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(54) Title: AN APPARATUS FOR STORING AND DISPENSING ARTICLES

(57) Abstract

The present invention relates to a method and apparatus adapted to promote the recycling of complex articles, such as, in particular, printer cartridges, toner cartridges and other complex office items. The invention provides an apparatus having storage space arranged to store a number of such complex articles for recycling. Access to the storage space is controlled by a data processor which interacts with a user by way of a visual display unit and control panel. If the user wishes to store an item, he indicates this by way of the control panel and the apparatus is then operable to open a receptacle to receive the used item. When the used item is placed in the receptacle, in preferred embodiments means are provided to determine that the used item is an article of an appropriate type to be stored. These means preferably employ shape recognition. The article will be rejected if it is not of the correct type and accepted and retained in a storage space if it is of the correct type. The preferred apparatus is also arranged to dispense items on request by the user. A preferred feature is that the apparatus will not dispense a new or recycled item if a predetermined ratio of new items dispensed to used items stored by that user would be exceeded. This encourages recycling.

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