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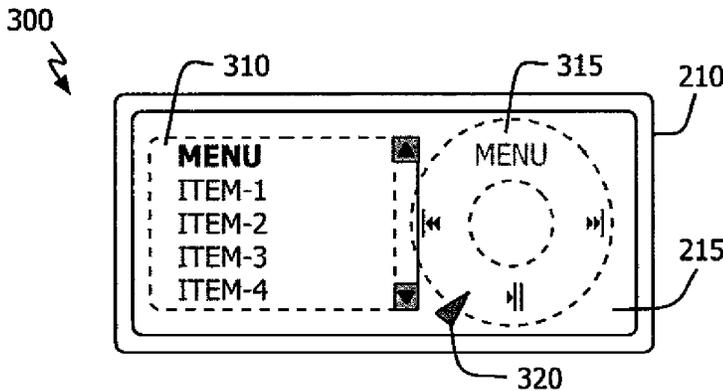
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(57) Abstract: An electronic device uses separate surfaces for input and output. One of the surfaces (e.g., the bottom) includes a force-sensitive touch-surface through which a user provides input (e.g., cursor manipulation and control element selection). On a second surface (e.g., the top), a display element is used to present information appropriate to the device's function (e.g., video information), one or more control elements and a cursor. The cursor is controlled through manipulation of the back-side touch-surface. The cursor identifies where on the

back-side touch-surface the user's finger has made contact. When the cursor is positioned over the desired control element, the user selects or activates the function associated with the control element by applying pressure to the force-sensitive touch-surface with their finger. Accordingly, the electronic device may be operated with a single hand, wherein cursor movement and control element selection may be accomplished without lifting one's finger.

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BACK-SIDE INTERFACE FOR HAND-HELD DEVICES

Background

[0001] The invention relates generally to user input for computer systems and more particularly to a touch and force-sensitive back-side interface for hand-held electronic devices (*e.g.*, hand-held electronic and computer platforms).

[0002] An increasingly popular form of electronic device is the hand-held multi-media device. Illustrative devices of this type include palm or hand-held personal computers, tablet computer systems, mobile telephones, personal digital assistants, portable video players and portable audio players. One specific example of such a device is the video iPod[®] from Apple Computer. (IPOD is a registered trademark of Apple Computer, Inc.) In this class of device the display screen, typically a liquid crystal display ("LCD"), is often too small to make effective use of finger based touch input. Although a touch-screen interface could be embedded in or overlaid on the display, the use of even a single finger for input may occlude a significant portion of the display or cover more than a single operational control element. While this problem could be mitigated by limiting the touch area to a portion of the display screen (*e.g.*, the display edges where horizontal or vertical motion could emulate slider controls), a single finger could still cover a substantial amount of the useful display area. In addition, display smudging is a problem as with all finger sensitive touch-screen interfaces. While stylus based touch-

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screens may be used to partially reduce the occluding problem and eliminate smudging, they suffer a large disadvantage compared to finger based touch-screen systems in that they require the storage and removal of a stylus. In addition, for small hand-held devices a stylus input requires the use of two hands: one to hold the device and one to hold and manipulate the stylus.

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[0002a] As used herein, except where the context requires otherwise, the term "comprise" and variations of the term, such as "comprising", "comprises" and "comprised", are not intended to exclude further additives, components, integers or steps.

Summary

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[0002b] In one aspect of the invention there is provided a method for operating a hand-held electronic device, comprising:

displaying first information on a display element on a first surface of a hand-held electronic device;

displaying control elements and a cursor on the display element when the electronic device is in a specified state;

adjusting a display position of the cursor in response to a movement of a contact on a force-sensitive touch-surface on a back surface of the electronic device; and

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activating a function associated with a first displayed control element when the cursor is positioned coincident with the first displayed control element and an activation force greater than a specified threshold is applied to the force-sensitive touch-surface at a position overlapping the position of the cursor on the first surface,

wherein the act of activating by force is performed continuously with the act of adjusting while maintaining contact with the force-sensitive touch-surface.

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[0002c] In another aspect of the invention there is provided a hand-held electronic device, comprising:

a first surface having a display element coupled thereto;

a back surface having a touch-surface coupled thereto, the touch-surface

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adapted to detect a location on the touch-surface contacted by an object and an

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activation force applied to the touch-surface by the object; and

control means for –

displaying on the display element first information, control elements, and a mark representing the contact's location on the touch-surface,

determining when the mark at least partially overlaps one of the control elements,

determining the activation force is greater than a specified threshold and applied at a location on the back surface overlapping a location of the mark on the first surface, and

activating a function associated with the one control element if the activation force is greater than the specified threshold and applied at a location on the back surface overlapping the location of the mark on the first surface while maintaining contact with the back surface.

[0003] Also described herein is a method to operate an electronic device. The method includes displaying first information appropriate to the device's function on a display element on a top surface of the electronic device (e.g., video, graphic or textual information), displaying one or more control elements and a cursor on the display element (e.g., numeric or alphanumeric keys, buttons, sliders and control wheels), adjusting the cursor's displayed position in response to an object contacting a force-sensitive touch-surface on the device's bottom surface, and activating or executing a function associated with one of the control elements when the cursor is positioned "over" the control element and a force is applied to the force-sensitive touch-surface at a position corresponding to the cursor. In a preferred embodiment, the control elements are displayed transparently so that the first information is not totally occluded by the display of the control elements. A program implementing the method may be stored in any media that is readable and executable by a computer processor.

[0004] Also described herein is an electronic device that may be operated in accordance with the described method. Illustrative electronic devices of the type described and taught herein include, but are not limited to, hand-held computer systems, tablet computer systems, personal digital assistants, portable video playback system, portable audio playback systems and mobile telephones.

Brief Description of the Drawings

[0005] Figure 1 shows a perspective view of a prior art hand-held multi-media device.

[0006] Figure 2 shows, in cross-section, a hand-held multi-media device in accordance with one embodiment of the invention.

[0007] Figures 3A and 3B show one embodiment of a multi-media hand-held device in accordance with the invention.

[0008] Figure 4 shows another embodiment of a multi-media hand-held device in accordance with the invention wherein alpha-numeric input control elements are provided.

[0009] Figure 5 shows yet another embodiment of a multi-media hand-held device in accordance with the invention wherein alpha-only input control elements are provided.

[0010] Figure 6 shows, in block diagram format, an electronic device in accordance with one embodiment of the invention.

Detailed Description

[0011] The following description is presented to enable any person skilled in the art to make and use the invention as claimed and is provided in the context of the particular examples discussed below, variations of which will be readily apparent to those skilled in the art. Accordingly, the claims appended hereto are not intended to be limited by the disclosed embodiments, but are to be accorded their widest scope consistent with the principles and features disclosed herein.

[0012] Small multi-media hand-held devices such as mobile telephones and video playback units typically divide their front surface into an output region (through which video or graphic information is presented) and an input region (comprising one or more control elements through which a user operates the device). An illustrative prior art device that is laid out in this manner is the iPod® from Apple Computer, Inc. As shown in FIG. 1, the output region of iPod® **100** comprises LCD **105** and the input region comprises a single multi-function control element – spin or click-wheel **110**.

[0013] In contrast, a multi-media device in accordance with the invention uses separate device surfaces for input and output. More specifically, a force-sensitive touch-surface is provided on a first or back-side surface of the device through which a user provides input (*e.g.*, cursor manipulation and control element selection/activation). On a second or front-side surface, a display element is used to present one or more control elements and a cursor that is controlled through manipulation of the back-

side touch-surface. When the device is activated or placed into an operational state where it is appropriate, control elements (*e.g.*, soft keys and menus) are displayed on the display element. The soft keys may be opaque or transparent (so as not to occlude prior displayed information such as a video presentation, a picture, a graphic or textual information). The displayed cursor identifies where on the back-side touch-surface the user has their finger. When the cursor is positioned over the desired control element/soft key (*i.e.*, spatially overlapping on the display element), the user selects or activates the control element by applying pressure to the force-sensitive touch-surface with their finger. Accordingly, the invention provides a means to operate a hand-held electronic device with one hand, wherein cursor movement and control element selection/activation may be accomplished without lifting one's finger.

[0014] Referring to FIG. 2, a cross-sectional view of multi-media hand-held device **200** in accordance with one embodiment of the invention includes device housing **205**, top surface **210** having display element **215** and bottom surface **220** having force-sensitive touch-surface **225**. As used herein, a force-sensitive touch-surface is a surface that is adapted to simultaneously detect where one or more objects touch it (*e.g.*, fingers) and the force those objects apply to the surface. Illustrative embodiments of force-sensitive capacitance-based touch-surfaces are described in the documents identified in paragraph **Error! Reference source not found.** above. Illustrative display elements include LCD panels.

[0015] Referring to FIG. 3A, hand-held multi-media device **300** in accordance with one embodiment of the invention incorporates the functionality of click-wheel **305** on the device's force-sensitive touch-surface **225** (on bottom surface **220**). Click-wheel **305** may be represented on touch-surface **225** by, for example, an etched or raised outline. Referring to FIG. 3B, when the user activates click-wheel **305**, navigation menu **310** and click-wheel **315** are shown. Also displayed is cursor **320** which shows the position of the user's finger against the back-side touch-surface relative to click-wheel **315**. In the illustrated embodiment, navigation menu **310** and click-wheel **315** are rendered transparently (denoted by dashed lines in FIG. 3B) so that the user may continue to view whatever information was being displayed at the time they activated the back-side control. Once the user manipulates cursor **320** by sliding their finger across force-sensitive touch-surface **225** to the desired position (*e.g.*, the "pause" control element position on click-wheel **315**), all the user need do is apply pressure with that finger to the force-sensitive touch-surface to activate the desired action. Thus, a user may move the displayed cursor and make a selection (*aka* a "mouse-click") without lifting their finger from surface **225**. In this manner multi-media device **300** may be controlled by the user with a single hand.

[0016] In another embodiment, a multi-media hand-held device such as device **300** may provide more than a single control element. In embodiments of this type, each control element (*e.g.*, button, key, slider or click-wheel) may have an etched counterpart on back-side touch-surface **225**, with each

being displayed as desired (one at a time depending upon where the user's finger is detected, or all at once). In yet another embodiment, control element outlines are not etched or otherwise denoted on back-side touch-surface **225**.

[0017] While the interface of FIGS. 3A and 3B may be effective for selecting items from a list, it is not as convenient for alphanumeric input. Accordingly, in another embodiment of the invention one or more control elements may be displayed when the device's back-side force-sensitive touch-surface is activated (see discussion below). Referring to FIG. 4, in one embodiment suitable for a device that incorporates mobile telephone capability, device **400** displays numeric soft keys **405** on display screen **215** situated on front surface **210**. The user may select or activate one or more of the displayed buttons by moving their finger(s) across back-side force-sensitive touch-surface **225** so as to position cursor **410** above (*i.e.*, spatially coincident with) the desired button. Selection may be made by applying pressure to the back side of the device as discussed above. For the user's convenience, previously selected numbers **415** may be displayed.

[0018] Referring to FIG. 5, in yet another embodiment in accordance with the invention, device **500** displays alpha soft keys **505** on display element **215** on front surface **210**. By selecting various keys **505**, the user may enter character strings (*e.g.*, string **510**). As before, the user positions cursor **515** through movement of their fingers across the device's back-side force-sensitive touch-surface; button selection is made through the

application of pressure to the back-side touch-surface. As shown, device **500** displays alpha buttons **505** transparently so that the user may continue to view information that may be displayed "beneath" them. Of course, buttons **505** may be opaque.

[0019] In still another embodiment, a multi-media hand-held device having a back-side force-sensitive touch-surface may utilize two or more of the interfaces described above. For example, in a first mode (*e.g.*, a music playback mode), the click-wheel interface described above with respect to FIGS. 3A and 3B could be employed (with or without backside surface etching). In another mode (*e.g.*, a telephone mode), the interface described above with respect to FIG. 4 could be implemented. In still another mode (*e.g.*, text input, electronic mail or instant messaging modes) the alpha interface described in connection with FIG. 5 may be used. Other interfaces will be apparent to one of ordinary skill in the art having the benefit of this disclosure.

[0020] In some embodiments, the display of control elements and/or a menu may be triggered by a specific user action. For example, by the user holding their finger on back-side touch-surface **225** within the region defined by an etched control element (*e.g.*, click-wheel **305**) for a specified period of time (*e.g.*, one second). Another user action to trigger activation of a mode-appropriate user interface would be to simply hold one or more fingers against the back-side force-sensitive touch-surface for a specified period of time and with at least a minimum specified force (*e.g.*, a "light" grip or poke).

[0021] Alternatively, a change in device **200**'s operational state may cause the same result. For instance, appropriate control element or menu may be displayed when device **200** transitions from a first state to a second state. Illustrative operational states include, but are not limited to – on, off, locked, phone mode, video play mode, audio play mode, calendar mode, email mode, address book mode and image capture mode. Thus, a single user action may have cause different control elements to be displayed (or no control elements at all), depending on the device's current operational state.

[0022] Referring to FIG. 6, an illustrative implementation of hand-held multi-media device **200** includes force-sensitive touch-surface controller **600**, processor **605**, memory **610** and display element controller **615**. Controller **600** provides the necessary drive and sensing circuitry to obtain location and force information from force-sensitive touch-surface **225**. In a typical implementation, touch-surface **225** is comprised of a number of sensing elements arranged in two-dimensional array. Each sensing element (*aka* "pixel") generates an output signal indicative of the electric field disturbance (for capacitance sensors), force (for pressure sensors) or optical coupling (for optical sensors) at the sensor element. The ensemble of pixel values at a given time represents a "proximity image." Touch-surface controller **600** provides this data to processor **605** or to memory **610**. Processor **605**, in turn, processes the proximity image information to correlate the user's finger movement across touch-surface **225** with the displayed information. Memory **610** may include one or more of the following types of storage media:

magnetic disks; optical media; and semiconductor memory devices such as static and dynamic random access memory (RAM), Electrically Programmable Read-Only Memory ("EPROM"), Electrically Erasable Programmable Read-Only Memory ("EEPROM"), Programmable Gate Arrays and flash devices. Display controller **615** is responsible for producing the display element signals necessary to actually display information.

[0023] Various changes in the materials, components, circuit elements techniques described herein are possible without departing from the scope of the following claims. For instance, illustrative multi-media hand-held device **300** has been described as including an etched control element on its back-side touch-surface. This is not necessary. Further, multimedia devices in accordance with the invention may include physical buttons/switches in addition to a force-sensitive touch-surface (*e.g.*, power, mute and reset buttons). In addition, processor **605** may be a single computer processor, a special purpose processor (*e.g.*, a digital signal processor or "DSP"), a plurality of processors coupled by a communications link or a custom designed state machine. Custom designed state machines may be embodied in a hardware device such as an integrated circuit including, but not limited to, application specific integrated circuits ("ASICs") or field programmable gate array ("FPGAs"). Processor **605** may also execute program instructions stored in memory **610** to perform the acts described herein.

Claims

1. A method for operating a hand-held electronic device, comprising:

displaying first information on a display element on a first surface of a hand-held electronic device;

5 displaying control elements and a cursor on the display element when the electronic device is in a specified state;

adjusting a display position of the cursor in response to a movement of a contact on a force-sensitive touch-surface on a back surface of the electronic device; and

0 activating a function associated with a first displayed control element when the cursor is positioned coincident with the first displayed control element and an activation force greater than a specified threshold is applied to the force-sensitive touch-surface at a position overlapping the position of the cursor on the first surface,

wherein the act of activating by force is performed continuously with the act of adjusting while maintaining contact with the force-sensitive touch-surface.

5 2. The method of claim 1, wherein the act of displaying control elements comprises displaying one or more control elements selected from the list consisting of a button, a slider, a spin-wheel, a numeric input key, an alpha input key and an alpha-numeric input key.

0 3. The method of claim 1, wherein the act of displaying control elements comprises displaying translucent control elements.

25 4. The method of claim 3, wherein the act of displaying translucent control elements is performed so that the first information remains at least partially visible through the control elements.

30 5. The method of claim 1, wherein the act of displaying control elements comprises displaying opaque control elements.

6. The method of claim 1, wherein the act of displaying control elements further comprises displaying one or more menu items, wherein the one or more menu items identify at least one operation.

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5 7. The method of claim 1, wherein the act of displaying a cursor comprises displaying a translucent cursor.

8. The method of claim 1, wherein the specified state is associated with an operational mode of the hand-held electronic device.

0 9. The method of claim 8, wherein the operational mode comprises a telephone mode.

10. The method of claim 8, wherein the operational mode comprises a alpha-numeric data entry mode.

5 11. The method of claim 8, wherein the operational mode comprises a character-based input mode.

12. The method of claim 1, wherein the act of adjusting comprises tracking the contact as it moves about the force-sensitive touch-surface.

0 13. The method of claim 1, wherein the hand-held electronic device comprises a mobile telephone.

14. The method of claim 1, wherein the hand-held electronic device comprises a hand-held computer system.

25 15. The method of claim 1, wherein the hand-held electronic device comprises a personal digital assistant.

30 16. The method of claim 1, wherein the hand-held electronic device comprises a video display unit.

17. The method of claim 1, wherein the hand-held electronic device comprises a digital music device.

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18. A program storage device, readable by a processor, comprising instructions stored thereon for causing the programmable control device to perform the method in accordance with claim 1.

5 19. A hand-held electronic device, comprising:

a first surface having a display element coupled thereto;

a back surface having a touch-surface coupled thereto, the touch-surface adapted to detect a location on the touch-surface contacted by an object and an activation force applied to the touch-surface by the object; and

0 control means for –

displaying on the display element first information, control elements, and a mark representing the contact's location on the touch-surface,

determining when the mark at least partially overlaps one of the control elements,

5 determining the activation force is greater than a specified threshold and applied at a location on the back surface overlapping a location of the mark on the first surface, and

0 activating a function associated with the one control element if the activation force is greater than the specified threshold and applied at a location on the back surface overlapping the location of the mark on the first surface while maintaining contact with the back surface.

20. The hand-held electronic device of claim 19, wherein the device comprises a mobile telephone.

25 21. The hand-held electronic device of claim 19, wherein the device comprises a video playback device.

30 22. The hand-held electronic device of claim 19, wherein the device comprises an audio playback device.

23. The hand-held electronic device of claim 19, wherein the device comprises a personal digital assistant.

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24. The hand-held electronic device of claim 19, wherein the first information comprises one or more of the following types of information: video, graphic and textual.

25. The hand-held electronic device of claim 24, wherein the first information is displayed opaque.

26. The hand-held electronic device of claim 19, wherein the control elements comprise one or more of a button, a numeric key, an alpha key, a slider, a click-wheel and a menu.

27. The hand-held electronic device of claim 19, wherein one or more of the control elements are transparent.

28. The hand-held electronic device of claim 19, further comprising one or more physical buttons coupled to a surface of the device.

29. The hand-held electronic device of claim 28, wherein one of the one or more physical buttons comprises a power button adapted to turn-off the display element.

30. The hand-held electronic device of claim 19, wherein the means for displaying is activated after a contact to the back surface has been made and held substantially in one place for a specified period of time.

31. The hand-held electronic device of claim 19, further comprising at least one etched button on the back surface, the at least one etched button corresponding to a displayed control element.

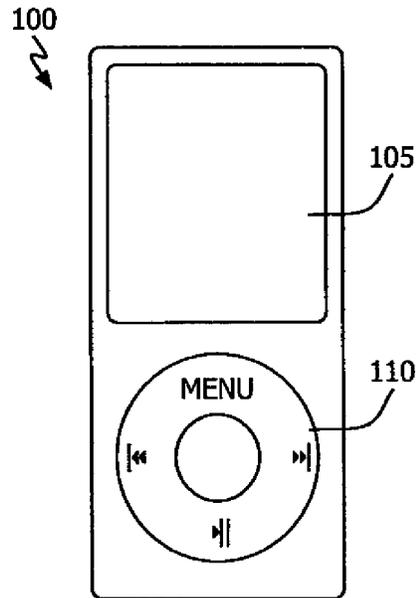


FIG. 1
(PRIOR ART)

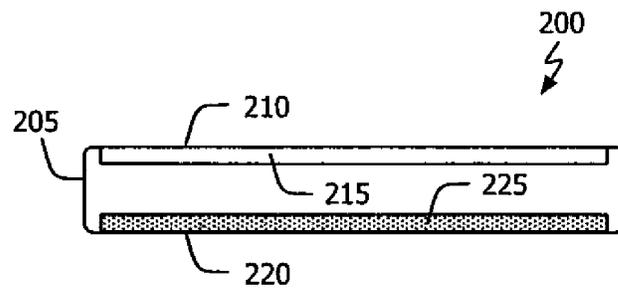


FIG. 2

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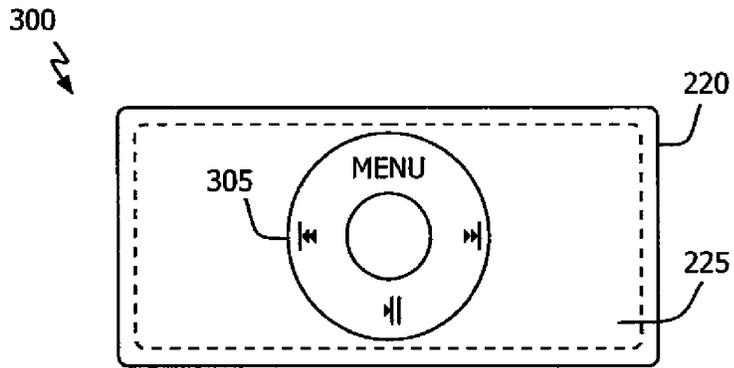


FIG. 3A

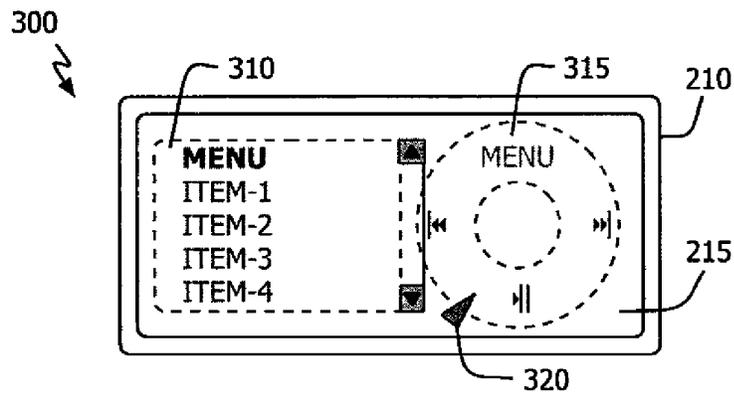


FIG. 3B

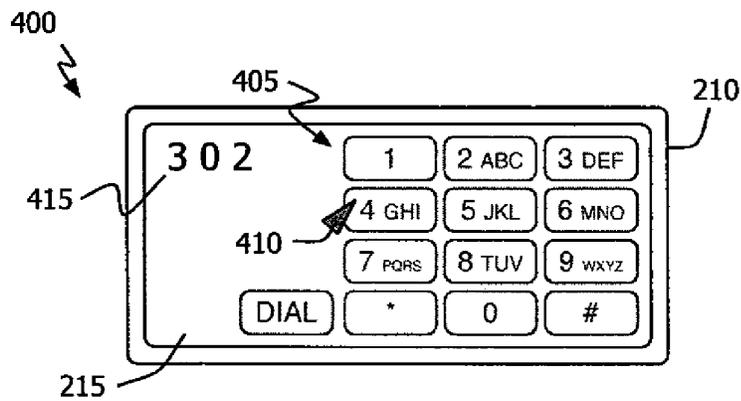


FIG. 4

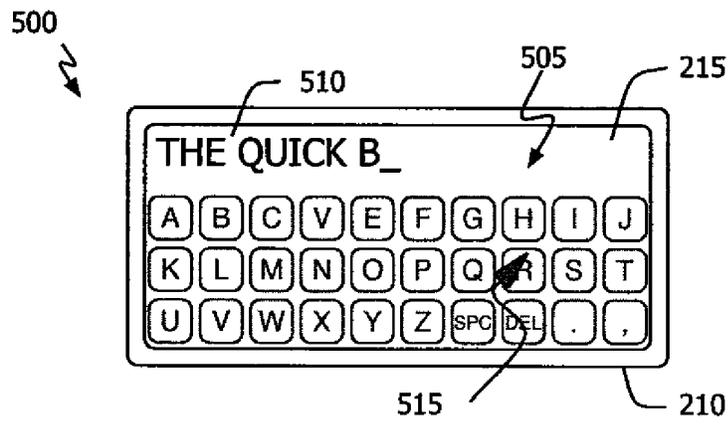


FIG. 5

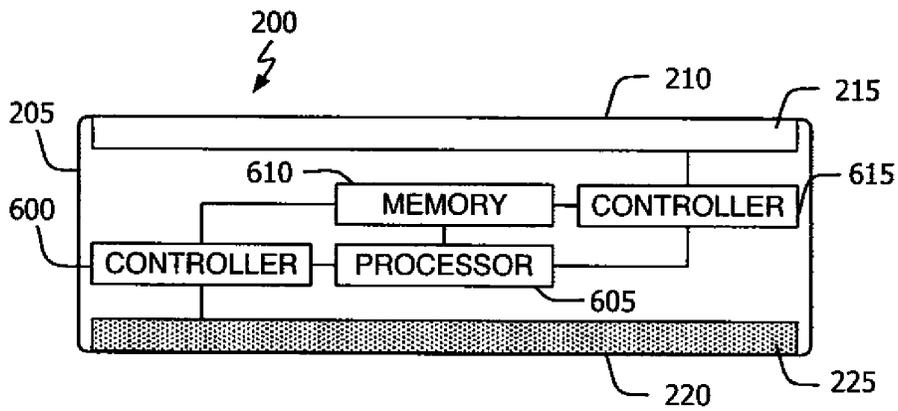


FIG. 6