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(54) **Textile sampling**

(57) An apparatus is disclosed for displaying a plurality of textile or fabric samples. The apparatus includes a plurality of elongate rail members configured to receive and engage at least one sample member. The or each

sample member holds at least one sample and is adapted to slidably and/or pivotally engage at least one rail member by way of one or more corresponding apertures or channels provided therein.

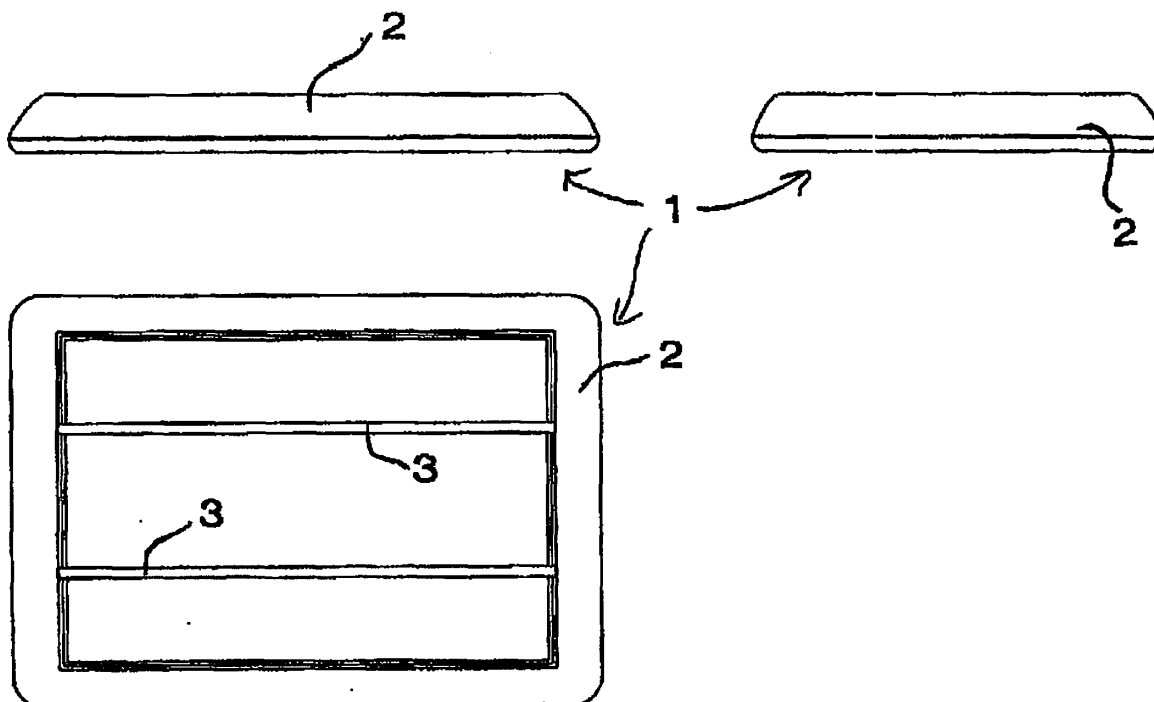


FIGURE 1

Description

Field

[0001] This invention relates to the display of samples, particularly but not exclusively to fabric or textile samples, namely an apparatus, system and method therefor.

Background

[0002] Traditionally, systems for displaying representative samples of a pattern, colour or texture of textiles, fabrics, paint colours, wallpapers and the like, have been displayed in pattern books wherein each sample, or swatch, is bound or otherwise held together along one edge so that a customer may browse the samples like a book.

[0003] This has a number of disadvantages, most notably that the samples cannot easily be removed from the book for closer inspection, comparison, or replacement. Therefore, sample books including just one sample corresponding to a discontinued or unavailable product line may become obsolete. For example, United States Patent No. 3,631,975 to Leibowitz entitled "Fabric Display Kit" discloses a portable fabric display kit wherein a plurality of fabric swatches are bound together as in a book.

[0004] Also known in the art are display systems wherein the individual samples may be provided with two or more holes with which they may be secured, for example, in a ring binder or folder. This solution allows the removal of samples, but is again limited in size due to the folder. Furthermore, removing non-consecutive samples can be inconvenient and the weight of the samples can make it difficult to turn a number of sample swatches simultaneously. An example of such a folder is disclosed in United States Patent No. 2,786,281 entitled "Binder for Textile Swatch" to Kramer et al.

[0005] While conventional sample books may contain samples of a similar style and/or be targeted to some extent to a particular market-base, no link has been conventionally made between the samples held by a vendor and the corresponding goods sold, nor trade customers. Thus, vendors may have in their possession a number of samples of limited or no interest.

[0006] There is a need for an improved sampling system.

Objects of the Invention

[0007] It is therefore an object of the invention to provide an improved sampling system which overcomes or ameliorates at least one disadvantage of the prior art.

[0008] It is an alternative object of the invention to provide a method for configuring a sampling system having removable and replaceable samples.

[0009] Alternatively, or additionally, it is a broad object of the invention to at least provide the public with a useful

choice.

[0010] Further objects of the invention will become apparent from the following description.

Summary of Invention

[0011] According to a first aspect, the Invention may broadly be said to consist in an apparatus for displaying a plurality of samples, the apparatus including a plurality of elongate rail members configured to receive and engage at least one sample member, said rail members being spaced apart by at least one frame member.

[0012] Preferably, the apparatus includes at least one said sample member, wherein each sample member is configured to hold at least one of said plurality of samples.

[0013] Preferably, at least one sample member is configured to releasably engage at least one of said rail members.

[0014] Preferably, at least one sample member is configured to engage each or a selection of the plurality of rail members via a corresponding plurality of channels provided therein, said channels being provided on or proximate to an edge of each said sample member, each channel extending from said edge and having a width which narrows proximate said edge.

[0015] Such embodiments enable sample members to be easily removed from and/or added to the apparatus. However, preferably, the force required to break the coupling is equal to or greater than the combined weight of the sample and corresponding sample member to prevent the sample / samples member from becoming undesirably detached. This is particularly important according to embodiments in which the apparatus is configured to be portable.

[0016] Preferably, at least one said sample member is configured to slidably and/or pivotably engage the rail members.

[0017] Preferably the or each sample member comprises a substantially rigid base portion and a sheet portion which is at least semi-rigid, wherein the base portion is adapted to engage with at least one of said plurality of rail members, and the sheet portion is configured to hold at least one of said plurality of samples.

[0018] Note that one or more sample members may be permanently or more permanently attached to the rail members, such as via apertures provided in the sample member.

[0019] Preferably, the apparatus includes at least one substantially rigid buttressing member.

[0020] Preferably, the or each buttressing member is configured to slidably and/or pivotably engage at least one of said rail members.

[0021] While the or each buttressing member may be configured to releasably engage said rail member(s), preferably a fixed coupling is affected such that the or each buttressing member is not readily removable from the rail member(s). Preferably, such fixed coupling allow for any required sliding and/or pivoted movement

[0022] According to preferred embodiments, a plurality of sample members are coupled to the rail members sandwiched between first and second buttressing members. According to an alternative embodiment, a single buttressing member may be provided at one end of the samples.

[0023] Preferably, the apparatus includes means for securing at least one buttressing member in a first configuration substantially orthogonal to the rail members.

[0024] Preferably, said means for securing is integral to or coupled to said frame member.

[0025] According to preferred embodiments in which two buttressing members are provided, each buttressing member may be configured in the first configuration with one being at each end of the rail members.

[0026] Preferably said buttressing members, when in the first configuration, enable a plurality of apparatuses to be stacked on top of each other.

[0027] Preferably, the or each buttressing member includes a plurality of apertures, each being adapted to engage a corresponding one of the plurality of rail members. However, where it is desired for the buttressing members to be more readily removable from the apparatus, channels similar to the channels which may be provided on the sample members may be included on the buttressing members.

[0028] Preferably, each aperture provided in the or each buttressing member is substantially elongate in shape or otherwise configured, such that the or each buttressing member is permitted a limited range of movement substantially orthogonal to the rail members and, when not engaged with a frame member, is permitted to recline relative to the rail members in a second configuration, such that said buttressing member(s) may pivot relative to the rail members.

[0029] According to a second aspect, the invention may broadly be said to consist in a method of configuring a sample display apparatus having removable samples, the apparatus preferably being the apparatus of the first aspect, the method including:

- maintaining a database of samples held in said apparatus;
- determining whether to remove and/or add a sample to the apparatus;
- removing and/or adding a sample based on said determination; and
- updating the database accordingly.

[0030] Preferably the step of determining includes analysing sales and/or other indicators of interest in products corresponding to the samples.

[0031] Preferably, the sales and/or other indicators of interest are stored in the same database.

[0032] Preferably, the sales and/or other indicators of interest are updated each time a sale or other indicator interest occurs corresponding to a sample.

[0033] According to preferred embodiments, the ap-

paratus is held by a vendor and used to display sample material, fabrics, paint colours, wallpapers, patterns, textiles, sample cards, chips, hangers, waterfalls, loose memos, binders etc. Thus, where a particular vendor makes no sales corresponding to a particular sample or a sample becomes redundant or is not required for any other reason, that sample may be removed from the apparatus. Thus, the samples held by a particular apparatus may be determined by the user of the apparatus and/or the owner or supplier of the samples.

[0034] Preferably, the sample is then returned to the supplier thereof. According to particular embodiments, the entire apparatus may be returned. Thus, some or all of the apparatus may be re-used or recycled.

[0035] The returned sample may then be distributed to an alternative vendor or returned to stock.

[0036] According to preferred embodiments, the alternative vendor is selected based on sales records which have preferably been stored in the database. Thus, the sample may be passed to a vendor likely to receive interest and ultimate sales corresponding to the sample.

[0037] Preferably, a replacement sample is sent to the vendor from which the sample was removed. Again, the replacement sample is preferably selected based on sales or other indicators of interest for that vendor so as to tailor the selected sample to that vendor's market based on historical sales and/or other information.

[0038] Preferably, the database is updated each time a sample is removed and/or added to the apparatus.

[0039] Where no sales or other interest is received by a particular sample, the method may include withdrawing or replacing that sample. Thus, a supplier, distributor or the like may select to no longer offer goods corresponding to that sample.

[0040] Preferably, samples are provided to a plurality of entities such as vendors, each entity being provided with at least one said apparatus.

[0041] Preferably, the method includes the maintaining and/or updating the database for each said entity and/or each said apparatus.

[0042] Preferably, the maintaining and/or updating comprises maintaining and/or updating details of each sample held by each entity.

[0043] Preferably, the maintaining and/or updating comprises maintaining and/or updating details of sales corresponding to each sample held by each entity.

[0044] Preferably, the details include one or more of item identifier or code, sample identifier or code, design, colour, size, pattern, origin, brand, composition, or recommended use.

[0045] Thus, the selection of samples for a particular entity takes into account interest shown therein by that entity's market, enabling the selection of samples to be tailored to that entity's market sector. It is important to note that the overall cost of providing samples is high and may be reduced through use of embodiments of the invention by providing particular samples where they are most likely to receive interest, and replacing samples for

which no interest is received, preferably after a predetermined time period.

[0046] Preferably, the method includes the step of recording details of each entity's specialty or market-base.

[0047] Preferably, the selection of samples takes account of each entity's specialty by selecting product samples having details corresponding thereto.

[0048] According to a third aspect, the invention may broadly be said to consist in a system for the selection and display of removable samples by a plurality of entities, the system including:

a database containing details of the samples including information as to which samples are held by each entity; and
means for determining whether to remove a sample from and/or to provide an additional sample to at least one said entity.

[0049] Preferably, in response to the determination, an operator at the at least one entity returns and/or receives a sample, such as to/from a supplier thereof.

[0050] Preferably, the system comprises means for updating the database accordingly.

[0051] Preferably, the samples are configured for display by an apparatus according to the first aspect.

[0052] As will be apparent to one of skill in the art, references to "a database" are not limited to a single database, or a single database held in one location. Multiple databases may be provided and/or a database may be available and/or stored in a plurality of locations, preferably through use of any known data communication means.

[0053] Preferably, the system includes means for registering an interest in a sample and/or an interest in goods corresponding thereto. Preferably, said interest is a sale.

[0054] Preferably, the means for updating the database is configured to update the database in response to such interest. To effect such updating, preferably, the means for registering is communicatively coupled to the means for updating via any known communication means.

[0055] The means for registering may conveniently be incorporated in or integral to an electronic point of sale terminal, such as one which incorporates a bar code scanner or the like. Alternatively, dedicated means may be used or even more conventional means, such as a more conventional computing device. Yet still, the invention does not preclude the use of manual records although these are not preferred due to the subsequent delay or possible failure in updating the database.

[0056] The means for registering and/or the means for updating may be configured to recognise a sale corresponding to a particular sample through input of an identifier on or associated with the sample and/or through input of details of an item including material or such like corresponding to the sample, wherein a link to said sample has previously been provided to the system and

stored, for example, in the database.

[0057] Preferably, the means for determining is configured to determine whether to add or remove samples based at least in part on the record of interest for at least one sample for at least one entity.

[0058] Thus the system of the invention provides means for ensuring that samples provided to an entity are tailored to that entity's market-base.

[0059] Further aspects of the invention, which should be considered in all its novel aspects, will become apparent from the following description.

Drawing Description

[0060] A number of embodiments of the invention will now be described by way of example with reference to the drawings in which:

- Figure 1** provides views of a first embodiment of an apparatus of the invention.
- Figure 2** is a perspective view of the apparatus of Figure 1.
- Figure 3** provides views of a second embodiment of an apparatus of the invention.
- Figure 4** is a perspective view of the apparatus of Figure 2.
- Figure 5** is a side view of the apparatus of Figures 1 and 2, fully populated with samples.
- Figure 6** is a perspective view of the apparatus of Figure 5.
- Figure 7** is a side view of the apparatus of Figures 5 and 6 in an alternative configuration.
- Figure 8** is a perspective view of the apparatus of Figure 7.
- Figure 9** provides cross-sectional and plan views of a framework according to an embodiment of the invention.
- Figure 10** provides view of the preferred embodiment of an apparatus according to the present invention
- Figure 11** is a perspective view of the apparatus of Figure 10
- Figure 12** shows a sample member according to an embodiment of the invention.
- Figure 13** provides views of a narrow base portion of the preferred embodiment of a sample member according to the invention
- Figure 14** is a perspective view of the narrow base portion of the Figure 13
- Figure 15** provides view of a wider base portion of the preferred embodiment of a sample member according to the invention
- Figure 16** is a perspective view of the wide base portion of Figure 15
- Figure 17** is a schematic diagram of an embodiment of the system of the invention.

Detailed Description of the Drawings

[0061] Throughout the description like reference numerals will be used to refer to like features in different embodiments.

[0062] Although the invention is described herein with reference to the preferred application for the display of textile or fabric samples, it will be appreciated by those skilled in the art that the sampling system may be adapted for displaying a wide variety of product samples including, but not limited to, paint colour swatches, carpet samples, wallpaper samples, etc. Other applications will also be apparent to one of skill in the art and are included within the scope of the invention.

[0063] Referring first to Figures 1 and 2, a first embodiment of an apparatus is shown generally referenced 1. Apparatus 1 consists of frame member 2 and two or more substantially linear parallel rail members 3, spaced apart by frame member 2. Frame member 2 is preferably rectangular, however it may alternatively consist of a separate individual frame members 2 provided at one or each end of the parallel rail members 3 (i.e., not along the sides) as shown in Figure 9. Furthermore, while shown in Figure 1 as an integral unit, frame 2 may consist of a number of discrete elements which may be fixedly or releasably coupled to one another. Note that the presence of at least two rails is preferred to provide greater control over the orientation of the samples but the scope of the invention is not limited thereto and includes apparatus having a single rail member 3.

[0064] Rail members 3 are most commonly provided along a major axis of the sampling system 1 as shown in Figures 1 and 2, but may alternatively be provided along a minor axis as shown in Figures 3 and 4. According to preferred embodiments, the same frame member 2 is configurable in each configuration. Rail members 3 are shown as being linear. However, according to an alternative embodiment, while the spacing therebetween is fixed, rail members 3 may be contoured or arcuate.

[0065] According to the preferred embodiment of the invention, the apparatus 1 includes four rail members 3 provided as two adjacent spaced parts parallel with the major axis of the apparatus 1 as shown in Figures 10 and 11.

[0066] Rail members 3 are adapted to accommodate a plurality of sample members which are preferably detachable therefrom. One possible embodiment of a sample member generally referenced 5 is shown in Figure 12. Sample member 5 is substantially planar and formed from a semi-rigid material, such as but not limited to a plastic. Sample member 5 is configured to hold and display a sample (not shown) on at least one surface thereof. According to a preferred embodiment, a sample is fixed, such as but not limited to by an adhesive, on one face of sample member 5 from where it passes over edge 105 onto the other side of sample member 5, this portion of the sample being left free to allow for improved handling, interaction with and display thereof. Note that semi-per-

manent fixing means such as Velcro may be used to provide for easy removal and replacement of samples. According to such embodiments, it is not essential for sample members 5 to be detachably coupled to rail members 3.

[0067] Sample member 5 includes two or more generally keyhole-shaped grooves 102 provided on one edge thereof, corresponding in number and position to rail members 3. Grooves 102 are configured to allow sample member 5 to be urged onto and retained by rail members 3 due to the narrowing of and contouring of portion 103 of grooves 102 proximate the edge of sample member 5. Once sample member 5 is urged into engagement, preferably sliding and/or pivoting engagement, with rail members 3, rail members 3 are retained in portion 104 of grooves 102 due to the contouring of portion 103 unless sufficient force is used to break the engagement. Thus it will be appreciated that the apparatus of Figure 1 may be provided with a single row of sample members 5, each engaging with both rail members 3, while the preferred apparatus of Figure 10 may be provided with two rows of relatively narrow sample members 5 each engaging with either parts of rail members 3, a single row of wider sample members 5 each engaging with two or more of the four rail members 3, or a combination thereof.

[0068] According to preferred embodiments, apparatus 1 is of a portable nature. To avoid samples and sample members 5 from becoming undesirably detached from apparatus 1, preferably grooves 102 and/or rail members 3 are configured such that this force is greater than the weight thereof. According to a less preferred embodiment, grooves 102 may be replaced by apertures. Such arrangements reduce the ease of or prevent sample members 5 from being removed from rail members 3, unless rail members 3 are removable or frame member 2 has at least one removable or detachable portion.

[0069] According to the preferred embodiment of the invention, the sample member 5 comprises a base portion 130 and a sheet portion. Figures 13 and 14 show a preferred narrow base portion 130 adapted to engage with a single pair of rail members 3, as provided in the preferred embodiment of the apparatus 1 illustrated in Figures 10 and 11. The base portion 130 comprises a substantially rigid material including a pair of generally key-shaped grooves 102 as described herein above with respect to Figure 12, and an attachment means 131 or attaching a sheet portion (not shown) to which one or more samples may be fixed as previously described. The sheet portion may be either permanently or removeably attached to the base portion 130. If removeably engaged, the grooves 102 may be replaced by apertures as previously described.

[0070] A preferred wide base portion 130 is shown in Figures 15 and 16. The wider base portion includes two grooves 102 adapted to engage with the outer rail members 3 of the preferred embodiment of the apparatus 1 including four rail members configured as two adjacent

pairs as previously described, and a recess 150 circumventing in use, the inner rails 3. The wider portion also includes an attachment means 131 for attaching a correspondingly wider sheet portion, or a plurality of narrower sheet portions.

[0071] Thus, it will be appreciated with the preferred embodiment of the apparatus 1 may be provided with narrow or wide sample members, or a combination thereof, without requiring any modification of the apparatus.

[0072] Referring to Figures 5 and 6, the embodiment of Figures 1 and 2 is shown populated with a pair of substantially planar buttressing members 4 and a plurality of sample members 5. Sample members 5 are preferably thinner and less rigid than buttressing members 4 to provide for improved ease of manipulation thereof, including in sliding and pivoting the members along or about rail members 3. This also serves to reduce the overall weight of apparatus 1 as well as increase the number of samples and sample members which may be held.

[0073] The buttressing member or members 4 are preferably provided with a plurality of apertures corresponding to rail members 3 through which the rail members 3 are provided. However, the apertures in each buttressing member 4 are preferably elongate to permit a limited range of movement in a direction substantially orthogonal to the rail members 3, and to allow buttress members 4 to pivot between the position shown in Figures 5, 6 and that shown in Figures 7, 8. Note that while it is preferred that buttress members 4 are not readily removable from rail members 3 since buttress members 4 provide some structural support, the invention is not limited thereto. Thus, buttress members 4 may have a similar configuration to sample member 5 of Figure 12, however, due to the higher rigidity thereof, buttress members 4 may be more difficult to remove from rail members 3.

[0074] When in the first configuration as shown in Figures 5 and 6, sample members 5 are secured between buttressing members 4 at opposing ends of apparatus 1. Multiple apparatus 1 may therefore be stacked when in this first configuration without damaging any of the sample members 5.

[0075] Furthermore, a single buttressing member 4 may be placed in the first configuration and frame member 2 at the opposing end of apparatus 1 used as a handle to carry apparatus 1. This is particularly convenient when apparatus 1 contains fewer sample members 5 such that apparatus 1 is not fully populated. Alternatively, a handle or the like could be attached or integral to said opposing end. However, in the preferred embodiment of the invention the or each buttressing member 4 may be provided with a substantially hand-sized opening 60 substantially adjacent the frame 2 such that the end of the frame 2 may still be used as a handle when the adjacent buttressing member 4 is in the first configuration, as in the preferred embodiment illustrated. In a less preferred embodiment of the invention, therefore, at least one buttressing member 4 may be provided at either end of the rail members 3 permanently attached to, or integrated with, the

frame member 2 in the first configuration.

[0076] Referring to Figures 7 and 8, buttressing members 4 are shown in a second configuration wherein the elongate apertures permit buttressing members 4 to recline relative to the rail members 3. In this second configuration, the sample members 5 fan out to allow easier viewing of the product samples.

[0077] Figure 9 illustrates preferred features of the Invention for lockably and/or fixedly engaging buttressing members 4 in the first configuration as shown in Figures 5 and 6. Frame member 2 is provided at one or each end of the apparatus with slot 6 adapted to receive and engage with an edge of buttressing member 4 to support the buttressing member substantially orthogonally with respect to frame member 2 and rail members 3. Through use of the elongate apertures of buttressing member 4, buttressing member 4 may be lifted and then lowered to engage or disengage with slot 6 which is configured to substantially inhibit sliding and pivoting movement of buttress member 4.

[0078] The invention also provides a method of configuring an apparatus having removable samples, such as that described above with reference to Figures 1 to 10, for example. The method includes maintaining a list or database of each of a plurality of such apparatus and the product samples displayed therein. By analysing the sales statistics and current product range, additional and/or replacement samples may be selected for some or all of such apparatus depending on whether there is any interest in particular ones of the samples. Once added or replaced, the list or database is preferably updated.

[0079] Preferably, the selection of samples takes account of the target market or specialty of the entity provided with each individual apparatus. For example, a retailer may elect to have each of their apparatus specialising in one or more of a particular design, colour, size, pattern, origin, brand, composition, recommended use, or any other characteristic. This information should also be recorded in the database, in the form of a client or display system profile, as appropriate, and taken into account in the selection of samples for each apparatus.

[0080] For example, only textiles suitable for use as upholstery would be suitable for an upholsterer's apparatus, or the upholsterer may have an apparatus dedicated to heavy duty upholstery textiles.

[0081] The method ensures that discontinued products are replaced in the display system, and that the samples in each display system are those most suitable for the client and/or individual apparatus while ensuring that those products which are currently most popular are widely displayed to capitalise on current and evolving trends.

[0082] Figure 17 illustrates an embodiment of a system, generally referenced 110, according to the invention. System 111 includes first entity 111 having two apparatus 1 of the invention and second entity 112 having single apparatus 1. Note that the system and apparatus of the invention are not limited to use with the apparatus of the

invention. System 1 further includes communication means 113 associated with each entity 111, 112 and database 114. Note that system 110 will include a plurality of other or additional elements. However, to avoid obscuring the scope of the invention, only the novel combination of elements of system 1 are shown.

[0083] Database 114 includes details of each entity 111, 112. Preferably, this information includes at least how many apparatus 1 are being held by each entity 111, 112, as well as particulars of the corresponding samples. Details of sales or other expressions of interest in a particular sample, depending on the context and nature of the sample, are also preferably recorded in database 114. Such details are preferably passed to database 114 each time there is a sale or expression of interest although this is not essential to the working of the invention which includes within its scope the possibility of sending reports in batches. Any wired and/or wireless communication means may be used to transfer data from communication means 112 to database 114, including via the internet.

[0084] From the foregoing it will be seen that an improved product display and sampling system is provided which offers a number of benefits over the prior art. Among other advantages, the display system is stackable, portable, convenient, and configurable in multiple configurations. Also provided is a method of and system for configuring such a display system which ensures that appropriate and popular samples are displayed in all display systems. While the apparatus of the invention has been described with particular reference to the display of samples by vendors, the scope of the invention is not limited thereto. Moreover, the apparatus of the invention may be used to hold and/or display other items, such as business cards, photos, postcards, etc, and may be adapted for three dimensional items or at least to items having other than a negligible thickness.

[0085] Although this invention has been described by way of example and with reference to possible embodiments thereof, it is to be understood that modifications or improvements may be made thereto without departing from the scope of the invention. Furthermore, where reference has been made to specific components or integers of the invention having known equivalents, then such equivalents are herein incorporated as if individually set forth.

[0086] Any discussion of prior art throughout the specification should in no way be considered as an admission that such prior art is widely known or forms part of common general knowledge in the field.

[0087] Unless the context clearly requires otherwise, throughout the description the words "comprise", "comprising" and the like are to be construed in an inclusive sense as opposed to an exclusive or exhaustive sense, i.e. in the sense of "including, but not limited to".

Claims

1. An apparatus for displaying a plurality of samples, the apparatus including a plurality of elongate rail members configured to receive and engage at least one sample member, said rail members being spaced apart by at least one frame member.
2. An apparatus as claimed in claim 1 including at least one sample member, wherein each sample member is configured to hold at least one of said plurality of samples.
3. An apparatus as claimed in claim 2 wherein at least one sample member is configured to releasably engage at least one of said rail members.
4. An apparatus as claimed in claim 3, wherein said at least one sample member is configured to engage each or a selection of the plurality of rail members via a corresponding plurality of channels provided therein, said channels being provided on or proximate to an edge of each said sample member, each channel extending from said edge and having a width which narrows proximate said edge.
5. An apparatus as claimed in claim 3 or claim 4 wherein the force required to break the engagement is equal to or greater than the combined weight of the sample and corresponding sample member(s) to prevent the sample member from becoming undesirably detached.
6. An apparatus as claimed in any one of claims 2 to 5 wherein at least one sample member is configured to slidably and/or pivotally engage at least a selection of said rail members.
7. An apparatus as claimed in any one of claims 2 to 6, wherein the or each sample member comprises a substantially rigid base portion and a sheet portion which is at least semi-rigid, wherein the base portion is adapted to engage with at least one of said plurality of rail members, and the sheet portion is configured to hold at least one of said plurality of samples.
8. An apparatus as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, including at least one substantially rigid buttressing member configured to engage the rail members.
9. An apparatus as claimed in claim 8, wherein at least one buttressing member is configured to slidably and/or pivotally engage at least one of said rail members.
10. An apparatus as claimed in claim 9, wherein the apparatus includes means for securing at least one but-

trekking member in a first configuration substantially orthogonal to the rail members.

11. An apparatus as claimed in claim 10 wherein said means for securing is integral to or coupled to said frame member. 5
12. An apparatus as claimed in claim 10 or claim 11, wherein two buttressing members are provided and each buttressing member may be configured in the first configuration with one being at each end of the rail members. 10
13. An apparatus as claimed in claim 12, wherein said buttressing members, when in the first configuration, enable a plurality of apparatuses to be stacked on top of each other. 15
14. An apparatus as claimed in any one of claims 10 to 13, wherein the or each buttressing member includes a plurality of apertures, each being adapted to engage a corresponding one of the plurality of rail members, wherein each aperture is substantially elongate in shape or otherwise configured such that the or each buttressing member is permitted a limited range of movement substantially orthogonal to the rail members and is permitted to recline relative to the rail members in a second configuration, such that said buttressing member(s) may pivot relative to the rail members. 20 25 30
15. A sample member for engagement with an apparatus according to any one of the preceding claims. 35

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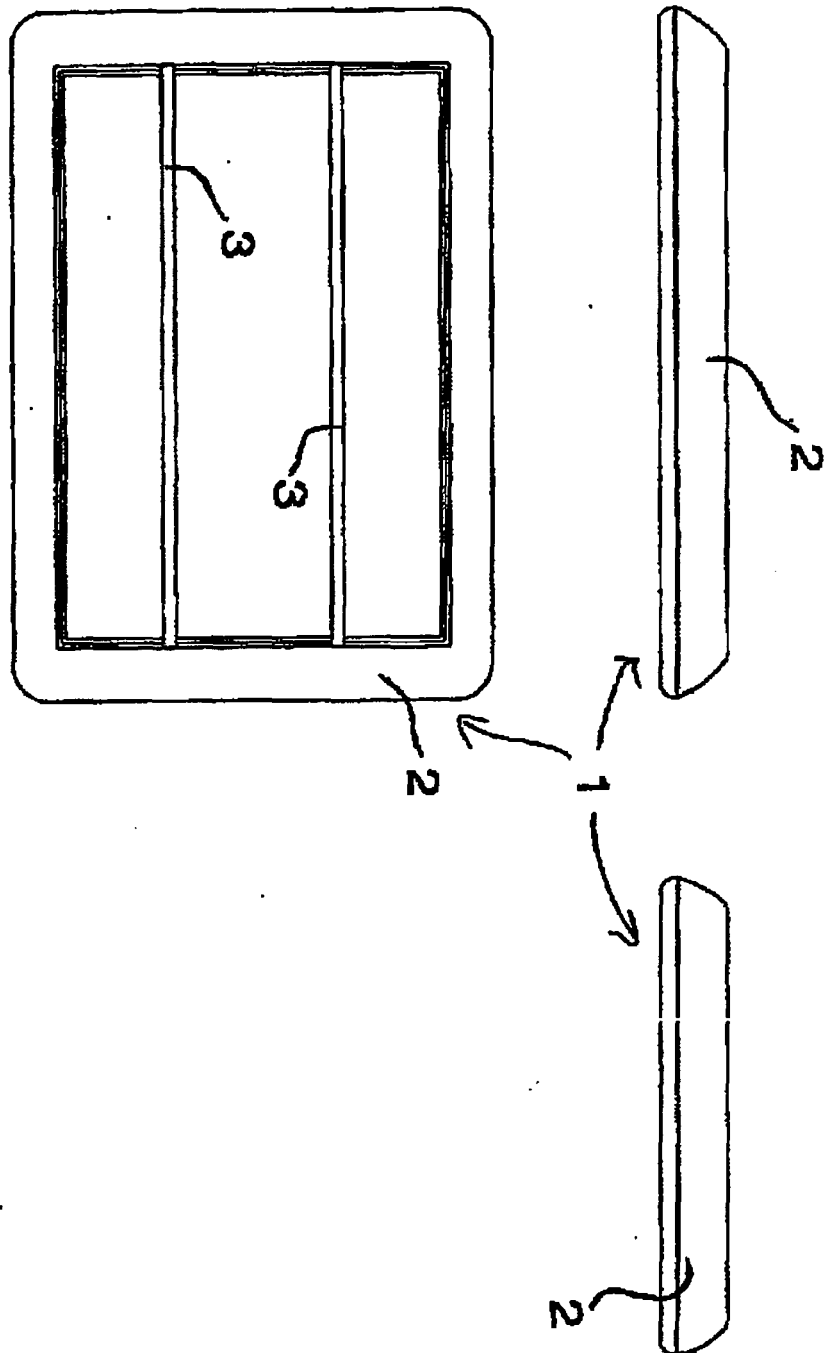


FIGURE 1

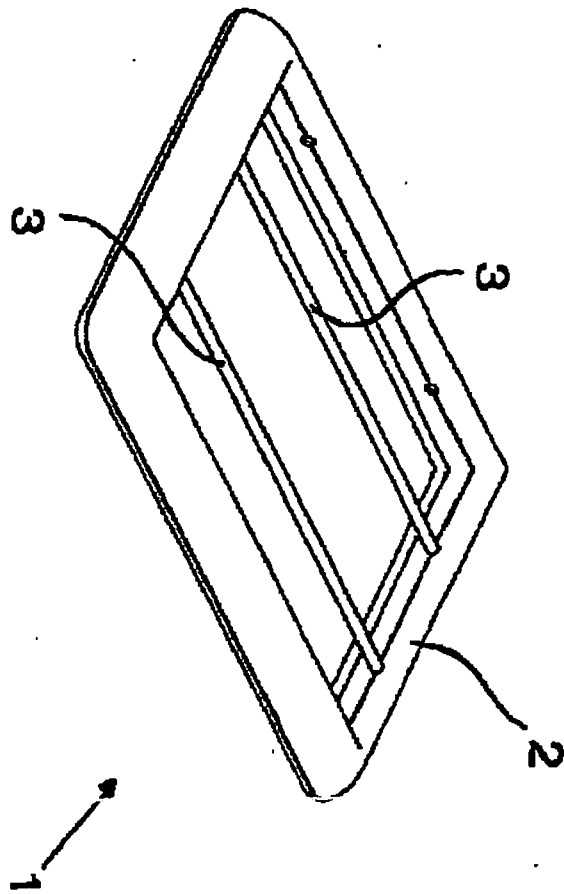
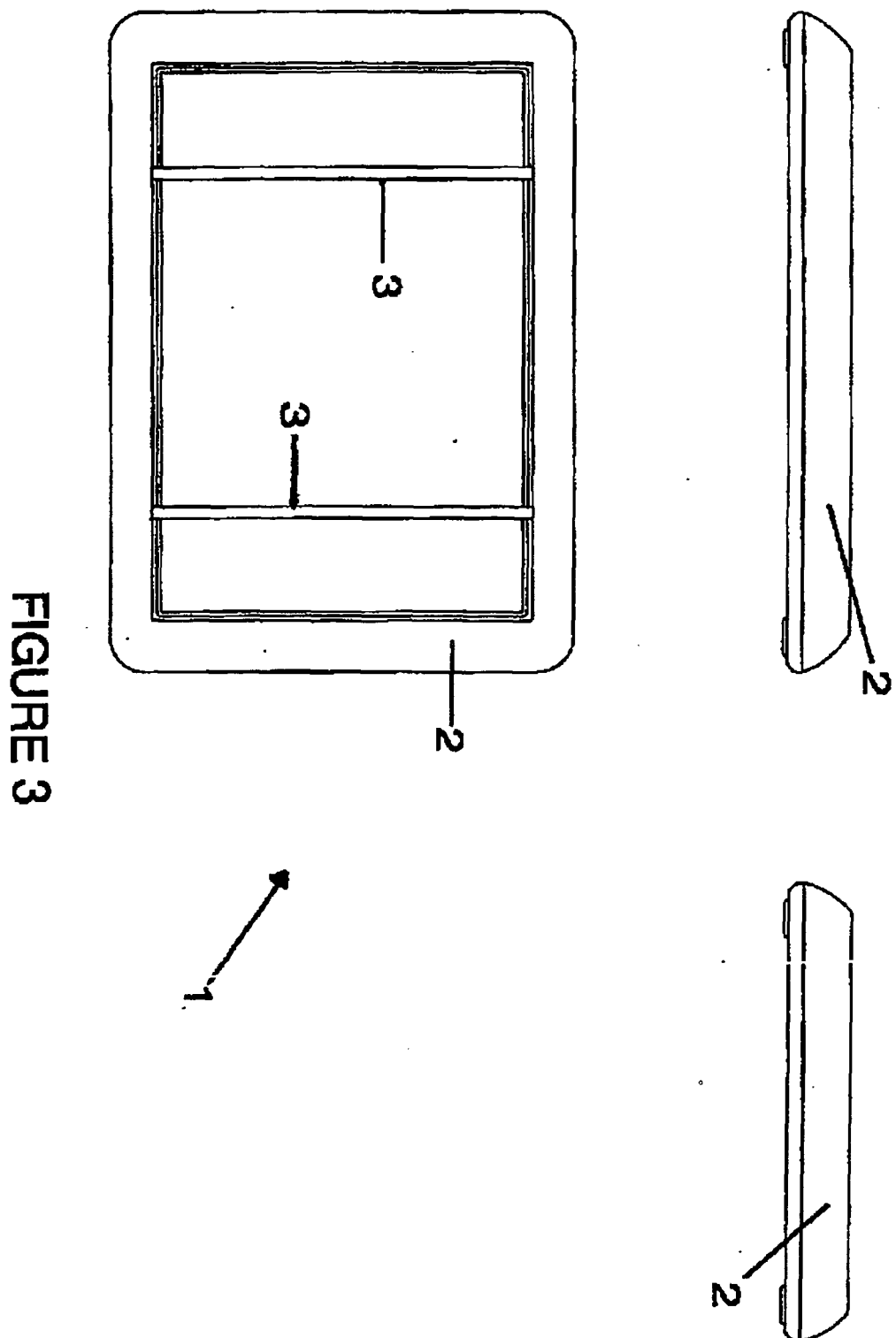


FIGURE 2



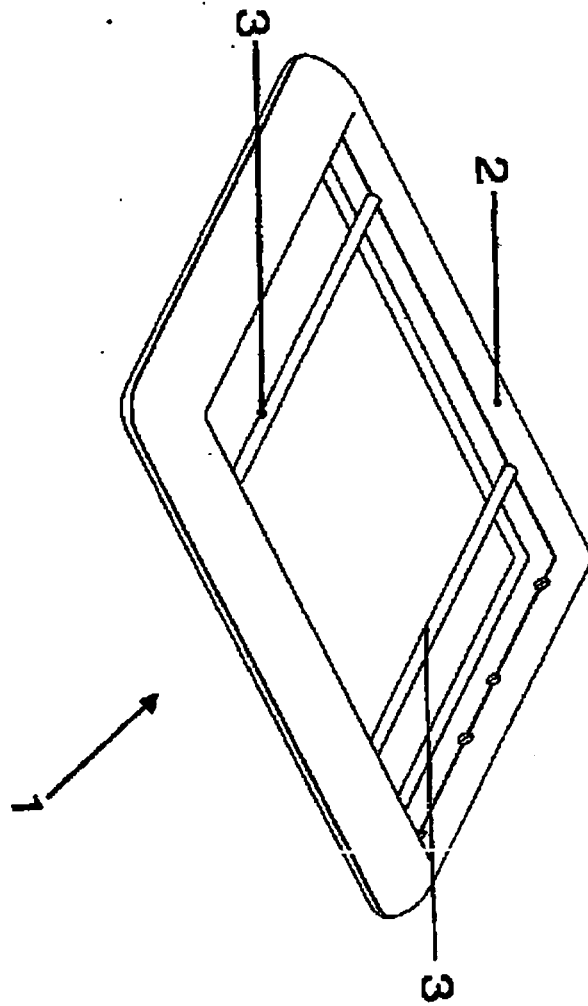


FIGURE 4

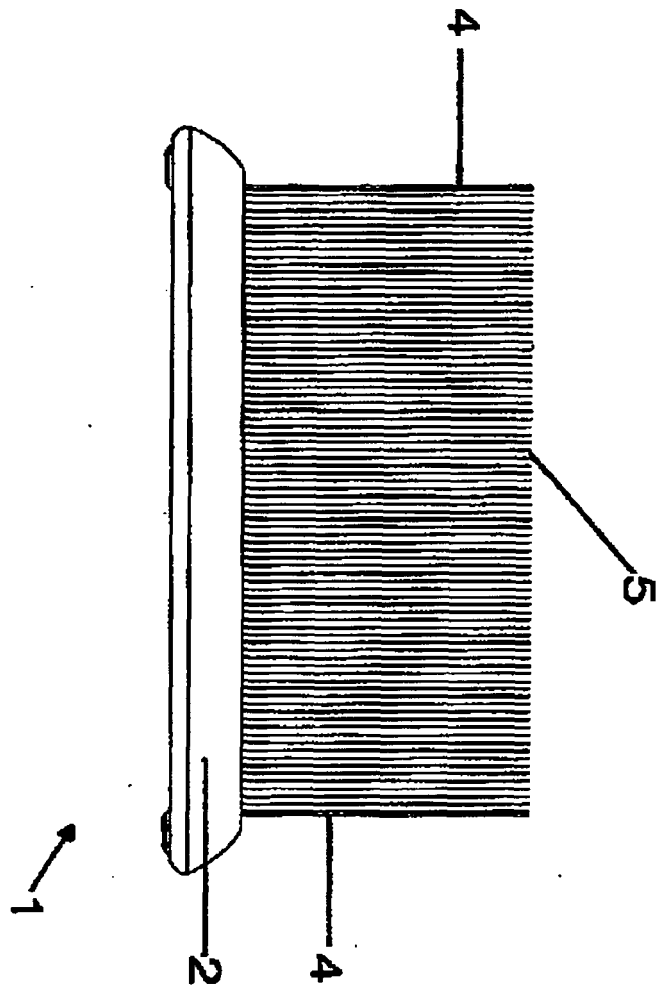


FIGURE 5

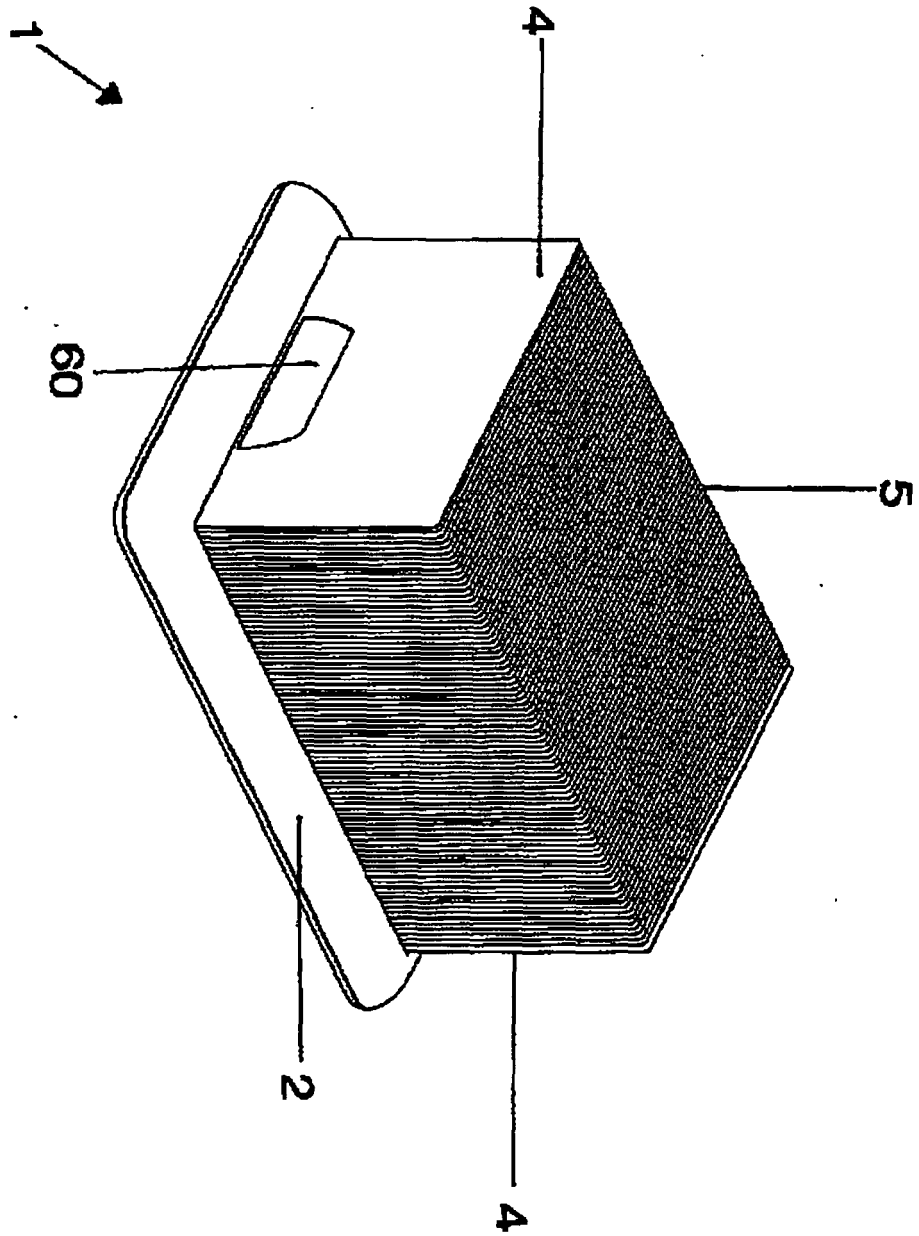


FIGURE 6

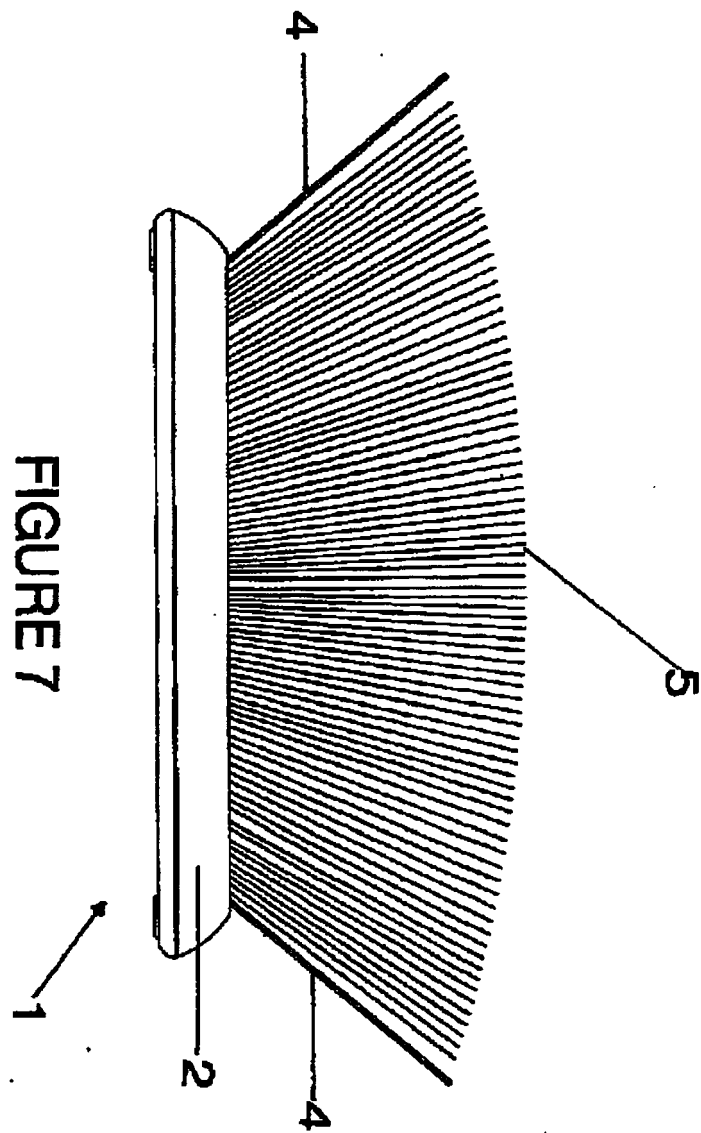


FIGURE 7

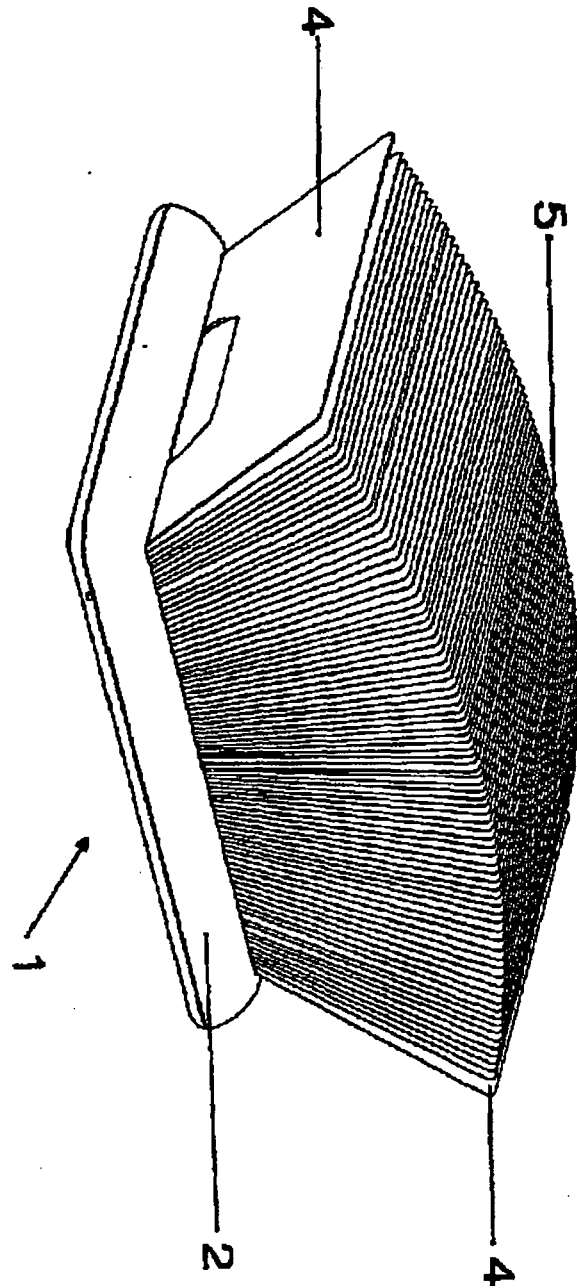


FIGURE 8

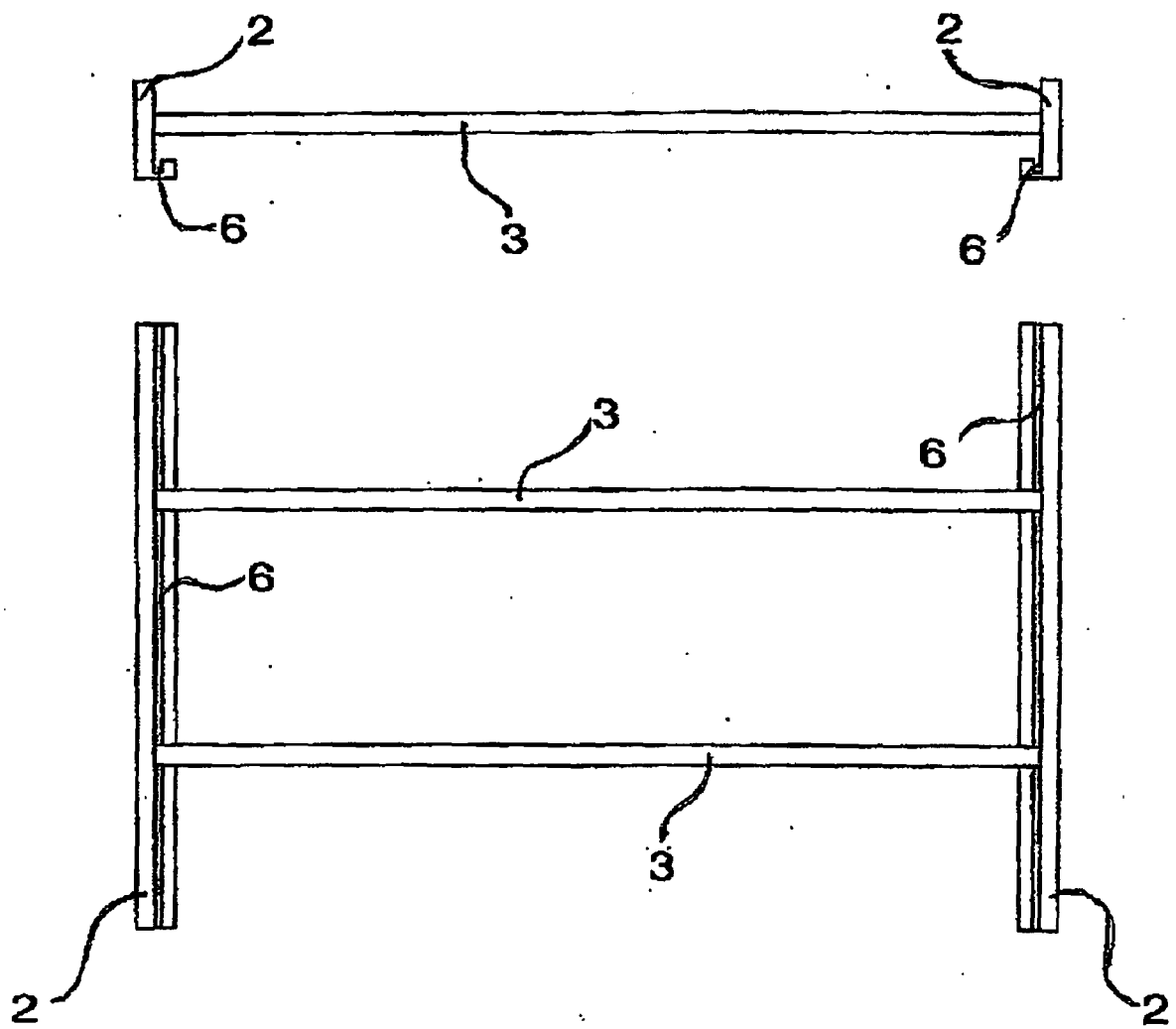


FIGURE 9

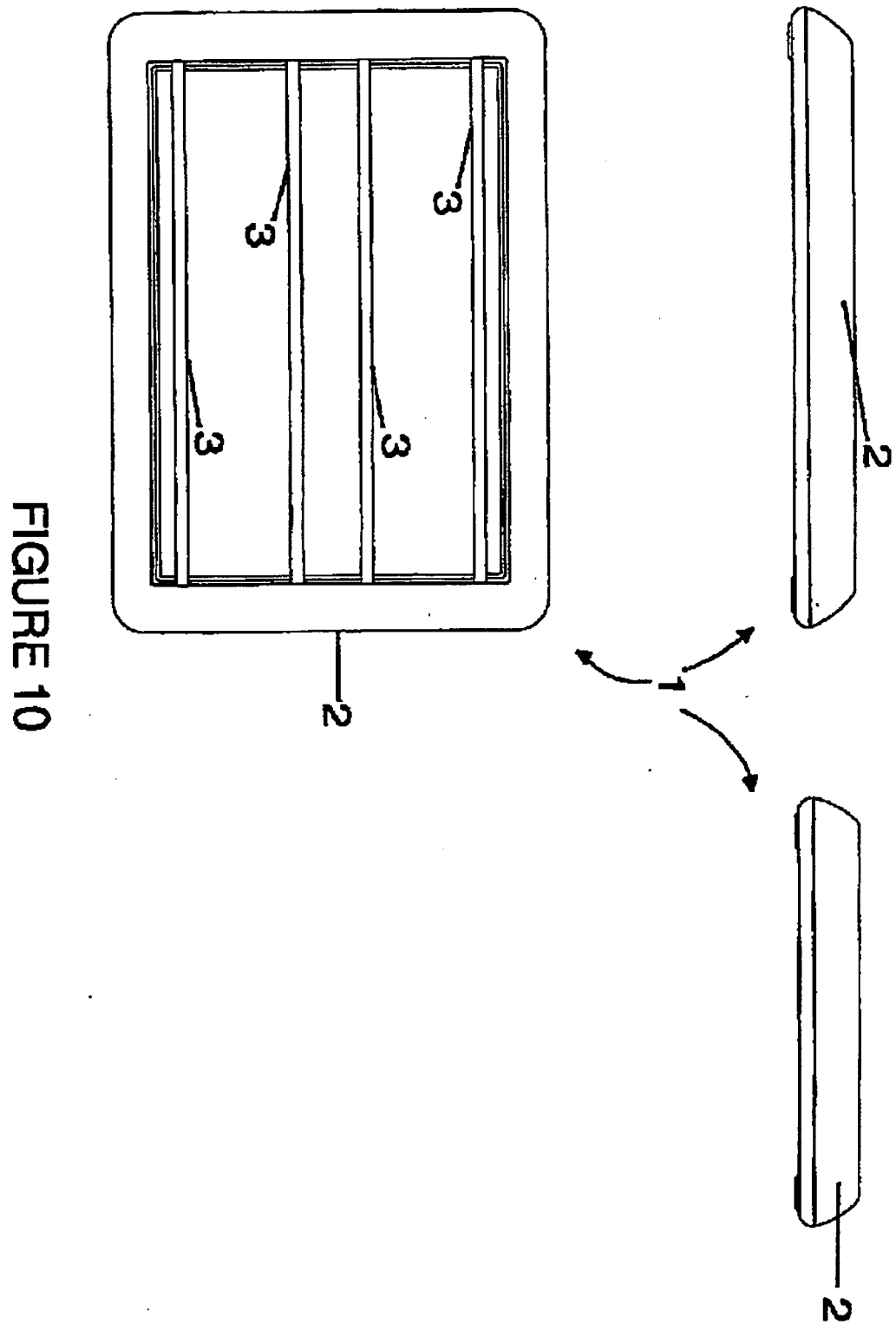
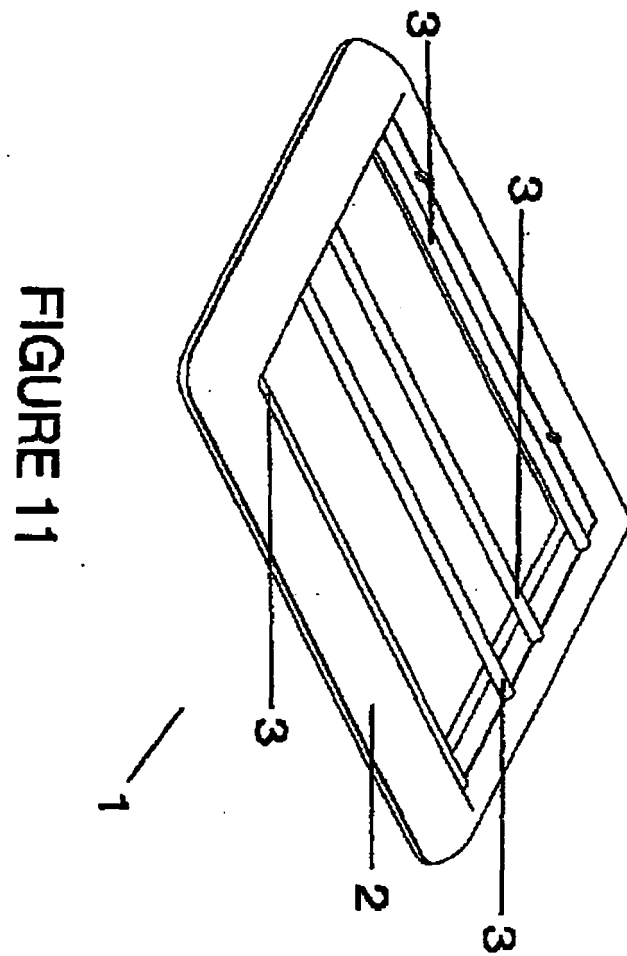


FIGURE 10



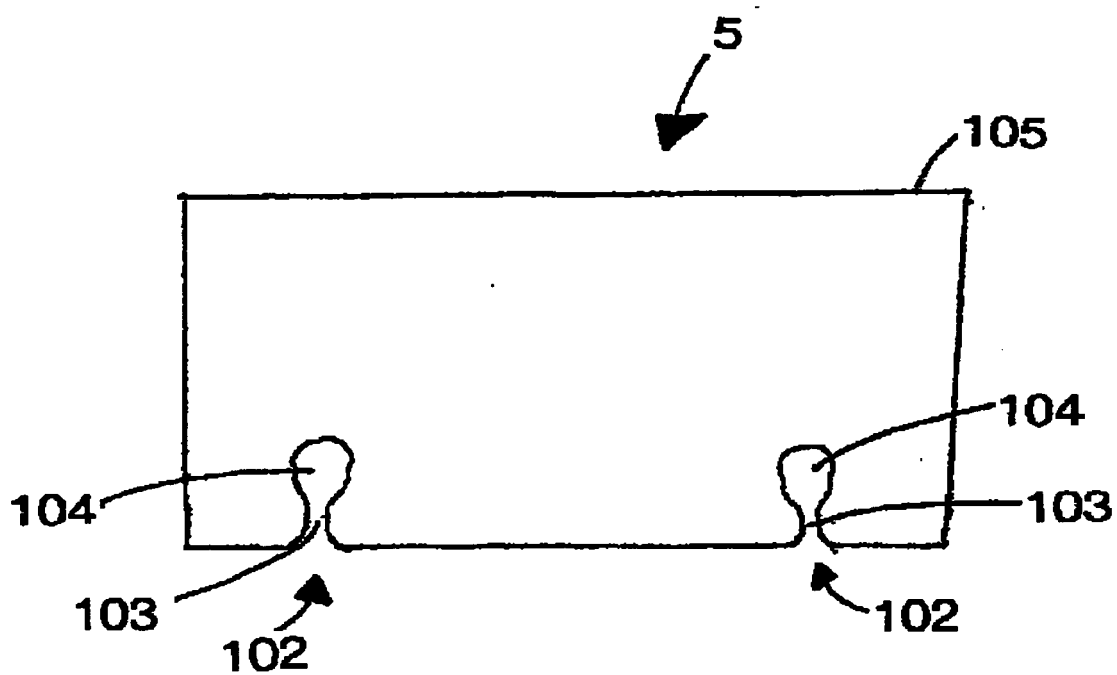


FIGURE 12

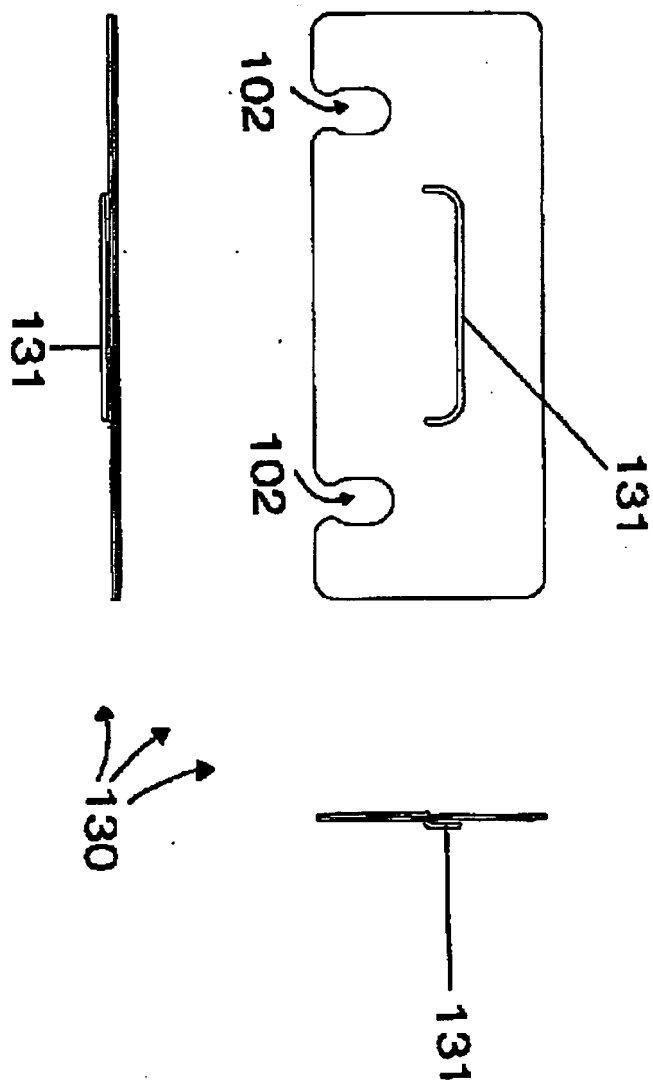


FIGURE 13

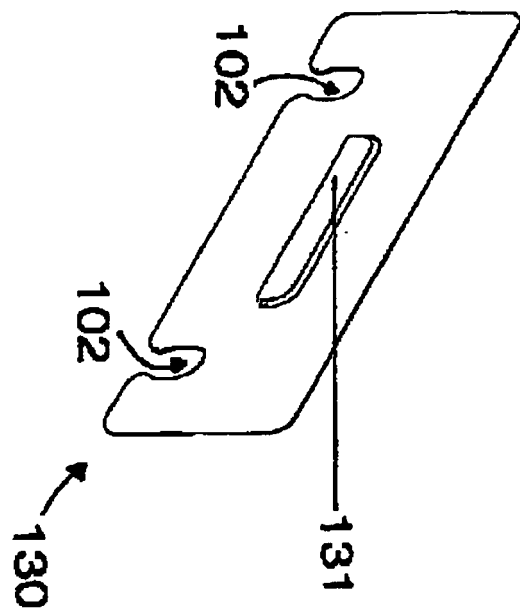


FIGURE 14

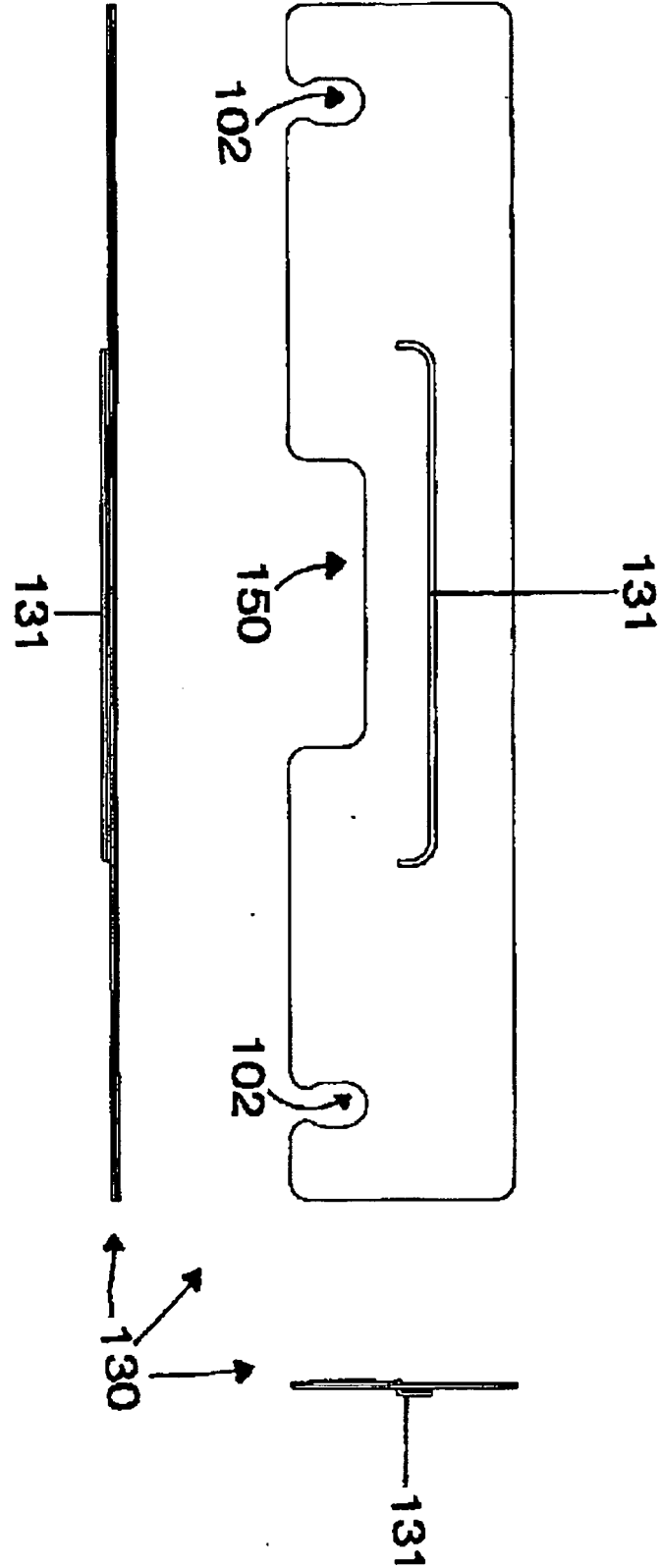
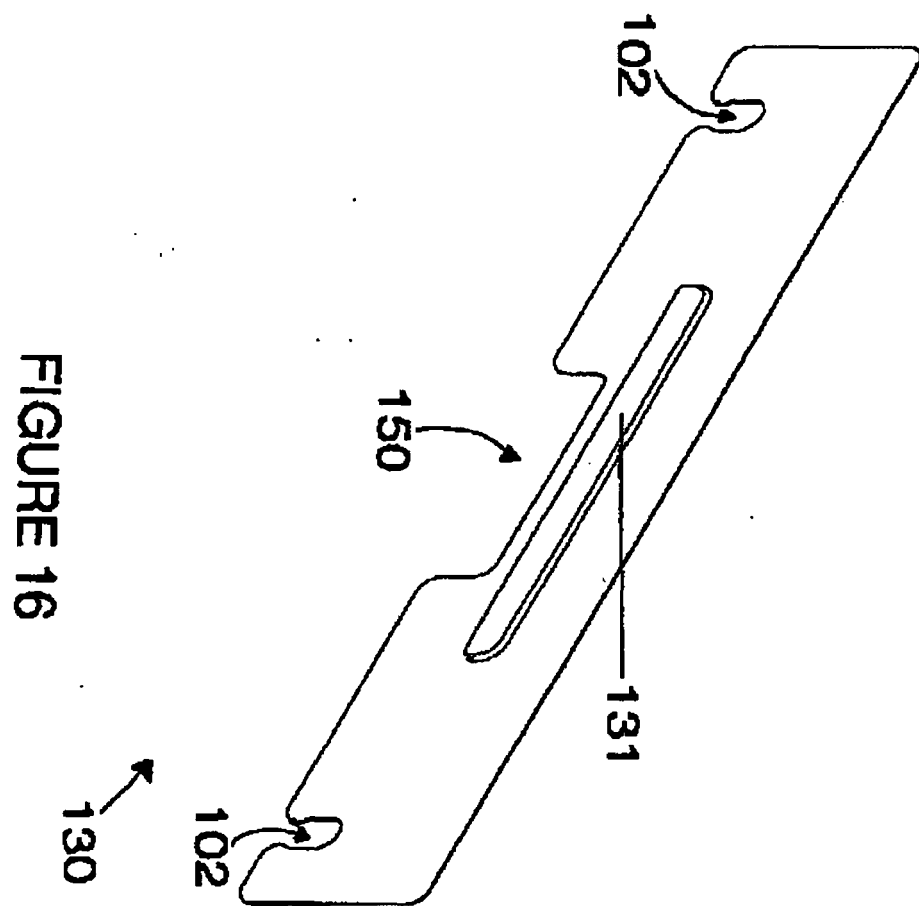


FIGURE 15



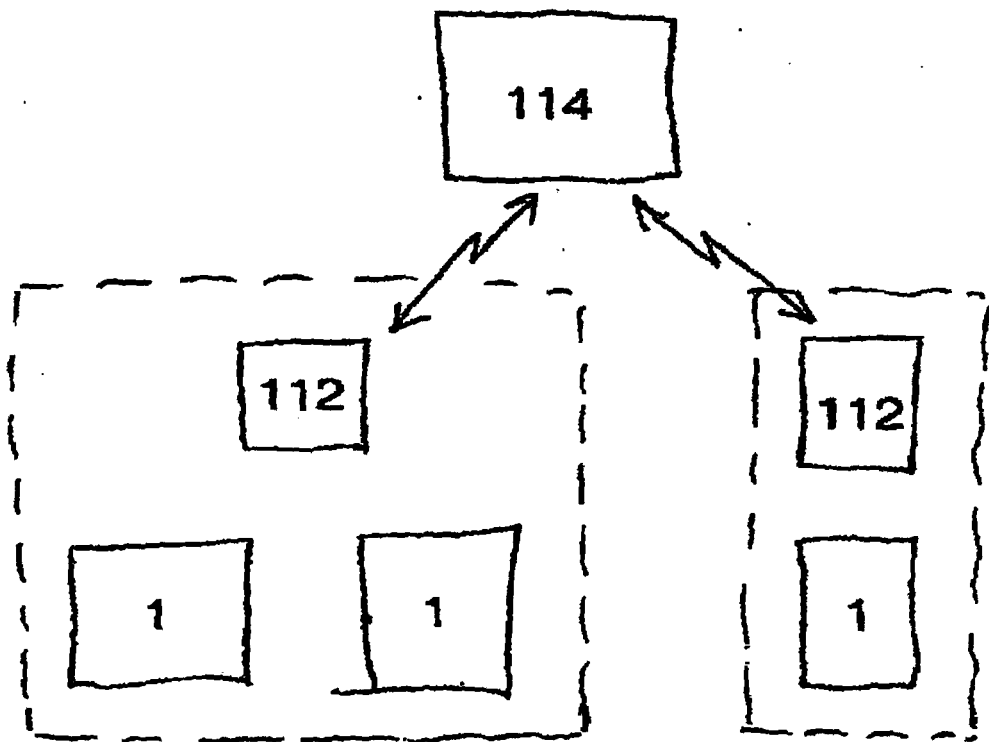


FIGURE 17

REFERENCES CITED IN THE DESCRIPTION

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