A merchandise display system including a hanger having retention elements configured to operatively connect to paired merchandise items. The retention elements may include tabs configured to retain the merchandise items in a desired position. The hanger will typically include a number of holes to facilitate placement in a retail display area. Various elements may be utilized in conjunction with the hanger to maintain desired orientation and position of the paired merchandise items, including securing devices and fasteners. The merchandise display system advantageously permits the wearing of paired merchandise items while maintaining security and pair integrity.
MERCHANDISE DISPLAY APPARATUS AND METHOD

BACKGROUND OF INVENTION

[0001] 1. Field of the Invention

[0002] The invention relates generally to merchandising systems for displaying merchandise in a retail store, and more particularly to a hanger configured to display paired wearable merchandise while maintaining security and pair integrity of such merchandise.

[0003] 2. Background Art

[0004] In retail stores, conventional sales techniques for consumer products typically require that they be displayed on shelves or suspended from hangers such that consumers may readily view them and, when appropriate, remove them for the purpose of examination and evaluation. Typically, consumer products will either be enclosed in packaging, and/or suspended from a hanger.

[0005] Packaging of products will typically provide a greater protection of the product, and increased theft deterrence. However, for certain products, particularly those which are to be worn by a user, such packaging may interfere with the consumer’s evaluation of the product. The opportunity for a customer to come into physical contact with the merchandised article is especially beneficial in the context of wearable merchandise because a prospective consumer will typically desire to handle such merchandise and determine its comfort and fit prior to purchase. Accordingly, wearable products are often displayed using a hanger system which will allow for removal and further evaluation of the product separate from its packaging.

[0006] Paired merchandise, such as gloves, kneepads, and similar items pose an additional challenge of maintaining pair integrity. Removal, handling, and fitting by a consumer will often occur in separation of paired merchandise, requiring a retail employee to locate, identify, and reunite the pairs. This may also result in loss of individual articles from a pair, or purchase of a mismatched pair by a consumer, resulting in another mismatched pair remaining in the retail store. Because mismatched pairs and unmarked individual articles of a pair will often be returned to the manufacturer, this will result in decreased efficiency and an increased cost for the manufacturer, retail store and consumer.

[0007] Furthermore, theft of removable merchandise from such display hangers may also occur. Often, wearable merchandise is not suitable for the placement of theft-deterrent devices, or the inclusion of such devices would cause additional expense or hinder the consumer’s evaluation of the merchandise. Accordingly, there exists a need for a merchandising system that is configured to securely maintain pair integrity while still providing the consumer an opportunity to handle and properly evaluate paired products.

SUMMARY OF INVENTION

[0008] Variations of the invention include a hanger system for securing and displaying paired merchandise items. The hanger system may include various components such as tabs, securing devices, and fasteners, to securely retain the paired merchandise items. The hanger system may be cost-effectively formed as a single unit.

[0009] Variations of the invention relate to a merchandise hanger system kit, such include typically including a merchandise hanger, paired merchandise items, and various components for creating and/or maintaining a desired relationship between the paired merchandise items and the merchandise hanger.

[0010] Variations of the invention relate to a method for displaying paired merchandise items in a retail display area. Such methods involve the securing of the paired merchandise to a hanger system configured to be displayed in a retail display area, utilizing various components to maintain pair integrity and the security of the connection between the merchandise items and the hanger.

[0011] Other aspects and advantages of the invention will be apparent from the following description and the appended claims.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF DRAWINGS

[0012] FIG. 1 shows a hanger system according to one embodiment of the invention.

[0013] FIG. 2 shows a hanger system with operatively connected securing devices according to one embodiment of the invention.

[0014] FIG. 3 shows a hanger system with operatively connected merchandise items according to one embodiment of the invention.

[0015] FIG. 4 shows a hanger system with enlarged tabs according to one embodiment of the invention.

[0016] FIG. 5 shows a hanger system with removable tabs according to one embodiment of the invention.

[0017] FIGS. 6A-6B show one embodiment of a hanger system having removable tabs according to one embodiment of the invention.

[0018] FIGS. 7A-7D show various embodiments of the invention.

[0019] FIGS. 8A-8C show various configurations of an upper portion of a hanger system, according to various embodiments of the invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0020] As shown in FIG. 1, a hanger system 2 according to one embodiment of the invention will typically include one or more openings 4 for passage of a rod, hook, or similar object, to permit the hanger system 2 to be suspended in a retail display area. The opening 4 will typically be located in a central support member, generally indicated at 6, of the hanger system 2, to ensure that the hanger system 2 will remain in a stable and relatively horizontal position when suspended in the retail display area. Although a single opening 4 will typically be located in a central location, multiple openings may also be used, and these will typically be symmetrically distributed in the hanger system 2. The number, shape, and location of the openings 4 may vary.

[0021] A pair of retention members, generally indicated at 8, are operatively connected to the ends of the support member 6. A tab 10 is disposed at the distal end of each retention member 8. The tab 10 may be of any desired length and configuration, and will typically be at least partially oriented
in a different direction from the longitudinal axis of the retention member 8. Various embodiments of the tab 10 may include, but are not limited to, L-shaped (terminating substantially perpendicular to the longitudinal axis of the retention member 8), J-shaped (curved such that a portion is substantially parallel to the longitudinal axis of the retention member, and terminating in a portion that is substantially parallel to the longitudinal axis of the retention member 8), and U-shaped (similar to J-shaped configuration, and having the terminal portion extend substantially back to, or beyond a portion of, the support member 6) configurations. Such configurations advantageously create an increased retention of products or portions thereof disposed in the retention member 8.

[0022] As used herein, the term “tab” has no set configuration, but instead refers to a terminal portion of the retention member 8 which varies in one or more ways (orientation, width, etc.) from the preceding portion of the retention member 8. The operative connection between the tab 10 and retention member 8 may be of any type known in the art, and in one or more embodiments, these two elements will be molded as a single piece. Retention members 8 will typically be substantially parallel to the longitudinal axis of the hanger system 2, while tabs 10 may often be configured with at least some portion being substantially non-parallel to the longitudinal axis of the hanger system 2.

[0023] As shown in FIGS. 1-2, embodiments of the invention may also include one or more indents 12 configured to retain some portion of a securing device 16 therein. Alternatively, securing devices 16 may be used without indents 12 and simply rely on frictional forces or other characteristics to stabilize them in a desired position and orientation. The indents 12 advantageously provide a stabilization of the securing devices 16 in a predetermined location. Similarly, other configurations such as slits, holes, texturing, etc., may also be used to stabilize a securing device 16 in a desired location and/or orientation. Securing device 16 may be of any type known in the art, including, but not limited to, elastic bands, cable-ties, and/or any other item capable of connecting to the hanger system 2 substantially parallel to the longitudinal axis of the retention member 8 such that a gap G is formed between the securing device 16 and the retention member 8.

[0024] As used herein, the terms upper, lower, top, and bottom are based on a suspended orientation of the hanger system (e.g., as when the hanger system 2 is suspended in a display area of a retail store). The terms proximal and distal are relative to an imaginary line bisecting the hanger system 2 in a vertical direction, when the hanger system 2 is in a suspended orientation.

[0025] FIG. 3 shows one embodiment of the hanger system 2 operatively connected to a pair of representative merchandise items, in this case knee pads 18. The knee pads 18 each comprise a suspension element 20 into which a retention member 8 is passed until the retention member 8 passes through substantially the entire length of the suspension element 20. The suspension element 20 may be of any desired type and configuration, and in one embodiment will comprise a folded label. The use of a folded label, or similar configuration, advantageously provides both a suspension element 20 and merchandise label. The folded label may comprise any material known in the art, and in one embodiment will comprise a material similar or identical to that of the merchandise item 18, thereby advantageously providing an unobtrusive functional element to the merchandise item 18. An additional advantage of a folded label configuration is the ability to include labeling and logos on the folded label, which will be visible when the merchandise item 18 is suspended by the hanger system 2.

[0026] In the embodiment of FIG. 3, fasteners 22 operatively connecting the merchandise items 18 help prevent removal of the merchandise items 18 from the hanger system 2 by limiting the distance between the merchandise items 18, thereby restricting the removal of either of the merchandise items 18 from its retention member 8 by hindering or preventing extraction of the retention member 8 from within the suspension element 20. Tabs 10, as well as any securing devices 16 (not shown in FIG. 3) may be used with such configurations to help retain the merchandise items 18. The use of a combination of tabs 10, securing devices 16, and/or fasteners 22, according to various embodiments, advantageously provides a redundant system of deterrents to removal of a merchandise item 18 from its hanger system 2.

[0027] The size, and the location of each suspension element 20 on each merchandise item 18, may vary. In various embodiments, the merchandise items 18, tabs 10, and/or retention members 8 will have a size and/or configuration that is compatible with the other. For example, wider merchandise items 18 will typically require a wider hanger system 2, and the width of the suspension element 20 might reflect the width of the retention member 8 or vice versa. The dimensions and/or configuration of the support member 6 may also vary depending on the type and size of merchandise items to be displayed, configuration of desired retail display area, and other factors.

[0028] Any number of fasteners 22 may operatively connect a plurality of merchandise items 18 at any desired location(s). The fasteners 22 may be of any type known in the art, including but not limited to, Tach-It® plastic barbs, cable-ties, and any other suitable connecting elements. The merchandise items 18 may also be configured to more effectively operatively connect to a fastener 22, by, for example, the disposition of holes, lanyards, clips, and/or other elements therein. As used herein, the term “fastener” is not limited to any particular configuration and may comprise any device capable of operatively connecting two items such that the distance between them is restricted.

[0029] As shown in the embodiment of FIG. 4, the tabs 10 may be of any desired size and configuration. Larger tabs 10 may advantageously provide an increased retention of the suspension elements 20. Furthermore, larger tabs 10 may advantageously provide an increased surface area for assisting removal of the tabs 10 from the hanger system 2 by a consumer. In one embodiment, the tabs 10 will be configured to break away from the retention members 8 when sufficient pressure is applied and larger tabs 10 advantageously facilitate the application of such pressure. Larger tabs 10 may also advantageously provide a surface for the placement of labels, such as, e.g., sizing stickers.

[0030] As shown in the embodiment of FIG. 5, the tabs 10 may comprise separate elements configured to operatively connect to the retention member 8. Mating elements 24 disposed on the tab 10 and retention member 8 may be of any type known in the art. In one embodiment, the mating of tab 10 and retention member 8 will be configured to be reversible.
for example, by provision of a release hole 26 at a location that will be in close proximity to a release element 28 when the retention member 8 and tab 10 are operatively connected, such that the release element 28 may be moved from a first position to a second position, thereby allowing separation of the tab 10 and retention member 8. In one embodiment, the mating mechanism for operatively connecting a tab 10 to a retention member 8 may include a ratcheting or toothed configuration which will advantageously allow for an adjustment of the length of the retention member 8.

[0031] In the embodiment of FIGS. 6A and 6B, the operative connection between the tab 10 and retention member 8 comprises a pair of mating surfaces 30. The mating surfaces 30 may be of any configuration known in the art, and may be configured to form a reversible or permanent operative connection. In one embodiment, the operative connection of the tab 10 and retention member 8 may comprise an ultrasonic weld. Such a configuration would advantageously provide a permanent operative connection between the tab 10 and retention member 8, while permitting formation of the connection after a merchandise item has been disposed in the retention member 8. Such configurations would also be advantageously hidden once the retention member 8 is disposed within a suspension element 20 of a merchandise item 18.

[0032] While the embodiments of FIGS. 1-2 are configured with a retention member 8 having an upwardly-oriented tab 10, other embodiments may include tabs 10 which are oriented in a downward direction. As shown in FIGS. 7A-7B, tabs 10 may be configured with an extended length, possibly reaching to, or extending beyond, a portion of the support member 6. Such tabs 10 may be flexible, being moveable from a first flexed orientation which permits an operative connection with a merchandise item, to a second unflexed orientation, wherein the end portion of the tabs 10 is fixed to the support member 6 to prevent removal of the merchandise item from the hanger system 2.

[0033] FIGS. 7C and 7D show additional embodiments of the hanger system 2. As shown in the embodiment of FIG. 7C, one end of a hanger system 2 may comprise two substantially parallel retention members 8, wherein one of the retention members 8a includes a tab 10 that is operatively connectible to the second, substantially parallel retention member 8b. As shown in the embodiment of FIG. 7D, the retention member 8 may comprise a separate clip-like element operatively connectible to one end of the support member 6. The operative connection of the clip-like embodiment of a retention member 8 may be permanent or reversible.

[0034] As shown in the embodiments of FIGS. 8A-8C, the upper portion of the support member 6 may have various configurations. As shown in FIG. 8A, such configurations may include a lip 32 disposed at an upper portion thereof, such lip 32 having a wider cross-section than the adjoining portion of the hanger system 2, thereby advantageously facilitating gripping by a human or device. As shown in FIG. 8B, the upper portion of the support member may include texturing, indicated generally at 34, which will also advantageously facilitate gripping. FIG. 8C demonstrates an interaction between a clip 36, such as may be used in a retail setting, and a lip 32 of the hanger system 2.

[0035] As is apparent from the various configurations described herein, the term “tab” is used to identify an element that is connected or connectible to a distal portion of the hanger system 2, and which typically includes a different directional orientation than the longitudinal axis of the hanger system 2. Although described herein as separate elements, the support member 6 retention member(s) 8 and tab(s) 10 may together or in any combination comprise an integral unit, and variations may be molded as a single piece. Furthermore, unless specified in a particular embodiment, each of these may have any desired location with respect to any other member. For example, in one embodiment, the retention member(s) 8 and/or tabs 10 may have a relatively central location, largely beneath the support member 6.

[0036] Advantages of the various embodiments described herein are numerous, and include, but are not limited to, providing a potential consumer the ability to comfortably wear a wearable merchandise item while it remains secured to its packaging, maintenance of pair integrity while allowing greater interaction with potential consumer, increased theft deterrence, increased efficiency in retail setting, and decreased waste. Further advantages include the possibility of reuse of the hanger system by the consumer, manufacturer, and/or retailer.

[0037] Embodiments of the invention, and the various components thereof may comprise any material or combination of materials known in the art. Furthermore, the various surfaces of embodiments of the hanger system 2 may be of any configuration known in the art, including decorative configurations, and configurations optimized for the operative connection of labels and advertising content (e.g., predetermined flat surfaces for the placement of stickers, etc.). The hanger system 2 and various components thereof may comprise any desired color, or combination of colors, and may also be transparent.

[0038] As used herein, the terms “merchandise hanger system,” “merchandise hanger,” and “hanger system” are used interchangeably. While the invention has been described with respect to a limited number of embodiments, those skilled in the art, having benefit of this disclosure, will appreciate that other embodiments can be devised which do not depart from the scope of the invention as disclosed herein. Accordingly, the scope of the invention should be limited only by the attached claims.

What is claimed is:

1. A merchandise hanger, comprising:
   a support member;
   a pair of retention members operatively connected to distal ends of the support member; and
   a pair of tabs, operatively connected to the distal ends of the pair of retention members.

2. The merchandise hanger of claim 1, further comprising at least one opening disposed in the support member.

3. The merchandise hanger of claim 1, wherein an upper surface of each of the pair of retention members is lower than a lower surface of the support member.

4. The merchandise hanger of claim 1, further comprising an indent formed in an outer surface of each of the pair of retention members.

5. The merchandise hanger of claim 1, wherein each of the pair of tabs has a configuration selected from an L-shape, a J-shape, and a U-shape.
6. The merchandise hanger of claim 1, wherein the operative connection of the pair of tabs comprises at least one selected from an ultrasonic weld, paired mating surfaces, and a set of mating elements.

7. The merchandise hanger of claim 1, wherein the pair of tabs comprise an increased surface area.

8. The merchandise hanger of claim 1, wherein at least one operative connection selected from the operative connection of the pair of retention members to the distal ends of the support member, and the operative connection of the pair of tabs to the retention members, comprises an integrally-formed unit.

9. The merchandise hanger of claim 1, further comprising a lip disposed in an upper portion of the support member, such lip having an increased thickness relative to an adjoining portion of the support member.

10. The merchandise hanger of claim 8, wherein the lip is configured to operatively connect to a predetermined configuration of a clip.

11. The merchandise hanger of claim 1, further comprising a texturing disposed on the surface an upper portion of the support member.

12. The merchandise hanger of claim 1, wherein a longitudinal axis of the pair of tabs differs from the longitudinal axis of the pair of retention members by at least 10 degrees.

13. The merchandise hanger system of claim 1, wherein a longitudinal axis of the pair of tabs is substantially perpendicular to the longitudinal axis of the pair of retention members.

14. A merchandise hanger system kit, comprising:

- a merchandise hanger, comprising a support member having a first distal end and a second distal end, the first distal end operatively connected to a first retention member, and the second distal end operatively connected to a second retention member;

- paired merchandise items, wherein a first individual item of the paired merchandise items comprises a suspension element configured to operatively connect to the first retention member, and a second individual item of the paired merchandise items comprises a suspension element configured to operatively connect to the second retention member; and

- at least one selected from (a) a fastener operatively connecting the paired merchandise items, and (b) tabs operatively connected to distal ends of the retention members.

15. The merchandise hanger system kit of claim 14, wherein the paired merchandise items are each configured to operatively connect the fastener.

16. The merchandise hanger system kit of claim 14, further comprising indents disposed on an outer surface of each of the tabs.

17. The merchandise hanger system kit of claim 14, further comprising securing devices operatively connected to the tabs such that a gap is formed between the securing devices and the retention members, such gap of sufficient size to accommodate a predetermined size of suspension element.

18. The merchandise hanger system kit of claim 14, wherein the fastener has a predetermined length sufficient to maintain a predetermined distance between the paired merchandise items when the paired merchandise items are operatively connected to the merchandise hanger.

19. A method for preparing paired merchandise for display, comprising:

- providing a hanger system having a support member operatively connected to at least one pair of retention members;

- passing each of the retention members through a suspension element operatively connected to a merchandise item; and

- securing the merchandise item to the hanger system.

20. The method of claim 19, wherein the step of securing the merchandise item to the hanger system comprises at least one selected from:

- (a) passing the merchandise item over a tab,

- (b) operatively connecting a securing device to the retention member, and

- (c) using a fastener to operatively connecting the merchandise item to a second merchandise item which is operatively connected to the hanger system, such that the pair of merchandise items will maintain a predetermined distance from each other, such distance sufficiently small to prevent reversal of the operative connection between each merchandise item and the hanger system.

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