Claims:

1. An access and storage system comprising:

a storage component configured to store an item therein or thereon, wherein said item is storable in more than one of a plurality of ~~in an associated~~ storage ~~position~~ positions, wherein said storage component is configured to provide a user direct manual access to said item in said storage position; and

a sensor system configured to track at least one of a user's removal of said item from ~~the~~ an associated storage position or replacement of said item to the associated storage position, wherein said sensor system operates independently of any sensor component secured to said item, wherein the system is configured such that said item resides in its storage position prior to said user identifying the item or attempting to access the item until such time that said user directly manually accesses said item in its storage position.

2. The system of claim 1 wherein said storage component is configured to store a plurality of items therein or thereon in an associated storage position, wherein said storage component is configured to provide said user direct manual access to each of said items in their associated storage position, and wherein said sensor system configured to track at least one of said user's removal of at least one of said items from the associated storage position or replacement of at least one of said items to the associated storage position, wherein said sensor system operates independently of any sensor component secured to any of said items.

3. The system of claim 2 further comprising an identification system for identifying said user and an authorization database operatively coupled to said identification system for tracking which of said items a particular identified user is authorized to access.

4. The system of claim 3 wherein said storage component is configured to provide said user direct manual access to any of said items only after said user is identified by said identification system.

5. The system of claim 4 wherein said storage component is configured to block direct manual access to said items to a user who is not identified by said identification system.

6. The system of claim 3 wherein said storage component is configured to provide said user direct manual access only to said items said user is authorized to access as determined by said authorization database.

7. The system of claim 3 wherein said storage component includes at least one secure storage area which is not directly manually accessible to a user who is not granted access thereto.

8. The system of claim 7 wherein said secure storage area defines an inner volume, and wherein the secure storage area is movable between a closed state in which a user is generally prevented from accessing any items in said inner volume and an open state in which a user is able to directly manually access to items in said inner volume, and wherein the system is configured such that the secure storage area is locked in said closed state until said identification system identifies a user that is authorized to access an item in said secure storage area, at which time said secure storage area is unlocked to enable said secure storage area to move to said open state.

9. The system of claim 8 wherein said secure storage area includes a door or drawer which is movable between an open position and a closed position, and wherein the position of said door or drawer corresponds to the state of the secure storage area.

10. The system of claim 3 wherein said system is configured to prevent removal of an item by a user not authorized to remove such item.

11. The system of claim 3 wherein said system is configured to initiate a notice upon removal or attempted removal of an item by a user not authorized to remove such item.

12. The system of claim 3 further comprising a controller, and wherein said controller is operatively coupled to said identification system, said authorization database and said sensor system.

13. The system of claim 12 wherein said controller is configured to record the identity of each item accessed or attempted to be accessed by each identified user.

14. The system of claim 3 wherein said identification system is configured to identify each user by an identification token carried by said user, or by biometric information, or by information provided by said user.

15. The system of claim 3 wherein said identification system is configured to automatically identify each user without any affirmative action by each user.

16. The system of claim 2 further comprising a controller operatively coupled to said sensor system, and wherein said controller is configured to track levels of inventory of said items in said system.

17. The system of claim 2 further comprising a controller operatively coupled to said sensor system, and wherein said controller is configured to provide access, to an administrator, of levels of inventory of said items in said system and a history of user actions with respect to said system.

18. The system of claim 2 further comprising said items, each item being positioned in its associated storage position.

19. The system of claim 18 wherein each item is manually removable from said storage component.

20. The system of claim 2 further comprising an identification system for identifying a user, wherein the system is configured such each particular item desired to be accessed does not change position from a time said identification system identifies said user until a time said user directly manually accesses said particular item.

21. The system of claim 1 wherein said item does not reside on a helical coil or a dispensing arm when in its storage position.

22. The system of claim 1 wherein said sensor system utilizes only sensors other than RFID sensors.

23. The system of claim 1 wherein said sensor system does not directly measure the movement of said item.

24. The system of claim 1 wherein said sensor system deductively determines the removal or replacement of said item from or to its storage position.

25. The system of claim 1 wherein said sensor system includes a plurality of sensors configured to track said user's accessing of or replacement of said item.

26. The system of claim 1 wherein said storage component takes the form of a dispenser configured to dispense a plurality of items of only a single type, and wherein said sensor system is configured to track removal of any items from said dispenser.

27. The system of claim 26 wherein the system further comprises an identification system for identifying a user, and wherein the dispenser is positioned in a secured area, and wherein the system is configured to provide a user direct manual access to said dispenser only after said user is identified by said identification system.

28. The system of claim 1 wherein said storage component is positioned in a manually carryable tray, along with a plurality of other storage components.

29. The system of claim 1 wherein said storage component takes the form of manually carryable tray, said tray storing or receiving a plurality of dispensers therein, each dispenser storing a plurality of items therein in their storage positions for removal therefrom by a user.

30. The system of claim ~~28~~ 29 wherein said sensor system is configured to track at least one of said user's removal of items from each dispenser or return of items to each dispenser.

31. The system of claim 1 wherein said storage component takes to form of a storage cabinet, said storage cabinet defining a plurality of secure storage areas which can be manually accessed, each secure storage area having a dispenser positioned therein, each dispenser storing a plurality of items therein for removal therefrom by a user.

32. The system of claim 31 wherein said sensor system is configured to track at least one of a user's removal of items from each dispenser or return of items to each dispenser.

33. The system of claim 1 wherein said storage component is positioned within a secure walk-in area, and wherein the system is configured to prevent unauthorized users from entering the secure walk-in area.

34. The system of claim 33 wherein said storage component includes a plurality a shelves, each shelf having a dispenser positioned thereon, each dispenser storing a plurality of items therein for removal therefrom by a user, wherein said sensor system is configured to track at least one of a user's removal of items from each dispenser or return of items to each dispenser.

35. The system of claim 1 wherein said storage component includes at least one wall and a door through which a user can pass, said wall defining a secure walk-in area into which a user can enter, wherein a plurality of dispensers are positioned in said secure walk-in area, each dispenser storing a plurality of items therein for removal therefrom by a user, wherein said sensor system is configured to track at least one of a user's removal of items from each dispenser or return of items to each dispenser.

36. The system of claim 1 further comprising an identification system for identifying a user, and wherein said storage component is positioned within a walk-in area, and wherein the identification system is configured to identify a user who enters into the walk-in area.

37. The system of claim 1 wherein said sensor system include motion tracking sensors configured to track user's motions when accessing said item.

38. The system of claim 1 wherein said storage component includes an outer casing with an aperture, said storage component receiving a plurality of items therein, and wherein said aperture is configured such that items can be removed from said storage component therethrough, and wherein said aperture is sized such that only one item can be removed from said storage component at a time.

39. The system of claim 38 wherein said sensor system is configured to track the dispensing of each item through said aperture.

40. The system of claim 1 wherein said storage component includes a first part and a second part movable relative to said first part, and wherein said sensor system includes a distance-based sensor which can determine the distance of said second part relative to said first part, and wherein said system is configured to detect a change in distance between said second part and said first part so that said user's removal of said item from the associated storage position or replacement of said item to the associated storage position can be determined.

41. The system of claim 40 wherein said system is configured to determine the number of units of said item that have been removed or returned based upon said difference in distance.

42. The system of claim 1 wherein said sensor system includes a presence sensor which can detect the presence or absence of said item at said storage position, and wherein said item is directly manually removable from said storage position.

43. The system of claim 1 wherein said item is directly manually replaceable to said storage position.

44. The system of claim 1 wherein said sensor system includes a weight sensor configured to detect the weight of said item at said storage position.

45. The system of claim 44 wherein said system is configured to determine a difference in weight so that a user's removal of said item from the associated storage position or replacement of said item to the associated storage position can be determined.

46. The system of claim 45 wherein said system is configured to determine the number of units of said item that have been removed or returned based upon said difference in weight.

47. The system of claim 1 wherein said storage component includes a helical coil or dispensing arm, and wherein said sensor system includes a sensor configured to determine when said item has be removed from or dispensed from said helical coil or dispensing arm.

48. The system of claim 1 wherein said removal of said item includes removal of only a part of said item.

49. A method for operating an access and storage system comprising:

providing a storage component storing items therein or thereon, each item being stored in an associated storage position and being storable in more than one of a plurality of associated storage positions, wherein said storage component provides a user direct manual access to at least some of said items in their storage positions, wherein the storage component includes a sensor system configured to operate independently of any sensor component secured to the items, and wherein the system is configured such that each item resides in its associated storage position prior to said user identifying the item or attempting to access the item until such time that said user directly manually accesses said accessed item in its storage position; and

tracking, via the sensor system, at least one of a user's removal of items from ~~the associated~~ one of the plurality of storage position or replacement of items to the ~~associated~~ one of the plurality of storage position.

50. An access and storage system for use with a plurality of items comprising:

a plurality of sensors configured to track a user's accessing of each of a plurality of identical items;

an identification system for identifying said user, wherein the system is configured such that each particular item to be accessed does not change position from a time said identification system identifies said user until a time said user directly manually accesses said particular item; ~~and~~

a storage component storing each of said plurality of items therein or thereon in an associated storage position, wherein said storage component is configured to provide said user direct manual access to said items in said storage positions, which direct manual access is trackable by said sensor system; and

a controller operatively coupled to said plurality of sensors, wherein said controller is configured to track levels of inventory of said identical items in said system.

51. The system of claim 1 further comprising an identification system for identifying said user, and wherein said storage component is configured such that said item does not change position from a time said identification system identifies said user until a time said user directly manually accesses said item.

52. The system of claim 1 wherein the system is configured such that said item does not change position relative to any part of said storage component prior to said user identifying the item or attempting to access the item until such time that said user directly manually accesses said item in its storage position.

53. The system of claim 50 wherein said controller is configured to track the number of each of said identical items stored in the system.