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

(19) World Intellectual Property Organization
International Bureau

(43) International Publication Date
4 August 2005 (04.08.2005)

PCT

(10) International Publication Number
WO 2005/070069 A2

(51) International Patent Classification: Not classified

(21) International Application Number:
PCT/US2005/000431

(22) International Filing Date: 7 January 2005 (07.01.2005)

(25) Filing Language: English

(26) Publication Language: English

(30) Priority Data:
60/535,479 9 January 2004 (09.01.2004) US

(71) Applicant *(for all designated States except US)*: **WM. WRIGLEY JR. COMPANY** [US/US]; Wrigley Building, 410 North Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60611-4287 (US).

(72) Inventors; and
(75) Inventors/Applicants *(for US only)*: **MASKELL, William J.** [GB/GB]; 55a Highworth Road, London Middlesex N11 2SN (GB). **SALMON, David** [GB/GB]; 39 Fearnley Street, Watford Hertfordshire WD18 ORB (GB).

(74) Agents: **BARRETT, Robert M.** et al.; Bell, Boyd & Lloyd LLC, P.O. Box 1135, Chicago, Illinois 60690-1135 (US).

(81) Designated States *(unless otherwise indicated, for every kind of national protection available)*: AE, AG, AL, AM, AT, AU, AZ, BA, BB, BG, BR, BW, BY, BZ, CA, CH, CN, CO, CR, CU, CZ, DE, DK, DM, DZ, EC, EE, EG, ES, FI, GB, GD, GE, GH, GM, HR, HU, ID, IL, IN, IS, JP, KE, KG, KP, KR, KZ, LC, LK, LR, LS, LT, LU, LV, MA, MD, MG, MK, MN, MW, MX, MZ, NA, NI, NO, NZ, OM, PG, PH, PL, PT, RO, RU, SC, SD, SE, SG, SK, SL, SY, TJ, TM, TN, TR, TT, TZ, UA, UG, US, UZ, VC, VN, YU, 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, HU, IE, IS, IT, LT, LU, MC, NL, 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:
— *without international search report and to be republished upon receipt of that report*

For two-letter codes and other abbreviations, refer to the "Guidance Notes on Codes and Abbreviations" appearing at the beginning of each regular issue of the PCT Gazette.

WO 2005/070069 A2

(54) Title: CONFECTIONARY PACKAGES AND METHODS FOR DISPENSING CONFECTIONARY PRODUCTS

(57) Abstract: A first product dispenser is provided and includes a first housing sized to hold a plurality of confectionary products, a second housing sized to hold a plurality of the confectionary products and a member holding the first and second housings together so that the first and second housings can each be translated sequentially along the divider to dispense one of the products. A second product dispenser is provided and includes a housing sized to hold a plurality of the confectionary products, the housing including a top and a base separated by a plurality of product dividers, and a belt held by the housing so that an opening in the belt is manually and selectively able to be rotated into registry between the dividers to dispense one of the products.

SPECIFICATION

TITLE OF THE INVENTION

CONFECTIONARY PACKAGES AND METHODS FOR DISPENSING CONFECTIONARY PRODUCTS

COPYRIGHT NOTICE

[0001] A portion of the disclosure of this patent document contains or may contain material which is subject to copyright protection. The copyright owner has no objection to the photocopy reproduction by anyone of the patent document or the patent disclosure in exactly the form it appears in the Patent and Trademark Office patent file or records, but otherwise reserves all copyright rights whatsoever.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0002] The present invention relates to product dispensing and more particularly to apparatuses and methods for dispensing confectionary products and medicaments.

[0003] It is known to package confectionary products, such as gum, in small packages. Small packages enable the consumer to readily transport the product, to maintain the product in a single, accessible place, and to easily ascertain the available supply of products.

[0004] Historically, much confectionary packaging of small products and especially gum products included individually wrapping such products and then placing the individually wrapped products inside of a main package. The main package provided a suitable area for branding and product information. The individual wrappers ensured that each product or piece was kept fresh and kept separate from the other pieces, that is, kept the pieces from sticking or clumping together. That kind of packaging has a number of drawbacks. First, the individual wrappers are labor and material intensive. Second, the packages tend to create a lot of waste. Also, the packages can be cumbersome and noisy in certain environments. For example, students can find the packages awkward and noisy to open in a classroom.

[0005] More recently, confectionary products and medicaments have been packaged without individual wrappers in so-called push packs or blister packs.

Packaging of this type has historically been used for medicine and other types of products shaped in tablet form. The blister packs include compartments, recesses or cups that each receive one tablet or the like. Afterward, the packaging is sealed with a cover. The cover is typically sealed to flange-like areas surrounding recesses or cups. The seal is typically continuous, for example, to maintain a drug tablet in an air-tight state.

[0006] The blister pack compartments or recesses have typically been made of plastic or a plastic composite, while the cover in many instances has been made of aluminum foil or an aluminum-containing foil composite. The aluminum or composite foil enables the user to push a single product from the compartment or recess side of the package through the foil, which ruptures. The continuous seal around the compartments or recesses stops the foil from rupturing too much, exposing a product that is not intended to be consumed.

[0007] While blister-type packaging is well suited for medicine or drug tablets, such packaging is not as well-suited for confectionary products that are consumed primarily for enjoyment, especially by kids and teenagers. For one reason, blister packs tend to be bulky and not as compact as typical stick or block-type gum packages. Also, the pushing of the plastic compartment to pop the aluminum foil is somewhat cumbersome and noisy and therefore undesirable to younger people as discussed above.

[0008] Typical blister packaging is also somewhat of an overkill for confectionary products consumed for enjoyment. While it is desirable to keep individual, unwrapped confectionary products from sticking to each other, it is not necessary to maintain those products in as air-tight a state as with drugs or medicine. Accordingly, the continuous seal typically present with blister packs may not be necessary.

[0009] A need therefore exists for a confectionary product package, other than a blister-type package, that holds, separates and dispenses individually unwrapped products.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0010] The present invention provides multiple apparatuses and methods for dispensing products, such as products that are individually unpackaged. The products

in one embodiment are confectionary products, such as gum. The teachings of the present invention, however, are not dependent upon the products being any particular type as long as the products can fit within the product dispensers described herein. The dispensers herein, regardless of what product is being dispensed, are configured to be highly functional, to have an aesthetic element, and to provide a suitable tactile feel for the user and consumer.

[0011] It is believed that users of confectionary products, and in particular younger users, find certain features desirable and undesirable in the packaging of products consumed on a daily basis, such as comestible products or gum products. Specifically, it is believed that consumers desire a compact shape for easy, everyday storage. It is an added benefit to the manufacturer if the shape is also innovative and/or sleek looking. Such a shape gains customer attention. Furthermore, it is desirable to have a dispenser that is intuitive and easy to determine how to use. Still further, consumers, especially young consumers, desire the dispenser to be quiet and to not require too much manipulation, so that the products can be dispensed in an easy and discrete manner.

[0012] Moreover, control over product dispensing is important. That is, consumers want to be able dispense only a desired amount of product. To that end, especially in the case of individually unpackaged products, it is desirable that the products do not stick or clump together. One-handed operation is also desirable.

[0013] According to those goals, the present invention provides in one embodiment a dispenser that includes two halves or housings that each hold a plurality of products. A member is located between the two halves or housings and slidingly couples to those housings. The housings in one embodiment are translucent or transparent, so that the consumer can see how much product remains in the package.

[0014] The member of the sliding dispenser includes at one end a tamper proof seal and at the other end a wall or stop. The wall or stop provides leverage for the user to push, with a single hand, a first housing against the second housing, which moves the first housing, breaking the tamper resistant tab and enabling the housing to slide past the member. The housings are open at their inner edges facing the member, so that when one of the housings is slid past the member, a product can fall from the moved housing.

[0015] The dispenser is structured in such a way that the user can move the housings alternatingly to dispense products alternatingly from the housings of the dispenser. Or, the user can dispense each product in one housing or half of the dispenser before dispensing a single product from the other housing or half of the dispenser. In an embodiment multiple tamper resistant tabs are provided so that the consumer only has to break one half of the seal if the consumer desires to deplete one housing of product completely before sliding the second housing.

[0016] In one embodiment, the housing includes dividers that compartmentalize and separate the products. In another embodiment, the housings and products are configured so that the products can abut one another and still be dispensed without sticking or clumping. The first dispenser, it should be appreciated, provides a first method for dispensing individual products and is constructed according to a first method, each of which is based on two housings or halves sliding against an intermediate member that holds the housings in a slidingly coupled manner.

[0017] A second dispensing apparatus, method of dispensing and method of producing a product dispenser is also provided. Here, instead of sliding two housings against one another, a belt defining a hole or aperture is fitted snuggly around a housing having a top and base separated by a guide. The guide is continuous around end portions of the housing, which are semi-circular, ovular, elliptical or otherwise suitable to frictionally receive a sliding belt. The guide at the straight dispensing sections between the top and bottom of the housing, however, opens to enable a product to be dispensed from the dispenser when the hole or aperture defined by the belt is placed in registry with the product.

[0018] In one embodiment, a plurality of rows of products are stored within the housing, wherein the rows can be divided by a divider. Products within each row can also be divided from one another or alternatively allowed to abut each other. In any case, the user can move the belt to dispense the products one by one, skip over certain products, alternate dispensing between the separate rows of products and any combination thereof. Manipulating the belt is intuitive, highly controllable via one hand and quiet.

[0019] The two dispensers share various features and advantages. The dual housings of the sliding dispenser, and the top and base of the rotating dispenser, can be

identical components or halves, reducing the cost of manufacture. The respective sliding and rotational motions in one embodiment are provided with ribbed or serrated projections that add a tactile feel to the dispensing motion. Further, such projections help hold the dispensers closed when they are not being used and open to a certain registry when a product is being dispensed.

[0020] It is therefore an advantage of the present invention to provide a product dispenser for dispensing individually unwrapped products, where the products do not stick to one another or clump.

[0021] It is another advantage of the present invention to provide dispensers that are compact and easily stored.

[0022] It is a further advantage of the present invention to provide innovative dispensers that are enjoyable to operate, have "play" value, and that gain customer attention.

[0023] It is a further advantage of the present invention to provide product dispensers that are intuitive to use.

[0024] Moreover, it is an advantage of the present invention to provide dispensers that are quiet both when being transported and when dispensing gum.

[0025] Still further, it is an advantage of the present invention to provide product dispensers that are controllable to dispense only a desired amount of product.

[0026] Yet further, it is an advantage of the present invention to provide product dispensers that dispense products via gravity alone without agitation.

[0027] Furthermore, it is an advantage of the present invention to provide product dispensers that can be maneuvered and manipulated with one hand.

[0028] Additional features and advantages of the present invention are described in, and will be apparent from, the following Detailed Description of the Invention and the figures.

[0029] Additional features and advantages of the present invention are described in, and will be apparent from, the following Detailed Description of the Invention and the figures.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE FIGURES

[0030] Fig. 1 illustrates a top perspective and assembled view of one embodiment of the product dispenser of the present invention.

[0031] Fig. 2 illustrates a bottom perspective and exploded view of the product dispenser of Fig. 1.

[0032] Fig. 3 illustrates a top perspective view of the dispenser of Fig. 1, which has been partially maneuvered to break a tamper proof tab.

[0033] Fig. 4 illustrates a top perspective view of the dispenser of Fig. 1, showing the method of operation and assembly of the dispenser, which is dispensing one of the products.

[0034] Fig. 5 illustrates a top perspective and assembled view of a second embodiment of the product dispenser of the present invention, which has a rotating belt located at a parked or non-dispensing position.

[0035] Fig. 6 illustrates the top perspective view of the dispenser shown in Fig. 5, wherein the rotatable belt of the dispenser has been moved in registry with a product that has been dispensed from the dispenser.

[0036] Fig. 7 is a front perspective and exploded view of the dispenser of Fig. 5, showing the separated dispenser lid, base and rotating belt.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0037] The present invention provides multiple apparatuses and methods for dispensing confectionary products, such as gum and the like. The dispensers are well suited for dispensing individual products that are unwrapped. The present invention is expressly not limited, however, to dispensers and methods for dispensing individually unwrapped products. The dispensers and methods work equally as well with products that are individually wrapped. While the dispensers are particularly well suited to dispense individual gum products, the dispensers are also operable to dispense other types of confectionary products, such as candy and chocolate. Moreover, the products can be or include a medicament, such as gum having additives for the whitening of teeth. Still further, the dispenser can also be used to dispense drugs, for example, in tablet form. Furthermore, the dispenser can be used to dispense non-edible products, such as small household items or coins.

[0038] Referring now to the drawings and in particular to Figs. 1 to 4, one embodiment of a dispenser of the present invention is illustrated by dispenser 10. Dispenser 10 includes a first housing 12 and a second housing 14. Housings 12 and 14 are made of any suitable type of plastic, paper, cardboard, rubber, metal, ceramic or

composite material. In one embodiment, housings 12 and 14 are smooth, transparent or translucent plastic housings. Being at least translucent enables a consumer to see how many individual products 16 remain within dispenser 10. Housings 12 and 14 can be tinted or colored and still enable the consumer to view products 16 contained within. In an alternative embodiment, housings 12 and 14 are opaque. Additionally, the material of housings 12 and 14 can be coated or treated to be resistant to ultraviolet light, for example, to help prevent products 16 from being heated, becoming tacky or melting. The insides of housings 12 and 14 can also be coated to help dispense products 16 readily and via gravity alone.

[0039] Housings 12 and 14 are held together by a member 18. Member 18 includes a top 20 and a bottom 22, which are separated by a divider 24. Member 18 also has a first end 26 and a second end 28. Member 18 is made of any of the materials listed above and in various preferred embodiments is paper, foil, cardboard or any combination thereof. Member 18 includes branding or design indicia 58, which can be printed directly thereon or be provided on a separate label that is adhered to member 18.

[0040] As seen in Fig. 3, the first end 26 of member 18 includes a tamper resistant tab 30 that breaks or tears away when dispenser 10 is used initially. Tab 30 can be made of any suitable material, such as paper, cardboard or foil. Tab 30 can be made of the same or of a different material as member 18. For example, top 20, bottom 22 and divider 24 can be constructed of a first material, such as cardboard or plastic, while tab 30 is constructed of a second material, such as paper or foil.

[0041] Tab 30 is connected to member 18 such that tab 30 breaks free when the user slides either housing 12 or housing 14, without requiring an excessive amount of force from the user. On the other hand, tab 30 is chemically or mechanically connected to member 18 sufficiently so that tab 30 does not break or rupture inadvertently via shipping or before the user has an opportunity to dispense one of the products 16 from dispenser 10. Tab 30 can be sealed to bridge 24 and member 18 so that only one side of tab 30 opens when either housing 12 or 14 is moved initially. Alternatively, separate tamper resistant tabs 30 are provided, one for each housing. In any event, dispenser 10 can be made so that only one tamper proof tab is broken as long as only one housing 12 or 14 is moved.

[0042] Fig. 2 illustrates that end 28 of member 18 includes a wall or stop 32. Figs. 3 and 4 illustrate that either one of housings 12 or 14 can be pushed in from end 28 of member 18 and out past end 26 of member 18. Stop 32 prevents either of housings 12 or 14 from being pushed past end 28 of member 18. Stop 32 also provides a fixed surface against which the user can move either housing 12 or 14 against the other of housing 12 or 14. That is, if stop 32 were not present and the user attempted to slide housing 12 against housing 14, both housings would slide in opposite directions, preventing the user from achieving the desired movement of one of the housings to open and dispense a product 16 from within.

[0043] Grips 34 are provided along the outer edges of housings 12 and 14 to aid the consumer in grasping and sliding the housings. In one embodiment, grips 34 are made of rubber or other type of material that is relatively soft and frictionally suitable to be grasped and pushed. Alternatively, grips 34 could be made of plastic, metal, paper, cardboard, foil or other material. While housings 12 and 14 are translucent or transparent in one embodiment, grips 34 can be opaque if desired. Grips 34 also include ribs 36 or other types of knurls or projections that also aid the user in grasping and moving housings 12 and 14 with respect to member 18 and with respect to each other.

[0044] Fig. 2 illustrates one possible method of coupling housings 12 and 14 in a slideable type of engagement with member 18. Housing 14 is shown having a raised lip 38 that fits within a track 40 extending downwardly from top 20 (not seen) on both sides of divider 24 of member 18. Second tracks 40 are also provided and extend upward from bottom 22 on both sides of divider 24 of member 18. Those second tracks 40 engage second lips 38 extending from and along the bottom of housings 12 and 14. In an alternative embodiment, if either housings 12, 14 or member 18 is sufficiently thick, the thick piece can define a groove that couples with a lip of the other piece to provide the desired sliding engagement. Two or more adjacent lips 38 can alternatively be provided to fit with one or more adjacent track 40 as needed to provide a stable sliding motion between member 18 and housings 12 and 14. Lips 38 and tracks 40 can also be flip-flopped so that housings 12 and 14 define or include the tracks, while member 18 defines or includes the lips 38.

[0045] An alternative serrated lip 42 is illustrated on housing 12. Serrated lip 42 couples with one or more mating serrated lip or track extending down from the top 20 (not illustrated) of member 18. The serrated lip 42 serves two purposes. First, it helps the housings 12 and 14 to remain in a closed position with respect to member 18 when dispenser 10 is not being used or in an open position to dispense a product 16. That is, the serrations prevent housings 12 and 14 from inadvertently sliding open or closed after tab 30 has been removed, thereby preventing products 16 from being dispensed inadvertently and preventing the housings from closing before a product has been dispensed.

[0046] The serrated lip 42, when being slid along a mating lip of member 18, also provides a tactile sensation to the user. It should be appreciated that the tactile sensation can be created via any suitable type of projections, bumps, indentations and other non-uniformities. Such tactile sensation may aid the operation of dispenser 10, for example, by enabling the user to feel and/or hear an amount of movement as opposed to being forced to visually determine how far the housing has been slid. One goal of the dispenser 10 of the present invention is to provide a dispenser that is intuitive and easily maneuvered, preferably with one hand.

[0047] In one preferred embodiment, housings 12 and 14 are identical structures. Fig. 2 shows that the outer edges of the housings include indentations 44 that are contoured to receive grips 34. Grips 34 can be adhered to housings 12 or 14 and/or snap or pressure fit in place. Alternatively, grips 34 and housings 12 and 14 can be heat sealed, sonically sealed, sealed via radio frequency welding or connected via any other suitable means. As seen in Figs. 2, 3 and 4, an inner side 46 of housings 12 and 14 is open so that a product 16 can be dispensed though the open side 46 when the respective housing is slid past end 26 of member 18.

[0048] Although not illustrated, housings 12 and 14 can include separators that are placed between products 16 to partially or completely isolate the products from one another. Alternatively, the clearance between the housings 12 and 14 and the thickness of the products 16 is sized such that it is difficult or impossible for one of the products 16 to become unaligned within the housings. To that end, the products 16 can also be tightly laterally packed within the housings. As illustrated, products 16

can also be tapered at their edges to minimize the amount of contact area between adjacent or abutting products 16.

[0049] The products 16 or the inner surfaces of housings 12 and 14 can be coated, made smooth or otherwise adapted to reduce the amount of friction between products 16 and such inner surfaces. In one preferred embodiment, the interface between products 16 and housings 12 and 14 is such that the products are readily dispensed due only to the force of gravity and do not require the user to shake dispenser 10 and potentially create noise. Also, dispenser 10 enables a single product, or multiple products if desired, to be dispensed readily without sticking or clumping.

[0050] It is believed that dispenser 10 provides a desirable apparatus especially for younger consumers for many reasons. One reason is that dispenser 10 has a certain amount of "play" value, wherein the package 10 is fun to maneuver and manipulate. The tactile feedback of the relative sliding motion also enhances such play value. To that end, the user can dispense products alternatingly from housings 12 and 14, dispense all products from one housing before dispensing any products from the other or dispense products in any desired combination or sequence.

[0051] Referring now to Figs. 5 to 7, another embodiment for dispensing products 16 is illustrated by dispenser 50. Products 16 can be any of the products described above for use in connection with dispenser 10, such as any type of confectionary product, a medicament, a combination thereof, a tablet or even a non-edible type of product. Dispenser 50 includes a lid 52 and a base 54, which are made of any of the materials described above for housings 12 and 14. In one preferred embodiment, lid 52 and base 54 are translucent or transparent, so that a user can look into package 50 to determine how many products 16 remain.

[0052] Dispenser 50 differs from dispenser 10 in that the product and branding information 58 is printed or otherwise marked on the plastic or other type of housing material of lid 52 and/or base 54. Such branding or markings 58 are provided alternatively on lid 52 and/or base 54 via a separate label adhered to the lid and/or base. In any event, dispensers 10 and 50 both provide ample space for marking any suitable design, trademark, trade name, etc. Such markings 58 can also include functional markings, such as arrows pointing in the translational direction of travel in

connection with dispenser 10 and a preferred rotational direction of travel of a belt 56 with respect to dispenser 50.

[0053] Belt 56 alternatively or additionally can include directional markings 60, indicating a preferred direction of rotational motion for the belt. Markings 60 in one embodiment are projections that double as gripping apparatuses, which help to increase friction and tactile feel provided by belt 56 to the user. Belt 56 in one embodiment is rubber, plastic, paper or any of the materials described above in connection with dispenser 10. In a further alternative embodiment, there is no preferred direction of rotation and belt 56 can be freely rotated in a clockwise or counterclockwise manner. In such a case, projections 60 can have an alternative shape, such as the shape of ribs 36, which does not indicate any preferred direction of rotation.

[0054] Lid 52 and base 54, like housings 12 and 14, in one preferred embodiment, are identical components, which can includes like or different indicia 58. As seen in Fig. 7, lid 52 and base 54 are both provided with alternating male mounting structures 62 and female mounting structures 64, which enable lid 52 and base 54 to press-fit or snap-fit together. Other suitable apparatuses can also be provided to couple lid 52 and base 54 together mechanically. Alternatively or additionally, a suitable adhesive or weld can be employed to attach lid 52 to base 54.

[0055] In the illustrated embodiment, lid 52 and base 54 each include a plurality of mating divider projections 66. Projections 66 of lid 52 meet projections 66 of base 54 to create a divider that separates products 16 from one another. Such dividers 66 are alternatively provided with dispenser 10 as discussed above. Further alternatively, dividers 66 are not provided and products 16 are instead packaged abutting one another as illustrated in connection with dispenser 10.

[0056] Fig. 7 illustrates that a plurality of rows of products 16 are stored between lid 52 and base 54. Although not seen, additional dividing projections, such as divider halves 66, can be provided on lid 52 and base 54 to separate and isolate the different rows of products 16 stored within the chamber defined between lid 52 and base 54.

[0057] Lid 52 and base 54 also define or provide guides halves 68. End portions of guides 68 are semi-circular, ovular, elliptical or otherwise suitable to

engage belt 56. Guides 68 as illustrated extend at different heights all the way around the perimeters of lid 52 and base 54. In an alternative embodiment, guides 68 extend only part way around the perimeters of one or both lid 52 and base 54. As illustrated, guides 68 mate at the end portions of lid 52 and base 54 when the lid is mated with base 54 to provide a continuous and supporting surface around which belt 56 is rotated. The height of guide 68 along the dispensing sides of dispenser 50 is not as high as at the ends (to allow products 16 to be dispensed from the chamber between lid 52 and base 54) but is at least as high or higher than the edges 72 of belt 56 defining an opening 70. That feature ensures that the products 16 do not catch belt 56 as they are being dispensed from dispenser 50.

[0058] Guides 68 and belt 56 are smooth and possibly lubricated in one embodiment, alternatively, guides 68 include perforations, ribs or other types of projections or serrations that in combination with similar ribs, projections, perforations or serrations on snugly fitting belt 56 cause a tactile feel of belt 56 around guide 68 to be non-smooth and perhaps provide a slight clicking noise. Such tactile feedback and noise aids the consumer in maneuvering the belt 56 to a desired position. Such perforations, serrations, projections and other non-uniformities also help to hold belt 56 in place with respect to guide 68 when dispenser 50 is being stored or after belt 56 has been rotated to a desired location.

[0059] Figs. 5 to 7 each illustrate that belt 56 defines opening or aperture 70. Fig. 5 illustrates aperture 70 positioned around the end of guide 68 in a parked or non-dispensing position. Once a tamper proof tab 74 is removed from the belt 56, sealed initially to sides 72 defining aperture 70, and the aperture is moved in front of a product 16, the product can be dispensed. Tab 74 can be made of any of the materials discussed above for tab 30 and be removably coupled to belt 56 according to any of the methods described above for tab 30.

[0060] Fig. 6 illustrates that aperture 70 has been rotated to be in registry with a portion of an open chamber defined between lid 52 and base 54 and between divider portions 66. In such position, aperture 70 enables one of the products 16 to be dispensed from dispenser 50. Afterwards, the user can rotate belt 56 in the same direction to another product opening or to a parked position at either end of dispenser

50. Alternatively, the user can rotate belt 56 in an opposite direction towards another product opening or to a parked position at one of the ends of dispenser 50.

[0061] Dispenser 50, like dispenser 10 also, has a certain amount of "play" value that is desirable especially for younger consumers. The rotating belt dispenser 50 is intuitive, and like the sliding dispenser 10, readily enables products 16 to be dispensed with one hand from the dispenser. As before, dispenser 50 enables products 16 to be dispensed via gravity alone and does not require shaking or jostling by the user.

[0062] It should be understood that various changes and modifications to the presently preferred embodiments described herein will be apparent to those skilled in the art. Such changes and modifications can be made without departing from the spirit and scope of the present invention and without diminishing its intended advantages. It is therefore intended that such changes and modifications be covered by the appended claims.

CLAIMS

The invention is claimed as follows:

1. A confectionary product dispenser comprising:

a first housing sized to hold a plurality of confectionary products;

a second housing sized to hold a plurality of the confectionary products; and

a member holding the first and second housings together, the member including a divider that includes a first side coupled in a sliding relationship with the first housing and a second side coupled in a sliding relationship with the second housing, so that the first and second housings can each be translated sequentially along the divider to dispense one of the products.

2. The confectionary product dispenser of Claim 1, wherein the housings are constrained initially by a tamper resistant tab.

3. A confectionary product dispenser comprising:

a housing sized to hold a plurality of the confectionary products, the housing including a top and a bottom separated by a plurality of product dividers; and

a belt held by the housing and extending between the top and bottom, the belt defining an opening and rotatable around the dividers, so that the opening is manually and selectively able to be rotated into registry between the dividers to dispense one of the products.

4. The confectionary product dispenser of Claim 3, wherein the opening is covered initially by a tamper resistant tab.

5. A confectionary product dispensing method comprising the steps of:

engaging a first housing in a sliding arrangement with a member so that a person can slide the first housing past a first end of the member to dispense a product from the first housing; and

engaging a second housing in a sliding arrangement with the member so that the person can slide the second housing past the first end of the member to dispense a product from the second housing.

6. The confectionary product dispensing method of Claim 5, which includes placing a stop at a second end of the member, the stop preventing the housings from sliding past the second end and allowing one of the housings to be pushed against the other of the housings.

7. A confectionary product dispensing method comprising the steps of:

configuring a belt to be held by and rotatable around an open side provided by a housing, the belt defining an opening; and

aligning products within the housing so that the belt can be manually registered around the housing to selectively allow products to be dispensed through the open side of the housing and through the opening of the belt.

8. The confectionary product dispensing method of Claim 7, which includes providing tactile devices so that the opening of the belt can be set at a desired position until being moved again.

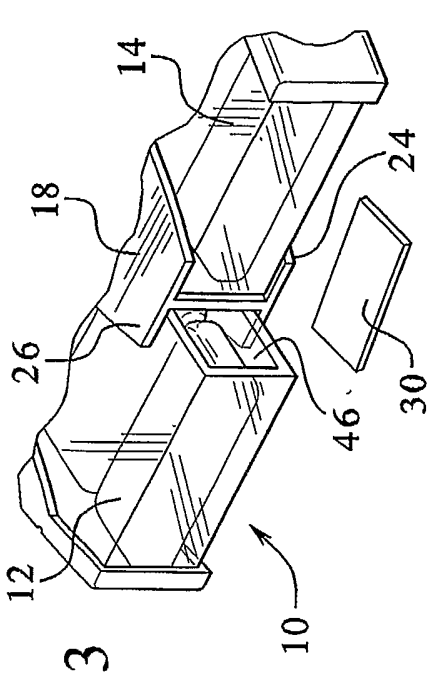


FIG.3

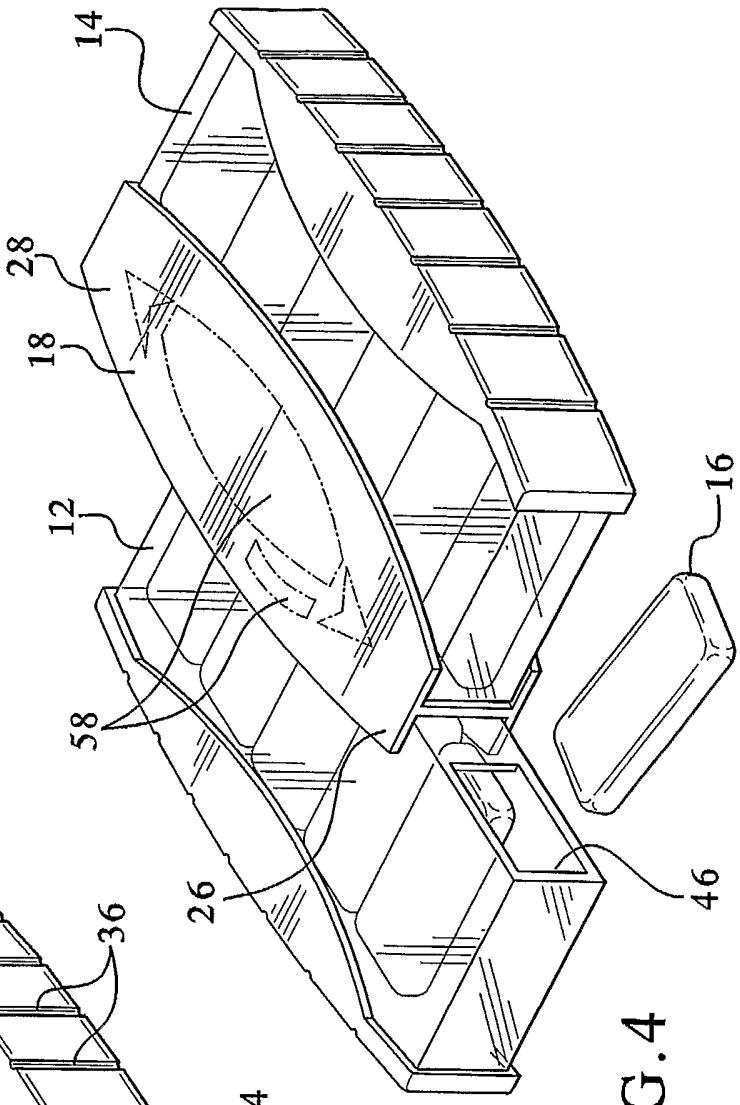


FIG.4

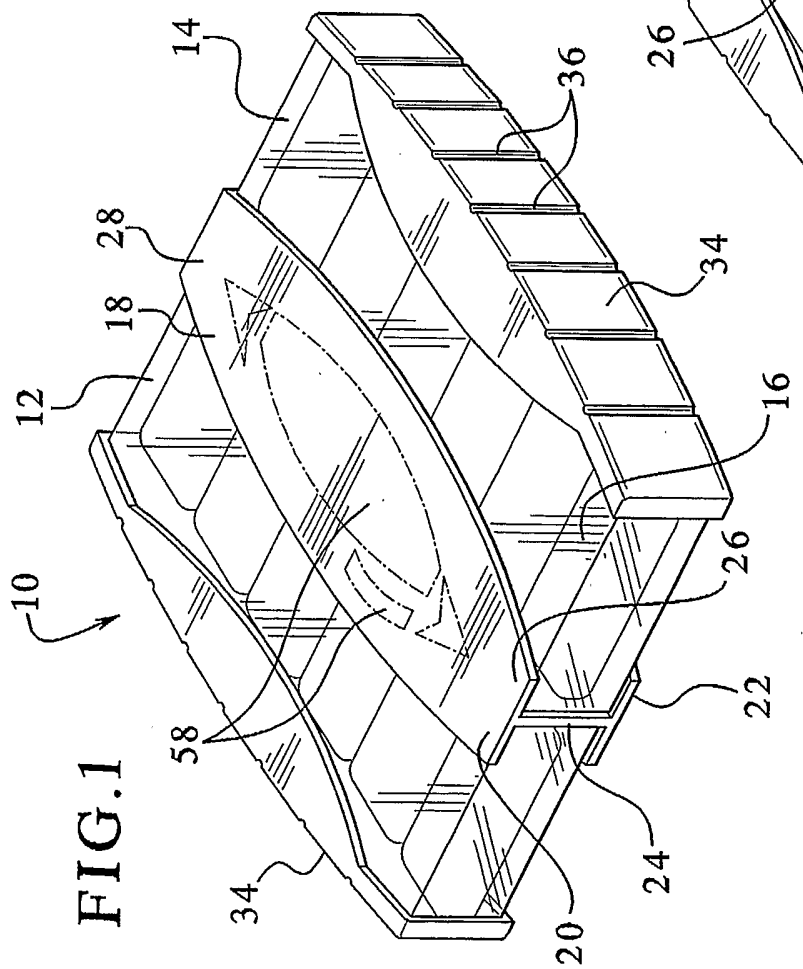


FIG.1

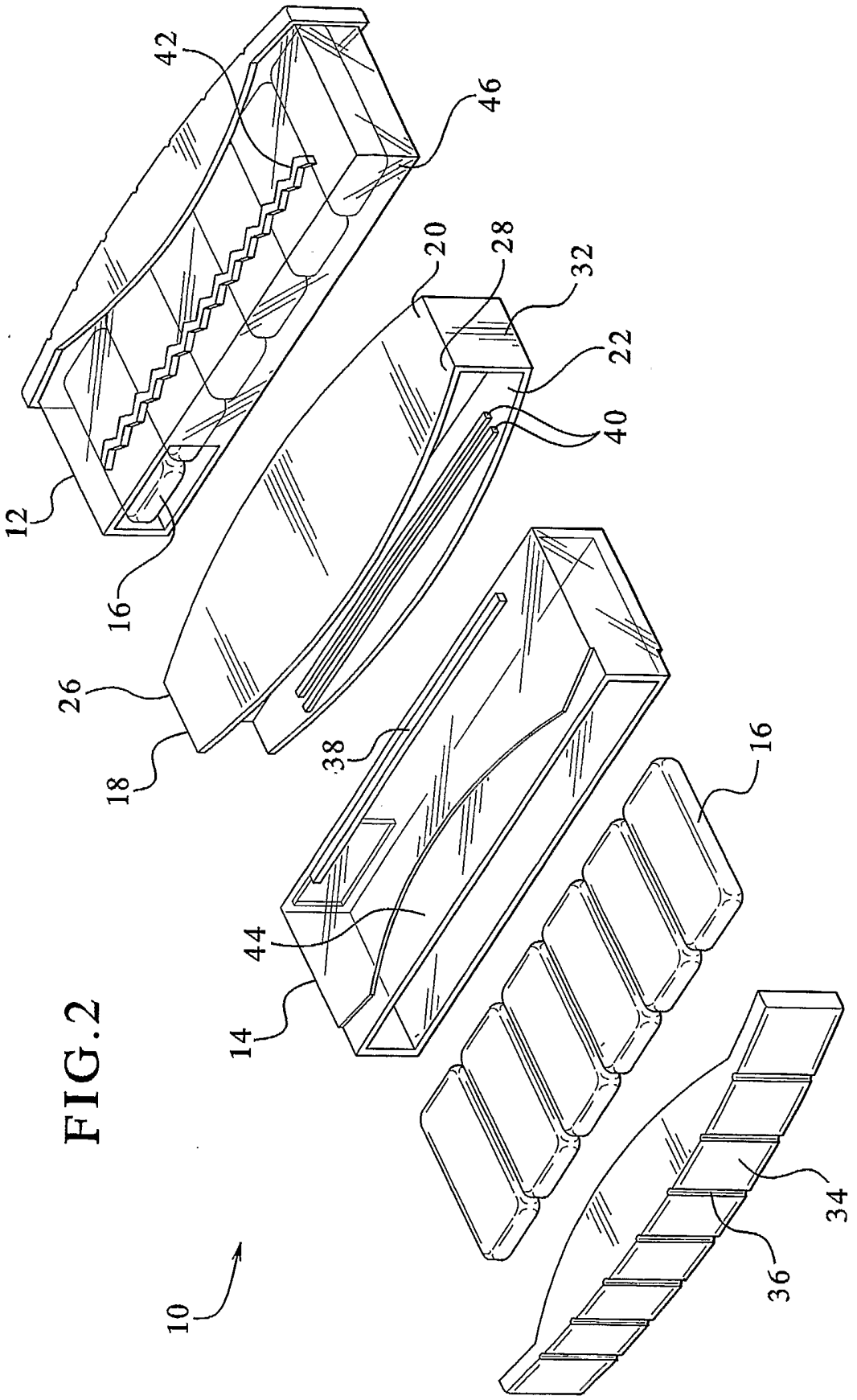


FIG.2

FIG.5

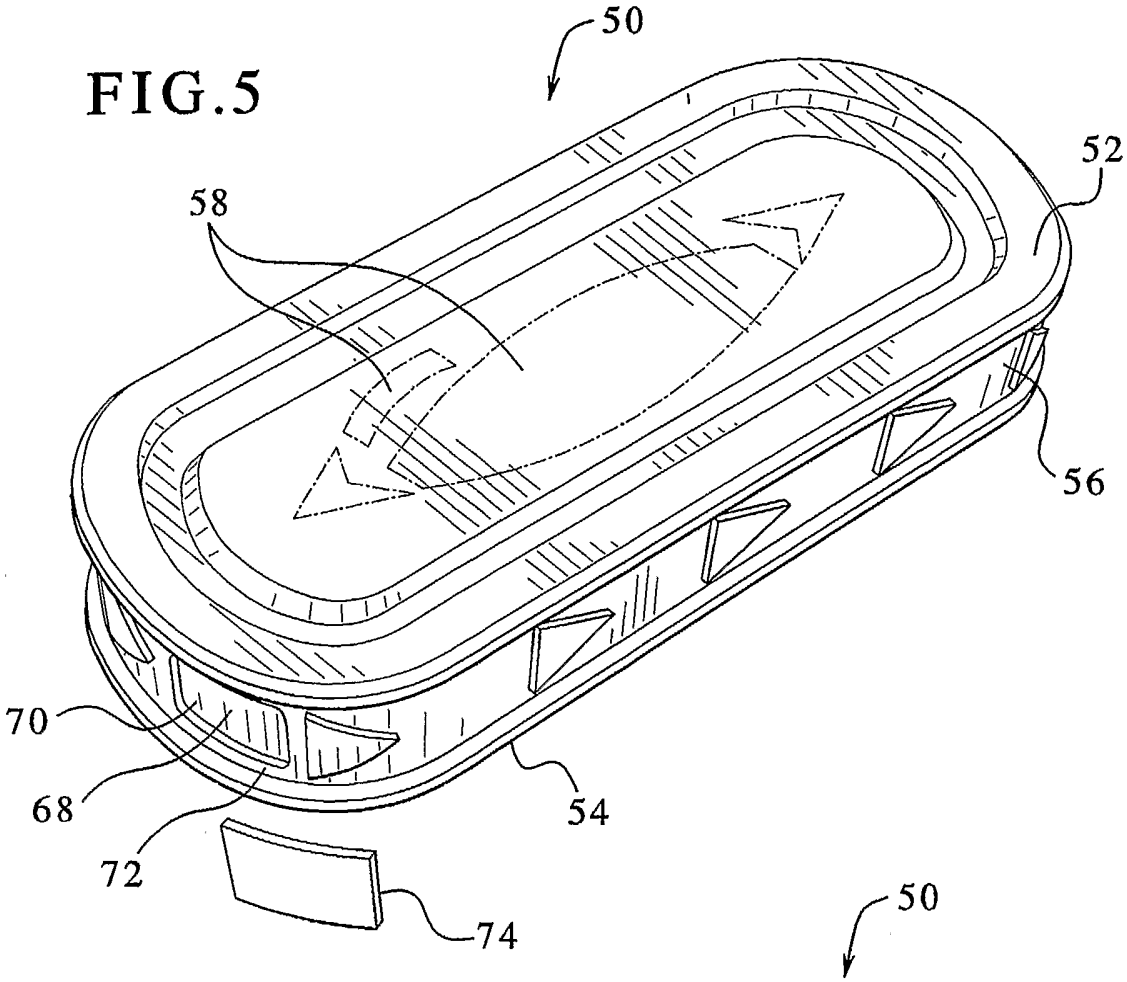


FIG.6

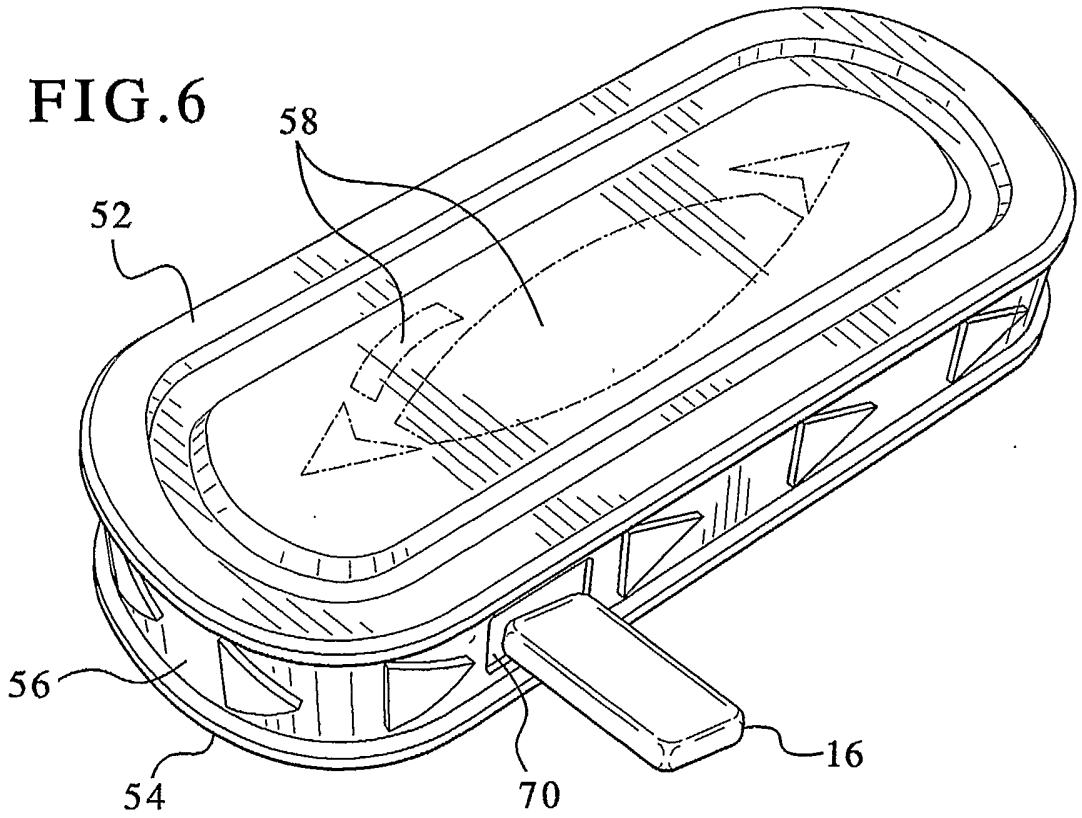
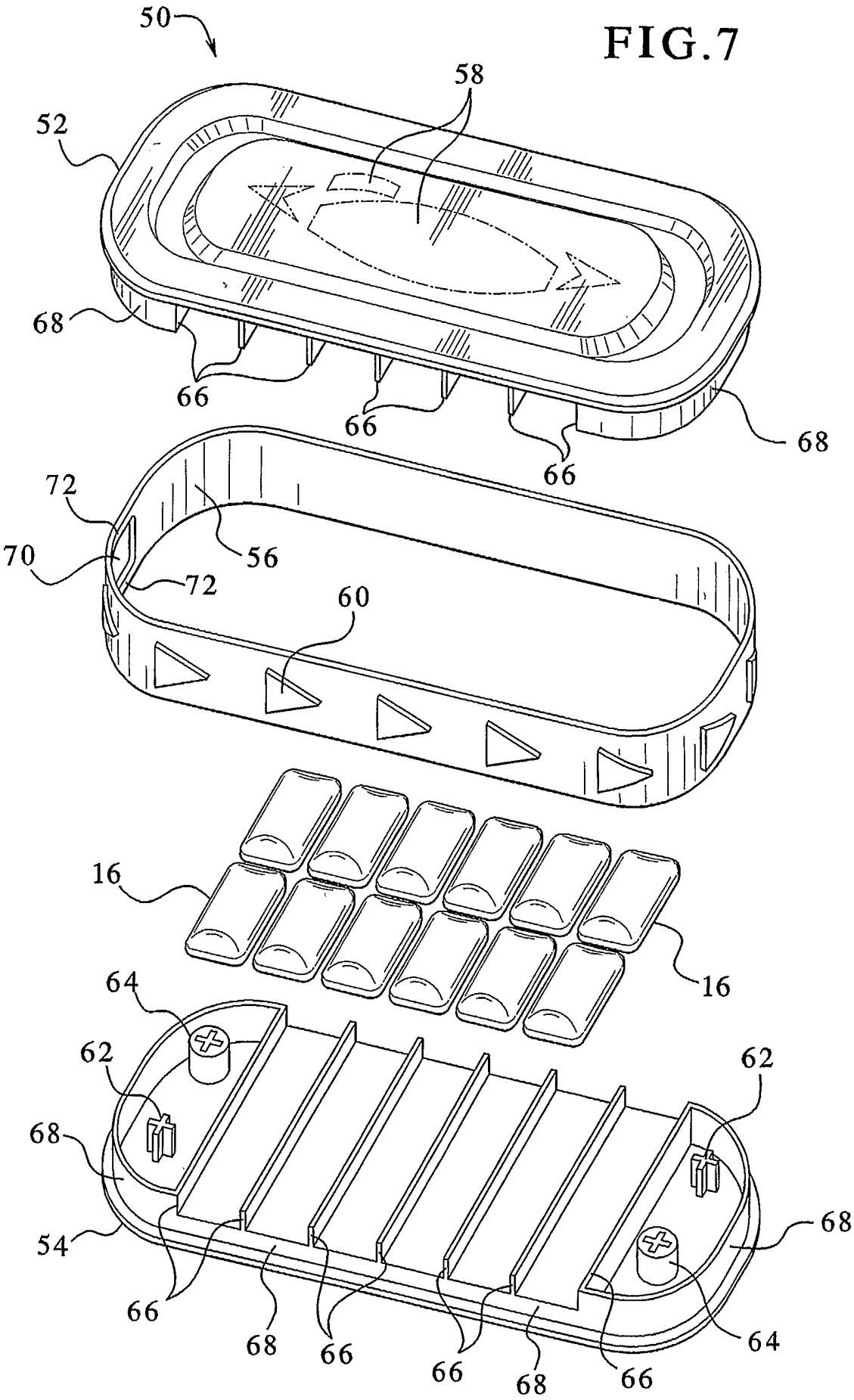


FIG.7


50
58
52
68
66
66
66
68
72
56
70
72
60
16
16
64
62
62
68
54
68
66
68
66
66
68
66
64