

(19)



(11)

EP 2 534 983 A1

(12)

EUROPEAN PATENT APPLICATION

(43) Date of publication:

19.12.2012 Bulletin 2012/51

(51) Int Cl.:

A47F 3/00 ^(2006.01)

A47F 5/00 ^(2006.01)

A47F 5/02 ^(2006.01)

(21) Application number: **11250597.9**

(22) Date of filing: **17.06.2011**

(84) Designated Contracting States:

**AL AT BE BG CH CY CZ DE DK EE ES FI FR GB
GR HR HU IE IS IT LI LT LU LV MC MK MT NL NO
PL PT RO RS SE SI SK SM TR**

Designated Extension States:

BA ME

• **Ugo, Guido**

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(54) **Merchandising unit with moveable housing**

(57) A merchandising unit (10) for consumer goods comprising: a support unit (12) comprising connecting means for mounting the merchandising unit on a support surface and at least one hinged support arm (20,22) extending from the connecting means and moveable relative to the connecting means between a first position and a second position; and a housing (14) for housing the

consumer goods. The housing (14) is mounted on the at least one hinged support arm (20,22) for movement relative to the at least one hinged support arm between a closed position, in which at least some of the consumer goods are not visible, and an open position in which at least some of the consumer goods that are not visible in the closed position are visible.

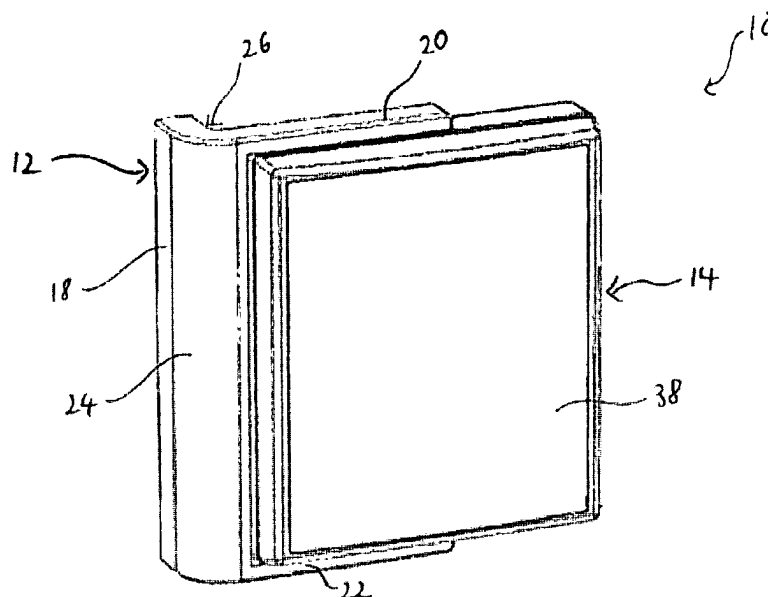


Figure 1

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Description

[0001] The present invention relates to a merchandising unit having a moveable housing for housing consumer goods. The invention finds particular application as a merchandising unit for smoking articles.

[0002] A wide variety of different types of merchandising units are used to store, dispense and display consumer goods at the point of sale. For example, in shops and kiosks, the majority of consumer goods are displayed on free standing or wall mounted shelving units and racks. However, it may be preferred to dispense certain items from units which can be optionally covered or closed between purchases.

[0003] It would therefore be desirable to provide a novel consumer goods merchandising unit which provides increased flexibility in the storage and display of the consumer goods at the point of sale.

[0004] According to the present invention there is provided a merchandising unit for consumer goods comprising a support unit comprising connecting means for mounting the merchandising unit on a support surface and at least one hinged support arm extending from the connecting means and moveable relative to the connecting means between a first position and a second position; and a housing for housing the consumer goods. The housing is mounted on the at least one hinged support arm for movement relative to the at least one hinged support arm between a closed position, in which at least some of the consumer goods are not visible, and an open position in which at least some of the consumer goods that are not visible in the closed position of the housing are visible. In the first position of the at least one hinged support arm the housing is retained in the closed position and in the second position of the at least one hinged support arm the housing is moveable between the closed position and the open position.

[0005] According to the invention, the term "consumer goods" is used throughout the text to refer to any type of good or item that may be sold to a consumer. The term is also used to refer to bundles or packages comprising such goods.

[0006] In order to make the consumer goods within the housing visible to the consumer, the at least one hinged support arm of the support unit is therefore moveable to the second position before the housing can be moved to the open position. The consumer goods are preferably accessible from the interior of the housing in the open position of the housing. The consumer goods that are initially not visible may also be accessible from the interior of the housing in the closed position of the housing. However, more preferably, the interior of the housing is not accessible in the closed position of the housing so that the housing must be moved to the open position in order to access the initially not visible consumer goods.

[0007] Preferably, all of the consumer goods in the housing are not visible in the first position of the at least one hinged support arm.

[0008] By "visible" is meant that the consumer goods are sufficiently visible that it is possible for a consumer to not only see that consumer goods are provided within the housing but also to discern what the consumer goods are. This means that the visibility of the consumer goods in the open position of the housing must be sufficient that the outer appearance of the consumer goods can be clearly seen by the consumer. This enables the consumer to identify the type and brand of the goods prior to purchase. The consumer can also distinguish between any different types of visible consumer goods within the housing.

[0009] The merchandising unit according to the invention offers greater flexibility in the display and access of the consumer goods at the point of sale. The housing can remain in the closed position such that the consumer goods are not visible until the retailer chooses to move the housing to the open position. This may be beneficial for a number of reasons. For example, it may be desirable to control the visibility of the consumer goods at the point of sale. By using a display assembly that can be readily moved between a closed position and an open position, the retailer is able to choose whether to display or hide the consumer goods. Advantageously, in the closed position of the housing the consumer goods are protected from exposure to air, heat, moisture or UV, for example. This may prevent the consumer goods from drying out, melting or other forms of degradation.

[0010] Advantageously, the combination of the movement of the hinged support arm and the housing provides for an eye-catching, interesting opening mechanism that can attract the attention of the customer.

[0011] In certain embodiments, it may be advantageous to provide locking means for locking the housing in the closed position. This may be achieved by locking the housing to prevent movement of the housing relative to the at least one hinged support arm. Alternatively, this may be achieved by locking the at least one hinged support arm in the first position so that it is not possible for the housing to be moved between the closed and open positions. The incorporation of locking means may be desirable, for example, where the merchandising unit is positioned so that it is unsupervised or freely accessible to consumers.

[0012] Merchandising units according to the invention may be mounted on a substantially horizontal support surface, such as a table or counter at the point of sale. Alternatively, merchandising units according to the invention may be mounted on a vertical support surface, such as a wall. In preferred embodiments, the merchandising unit is a wall-mounted merchandising unit which be mounted, for example, behind a counter or bar.

[0013] The support unit of the merchandising units of the present invention has the combined functions of connecting the merchandising unit to the support surface and supporting the housing containing the consumer goods. The form of the connecting means for connecting the merchandising unit to a support surface will depend

upon the orientation of the support surface.

[0014] Where the merchandising unit is adapted for mounting on a vertical surface such as a wall, the connecting means is preferably in the form of a rail or bar including attachment means, such as screws or bolts, for fixing the rail or bar to the wall. Preferably, the at least one hinged support arm is connected to one or both ends of the rail or bar, for pivotal movement relative to the support unit. In alternative embodiments, the connecting means may comprise a support frame formed of two or more connected rails or bars.

[0015] Where the merchandising unit is adapted for mounting or standing on a horizontal surface such as a counter, the connecting means is preferably in the form of a free-standing post or frame with a base that can be placed directly onto the support surface and which may optionally be secured to the support surface by suitable attachment means, such as screws or bolts.

[0016] Merchandising units according to the invention include one or more hinged, elongate support arms, each of which is preferably pivotally moveable relative to the connecting means. Preferably, one end of each support arm is pivotally connected to the connecting means and the opposite end of each support arm is pivotally connected to the housing. Each support arm may comprise a single, rigid arm portion. Alternatively, each support arm may be formed of two or more connected arm portions. The connected arm portions may be connected together such that the portions can be moved relative to each other. For example, the connected arm portions may be connected together at a hinged joint, or in a folded or telescopic arrangement so that the support arm can be extended.

[0017] The housing of merchandising units according to the present invention may take any suitable form for containing the consumer goods. Preferably, the housing is in the form of a substantially parallelepipedal box.

[0018] The housing is mounted on the at least one hinged support arms for movement relative to the support arm. Preferably, the housing is mounted for pivotal movement relative to the support arm. Preferably, the housing is rotatable about a substantially vertical axis, between the closed position and the open position. The housing is preferably connected to each hinged support arm at an attachment point, about which the housing is pivotable. Preferably the attachment point is provided at the top of the housing. This arrangement typically provides the maximum freedom in the rotation of the housing relative to the support arm, where the axis of rotation is vertical. Where two or more hinged support arms are incorporated, preferably attachment points are provided at the top and bottom of the housing.

[0019] The attachment point or points may be provided approximately centrally so that the housing spins about a central axis. Alternatively, the attachment point or points may be provided off-centre so that the axis of rotation is provided towards one side of the housing.

[0020] Alternatively or in addition to being pivotally

moveable relative to the support arm, the housing may be mounted for translational sliding movement relative to the support arm. For example, the housing may be mounted such that it is able to slide along the support arm before being rotated into an open position. This may be achieved, for example, by providing a track on the support arm on which a part of the support arm may be mounted for movement along the track. Suitable arrangements would be known to the skilled person.

[0021] Preferably, the housing comprises a first compartment for housing the consumer goods. The first compartment preferably includes an access opening through which the consumer goods are accessible in the open position of the housing. Preferably, the access opening is covered when the housing is in the closed position. For example, in the closed position the access opening may be positioned against the support surface on which the merchandising unit is mounted, so that it is inaccessible.

[0022] In certain embodiments, the consumer goods within the first compartment may be visible to the consumer when the housing is moved to an open position. For example, the access opening may be uncovered, or may be covered by a transparent cover. In other embodiments, the consumer goods within the first compartment may not be visible to the consumer when the housing is moved to an open position. In either case, an additional, second compartment may be provided for displaying the consumer goods in the open position of the housing. In the second compartment, a single consumer item or a small number of consumer items can be mounted in such a way that the consumer item or its outer packaging is clearly displayed.

[0023] Preferably, the housing further comprises a cover panel connected to the housing along a hinge line. The cover panel is pivotable about the hinge line between a closed position, in which the cover panel covers the access opening of the first compartment, and an open position, in which the access opening is uncovered. The cover panel may be at least partially formed of a substantially transparent material so that the consumer goods within the first compartment can be viewed through the cover panel in the second position of the support arm. Alternatively, the cover panel may be formed of an opaque material through which the consumer goods within the first compartment cannot be viewed.

[0024] The housing of merchandising units according to the present invention preferably further comprises means for mounting the consumer goods to be housed therein. It may be desirable to incorporate such mounting means in order to facilitate the arrangement and dispensing of the consumer goods. For example, within the housing there may be provided one or more racks or stands for stacking the consumer goods. Alternatively, the consumer goods may be stacked within one or more cassettes, which optionally include spring loaded mechanisms to aid the dispensing of the consumer goods.

[0025] The first compartment preferably further com-

prise a light for illuminating the consumer goods housed within the compartment when the housing is in an open position and any cover panel is also open, such that the consumer goods are more visible. This may be particularly advantageous when the light level at the point of sale is low. Where the housing includes a second compartment, a light for illuminating the displayed consumer goods within the second compartment is preferably provided. Alternatively, or in addition, means for controlling at least one of the temperature or humidity of the compartments in the housing may be provided in the merchandising unit.

[0026] The outer surfaces of the housing, including any cover panel, are preferably provided with graphics or text. This may, for example, reflect the branding of the consumer goods within the housing, or related consumer goods, or may advertise entirely different consumer goods. Alternatively, or in addition, the housing may include one or more areas in which graphics or text are provided on the inner surface. The graphics and text therefore become visible only when the housing is moved to its open position. For example, where a cover panel is provided over the access opening, graphics or text may be provided on the inner surface of the cover panel which becomes visible to the consumer when the cover panel is opened.

[0027] In certain preferred embodiments, the housing comprises one or more illuminated panels for covering the consumer goods in the closed position of the housing. For example, the panel or wall forming the front wall of the housing in the closed position may be provided with an illuminated panel. This may advantageously attract attention to the merchandising unit, particularly in a dark environment. The illuminated panel may also be used to enhance the visibility of any branding or graphics provided on the housing for display in the closed position.

[0028] Merchandising units according to the present invention preferably further comprise one or more additional storage compartments for housing consumer goods. The consumer goods within the additional compartments may be the same as or different to those in the first compartment.

[0029] In preferred embodiments of the present invention, the at least one hinged support arm of the support unit is adapted to lie against the support surface on which the merchandising unit is mounted in the first position of the support arm. The support arm must then be rotated away from the support surface in order to move it to the second position in which the housing can be moved to an open position.

[0030] This arrangement of the support arm is particularly convenient for wall mounted merchandising units, where the connecting means is attached to a vertical wall. The hinged support arm can be stowed against the wall in the first position so that the merchandising unit occupies minimal space and does not significantly protrude from the wall. In this position, the merchandising unit may resemble a regular wall mounted unit or cabinet. Rotation

of the hinged support arm and housing away from the wall is only necessary when it is desired to display the consumer goods within the housing. Whilst the hinged support arm is in place against the wall or other support surface, the support surface prevents the movement of the housing from the closed position, since the axis about which the housing must pivot lies against the support surface. In certain embodiments, however, the hinged support arm may be moveable back to the first position against the support surface once the housing is in the open position.

[0031] Preferably, the support unit comprises a pair of opposed hinged support arms, wherein the housing is mounted between the opposed support arms. This arrangement provides additional support to the housing and may be particularly beneficial when the housing is relatively large or heavy. Each of the hinged support arms is preferably connected to the connecting means for mounting the merchandising unit on the support surface. In some embodiments, the two opposed support arms may be connected to each other as well as the connecting means. For example, the two support arms may be integrally formed, in a fork arrangement, or connected to each other through an intermediate support arm or unit. This enables the pair of hinged support arms to be conveniently moved together relative to the connecting means.

[0032] The merchandising units according to the present invention find particular application as merchandising units for the display and dispensing of packs of smoking articles. The merchandising unit may be adapted to house different numbers, sizes and shapes of packs of smoking articles and may be adapted to display the packs in a wide variety of ways.

[0033] The invention will be further described, by way of example only, with reference to the accompanying drawings in which:

Figure 1 shows a front perspective view of a merchandising unit according to the invention with the hinged support arms in the first position and the housing in a closed position;

Figure 2 shows the merchandising unit of Figure 1 with the hinged support arms in the second position and the housing in a closed position; and

Figure 3 shows the merchandising unit of Figures 1 and 2 with the hinged support arms in the first position and the housing in an open position.

[0034] The merchandising unit 10 of Figures 1 to 3 is adapted for mounting on a substantially vertical wall and comprises a support unit 12 and a housing 14 for containing a plurality of packs of smoking articles (not shown).

[0035] In the following description, the terms 'top', 'bottom', 'front' and 'back' refer to the relative position of components of the merchandising unit 10 in the configuration shown in Figure 1, with the support arms 20, 22 of the

support unit 12 in a first position and the housing 14 in a closed position.

[0036] The support unit 12 comprises a vertical support bar 18 including attachment means (not shown) for connecting the support bar to a wall. A first end of an upper support arm 20 is attached at the top end of the support bar 18 and a first end of a lower, opposed support arm 22 is attached to the bottom end of the support bar 20. The upper support arm 20 and lower support arm 22 are integrally connected by means of a substantially vertical member 24 to form a C-shaped frame 26. The first 20 and second 22 support arms are pivotally mounted at the opposed ends of the support bar 18 so that the C-shaped frame 26 is rotatable relative to the support bar 18 between a first position, as shown in Figure 1, and a second position, as shown in Figure 2.

[0037] The housing 14 comprises a substantially rectangular parallelepipedal cabinet comprising a first compartment 28 for storing the plurality of packs of smoking articles and a second compartment 30, located above the first compartment 28, containing spaces 32 for displaying three display packs (not shown) indicative of the packs of smoking articles within the first compartment 28.

[0038] As shown in Figure 3, the first compartment 28 includes a plurality of vertical channels or racks in which a plurality of packs may be vertically stacked with an end face of each pack facing outwards. The first compartment 28 includes an access opening 34 at the back wall of the housing, through which the packs of smoking articles can be removed.

[0039] A cover panel 36 is connected to the housing 14 along a hinge line extending along the right side edge of the access opening 34. The cover panel 36 is pivotal about the hinge line between the closed position shown in Figure 2, in which the cover panel 36 substantially covers the access opening 34, and the open position shown in Figure 3, in which the cover panel 36 has been pivoted away from the first compartment 28 so that the access opening 34 is uncovered. The cover panel 36 is formed of a substantially opaque material so that in the closed position shown in Figure 2 the packs of smoking articles within the first compartment cannot be seen through the panel 36.

[0040] As shown in Figure 2, the second compartment 30 contains three spaced apart spaces for display packs, which are mounted within the second compartment 30 with the front face of each pack facing outwards. The second compartment 30 is uncovered so that the display packs are visible at all times when the back wall of the housing 14 is visible, as in Figures 2 and 3.

[0041] The housing 14 includes a front wall 38 formed of an illuminated panel, which covers the packs of smoking articles within the housing when the housing 14 is in the closed position shown in Figure 1, with the front wall 38 facing outwards.

[0042] The housing 14 is connected between the upper 20 and lower 22 support arms at opposed attachment points 40 at the centre of the top wall and bottom wall of

the housing, respectively. This enables the housing 14 to rotate about a substantially vertical axis extending between the attachment points 40, when the support arms 20,22 are in the second position shown in Figure 2. The housing 14 is rotatable about the axis between the closed position shown in Figure 1 and the open position shown in Figures 2 and 3. In the closed position the front wall 38 of the housing 14 faces outwards. In the open position, the back wall of the housing 14 faces outwards. In addition, in the open position, the display packs within the spaces 32 are visible to a consumer standing in front of the merchandising unit 10. The cover panel 36 can be opened in order to access the packs of smoking articles within the first compartment 28.

[0043] Figure 1 shows the merchandising unit 10 with the support arms 20,22 in a first position. In this position, the support arms are lying substantially parallel to the surface of the wall on which the merchandising unit is mounted. The housing 14 is in a closed position with the front wall 38 facing outwards. The packs of smoking articles within the housing 14 are not visible and cannot be accessed. In this position, the wall on which the merchandising unit is mounted prevents the rotation of the housing 14 towards the open position so that the housing 14 is retained in the closed position.

[0044] In order to access the packs of smoking articles within the first compartment 28, the support arms 20,22 must first be rotated about the support bar 18, in order to move the arms away from the wall and into the second position shown in Figure 2. In the second position, the support arms 20,22 extend substantially perpendicularly outwards from the wall. The housing 14 may be freely rotated from the closed position in which the front wall 38 faces outwards, to the open position shown in Figure 2 in which the back wall faces outwards. The support arms 20,22 may then be rotated about the support bar 18 in order to move the arms back against the wall, as shown in Figure 3. The support arms 20,22 are therefore returned to the starting position but with the housing 14 in the open position.

[0045] In the open position shown in Figure 3, the display packs in the spaces 32 are visible to the consumer. In order to access the packs within the first compartment 28, the cover panel 36 must be rotated away from the remainder of the housing 14 from the closed position shown in Figure 2 to the open position shown in Figure 3. The access opening 34 in the first compartment is then uncovered and the packs within the first compartment 28 can be removed through the access opening 34.

[0046] Once the packs of smoking articles have been dispensed, the merchandising unit 10 can be returned to the position shown in Figure 1, with the housing 14 in a closed position and the support arms 20,22 in the first position against the wall.

Claims

1. A merchandising unit for consumer goods comprising:

a support unit comprising connecting means for mounting the merchandising unit on a support surface and at least one hinged support arm extending from the connecting means and moveable relative to the connecting means between a first position and a second position; and a housing for housing the consumer goods, wherein the housing is mounted on the at least one hinged support arm for movement relative to the at least one hinged support arm between a closed position, in which at least some of the consumer goods in the housing are not visible, and an open position in which at least some of the consumer goods that are not visible in the closed position of the housing are visible, wherein in the first position of the at least one hinged support arm the housing is retained in the closed position and in the second position of the at least one hinged support arm the housing is moveable between the closed position and the open position.

2. A merchandising unit according to claim 1 wherein the housing is mounted for pivotal movement relative to the at least one hinged support arm.

3. A merchandising unit according to claim 1 or 2 wherein the interior of the housing is accessible in the open position.

4. A merchandising unit according to any of claims 1 to 3 wherein the housing comprises a first compartment for housing the consumer goods, wherein the first compartment includes an access opening through which the consumer goods are accessible in the open position of the housing.

5. A merchandising unit according to claim 4 wherein the housing further comprises a second compartment for displaying the consumer goods in the open position of the housing.

6. A merchandising unit according to claim 4 or 5 wherein the housing further comprises a cover panel connected to the housing along a hinge line, wherein the cover panel is pivotable about the hinge line between a closed position, in which the cover panel covers the access opening of the first compartment, and an open position, in which the access opening is uncovered.

7. A merchandising unit according to any preceding claim wherein the housing further comprises an illu-

minated panel for covering the consumer goods in the closed position of the housing.

8. A merchandising unit according to any preceding claim wherein the at least one hinged support arm is adapted to lie against the support surface in the first position and wherein the at least one hinged support arm is rotated away from the support surface in order to move it towards the second position.

9. A merchandising unit according to any preceding claim comprising means for mounting a plurality of consumer goods within the housing.

10. A merchandising unit according to any preceding claim wherein the at least one support arm comprises a pair of opposed, hinged support arms and wherein the housing is mounted between the opposed support arms.

11. A merchandising unit according to claim 10 wherein the pair of opposed support arms are connected.

12. A merchandising unit according to any preceding claim for housing packs of smoking articles.

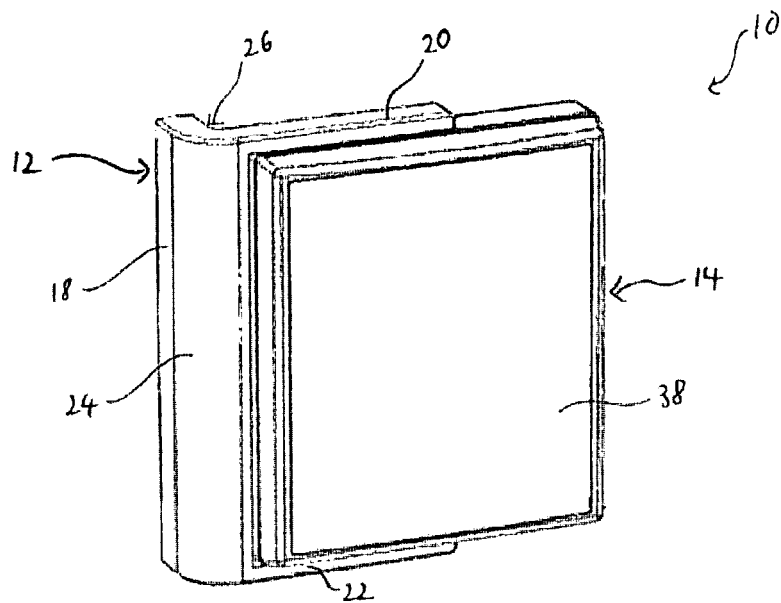


Figure 1

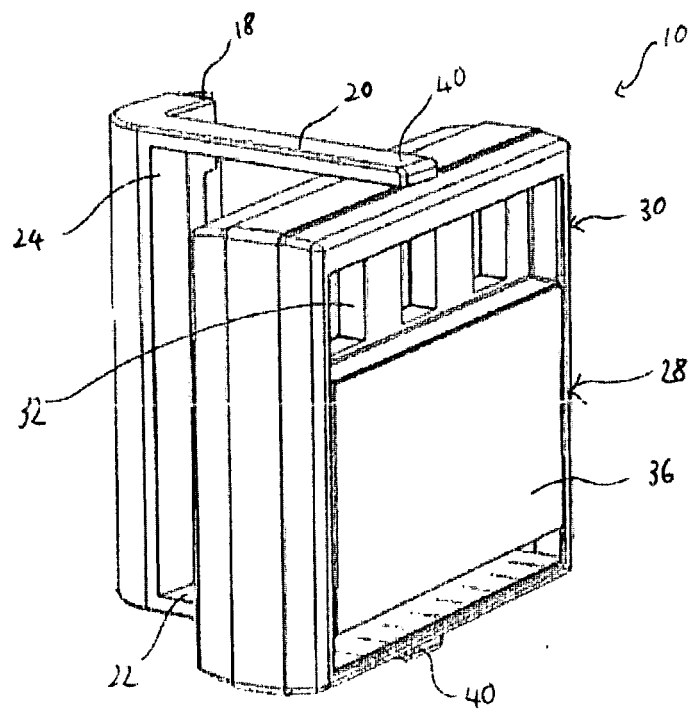


Figure 2

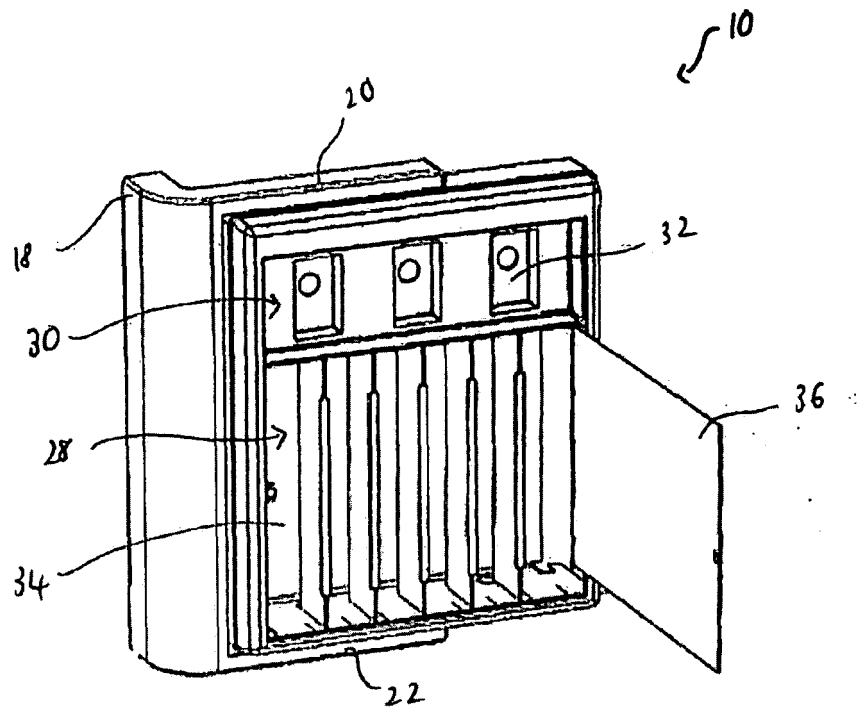


Figure 3



EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT

Application Number
EP 11 25 0597

DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT			
Category	Citation of document with indication, where appropriate, of relevant passages	Relevant to claim	CLASSIFICATION OF THE APPLICATION (IPC)
A	US 2009/011151 A1 (CRUZ MARK C [US]) 8 January 2009 (2009-01-08) * the whole document *	1-12	INV. A47F3/00 A47F5/00 A47F5/02
A	AT 344 936 B (CONDOR LEDERMODE [AT]) 25 August 1978 (1978-08-25) * the whole document *	1-12	
A	US 3 820 862 A (CROSSLEN L) 28 June 1974 (1974-06-28) * the whole document *	1-12	
The present search report has been drawn up for all claims			TECHNICAL FIELDS SEARCHED (IPC)
			A47F
Place of search		Date of completion of the search	Examiner
Munich		11 November 2011	Cardan, Cosmin
CATEGORY OF CITED DOCUMENTS X : particularly relevant if taken alone Y : particularly relevant if combined with another document of the same category A : technological background O : non-written disclosure P : intermediate document T : theory or principle underlying the invention E : earlier patent document, but published on, or after the filing date D : document cited in the application L : document cited for other reasons & : member of the same patent family, corresponding document			

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EPO FORM 1503 03.82 (P04C01)

**ANNEX TO THE EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT
ON EUROPEAN PATENT APPLICATION NO.**

EP 11 25 0597

This annex lists the patent family members relating to the patent documents cited in the above-mentioned European search report. The members are as contained in the European Patent Office EDP file on
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11-11-2011

Patent document cited in search report		Publication date	Patent family member(s)		Publication date
US 2009011151	A1	08-01-2009	NONE		

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