Description

This invention concerns an apparatus for forming an image on a record medium, the apparatus having a record medium insertion opening and a record medium discharge opening, transport means for causing the record medium to be transported along a transport path from the insertion opening to the discharge opening, and means for imparting the image to the record medium while the latter is on the paper transport path.

Apparatus of the above-mentioned type may either be arranged for "face-up" or for "face-down" delivery, in which the surface of a sheet of paper having the image thereon faces upwardly or downwardly respectively. Apparatus arranged for face-down delivery is liable to cause the paper to curl since it is turned back on itself, there is an increase in the rate of jamming due to an increase in the length of the paper transport path, the said transport means is complicated and expensive, and printing is slow.

Document JP-A-59-133 577 discloses an image forming apparatus of the face-up delivery type. The apparatus has a door and a further frame which both are pivoted about an axis parallel to an image receiving member with the door opening from the rear of the apparatus.

Known clamshell type copiers such as those disclosed in DE-A-3 433 665, JP-A-60-168 158 and JP-A-61-32 865 discharge paper image face-down but provide access to the paper path from the top.

According to the present invention there is provided an apparatus for forming an image on a record medium as claimed in claim 1.

Preferably, the image-receiving member is a photosensitive member, the image-imparting means also including charging means for charging a portion of the photosensitive member, an optical signal generator for irradiating the photosensitive member with a light pattern so as to produce a latent image thereon, a developing device for applying toner to the latent image so as to develop the latter, and a cleaning device for cleaning toner from the photosensitive member.

Preferably, the photosensitive member, charging means, optical signal generator, developing device and cleaning device are disposed in the immovable part.

The image-imparting means preferably also includes a transfer device for transferring the image from the image-receiving member to the record medium, the transfer device being carried by the movable part.

The image-imparting means preferably also includes a fixing device for fixing the image on the record medium, the fixing device being carried by the movable part.

The fixing device may comprise a pair of rollers between which the transport path extends, the construction being such that the nip pressure between the rollers is automatically cancelled when the movable part is moved out of the said closed position.

Damping means are preferably provided to effect damping of opening movement of the movable part.

The apparatus preferably comprises a cartridge provided with at least two of the parts constituted by the photosensitive member, the charging device and the cleaning device.

The cartridge is preferably disposed in the immovable part.

The housing preferably has an insertion opening through which the record medium may be introduced into the housing and onto the transport path, the insertion opening being disposed in the upper surface of the housing.

In the preferred embodiment of the present invention, the apparatus has a reduced production cost and a reduced installation space and is capable of printing thick paper, envelopes and the like using a face-down delivery mechanism alone without the need to provide a face-up delivery mechanism and associated switching means and with a reduced risk of causing a jam.

It is preferably so designed that the fast print time (the period of time which begins at the time when a print command is given and which ends at the time when a printed sheet of paper has completely been discharged) is reduced by a large margin and the operability is improved.

It is also preferably such as to have a reduced production cost and a reduced installation space and may be compact in size and light in weight. It is preferably so designed that any jam can readily be cleared even by an inexperienced user in a natural posture without any fear of his hands being stained and with no risk of the machine being damaged. It is also preferably such that the user can reliably exchange a cartridge employed in the apparatus in a natural posture, this being achieved by performing almost the same operation as a jam removing operation from the front side of the apparatus from which paper is discharged in normal use.

The cartridge may be disposed in front of a light-emitting device of the optical signal generator when viewed in the direction in which the movable part is moved out of the said closed position.

The construction may be such that the cartridge is unloaded from the apparatus in the direction in which the movable part is moved out of the said closed position and is loaded into the apparatus in the opposite direction.

The transfer device may be pivotally connected at one end thereof to the cartridge so that it can be moved pivotally about said end in a direction in which the movable part is moved out of the said closed position.

Alternatively, the arrangement may be that the

opposite ends of the transfer device are pivotally connected to and supported by the cartridge.

The cartridge may be provided with a cleaning device which has a waste toner receptacle, the cleaning device having a flat bottom surface or at least three projections on its bottom surface which define a ground plane, the centre of gravity of the cartridge being within the ground plane.

The cartridge may be provided with a handle by means of which the cartridge may be maintained in the same posture while being loaded into and out of the apparatus and while being transported. The cleaning device may be arranged to be supported in the cartridge by said handle in such a way that a first straight line which intersects the handle and the centre of gravity of the cartridge when there is no waste toner in said receptacle is disposed adjacent a second straight line which intersects the said handle and the centre of gravity of the cartridge when there is a substantial quantity of toner in the said receptacle.

The transfer device may be formed integrally with the cartridge, thereby eliminating the need to carry out maintenance such as cleaning of the transfer device and also enabling the transfer device to be readily moved away from the photosensitive member in order to facilitate, for example, removal of jamming paper. This construction allows the transfer device to be readily cleaned if it needs to be cleaned when trouble occurs.

If the developing device is disposed above the photosensitive member included in the cartridge in order to arrange the image-imparting means vertically, the movable part can be opened outwardly from the front side thereof, thus enabling cartridges to be exchanged and jammed paper to be removed from the opening provided between the immovable and movable parts.

The invention is illustrated, merely by way of example, in the accompanying drawings, in which:-

Figure 1 is a sectional view of one embodiment of an apparatus according to the present invention;

Figure 2 is a perspective view which shows the external appearance of one embodiment of an apparatus according to the present invention in which a delivery tray can be accommodated on the outer side of the casing of the apparatus;

Figure 3 shows one example of an apparatus according to the present invention in which a laser diode is employed as an optical signal generator;

Figure 4 shows one example of an apparatus according to the present invention in which a reflecting mirror is employed in the laser optical path;

Figure 5 illustrates one embodiment of the present invention showing the movable part thereof in its opened state and also shows the direction in which a cartridge is unloaded;

Figures 6(a) and 6(b) show in combination the way in which the nip pressure applied by the rollers of a fixing device in the figure 5 embodiment of the present invention is automatically cancelled by opening the movable part;

Figures 7(a) and 7(b) shown in combination the way in which the degree of opening of the door in one embodiment of the present invention is limited to a predetermined angle by an abutment member and, even when the door is in the fully opened position, the angle to which it is opened is regulated so that the position of centre of gravity thereof is not offset from the bottom of the apparatus;

Figure 8 shows one embodiment of the present invention in which the fixing device is installed on an immovable part of the apparatus;

Figures 9(a) and 9(b) show in combination one embodiment of the present invention in which a damping means is provided for preventing the door from gravitationally opening suddenly and in which the door is opened to such an extent that it comes into contact with the surface of the place on which the apparatus is installed;

Figures $10(a_1)$, $10(a_2)$, $10(b_1)$, $10(b_2)$, $10(b_3)$ and $10(c_1)$, $10(c_2)$ show various examples of the arrangement of a cartridge of an apparatus according to the present invention;

Figure 11 shows one example of a cartridge which may be used in an apparatus according to the present invention, the cartridge being provided with projections;

Figure 12 is a sectional view showing the positional relationship between a handle and a cleaning device provided on the cartridge;

Figure 13 shows a prior art apparatus in which paper is discharged in a face-up delivery manner; and

Figure 14 shows another prior art apparatus in which paper is fed from the front side of the apparatus and is discharged onto the upper side thereof in a face-down delivery manner.

Terms such as "right" and "left", as used in the description below, are to be understood to refer to directions as seen in the respective drawings.

Figure 13 schematically shows the arrangement of a prir art electrophotographic image forming apparatus. In the apparatus of figure 13, a paper stacker 8 and a delivery tray 18 are disposed on the right- and left-hand sides, respectively, as viewed from the front side of the apparatus. A sheet of paper is fed from the right-hand side as viewed in figure 13, passed through the inside of an image forming apparatus and discharged onto the tray 18 in such a manner that the surface of the sheet of paper having an image formed thereon faces upwardly. When the discharge of the paper is carried out in this way it is generally known as "face-up delivery". In such arrangement, the width W of the image forming apparatus needs to be about three times the length of the paper, and the depth D

of the apparatus needs to be equal to the sum of the width w of the paper and some additional minimum length.

Figure 14 shows another prior art apparatus in which paper is discharged in such a manner that the image forming surface thereof faces downwardly. When the discharge of the paper is carried out in this way it is generally known as "face-down delivery". When the face-down delivery is adopted, output sheets of paper are stacked in the order page 1, page 2, page 3 ..., from the bottom toward the top of the stack of sheets. Therefore. when the stack of output sheets is turned upside down so that the image forming surface of the uppermost sheet can be seen, the uppermost sheet is page 1 and the following sheets are page 2, page 3 ... which means that it is unnecessary to rearrange the stack of sheets in the paginal order. In the case of the face-up delivery, on the other hand, when the stack of output sheets is placed in the state wherein the image forming surface of the uppermost sheet of the stack can be seen, the uppermost sheet is the final page and the lowermost sheet is page 1, which means that it is necessary to rearrange the stack of sheets in the paginal order.

In the prior art apparatus shown in figure 14, the width W' of the image forming apparatus is the same as the depth D of the apparatus shown in figure 13, whereas the depth D' of the apparatus shown in figure 14 is about twice the length of the paper.

Reference numerals shown in figures 13 and 14 and not referred to above correspond to like numbered parts of figures 1 and 2 which are described below.

Thus, the prior art image forming apparatuses having the above-described arrangements suffer from the following disadvantages. Namely, when the apparatus employing face-up delivery is installed, there is a need for a floor area which is about three times the area of a sheet of paper on which an image is to be formed, whereas when the apparatus employing face-down delivery is installed, a floor area which is about twice the area of said paper is needed. In particular, the arrangement shown in figure 14, which is adopted to achieve face-down delivery, has the disadvantages that there is an increase in the degree to which the paper curls, since the paper is turned back, and that there is an increase in the rate of jamming due to an increase in the length of the paper transport path. In addition, since the paper transport mechanism is complicated, the production costs are raised and there is a considerable increase in the "first print time" (the period of time which begins at the time when a print command is given and which ends at the time when the first printed sheet of paper has been completely discharged from the machine body. The quality of the printing may be judged by the length of the first print time).

Further, unlike the face-up delivery, the face-down delivery involves a structure in which a paper transport path 21 is twice bent at approximately 90° in its course, which means that it is impossible to prevent thick paper, envelopes and the like from causing a jam or from becoming wrinkled.

In order to enable envelopes and the like to be printed without such problems, it is necessary to increase the radius of a circle defined by a bent portion of the paper transport path 21 to about 5cms, and this leads to a considerable increase in the size of the apparatus.

Accordingly, an apparatus which is stated to be capable of printing envelopes and the like is provided with a mechanism in which a paper path switching lever is provided immediately downstream of a fixing device 11 so that paper is not bent but is discharged as it is in the face-up delivery manner, which means that the size of this type of apparatus is increased correspondingly and the number of required parts is also increased, resulting in a rise in the production cost. In addition, it is necessary to switch over the face-up and face-down delivery modes from one to the other according to need, and if the operator forgets to conduct this changeover operation, a jam may occur, and this may lead to a failure of the apparatus.

The prior art further involves the problem that it is complicated and difficult to exchange cartridges, which get used up, and the apparatus can only be installed in a position which gives free access to the relevant side of the apparatus which must be accessible to enable parts to be exchanged, and this requires an exceedingly large installation space. In addition, since a clamshell system is adopted in order to overcome jamming, there is a need to provide a strong spring for raising almost all the elements constituting a heavy electrophotographic system and an optical writing system, and the machine frame therefore needs to have great strength so that it is not deformed by the force from the strong spring, and this produces an increase in production costs. Further, it is necessary, when removing a cause of a paper jam, to conduct an operation in which the operator stoops down to look into the interior of the machine from an opening which is located at a relatively low position and looks like an open mouth of a shellfish, which is an awkward operation. In addition, since the inside of the apparatus cannot be seen very clearly, an essential member of the electrophotographic system may be damaged when the jammed paper is pulled out.

The arrangement and features of an apparatus according to the present invention will therefore now be described hereinunder with reference to the accompanying drawings.

Figure 1 shows the arrangement of an apparatus in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention.

A cylindrical photosensitive member or drum 1 is rotatably mounted so as to be rotatable in the direc-

tion of an arrow A. A charging device 2, an optical signal generator 3 for irradiating the photosensitive member 1 with a light pattern in accordance with the image to be produced, a developing device 4 for developing a latent image on the photosensitive member 1, a transfer device 5 for transferring the developed image from the photosensitive member 1 to the sheet of paper, a cleaning device (not shown) for cleaning toner from the photosensitive member 1, and an erasing device 7 are disposed around the photosensitive member 1. A paper stacker 8, a paper feed roller 9 and paper register rollers 10 are disposed above the photosensitive member 1, while a fixing device 11 for fixing on the sheet of paper the developed image which has been transferred thereto, a paper guide plate 12, delivery rollers 13, an exhaust fan 14 and a power supply 15 are disposed below the photosensitive member 1. A control board 16 is disposed on the rear side of the body of the apparatus. The apparatus is provided with an outer casing 25.

The paper register rollers 10 and the delivery rollers 13 constitute transport means for causing the sheet of paper to be transported along a paper transport path within the apparatus from a paper insertion opening to a paper discharge opening. The parts 1 - 7, 11 constitute electrophotographic means for imparting the image to the sheet of paper while the latter is on the paper transport path. Thus the transfer device 5 and the fixing device 11 are disposed adjacent to and on opposite sides of the transport path.

The image forming process carried out by the apparatus according to the present invention will be explained below.

The photosensitive member 1 has a surface layer which has photo-semiconductor characteristics such that it shows a relatively high electrical resistance in a dark place (ie. the surface layer becomes an insulator), whereas, when light is applied thereto, the electrical resistance of the irradiated portion lowers (ie. the irradiated portion becomes an electrical conductor).

The charging device generates a corona discharge when a high voltage, ie. several kilovolts, is applied between a fine metal wire (not shown) and a ground electrode (not shown), thus causing a positive or negative electrical charge to be generated near the charging device.

The optical signal generator 3 is constituted by a device having a relatively short optical path, such as the liquid crystal shutter array or an LED array, and is adapted to convert electrical image information produced at the control board 16 into optical signals (ON and OFF signals in the form of light) and to output the converted signals. It should be noted that a laser scanner (not shown) may also be employed as the optical signal generator 3, although in such a case the optical path becomes relatively long.

The ambient light is shut off by means of the outer casing 17, and when the inside of the outer casing 17 is dark, the photosensitive member 1 is constituted by an insulator. When, in this state, the photosensitive member 1 is rotated at a constant speed, the positive or negative electrical charge generated by means of the charging device adheres to the surface of the photosensitive member 1 (ie. the photosensitive member 1 is electrically charged). The charged photosensitive member 1 is irradiated with light in accordance with the image information from the optical signal generator 3. In consequence, the irradiated portion is changed to an electrical conductor and the charge on the surface of the irradiated portion is grounded. More specifically, the surface of the photosensitive member 1 in this state has a portion on which a charge corresponding to the image information is present and a portion having no charge (ie. a latent image portion is formed).

The developing device 4 contains toner (not shown) which is charged positive or negative. The developing device 4 brings the toner into contact with the said latent image portion through a developing sleeve 4a. Whether the toner is to be attached to a charged portion of the surface of the photosensitive member 1 or to the non-charged portion is determined in accordance with the polarity of the charge on the surface of the photosensitive member 1 and the polarity of the charged particles of the toner. More specifically, when the charge on the surface of the photosensitive member 1 is positive, if the polarity of charged particles of the toner is positive, the toner adheres to the non-charged portion of the photosensitive member 1, whereas, if the polarity of the charged particles of the toner is negative, the toner adheres to the charged portions of the surface of the photosensitive member 1. On the other hand, when the charge on the surface of the photosensitive member 1 is negative, if the polarity of the charged particles of the toner is positive, the toner adheres to the charged portion of the surface of the photosensitive member 1, whereas, if the polarity of the charged particles of the toner is negative, the toner adheres to the non-charged portion of the surface of the photosensitive member 1.

The uppermost one of the sheets of paper stored in the paper stacker 8 is fed by the action of the paper feed roller 9 to the paper register rollers 10 to stand by at this position.

The register rollers 10 rotate in synchronism with the rotation of the photosensitive member 1 developed by the operation of the developing device 4 having the toner adhering to the surface thereof, and the paper is thereby advanced to an intermediate position between the photosensitive ember 1 and the register rollers 10.

The transfer device 5 has two constituent members, namely a fine metal wire 5a and a ground electrode 5b in the same way as the charging device 2 and

is adapted to charge the rear side of the paper by means of positive or negative ions which are generated by a relatively high voltage applied between the two constituent members. The toner developed on the surface of the photosensitive member 1 is attached to the obverse surface of the paper by means of the positive or negative charge on the reverse surface of the paper, thus effecting the transfer. The paper subjected to the transfer operation is passed through the area between fixing rollers of the fixing device 11 and, while doing so, the toner on the surface of the paper is fixed thereto. Although there are known fixing methods employing heat and pressure rollers, respectively, this embodiment adopts a fixing method employing a heated roller for the purpose of minimising the size of the apparatus. A heat source such as an infra-red lamp is disposed in the centre of a roller 11a, thereby effecting temperature control so that the surface temperature of the roller 11a is maintained at a constant level. The surface temperature of the roller 11a depends upon the kind of toner used, but it is generally set at from about 140°C to 200°C. The toner on the paper comes into contact with the surface of the roller 11a and receives heat from the latter, thus causing a resin contained in the toner as a component thereof to be fused so as to penetrate the fibres of the paper. The fused toner is cooled and fixed to the surface of the paper at the time the paper is fed out from the area between the fixing rollers.

In this embodiment, the transfer device 5 may be disposed on the horizontal line which passes through the centre of the photosensitive member 1 and on the front side of the image forming apparatus. The optical signal generator 3 is disposed on said horizontal line and on the rear side of the apparatus. When the image forming apparatus is used for a long period of time, paper dust and toner accumulate inside the apparatus, and the amount of accumulated dust and toner is largest at the gravitationally lower portion, that is, the lower portion of the apparatus. If toner or paper dust adheres to the transfer device 5, a corona discharge may not occur in a normal state when a high voltage is applied; in such a case, transfer cannot satisfactorily be effected. Any toner or paper dust adhering to the optical signal generator 3 blocks the passage of light and thus prevents the photosensitive member 1 from becoming electrically conductive, so that the charge on the surface will not escape sufficiently.

To solve these problems, the disposition of the transfer device 5 and the optical signal generator 2 in the lower portion inside the apparatus is avoided in this embodiment.

When an optical system employing a laser diode (not shown) is adopted as the optical signal generator 3, the length of the optical path (figure 3) needs to be about 300mm at the minimum, which means that it is difficult to reduce the depth D of the image forming apparatus as shown in figure 3. It should be noted that in this embodiment is about 300mm. If, in order to minimise the depth D, an optical system employing a laser diode is provided with one reflecting portion (or mirror 19b) as shown in figure 4, a polygon scanner 19a which rotates at high speed must be disposed in such a manner that its longitudinal axis extends horizontally, which means that a very heavy load is imposed on a means for supporting the rotation of the polygon scanner 19a and this makes it difficult to ensure that it has a long life. The light generated from the laser diode is reflected by the polygon scanner 19a which is rotated at high speed and which transfers the latent image to the photosensitive member 1 by way of the mirror 19b. In this embodiment, a liquid crystal shutter array or an LED array (the optical path of which devices is 70mm or less) is employed to constitute the optical signal generator 3, thereby allowing a reduction in the depth D of the image forming apparatus. However, if a reflecting mirror is additionally provided, the optical signal generator 3 can also be constituted by a laser scanner although the cost is relatively high.

The paper passing through the fixing device 11 is discharged to the outside of the image forming apparatus by the action of the delivery rollers 13. In this embodiment, the paper is discharged to the front side of the apparatus in such a manner that the printed surface thereof faces downwardly. Further, in this embodiment, when the apparatus is in operation, the paper register rollers 10 which are defined by a pair of rollers and the fixing device 11 which is also defined by a pair of rollers are disposed in such a manner that the line which intersects the areas of contact between the former pair of rollers and that between the latter pair of rollers (said line defining the paper transport path), extends substantially vertically, and the photosensitive member 1 is disposed so as to be in contact with said vertical line at the transfer position.

The photosensitive member 1, after the completion of the transfer, has a slight amount of toner remaining on its surface, said toner having failed to be transferred. The remaining toner is scraped off by means of the cleaning device 6.

Further, the surface of the photosensitive member 1 is uniformly irradiated with light by means of the erasing device 7 in order to allow the charge to escape reliably from the surface of the photosensitive member 1 and to make the surface condition of the latter uniform.

The exhaust fan 14 is disposed near and below the fixing device 11 to discharge the air heated by the power supply 15 and by the fixing device 11.

The power supply 15 supplies electrical power to each of the units in the image forming apparatus. Since the power supply 15 includes a transformer (not shown) and other heavy members as its constituent

elements, it is disposed in the lowermost part of the apparatus. In the case of an image forming apparatus having a relatively small bottom area and a relatively large height, it is very desirable to dispose the power supply 15 in the lowermost part of the apparatus.

The control board 16 is arranged to control a signal to be sent to the optical signal generator 3, to interface the image forming apparatus with a host computer not shown, and to effect sequence control of each of the elements in the apparatus. In this embodiment, since the control board 16 has a size which is approximately equal to the paper size A4, it is disposed on the rear side of the image forming apparatus.

With the above-described contents, an image forming apparatus having a width W of 300mm, a depth D of 170mm and a height H of 260mm was experimentally produced. Thus the height H is greater than the depth D. The paper transport path 21 was not bent to a substantial degree and the greatest angle of bend was about 20° to 30° as described above. Thus, it was possible to print envelopes and the like without the occurrence of any jam and without the generation of wrinkles In experiments which were carried out, a structure in which the paper transport path was bent at about 90° was examined and almost no problem was found.

However, when the paper transport path was bent at 120° or more, problems such as jamming and wrinkles occurred considerably in the case of certain kinds of paper, and when the angle of bend exceeded 180°, a relatively large number of different kinds of envelope became wrinkled almost every time they were printed.

Thus, the most preferable angle at which the paper transport path may be bent is about 20° to 30° at the maximum, the preferred range of angles being from about 60° to about 80°.

In the case where the apparatus is arranged so as to minimise the degree to which the paper transport path is bent as described above and is also arranged to employ face-down delivery, the paper transport path may be arranged so as to extend substantially vertically as in the case of this embodiment, or may be such as to have a structure obtained by turning the arrangement of the prior art shown in figure 13 upside down. In the latter case, there are problems such as an increase in the amount of toner adhering to the charging device 2 and to the optical signal generator 3 due to the gravity drop, complication of the toner transport mechanism of the developing device 4, difficulty in employing a blade system which is suitable for reducing the size of the cleaning device 6, and damage to the image caused by the contact of the toner which has not yet been fixed with the paper transport path due to the fact that the printed surface of the paper faces upwardly. In addition, the size of the apparatus is undesirably increased in the same way as in the case of the prior art shown in figure 13.

Accordingly, it is preferable to provide a paper transport path which extends substantially vertically as in the case of this embodiment, and it is very desirable, in order to realise this structure, to dispose the optical signal generator 3 so as to emit an optical signal toward the centre of the photosensitive member 1 from a position which is within a range of 60° around the horizontal line which passes through the centre of the photosensitive member 1. It is preferable for the optical signal generator 3 to emit an optical signal from a position which is substantially on said horizontal line. Further, it is very desirable to dispose the developing device 4 above the optical signal generator 4 from the viewpoint of the above described structural features. It is preferable to dispose the developing device 4 within a range of 10° to 90° from said horizontal line. More specifically, it is preferable to dispose the developing sleeve 4a at the lowermost portion of the developing device 4 with a view to realising a structure which enables the toner to be most efficiently transported by means of gravity.

When this embodiment was experimentally run at a print speed of 8ppm (pages per minute), the fast print time was able to be shorted to only 12 seconds, whereas the fast print time in the prior art apparatus shown in figure 14 is generally 30 to 40 seconds because of a relatively long paper transport path.

In this embodiment, among the process elements, the rotary photosensitive member 1, the charging device and the cleaning device are formed as a unit to constitute a cartridge 22 which is adapted to be detachable with respect to the apparatus body, as shown in figure 5 which illustrates the way in which the cartridge 22 is loaded or unloaded with a movable part 23 on the image forming apparatus opened.

The transfer device 5 and the fixing device 11 are rigidly secured to the inner side of the movable part 23 and constitute an integral part of the movable part 23. The movable part 23, which is constituted by a door which when opened provides access to the interior of the apparatus and thus to the transport path, is supported by a pivot shaft 24 mounted in an immovable part 25 of the image forming apparatus. The axis around which the movable part 23 is pivoted is substantially parallel to that of the rotary photosensitive member 1. When the cartridge 22 is to be unloaded the movable part 23 is pivoted in the direction of an arrow C and the cartridge 22, which is guided and supported by a guide member (not shown) which is rigidly secured to the immovable part 25, is unloaded in the direction of an arrow G. When the movable part 3 is closed, the portion of the transport path between the transfer device 5 and the fixing device 11 is substantially vertical.

As shown in figures 6(a) and 6(b), the fixing device 11 is constituted by two roller sections 31 and 32 which include the rollers 11 and 11a and resilient

members, for example, springs 34, are provided so as to urge the roller sections 31 and 32 away from each other and thus urge them in the direction in which the nip pressure is cancelled.

Accordingly, when the movable part 23 is opened, the nip pressure is cancelled; whereas, when it is closed, the roller section 32 is pressed by an abutment member 33, and a normal nip pressure for fixing is thus obtained.

When the movable part 23 is opened, the centre of gravity is, as a matter of course, moved toward the front side of the apparatus, and in the worst case the apparatus may fall down toward the front side. However, in the embodiment illustrated in figures 7 (a) and 7(b), an abutment member 35 is provided so that the movable part 23 can be opened only to an angle θ beyond which the position of the centre of gravity is no longer within the bottom of the apparatus, thereby making it possible to prevent the apparatus from falling down.

When, for example, the fixing device 11 is provided on the movable part 23, the movable part 23 becomes very heavy, and if the movable part 23 is opened carelessly, a harmful impact may be applied to the whole of the apparatus in addition to the impact to the abutment member 35 and the support shaft 24. There is also a risk that the apparatus will be forced to fall down or will be forced to collide with another object. The occurrence of such accidents is prevented by the action of a damping means 36 which enables the movable part 23 to be opened smoothly and slowly at a predetermined speed.

It is also effective practice to provide the fixing device 11 on the immovable part 25 as shown in figure 8 for the purpose of facilitating removal of a jam caused by paper passing through the fixing device 11. As shown in figure 8, the movable part 23 is provided with one of the register rollers 10 and with paper guides 40. In such a case, it is necessary to arrange the apparatus so that the cartridge 22 can be loaded from or unloaded toward the front side of the apparatus without being obstructed by the fixing device 11. In this arrangement, particularly, as shown in figures 9(a) and 9(b), since no heavy member is provided on the movable part 23, the structure may be greatly simplified. That is to say, it may be possible to omit the abutment member 35 and the damping means 36 and allow the movable part 23 to be opened until it comes into contact with the surface of the place on which the apparatus is installed. However, employment of the damping means 36 of course enables the movable part 23 to be opened and closed even more smoothly.

Referring next to figures $10(a_1)$ to $10(c_2)$, the transfer device 5 may be provided on the cartridge 22, and may further be made detachable, as best shown in figure $10(a_2)$, or the transfer device 5 may be made pivotal, as in figures $10(b_1)$ and $10(b_2)$, either one or both of two regions where it is supported by the cartridge 22, thereby facilitating cleaning of the transfer device 5 and removal of jamming paper. Figure $10(b_3)$ illustrates how the lower end of the transfer device 5 may be received in a catch 5a in the cartridge 22.

The cartridge 22 may have a flat bottom surface or may have a plurality of projections 41 to 44 provided on its bottom surface as shown in figure 11. More specifically, the cartridge 22 may be arranged such that it is supported by at least three projections which define in combination a polygonal stable plane and the centre of gravity of the cartridge 22 is perpendicularly upwardly thereof. In such a case, it is possible to dispose the cartridge 22 on even a non-flat plane without any fear of the cartridge 22 oscillating unstably. Employment of rubber leg members to define the above described projections improves the stability and prevents generation of noise. It is also possible to increase the degree of accuracy in the mounting of the cartridge 22 by employing the projections as positioning members when the cartridge 22 is loaded into the apparatus body.

It should be noted that the position of the centre of gravity of the cartridge 22 changes as the amount of waste toner changes, but it is preferable to meet the above described conditions concerning the centre of gravity irrespective of the amount of toner.

The cartridge 22 may be loaded or unloaded using a handle 26 as shown in figure 5. The handle 26 is defined by a member which is formed integrally with the casing of the cartridge 22 so as to project from the casing and extend in the direction of the axis of rotation of the photosensitive member 1. The handle 26 is formed at such a position that it is possible to draw out the cartridge 22 from the image forming apparatus and transport the cartridge 22 without any need to change its posture and shift it from one hand to the other. In other words, when the cartridge 22 is to be unloaded, the user opens the movable part 23, draws out the cartridge 22 in the direction of the arrow G and then, for example, transports it to another place. Since the handle 26 is provided on the uppermost part of the cartridge 22 as viewed when it is loaded inside the apparatus body, there is apparently no fear that the posture of the cartridge 22 provided with such a handle 26 will be changed during the unloading operation. Accordingly, the waste toner which is collected within the cleaning device 6 provided below the photosensitive drum 1 is left as it is during the unloading operation and there is therefore no risk of the waste toner being moved to one side so as to scatter or leak out of the cartridge 22. Further, the cartridge 22 according to this embodiment has a bottom surface which is so shaped and a centre of gravity which is so positioned that the cartridge 22 will maintain the above-described posture without any change even when it is left outside the image forming apparatus for some reason.

Toner has an angle of repose in the range from 40° to 50° with respect to the horizontal and when the angle of inclination exceeds this range, the toner flows. Accordingly, any change in posture of the cartridge 22 during the unloading operation and transportation, or when it is temporarily left outside the image forming apparatus, should be kept at a level which is less than the above described angle of repose. It is desirable that any change in the posture of the cartridge 22 should be much smaller than the angle of repose of the toner. In order to achieve this, the cartridge 22 according to this embodiment is arranged as shown in figure 12 which is a sectional view thereof. More specifically, when the cartridge 22 has not yet been used, no waste toner is collected in a waste toner box 50 provided inside the cleaning device 6 and the centre of gravity of the cartridge 22 is therefore at the point E, so that the point E and the handle 26 are connected together by the straight line EH. As the cartridge 22 is used, waste toner is collected in the waste toner box 15, resulting in the centre of gravity of the cartridge 22 moving to the point F, the handle 26 and the point F being connected by the straight line FH. The cleaning device 6 is, however, disposed at such a position that the straight liens EH and FH are adjacent to each other, thereby preventing, as much as possible, an undesirable degree of inclination of the cartridge 22 during its use.

As has been described above, the image forming apparatus has a reduced bottom area and therefore occupies a minimised area on the top of a desk. In particular, the above described embodiment has a depth of about 170mm and therefore, when this apparatus is placed on an ordinary desk having a depth of 700mm and sheets of paper of A4 size are discharged from the front side of the apparatus, the sum total of the length of the paper, ie. 300mm, and the depth of the apparatus, ie. 170mm, is 470mm, which means that a sufficiently large area is left on the top of the desk. Further, since paper is discharged from the front side of the apparatus, it is easy for the operator to handle the sheets of paper coming from the machine. The arrangement wherein paper is inserted from the upper side of the apparatus and discharged from the front side thereof enables the face-down delivery system to be achieved with a paper transport path which is much simpler than that of the prior art. Accordingly, envelopes and the like can be printed without the need to additionally provide a face-up delivery mechanism and its associated switching means and with substantially reduced problems such as jamming and the generation of wrinkles.

In addition, it is possible, according to this embodiment, to shorten the fast-print time to 12 seconds in the case of paper of A4 size, whereas the fast-print time of conventional 8ppm machines is 25 to 30 seconds.

It is possible for the operator to readily exchange cartridges and to remove jamming paper in a natural posture and also possible for him to see his hand during such an operation. There is therefore no fear of an electrophotographic process member being accidentally damaged.

Since exchange of cartridges is carried out from the front side of the apparatus, there is no need to provide any free space for this purpose as a part of the installation space, which has heretofore been required for the prior art apparatus wherein exchange of cartridges is conducted from one lateral side of the apparatus.

Although the prior art which adopts the clamshell system in order to cancel jamming needs a strong spring for supporting a movable part having a weight of several tens of kilograms in close proximity with the support point and also needs a high-strength frame for preventing deformation, the embodiments of the present invention described above eliminate the need to provide such members.

Further, since the transfer device 5 is incorporated in the cartridge 22, it is unnecessary for the user to clean the transfer device (ie. the transfer device is disposable). The embodiments of the present invention described above enable the transfer device to be readily cleaned in case of occurrence of any abnormal operation.

It is possible for the user to readily load and unload the cartridge by holding the handle provided thereon and by placing it on the top of a desk or the like with ease and without any fear of waste toner collected therein moving to one side to fall.

Claims

1. Apparatus for forming an image on a record medium comprising a housing (23, 25) having a front, a rear, a top, a bottom and two sides; transport means (10, 13) for causing a record medium to be transported along a transport path, within the housing (23, 25) so as to be discharged therefrom; and image-imparting means (1, 2 and 6), including a rotary image-receiving member (1), within the housing (23, 25) for imparting the image to the record medium while the latter is on the transport path, the housing (23, 25) having an immovable part (25) and a movable part (23) and being characterised by:-

the movable part (23) being at the front of the housing,

the movable part being pivotable about an axis parallel to that of the image-receiving member (1) so that the movable part (23) can be moved between open and closed positions in which direct access to the transport path is respectively permitted and prevented;

the arrangement being such that when the

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the movable part (23) being at the front of the housing,

the movable part being pivotable about an axis parallel to that of the image-receiving member (1) so that the movable part (23) can be moved between open and closed positions in which direct access to the transport path is respectively permitted and prevented;

the arrangement being such that when the

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movable part (23) is in the closed position, the transport path is in contact both with the movable part (23) and the immovable part (25), and that the apparatus is arranged such that the record medium is discharged therefrom with the said image face down.

2. Apparatus as claimed in claim 1 characterised in that the image-receiving member is a photosensitive member (1), the image-imparting means (1, 2 and 6) also including charging device (2) for charging a portion of the photosensitive member (1), an optical signal generator (3) for irradiating the photosensitive member (1) with a light pattern so as to produce a latent image thereon, a developing device (4) for applying toner to the latent image so as to develop the latter, and a cleaning device (6) for cleaning toner from the photosensitive member (1).

3. Apparatus as claimed in claim 2 in which the photosensitive member (1), charging device (2), optical signal generator (3), developing device (4) and cleaning device (6) are disposed in the immovable part (25).

4. Apparatus as claimed in any preceding claim characterised in that the image-imparting means (1, 2 and 6) also includes a transfer device (5) for transferring the image from the image-receiving member (1) to the record medium, the transfer device (5) being carried by the movable part (23).

5. Apparatus as claimed in any preceding claim characterised in that the image-imparting means (1, 2 and 6) also includes a fixing device (11) for fixing the image on the record medium, the fixing device (11) being carried by the movable part (23).

6. Apparatus as claimed in claim 5 characterised in that the fixing device comprises a pair of rollers (11) between which the transport path extends, the construction being such that the nip pressure between the rollers (11) is automatically cancelled when the movable part (23) is moved out of the said closed position.

7. Apparatus as claimed in any preceding claim characterised in that damping means (36) are provided to effect damping of opening movement of the movable part (23).

8. Apparatus as claimed in claim 2 or in any claim appendant thereto characterised in that the apparatus comprises a cartridge (22) provided with at least two of the parts constituted by the photosensitive member (1), the charging device (2) and the cleaning device (6).

9. Apparatus as claimed in claim 8 characterised in that the cartridge (22) is disposed in the immovable part (25).

10. Apparatus as claimed in any preceding claim characterised in that the housing (23, 25) has an insertion opening through which the record medium may be introduced into the housing and onto the transport path, the insertion opening being disposed in the upper surface of the housing.

Patentansprüche

1. Gerät zum Erzeugen eines Bildes auf einem Aufnahmemedium mit einem eine Vorderseite, eine Hinterseite, eine Oberseite, eine Bodenseite sowie zwei Seiten aufweisenden Gehäuse (23, 25); Transportmitteln (10, 13) zum Transport eines Aufzeichnungsmediums längs eines Transportweges im Gehäuse (23, 25) zu seiner Ausbringung aus diesem; und ein rotierendes Bildempfangsele-ment (1) enthaltenden Bildübertragungsmitteln (1, 2 und 6) im Gehäuse (23, 25) zur Übertragung des Bildes auf das im Transportweg befindliche Aufzeichnungsmedium, wobei das Gehäuse (23, 25) ein unbewegliches Teil (25) und ein bewegliches Teil (23) besitzt, **dadurch gekennzeichnet**, daß das bewegliche Teil (23) sich an der Vorderseite des Gehäuses befindet,
das bewegliche Teil um eine zur Achse des Bildempfangselementes (1) parallele Achse so schwenkbar ist, daß das bewegliche Teil (23) zwischen einer offenen und einer geschlossenen Stellung bewegbar ist, in denen ein direkter Zugang zum Transportweg ermöglicht bzw. verhindert wird;
die Anordnung so getroffen ist, daß der Transportweg sowohl mit dem beweglichen Teil (23) als auch dem unbeweglichen Teil (25) in Kontakt steht, wenn das bewegliche Teil (23) sich in der geschlossenen Stellung befindet,
und das Gerät so ausgebildet ist, daß das Aufzeichnungsmedium mit dem Bild nach unten aus ihm ausgebracht wird.

2. Gerät nach Anspruch 1, **dadurch gekennzeichnet**, daß das Bildempfangselement ein photoempfindliches Element (1) ist, die Bildübertragungsmittel (1, 2 und 6) weiterhin eine Ladeanordnung (2) zur Aufladung eines Teils des photoempfindlichen Elementes (1), einen optischen Signalgenerator (2) zur Bestrahlung des photoempfindlichen Elementes (1) mit einem Lichtmuster zwecks Erzeugung eines latenten Bildes

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darauf, eine Entwicklungsanordnung (4) zum Aufbringen von Toner auf das latente Bild zwecks dessen Entwicklung sowie eine Reinigungsanordnung (6) zur Entfernung von Toner vom photoempfindlichen Element (1) enthalten.

3. Gerät nach Anspruch 2, in dem das photoempfindliche Element (1), die Ladeanordnung (2), der optische Signalgenerator (3), die Entwicklungsanordnung (4) und die Reinigungsanordnung (6) im unbeweglichen Teil (25) angeordnet sind.

4. Gerät nach den vorhergehenden Ansprüchen, **dadurch gekennzeichnet**, daß die Bildübertragungsmittel (1, 2 und 6) weiterhin eine Übertragungsanordnung (5) zur Übertragung des Bildes vom Bildempfangselement (1) auf das Aufzeichnungsmedium enthalten und die Übertragungsanordnung (5) vom beweglichen Teil (23) getragen ist.

5. Gerät nach den vorhergehenden Ansprüchen, **dadurch gekennzeichnet**, daß die Bildübertragungsmittel (1, 2 und 6) weiterhin eine Fixierungsanordnung (11) zur Fixierung des Bildes auf dem Aufzeichnungsmedium enthalten und die Fixierungsanordnung (11) vom beweglichen Teil (23) getragen ist.

6. Gerät nach Anspruch 5, **dadurch gekennzeichnet**, daß die Fixierungsanordnung ein Paar von Rollen (11) umfaßt, zwischen denen der Transportweg verläuft, und daß die Konstruktion so beschaffen ist, daß der Klemmdruck zwischen den Rollen (11) automatisch aufgehoben wird, wenn das bewegliche Teil (23) aus der geschlossenen Stellung bewegt wird.

7. Gerät nach den vorhergehenden Ansprüchen, **dadurch gekennzeichnet**, daß zur Dämpfung der Öffnungsbewegung des beweglichen Teils (23) Dämpfungsmittel (36) vorgesehen sind.

8. Gerät nach Anspruch 2 oder den davon abhängigen Ansprüchen, **dadurch gekennzeichnet**, daß das Gerät eine Kassette (22) umfaßt, die mit wenigstens zwei Teilen versehen ist, die durch das photoempfindliche Element (1), die Ladeanordnung (2) und die Reinigungsanordnung (6) gebildet sind.

9. Gerät nach Anspruch 8, **dadurch gekennzeichnet**, daß die Kassette (22) im unbeweglichen Teil (25) angeordnet ist.

10. Gerät nach den vorhergehenden Ansprüchen, **dadurch gekennzeichnet**, daß das Gehäuse (23, 25) eine Einsatzöffnung besitzt, durch die das Aufzeichnungsmedium in das Gehäuse und den Transportweg einführbar ist und die in der Oberseite des Gehäuses angeordnet ist.

Revendications

1. Appareil pour former une image sur un support d'enregistrement comprenant: un boîtier (23, 25) ayant un avant, un arrière, un haut, un bas et deux côtés; des moyens de transport (10, 13) pour permettre le transport d'un support d'enregistrement sur une trajectoire de transport à l'intérieur du boîtier (23, 25), de manière à être déchargé de celui-ci; et un moyen de transfert d'image (1, 2 et 6), comprenant un élément de réception d'image tournant (1), à l'intérieur du boîtier (23, 25) pour transférer ladite image sur le support d'enregistrement, pendant que ce dernier se trouve sur la trajectoire de transport, ledit boîtier (23, 25) ayant une partie fixe (25) et une partie mobile (23), et étant caractérisé par le fait que :

la pièce mobile (23) se trouve à l'avant du boîtier,

la partie mobile pouvant pivoter sur un axe parallèle à celui de l'élément de réception d'image (1), de manière que la partie mobile (23) puisse se déplacer entre les positions ouverte et fermée dans lesquelles l'accès direct à la trajectoire de transport est respectivement autorisée et interdite;

l'agencement étant tel que, lorsque la partie mobile (23) est en position fermée, la trajectoire de transport se trouve en contact avec la partie mobile (23) et la partie fixe (25);

et par le fait que l'appareil est agencé de telle sorte que le support d'enregistrement est déchargé de ce dernier avec ladite image face vers le bas.

2. Appareil selon la revendication 1, caractérisé en ce que l'élément de réception d'image est un élément photosensible (1), le moyen de transmission d'image (1, 2 et 6) comprenant également un dispositif de charge (2) pour charger une partie de l'élément photosensible (1), un générateur de signaux optiques (3) pour irradier l'élément photosensible (1) avec un faisceau lumineux de manière à produire une image latente sur ce dernier, un dispositif de développement (4) pour appliquer du toner sur l'image latente de manière à développer celle-ci, et un dispositif de nettoyage (6) pour nettoyer le toner de l'élément photosensible (1).

3. Appareil selon la revendication 2, dans lequel l'élément photosensible (1), le dispositif de charge (2), le générateur de signaux optiques (3), le

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dispositif de développement (4) et le dispositif de nettoyage (6) sont disposés dans la partie fixe (25).

4. Appareil selon l'une quelconque des revendications précédentes, caractérisé en ce que le moyen de transmission d'image (1, 2 et 6) comprend également un dispositif de transfert (5) pour transférer l'image de l'élément de réception d'image (1) sur le support d'enregistrement, ledit dispositif de transfert (5) étant supporté par la partie mobile (23).

5. Appareil selon l'une quelconque des revendications précédentes, caractérisé en ce que le moyen de transmission d'image (1, 2 et 6) comprend également un dispositif de fixation (11) pour fixer l'image sur le support d'enregistrement, ledit dispositif de fixation (11) étant supporté par la partie mobile (23).

6. Appareil selon la revendication 5, caractérisé en ce que le dispositif de fixation comprend une paire de rouleaux (11) entre lesquels passe la trajectoire de transport, la construction étant telle que la pression de pincement entre les rouleaux (11) est automatiquement annulée lorsque la porte mobile (23) est déplacée de ladite position fermée.

7. Appareil selon l'une quelconque des revendications précédentes, caractérisé en ce que des moyens d'amortissement (36) sont prévus pour effectuer l'amortissement du mouvement d'ouverture de la partie mobile (23).

8. Appareil selon la revendication 2 ou l'une quelconque des revendications y annexées, caractérisé en ce que l'appareil comprend une cartouche (22) comportant au moins deux des parties constituées par l'élément photosensible (1), le dispositif de chargement (2) et le dispositif de nettoyage (6).

9. Appareil selon la revendication 8, caractérisé en ce que la cartouche (22) est disposée dans la partie fixe (25).

10. Appareil selon l'une quelconque des revendications précédentes, caractérisé en ce que le boîtier (23, 25) comporte une ouverture d'insertion à travers laquelle le support d'enregistrement peut être introduit dans le boîtier et sur la trajectoire de transport, l'ouverture d'insertion étant disposée à la surface supérieure dudit boîtier.

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