

ABSTRACT

A lottery ticket dispenser array includes individual ticket bins, with each bin including an electronic drive that dispenses interconnected lottery tickets through a slot in a back side of the bin housing. A calibration slot is defined through a member internal to the housing at a location such that the tickets pass through a calibration field as they pass through the dispensing slot. A receiver is disposed to receive light that passes through the calibration slot and is in communication with a control system. Based on location of the forward edge of the ticket and amount of light passing through the calibration slot, the control system determines an adjustment to a predefined length of the leading ticket to advance in a subsequent dispense cycle.

SMART BIN LOTTERY TICKET DISPENSER WITH CALIBRATED TICKET FEED

BACKGROUND

Instant lottery tickets (e.g., “scratch-off” lottery tickets) are sold at many types of retail locations including, stores, such as grocery stores, general merchandise stores, and the like. Various configurations of lottery ticket dispensers have been proposed in the industry for this purpose, including electronic dispensers that automatically dispense a ticket from a bin or compartment upon receipt of an electronic command signal.

The typical scratch-off lottery tickets are delivered to retail establishments in the form of an interconnected strip in a fan-fold or rolled configuration, wherein perforation lines define individual tickets. In this regard, the individual dispensing bins must be equipped with a mechanism for separating the tickets in a reliable and repeatable manner. Various separation devices, such as tear bars, rotary knives, bursting wheels, and so forth are used in lottery ticket dispensers for this purpose. Failure of the final ticket separation process can be costly. For example, if the dispenser does not separate a ticket exactly along the perforation, the ticket may be “unsellable” or information needed for verification can be separated from the ticket and lost.

One cause of improper ticket separation relates to how the ticket feed is detected. In order to advance the interconnected tickets through the drive mechanism by a sufficient amount (length) to ensure that the perforation line is precisely positioned relative to the separation device, the linear ticket feed is often detected by a proximity detector or other sensor (e.g., an edge detector) located within or adjacent to the feeding mechanism. As a ticket tears or is separated from the fanfold, small particles of the ticket material are released and settle within the ticket feeding mechanism and can block the sensor. Thus, such particles can interfere with a proper detection of the ticket by the proximity sensor and result in an erroneous ticket feed.

With certain types of feed mechanisms, inherent characteristics of the drive wheels, clutches, etc., may cause the tickets to skew slightly during the feeding process and lose a desired alignment with the separation mechanism. Loss of alignment with the ticket separation mechanism will generally result in an improper ticket separation.

Another variable that detrimentally impacts the ability to consistently align the perforation lines with the separation device is the manufacturing tolerances of the tickets in general. The length of individual tickets with respect to other tickets in the same fan-fold or rolled stream can vary, for example on the order of a fraction of an inch (e.g., 1/16 inch) inch or so. As a result, even though the separation blade or other type of device may be aligned with the majority of the perforation lines of weakness in a given stack, due to such length, it can easily become misaligned with the perforation lines of other tickets in the same stack.

The present invention provides a reliable and cost-effective improvement to lottery ticket alignment and separation in automated dispensers that addresses at least certain problems noted in the art.

SUMMARY

Objects and advantages of the invention will be set forth in part in the following description, or may be obvious from the description, or may be learned through practice of the invention.

In accordance with aspects of the invention, a lottery ticket dispensing array is provided for dispensing instant or other preprinted lottery tickets at a retail establishment. The type of retail establishment may vary widely within the scope and spirit of the invention. For example, in certain embodiments, the retail establishment may be a convenience store, gas station, pub, or any other establishment that typically sells lottery tickets to the public. The present array has particular usefulness for much larger retail establishments, such as "big-box" retail stores that are part of a national or other geographic chain, wherein the sale of lottery ticket sales has generally not been implemented.

The lottery ticket dispenser array includes a plurality of separate bins, for example an array of 3 X 4 separate bins, wherein each bin is defined by a housing having a front side that faces a purchaser in operational use of the dispenser array, an opposite back side that faces the retail vendor or clerk. Each bin has a

defined first internal space for receipt of a first supply of interconnected lottery tickets (e.g., a roll or fan-folded stack of tickets), wherein a weakened line, such as a perforation line, defines the individual tickets. Each bin may contain a supply of different scratch-off lottery ticket games, or two or more bins may contain a respective supply of tickets for the same game.

Each bin in the array has an electronic drive mechanism that dispenses the lottery tickets therefrom. A slot is defined in the back side of each bin through which the lottery tickets are dispensed from the internal space by the drive mechanism.

Each bin includes a separation device configured adjacent the slot. In certain embodiments, this device is a tear bar or blade against which the tickets are pulled in a dispense cycle to separate the tickets along the perforation line.

In each bin, a calibration field is provided internal to the housing relative to the slot such that the lottery tickets pass alongside the calibration field in a travel path of the lottery tickets through the slot. This calibration field is defined by one or more slots in a member through which detectable light passes.

A receiver is disposed internal to the housing to receive light that passes through the calibration field. The receiver is disposed at an opposite side of the member containing the one or more slots as compared to the lottery tickets.

A control system is provided, wherein the receiver and the drive mechanism are in communication with the control system.

Based on a position of a forward edge of a leading ticket in the calibration field and an amount of light passing through the calibration field and incident on the receiver, the control system is configured to determine an adjustment to a predefined length of the leading ticket to be advanced in a subsequent dispense cycle so that a separation line between the leading ticket and an attached trailing ticket is brought by the drive mechanism to a desired position relative to the separation device. Once at this position, the ticket can be pulled against the separation device to separate the leading ticket along the perforation line.

In a particular embodiment, the amount of light sufficient for the calibration function is the ambient light within the housing. In an alternative embodiment, a light source is disposed internal to the housing at a location to direct light through the calibration field.

It may be desired to provide a shield around the receiver that extends to adjacent the calibration field so as to minimize light from external sources that may interfere with the calibration process.

The receiver may be a conventional photocell or photo resistor that generates an output signal that is proportional to the amount of incident light on the receiver. The control system uses the signal (e.g., a magnitude value of the signal) to determine a position of the leading edge of the ticket within the calibration field. Based on this determined position, the control system computes an adjustment (plus or minus amount) to the length of ticket to be dispensed in the subsequent dispense cycle.

In some embodiments, the separation device is configured as a tear bar disposed internal to the housing adjacent to the slot, wherein the calibration field is disposed adjacent to the tear bar at a location such that the travel path of the lottery tickets is between the receiver and the calibration field.

In certain embodiments, a guide plate may be disposed along the travel path of the lottery tickets upstream of the slot. The calibration field may be defined through the guide plate such that the lottery tickets pass adjacent to the guide plate and progressively cover the calibration field as the lottery tickets move along the travel path. With this embodiment, the receiver is disposed at a side of the guide plate opposite from the lottery tickets. The guide plate may be an upper guide plate, and each bin may include a transparent lower guide plate spaced from the upper guide plate, whereby the lottery tickets pass between the upper and lower guide plates.

The calibration field may be defined by a single slot extending longitudinally along the travel path of the lottery tickets. This slot may have any size, shape, etc., and serves simply as a passage or hole for light to move through the calibration field, with the amount of light incident on the receiver being a function of the amount (surface area) of the slot covered by the leading edge of the lottery ticket. The calibration field may also be defined by a plurality of slots or other openings.

In certain embodiments wherein the separation device is downstream of the calibration field in the travel path of the tickets, the control system is further configured to reverse the drive mechanism after the leading ticket has been separated so as to withdraw a forward edge of the trailing ticket to a position within

the calibration field. With this embodiment, it may be desired to include a sensor configured with the separation device and in communication with the control system, wherein the sensor generates a signal when the leading ticket is separated by the separation device. For example, the separation device may be a tear bar, and the sensor is one of an electrical sensor, mechanical sensor, or electro-mechanical sensor that detects movement or deflection of the tear bar caused by pulling the leading ticket against the tear bar to separate the ticket. The control system reverses the drive mechanism to withdraw the ticket upon receipt of the separation signal from the sensor.

The dispenser may be designed such that the control system is common to all of the bins in the array. In an alternate embodiment, the control system is an individual system, wherein each bin has a dedicated control system. For example, the control system may be implemented by logic circuitry on a control board within each bin.

It should be appreciated that the architecture of the individual bins can vary within the scope of the invention. For example, in one embodiment, the back side of the bin includes a pivotal door that opens to the internal space for loading of the supply of lottery tickets into the bin, wherein the dispensing slot is defined in the pivotal door, and the separation device and receiver are mounted on the door. The calibration field may be defined through a member mounted to the back door at a location such that the lottery tickets pass adjacent the member and the receiver is disposed at an opposite side of the member.

The present invention also encompasses a stand-alone ticket dispensing bin as described herein.

In a broad aspect, moreover, the present invention provides a lottery ticket dispenser array, comprising: a plurality of separate bins, each bin defined by a housing having a front side that faces a purchaser in operational use of the dispenser bin, an opposite back side, and an internal space for receipt of a supply of interconnected lottery tickets; each bin having an electronic drive mechanism that dispenses the lottery tickets therefrom; a slot defined in the back side of each bin through which the lottery tickets are dispensed from the internal space; a separation device configured adjacent the slot; a calibration field defined in a member internal to the housing and located relative to the slot such that the lottery

tickets pass alongside the calibration field in a travel path of the lottery tickets through the slot, the calibration field defined by one or more slots in the member through which detectable light passes; a receiver disposed internal to the housing opposite to the calibration field to receive light that passes through the calibration field; a control system, the receiver and the drive mechanism in communication with the control system; and wherein, based on a position of a forward edge of a leading ticket in the calibration field and an amount of light passing through the calibration field and incident on the receiver, the control system is configured to determine an adjustment to a predefined length of the leading ticket to advance in a subsequent dispense cycle so that a separation line between the leading ticket and an attached trailing ticket is brought by the drive mechanism to a stopped position relative to the separation device.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

A full and enabling disclosure including the best mode of practicing the appended claims and directed to one of ordinary skill in the art is set forth more particularly in the remainder of the specification. The specification makes reference to the appended figures, in which:

Fig. 1 is a block diagram of a lottery ticket dispenser in accordance with aspects of the present invention;

Fig. 2 is a block diagram of another embodiment of a lottery ticket dispenser in accordance with aspects of the present invention;

Fig. 3 is a back perspective view of an embodiment of a lottery ticket dispenser;

Fig. 4 is a front perspective view of the lottery ticket dispenser of Fig. 3;

Fig. 5 is a front perspective view of a lottery ticket bin in accordance with the invention;

Fig. 6 is a side view of the bin embodiment of Fig. 5;

Fig. 7 is another side view of a bin in accordance with aspects of the invention; and

Figs. 8A through 8D are sequential diagram views depicting movement of lottery tickets relative to a calibration field in accordance with aspects of the invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Reference will now be made in detail to various and alternative exemplary embodiments and to the accompanying drawings, with like numerals representing substantially identical structural elements. Each example is provided by way of explanation, and not as a limitation. In fact, it will be apparent to those skilled in the art that modifications and variations can be made without departing from the scope or spirit of the disclosure and claims. For instance, features illustrated or described as part of one embodiment may be used on another embodiment to yield a still further embodiment. Thus, it is intended that the present disclosure includes modifications and variations as come within the scope of the appended claims and their equivalents.

Fig. 1 depicts an embodiment of a system 10 and related methodology for dispensing lottery tickets 14 at a retail establishment 12. As mentioned above, the type of retail establishment 12 may vary widely within the scope and spirit of the invention. A retail establishment or location 12, such as a retail store, convenience store, pub, restaurant, or the like, is generally authorized by a lottery jurisdiction to carry out lottery activities, such as the sale of instant scratch-off tickets or terminal printed draw tickets for games such as Powerball™. The lottery jurisdiction may be a state lottery authority, such as the Pennsylvania Lottery, or any other governmental jurisdictional authority. A separate game provider may be partnered with the lottery jurisdiction to provide certain control, implementation, and logistical functions of the game. It should be appreciated that the type of retail

establishment 12 or lottery jurisdiction entities are not limiting factors of the invention. Although not limited to such, the present system 10 has particular usefulness for larger retail establishments, such as “big-box” retail stores that are part of a national or other geographic chain.

The retail establishment 12 includes one or more retail point-of-sale (POS) registers 18 wherein patrons of the establishment 12 purchase goods. Typically, a scanner is associated with the POS register 18 to scan a UPC code on the products, with the UPC code linked to a purchase price and identification of the products, as is well-known in the art.

In the embodiment of Fig. 1, a lottery ticket terminal 20 is configured in wired or wireless communication with the retail POS register 18 to accept a request for purchase of a particular lottery ticket 14 (Fig. 3) selected from a plurality of different lottery tickets made available to patrons for purchase. This request may be input directly to the terminal 20 or come via the POS register 18. The lottery tickets 14 may be, for example, conventional instant scratch-off lottery tickets. Various types of lottery ticket terminals are known in the art and suitable for configuration with a system 10 in accordance with the invention. For example, Scientific Games Corporation having a principal place of business in Alpharetta, Georgia, USA, offers Flair™ and Wave™ lottery ticket terminals that may be readily configured by those skilled in the art for a system as described herein.

A patron's request for a particular scratch-off lottery ticket may be inputted into the lottery ticket terminal 20 by a retail clerk or other employee of the retail establishment 12 by various means. For example, the terminal 20 may be configured with a scanner, wherein the clerk scans a “master” card having a code corresponding to the particular lottery ticket 14 requested by the patron. Thus, a master card or master code would be provided for each type of lottery ticket 14 offered by the establishment 12. In another embodiment, the terminal 20 may be configured with a touch-screen, keyboard, or other data input device, wherein the clerk enters or identifies the ticket 14 requested by the patron.

Still referring to the embodiment of Fig. 1, a “smart” lottery ticket dispenser array 22 is in wired or wireless communication with the terminal 20. This dispenser array includes one or a plurality of individual lottery ticket bins 24, with each bin 24 typically containing a different respective lottery ticket game. For example, one bin 24 may contain “Lucky 7” themed scratch-off lottery tickets 14,

while an adjacent bin 24 may contain “Gold Rush” themed scratch-off lottery tickets 14, and so forth.

Each lottery ticket 14 in the different bins includes a machine readable code 101 (Fig. 8A) printed on a front or back side thereof, such as an alpha-numeric code, bar code, QR code, or the like. The type of code may vary depending on the desired information content of the code, space on the ticket 14, and so forth. The use of such codes on lottery tickets 14 for various functions related to inventory, identification, verification, and security are well-known. In accordance with aspects of the invention, the lottery tickets in each bin 24 are generally loaded as a fan-folded or roll of sequentially numbered tickets, wherein the machine readable code on each lottery ticket 14 contains this number (as well as any manner of additional ticket information), for example in the form of a serial number embedded in the code.

Referring to the figures in general, each bin 24 in the dispenser array 22 includes an electronic drive mechanism 26 that, when activated, dispenses one or more lottery tickets 14 from the bin 24 (depending on the number of tickets requested by the patron). This drive mechanism 26 may include a motor that drives a friction roll, wherein the tickets 14 are engaged between the friction roll and an idler roll such that driven rotation of the friction roll causes the tickets 14 to be advanced through a dispensing slot 28 in a wall of the individual bin 24.

For each dispense cycle of a lottery ticket, a predefined length of ticket is advanced by the drive mechanism 26. For example, if the lottery tickets are six-inch long tickets, the drive mechanism 26 advances the interconnected tickets in six-inch increments. For this function, the friction or idler roll may include an electrical or mechanical encoder that indirectly measures the length of a ticket passing between the rolls as a function or rotations of the roll. In another embodiment, a timing circuit may control the length of ticket dispensed as a function of run time of the motor. It should be appreciated that the drive mechanism 26 may be variously configured to perform the functions of dispensing the requisite number and length of tickets 14 from the individual respective bin 24 within the scope and spirit of the invention.

In the illustrated embodiments, each bin 24 also includes an optical scanner 40 disposed so as to read the code 101 on the lottery tickets 14 as they are dispensed from the bin 24. The scanner 40 may be any conventional optical

scanner or reader, such as a point scanner, linear scanner, laser scanner, LED image scanner, and so forth. The tickets 14 are loaded into the bins 24 such that the code 101 printed on each ticket passes within the detection field of the scanner 40. An integral (or separate) reader is typically configured with the scanner 40 to decode the scanner signal.

The architecture of each bin 24 and the array 22 in general can vary within the scope of the invention. Referring to Figs. 1 through 7, the dispenser array 22 includes a bottom row of bins 24 having interconnected base structures 58. For example, each base structure 58 may include a male power plug and male data plug along one side, and a female power port 60 and female data port 62 along the opposite side. The plugs and ports of adjacent base structures 58 interconnect to essentially define a data bus 54 (Figs. 1 and 2) running the length of the base structures 58. An exposed power port 60 and data port 62 at one of the ends of the interconnected base structures is available for connection with a power cord and a data cord from the system control system 38 or lottery terminal 20.

Referring to Figs. 5 and 6 in particular, each of the individual bins 24 includes a multi-sided housing 108 defining an internal space 112 in which the stack or roll of lottery tickets 14 is stored. In the depicted embodiments, the housing 108 is a box-like member having top and bottom walls, side walls, a front wall 101, and a pivotal back wall or door 104. The back wall 104 swings open to provide access into the housing 108 for loading the ticket stack. The dispensing slot 28 may be defined in this wall 104.

As shown in Fig. 4, each bin 24 may include a sample ticket 14 or other identifying insert attached to a front face of the bin 24 that faces the patrons so that the patron is aware of the exact tickets available for purchase. Each bin 24 includes a male power/data connector 64 on the top or bottom surface, and a corresponding female power/data connector 66 on the opposite surface, as seen in Figs. 5 and 6. With this configuration, a plurality of the bins 24 can be vertically stacked and interconnected, as depicted in the various figures.

Referring to Figs. 5 through 8D in general, each bin 24 in the array 22 includes a separation device 124 configured within the housing 18 adjacent the slot 28. In certain embodiments, this device 124 is a tear bar or blade against which the tickets 14 are pulled in a dispense cycle to separate the tickets 14 long a

weakened line 122, such as a perforation line, between adjacent tickets 14. The separation device 124 may also be mounted to the back wall 104.

In each bin 24, a calibration field 109 is provided internal to the housing 108 relative to the slot 28 such that the lottery tickets 14 pass alongside the calibration field 109 in a travel path of the lottery tickets 14 through the slot 28. This calibration field 109 is defined by one or more slots 111 defined through a member 103 internal to the housing 108 through which detectable light passes.

A receiver 115 is disposed internal to the housing 108 to receive light that passes through the calibration field 109, particularly through the one or more slots 111. The receiver 115 is disposed at an opposite side of the member 103 containing the one or more slots 111 as compared to the lottery tickets 14.

A control system 38 is provided, wherein the receiver 115 and the drive mechanism 26 are in communication with the control system 38.

Referring to Figs. 8A through 8D, based on a position of a forward edge 126 of a leading ticket 120 in the calibration field 109, a certain amount of light passes through the slot 111 in the calibration field 109 and is incident on the receiver 115. The control system 38 is configured to determine an adjustment to the predefined length of the leading ticket 120 to be advanced in a subsequent dispense cycle so that a separation line 122 between the leading ticket 120 and an attached trailing ticket 130 is brought by the drive mechanism to a desired position relative to the separation device 124. Once at this position, the ticket 120 can be pulled against the separation device 124 to separate the leading ticket 120 along the perforation line 122.

In an initial set-up mode, the receiver 115 and control system 38 are initialized to the amount of light incident upon the receiver 115 when no part of the slot 111 is covered by a lottery ticket. Thus, the bin 24 is initialized to the location and amount of ambient light in the retail establishment. In certain embodiments, this amount of ambient light within the housing 108 generated by external sources is sufficient for operation of the system. In other embodiments, it may be desired to equip the bin 24 with an internal light source 113, such as an LED bulb or other low energy device, that is located and oriented within the housing 108 to project light towards the calibration field slot 111.

As depicted in Figs. 5 through 7, it may be desired to provide a shield 117 around the receiver 115, with the shield 117 extending to adjacent the calibration

field 109 and serving to minimize light from external sources that may interfere with the calibration process.

The receiver 115 may be a conventional photocell or photo resistor that generates an output signal that is proportional to the amount of incident light on the receiver 115, which will vary as a function of the how much of the slot 111 is covered up by the lottery ticket. The control system 38 uses the signal (e.g., a magnitude value of the signal) to determine a position of the leading edge 126 of the ticket within the calibration field 109. The magnitude values of the light signal relative to positions of the leading edge 126 of the tickets are predetermined and stored in the control system 38. Based on this determined position, the control system 38 computes an adjustment (plus or minus amount) to the length of ticket to be dispensed in the subsequent dispense cycle.

In some embodiments, the separation device 124 is configured as a tear bar disposed internal to the housing 108 adjacent to the slot 28, wherein the calibration field 109 is disposed adjacent to the tear bar 124 at a location such that the travel path of the lottery tickets is between the receiver 115 and the calibration field 109.

In certain embodiments depicted in the figures, the member 103 in which the calibration field 109 is defined is a guide plate 103 disposed along the travel path of the lottery tickets upstream of the slot 28. The calibration field 109 may be defined through the guide plate 103 such that the lottery tickets pass adjacent to the guide plate 103 and progressively cover the calibration field 109 as the lottery tickets move along the travel path. With this embodiment, the receiver 115 is disposed at a side of the guide plate 103 opposite from the lottery tickets. The guide plate 103 may be an upper guide plate, as depicted in the figures, and each bin 24 may include a transparent lower guide plate 105 spaced from the upper guide plate 103, whereby the lottery tickets pass between the upper 103 and lower 105 guide plates.

As shown in the figures, the calibration field 109 may be defined by a single opening or slot 111 extending longitudinally along the travel path of the lottery tickets. This slot 111 may have any size, shape, etc., and serves simply as a passage or hole for light to move through the calibration field 109, with the amount of light incident on the receiver 115 being a function of the amount (surface area) of the slot 111 covered by the leading edge 126 of the lottery ticket. The

calibration field 109 may also be defined by a plurality of slots or other openings in any suitable pattern.

In Fig. 8A, a leading lottery ticket 120 (dashed lines) is depicted as moving under the upper guide plate 103 and calibration field slot 111, as indicated by the arrow. The leading ticket 120 is attached to the trailing ticket 130 via a perforation or other type of weakened separation line 122.

Fig. 8B depicts the leading ticket 120 advanced to a stopped position determined by the control system 38 (as discussed above) such that the perforation line 122 between the leading ticket 120 and trailing ticket 130 is at or sufficiently near the tear bar 124. At this position, the leading ticket 120 can be pulled against the tear bar 124 and separated from the trailing ticket 130.

With embodiments wherein the separation device 124 is downstream of the calibration field 109 in the travel path of the tickets, the control system 38 may be further configured to reverse the drive mechanism 26 after the leading ticket 120 has been separated so as to withdraw the forward edge 126 of the trailing ticket 130 (which is now the new leading ticket 120) to a position within the calibration field 109, as depicted in Fig. 8C. Reversal of the ticket direction is then stopped and the forward edge 126 rests in the calibration field 109, as depicted in Fig. 8D. Based on the position of the forward edge 126 in the field 109 and the amount of light that passes through the slot 111 and is incident on the receiver 115, the control system 38 then computes an adjustment to the length of the ticket 130 that must be advanced by the drive mechanism 26 in the next dispense cycle to ensure that the leading edge 126 of the trailing ticket 130 is brought to the tear bar 124 (e.g., the position depicted in Fig. 8B), as explained above. As discussed, the drive mechanism 26 may include an encoder or timing circuit for this purpose.

With the embodiment depicted by Figs. 8A through 8D, it may be desired to include a sensor 106 configured with the separation device 124 and in communication with the control system 38, wherein the sensor 106 generates a signal when the leading ticket 120 is separated by the separation device 124. For example, if the separation device 124 is a tear bar, the sensor 106 may be one of an electrical sensor, mechanical sensor, or electro-mechanical sensor that detects movement or deflection of the tear bar caused by pulling the leading ticket 120 against the tear bar to separate the ticket. The control system 38 reverses the

drive mechanism 26 to withdraw the ticket upon receipt of the separation signal from the sensor 106.

The dispenser 22 may be designed such that the control system 38 is common to all of the bins 24 in the array. In an alternate embodiment, the control system 38 is an individual system, wherein each bin 24 has a dedicated control system 38. For example, the control system may be implemented by logic circuitry on the control board 100 within each bin 24. Any manner of control or power components can be mounted on the board 100 for operation of the individual bins 24 as described herein. Fig. 2 depicts individual control systems 38 for each bin 24 in direct communication with the terminal 20 via a signal router 56 integrated with the dispenser array 22. This router 56 routes the purchase signal 30 from the lottery ticket terminal 20 to the correct bin 24.

Referring to the system 10 in Figs. 1 and 2, the lottery ticket terminal 20 transmits a purchase signal 30 for dispensing a particular lottery ticket 14 that is routed to the respective bin 24 within the dispenser array 22 containing the requested lottery ticket. This purchase signal 30 may be sent to an individual control system 38 associated with the bin 24 (Fig. 2), or to a common control system 38 associated with all of the bins 24 (Fig. 1), to activate the drive mechanism 26 and dispense the requisite number of lottery tickets 14 from the bin 24. Signals from the tear bar sensors 107, 109 are received by the control system 38 (individual system or common system).

In an alternate embodiment, the purchase signal 30 is generated by the POS register 18 and transmitted to the control system 38 after the POS register 18 receives a purchase code from the lottery ticket terminal 20 corresponding to the particular ticket requested by the patron.

The system 10 may include a central lottery server 34 that is common to a number of different retail establishments 12. As described above, as the tickets 14 are dispensed from the bin 24, the scanner 40 reads the code 101 printed on each ticket or, alternatively, the first and last codes printed on sequentially dispensed tickets, and the tear bar sensors 106 detects a ticket separation cycle. A signal 32 from the control system 38 containing the scanned code and tear bar sensor data may be routed to the central lottery server 34 for each lottery ticket dispensed from the dispenser array 22 to enable certain actions relevant to the sale, dispensing, verification, accounting of the individual tickets 14. For example, the central lottery

server 34 may include a database of all tickets delivered to the respective retail establishments 12, and the near instantaneous identification of dispensed/sold lottery tickets 14 to the server 34 enables various desired functionalities. For example, the individual lottery tickets 14 may remain “inactive” in the lottery provider’s system (and thus unable to be redeemed) until individually activated by the central lottery server 34 as they are dispensed and sold. Thus, fraudulently obtained tickets (e.g., stolen or otherwise illegally obtained) cannot be redeemed. This is contrary to a conventional practice of activating entire books (“packs”) of tickets upon delivery to a retail establishment 12.

The present system also 10 allows for enhanced accountability of lottery tickets 14 sold at a particular retail establishment 12 by logging each ticket as it is sold and dispensed. The number of tickets 14 sold during a work shift (or other time period) is easily determined by generating a report by the central server 34 of the tickets sold at any of the retail establishments during any defined time period. The number of tickets 14 sold at any of the retail establishments 12 can be readily reconciled with tickets delivered to the establishment. Likewise, the number of tickets 14 dispensed during a defined time can be readily and electronically reconciled with reported purchase transactions from the respective establishment 12, with discrepancies being immediately identified for further investigation.

Another particular advantage of the system 10 and associated method is that billing practices between the retail establishments 12 and lottery authority, the lottery service provider, or ticket manufacturer can be based on real-time sales of the lottery tickets 14. For example, the retail establishments 12 can be invoiced on a periodic basis (e.g., daily or weekly) for the actual number of tickets sold (dispensed) at each respective establishment based on the signals 32 routed to the central lottery server 34 instead of upon delivery, or other payment methodology typically in use today. These include but are not limited to consignment for a predetermined time period, or estimate of sales based on the number of winning tickets cashed from a pack of tickets being sold.

It should be appreciated that the term “server” is used herein to encompass any configuration of computer hardware and software that is maintained by a lottery authority or game provider to carry out the functionalities of the present system 10 and associated method, as well as any manner of additional lottery functions known to those skilled in the art.

The server 34 may include an integrated server, or any manner of peripheral server or other hardware structure. The central lottery server 34 is typically remote from the retail establishments 12, and is in communication with the establishments 12 via a suitable secure communication network, which may include any manner of wide area network, wireless internet, or cloud computing. The server 34 may be a single networked computer, or a series of interconnected computers having access to the communications network via a gateway or other known networking system. Generally, the server 34 is configured to communicate with, manage, execute and control individual lottery terminal units 20 within the lottery jurisdiction. The server 34 may be a "front end" server provided by the lottery game provider that is interfaced with the existing draw/instant game system infrastructure one or more separate lottery authorities. The server 34 may include a memory for storing gaming procedures and routines, a microprocessor (MP) for executing the stored programs, a random access memory (RAM) and an input/output (I/O) bus. These devices may be multiplexed together via a common bus, or may each be directly connected via dedicated communications lines, depending on the needs of the system 10.

The server 34 may be directly or indirectly connected through an I/O bus to any manner of peripheral devices such as storage devices, wireless adaptors, printers, and the like. In addition, a database (DB) may be communicatively connected to the server 34 and provide a data repository for the storage and correlation of information gathered from the individual dispenser arrays 22, such as the identity of each lottery ticket 14 dispensed from the array, the time of the dispense sequence, confirmation of ticket activation, and so forth.

It should be appreciated that embodiments of the methods and systems 10 disclosed herein may be executed by one or more suitable networked lottery gaming components and establishment components (e.g., POS register 18, back office server, and so forth) within a plurality of the establishments 12, as well as the remote central server 34. Such gaming systems and computing devices may access one or more computer-readable media that embody computer-readable instructions which, when executed by at least one computer, cause the computer(s) to implement one or more embodiments of the methods of the present subject matter. Additionally or alternatively, the computing device(s) may comprise circuitry that renders the device(s) operative to implement one or more of the

methods of the present subject matter. Furthermore, components of the presently-disclosed technology may be implemented using one or more computer-readable media.

As mentioned above, aspects of the present system 10 and methods rely on the transmission of data over one or more communications networks. It should be appreciated that network communications can comprise sending and/or receiving information over one or more networks of various forms. For example, a network can comprise a dial-in, public switched telephone network (PSTN), a local area network (LAN), wide area network (WAN), , the Internet, an intranet or other type of network. A network may comprise any number and/or combination of hard-wired, wireless, or other communication links.

The material particularly shown and described above is not meant to be limiting, but instead serves to show and teach various exemplary implementations of the present subject matter. As set forth in the attached claims, the scope of the present invention includes both combinations and sub-combinations of various features discussed herein, along with such variations and modifications as would occur to a person of skill in the art.

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A lottery ticket dispenser array, comprising:

a plurality of separate bins, each bin defined by a housing having a front side that faces a purchaser in operational use of the dispenser bin, an opposite back side, and an internal space for receipt of a supply of interconnected lottery tickets;

each bin having an electronic drive mechanism that dispenses the lottery tickets therefrom;

a slot defined in the back side of each bin through which the lottery tickets are dispensed from the internal space;

a separation device configured adjacent the slot;

a calibration field defined in a member internal to the housing and located relative to the slot such that the lottery tickets pass alongside the calibration field in a travel path of the lottery tickets through the slot, the calibration field defined by one or more slots in the member through which detectable light passes;

a receiver disposed internal to the housing opposite to the calibration field to receive light that passes through the calibration field;

a control system, the receiver and the drive mechanism in communication with the control system; and

wherein, based on a position of a forward edge of a leading ticket in the calibration field and an amount of light passing through the calibration field and incident on the receiver, the control system is configured to determine an adjustment to a predefined length of the leading ticket to advance in a subsequent dispense cycle so that a separation line between the leading ticket and an attached trailing ticket is brought by the drive mechanism to a stopped position relative to the separation device.

2. The lottery ticket dispenser array as in claim 1, further comprising a light source disposed internal to the housing at a location to direct light through the calibration field.

3. The lottery ticket dispenser array as in claim 1, wherein the receiver generates a signal that is proportional to an amount of incident light on the receiver, the control system using the signal to determine a position of the leading edge within the calibration field.

4. The lottery ticket dispenser array as in claim 1, wherein the separation device comprises a tear bar disposed internal to the housing adjacent to the slot, the calibration field disposed adjacent to the tear bar at a location such that the travel path of the lottery tickets is between the receiver and the calibration field.

5. The lottery ticket dispenser array as in claim 1, further comprising a guide plate disposed along the travel path of the lottery tickets upstream of the slot, the calibration field defined through the guide plate such that the lottery tickets pass adjacent to the guide plate and progressively cover the calibration field as the lottery tickets move along the travel path, the receiver disposed at a side of the guide plate opposite from the lottery tickets.

6. The lottery ticket dispenser array as in claim 5, wherein the guide plate comprises an upper guide plate, and further comprising a transparent lower guide plate spaced from the upper guide plate, the lottery tickets passing between the upper and lower guide plates.

7. The lottery ticket dispenser array as in claim 1, wherein the calibration field comprises a single slot extending longitudinally along the travel path of the lottery tickets.

8. The lottery ticket dispenser array as in claim 1, wherein the control system is configured to reverse the drive mechanism after the leading ticket has been separated so as to bring a forward edge of the trailing ticket to a position within the calibration field.

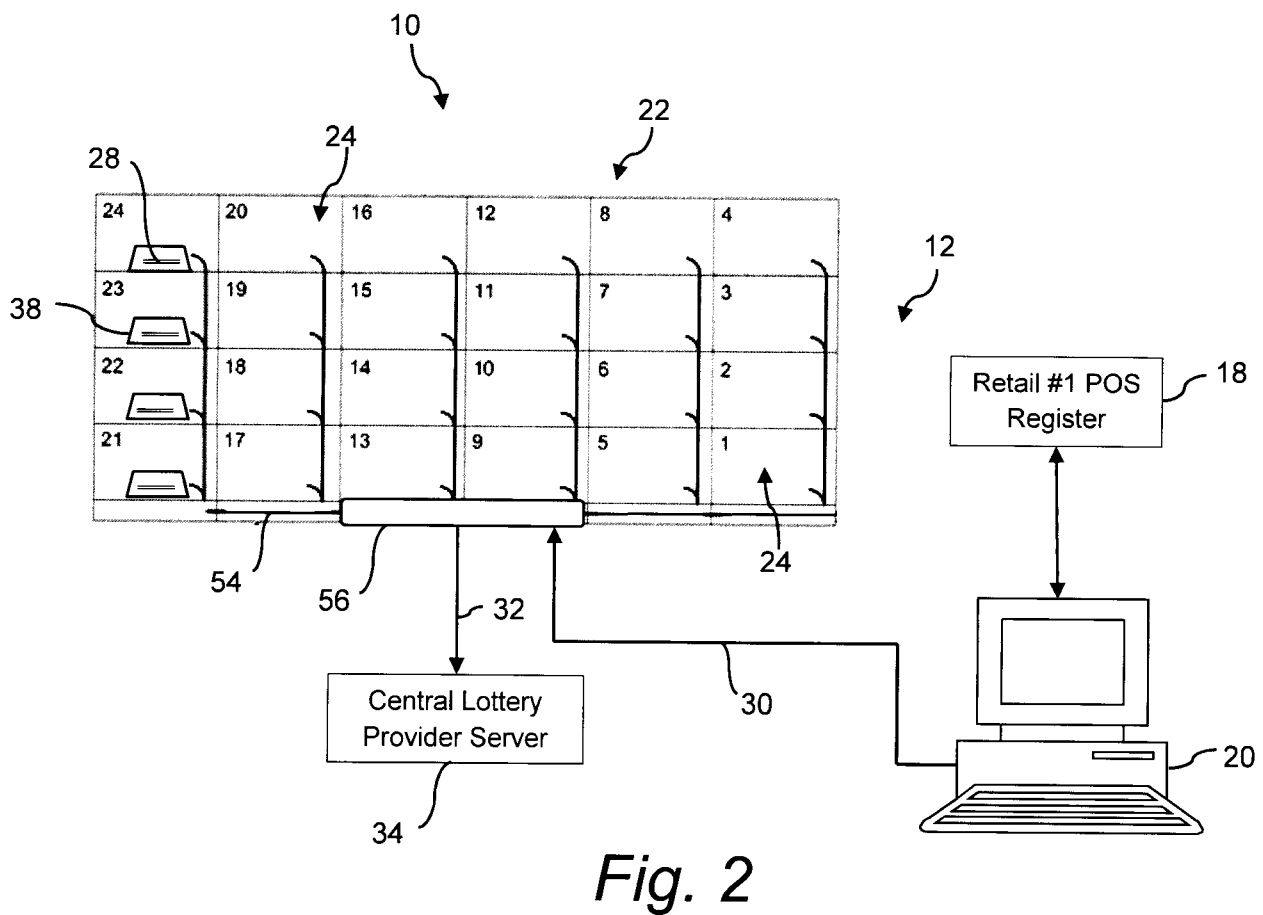
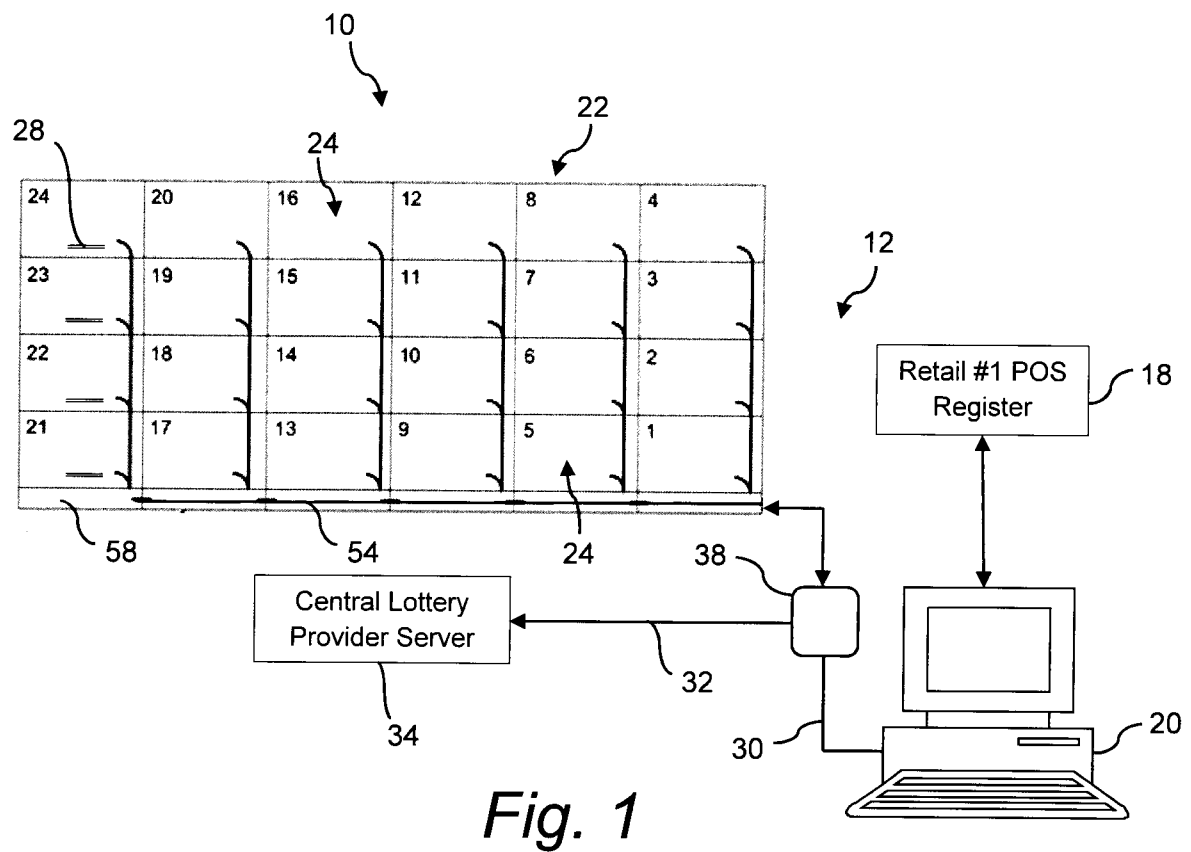
9. The lottery ticket dispenser array as in claim 8, further comprising a sensor configured with the separation device and in communication with the control system, the sensor generating a signal when the leading ticket is separated by the separation device.

10. The lottery ticket dispenser array as in claim 9, wherein the separation device is a tear bar, and the sensor is selected from the group consisting of an electrical sensor, a mechanical sensor, and a electro-mechanical sensor that detects movement of the tear bar caused by pulling the leading ticket against the tear bar to separate the leading ticket.

11. The lottery ticket dispenser array as in claim 1, wherein the control system is common to all of the bins in the array.

12. The lottery ticket dispenser array as in claim 1, wherein the control system is an individual control system for each bin.

13. The lottery ticket dispenser array as in claim 1, wherein the back side of each bin comprises a pivotal door that opens to the internal space for loading of the supply of lottery tickets into the bin, the slot defined in the pivotal door, the separation device mounted on the pivotal door, the receiver mounted on the back door, and the calibration field defined on a member mounted to the back door at a location such that the lottery tickets pass adjacent to one side of the member and the receiver is disposed at an opposite side of the member.



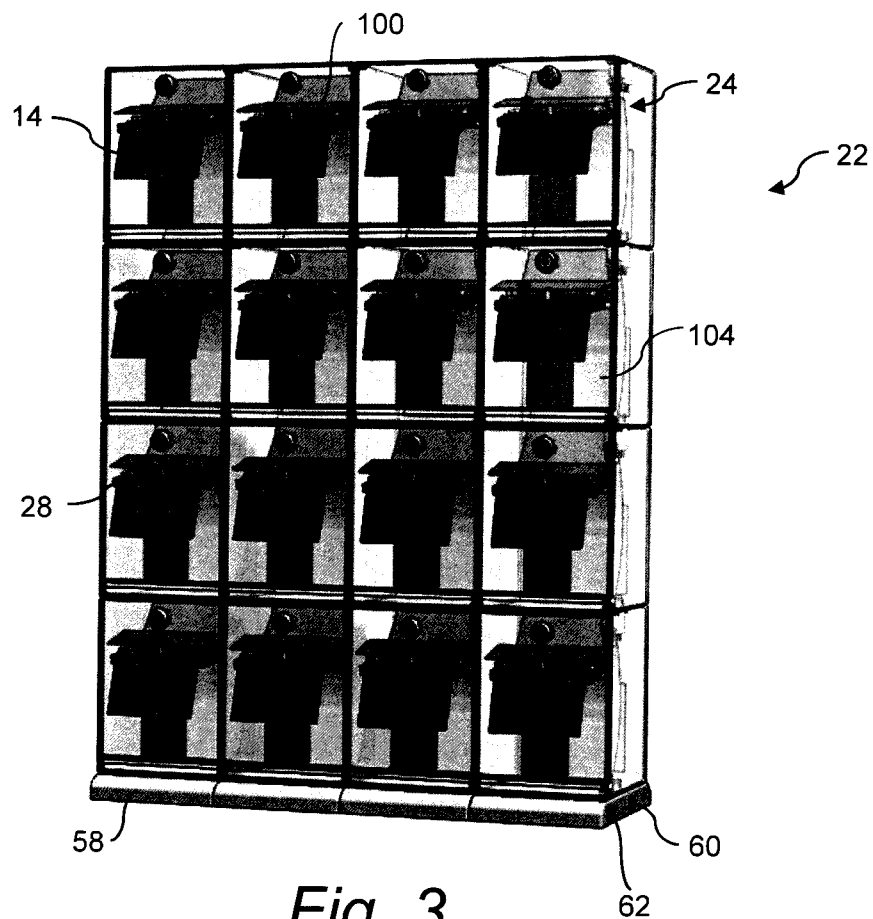


Fig. 3

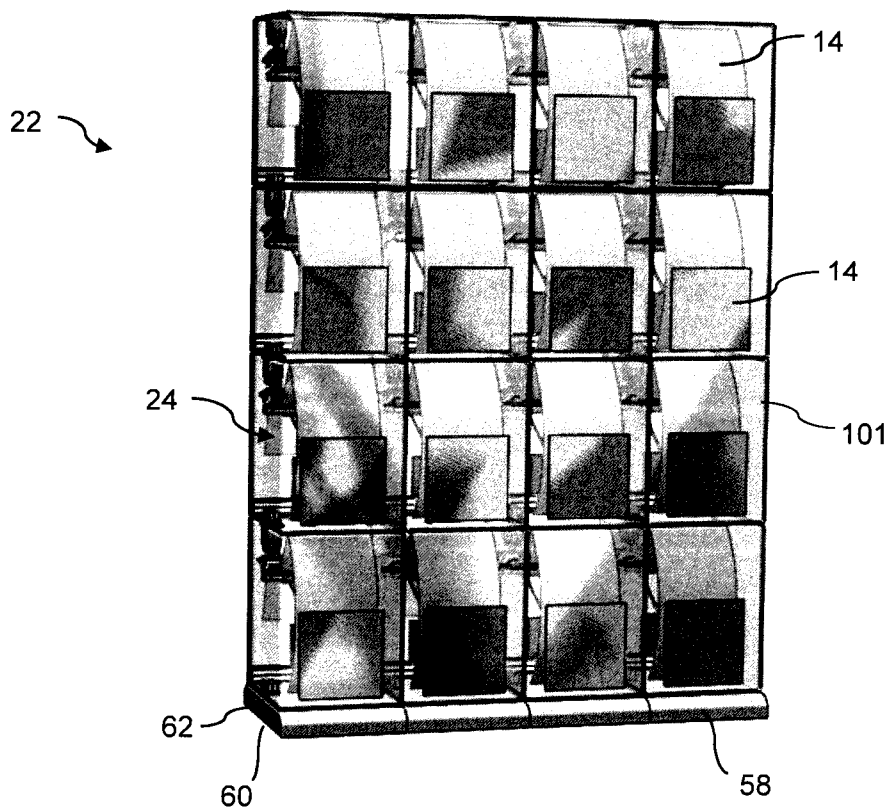


Fig. 4

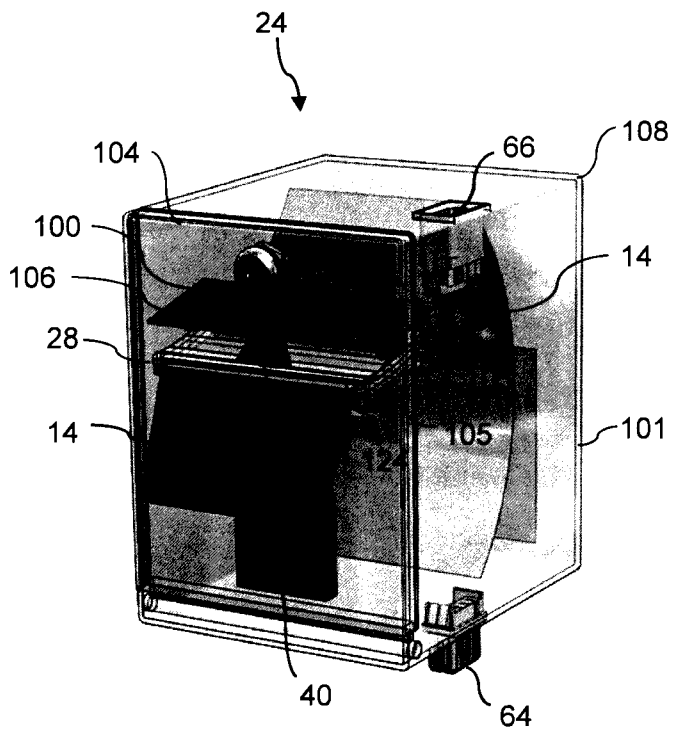


Fig. 5

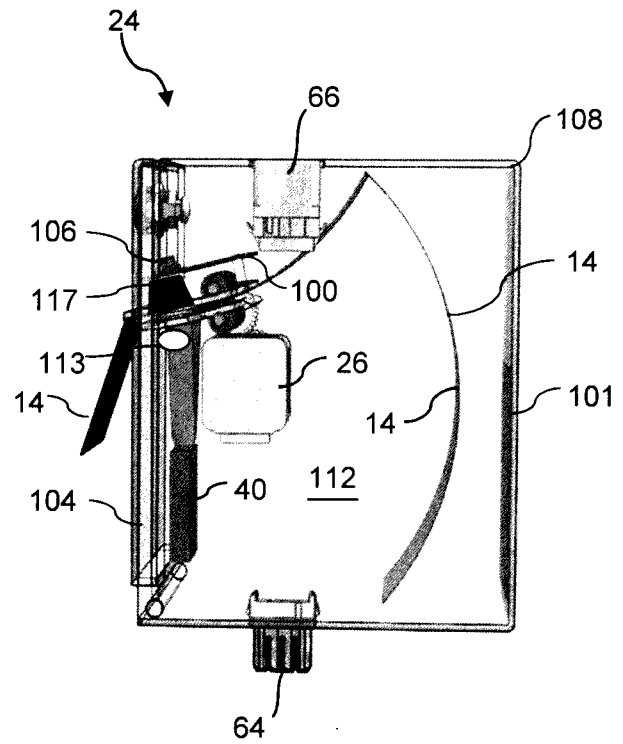


Fig. 6

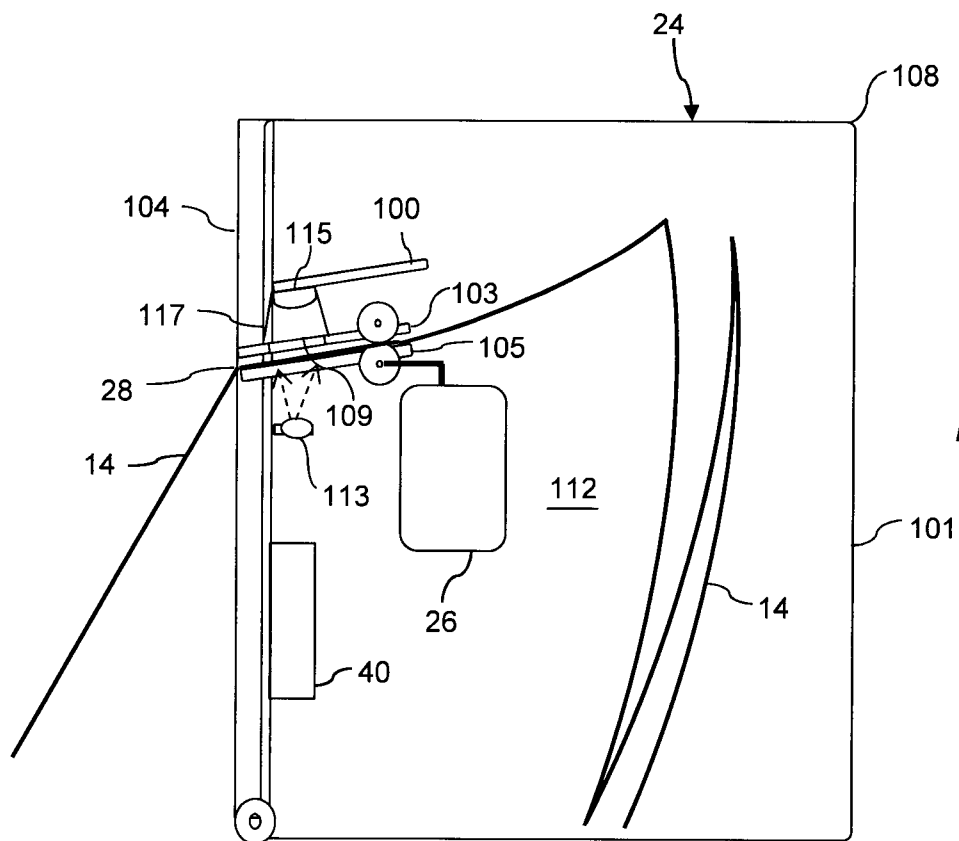


Fig. 7

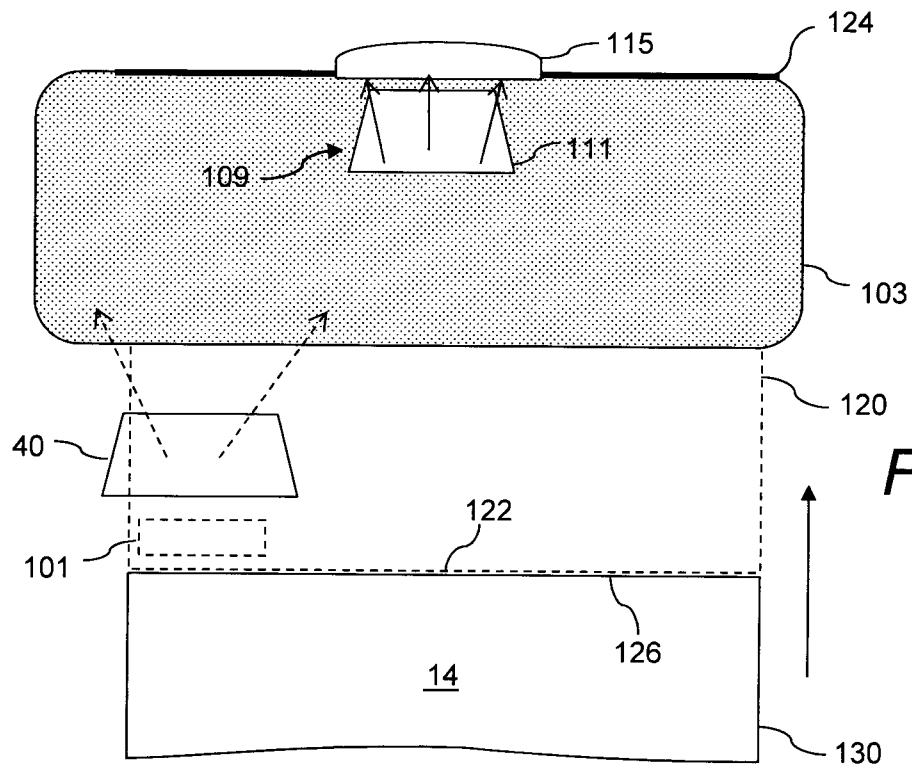


Fig. 8A

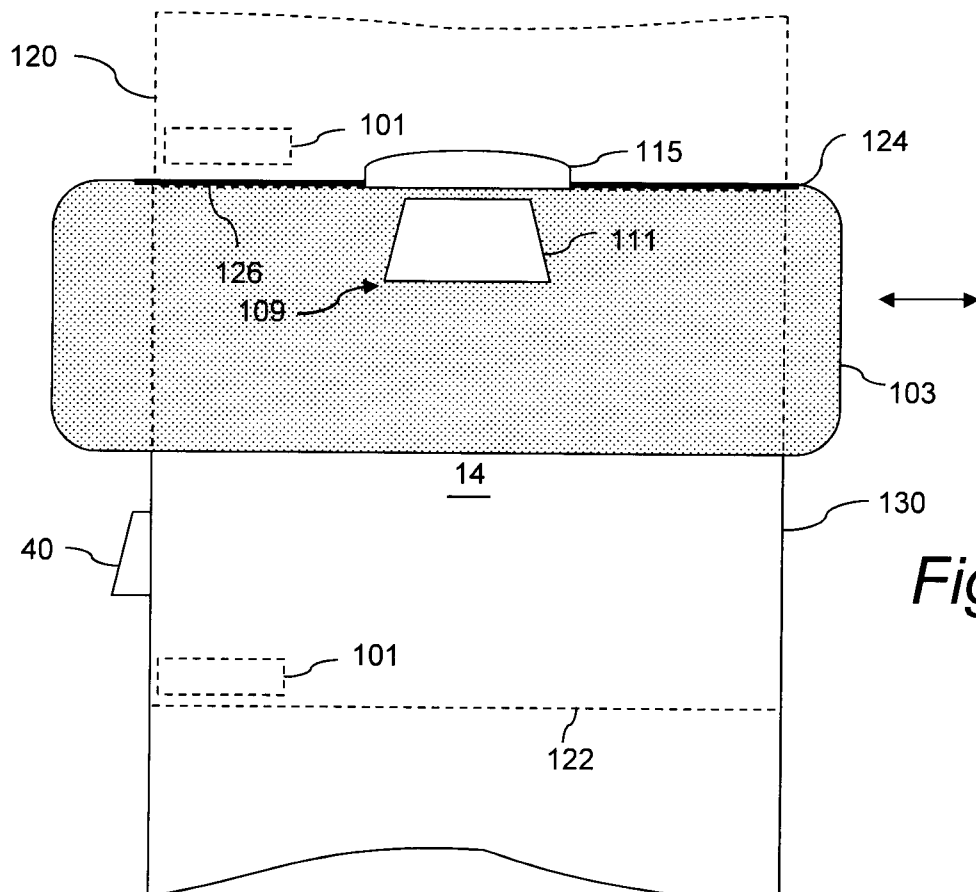


Fig. 8B

