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(54) **CAN-TOP PRODUCT STORAGE DEVICE
AND RELATED METHODS OF STORING
PRODUCTS**

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

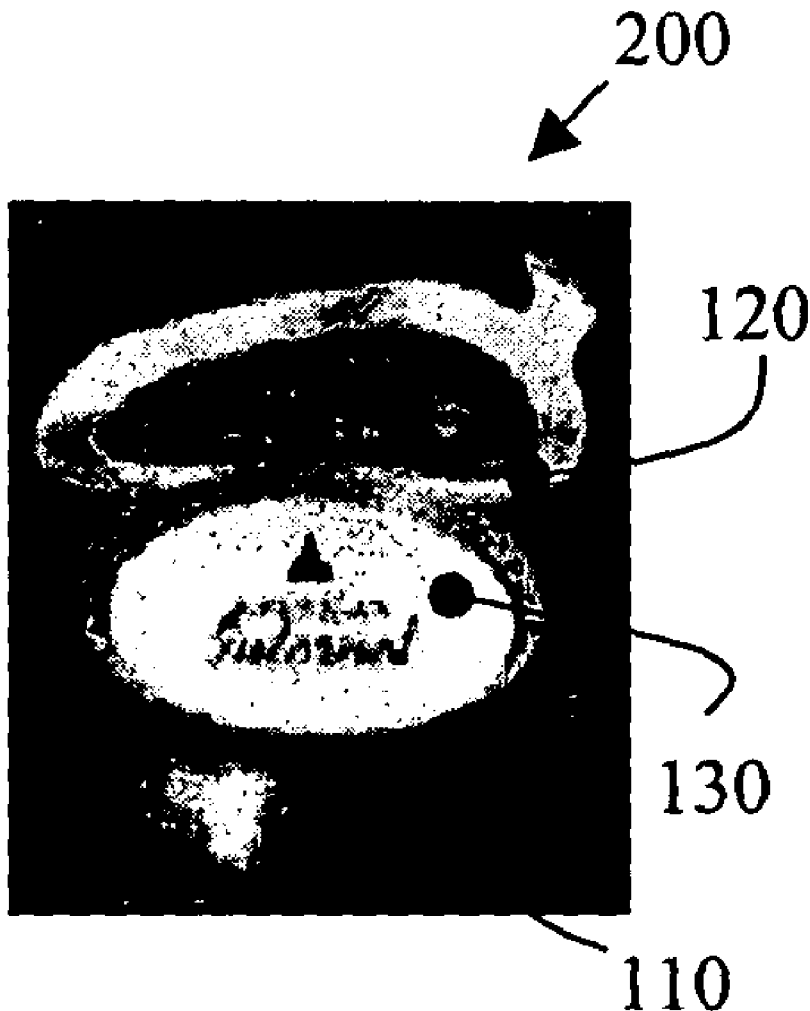
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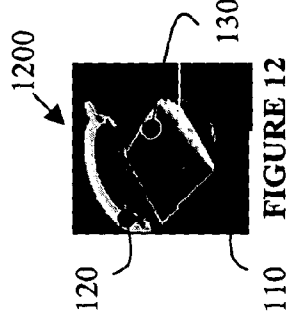
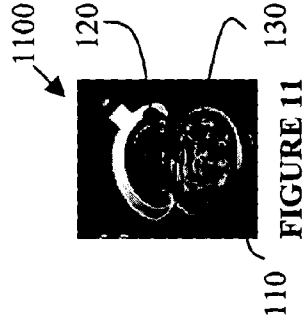
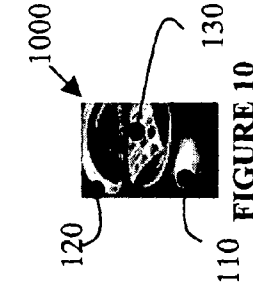
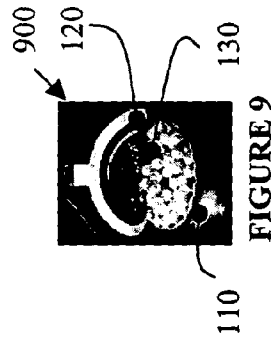
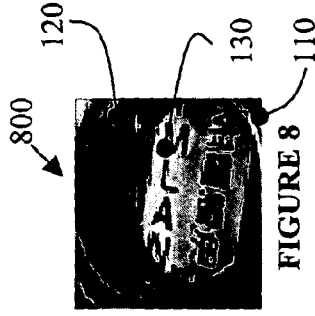
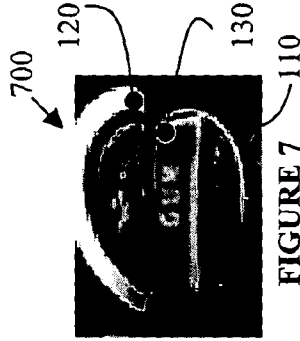
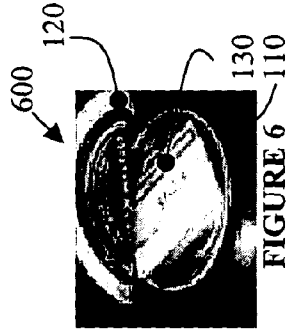
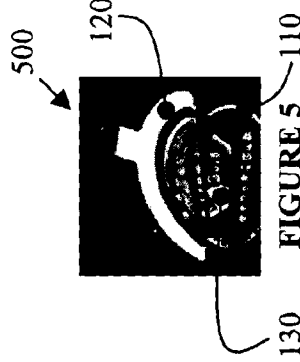
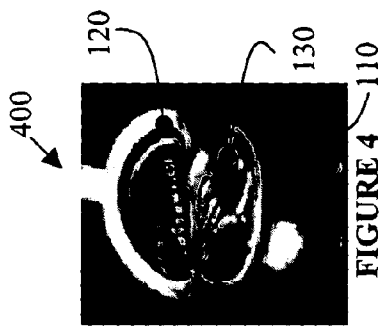
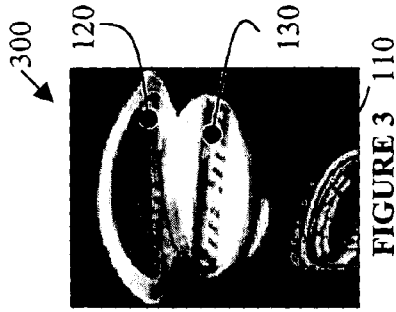
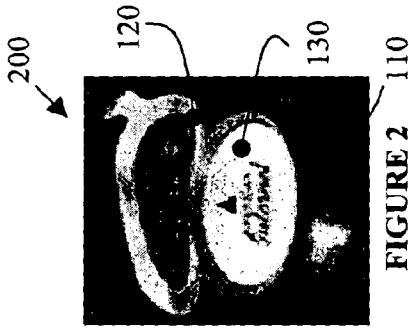
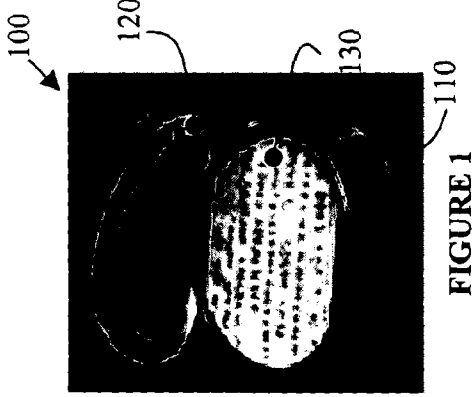
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Related U.S. Application Data

(60) **Provisional application No. 60/465,403, filed on Apr. 25, 2003.**

Disclosed herein are embodiments of systems and methods for storing and distributing promotional items to consumers. In one embodiment, a system comprises a container having an openable orifice on a portion of the container. In this embodiment, the system further includes a cover piece removably coupled over the orifice, where the coupled cover piece creates an enclosed storage space between the openable orifice and the cover piece. In addition, the system for storing promotional items includes a promotional item housed in the enclosed storage space.





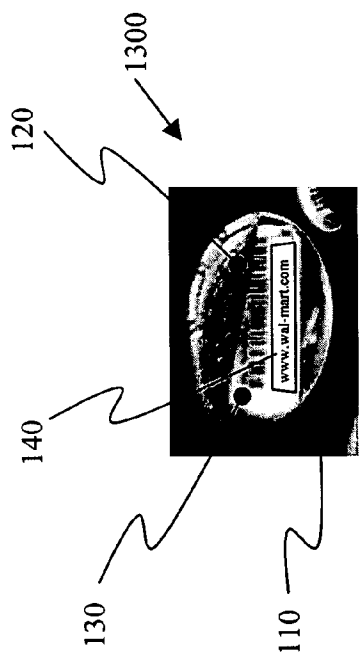


FIGURE 13

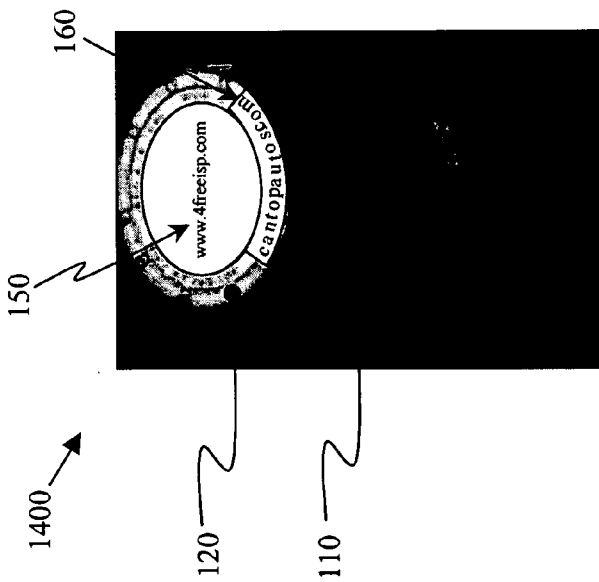


FIGURE 14

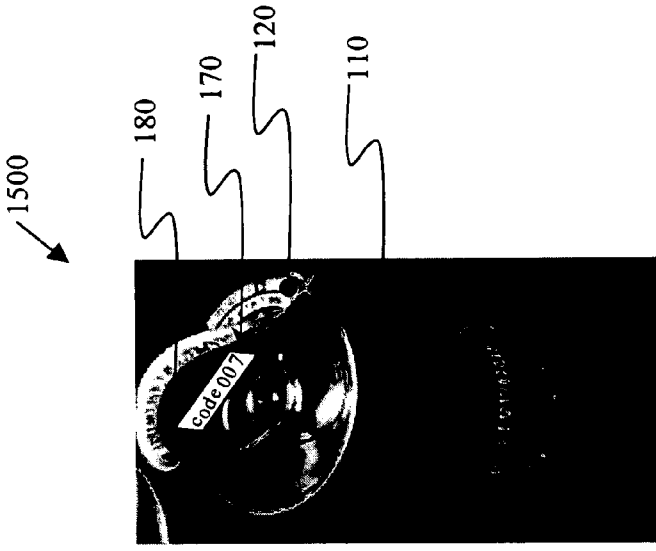


FIGURE 15

CAN-TOP PRODUCT STORAGE DEVICE AND RELATED METHODS OF STORING PRODUCTS

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION

[0001] This Utility Patent Application claims the benefit of U.S. Provisional Application Ser. No. 60/465,403, filed on Apr. 25, 2003, and entitled "Promotional Space Realized Under A Can Top Cover and Aside the Can", which is commonly owned with the present Application and incorporated herein by reference for all purposes.

TECHNICAL FIELD

[0002] Disclosed embodiments herein relate generally to advertisements and promotional messages, and more particularly to systems and methods for providing product storage under can-tops.

BACKGROUND

[0003] The world of advertising has continued to increase over the years. As evidence, advertisers expend millions of dollars each year for product and service promotions and advertisements. In many marketing campaigns, seemingly unrelated products are employed as advertising billboards for the promotion of another product or service. In other campaigns, the actual products of a manufacturer or distributor are employed to advertise contests or other promotions in an effort to boost sales of their products. Of course, while many costly marketing campaigns are successful in their purpose, many are also a failure and result only in the expenditure of more financial resources. Thus, a key to marketing and advertising success is the exposure of advertisements to as many consumers as possible, as well as drawing their attention by engaging consumers through an interactive and innovative technique.

BRIEF SUMMARY

[0004] Disclosed herein are embodiments of systems and methods for storing and distributing promotional items to consumers. In one embodiment, a system comprises a container having an openable orifice on a portion of the container. In this embodiment, the system further includes a cover piece removeably coupled over the orifice, where the coupled cover piece creates an enclosed storage space between the openable orifice and the cover piece. In addition, the system for storing promotional items includes a promotional item housed in the enclosed storage space.

[0005] In another aspect, a method for storing promotional items comprises providing a container having an openable orifice on a portion of the container. In addition, the method includes removeably coupling a cover piece over the orifice to create an enclosed storage space between the openable orifice and the cover piece. Then, the method includes housing a promotional item in the enclosed storage space.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0006] Reference is now made to the following detailed description of preferred embodiments taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings. It is emphasized that various features may not be drawn to scale. In fact, the dimensions of various features may be arbitrarily increased or reduced for clarity of discussion. In addition, it is empha-

sized that some components may not be illustrated for clarity of discussion. Reference is now made to the following descriptions taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, in which:

[0007] **FIG. 1** illustrates one embodiment of a system, and related method, for storing promotional items in accordance with the principles disclosed herein; and

[0008] **FIGS. 2-15** illustrate several other exemplary embodiments of promotional systems and methods for promoting items to consumers, in accordance with the principles disclosed herein.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

[0009] Referring initially to **FIG. 1**, illustrated is one embodiment of a system **100** for storing promotional items in accordance with the principles disclosed herein. Also illustrated is a container **110** in the form of an aluminum soft-drink can. Although shown as a beverage can, the container **110** may be any type of consumer container capable of holding any item, and may be constructed of any material, including plastic and glass.

[0010] Also illustrated in **FIG. 1** is a cover piece **120** removeably coupled to a top of the container **110**. The cover piece **120** may be removable with respect to the container **110** by coupling it thereto using a non-permanent adhesive. In addition, a pull-tab may be located on an edge of the cover piece **120**, and grasped to remove the cover piece **120** from the container **110**. In the illustrated embodiment, the cover piece **120** is removeably affixed to a soft-drink beverage can **110**, over an openable orifice in the beverage can **110**. More specifically, the openable orifice is simply an openable lid located at the top of the soft-drink can **110** and used for drinking the beverage contained therein.

[0011] Furthermore, in some embodiments, an exposed side of the cover piece **120** may include promotional material, perhaps in the form of text, or may simply be left blank to provide a clean, sanitary appearance. In other embodiments, an unexposed surface of the cover piece **120** may include promotional material, such as the promotional text mentioned above. In yet another embodiment, the cover piece **120** may be formed of transparent or translucent material, rather than the opaque material illustrated in **FIG. 1**. Furthermore, the cover piece **120** may further include an edge overlapping at least one side of the container adjacent the orifice, which may include promotional text on an exposed surface thereof, such as an advertising phrase.

[0012] When the cover piece **120** is removeably coupled to the orifice of the container **110** (e.g., the lid in the can **110**), an enclosed storage space between the openable orifice and the cover piece **120** is created. In accordance with the principles disclosed herein, once an enclosed storage space is created between the two, a promotional item **130** may then be housed in the enclosed storage space. The embodiment in **FIG. 1** illustrates a promotional item in the form of a musical concert ticket **130**, but any type of ticket, such as a ticket to a sporting event, may be stored in the space. In a more specific embodiment, the enclosed storage space has an air-tight seal when the cover piece **120** is affixed to the orifice of the container **110**, but such a seal is not required. In addition, other types of seals, such as a hermetic seal, may

also be employed. In those embodiments having a seal, however, perishable items, such as food items, may be stored in the space with a reduced risk of spoiling or contamination.

[0013] In addition to being part of the system 100 and creating the enclosed space, the cover piece 120 also provides a significant advantage by providing protection for the lid from contaminants. For example, in embodiments where the container 110 is a soft-drink can, such cans often sit in warehouses awaiting shipment for prolonged periods of time while exposed to the environment. During this exposure, contaminants, ranging, for example, from rodents or bugs to dirt or mildew, may easily contaminate the lid. By being affixed over the entire lid, the cover piece 120 may provide protection from such contaminants, which makes drinking from or handling the lid of the container 110 more sanitary and worry-free.

[0014] Referring now to FIGS. 2-15, illustrated in the following figures are several exemplary embodiments of promotional systems and methods for promoting items to consumers. Each of the illustrated promotional systems, as well as the process by which each system functions, are constructed and conducted according to the principles disclosed herein. Moreover, although several embodiments are illustrated in the following figures, covered embodiments of the invention are not intended to be limited to those illustrated. Furthermore, providing advertising and promotional campaigns by incorporating the principles of the promotional systems and methods of the embodiments illustrated and discussed herein, beneficially permits advertisers and promoters to extend their campaigns to any products and packages capable of holding a cover piece employable to create a storage space between it and the container to which it is attached for storage of promotional items.

[0015] Turning now to FIG. 2, illustrated is another embodiment of a system 200 for storing promotional items in accordance with the principles disclosed herein. The system 200 also includes a container 110 and a cover piece 120 removeably affixed to the top of the container 110. In this embodiment, the cover piece 120 has been removed by a consumer to reveal a promotional item 130 in the form of free Internet access from a particular Internet Service Provider (ISP).

[0016] Similarly, FIG. 3 illustrates another embodiment of a system 300 as disclosed herein, also having a promotional item 130 related to Internet access. The system 300 in FIG. 3 also includes the container 110, and the cover piece 120 removeably affixed to the top of the container 110. However, in this embodiment, the Internet-related promotional item 130 is simply in the form of an advertisement for an ISP, and does not provide free Internet access to consumers. Of course, any number of alternative embodiments related to Internet access may also be envisioned.

[0017] Looking now at FIG. 4, illustrated is yet another embodiment of a system 400 for storing promotional items as described herein. The illustrated system 400 also includes a container 110, and a cover piece 120 removeably affixed to the top of the container 110. In this embodiment, however, the cover piece 120 has been removed by a consumer to reveal a promotional item 130 in the form of a key. In a more specific embodiment, the key 130 may be an automobile key for use in a contest where the consumer who purchases a container 110 having the key 130 wins the automobile. In a

similar embodiment, the key 130 may be one of several keys distributed all over the country, only one of which is the winning key.

[0018] Referring now to FIG. 5, illustrated is a further embodiment of a system 500 for storing promotional items as described herein. This system 500 also includes the container 110, and the cover piece 120 removeably affixed to the top of the container 110. In this embodiment, however, the cover piece 120 has been removed by a consumer to reveal a promotional item 130 in the form of a movie or cinema ticket. Such a ticket may be valid for admission into a specific chain of movie theaters sponsoring the promotion, or may provide the consumer with a discount or free goods if the promotional item 130 is returned to the movie theater.

[0019] Turning now to FIG. 6, illustrated is still another embodiment of a system 600 for storing promotional items as described herein. The illustrated system 600 also includes the container 110 and the cover piece 120 removeably affixed to the top of the container 110. In this embodiment, however, the cover piece 120 has been removed by a consumer to reveal a promotional item 130 in the form of product or service coupon. In such an embodiment, the coupon 130 may be redeemed at the storing sponsoring the promotion for a discount on goods or services purchased by the consumer.

[0020] FIG. 7 illustrates yet a further embodiment of a system 700 for storing promotional items as described herein. The illustrated system 700 also includes a container 110 and a cover piece 120 removeably affixed to the top of the container 110 as described above. In this embodiment, however, the cover piece 120 has been removed by a consumer to reveal a promotional item 130 in the form of a food item. More particularly, the food item 130 stored in the storage area created beneath the cover piece 120 is a stick of chewing gum. Of course, other types of food items, both perishable and nonperishable, may be stored in the storage space.

[0021] Looking now at FIG. 8, illustrated is another embodiment of a system 800 for storing promotional items as described herein. The illustrated system 800 also includes a container 110 and a cover piece 120 removeably affixed to the top of the container 110. In this embodiment, however, the cover piece 120 has been removed by a consumer to reveal a promotional item 130 in the form of promotional flyer. In such embodiments, the promotional flyer 130 may be written in a language specifically selected to cater to the consumer of the particular product provided in the container 110. For example, if a beverage produced overseas is imported and targeted for sale to consumers originating from that producing country, the language selected might be the language common to that foreign country. Of course, the promotional items 130 may be flyers printed in any language, and may include content directed towards product advertisements, event promotions, or even political commentary, without limitation.

[0022] Turning now to FIG. 9, illustrated is still a further embodiment of a system 900 for storing promotional items as described herein. The illustrated system 900 also includes a container 110 and a cover piece 120 removeably affixed to the top of the container 110. In this embodiment, however, the cover piece 120 has been removed by a consumer to reveal a promotional item 130 in the form of jewelry. In the

illustrated embodiment, the jewelry **130** is a pearl necklace, but other types of jewelry, for example, bracelets and earrings, may also be used as the promotional items **130** stored under the cover piece **120**. In another embodiment, the jewelry **130** may be costume jewelry, for instance, Mardi Gras beads, distributed with containers **110** sold during a Mardi Gras party for consumers to wear during that party.

[0023] Referring now to **FIG. 10**, illustrated is a further embodiment of a system **1000** for storing promotional items as described herein. The illustrated system **400** also includes a container **110** and a cover piece **120** removeably affixed to the top of the container **110**. In this embodiment, however, the cover piece **120** has been removed by a consumer to reveal a promotional item **130** in the form of a lottery or lotto ticket. Once revealed, the consumer may then use the lottery or lotto ticket, for example, by scratching-off portions if the ticket is a "scratch-off" ticket, in attempt to win a larger prize. Depending on the embodiment, the lottery or lotto ticket may be a private promotion made to look like an official contest, or may be indeed be a state-sponsored gambling contest. In other similar embodiments, the promotional item **130** may be a game piece for use with an ongoing promotional game associated with a particular vendor or retailer.

[0024] Looking now at **FIG. 11**, illustrated is yet a further embodiment of a system **1100** for storing promotional items as described herein. The illustrated system **1100** also includes a container **110** and a cover piece **120** removeably affixed to the top of the container **110**. In this embodiment, however, the cover piece **120** has been removed by a consumer to reveal a promotional item **130** in the form of paper currency. In this embodiment, the lucky consumer would simply peel the cover piece **120** off to reveal an instant cash prize. Of course, any denomination of currency may be stored under the cover piece **120**, as well as equivalents of currency, such as gift certificates or "play money" for use in place of cash at specific locations.

[0025] Turning to **FIG. 12**, illustrated is still another embodiment of a system **1200** for storing promotional items as described herein. The illustrated system **1200** also includes a container **110** and a cover piece **120** removeably affixed to the top of the container **110**. In this embodiment, however, the cover piece **120** has been removed by a consumer to reveal a promotional item **130** in the form of a bank draft (e.g., a check). With this embodiment, sponsors or vendors weary of storing actual cash under the cover piece **120** may simply store the check **130** to provide the prize amount, as illustrated. In a related embodiment, a verification of the purchase of the container **110** may also be employed, such as presenting a purchase receipt when cashing the check, in order to further deter theft or otherwise unauthorized obtaining of the containers **110** in order to find such checks **130**.

[0026] Referring now to **FIG. 13**, illustrated is another embodiment of a system **1300** for storing promotional items as described herein. As before, this system **1330** also includes a container **110** and a cover piece **120** removeably affixed to the top of the container **110**. The system **1300** shown in **FIG. 13** is similar to that shown in **FIG. 6** in that a coupon is provided as the promotional item **130** under the cover piece **120**. However, in this embodiment, the promotional item **130** also includes an Internet address printed

thereon for use by the consumer to access other material, perhaps associated with the company providing the promotional item, through the Internet. Similarly, the Internet address, such as the illustrated "www.wal-mart.com", may be associated with the producer or retailer of the product in the container **110**. Of course, other types of promotional text and materials may also be printed on the promotional item **130**, and may be associated with any number of entities involved.

[0027] In another embodiment, the promotional item **130** under the cover piece **120** may also include a unique identifier associated with the Internet address, allowing the entity associated with the Internet site to determine the origin of the discovery of the Internet address as the system **1300**. Moreover, the promotional item **130** may include a promotional code, for example, to provide a discount to a consumer who navigated to the Internet site via the promotional system **130**. For a more detailed look at employing unique identifier and Internet addresses on can-top promotions, see co-pending patent application Ser. No. 10/455, 225, entitled "DECODING SYSTEMS FOR MULTI-PART MESSAGES AND RELATED METHODS OF DECODING MESSAGES."

[0028] Looking now at **FIG. 14**, illustrated is still another embodiment of a system **1400** for storing promotional items as described herein. The illustrated system **1400** also includes a container **110** and a cover piece **120** removeably affixed to the top of the container **110**, as in all the embodiments discussed above. In this embodiment, however, the cover piece **120** may also include one or more Internet addresses **150** printed on an exposed side of the cover piece **120**. As with the embodiment of **FIG. 13**, the Internet address **150** may be associated with the company providing the promotional item, associated with the producer or retailer of the product in the container **110**, or associated with any other entity involved in the manufacture, distribution, sale, or even the promotion of the product in the container **110** itself or the promotional item **130** stored under the cover piece **120**. In addition, a second Internet address **160** may also be included on the cover piece **120**, which may be unrelated to any entity associated with the first Internet address **150**, as illustrated. Of course, such an embodiment allows for increased revenues from such included Internet address **160** provider.

[0029] In a related embodiment, a unique code or other identifier **170** (see **FIG. 15**) may be associated with the Internet address **150**, such that when a consumer visits a website associated with the Internet address **150** and enters the unique code **170**, a promotional offer or gift may be given to the consumer in return for the visit or for entering the unique code **170**. In another related embodiment, a database associated with the website may be maintained and employed to track the source of the consumer's visit to the website from the entering of the unique code **170**. If the unique code **170** is only available from the cover piece **120** advertisement, then a positive link between the can-top advertisement and the consumer's visit to the website may be established. Payments for promotion of the Internet address **150** and website on the cover piece **120** may even be based, at least in part, on the number of visits obtained from the can-top advertisement, in other specific embodiments.

[0030] Turning finally to **FIG. 15**, illustrated is still another embodiment of a system **1500** for storing promo-

tional items as described herein. The illustrated system **1500** also includes a container **110** and a cover piece **120** removably affixed to the top of the container **110**. As mentioned above, a unique code **160** or other type of identifier is included on an unexposed side of the cover piece **120**, to prevent knowledge of the code **160** without purchasing the product in the container **110**.

[0031] Additionally, in this embodiment, as the cover piece **120** is removed by a consumer of the container **110**, promotional material **180** printed on the unexposed side of the cover piece **120** is also revealed. In one embodiment, the promotional material **180** is associated with the promotional item (not illustrated) found in the storage space under the cover piece **120**. Of course, in other embodiments, the promotional material **180**, which may be in the form of advertising text or graphics, may be associated with other entities associated with the promotional system **1500**, such as the manufacturer or retailer of the product in the container **110**, or simply an independent advertiser employing the popularity of the product in the container **110** to reach a wider range of potential customers. Of course, the system **1500** and associated method of promoting items is not limited to any particular example.

[0032] While various embodiments of systems for use in the promotion of items with merchandise, as well as the methods related to employing those systems, have been described above, it should be understood that they have been presented by way of example only, and not limitation. Thus, the breadth and scope of the invention(s) should not be limited by any of the above-described exemplary embodiments, but should be defined only in accordance with the following claims and their equivalents. Moreover, the above advantages and features are effected in described embodiments, but shall not limit the application of the claims to processes and structures accomplishing any or all of the above advantages.

[0033] Additionally, the section headings herein are provided for consistency with the suggestions under 37 CFR 1.77 or otherwise to provide organizational cues. These headings shall not limit or characterize the invention(s) set out in any claims that may issue from this disclosure. Specifically and by way of example, although the headings refer to a "Technical Field," the claims should not be limited by the language chosen under this heading to describe the so-called technical field. Further, a description of a technology in the "Background" is not to be construed as an admission that technology is prior art to any invention(s) in this disclosure. Neither is the "Brief Summary" to be considered as a characterization of the invention(s) set forth in the claims found herein. Furthermore, any reference in this disclosure to "invention" in the singular should not be used to argue that there is only a single point of novelty claimed in this disclosure. Multiple inventions may be set forth according to the limitations of the multiple claims associated with this disclosure, and the claims accordingly define the invention(s), and their equivalents, that are protected thereby. In all instances, the scope of the claims shall be considered on their own merits in light of the specification, but should not be constrained by the headings set forth herein.

What is claimed is:

1. A system for storing promotional items, comprising:
 - a container having an openable orifice on a portion of the container;
 - a cover piece removably coupled over the orifice, the coupled cover piece creating an enclosed storage space between the openable orifice and the cover piece; and
 - a promotional item housed in the enclosed storage space.
2. A system according to claim 1, wherein the container is a soft-drink can and the orifice is an openable lid of the can.
3. A system according to claim 1, wherein the promotional item comprises an Internet address printed thereon, the Internet address associated with an Internet site of an entity related to the promotional item.
4. A system according to claim 1, wherein the cover piece comprises an Internet address printed thereon, the Internet address associated with an Internet site of an entity related to the promotional item.
5. A system according to claim 1, wherein the cover piece further comprises promotional material on an exposed side thereof.
6. A system according to claim 1, wherein the promotional item is selected from the group consisting of:
 - a cinema ticket;
 - a lottery ticket;
 - a concert ticket;
 - a sporting event ticket;
 - a game piece;
 - monetary currency;
 - a food item;
 - a bank draft;
 - a key;
 - a coupon;
 - jewelry;
 - an advertisement;
 - a unique identifier;
 - a promotional code; and
 - an Internet address.
7. A system according to claim 1, wherein the cover piece is opaque.
8. A system according to claim 1, wherein the enclosed storage space comprises an air-tight seal.
9. A system according to claim 1, wherein the cover piece further comprises a pull-tab for grasping to remove the cover piece from over the orifice.
10. A system according to claim 1, wherein the cover piece further comprises promotional material associated with the promotional item on an unexposed side of the cover piece.

11. A method of storing promotional items, comprising:
 providing a container having an openable orifice on a portion of the container;
 removeably coupling a cover piece over the orifice to create an enclosed storage space between the openable orifice and the cover piece; and

housing a promotional item in the enclosed storage space.

12. A method according to claim 11, wherein providing a container having an openable orifice comprises providing a soft-drink can having an openable lid.

13. A method according to claim 11, wherein housing a promotional item comprises housing a promotional item having an Internet address printed thereon, the Internet address associated with an Internet site of an entity related to the promotional item.

14. A method according to claim 11, wherein removeably coupling a cover piece comprises removeably coupling a cover piece having an Internet address printed thereon, the Internet address associated with an Internet site of an entity related to the promotional item.

15. A method according to claim 11, wherein removeably coupling a cover piece comprises removeably coupling a cover piece having promotional material on an exposed side thereof.

16. A method according to claim 11, wherein housing a promotional item comprises housing a promotional item selected from the group consisting of:

- a cinema ticket;
- a lottery ticket;
- a concert ticket;
- a sporting event ticket;

- a game piece;
- monetary currency;
- a food item;
- a bank draft;
- a key;
- a coupon;
- jewelry;
- an advertisement;
- a unique identifier;
- a promotional code; and
- an Internet address.

17. A method according to claim 11, wherein removeably coupling a cover piece comprise removeably coupling an opaque cover piece.

18. A method according to claim 11, wherein removeably coupling a cover piece over the orifice to create an enclosed storage space comprises removeably coupling a cover piece over the orifice to create an enclosed storage space having an air-tight seal.

19. A method according to claim 11, wherein removeably coupling a cover piece comprises removeably coupling a cover piece having a pull-tab for grasping to remove the cover piece from over the orifice.

20. A method according to claim 11, wherein removeably coupling a cover piece comprises removeably coupling a cover piece having promotional material associated with the promotional item on an unexposed side of the cover piece.

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