



US 20060070893A1

(19) **United States**

(12) **Patent Application Publication**
Granick

(10) **Pub. No.: US 2006/0070893 A1**

(43) **Pub. Date: Apr. 6, 2006**

(54) **MERCHANDISE CONTAINER WITH
INTERNAL STORAGE COMPARTMENT AND
METHOD OF DISTRIBUTING
MERCHANDISE**

Related U.S. Application Data

(62) Division of application No. 10/778,408, filed on Feb. 13, 2004, now abandoned.

Publication Classification

(51) **Int. Cl.**
A45C 11/00 (2006.01)
(52) **U.S. Cl.** 206/37

(76) Inventor: **Daniel H. Granick**, Buffalo Grove, IL
(US)

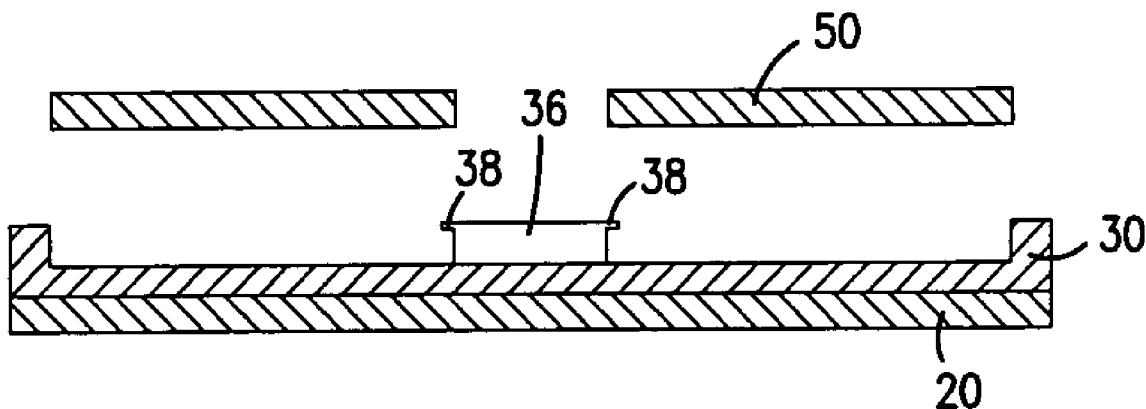
Correspondence Address:
GREENBERG TRAUIG, LLP
77 WEST WACKER DRIVE
SUITE 2500
CHICAGO, IL 60601-1732 (US)

(57) **ABSTRACT**

A merchandise container comprises a coaster member including a top surface, for receiving a beverage container thereon; a storage compartment positioned within the coaster member for receiving and storing a merchandise item therein; and a means for securing the merchandise item within the storage compartment.

(21) Appl. No.: **11/232,845**

(22) Filed: **Sep. 22, 2005**



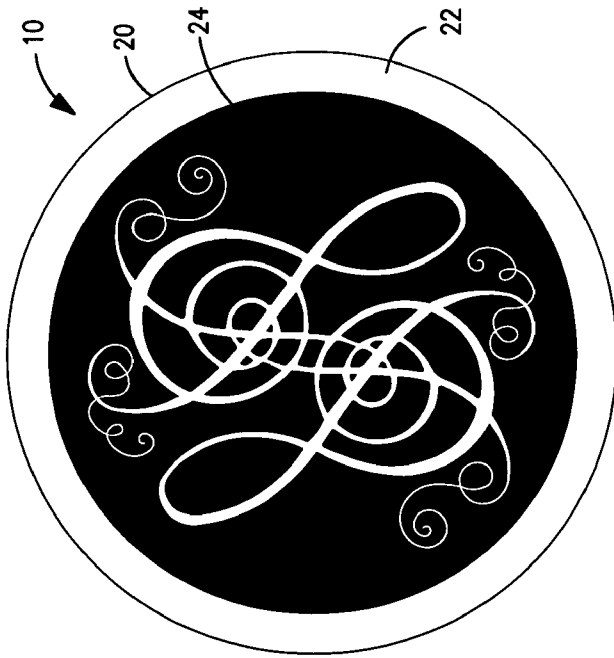


FIG. 1

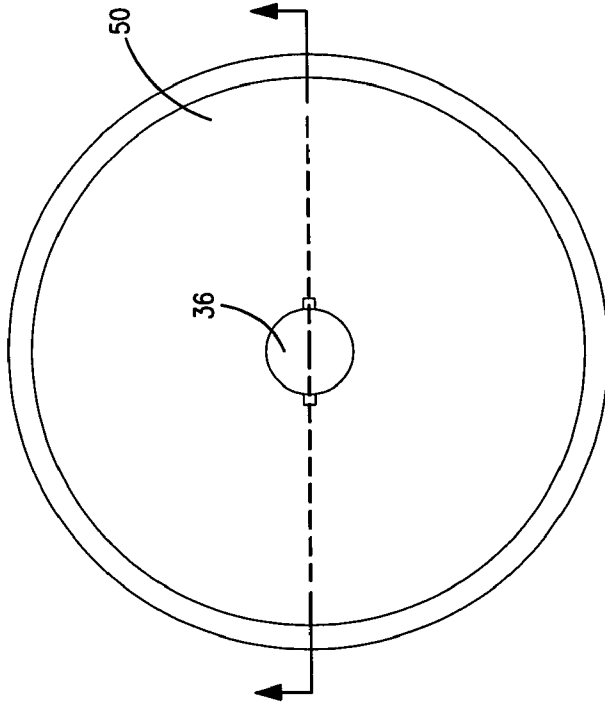


FIG. 2

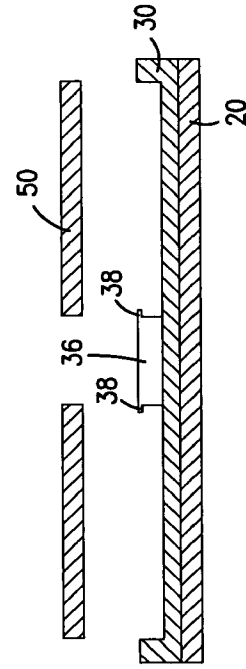


FIG. 4

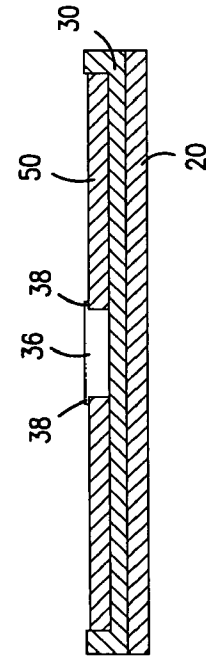


FIG. 3

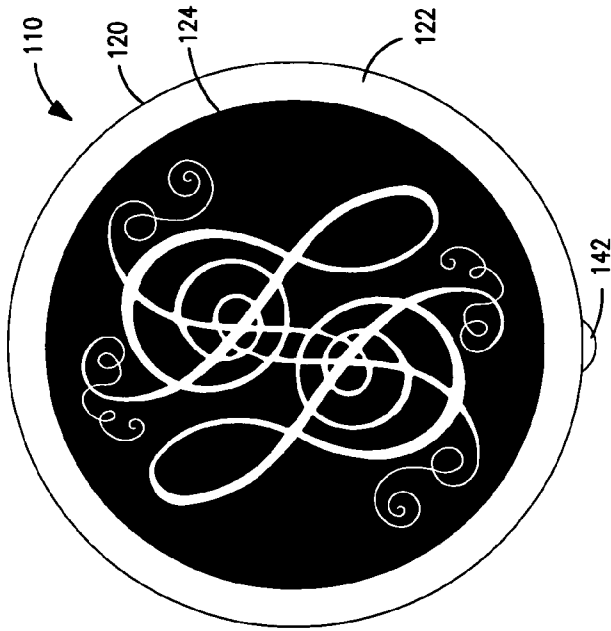


FIG. 5

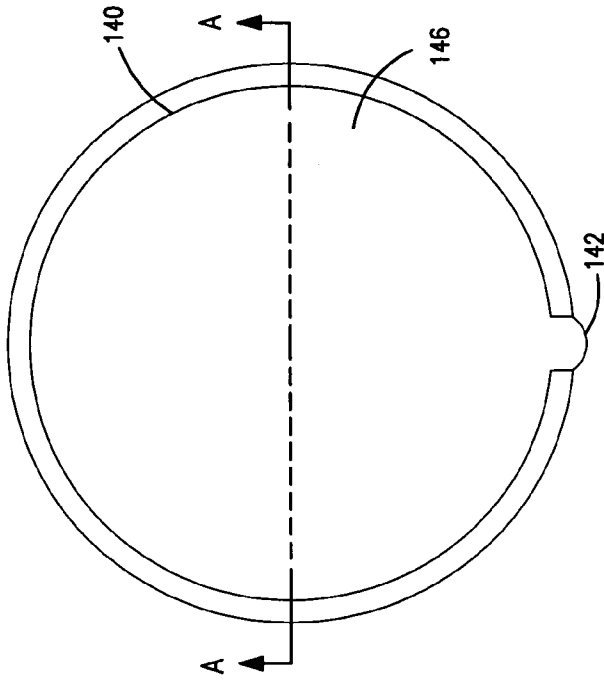


FIG. 6

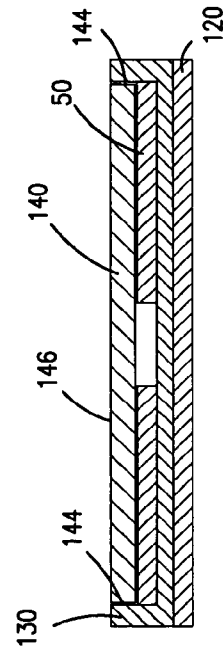


FIG. 7

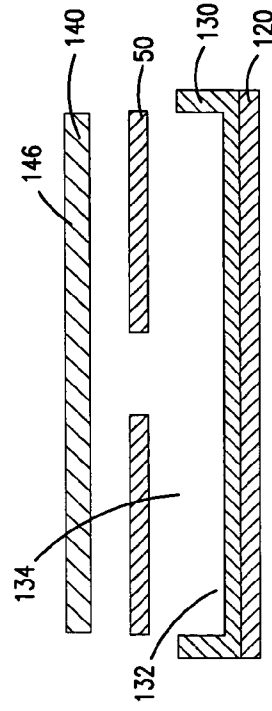


FIG. 8

MERCHANDISE CONTAINER WITH INTERNAL STORAGE COMPARTMENT AND METHOD OF DISTRIBUTING MERCHANDISE

[0001] This application is a division of and claims priority of the filing date of U.S. Ser. No. 10/778,408, filed 13 Feb. 2004, and presently pending, the complete disclosure of which is hereby specifically incorporated herein by reference.

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0002] Not Applicable.

STATEMENT REGARDING FEDERALLY SPONSORED RESEARCH OR DEVELOPMENT

[0003] Not Applicable.

REFERENCE TO A "MICROFICHE APPENDIX"

[0004] Not Applicable.

BACKGROUND OF THE DISCLOSURE

[0005] 1. Field of the Invention

[0006] The present invention is directed to a merchandise container for the mass distribution of merchandise items, such as compact discs, and, more specifically, a drink coaster having a storage compartment into which a compact disc or other merchandise item may be placed prior to distribution thereof, together with a method of distributing merchandise utilizing such a container.

[0007] 2. Background Art

[0008] It is well known for companies to distribute inexpensive promotional merchandise items bearing the company's logo, advertising, and other information through various channels of mass distribution. One particular merchandise item which is commonly distributed to the public are compact discs (CDs), which include CD-ROMs (for both data and audio) and Digital Video Discs ("DVDs"). Companies often distribute promotional CDs for free through various channels, including via direct mail, at retail outlets, and on the street. CDs are well suited for mass promotional distribution through such channels, due to the fact that they are relatively inexpensive to produce in large quantities and are highly durable. Companies that have been known to distribute promotional CDs in this manner include Internet service providers, which typically distribute CD-ROMs containing their access software. Many other types of companies have also been known to distribute CD-ROMs in this manner, which typically include screen savers, games, product information, and various other types of software.

[0009] Various distribution devices for CDs or other promotional merchandise items are known in the prior art. The standard distribution devices for CDs are paper sleeves and plastic "jewel box" cases. However, in order to find new and unique ways of distributing such items in a manner which catches the attention of consumers, other devices for distributing CDs have been used. One such distribution device is a lid for a disposable drink cup having an internal compartment for holding a CD or similar item. Such a device is disclosed by U.S. Pat. Nos. 6,070,752 and 6,196,411.

[0010] A limitation of such a device, however, is the fact that the possible universe of distribution outlets is limited to establishments that sell drinks requiring lids. A further limitation of such a device is the fact that such a cup lid, which is typically constructed from a thin, clear or semi-transparent plastic material, is not well-suited for bearing high-impact graphics designed to catch the attention of consumers. As a result, the potential for using the lid itself as a medium for bearing advertising is lost. Additionally, a distribution device of this type is unlikely to serve as an effective container for retail sale of merchandise, as its use is limited to the cup lid environment.

[0011] It is therefore an object of the present invention to provide a distribution device for CDs, DVDs or other promotional merchandise items which is well-suited for distribution through a large number of establishments. It is a further object of the present invention to provide such a distribution device which is suitable for bearing high-impact graphics designed to catch the attention of consumers, thereby facilitating the placement of advertising on the device itself. It is yet another object of the present invention to provide such a distribution device which is suitable for use as a container for the retail sale of merchandise, such as CDs and DVDs.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0012] A merchandise container according to the present invention comprises a coaster member including a flat top surface for the receipt of a beverage container, a storage compartment positioned beneath the coaster member for receiving and storing a merchandise item therein, and a means for securing the merchandise item within the storage compartment. In a preferred embodiment of the invention, the storage compartment is of a size and shape adapted for receiving and storing a compact disc therein, and the merchandise item comprises a compact disc. The coaster member preferably includes graphics imprinted on the flat top surface thereof.

[0013] The coaster member may be constructed either from a moisture-absorbent material, such as paper, or a non-absorbent material, such as plastic, as desired.

[0014] The means for maintaining the merchandise item within the storage compartment may comprise a hub member disposed within the storage compartment, the hub member being of a size and shape adapted for receiving a compact disc thereon. Alternatively, the means for maintaining the merchandise item within the storage compartment may comprise a closure member adapted for insertion within the storage compartment. The closure member may be maintained in place either by means of a friction fit between the closure member and the storage compartment, or alternatively by a tab associated with the closure member and adapted for engagement with the storage compartment.

[0015] A method of distributing merchandise items comprises assembling a merchandise container according to the present invention, inserting a merchandise item into the storage compartment, securing the merchandise item within the storage compartment by way of the securing means, and distributing the merchandise container through a desired means of mass distribution. The means of mass distribution may include distribution of the merchandise containers to customers at beverage-serving establishments, distribution

of the merchandise containers via mail, retail sale of the merchandise containers, or any other desired means of distribution.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0016] **FIG. 1** is a top plan view of a preferred embodiment of a drink coaster according to the present invention.

[0017] **FIG. 2** is a bottom plan view of the drink coaster of **FIG. 1**.

[0018] **FIG. 3** is a cross-sectional view of the drink coaster of **FIG. 1**, taken along the line "A-A" of **FIG. 2**.

[0019] **FIG. 4** is an exploded cross-sectional view of the drink coaster of **FIG. 1**, taken along the line "A-A" of **FIG. 2**.

[0020] **FIG. 5** is a top plan view of a second embodiment of a drink coaster according to the present invention.

[0021] **FIG. 6** is a bottom plan view of the drink coaster of **FIG. 5**.

[0022] **FIG. 7** is a cross-sectional view of the drink coaster of **FIG. 1**, taken along the line "A-A" of **FIG. 6**.

[0023] **FIG. 8** is an exploded cross-sectional view of the drink coaster of **FIG. 1**, taken along the line "A-A" of **FIG. 6**.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0024] While this invention is susceptible of embodiment in many different forms, there is shown in the drawings, and will be described in detail herein, several specific embodiments, with the understanding that the present embodiments are to be considered as an exemplification of the principles of the invention and are not intended to limit the invention to the embodiments illustrated.

[0025] The present invention is directed to a container for the mass distribution of promotional items. The preferred embodiments of the invention comprise a drink coaster **10** and **110** specifically adapted for the distribution of compact discs (either-CD-ROMs or audio CDs), digital video discs ("DVDs") or similar items. While the preferred embodiments of the invention are directed to a drink coaster of a particular size and shape which is specifically adapted to contain a compact disc, it is also contemplated that a container according to the invention may assume different sizes or shapes as desired, so as to be adapted to contain various other promotional items. Such items may include floppy disks, books, catalogs, coupons, postcards, pens, pencils, buttons, food items, product samples, and any number of other desired items. Moreover, the container may assume other forms in addition to the drink coaster of the preferred embodiment.

[0026] Coaster **10** is shown in **FIGS. 1-4** as including top portion **20** and chamber portion **30**. Top portion **20** may be preferably constructed from a paper-based material that is capable of absorbing moisture or a rubber-based material capable of repelling moisture, as is well known in the art of drink coasters. Alternatively, the coaster may be manufactured out of any material suitable for its purpose, such as plastic, and known in the art. Top portion **20** includes top surface **22** which bears graphics **24**.

[0027] Coaster **10** is designed to be used for placing a hot or cold beverage cup (not shown) directly upon top surface **22**, which will absorb or repel any condensation or spillage therefrom. As such, top surface **22** is suited for the display of graphics **24** designed to catch the attention of consumers to whom coaster **10** may be distributed, as are commonly found on disposable drink coasters used in restaurants, bars and other establishments where beverages are served. Graphics **24** may include logos and/or advertising of the company distributing the compact disc **50** contained there-within, or other graphics targeted to consumers to whom the compact disc **50** is being distributed. Additionally, graphics **24** may function as a selling point of coaster **10**, permitting the use of coaster **10** as a container for the retail sale of compact discs or other similar items.

[0028] Alternatively, graphics **24** may be utilized for the purpose of marketing coaster **10** as a collectible item, to be sold either with or without compact disc **50**, as desired. In such case, graphics **24** may comprise likenesses of athletes or celebrities, photographs, works of art, cartoon characters, or any other desired graphics or text.

[0029] Chamber portion **30** is within Coaster **10** and below top portion **20**. Chamber portion **30** is hollow, and includes chamber **32**, opening **34**, hub **36** and detents **38**. While Chamber portion may be constructed from the same material as top portion **20**, or any other material suitable to its purpose and known in the art, Chamber portion **30** is preferably constructed from a material which is moisture-resistant, such as plastic, thereby serving to prevent moisture absorbed by top portion **20** from entering into chamber **32**. Chamber **32** is preferably of a size and shape which conforms to a standard compact disc **50**. Compact disc **50** may include computer files and/or audio files thereon, as desired. Hub **36** of chamber portion **30** is sized so as to receive a standard compact disc **50** thereon by way of its center hole, with detents **38** serving to maintain compact disc **50** in place within chamber **32**. Compact disc **50** may be easily removed from chamber **32** simply by pulling upward on an edge thereof, which will cause flexible detents **38** to bend upward sufficiently to allow for removal of compact disc **50**. Other mechanisms for maintaining compact disc **50** on hub **36** may be used as desired, without departing from the scope of the invention.

[0030] Additionally, both top portion **20** and chamber portion **30** may be constructed from other materials, as desired, without departing from the scope of the invention. Further, top portion **20** and chamber portion **30** may form a single, unitary member, if desired, in order to simplify the manufacturing process of coaster **10**.

[0031] A second embodiment of the present invention, coaster **110**, is shown in **FIGS. 5-8** as including top portion **120**, chamber portion **130**, and closure portion **140**. Coaster **110** is substantially similar to the embodiment of **FIGS. 1-4**, albeit having an alternate means of maintaining compact disc **50** in place within chamber portion **130**, as described further below.

[0032] Chamber portion **130** is affixed to the bottom of top portion **20**, and includes chamber **132** and opening **134**. Chamber **132** is preferably of a size and shape which conforms to a standard compact disc **50**, so as to form a friction fit between compact disc **50** and the walls of chamber **132**.

[0033] Closure portion **140** is adapted to fit within opening **134** of chamber **132** to close opening **134**, thereby enclosing compact disc **50** within chamber **132**. Closure portion **140** is preferably held in place within chamber **132** by means of a friction fit **144** between the outer wall of closure portion **140** and the inner wall of chamber portion **130**. Alternatively, closure portion **140** may include tabs or detents (not shown) which engage with the inner wall of chamber portion **130** to secure closure portion **140** in place. Closure portion **140** may also include flap **142** extending outwardly from the outer edge of bottom surface **146**, which facilitates removal of closure portion **140** from within chamber portion **130**. Namely, the recipient of coaster **110** can remove compact disc **50** from coaster **110** simply by pulling upwardly on flap **142**, in order to remove closure portion **140** from within chamber portion **130**, and then pulling upwardly on an edge of compact disc **50** to remove it from chamber **132**.

[0034] The foregoing description and drawings merely explain and illustrate the invention, and the invention is not limited thereto except insofar as the pending claims are so limited, as those skilled in the art and having the present disclosure before them will be able to make modifications and variations therein without departing from the scope of the invention.

What is claimed is:

1. A merchandise container comprising:
 - a coaster including a top surface capable of displaying at least one of graphical or text images, said top surface being capable of accepting a beverage container;
 - a storage compartment for receipt of an item therein, said storage compartment being within said coaster and beneath said top surface; and
 - means for securing said item within said storage compartment;
 - said item comprising a compact disc;
 - the means for maintaining the merchandise item within the storage compartment comprising a closure member adapted for insertion within the storage compartment.
2. The merchandise container of claim 1, wherein the closure member is maintained in place within the storage compartment by means of a friction fit between the closure member and the storage compartment.
3. The merchandise container of claim 1, wherein the closure member comprises a tab for engagement with the storage compartment, for maintaining the closure member in place within the storage compartment.

* * * * *