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- (71) Applicant: EASTMAN KODAK COMPANY [US/US];
343 State Street, Rochester, NY 14650-2201 (US).
- (72) Inventor: KROL, Alexander; 343 State Street, Rochester,
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(54) Title: RESCREENING SELECTED PARTS OF A HALFTONE IMAGE

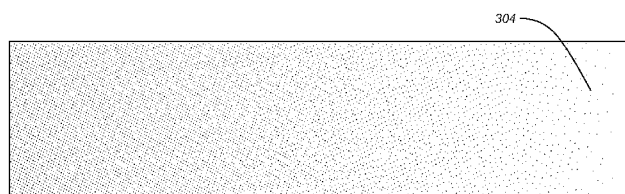


FIG. 3

(57) **Abstract:** A method for enhancing appearance of a halftone image (204) for imaging on a flexographic plate (108) includes re-trieving the halftone image from a data storage device (132); setting a minimal dot size value for printing; analyzing the halftone im-age with a computer (130); detecting areas (404) in the halftone image populated with a plurality of dots smaller than the minimal dot size value; replacing the plurality of dots with a reduced set of dots wherein each of the reduced set of dots are larger in size (504) than the plurality of dots and wherein each of the reduced set of dots maintains an original geometric characteristics of the plurality of dots; and saving the reduced set of dots.



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RESCREENING SELECTED PARTS OF A HALFTONE IMAGE**FIELD OF THE INVENTION**

The present invention relates to the field of graphic arts, printing and publishing technologies, specifically, to image reproduction systems
5 characterized by limited numbers of levels of optical parameters.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

In graphic arts technology there is a need for reproduction of continuous tone images by an imaging device. The imaging device, for example, a laser based imager is capable of producing a limited number of levels
10 representing optical parameter (in most common cases only two levels are used - black and white). This goal is achieved by applying a process called screening, wherein a gray tone value which represents a pixel to be screened in the original image is simulated by means of varying relative area covered by dark elements (pixels) as compared to light elements.

15 Different screening methods exist. In one of the most common, an area of an image is reproduced by subdividing it into equal, periodically repeated sub-areas called mesh cells, containing variable-size dark elements (printing dots, alternatively called halftone dots). Relative area coverage is defined as ratio of dark element area to a mesh cell area. Such screening method is commonly called
20 Amplitude Modulation (AM) screening. Such screen, with a regular, usually square grid structure, is characterized by a screen period and a screen angle. The reciprocal of this period is called screen frequency or screen ruling.

Particular problems arise when reproducing characteristics of printing dots which are size dependant. Examples of such processes are
25 flexographic, offset and xerographic printing processes.

In flexographic printing, the size of the smallest halftone printing dot on a printing plate that can be consistently reproduced on press is usually around 40 microns in size. Below this size, halftone dots tend to print unevenly, and may also include drastic increase in size and produce large blot artifacts, or
30 not printing at all. For commonly used line ruling of 120 lpi and commonly used device resolutions of 2400 or 2540 dpi, 40 micron halftone dot corresponds to area coverage of 3%; for line ruling 1500 lpi, it corresponds to area coverage around

4%. This may result in discontinuity, with annoying artifacts in certain cases especially in the highlight parts of printed images. The high dot gain that is associated with flexographic printing process enhances the effect and exacerbates the problem.

5 In the offset printing process, the minimal halftone printing dot that can be reproduced consistently can often be as small as 10 micron. For lower quality paper and high-speed printing presses, for example, in newspaper printing, the same fundamental problem discussed above exists. A similar situation exists in electro-photographic printing, wherein minimal printing dot size is often
10 defined by physical characteristics of toner particles.

 One solution for the above problems is using Frequency Modulation (FM) screening techniques with controlled minimal dot size, so-called “green noise” frequency modulation, shown in U.S. Pat. No. 5,689,623 (Pinard), or with controlled midtone clustering, so-called “second order” frequency
15 modulation, shown in U.S. Pat. No. 5,579,457 (Hall). While solving the problem of highlight region reproduction, frequency modulation introduces its own drawbacks. Relatively rough feature size needed for proper highlights reproduction, often leads to grainy appearance both in highlights and in the midtones areas. Additionally, high circumference-to-area ratio inherent for FM
20 generated printing dots leads to significantly higher dot gain compared to AM halftone screening. Considering that flexographic printing process is already characterized by high dot gain, FM screening may lead to significant contraction of the dynamic range for printed images.

 Another solution is known as the “double dot” technique or “Respi
25 screen.” According to this technique, the extremes of tone scale, highlights and/or shadows, are rendered with halftone dots that are laid on a grid with the same angle, but with the frequency of the square root of the halftones in the rest of tone scale, thus halving the number of halftone dot and, consequently, doubling the size of each dot. This renders the transition area between extreme and main part
30 of tone scale with halftone dots of two different sizes placed in checkerboard pattern. While moving the cutoff value for non reproducible part of the image farther to extreme parts of tone scale, it still does not completely solve the

problem. Moreover, by introducing additional screen frequencies, such technique may produce highly undesirable moiré effects in multi-colored images in case of regions where part of color separations are in extreme parts of the tone scale and other separations are in non-extreme part of the color scale.

5 In order to overcome the deficiencies above stated, an approach was proposed by U.S. Pat. No. 5,766,807 (Delabastita et al.). This method is known as “hybrid screening.” In this approach, a “supercell” threshold matrix suitable for periodically tiling a plane is defined in such a way that it contains a plurality of locations for halftone dot centers and is filled with threshold values.

10 When the matrix is used for screening a contone image, in the extreme parts of the tone scale halftone dot of predefined minimal size are produced, whereas in the remaining part of halftone dot centers no halftone dot are produced at all. This is performed in such a way that the area coverage for a whole supercell area corresponds to a tone value in the contone image. In other words, instead of

15 modulating halftone dot size, below predefined dot percentage, dot size is kept constant but dot number is modulated as a function of tone value; accuracy of tone representation being defined by predefined minimal halftone dot size and count of halftone dot centers in supercell threshold matrix.

 While free of most undesirable effects of previous solutions, this

20 approach still has some problems. Notably, the supercell-based pattern is prone to grainy and “noisy” appearance; relatively rough quantization steps limited by number of halftone dot centers in a supercell threshold matrix may produce banding effects in vignette parts of image; “orphaned” and incomplete halftone dots still may produce undesirable “blot-like” artifacts; and supercell-based

25 approach limits available number of screen angle/screen frequency combinations to those with rational tangent angles.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

 Briefly, according to one aspect of the present invention a method for enhancing appearance of a halftone image for imaging on a flexographic plate

30 includes retrieving the halftone image from a data storage device; setting a minimal dot size value for printing; analyzing the halftone image with a computer; detecting areas in the halftone image populated with a plurality of dots smaller

than the minimal dot size value; replacing the plurality of dots with a reduced set of dots wherein each of the reduced set of dots are larger in size than the plurality of dots and wherein each of the reduced set of dots maintains an original geometric characteristics of the plurality of dots; and saving the reduced set of dots to a storage device.

The invention and its objects and advantages will become more apparent in the detailed description of the preferred embodiment presented below.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 represents in diagrammatic form a prior art imaging system adapted to expose flexographic plates;

FIG. 2 represents in diagrammatic form a prior art halftone image ready to be exposed;

FIG. 3 represents in diagrammatic form an enhanced halftone image, enhancing the image shown in FIG. 2;

FIG. 4 represents in diagrammatic form a small dots area from a halftone image to be enhanced; and

FIG. 5 show in diagrammatic form enhanced area of small dots shown in FIG. 4, the small dots were replaced with a set of fewer dots wherein each new dot is larger in size.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

In the following detailed description, specific details are set forth in order to provide a thorough understanding of the disclosure. However, it will be understood by those skilled in the art that the teachings of the present disclosure may be practiced without these specific details. In other instances, well-known methods, procedures, components and circuits have not been described in detail so as not to obscure the teachings of the present disclosure.

While the present invention is described in connection with one of the embodiments, it will be understood that it is not intended to limit the invention to this embodiment. On the contrary, it is intended to cover all alternatives, modifications and equivalents as covered by the appended claims.

In order to improve the reproduction characteristics of a halftoned image by of controlling halftone dot size and spatial distribution in extreme tone

scale parts of said image, a halftone image already screened by means of traditional Amplitude Modulation (AM) screening is conceptually represented as rectangular array of black and white pixels. The present invention is not limited by any specific type, algorithm or method of AM screening and utilizes only two
 5 basic characteristics of AM screening, namely parameters of a periodic grid, its angle and its frequency represented by its line ruling, i.e. mesh, and derived parameter such as res/mesh ratio, equal to side length of single mesh cell in units of single pixel size.

In order to process the screened image 204 shown in FIG. 2. The
 10 screened image 204 is fetched from storage element 132 (FIG. 1) by computer 130. A “natural” system of coordinates is defined, where X axis runs along image lines and Y axis is perpendicular to Y axis, and unit of measure is single pixel size, and its “shifted” system of coordinates, where X’ axis and Y’ axis run along mesh grid directions that is, rotated by screen angle related to natural system of
 15 coordinates and unit of measure stated res/mesh ratio.

Additionally, DS1 is defined as minimal reliably reproducible halftone dot size (in pixels) and $DS2 \geq DS1$ as halftone dot size (in pixels) corresponding to cutoff area coverage defining transfer from normal to “extreme” parts of tone scale. Separate halftone dots contained in the halftone image are
 20 identified and are processed in following the manner: if size of halftone dot is $\geq DS2$, this halftone dot is not modified.

If size of halftone dot DS is $< DS2$, coordinates of its center of gravity X_c and Y_c are calculated in natural system of coordinates, these coordinates are transformed into X'_c and Y'_c in shifted coordinates, and from
 25 these coordinates corresponding mesh cell indices $M_x = \text{floor}(X'_c)$ and $M_y = \text{floor}(Y'_c)$ are obtained. To these indices operator $F(DS, m_x, m_y)$ is applied, which returns 1 or 0 in such a way that average value $(1/N_{ds}) \sum F(DS, m_x, m_y) * DS2$, where sum is done for all halftone dots of size DS, is substantially equal to DS. Operator F can be analytical expression or simple lookup operation into
 30 predefined array. If operator F returns 0, we remove halftone dot by replacing all its pixels with pixels of an opposite color. If operator F returns 1, halftone dots are replaced with the halftone dots of the same shape and the same center of

gravity, but of size DS_n , where DS_n is a value chosen out of array of values $[DS_{n1}, DS_{n2}, \dots, DS_{nN}]$ such as $DS_{n1} \geq DS_1, DS_n X < DS_n(X+1)$ and average value $(1/N) \sum (DS_n X) = DS_2$.

5 This method ensures both consistent reproduction of halftone dots in regions with extreme values of tone scale via printing process and smooth, non-grainy, artifact-free appearance of said regions and transition regions from extreme values of tone scale to midtone ones.

In a preferred embodiment of the invention, an array of values $[DS_{n1}, DS_{n2}, \dots, DS_{nN}]$ contains four elements – DS_{n1} , DS_{n2} , DS_{n3} and
 10 DS_{n4} such that the size of element DS_{n1} is equal to DS_1 , minimal reliably reproducible halftone dot size (in pixels); size of elements DS_{n2} , DS_{n3} and DS_{n4} is DS_1+1 , DS_1+2 and DS_1+3 pixels, respectively. Cutoff size DS_2 in a preferred embodiment is defined as DS_1+2 pixels.

Operator $F(DS, mx, my)$ in the preferred embodiment is defined as
 15 a compare operation of a value derived from halftone dot size DS with a value from square lookup array $B[N][N]$ where array size N is 2^n , $n \gg 8$. Lookup array $B[N][N]$ is uniformly filled with integer values from 0 up to $M=2^m-1$, $m \geq 10$ in such a way that a) array $B[N][N]$ exhibits wraparound properties in both horizontal and vertical directions and b) when used as threshold array, results
 20 of threshold operation at any given level from 0 up to M exhibits blue-noise characteristics.

Screen angle is denoted as α , screen line ruling as mesh, image resolution as res and screen cell side length as $r_{2m} = res/mesh$. Given above these definitions, the preferred embodiment of the invention can be represented in
 25 pseudo code in following way:

```

    While scanning a halftoned 1-bit image;
        identify halftone dots;
        assign each pixel to its respective dot.
  30     For each halftone dot
        If ( dot size in pixels  $DS \geq DS_2$ )
            continue to next halftone dot without modification;
        else modify dot as described below:
        {
  35

```

```

// calculate center of gravity
Xc = (1/DS)ΣXpix (summation for all pixels of halftone dot)
Yc = (1/DS)ΣYpix (summation for all pixels of halftone dot)
// transform coordinates into shifted system of coordinates
5   X'c = Yc*sin(α)+Xc*cos(α);
    Y'c = Yc*cos(α)-Xc*sin(α);
    // Normalize to shifted coordinates units
    X'c = X'c/r2m;
    Y'c = Y'c/r2m;
10  // Calculate mesh cell indices
    Mx = floor(X'c);
    My = floor(Y'c);
    // Calculate offset into lookup array
    Nx = Mx%N;
15  Ny = My%N;
    // Calculate effective area coverage for current halftone dot
    Coverage = DS*100/(r2m*r2m);
    // Calculate compare value for thresholding operation with value // from
    lookup array B
20  cutoffCoverage = DS2*100/( r2m*r2m);
    percentToKeep = 100.* Coverage / cutoffCoverage;
    arrayCompareVal = (100.-percentToKeep)*(M+1) /100;
    if (B[Nx][Ny]> arrayCompareVal)
        then remove halftone dot;
25  else
        {
            Stochastically choose dot size from array of dot size values
            Put halftone dot of chosen size with the same center of gravity as
            original halftone dot
30  }
    }

```

FIG. 3 shows the halftone image after enhancement. Numeral 304 shows an area of dots 304 which replaced the area of dots 204. The replaced dots 304 include a smaller number of dots compared to dots 204 which originally populated the area in FIG. 2. Each of the newly created dots 304 are larger in size than the original dots 204 and maintain the geometric characteristics of the dots 304 in terms such as center of gravity and angle.

FIG. 4 shows a zoomed in area of small dots 404, wherein FIG. 5 shows dots 504 which are replacing dots 404. It can be seen much more clearly that the number of the replaced dots are fewer and each of the new dots 504 is larger

than the original dots 404, however the geometrical layout of the dots 504 is maintained to be similar to the those shown for dots 404.

FIG. 1 shows an imaging system 100. The imaging system 100 includes an imaging carriage 112 mounted on an imaging head 120. The imaging
5 head 120 is configured to image on a flexographic plate 108 mounted on a rotating cylinder 104. The carriage 112 is adapted to move substantially in parallel to cylinder 104 guided by an advancement screw 116.

The enhanced halftone 304 is delivered by controller 128 from computer 130 to imaging head 120 of imaging system 100, and is further exposed
10 on flexographic plate 108, by imaging system 100 to form imaged flexographic plate.

While the invention has been described with respect to a limited number of embodiments, these should not be construed as limitations on the scope of the invention, but rather as exemplifications of some of the preferred
15 embodiments. Other possible variations, modifications, and applications are also within the scope of the invention. Accordingly, the scope of the invention should not be limited by what has thus far been described, but by the appended claims and their legal equivalents.

PARTS LIST

100	imaging system
104	rotating cylinder
108	flexographic plate
112	carriage
116	screw
120	imaging head
128	controller
130	computer
132	data storage device
204	AM screened image before treatment
304	screened dots after treatment
404	area of small dots previously screened
504	area of screened dots after treatment

CLAIMS:

1. A method for enhancing appearance of a halftone image for imaging on a flexographic plate comprising:
retrieving the halftone image from a data storage device;
5 setting a minimal dot size value for printing;
analyzing the halftone image with a computer;
detecting areas in the halftone image populated with a plurality of dots smaller than the minimal dot size value;
replacing the plurality of dots with a reduced set of dots
10 wherein each of the reduced set of dots are larger in size than the plurality of dots and wherein each of the reduced set of dots maintains an original geometric characteristics of the plurality of dots; and
saving the reduced set of dots to the storage device.
- 15 2. The method according to claim 1 wherein the original geometric characteristics is a center of gravity of a dot.
3. The method according to claim 1 wherein the original geometric characteristics is an angle at which the dots are positioned.
20
4. The method according to claim 1 wherein the original geometric characteristics is a mesh of the dot.
5. The method according to claim 1 wherein each of the
25 reduced set of dots is enlarged according to a dot size wherein the dot size is determined in stochastic manner.
6. The method according to claim 1 comprising:
printing the halftone image.

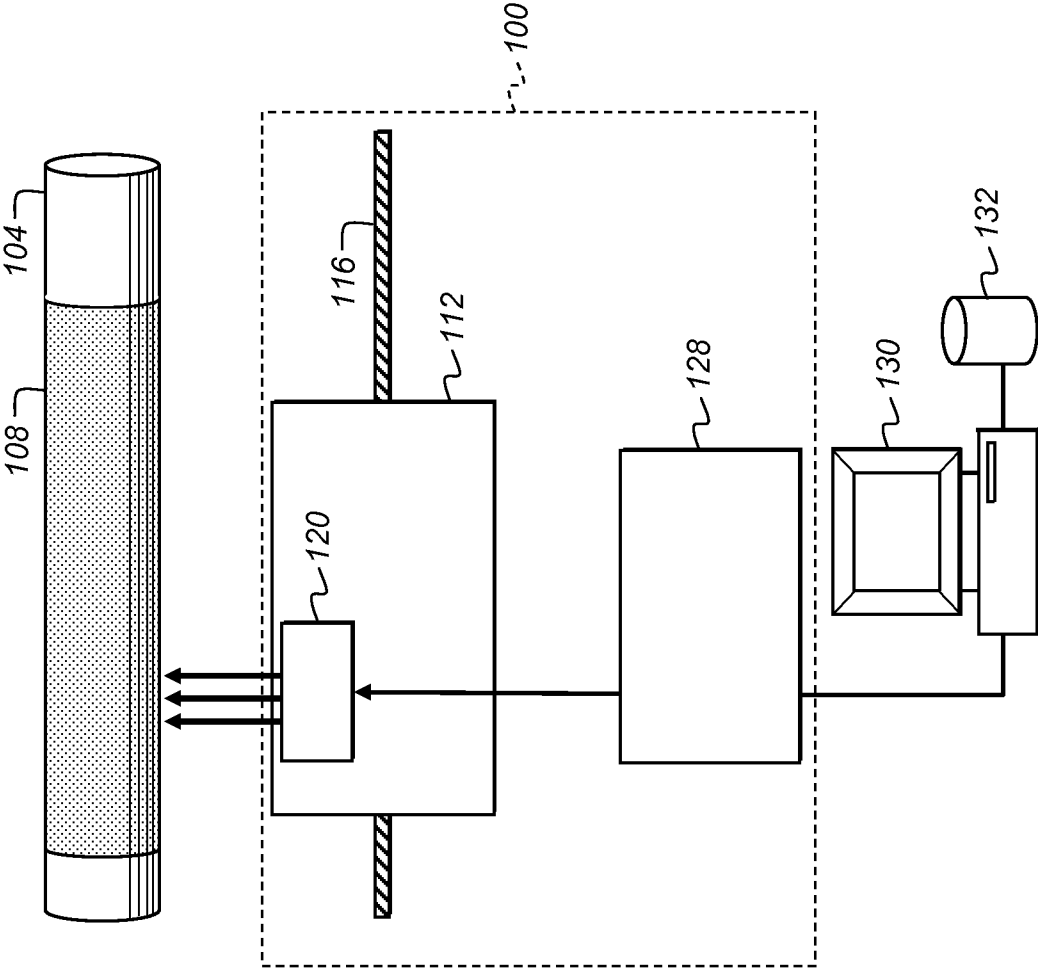
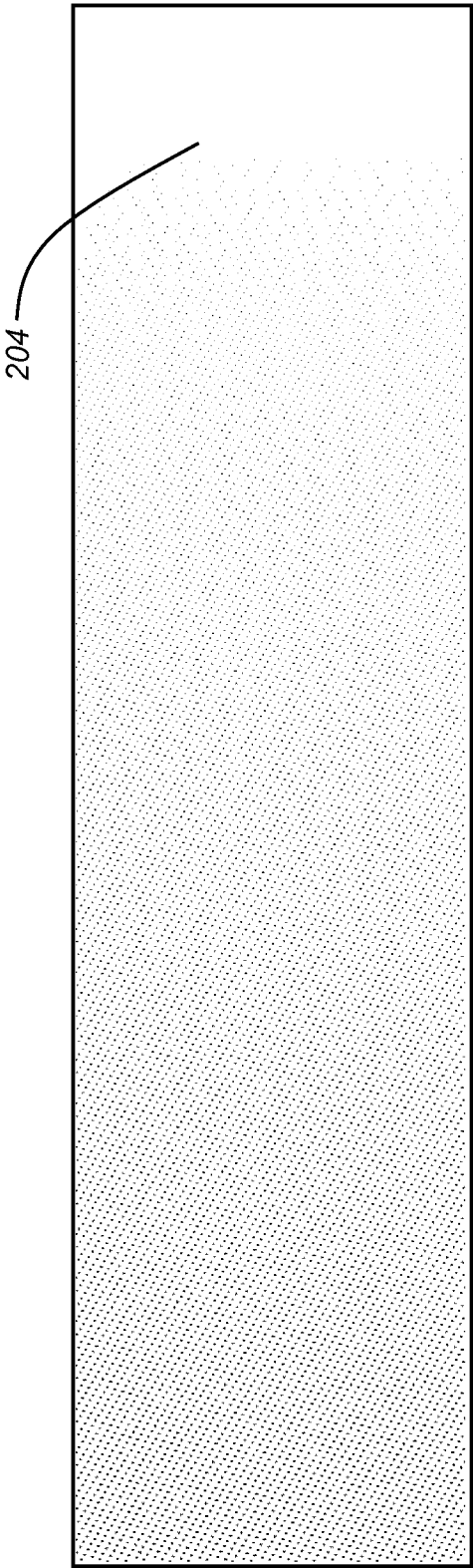


FIG. 1
(PRIOR ART)

2/5



204

FIG. 2
(PRIOR ART)

3/5

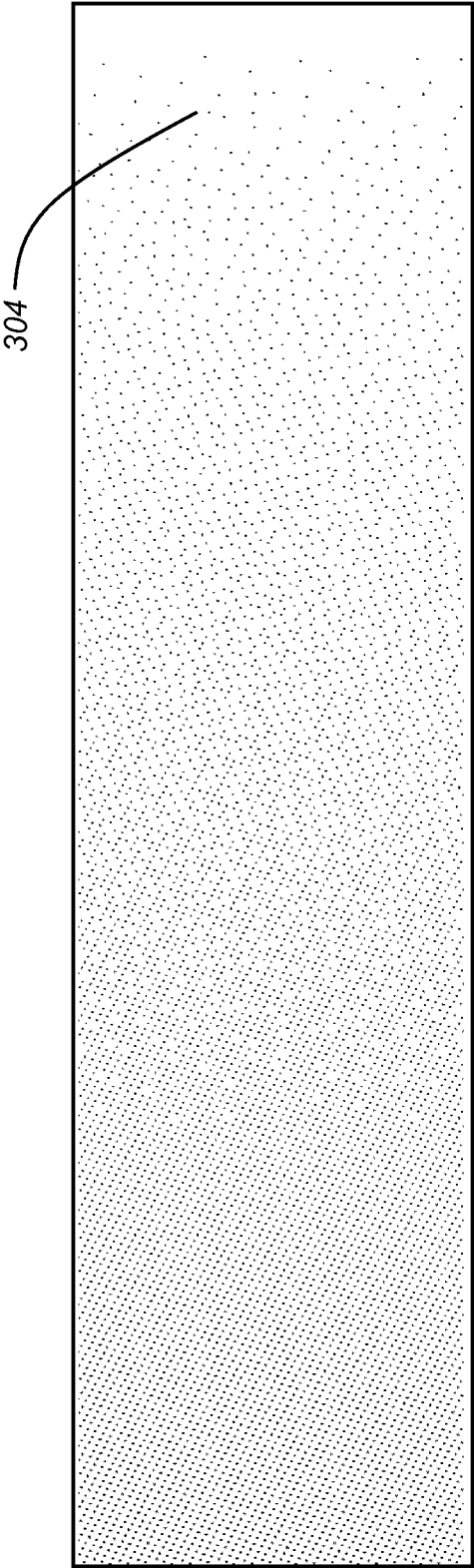


FIG. 3

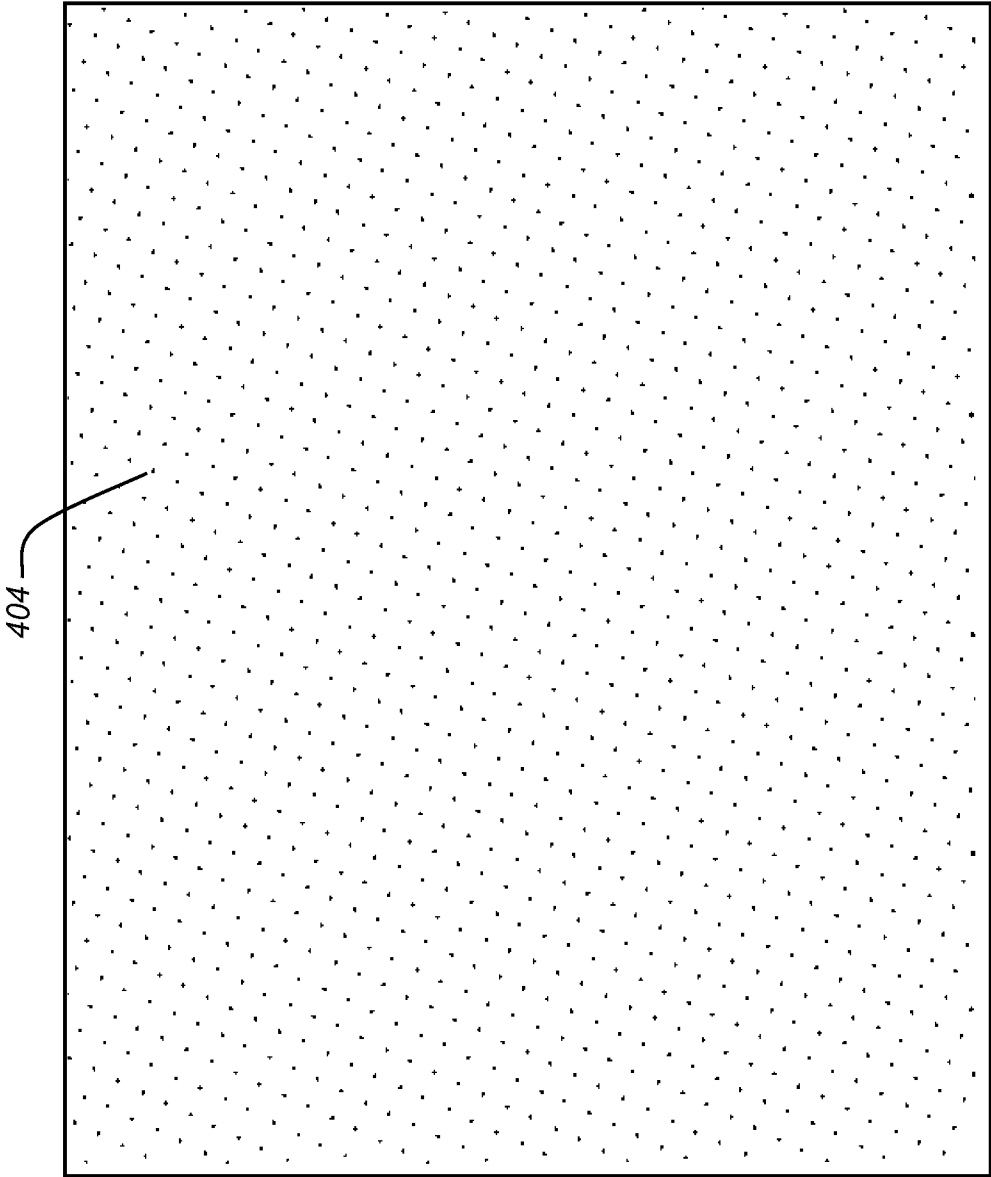


FIG. 4

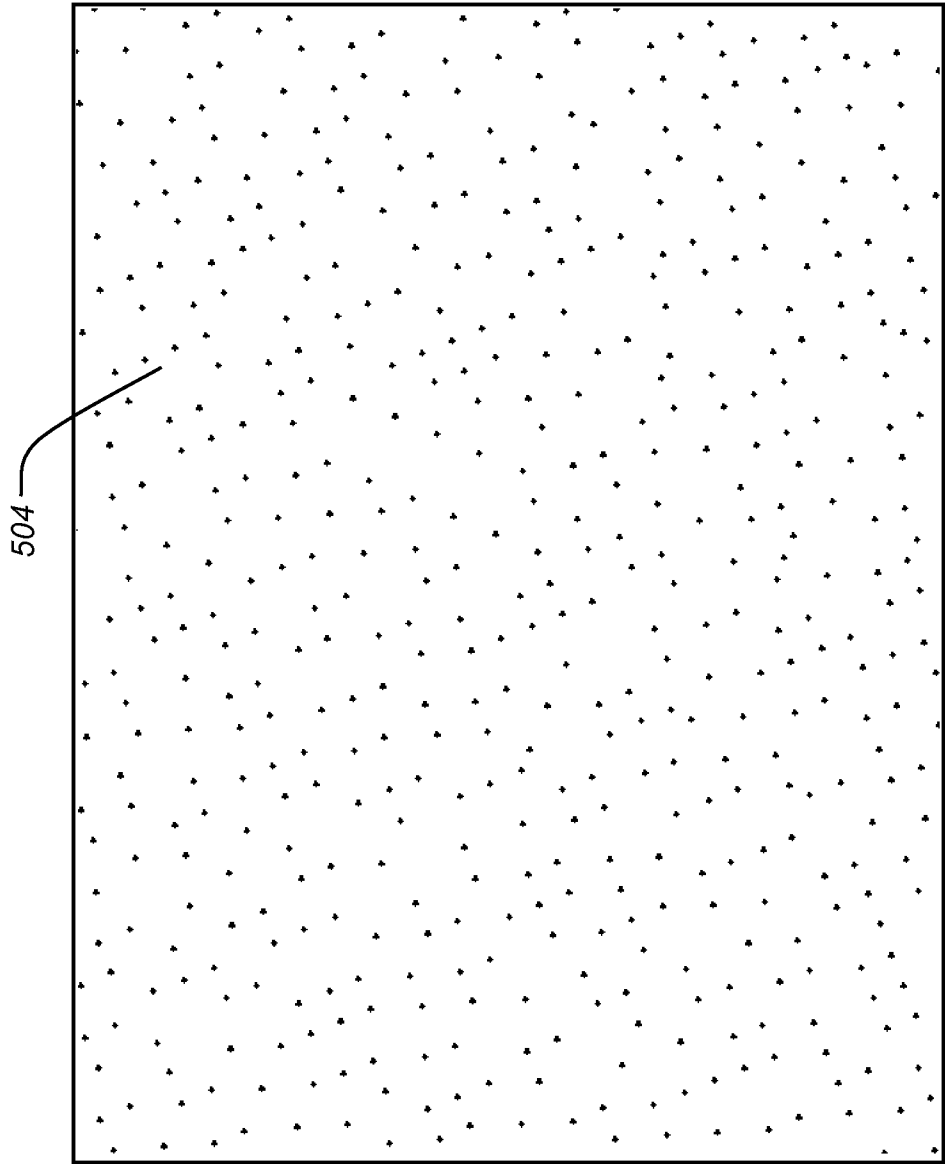


FIG. 5

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No
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A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER
INV. H04N1/405 H04N1/407
ADD.

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)
H04N

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)

EP0-Internal, WPI Data

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

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Y	abstract; figure all the whole document	2-5
Y	----- EP 1 557 279 A2 (ESKO GRAPHICS AS [DK] ESKO IP NV [BE]) 27 July 2005 (2005-07-27) abstract; figure all paragraphs [0001] - [10126], [0155], [0217] - [0222]	3-5
Y	----- US 2007/008585 A1 (KARITO NOBUHIRO [JP]) 11 January 2007 (2007-01-11) abstract; figure all paragraphs [0001] - [0010] ----- -/--	2



Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C.



See patent family annex.

* Special categories of cited documents:

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"&" document member of the same patent family

Date of the actual completion of the international search

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NL - 2280 HV Rijswijk
Tel. (+31-70) 340-2040,
Fax: (+31-70) 340-3016

Authorized officer

Winne, Dominique

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No
PCT/US2013/041308

C(Continuation). DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

Information on patent family members

International application No

PCT/US2013/041308

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