TRAY WITH SKIRT

Inventor: Bill Loh, Alameda, CA (US)
Correspondence Address:
Robert S. Smith
1263 Emory St.
San Jose, CA 95126 (US)

Appl. No.: 10/237,534
Filed: Sep. 7, 2002

Continuation-in-part of application No. 10/067,007, filed on Feb. 4, 2002.

Publication Classification

Int. Cl. B65D 69/00; B65D 71/00
U.S. Cl. 220/575

ABSTRACT

A tray being a panel with depressions where each depression is a compartment for holding a group of items distinct from items in other groups. A skirt is provided having a rim that is engaged with the rim of the tray and usually preferably long enough to conceal the underside of the depressions. The skirt is preferably paper to reduce cost. Messages such as advertisements or labels for the items in the compartments are printed on the outside surface of the skirt in clear view of the user or passerby. The skirt, being paper, is economical to replace when a change in the message is required.
TRAY WITH SKIRT

CROSS REFERENCE TO EARLIER FILED INVENTIONS

[0001] This application is a continuation-in-part of application Ser. No. 10/067,007 filed Feb. 4, 2002 from which priority is claimed.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0002] This invention relates to trays and to an organizer (tray) for holding various items in separate compartments of the tray. When the items are food, the tray enables the user to hold the food in one hand leaving the other hand free for eating or other purposes.

BACKGROUND AND INFORMATION DISCLOSURE

[0003] Trays with compartments are used for many situations particularly where fast and convenient access to the items is required. Such situations include storage of groups of items on a shelf wherein all members of a group are identical yet items of each group are different from items of another group. For example, it is often desirable in a hardware store to store all screws in one area though it is required to keep screws of a given size separate from screws of another size.

[0004] Food trays are particularly useful for situations where the diner is not able or desirous to sit down at a typical dinner table or where there is a requirement to transport a meal from the kitchen to a remote location. Meals for such occasions are typically of the fast food variety, particularly "finger food" such as kebobs (meat and/or vegetables on a stick) potatoes, crackers, etc. Balancing a beverage on such occasions is a particular challenge. The problem is further complicated by the occasional need to have a free hand such as for answering a cell phone, greeting an attendee at a party, etc.

[0005] A number of disclosures have appeared related to the problem.

[0006] U.S. Pat. No. 6,264,026 B1 discloses a utility food tray having a shallow food section and an aperture for receiving a beverage container and has downwardly extending legs.

[0007] U.S. Pat. No. 6,152,302 discloses a "chip and dip" tray that nests a beverage container with a bag of chips.

[0008] U.S. Pat. No. 6,129,232 discloses a box for transporting food including a lid with a depression for holding a beverage cup.

[0009] U.S. Pat. No. 5,971,139 discloses a tray with a food and beverage section and a bottomward extending handgrip.

[0010] U.S. Pat. No. 5,826,784 disclose a bottom tray hingedly attached to a lid arranged to prevent spillage.

[0011] U.S. Pat. No. 5,988,844 discloses a food bowl integrally joined to a section having a depression for receiving a beverage cup.

[0012] U.S. Pat. No. 5,520,119 discloses a tray with appendages arranged to stabilize the tray on the user's lap.

[0013] U.S. Pat. No. 4,511,042 discloses a combination tray for carrying a drink container and a food container.

[0014] Identification of items stored in the compartments is often a problem. Furthermore, there is often a situation where it is desired to attract attention to the item in the tray. The problem is further complicated when any given tray will be used to store a variety of groups of items on one occasion and a different variety on another occasion. Such a problem arises in dispensing food when a menu change takes place. On consecutive days or even from one mealtime to the next.

[0015] None of the trays disclosed provide the convenience for arranging and dispensing types of items and displaying a description or advertisement of the items wherein the description or advertisement can be changed as the need arises.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0016] It is an object of this invention to provide a tray that is compartmentalized to enable a user to store items in various compartments.

[0017] It is another object to provide a means for displaying or advertising designs and text that boldly inform the user of the contents of the tray.

[0018] It is another object that the medium for displaying the designs and text is inexpensive and separable from the storage medium of the items so that storage medium can be used successively for various items and only the relatively inexpensive display medium need be changed.

[0019] In particular, it is an object to provide a tray that would be advantageous for dispensing fast food items including beverages. In this situation, it is desirable to accommodate the user holding the tray in one hand while the other hand is free.

[0020] This invention is directed toward a tray being a panel with depressions. The depressions have various shapes to accommodate storage of various items such as beverage. The tray is fitted with a skirt that is secured around the rim of the tray. The skirt is replaceable and made of paper or a similar medium that is relatively inexpensive and conveniently imitable with suitable text and decorations.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE FIGURES

[0021] FIG. 1 shows the tray with skirt of this invention.

[0022] FIG. 2 shows the tray poised for attachment to the skirt.

[0023] FIG. 3 is a sectional view of the tray with skirt attached.

[0024] FIGS. 4A-C show views of the skirt in three stages of fold.

DISCUSSION OF A BEST MODE

[0025] Turning now to a discussion of the drawings, FIG. 1 illustrates this invention comprising a tray section and a skirt section.

[0026] In FIG. 2 the tray section 39 is poised for positioning on the skirt section 51 so that the rim of the tray section engages a rim of the skirt section.
As shown by the sectional view of FIG. 3, the tray section 39 is a plastic panel with a plurality of depressions. 53, 55, dimensioned for various purposes. Engagement of the rim 57 of the tray section 39 with the rim 59 of the skirt section 51 is shown.

The tray design of FIG. 2 is particularly convenient for dispensing food and beverage. One depression 53 is intended for holding the beverage. The user drinks from the depression with a straw.

Other depressions 55 are dimensioned for holding solid foods such as French fries, kebobs, etc.

FIG. 2 shows the skirt section 51 being a frame of four panels, 51A, 51B, 51C, 51D with no floor panel.

FIG. 4A is a top view of the skirt with the skirt 51 completely open. FIG. 4B is a top view of the skirt 51 with the skirt 51 partially folded. FIG. 4C is a top view of the skirt with the skirt 51 folded completely closed.

The skirt has several important properties.

Preferably, the skirt is made of paper which is relatively inexpensive. In another embodiment, the skirt is made of corrugated paper, which has the advantage of strength and low thermal conductivity. The flattened skirt takes very little storage space when the skirts are stored as a stack of skirts.

Printing can be applied to the outside of the skirt rendering the combination tray on skirt very attractive. Another advantage of printing on a paper skirt is that various messages can advertise the “special meal of the day” and when the meal is changed, printing on the skirt can be used to advertise the changes. The paper skirt is biodegradable.

In one embodiment, particularly advantageous for conveying food where cost is an important consideration, the tray section is plastic so that the tray can be made by well known processes such as injection molding or vacuum molding.

However, in some circumstances such as when the tray is used to convey hardware (e.g., display on a store shelf, the tray is a metal, e.g., aluminum. and the tray can be made by stamping.

Variations and modifications of this invention may be contemplated after reading the specification and studying the drawings which are within the scope of this invention. I therefore wish to define the scope of my invention by the appended claims.

What is claimed is:

1. An organizer for separately holding items, which comprises:
   a tray section having a rim;
   a skirt section including four side panels, each panel having one edge coincident with an edge of one neighboring panel and another edge coincident with an edge of another neighboring panel, said four side panels forming a frame without a floor and having a skirt rim including four edges of said panels;
   said rim of said tray section dimensioned to engage said skirt rim
   said tray section being a panel with a plurality of depressions, each depression dimensioned to permit holding special items.

2. The organizer of claim 1 wherein said skirt is made of paper

3. The organizer of claim 1 wherein said skirt is made of corrugated paper.

4. The organizer of claim 1 wherein an outside visible surface of said skirt is imprinted with at least one of alpha-numeric figures and designs.

5. The organizer of claim 1 wherein said skirt has a length selected to conceal a view of an underside of said depressions when said tray section is mounted on said skirt section.

6. The organizer of claim 1 wherein said items are food.

7. The organizer of claim 1 wherein at least one of said depressions is dimensioned to hold a quantity of liquid equivalent to one cup.

8. The organizer of claim 1 wherein said tray section is made of a plastic.

9. The organizer of claim 22 wherein said tray section is made of a metal.