

CONTAINER WSTH ADDITIONAL EXTERNAL PANEL

The present invention relates to a container with an additional external panel. The container finds particular application as a container for smoking articles such as cigarettes.

It is known to package smoking articles and other consumer goods in containers formed from folded laminar blanks. Elongate smoking articles, such as cigarettes and cigars, are commonly sold in hinge lid packs constructed from one-piece laminar cardboard blanks. However, containers for elongate smoking articles and other consumer goods having two portions, an outer shell and an inner housing, formed from separate laminar blanks, are also known. In such containers, the consumer goods are housed in the inner housing, which is slidable within the outer shell between a closed position and an open position, in which an opening in the inner housing is at least partially exposed so that the consumer may access the consumer goods. Containers in which the consumer goods are housed in an inner housing having a hinged lid that covers an open end of the inner housing are also known.

Graphics and text are typically applied to the exterior of packaging for consumer goods in order to communicate information to the consumer. However, standard packs for consumer goods are relatively small in size and have a limited visible exterior surface area for displaying such information. It is known to increase the exterior surface amount of information communicated to the consumer by providing additional surfaces on which the information may be printed. This has been achieved, for example, by incorporating additional panels, or coupons into the container.

It would be desirable to provide a container having novel means for providing information to consumers. In particular, it would be desirable if those novel means increased the surface area available for providing information.

According to the invention there is provided a container comprising; an outer sleeve; an inner housing contained within the outer sleeve and moveable relative to the outer sleeve between a closed position and an open position; an external panel visible on the outer sleeve and mounted on the container for movement along a first wall of the outer sleeve; and a linking device connecting the external panel to the inner housing, wherein movement of the inner housing between an open and closed position brings about movement of the external panel along the first wall of the outer sleeve. The linking device passes through one or more opening in the outer sleeve.

Preferably, the inner housing is slidable within the outer sleeve, in at least one direction. As the inner housing is moved between its closed position to its open position, the external panel is caused to move along the first wall of the outer sleeve. The area of the first wall which is initially covered by the external panel when the inner housing is in the closed position is gradually uncovered as the external panel moves away from its initial position. The text or graphics provided in this area are therefore only revealed to the consumer when

the container is opened.

The inclusion of the external panel advantageously increases the overall surface area available for displaying consumer information compared to known containers, since graphics and text may be applied to both the first wall of the outer sleeve and the outer surface of the external panel.

In the open position, at least a portion of the inner housing projects outwardly from the outer sleeve through an open end such that the interior of the inner housing is accessible. The outer sleeve may have a single open end. Alternatively, the outer sleeve may have a pair of opposed open ends so that, in use, the consumer can push the inner housing through an open end of the outer sleeve. For example, in a preferred embodiment of the invention, the top and bottom ends of the outer sleeve are both open.

Containers according to the invention may optionally further comprise a pull tab connected to the inner housing, which, in use, may be grasped and pulled on by a consumer in order to slide the inner housing from the closed position to the open position.

The dimensions of the external panel are preferably such that in the closed position of the inner housing, the panel does not extend beyond the edges of the first wall of the outer sleeve. Furthermore, the external panel is preferably mounted close to, or against the first wall. Both of these features mean that the external panel does not substantially affect the overall size and shape of the container when the inner housing is in the closed position. This facilitates the manufacturing process of the filled container, such as any wrapping or labelling processes, since it enables existing techniques and apparatus to be used. In addition, the containers according to the invention can advantageously be displayed and sold in conventional display units and vending machines.

The external panel may be formed in any desired shape and may be used to customise the container, for example, by reflecting a brand or logo associated with the consumer goods within the container.

The linking device of containers of the present invention is attached to both the external panel and the inner housing such that the external panel automatically moves when the inner housing is moved relative to the outer sleeve. The linking device must therefore be free to move relative to the outer sleeve.

In containers according to the invention, the outer sleeve lies between the external panel and the inner housing. Therefore, in order to connect the inner housing to the external panel, the linking device must be arranged such that it passes around or through the outer sleeve. This will typically be achieved by passing the linking device from the inner housing to the external panel through one or more openings in the outer sleeve. For example, where the outer sleeve has one or more open ends, the linking device may pass from the inner housing through one or more of those open ends. Alternatively, or in addition, the outer

sleeve may be provided with one or more apertures, or cut outs in the first wall, through which the linking device passes.

The linking device may be provided by any suitable means for connecting the inner housing and the external panel such that the movement of the external panel is dependent on the movement of the inner housing, as described above. Preferably, the linking device is an elongate strip, or ribbon, which is adhered to both the inner housing and the external panel. Advantageously, the elongate ribbon may lie substantially flat against the walls of the outer sleeve and the inner housing and does not obstruct the relative movement of the inner housing and outer sleeve. Alternatively, the linking device may be, for example, an elongate cord, string or thread.

Preferably, where the linking device is an elongate ribbon, the elongate ribbon is formed from a strip of a relatively low friction sheet material, so that the linking device slides easily and smoothly along the walls of the container with which it is in contact. For example, the elongate ribbon may be formed of a coated or uncoated paper material, or a plastic film. Where a plastic film is used, the film may be substantially transparent so that it does not cover the graphics in the area of the first wall of the outer sleeve which the linking device overlies. Alternatively, the elongate ribbon may itself be printed or coloured so as to form an integral part of the graphics and text provided on the first wall.

In a particularly preferred embodiment the linking device is a continuous band, or belt, which has been formed by connecting the ends of an elongate ribbon. The continuous band extends around all, or a part of, the first wall of the outer sleeve and is attached to the inner housing and the external panel at first and second connection points along the belt, respectively. As the inner housing is moved towards the open position, the band is caused to move around a continuous belt path, at least part of which coincides with the path of the inner housing as it moves to the open position. This movement of the belt in turn brings about the movement of the external panel along the belt path. As the inner housing moves from the closed position to the open position, the external panel will move from an initial position on the first wall, to a different, final position on the first wall.

Preferably, the continuous belt passes through a pair of apertures, or slits in the first wall, which are spaced apart so that the belt is arranged around a section of the first wall of the outer sleeve. The slits should be spaced apart by a distance which is the same or greater than the distance between the open position and the closed position of the inner housing, so that the movement of the inner housing is not restricted in any way. Preferably, the width of the slits is similar to that of the elongate ribbon, so that significant transverse movement of the ribbon away from the belt path is avoided.

Preferably, the slits are substantially parallel to each other and substantially perpendicular to the direction of movement of the inner housing. This means that the

elongate ribbon lies substantially parallel to the direction of movement of the inner housing. The belt may be of any thickness relative to the dimensions of the container but will typically be narrower than the width of the first wall of the container.

The external panel and the inner housing may be connected such that they move in the same direction. For example, the external panel may be fixedly connected to the inner housing through the outer sleeve, so that the external panel and the inner housing move together, in the same direction.

Alternatively, the external panel and the inner housing may be connected such that they move in a different direction. In one preferred example, the external panel and the inner housing are connected by means of a continuous belt, as described above, such that the external panel moves in the opposite direction to the inner housing. For example, in a container in which the inner housing is moved upwards relative to the outer sleeve in order to move it from the closed position to the open position, the external panel moves downwards along the first wall of the outer sleeve. Alternatively, in a container in which the inner housing is moved out of a side of the outer sleeve in order to move it to the open position, the external panel may move sideways in the opposite direction, away from the inner housing.

The external panel may be mounted for movement along any wall of the outer sleeve. Where the container is in the shape of a rectangular parallelepiped, like standard cigarette packs, the external panel is preferably mounted on either the front wall or rear wall of the outer sleeve, since these walls have a greater surface area than the side walls and therefore allow the provision of a larger external panel.

The external panel must be moveable relative to the first wall and is preferably connected only to the linking device and not directly to the outer sleeve or the inner housing. However, the external panel may alternatively be attached or integral to the outer sleeve or the inner housing, provided the functioning of the container is not adversely affected.

Preferably, the linking device is arranged so as to restrict or substantially prevent movement of the inner housing beyond the open position. Alternatively, or in addition, the container may comprise additional retention means for preventing the movement of the inner housing relative to the outer sleeve beyond the open position, or for preventing the inadvertent opening of the inner housing, or both.

The inner housing may be of any suitable construction that enables the consumer goods contained within the housing to be accessed when the inner housing is in the open position. For example, the inner housing may be of a slide, or tray construction, which includes an opening in at least one wall. In the closed position, the opening is covered by the outer sleeve but the opening becomes at least partially exposed as the inner housing is moved out of the outer sleeve towards the open position. This type of construction is typical of the standard slide and shell containers used to house smoking articles.

Alternatively, the inner housing may comprise a body portion and a lid portion. The lid portion may be connected to the body portion along a hinge line extending across a wall of the inner housing. The lid portion must be pivoted open about the hinge line in order to access the consumer goods housed within the box portion of the inner housing.

5 Where a lid portion is provided on the inner housing, the lid portion may be directly or indirectly connected to the outer sleeve such that it is automatically caused to open as the inner housing is moved relative to the outer sleeve. This may be achieved using known constructions, in which the hinge lid includes a flap on the outside thereof, that engages with the inner surface of the outer sleeve as the outer sleeve and inner housing are moved
10 relative to each other. The flap is then pulled along with the outer sleeve, thereby opening the hinge lid. A construction of this type is described, for example, in EP-A-1,847,478.

Where the container includes a mechanism for the automatic opening of the hinge lid, the linking device and external panel are preferably provided on a different side of the container to the side including the interacting lid flaps, so that the functioning of the linking
15 device does not interfere with the opening mechanism of the lid.

Containers according to the invention may be in the shape of a rectangular parallelepiped, with right-angled longitudinal and right-angled transverse edges. Alternatively, the container may comprise one or more rounded longitudinal edges, rounded transverse edges, bevelled longitudinal edges or bevelled transverse edges, or combinations
20 thereof. For example, by scoring in a known manner a laminar blank from which the outer sleeve or inner housing of the container are erected, a "rounded-corner" pack of cigarettes or other smoking articles according to the invention may be produced.

The container may be formed from any suitable materials including, but not limited to, cardboard, paperboard, plastic, metal, or combinations thereof. The outer sleeve and inner
25 housing may be formed from the same material as each other, or a different material. Similarly, the external panel may be formed of the same material as the outer sleeve or the inner housing, or a different material. Preferably, the outer sleeve and the inner housing are each formed from a single folded laminar blank, more preferably from a folded laminar cardboard blank. Preferably, the cardboard has a weight of between about 100 grams per
30 square metre and about 350 grams per square metre.

Containers according to the invention may be used as packages for a variety of consumer goods. In a particularly preferred embodiment, containers according to the invention are used to package smoking articles. Containers according to the invention may be advantageously used to package smoking articles including, but not limited to,
35 conventional lit-end cigarettes, cigars or cigarillos, heated smoking articles comprising a combustible fuel element or heat source and an aerosol-generating substrate (for example cigarettes of the type disclosed in US-A-4,714,082) and smoking articles for use with

electrical smoking systems (for example cigarettes of the type disclosed in US-A-5,692,525).

Through an appropriate choice of the dimensions thereof, containers according to the invention may be designed to hold different total numbers of smoking articles, or different arrangements of smoking articles. For example, through an appropriate choice of the dimensions thereof, containers according to the invention may be designed to hold a total of
5 between ten and thirty smoking articles.

The smoking articles may be arranged in different collations, depending on the total number of smoking articles. For example, the smoking articles may be arranged in a single row of six, seven, eight, nine or ten. Alternatively, the smoking articles may be arranged in
10 two or more rows. The two or more rows may contain the same number of smoking articles. For example, the smoking articles may be arranged in: two rows of five, six, seven, eight, nine or ten; three rows of five or seven; or four rows of four, five or six. Alternatively, the two or more rows may include at least two rows containing different number of smoking articles to each other. For example, the smoking articles may be arranged in: a row of five and a row
15 of six (5-6); a row of six and a row of seven (6-7); a row of seven and a row of eight (7-8); a middle row of five and two outer rows of six (6-5-6); a middle row of five and two outer rows of seven (7-5-7); a middle row of six and two outer rows of five (5-6-5); a middle row of six and two outer rows of seven (7-6-7); a middle row of seven and two outer rows of six (6-7-6); a middle row of nine and two outer rows of eight (8-9-8); or a middle row of six with one outer
20 row of five and one outer row of seven (5-6-7).

Containers according to the present invention may hold smoking articles of the same type or brand, or of different types or brands. In addition, both filterless smoking articles and smoking articles with various filter tips may be contained, as well as smoking articles of differing length (for example, between about 40 mm and about 180 mm), diameter (for
25 example, between about 4 mm and about 9 mm). In addition, the smoking articles may differ in strength of taste, resistance to draw and total particulate matter delivery. Preferably, the dimensions of the container are adapted to the length of the smoking articles, and the collation of the smoking articles. Typically, the outer dimensions of the container are between about 0.5 mm to about 5 mm larger than the dimensions of the bundle or bundles of smoking
30 articles housed inside the container.

The length, width and depth of containers according to the invention may be such that, in the closed position, the resultant overall dimensions of the container are similar to the dimensions of a typical disposable hinge-lid pack of twenty cigarettes.

The exterior surfaces of containers according to the invention may be printed, embossed, debossed or otherwise embellished with manufacturer or brand logos, trade
35 marks, slogans and other consumer information and indicia.

Where the inner housing of a container according to the present invention contains a

bundle of cigarettes or other elongate smoking articles, the smoking articles are preferably wrapped in an inner liner of, for example, metal foil or metallised paper.

Once filled, containers according to the invention may be shrink wrapped or otherwise over wrapped with a transparent polymeric film of, for example, polyethylene or polypropylene in a conventional manner. Where containers according to the invention are
5 over wrapped, the over wrapper may include one or more tear tapes. The one or more tear tapes may extend in a transverse or longitudinal direction around the container.

The invention will be further described, by way of example only, with reference to the accompanying drawings in which:

10 Figure 1 shows a container according to the present invention with the inner housing in a closed position;

Figure 2 shows the container of Figure 1 in an open position; and

Figures 3a and 3b show a partial, schematic cross section of the container of Figure 1 in the closed and open position, respectively.

15 The container 10 shown in the accompanying figures is in the shape of a rectangular parallelepiped and comprises an outer sleeve 12 and an inner housing 14 mounted within the outer sleeve 12. The inner housing 14 is intended for housing a wrapped bundle of cigarettes, although these are not shown in the figures.

In the following description of the container 10 the terms "upper" and "top", "bottom" and "lower" and "front" and "rear", are used to describe the relative positions of components
20 of the outer sleeve 12 and inner housing 14 when the container is in an upright position, so that the inner housing 14 is slidable in a substantially vertical direction within the outer sleeve 12.

The outer sleeve 12 comprises a front wall 16, a back wall, a left side wall and a right
25 side wall 18. The top end of the outer sleeve 12 is open, to allow movement of the inner housing 14 out of the outer sleeve 12 during opening. In addition, the bottom end of the outer sleeve 12 is also open so that a force may be applied to the bottom of the inner housing 14 in order to move it to its open position.

The inner housing 14 comprises a front wall 20, a back wall, a left side wall, a right
30 side wall 22, a top wall 24 and a bottom wall. The front wall 20 is of reduced height compared to the back wall, so that the upper edge of the front wall 20 is below the top wall 24. This creates a rectangular access opening at the top of the front face of the inner housing 14, through which the cigarettes within the inner housing 14 can be removed.

The transverse external cross-section of the inner housing 14 is substantially equal to
35 the transverse internal cross-section of the outer sleeve 12 so that frictional forces generated between the outer surface of the inner housing 14 and the inner surface of the outer sleeve

14 substantially prevent movement of the inner housing 14 relative to the outer sleeve 12 until a positive force is applied.

Figure 1 shows the container 10 with the inner housing 14 in a closed position so that the front wall 16 of the outer sleeve 12 fully covers the access opening. The height of the inner housing 14 and the outer sleeve 12 are substantially equal, so that in the closed position the inner housing 14 does not project from the ends of the outer sleeve 12. The top 24 and bottom walls of the inner housing 14 therefore form the top and bottom walls of the container 10.

In use, to gain access to the consumer goods in the inner housing 14, the inner housing 14 is pushed upwardly relative to the outer sleeve 12 in the direction indicated by the arrow A in Figure 1. This is typically achieved through the application of a force to the bottom wall of the inner housing 14, which causes the inner housing 14 to slide longitudinally relative to the outer sleeve 12 from the closed position shown in Figure 1 to the open position shown in Figure 2.

In the open position, the upper part of the inner housing 14 protrudes from the top of the outer sleeve 12 and the access opening in the front face of the inner housing 14 is exposed so that the cigarettes can be accessed.

The front wall 16 of the outer sleeve 12 includes a pair of parallel, opposed slits 26 which are longitudinally spaced apart and extend transversely across the front wall 16, perpendicular to the direction of movement of the inner housing. The slits 26 are centrally positioned in the transverse direction and are between 10 and 20 mm in length.

An elongate ribbon is inserted through each of the slits 26 and the ends of the elongate ribbon 28 are connected to form a continuous band 28 around the portion of the front wall 16 of the outer sleeve 12 between the slits 26. The width of the ribbon is similar to the length of the slits 26, so that transverse movement of the ribbon is substantially prevented. The length of the ribbon is such that the perimeter of the continuous band 28 is approximately twice the distance between the slits 26. This is to ensure that the band 28 is relatively taut and lies flat against the adjacent walls of the outer sleeve 12 and the inner housing 14. The ribbon is formed of a strip of transparent plastic film.

An external panel 30 is attached to the portion of the band 28 running along the outside of the outer sleeve 12 at a first connection point 32, by means of a suitable adhesive. As shown in Figures 1 and 3a, in the closed position of the inner housing 14, the first connection point 32 between the band and the panel lies at the upper end of the belt 28. The external panel 30 is therefore positioned towards the top of the front wall 16 of the outer sleeve 12.

The portion of the band 28 running between the outer sleeve 12 and the inner housing 14 is attached to the front wall 20 of the inner housing 14 at a second connection

point 34, by means of a suitable adhesive. As shown in Figures 1 and 3a, in the closed position of the inner housing 14, the second connection point 34 between the inner housing 14 and band 28 lies at the lower end of the belt, opposite the first connection point 32 between the external panel 30 and the band 28.

5 As the inner housing 14 is moved upwards towards its open position, the belt 28 is caused to move around the portion of outer sleeve 12 between the slits 26, in an anticlockwise direction. This in turn causes the external panel 30 to move down the front wall 16 of the outer sleeve 12 in the direction of the arrow B, into the position shown in Figure 2 and 3a. The area of the front wall 16 of the outer sleeve 12 initially covered by the external
10 panel 30 is therefore uncovered and any graphics and text printed in that area is revealed to the consumer.

The extent of the upwards movement of the inner housing 14 out of the top of the outer sleeve 12 is limited by the presence of the band 28. This is because once the second connection point 34 between the inner housing 14 and the band 28 reaches the upper slit 26,
15 further rotation of the band 28, and therefore further upwards movement of the inner housing 14, is not possible.

The outer sleeve 12 and inner housing 14 of the container 10 are both formed from cardboard laminar blanks. The laminar blank for forming the inner housing 14 is of a similar construction to that used to form the slide of a conventional slide and shell container. The
20 inner housing 14 may be formed around the wrapped bundle of smoking articles, in the conventional manner. The laminar blank for forming the outer sleeve 12 is also of a similar construction to that used to form the outer sleeve of conventional containers, except that the front wall panel of the blank is provided with two slits 26, as described above.

The elongate ribbon is inserted through the slits 26 and the ends of the ribbon joined
25 together to form the continuous band 28. The outer sleeve 12 is then assembled around the inner housing 14, with the band glued to the front wall 20 of the inner housing 14 at the second connection point 34, as described above. The external panel 30, also formed of sheet cardboard, is glued to the band on the outside of the front wall of the outer sleeve at the first connection point 32, either before or after assembly of the outer sleeve around the
30 inner housing. Finally, the assembled and filled container 10 is overwrapped with a transparent wrapper in the conventional manner.

Although the inner housing 14 of the container 10 shown in the figures and described above is of a relatively simple construction, with an access opening in the front face, it will be appreciated that many other constructions of inner housing would also be compatible with
35 the present invention. For example, as mentioned above, the inner housing may include one or more hinge lids which may optionally be connected to the outer sleeve such that they open automatically when the inner housing is moved upwards out of the outer sleeve.

It will be appreciated that whilst in the embodiment described above, the external panel is mounted on the front wall of the outer sleeve, the panel could alternatively be mounted on the back wall, or one of the side walls of the sleeve. Also, it will be appreciated that whilst in the embodiment described above, the access opening is provided in the front face of the inner housing, it could alternatively be provided in one of the other faces. Furthermore, the opening could, if desired, extend over more than one face.

Although in containers according to the present invention, the bottom end of the container is fully open, it will be appreciated that this is not an essential feature of the invention and the outer sleeve may alternatively include a bottom wall, which may optionally be provided with a cut out through which the inner housing can be pushed. Furthermore, it will be appreciated that whilst in the container described above, the inner housing projects through the top end of the outer sleeve in the open position, it could alternatively project through another end or side of the outer sleeve.

CLAIMS

1. A container comprising:
 - an outer sleeve;
 - an inner housing contained within the outer sleeve and moveable relative to the outer sleeve between a closed position and an open position;
 - an external panel visible on the outer sleeve and mounted for movement along a first wall of the outer sleeve; and
 - a linking device connecting the external panel to the inner housing such that movement of the inner housing between the closed position and the open position brings about movement of the external panel along the first wall of the outer sleeve, wherein the linking device passes through one or more openings in the outer sleeve.
2. A container according to claim 1 wherein the linking device passes through at least one open end of the outer sleeve.
3. A container according to claim 1 or 2 wherein the linking device is an elongate ribbon, the ends of which are optionally connected to form a continuous band.
4. A container according to any preceding claim wherein the panel and inner housing are connected such that the panel and inner housing are moveable in substantially opposite directions.
5. A container according to any preceding claim wherein the inner housing comprises a body portion and a lid portion connected to the box portion along a hinge line extending across a wall of the inner housing.
6. A container according to any preceding claim wherein the inner housing comprises an access opening which is covered by the outer sleeve when the inner housing is in the closed position and at least partially exposed when the inner housing is in the open position.
7. A container according to any preceding claim wherein the linking device is formed of a different material to the outer sleeve.
8. A container according to any preceding claim wherein the linking device is arranged so as to restrict or substantially prevent movement of the inner housing beyond the open position.

9. A container according to any preceding claim comprising a plurality of smoking articles in the inner housing.