A primary bag that can be used for holding the majority of purchased items includes an integral or attachable secondary container that may contain items related to the purchase. For use in the fast food industry, the secondary container is used to house finger food to allow a customer, easy, safe and undisruptive access to snack items that can be consumed on the way to his or her destination.
RECEIVE FOOD ORDER

OFFER RIDE-ALONG FEATURE

IF CUSTOMER AGREES

STANDARD PROCEDURES

UTILIZE TWO-COMPARTMENT BAG

PLACE ITEMS IN FIRST COMPARTMENT

PLACE RIDE-ALONG ITEM IN SECOND COMPARTMENT

PROVIDE TO CUSTOMER

END

Fig. 6
QUICK ACCESS POCKET FOR SHOPPING BAGS

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This patent application is a U.S. non-provisional application filed pursuant to Title 35, United States Code §100 et seq., and 37 C.F.R. Section 1.53(b) claiming priority under Title 35, United States Code §119(e) to United States Provisional Application for Patent having been assigned the Ser. No. of 60/767,354 and filed on Mar. 21, 2006, which application is herein incorporated by reference.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0002] The present invention is directed towards packaging products and more specifically to a quick and easy access pocket, pouch, bag or other container that can be externally connected, adhered to or formed onto another container to facilitate access to the contents thereof.

[0003] You are either guilty or you’re a victim—or you may even be both. What we are talking about is that sneaky, grubby, quick fingered culprit that was sent to the local fast food restaurant to pick-up everyone else’s lunch, dinner or second-half, get-through-the-game fuel. Upon his or her return, the bag is opened up and the food is distributed. However, as is usually the case, some of the little bags or pockets of fries are fuller than other little bags or pockets of fries. Why is this so? And then, there are the orphan fries at the bottom of the big bag—where did they come from? What is the answer to this great intrigue? Are fast food restaurants which are striving for excellence in service in this highly competitive market breaking their own standards of impeccable service and being careless? Do they actually only fill some of the little bags halfway while stuffing the others to the brim? I think not. You have seen them operate before. They use the fry scoop. The fry scoop insures the bags are full. No, fault does not fall upon the fast food restaurant employees. Fault is much closer to home than you think. A quick examination of the fast food fetcher will show all the evidence necessary. Salty fingers, glistening lips, a hint of fry breath and a satisfied smile—these are the signs you look for to identify the guilty party. But really, you can’t blame the fry-on-the-sly guy (or gal) because, most likely, you have been there yourself. Driving down the road with a bag full of steamy hot fries or other delectable side order just sitting next to you in the passenger seat is a temptation that not even Mother Theresa herself could have pushed aside. They actually call to you in a voice much more alluring than Homer’s sirens. They say, “just one, nobody will notice if you eat just one”. Then they follow up with a very logical point. “We are steamy hot right now, by the time you get home we will only be luke warm”. “Why should EVERY-ONE eat lukewarm fries? You were the one that had to leave the house or office, drive to the restaurant, order and buy the food! It only seems faire that you snatch one or two, or maybe two or three hot steamy fries from each bag”.

[0004] You turn up the radio, you try to concentrate on baseball or flowers, and you may even try to picture the excited looks of your children or buddies when they receive a full bag of fries. But nothing works. You finally cave-in to the temptation as you slowly move one hand off of the steering wheel and fumble for the top of the bag thinking to yourself, well, just one is okay. You find the bag but you can’t seem to get the top open so you divert your eyes from the road just to provide a little assistance to your hand. Finally, the bag is open, you can feel the steam rise and flow between your fingers as the car is filled with the aroma of hot fries. Your hand slowly dives into the bag as you are trying to focus on the road and keep the saliva from dribbling down your chin. You feel napkins, straws, sandwiches, apple pies, more napkins—panic begins to rush over you mind. What if they forgot the fries? You divert your eyes from the road yet again as you plunge your hand deeper into the bag. You grimace as your fingers slide into a bag of extremely hot and greasy fries but it does not slow you down. You tell yourself you are only taking one but you know very well that you are planning to pull out as many as you can—simply because your not willing to run the risk of pulling out a single, short, overcooked fry after going through all of this trouble. As you pull your hand back out of the bag, you once again divert your eyes from the road to get a glimpse of the marvelous spoil of your gallant efforts. Your fingers are throbbing from the grease burns but you don’t care. You count the fries and immediately assess their quality as you slowly move your hand towards your mouth. You try to open wide too accommodate the entire handful, but there is too much, one of the fries slides down your left cheek leaving behind salty juicy evidence. You savour the flavor as you slowly chew on the fries, opening your mouth to breath cool air in to help cool the fire-hot fries. Finally, the molten morsel is fully chewed and you let it slide down the back of your throat and at this point, unless you have already sold your soul out, the remorse begins to overwhelm you. What have you done? You just ate someone else’s fries and, more than that, you risked your life in doing so. You took unnecessary risks by diverting your eyes from the road—several times! You begin to lecture yourself about how ashamed you are with yourself and then you stop abruptly as you realize that your hand has unconsciously returned to the bag. You, my friend, need help.

[0005] In actuality, the above-described story happens quite frequently. And as pointed out in the story, this activity can impose a threat on the safety of a driver and others. Anytime a driver diverts his attention from the road, regardless of the reason, the driver is assuming a risk. Furthermore, after handling the money to pay for the food, there is some level of a health and sanitary issue that arises as the driver puts his hand into the bag and touches various fries. Additionally, there is the issue of fairness. It is true that it is not fair to eat someone else’s fries without their permission. However, it is equally true that the person that has to go after the fast food should reap some sort of an award. Thus, there is a need in the art for a solution to this dilemma. What is needed in the art is a solution that would provide a safe and sanitary way to reward a driver for fetching food for everyone else without unfairly treating the hungry anticipants. The present invention provides such a solution.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0006] The present invention provides a solution to the above-described needs in the art by providing a two-compartment bag that can be used to offer a ride-along feature to fast-food restaurant customers (i.e., RIDE-ALONG-FRIES™). The two compartment bag includes a main compartment that is used to house the bulk of a customer’s order, and a secondary compartment that is used to house a portion of finger food for the customer to consume on his or
her way to their destination. The secondary compartment is affixed or integral to the bag and includes an exterior opening that facilitates easier access to the contents by the customer. Thus, finger foods can be placed into the interior of the secondary compartment and the customer will have easy, safe and sanitary access to the contents. In one embodiment of the invention, the secondary compartment is a pouch that is affixed to the external side of the main compartment or paper bag. In another embodiment, the secondary compartment is formed by placing a panel on the interior surface of the main compartment (or paper bag) thereby creating a pouch. In addition, an opening on the exterior of the main container is provided to gain access the pouch. In yet another embodiment, the main container is a beverage cup and the secondary container is affixed to the side of the beverage cup or to a lid for the beverage cup. In each of these embodiments as well as their equivalents, a customer is provided with a ride-along feature or service that allows the customer to gain safe and/or sanitary access to a finger food or other item without having to breach the seal or open the main container.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SEVERAL VIEWS OF THE DRAWING

[0007] FIG. 1 is a drawing of an embodiment of the present invention providing an external pocket on a paper bag.
[0008] FIG. 2 is a drawing of another embodiment of the present invention providing an externally accessible pocket on a paper bag.
[0009] FIG. 3 is a drawing of an embodiment of the present invention providing an expandable pocket on a paper bag.
[0010] FIG. 4 is a drawing of an embodiment of the present invention providing an external pocket on a paper bag.
[0011] FIG. 5 is a drawing of an embodiment of the present invention providing an external pocket attached to the top of a beverage container.
[0012] FIG. 6 is a flow diagram illustrating one embodiment for implementing the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0013] The present invention provides a multi-access container that can be used to provide safe and/or sanitary access to food items, as well as preserve the sanctity of someone else's fries. More particularly, in one embodiment of the invention, a paper bag used to storing purchased fast food items includes an exterior pocket, pouch or bag that can be used to hold french fries or other finger foods. Advantageously, this embodiment of the invention provides easy access to the finger food so that a driver, can easily consume the finger foods while driving without having to divert his or her eyes from the road to open the paper bag and without having to stick his or her hands into the paper bag potentially contaminating, disturbing or damaging the food items.

[0014] Now turning to the figures in which like references refer to like elements throughout the several views, various embodiments, features and aspects of the present invention are presented.

[0015] FIG. 1 is a drawing of an embodiment of the present invention providing an external pocket on a paper bag. In this embodiment of the present invention, a paper bag assembly 100 includes a main compartment 110 and a secondary compartment 120. The main compartment 110 is a paper bag that can be fabricated in a variety of manners, shapes and sizes as will be well known to those skilled in the art. The secondary compartment 120 is a pocket that is fixedly attached to an exterior surface 112 of the main compartment 110. The secondary compartment includes a front panel 122 and a back panel 124. The front panel 122 and the back panel 124 are substantially similar with the exception that the front panel 122 includes an indentation or recess 126. The front panel 122 and the back panel 124 are joined on three adjacent sides but are not joined at the indentation or recess 126, thereby creating an opening. This structure creates a pocket compartment 128 that is comprised of an interior surface of the front panel 122 and an interior surface of the back panel 124. This pocket can be used to contain items. The exterior of the back panel 124 is adhered to the exterior surface 112 of the main compartment 110 with the opening being oriented towards to top of the main compartment 110.

[0016] FIG. 2 is a drawing of another embodiment of the present invention providing an externally accessible pocket on a paper bag. In this embodiment of the present invention, a paper bag assembly 200 includes a main compartment 210 and a secondary compartment 220. The main compartment 210 is a paper bag that can be fabricated in a variety of manners, shapes and sizes as will be well known to those skilled in the art. The secondary compartment 220 is a pocket that is integrally formed in the bag assembly 200 with an opening 222 that is accessible on the exterior of the bag assembly 100. In this embodiment, the secondary compartment 220 is formed by creating an opening 222 on an exterior surface of a panel 212 of the main compartment 210 and then adhering a back panel 224 to the interior surface of the panel 212 in a manner that covers the opening 222, thereby creating a pocket (shown as a broken line 225). The back panel 224 is positioned in a manner so that the opening 222 is near the upper portion of the pocket 220. This structure creates a pocket compartment 228 that is comprised of an interior surface of the back panel 224 and an interior surface of a panel 212 of the main compartment 210. Thus, this embodiment of the invention includes an externally accessible pocket that is integrally formed within a paper bag assembly.

[0017] FIG. 3 is a drawing of an embodiment of the present invention providing an external expandable pocket on a paper bag. In this embodiment of the present invention, a paper bag assembly 300 includes a main compartment 310 and a secondary compartment 320. The main compartment 310 is a paper bag that can be fabricated in a variety of manners, shapes and sizes as will be well known to those skilled in the art. The secondary compartment 320 is a pocket that is fixedly attached to an exterior surface 312 of the main compartment 310. The secondary compartment 320 includes a front panel 322 and a back panel 324. The front panel 322 and the back panel 324 are substantially similar with the exception that the front panel 322 includes an indentation or recess 326. The front panel 322 and the back panel 324 are joined on three adjacent sides, either directly or through the use of an expandable side panel, but are not joined at the indentation or recess 326, thereby creating an opening. FIG. 3 shows an expandable side panel 340 that is used to adjoin one edge of the front panel 322 to
one edge of the back panel 324. In the illustrated embodiment, the expandable side panel 340 includes a single fold, however, multi-fold panels could be utilized. In addition, the expandable side panel can be used to adjoin one to three edges of the front panel 322 to the back panel 324. This structure creates an expandable pocket compartment 328 that is comprised of an interior surface of the front panel 322, an interior surface of the back panel 324 and interior surfaces of one or more side panels 340. This pocket can be used to contain items. The exterior of the back panel 324 is adjoined to the exterior surface 312 of the main compartment 310 with the opening being oriented towards top of the main compartment 310.

[0018] FIG. 4 is a drawing of an embodiment of the present invention providing an external pocket on a paper bag. In this embodiment of the present invention, a paper bag assembly 400 includes a main compartment 410 and a secondary compartment 420. The main compartment 410 is a paper bag that can be fabricated in a variety of manners, shapes and sizes as will be well known to those skilled in the art. The secondary compartment 420 is a pocket that is fixedly attached to an exterior surface 412 of the main compartment 410. The secondary compartment includes a front panel 422 and a back panel 424. The front panel 422 and the back panel 424 are substantially similar with the exception that the front panel 422 includes an indentation or recess 426 and the back panel 424 includes an extension 425. The front panel 422 and the back panel 424 are joined on three adjacent sides but are not joined at the indentation or recess 126, thereby creating an opening. This structure creates a pocket compartment 428 that is comprised of an interior surface of the front panel 422 and an interior surface of the back panel 424. This pocket can be used to contain items. At least a portion of the exterior of the back panel 424 is adhered to the exterior surface 412 of the main compartment 410 with the opening being oriented towards top of the main compartment 410. In one embodiment, an upper portion of the extension 425 is connected to the surface 412 of the main compartment 410 and in other embodiments, the entire back panel 424 can be attached to the surface 412 of the main compartment 410. In this embodiment, a portion of the back panel 424, ranging from the entire panel to only the top portion of the panel can be adhered to the surface 412 of the main compartment 410.

[0019] It will be appreciated that the secondary container may thus be an externally and fixedly attached item to the primary container, may be attachable and removable, or may be integrally formed in the primary container. In addition, the secondary container may also be constructed to be inside the primary container.

[0020] FIG. 5 is a drawing of an embodiment of the present invention providing an external pocket attached to the top of a beverage container. In this embodiment of the present invention, a beverage container assembly 500 includes a beverage compartment 510, a top 515 and a side compartment 520. The beverage compartment 510 is a paper or plastic cup that can be fabricated in a variety of manners, shapes and sizes as will be well known to those skilled in the art. The top 515 of the beverage container 500 is sized to snap over the top of the beverage container 500, or otherwise attach to the opening of the beverage container 500 as is well known to those skilled in the art. The side compartment 520 is a pocket that is fixedly attachable to either the exterior surface of the beverage container 510 (not shown) or to the top 515 of the beverage container 510. In other embodiments the side compartment 520 may be integrally formed into the top 515. In other words, the two components may actually be a single fabricated item. The side compartment 520 includes a front panel 522 and a back panel 524. The front panel 522 and the back panel 524 are substantially similar with the exception that the front panel 522 includes an indentation or recess 526 and the back panel 524 includes an extension 525 and a top attachment 527. The extension 525 extends to the top of the beverage container 510 and is adjoined with the top attachment 527. The top attachment 527 is such that it can be attached to the top 515 either permanently or temporarily but in either case, with enough security so that if items are placed into the side compartment 520 or extracted from the side compartment 220, the top attachment 527 will not decouple from the top 515. The front panel 522 and the back panel 524 are joined on three adjacent sides but are not joined at the indentation or recess 126, thereby creating an opening. This structure creates a pocket compartment 528 that is comprised of an interior surface of the front panel 522 and an interior surface of the back panel 524. This pocket can be used to contain items. Advantageously, the various embodiments of the present invention can be utilized in providing a ride along fries, or ride along finger-food service. The various structures described above enable a finger food, such as fries, tator tots, chicken fingers, pies, etc., to be provided to a customer in a safe and sanitary manner. In addition, embodiments of the may also be used to hold condiments or other items such as salt, ketchup, mustard, mayonnaise and other similar sauces or spice pockets. In addition, the container can be fabricated in such a manner that it includes a replaceable or removable lid, and as such, may contain dipping sauces. In addition, in a multi-extra container embodiment, one secondary container can be used for containing a food item, such as french fries, while the other secondary container holds a dipping sauce, such as ketchup.

[0022] When a customer places an order for fast food, the service provider can either ask the customer if he or she would like to purchase or upgrade the purchase to include the ride along feature. Alternatively, this service or feature can be automatically provided to all customers or select customers. Regardless of the particular implementation, a bag formulated by one of the described structures, or equivalents thereof, is utilized to fill the customer's main order by placing such items into the main compartment, and then placing finger food items into the secondary compartment. The secondary compartment securely holds the food item but grants easy access to the finger foods. Thus, a driver of an automobile, or other participant, can easily access the finger food items without having to divert his or her eyes from the driving task. In addition, because the finger food items are stored in the secondary compartment external to the main compartment, the party partaking in the ride along finger food items does not have to reach into the interior of the main compartment. Advantageously, this allows the main compartment to stay closed, and as such, the food items are more apt to remain warm. In addition, the partaking party does not contaminate, damage or disturb any food items located on the interior of the main compartment when reaching for the finger foods. Advantageously, the customer can partake in the morsels without inadvertently eating someone else's food item.
FIG. 6 is a flow diagram illustrating one embodiment for implementing the present invention. The process 600 starts when a customer requests an order and the service provider receives the order 605, typically this represents a customer ordering fast food items from a fast food restaurant. The service provider then offers the customer access to the ride-along feature. Such access may be presented as a free service or, may involve a surcharge on the customer’s order. In either case, the service provider provides the option to the customer. In other embodiments, the ride-along feature may automatically be presented by a merchant without providing an offer to the customer. If the customer rejects the ride-along feature 615, then processing continues as normal or standard operating procedures for the service provider and the customer 620. However, if the customer accepts or agrees to the ride-along feature, processing continues by the service provider utilizing one of the variously described embodiments of the two-compartment bag 625. The service provider places items into the first compartment (i.e., sandwiches, fries, pies, etc.) 630 and then places some form of finger food, typically french fries, into the second compartment 635. The filled bag is then provided to the customer 640 and the customer can proceed towards a destination with save and sanitary access to the finger foods. Thus, it will be appreciated that the present invention provides a container and a method for having safe and sanitary access to finger food items.

In various embodiments of the present invention, the material of the secondary container may require different characteristics. For instance, if the secondary container is primarily for housing food items, the material can include thermal characteristics to help keep the food warm. In addition, if the item to be placed in the container has a high amount of moisture, then the material may be non-porous or liquid proof.

It should be appreciated that although the present invention is described as utilizing a single secondary pocket or pouch, in actuality, multiple pockets or pouches may be provided. Thus, multiple types of finger foods can be provided or, the driver and a passenger may have their own dedicated ride-along pocket. In addition, one pocket may be used to house a finger food item, such as fries or chicken fingers, and another pocket may be used to contain a sauce, such as ketchup or honey mustard etc. In addition, a secondary pocket may be utilized to hold a napkin for the customer or other various condiments and items such as straws, napkins, sauce packets, plastic ware, receipts, etc.

It should be appreciated that although the main container is described as a paper bag in FIGS. 1-4, other materials such as plastic or any synthetic, composite or natural material could also be used without departing from the scope of the present invention. In addition, although the embodiment of a paper bag for fast food has been described, it should be appreciated that general shopping bags for other items may also serve as suitable embodiments for the present invention. The secondary compartment could be used to hold promotional items, receipts, small items, accessories (such as batteries, jewelry, etc.). It should be emphasized that the above-described embodiments of the present invention, particularly, any “preferred” embodiments, are merely possible examples of implementations and merely set forth for a clear understanding of the principles of the invention. Many variations and modifications may be made to the above-described embodiment(s) of the invention without departing substantially from the spirit and principles of the invention. All such modifications and variations are intended to be included herein within the scope of this disclosure and the present invention and protected by the following claims. Furthermore, various features and aspects of the present invention have been described, each of which may be separately and distinctly novel and the present invention may be comprised of one or more such features or aspects.

What is claimed is:

1. An apparatus for containing items, the apparatus comprising:
   a main compartment that is operable to receive a first item;
   a secondary compartment that is smaller than the first compartment and is operable to receive a second item; and
   the secondary compartment being accessible external to the main compartment and providing easy access to the second item.

2. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the main compartment is a paper bag.

3. The apparatus of claim 2, wherein the secondary compartment is integral to the paper bag.

4. The apparatus of claim 2, wherein the secondary compartment is attachable to the side of the paper bag.

5. The apparatus of claim 2, wherein the secondary compartment is a pocket fixedly attached to the side of the paper bag.

6. The apparatus of claim 5, wherein the paper bag includes a front, a back, a left side and a right side with the front and the back having the same dimensions and the left side and right side having the same dimensions, the width of the front and back being larger than the width of the left side and right side, and the pocket being fixedly attached to the front or back.

7. The apparatus of claim 6, wherein the pocket is attached to the lower portion of the front or back of the paper bag.

8. The apparatus of claim 2, wherein the pocket is expandable.

9. The apparatus of claim 8, wherein the pocket is comprised of a heavier stock material than the paper bag.

10. The apparatus of claim 5, wherein the pocket is fixedly attached by adhering one surface of the pocket to one surface of the paper bag.

11. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the main compartment is a paper bag and the secondary compartment is formed by creating an opening in the side of the paper bag and affixing a panel to the interior surface of the paper bag over the opening, thereby creating a pocket.

12. The apparatus of claim 2, wherein the secondary compartment is a pocket including an extension, and wherein the extension of the pocket can be folded with the top of the paper bag when closing the paper bag, thereby securing the pocket to the paper bag.

13. The apparatus of claim 2, wherein the secondary compartment is a pocket including an extension, and wherein the extension of the pocket is adhered to a surface of the paper bag.

14. The apparatus of claim 2, wherein the secondary compartment is constructed of a material having thermal characteristics.
15. A container including a main compartment and a secondary compartment, the container comprising:
   a first plurality of surfaces defining the interior of the main compartment, the main compartment including an opening providing access to the interior of the main compartment;
   a second plurality of surfaces defining the interior of the secondary compartment, the secondary compartment including an opening that is external to the interior of the main compartment and provides access to the interior of the secondary compartment.
16. The container of claim 15, wherein the main compartment is a paper bag and the secondary compartment is a paper pocket adhered to an exterior surface of the paper bag.
17. A method for providing safe access to a plurality of items that have been purchased for consumption, the method comprising:
   placing a first plurality of items into a main compartment of a container;
   placing a second plurality of items into a secondary compartment of the container;
   closing the opening of the main compartment leaving access to the secondary compartment readily available without having to open the main container.
18. The method of claim 17, wherein prior to the step of placing the second plurality of items into the secondary compartment, a seller inquires of a purchaser whether the purchaser desires to receive the second plurality of items.
19. The method of claim 18, wherein the second plurality of items is finger food and the seller’s inquiry is an indication that for an increased purchase price, the purchaser can obtain the finger food placed into the secondary opening.
20. The method of claim 18, wherein the finger food is french fries and the seller’s inquiry includes asking the purchaser if the purchaser would like to purchase ride-along-fries.

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