

(12) STANDARD PATENT
(19) AUSTRALIAN PATENT OFFICE

(11) Application No. **AU 2009210594 B2**

(54) Title
Continuous strip of thermal wristband/label

(51) International Patent Classification(s)
G09F 3/00 (2006.01) **G09F 3/02** (2006.01)

(21) Application No: **2009210594** (22) Date of Filing: **2009.01.26**

(87) WIPO No: **WO09/099787**

(30) Priority Data

(31) Number	(32) Date	(33) Country
12/026,030	2008.02.05	US

(43) Publication Date: **2009.08.13**

(44) Accepted Journal Date: **2013.12.19**

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(56) Related Art
US 6641048 B1
US 7222448 B2
US 2004/0148836 A1

(12) INTERNATIONAL APPLICATION PUBLISHED UNDER THE PATENT COOPERATION TREATY (PCT)

(19) World Intellectual Property Organization
International Bureau



(43) International Publication Date
13 August 2009 (13.08.2009)

(10) International Publication Number
WO 2009/099787 A1

(51) International Patent Classification:
G09F 3/00 (2006.01) *G09F 3/02* (2006.01)

(21) International Application Number:
PCT/US2009/031979

(22) International Filing Date:
26 January 2009 (26.01.2009)

(25) Filing Language: English

(26) Publication Language: English

(30) Priority Data:
12/026,030 5 February 2008 (05.02.2008) US

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(81) Designated States (unless otherwise indicated, for every kind of national protection available): AE, AG, AL, AM, AO, AT, AU, AZ, BA, BB, BG, BH, BR, BW, BY, BZ, CA, CH, CN, CO, CR, CU, CZ, DE, DK, DM, DO, DZ, EC, EE, EG, ES, FI, GB, GD, GE, GH, GM, GT, HN, HR, HU, ID, IL, IN, IS, JP, KE, KG, KM, KN, KP, KR, KZ, LA, LC, LK, LR, LS, LT, LU, LY, MA, MD, ME, MG, MK, MN, MW, MX, MY, MZ, NA, NG, NI, NO, NZ, OM, PG, PH, PL, PT, RO, RS, RU, SC, SD, SE, SG, SK, SL, SM, ST, SV, SY, TJ, TM, TN, TR, TT, TZ, UA, UG, US, UZ, VC, VN, ZA, ZM, ZW.

(84) Designated States (unless otherwise indicated, for every kind of regional protection available): ARIPO (BW, GH, GM, KE, LS, MW, MZ, NA, SD, SL, SZ, TZ, UG, ZM, ZW), Eurasian (AM, AZ, BY, KG, KZ, MD, RU, TJ, TM), European (AT, BE, BG, CH, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, GB, GR, HR, HU, IE, IS, IT, LT, LU, LV, MC, MK, MT, NL, NO, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, TR), OAPI (BF, BJ, CF, CG, CI, CM, GA, GN, GQ, GW, ML, MR, NE, SN, TD, TG).

Published:

— with international search report (Art. 21(3))

(54) Title: CONTINUOUS STRIP OF THERMAL WRISTBAND/LABEL

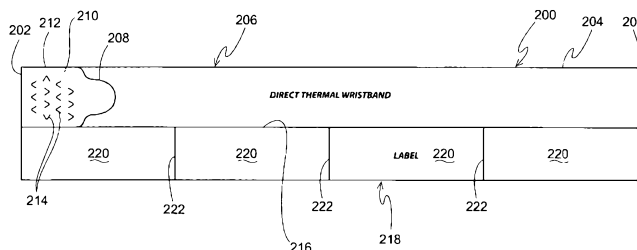


Fig. 2

(57) Abstract: A thermal printer processible combination wristband/label form (200) has a top portion comprising a wristband (204) which occupies substantially the entirety of thereof and a bottom portion comprising one of several alternative embodiments of labels (220). The label embodiments include a plurality of individually formed labels (220), a plurality of labels (220) occupying substantially the entirety of the bottom portion, and a die cut (222) defining a label portion with pairs of nicks spaced along an upper and lower border of the die cut and between which a user may tear off labels of a desired length including different lengths. The form (200) is produced in quantity and joined together into a fan fold strip having an overall width of a nominal two inches so as to be capable of being printed by relatively older thermal printers having a nominal two inch throat.

WO 2009/099787 A1

Continuous Strip of
Thermal Wristband/Label Forms

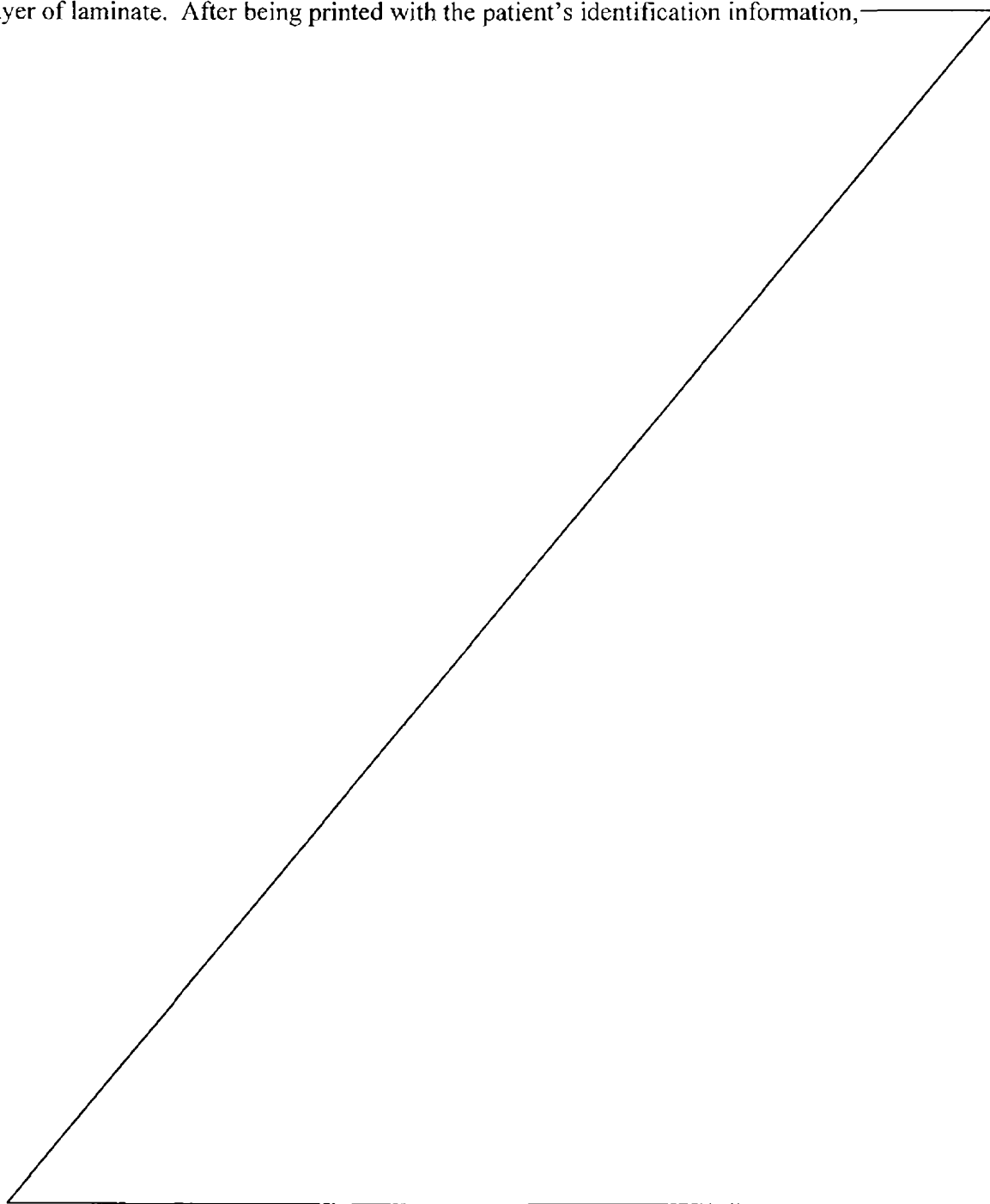
Background and Summary of the Invention:

The following discussion of the prior art is intended to place the invention in an appropriate context and to allow the unique characteristics and advantages of it to be more fully understood. However, any discussion of the prior art throughout the
5 specification should in no way be considered as an express or implied admission that such prior art is widely known or forms part of common general knowledge in the field.

Combination wristband/label forms have become well known in the business form and medical arts, and commercialized to great success, through the innovative
10 efforts of the inventor herein as well as others through the company which is the assignee hereof. Examples of the inventive wristband/label forms which have met with significant commercial success may be found in just a few representative US Patents which have already been issued, and for which multiple patent applications remain in prosecution. See, for example, issued US Pat. No. 7,017,293; 7,017,294;
15 7,047,682; 7,222,448; and 7,325,347.

While many of these wristband/label designs are intended for printer processing through a laser printer, with its generally universal capability to process forms of widely varying dimensions, a couple of these inventive designs have been particularly identified for printing by thermal printers. Some of these inventive
20 designs have also been adapted for use with thermal printers, with their more limited capability to process forms of varying sizes. One such example is shown in fig. 1

which depicts a fan fold, continuous strip 100 of a plurality of wristband/label
assemblies or forms 102, separated by a line of weakness 104 to facilitate each
assembly from the strip 100 after being printed. The wristband 106 is itself a self-
laminating design, with a center image-receiving area 108 die cut into a top face ply
5 and a laminating portion 110 having a pair of offset straps 112 die cut into a backing
layer of laminate. After being printed with the patient's identification information,



and then separation of the wristband 106 from the assembly 102, the laminating portion 110 is folded over the image receiving portion 108 and the self laminating wristband 106 is secured to the wearer's wrist with a patch of adhesive 114 on the ends of one or both of the straps 112. A wristband extender 116 is also formed in the
5 wristband portion and may be used to extend either strap 112 to accommodate patient's with bigger wrists. A bottom portion of the assembly has a plurality of self adhering labels 118 die cut into a label portion 120, for separate removal and use.

While this combination wristband/label design, as adapted for use with a thermal printer, has met with great commercial success, it's approximately four inch
10 width has limited its usability to only those thermal printers having a "throat" large enough to accept it. It has become widely accepted in the industry that combination wristband/label forms are best suited to medical applications as admitting a new patient virtually always creates a need not only for a wristband for the patient, but also labels for charts, specimen bottles, utensils, etc. The combo form contains both the
15 wristband and labels which may be printed up at the same time by a single printer to minimize any chance for error, and presented to the admitting personnel for patient in-processing. Thus, there is a long felt need for a combination form, or "combo" as it's called, in the thermal printer medical market. While many of the newer thermal printer designs are capable of accepting and printing a form as large as the
20 aforementioned design, there is a substantial installed base of older thermal printers which have a two inch throat and which are thus unable to accept and use this combination wristband/label form. In addition, as hospitals have been moving to bedside banding of patients utilizing mobile computers and printers on wheeled carts, there is a significant growth market for light, small-throat thermal printers that can be
25 easily mounted on such carts and moved between patient rooms. Thus, while the

inventors previous design has partially met this long, unsolved need, and has been received with great commercial success, it has not completely met the needs of the owners of smaller thermal printers.

Yet another factor to be considered with regard to the existing installed base is
5 the matter of wristband expense. For many users, their older thermal printer continues to work just fine and they are reluctant to spend the money to upgrade to a newer thermal printer, much less a laser printer. As cost is an issue for these users, there would be resistance to adopting the form described and shown in fig. 1 even if it could be made in a two inch format for the reason that its construction is more
10 complex than a simple non-laminating wristband and, hence, more expensive. Although the greater reliability, reduced need to replace wristbands, and other factors if fully considered would prove that the cost of the more complex form is more than justified, many users just can't get past the initial cost and use that factor exclusively to determine which wristband to buy.

15 The foregoing has created a long felt need for a wristband/label "combo" assembly/form which is capable of being processed through the significant installed based of thermal printers having a two inch throat. This need extends beyond the need of the installed base as newer installations with the smaller thermal printers represent a new application which is increasing this need. Yet another aspect to this
20 need is a combo form that is low cost, with relatively simple design wristbands and labels. Still another aspect of the need, which contributes to the cost, is to eliminate "wastage" or left over and unused materials upon use of the combo form. As the amount of material used in each wristband or label directly contributes to the cost, eliminating wastage can significantly lower the cost of the form.

As an additional solution to the unsolved needs of the owners of thermal printers, as at least partially described above, the inventor herein has succeeded in designing and developing a two inch wide combo form, with the wristband design being non-laminating but also of relatively simple construction so as to reduce cost, and with a label area of alternative embodiments one of which includes providing weakness points allowing a user to tear off labels of varying length and shape to suit the need. The wristband is preferably constructed to occupy the entirety of the wristband area of the combo form, with one end having a peel away tab for exposing adhesive to be used to secure the wristband about the wearer's wrist, to thereby eliminate wastage. The label area has been conceived in alternate embodiments. One embodiment comprises a two ply area with die cuts defining individually separable, self adhering labels; a second embodiment comprises a two ply construction with die cuts defining individually separable, self adhering labels with the labels occupying the entirety of the top ply to minimize wastage, and a third embodiment comprising a two ply construction with a die cut defining a label area with pairs of Vee shaped "nicks" spaced along the upper and lower border thereof to allow a user to conveniently tear the label area at a desired location to shape and size labels as needed. While preferably a plurality of these forms would be provided in a fan fold strip, they may also be provided either as a roll or even as individual forms.

20

While the principal advantages and features of the present invention have been briefly described above, a fuller understanding of the preferred embodiment of the invention may be attained by referring to the drawings and detailed description that follows.

25

Brief Description of the Drawings:

Figure 1 is a plan view depicting a four inch wide thermal combo form taken from a fan fold strip of a plurality thereof, with a top portion having a self laminating wristband and extender defined by die cuts and a bottom portion having die cuts
5 defining individually separable, self adhering labels, all in two ply construction comprising a face top ply and a laminate bottom ply; and

Figure 2 is a plan view depicting a two inch wide, two ply, thermal combo form taken from a fan fold strip of a plurality thereof, with the top area comprising a wristband with a peel away end tab to expose adhesive for securing it about a
10 wearer's wrist, and a bottom label area having a plurality of self adhering labels defined by die cuts; and

Figure 3 is a plan view depicting a two inch wide, two ply, thermal combo form taken from a fan fold strip of a plurality thereof, with the top area comprising a wristband with a peel away end tab to expose adhesive for securing it about a
15 wearer's wrist, and a bottom label area defined by a die cut with a plurality of pairs of nicks spaced along the upper and lower border thereof for tearing off labels of differing length.

Detailed Description of the Preferred Embodiment:

The four inch, combo thermal form with self laminating wristband has been described above, and is a good and valuable invention subject to patent protection with several patents issued and others pending, all of which have been assigned to the
5 assignee hereof. This form has been met with great commercial success and represents a significant improvement over the prior art.

The present invention is exemplified by the preferred embodiments shown in the next several figures. Figure 2 depicts a single two inch combo thermal form/assembly 200, but it is to be understood that preferably these form/assemblies
10 are provided joined end to end at their narrower end, in a fan fold strip for ready feeding into the throat of a thermal printer. For clarity, a single form is shown but multiple forms would typically be joined with a line of weakness 202 separating adjacent forms. The line of weakness 202 could be a line of perforation, a die cut or other similar type of construction as would allow for the ready separation of adjacent
15 forms after being processed by a thermal printer but which would be strong enough to retain the forms together in a fan fold strip before, during and after printing. As used herein, the term die cut, perforation, line of weakness is meant to include any of the other terms as would be deemed appropriate by one of ordinary skill in the art.

As mentioned, the combo thermal form depicted in fig. 2 includes a wristband
20 204 preferably of two or three ply construction with one of said plies 206 being suitable to receive and retain an imprint by a thermal printer printing in a conventional fashion. Examples of materials from which each ply may be constructed include polypropylene for the thermal imaging ply and polyester for the backing ply. As is known in the art, a thermal print ply may be coated with a protective coating, such as
25 a lacquer coating, to protect the print surface from being "spoiled" by extraneous

environmental assaults such as from liquids, fluids, UV, etc. Yet another technique for protecting the thermally printed surface is to provide a ply of polyester or polypropylene, such as for example in a ½ mil. or even thinner size to the same reasons. As a protective coating or ply may or may not be applied, as a matter of choice, for purposes of this disclosure it will be considered as an option which is not central to the invention. One of the two plies has a die cut 208 at an end of the wristband defining a peel away tab 210 for exposing a layer of adhesive 212 for securing the wristband 204 to a wearer's wrist. Another series of die cuts 214 in the ply underlying the tab 210 create a series of pull away portions thereof so that after being secured and adhered to the other end, these pull away portions would separate should the adhesive seal be broken. This provides a security seal to indicate when the wristband has been removed from the wearer and re-attached and helps discourage wristband wearers from swapping wristbands, for example, and thereby ensure that once banded, the wearer is wearing his correct wristband.

As shown in fig. 2, the wristband 204 comprises the entirety of the top area of the form 200. This eliminates wastage and helps reduce cost. Also, its design allows it to make full use of the allotted one inch width, thereby maximizing the space allotted for printing of patient information, etc. In the preferred embodiment the wristband 204 occupies one half the width of the form, or a nominal one inch, while the other area as described below occupies another nominal one inch of width. However, this is to some extent a matter of design choice and the invention shall not be considered as limited in any manner thereby.

A die cut 216 running longitudinally along the length of the form 200 separates the top area or wristband 204 from the bottom or label area 218. In fig. 2, the label area 218 has a plurality of self adhering labels 220 formed by a plurality of

die cuts 222. The labels 220 occupy the entirety of the label area 218, thereby eliminating wastage. Alternately, a series of die cuts (not shown), could be used to define a series of separated labels of any design of choice, limited solely by the overall dimensions of the label area 218, as would be apparent to one of ordinary skill. As mentioned above, the term die cut should be understood as encompassing other similar lines of weakness as is typically used in forms of these kind, such as perforations, etc.

As shown in fig. 3, the same wristband 204 occupies the entirety of the top area of the form 200, but a different embodiment is shown for the label area 218. A die cut 224 extends around the periphery of the label area 218, with an upper border 226 and a lower border 228 having a series of pairs of nicks 230 spaced therealong. Upon separation of the wristband 204, the label area may be conveniently torn from one nick 230 in the upper border 226 to another nick 230 in the bottom border 228 to thereby size a label of any desired length, multiple labels of differing length, etc. In fact, although somewhat less convenient, the user may tear from one nick to another nick offset from the first nick to thereby create a label having an oblique end. Furthermore, pairs of nicks in any desired arrangement could be provided to allow for pre-designated label length or design. While nicks have been depicted as generally being of a rounded "Vee" shape, other shapes could conveniently be used with the desire being to create points of weakness along the upper and lower borders.

While in its preferred embodiment the combo thermal form invention is described as having a nominal two inch width or height, in a broader sense the invention should not be considered as so limited in view of its other novel and patentable features.

While the principal advantages and features of the present invention have been described herein in the form of preferred embodiments, one of ordinary skill in the art could readily determine variations or modifications to the invention relying on the teaching of this disclosure and those variations and features should be considered as
5 part of the present invention. For example, while the preferred embodiment is disclosed as preferably having a width of a nominal two inches divided substantially equally between the wristband and labels, that is not intended to be an exact or limiting dimension except as it shall be recited in the claims, it only being intended to be sufficiently sized overall to be processed by a thermal printer. The materials
10 disclosed are preferred but other materials could be used as well. Protective coatings or plies could be added to the form without departing from the spirit of the concept. Accordingly, the invention is intended to be limited solely by the scope of the claims appended hereto and their legal equivalents.

In the claims below and the description herein, any one of the terms
15 "comprising", "comprised of, or "which comprises" is an open term that means including at least the elements/features that follow, but not excluding others. Thus, the term "comprising", when used in the claims, should not be interpreted as being limitative to the means or elements or steps listed thereafter. For example, the scope of the expression "a device comprising A and B" should not be limited to devices
20 consisting only of elements A and B. Similarly, any one of the terms "including", "which includes" or "that includes" as used herein is also an open term that also means including at least the elements/features that follow the term, but not excluding others. Thus, "including" is synonymous with and means the same as "comprising".

What is claimed is:

1. A strip of a plurality of thermal printer processible wristband/label assemblies, said wristband/label assemblies being joined at their ends to adjacent wristband/label assemblies to form the strip with a line of weakness separating adjacent assemblies, each of said wristband/label assemblies comprising (i) a wristband area comprising a full length wristband with its longest dimension extending between said adjoining wristband/label assemblies and comprising substantially the entirety of the wristband area, wherein the full length wristband of at least one of said wristband/label assemblies comprises a non-laminating wristband and (ii) a label area comprising a label portion extending substantially the full length of the wristband/label assembly, and (iii) a second line of weakness extending between said adjoining wristband/label assembly ends and separating said wristband area from said label area thereby facilitating their ready separation from each other, each of said wristband/label assemblies being substantially rectangular shaped and oriented to be fed into said thermal printer from its shortest dimension to thereby maximize the size of each wristband/label assembly processible in a continuous manner by said thermal printer.
2. The strip of claim 1, wherein at least some of the label portions of the wristband/label assemblies have weakness points to facilitate the separation of one or more labels from said label area, at least some of said weakness points comprising a plurality of die cuts defining said one or more labels.
3. The strip of claim 1, further comprising a die cut extending around a periphery of at least some of the label areas, said die cut extending around the periphery of at least some of the label areas includes an upper boarder, a lower boarder; said weakness points comprising a series of nicks positioned along the upper and lower border of the die cut extending around a periphery of at least some of the label areas to facilitate tearing of the label area between a pair of nicks to thereby variably size a label.
4. The strip of claim 3 wherein at least some of said nicks are irregularly spaced along the at least one of said boarders to thereby facilitating the formation of variable length labels.

5. The strip of any one of claims 2 to 4, wherein the wristband comprises the entirety of the wristband area.
6. The strip of any one of the preceding claims wherein at least some of said wristband/label assemblies are comprised of only two plies with each of said plies being made of either polypropylene or polyester.
7. The strip of any one of claims 2 to 5 wherein each of said wristband area and said label area are constructed of materials suitable for thermal printing, and wherein the width of each of said assemblies are sized to substantially fill a typical opening for a thermal printer.
8. The strip of claim 7 wherein the width of said strip is nominally two inches and wherein each of the wristband area and the label area occupies approximately one inch of the overall strip width.
9. A fan fold, continuous strip of a plurality of thermal printer processible wristband/label business forms, said wristband/label forms being generally rectangularly shaped and being joined at their narrower ends to adjacent wristband/label forms to form the strip with a die cut separating adjacent forms, each of said wristband/label forms comprising two longitudinal areas comprising (i) a wristband area comprising a full length wristband extending substantially the full length of the form and occupying substantially the entirety of the wristband area, wherein the full length wristband of at least one of said wristband/label forms comprises a non-laminating wristband and (ii) a label area comprising a label portion extending substantially the full length of the form; each of said areas having substantially the same width of a nominal one inch, and a die cut separating said areas thereby facilitating their ready separation from each other and the form.
10. The strip of claim 9 wherein the wristband comprises the entirety of the wristband area and the label portion has a plurality of pairs of nicks spaced along an upper and lower border thereof, said nicks facilitating tearing of said label portion there between to create labels of a desired size.

11. The strip of claim 10 wherein the label portion has a plurality of pairs of nicks spaced along an upper and lower border thereof, said nicks facilitating tearing of said label portion there between to create labels of a variable size.
12. The strip of claim 11 wherein said nicks are substantially evenly spaced along the borders and aligned with each other.
13. The strip of any one of claims 9 to 12 wherein each of said business forms is comprised of two plies, each of said plies being made of film material.
14. The strip of claim 13 wherein at least one of said plies is adapted to receive a thermal image and further comprising a protective layer covering said at least one ply.
15. The strip of claim 14 wherein said protective layer comprises a coating.
16. The strip of claim 14 or claim 15 wherein said protective layer comprises a ply of either polyester or polypropylene.
17. A fan fold, continuous strip of a plurality of thermal printer processible wristband/label business forms, said wristband/label forms being generally rectangularly shaped and being joined at their narrower ends to adjacent wristband/label forms to form the strip with a die cut separating adjacent forms, each of said wristband/label forms comprising two longitudinal areas comprising (i) a wristband area comprising a full length wristband extending substantially the full length and width of the wristband area and occupying substantially the entirety of the wristband area, wherein the full length wristband of at least one of said wristband/label forms comprises a non-laminating wristband and (ii) a label area comprising a label portion extending substantially the full length and width of the label area; and a die cut separating said areas thereby facilitating their ready separation from each other and the form.
18. The fan fold strip form of claim 17 wherein each of said areas has substantially the same width of a nominal one inch, thereby making the overall form width nominally two inches.

19. The fan fold strip form of claim 17 or claim 18 wherein each of said business forms is comprised of two plies, each of said plies being made of a film material.
20. The fan fold strip form of any one of claims 17 to 19 wherein a plurality of said business forms is comprised of two plies, each of said plies being made of a film material.
21. The strip of any one of claims 2 to 4, wherein the label portion comprises the entirety of the label area.
22. The strip of any one of claims 2 to 4, wherein the wristband comprises the entirety of the wristband area and the label portion comprises the entirety of the label area.
23. The strip of claim 17, wherein the wristband comprises the entirety of the wristband area.
24. The strip of claim 17, wherein the label portion comprises the entirety of the label area.
25. The strip of claim 17, wherein the wristband comprises the entirety of the wristband area and the label portion comprises the entirety of the label area.
26. A strip of a plurality of thermal printer processible wristband/label assemblies substantially as herein described and with reference to the drawings, with the exception of Figure 1.
27. A fan fold, continuous strip of a plurality of thermal printer processible wristband/label business forms substantially as herein described and with reference to the drawings, with the exception of Figure 1.

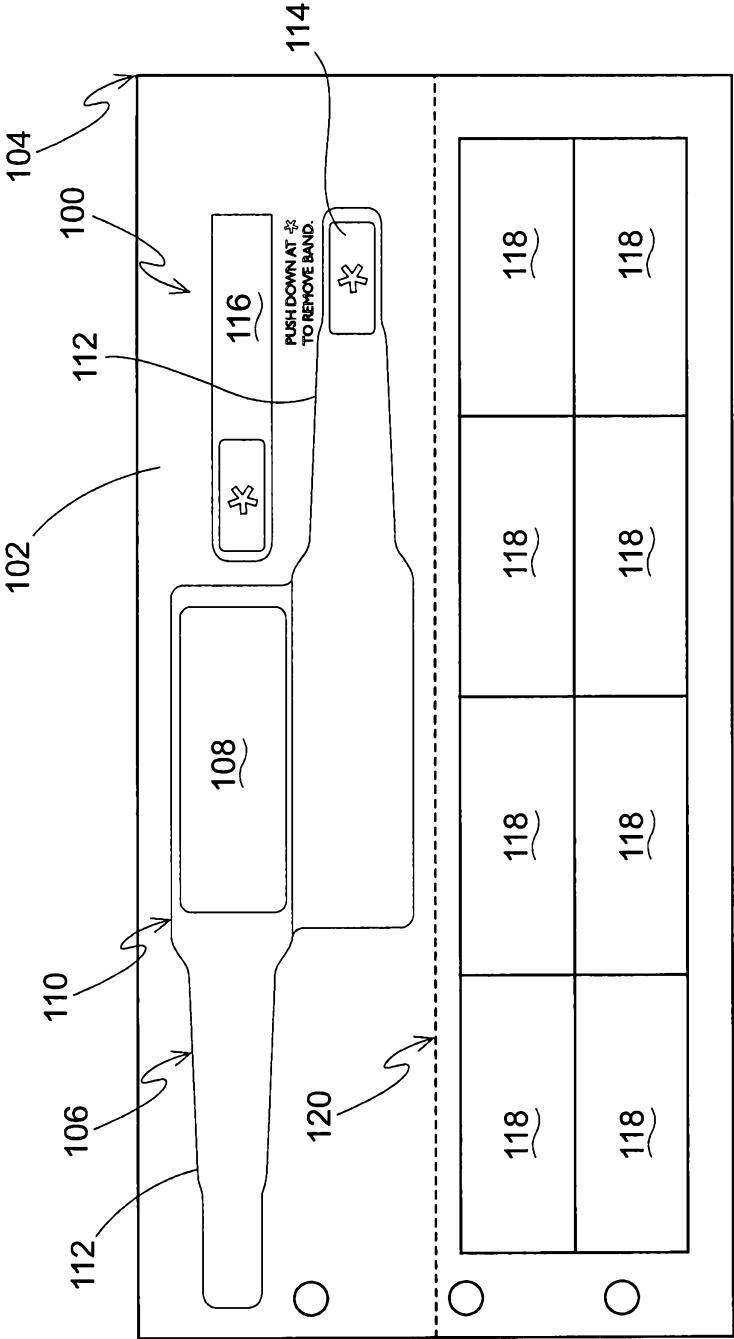


Fig. 1

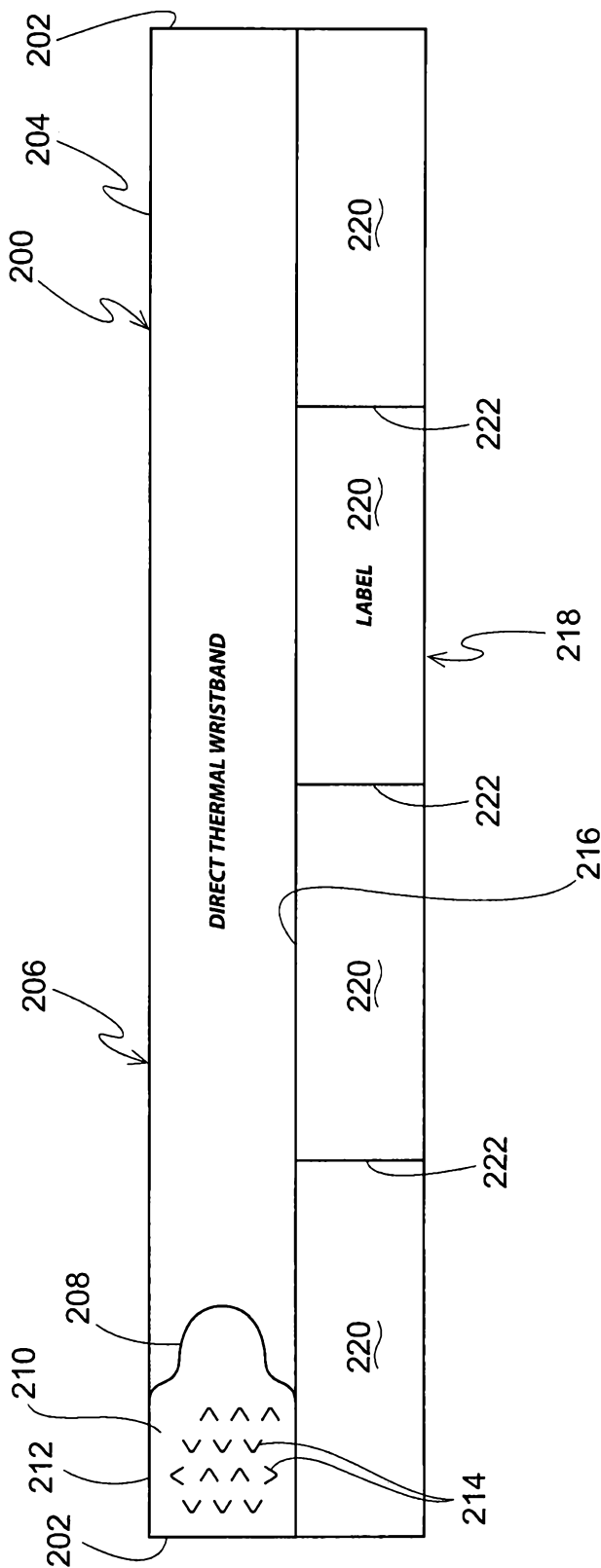


Fig. 2

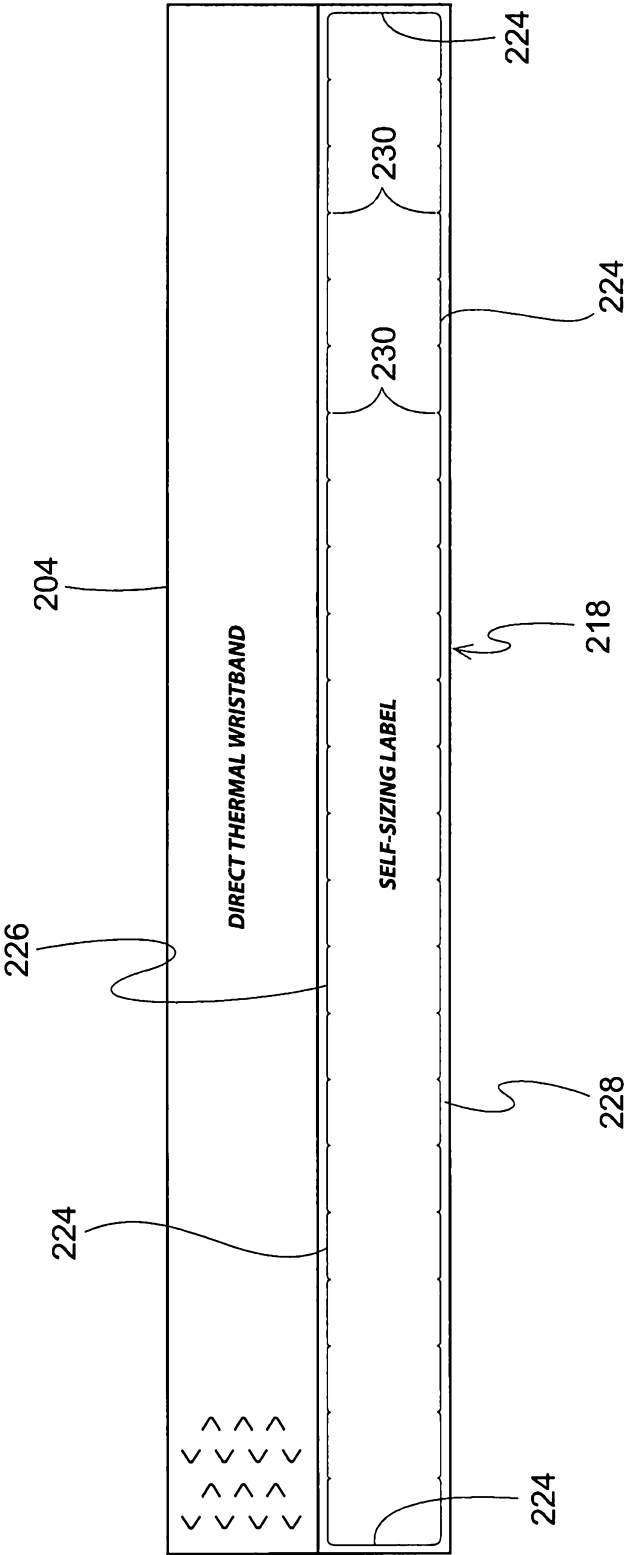


Fig. 3