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(57) Abrégé(suite)/Abstract(continued):
House signs within the interior. A flexible fabric cover which is attached to the main body at one end and has a free end with a fastening mechanism for securing the free end to the main body provides a cover for the opening. A securing mechanism is positioned within the interior for securing the signs to one of the walls.
CASE FOR HOLDING SIGNS

ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

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CASE FOR HOLDING SIGNS

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to portable cases, and in particular, to a case for holding signs such as real estate Open House signs.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Realtors when marketing homes for sale often times hold Open Houses. Generally advertisements are run in papers and/or homes are listed on the Internet with addresses identifying the location of the home. To provide the buyer with a further aid in locating the home, signs are placed near roadways to guide the prospective buyer to the Open House.

Such signs are typically free standing signs. The typical construction of such freestanding Open House signs include a sign face that is typically hinged at the top and four legs, with two of such legs being attached to the sign face at opposite edges of the sign face. The signs are made freestanding since the sign faces open up to a "A" frame configuration. The signs typically include a carrying handle on the top edge, and when the sign is lifted by the handle, the sign collapses to a substantially flat condition.

For a typical Open House, a realtor uses several signs to guide prospective buyers. The signs are positioned along roadways often times at street corners to guide the prospective buyer on when a turn needs to be made. Since most houses are approachable from different directions, a number of signs need to be used just for one Open House. The signs are typically transported in a collapsed condition in the back of pickup truck, SUV or in a trunk of a car.

The sign faces are typically made of a composite plastic board that has a somewhat slippery surface. Even if the signs are stacked carefully in the vehicle, on accelerating or stopping or turning of the vehicle, the signs will slide with respect to each other causing scratches on the vehicle's surface and even on occasion causing a distraction to the driver due to noise made by the sliding signs hitting an interior surface of the vehicle. The signs cannot be kept in a
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stacked fashion in the vehicle over any period of time and therefore result in a problem if other things need to be transported in a vehicle.

In addition, since the number of signs needed can vary, most realtors own more signs than are needed for one Open House. The signs are bulky and are difficult to store even in a garage. There is a need for organizing and storing Open House signs in an orderly fashion.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention includes a case for holding signs, the case comprising a plurality of connected walls, the walls defining a main body having an interior. The walls also define an opening that provides access to the interior with the opening being sufficient in size for placing signs such as real estate Open House signs within the interior. A flexible fabric cover which is attached to the main body at one end and has a free end with a fastening mechanism for securing the free end to the main body to cover the opening. A securing mechanism is positioned within the interior for securing the signs to one of the walls.

The case of the present invention provides a solution to contain, restrain and store such Open House signs and other types of signs having a similar general configuration.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Figure 1 is a perspective view of a case of the present invention.

Figure 2 is a perspective view of the case being opened.

Figure 3 is a perspective view showing the backside of the case.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF ILLUSTRATIVE EMBODIMENTS

The case of the present invention is generally illustrated at 10 in Figure 1. The case 10 includes left and right sidewalls 12 and 14, respectively, backwall 16, a floor 18 and a front wall 20. The walls 12, 14, 16, 20 and the floor 18 are preferably rigid and the walls 12, 14, 16, 20 are attached to the floor 18 along rectangular sides of the floor. The sidewalls 12 and 14 are attached to opposite edges of the backwall 16 in an adjoining fashion. The front wall 20 is
shorter than the sidewalls 12 and 14 and with the sidewalls 12 and 14 define an opening 36.

The case 10 also includes a flexible cover 22 made of a sturdy fabric that is attached to an upper edge of the backwall 16 such that when the cover 22 is in a down position, the cover 22 will engage upper edges 24 and 26 of the sidewalls 12 and 14, respectively. The cover 22 is also movable to an upright position to provide more access by enlarging the opening 36.

The case 10 further includes a front cover 28. The front cover 28 is made of a flexible material such as a sturdy fabric and is attached at a lower end 30 to the front wall 20, preferably along the lower end’s entire length. The front cover 28 includes an upper overlay portion 32 and a main portion 34 to cover the opening 36.

The size of the opening 36 will vary depending on whether the top cover 22 engages edges 24 and 26 or whether the top cover is in an open or upright position. When the cover 22 is down, the cover 22 engages front edges 25 and 27 of sidewalls 12 and 14, respectively, the size of the opening 36 is decreased. Placing the cover 22 in an upright position increases the size of opening 36 providing greater access.

The walls 12, 14, 16, 18 and 20 define an enclosure 38 or an interior of the case 10. The enclosure 38 is sufficiently large to accept a plurality of signs 40. Preferably, the signs 40 are Open House real estate signs having a sign face 42 that is attached to four legs 44. The signs 40 are hinged at a top end 46 in a manner such that adjacent legs 44 can be spread apart forming an A frame configuration so that the sign becomes a freestanding sign. Typically, such signs have handles 48 at the top 46 and when lifted by the handles, the legs 44 come together in an adjacent fashion. Although believed not to be important to the present invention, such signs have a sign face that is typically approximately 24 inches high and approximately 18 inches wide, with a distance from the bottom of the legs to the top of the sign of approximately 32 to 33 inches. Such signs are typically placed along roadways to direct buyers to Open Houses being
held by realtors. The signs have to be sufficiently large with large enough lettering so that people driving by in a car can view, read and understand what is on the sign. The legs of the sign are typically made of metal with the sign face being made of a composite plastic board. Generally, for an Open House, a realtor needs to carry several signs 40 in order to guide prospective buyers to the Open House. Typically, such signs are carried by the realtor in the back of a vehicle such as an SUV or in a trunk of a car. The signs when stacked will slide due to the motion of the vehicle and due to the plastic surface which results in problems from the sliding signs.

The enclosure 38 is preferably sufficiently large to include approximately six Open House signs 40, although the enclosure could be made to accommodate more or less signs. To further contain the Open House signs within the case 10, a securing mechanism 50 is included to secure the collapsed Open House signs in a neat and orderly fashion. The signs 40 are positioned within the enclosure 38 in a substantially flat condition with the legs 44 positioned on the floor 18. The signs 40 are positioned such that the signs may be removed from the enclosure 38 by grasping the sign handle 48 and lifting the signs 40 individually from the enclosure. Preferably, the top cover is in an upright position thereby expanding the size of the opening 36 to provide better access and easier removal of the signs 40.

The securing mechanism illustrated in the drawings includes an interior restraining strap 52 that is secured at an end 54 to the backwall 16. When the plurality of signs 40 are positioned within the enclosure 38, the strap 52 is positioned around the sign face 56 of the signs 40 and is secured to the backwall at its other end 55 by a side release quick connect and disconnect buckle which is well known in the art. One example of such a buckle is more specifically described in U.S. Patent No. 6,226,844 which is herein incorporated by reference. The buckle 56 separates into a female half 58 and a male half 60. When the half 58 is inserted into the half 60, the strap 52 is positioned around the sign faces 42 of the signs 40 thereby containing the signs. The length of the
strap 52 may be shortened by pulling on an end 62 which will move the strap through the buckle half 58 thereby shortening the amount of strap 52 that goes around the sign faces 42. The manner of attachment of the strap to the buckle half 58 to increase or decrease the length of strap is also well known in the art. Although a side release quick connect and disconnect buckle is specifically illustrated in the drawings, other types of separating buckles, or other types of separating fasteners are within the scope of the present invention. Although a strap and buckle securing mechanism is specifically discussed and illustrated in the drawings, other types of securing mechanisms are within the scope of the present invention.

The case 10 of the present invention further preferably includes exterior side pockets 66 and 68. The side pockets 66 and 68 are used to store supplemental realtor signs 70. The side pockets are shown in the Figures as attached to exterior surfaces of sidewalls 12 and 14, respectively, but may be attached to any wall, including the flexible cover portion 28. The side pockets 66 and 68 are of a size that readily accepts a plurality of supplemental signs 70. Such supplemental signs are typically attached to other realtor signs and therefore have apertures 72 which permit wire-type fasteners to pass through and which then are used to hang the supplemental signs from other realtor signs. Such supplemental signs provide information such as the realtor's name, the sold status of the house and the like. To aid in inserting and removing the supplemental signs 70 from the side pockets 66 and 68, the side pockets 66 and 68 have angled openings 74 positioned such that a portion of the supplemental sign sticks out of the opening 74 so that the supplemental signs can be easily grasped and removed from the side pockets.

The front cover 28 is placed in a closed position by first positioning the top cover 22 to engage upper side edges 24 and 26, as best illustrated in Figure 1. The cover 28 is then grasped and placed in a taut position with overlay portion 32 engaging the topside of top cover 22. Exterior side release quick connect and disconnect buckles 80 and 82 are used to secure the cover 28 in
place. The buckles 80 and 82 are positioned in a spaced apart relationship. The buckles 80 and 82 are the same in construction as buckle 56 and include a female buckle half 84 and a male buckle half 86 which are disconnected from each other by pressing in portions of the male buckle 86. The male buckle half 86 is fixedly attached to the overlay portion 32 of the front cover 28. The position of the buckle halves may be reversed, that is the male buckle half may be attached to the cover 22 while the female buckle half may be attached to the overlay portion 32. The cover 28 is drawn to a tauter condition by pulling on strap ends 90 and 92 of the buckles 80 and 82 thereby shortening the strap length between the male buckle half 86 and the point of attachment to the overlay portion 32.

The case 20 also includes a top handle 94 attached preferably to the top cover 22 between the buckles 80 and 82 and a side handle 96 preferably attached to the front wall 20. The positioning and placement of the handles 94 and 96 and the number of handles may be varied as also the type of handle.

The case 10 includes bottom feet 100 (only one of which is illustrated) attached to the floor 18 for use when in an upright position. When the case 10 is placed in a horizontal position, the case 10 rests on a plurality of side feet 102 attached to the backwall 16, preferably positioned in a triangular fashion to provide sufficient support to the backwall 16. The number, placement and type of side feet as well as bottom feet, can be varied. In addition, a pair of rollers 104 are included at a bottom edge of the backwall 16 such that the case 10 can be rolled along the ground by grasping the handle 94 and pulling.

The front cover 28 preferably includes side pocket cover flaps 110 and 112 which extend from opposing lateral sides of the front cover 28. The side pocket cover flaps 110 and 112 extend sufficiently far that when the front cover 28 is positioned over the opening 36, the pocket cover flaps 110 and 112 extend over the opening 74 of the side pocket 66 and 68, as best illustrated in Figures 1 and 3. The side pocket cover flaps are held in place over the opening 74 by hook and loop type fasteners 114. Another function of the side pocket cover
flaps is to provide support for the front cover 28 by engaging the edges 25 and 27 of the sidewalls 12 and 14 when the side pocket cover flaps are held in place by the hook and loop fasteners 114 since lateral tension is created in the front cover 28. The lateral tension keeps the front cover 28 taut in the lateral direction.

Although the present invention has been described with reference to preferred embodiments, workers skilled in the art will recognize that changes may be made in form and detail without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention.
WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A case for holding signs, the case comprising:
   three connected adjoining rigid walls and a rigid bottom connected to
   each adjoining wall;
   a cover wall attached to one of the three rigid walls;
   a flexible cover extendable between two of the three rigid walls and
   having a portion for overlaying the top wall thereby forming an
   enclosure defined by the three adjoining rigid walls and the rigid
   bottom; and
   a securing mechanism positioned within the enclosure for securing the
   signs placed within the enclosure.

2. The case of claim 1 wherein the cover wall is rigid and is hingedly
   attached to one of three rigid walls.

3. The case of claim 2 and further including a handle attached to the cover
   wall.

4. The case of claim 1 wherein the securing mechanism is a strap attachable
   to at least one of the rigid walls and is positioned within the enclosure for
   securing the signs.

5. The case of claim 4 wherein the strap has a first end fixedly attached to
   one of the three adjoining rigid walls and another end for detachable attachment
   to one of the three rigid walls.

6. The case of claim 1 and further comprising at least one exterior pocket
   disposed on one of the three adjoining rigid walls.
7. The case of claim 6 and further including a side pocket cover attached to the flexible cover and extendable to cover the exterior pocket.

8. The case of claim 1 wherein the three adjoining rigid walls comprise a backwall and two sidewalls attached to the backwall and two exterior pockets, each pocket disposed on one of the two exterior sidewalls and two side pocket covers attached to the flexible cover such that when the flexible cover is extended between two of the rigid walls, the flexible side pocket covers are extendable over at least a portion of the two side pockets.

9. The case of claim 1 and further including a pair of spaced apart buckles disconnectable into two halves with one of the two halves of each buckle attached to the cover wall and the other of the two halves attached to the flexible cover.

10. A case for storing signs, the case comprising:
    a main body having a plurality of connected walls and an opening, the walls defining an interior and the opening providing access to the interior, the opening being sufficient in size for placing the signs within the interior;
    a flexible fabric cover attached to the main body at one end, and having a fastening mechanism at a free end for securing the free end to the main body to cover the opening; and
    a securing mechanism positioned within the interior for securing the signs to one of the plurality of walls.

11. The case of claim 10 and further including a cover hingedly attached to one of the plurality of walls.
12. The case of claim 10 wherein the securing mechanism is a strap positioned within the interior for securing the signs.

13. The case of claim 12 wherein the strap has a first end fixedly attached to one of the connected walls and another end for detachable attachment to one of the connected walls.

14. The case of claim 10 and further comprising at least one exterior pocket disposed on one of the connected walls.

15. The case of claim 14 and further including a side pocket cover attached to the flexible cover and extendable to cover the exterior pocket.

16. The case of claim 10 wherein the connected walls are rigid and comprise a backwall and two sidewalls attached to the backwall and two exterior pockets, each pocket disposed on one of the two exterior sidewalls and two side pocket covers attached to the flexible cover such that when the flexible cover is extended between two of the rigid walls, the flexible side pocket covers are extendable over at least a portion of the two side pockets.

17. The case of claim 10 and further including a pair of spaced apart buckles disconnectable into two halves with one of the two halves of each buckle attached to the cover wall and the other of the two halves attached to the flexible fabric cover.

18. A method of storing real estate Open House signs, the Open House signs each having four legs and a sign face, with the legs being hingedly attached at a top end thereof, the sign being collapsible to a substantially flat condition, the method comprising:
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providing a case having a plurality of walls defining an interior, and having an opening sufficient in size to permit placement of the Open House signs into the interior; and

storing the Open House signs in the substantially flat condition within the interior of the case.

19. The method of claim 18 wherein a flexible cover is fixedly attached at one end to the case and has a free end for extending over the opening, the method further comprising extending the flexible cover over the opening and attaching a free end of the flexible cover to one of the plurality of walls thereby closing the opening.

20. The method of claim 18 wherein a restraining strap is provided within the enclosure with one end being attached in the enclosure to one of the plurality of walls, the method further comprising positioning the strap over a face of the signs within the enclosure and detachably attaching another end of the strap to one of the plurality walls such that the signs are restrained within the enclosure.