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(54) Title: DISPENSING APPARATUS WITH DIRECTIONAL LED LIGHTING

(57) Abstract: A device for providing a number of products. The device may include an enclosure and a number of directional light emitting diodes positioned within the enclosure for illuminating the products.

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DISPENSING APPARATUS WITH DIRECTIONAL LED LIGHTING

Technical Field

The present invention relates generally to a dispensing apparatus, such as a vending machine, a cooler, a glass front merchandiser, and the like, and more particularly relates to a dispensing apparatus with light emitting diode ("LED") lighting sources.

Background of the Invention

The design and the construction of a dispensing apparatus may focus on the sometimes conflicting goals of (1) how effectively the apparatus markets the products therein and (2) how efficient the apparatus may be in terms of energy consumption. By product marketing, we mean that the dispensing apparatus and the products therein should be visually appealing so as to catch the eye of the consumer. The products therein preferably can be easily seen and identified. By energy efficiency, we mean that the energy usage of the apparatus should be reasonable with respect to the desired cooling load and any other desired functions of the apparatus, such as product marketing.

These conflicting goals, however, may not be easily reconciled. For example, the energy costs involved in effectively lighting a dispensing apparatus at all times may be extensive. Conversely, insufficient lighting or the inability of the apparatus to catch and keep the eye of the consumer may affect desired sales levels.

What is desired, therefore, is a dispensing apparatus that adequately illuminates and promotes the products therein while being reasonable in terms of energy usage. These competing goals should be accomplished in an apparatus that is reasonable in terms of the cost of manufacture and the cost of usage.

Summary of the Invention

The present invention thus provides a device for providing a number of products. The device may include an enclosure and a number of directional light emitting diodes positioned within the enclosure for illuminating the products.

Specific embodiments of the invention may include the directional light emitting diodes having a directivity of about twenty (20) degrees and a luminous intensity of about five (5) to six (6) Candela, with about 5.6 Candela preferred. The enclosure may include a number of shelves, a doorframe, and one or more mounting blocks. The directional light emitting diodes may be positioned on the shelves, on the doorframe, and/or on the mounting blocks. The products may each include an indication of source. The directional light emitting diodes may be directed at the indication of source. The directional light emitting diodes may be adjustable. The device may further include a number of light emitting diodes and a florescent light source.

The device may include an a heat transfer system positioned in communication with the enclosure. The heat transfer system may include a Stirling cycle device. The light emitting diodes may be in the form of light emitting diode bundles. The light emitting diodes may have a brightness of about 1000 to about 3000 Lumens. The device may include an a vending mechanism positioned in communication with the enclosure. The vending mechanism may include a selection device and a payment device.

Brief Description of the Drawings

Fig. 1 is a perspective view of a dispensing device of the present invention.

Fig. 2 is a side exploded view of the dispensing device of Fig. 1.

Fig. 2A is a Stirling cycle cooler useful with the present invention.

Fig. 3 is a front plan view of an alternative dispensing device of the present invention with the directional LED's shown in phantom lines.

Fig. 4 is a partial top cross-sectional view of the dispensing device of Fig. 3 taken along line A-A.

Fig. 5 is a front plan view of an alternative embodiment of the dispensing device of the present invention with the LED's shown in phantom lines.

Fig. 6 is a front plan view of an alternative embodiment of the dispensing device of the present invention with the directional LED's shown in phantom lines.

Detailed Description of the Invention

Referring now in more detail to the drawings, in which like numerals refer to like elements throughout the several views, Figs. 1 and 2 show a dispensing device **100** of the present invention. The dispensing device **100** may include any type of enclosure **105**. In this embodiment, the dispensing device **100** may be in the form of a refrigerator or a cooler **110**. The scope of the invention, however, is not in any way limited by the scope or nature of the enclosure **105**. The cooler **110** may have an insulated shell **120** enclosing an interior portion **130**. The insulated shell **120** may be made from a conventional combination of metals, foams, plastics, or similar types of materials. The insulated shell **120** may be largely of conventional design. Although a substantially rectangular shape is shown, any convenient shape, size, or capacity may be used. The cooler **110**, the insulated shell **120**, and the other components of the dispensing device **100** of the present invention may be similar to that sold by the Beverage-Air Company of Spartanburg, South Carolina with coolers under the mark "Marketeer".

The cooler **110** may have a heat transfer system **140** positioned therein or adjacent thereto so as to chill the interior portion **130**. The heat transfer system **140** may be a Stirling cycle system **135** a conventional Rankine cycle system **145**, a Transcritical Carbon Dioxide cycle device, or any other type of refrigeration system. A Stirling cycle cooler useful in the present invention is shown in commonly owned U.S. Patent Nos. 6,266,963 and 6,272,867. Alternatively, the heat transfer system **140** may transport heat to the interior portion **130** so as to warm the interior portion **140** in a conventional manner. The heat transfer system **140** also may heat one part of the interior portion **130** while chilling another part. The scope of the invention, however, is not in any way limited by the scope or nature of the heat transfer system **140**.

One or more doors **150** may enclose the insulated shell **120**. The door(s) **150** may be insulated in a conventional manner. Each door **150** may include an outer frame **160** and one or more substantially transparent panels **170**. The outer frame **160** may be made from metals, plastics, or similar types of materials. The transparent panel **170** may be made from single or multiple paned glass or any other type of substantially transparent materials with good insulating capabilities. For example, polycarbonate, ABS (acrylonitrile-butadiene-styrene), or other suitable materials may be used. A handle **180** or a similar device may be used to open the door **150**.

Positioned within the interior portion **130** of the cooler **110** may be a plurality of shelves **190**. The shelves **190** may be conventional flat shelves, gravity feed slides **195**, rotating coils, other types of drop mechanisms, or any other type of product support or product feeding system. Further, any combination of these elements may be used together. Positioned on the shelves **190** may be a plurality of products **200**. The products **200** may be in the shape of a bottle, a can, a pouch, a box, a carton, a package, a wrapper, or any other type of product container or configuration. The products **200** may be any type of object that may be sold in a dispensing device, including but not limited to any type of object that is generally heated or chilled prior to dispensing. The scope of the invention is not in any way limited by the scope or nature of the products **200**. Each of the products **200** may include an indication of source **205**, such as a label or other type of product and/or brand identification.

The interior portion **130** of the cooler **110** may have one or more light emitting diodes ("LED's") **210** positioned therein. The LED's **210** may be positioned adjacent to the door **150** or elsewhere within the cooler **110**. The LED's **210** may serve to illuminate the interior portion **130** of the cooler **110** and the products **200** positioned therein.

The LED's **210** may have a significantly longer lifetime than fluorescent lighting or other types of conventional lighting sources. For example, it may be expected for the LED's **210** to last as long as the refrigeration system **140** or even the cooler **110** itself. As such, there is generally no replacement costs involved in the long-term use of the LED's. Further, the LED's **210** generally require very little maintenance, if any.

Not only may the LED's **210** have a significant lifetime, the LED's **210** generally require much less energy to operate than conventional lighting sources. The LED's **210** also produce very little heat. As such, the overall efficiency of the cooler **110** may increase. In fact, the use of the LED's **210** may decrease the energy demands of the cooler **110** as a whole.

The LED's **210** generally may be smaller in size than conventional fluorescent lighting fixtures. Despite this smaller size, the use of the LED's **210** may provide a significant increase in brightness and clarity as compared to conventional lighting techniques. The LED's **210** also may provide various colors, such as blue, red, and green, that may be used separately or together. A preferred LED **210** may be manufactured by Color Kinetics of Boston, Massachusetts under

the mark "ChromaCore". Each LED **210** may be a type T1.75 inch (500 millimeters) with a luminous intensity of about 5.6 Candela and a directivity of about twenty (20) degrees. The LED's **210** described herein also may be used in combination with conventional lighting sources.

In this example, the LED's **210** may be arranged in a tube-like bundle **215**. Each LED bundle **215** may have a diameter of about 0.75 to about 1.25 inches (about 1.9 to about 3.2 millimeters) and a length of about 1 to about 3 feet (about 0.3 to about 0.9 meters). Each LED bundle **215** may have about 18 to 54 LED's **210** therein. Each LED **210** may have a power consumption of about 0.14 Watt such that each LED bundle **215** may have a LED **210** power consumption of about 2.5 to about 7.5 Watts. A LED bundle **215** useable with the present invention may be sold by Advanced Lighting, Inc. of Ormond Beach, Florida, under the mark "E-Stars Nova Series" Mono-Chromatic LED Light Strips and under other marks.

Figs. 3 and 4 show an alternative embodiment of the product dispensing device **100** of the present invention. This embodiment shows a cooler **250**. The cooler **250** may be substantially identical to the cooler **110** described above. Rather than the having the LED's **210** being positioned generally within the interior portion **130**, this embodiment employs the use of a number of directional LED's **260**. As the name implies, the directional LED's **260** may tightly focus their light in a particular direction in a manner similar to a small spotlight or flashlight. A number of directional LED's **260** may be bundled together so as to provide a sufficient amount of lighting and/or brightness.

The individual directional LED's **260** may be identical to the individual LED's **210** described above. Each directional LED **260** may have a power consumption of about 0.14 Watt such that the cooler **250** with about 18 to 54 directional LED's **260** may have a directional LED **260** power consumption of about 2.5 to about 7.5 Watts. Each directional LED **260** may be a type T1.75 inch (500 millimeters) with a luminous intensity of about 5.6 Candela and a directivity of about twenty (20) degrees.

The directional LED's **260** may be positioned within the doorframe **160**, on the shelves **190**, or positioned otherwise within the interior portion **130** of the cooler **110**. Specifically, the directional LED's **260** may be positioned anywhere within the cooler **110**. Each directional LED **260** may be mounted upon a mounting block **270**. The mounting block **270** provides that each of the directional LED's **260** may be positioned so as to illuminate a particular product **200** within the interior

portion **130** or simply a particular location within the interior portion **130**. For example, the directional LED's **260** may be targeted so as to illuminate specifically the source indication **205** or other product identification information found on each product **200**. More than one directional LED **260** or a combination of directional LED's **260** may be used for each product **200**. The directional LED's **260** may be adjustable so as to change the direction and/or the focus of the light beam or beams as desired. The position of each directional LED **260** also may be changed.

The cooler **250** thus may use the directional LED's **260** to illuminate the products **200** as opposed to illuminating all of the interior portion **130** of the cooler **110** as is done with conventional fluorescent lighting. Each directional LED's **260** may be positioned, directed, and focused as desired. For example, the directional LED's **260** may be focused on particular products **200** or areas within the interior portion **130** of the cooler **110**. Alternatively, the directional LED's **260** may be focused on just the source indication **205** of the products **200**. The net result should be a net reduction in energy usage and an increase in overall energy efficiency. Further, the directional LED's **260** may be used in combination with the LED's **210** described above or with a conventional fluorescent lighting source **270** so as to highlight selectively certain products **200** or certain areas within the interior portion **130** of the cooler **110** while the fluorescent lighting sources **270** provide general or background lighting.

Fig. 5 shows a further alternative embodiment of the dispensing device **100**. This embodiment shows a glass front vendor **300** or a similar type of conventional vending machine of the present invention. Specifically, the glass front vendor **300** may be largely of conventional design. The glass front vendor **300** may include an outer shell **310**. The outer shell **310** may define an interior portion **320**. The outer shell **310** also generally may include one or more front panels **330**. The front panel(s) **330** may be made from single or multiple paned glass or any other type of transparent materials. For example, polycarbonate, ABS, or other suitable materials may be used. Side or lateral panels also may be used. The glass front vendor **300** may or may not include a heat transfer system **140** such as that described above. The scope of the invention is not limited by the scope or the nature of the glass front vendor **300**.

The interior portion **320** of the glass front vendor **300** also may include a plurality of shelves **340**. The shelves **340** may be the gravity feed slides **195** as shown in Fig. 2, a plurality of rotating coils **345**, other types of drop

mechanisms, or any other type of product support or product feeding system. A plurality of products **350** may be positioned on the shelves **340**. The products **350** may be any type of object that is normally sold in a dispensing device similar to or identical to those products **200** described above. Also as described above, the products **350** may have one or more types of identification indication of source **360** positioned thereon.

The shell **310** of the glass front vendor **300** also may have a vending area **370**. The vending area **370** may have a number of bins, trays, slots, or other types of conventional product collection or drop spaces so as to permit the consumer to receive and remove the products **350** as they are selected and dispensed therein. The glass front vendor **300** also may have typical vending devices such as a selection mechanism **315**, a payment mechanism **325**, and other typical vending machine components of conventional design and operation.

As is shown in phantom lines, the glass front vendor **300** may have one or more LED's **380** positioned within the interior space **320**. As with the cooler **110**, the LED's **380** may be in the form of a LED bundle **385** and may be positioned about the panel **330** so as to provide illumination to the products **350** therein. The LED's **380** may generally illuminate the interior portion **320**. The LED's **380** and the LED bundles **385** may be similar or identical to the LED's **210** and the LED bundles **215** described above. Likewise, the positioning and use of the LED's **380** and the LED bundles **385** may be similar or identical to that described above. The LED's **380** and the LED bundles **385** may be used in combination with the traditional lighting sources **270** so as to highlight selectively certain products **350** or certain areas within the interior portion **320** of the glass front vendor **300**.

Fig. 6 shows a further embodiment of the dispensing device **100** of the present invention. This embodiment shows an alternative glass front vendor **400**. The glass front vendor **400** may be substantially identical to the glass front vendor **300** described above. Instead or in addition to the LED's **380**, however, the glass front vendor **400** may use a number of directional LED's **410** similar to those used in the cooler **250** described above.

The directional LED's **410** may be mounted about the panel **330**, on the mounting block **270**, on the shelves **340**, or in any part of the interior portion **320** of the glass front vendor **400**. The directional LED's **410** may be positioned on the shelves **340** so as to illuminate the products **350** from above or below. The directional LED's **410** also may be positioned so as to illuminate the products **350**

and/or their identification indication of source **360**. The directional LED's **410** also may be adjusted to illuminate any desired part of the interior portion **320**. The directional LED's **410** may be similar or identical to the directional LED's **260** described above. Likewise, the positioning and use of the directional LED's **410** may be similar or identical to that described above. Further, the directional LED's **410** may be used in combination with the LED's **380** described above or with the traditional lighting sources **270** so as to highlight selectively certain products **350** or certain areas within the interior portion **320** of the glass front vendor **400**.

CLAIMS

I claim:

1. A device for providing a number of products, comprising:
an enclosure; and
a plurality of directional light emitting diodes positioned within said enclosure for illuminating one or more of the number of products.

2. The device of claim 1, wherein one or more of said plurality of directional light emitting diodes comprises a directivity of about twenty (20) degrees.

3. The device of claim 1, wherein one or more of said plurality of directional light emitting diodes comprise a luminous intensity of about five (5) to six (6) Candela.

4. The device of claim 1, wherein said enclosure comprises a plurality of shelves for the number of products.

5. The device of claim 4, wherein one or more of said plurality of directional light emitting diodes are positioned on one or more of said plurality of shelves.

6. The device of claim 1, wherein said enclosure comprises a doorframe.

7. The device of claim 6, wherein one or more of said plurality of directional light emitting diodes are positioned on said doorframe.

8. The device of claim 1, wherein said enclosure comprises one or more mounting blocks.

9. The device of claim 8, wherein one or more of said plurality of directional light emitting diodes are positioned on said one or more mounting blocks.

10. The device of claim 1, wherein the number of products each comprise an indication of source and wherein one or more of said plurality of directional light emitting diodes are directed at said indication of source of one or more of the number of products.

11. The device of claim 1, wherein said plurality of directional light emitting diodes comprises a plurality of adjustable light emitting diodes.

12. The device of claim 1, further comprising a plurality of light emitting diodes positioned within said enclosure.

13. The device of claim 1, further comprising a florescent light source positioned within said enclosure.

14. The device of claim 1, further comprising a heat transfer system positioned in communication with said enclosure.

15. The device of claim 14, wherein said heat transfer system comprises a Stirling cycle device.

16. The device of claim 1, wherein said plurality of directional light emitting diodes comprise one or more light emitting diode bundles.

17. The device of claim 1, wherein said plurality of directional light emitting diodes comprise a brightness of about 1000 to about 3000 Lumens.

18. The device of claim 1, further comprising a vending mechanism positioned in communication with said enclosure.

19. The device of claim 18, wherein said vending mechanism comprises a selection device.

20. The dispensing device of claim 18, wherein said vending mechanism comprises a payment device.

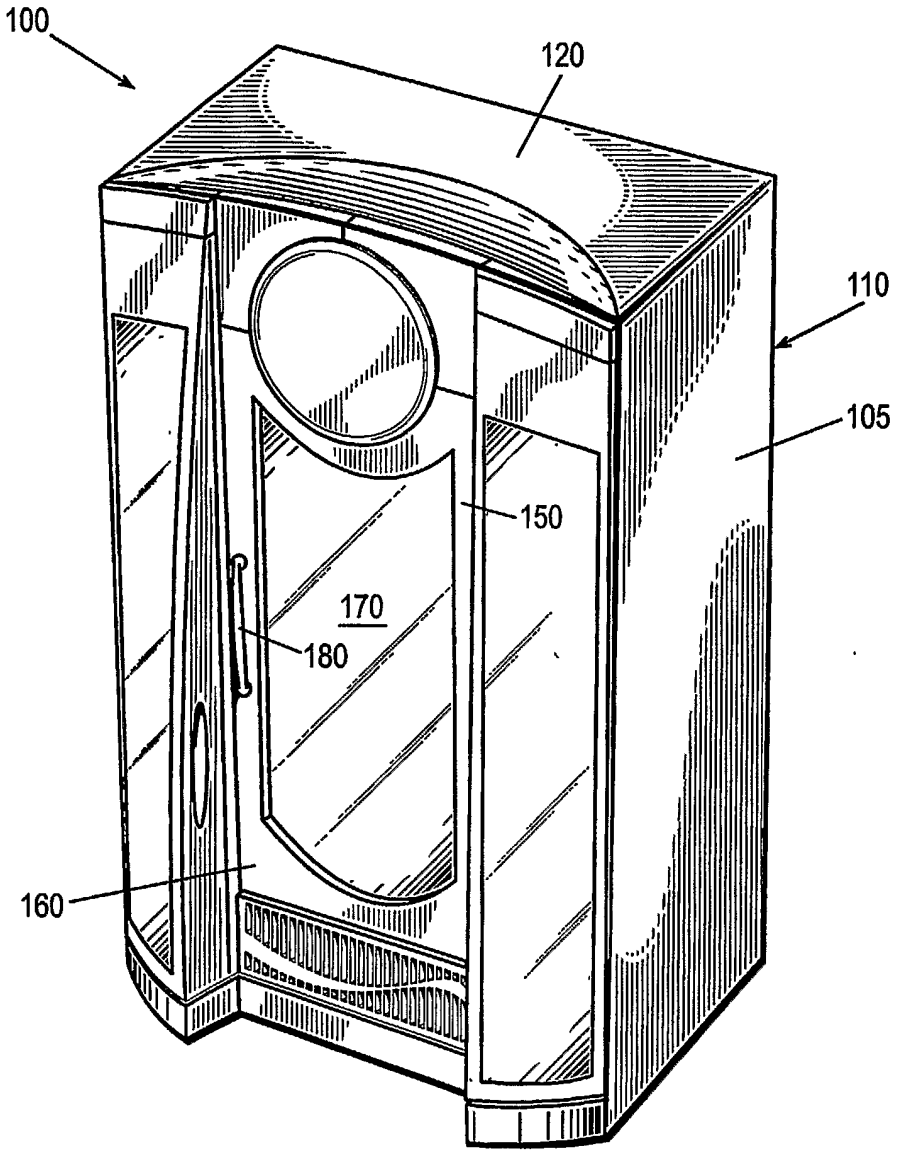

Fig. 1

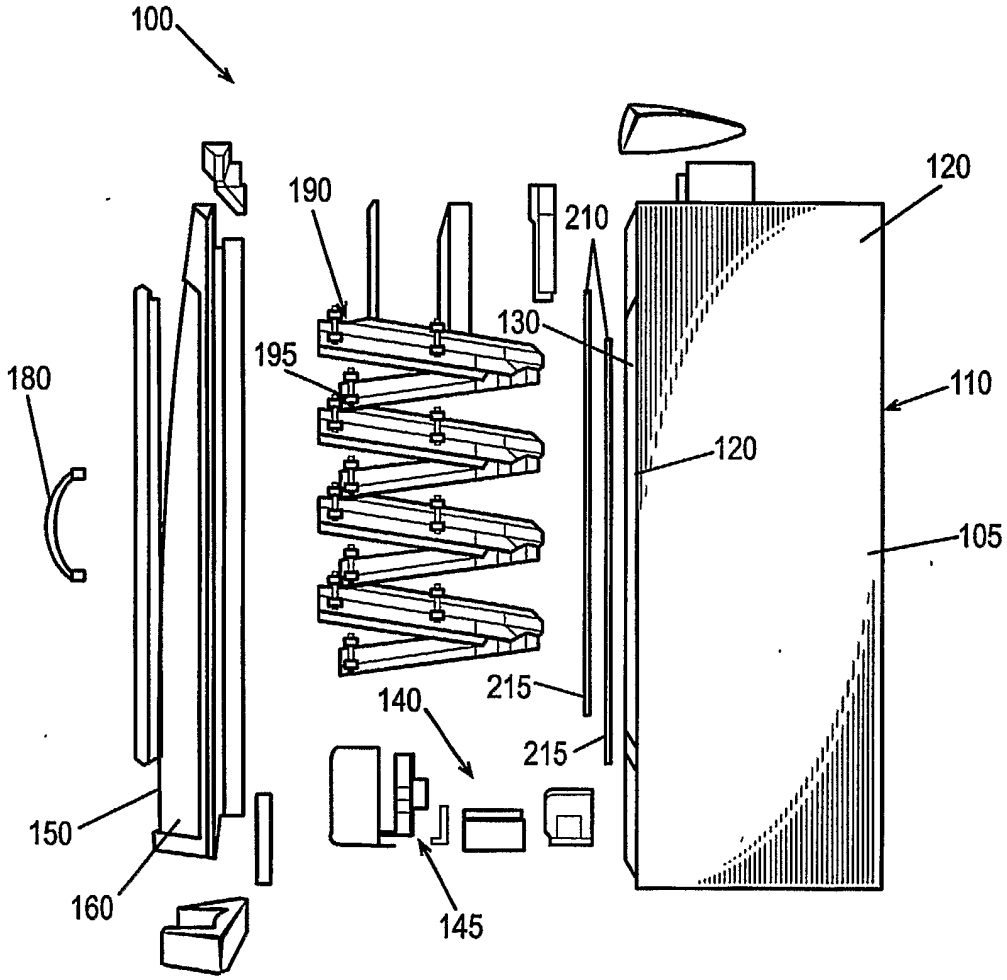

Fig. 2

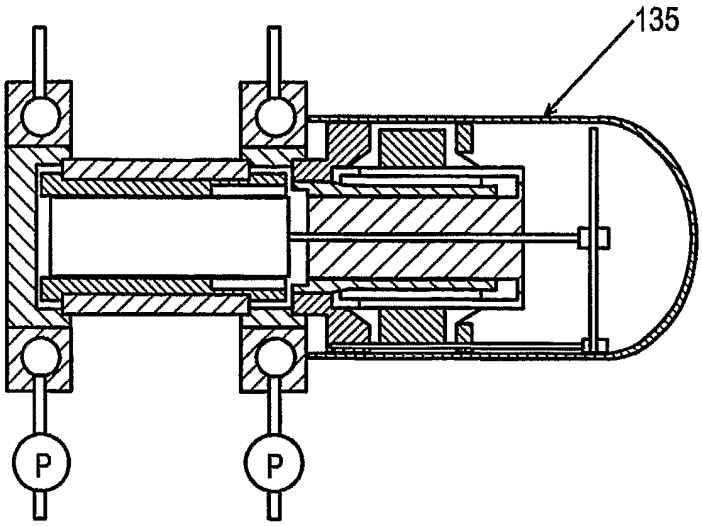
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Fig. 2A

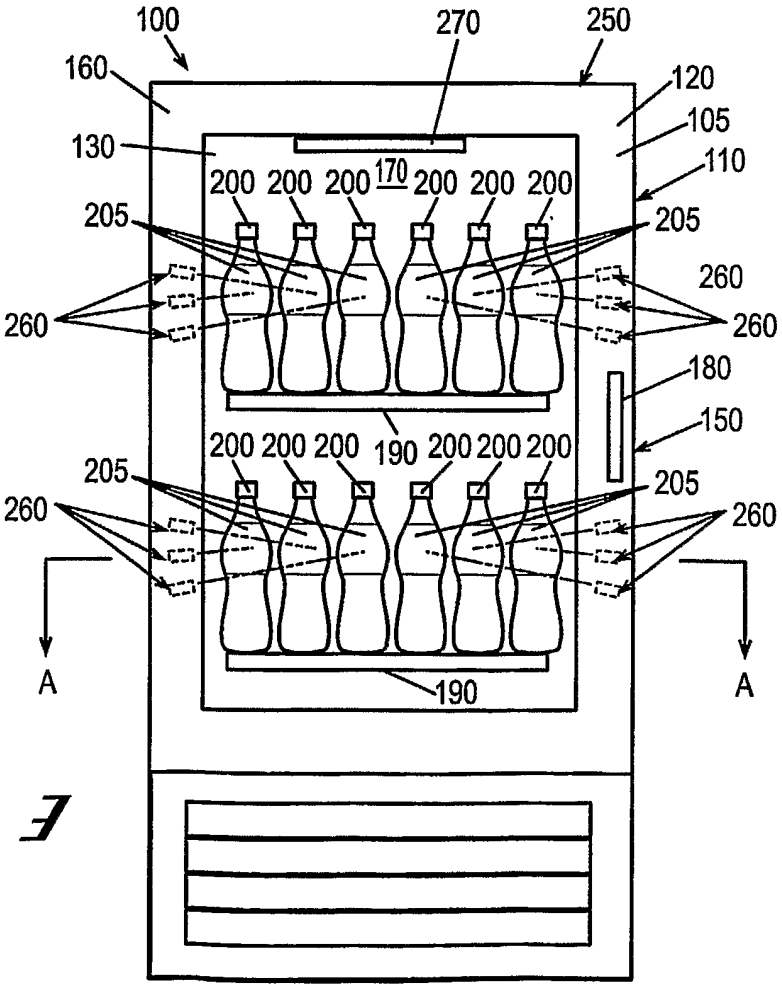
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Fig. 3

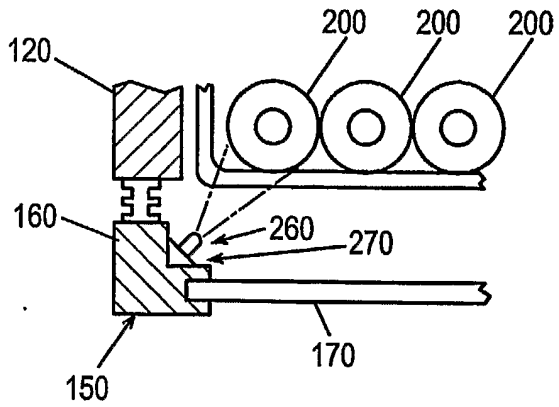
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Fig. 4

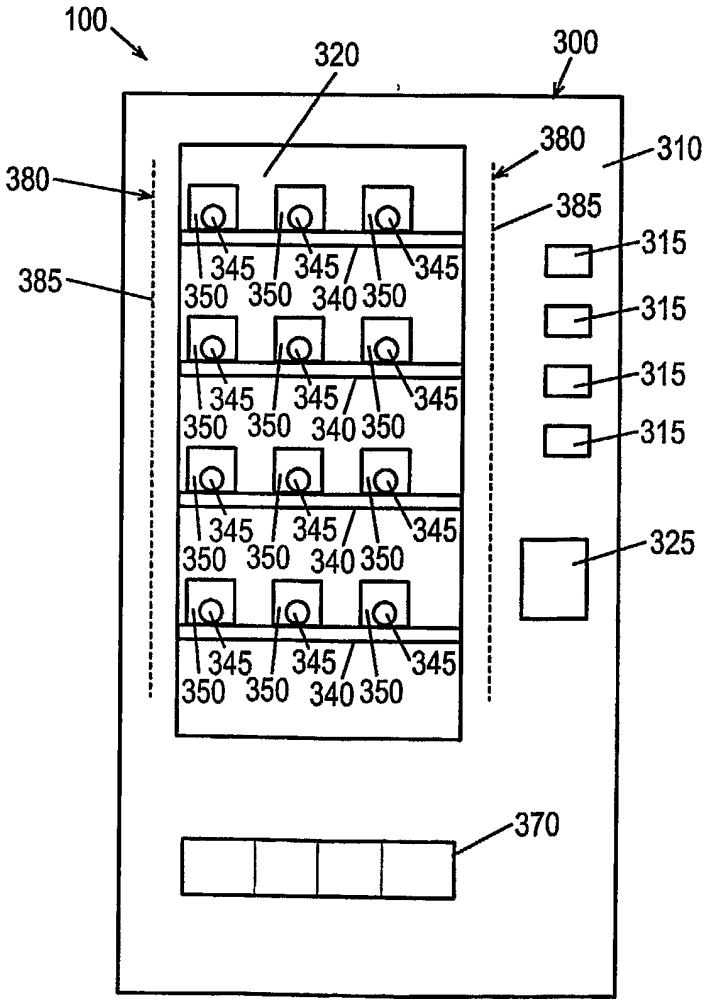
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Fig. 5

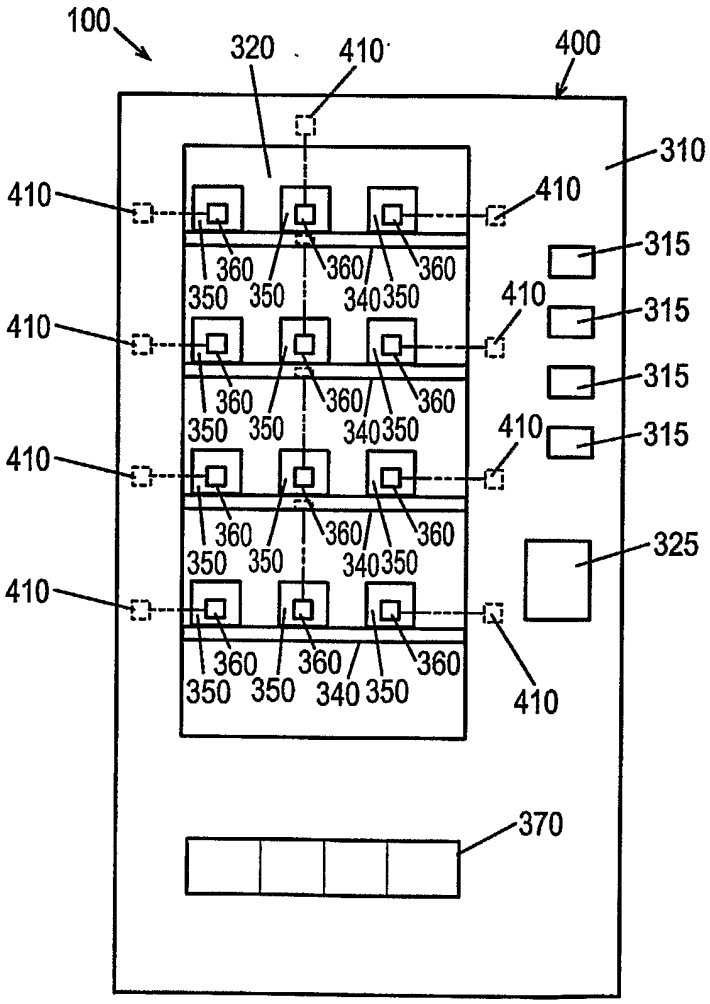
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Fig. 6