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(54) Title: METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR THE SELECTION OF COFFEE

(57) Abstract: Methods and apparatus for the selection of coffee products by a consumer from a plurality of available options is disclosed. The method includes an information request step, a coffee selection step, and an information display step. In the information request step, information is requested from a consumer regarding the consumer's taste preferences. Such preferences may include coffee roast character and food flavor intensity preferences. In the coffee selection step, the information collected is used to select a particular classification of coffee products from a group of two or more available classifications. Each of the available classifications is adapted to correspond to a predetermined range of taste preferences. In the information display step, information identifying the coffee products which make up the selected classification is provided to the consumer, thereby allowing the consumer to purchase the selected coffee products. The methods may be accomplished through the use of a point-of-purchase display case with a coffee selection advisor. A wide variety of coffee products may be offered and reliably placed with the disclosed method.



WO 01/12041 A2

METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR THE SELECTION OF COFFEE

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FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention is directed generally to methods and apparatus for the selection of one or more types of food and beverage products from a plurality of options
10 by a consumer. More particularly, the present invention is directed to methods and apparatus in which information is requested from a consumer regarding certain taste preferences of the consumer. The information collected is used to select a particular classification of food or beverage products from a group of two or more available classifications. The food or beverage product or products within the selected
15 classification are then revealed to the consumer allowing the consumer to identify and readily purchase one or more of the products. Use of the methods and apparatus to select food or beverage products results in significantly higher measured acceptance of the selected products than if these products were self-selected by the consumer from the same available options.

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BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

A wide variety of prepared food and beverage products are currently available in the market place. These prepared products comprise at least two characteristic attributes such as flavor and color, for example. Other characteristic attributes include, but are not
25 limited to, serving temperature, aroma, appearance, texture, consistency (i.e., thick, oily,

etc.), additives (e.g., fruit), and the like. For any given food or beverage product all of these characteristic attributes combine to give the food or beverage product a specific character. Examples of such food and beverage products with a specific character include, but are not limited to, juices, milk, cheeses, yogurts and other dairy based products,
5 seasoning rubs, sauces, dressings, stuffing, pastas, teas, cocoas, and the like.

The methods and apparatus of the present invention are particularly well suited for helping aid in the selection of coffee products, particularly premium coffee products. As used herein, the term "coffee product" is defined as any particular type of whole bean or ground coffee which may be used to brew a cup of coffee by a consumer. The coffee
10 product may comprise coffee from any number of coffee producing regions and/or sub-regions. Additionally, the coffee product may comprise coffee beans from a single region or be a blend of coffee beans from any number of regions. For example, a given coffee product may be entirely comprised of arabica beans grown in a specific geographic region, or may be a blend of arabica beans from a variety of arabica producing regions.
15 Alternatively, the coffee product may be a blend of coffee beans such as arabica, robusta, and the like. Any given coffee product incorporates numerous characteristic attributes including, but not limited to, aroma, roast color, acidity, bitterness, body, dairy based additives (e.g., cream) and the like.

In recent years, the variety of coffee products available in the marketplace has
20 grown. Additionally, there has been a great increase in the popularity of "premium" types of coffees. Whether sold as whole bean or ground products, these "premium" coffee products tend to be more expensive to purchase than other available or "non-premium" types of coffee products. Many consumers are willing to pay an increased price for such premium products in order to enjoy a cup of coffee which more particularly suits their
25 taste preferences or which offer a greater variety of options than typically available non-premium coffee products.

Because of the increased price, however, many consumers may find experimentation or the "trial-and-error" associated with finding their most desired type of coffee product to be unacceptable. Many consumers do not understand how the various

options available with respect to coffee products correspond to their taste preferences with respect to other types of foods with which they may be more familiar. Further complicating this situation is that in a given store, literally dozens of options with respect to coffee products might be available for purchase.

5 The increased expense of premium coffee also impacts the ability of a merchant to offer a wide selection of options to the public at large. Premium type coffees must meet the highest standards of freshness to be marketable. Therefore, particular product offerings cannot be reliably delivered to consumers who are likely to accept them, then consumer acceptance may be low. This can lead to uneconomical waste of product which
10 does not get purchased within a required time frame. This is a particular concern where such product would have been purchased if consumers were assisted in selecting particular products which they are likely to prefer.

 The positive or negative reaction to a particular coffee product by a consumer is described as the product's "acceptance." Whether or not a given consumer will "accept"
15 a given coffee product is a matter of taste which is, of course, subjective. Nevertheless, it can be demonstrated empirically that each person has a "taste profile" which may be measured and which may be used to predict such an individual's acceptance of a given coffee product. Additionally, the degree of such acceptance among a representative group of consumers may be quantified using data sampling and other statistical methods.

20 It is, therefore, desirable to provide a method and apparatus which will allow a consumer to identify one or more coffee products which that consumer has a statistically greater chance of accepting from a taste preference standpoint than other available coffee products. Ideally, such methods and apparatus should be simple to understand and use while providing the maximum advantages of preference matching.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention is directed to novel methods and apparatus for the selection of one or more types of food or beverage products having a specific character, particularly coffee products, from a plurality of options by a consumer. It is an object of the present invention to enable a consumer to more effectively and efficiently select a preferred food or beverage product based upon personal taste preference data provided by the consumer. The present invention, in one embodiment, is directed to a method in which information is requested from a consumer regarding the consumer's taste preferences. This information request is accomplished through the use of a coffee selection advisor. The coffee selection advisor selects a classification of coffee products from among at least two available classifications, where each of the classifications comprises one or more different coffee products. Each of the available classifications corresponds to a set of taste preferences.

The method also includes the step of conveying information from the coffee selection advisor to the consumer identifying the coffee products within said selected classification, thereby allowing the consumer to identify and purchase one or more of said products. In another embodiment of the present invention, the coffee selection advisor directly selects one or more coffee products to be conveyed to the consumer based on the requested consumer data.

The coffee selection advisor can be proximate to a display case containing at least one coffee product within each of the available classifications, or may be remotely located from the coffee products being purchased.

In one embodiment, the coffee selection advisor may be fixedly mounted to a shelf display unit. The coffee selection advisor may comprise several different designs including, but not limited to, a modified slide-rule type device, a printed chart or matrix, a flip-chart, one or more rotating dials, rotating tube-like devices, and the like. In the broadest sense, what is required is that the device be able to display the information being requested and the appropriate coffee classification and/or coffee products, in addition to some scheme of selecting the appropriate coffee classification and/or coffee product based

on the requested information. Preferably, the proper way to use the coffee selection advisor will either be readily apparent or the device will be accompanied by instructions for use.

In another embodiment, the coffee selection advisor comprises an interactive
5 computer. The device may either be a stand alone device capable of requesting the consumer's taste preference information, selecting at least one appropriate coffee classification and/or product, and display the appropriate coffee classification and/or products back to the consumer. Optionally the interactive coffee selection advisor may be part of a larger network, with certain components being proximately located to the coffee
10 products being purchased, and other components being remotely located.

In another embodiment of the present invention, the method comprises the steps of requesting information from a consumer regarding the consumer's taste preferences. The method also includes the step of selecting a classification of coffee products from among at least two available classifications. Each of the classifications comprises one or
15 more different coffee products, wherein each of the available classifications corresponds to a predetermined range of taste preferences. The method also includes the step of providing information to the consumer identifying the coffee products within the selected classification thereby allowing the consumer to identify and purchase one or more of said products. In this embodiment of the present invention, the classifications comprise at
20 least a first classification and a second classification wherein the first classification contains a coffee product having a Hunter color of greater than about 15L and the second classification contains a coffee product having a Hunter color of less than about 15L. Preferably, the step of providing information to the consumer regarding the products within the selected classification is accomplished through the use of packaging indicia. In
25 a preferred embodiment, the number of available classifications is between 3 and 8, inclusive, more preferably 6. A plurality of different coffee products within one of the available classifications may be packaged in a common package.

In yet another embodiment of the present invention, the method comprises the steps of requesting information from a consumer regarding the consumer's taste

preferences. Preferably, the information request step is performed by prompting the consumer to answer no more than four questions designed to elicit the taste preference information based on the ease of use for the consumer. However, it will be appreciated that use of more than four questions is acceptable. This method further includes the step
5 of selecting a classification of coffee products from among at least two available classifications. Each of the classifications comprises one or more different coffee products, and each of the available classifications corresponds to a predetermined range of taste preferences. The method further includes the step of providing information to the consumer identifying the coffee products within said selected classification thereby
10 allowing the consumer to identify and purchase one or more of said products. Preferably, at least one of the questions regards taste preferences with respect to foods other than coffee.

In another embodiment of the method of the present invention, the method comprises the steps of collecting information from a consumer regarding the consumer's
15 preferences with respect to coffee roast character. The method further includes the step of collecting information from the consumer regarding the consumer's preferences with respect to food flavor intensity. The method further includes the step of selecting a classification of coffee products from among at least two available classifications, each of the classifications comprising one or more different coffee products, wherein each of the
20 available classifications corresponds to a predetermined range of taste preferences. The method also includes the step of providing information to the consumer identifying the coffee products within the selected classification thereby allowing the consumer to identify and purchase one or more of the products. The classifications comprise at least a first classification and a second classification wherein the first classification contains a
25 coffee product having a Hunter color of greater than about 15L and the second classification contains a coffee product having a Hunter color of less than about 15L. Preferably, the first classification has a coffee product with a Hunter color of greater than about 17L, more preferably, greater than about 18L, and the second classification has a coffee product with a Hunter color of less than about 13L, more preferably, less than
30 about 11L.

In another embodiment of the present invention, an interactive coffee selection advisor device is provided. The interactive coffee selection advisor device requests information from a consumer regarding the consumer's preferences with respect to coffee roast character. The coffee selection advisor device further requests information from the consumer regarding the consumer's preferences with respect to food flavor intensity. The coffee selection advisor device requests this information through the use of an interactive device, where the device allows the consumer to indicate the preferences on a scale of at least 6 options. The coffee selection advisor device also selects a classification, based on the requested information, of coffee products from among at least two available classifications. Each of the classifications comprises one or more different coffee products, wherein each of the available classifications corresponds to a predetermined range of taste preferences. The coffee selection advisor device also provides information to the consumer identifying the coffee products within the selected classification, thereby allowing the consumer to identify and purchase one or more of said products. Optionally, the interactive coffee selection advisor device is proximately located to a printing device such that the consumer may retain a record of the interaction that will facilitate the identification and repurchase of the identified coffee product(s). In this embodiment, the interactive coffee selection advisor device allows the consumer to indicate the preferences on a scale of 11 options.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

While the specification concludes with claims particularly pointing out and distinctly claiming the subject matter which is regarded as forming the present invention, it is believed that the invention will be better understood from the following description taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, in which:

FIGS. 1-3 show specific embodiments of the methods of the present invention

FIG. 4 is a variation of a standard display case that can optionally have a coffee selection advisor for facilitating the method of the present invention attached thereto.

FIG. 5a – 12b show several embodiments of the coffee selection advisor device which may be used to facilitate the methods of the present invention.

FIG. 13 shows one embodiment of an interactive coffee selection advisor device which may be used to facilitate the methods of the present invention.

5 FIG. 14 shows one embodiment of the apparatus of the present invention where the coffee selection advisor is connected to a network.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

The present invention is directed to methods and apparatus for the selection of one
10 or more food or beverage products, particularly coffee products, from a plurality of options. One method of the present invention comprises three basic steps: requesting information from a consumer regarding the consumer's taste preferences, selecting an appropriate classification of coffee products from a group of two or more available classifications of products, and displaying information to the consumer identifying the
15 products which make up the selected classification allowing the consumer to identify, and optionally purchase, products within the selected classification.

As used herein the term "coffee products" refers to a particular type of coffee offering. Multiple samples of the same variety of coffee are considered one coffee product. "Coffee" or "Coffee Products" as used herein refers to the beans themselves
20 after roasting, in a condition for grinding and brewing of a coffee beverage by a consumer. Additionally, the term "coffee" or "coffee product" may also refer to a prepared grind ready for brewing of a coffee beverage by a consumer. It is not necessary that the beverage actually be brewed for the ready to grind beans, or the ready to brew grind from such beans to be considered "coffee" within the meaning of this specification.

25 Coffee products might differ from each other by virtue of differences in the underlying bean blend, by differences in roasting, or by both of these. For example a coffee consisting of 100% Sumatra beans is a different coffee product than a coffee

consisting of a blend of 50% Colombian Supremo beans and 50% Costa Rican Hard beans. This is the case whether the beans have been subjected to the same or different roasting process. Likewise, a first coffee product might consist of a given blend of beans which have been roasted to yield a Hunter color of 17 L (according to the Hunter
5 Colorimeter method, described below). A second coffee product might be made from the same supply of beans, but which has been roasted for to yield a Hunter color of 14 L according to the Hunter Colorimeter method, described below. Of course, it is possible to vary both the underlying bean selection and the roasting parameters to yield a wide variety of coffee products.

10 It has been found during development of the present invention that certain key pieces of information regarding the taste preferences of a particular consumer may be used to assist that consumer in the selection of coffee products from an available group. When such assistance is provided, it has been found, that the acceptance of such products is statistically greater than if the consumer self-selected coffee products from the same
15 available group. The method of the present invention centers around the ability to properly identify ranges of taste preferences for a given consumer and to match these preferences with appropriate coffee products.

As used herein, the term "taste preferences" refers to the stated, perceived, and/or observed likes and dislikes of an individual, with respect to the characteristic
20 attributes of foods and beverages. The taste preference information being requested, however, may also include information not directly related to food and beverage characteristic attributes, but that may serve as a proxy for these attributes. For example, the requested taste preference information may include information pertaining to the consumer's lifestyle interests (e.g., hobbies and other preferred activities), recent purchase
25 patterns (e.g., food and beverage preparation appliances), television viewing preferences (e.g. favorite programs), and the like. This type of requested information may serve as proxies for various food and beverage characteristic attributes such as spiciness, flavor intensity, and the like. By way of example, a consumer who regularly participates in activities such as mountain biking and sea kayaking, who also enjoys South American
30 travel may have a remarkably different taste profile from another consumer with similar

demographic characteristics (e.g., age, ethnicity, education, income) who regularly watches televised sporting events and does not like to travel.

Additionally, the requested taste preference information concerning one type of food or beverage's characteristic attribute may serve to identify the consumer's taste
5 preference for a related characteristic attribute of a different food or beverage product. For example, in one embodiment of the present invention the consumer is requested to provide information regarding the consumer's preferences with respect to the preferred food flavor intensity of salsa or pepper sauce. This information is then used to predicted the consumer's preferred food flavor intensity for certain coffee characteristic attributes
10 (i.e., acidity and bitterness).

It has long been recognized that taste preferences vary from individual to individual and are subjective. In other words, one individual might respond quite favorably to a given taste, while another individual may express dislike for the same taste. Surprisingly and unexpectedly, however, it has been found that taste preferences for a
15 given individual tend to be consistent over different types of food and drink offerings. In other words, persons who tend to prefer certain taste with respect to one type of food or drink will also tend to prefer other types of food and drink with a corresponding taste. Furthermore, while taste is subjective from one individual to the next, the particular "taste profile" of an individual is measurable using standard surveying techniques. One aspect
20 of the present invention is the recognition of the links in taste preferences across different categories of food and drink items which allow consumers to be assisted in the selection of food and beverage products, particularly coffee products, by using other food and beverage items with which they may be more familiar as a reference.

The term "classification" as used herein refers to one or more coffee products
25 which are related by similar taste parameters or characteristics such as roast character and flavor intensity characteristics. Roast character is primarily a function of the roasting process to which a particular bean or blend of beans has been subjected. Roast character generally refers to the flavor imparted to a coffee product as a result of the degree of roast of the coffee. Roast character is preferably measured by the roast color of a particular

coffee product. The Hunter Color "L" scale system is generally used to define the color of the coffee beans and the degree to which they have been roasted. Hunter Color "L" scale values are units of light reflectance measurement, and the higher the value is, the lighter the color is since a lighter colored material reflects more light. Thus, in measuring
5 degrees of roast, the lower the "L" scale value the greater the degree of roast, since the greater the degree of roast, the darker is the color of the roasted bean. This roast color is usually measured on the coffee beans after they have been ground or flaked into a finished coffee product.

A complete technical description of the system can be found in an article by R. S.
10 Hunter "Photoelectric Color Difference Meter," J. of the Optical Soc. of Amer., 48, 985-95 (1958). A Hunter Colorimeter (D25 DP9000 series) is used to measure the lightness/darkness of powders, including coffee. An optical sensor light from a quartz halogen cycle lamp is directed at the sample at a 45° angle from the perpendicular. The reflected light is then collected in a receptor located directly above the sample at 0° angle
15 from the perpendicular. The amount of reflected light is used to determine the lightness of the sample as indicated on the above-described "L" scale. In general, the Hunter Color "L" scale values are units of light reflectance measurement, and the higher the value is, the lighter the color is since a lighter colored material reflects more light. In particular, in the Hunter Color system the "L" scale contains 100 equal units of division; absolute black
20 is at the bottom of the scale (L=0) and absolute white is at the top (L=100). Thus, in measuring degrees of roast, the lower the "L" scale value the greater the degree of roast, since the greater the degree of roast, the darker is the color of the roasted bean. The L scale was developed by Hunter Labs and is based on the internationally accepted measure for lightness. The L value is calculated by the formula:

$$L = 100\sqrt{Y}$$

25 where Y is the lightness function of the CIE Tristimulus XYZ Values. CIE is the Commission Internationale de l'Eclairage or the International Commission on Illumination. (Hunter Colorimeter User's Manual for D25 DP-9000 Series, Manual Version 1.4, April 1993, Hunter Associates Laboratory, Reston, VA.)

“Flavor intensity” as the term is used herein, refers to the characteristic attribute of high or low impact of a particular food or beverage flavor, particularly noticeable in coffee. Flavor intensity is not measured directly or empirically, but there is a consensus among those of skill in the art as to categories of foods which are generally recognized as high impact and categories of foods which are generally recognized as lower impact. It has been found during the development of the present invention, that the preference of a particular individual with respect to high impact or lower impact tastes tends to remain consistent across food types and categories. For example, a consumer who generally prefers mild salsa or pepper sauce (a lower impact taste) will generally prefer lower impact tastes in coffee products. Correspondingly, a consumer who generally prefers hot salsa or pepper sauce (a high impact taste) will generally prefer high impact tastes in coffee products.

For lighter roast colors of coffee products (approximately 15L and above), the flavor intensity of a particular coffee product is a primarily a function of its underlying bean compositional blend. This is because lighter roasting of coffee generally results in a clean vibrant taste that allows the natural acidity and specific country and/or regional notes of a coffee to be displayed. Darker roast colors of coffee (about 15L and below) generally leads to a more smoky, bittersweet flavor. Dark roasting typically leads to roast flavor dominating the total flavor profile (rather than the country and/or region specific flavor of the green coffee beans). Therefore, darker roasts are typically always high impact with respect to flavor intensity as the darkness of the roast tends to dominate the taste without respect to the underlying bean composition.

A given “classification” of coffee product, then, may consist of a given combination of roast character and flavor intensity ranges. For example, one classification of coffee products might include products which are characterized by light roast color and high impact taste. Another classification might include medium roast color and lower impact flavor intensity coffee products. Each of the coffee products within such a classification group is chosen to be most likely to be accepted by consumers falling within a predetermined range of taste preference characteristics. It has been found during development of the present invention that many consumers typically have a

stronger preference for products in one such classification than for products in other available classifications. Therefore, the method of the present invention which allows for identification and purchase of coffee products within a selected classification are more likely to be preferred by a given consumer than other coffee products.

5 It has been found during development of the present invention that certain key pieces of information regarding the taste preferences of a particular individual may be used to assist that individual in the selection of a classification of coffee products which are particularly adapted to the consumer's true taste preferences. The use of coffee products within such an adapted classification will preferably achieve a measurable
10 increase in the acceptance of such products by consumers as compared to self-selection without assistance of the present method.

In one embodiment of the present invention, there are six predetermined available coffee product classifications which correspond to particular ranges of taste preferences. Each range of taste preference characteristics has at least one corresponding classification
15 of coffee products which is specifically adapted for acceptance by consumers within that range. An individual consumer is placed in the appropriate range based upon information collected from the consumer.

Table 1 is a table which shows six possible classifications of coffee products which may be used in one embodiment of carrying out the method of the present
20 invention.

TABLE 1

ROAST CHARACTER PREFERENCE

		Light Roast (0-4)	Medium Roast (5-6)	Medium Dark (7-8)	Dark (9-10)
FLAVOR INTENSITY	High Impact (6+)	Class 2	Class 4	Class 5	Class 6

PREFERENCE	Lower Impact (0-5)	Class 1	Class 3		
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As shown in Table 1, the topics of information collected from a consumer relate to the consumer's taste preferences. Preferably, the information collected with respect to taste preferences pertains to both roast character preference and flavor intensity preference of the consumer. In Table 1, flavor intensity preference ranges are shown on the "Y"-axis and roast character preference ranges are shown on the "X"-axis. The parenthetical numerical values given represent typical values on an 11 point scale (i.e. 0 to 10) at which boundaries between classifications may be drawn.

The taste preference ranges with respect to both roast character and flavor intensity are separated into 6 different classifications or categories as shown in Table 1.

The consumer is prompted in any suitable manner (e.g., through the answering of questions printed on a chart or interactive display screen) to provide sufficient information to place the consumer in one of the ranges for each of the taste preference topics shown (i.e. roast character and flavor intensity). For example, in order to determine the proper category for a particular consumer with respect to roast character, a consumer may be asked to choose on a scale of zero to ten with zero being the lightest and ten being the darkest, the darkness of roast they prefer in coffee products. In this example, the taste preference with respect to roast character is determined directly. It has been found that consumers are generally adept at accurately identifying the darkness of roast which they prefer in coffee.

In variations of this embodiment, however, a consumer's taste preferences with respect to roast character preference may be collected indirectly. In other words, rather than directly prompting a consumer directly to identify a preferred darkness of roast, the information may be gathered by prompting the consumer for other taste information which may be related to roast character preference. For example, consumers may be questioned to answer if they generally prefer a clean smooth taste in coffee products or a smoky taste in coffee products. Cleaner, smoother taste preferences correspond to the lighter roast categories (light and medium) shown in Table 1. Similarly, consumers who

respond that they prefer a smoky taste, will generally also prefer the darker roast character classifications shown in Table 1 (medium dark and dark). Additionally, taste preferences in non-coffee food products are often analogous to taste preference with respect to coffee roast character preferences. An example is a consumer's preference with respect to
5 darkness of toast. A darker toast preference may be taken as indicative as a taste preference for darker roast character with respect to coffee products when performing the method of the present invention.

Because consumers generally are able to accurately gauge their preferences with respect to coffee roast character, in specific embodiments of the present invention, such
10 information is collected in direct terms from the consumer. This information is preferably collected by prompting a consumer to indicate on an 11 point scale of how dark they prefer their roast of coffee (with 10 being the darkest and zero being the lightest). In variations of this embodiment, a scale of fewer options may be used. It has been found, however, during the development of the present invention that more optimal results are
15 achieved when the scale used for selecting a preference with respect to roast character has at least 6 or more divisions. This is believed to be a result of a tendency among consumers to try to avoid either extreme in answering a question posed in a "multiple choice" format. If a scale of only 3 or 4 options is presented (e.g. light, medium, dark), a disproportionate number of responses may be clustered toward the middle and the
20 extremes will be avoided. Consequently, the method will tend to over-select middle classifications even for those consumers who may actual prefer a lighter roast or a darker roast.

As shown in Table 1, a first range of roast character preference may be categorized as "light roast" corresponding to a range of 0-4 on an 11 option scale. Similarly, a second
25 range of roast character preference may be categorized as "medium" corresponding to 5-6 on an 11 option scale. "Medium dark" may represent a third range of 7-8, and "dark" may represent a fourth range of 9-10 on such an 11 option scale.

In addition to roast character preference, additional information pertaining to a consumers taste preferences is preferably also collected as part of the method of the

present invention. In one preferred embodiment, such information includes information which pertains to the consumer's flavor intensity preferences. As shown in Table 1, for most categories or classifications of preference ranges, flavor intensity preference is essentially independent of roast character preference.

5 It has been found during development of the present invention, that many consumers are not as accurate in identifying their true preferences with respect to flavor intensity as they are at identifying their preferences with respect to roast character. This may a result of some consumers being unfamiliar with what types of tastes are considered to be high impact as opposed to lower impact (at least as applied to coffee products).
10 Also, for many consumers, the use of the terms high impact and lower impact (or mild, bland, or similar term) themselves may suggest that one choice is more desirable than another. Consequently, the use of direct terms such as high impact and lower impact to gauge flavor intensity preference often leads to skewed results. In specific embodiments of the present invention, therefore, it is desirable to indirectly collect information from a
15 consumer regarding flavor intensity preference.

One particularly effective manner in which to measure flavor intensity preferences with respect to coffee products is to request information from a consumer regarding flavor intensity taste preferences with respect to non-coffee foods and/or beverages. One preferred mechanism to elicit a consumer's flavor intensity preference is to prompt the
20 consumer in any suitable manner to indicate how hot they prefer salsa or pepper sauce. Such an indication may preferably be made on a scale ranging from 0 to 10. A response of 0-5 on such a scale to this type of prompt is taken an indication of a lower impact taste preference. A response of 6 or greater on such a scale to a prompt relating to preference of salsa or pepper sauce is taken as an indication of a high impact taste preference.

25 A consumer's preference with respect to level of hotness preferred in salsa or pepper sauce unexpectedly correlates well to a consumer's preference with respect to flavor intensity of coffee. It has been found that other non-coffee related flavor intensity preferences also provide a good indication of flavor intensity preference with respect to coffee. For example, a consumer may be prompted to indicate a preference for dark

chocolate as compared to milk chocolate. Preferably, such may be indicated on an 11 option scale with one end of the scale (e.g. zero) indicating an absolute preference for milk chocolate and the other end of the scale (e.g. 10) indicating an absolute preference for dark chocolate. In this example, the high impact classification preferably corresponds to a response of 4 or greater while a response of 0-3 corresponds to a lower impact flavor intensity preference.

A third example of how information regarding flavor intensity preference may be elicited from the consumer is to prompt for an indication of the consumer's preference for Italian Salad dressing. On the above-described 11 point scale, a high impact flavor intensity preference may correspond to a response of 7 or more, while a response of 0-6 may correspond to a preference for lower impact flavor intensity.

Some additional examples of indications that a consumer is likely to demonstrate a preference for high impact flavor intensity coffee products are a preference for Japanese foods, a preference for tart beverages over soothing beverages, and a preference for new foods over familiar foods. A wide variety of higher impact foods and/or beverages may be compared to a lower impact food or beverage to elicit flavor intensity preference information. Additionally, a direct comparison is not required. A consumer may be prompted simply for acceptance of a food or beverage which is high impact in terms of flavor intensity. The example given above with respect to Italian salad dressing is an example of this type of approach. The most effective location at which to draw the boundary between high impact preference and lower impact preference may vary as function of the manner in which flavor intensity preference information is elicited from the consumer.

Referring to Table 1, the indication by a consumer of preferences for light roast character and lower impact flavor intensity would fall into Class 1 of six available classifications. For example, a consumer who responded "2" when prompted for roast character preference on an 11 option scale (with 0 being lightest and 10 being the darkest) and also responded "3" when prompted for information regarding level of hotness desired

in salsa on an 11 option scale (with 0 being most mild and 10 being hottest) would have Class 1 selected by the method of the present invention.

When the six classifications shown in Table 1 are the available classifications, about 28% of the coffee drinking population may be expected to have Class 1 selected by the method of the present invention. Preferably, Class 1 contains coffee products with a roast color of about 15.8 L or higher and a lower impact flavor intensity. One preferred example of a suitable coffee product for this classification is a blend of 33% Colombian Excelso, 33% Mexico High Grown, and 33% Guatemala Hard beans which has been roasted to a color of about 17.5 L. Commercially available products from Procter & Gamble Company of Cincinnati, Ohio in this category include MILLSTONE Gentle Roast, MILLSTONE Sidewalk Café, MILLSTONE Breakfast Blend, MILLSTONE Decaf. Breakfast Blend, FOLGERS Classic Roast, and FOLGERS Breakfast Blend. Flavored coffee products such as MILLSTONE Kahlua Vanilla Cream, MILLSTONE Vanilla Almond, MILLSTONE Chocolate Macadamia Nut, MILLSTONE Southern Pecan, MILLSTONE Swiss Chocolate Almond, and MILLSTONE Hazelnut Cream may also be included in this classification.

A second classification which is labeled as Class 2 on Table 1 corresponds to taste preferences for light roast (preferably about 15.8 L or higher) and a high impact flavor intensity. This classification is expected to be preferred by about 12% of the coffee drinking population when such population is having one of the six available classifications shown in Table 1 being selected through the method of the present invention. One example of a suitable coffee product for this classification is a Guatemala Antigua bean coffee which has been roasted to a color of about 15.8 L. Commercially available products from Procter & Gamble in this category include MILLSTONE Kona Blend, MILLSTONE Guatemala Antigua, and FOLGERS Colombian Supreme. Flavored coffee products such as MILLSTONE Danish Pastry, MILLSTONE Cinnamon Hazelnut, MILLSTONE Raspberry and Cream, MILLSTONE Amaretto, MILLSTONE Irish Cream, MILLSTONE Butter Rum, MILLSTONE Chocolate Raspberry, MILLSTONE Chocolate Mint, and MILLSTONE Candy Cane may also be included in this classification.

A third classification which is labeled as Class 3 on Table 1 corresponds to a taste preference for medium roast and a lower impact flavor intensity. Medium roast preferably corresponds to a roast color range from about 15.7L to about 14 L. About 18% of the coffee drinking population is expected to have Class 3 selected by the method of the present invention when the classes shown in Table 1 are available. One example of a suitable coffee product for this classification is a Colombian Supremo bean coffee which has been roasted to a color of about 14.3 L. Another suitable coffee product for this classification is a blend of 33% Colombian Excelso, 33% Costa Rica Hard, and 33% Guatemala Hard beans which has been roasted to a color of about 14.1 L. Commercially available coffee products from Procter & Gamble in this category include MILLSTONE Foglifter, MILLSTONE Colombian, MILLSTONE Millennium Blend, MILLSTONE Regular Joe, and MILLSTONE Decaf. Colombian.

A fourth classification which is labeled as Class 4 on Table 1 corresponds to a taste preference for medium roast and high impact flavor intensity. Medium roast preferably corresponds to a roast color range from about 15.7L to about 14 L. About 14% of the coffee drinking population is expected to have Class 4 selected by the method of the present invention when the classes shown in Table 1 are available. One example of a suitable coffee product for this classification is a Sumatra bean coffee which has been roasted to a color of about 14.7 L. Another suitable coffee product for this classification is an Ethiopian Yirgacheffe bean coffee which has been roasted to a color of about 15 L. A third example of a suitable coffee product for this classification is a blend of 37% Colombian Excelso, 31.5% Ethiopian Harar Longberry, and 31.5% Indonesia Java beans which has been roasted to a color of about 15.6L. Coffee products which are available from the Procter & Gamble Company which are suitable for inclusion in this classification are MILLSTONE Organic Sierra Madre, MILLSTONE Sumatra, MILLSTONE Ethiopian Yirgacheffe, and MILLSTONE Mocha Java.

A fifth classification which is labeled as Class 5 on Table 1 corresponds to a taste preference for medium dark roast and a high impact flavor intensity. As previously noted, most medium dark roast coffees will naturally tend to exhibit a high impact flavor intensity profile. Medium dark roast preferably corresponds to a roast color range from

about 13.9L to about 12.5 L. About 20% of the coffee drinking population is expected to have Class 5 selected by the method of the present invention when the classes shown in Table 1 are available. One example of a suitable coffee product for this classification is a blend of 35% Colombian Excelso, 35% Guatemala Strictly Hard, and 30% Indonesia Java beans which has been roasted to a color of about 13.1 L. Another example of a suitable coffee product for this classification is a blend of 42.5% Colombian Excelso, 36.5% Indonesian Sumatra, and 21% Guatemala Strictly Hard beans which has been roasted to a color of about 13L. Commercially available products from Procter & Gamble which suitable for inclusion in this classification are MILLSTONE Dark Colombian, MILLSTONE Northwest Espresso, MILLSTONE Bed & Breakfast Blend, MILLSTONE Restaurant Special Light, MILLSTONE Decaf. Bed & Breakfast, and MILLSTONE Espresso Mezzo MILLSTONE Decaf. Espresso Mezzo.

A sixth classification which is labeled as Class 6 on Table 1 corresponds to a taste preference for dark roast and a high impact flavor intensity. As previously noted, most medium dark roast coffees will naturally tend to exhibit a high impact flavor intensity profile. Dark roast preferably corresponds to a roast color range from about 12.4 L or lower. About 8% of the coffee drinking population is expected to have Class 6 selected by the method of the present invention when the classes shown in Table 1 are available. One example of a suitable coffee product for this classification is a blend of 33% Mexico High Grown, 33% Guatemala Strictly Hard, and 33% Honduras Strictly Hard beans which has been roasted to a color of about 11.8 L. Commercially available coffee products from the Procter & Gamble Company which are suitable for inclusion in this classification include MILLSTONE Café Midnight, MILLSTONE Café Europa, MILLSTONE Restaurant Special, MILLSTONE French Roast, and MILLSTONE Decaf. French Roast. MILLSTONE French Vanilla is a flavored coffee product available from the Procter & Gamble Company which is also suitable for inclusion in this classification.

In preferred embodiments of the present invention, the available classifications cover as broad range of taste preferences as possible. In other words, the method preferably includes classifications which contain coffee products which are at the light end of a range likely to be preferred by some consumers as well as coffee products which

are at the dark end of a range likely to be preferred by some consumers. The availability of a wide variety of options with respect to taste preferences increases the likelihood that a given consumer will receive a product which the consumer finds acceptable. Past attempts at guiding a consumer in the selection of coffee products offered products which
5 were all similar in terms of roast character and/or flavor intensity. By offering a selection of products which includes lighter color and darker color offerings, the method may be used successfully by the entire coffee drinking population.

In one embodiment of the present invention described with the aid of Table 1, six total classifications are available. The number of classifications may vary, although a
10 total of 3 to 8 classifications are preferred. High numbers of classifications tend to over-segment the population and may increase the complexity and manageability of using the system without obtaining much additional benefit with respect to consumer acceptance. If the number of available classifications is too few, not enough differentiation will be achieved, leading to a decrease in overall acceptance of the method. The classifications
15 shown in Table 1, may be expanded or reduced by combining some of the shown classifications or splitting some of those shown into two or more. Preferably, when combining classes together, those which are expected to represent smaller percentages of the overall coffee drinking population may be combined. Similarly, classifications which are expected to represent larger percentages of the overall coffee drinking population are
20 potential candidates for additional segmentation.

In one embodiment, the method of the present invention comprises the basic steps of: requesting information from a consumer regarding the consumer's taste preferences, selecting an appropriate classification of coffee products from a group of two or more available classifications of products, and displaying information to the consumer
25 identifying the products which make up the selected classification allowing the consumer to identify, and optionally purchase, products within the selected classification. In certain embodiments of the present invention, the basic steps of requesting information from a consumer regarding the consumer's taste preferences and selecting an appropriate classification of coffee products are performed in a substantially continuous, interactive
30 process. For example, the information may be requested from a consumer and a

classification selected through the use of an appropriate coffee selection advisor such as an interactive store display. Such a display could be equipped with an interactive computer which will prompt the user to answer questions, keep track of the answers, and select an appropriate system based on those answers as described above. In alternative
5 embodiments, the information may be collected from a consumer through the use of an interactive site on the World Wide Web, through the use of an interactive menu-driven phone system, and the like. Charts, tables or other figures may be used as devices for requesting information from a consumer and taking the consumer through the coffee selection process as described above. These charts or figures may be located on an in-
10 store display or in in-store advertising. Similarly, charts or figures could be published in publications such as newspapers or magazines, could be mailed to potential consumers, could be distributed via e-mail, published over a network such as the World Wide Web, and the like. It is also possible for information regarding the selection of coffee products in accordance with the methods of the present invention to be distributed to restaurants,
15 coffee shops, merchants, or other persons and/or places likely to be engaged in the retail sale of coffee products. In such scenarios, the interaction described in the present application could take place between a consumer and a waiter, merchant, or other person engaged in the sale of coffee products.

It is desirable when providing a methods and apparatus for selecting coffee
20 products in accordance with the present invention to make such methods and apparatus as simple to learn and use as possible. Additionally, highly preferred executions of the present invention are as simple and as fast to complete as possible. When using the method for coffee products which will be sold to consumers in retail establishments such as supermarkets or other food stores, a point of purchase coffee selection advisor is
25 particularly preferred for the information collection step of the present invention. Such a coffee selection advisor is preferably located proximate to a display case containing one or more of the coffee products available within each of the available classifications.

Fig. 1 provides an overview of one method of the present invention. As indicated in block 100 a coffee selection advisor requests information regarding a consumer's taste
30 preferences. The manner in which the taste preference information is requested depends

on the type of coffee selection advisor being employed. In one embodiment of the present invention an interactive coffee selection advisor is used that comprises a data output device for requesting consumer taste preference information, and a data input device by which the consumer can input the requested data. Suitable devices include, but are not limited to, touch-screen displays, LCD screens, LED screens, CRT monitor devices, television screens, projectors, speakers, microphones, keyboards, Graphical User Interface (GUI) pointing devices (i.e., mouse, graphics tablets), scanners, printers (i.e., dot matrix, laser, inkjet, thermal sublimation), and the like. In this embodiment the interactive coffee selection device also comprises a data storage device (i.e., optical storage device, magnetic storage device, RAM, ROM, EPROM, and the like) that stores a set of selection criteria used to select an appropriate coffee classification based on the requested taste preference data inputted by the consumer. The data storage device may optionally store information corresponding to which coffee products are defined as belonging to which coffee classification. The interactive coffee selection advisor will also comprise a processor which compares the requested taste preference data inputted by the consumer with the selection criteria to select and display at least one appropriate coffee classification, or alternatively directly display at least one appropriate coffee product.

In another embodiment of the present invention, as exemplified by Table 1, the coffee selection advisor is a chart displaying a two-dimensional, pre-printed matrix. The various coffee classifications, or alternatively various coffee products, are represented by the cells of the matrix. Printed along one axis of the matrix is a request for consumer taste preference information (i.e., preferred roast color). Printed along the remaining axis of the matrix is a second request for taste preference information (i.e., preferred flavor intensity). In this embodiment the consumer has inputted the requested information by answering the appropriate questions.

Once the taste preference information has been requested and inputted by the consumer, block 102, the coffee selection advisor selects an appropriate coffee classification, block 104. The manner in which the appropriate coffee classification is selected depends on the type of coffee selection advisor being employed. In one

embodiment of the present invention an interactive coffee selection advisor is used that matches the requested taste preference information against a set of coffee classification selection criteria.

The coffee classification selection criteria could be a decision tree, or optionally a set of look-up tables. A decision tree typically comprises a set of responses/traits/categories against which the consumer taste preference data can be compared against. For example, a decision tree might comprise every combination of possible consumer taste preference data. The taste preference data is then compared against the decision tree for a matching branch and the matching branch provides further instructions to be executed as a result of the match. Such decision trees would preferably comprise potential combinations of consumer taste preference data which have been designed with the system's intended application in mind, so that appropriate optimized operating conditions can be established that pertain to the coffee classifications and/or products to be delivered. Preferably, the decision trees are converted to mathematical algorithms, which then process the decision tree comparisons or "decisions" electronically to quickly ascertain the appropriate optimized beverage formulation for the beverage delivery system.

In order to update the optimization process to allow for modification or "morphing" as appropriate, one embodiment of the present invention comprises the decision trees or algorithms of the coffee selection advisor being updated by a neural network. In this embodiment, the neural network would assess various applicable consumer taste preference data and feedback data retrieved from the data store to determine if any changes to the mathematical algorithms or dialog scripts are needed to facilitate or optimize the decision making process of determining appropriate coffee classifications and/or products. For example, a neural network can continuously update its decision making algorithm by incorporating user input such as feedback into the decision making process akin to artificial intelligence or "smart" logic. According to Haykin, S. (1994), *Neural Networks: A Comprehensive Foundation*, NY: Macmillan, p. 2, a neural network is a massively parallel distributed processor that has a natural propensity for storing experiential knowledge and making it available for use. It resembles the brain in

two respects: 1) Knowledge is acquired by the network through a learning process; and 2) Interneuron connection strengths known as synaptic weights are used to store the knowledge. The neural network analyzes the data trends, feedback data, consumer taste preference data and other additional data to develop and refine algorithms for decision making. In one embodiment, a neural network would automatically make changes to the coffee selection advisor's decision trees or algorithms based upon the growing base of consumer preference and user feedback data.

In another embodiment of the present invention, as exemplified by Table 1, the coffee selection advisor is a chart displaying a two-dimensional matrix. The selection of the appropriate coffee classification is predetermined depending on the answers provided by the consumer to the requested taste preference information and the selection criteria used in the design of the matrix. For example, if the consumer answered that her preference was for high impact beverages (e.g., answering an 8 on the 11 point scale) and dark roasted coffee (e.g., answering a 10 on the 11 point scale), the coffee selection advisor would select coffee classification six (6).

Once the appropriate coffee classification has been selected the coffee selection advisor displays a coffee classification identifier corresponding to the selected coffee classifications, block 106. This coffee classification identifier is comprised of one or more identification elements such as a classification name or another written word or group of words, an icon or set of icons, a color, a pattern, a sound, an aroma, or any combination, and the like. The requirement is that each coffee classification identifier be unique with respect to identifiers of other coffee classifications. However, one skilled in the art will appreciate that the unique quality of the coffee classification identifier can be attributed to a unique combination of otherwise generic identification elements.

Finally, the coffee selection advisor displays a coffee product identifier corresponding to the selected coffee classification, block 108. As with the coffee classification identifier above the coffee product identifier must be unique and can be comprised of one or more identification elements.

As used herein, the term “display” is meant to mean any action which allows the consumer to perceive information provided by the coffee selection advisor. It will be appreciated by those skilled in the art that the term display can include, but is not limited to, visual representations of data either on a television, CRT, LED, LCD, or projection
5 screens, printers of all types, and the like. However, it will also be appreciated that use of the term “display” is intended to encompass such devices that provide information perceptible by any of the senses (e.g., sound, taste, olfactory, tactile, and vision). Use of display devices that convert text and other visual cues to speech, as well as devices that convert visual cues to tactile producing devices (i.e., Braille), are specifically
10 contemplated as being within the scope of this invention.

Fig. 2 provides an overview of another method of the present invention. In step 200 consumer taste preference information is requested from the consumer. The consumer then inputs the requested taste preference information in a manner consistent with the type of coffee selection advisor being employed, step 202. The coffee selection advisor
15 compares the taste preference information requested of the consumer and matches that information against a set of coffee product selection criteria, steps 204 and 206. The exact type and implementation of the coffee product selection criteria depends on the type of coffee selection advisor employed in a given embodiment of the present invention.

The coffee selection advisor then displays, in a manner consistent with the exact
20 type of coffee selection advisor employed, a coffee product identifier, comprising one or more identification elements, for at least one coffee product, step 208.

Figure 3 provides an overview of the process detailing how either the coffee classification selection criteria and/or coffee product selection criteria can be further refined and updated. In step 300 consumer taste preference information is requested from
25 the consumer. The consumer then inputs the requested taste preference information in a manner consistent with the type of coffee selection advisor being employed, step 302. The coffee selection advisor analyzes the requested taste preference information, step 304, and refines the appropriate selection criteria, step 306. In optional step 308, the coffee

selection advisor may reapply the refined selection criteria or it may store the refined selection criteria for review and subsequent use.

FIG. 4 shows a typical in store display case 400 containing a plurality of different coffee products in various display bins 402 which contain coffee products comprising whole beans and blends of whole beans. Display case 400 also comprises shelf space for ground, prepackaged coffee products 404.

FIG. 5a shows one example of a coffee selection advisor 500 in the form of a “barber pole” movable device that may be used to “ask” consumers questions designed to collect the information described above with respect to taste preferences. Preferably, as shown in FIG. 5a, the coffee selection advisor is affixed to display case 400. In other embodiments, the coffee selection advisor may be removeably mounted on the display case or may be proximate to, but not necessarily attached to the display case. In the latter example, a coffee selection advisor in the form of a chart could be located near a shelf display unit without necessarily being directly mounted on such display unit.

The coffee selection advisor 500 shown in FIG. 5a and Fig 5b is a type of “modified slide rule” type device because of the manner in which a consumer moves a part of the interface to a position corresponding to input the requested consumer taste preference information and is thus able to read off the information displayed by the coffee selection advisor 500.

Any suitable mechanism may be used to request taste preference information from the consumer. FIGS. 6-12b shows various embodiments of the coffee selection advisor 500. FIG. 6 shows coffee selection advisor 500 in the form of a printed chart, possibly similar to the chart that appears as Table 1. FIGS. 7a – 7c show coffee selection advisor 500 in the form of a horizontal cylinder with a stationary outer shell 702, and a rotating inner core 702. Requested taste preference information and the corresponding coffee classifications and/or coffee products are displayed on the components. Taste preference information is inputted, and appropriate classifications and/or products are selected and displayed by the position of the components relative to each other. FIG. 8 is an example of a rotating wheel design for coffee advisor 500.

In a variation shown in FIG. 10, the coffee selection advisor could have a “flip up” portion to execute the interactive method. FIGS. 11a and 11b show coffee selection advisor comprising a rotating, 3 planar member with taste preference information and coffee classification and/or coffee product data displayed on portions of the three planes. FIGS. 12a and 12b show coffee selection advisor 500 comprising a roll component 1200 on which the requested taste preference information and corresponding coffee classification and/or coffee product data are displayed.

FIG. 13 shows an example of an interactive coffee selection advisor 500. Requests for taste preference information are displayed on LED screen 512, and inputted by the consumer via keypad 510. The requested consumer taste preference information is then compared by processor 514 with the coffee classification and/or coffee product selection criteria stored in data storage device 516. Appropriate coffee classifications and/or coffee products are display on LD screen 512, or optionally printed by printing device 518 to produce a coffee selection suggestion card 550.

Fig. 14 schematically illustrates a sample coffee selection advisor 500 designed as a client/server network which might be employed to implement an embodiment of the present invention. As one with ordinary skill in the art will readily appreciate, a client/server network is only one type of network, and a variety of other configurations, such as peer-to-peer connections, are also considered networks. In a client/server network, a plurality of nodes are interconnected such that the various nodes send and/or receive information to/from one another. As shown here, a server node 558 is interconnected with a plurality of network components using connection 551 such as a token ring, Ethernet, telephone modem connection, radio or microwave connection, parallel cables, serial cables, coaxial cables, telephone lines, universal serial bus "USB", Firewire, Bluetooth, fiber optics, infrared "IR", radio frequency "RF", or other wireless communications, and the like, or combinations thereof.

Display case 400 is proximately located to LCD display device 552 and input device 554. Additionally, printing device 556 can also be proximately located to display case 400 for creating a printout of the coffee selection process. Display device 552 and

input device 554 are connected to server 558. Server 558 executes the functions of the coffee selection advisor and accesses data storage device 560 to obtain the appropriate selection criteria, identifiers and identification elements.

The coffee selection advisor 500 can be in the form of software code that is
5 executed in whole or in part on a generic computer 562 connected to the World Wide Web. The consumer can receive the software code from server 558 over the network, or from a software storage device 575 that contains all the necessary code to turn generic computer 562 in coffee selection advisor 500.

In one embodiment of the present invention, coffee selection advisor 500 displays
10 requested taste preference information on the display device of generic computer 562 which is connected to the World Wide Web. Coffee selection advisor 500, after receiving the requested taste preference data and selecting the appropriate coffee classification and/or coffee products, then allows the consumer to purchase the selected coffee products. Purchase may be made over both secure or unsecured e-commerce transaction servers and
15 the purchased coffee products can then be shipped directly to the consumer.

After having requested information from a consumer regarding the consumer's taste preferences, comparing that information against the selection criteria and having selected a classification of coffee products from among two or more available classifications, the method of the present invention calls for displaying information back to
20 the consumer identifying the products which make up the classification, thereby allowing the consumer to purchase such products. This provision of information may be provided through the use of packaging indicia. For example, in preferred embodiments where there are six available classifications of coffee products, each of the four systems might have a unique number, color, symbol, or some combination of these, associated with it. Products
25 which make up each of the six classifications could then be packaged in packages marked with the corresponding unique number, color, or symbol.

In yet another embodiment of the present invention, the multiple coffee products making up a given classification are packaged together in a common package. This

allows a consumer to purchase an entire classification in a “sampler pack” format without having to gather the required products.

While particular embodiments of the present invention have been illustrated and described, it would be obvious to those skilled in the art that various other changes and
5 modifications can be made without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention. Any of the aspects of the invention of the present invention found to offer advantages over the state of the art may be used separately or in any suitable combination to achieve some or all of the benefits of the invention disclosed herein.

CLAIMS

1. A method for the selection of a type of coffee by a consumer from a plurality of options, said method comprising the steps of:

5 requesting information from said consumer regarding said consumer's taste preferences, said information collection being accomplished through the use of a coffee selection advisor;

10 said coffee selection advisor selecting a classification of coffee products from among at least two available classifications, each of said classifications comprising one or more different coffee products, wherein each of said available classifications corresponds to a predetermined range of taste preferences; and

15 displaying information from said coffee selection advisor to said consumer identifying the coffee products within said selected classification thereby allowing the consumer to identify, and optionally purchase, one or more of said products; wherein

said coffee selection advisor is proximate to a display case containing at least one coffee product within each of said available classifications.

- 20 2. The method of Claim 1 wherein said coffee selection advisor is fixedly mounted to a shelf display unit.

3. The method of Claim 1 wherein said coffee selection advisor comprises a modified slide-rule type device.

- 25 4. The method of Claim 1 wherein said coffee selection advisor comprises a printed chart and accompanying instructions for use.

5. The method of Claim 1 wherein said coffee selection advisor comprises an interactive computer.

6. The method of Claim 1 wherein said taste preferences information comprises information regarding said consumer's preferences with respect to coffee roast character.

5 7. The method of Claim 1 wherein said taste preferences information comprises information regarding said consumer's preferences with respect to food flavor intensity.

8. The method of Claim 7 wherein said information regarding said consumer's preferences with respect to food flavor intensity is elicited by collecting information from said consumer regarding said consumer's preferences with
10 respect to salsa or pepper sauce.

9. The method of Claim 1 wherein the number of said available classifications is between 4 and 6.

10. A method for the selection of a type of coffee by a consumer from a plurality of options, said method comprising the steps of:

15

requesting information from said consumer regarding said consumer's taste preferences;

20

selecting a classification of coffee products from among at least two available classifications, each of said classifications comprising one or more different coffee products, wherein each of said available classifications corresponds to a predetermined range of taste preferences; and

25

displaying information to said consumer identifying the coffee products within said selected classification thereby allowing the consumer to identify, and optionally purchase, one or more of said products; wherein

said classifications comprise at least a first classification and a second classification wherein said first classification contains a coffee product having a

Hunter color of greater than about 15L and said second classification contains a coffee product having a Hunter color of less than about 15L.

11. The method of Claim 10 wherein the step of displaying said information to the consumer regarding the products within said selected classification is accomplished through the use of packaging indicia.
12. The method of Claim 10 wherein the number of said available classifications is between 3 and 8, inclusive.
13. The method of Claim 12 wherein the number of said available classifications is 6.
14. The method of Claim 10 wherein a plurality of different coffee products within one of said available classifications is packaged in a common package.
15. The method of Claim 10 wherein said first classification contains a coffee product having a Hunter color of greater than about 17L and said second classification contains a coffee product having a Hunter color of less than about 13L.
16. The method of Claim 15 wherein said first classification contains a coffee product having a Hunter color of greater than about 18L and said second classification contains a coffee product having a Hunter color of less than about 11L.
17. A method for the selection of a type of coffee by a consumer from a plurality of options, said method comprising the steps of:
 - requesting information from said consumer regarding said consumer's taste preferences, wherein said information request step is performed by prompting the consumer to answer no more than four questions designed to elicit said taste preference information;
 - selecting a classification of coffee products from among at least two available classifications, each of said classifications comprising one or more different coffee products, wherein each of said available classifications corresponds to a

predetermined range of taste preferences; and

displaying information to said consumer identifying the coffee products within
said selected classification thereby allowing the consumer to identify and purchase
one or more of said products.

18. The method of Claim 17 wherein at least one of said questions regard taste
preferences with respect to food and beverages other than coffee.

19. A method for the selection of a type of coffee by a consumer from a plurality of
options, said method comprising the steps of:

requesting information from said consumer regarding said consumer's preferences
with respect to coffee roast character;

requesting information from said consumer regarding said consumer's preferences
with respect to food flavor intensity;

selecting a classification of coffee products from among at least two available
classifications, each of said classifications comprising one or more different coffee
products, wherein each of said available classifications corresponds to a
predetermined range of taste preferences; and

displaying information to said consumer identifying the coffee products within
said selected classification thereby allowing the consumer to identify, and
optionally purchase one or more of said products, wherein

said classifications comprise at least a first classification and a second
classification wherein said first classification contains a coffee product having a
Hunter color of greater than about 15L and said second classification contains a
coffee product having a Hunter color of less than about 15L.

20. A method for the selection of a type of coffee by a consumer from a plurality of
options, said method comprising the steps of:

(a) requesting information from said consumer regarding said consumer's preferences with respect to coffee roast character;

(b) requesting information from said consumer regarding said consumer's preferences with respect to food flavor intensity;

(c) selecting a classification of coffee products from among at least two available classifications, each of said classifications comprising one or more different coffee products, wherein each of said available classifications corresponds to a predetermined range of taste preferences; and

(d) providing information to said consumer identifying the coffee products within said selected classification thereby allowing the consumer to identify, and optionally purchase, one or more of said products; wherein

steps (a) and (b) are performed through the use of an interactive device, said device allowing said consumer to indicate said preferences on a scale of at least 6 options.

21. The method of Claim 20 wherein steps (a) and (b) are performed through the use of an interactive device, said device allowing said consumer to indicate said preferences on a scale of 11 options.

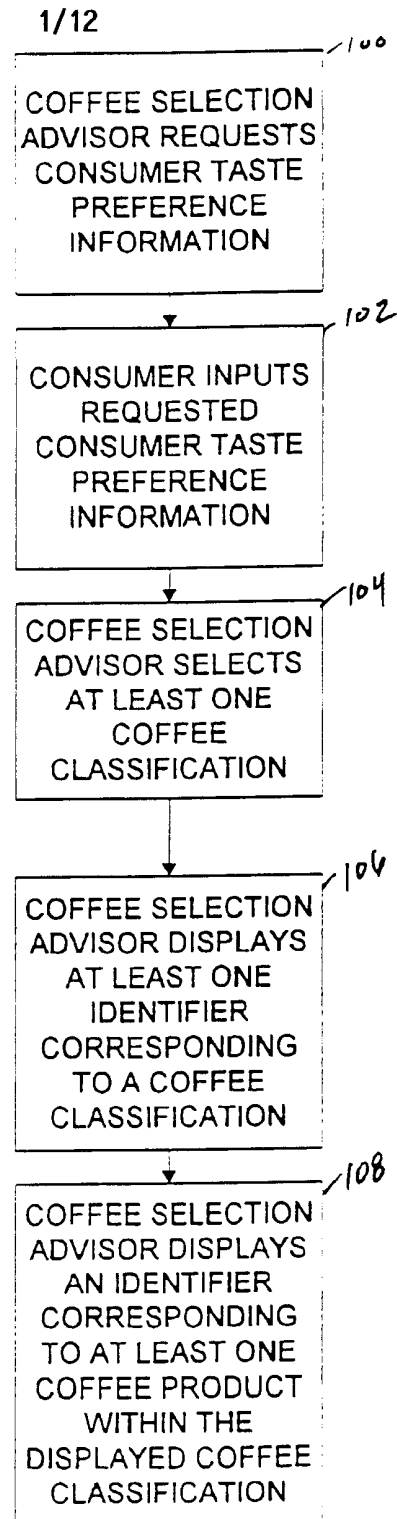


Fig. 1

2/12

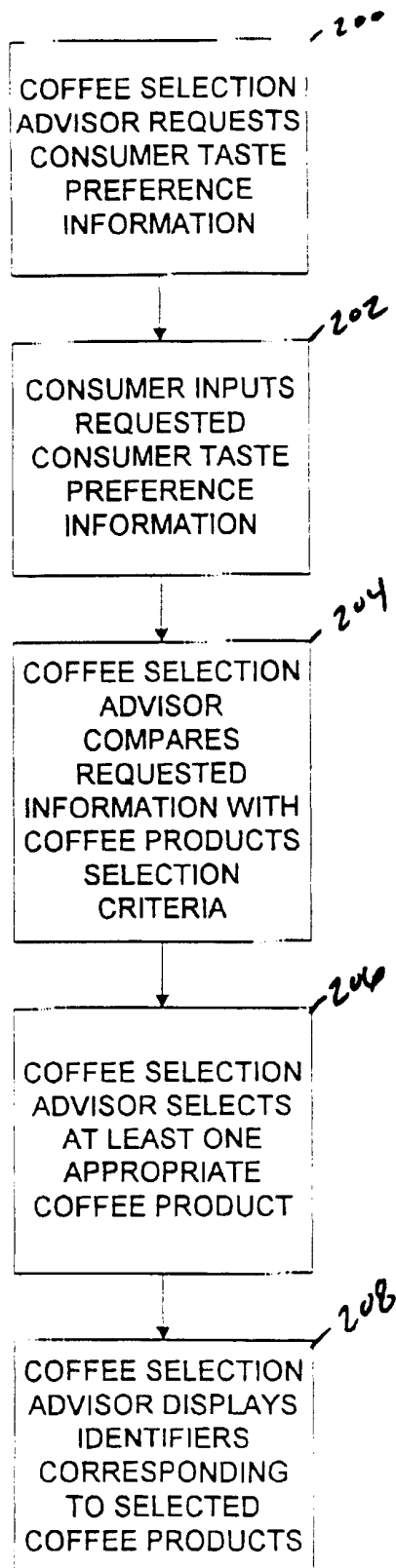


Fig. 2

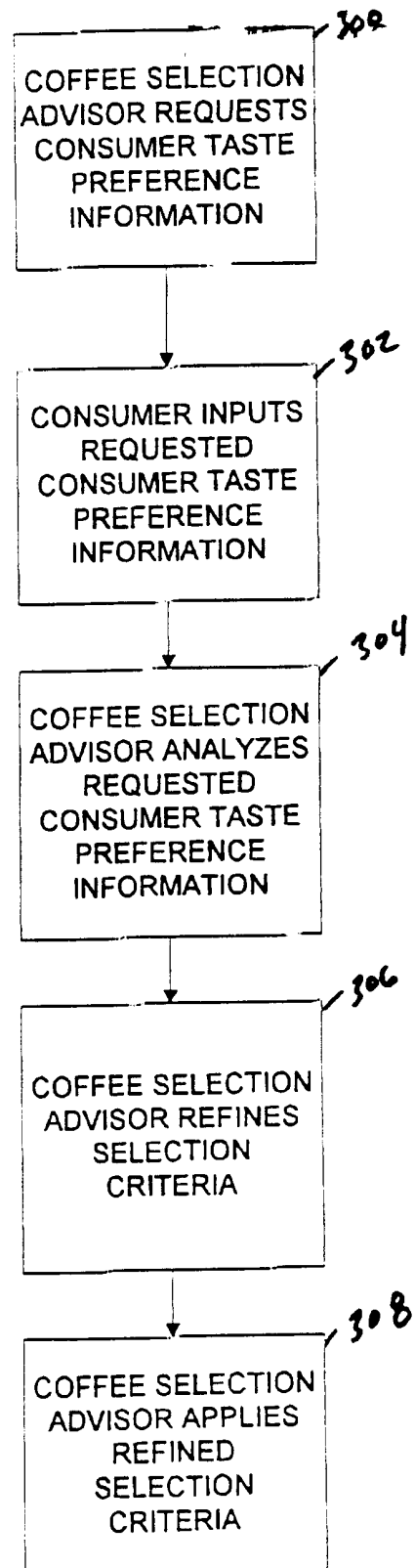


Fig. 3

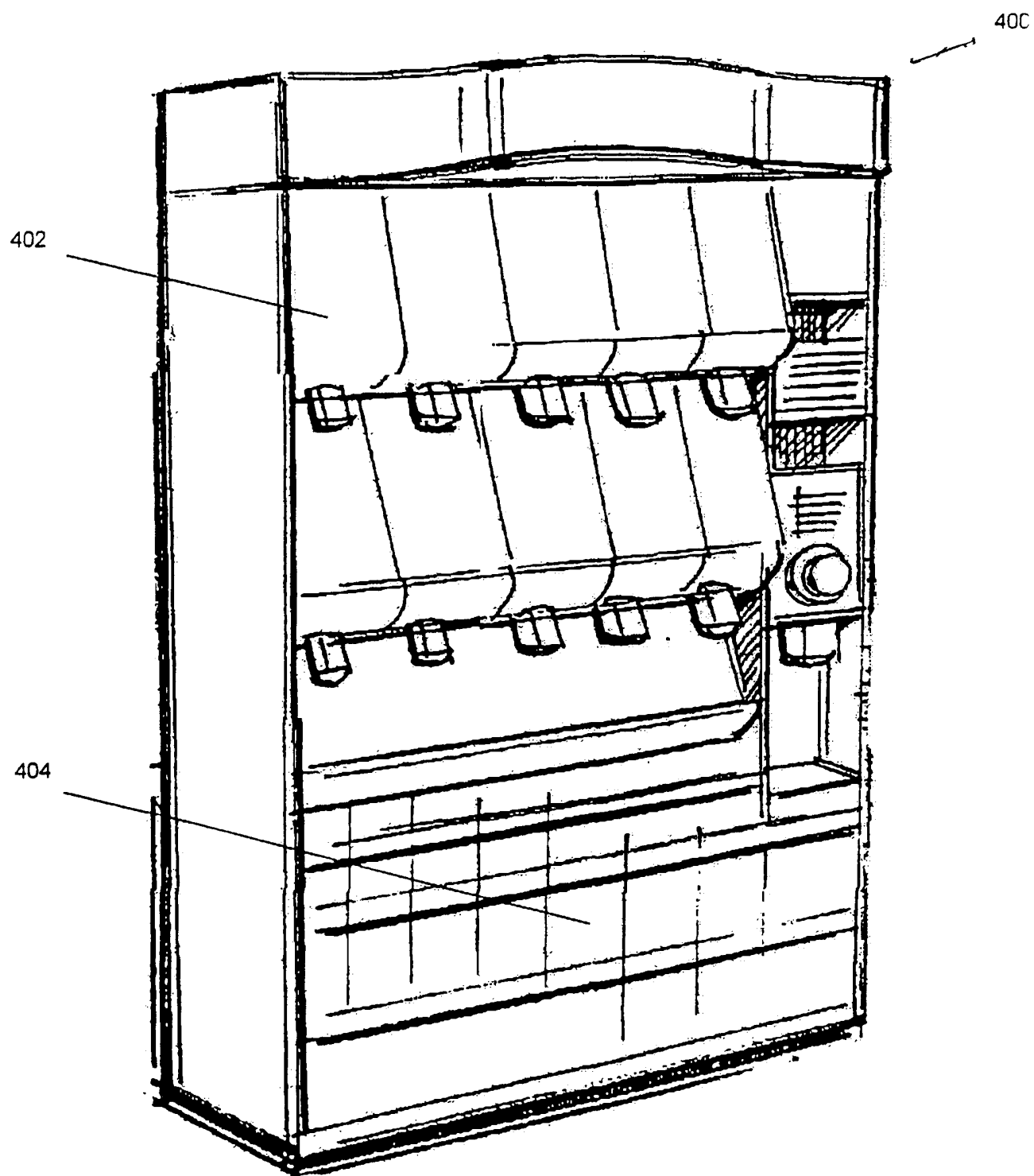


Fig. 4

4/12

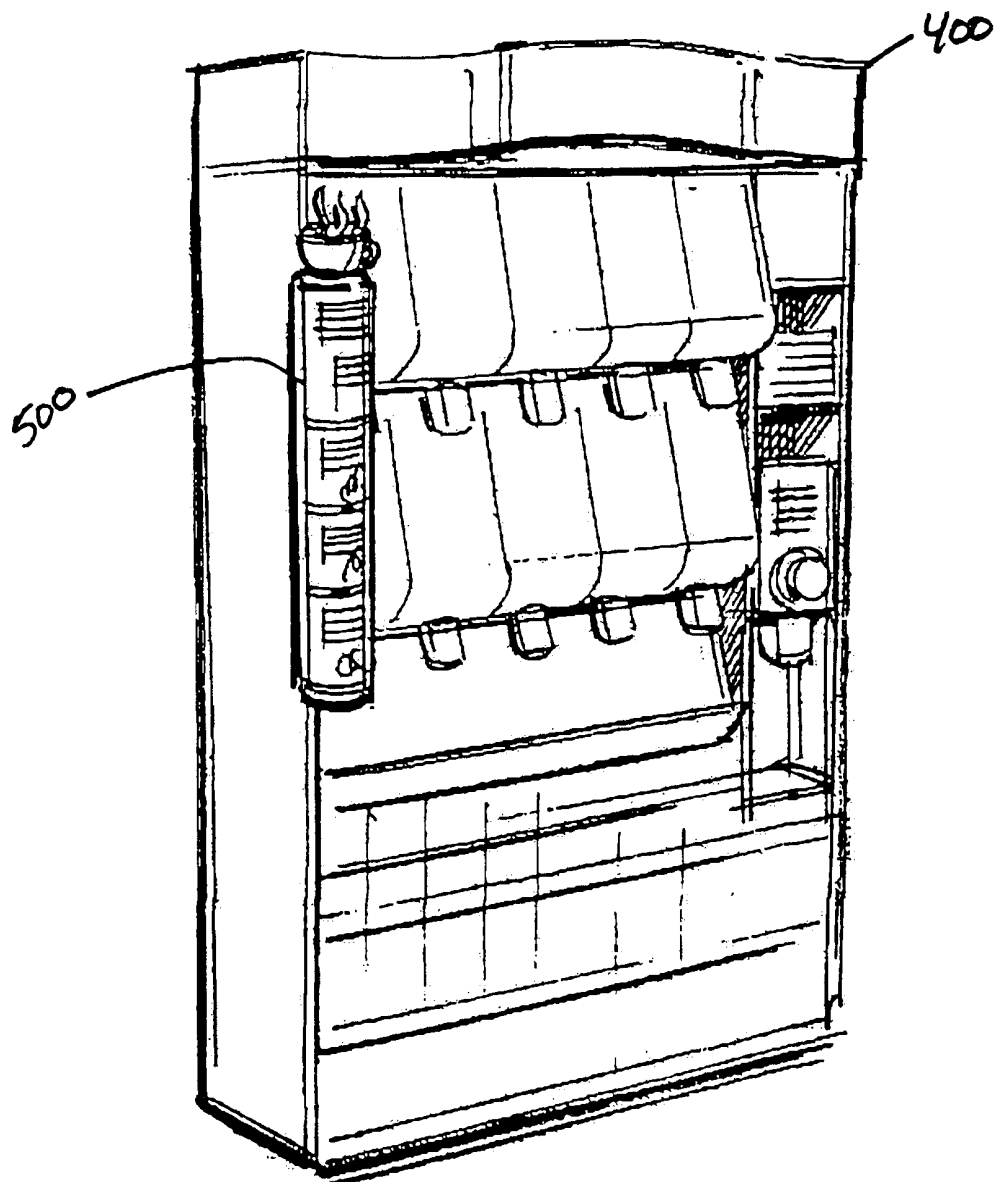


Fig. 5a

5/12

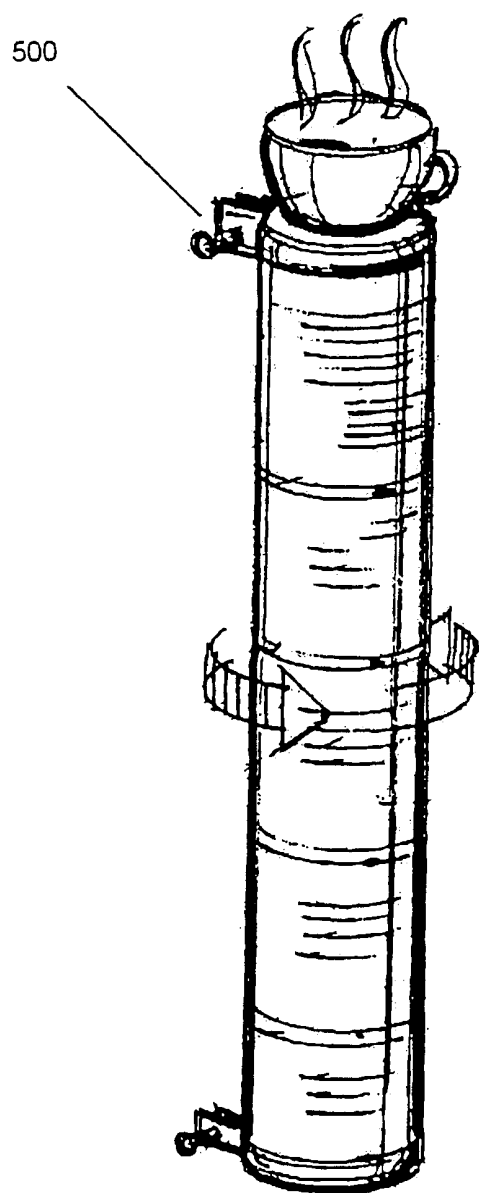


Fig. 5b

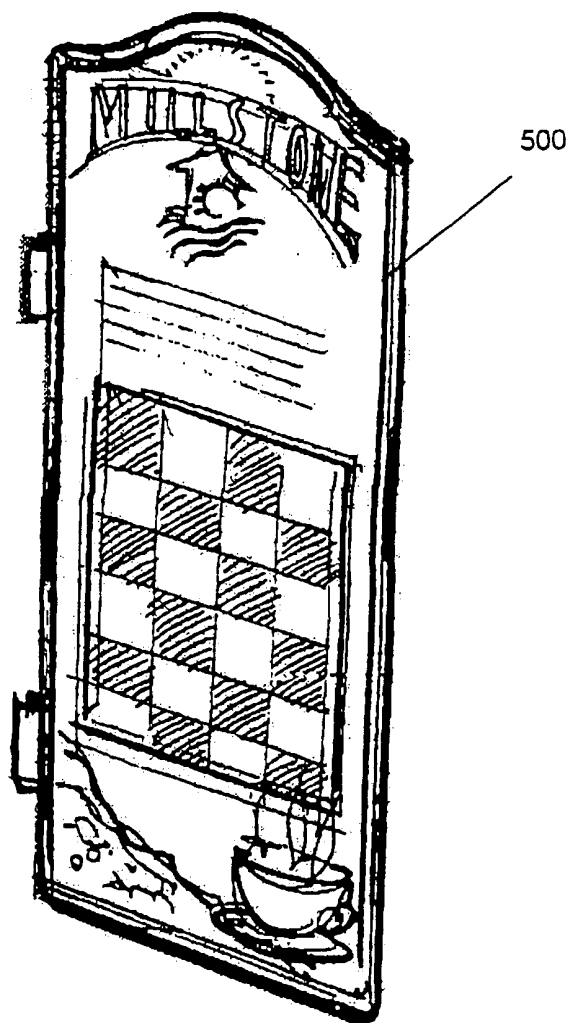


Fig. 6

6/12

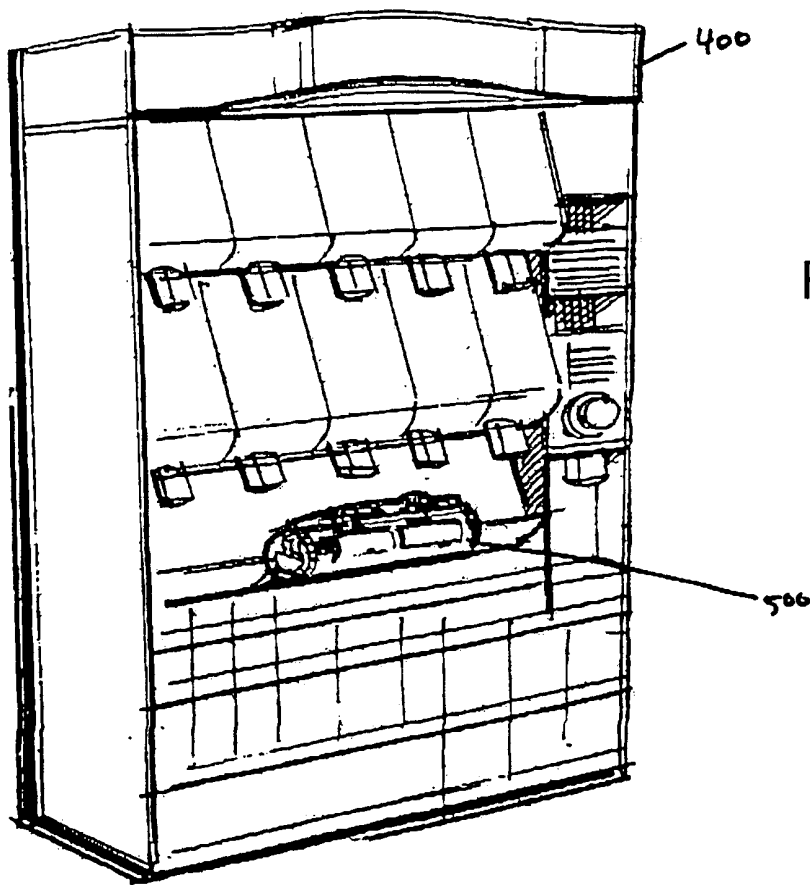


Fig. 7a

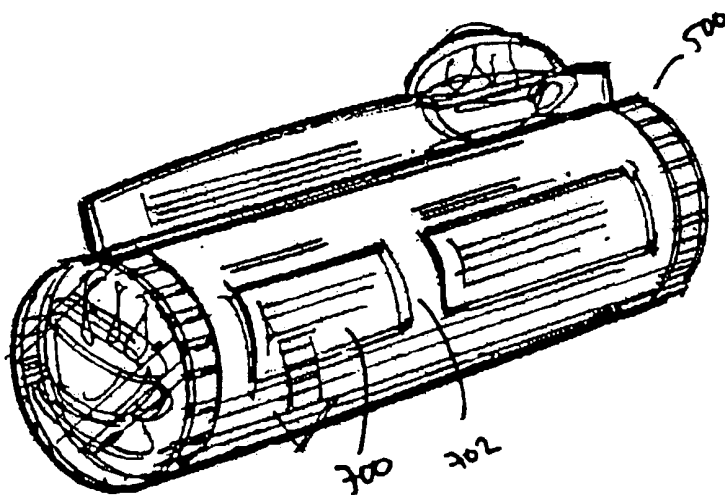


Fig. 7b

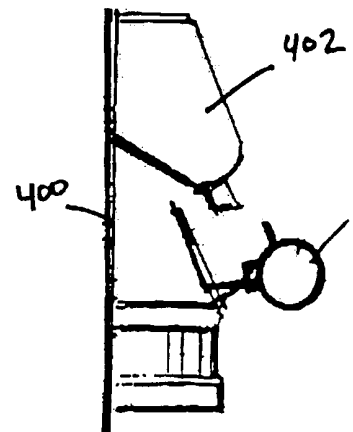


Fig. 7c

7/12

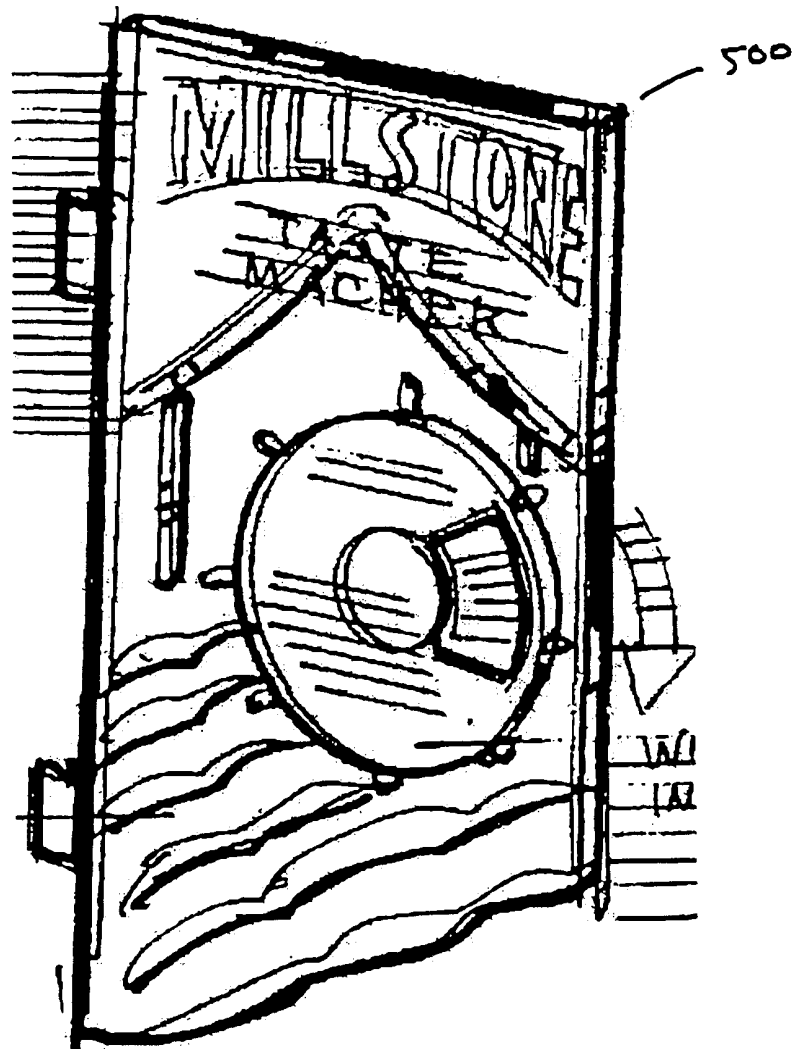


Fig. 8

8/12

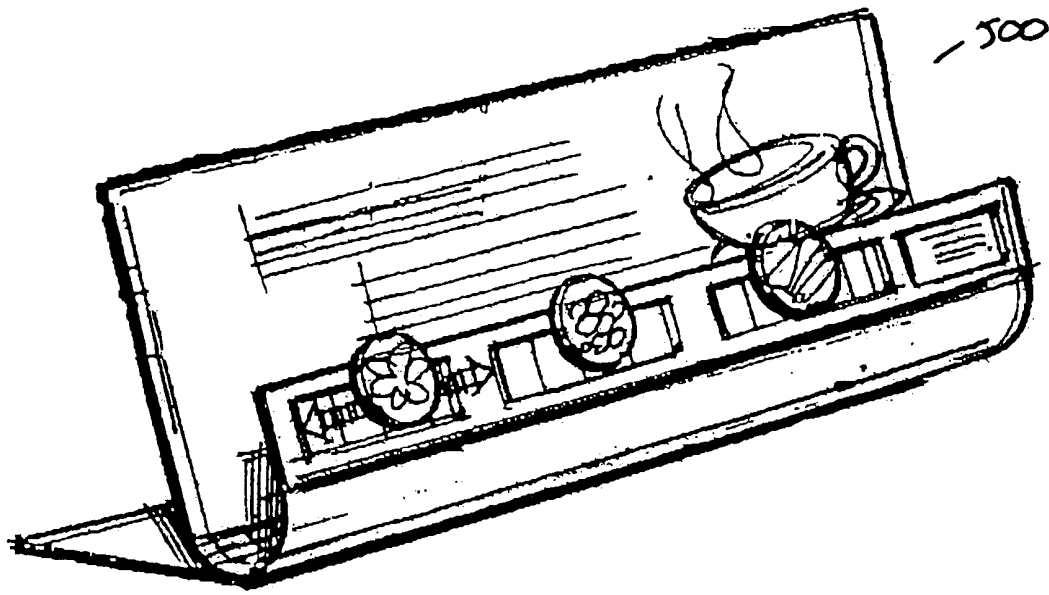


Fig. 9

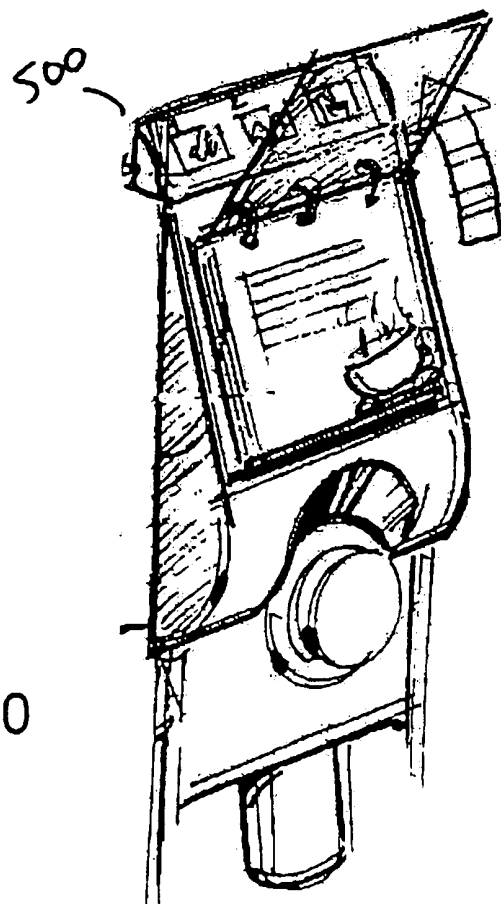


Fig. 10

9/12

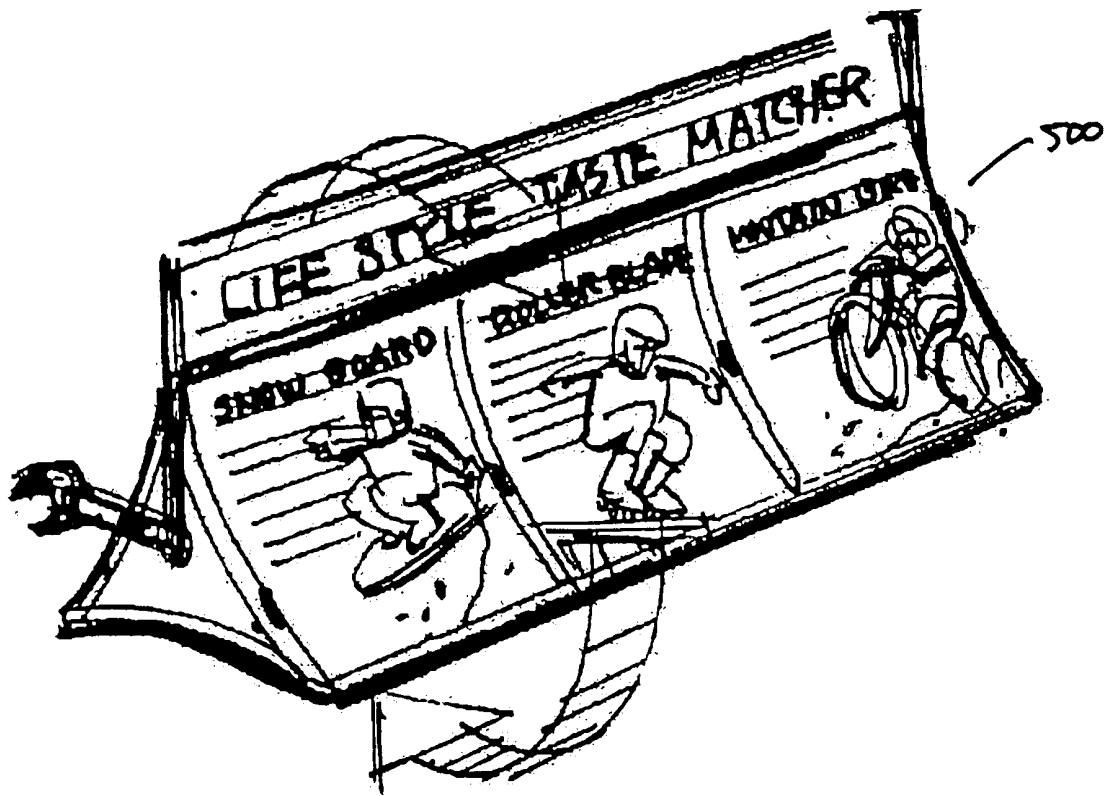
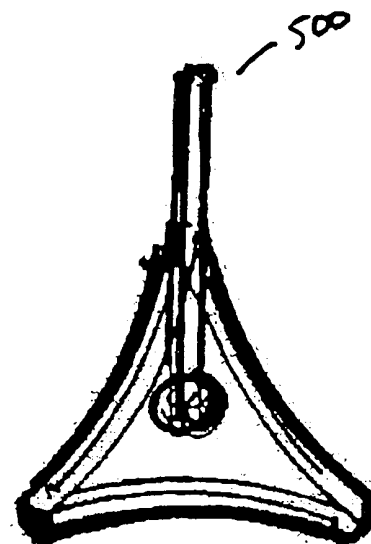


Fig. 11a

Fig. 11b



10/12

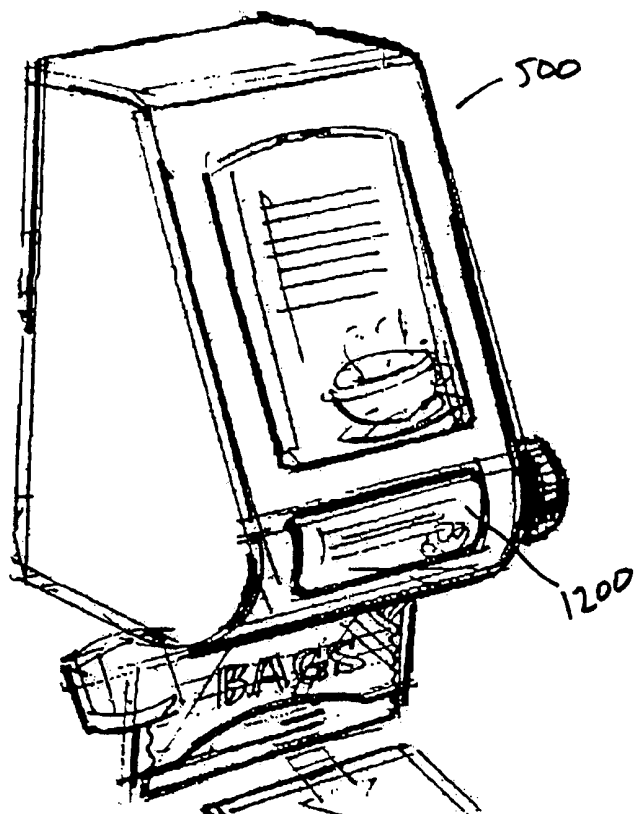


Fig. 12a

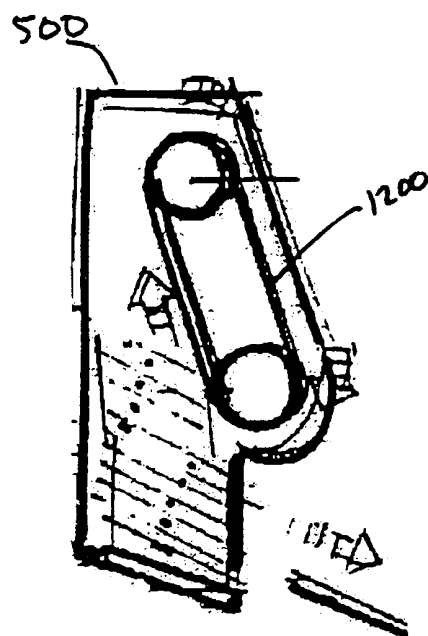


Fig. 12b

11/12

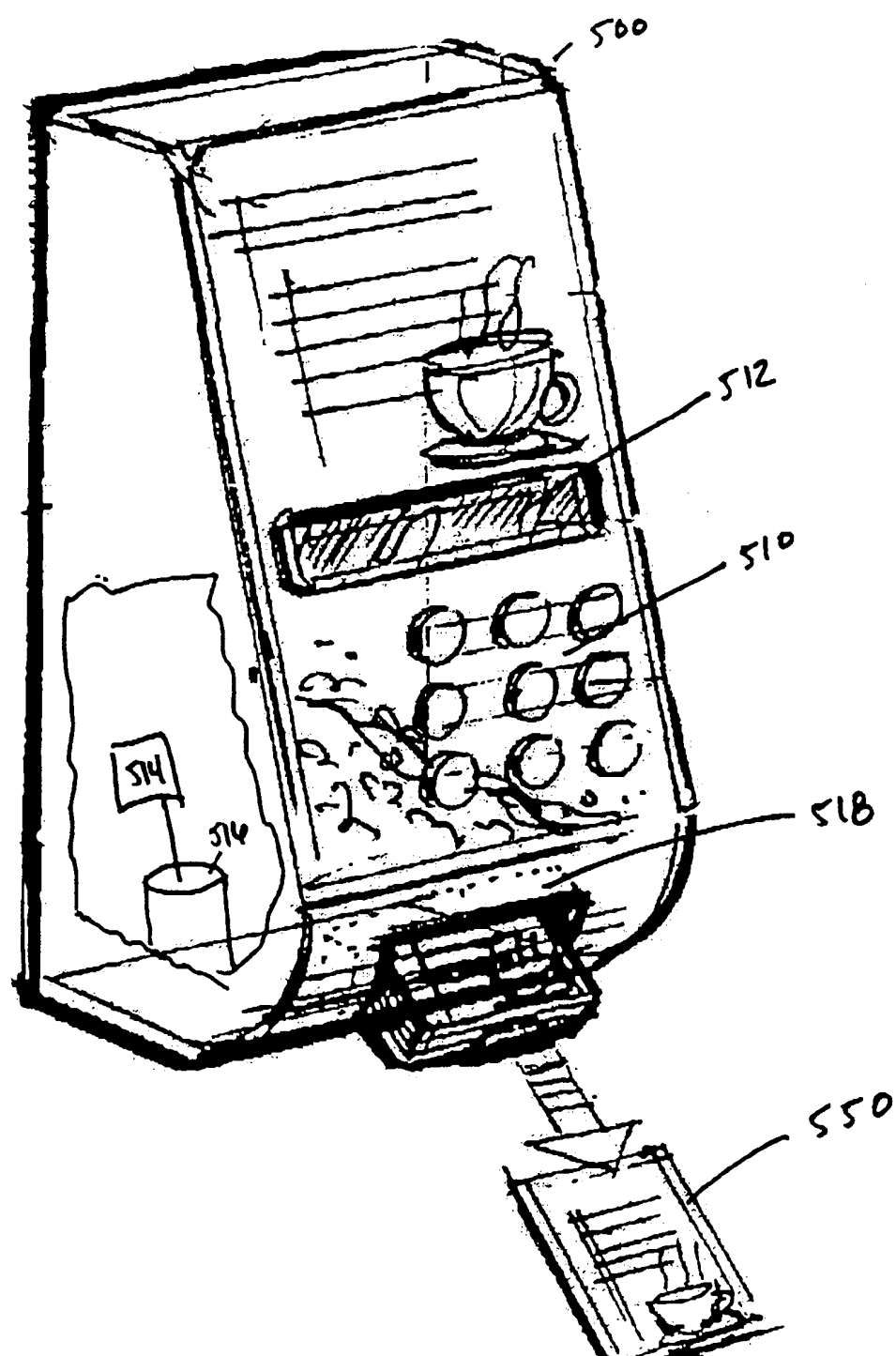


Fig. 13

12/12

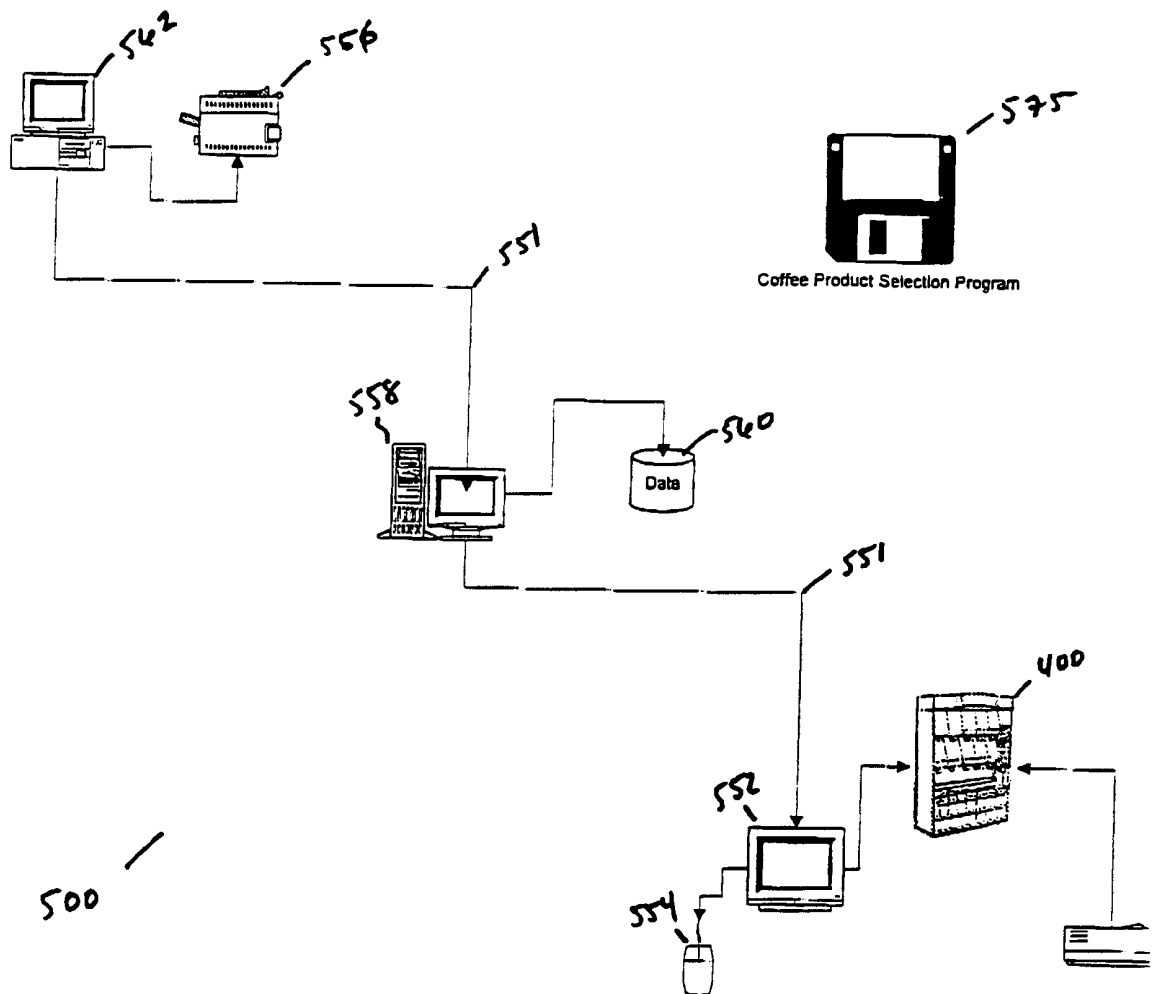


Fig. 14