SYSTEMS AND METHODS FOR DISPLAYING PRODUCTS

Inventors: Douglas S. McLaughlin, Clemmons, NC (US); Jeffrey A. Dean, Clemmons, NC (US); Leslie R. McCraw, Winston-Salem, NC (US); Christopher J. Hartley, Clemmons, NC (US); Eric Harrison, Bentonville, AR (US); Scott Winchester, Rogers, AR (US)

Correspondence Address:
KILPATRICK STOCKTON LLP
1001 WEST FOURTH STREET
WINSTON-SALEM, NC 27101

ABSTRACT

Systems and methods for displaying products are described. One system comprises a lockable sidekick display configured to display a product.
PLACE LOCKABLE SIDEKICK DISPLAY IN PUBLIC AREA OF RETAIL STORE

PLACE STOCKING CONTAINER IN PRIVATE AREA OF RETAIL STORE

STOCK STOCKING CONTAINER

UNLOCK LOCKABLE SIDEKICK DISPLAY

REFILL LOCKABLE SIDEKICK DISPLAY FROM STOCKING CONTAINER

DISPLAY PRODUCT IN LOCKABLE SIDEKICK DISPLAY

FIG. 5
PLACE LOCKABLE SIDEKICK DISPLAY WITHIN SIGHT OF CASH REGISTER IN RETAIL STORE

DISPLAY FULL REFILLABLE CONTAINER IN LOCKABLE SIDEKICK DISPLAY

RECEIVE EMPTY REFILLABLE CONTAINER

UNLOCK LOCKABLE SIDEKICK DISPLAY

EXCHANGE EMPTY REFILLABLE CONTAINER WITH FULL REFILLABLE CONTAINER FROM LOCKABLE SIDEKICK DISPLAY

FILL EMPTY REFILLABLE CONTAINER

INSERT REFILLED REFILLABLE CONTAINER INTO LOCKABLE SIDEKICK DISPLAY

FIG. 6
SYSTEMS AND METHODS FOR DISPLAYING PRODUCTS

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0001] The invention relates to systems and methods for displaying products.

BACKGROUND

[0002] Certain products offered for sale in a retail environment may be dangerous or prone to theft. However, keeping such a product in an area off-limits to or out of sight from a customer may decrease a retailer’s ability to sell the product. Similarly, one of these products may be stored in a conventional display unit visible to the customer (such as a lockable jewelry/cosmetic counter case, a lockable electronics cabinet, or a gravity-feed display behind a counter), but many conventional display units may be difficult to move, take up a significant amount of retail floor space, be incompatible with certain products, or require placement distant from an associated product or class of products not as dangerous or likely to be stolen, thereby decreasing opportunities for cross-marketing and selling.

[0003] Display units in a retail environment may be costly to replace and may represent a significant expense in the set-up of a retail environment. Accordingly, a retailer with an existing store location may be resistant to modifying or replacing existing display units in order to accommodate a new product or service. Conventional display units may be configured to display a variety of different products during different retail seasons or sale periods, and a retailer may wish to minimize the time required to change out products in a display unit. Conventional display units may also be ill equipped to prevent damage to a product caused by a customer or employee. Accordingly, a demand exists for further systems and methods capable of safely and securely displaying a product in a retail environment.

SUMMARY

[0004] Embodiments of the present invention provide systems and methods for displaying products. One illustrative embodiment comprises a lockable sidekick display configured to display a product.

[0005] This embodiment is mentioned not to limit or define the invention, but to provide an example of an embodiment of the invention to aid understanding thereof. Illustrative embodiments are discussed in the Detailed Description, and further description of the invention is provided there. Advantages offered by the various embodiments of the present invention may be further understood by examining this specification.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE FIGURES

[0006] These and other features, aspects, and advantages of the present invention are better understood when the following Detailed Description is read with reference to the accompanying drawings, wherein:

[0007] FIG. 1 is a plan view of a retail store layout comprising a display unit according to one embodiment of the present invention;

[0008] FIG. 2 is a perspective view of a portion of a retail store display system, wherein a lockable sidekick display is shown in a closed and locked configuration according to one embodiment of the present invention;

[0009] FIG. 3 is a cross-sectional elevation view of a lockable sidekick display according to one embodiment of the present invention;

[0010] FIG. 4 is an elevation view of a back of a lockable sidekick display and a mounting bracket according to one embodiment of the present invention;

[0011] FIG. 5 is a flow chart of a method according to one embodiment of the present invention; and

[0012] FIG. 6 is a flow chart of a method according to one embodiment of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0013] Embodiments of the present invention provide systems and methods for displaying products. The systems and methods embodying the invention can be adapted for use in many environments, wherever there is a need to display a product. For example, in one embodiment, a lockable sidekick display may be used to display a product that may be dangerous or prone to theft.

[0014] The illustrative embodiments below show the invention used in a retail environment in association with systems and methods used to display refillable carbon dioxide tanks designed for use with paintball guns. In other embodiments, the present invention may be used to display various other types of products. For example, in various embodiments, a display according to the present invention may be used to display products such as food, wine, beer, spirits, chemicals, cleaners, paints, tools, ammunition, medicines, contraceptives, or tobacco products.

[0015] Referring now to the Figures, in which like part numbers depict like elements throughout the Figures, FIG. 1 is a plan view of a public area in a retail store layout according to one embodiment of the present invention. In the layout shown in FIG. 1, a plurality of aisles 20 are shown. The aisles 20 comprise floor space left between adjacent modular display units 30. The modular display units 30 may comprise, for example, adjustable shelving used to display items a consumer can select from while moving about the aisles 20.

[0016] In the embodiment shown in FIG. 1, an endcap display 40 is placed at the end of each row of modular displays 30. One or both of the modular displays 30 and the endcap displays 40 may comprise an existing retail shelving system. Some retailers may use the endcap displays 40 to display items that are sale-priced or seasonal in nature. As such, the items displayed in the endcap displays 40 may change frequently. The endcap displays 40 may comprise one or more adjustable shelves used to display a product.

[0017] The store layout 10 further comprises a plurality of lockable sidekick displays 50 disposed on the side of each endcap display 40. The lockable sidekick displays 50 are disposed such that they are coupled to at least one of the adjacent endcap display 40 and the adjacent modular display 30. In the embodiment shown in FIG. 1, the lockable sidekick displays 50 are positioned on both sides of the aisle 20. and on a single side of the endcap displays 40. In other embodiments, one or more lockable sidekick displays 50...
may be positioned on only one of the aisle 20, or on both sides of an endcap display 40.

[0018] The store layout 10 shown in FIG. 1 further comprises a sales counter 60. At the sales counter 60, an employee may be stationed to operate a cash register 70. In another embodiment, one or both of the sales counter 60 and the cash register 70 may be located in an area inaccessible to a customer (a private area) of the retail store. In one embodiment, a stocking container may be placed in a private area of the retail store, and products may be stocked in the stocking container, inaccessible to the customers. When desired by a retailer, the lockable sidekick display 50 in the public area of the store layout 10 may be at least partially refilled with one or more products from the stocking container.

[0019] As shown in FIG. 1, the store layout 10 is arranged such that the lockable sidekick displays 50 are in clear view of the sales counter 60 and the cash register 70. In another embodiment, one or more (or all) of the lockable sidekick displays 50 may be positioned such that they are not in view of the sales counter 60 or the cash register 70. Yet another embodiment, at least one of the lockable sidekick displays 50 and the floor space nearby may be electronically monitored (such as by video surveillance, motion detectors, weight sensors, a call button placed nearby, etc.) to alert one or more employees that a consumer may wish to purchase an item within the lockable sidekick display 50.

[0020] Referring now to FIG. 2, a perspective view of a portion of a retail store display system 210 is shown. The display system 210 comprises a modular display 230, an endcap display 240 (of which only the base shelf 243 is visible in FIG. 2), and a lockable sidekick display 250. The lockable sidekick display 250 is configured to prevent damage or loss to one or more products displayed thereon, such as may be caused by a collision with a shopping cart, a customer, or other accident or malicious act.

[0021] The modular display 230 shown in FIG. 2 comprises a plurality of shelves 233, one or more of which may be adjustable. The shelves 233 are configured to be coupled with at least the side 235 of the modular display 230. The modular display 230 further comprises a frame member 236. The frame member 236 comprises a plurality of receptacles therein (not shown) into which one or more types of brackets, shelves, or other fixtures may be inserted, thereby coupling the inserted item to the frame member 236.

[0022] The endcap display 240 in the embodiment shown in FIG. 2 is coupled to the modular display 230. The endcap display 240 comprises a plurality of shelves 243, all of which but the bottom shelf 243 are hidden from view in FIG. 2 behind the lockable sidekick display 250.

[0023] The lockable sidekick display 250 is shown in a closed and locked configuration. The lockable sidekick display 250 is configured to display two different types of products. The first type of product is a steel 9-ounce refillable tank filled with carbon dioxide, and the second type of product is a steel 20-ounce refillable tank filled with carbon dioxide. Both of the refillable tanks are configured to be coupled to a paintball gun in order to provide a propulsive force thereto. In another embodiment, the lockable sidekick display 250 may be configured to display only a single type of product, or may be configured to display more than two different types of products.

[0024] The lockable sidekick display 250 comprises a case 251. The case 251 in the embodiment shown in FIG. 2 has been fabricated by punching openings within, bending, and welding multiple sheets of steel into a suitable configuration. In the present embodiment, the case 251 comprises the following dimensions: 53 inches high, 14 inches wide, and 5.5 inches deep. In another embodiment, the case 251 may comprise one or more different dimensions (for example to comply with a retailer's guidelines for sidekick displays), be fashioned from another suitable material or in a different manner. For example, the case 251 may be fashioned from aluminum or a plastic material, or may be fashioned by injection molding, forging, casting, bonding, melting, or otherwise manipulating one or more pieces of one or more materials into a suitable configuration.

[0025] The lockable sidekick display 250 further comprises a plurality of shelves 252. In different embodiments, the lockable sidekick display 250 may comprise a greater or lesser number of shelves, or may not comprise any shelves at all. In one such embodiment, the lockable sidekick display 250 may comprise one or more pins or hooks used to hang items, one or more racks, or one or more other elements known in the art used to display items. The shelves 252 in the embodiment shown in FIG. 2 are adjustable. In another embodiment, one, a plurality, or all of the shelves 252 may be non-adjustable. In the embodiment shown, the shelves 252 are fabricated from steel sheet metal, bent into a suitable configuration. In a different embodiment, the shelves 252 may be fashioned using another suitable process, or may be fashioned from a different suitable material, such as aluminum or a plastic material.

[0026] Each of the shelves 252 in the embodiment shown in FIG. 2 comprises a sign holder 254. The sign holders 254 comprise a tongue-in-groove type receptacle in which a sign may be inserted horizontally from one end. The sign holders 254 are configured to secure a sign so inserted from the top and the bottom of the sign. In a different embodiment, one or more of the shelves 252 may not comprise a sign holder 254, or may comprise another suitable type of sign holder 254.

[0027] One or more of the openings in the case 251 of the lockable sidekick display 250 may be configured to couple with either one or more of the shelves 252, or to a mounting bracket, such as the mounting bracket shown in FIG. 4. A mounting bracket in one embodiment may be configured to mount the lockable sidekick display 250 to one or both of a portion of the modular display 230 and a portion of the endcap display 240. Such a mounting bracket may be used by inserting a first end thereof into an opening in the lockable sidekick display 250, and a second end into an opening in an existing retail shelving system (such as the modular display 230 or the endcap display 240), thereby coupling the mounting bracket to both the lockable sidekick display 250 and the existing retail shelving system.

[0028] In one embodiment, the lockable sidekick display 250 may be designed so as to be compatible with several different manufacturers' conventional mounting bracket products. In another embodiment, the lockable sidekick display 250 may be designed to work with a unique mounting bracket according to one embodiment of the present invention.

[0029] Referring still to FIG. 2, the lockable sidekick display 250 further comprises a door 256. The door 256 is
configured to permit viewing of a product or information associated with a product within the lockable sidekick display 250 when the door 256 is closed, and to permit insertion and removal of items into the lockable sidekick display 250 when it is open. The door 256 in the embodiment shown in FIG. 2 comprises a doorframe 257 and a window 258. In another embodiment, the door 256 may comprise fewer or lesser parts than in the present embodiment.

The doorframe 257 is fashioned from steel channel material comprising an inside channel width dimension of approximately 0.188 inches and configured to receive the window 258 therewith. The steel channel material has been cut to a suitable dimension and welded into a suitable shape at two of the door frame’s 257 corners, while the top piece of the door frame 257 is coupled to the sides thereof with corner brackets configured to receive screws so that the window 258 may be installed and removed as necessary. In another embodiment the doorframe 257 may comprise a different suitable material or may be fashioned using one or more different suitable processes. In yet another embodiment, the door 256 may not comprise a doorframe 257, and the door 256 may comprise a hinged window 258 with a lock 259.

The doorframe 257 is movable coupled to the case 251 along its vertical side opposite the lock 259 using three hinges (not shown). In one embodiment, the hinges may comprise, for example, part number BRC02019 available from American Performance Industries, Inc. of Sanford, N.C. The hinges are welded to the doorframe 257, and coupled to the case 251 using screws. The hinges are configured to conveniently allow the door 256 to open and close when the lock 259 is unlocked. In another embodiment, the door 256 may be movable coupled to the case 251 in another suitable manner.

The window 258 in the embodiment shown in FIG. 2 comprises a transparent Plexiglas sheet of approximately 0.168-0.186 inches thickness securely held in the doorframe 257. In another embodiment, the window 258 may be fashioned from another suitable material that allows a customer to view at least one of a product and information associated with a product within the lockable sidekick display 250 when the door 256 is closed. For example, tempered glass, or a metal wire mesh or screen coupled to the doorframe 257 may be used.

The lockable sidekick display 250 further comprises a lock 259 configured to restrict access to the interior of the lockable sidekick display 250 and any products therein by preventing the door 256 from opening without using a key to unlock the lock 259. The lock 259 comprises a keyed lock. In another embodiment, the lockable sidekick display 250 may comprise a plurality of locks 259, one or more of which may comprise another suitable type, such as a combination lock, a biometric verification interface, a magnetic lock, or a radio frequency actuated lock.

The lock 259 is positioned adjacent the side 252 of the lockable sidekick display 250. The door 256 in the embodiment shown in FIG. 2 is configured to open from the side 252 when the lock 259 is unlocked. In a different embodiment, the door 256 may be configured to open from the opposite side of the lockable sidekick display 250, from the bottom or the top of the lockable sidekick display 250, or may be adjustable to be opened from multiple directions, either simultaneously or in the alternative. In another embodiment, the lockable sidekick display 250 may comprise a plurality of doors 256, one or more of which may comprise a lock 259, and one or more of which may not.

In the embodiment shown in FIG. 2, the case 251, the shelves 253, the sign holders 254, and the door frame 257 may have all been painted to increase resistance to rusting and add visual impact, but in another embodiment one or more of these parts may be left unpainted or may be fashioned from one or more materials each comprising one or more unique colors, textures, or reflective properties.

In some embodiments, one or more elements of the lockable sidekick display 250 may be marked with information associated with a product displayed within the lockable sidekick display 250. For example, the side 252 of the case 251 may be marked with marketing information in a bold color or font configured to catch a customer's attention as he or she passes down an aisle. As shown in FIG. 2, in one embodiment, the lockable sidekick display 250 extends at least partially further into the aisle than the modular display 230 adjacent thereto. This configuration may provide a customer in an aisle adjacent the modular display 230 with a clear line of sight to the side 252 of the lockable sidekick display 250, and any information marked thereon. In another embodiment, the door 256 or the case 251 of the lockable sidekick display 250 may comprise a sign holder configured to hold a sign associated with one of the products displayed within the lockable sidekick display 250 (or even information associated with a product or service that bears little or no relation to the products displayed within the lockable sidekick display 250).

In one embodiment, one or more of the shelves 253 may be configured to support a product at an angle configured to reduce the amount of space required between two adjacent shelves 253 within the lockable sidekick display 250 while permitting ingress and egress of a product. For example, in the embodiment shown, each of the shelves 253 is angled at 15° from horizontal towards the door 256, such that a 20-ounce refillable steel tank displayed within the lockable sidekick display 250 with its fitting angled towards the door 256 and supported by both a shelf 253 and a portion of a sign holder 254 that is part of the shelf 253. In another embodiment, a different angle may be used, or a product may be angled away from the door 256.

Referring now to FIG. 3, a cross-sectional elevation view of a lockable sidekick display 350 according to one embodiment of the present invention is shown. As shown in FIG. 3, the lockable sidekick display is filled with a plurality of refillable containers 390 configured to be filled with a compressible gas (such as carbon dioxide) and coupled to a paintball gun to provide a propulsive force thereto. The lockable sidekick display 350 comprises four shelves 353, and is configured to display two different sizes of refillable containers 390.

The top shelf 353 of the lockable sidekick display 350 is substantially perpendicular to the longest dimension of the lockable sidekick display 350. The top shelf is configured to hold twelve 9-ounce refillable containers 390 in a six-wide by two-deep arrangement. Each of the three lower shelves 353 is configured to hold four 20-ounce refillable containers 390 in a four-wide by one-deep con-
configuration. In the embodiment shown, all shelves 353 but the top shelf 353 have a shelf bottom 363 that is angled towards the front of the lockable sidekick display 350 at an angle of 15° from horizontal. In the embodiment shown in FIG. 3, the shelf bottoms 363 are angled to decrease the amount of space required between the shelves 353 and still permit ingress and egress of the 20-ounce refillable containers 390. In a different embodiment, none, all, or a greater or lesser number of the shelves 353 in the lockable sidekick display 350 may be angled.

[0040] As shown in FIG. 3, each of the shelves 353 comprises a sign-holder 354. The configuration of the shelf 353 and sign-holder 354 combination is such that the 20-ounce refillable containers 390 on the three lower shelves 353 are supported by the top of the adjacent sign holder 354 and by the bottom 363 of the adjacent shelf 353. As shown in FIG. 3, the 20-ounce refillable containers 390 are displayed in the lockable sidekick display 350 such that they lean towards the front of the lockable sidekick display 350, thus making ingress and egress of the containers 390 easier.

[0041] Referring now to FIG. 4, an elevation view of a portion of a back of a lockable sidekick display 450 is shown coupled with a plurality of mounting brackets 480 according to one embodiment of the present invention. The mounting brackets 480 are configured to couple the lockable sidekick display 450 to a modular display (such as the modular display 230 shown in FIG. 2). In the embodiment shown, two mounting brackets 480 are coupled to the lockable sidekick display 450. In another embodiment, a single mounting bracket 480 or three or more mounting brackets 480 may be used to couple the lockable sidekick display 450 to another display unit. In yet another embodiment, the lockable sidekick display 450 may be configured to couple directly with a display unit without the use of a mounting bracket 480.

[0042] As shown in FIG. 4, the back of the lockable sidekick display 450 comprises a plurality of sets of four rectangular mounting bracket receptacles 490. Each of the plurality of sets of four rectangular mounting bracket receptacles 490 are arranged to provide several locations for the mounting brackets 480 to couple with the lockable sidekick display 450. By providing a variety of locations for each mounting bracket 480 to couple with the lockable sidekick display 450, an installer of the lockable sidekick display 450 may be able to select the location most compatible with existing store displays. Each of the rectangular mounting bracket receptacles 490 are configured to receive a corresponding portion of the mounting bracket 480, such as a tab, a flap, or a hook.

[0043] As shown in FIG. 4, the mounting brackets 480 each comprise a plurality of mounting tabs 482. The mounting tabs 482 are each configured to engage a set of four rectangular mounting bracket receptacles 490 in the lockable sidekick display 450. Each of the mounting brackets 480 further comprises a spring pin 484. The spring pin 484 is configured to push a pin toward the back of the lockable sidekick display 450. The lockable sidekick display 450 further comprises a plurality of spring pin receptacles 492. The spring pin receptacles 492 are arranged so that the spring pin 484 engages with a spring pin receptacle 492 only when the mounting tabs 482 are fully engaged with a set of the mounting bracket receptacles 490. As such, the spring pins 484 can provide an installer of the lockable sidekick display 450 with verification that the mounting bracket 480 is securely coupled with the lockable sidekick display 450.

[0044] Each of the mounting brackets 480 shown further comprises a plurality of hooks 486 on one of the ends thereof. In the embodiment shown in FIG. 4, the hooks 486 are arranged to couple with receptacles in a vertical bar of a modular display. For example, when used with the modular display 230 described with respect to FIG. 2, the hooks 486 may be coupled with receptacles in the side of the vertical frame member 236. In another embodiment, the mounting brackets 480 may comprise hooks 486 on both ends, or on the side of the mounting bracket 480 facing away from the lockable sidekick display 450. In one such embodiment, hooks 486 may be configured to couple with a portion of an endcap display, such as the endcap display 240 shown in FIG. 2.

[0045] Certain embodiments of the present invention may comprise methods, such as methods for displaying products. Referring now to FIG. 5, one such method 500 according to an embodiment of the present invention is shown. As shown in box 505, the method 500 comprises placing a lockable sidekick display in a public area of a retail store. For example, the lockable sidekick display (50) may be placed adjacent an endcap display (40) and a modular display (30) as described above with respect to FIG. 1. In one illustrative embodiment, a lockable sidekick display may be placed in a public area of a retail store within sight of a cash register (70) or another location a store employee may be known to frequent.

[0046] In another embodiment, a lockable sidekick display configured to display a first product may be placed such that it is adjacent to a display of a second product associated with the first product. For example, the modular display (230) shown in FIG. 2 may be configured to display a variety of paintball designed for use with paintball guns. In such an embodiment, a lockable sidekick display (such as the lockable sidekick display (250) described with respect to FIG. 2) may be configured to hold one or more sizes of refillable aluminum tanks filled with a compressible gas (such as carbon dioxide), and designed to couple with a paintball gun that uses the paintballs displayed in the adjacent modular display (230).

[0047] In some embodiments, placing the lockable sidekick display within a public area of a retail store may comprise coupling a first end of a mounting bracket to the lockable sidekick display by inserting the first end into one or more holes in the lockable sidekick display. In such an embodiment, a second end of the mounting bracket may be coupled to one or more parts of an existing retail shelving system (such as the modular display (230) or the endcap display (240)). The lockable sidekick display may be designed to accept a plurality of suitable conventional types of mounting brackets produced by multiple manufacturers or used by multiple retailers. In another embodiment, the lockable sidekick display may comprise an integral mounting bracket, or may come equipped with a unique mounting bracket according to one embodiment of the present invention.

[0048] Referring still to FIG. 5, as shown in box 515, the method 500 further comprises placing a stocking container in a private area of the retail store. For example, in one
The method 500 further comprises displaying the lockable sidekick display as shown in box 545. For example, in one embodiment, an employee may be charged with keeping track of an inventory of products displayed within a lockable sidekick display (250) as described above with respect to FIG. 2. In such an embodiment, the employee may use the sidekick in the private area of the retail store when he or she notices a product in short supply.

He or she may then bring one or more of the products into the public area of the retail store and use a key to unlock the lock (250) on the lockable sidekick display (250). He or she may then open the door (256) of the lockable sidekick display (250) to gain access to the shelves (253) therewith. He or she may then refill the lockable sidekick display (250) with the appropriate number and type of products based on a variety of factors, such as the date, past sales data, or space available within or configuration of the lockable sidekick display (250). The employee may also wish to remove one or more products from the lockable sidekick display (250) at the same time due to a change in retail season, slow selling-performance, etc.

As shown in box 555, the method 500 further comprises displaying the product(s) in the lockable sidekick display. For example, in one embodiment, after the lockable sidekick display has been at least partially refilled from the stocking container, an employee may close and lock the lockable sidekick display. In some embodiments, the lockable sidekick display may be configured to lock automatically upon closing a door or other access element. In one embodiment, a retailer may mark at least a portion of the lockable sidekick display with information associated with a product displayed therein. For example, the lockable sidekick display may comprise one or more sign-holders (such as the sign holders (254) described above with respect to FIG. 2) that a retailer may wish to use with signs providing information about a displayed product’s price, quality, purpose, hazards, etc.

Referring now to FIG. 6, another method 600 according to an embodiment of the present invention is shown. The method 600 comprises placing a lockable sidekick display (such as the lockable sidekick display (250) described above with respect to FIG. 2) within sight of a cash register in a retail store as shown in box 605. The resulting store layout may be similar to the store layout (10) described above with respect to FIG. 1.

The method 600 further comprises displaying at least one substantially full refillable container in the lockable sidekick display as shown in box 615. As described above, the refillable container may comprise, for example, a steel or aluminum 20-ounce tank configured to couple with a paintball gun and filled with carbon dioxide.

As shown in box 625, the method 600 further comprises receiving an empty refillable container. For example, a customer may approach an employee of a retail store with an empty refillable carbon dioxide tank that the customer may own, or that a company providing a tank exchange service may own. In another embodiment, an automatic vending machine may receive the empty refillable container and provide the customer with a receipt indicating that he or she has returned the empty refillable container to the retail store in question.

The method 600 further comprises unlocking the lockable sidekick display as shown in box 635. For example, this may be done in a manner described above with respect to FIG. 5. The employee may unlock the lockable sidekick display in response to a manual alert that a customer needs a replacement refillable container (such as a conversation between the customer and the employee) or an automatic alert (such as receiving an electronic or printed notification that a customer has returned the empty refillable container and is seeking a full replacement). In yet another embodiment, the customer may automatically receive a code configured to unlock at least a portion of the lockable sidekick display in response to returning the empty refillable container.

As shown in box 645, the method 600 further comprises exchanging the received empty refillable container with the full refillable container from the lockable sidekick display. In one embodiment, the exchange may be made entirely by a store employee. In another embodiment, the process may be automated such that an employee is not required to be involved with the exchange. In some embodiments, the exchange of refillable containers may take place in exchange for a fee paid by the customer bringing in the empty refillable container, either at the time of the exchange, in advance, or on a recurrent basis.

The method 600 further comprises filling the empty refillable container as shown in box 655. For example, a retailer may fill a 9-ounce aluminum tank configured to be coupled to a paintball gun with carbon dioxide after being received in an empty state from a customer. In another embodiment, a third party may collect the empty refillable containers from the retailer and provide the refilling services prior to returning at least a portion of the refilled containers.

The method 600 finally comprises inserting the refilled refillable container into the lockable sidekick display as shown in box 665. In one embodiment, this may comprise unlocking the lockable sidekick display, opening a door
thereof, and inserting at least one refilled refillable container into the lockable sidekick display prior to closing and locking the lockable sidekick display. In one such embodiment, a stocking container as described above with respect to FIG. 5 may be used to store at least a portion of the refilled refillable containers in a private area of the retail store until such time that they are needed to restock the lockable sidekick display.

[0061] The foregoing description of embodiments of the invention has been presented only for the purpose of illustration and description and is not intended to be exhaustive or to limit the invention to the precise forms disclosed. Numerous modifications and adaptations thereof will be apparent to those skilled in the art without departing from the spirit and scope of the present invention.

What is claimed is:
1. A system comprising:
   a lockable sidekick display configured to display a product.
2. The system of claim 1, wherein the lockable sidekick display comprises:
   a case;
   a door configured to permit viewing of at least one of the product and information associated with the product when closed, and to permit at least one of removal and insertion of the product when open; and
   a lock configured to restrict access to the product.
3. The system of claim 2, wherein at least a portion of the door comprises a transparent material.
4. The system of claim 2, wherein the lock comprises at least one of the following: a keyed lock and a combination lock.
5. The system of claim 2, wherein at least a portion of at least one of the case and the door is marked with information associated with the product.
6. The system of claim 2, wherein at least a portion of at least one of the case and the door is configured to prevent damage to the product.
7. The system of claim 2, wherein the case comprises a plurality of openings configured to couple with at least one of a shelf within the case and a first end of a mounting bracket comprising a second end configured to couple with an existing retail shelving system.
8. The system of claim 7, further comprising:
   an existing retail shelving system.
9. The system of claim 1, wherein the product comprises a first type of product, and wherein the lockable sidekick display is further configured to display a second type of product.
10. The system of claim 1, wherein at least a portion of the lockable sidekick display comprises sheet metal.
11. The system of claim 1, wherein the lockable sidekick display is located in a public area of a retail store, and further comprising:
   a stocking container placed in a private area of the retail store from which the lockable sidekick display may be at least partially refilled.
12. The system of claim 1, wherein the product comprises at least one of a refillable container configured to be filled with a compressible gas and a quantity of the compressible gas within the refillable container.
13. The system of claim 12, wherein the refillable container is configured to be coupled to a paintball gun.
14. The system of claim 1, wherein the lockable sidekick display comprises:
   a shelf within the lockable sidekick display configured to hold the product.
15. The system of claim 14, wherein the shelf is configured to support the product at an angle configured to reduce the amount of space required between the shelf and a second shelf within the lockable sidekick display while permitting at least one of ingress and egress of the product.
16. The system of claim 14, wherein the shelf comprises a tongue-in-groove sign holder configured to hold a sign comprising information associated with the product.
17. A method comprising:
   placing a lockable sidekick display configured to display a product within a public area of a retail store.
18. The method of claim 17, further comprising:
   marking at least a portion of the lockable sidekick display with information associated with the product.
19. The method of claim 17, wherein placing the lockable sidekick display within the public area of the retail store comprises:
   coupling a first end of a mounting bracket to a hole in the lockable sidekick display; and
   coupling a second end of the mounting bracket to an existing retail shelving system.
20. The method of claim 17, wherein the product comprises a first product, and wherein placing the lockable sidekick display within the public area of the retail store comprises:
   placing the lockable sidekick display adjacent to a display of a second product associated with the first product.
21. The method of claim 17, further comprising:
   displaying the product in the lockable sidekick display.
22. The method of claim 17, wherein the public area is within sight of a cash register.
23. The method of claim 17, further comprising:
   placing a stocking container in a private area of the retail store.
24. The method of claim 23, further comprising:
   stocking the stocking container with the product; and
   at least partially refilling the lockable sidekick display from the stocking container.
25. The method of claim 17, wherein the product comprises at least one of a refillable container configured to be filled with a compressible gas and a quantity of the compressible gas within the refillable container.
26. The method of claim 25, wherein the refillable container is configured to be coupled with a paintball gun.
27. The method of claim 25, wherein the refillable container is displayed within the lockable sidekick display in a substantially filled state, and further comprising:
   receiving a substantially empty refillable container; and
exchanging the substantially empty refillable container with a substantially filled refillable container displayed within the lockable sidekick display for a fee.

28. The method of claim 27, further comprising:

at least partially filling the substantially empty refillable container with the compressible gas.

29. The method of claim 17, wherein the lockable sidekick display comprises a door, and further comprising:

at least one of locking and unlocking the lockable sidekick display;

at least one of opening and closing the door; and

at least one of inserting the product into and removing the product from the lockable sidekick display.