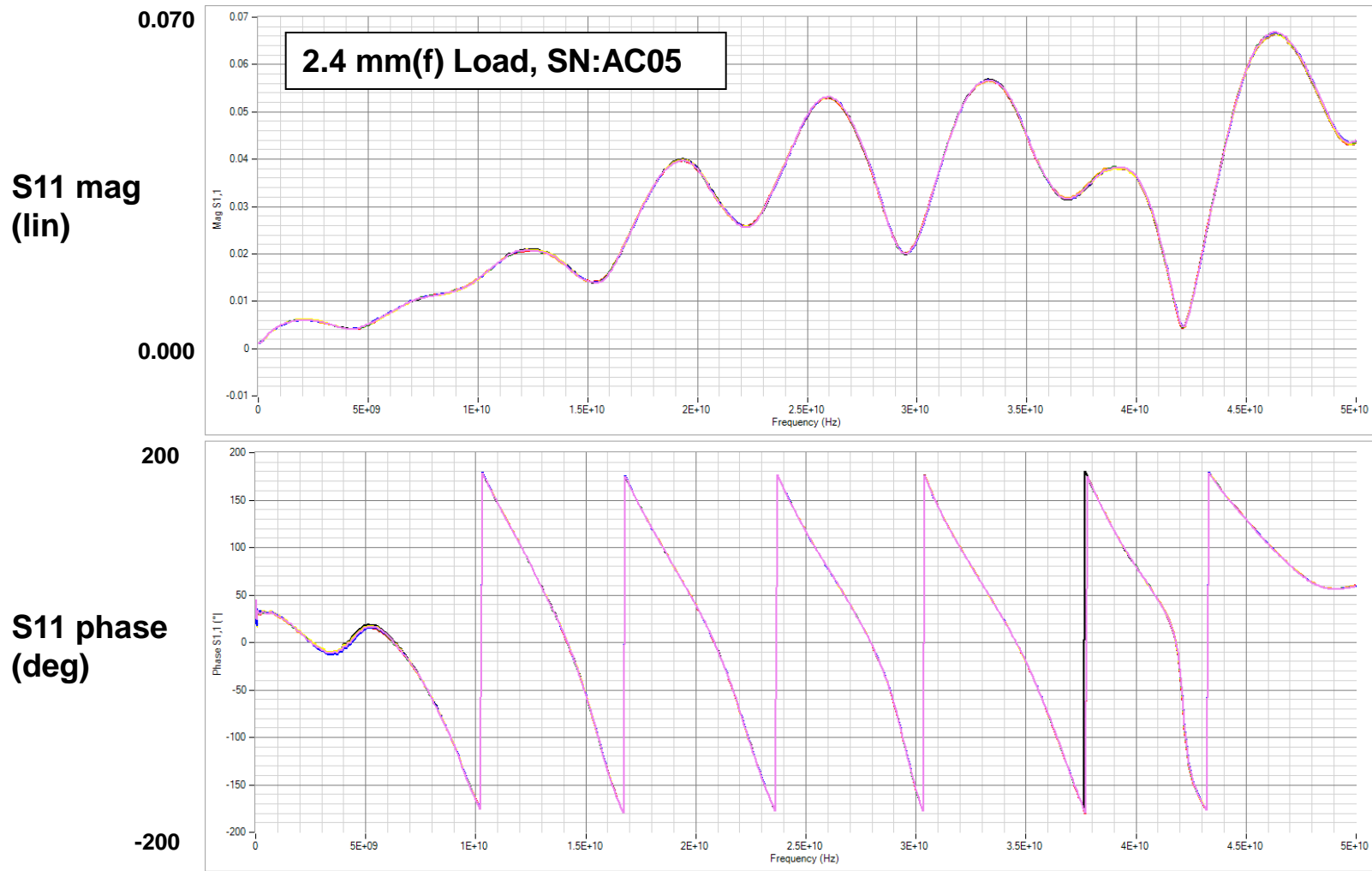


# Accurate and traceable calibration kits and methods

- **Traceable characterized calibration standards – what is important:**
  - **The systematic connector effects must be included** (accurate reference plane definition).
  - **Repeatability of the used standards** (short and long term stability, connector orientation).
  - **S-parameter data format must include the uncertainty and correlation information.**
  - **Calibration standard definitions: data based versus polynomial data?**
  - ...

# A stable calibration standard is a must for data based def.

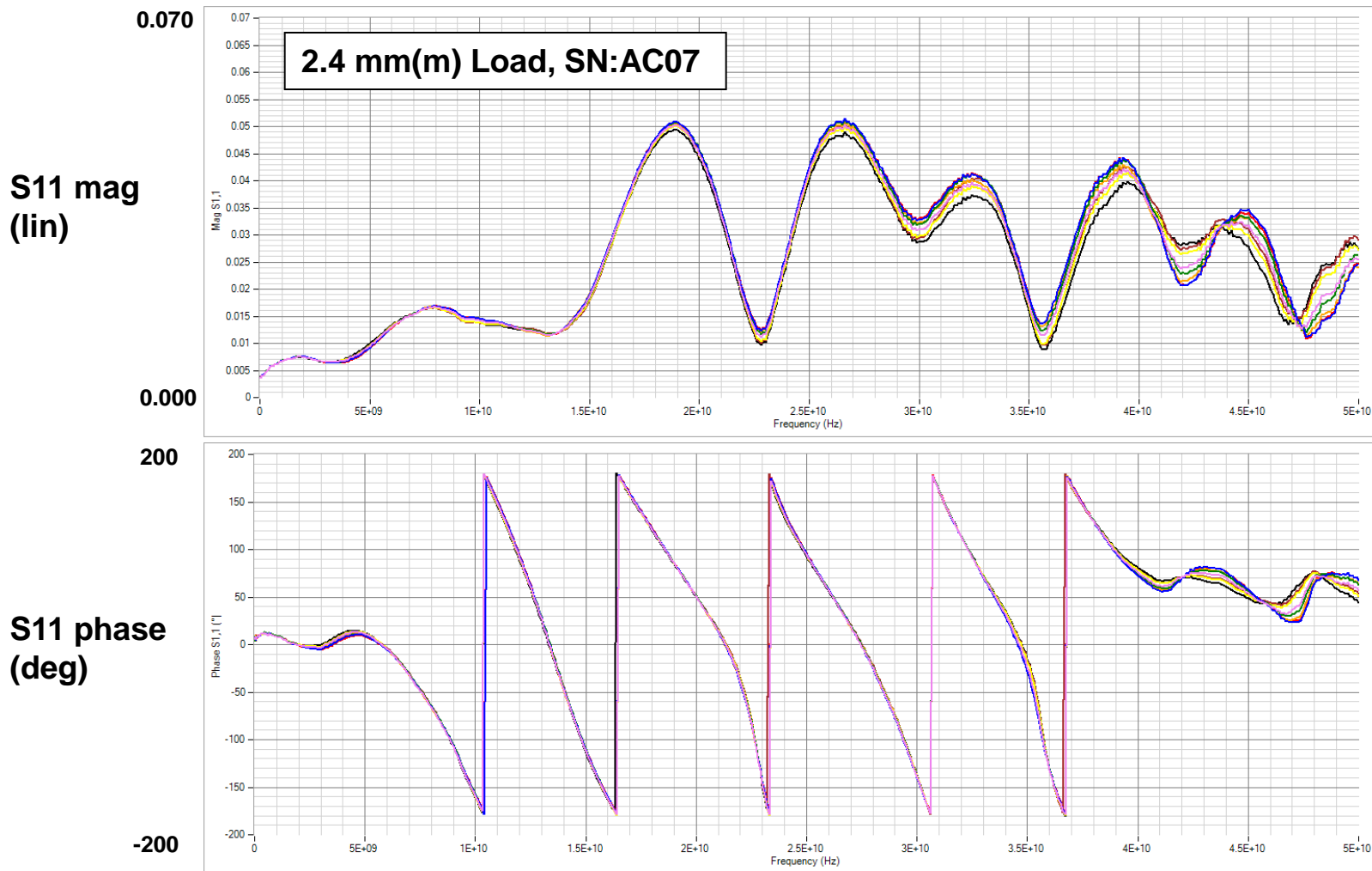
- S11 of a load measured at 8 different connector orientations



**First example:**  
Calibration standard showing a good repeatability behaviour.

# A stable calibration standard is a must for data based def.

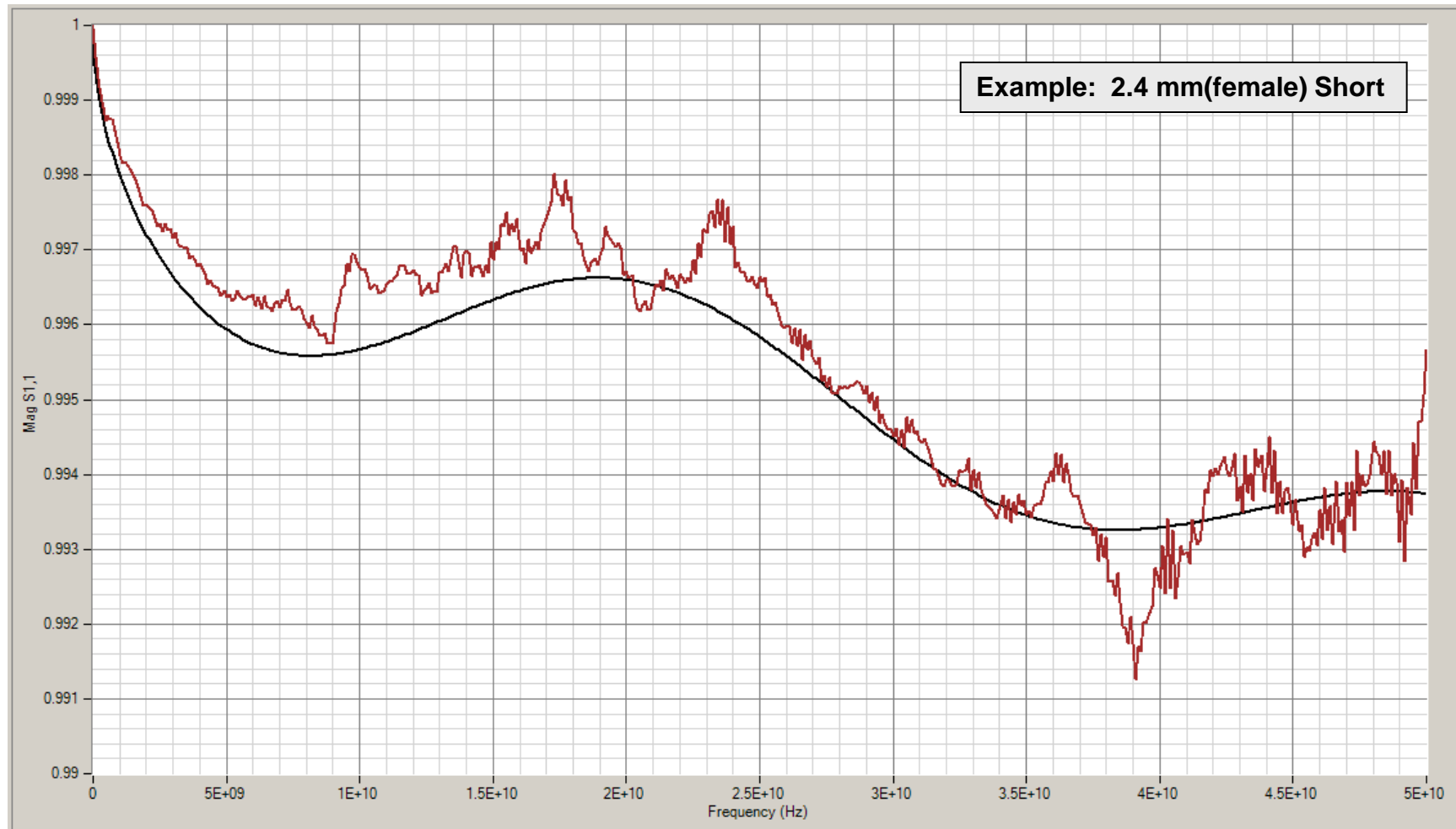
- S11 of a load measured at 8 different connector orientations



**Second example:**  
Calibration standard showing a bad repeatability behaviour.



# Standard definitions: data based versus polynomial data?





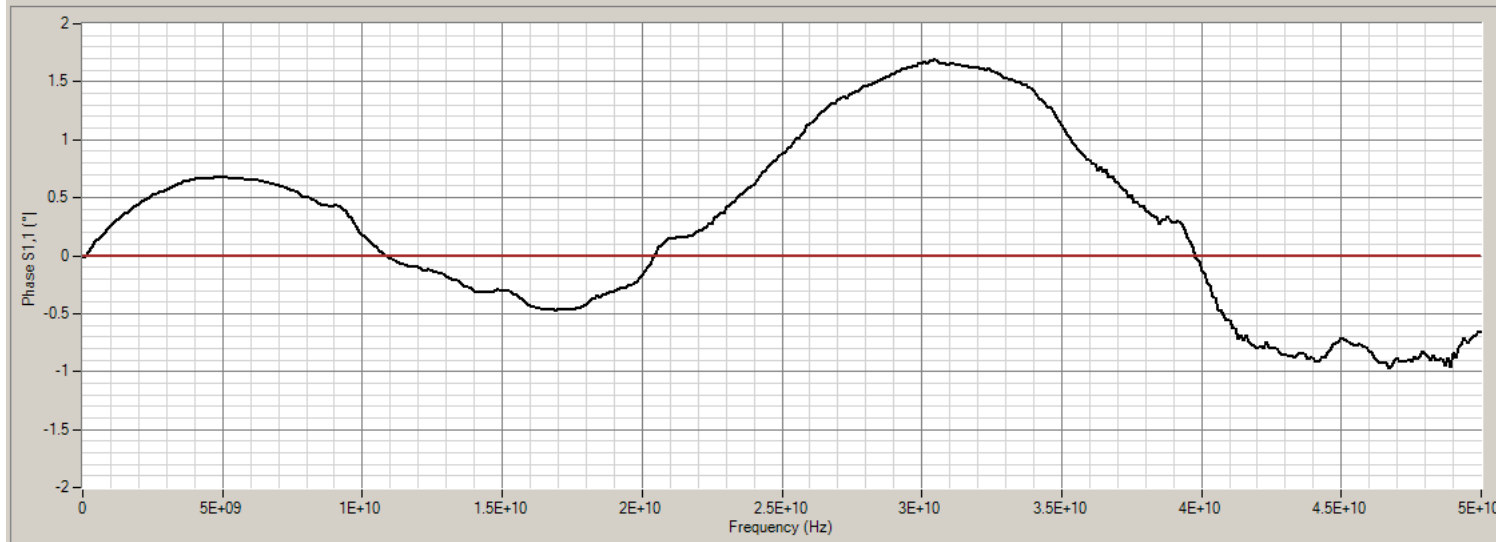
# Data based versus polynomial data: fitting losses !

S11 mag  
(lin)



Normalized  
to the  
data based  
value

S11 phase  
(deg)





## Accurate and traceable calibration kits and methods

- **Traceable characterized calibration standards – what is important:**
  - **The systematic connector effects must be included** (accurate reference plane definition).
  - **Repeatability of the used standards** (short and long term stability, connector orientation).
  - **S-parameter data format must include the uncertainty and correlation information.**
  - **Calibration standard definitions: data based versus polynomial data.**
  - ...
  
- **Select the most appropriate cal method** (SOLT, Unknown Thru, etc.)
  - **One Port** (no cable movements).
  - **SOLT** (insertable test port configuration, Thru connection is assumed to be perfect).
  - **Unknown Thru** (Opens and Shorts are the dominant uncertainty contributors).
  - **Optimization calibration** (over-determined: more cal standards than error terms).



## 4<sup>th</sup> Topic

- **Mating techniques and connector handling hints**





# Connector cleaning and specifications (preparation)

- **Consult connector guides**  
(see the references on the last slide)
- **Connector cleaning**
  - Stereo microscope → a must for the small coaxial families.
  - Use appropriate cleaning tools and solvents.
  - Cleaning techniques: → avoid any stress to the center conductor and contact fingers.  
→ first mating areas, threads, protection caps.
- **Check for the connector specifications**
  - Mechanical or optical pin-depth measurements (mean pin-depth and compression effect).
- **Practical cleaning hints for best measurements**
  - Cleaning process just before an electrical measurements (dry air with 23 deg).
  - Special storage boxes (particles from the female connector protection caps).



# Special storage boxes for the data base standards



## Best mating techniques (goal: to improve the repeatability)

- **Good measurement guides and (old) cal kit operating manuals.**
- **Use a high quality torque wrench with the right setting and procedure.**
  - Avoid to use warm wrenches (from body heat).
  - Minimal thermal impact: alternately use two different wrench sets (load and long DUT).
- **Practical handling hints for best mating performance (repeatability):**
  - Avoid to rotate the coaxial components in respect to the test port (wear and contact).  
For all components: keep the DUT body orientation fixed with a counter wrench.  
Coaxial families with thin contact fingers are very sensitive to rotational stress.  
(1 mm and 2.92 mm: finger bending will result in a change of the contact point).
  - First optimize the performance of the test port (see slide 22: test port handling hints).
  - Perform at least one test connection (removal of oxide layers and contact finger settling).
  - Do not push the DUT connector during the mating process (only for the thread mating).
  - Mating speed controlled by the thread lead (slightly pull back the DUT component).
  - Always minimize the cal standard and DUT warm up effects from the body heat.
  - Avoid a fast loosening process (reduce any impact forces to the center conductors: 'click').
  - Cleanliness!



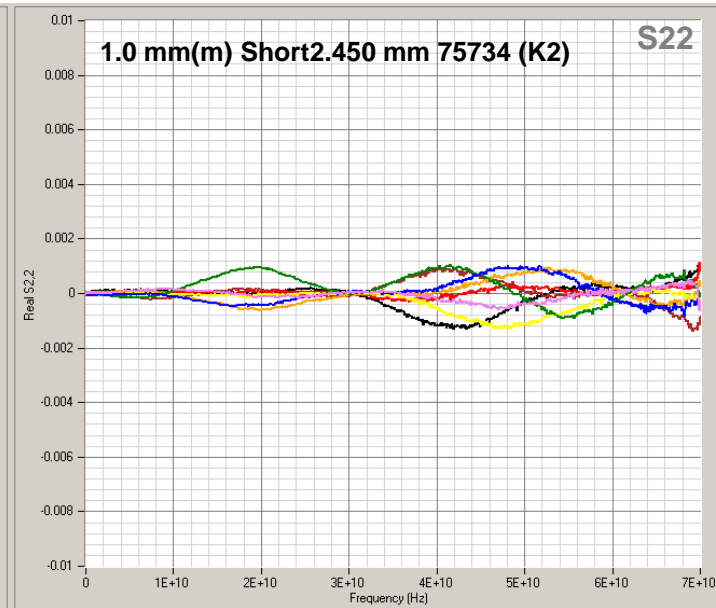
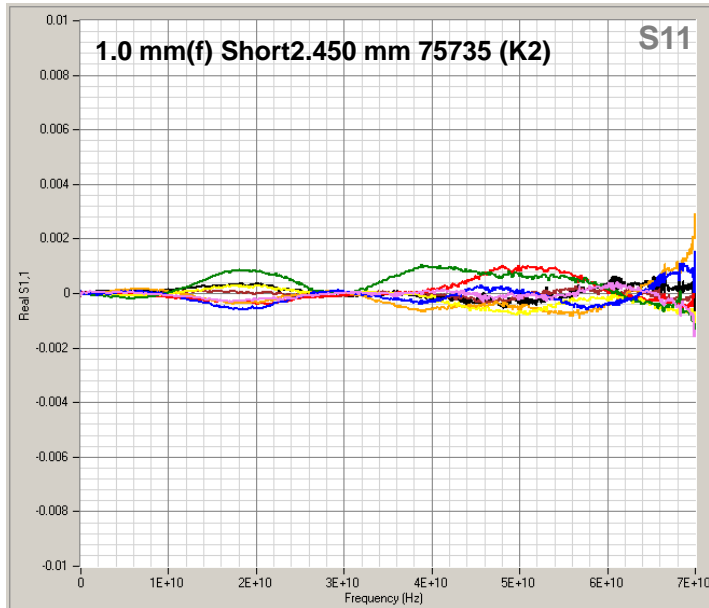
## Best mating techniques (S-parameters analysis)

- **Monitor and analyze the S-parameter data information**
  - **Critical connections: check for the direct response on the VNA display** (e.g.: beadless airline mating process, sliding load mating process).
  - **Measure each component at least at 4 different connector orientations (90 deg).**
  - **VNA Tools II: use the add measurement series** (evaluate the normalized raw data).



Real (lin)  
S11, S22

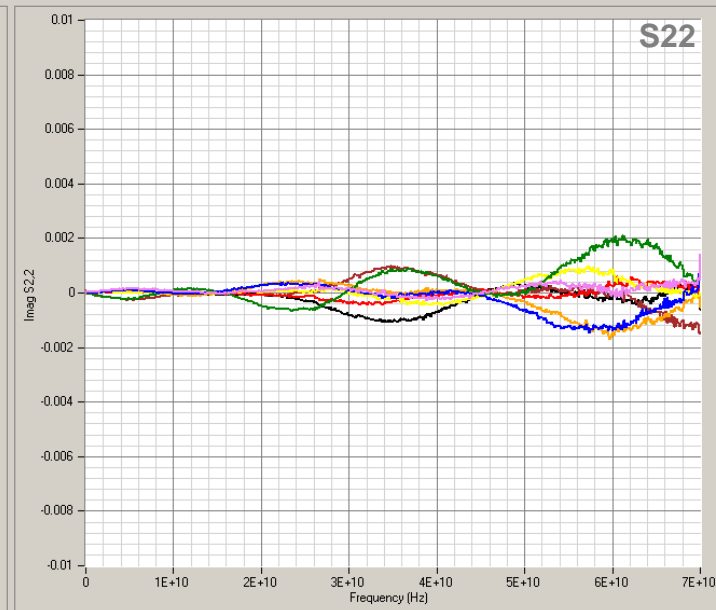
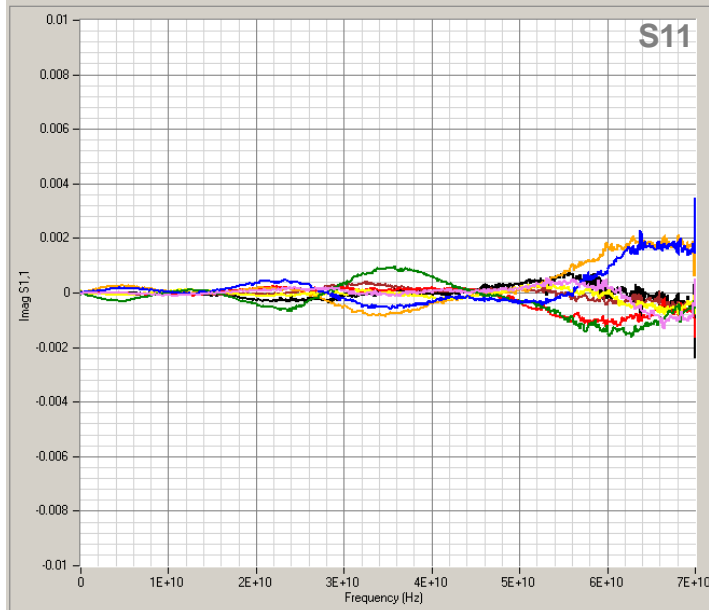
0.010



Raw data,  
normalized  
to mean

Imag (lin)  
S11, S22

0.010

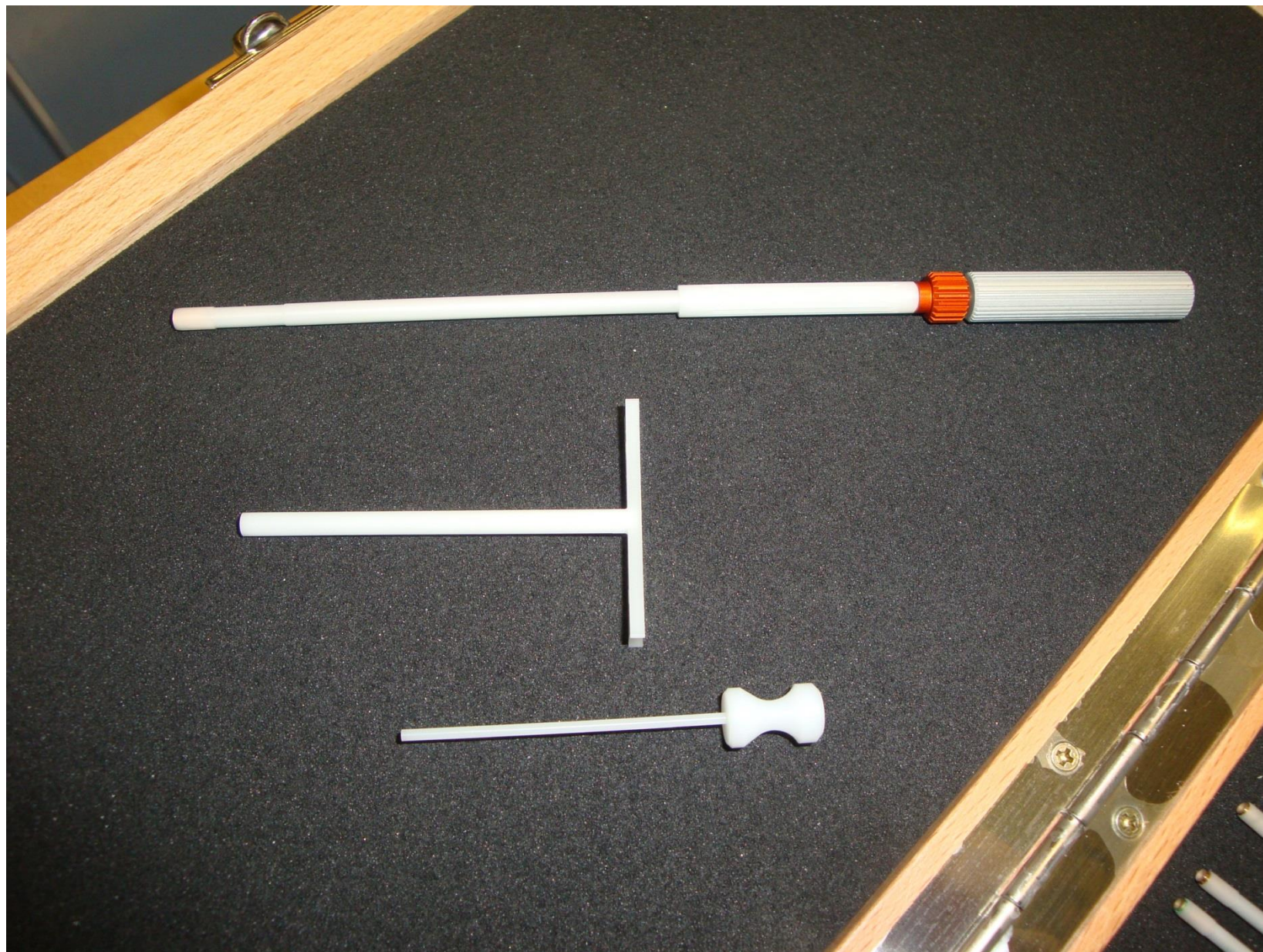


-0.010



## Best mating techniques (S-parameters analysis)

- **Monitor and analyze the S-parameter data information**
  - **Critical connections: check for the direct response on the VNA display** (e.g.: beadless airline mating process, sliding load mating process).
  - **Measure each component at least at 4 different connector orientations** (90 deg).
  - **VNA Tools II: use the add measurement series** (evaluate the normalized raw data).
  
- **Practical handling hints for best mating performance (accuracy):**
  - **A fixed test port allows a controlled and more precise mating process.**
  - **Use finger cots instead of gloves: does offer a better fine motor sensitivity!**
  - **Use a head loop with the small coaxial line systems: both hands are free!**
  - **For the initial connection process of a beadless airline:**
    - use an outer conductor inner diameter (OCID) alignment tool for the first connection.
    - use an center conductor (CC) alignment tool to control the mating process.





# OCID alignment tool (shown example: Type-N)



## 5<sup>th</sup> Topic

- **Practice and experience**

**Quality management documents, metrology grade hardware and traceable kits are only the first steps towards the best accuracy...**



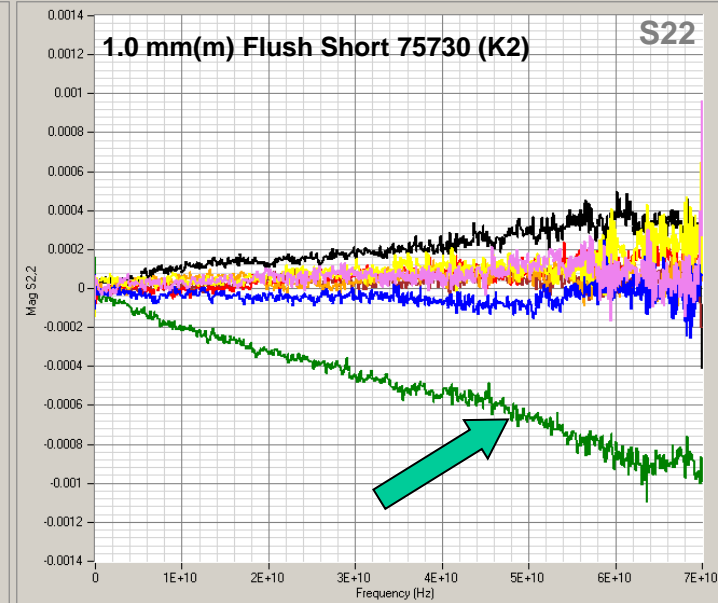
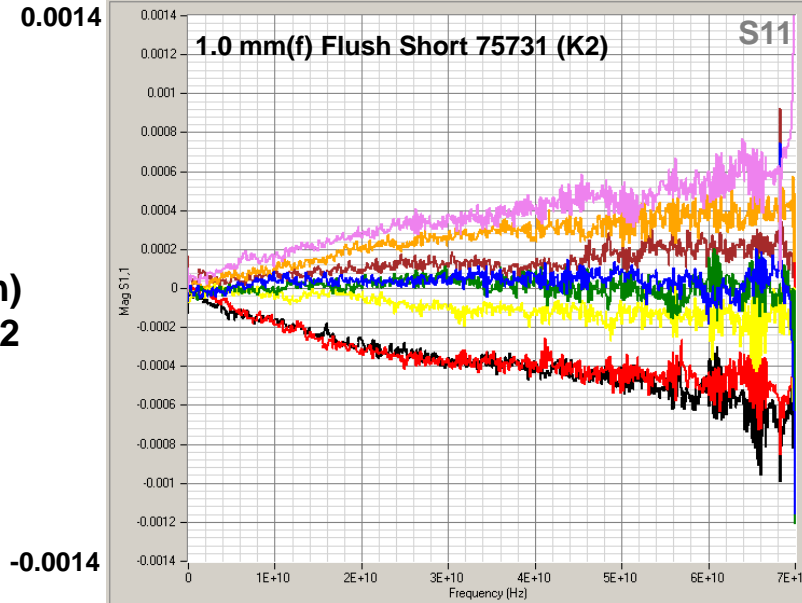


## VNA Tools II - best calibration and measurement hints

- **Evaluate for the best possible performance for each specific VNA:**
  - VNA settings (source power, IF-BW, average, sweep time and dwell time).
  - Roll-off characteristic (reliable start frequency – not what is written on the VNA!).
  
- **Evaluation of the best cal standard measurement data:**
  - Measure each component at least at 4 different connector orientations (90 deg).
  - Identify outliers and select the measurement closest to the mean as reference data.  
**Note:** pay attention to the measurement order (identify contact or temperature effects).
  - Or: use more measurements with the over-determined optimization calibration.

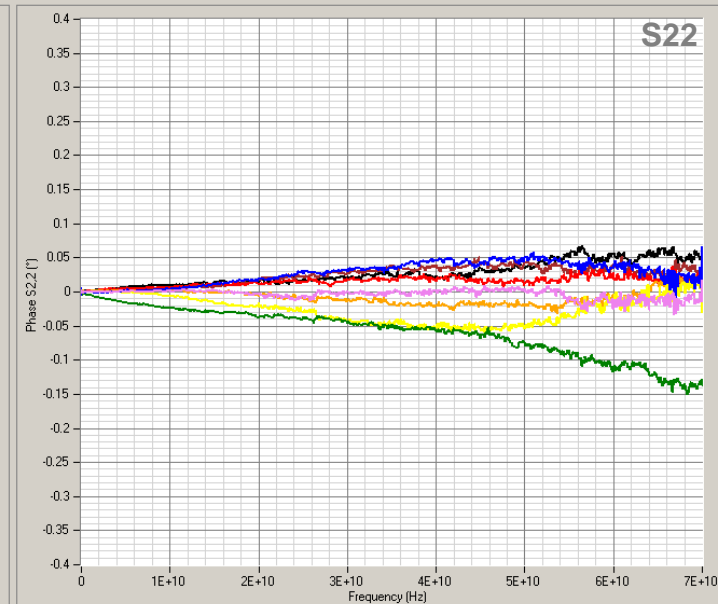
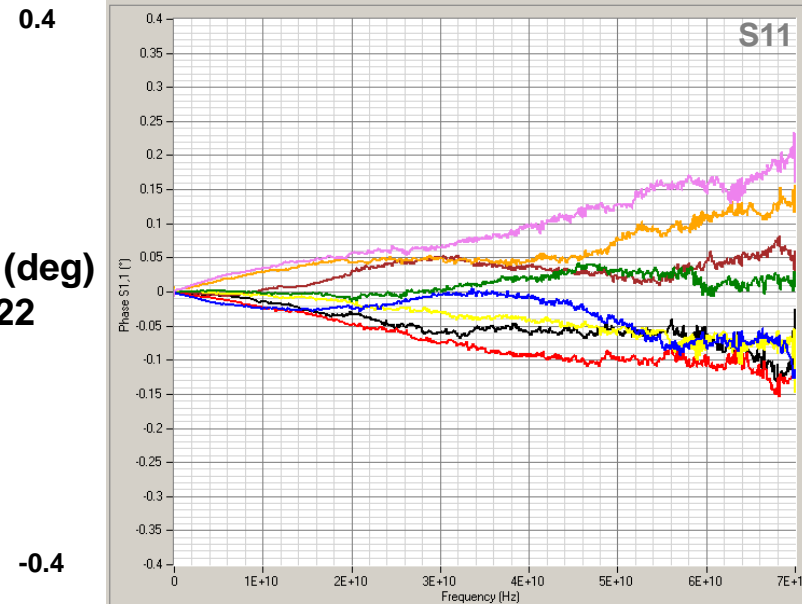


Mag (lin)  
S11, S22



8 different connector orientation measurement data, normalized to the mean.

Phase (deg)  
S11, S22





## VNA Tools II - best calibration and measurement hints

- **Best calibration standard and DUT measurement order:**
  - Minimize the drift effects from the VNA setup (try to keep the project time short).
  - One port measurements with the fixed ports: -> best measurement order?
    - Measure similar components together (showing a similar receiver ratio).
    - Use the following measurement order (cal and DUT together): **Loads, Opens then Shorts.**
- **Verification process:**
  - For long measurement series: periodically re-measure a stable component.
  - For 2-port measurements: periodically re-measure the Thru connection (cable & drift).
  - A stable and traceable verification standard can also be used for the calibration.
  - Create a comparison folder to save the reference data.
  - If more cal standards available than needed: compare the different **One port cal results.**
  - For passive devices: reciprocal transmission response (use the display function  $S/S'$ ).
  - **SOLT:** check for the Thru measurement response which was used during the calibration.
  - Compare SOLT with an 'Unknown Thru' cal: Check for the Thru measurement response.
  - Always re-measure the verification standard at the end of a measurement project.
  - ...



## Conclusions : “best VNA performance”

- **Optimize and characterize the VNA measurement setup.**
- **Use traceable calibration kits – not only verification kits.**
- **Choose appropriate and stable verification standards.**
- **Mating techniques and connector handling.**
- **Determine the main uncertainty contributors (investment).**
- **No way around more “practice and experience”.**

**Thank you very much for your attention  
!**

More information: [\*www.metas.ch/hf\*](http://www.metas.ch/hf)

[\*www.metas.ch/vnatools\*](http://www.metas.ch/vnatools)





## Some connector handling guides:

- **Hewlett Packard (now Agilent), “Microwave connector care”, Manual Part No. 0851-90064, April 1986**
- **Hewlett Packard (now Agilent), “Connector care for RF & microwave coaxial connectors”, Manual Part No. 0851-90064 Edition 2, 1991**
- **Hjipieris, G., “RF and Microwave connector care”, Technical information, Marconi Instruments publication No. 46889-505, 1997**
- **Skinner, A.D., “ANAMET connector guide”, 3rd edition, August 2007.**  
(available for free, from: <http://www.npl.co.uk/anamet-connector-guide>)
- **[http://na.tm.agilent.com/pna/connectorcare/Connector\\_Care.htm](http://na.tm.agilent.com/pna/connectorcare/Connector_Care.htm)**
- **[http://na.tm.agilent.com/pna/help/latest/Tutorials/Connector\\_Care.htm](http://na.tm.agilent.com/pna/help/latest/Tutorials/Connector_Care.htm)**

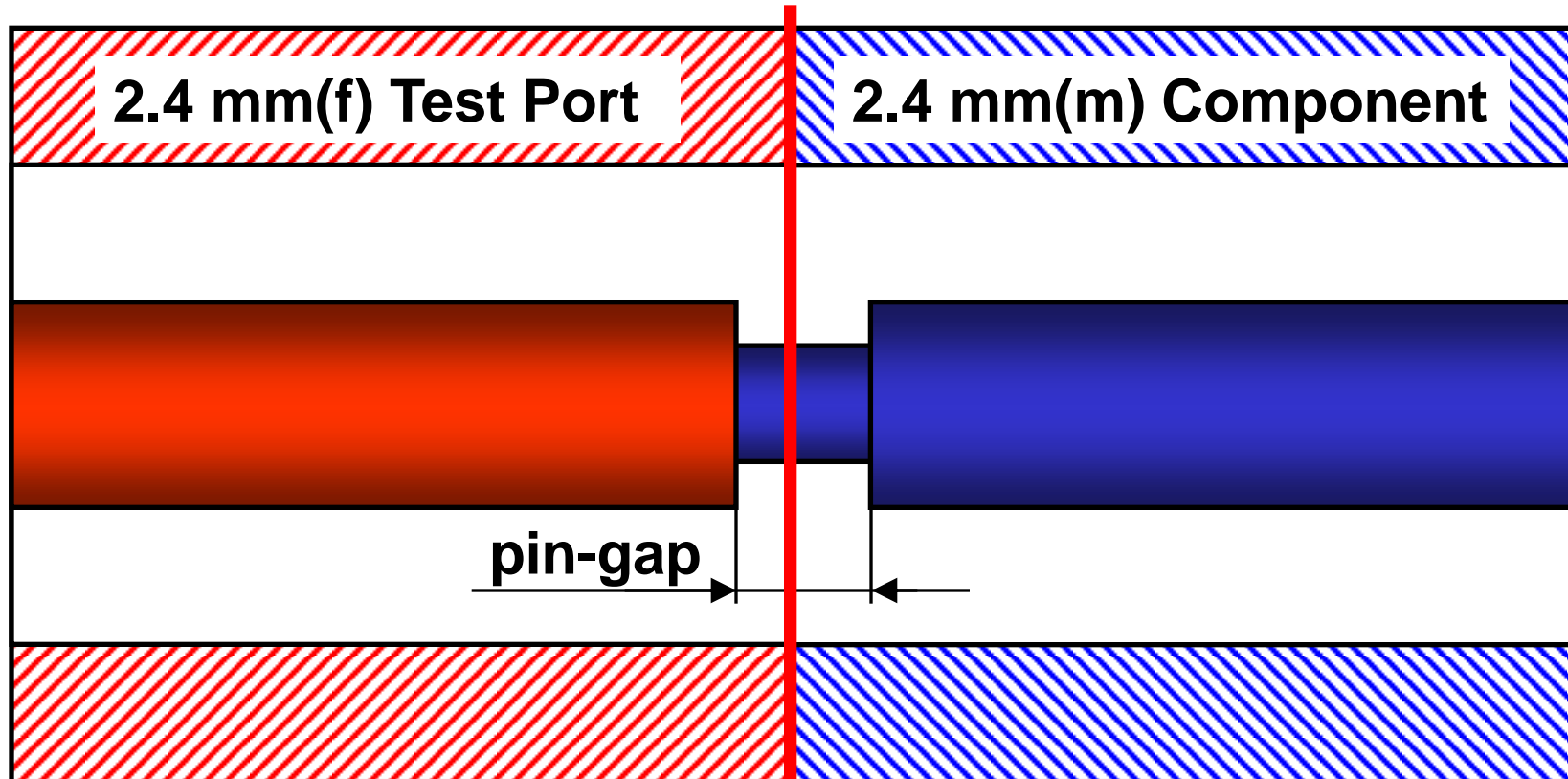
Hewlett Packard (now Agilent) „Microwave connector care“ (manual out of print)







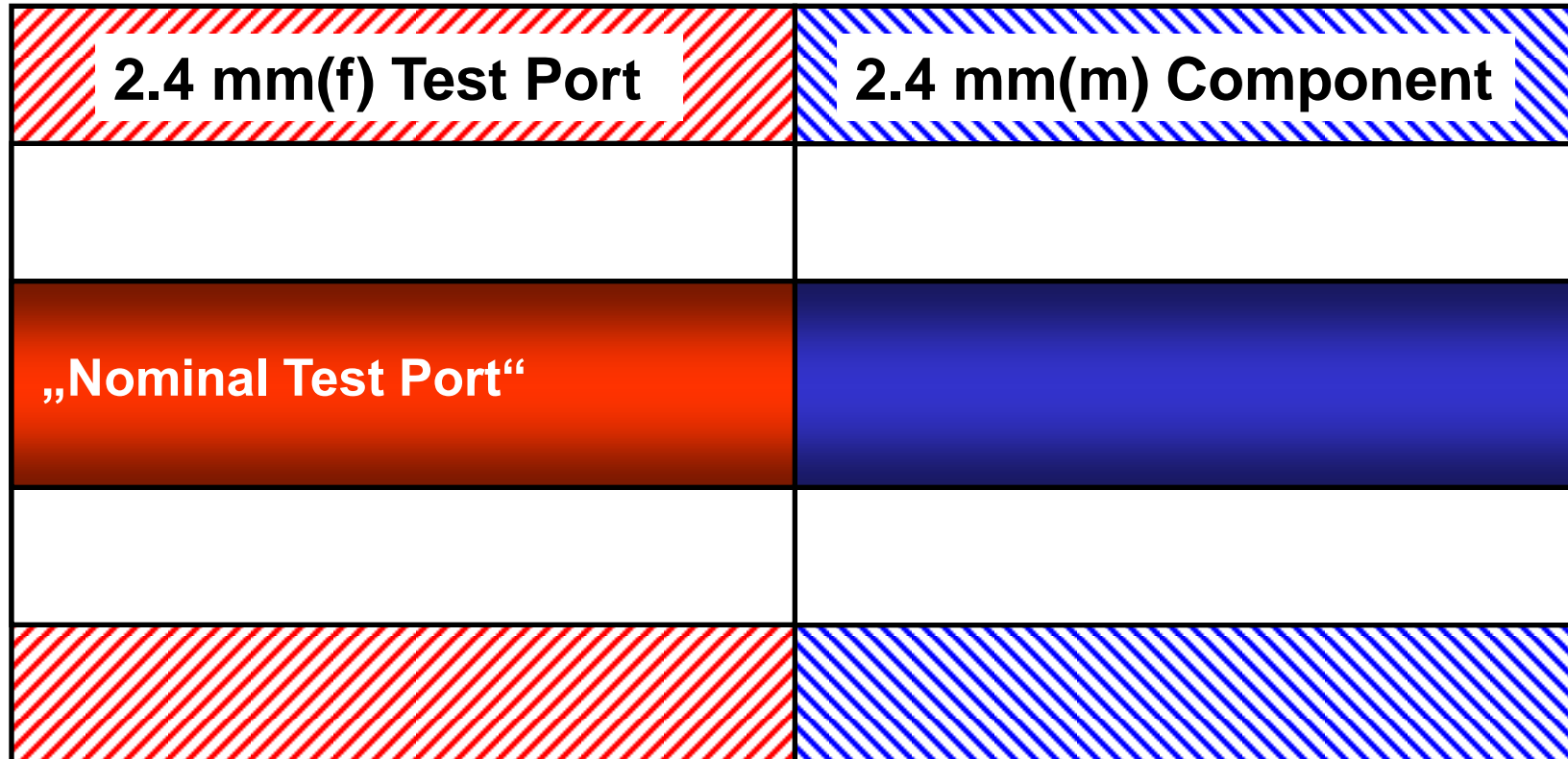
- Typical connection
- Pin-depth on both sides



**Electrical reference plane**



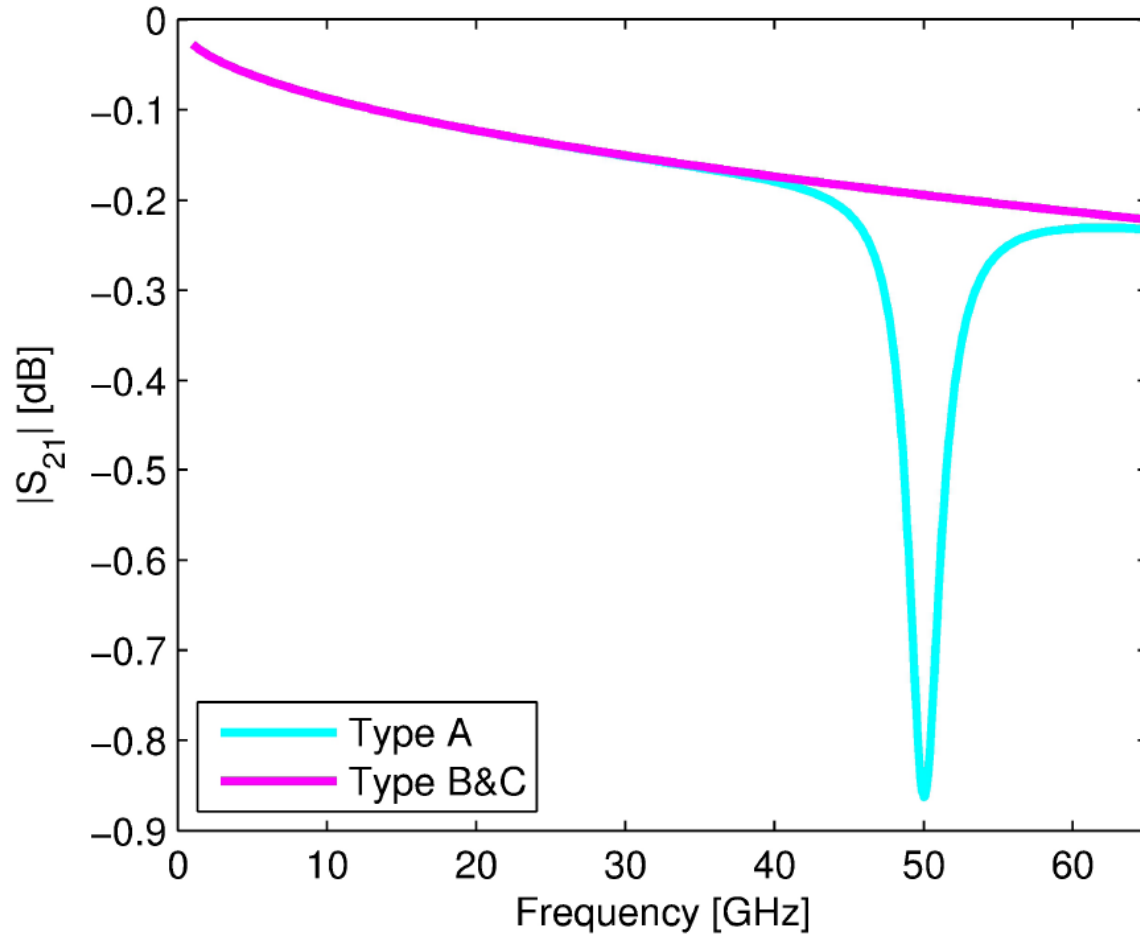
**Old dogma:** - Mind the pin-gap  
- Ideal connection (50 ohm)



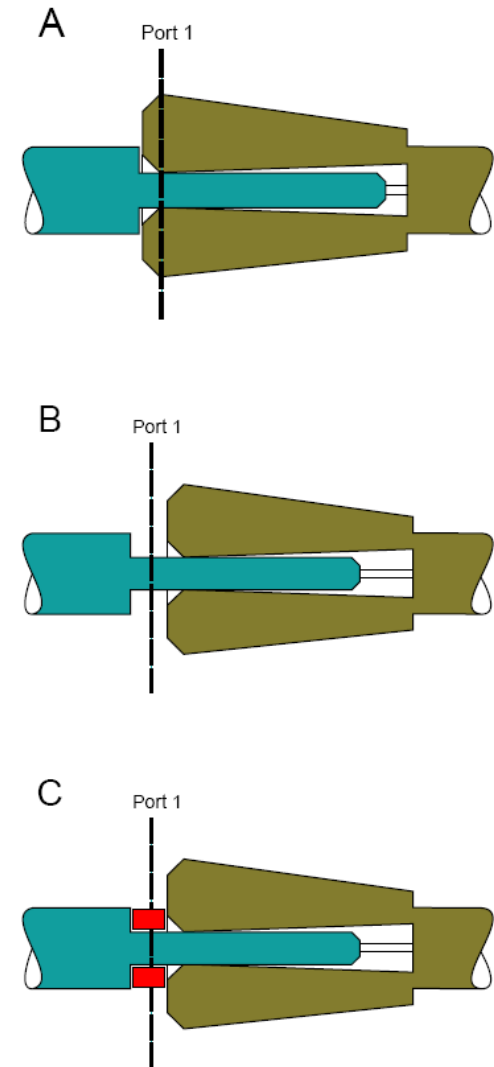
**Electrical reference plane**



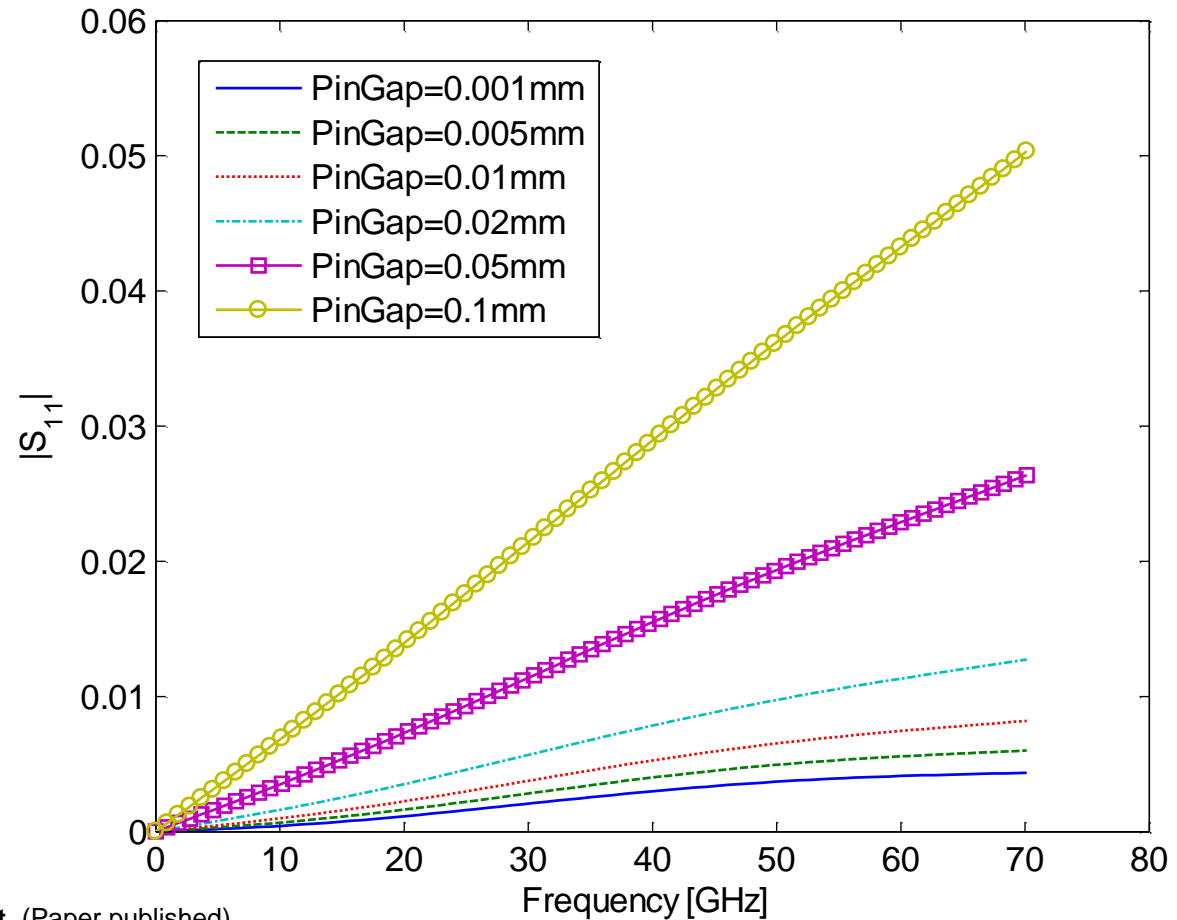
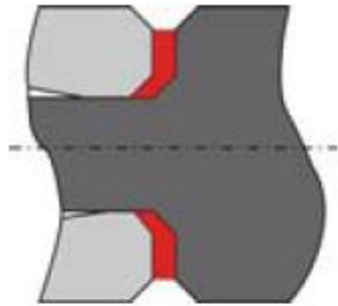
# Typical coupling effects when measuring beadless air lines



Resonance due to zero pin gap



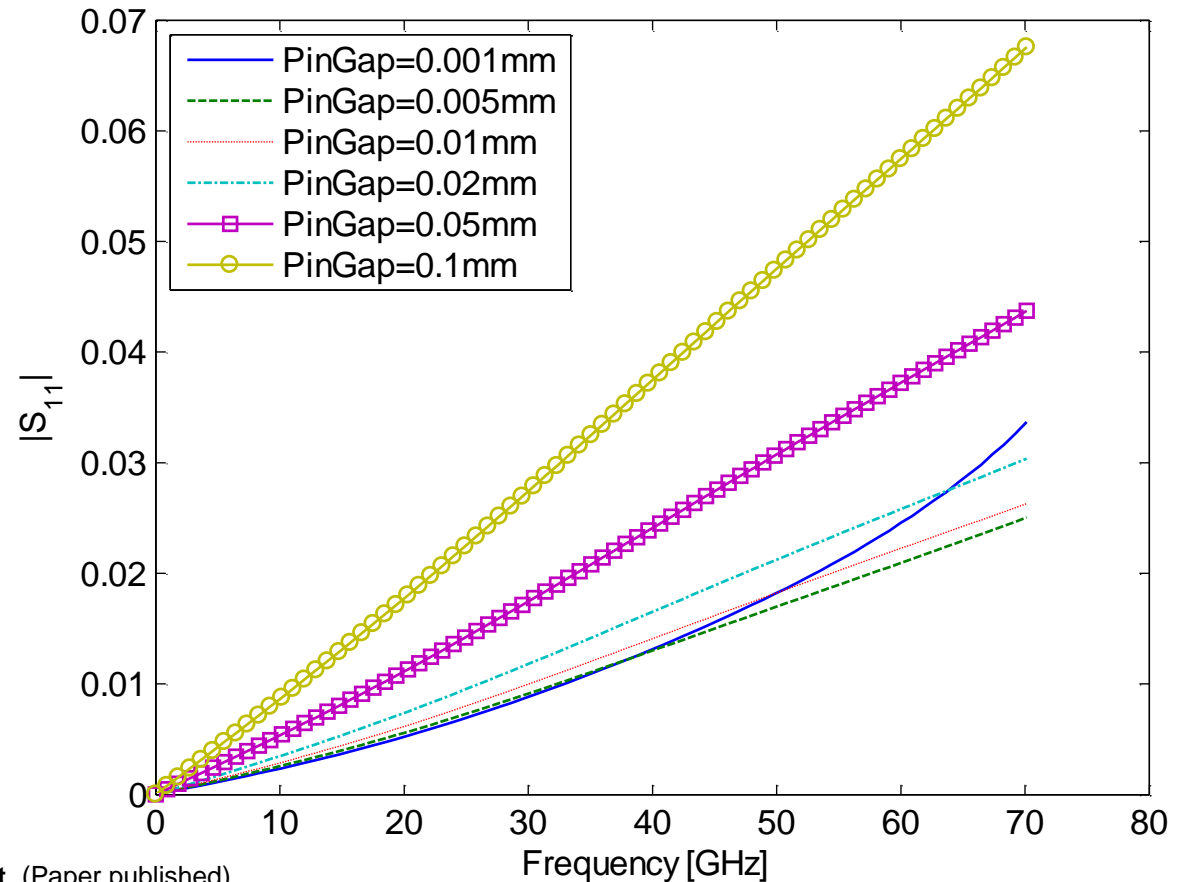
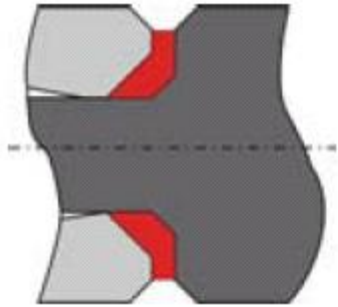
# 1.85 mm connector: S11 with small female chamfer



**CoMo70 outcomes:**

Johannes Hoffmann, ETHZ, CoMo70 project (Paper published)

## 1.85 mm connector: S11 with big female chamfer



**CoMo70 outcomes:**

Johannes Hoffmann, ETHZ, CoMo70 project (Paper published)



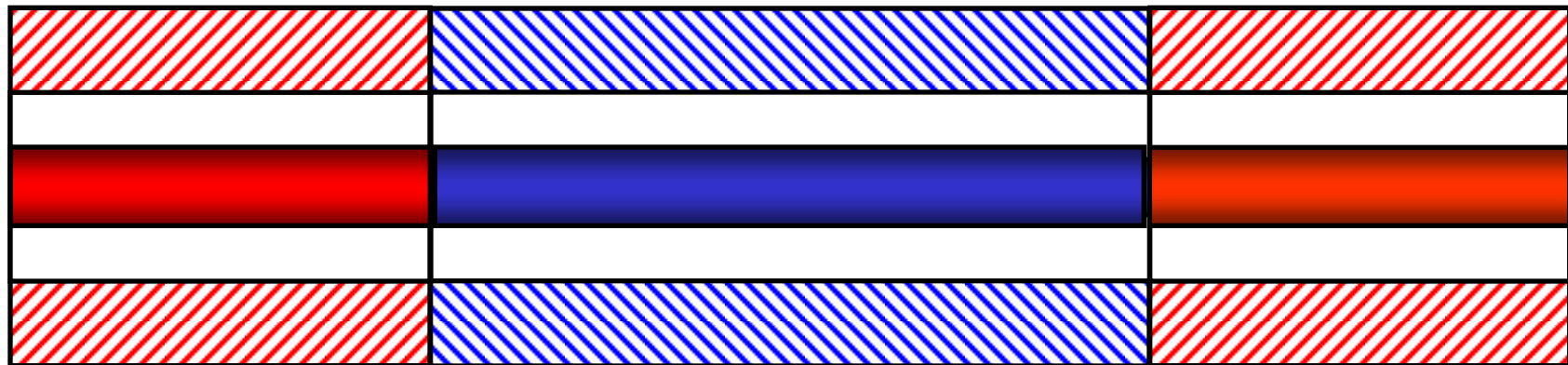
**Old paradigm:** Test Port Adapters pin-depth set close to zero

**Advantage:** Centre Conductor position can be controlled

3.5 mm(m) TP1

3.5 mm beadless Air Line

3.5 mm(f) TP2



**Electrical reference plane TP1**

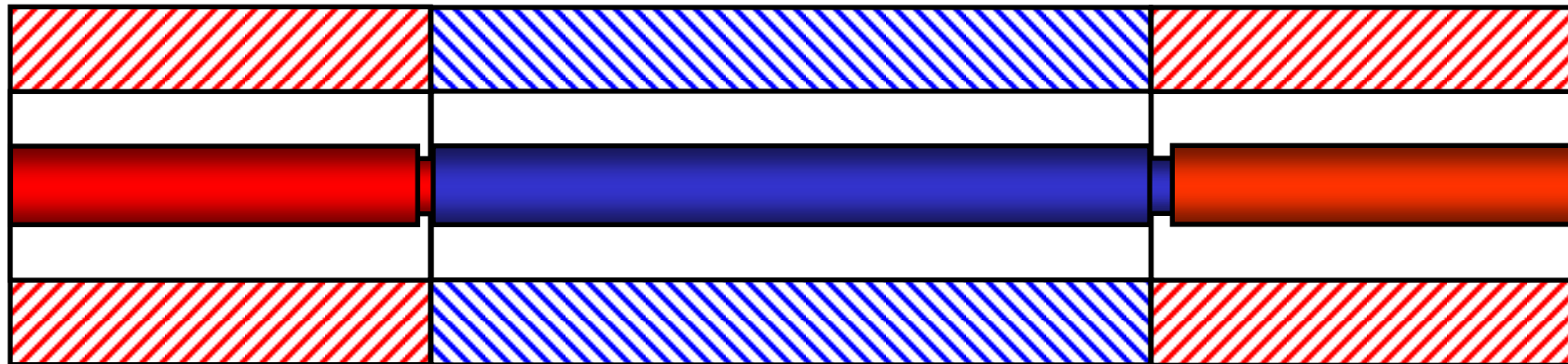
**Electrical reference plane TP2**

## New paradigm: TP's recessed to avoid near field effects

3.5 mm(m) TP1

3.5 mm beadless Air Line

3.5 mm(f) TP2



**Problem: undefined Centre Conductor position**

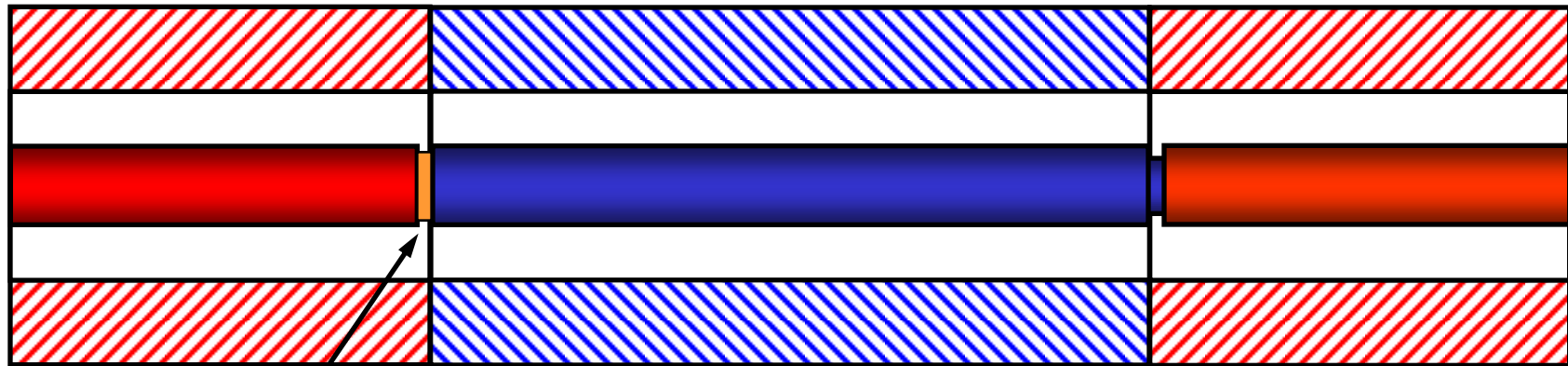


## TP1 mounted with Kapton disc to avoid near field effects and to control a flush centre conductor position

3.5 mm(m) TP1

3.5 mm beadless Air Line

3.5 mm(f) TP2

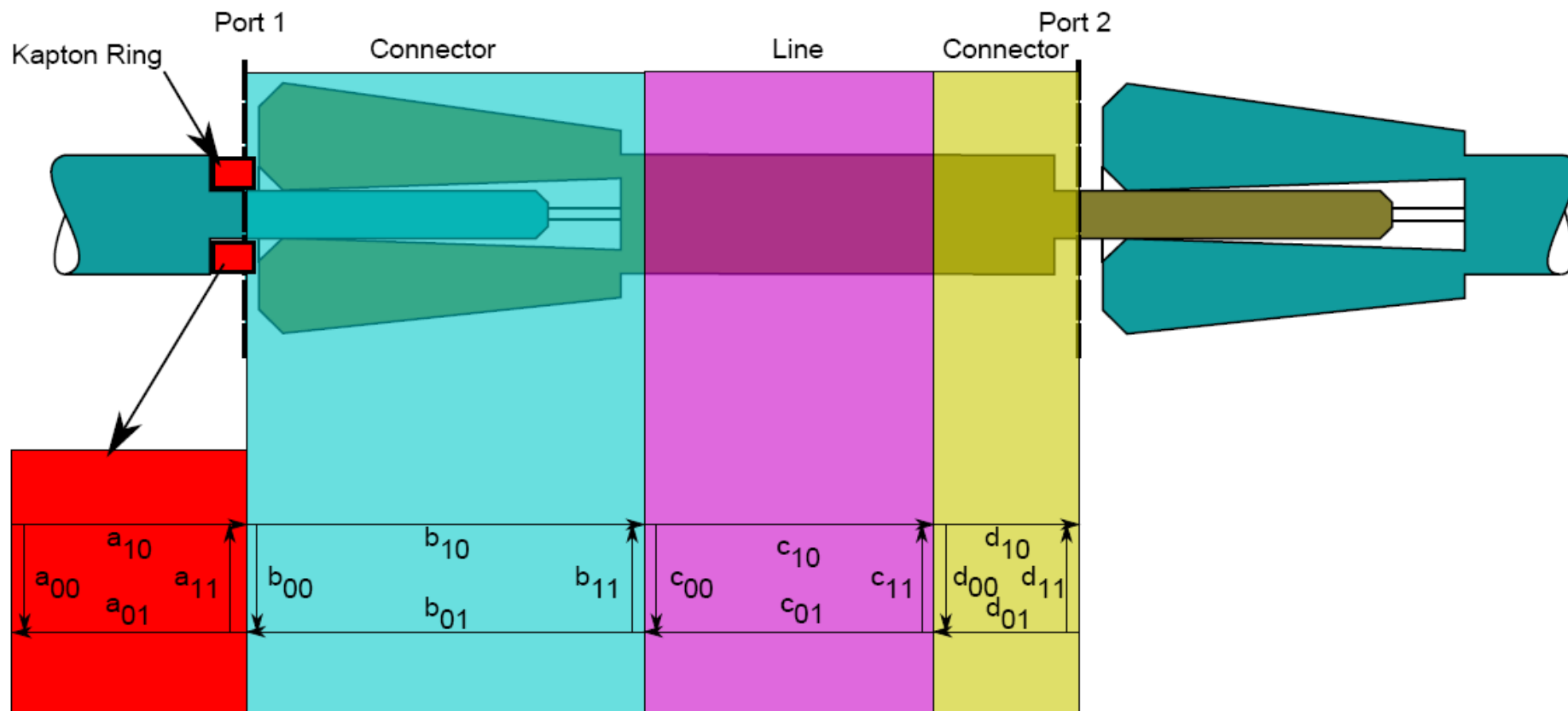


**Kapton disc sizes used at METAS: 12.7  $\mu\text{m}$  or 19  $\mu\text{m}$**

**Note:** optimal CC pin-depth recession for the 3.5 mm line system = 15  $\mu\text{m}$

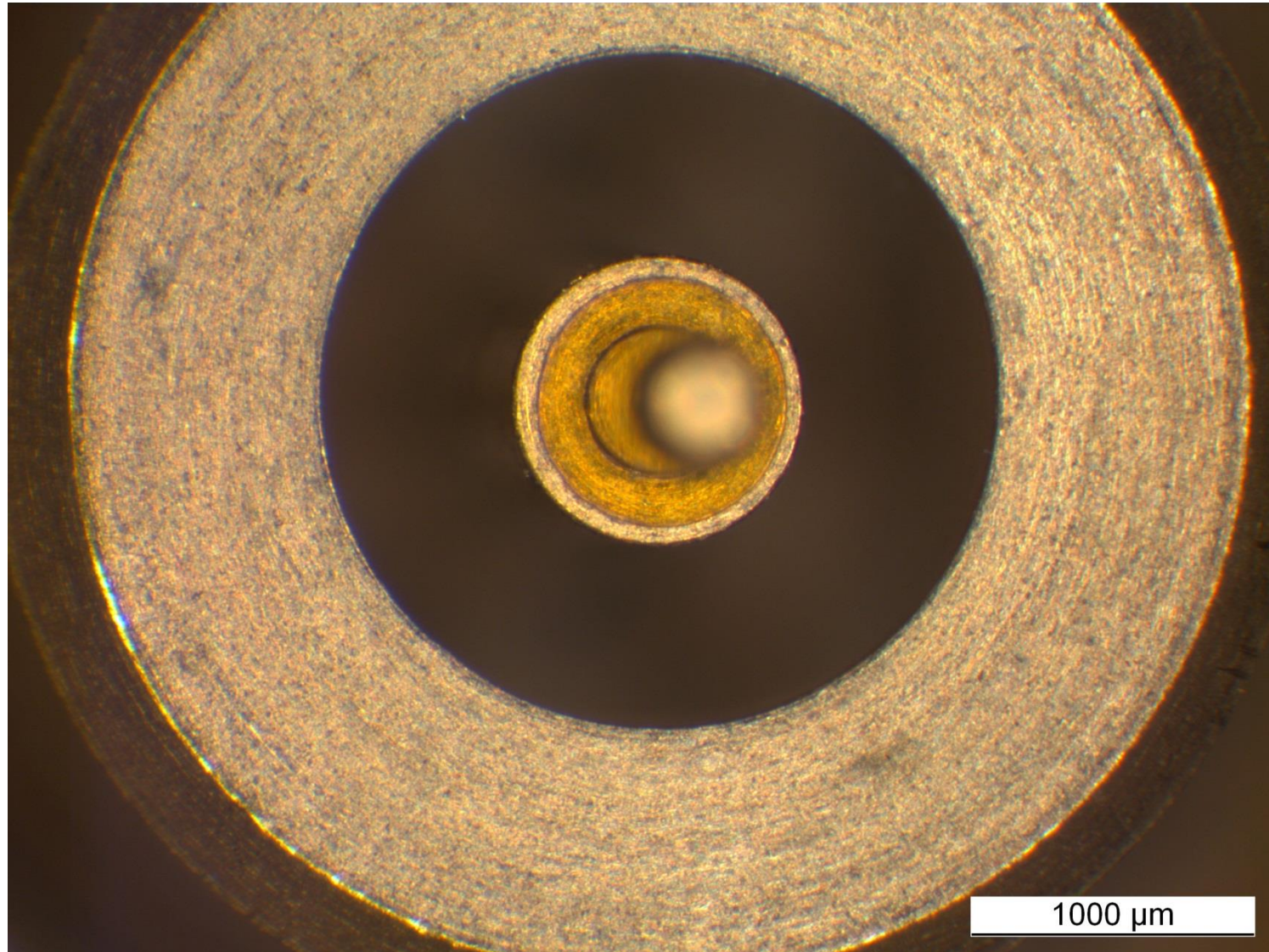


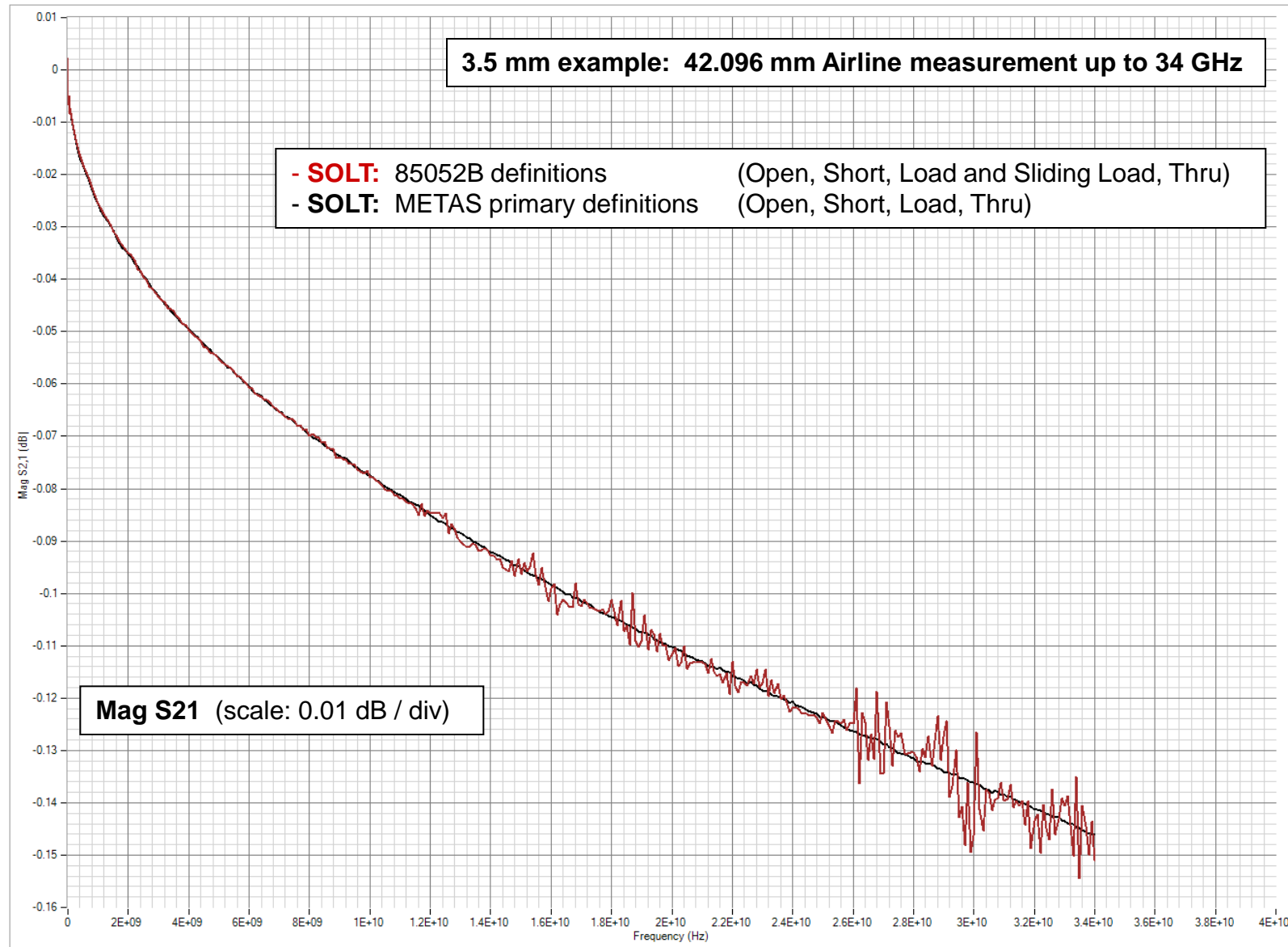
# Airline model with a mounted Kapton disc





## Kapton disc mounted on a 2.4 mm test port male pin





S21 mag (dB)