MERCHANDISING STRIP WITH LOCKING TAB

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Appl. No.: 10/603,553
Filed: Jun. 25, 2003

Publication Classification

Int. Cl.7 ................................................ A47F 5/08
U.S. Cl. .................................................... 211/113

ABSTRACT

A merchandising strip (10, 10') includes an elongate body portion (12,12') with an aperture (46, 46). A plurality of engagement means (20, 20'), which may include tongue-shaped cut lines, is associated with the body portion for supporting associated packages (30). A tab (14, 14') for mounting the merchandising strip to an associated support member (44) includes a strap (40, 40') having a first end extending from the body portion and a head (42) at a second end. The strap is shaped to be received through the aperture. The head has a transverse width (w,) which is greater than a transverse width (w,) of the aperture at a widest point of the aperture. Because the inserted strap is most stable in a position which is perpendicular to an axial length (l) of the aperture, the strap resists twisting to a position in which the head can pass through the aperture. This locks the strap to the body portion and prevents the merchandising strip from falling off the associated rigid support ember to which it is attached.
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BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0001] 1. Field of the Invention

[0002] The present invention relates to point of purchase display systems. More particularly, the invention relates to strip merchandisers for product display.

[0003] 2. Discussion of the Art

[0004] Small items of merchandise, such as blister packs, are often displayed in stores on merchandise strips. Merchandise strips generally consist of an elongate plastic strip, which is suspended from the front edge of a merchandise display shelf, or the like. The strips are usually made from a die cut plastic material and have a series of spaced cut lines. When the material is pushed out of the plane of the strip it forms integral upwardly facing individual tongues that act as support hooks for the products. Adjacent each upwardly facing hook or tongue can be a pair of downwardly facing tongues. The various tongues are generally defined in the strip merchandiser by a continuous cut line. The downwardly facing tongues can serve to prevent the package, once it is suspended from the upwardly facing tongue, from being detached therefrom during transit and display. The downwardly facing tongues have to be pushed out of the way in order to allow the package to be unhooked from the upwardly facing tongue. Examples of such strips are shown in U.S. Pat. Nos. 5,103,970, 5,199,578, 5,284,259, and 6,145,675.

[0005] At their upper end, the strips have a mounting portion for attaching the strip to the shelf, or other stationery support. The mounting portion has an aperture, through which a screw, hook or other fixing member is selectively inserted to attach the merchandise strip to price channels, shelves, gondolas, or wire racks by the retailer.

[0006] Particularly where the merchandise strip is to be removed at intervals, it is convenient for the strip to be attached to the shelf without the need for separate fixing members. For example, U.S. Pat. No. 4,911,992 discloses a strip merchandiser with a reinforced portion, which defines an arrowhead formation that can be pressed into an aperture on the shelf. There is a tendency, however, for the strip to become disengaged in use, or under the weight of heavy items of merchandise.

[0007] Information tags have been developed which allow the tag to be mounted without separate fixing members. U.S. Pat. No. 4,869,007, for example, discloses a merchandise information tag for use with a wire type rack. The tag has two tabs which slot into corresponding apertures on a display portion of the tag. Such tags, however, are disadvantageous in that the tabs tend to disengage from the apertures and the tag readily becomes disengaged from the shelf. Additionally, such systems are generally unsuited for supporting the weight of items of merchandise. Rather, they are used to display lightweight items such as small card or paper strips.

[0008] Accordingly, it has been considered desirable to develop a new and improved strip merchandiser which would overcome the foregoing difficulties and others while providing better and more advantageous overall results.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0009] In accordance with one aspect of the present invention, a merchandising strip is provided. The merchandising strip includes a planar body portion with an aperture. At least one finger is associated with the body portion for supporting an associated package. A tab is provided for mounting the merchandising strip to an associated support member. The tab includes a strap having a first end extending from the body portion. A head located at a second end of the strap is shaped to be received through the aperture. The head has a transverse width which is greater than a transverse width of the aperture at a widest point of the aperture. The transverse width of the aperture is greatest at an end of the aperture closest to the strap.

[0010] In accordance with another aspect of the present invention, a merchandising strip is provided. The merchandising strip includes a tab for mounting the merchandising strip to an associated support member. The tab includes a strap and a head at a distal end of the strap. A body portion has an aperture for receiving the strap therethrough. The body portion is connected with the tab. The aperture has a length which is greater than a maximum transverse width of the head. The aperture defines a widened portion having a maximum transverse width which is intermediate a transverse width of the strap and the maximum transverse width of the head. A narrow portion of the aperture extends from the widened portion. The narrow portion has a transverse width which is less than the transverse width of the strap. At least one engagement means is associated with the body portion for supporting an associated package.

[0011] In accordance with another aspect of the present invention, a method of supporting a plurality of packages from a rigid support member is provided. The method includes providing a merchandising strip comprising a body portion and an elongate strap connected therewith, the body portion defining an aperture for receiving a head at a distal end of the strap. A portion of the support member is encased with the elongate strap of the merchandising strip.

The head of the strip is inserted through the aperture in the body portion with the head positioned such that its transverse width is oriented in a direction which is generally parallel with a longitudinal axis of the merchandising strip. The maximum transverse width of the head is greater than a maximum transverse width of the aperture. Once the head has passed through the aperture, the head is rotated such that its transverse width is generally perpendicular to a longitudinal axis of the merchandising strip. A plurality of packages is releasably supported on the merchandising strip.

[0012] The advantages of the present invention will be readily apparent to those skilled in the art, upon a reading of the following disclosure and a review of the accompanying drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0013] FIG. 1 is a front elevational view of a merchandising strip according to a first embodiment of the present invention;

[0014] FIG. 2 is an enlarged front perspective view of the merchandising strip of FIG. 1 attached to a rail, illustrating a plurality of attached products;

[0015] FIG. 3 is an enlarged rear perspective view of an upper end of the merchandising strip of FIG. 1, attached to a rail;
FIG. 4 is an enlarged front elevational view of an upper end of the merchandising strip of FIG. 1; and FIG. 5 is a front elevational view of a second embodiment of a merchandising strip according the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

Referring now to the drawings wherein the showings are for purposes of illustrating the preferred embodiments of the invention only and not for purposes of limiting same, FIG. 1 shows a merchandising strip 10 suited to supporting and displaying one or more vertically spaced packaged items, such as packages of snack foods, batteries, household items, and the like from a rail, shelf, or other support surface.

The merchandising strip 10 includes an elongate, generally planar body portion 12 and a mounting portion in the form of a tab 14, which extends axially from the body. In the illustrated embodiment, the body portion 12 takes the form of an elongated strip of material which is substantially longer than it is wide and has front and rear planar surfaces 16, 18 (FIGS. 1 and 3).

With continuing reference to FIG. 1, a series of axially spaced merchandising means 20 is provided on the body portion 12. The engagement means 20 illustrated in FIG. 1 each comprise a generally W-shaped cut line. Each cut line defines a centrally located, upward facing finger or tongue 22 and a pair of adjacent, downward facing side stabilizing fingers 24, 26. Although a single column of cut lines 20 is illustrated in FIG. 1, it is to be appreciated that two or more rows of cut lines may be provided, as shown in FIG. 5.

With reference now to FIG. 2, packages 30 meant to be suspended from the merchandising strip 10 are generally provided with a reduced thickness region 32, with a suitably positioned central aperture 34, located at an upper end of the package. To hang the package on the merchandising strip, the tongue 22 is bent outward slightly from the front face 18. The central tongue 22 protrudes through the package aperture 34 in the reduced thickness region 32, and the package hung by its aperture, as illustrated in FIG. 2. The two side stabilizing fingers 24, 26 are used to grip the upper end 32 of the package between the fingers and the adjacent body portion 12.

It is contemplated that alternative engagement means may be provided. The alternative engagement means may be integrally formed with and in the same plane as the body, such as an inverted U-shaped cut line, or extend from the body and/or be attached to the body, such as a clip. Examples of such alternative engagement means are shown, for example, in U.S. Pat. Nos. 5,103,970 and 6,145,675, which are incorporated herein in their entirety by reference.

With reference now to FIG. 4, the mounting tab 14 includes an elongate strap 40 in the same plane as the body portion 12. The strap terminates in an arrowhead-shaped head 42, tapered inward toward its tip 43. The tip can be flattened, as shown, or a pointed tip can be used (not shown). As illustrated in FIG. 3, the strap 40 is of sufficient length and flexibility to allow it to be looped around a suitable rigid horizontal support surface, such as a rail 44. Alternatively, the strap can be passed through a suitable aperture adjacent an edge of a shelf (not shown). As shown in FIG. 2, the head 42 is received through an aperture 46, which may be cut out or otherwise formed in an upper end 48 of the body portion 12 above the engagement means.

As shown in the enlarged view of FIG. 4, the aperture 46 can extend axially, or generally axially, along the body portion 12, i.e., its longest dimension 1 is aligned no more than 20°, preferably no more than 10°, from the axis X of the strip 10. In the illustrated embodiment, the longest dimension of the aperture 46 is aligned with the axis X of the strip. The length l of the aperture is equal to or slightly in excess of the transverse width w of the head, measured at its widest point, and is arranged generally perpendicular thereto.

The aperture 46 includes a widened upper portion 50, having the generally shape of an inverted triangle, tapering inward toward its lower end, and being widest at an engagement surface 51 at an upper end thereof. The widened portion 50 is narrower, in all directions, than the maximum transverse width w of the head (all widths and lengths referred to herein are determined in the plane of the merchandising strip). A narrow slit 52 extends downward from the widened upper portion, in a generally axial direction, and has a transverse width w. The upper portion 50 has a transverse width which, at its widest point w, is equal to or slightly wider than a width w of the strap 40 and which is less than the width w of the head. The transverse width w of the slit 52 is sufficient to allow the head therethrough only when the head is twisted to an orientation in which the head is orientated generally perpendicular to the plane of the body portion. The width w is thus equal to or slightly greater than the thickness t of the head (as measured perpendicular to the plane of the merchandise strip), and is less than the transverse width w of the head, the width w of the strap 40, and the width w of the engagement surface. In an alternative embodiment (not shown) the triangular upper portion can be oriented with the engagement surface lowermost and the slit extending upward from the apex of the triangle, i.e., the entire aperture could be inverted.

To attach the merchandising strip to the rail, the strap is looped around the rail and the head 42 positioned such that its widest dimension w is axially aligned with, and perpendicular to an axial length l of the aperture 46. The head 42 is then passed through the aperture 46. Once the head is fully through the aperture, the head is moved upward, or moves upward, until the strap 40 is located in the triangular portion 50. The strap 40 can then be rotated, or allowed to rotate under its own momentum, until the head 42 is in the position illustrated in FIG. 3, i.e., with its widest dimension generally parallel to and generally flush with the engaging surface at the upper end of the aperture 51.

In this position, shoulders 54, 56 of the head 42 engage adjacent surfaces of the body portion 12, thereby resisting removal of the strap 40 from the aperture 46. A downward force on the merchandising strip 10, such as may be applied by the weight of packages, or intermittently, by a user, urges the head 42 to move closer to the upper end 51 of the aperture, further resisting twisting of the head and accidental removal of the strap 40. The inserted strap 40 is most stable in the position shown in FIG. 3, thus resisting
twisting which would bring the head 42 to a position in which it is in vertical alignment with the aperture length 1. Since the triangular upper portion 50 is not wide enough for the head to pass through, even if the strap shifts slightly, the strap is locked to the base portion 12 until a user applies sufficient rotational force to twist the strap until the widest portion of the head is in vertical alignment with the aperture length 1. Then, the head has to be moved downwardly in relation to the aperture 46 so that the adjacent shoulder (54 or 56) clears the engagement surface 51. The head can then be passed back through the aperture 46 and the merchandising strip removed from the rail.

[0028] With reference once more to FIG. 1, widthwise creases 60 in opposite directions or perforations can be provided at spaced intervals on the body portion 12 so that the body is fan-foldable in sections 62, 64, 66, 68. In one embodiment, the creases are provided after the third and every subsequent three engagement means 20. Optionally, the body portion can be torn away sequentially at the perforations 60 after packages have been removed from one or more of the lower sections 68, 66 so as to reduce the length of the merchandising strip and provide an appealing merchandise display which remains substantially full of packages.

[0029] As will be appreciated, in the event that a suitable horizontal rail 44 or shelf aperture is available for looping the strap 40 around or through, the aperture 46 in the body portion can be used in conventional fashion to receive a screw or hook, or other suitable fixing member therethrough for attaching the merchandising strip 10 to a suitable rigid support surface.

[0030] In one embodiment, the merchandising strip 10 is made from a suitable, conventional thermoplastic material, such as polypropylene, by a suitable conventional process such as injection molding. The body portion 12 and mounting tab 14 can be integrally formed, for example by die-cutting the entire merchandising strip from a sheet of a suitable plastic material. Alternatively, the strip 10 can be vacuum formed. Also, the body portion 12 and mounting tab 14 can be separately formed and heat welded, glued, or otherwise securely attached to each other. While FIG. 1 illustrates a single mounting tab 14, it will be appreciated that two or more mounting tabs may be employed, as illustrated in FIG. 5.

[0031] With reference now to FIG. 5, an elongated merchandising strip according to a second embodiment of the present invention is shown. For ease of understanding an appreciation of this embodiment, like components are identified by like numerals with a primed suffix (') and new components are identified by new numerals. A merchandising strip 10 has an elongated body portion 12', which is divided into two or more sections 70, 72', by one or more respective perforation lines or fold lines 74. If perforation lines are provided, one of the portions 70, 72 can be torn from the other, along the perforation line 74, to create two merchandise strips 10, similar to that illustrated in FIG. 1. The fold line 74 would enable one of the portions to be oriented into a different plane than the adjacent portion. Alternatively, the merchandising strip 10' is attached to the same rail 44' or to a pair of adjacent shelf apertures, by two (or more) side by side tabs 14' which are inserted in two (or more) corresponding apertures 46'.

[0032] In addition, for particularly heavy or bulky items being held on a wider merchandising strip, two tabs can be provided on the strip. Such a design would enable the strip to stably support the heavy or bulky items when mounted on a suitable support structure, which can be any of the various kinds discussed above.

[0033] With reference once more to FIG. 2, a display tag 80 can be mounted to the merchandise strip 10, 10' in a location which is between the aperture 46 and the uppermost engagement means 20. The tag 80 may be used to display pricing and/or product information relating to the associated packages, or the like. The tag is slidably mounted on the body portion 12, prior to attaching the packages. For this purpose, the display tag 80 has upper and lower parallel horizontal cut lines 82, 84, of a suitable width to receive the body portion therethrough.

[0034] The invention has been described with reference to preferred embodiments. Obviously, modifications and alterations will occur to others upon the reading and understanding of the preceding specification. It is intended that the invention be construed as including all such alterations and modifications insofar as they come within the scope of the appended claims or the equivalents thereof.

What is claimed is:

1. A merchandising strip comprising:
   a planar body portion with an aperture;
   at least one finger, associated with the body portion, for supporting an associated package;
   a tab for mounting the merchandising strip to an associated support member, the tab including:
   a strap having a first end extending from the body portion, and
   a head located at a second end of the strap, wherein said head is shaped to be received through the aperture, the head having a transverse width which is greater than a transverse width of the aperture at a widest point of the aperture, wherein the transverse width of the aperture is greatest at an end of the aperture closest to the strap.

2. The merchandising strip of claim 1, wherein the head defines at least one shoulder for engaging an adjacent region of the body portion when the head is received through the aperture.

3. The merchandising strip of claim 1, wherein the body portion defines an engagement surface at an end of the aperture for engaging the strap, the engagement surface having a width which is less than the transverse width of the head adjacent the engagement surface.

4. The merchandising strip of claim 3, wherein the aperture defines a triangular portion, the engagement surface defining a side of the triangular portion.

5. The merchandising strip of claim 3, wherein the aperture has an axial length which is greater than the transverse width of the aperture.

6. The merchandising strip of claim 3, wherein the engagement surface is perpendicular to the axial length of the aperture.
7. The merchandising strip of claim 4, wherein the aperture defines an axially extending slit which extends from an apex of the triangular portion opposite the engagement surface.

8. The merchandising strip of claim 7, wherein the axially extending slit which extends from the triangular portion in a direction away from the strap.

9. The merchandising strip of claim 3, wherein the engagement surface defines an end of the aperture which is closest to the strap.

10. The merchandising strip of claim 7, wherein the slit has a maximum transverse width which is less than a transverse width of the strap.

11. The merchandising strip of claim 1, wherein the at least one finger includes a plurality of fingers for supporting a plurality of packages.

12. The merchandising strip of claim 1, wherein each finger is defined by a cut line in the body portion.

13. The merchandising strip of claim 12, further including a second finger and a third finger, the second and third fingers extending in an opposite direction to the first finger, the first, second, and third fingers together being defined by a generally W-shaped cut line in the body portion.

14. The merchandising strip of claim 1, further comprising a perforation line extending transversely across said strip.

15. A merchandising strip comprising:

   a tab for mounting the merchandising strip to an associated support member including:

   a strap, and

   a head located at a distal end of the strap;

   a body portion having an aperture for receiving the strap therethrough, the body portion being connected with the tab, the aperture having a length which is greater than a maximum transverse width of the head, the aperture defining:

   a widened portion having a maximum transverse width which is intermediate a transverse width of the strap and the maximum transverse width of the head, and

   a narrow portion which extends from the widened portion, the narrow portion having a transverse width which is less than the transverse width of the strap; and

   at least one engagement means, associated with the body portion for supporting an associated package.

16. The merchandising strip of claim 15, wherein the widened portion defines an engagement surface which is perpendicular to a longitudinal axis of the merchandising strip.

17. The merchandising strip of claim 16, wherein in the narrow portion extends in a direction which is aligned with the axis of the merchandising strip.

18. The merchandising strip of claim 15, wherein each of the at least one engagement means includes at least a first finger defined by a cut line in the body portion.

19. A method of supporting a plurality of packages from a rigid support member, the method comprising:

   providing a merchandising strip comprising a body portion and an elongate strap connected therewith, the body portion defining an aperture for receiving a head at a distal end of the strap;

   encircling a portion of the support member with the elongate strap of the merchandising strip;

   inserting the head of the strap through the aperture in the body portion with the head positioned such that its transverse width is oriented in a direction which is generally parallel with a longitudinal axis of the merchandising strip, the maximum transverse width of the head being greater than a maximum transverse width of the aperture,

   once the head has passed through the aperture, rotating the head such that its transverse width is generally perpendicular to a longitudinal axis of the merchandising strip; and

   releasably supporting a plurality of packages on the merchandising strip.

20. The method of claim 19, wherein the step of orienting the head such that its transverse width is generally perpendicular to the longitudinal axis of the merchandising strip includes positioning the strap in a widened portion of the aperture, the widened portion includes an engagement surface which defines the maximum transverse width of the aperture, the engagement surface being oriented perpendicular to the longitudinal axis of the merchandising strip.

21. The method of claim 19, wherein the weight of the merchandising strip and any packages mounted thereto urges the strap to a position in which the strap engages the engagement surface.