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MULTI-APPLICATIONS PORTABLE CARD FOR PERSONAL COMPUTER

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION1. Field of the Invention

The invention relates to multi-applications portable cards designed to be inserted temporarily into a card reader forming part notably of a micro-computer or PC (personal computer). It relates more particularly to 68-pin PCMCIA format cards standardized by the Personal Computer Memory Card International Association, 1030B East Duane Avenue, Sunnyvale, California.

2. Description of the Prior Art

These cards could, in the near future, replace diskettes or other magnetic type mass storage means as well as chip-card type portable electronic cards.

Indeed, their high mass-storage memory capacity (in the range of some millions of bytes), their compactness (in the range of 5 cm x 8 cm for a thickness of 3 mm) and their speed of access which is substantially higher than that of magnetic diskettes make them an ideal information medium.

However, for reasons related to the constitution of the magnetic medium used, the PCMCIA cards are not secure. The information that they contain is considerably more accessible than the information that would be contained notably in a chip card.

In order to overcome this drawback, it was first of all proposed to introduce a standard chip card into a PCMCIA card, by making a connection between the chip of the chip card and the data-processing system of the PCMCIA card. An approach such as this is described, for

example, in the French patent application published under No. 2 686 172.

However, this attractive solution is a limited one. Indeed, the presently used chip cards are designed only for one application since, although a chip can, in theory, contain a quantity of information sufficient for several applications, the development of the multi-application chip cards makes it necessary for the different suppliers to arrive at agreements that are practically impossible to obtain in the present economic context.

The idea then arose of positioning several chip cards with the PCMCIA chip card of the type described in the above-mentioned patent application. However, this approach is not viable since, with a standard chip card being 0.8 mm thick, the use for example of nine chip cards with a PCMCIA card such as this would result in a unit whose minimum thickness would be about $9 \times 0.8 \text{ mm} + 3 \text{ mm} = 10.2 \text{ mm}$. This is considerable for a so-called portable card that would have to fit into a coat pocket.

Furthermore, a U.S. patent No. 5, 049, 728, has proposed the use of multiple-chip cards. However, this approach cannot be envisaged because the body of these cards is very complicated to make, and it is difficult to handle the chips thereon.

It is an object of the present invention to overcome these drawbacks related to connection and complexity of handling by proposing a PCMCIA card with a rack capable of receiving a card such as this.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

According to the invention this aim, and others that shall appear hereinafter, are achieved by means of a multi-applications portable card that can be plugged

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in notably into a reader of a personal computer, said card comprising a first connector designed for a connection with said reader and positioned on the periphery of a pack, wherein said card comprises, firstly, a mobile rack positioned on an edge of the card that gets fitted into a cavity of the pack, comprising a housing provided with a bottom and designed to receive a chip borne by a token and, secondly, a second connector electronically linked to the first connector.

According to another characteristic of the invention, portable cards such as these advantageously comprise a lid provided with receptacles designed to receive the tokens.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The following description, which is in no way restrictive, will provide for a clearer understanding of the way in which the present invention can be implemented.

It must be read in relation to the appended drawings, of which:

- Figures 1A, 1B, 1C respectively show the opening of the rack of the portable card, the placing of the token in this rack and its closing;

- Figure 2 illustrates the superimposition, on a portable card according to the invention, of a lid with receptacles and of a set of tokens; and

- Figure 3 illustrates the superimposition, on a portable card according to the invention, of a lid with slideways and a set of tokens.

MORE DETAILED DESCRIPTION

The invention can be applied more particularly to PCMCIA-format portable cards referenced 1 in the set of figures.

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The PCMCIA-format cards form a parallelepiped shaped, rectangular pack 2 whose dimensions are substantially equal to 5 cm x 8 cm with a thickness of about 3 mm. This pack 2 may comprise a micro-processor and a mass storage memory.

A first standardized, 68-pin female connector 3 is positioned on the periphery of the pack 2 on one of its first sides, with a view to being plugged into a corresponding male connector of a personal computer.

The cavity 4, shown by dashes in figures 1A, 1B and 1C, is made in the PCMCIA card and opens out on the edge of this card, at one of the sides not used by the connector 3. Preferably, this side is a large side of the PCMCIA card.

This cavity 4 is designed to receive a rack 5 shown in the opened position in figures 1A and 1B, and in the closed position in figure 1C.

The rack 5 is solid except at the position of a housing or recess referenced 6 as a whole. This housing 6 has a bottom 6a and substantially vertical edges 6b, advantageously having a slight taper. The bottom of the rack 5 is actually the bottom 6a of the housing 6. Chips 7 with contacts flush with the surface may be deposited in the housing 6. These contacts are of the type found typically in the chip cards used chiefly for security of access to various premises, for banking transactions or for the provision of services such as telephone communications. In the case of the invention, the chips themselves are each positioned on a token 8 with a format smaller than the chip-card format.

The housing 6 then advantageously takes the shape of the tokens 8. These tokens are contained, for example, within a parallelepiped about 15 mm wide, 25 mm long and 0.8 mm thick. One of the corners is cut to

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enable an accurate orientation of the token 8 or of the chip 7 with respect to the rack 5.

Naturally, the framework of the invention is not limited solely to portable cards comprising a single cavity 4 provided with a rack 5, but it further comprises portable cards having several cavities, each provided with a rack 5. The number of pins of the PCMCIA card can allow such a variant, since the chips generally have eight contacts at most. In this case, a microprocessor contained, if necessary, in the PCMCIA card may even carry out a multiplexing between the chips connected in the racks.

Furthermore, the portable cards of the invention include a second connector designed to set up a connection between the eight contact pads, flush with the surface, that are conventionally contained in a chip and the active elements of the PCMCIA card and between these active elements of the PCMCIA card and the first 68-pin connector. This second connector therefore has eight conductive wires connected either directly to the 68-pin conductor or to an interface that is managed by the microprocessor of the card and that carries out notably a protocol conversion between signals received or sent out by the chip and signals recognized by the personal computer.

The second connector is positioned, as required, in the cavity 4 as represented in the right-hand part of figure 1B or at the bottom of the rack 5, in the housing 6, as shown in the left-hand part of this figure.

If it is positioned in the cavity 4, it is placed against a ceiling of this cavity. The token 8 is then oriented, in the rack 5, with metallisations 15 of the chip 7 pointed upwards. The representation of the

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second connector in figure 1B is then referenced 12. The connector 12 may, in this case, be fixed. The contact with the chip 7 is formed as soon as the rack 5 is closed, by a very precise adjusting and with contact pads of the second connector comprising flexible parts. These are flexible parts such as, for example, contacts forming metal and elastic strips referenced 19 in figure 1C, on the right-hand side, which shows a longitudinal side of the rack 5 fitted into in the card 1. The second connector may also be mobile. In this case, the closing of the rack 5 causes a shifting of the contact pads of the second connector towards the chip. The former example is simple to make but the chip 7 may be scratched by repeated contacts with the strips of the connector 12. The latter example does not have this drawback, but is mechanically more difficult to make. However, the latter type of structure is possible. By virtue of its principle, it is the structure implemented in known chip-card connectors of the so-called landing type.

On the contrary, if the second connector is positioned on the rack 5, it is fixed to the bottom of the housing 6. Its representation in figure 1B is then referenced 13. In this embodiment, the token 8 has to be deposited with the connector of the chip 7 pointed downwards. The second connector is then connected to flexible conductive wires 14 that are long enough to enable an opening and closing of the rack 5, without strains. In this case, the cavity 4 has, at the bottom, a vacant space to receive the strands of the connection wires when the rack is in a closed position. In practice, these wires exert a force that tends naturally to open the rack. This approach is particularly useful because the chip 7 then will not be

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scratched by the connector 13, and this connector is simple to make as compared with a mobile connector.

When the PCMCIA card is positioned in the reader of the microcomputer, the side walls of the insertion slot of this reader advantageously exert a holding force on the stop 16 mounted at the end of this rack, in order to keep it closed. Preferably, the stop 16 has a chamfer 17 in its front, in the direction of insertion, to further the engagement of the rack 5. It is also possible to make provision, between the rack 5 and the cavity 4, for slight friction or for an elastic tappet to keep the rack closed. In this case, beneath the rack, there is a tab by which it can be removed. Furthermore, the rack is preferably pierced, at its bottom, with a through hole 18 enabling the removal of the token 8.

As illustrated in figures 2 and 3, the card 1 may receive a lid 9 provided with receptacles 10 designed to receive chips which are each supported by a token 8.

This lid 9 is capable of covering one of the main faces of the PCMCIA card. It advantageously has a length slightly smaller than the length of the card, so as to leave the first connector 3 uncovered. The lid 9 advantageously gets clipped to the PCMCIA card by every means commonly available to those skilled in the art, such as small hooks, shoulders etc., which shall not be described herein. According to another embodiment, the lid 9 may include a slideway into which the PCMCIA card will be inserted. Furthermore, this lid 9 may be fixed to a bottom constituting a box designed to receive the PCMCIA card.

The receptacles shown in figure 2 are cavities which are, for example, rubber-lined or provided with flexible edges adapted to the positioning of the chips

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7 supported by their tokens 8, by being clipped on the hand. The lid 9 according to the invention has nine tokens at most. Furthermore, the bottom of each receptacle 10 advantageously has a hole 11, for example
5 a circular hole, to enable a token to be grasped.

By contrast, the receptacles 10 shown in figure 3 are formed by slideways. The lid 9 has, for example, three slideways each designed to receive three tokens 8.

10 In the above-mentioned two cases, the thickness of the portable card covered with its lid will be only slightly greater than $3 + 0.8 = 3.8$ mm. In practice, it is smaller than 6 mm. Such a thickness, which is far smaller than the 10.2 mm estimated here above, remains
15 within proportions that are acceptable to a user.

With regard to the functional aspect of the invention, we shall consider a user provided with a portable card according to the invention seeking to implement the specified application of a chip borne by
20 a token 8 of the lid 9. This user will have to remove the lid 9 of the PCMCIA card, select the appropriate token on the lid 9, recover this token, open the rack 5, insert the token 8 into this rack and close the rack again before inserting the card into the reader.

25 The tokens 8 preferably include particular inscriptions or logos, enabling the immediate selection of the token corresponding to the desired application.

After the lid has been removed, a token 8 is recovered either by making it slide into its receptacle
30 (as in the case of figure 3) or by applying slight pressure by the finger through the hole 11 in order to unclip it (as in the case of figure 2).

Once the selected chip has been recovered, it is enough to open the rack 5, for example by using the

finger-nails, to insert the token 8 into the housing and then close said rack 5. The rack 5 is opened and closed in a direction substantially crosswise to the plane formed by the edge of the card comprising said rack 5. The rack 5 always remains fixedly joined to the pack 2, even when it is opened. The bevelled edge of the housing 6 can be used to orient the token 8 accurately. This corner is used as a position-correcting feature.

10 Depending on whether the second connector is positioned at the bottom of the rack or in the cavity, the connection between the eight pads of the chip 7 forming the metallizations 15 and the active elements of the PLMCIA card and between these active elements
15 and the first connector 3 will be done respectively on the rack 5 or in the cavity 4.

However, one problem remains: that of limiting the wearing out of the metallizations 15 of the token 8. Indeed, in the case of the proposed approach where the
20 metallizations 15 are pointed upwards during the positioning of the token 8 (right-hand part of figure 1B), the fact of inserting the token 8 into the card and removing it therefrom several times leads to the scratching of the metallizations 15 when the rack 5 is
25 closed, through the passage of these metallizations 15 under the flexible and protruding contacts 19 located beneath the ceiling of the cavity 4. In practice, it has been observed that the scratches are all the deeper, and detrimental to the preservation of the
30 token 8 as the flexible and protruding contacts 19 need to have a wide range of play to compensate for the clearances needed on each side of the token 8 during its insertion. It has then been realized then that the making of a rack 5 with a bottom 6 would make it

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possible to limit these clearances to just one area clearance. Consequently, it has been possible to limit the protrusion of the contacts and obtain a card that scratches the metallizations of the token 8 to a lesser extent. Of course, the bottom of the rack 5 in itself prevents the removal of the token 8, unless there is a removal hole 18.

The card could then be plugged into the reader and the chip 7 will be in direct communication with the personal computer.

In order to improve safety, the PCMCIA card may advantageously comprise a system for the recognition of the carrier such as a recognition system or a system using an identification code.

For the implementation of the invention, the portable card could include tokens with different functions, for example a phone token, a health token, a television token, a video games token and an identification token. The mass storage memory may be used for different applications, in combination with the associated tokens.

The telephone token would be used to make telephone calls according to a given number of units. Furthermore, memories associated with the microprocessor of the PCMCIA card would then advantageously contain a customized directory.

The health token could be used, for example, to make medical payments while the PCMCIA card would contain the medical card of its bearer, along with emergency numbers.

The television token would be used notably in cases of subscriber television. The memory of the PCMCIA card would contain the following elements together: the

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week's television programs, the user's preferences and subscriptions pending validation.

The video games token would enable the purchase of games through a computer network. Said games would then
5 be immediately integrated into the mass-storage memory of the PCMCIA card, possibly in compacted form.

The identification token would enable access to network-distributed information elements, or physical access to premises. In the latter case, the PCMCIA card
10 would at the same time contain a transmission antenna for contact-free access.

Naturally, numerous applications are possible. Each application can use the mass-storage memory of the PCMCIA card to store data elements that may or may not
15 be secured, as desired by the user. If, in addition, the then secured memory of the microprocessor comprises codes for access to the services of the different chips, the far too frequent memory lapses of habitual users would then be of no consequence.

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WHAT IS CLAIMED IS

1. A multi-applications portable card that can be plugged in notably into a reader of a personal computer, said card comprising a first connector designed for a connection with said reader and positioned on the periphery of a pack, wherein said card comprises, firstly, a mobile rack positioned on an edge of the card that gets fitted into a cavity of the pack, comprising a housing provided with a bottom and designed to receive a chip borne by a token and, secondly, a second connector electronically linked to the first connector.

2. A portable card according to claim 1, wherein the dimensions of the token are contained in a parallelepiped about 15 mm wide, 25 mm long and 0.8 mm thick.

3. A portable card according to either of the claims 1 or 2, wherein the second connector is located against a ceiling of the cavity.

4. A portable card according to any of the claims 1, 2 or 3, wherein the second connector is a feeler connected by fixed wires to the first connector.

5. A portable card according to any of the foregoing claims, wherein the second connector is fixed to the bottom of the rack, said connector being connected by flexible conductive wires to the first connector.

6. A portable card according to any of the foregoing claims, said card being based on the PCMCIA format.

7. A portable card according to any of the claims 1 to 6, wherein the rack has a hole to disengage the token from the housing.



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8. A portable card according to any of the foregoing claims, furthermore comprising a lid provided with for the tokens.

5 9. A portable card according to claim 8, wherein the receptacles are slideways adapted to the positioning of the tokens.

10 10. A portable card according to claim 8, wherein the receptacles are cavities provided with flexible shoulders suited to the positioning of the tokens through their being clipped on by hand, and provided with holes to enable the removal of the tokens.

11. A portable card according to any of the claims 8 to 10, wherein the lid has receptacles for nine tokens.

15 12. A portable card according to any of the foregoing claims, wherein the microprocessor includes a mechanism for the recognition of the bearer.

20 13. A portable card according to any of the foregoing claims, wherein the secured memory of the microprocessor comprise the codes providing access to the services of the different chips of the tokens.

25 14. A portable card according to any of the foregoing claims, wherein the mass-storage memory may be used for the different applications in combination with the associated tokens.