

Napkins

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This invention relates to napkins being tableware, and in particular to paper napkins which are printed with images.

It is known to fold napkins, made of absorbent paper, into regular geometric shapes, for sale in stacked multiples, wrapped in transparent plastics packaging or boxes or the like. Square folded napkins, for example, are pre-folded with two successive folds, and are then unfolded for use at table. Sometimes such napkins are arranged decoratively on a table by introducing further folds and then setting them on the table top or in a wine glass, for example. It is also known to fold textile napkins, which should then be starched, into decorative 3-dimensional shapes for standing on a table top.

The preparation of napkins by folding them in a decorative manner for presentation on the table top is time consuming, and the purpose of the present invention is to save time by providing napkins which have been pre-folded decoratively and are ready for presentation immediately on a table top.

The present invention provides a pre-folded and pre-printed paper napkin capable of being stacked with other such napkins for package and storage, the napkin being pre-printed such that the pre-folded napkin resembles a recognisable 3-dimensional object.

The recognisable 3-dimensional object could for example be an animal or a similar object attractive to children, or it could be a sports shirt such as the shirt of a recognised football team. Thus the napkin may be pre-printed with a representation of at least a neckline adjacent one edge of the napkin in its pre-folded configuration, such as to resemble a sports shirt.

The invention can also be used as a novelty item for promotional use in business by printing promotional images, the napkins then being used at business



corporate meals and/or special corporate functions such as race meetings, Wimbledon tennis championships and other major sporting occasions of that ilk. The three-dimensional object represented by the pre-folded napkin may then be symbolic of the relevant company or its products.

5 The invention also provides a method of manufacture of a pre-folded napkin, comprising printing an image on a flat paper napkin, and folding it in a sequence of multiple folds into a smaller size such that it reveals a pre-determined portion of the printed image and is capable of being stacked with other such napkins for package and storage, the napkin being pre-printed such that the pre-folded napkin resembles
10 a recognisable 3-dimensional object.

In order that the invention may be better understood, preferred embodiments will now be described, by way of example only, with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which:

Figure 1 is a perspective view from above and one side of a pre-folded paper
15 napkin embodying the invention, in the form of a football shirt;

Figure 2 is a perspective view from below of the napkin of Figure 1;

Figure 3 is a plan view of the napkin of Figures 1 and 2 in its unfolded, flat condition;

Figures 4a to 4f are sequential diagrams showing the folding operations for
20 the napkin of Figures 1 to 3;

Figures 5a to 5m are diagrams for the sequential folding of a different napkin embodying the invention and representing a sleeved football shirt when pre-folded; Figure 5l being an underside plan view, and Figure 5m being a top plan view, of the fully pre-folded napkin;

25 Figures 6a to 6e are diagrams corresponding respectively to Figures 5i to 5m, but relating to a napkin representing a sleeveless football shirt; and

Figure 7 is a perspective view of a box containing several pre-folded napkins as shown in Figure 3.

The paper napkins illustrated in these examples are formed of two- or three-
ply paper which is sufficiently absorbent for use as a table napkin, but which is
5 sufficiently thick to keep its fold; and is finished such as to allow it to be pre-printed
with a coloured image.

As shown in Figures 1 to 3, a napkin represents the football shirt of a well-
known football team, with its distinctive logo (of which only the neck design is
shown) and, optionally, advertising material from its sponsors. A set of up to
10 fourteen shirts, each differently printed with the numeral for a different player of the
team, is prepared and stacked in a transparent plastics box, as shown in Figure 7, in
which the images can be seen through the box, for package and storage. The pre-
folded napkins are typically sold in this boxed form as a set. Instead of using a
completely transparent box, as illustrated, the box or other container could of course
15 be just partially transparent, so that the important images can be viewed through the
container. The box could be provided internally with moulded formations for holding
the stack of napkins in place, avoiding damage through shifting in transit. This
would be important where the napkins have an irregular outer shape, for example
animal shapes, or sleeved shirts as described below.

20 As shown from above in Figure 1, which reveals the front of the shirt, and
from below in Figure 2, which reveals the rear of the shirt, the paper is pre-printed
with an image representing the shirt neck, along one edge. It is also pre-printed
with logos representing the team and its sponsors. To assist in the pre-folding
during manufacture, as shown in Figure 3, the original paper blank, which is
25 rectangular, is also pre-printed lightly with folding lines 10 and 11, at right-angles to
each other.

The rectangular flat sheet of Figure 3 also represents the napkin in its unfolded state, when it is to be used at table.

The napkin is folded from its open state of Figure 3, in the sequence illustrated in Figures 4a to 4f. As shown in Figure 4a, the outer quarter margins are
5 folded back along respective lines 11, and as shown in Figure 4b these are further folded together along the centre line 11. Then as shown in Figure 4c, the quadruple thickness rectangle of Figure 4b is folded along one of the lines 10, and in Figure 4d it is folded along the other of the lines 10. As shown in Figure 4e, one end is tucked into the other, so that the pre-folded napkin keeps its shape as shown
10 in Figure 4f, and as also shown in Figures 1 and 2.

An alternative method of folding a napkin from a rectangular flat shape is shown in Figures 5a to 5m, for representing a sleeved football shirt. The rectangular unfolded napkin of Figure 5a is shown with seven equally spaced parallel fold lines 12, and it is pre-printed with an image similar to that shown in
15 Figure 3, with the width of the image of the shirt front occupying one quarter of the width. The images of the shirt front and back (not shown) occupy the central quarter portion of the napkin shown in Figure 5a. First, as shown in Figure 5b, the outermost margins, each being one eighth the overall width, are folded back. As shown in Figure 5c, the folding is continued, with the next adjacent portions being
20 folded, again along the lines 12. This process is repeated as shown in Figure 5d to produce a rectangular folded napkin as shown in Figure 5e, one quarter the width of the original napkin of Figure 5a. Figure 5f shows further fold lines 13 and 14, corresponding to the lines 10 of Figure 3. The napkin is first folded about fold line 13, which corresponds to the edge along which the neck representation is printed.
25 Simultaneously, the paper edges are pulled out and folded along the four diagonal lines 15 which, in the flat shape of Figure 5g, join to form a diamond. By opening

out the corners as shown in Figure 5h, and simultaneously continuing the fold along line 13, flaps resembling shirt sleeves are pulled out as shown in Figure 5i. The lower portion is then folded up as shown in Figure 5j and tucked in as shown in Figure 5k to produce the finished pre-folded napkin as shown from front and back in
5 Figures 5l and 5m respectively.

The sleeve portions can be pre-printed with the relevant markings and logos which would be found on the team shirts on the sleeves.

The same napkin blank of Figure 5a can be used to produce a sleeveless shirt, by omitting steps of Figures 5g and 5h, resulting as shown in Figures 6a to 6e
10 in the sleeveless shirt of Figure 4f and Figures 1 to 3.

It will be appreciated that other types of shirt could be represented in the pre-folded napkin, and sets of such shirts produced, with the number of napkins depending upon the size of the teams. Other recognisable objects, particularly appealing to children for example, could be represented instead of shirts or other
15 items of clothing. Examples would be animals and birds and pre-historic monsters, which would be pre-folded using the techniques of origami. It would be important that they could be sufficiently flat and stable to be stacked for packing and storage, one above another. They should also be sufficiently stable that they can rest in the pre-folded condition on the table top, without becoming unfolded.

20 Further, table stands for the individual pre-folded napkins may be provided, either separately or packed together with the napkins. The stands would mount the napkins vertically for display on the table top.

The napkins are useful for promoting commercial enterprise by printing their names and brands and other advertising material on the paper such that it is visible
25 when folded and/or when unfolded for use - the napkin stands may also carry

images in this way. The napkins and stands, and their packaging, may carry images of well-known characters such as cartoons, artists and sportsmen.

Thus the invention may consist in relevant business methods. One such method would be identifying companies which own character-merchandising rights; 5 effecting any necessary licence agreements; printing and selecting the shape of the napkin of the invention to represent the image for character merchandising; pre-folding and stacking the napkins; and selling them through a distribution network. Another method would be identifying a company which requires promotional services; printing and selecting the shape of the napkin of the invention to represent 10 the company's required promotional image; pre-folding and stacking the napkins; and selling them to the company. A further business method is using the napkins of the invention to promote a business by supplying them for use as napkins, for example for putting on dining tables or reception stands or the like, or for handing out to guests at a meeting or conference or the like.

CLAIMS

1. A pre-folded and pre-printed paper napkin capable of being stacked with other such napkins for package and storage, the napkin being pre-printed such that the pre-folded napkin resembles a recognisable 3-dimensional object.
- 5 2. A napkin according to Claim 1, pre-printed with a representation of at least a neckline adjacent one edge of the napkin in its pre-folded configuration, such as to resemble a sports shirt.
3. A napkin according to Claim 1, comprising a pre-printed rectangular paper napkin folded in a sequence of multiple folds to assume a smaller rectangle having
10 multiple thicknesses of paper, such that it rests stably on a table, in use.
4. A set of stacked napkins in a container, each in accordance with Claim 1.
5. A set of stacked napkins according to Claim 4, in which the container is transparent, at least in part, for viewing the napkins.
6. A set of stacked napkins according to Claim 4, in which each is pre-printed
15 with a representation of at least a neckline adjacent one edge of the napkin in its pre-folded configuration, such as to resemble a sports shirt, and in which each napkin is printed with a different image so as to represent the shirts of a team of sportsmen.
7. A method of manufacture of a pre-folded napkin, comprising printing an
20 image on a flat paper napkin, and folding it in a sequence of multiple folds into a smaller size such that it reveals a pre-determined portion of the printed image and is capable of being stacked with other such napkins for package and storage, the napkin being pre-printed such that the pre-folded napkin resembles a recognisable 3-dimensional object.

8. A method of assembly of pre-folded napkins, comprising pre-folding a plurality of napkins in accordance with Claim 7, and stacking them in a container for package and storage.
9. A method according to Claim 8, in which the container is transparent.
- 5 10. A method of making and selling napkins, each napkin being a pre-folded and pre-printed paper napkin capable of being stacked with other such napkins for package and storage, the napkin being pre-printed such that the pre-folded napkin resembles a recognisable 3-dimensional object; comprising identifying companies which own character-merchandising rights; effecting any necessary licence
- 10 agreements; printing and selecting the shape of the napkin to represent the image for character merchandising; pre-folding and stacking the napkins; and selling them through a distribution network.
11. A method of making and selling napkins, each napkin being a pre-folded and pre-printed paper napkin capable of being stacked with other such napkins for
- 15 package and storage, the napkin being pre-printed such that the pre-folded napkin resembles a recognisable 3-dimensional object; comprising identifying a company which requires promotional services; printing and selecting the shape of the napkin to represent the company's required promotional image; pre-folding and stacking the napkins; and selling them to the company.
- 20 12. A method of using napkins, each in accordance with Claim 1, to promote a business by supplying them for use as napkins, for example for putting on dining tables or reception stands or the like, or for handing out to guests at a meeting or conference or the like.