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AUTOMATIC NAPKIN DISPENSER

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AUTOMATIC NAPKIN DISPENSER

ABSTRACT

The present application provides a dispenser for dispensing a number of products from a sheet material to an end user, and a tucker fold assembly for folding a sheet of material. The tucker fold assembly may include a tucker bar positioned adjacent to the knife assembly, a slot positioned adjacent to the tucker bar, and a pair of rollers downstream of the slot such that the sheet of material is forced through the slot by the tucker bar and the pair of rollers and forms a fold therein. The dispenser may include a loading station for loading the sheet material, a cutting mechanism for cutting a sheet from the sheet material, and a folding station for folding the sheet material downstream of the cutting mechanism, wherein the folding station comprises a tucker fold mechanism with a tucker bar and one or more rollers positioned adjacent to a slot for tucking a fold of the sheet material into the slot.

AUTOMATIC NAPKIN DISPENSER

[0095] This application is a divisional application of Australian patent application 2013216894, the entire contents of which are to be taken as incorporated herein by reference.

TECHNICAL FIELD

[0096] The present application and the resultant patent relate generally to a napkin dispenser and more particularly relate to an automatic napkin dispenser that folds and dispenses one or more napkins or groups of napkins in a controlled and efficient fashion from a continuous roll of sheet material.

[0097] A reference herein to a patent document or any other matter identified as prior art, is not to be taken as an admission that the document or other matter was known or that the information it contains was part of the common general knowledge as at the priority date of any of the claims.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0098] Dispensers, such as napkin dispensers, generally are configured to enable the end user to retrieve products such as napkins and the like for personal use. Although conventional dispensers adequately dispense the products therein, such dispensers also enable end users to obtain any number of napkins with no control mechanisms. Moreover, such conventional dispensers tend to allow napkins to be soiled due to contact

with the surrounding environment during storage and/or dispensing. As such, excessive distribution of napkins, prematurely soiled napkins, and other types of waste thus may lead to unnecessary operating expenses.

[0099] Known dispensers generally provide a stack of folded napkins therein. Establishments, such as quick service restaurants and the like, must maintain a ready supply of such napkins and also must continuously refill the dispensers to ensure customer satisfaction. Such pre-folded napkins, however, generally may be more expensive than, for example, a continuous roll of napkin material or other types of sheet material. More napkins may be created from such a continuous roll of material. Moreover, pre-folded napkins also require the time and expense to refill continuously the dispensers.

[0100] There is thus a desire for improved napkin dispensers and methods of dispensing napkins and the like. Such improved dispensers and methods may provide for controlled, automatic dispensing of napkins and similar types of paper products in an economical, efficient, and sanitary fashion so as to limit or eliminate unnecessary waste and expense.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0101] The present invention provides a dispenser for dispensing a number of products from a sheet material, comprising: a loading station for loading the sheet material; a cutting mechanism for cutting a sheet from the sheet material; and a folding station for folding the sheet material downstream of the cutting mechanism; wherein the

folding station comprises a tucker fold mechanism with a tucker bar and one or more rollers positioned adjacent to a slot for tucking a fold of the sheet material through the slot.

[0102] The present invention also provides a tucker fold assembly for folding a sheet of material, comprising: a tucker bar positioned adjacent to the knife assembly; a slot positioned adjacent to the tucker bar; and a pair of rollers downstream of the slot such that the sheet of material is forced through the slot by the tucker bar and the pair of rollers and forms a fold therein.

[0103] These and other features and improvements of the present invention will become apparent to one of ordinary skill in the art upon review of the following detailed description when taken in conjunction with the several drawings and the appended claims.

[0104] Where any or all of the terms "comprise", "comprises", "comprised" or "comprising" are used in this specification (including the claims) they are to be interpreted as specifying the presence of the stated features, integers, steps or components, but not precluding the presence of one or more other features, integers, steps or components.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0105] Fig. 1 is a schematic view of a napkin dispenser as may be described herein.

[0107] Fig. 3 is a partial side plan view of the napkin dispenser of Fig. 2.

[0108] Fig. 4 is a perspective view of a second alternative embodiment of a napkin dispenser as may be described herein with a partially transparent outer shell.

[0109] Fig. 5 is a perspective view of a third alternative embodiment of a napkin dispenser as may be described herein with a partially transparent outer shell.

[0110] Fig. 6 is a partial side plan view of the napkin dispenser of Fig. 5.

[0111] Fig. 7 is a perspective view of a fourth alternative embodiment of a napkin dispenser as may be described herein with a partially transparent outer shell.

[0112] Fig. 8 is a partial side view of the napkin dispenser of Fig. 7.

[0113] Fig. 9 is a perspective view of a fifth alternative embodiment of the napkin dispenser as may be described herein with a partially transparent shell.

[0114] Fig. 10 is a partial side view of the napkin dispenser of Fig. 9.

[0115] Fig. 11 is a perspective view of a sixth alternative embodiment of a napkin dispenser as may be described herein with a partially transparent outer shell.

[0116] Fig. 12 is a partial side view of the napkin dispenser of Fig. 11.

[0117] Fig. 13 is a perspective view of a seventh alternative embodiment of a napkin dispenser as may be described herein with a partially transparent outer shell.

[0118] Fig. 14 is a partial side view of the napkin dispenser of Fig. 13.

[0119] Fig. 15 is a perspective view of a number of napkin dispensers as may be described herein in several different configurations.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0120] Referring now to the drawings, in which like numerals refer to like elements throughout the several views, Fig. 1 shows a schematic diagram of an example of a napkin dispenser 100 as may be described herein. As will be described in more detail below, the napkin dispenser 100 may take many different sizes, shapes, and configurations and may use many different types of components. Moreover, the components described in the examples below may be interchangeable such that the napkin dispenser 100 is not limited to the given components or configurations of any one example. Rather, any of the components described herein and the like may be used together in any combination or orientation.

[0121] Generally described, the napkin dispenser 100 may use one or more continuous rolls 110 of a sheet material 120. Any number of the rolls 110 may be used in the napkin dispenser 100. The sheet material 120 may include any type of natural and/or synthetic cloth or paper sheets including woven and non-woven articles. The sheet material 120 may or may not include perforations at given intervals. The leading end of the sheet material 120 on each roll 110 may be considered a tail 125. The napkin dispenser 100 separates and folds the sheet material 120 to produce a number of napkins 130 with a fold 135 therein. The fold 135 may be a hard fold with a crease therein or more of a “U” or a “C”-shaped configuration. Moreover, multiple folds 135 also may be created, i.e., a “Z”-shaped fold or a dinner napkin fold also may be created herein.

[0122] The napkin dispenser 100 thus includes a number of stations so as to produce the napkins 130 from the sheet material 120 on the roll 110. These stations may

include a loading station 140. The loading station 140 accepts the roll 110 of the sheet material 120 therein. The loading station 140 may include a loading mechanism 145 and a transfer mechanism 150. The napkin dispenser 100 also may include a folding station 160. The folding station 160 may perform a number of functions. The folding station 160 thus may include a folding mechanism 170 and a cutting mechanism 180. The folding mechanism 170 also may provide napkin separation as will be described in more detail below, either with or without the cutting mechanism 180, as a speed mechanism 185.

[0123] The napkin dispenser 100 also may include a presentation station 190. The presentation station 190 provides the napkins 130 to an end user. The napkin dispenser 100 also may include a user interface 200. The user interface 200 may allow the end user to select the number of napkins 130 and the like as well as allowing the end user to initiate a dispense. These stations and the other components of the napkin dispenser 100 may be enclosed in whole or in part in an outer shell 210. The outer shell 210 may be made out of any type of substantially rigid material. The outer shell 210 may have one or more loading doors 220 thereon. The napkin dispenser 100 also may be in communication with a cash register 225 or other type of ordering or input device. Other components and other mechanisms also may be used herein in many different configurations.

[0124] Figs. 2 and 3 show a first example of the napkin dispenser 100 as may be described herein as a single roll, buckle fold, horizontal dispenser 230. The dispenser

230 may include a single roll 110. The single roll 110 may have a number of perforations 235 at substantially uniform intervals. The loading mechanism 145 of the loading station 140 may include a slot mechanism 245 having a pair of spindle plugs 240 in the roll 110 and a pair of slots 250 formed in the outer shell 210. The slots 250 are configured to accommodate the spindle plugs 240 therein. The loading door 220 also may have a tucker finger 260 sized to accommodate the sheet material 120 as will be described below.

[0125] The folding station 160 may include the folding mechanism 170 in the form of a buckle fold mechanism 270. The buckle fold mechanism 270 may include a first pair of pinch rollers 280 and a second pair of pinch rollers 290. The buckle fold mechanism 270 also may include a buckle tray 300 and a dispense shelf 310. The first pair of pinch rollers 280 may be positioned about the roll 110 and the loading door 220. The second pair of pinch rollers 290 may be positioned downstream about the buckle tray 300 and the dispense shelf 310. The second pair of pinch rollers 290 may be in line with the first pair of pinch rollers 280 as the tail 125 descends. The buckle tray 300 may be sized to accommodate the desired length of the napkin 130. The pinch rollers 280, 290 may be spring loaded and may be motor driven. Each pair of pinch rollers 280, 290 may be driven at different speeds. Stripper fingers between the pinch rollers also may be used herein.

[0126] The presentation station 190 may include a presentation tray 330. The presentation tray 330 may be semi-covered. The presentation tray 330 may include an

offset angle 340 so as to stack the napkins 130 therein. The angle of the buckle tray 340 may be about 140 degrees or so. Other angles may be used herein. The presentation tray 330 also may have multiple retracting shelves therein as will be described in more detail below. The user interface 220 may include a number of push buttons 350. The push buttons 350 may be any type of mechanical or electrical selector and the like. The push buttons 350 may indicate the number of napkins 130 to be dispensed therefrom. Although push buttons 350 for two, four, and six napkins 130 are shown, any number of the napkins 130 may be used herein with any number or orientation of the push buttons 350.

[0127] In use, the roll 110 may be dropped into the outer shell 210 via the loading door 220 along the slots 250 of the slot mechanism 245. The tail 125 of the roll 110 may be placed over the first pair of pinch rollers 280. The tucker finger 260 on the loading door 220 may push the tail 125 between the first pair of pinch rollers 280 to load the tail 125 therein when the loading door 220 is shut. The buckle fold mechanism 270 creates the fold 135 by driving the tail 125 into the buckle tray 300. Once the tail 125 hits the end of the buckle tray 300, the second pair of pinch rollers 290 drives the fold 135 therethrough. The perforation 235 may be separated based upon a speed differential between the first and the second pair of the pinch rollers 280, 290 acting as the speed mechanism 185. The speed differential may be about two to one or so as to separate the perforation 235 between the pinch rollers 280, 290. Once the perforation 235 is separated, the napkin 130 may drop along the dispense shelf 310 into the presentation

tray 330. Specifically, the number of napkins 130 as indicated by the push buttons 350 may drop into the presentation tray 330. The napkins 130 may be removed as a group by the end user. The presentation tray 330 then may be reloaded as above. Other components and other configurations may be used herein.

[0128] Fig. 4 shows a further example of a single roll, buckle fold, vertical dispenser 360. The dispenser 360 may be largely similar to the dispenser 230 described above except for the user interface 200. Instead of the push buttons 350, the user interface 200 may include one or more sensors 370. Each sensor 370 may be any type of motion sensor such as photoelectric, infrared, and the like that does not require physical contact. The sensor 370 may be positioned anywhere on the outer shell 210. The dispenser 360 thus may be activated by the end user waving his or her hand thereabout. The dispenser 360 may be set to dispense a predetermined number of napkins 130 or a single napkin 130 may be dispensed for each wave of the end user's hand about the sensor 370. The dispenser 360 may dispense the napkins 130 into the presentation tray 330 or directly into the end user's hand. The presentation tray 330 then may be reloaded as above. Other components and other configurations may be used herein.

[0129] Figs. 5 and 6 show a third example of the napkin dispenser 100 as may be described herein as a multiple roll, slot fold, vertical dispenser 380. The dispenser 380 may include two or more of the rolls 110. In this case, a first roll 390 and a second roll 400 may be used although any number may be used herein. The loading mechanism 145 of the loading station 140 may include a door loading mechanism 405 with a number of

the loading doors 220. Each roll 390, 400 may have its own loading door 220 with the first roll 390 having a first loading door 410 and the second roll 400 having a second loading door 420. Each door 410, 420 may be held open via a door prop 430. The door prop 430 may include a prop rod operating in a pen click like mechanism and the like. The loading doors 410, 420 may be held closed via magnets and the like. The transfer mechanism 150 may include a roller mechanism 435 with each door 410, 420 having a pair of spring loaded pinch rollers positioned thereabout. Specifically, a first pair of pinch rollers 440 may be positioned about the first door 410 and a second pair of pinch rollers 450 may be positioned about the second door 420. One of the rollers 440, 450 may be positioned on each of the doors 410, 420 with one positioned internally. Other positions may be used herein. The pinch rollers 440, 450 may be motor driven, *i.e.*, drive rollers. A sensor may be used to determine when one of the rolls 390, 400 is depleted so as to start the pair of pinch rollers 440, 450 of the other roll.

[0130] The folding station 160 of the dispenser 380 may include the folding mechanism 170 as a slot fold mechanism 460. The slot fold mechanism 460 may include a vertical plate 470 with a thin slot 480 therein. A horizontal pusher plate 490 may be positioned opposed the slot 480 and may include a plate drive motor 500 for largely horizontal motion. The upper edge of the slot 480 may create as little friction as possible while the lower edge may create a friction force thereabout. As such, a sharp, slightly offset corner may be used. The leading edge of the pusher plate 490 also may have sharp corners to create a frictional force. Multiple pusher plates 490 may be used herein. The

slot fold mechanism 460 may have an assembly drive mechanism 510 to maneuver the slot fold mechanism 460 vertically up and down or in any type of direction. Any type of drive mechanism may be used herein.

[0131] The presentation station 190 may take the form of a multiple slot presentation tray 530. The multiple slot presentation tray 530 may have a number of slots 540 therein. A first group 550 of the slots 540 may accommodate two napkins 130, a second group 560 of the slots 540 may accommodate four napkins 130, and a third group 570 of slots 540 may accommodate six napkins 130. The groups may accommodate any number of the napkins 130. Any number of groups may be used herein. Any type of a user interface 200 may be used herein.

[0132] In use, the first roll 390 may be loaded through the first door 410 while the second roll 400 may be loaded through the second door 420 of the door loading mechanism 405. The tail 125 of each roll 390, 400 may be positioned about the respective pair of pinch rollers 440, 450 of the roller mechanism 435 and fed therein. As the respective pair of pinch rollers 440, 450 pull the sheet material 120 downward, the pusher plate 490 of the slot fold mechanism 460 drives the sheet material 120 into the slot 480 so as to create the fold 135. The force of the pusher plate 490 also may separate the perforations 235 while the leading edge of the next napkin 130 is held via the pair of pinch rollers 440, 450. The pusher plate 490 then may be withdrawn so as to leave the napkin 130 in one of the slots 540. The slot fold mechanism 460 may be maneuvered vertically via the assembly drive mechanism 510 such that a napkin 130 may be

positioned within the slots 540 of each of the groups 550, 560, 570 by the pusher plate 490. The appropriate group of napkins 130 may be removed by the end user. The presentation tray 530 then may be reloaded as above. Other components and other configurations may be used herein.

[0133] Figs. 7 and 8 show a fourth example of the napkin dispenser 100 as may be described herein as a multi-roll, reverse fold, vertical dispenser 580. The dispenser 580 may use a number of the rolls 110. In this example, a first roll 590 and a second roll 600 are used, although any number of the rolls 110 may be used herein. The loading mechanism 145 of the loading station 140 may include a side door loading mechanism 405 with one or more side loading doors 610. The rolls 590, 600 may be spindle loaded through the side loading door 610. The first roll 590 may unwind along a back side 620 of the outer shell 210 while the second roll 600 may unwind along a front side 630 of the outer shell 210. A sheet guide 640 may be used between the rolls 590, 600.

[0134] The transfer mechanism 150 may take the form of a multi-roller mechanism 650. The multi-roller mechanism 650 may be positioned under the rolls 590, 600. The multi-roller mechanism 650 may include a top feed roller 660 and a pair of bottom directional rollers: a first directional roller 670 and a second directional roller 680. Some or all of the rollers 660, 670, 680 may be motor driven. The top feed roller 660 may cooperate with the first directional roller 670 to pull the sheet material 120 off of the first roller 590 while the top feed roller 660 may cooperate with the second directional roller 680 to pull the sheet material 120 off of the second roll 600. A tucker

finger 690 may be positioned adjacent the side loading door 610 so as to tuck the tails 125 of each roll 590, 600 into the multi-roller mechanism 650. Other positions may be used herein.

[0135] The folding station 160 of the dispenser 580 may include the folding mechanism 170 in the form of a reverse fold mechanism 700. The reverse fold mechanism 700 may include a reverse drive mechanism 710 positioned downstream of the multi-roller mechanism 650. The reverse drive mechanism 710 may include a pair of drive rollers: a first drive roller 720 and second drive roller 730, and a directional roller 740. Some or all of the rollers 720, 730, 740 may be motor driven. The reverse fold mechanism 700 also may include a pair of rollers 750 positioned downstream of the reverse fold mechanism 700. The rollers 750 may be spring loaded and motor driven.

[0136] The presentation station 190 may include a presentation tray 760. The presentation tray 760 may be partially covered. A presentation tray 760 may be positioned on either or both ends 620, 630 of the outer shell 210. The user interface 200 may take the form of an adjustable knob 770 or other type of selector so as to indicate the number of napkins 130 to be dispensed therefrom.

[0137] In use, the rolls 590, 600 may be loaded via the side loading door 610 of the side door loading mechanism. The tail 125 of the first roll 590 may extend along the back side 620 towards the multi-roller mechanism 650 while the tail 125 of the second roll 600 may extend along the front side 630 towards the multi-roller mechanism 650. The tucker finger 690 feed the tails 125 into the multi-roller mechanism 650 when the

side door 610 is closed. When the first roll 590 is to be dispensed, the top feed guide roller 660 of the multi-roller mechanism 650 may rotate in a counterclockwise direction while the first directional roller 670 rotates in a clockwise direction. When the second roll 600 is to be dispensed, the top feed guide roller 660 may rotate in a clockwise direction while the second directional roller 680 rotates in a counterclockwise direction. (These rotational directions are by way of example and only refer to relative as opposed to absolute directions. Any direction of rotation may be used herein in any order or orientation.)

[0138] In either orientation, the tail 125 is fed from the multi-roller mechanism 650 into the reverse drive mechanism 710 of the reverse fold mechanism 700. The first drive roller 720 may rotate in a clockwise direction while the second drive roller 730 rotates in a counterclockwise direction so as to pull the tail 125 downward. The directional roller 740 may rotate in a counterclockwise direction to advance the sheet material 120 to the desired length. The directional roller 740 then may reverse direction such that the fold 135 is formed and is captured by the downstream rollers 750. The speed differential between the multi-roller mechanism 650 and the reverse drive mechanism 710 acting as the speed mechanism 185 so as to separate the perforations 235. The directional roller 740 then may again reverse direction so as to continue to pull the sheet material 120 downward. The now folded napkin 130 drops into the presentation tray 760. The appropriate group of napkins 130 then may be removed by the end user. The presentation tray 760 then may be reloaded as above.

[0139] Alternate examples, however, may use a cutting mechanism 180 and the like downstream of the reverse fold mechanism 700 to separate the napkins 130 as will be described in more detail below. The dispenser 580 also may use the buckle fold mechanism 270 and the like herein instead of the reverse fold mechanism 700. Other components and other configurations may be used herein.

[0140] Figs. 9 and 10 show a fifth example of the napkin dispenser 100 as may be described herein as a single roll, tucker fold, vertical dispenser 780. The dispenser 780 may use the single roll 110 although additional rolls may be used. The dispenser 780 may include the loading station 140 in the form of a tail finding mechanism 790. The tail finding mechanism 790 may include a cradle 800. The cradle 800 may be spring loaded by a number of springs 810 or other types of tensioning devices. The tail finding mechanism 790 may include a pair of drive rollers 820. The pair of drive rollers 820 may be positioned about the bottom of the cradle 800. The roll 110 may be positioned with the cradle 800 via the loading door 220. The rollers 820 may rotate back and forth until the tail 125 is captured therein

[0141] The loading station 140 also may include the cutting mechanism 180 as a knife assembly 830. The knife assembly 830 may include a knife roller 840 with a knife blade 850 thereon as well as an anvil roller 860. The knife assembly 830 may be used with a non-perforated roll 870 of the sheet material 120. The knife assembly 830 may cut the napkin 130 from the non-perforated roll 830 by contact between the knife roller 840 and the anvil roller 860. The knife blade 850 may be slightly angled. An additional

roller may be used to maintain tension. The knife assembly 830 also may be used with a roll having the perforations 235.

[0142] The loading station 140 also may have the folding mechanism 170 in the form of a tucker fold assembly 880. As the napkin 130 advances from the knife assembly 830, the napkin 130 may be pushed through a slot 890 by a tucker bar 900 of the tucker fold assembly 880. The tucker bar 900 may be sized so as to accommodate the slot 890. The napkin 130 then may be pulled through the slot 890 via a pair of pinch rollers 910. The pinch rollers 910 may be spring loaded and motor driven. The fold 135 may be formed as the napkin 130 extends through the slot 890.

[0143] The napkin dispenser 780 also may include the presentation station 190 in the form of a hidden tray assembly 920. The hidden tray assembly 920 may include a flat tray 925 out of the normal view of the end user. The flat tray 925 may be motor driven or gear driven. A push paddle 930 may be positioned underneath the flat tray 925 and in communication with the flat tray 925. Depressing the push paddle 930 may cause the flat tray 925 to retract so as to drop a number of the napkins 130. A sensor and the like also may be used herein to initiate a dispense. The napkin dispenser 780 also may use the user interface 200 in the form of a knob 940 or other type of mechanical or electrical selector. Any suitable triggering mechanism may be used herein.

[0144] In use, the single roll 110 may be dropped into the cradle 800 of the tail finding mechanism 790. The rollers 820 may rotate back and forth until the tail 125 is captured therein. The sheet material 120 then may be pulled into the cutting mechanism

180. The knife assembly 830 cuts the sheet material 120 from the non-perforated roll 830 by contact between the knife roller 840 and the anvil roller 860. As the sheet material 120 advances from the knife assembly 830, the sheet material 120 may be pushed through a slot 890 by a tucker bar 900 in the tucker fold assembly 880 so as to create the fold 135 and the napkin 130. The napkin 130 then may drop onto the flat tray 925 of the hidden tray assembly 920. Depressing the push paddle 930 may cause the flat tray 925 to retract so as to drop one or more napkins 130 onto the push paddle 930 or on to the end user's hand. One or more trays also may be used. Other configurations and other components may be used herein.

[0145] Figs. 11 and 12 show a sixth example of the napkin dispenser 100 as may be described herein as a multi roll, reverse fold, horizontal dispenser 950. The dispenser 950 may have multiple rolls 110 therein. In this example, a first roll 960 and a second roll 970 may be used although any number of the rolls may be used. The assembly 950 may use the loading station 140 in the form of the door loading mechanism 405 with the two doors 410, 420 and the pair of drive rollers 440, 450 in the roller mechanism 435 such as that shown in Fig. 5. Likewise, the dispenser 950 may use the folding station 160 with the folding mechanism 170 as the reverse fold mechanism 700 of Fig. 7 with the reverse drive mechanism 710 having the first and second drive rollers 720, 730 and the directional roller 740.

[0146] The dispenser 950 may have the cutting mechanism 180 in the form of a wheel cutter 980 if a non-perforated roll 870 is used. The wheel cutter 980 may have a

cutting wheel 990 maneuvered by a pulley 1000 and the like. The pulley 1000 may pull the wheel cutter 980 over the sheet material 120 so as to separate the napkins. A speed differential created by a number of pinch rollers and the like also may be used to separate the perforations 235 as described above if a perforated roll 110 is used.

[0147] The dispenser 950 may have the presentation station 190 in the form of a presentation bucket 1010 with a number of trays 1020 therein. The trays 1020 may be divided by a number of shelves 1030. In this example, a first shelf 1040 and a second shelf 1050 are shown. Any number of the shelves may be used herein. Each of the shelves 1040, 1050 may have a shelf motor 1060 positioned thereabout. The shelf motor 1060 may retract one or both of the shelves 1040, 1050. The shelves 1030 may form a first tray 1070, a second tray 1080, and a third tray 1090. Any number of trays 1020 may be used herein. Any type of user interface 200 may be used herein.

[0148] In use, the rolls 960, 970 may be loaded within the doors 410, 420 of the door loading assembly 405 and fed through the pinch rollers 440, 450 of the roller mechanism 435. The fold 135 then may be formed via the reverse fold mechanism 700 or a similar device. Once the appropriate length of sheet material 120 has advanced, the wheel cutter 980 may cut the sheet material 120 via the cutting wheel 990 advancing along the pulley 1000. Alternatively, the speed of the respective pinch rollers may be used to separate a perforation 235 if perforated paper is used. Each napkin 130 then may fall into the presentation bucket 1010. The third tray 1090 may hold, for example, six napkins 130, the second tray 1080 may hold four napkins 130, and the first tray 1070 may

hold two napkins 130. The appropriate number of napkins 130 then may be removed from the appropriate tray 1020 by the end user. In order to reload the presentation bucket 1010, the first and the second shelves 1040, 1050 may be retracted via the shelf motors 1060. Six napkins 130 then may drop into the third tray 1090. The second shelf 1050 then may close such that four napkins 130 may drop into the second tray 1080. The first shelf 1040 then may close such that two napkins 130 may drop into the first tray 1070. Other shelf opening and loading techniques may be used herein. Other components and other configurations may be used herein.

[0149] Figs. 13 and 14 show a seventh example of the napkin dispenser 100 as may be described herein as a multi-roll, buckle fold, vertical dispenser 1100. The dispenser 1100 may use a number of the rolls 110. In this example, a first roll 1110 and a second roll 1120 may be used although any number of the rolls 110 may be used herein. In this example, the assembly 1100 may have the loading station 140 in a manner similar to that shown in Fig. 7 with the side door loading mechanism 605 having the side loading door 610 and the guide 640 positioned between the rolls 1110, 1120. The loading station 140 also may use the transfer mechanism 150 in the form of the multi-roller mechanism 650. The dispenser 1100 further may use the folding station 160 with the folding mechanism 170 similar to the buckle fold mechanism 270 with the pinch rollers 280, 290 and the buckle tray 300 described above.

[0150] The dispenser 1100 may have the presentation station 190 in the form of a multi-slot maneuverable presentation tray 1130. The multi-slot maneuverable

presentation tray 1130 may have a vertical drive mechanism 1140 positioned adjacent to the buckle fold mechanism 270. The multi-slot maneuverable presentation tray 1130 may have a number of slots 1150 therein. The slots 1150 may be organized into groups such that a first group 1160 may have two slots 1150, a second group 1170 may have four slots 1150, and a third group 1180 may have six slots 1150. Any number of the slots and the groups may be used herein. The vertical drive mechanism 1140 drives the multi-slot maneuverable presentation tray 1130 up and down such that the buckle fold mechanism 270 may deliver the appropriate number of napkins 130 into each group 1160, 1170, 1180. The napkins 130 may be removed as a group by the end user. The presentation tray 1130 then may be reloaded as suggested above. Other components and other configurations may be used herein.

[0151] As can be seen, the various types of loading stations 140, the various types of folding stations 150, the various types of presentation stations 190, and the various types of user interfaces 200 may be applied in many different combinations and orientations for the overall napkin dispenser 100. Although vertical orientations 1190 and horizontal orientations 1100 are shown above, Fig. 15 also shows a side by side orientation 1210, an above-counter mount 1220, a below-counter mount 1230, a rear wall mount 1240, and a sidewall mount 1250. Other types of mounting may be used herein. In addition to the use of the various types of user interfaces 200 described herein, the dispensers also may be in direct communication with the cash register 225 or other type of ordering device. Any type of input device may be used herein. The cash register 225

or other device may indicate the number of napkins 130 to be dispensed based upon the content of the order or other parameter. Other configurations and other components may be used herein.

[0152] It should be apparent that the foregoing relates only to certain embodiments of the present application and the resultant patent. Numerous changes and modifications may be made herein by one of ordinary skill in the art without departing from the general spirit and scope of the invention as defined by the following claims and the equivalents thereof.

The claims defining the invention are as follows:

1. A dispenser for dispensing a number of products from a sheet material, comprising:

a loading station for loading the sheet material;

a cutting mechanism for cutting a sheet from the sheet material; and

a folding station for folding the sheet material downstream of the cutting mechanism;

wherein the folding station comprises a tucker fold mechanism with a tucker bar and one or more rollers positioned adjacent to a slot for tucking a fold of the sheet material through the slot.

2. The dispenser of claim 1, wherein the loading station comprises a loading mechanism.

3. The dispenser of claim 2, wherein the loading mechanism comprises a slot mechanism, a door loading mechanism, a side door loading mechanism, a tall finder mechanism, or a transfer mechanism.

4. The dispenser of claim 3, wherein the transfer mechanism comprises a roller mechanism or a multi-roller mechanism.

5. The dispenser of any one of claims 1 to 4, further comprising a cutting mechanism.

6. The dispenser of claim 5, wherein the cutting mechanism comprises a knife assembly.

7. The dispenser of claim 5, wherein the cutting mechanism comprises a wheel cutter with a wheel shaped blade.

8. The dispenser of claim 1, further comprising a presentation station for presenting one or more of the folded napkins to the user.

9. The dispenser of any one of claims 1 to 8, wherein the presentation station comprises a presentation tray, a hidden tray assembly, or a multi-slot maneuverable presentation tray.

10. The dispenser of any one of claims 1 to 9, further comprising a user interface.

11. The dispenser of any one of claims 1 to 10, further comprising a cash register in communication therewith.

12. The dispenser of any one of claims 1 to 11, further comprising a speed mechanism for separating the sheet material from a continuous roll of sheet material via a difference in speed.

13. The dispenser of claim 12, wherein the speed mechanism comprises the first pair of pinch rollers and the second pair of pinch rollers.

14. The dispenser of claim 12 or 13, wherein the speed mechanism comprises a multi-roller mechanism and a reverse drive mechanism.

15. The dispenser of any one of claims 1 to 14, wherein the tucker fold mechanism further comprises a dispensing shelf downstream of the second pair of pinch rollers.

16. The dispenser of claim 15, wherein the user interface comprises one or more push buttons or one or more sensors.

17. The dispenser of any one of claims 1 to 16, wherein the speed differential between the second speed and the first speed is such that the plurality of perforations separate between the first pair of pinch rollers and the second pair of pinch rollers.

18. A tucker fold assembly for folding a sheet of material, comprising:
a tucker bar positioned adjacent to the knife assembly;
a slot positioned adjacent to the tucker bar; and
a pair of rollers downstream of the slot such that the sheet of material is forced through the slot by the tucker bar and the pair of rollers and forms a fold therein.

19. The tucker fold assembly of claim 18, further comprising a knife assembly for separating the sheet of material.

20. The tucker fold assembly of claim 18, further comprising a tail finding mechanism upstream of the knife assembly.

21. The tucker fold assembly of claim 18, wherein the knife assembly comprises a knife roller and an anvil roller.

22. The tucker fold assembly of claim 18, further comprising a hidden tray assembly downstream of the tucker bar.

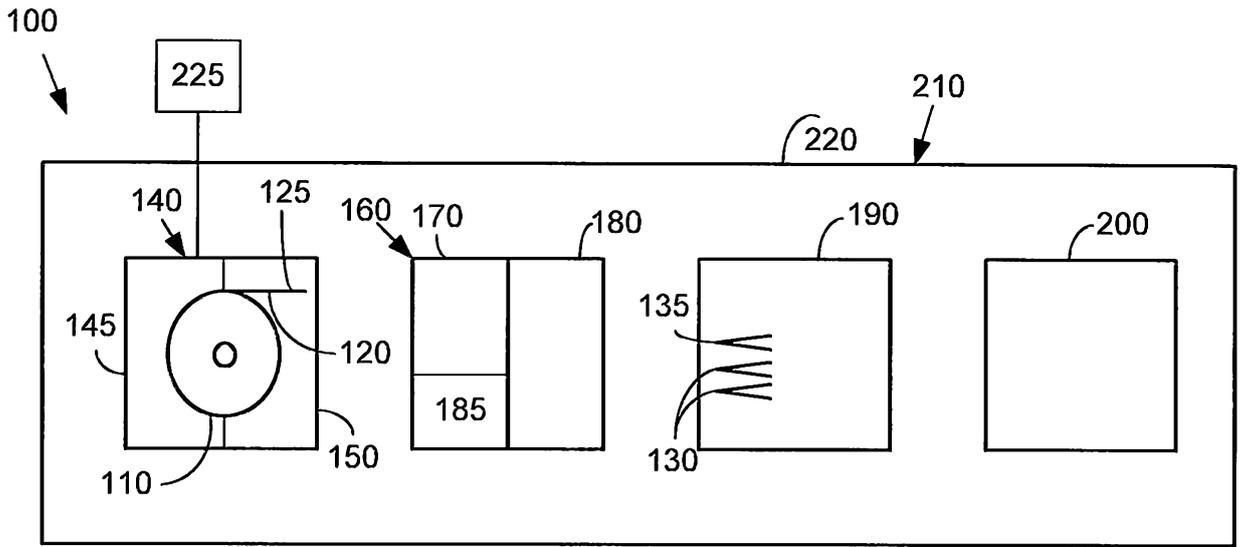


Fig. 1

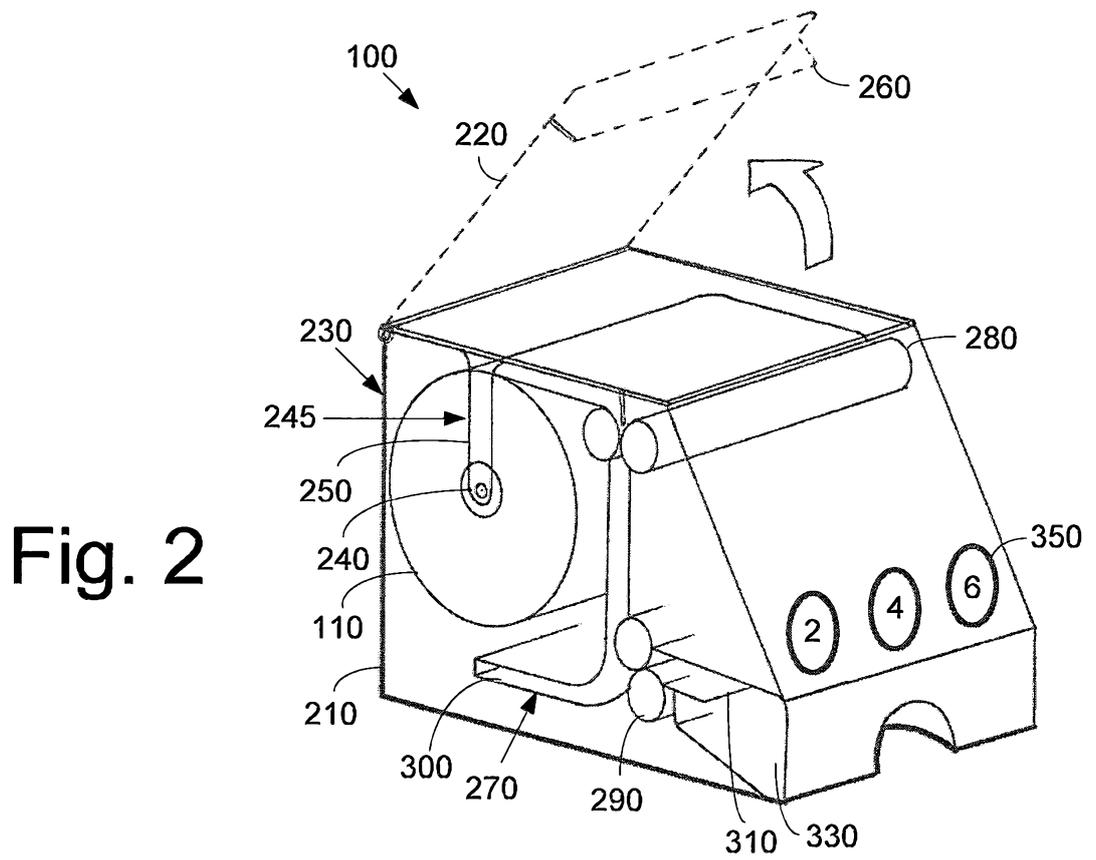


Fig. 2

Fig. 3

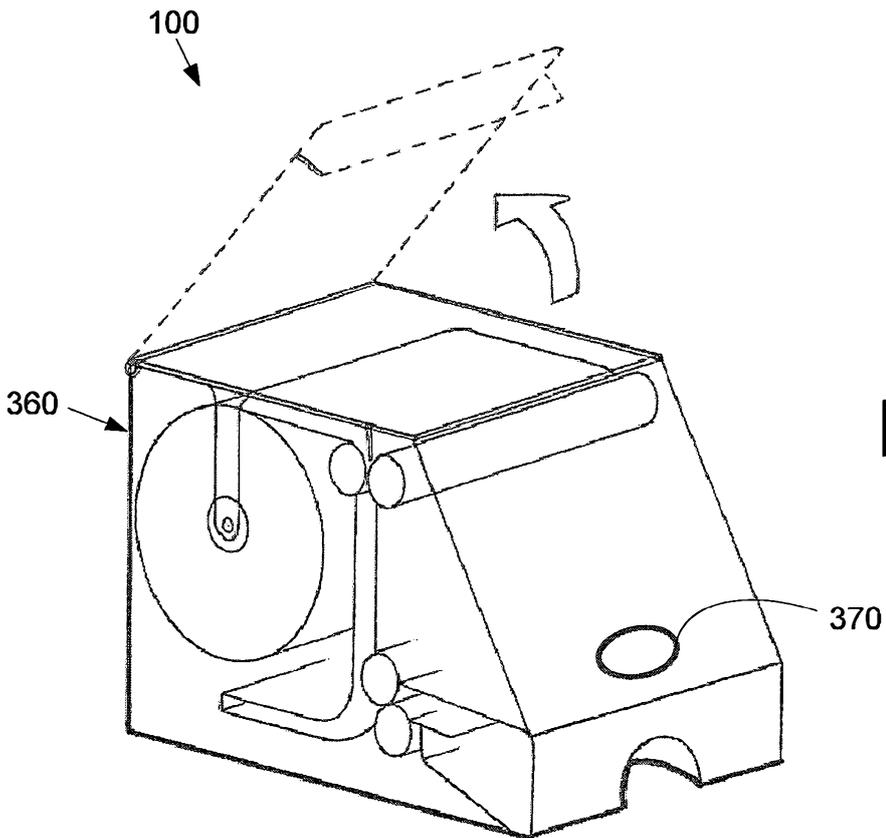
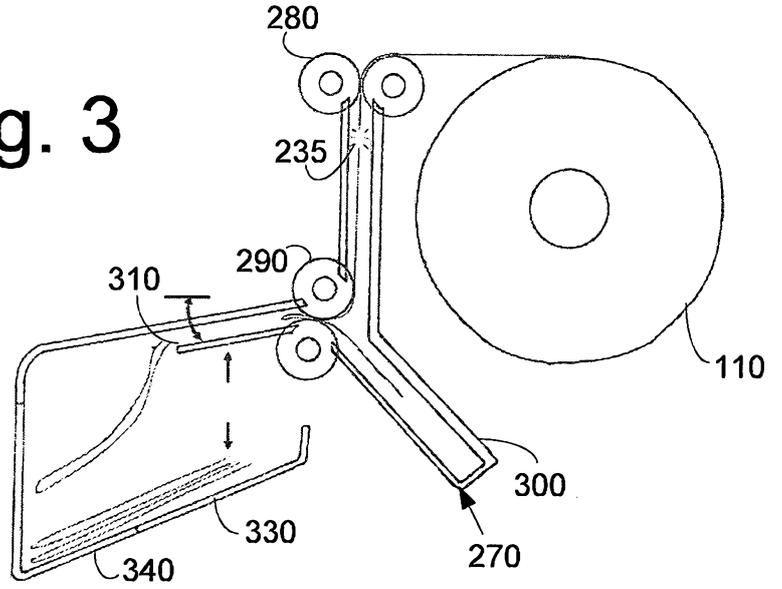


Fig. 4

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Fig. 5

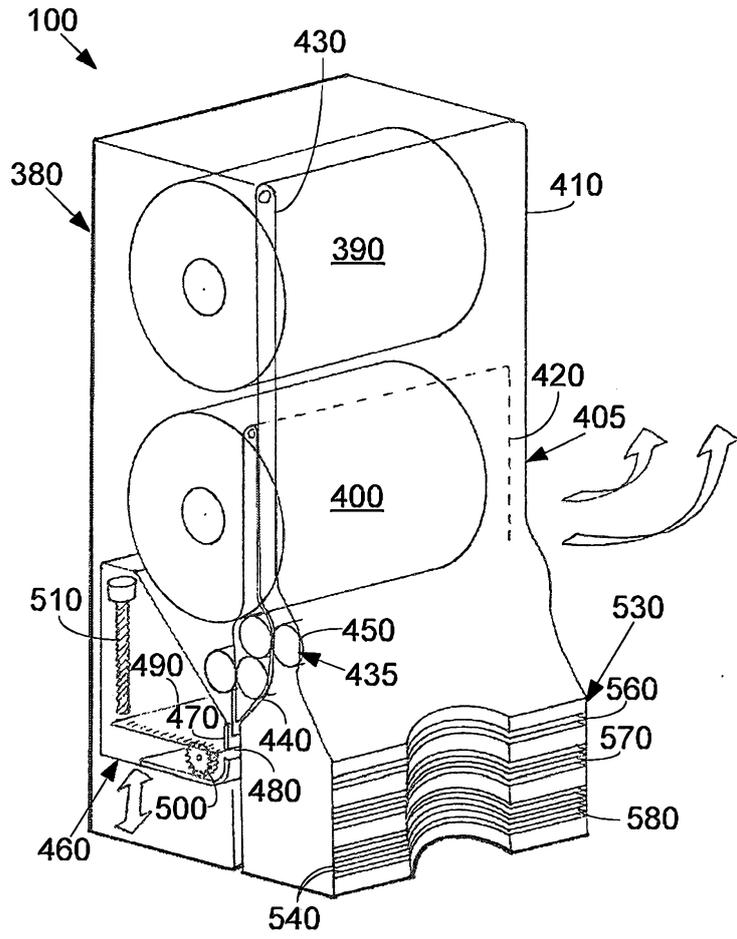


Fig. 6

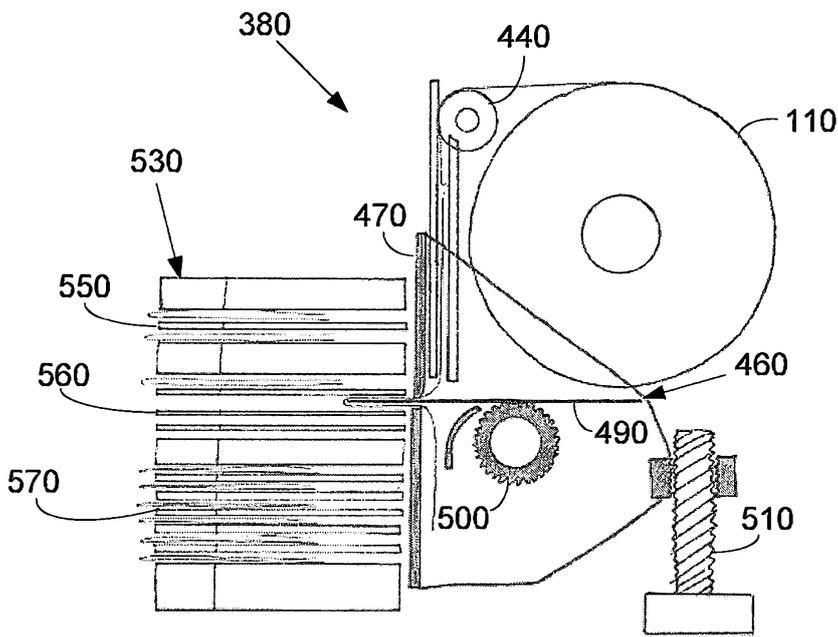


Fig. 7

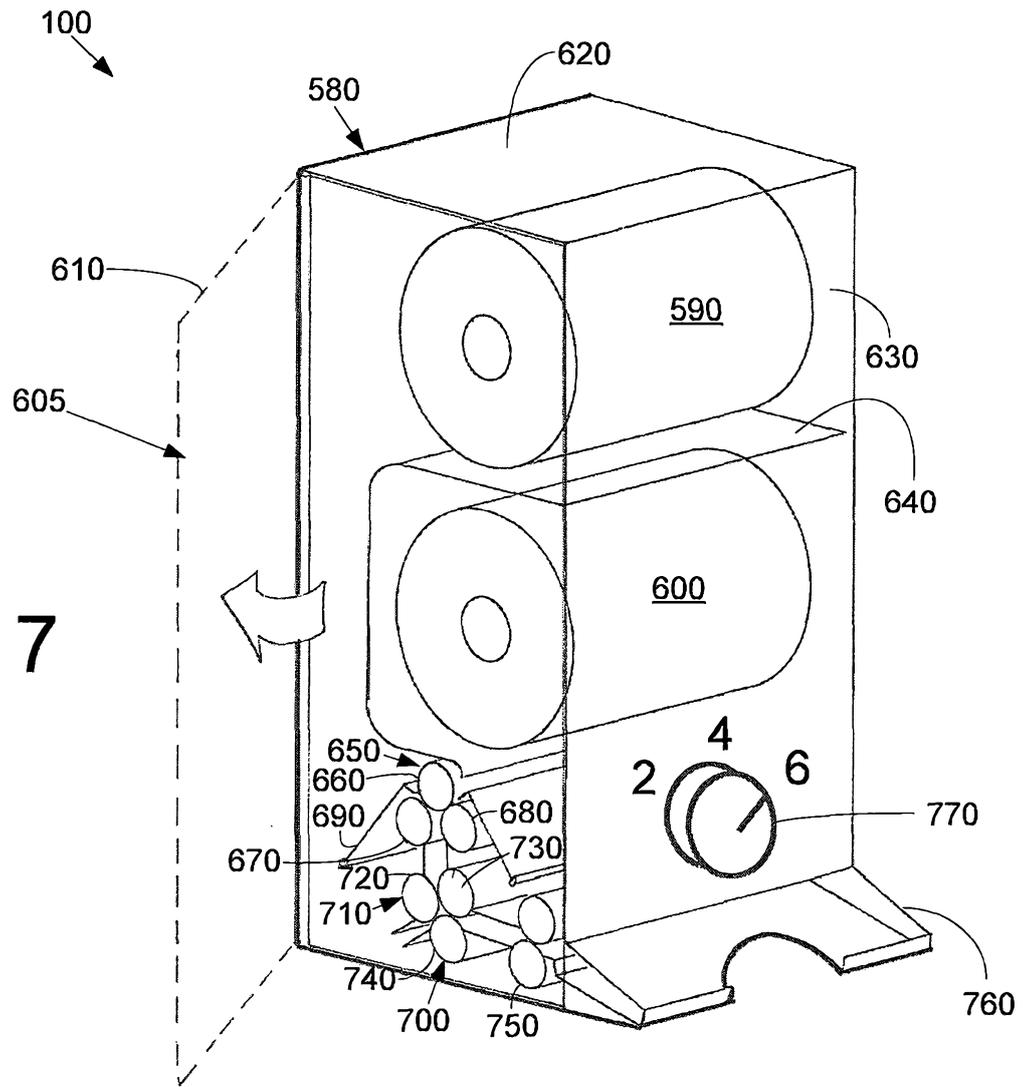
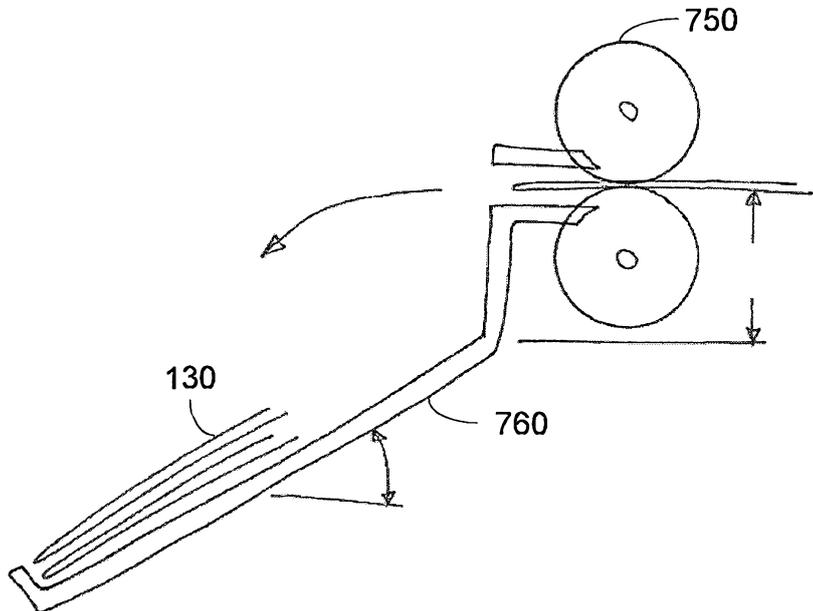
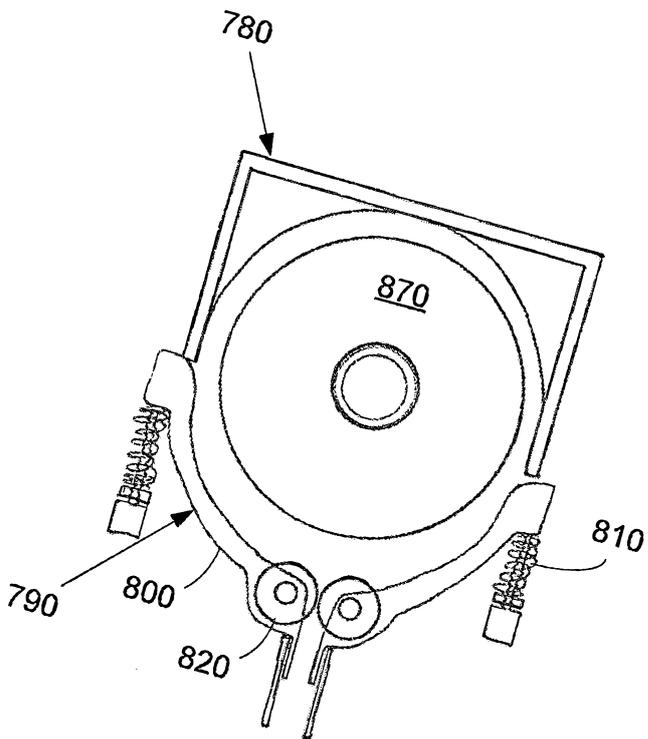
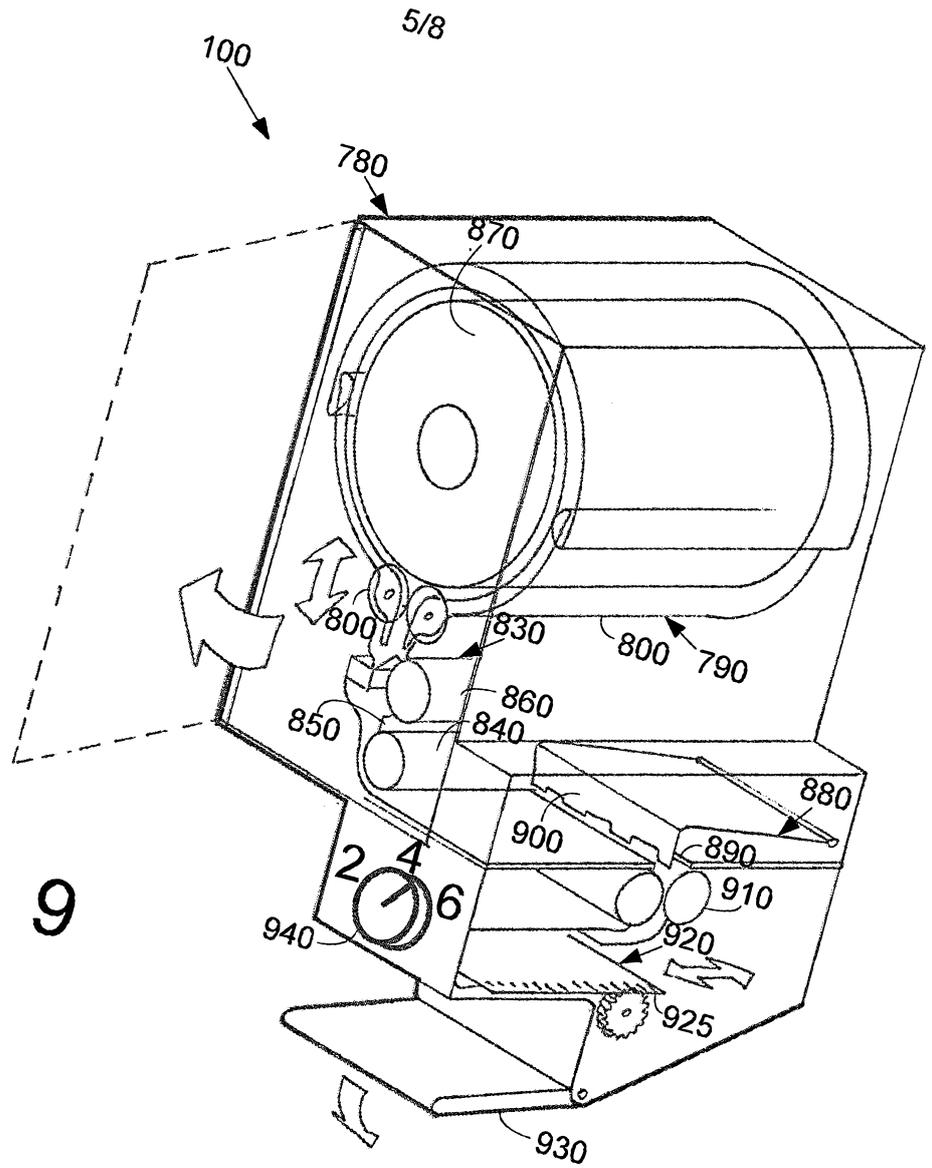


Fig. 8





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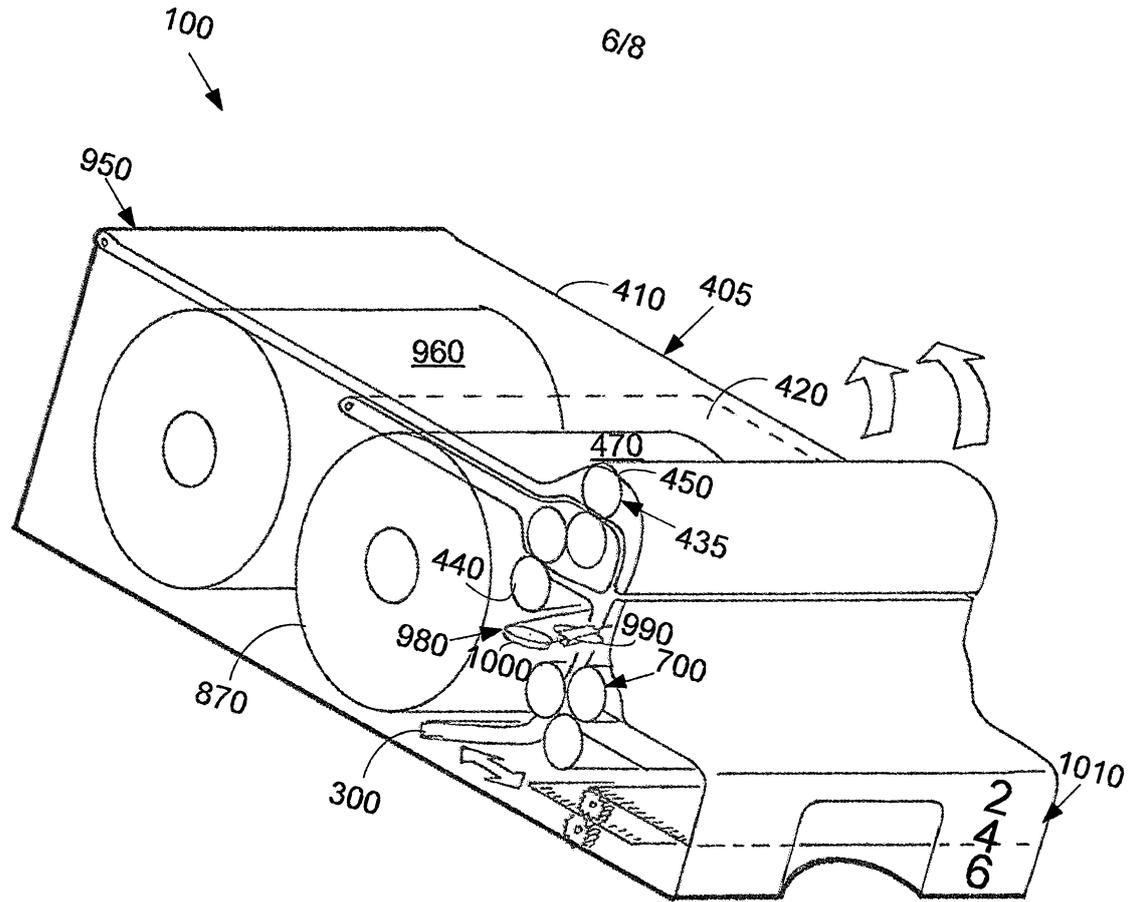


Fig. 11

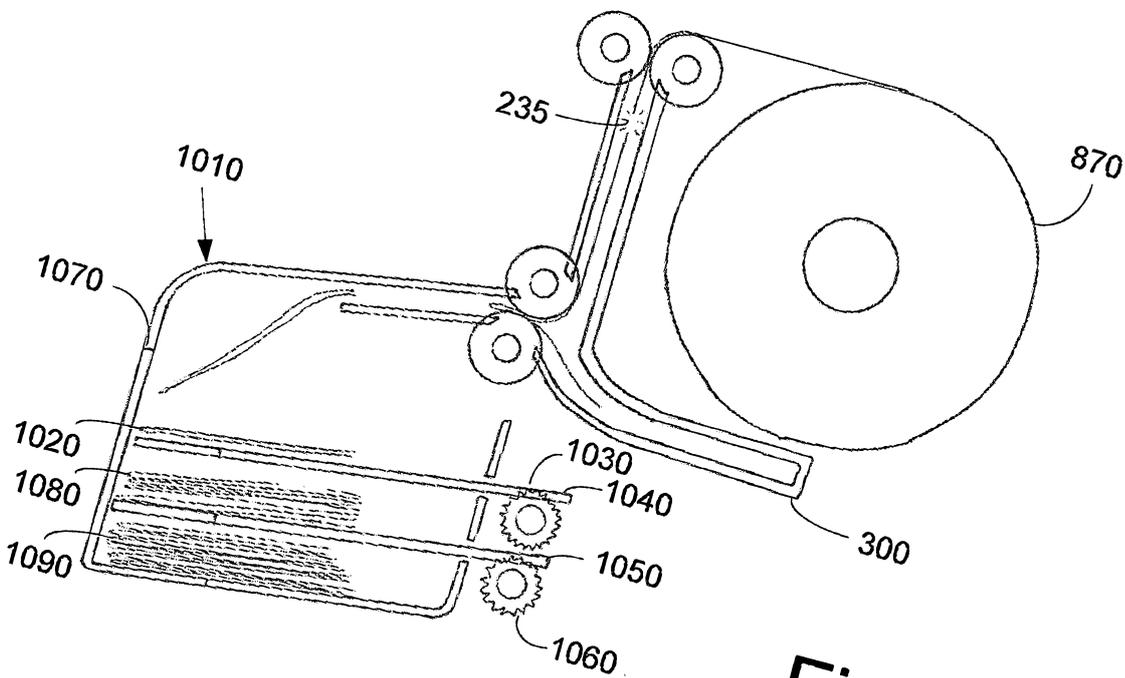


Fig. 12

Fig. 13

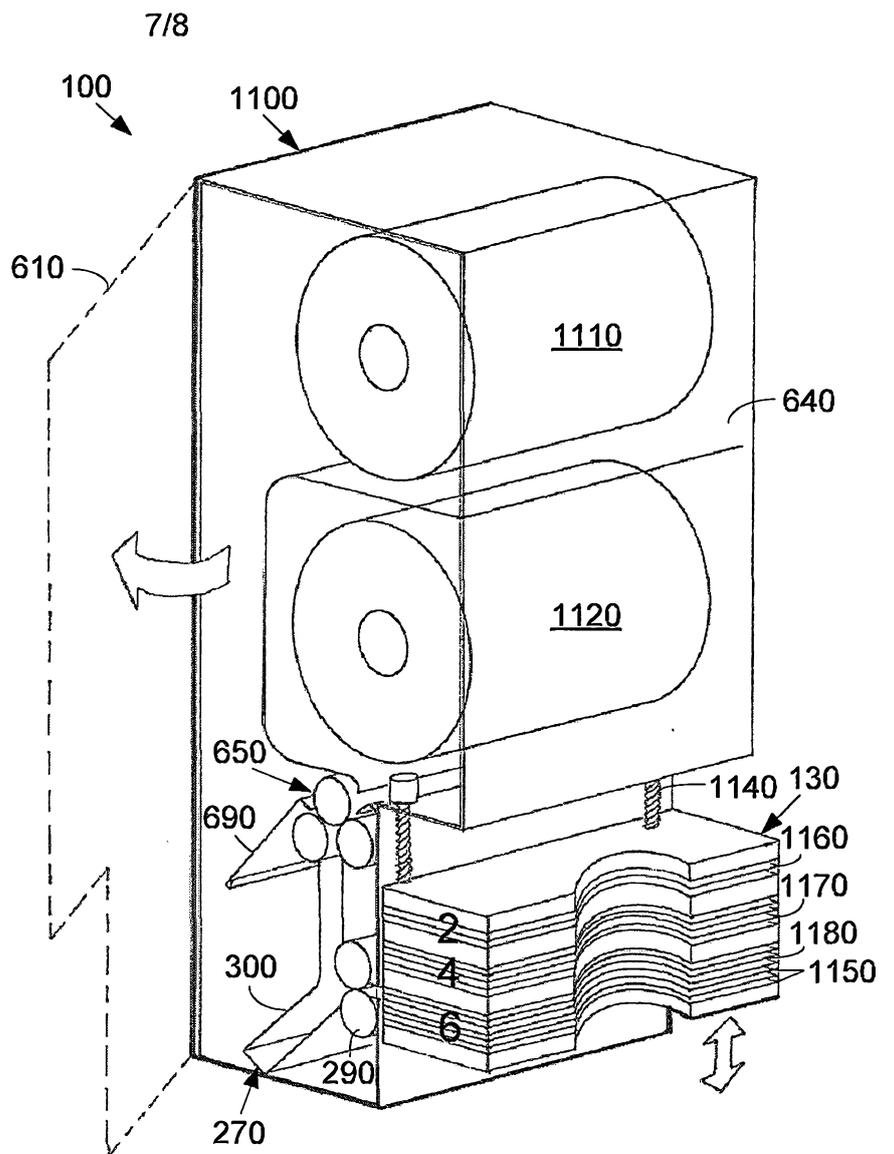
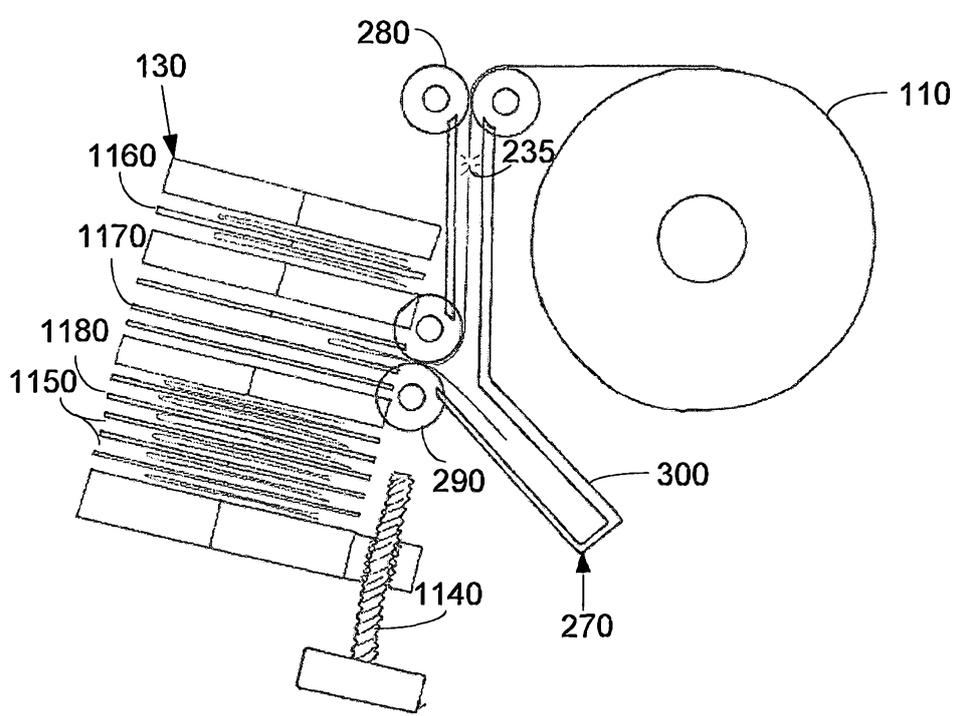


Fig. 14



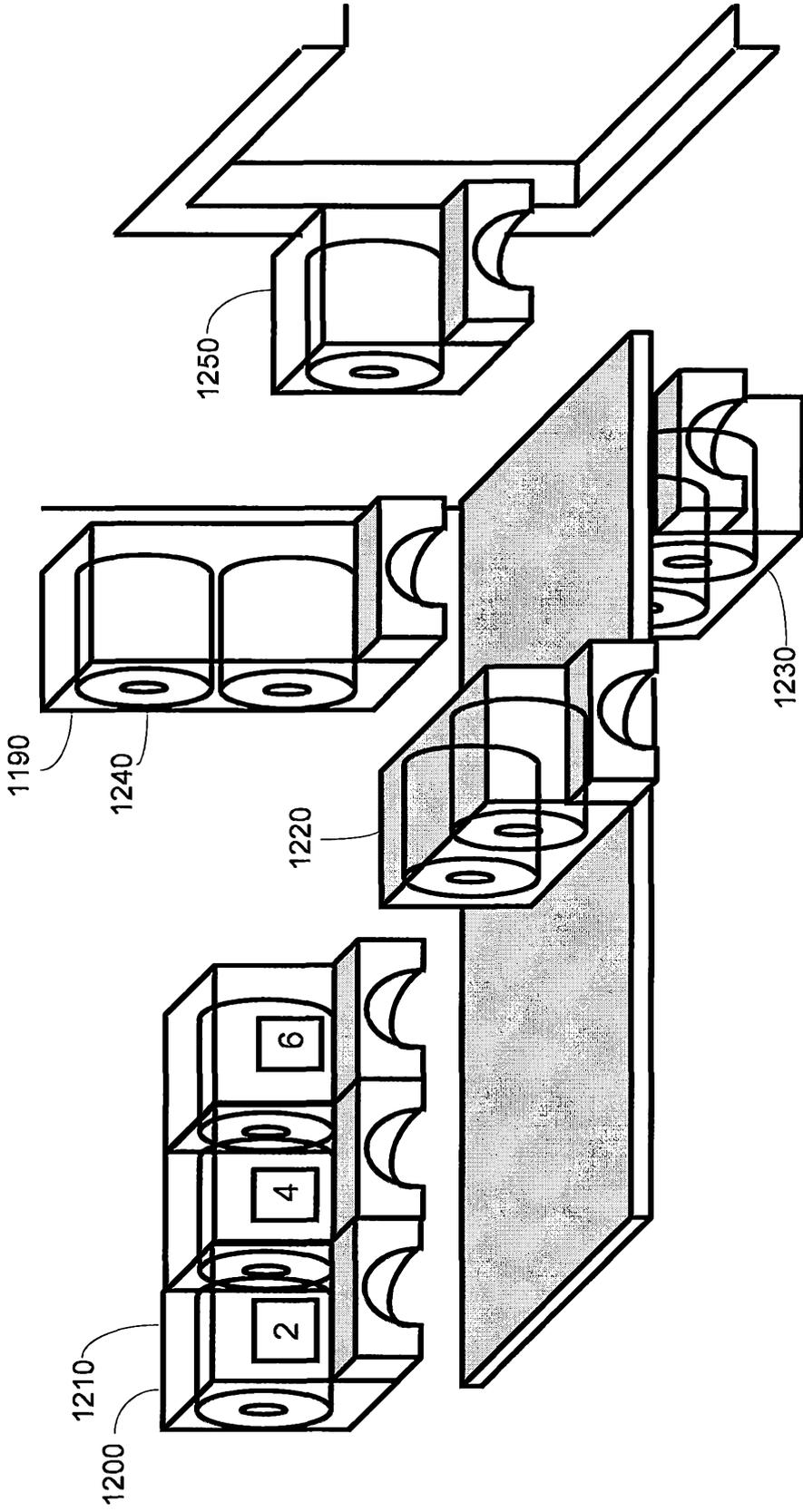


Fig. 15