ABSTRACT

A container is disclosed that can hold and dispense a beverage while at the same time storing and dispensing drinking cups for consuming the beverage, thereby enhancing the availability of drinking cups, by making them readily available for use with the container. The container includes a cup storage and dispensing portion formed into the bottom, the side, or some other surface of the container, with a cup retaining element capable of resisting removal of a cup from the portion. The cup storage and dispensing portion can be sealed by a removable cover, and can be shaped to accommodate a plurality of cups while maximizing the beverage volume of the container. In another aspect of the invention, the container includes a storage portion that can be used to store other items, such as beverage additives or promotional items, in addition to, or instead of, cups.
BEVERAGE CONTAINER WITH INTEGRAL STORAGE SPACE FOR DRINKING CUPS

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0001] This invention generally relates to containers, and particularly to beverage containers.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0002] Beverages come in a variety of container sizes. Single serving containers, such as 12 oz or 16 oz bottles or cans, contain only enough beverage for a typical person. If the person is not sharing the beverage, it can be consumed directly from the single serving container, without the need for a cup.

[0003] By contrast, high capacity beverage containers that contain multiple servings of a beverage are known for conveniently storing and dispensing large quantities of beverages economically and conveniently. However, large containers such as 2 liter soda bottles, ½ gallon bottles, and 1 gallon jugs are typically used to pour the beverage into one or more cups, rather than consuming the contents directly from the container. This often happens when people gather in groups and share the contents of a large beverage container.

[0004] Cups for drinking the contents of a large beverage container are typically not sold with the beverage container. Consequently, a consumer must purchase a package of cups separately. Usually, there are more cups included in the package than are needed to consume the beverage. This results in either wasted cups, or extra cups that must be saved for later use.

[0005] Additionally, cups and drinks are stored in separate places in the home—cups in a cabinet, drinks often in the refrigerator. If a person is going to take a large beverage container to use outside the home, that person must also remember to pack an appropriate number of cups for consuming the beverage. Otherwise, that person will again need to purchase yet another package of cups, such package containing too many cups.

[0006] Further, large drink containers are sold to consumers in separate sections of a grocery store, so consumers must visit two parts of the store if they have no cups with them, and intend to consume the beverage without going to their home or office where cups are stored. Worse yet, some stores that sell drinks in large capacity beverage containers do not also sell cups, or a store may run out of the appropriate size and/or style of cup, making it necessary for a consumer either to allow multiple persons to drink directly from the beverage container, or to go further and find yet another store to purchase the appropriate drinking cups.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0007] The invention enhances the availability of drinking cups for a beverage contained in a large beverage container. The cups are conveniently sized, and readily available for use with the container. By incorporating a cup storage and dispenser compartment as a deformation of the wall or bottom of the beverage container, substantial conveniences are provided. For example, a convenient number of cups can be stored in the wall or bottom of the container, making them readily available for consumption of the beverage stored within the container.

[0008] Because cup storage and dispensing features are integrated into the form of the large beverage container of the invention, the invention can be manufactured, distributed, and sold much like known large beverage containers. Further, the cost of manufacturing the invention is substantially the same as manufacturing known large beverage containers, since separate parts are not needed to provide for storage and dispensing of cups.

[0009] The invention has the advantage of conveniently providing the right size, type, and quantity of cups for the consumer at the exact time and place that the consumer needs them. This advantage results in fewer items for the consumer to purchase, transport, and store to consume a beverage in a large container. This advantage may be particularly attractive to consumers who live in small city apartments with scarce kitchen storage space, or businesses where convenience and one-time-use items reduce costs.

[0010] Because the shape of the beverage container of the invention does not significantly differ from the shape of standard large beverage containers, the capacity of the beverage container of the invention also does not significantly differ from standard large beverage containers. Thus, the beverage container of the invention can be of the same height and diameter as standard large beverage containers, while also storing and dispensing cups, with only a modestly reduced beverage storage capacity. Alternatively, the beverage container of the invention can be of slightly greater height and/or diameter as standard beverage container sizes, while having a standard beverage storage capacity.

[0011] Additionally since brand labeling is critical for soft drink companies, integrating the cups with the drink container offers companies an opportunity to brand label the cup so as to match the container, reinforcing the brand every time the cup is used.

[0012] For retailers, the invention takes up much less shelf storage space than separately shelved cups and drink containers.

[0013] Regarding distribution and shipping, since disposable drink cups are typically very lightweight, the impact of including cups on the total weight of a filled drink container is insignificant.

[0014] For consumers, the invention ensures the availability of cups for consumption of the beverage contained therein. This advantage is particularly significant when the beverage container is to be transported a long distance from home, such as to a picnic, or to the beach. Consumer convenience is further enhanced by providing immediate, ready access to the required drinking cups anytime the consumer desires to drink the beverage contained by the invention.

[0015] Accordingly, one general aspect of the invention is a container including a storage and dispensing portion capable of storing and dispensing at least one cup. In a preferred embodiment, the storage and dispensing portion is incorporated into a wall of the container. In a further preferred embodiment, the wall is the bottom of the container. In an alternate preferred embodiment, the wall is the side wall of the container.

[0016] In other preferred embodiments, the storage and dispensing portion includes a retaining ridge capable of resisting removal of cups stored in the storage and dispensing portion.

[0017] In yet other preferred embodiments, an inner surface of the storage and dispensing portion is shaped substantially like the inner surface of a drinking cup.

[0018] In still other preferred embodiments, the storage and dispensing portion is cooperative with a sealing cap.
In other preferred embodiments, the storage and dispensing portion is shaped so as to accommodate storage of a closed cylindrical container.

In yet more preferred embodiments, the storage and dispensing portion includes a plurality of drinking cups.

In still more preferred embodiments, the drinking cups each bear a trademark.

Another general aspect of the invention is a bottle for containing a beverage, and for storing and dispensing cups useful for consuming the beverage. The bottle includes a cup storage and dispensing portion formed into a surface of the bottle, an inner surface of the cup storage and dispensing portion including a cup retaining element capable of resisting removal of a cup from the cup storage and dispensing portion. The bottle also includes a plurality of cups stored within the cup storage and dispensing portion.

In preferred embodiments, the cup storage and dispensing portion is formed into a bottom of the bottle. In other preferred embodiments, the cup storage and dispensing portion is formed into a side wall of the bottle.

In still other preferred embodiments, the cup storage and dispensing portion is sealed by a cap.

In further preferred embodiments, the cup storage and dispensing portion is shaped to accommodate a cup, while maximizing the volume of the bottle.

In still further preferred embodiments, the bottle also includes at least one sample within the cup storage and dispensing portion.

In other preferred embodiments, the cup retaining element, capable of resisting removal of a cup from the cup storage and dispensing portion, includes a plurality of resistance regions.

In still other preferred embodiments, the resistance regions are circumferentially disposed.

In preferred embodiments, the cup retaining element is formed from a wall of the cup storage and dispensing portion.

Another general aspect of the invention is a method of providing promotional items with drink containers. The method includes providing a drink container with integral storage formed into a wall of the container, the storage forming an externally accessible cavity extending into the drink container. Then, placing one or more promotional items within the externally accessible cavity, and sealing the promotional items within the externally accessible cavity with a removable lid.

FIG. 5 is a cut-away view of an alternate preferred embodiment of the invention storing promotional items.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

FIG. 1 shows a cut-away perspective view of the drink storage and dispenser portion of a preferred embodiment of the invention with details of key features and elements. This portion of the preferred embodiment of the invention includes concentric cylinders joined at the top with the inner cylinder closed at the bottom. The shape of it is essentially that of a sleeve that can accept a plurality of cups within the sleeve such that only the bottom surface of the last cup inserted into the sleeve is exposed.

The storage and dispenser portion of the invention in this embodiment includes two cylinders, an outer cylinder 120 and an inner cylinder 130 which is smaller in diameter and shorter in length than outer cylinder 120. Additionally, the inner cylinder 130 has a closed end 140. The inner cylinder 130 is located concentrically within the outer cylinder 120 such that the open end of inner cylinder 130 is aligned yet opposed with respect to an open end of outer cylinder 120. The aligned open ends of the cylinders 120, 130 are attached by an annular seal 110 to maintain the cylinders 120, 130 in stable relative position, and to close off one end of the space between the cylinders, thereby creating a storage space 150 between cylinders, thereby providing space for a plurality of stacked drinking cups. A circumferential retaining ridge 160 provides a barrier that resists removal of each of the cups, as explained further below.

FIG. 2 shows a cut away view of a preferred embodiment of the invention where the bottom of a large beverage container, such as a soda bottle, includes a storage and dispensing portion 100. The storage and dispensing portion 100 of FIG. 2 is very similar to the structure described in FIG. 1, differing only in the relative slant of the cylinder walls, and that the plastic is formed as a continuous structure that is integral to the wall 210 which descends to form the bottom of the large beverage container 220, which includes the storage and dispensing portion 100. FIG. 2 also shows a cross-sectional view of a circumferential retaining ridge 160, which is essentially the same as the circumferential retaining ridge 160 of FIG. 1. This storage and dispensing portion 100 of the large beverage container 220 can accept a plurality of cups that can each be inserted by a person or by a machine situated outside the large beverage container 220.

The storage and dispensing portion 100 of the invention is made from the same material used to make standard beverage containers. For example, in the case of a two-liter soft drink container, the invention is made from PET plastic, which is relatively hard and transparent. In the case of a one-half or one gallon milk container, the invention is made from partially translucent or opaque plastic. The invention can also be made from glass, such as when included in the bottom or the side of a large glass milk jug. The invention could also be included in the side or the bottom of a very large plastic water cooler bottle, for example.

The storage and dispensing portion 100 can store and dispense a plurality of cups, each cup having a cup rim 260 sized to lightly contact the inner wall of the storage and dispensing portion 100. When a cup is moved past the circumferential retaining ridge 160 to add or remove a cup from the portion 100, it applies a compression force to a cup rim 260, temporarily deforming it slightly, as it moves past ridge.
The force applied to cup rim 260 is sufficient to prevent the cup 230 from falling out of the storage and dispenser portion 100 under its own weight, but is not enough to permanently deform the cup rim 260. Retaining ridge 160 can be a continuous structure, or it can be a plurality of segments interspersed with voids along the inner circumference of outer ring 120 so as to reduce the compression force on cup rim 260.

FIG. 3 also displays how the invention takes advantage of the fact that drinking cups 230 can be stacked to provide maximum drinking cup storage with minimum volume being taken away from the interior volume of a drink container.

To keep drinking cups 230 from being exposed to dirt and germs outside the drink container, a lid 310 can be placed over the open end of cup storage portion 100. The lid 310 can be constructed and attached in a way similar to the plastic or foil-backed lids used to seal many liquid storage containers. These peel-off, single use lids provide protection to the contents during manufacture, distribution, and retail handling. Alternatively, the lid 310 can be made of rigid plastic, and formed in the shape of a thin stopper to allow the lid 310 to be reusable.

With reference to FIG. 4, the storage and retaining portion 100 of the invention can be formed into any wall of a drink container. FIG. 4 shows a side-wall embodiment of the invention integrated into the side wall of a plastic bottle or glass jug.

FIG. 4 also shows an alternative embodiment of the invention without an inner wall similar to the inner cylinder 130. Instead, there is only an outer wall similar to the outer cylinder 120, and a flat back wall 410 instead of a cup-like wall 332. This embodiment provides storage for drinking cups, as well as anything else that one might want to include inside the inner-most cup, such as packets of sugar, drink flavoring, or collapsible drinking straws, for example. However, this embodiment also takes up a larger volume from drink container interior 220 than the other embodiments described herein.

FIG. 5 shows an alternate embodiment of the invention with storage and dispenser portion 100, which can be accessed by removing lid 310. The storage and dispenser portion 100 here is shown NOT storing cups, but instead being used for storage of promotional items such as game cards, key rings, a coupon 510, or a product sample 520, as the manufacturer or bottler may choose to provide. Thus, the shape of storage and dispenser portion 100 could be other than cup-shaped, and could therefore be smaller or larger than a set of cups so as to accept such promotional items. In this embodiment, storage portion 100 could be used by the retail consumer to store an item or items of their choosing such as non perishable food.

Alternatively, storage portion 100 could be used to store a different drink in its own small container, a trial sample 520 of a complimentary food, or other item offered by the manufacturer.

Storage portion 100 could also accept similarly sized cups provided by the retail consumer, or another party, independent of the consumption of the drink container contents. In this way, the storage and dispenser portion of the invention can function solely as a cup storage and dispensing apparatus.

Other modifications and implementations will occur to those skilled in the art without departing from the spirit and the scope of the invention as claimed. Accordingly, the above description is not intended to limit the invention except as indicated in the following claims.

What is claimed is:

1. A container for dispensing a beverage and storing and dispensing at least one cup, comprising:
   a beverage container that is able to contain and dispense a beverage; and
   an externally accessible cup storage and dispensing portion, incorporated into the structure of the container, that is able to store and dispense at least one cup.

2. The container of claim 1, wherein the cup storage and dispensing portion is incorporated into an enclosing surface of the container.

3. The container of claim 2, wherein the container has a bottom, and wherein the cup storage and dispensing portion is incorporated into the bottom of the container.

4. The container of claim 2, wherein the cup storage and dispensing portion is incorporated into a side wall of the container.

5. The container of claim 1, wherein the cup storage and dispensing portion includes a retaining ridge capable of resisting removal of cups stored in the storage and dispensing portion.

6. The container of claim 5, wherein the retaining ridge capable of resisting removal of cups stored in the cup storage and dispensing portion includes a plurality of resistance regions.

7. The container of claim 6, wherein the resistance regions are circumferentially disposed.

8. The container of claim 5, wherein the retaining ridge capable of resisting removal of cups stored in the cup storage and dispensing portion is formed from a wall of the cup storage and dispensing portion.

9. The container of claim 1, wherein an inner surface of the cup storage and dispensing portion is shaped substantially like the inner surface of a drinking cup, so as to minimize the volume of beverage displaced from the beverage container by the cup storage and dispensing portion.

10. The container of claim 1, wherein the cup storage and dispensing portion is cooperative with a sealing cap.

11. The container of claim 1, wherein the cup storage and dispensing portion is able to store and dispense a plurality of drinking cups.

12. The container of claim 1, further comprising at least one cup contained in the cup storage and dispensing portion.

13. A container for dispensing a beverage and for storing objects, comprising:
   a beverage container that is able to contain and dispense a beverage; and
   an externally accessible storage portion, incorporated into the structure of the container, that is able to store objects.

14. The container of claim 13, wherein the storage portion is shaped so as to accommodate storage of a closed cylindrical container.

15. The container of claim 13, wherein the storage portion is incorporated into an enclosing surface of the container.

16. The container of claim 13, wherein the container has a bottom, and wherein the storage portion is formed into the bottom of the container.

17. The container of claim 13, wherein the storage portion is formed into a side wall of the container.

18. The container of claim 13, wherein the storage portion is cooperative with a sealing cap.
19. A method for conveniently storing a beverage and at least one cup, and for dispensing the beverage into the cup, comprising:
providing a beverage container that contains and is able to dispense a beverage, and that includes an externally accessible cup storage and dispensing portion, incorporated into the structure of the container, that contains and is able to dispense at least one cup;
removing at least one cup from the cup storage and dispensing portion; and
dispensing beverage from the beverage container into the at least one cup.

20. A method for providing promotional items with beverage containers, the method comprising:
providing a beverage container that is able to contain and dispense a beverage and that includes an externally accessible storage portion, incorporated into the structure of the container, that is able to store objects;
placing one or more promotional items within the externally accessible storage portion; and
sealing the promotional items within the externally accessible storage portion with a removable cover.

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