Title: METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR REMOTE AUDIO RECORDING ONTO AN AUDIO CARD

Abstract: A system (26) and method for recording and delivering audio messages is presented. The system comprises a multiple audio format recorder (20) and portable audio cards (10). A sender may utilize a variety of communication devices (12, 14, 16, 18) to connect to the recorder system (26) through interface units. Additionally, a sender may communicate directly with a single vendor, with an individual and global ordering system, or with an order fulfillment center system. After an audio message is recorded onto an audio card (10), the audio card (10) may be presented individually to the recipient. Alternatively, the audio card (10) may be presented with a variety of carriers with numerous forms of gifts (24), merchandise (90) or promotional materials.
METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR REMOTE AUDIO RECORDING ONTO AN AUDIO CARD

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to recording personalized messages. More particularly, the present invention relates to a system and method for remotely recording a sender's audio message onto an audio card for playback.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Recently, the general public's interest in buying and obtaining products and information remotely has significantly increased. For example, numerous businesses provide customers with the ability to order products or information over the telephone. Additionally, in the recent surge of the Internet, businesses now provide customers with the ability to purchase products or obtain information over the Internet through various Web sites.

Often when a customer orders products or information from a remote provider, the customer is ordering the product or information for another person. Thus, it is desirable for customers as well as businesses to be able to provide a personal message to accompany the product or information sent to the other person. Further, it is desirable for the message or information to be an audio message rather than a textual message. Audio messages are preferred since they may be personalized by using specific verbal expressions or sounds. Thus, audio messages may be designed and customized/personalized to each specific recipient of the product or information in more depth and variety than a textual message.

Presently, current systems which provide personal messages to accompany products require the sender contact a central facility in order to record the message. The existing systems
provide a single format to receive the personal message over the telephone. However, the current systems do not provide a method and system for receiving multiple formats of audio messages such as from an analog telephone, computer generated sound files, or directly in person. Often the content of the prior art personal message systems are limited to personalizing an introduction and closing using a standard, generic body. Further, the existing systems do not provide a method for recording personal audio messages at the location of the product or information being sent to the recipient.

Therefore, there is a need for providing a method and system for receiving multiple formats of audio messages. In addition, there is a need for a method and system which receives and transfers purchase order information or customer identification and personal audio messages together to the location where the audio message is combined with the product or information being sent to the recipient.

**SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION**

A general object of the present invention is to provide a system and method for remotely recording personal audio messages. Thus, a system and method for recording and delivering personal audio messages is provided. The system comprises a multiple audio (analog and/or digital) format recorder and portable audio cards. When a sender wants to send a personalized audio message to an intended receiver, the sender uses any number of methods to communicate directly with a single vendor, through a global ordering system, or through an order fulfillment center. The methodology used to originate and transmit an audio message to the recorder includes a telephone, cellular phone, personal computer or by personally visiting the vendor facility. The recorder may also communicate and receive a personal audio message by connection to a computer network such as the Internet. The vendor or central order center
receives the personalized audio message and transmits it any number of ways (e.g. via a digital audio file, email and analog signal) to the recorder located at the site where the audio card is recorded. The audio card is then packaged and sent alone, or combined with a variety of carriers for attachment to merchandise such as gifts, cards, toys, balloons, pins, or promotional items being sent to the intended recipient. The audio card is recorded at the site where the merchandise and carrier are located.

The audio card recorder system has numerous applications. For example, the versatility of the audio card recorder system allows a single vendor such as a small business owner to operate independently of a central order center. Alternatively, the vendor may interface with the central order center. Further yet, this system may be implemented utilizing a central order center that itself operates independently. Or the central order center may interface with a distribution center to provide personal audio messages. Additionally, the versatility of the audio card recorder system includes the ability to receive the sender’s audio input from many inputs such as conventional telephones and cellular phones, direct recording into a microphone attached to the recorder at the vendor’s location, or via a sound file generated by a personal computer or a computer network such as the Internet.

The advantages of the audio card include size, mobility and adaptability to be a gift independently or be attached to virtually any merchandise item including flower arrangements, balloons, toys, clothing, or business promotional items such as business cards or brochures.

Playback of the audio card may be triggered automatically when the recipient opens the carrier, such as a conventional greeting card, or by pushing an external button on the audio card. When
playback of the audio card is triggered, the sender’s recorded audio message is played and heard by the recipient.

The above-described objects of the present invention and other unique features and benefits of the present invention will become clear to those skilled in the art when read in conjunction with the following detailed description of illustrative embodiments and viewed in conjunction with the attached drawings in which like numbers refer to like parts, and the appended claims.

**BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS**

Detailed description of the preferred embodiment of the invention will be made with reference to the accompanying drawings.

FIG. 1 is a system diagram of an exemplary audio card recorder system of the present invention;

FIGS. 2A-B are diagrams of exemplary audio cards of the present invention;

FIG. 3 is a diagram of an exemplary circuitry of an audio card of the present invention;

FIG. 4 is a flow diagram of an exemplary method of the present invention;

FIGS. 5A-B are system diagrams of an exemplary recorder system implemented as an individual system in accordance with the invention;

FIG. 6 is a system diagram of an exemplary recorder system implemented as an individual and global ordering system in accordance with the invention;

FIG. 7 is a system diagram of an exemplary recorder system implemented as an order fulfillment center system in accordance with the invention;

FIGS. 8A-8B are diagrams of the front and back sides of an exemplary carrier implemented as a design carrier in the shape of a sun in accordance with the invention;
FIGS. 9A-E are diagrams of exemplary design carriers attached to a variety of merchandise;

FIGS. 10A-B are diagrams of the front cover and inside of an exemplary greeting card carrier in accordance with the invention;

FIGS. 11A-B are diagrams of the front and back sides of an exemplary gift tag carrier with a plain front cover and a decorative front cover in accordance with the invention;

FIGS. 12A-B are diagrams of the front and back sides of a printed audio card carrier in accordance with the invention; and

FIGS. 13A-C are diagrams of a printed audio card carrier with the front side including a front flap.

**DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION**

Disclosed herein is a detailed description of the invention. This description is not to be taken in a limiting sense, but is made merely for the purpose of illustrating the general principles of the invention. The section titles and overall organization of the present detailed description are for the purpose of convenience only and are not intended to limit the present invention.

FIG. 1 is a diagram of an exemplary audio recorder system 26 which includes a multiple audio format recorder 20 that receives an analog or digital audio input and records the audio input onto an audio card 10. The recorder 20 includes a slot 22 for receiving an audio card 10. When an audio card 10 is inserted into slot 22, the slot 22 physically aligns the electrical connections of audio card 10 with the connections of the recorder 20, for example, via spring loaded or “plug in” type connectors. Thus, the recorder 20 functions as a base unit allowing numerous personal audio messages to be recorded onto different audio cards 10. After an audio message is recorded, the audio card 10 is removed from the recorder 20 and sent to the recipient
individually or attached to merchandise, such as a gift 24. The audio card can also be configured into a design carrier 90, as explained in more detail later.

Referring to FIG. 2A, the exemplary audio card 10 may be a device about the size of a credit card and have dimensions of approximately 1/8th – 1/4 inch thick. The audio card 10 serves to contain a recorded audio message that may be sent to a recipient by itself or sent with a merchandise 24 either with or without a carrier. The electrical components of the audio card 10 are encased within a container 28. The container material may be made from plastic or any other type of suitable material. One type of container 28 for the audio card 10 may have greetings or messages (happy birthday, get well, congratulations, etc.) printed on one side as shown in FIG. 2A and another type of container 28 may be plain without printed messages as shown in FIG. 2B.

The electrical components for the audio card 10 are identical for FIGS. 2A-B and include a switch 32, a speaker 38 and recorder contacts 36. However, in FIG. 2B, the plain container 28 includes the circuitry 30 for the audio card 10 within a central location. The circuitry 30 is contained within a perforated area 30 and includes the switch 32 and the speaker 38. Thus, the circuitry 30 may then be separated from the original container 28, for example, punching out along the perforation. This embodiment of the audio card 10 allows the circuitry 30 to be detached from the container 28 of the audio card 10. Then the circuitry 30 may be placed in a carrier after the personal audio message has been recorded onto the audio card 10.

FIG. 3 presents an exemplary electrical circuit diagram of the components of an audio card 10 encased in a protective container 28. The audio card 10 includes a programmable chip or controller 48 to receive an audio message, a memory device 46 to store the message and a switch
32 such as a micro-switch, pressure switch, button or similar device with or without a triggering mechanism. The audio card 10 further includes a digital-to-analog converter 42 to convert a message in digital form to analog for play back, an amplifier 40 to increase the signal of the message, a speaker 38 and a power supply 44. The power supply 44 may be a Nickel Metal Hydride battery which is rechargeable and inexpensive or a Lithium Cell battery which although not rechargeable, has a long life but is more expensive. Alternatively, other power sources may be used, such as, for example, solar power and self-powered integrated circuits.

Upon activating the switch 32, the data stored in the memory 46 is sent to the digital-to-analog converter 42 which converts the digital message to analog form. Next, the amplifier 40 amplifies the analog message and the audio speaker 38 plays back the previously recorded personal audio message. The speaker 38 provides good sound quality that replicates the sender’s audio message. Playback of the sender’s personal audio message will occur each time the switch 32 is triggered.

FIG. 4 illustrates a flow diagram of an exemplary personal message recording process of the present invention. Referring to FIG. 4, the recording process system begins with the step 2 when a customer contacts a vendor, global ordering, or fulfillment organization and makes a request to record an audio message onto an audio card 10. As will be discussed in more detail below, the customer connects to the recorder 20 by conventional telephone 16 or cellular phone 14, an individual computer or a computer network such as the Internet 12, or in person 18 via a built in microphone or conventional telephone-type handset instrument attached to the recorder 20. In step 4 of the recording process, the operator (or an automatic card loader) inserts an audio card 10 into the recorder 20 to record the sender’s message. The recorder 20 may receive
multiple format audio input from the sender and records an audio message onto the audio card 10. The audio message may be recorded onto the audio card 10 via a wireless (e.g. magnetic strips, infrared) or hardwire (e.g. spring loaded or plug type electrical contact) connection. Alternatively, the audio message may be recorded onto the audio card 10 through a magnetic strip similar to credit card machines.

In step 6 of the recording process, the customer is prompted by the recorder 20 to record a message. The customer is prompted via audio instructions during the entire recording process. If the customer is using a telephone or a digital audio recording software to record the personal audio message, the telephone prompt instructions include messages such as:

- "Welcome to the XYZ Company message recording system . . . you will have up to 45 seconds to record your personal message. Listen now for instructions. You may push 9 at any time to hear this menu again."

- "Please state your name and/or customer order number . . .
- "Thank you. Now push 1 to begin recording your message . . .
- "Press 2 when you have finished recording . . .
- "Press 3 to listen to your recorded message . . .
- "Press 0 to erase your message and then push 1 to start again . . .
- Provide a warning indicating x-amount of seconds left to record the message
- "Press the pound (#) key when you are satisfied with your recorded message."

The recorder 20 displays the status of the recording process via LED indicators. These indicators include a visual indicator (e.g. LED) to indicate the machine is “on”, to indicate that the audio card is properly connected to the recorder, to display the steps of the process as the
sender records the audio message, to inform the operator when the audio recording has been successfully completed, and to alarm with an audio warning sound, if the audio recorder 20 or system 26 is malfunctioning. When step 6 of the recording process is complete, in step 8 the vendor 62 removes the audio card 10 from the recorder 20 and sends it to the recipient either individually or with merchandise 24. Additional features of the recorder 20 include the capability to store information for a number of customers including the sender’s name, order number, and audio messages for recording onto an audio card 10 at a later time. Further, the recorder 20 contains a “repeat message” function that allows the same message to be recorded onto multiple audio cards 10.

Referring again to FIG. 1, the recorder 20 receives audio messages from several sources. For example, the sender may record an audio message in person 18 by speaking directly into a telephone-type handset or microphone that is connected to the recorder 20. If the sender is not physically present at the location of the recorder 20, he may connect to the recorder 20 a variety of ways. For example, the sender may call via telephone 14 or 16 the vender 62 where the recorder 20 is located. In this way, the sender is then connected to the recorder 20 by the store operator after the sender’s order information is obtained.

Alternatively, a sender may operate a personal computer or other equipment over a network 12 to generate analog or digital message. An audio sound file, for example a file with a .wav extension, is then sent as an attachment to an electronic transmission (e.g. email) containing the sender’s order information to the vendor 62 where it is downloaded into the recorder 20. If the sender has the technical capability, a two-way audio communications may be established between computers similar to a conventional telephone whereby the sender utilizing a computer
12 will be transferred to the recorder 20 similar to the telephone 14 or 16. A sender may also 
connect over a computer network such as the Internet to the Web sites of various businesses, 
catalog-type ordering and centralized distribution organizations. A customer may utilize his 
computer 12 to generate a sound file and send his audio message to these organizations directly 
through the various Web sites. Alternatively, the customer may be instructed from information 
on the Web site to use a telephone to be connected to the recorder 20.

The recorder system 26 may function independently of any other related equipment 
necessary for operation. No central processing computer or facility is required. This 
independence allows a single vendor 62, a central ordering center 72 or a distribution center 82 
to produce an audio card 10. Alternatively, the entities may work together to produce an audio 
card 10. The recorder system 26 is usually located at the same location as the gift 26.

FIG. 5A shows a system diagram of an exemplary recorder system 26 of the present 
invention implemented as an individual system 60. In this embodiment, a vendor 62 includes a 
recorder 20 at the vendor's location 62. The sender may call via telephone 14 or 16 the vendor 
62 where the recorder 20 is located. In this way, the store operator would request the sender's 
billing and order information and then connect the sender to the recorder 20 to record a message 
on an audio card 10. Additionally, a sender may utilize a personal computer or other equipment 
over a network 12 to generate an audio message. The sound file is then downloaded into the 
recorder 20 for recording onto the audio card 10. Finally, with a recorder 20 present at the 
vender location 62, a customer may record an audio message while physically at the vendor 
location 62 via a telephone-type handset or microphone connected directly to the recorder 20.
Regardless of the method for recording the audio card 10, once recorded, the audio card 10 may be sent to the recipient alone or attached to merchandise 24.

FIG. 5B shows a block diagram of an exemplary recorder system 26 of the present invention. The recorder system 26 includes a computer interface 50, a telephone interface 52, a handset or microphone interface 54, and an audio card interface 56. Additionally, the recorder system 26 utilizes an analog to digital converter 76 and a display unit 58. An external speaker unit 78 may be used in addition to or instead of the display unit 58. The system 26 in FIG. 5B also utilizes another digital to analog converter 43, a controller 49 and a memory device 45.

In operation, when a sender wishes to record an audio message over the telephone 14 or 16, the controller 49 accesses an audio message stored in the memory device 45 that contains recording instructions. This audio message is then sent to the sender by way of the analog to digital converter 43 and telephone interface 52. Then the sender conveys an audio message using telephone 14 or 16, which is received by the telephone interface 52. The telephone interface 52 then passes the sender’s analog message to the analog to digital converter 76 which converts the sender’s analog audio message into a digital format. The digital audio message is subsequently sent to the audio card interface 56 for recording onto an audio card 10.

When a sender contacts the recorder system 26 via a personal computer or over a computer network 12, the controller 49 accesses a textual or audio message stored in the memory device 45 that contains recording instructions. This message is sent to the sender via the computer interface 50. After receiving the sender’s audio data, the computer interface 50 forwards the sender’s audio message to the audio card interface 56 for recording onto an audio card 10.
Finally in FIG. 5B, when a sender visits a vendor 62 in person 18, a handset or microphone interface 54 allows the sender to record an audio message through an external microphone. The microphone interface 54 processes the recorded audio message received from the microphone and an analog to digital converter 76 converts the message to digital form. The digital message is then sent to the audio card interface 56 to be recorded onto an audio card 10. A display 58 may visually provide status information or instructions to the sender. Further, a handset or speaker unit 78 may be used to provide audio information or instructions. When the speaker unit 78 is implemented, a digital to analog converter 47 converts digital instruction messages stored in the memory device 46 to analog form which are played to the sender over the speaker unit 78.

FIG. 6 is a system diagram of an exemplary recorder system 26 of the present invention implemented as an individual vendor and global ordering system 70. In this embodiment, a sender either provides audio input directly to a vendor 62 or the customer provides the audio input to a central order center 72 which transfers the audio input to the recorder 20 located at the vendor 62 for recording the audio input onto an audio card 10. Examples of central order centers 72 include FTD, Telefloral, Tiffany, flower/gift shops (Conroy’s/Hallmark/Walmart), e-commerce (Yellow Pages, store Web site, 1-800-Flowers, gift.com, etc.). In the individual and global ordering system 70, a recorder 20 is not physically located at the central order center 72 but remains located at the vendor location 62. Thus, the central order center 72 receives the audio input by a sender calling via telephone 14b or 16b or a sender may utilize a personal computer or other equipment over a network 12b to generate an audio message.
If a sender calls the central order center or retail store 72, the operators at the central order center 72 would request the sender’s billing and order information. Then the central ordering operator would create a wav. file 74 to be transmitted with the order information to the vendor 62, who then downloads the wav. file 74 to the recorder 20 and creates the audio card 10 which is sent alone or with merchandise to the intended recipient. Or, the operator could connect the sender to the recorder 26 located at the vendor 62 to record a message. If, instead, a sender generates an audio message over a personal computer or other equipment over a network 12b, the sound file, for example, with a .wav extension, is then sent as an attachment to an electronic transmission 74 containing the sender’s order information to the vendor 62 where it is downloaded into the recorder 20 for recording onto the audio card 10.

FIG. 7 is a system diagram of an exemplary recorder system 26 of the present invention implemented as an order fulfillment center system 80. In this embodiment, a sender provides audio input to a central order center 72 that may (or may not) transfer the audio input to a distribution center 82. Examples of distribution centers 82 include distribution centers for companies such as Harry & David, Omaha Steaks, Lands-End, Neiman Marcus, Sears, etc. The audio input is provided by the sender similarly as in the individual system 60, and the individual and global ordering system 70.

However, in the order fulfillment center system 80, a recorder 20 is physically located at both the central order center 72 and at the distribution center 82. Thus, if the audio card 10 is to be sent to the recipient attached to merchandise 24, the audio input is recorded onto the audio card 10 at the location of the merchandise 24. If the merchandise 24a is located at the central order center or retail store 72, the audio input is recorded onto the audio card 10a at the central
order center 72. But if the merchandise 24b is located at the distribution center 82, the audio input is recorded onto the audio card 10b at the distribution center 82. It is important to note that the distribution center 82 does not receive audio input directly from the sender. Instead, when the merchandise 24b is located at the distribution center 82, the audio input is sent as an attachment to an electronic transmission 74 containing the sender's order information to distribution center 82 where it is downloaded into the recorder 20 for recording onto the audio card 10b. After recording the audio card 10 at the distribution center 82, the audio card 10b may be attached to or enclosed with merchandise 24b and sent to the recipient.

Audio cards 10 can be sent individually, or with merchandise 24 such as gifts or business promotional materials. When audio cards 10 are sent along with merchandise 24, carriers may be needed to attach the audio card 10 to the merchandise. This invention utilizes several embodiments of carriers. One such carrier is a design carrier 90 made of plastic or other suitable material and may be in the shape of a sun as shown in FIGS. 8A-8B. The design carrier 90 may be implemented as a large pin or broach, may be the gift itself or may accompany merchandise 24. Referring to FIG. 8A, the nose of the sun of the design carrier 90 includes a switch 32 that when pushed plays the audio message. The back of the design carrier 90 is designed so that the perforated cut-out of the audio card 10 containing circuitry 30 can be placed inside. The back opens by releasing a latch 98 to pivot open along a hinge 96.

It is to be noted that the design carrier 90 is not limited to a sun shape. The design carrier 90 could depict other characters or celebrations. For example, design carriers could be shaped as a birthday cake, Christmas tree, angle, Santa, Easter basket, heart, star, pumpkin, four-leaf clover, football, ballet shoes, theatre masks, cartoon characters, etc. All the design carriers
accommodate the basic circuitry 30 necessary for playing an audio message. It is important to note that for the design carriers 90, the circuitry 30 is surrounded by perforation such that the circuitry 30 may be snapped out of the audio card 10. This provides one type of audio card 10 which can accommodate several types of carriers for attaching to various merchandise 24 the customer may desire, i.e. flowers, balloons, bears, etc.

The back of the design carrier 90 has a clip 94 or loop 92 so that it may be attached to numerous types of merchandise 24 no matter what size or shape. Referring to FIG. 9A, the design carrier 90 may be attached to a florist fork and placed in a plant or flower arrangement. If the design carrier 90 is to be mounted on a florist fork, as in FIG. 9A, the clip 94 on the back can also accommodate an additional written gift card. The design carrier 90 may also be attached to the ribbons on a package as in FIGS. 9D-E or balloons or to any area on an item such as a teddy bear as in FIGS. 9B-C. The clip 94 on the back of the design carrier 90 also makes it possible for the recipient to wear it after they receive it or attach it to other things for display. Since the design carrier 90 may be attached as a pin or broach, it is possible that the design carrier 90 could be intended as the gift itself.

Another embodiment of a carrier includes a greeting card carrier 100 as shown in FIGS. 10A-B which is adapted to house the audio card 10 and playback circuitry within the carrier 100. The front cover 102 of the greeting card carrier 100 may be made of either high quality paper or a plastic type paper more commonly known as Vellum. The front cover 102 can be either plain, have a company logo or trademark, or have various celebration decorations as shown in FIG. 10A. An envelope may be included for the greeting card carrier 100 in order to address and send the greeting card carrier 100 to the recipient through the mail. When the greeting card carrier
100 is opened as shown in FIG. 10B, the audio card 10 can be slipped inside. On the interior of the card 104 there is a switch 32 which plays the message when triggered. Note that the back or front greeting card carrier may include perforations or holes in order for the sound to be heard from the speaker 38.

The greeting card carrier 100 may also accompany many types of gifts. Unlike the design carriers 90, the greeting card carrier 100 and front cover 102 may have several different appearances. The cover can be blank so you can write on the outside as well as the inside if desired. Or the cover can designate a certain holiday or special occasion such as Christmas, Easter, Jewish Holidays, wedding, Halloween, birthday, baby shower, etc. Either type of cover for the carrier 100 can be used with an envelope. The greeting card carriers 100 may be available in multiple sizes including, but not limited to, dimensions of 4" x 6" approximately designed to look like a conventional greeting card.

Referring to FIGS. 11A-B, yet another embodiment of a carrier for an audio card 10 is shown as a gift tag carrier 110. The gift tag carrier 110 is double sided and made so it houses the audio card 10 between a front cover 114 and a back cover 116, and/or may be constructed as a pouch-type envelope. No envelope is needed for this application as a string or ribbon 118 is tied at the top of the tag carrier 110 where the two covers 114 and 116 come together after the audio card 10 has been inserted. The gift tag carrier 110 may then be tied to the merchandise 24. The gift tag carrier 110 can come either preprinted with various celebrations on it as shown in FIG. 11B, or it can be ordered blank so that messages can be written on it as shown in FIG. 11A. The gift tag carrier 110 may be made using vellum or any other suitable material such that even gift tag carriers with printed celebrations may also be hand signed or written on if so desired. The
gift tag carrier 110 may include some adhesive material 112 to seal the front cover 114 to the back cover 116 once the audio card 10 has been inserted. The tag carrier 110 includes an accommodation for switch 32 which triggers playing the audio message. The tag carrier 110 may also include small holes so sound from the speaker 38 can be heard. The gift tag carrier 110 is slightly larger than the audio card. Like the design carriers 90 and greeting card carriers 100, the gift tag carrier 110 can be used for all types of gifts.

Another alternative carrier is the printed or plain audio card carrier 120 shown in FIGS. 12A-B. The printed audio card carrier 120 uses plastic, paper or any other suitable material wrapped around, attached to or enclosing the audio card 10. The material encasing the audio card 10 for the printed audio card carrier 120 may be glued or attached with adhesive onto the audio card 10 leaving holes in the bottom for the recorder contact points 36. The printed audio card carrier 120 resembles a smaller version of the greeting card carrier 100. However, this printed audio card carrier 120 does not open and is similar in size to a credit card. The printed audio card carrier 120 may also include a hole 124 in the left hand corner for the printed audio card carrier to tie onto a gift or other merchandise. However, for business marketing and promotional uses, the audio card 10 can be used with or without the hole 124. A switch 32 is also included with this carrier 120 for playing back the message. Printed audio card carriers 120 without an attaching hole 124 can be mailed or handed out and used in the business world similar to the traditional business cards. In another embodiment, the printed audio card carrier 120 may also resemble the coloring of a credit card in that it may be colored within a plastic audio card 10 much like the credit cards with various colors within the plastic itself.
As with the previously discussed carriers, the printed audio card carrier 120 may be inserted into clear tag type carriers 110 to accompany several types of gifts in the same way as the gift tag carriers 110 and no envelope is required. The gift tag carrier 110 may seem similar to the printed audio card carrier 120, however, the gift tag carrier 110 requires that the audio card is placed inside the two covers 114 and 116. In the printed audio card carrier 120, material is attached directly to an audio card 10. FIG. 12B shows the back of the printed audio card carrier 120 which includes adhesive strips 122 so that the printed audio card carrier 120 may be mounted to merchandise 24 including gifts or other merchandise such as business or promotional materials.

FIGS. 13A-C shows a printed audio card carrier 130 which includes a front flap 132. This carrier 130 is a variation of the printed audio card carrier 120. The printed audio card carrier 130 with front flap 132 also includes adhesive stripes 122 on the back of the carrier as shown in FIG. 13C. Thus, both carriers 120 and 130 may be affixed to any smooth, flat surface. FIG. 13B shows the carrier 130 with the front flap 132 lifted open and reveals a switch 32 and a speaker 38 as well as the circuitry 30.

It should be noted that either form of the audio card 10 shown in FIGS. 2A-B may be used for the carriers 100, 110, 120 and 130. The audio card 10 of FIG. 2B may only be required when used with a the design carrier 90 of a unique shape such that the rectangular shape of the audio card 10 will not accommodate the shape of the design carrier 90. In addition, when the audio card of FIG. 2B is used, the circuitry 30 may be implemented in a different arrangement other than the circular area in FIG. 2B. With regard to the audio card in FIG. 2A, the placement indicated for the speaker 38 and the switch 32 are only shown for illustrative purposes and are
not required to be in a specific location on the audio card 10. Further, numerous other types of carriers may also be developed including variations of the carriers disclosed above.

Although the present invention has thus been described in detail with regard to the preferred embodiments and drawings thereof, it should be apparent to those skilled in the art that various adaptations and modifications of the present invention may be accomplished without departing from the spirit and the scope of the invention. Accordingly, it is to be understood that the detailed description and the accompanying drawings as set forth hereinabove are not intended to limit the breadth of the present invention, which should be inferred only from the following claims and their appropriately construed legal equivalents.
WHAT IS ClaimED IS:

1. An audio card for receiving, storing and playing back a personal audio message comprising:
   a memory device for storing said personal audio message;
   an audio speaker for playing back said personal audio message;
   a controller for receiving and directing said personal audio message to said memory device for storage, and for directing said personal audio message to said audio speaker for playback;
   a switch for triggering the play back of said personal audio message; and
   a container to encase said controller, said memory device, and said audio speaker within a perforated portion of said container.

2. The audio card of claim 1 wherein said perforated portion is removable to form a modified container for said controller, said memory device, switch, and said audio speaker.

3. The audio card of claim 1 further including a contact for electrical connection to a recorder for receiving said personal audio message therefrom.

4. The audio card of claim 3, wherein said contact is located on said container, outside of said perforated portion.

5. The audio card of claim 4, further including printed electrical lines on said container for electrically connecting said contact to said controller.
6. The audio card of claim 1, wherein said personal audio message is stored as a digital audio file in said memory device.

7. The audio card of claim 6, further including a digital-to-analog converter for converting said personal audio message from digital-to-analog format.

8. The audio card of claim 1, further including an amplifier for amplifying said personal audio message.

9. The audio card of claim 1 further including a carrier for supporting said audio card.

10. The audio card of claim 9, wherein said carrier is a design carrier.

11. The removable audio card of claim 10 wherein said design carrier is configured into a sun.

12. The audio card of claim 9 wherein said carrier further comprises:
a slot for receiving said container; and
a plurality of holes adjacent to said audio speaker.
13. The audio card of claim 9 wherein said carrier further comprises an attaching mechanism.

14. The removable audio card of claim 9 wherein said switch is activated upon opening a panel attached to said carrier so that playback of said personal audio message occurs.

15. The audio card of claim 5 wherein said carrier comprises a gift tag carrier further comprising:
   a front cover;
   a back cover pivotally coupled to said front cover;
   a slot formed either on said front or back cover for receiving said container wherein said switch is accessible through said slot;
   a plurality of holes adjacent to said audio speaker of said circuitry;
   an attaching mechanism adapted to attach said gift tag to a separate article; and
   a sealing mechanism for securing said container within said slot.

16. The audio card of claim 2, further including a carrier for supporting said modified container, said carrier having a slot that is complementary shaped with said modified container.

17. The audio card of claim 1, further including a carrier for supporting said container having a printed matter, wherein said carrier includes an adhesive for attachment to a merchandise.
18. The audio card of claim 1, further including an audio card carrier having an adhesive for attachment to said container having no printed matter thereon.
19. An audio card recording machine comprising:

a plurality of inputs for receiving personal audio messages in different audio formats;

a memory device for storing said personal audio messages;

a slot adapted to receive a removable audio card; and

a controller for receiving and directing said personal audio messages to said memory device, and for directing said personal audio message to said removable audio card in said slot.

20. The audio card recording machine of claim 19 further comprising an instruction mechanism for prompting a user to record said personal audio message.

21. The audio card recording machine of claim 19 wherein said instruction mechanism further provides:

a greeting to said user; and

a plurality of user instructions for recording, listening, erasing and saving said personal audio message.

22. The audio card recording machine of claim 19 further including a plurality of indicator lights comprising:

a power-on indicator light;

a recording-in-progress indicator light;

a recording complete indicator light; and
an alarm including audio and visual indicators for indicating said audio card recording machine is malfunctioning.

23. The audio card recording machine of claim 19, wherein said audio format includes a telephone audio format.

24. The audio card recording machine of claim 19, wherein said audio format includes a digital audio format.

25. The audio card recording machine of claim 24 wherein said digital audio format is configured into a sound file.

26. The audio card recording machine of claim 25, wherein said sound file is in a .wav format.

27. The audio card recording machine of claim 19 wherein one of said inputs is configured to receive a microphone.

28. The audio card recording machine of claim 19 wherein one of said inputs is configured to receive a telephone-type handset.
29. The audio card recording machine of claim 19, further including an analog-to-digital converter a personal audio message into digital format if received in an analog format.
30. A method for recording an audio message comprising the steps of:
requesting an audio message from a user at a location of a sound recorder mechanism;
connecting said user to said sound recorder mechanism through a microphone or a handset;
prompting said user with directions to record said audio message;
recording said user's audio message; and
transferring said audio message from an audio card recorder to a removable audio card.

31. The method of claim 30 further comprising the steps of:
removing said audio card from said sound recorder mechanism;
attaching said audio card to an audio card carrier;
attaching said audio card carrier to an article; and
transferring said article with said attached audio card to an intended recipient.

32. The method of claim 30 further comprising the steps of:
removing said audio card from said sound recorder mechanism;
attaching said audio card to an audio card carrier; and
transferring said attached audio card to an intended recipient.

33. The method of claim 30 further comprising the steps of:
removing said audio card from said sound recorder mechanism; and
transferring said audio card to an intended recipient.
34. A method for remotely recording an audio message comprising the steps of:
   receiving a request for an audio message from a user at a remote location;
   connecting said user to an audio card recording system including a sound recorder
   mechanism;
   prompting said user with directions to record said audio message;
   recording said user's audio message onto said sound recorder mechanism; and
   transferring said audio message from said sound recorder mechanism to a removable
   audio card.

35. The method of claim 34 further comprising the steps of:
   removing said audio card from said sound recorder mechanism;
   attaching said audio card to an audio card carrier;
   attaching said audio card carrier to an article; and
   distributing said article with said attached audio card to an intended recipient.

36. The method of claim 34 further comprising the steps of:
   removing said audio card from said sound recorder mechanism;
   attaching said audio card to an audio card carrier; and
   distributing said article with said attached audio card to an intended recipient.

37. The method of claim 34 further comprising the steps of:
   removing said audio card from said sound recorder mechanism; and
distributing said audio card to an intended recipient.

38. The method of claim 34 further comprising the step of:
receiving said request for said audio message from a user at a remote location through a telephone line.

39. The method of claim 34 further comprising the step of:
receiving said request for said audio message from a user at a remote location through a digital connection.

40. The method of claim 39 further comprising the step of:
receiving a computer generated sound file through said digital connection.

41. A method for ordering an article to be sent to an intended recipient with an audio card containing an audio message comprising the steps of:
receiving information for an article at a first location;
receiving said audio message for recording onto said audio card; and
generating an electronic transmission comprising said user's audio message and said information for transmission to a second location.

42. The method of claim 41 further comprising the step of:
sending said electronic transmission to an audio card recording system comprising a sound recorder mechanism at said second location.

43. The method of claim 42 further comprising the steps of:
transferring said audio message to said sound recorder mechanism; and
recording said personal audio message onto a removable audio card.

44. The method of claim 41, wherein said information includes a customer order identification.

45. The method of claim 41, wherein said information includes a purchase order information.
46. A method for ordering an article to be sent to an intended recipient with an audio card containing an audio message comprising the steps of:

   receiving order information for an article at a first location;

   determining the location of said article when said user requests said audio card accompany said article;

   if said article is located at said first location, transferring said audio message onto a removable audio card; and

   if said article is located at a second location, generating an electronic transmission comprising said user's audio message and said order information for transmission to said second location.

47. The method of claim 46 further comprising the step of:

   sending said electronic transmission to an audio card recording system at said second location.

48. The method of claim 47 further comprising the steps of:

   transferring said audio message to a sound recorder mechanism; and

   recording said audio message onto a removable audio card.
49. A system for ordering a merchandise to be sent to an intended recipient with an audio card containing an audio message comprising:

a central ordering center for receiving order information for a merchandise, for receiving said audio message for recording onto said audio card and for generating an electronic transmission including said order information and said user's audio message to an audio card recording system.

50. The system of claim 49 further including:

said audio card recording system for receiving said electronic transmission including said order information and said user's audio message.

51. The system of claim 50 wherein said audio card recording system records said user's audio message onto a remote audio card.
52. A system for ordering an merchandise to be sent to an intended recipient with an audio card containing an audio message comprising:

a central ordering center for receiving order information for a merchandise, for determining the location of said merchandise, for transferring said audio message onto a removable audio card if said merchandise is located at said central ordering center, and for generating an electronic transmission comprising said user's audio message and said order information for transmission to a remote location if said merchandise is located at said remote location.

53. The system of claim 52 wherein said remote location includes an audio card recording system for sending said electronic transmission to said audio card recording system at said remote location.

54. The system of claim 53 wherein said audio card recording system transfers said audio message to a sound recorder mechanism and records said audio message onto a removable audio card.
FIG. 3
Sender calls vendor, global ordering or retail/distribution and requests audio card.

Global ordering or retail/distributor Vendor \( i \) inserts audio card into audio card recorder and connects sender to recorder.

Sender is prompted by recorder to record audio message.

Global ordering or retail/distributor Vendor \( i \) removes audio card from recorder and sends to recipient (with sender's gift or business card).

FIG. 4
FIG. 5A
Happy Birthday!

FIG. 11A

FIG. 11B
INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER
IPC(7) : H04M 1/64, 3/00
US CL : 379/67.1, 88.25
According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED
Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)
U.S. : 379/67.1, 88.25

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched
none

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)
STN/CAS, WEST 2.0

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages</th>
<th>Relevant to claim No.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Y</td>
<td>US 5,719,920 A (HARMAN) 17 February 1998, abstract.</td>
<td>1-54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y</td>
<td>US 5,251,251 A (BARBER et al) 05 October 1993, abstract.</td>
<td>1-54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C. See patent family annex.

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Date of mailing of the international search report: 04 APR 2001

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