

REMOTELY CONTROLLED FLUID DISPENSER

RELATED APPLICATIONS

5 The present application is related to a U.S. Patent Application Serial No. 12/568,180 entitled FLUID DISPENSING SYSTEM, filed on September 28, 2009 having the same inventor and ownership as the present application. The present application is also related to U.S. Patent Nos. 5,630,527, 5,765,722 and 6,682,601, all of which have the same ownership as the present application. This earlier U.S. Patent
10 Application and these three U.S. Patents are hereby incorporated herein by reference.

Field of the Invention

 The present invention is related to fluid dispensing methods and systems that are part of a network, and where each of the dispensers may be controlled by a remote Host computer system via the network. Herein “network” refers a communications network
15 where the Host communicates with one or many dispensers that may be nearby or spread over a wide geographical range. “Network” may be the Internet (the Web or Cloud), but it may be a hardwired local area network or any wireless local area network. “Host” is discussed below as a single computing entity, but the “Host” may be distributed processors or multiple processors that could be at different locations or addresses on the
20 network or on alternative networks.

Background Information

 Dispensing consistent, controllable, and accurate amounts of fluid of varying viscosities remains an issue for product manufacturers and suppliers. For example, for product manufacturing, it is important to reliably and accurately dispense adhesives to
25 ensure high quality and structural integrity of the end product. Herein the end product may be virtually any assembly where adhesives are used to secure parts of structures together. The range of products is broad, e.g., airplane assemblies to audio systems, furniture, housings, packaging, etc.

In instances where dispensers are distributed at widely diverse geographic locations, quality control of the end product may be difficult. For example, control of diverse fluid adhesives having widely diverse viscosities and with no post dispensing dripping is no easy task. Uniform, high quality, world wide dispensing is an important competitive advantage.

In dispensing adhesives and like fluids, the term "dot" or "bead" refers to the form factor of a quantity of fluid dispensed and "fluid" refers to liquids or suspensions or other such materials that react as do materials that fit the common definition of a fluid e.g., water. "Dot" refers to a single, stand alone quantity of fluid, while "bead" refers to a continuous, dispensed strand of fluid. In each case the quantity dispensed is important. For example when a bead is being dispensed in a curved strand the dispenser must accommodate the dynamic differences compared to a straight line dispensing in order to have a uniform bead.

The location of the dot or bead being dispensed on the work piece relies on positioning equipment that controls the X-Y position of a work piece or manual abilities with a dispensing gun that are well known in the art and will only be incidentally referenced herein.

Production facilities using adhesive dispensers are being locally established world wide in many technical fields. Having widely spread dispensers, each individually operated with little knowledge of their operations may result in uneven quality and competitive disadvantages. Regardless of geographic location, precise (repeatable) and accurate dispensing of adhesives is crucial to the assembly of the products. For example, the quality of dispensing adhesives in Mexico and dispensing in the U.S., or anywhere else in the world, should all be high quality.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention discloses a system for remotely controlling one or many fluid dispensers that may be locally distributed over a network or may be widely distributed over the world. Each dispenser may receive via a communications channel the necessary information to carry out a dispensing operation in real time. A Host at a location removed (in the next room or the next country) from the dispensers may

download and upload software to and from each dispenser, and the dispensers may transfer information with each other. The uploaded information from a dispenser may include the "status." Status refers to, *inter alia*, the Host monitoring the operations at various steps along the dispensing process for all the local dispensers. The monitoring
5 may include video and audio interchange between the Host and the specific dispenser in real time. For example, a picture of a dot or bead may be sent to the Host for evaluation, and the Host may measure the accuracy of the dot or bead dispensed, by, for example, comparing the video of the dot or bead to a model, or a template of the dot or bead. There may be mechanical alignment and positioning details that the Host may monitor.
10 The Host may activate an audible or visual alarm to signal the local personnel that their attention may be needed.

In one application the dispensers may be distributed throughout a large manufacturing or a commercial facility, but in another application the dispensers may be in different countries on different continents. Any issue (positive or negative) found at
15 one facility or at one dispenser may be made known to the other facilities and dispensers immediately. Any operation taken in response to an issue also will be available to the other locations within seconds. This coordinating may have special application where manufacturing standards must be met regardless of where the manufacturing or use occurs.

20 A dispensing process, moreover, may be developed at one location or at the Host and be downloaded to local dispensers as part of a training session. The process may be tested in real time. In order to develop processes and other related applications, for example, open sourcing of tools for developing applications may be available at the Host or at a local dispenser. A user may develop applications that may be made available
25 world wide. In such a case any issues, especially any local issues at one facility, may be quickly found and resolved in real time.

Related applications may include the ability to share dispensing processes and special reporting and/or monitoring applications directly between local dispensers and/or a Host. Additionally, information "Webinars" may be developed and made available to
30 dispensing locations and/or to any site on the network for training. The Webinars may

also be directed to and helpful for manufacturing, marketing, sales, purchasing and inventory support.

Monitoring may include production schedules and projections, including materials needed, and matching orders to production dates. Discrepancies discovered
5 may result in warnings that may require local personnel attention.

For devices that are manufactured as meeting some industry standard criteria for validation or approval, it may be possible to build a secure remotely controlled network of systems and an application that would allow validation at many locations at the same time. This would vastly improve the efficiency of any such operation, and such would
10 save time and costs.

In commercial operations, central Host coordinating manufacturing at different locations may provide more consistent, quicker and more efficient operations.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The invention description below refers to the accompanying drawings, of which:
15 FIGs. 1A, 1B and 1C are block diagram of a Host dispenser controller in communication with many local dispensers via a network;
FIG. 2A is a block diagram of a local dispenser;
FIG. 2B is a detail illustrating a syringe dispensing a bead onto a work piece;
FIG. 3 is a block diagram of Host;
20 FIG. 4 is a listing of software resident in a Host;
FIG. 5 illustrates the software resident in a local dispenser; and
FIG. 6 is a flow chart illustrating one operation between a Host and a local dispenser.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF AN ILLUSTRATIVE EMBODIMENT

25 FIG. 1A illustrates several networked arrangements of a Host 2 controlling a number of LDs 6 (local dispensers) configured on a bussed Ethernet network 4. In addition to the bussed Ethernet 4, a daisy chain, ring or star type networks may be employed. FIG. 1B illustrates a configuration where the Host 2 communicates with the

LDs 6' via a network 5. In this instance the network 5 may be wireless, e.g., WIFI, Bluetooth or virtually any communications network. FIG. 1C illustrates a system where the Host is distributed, where Host 2' communicates with Host 2'' via the network 5', network A, or directly 3.

5 The networks may be hardwired, wireless or combinations of both.

Communications among devices communicating via any network include a two way link with a known protocol. Briefly, the Host and each LC must establish a communication link between the devices, and the meanings (protocol) of the bits transferred between the two must be understood by both. The actual link type and
10 protocol are what distinguishes the different networks listed above, but virtually any network may be employed by the present invention, and , as such, the network and the protocol are ancillary to the present disclosure and will not be discussed further unless germane to a particular issue being discussed.

FIG. 2A illustrates the local controller 6 that may include a human interface 16
15 for inputting commands and displaying status, information, etc. For example, a touch screen, a keypad or full keyboard may be used. Other indicators, e.g. LEDs, may be housed in the controller, along with a microprocessor or DSP (Digital Signal Processor) 15 or their equivalents, e.g., gate arrays, etc. Memory 18 may include buffers, cache and main memory containing executable code. Mass or disk memory may be found in some
20 applications, and in some applications flash memory may be used and may contain the dispensing and application software that is uploaded and executed from the main memory. In such a case the flash may be removed where, as a software protection technique, no system software remains in the controller 6. Other I/O 20 may include audio, visual, motor drives for syringe and/or gun dispensers and X-Y tables and
25 communications to local dispensers. The communications allows the Host 2 to actively monitor the status and operations of the dispensers 6, and to transfer new or updated software and information via the network 4.

FIG. 2A and 2B depicts a single local dispenser LD 6 with a motor 9 driven syringe 10, piston 11 and an X-Y table (or a hand gun dispenser). The operations to
30 ensure the location and movement of the work piece mounted to the X-Y table and the dot or bead dispensing are well discussed in the incorporated application and U.S. patents

listed above. The motors may position the work piece and the bead size as determined by motor drive software found in the local dispenser 6. In this application, a syringe 10 dispenses a fluid 12 as a bead 13 continuously as the X-Y table moves the work piece. In one application the fluid 12 may be adhesives dispensed as a dot 21 on the work piece 15.

5 In such applications, a series of spaced adhesive dots and/or a bead are dispensed onto a work piece that is pressed to another work piece (not shown) to form a secure assembly.

Typically dot/bead size is critical to the application. In commercial applications, too little or too much fluid, or a non-uniform bead will adversely affect the quality of the final assembly. Moreover, post application dripping may adversely affect the appearance and the acceptability of the final product.

10 The operation of the physical dispensing precise and accurate fluids and control of the dispensing, back pressure, back off, etc. is illustrated in the incorporated U.S. patents and application.

In some applications the dispenser may dispense a fluid (not an adhesive) into vial, and the equivalent back off process may be developed for each quantity and type of fluid being dispensed. Here again, a back off process may be developed so that the meniscus is retained at the needle aperture after each amount of fluid is dispensed. When changes to the amount dispensed, the amount remaining in the syringe, the fluid type (wherein the viscosity, surface tension and other physical properties of the fluid change) occurs the dispensing process and the associated numbers may all change. In each case the numbers may be determined heuristically for each application. Again refer to the incorporated by reference U.S. patents and the application for more detail.

20 The Host controller 2 is illustrated in FIG. 3. The Host will have much the same categories of hardware and software as found in the LDs, but on a much larger scale. The Host 2 must serve and control many LDs over a wide geographical expanse in real time. As mentioned above the Host may be multiple processors working cooperatively and the processors may be at different locations with respect to the network.

30 The Host 2 may have a large, high speed processor system 30 capable of high speed control of possibly thousands of LDs in real time. The processor may be selected from manufacturers of the large computers and server systems, e.g. IBM. High speed memory 32 may include large RAM systems, buffers, caches, flash and redundant disk

systems made by IBM, EMC, Network Appliances, etc. The I/O 34 may include the usual touch screens, keyboards, indicators (LEDs) printers, scanners, video and audio hardware, and high speed encrypted communications.

The Host software is listed in FIG. 4 and includes an operating system suitable for communicating with the operating system in the LDs. The operating system preferably is open sourced and/or has tools to accommodate writing and refining applications. For example the ANDROID (or DROID) operating system for mobile systems is based on LINUX and allows JAVA to be used to write applications (commonly referred to as "apps"). iPHONE operating systems include an SDK (Software Developers Kit) that also accommodates writing apps. XP and similar operating systems typically will support programs that accommodate writing applications.

Other applications may include dispensing programs, diagnostics and service programs, teaching/training programs, encryption programs and programs meant to implement, adhere to and test to quality industry standards.

The software resident in the LDs cooperatively exchanges communications with the Host. The dispensing programs may be downloaded from the Host and executed in the LDs.

As mentioned above, a dispensing process may be developed heuristically for particular applications at a local dispenser or at the Host. For example, for a particular fluid in a particular application, the number of stepping motor steps to dispense the required dot or bead and then the number back off steps to prevent dripping as the syringe is depleted may be developed at one LD location. Once developed, the process may be up loaded to the Host and then down loaded to dispensers anywhere in the world. The process may be tested at each location to ensure quality and reliability. Part of the testing at each location, may entail a video showing the dot and/or bead that is sent to the Host. The Host may verify proper operation at the various locations. Voice communications may be used redundantly ensure proper operation with local personnel. In other applications one LD may be arranged to communicate with another LD and transfer a dispensing program.

FIG. 6 illustrates one operation of networked dispensers. Here a particular adhesive dispensing program 60 is developed at a local dispenser for a particular

assembly. When completed that program is uploaded 62 to the Host. The Host may download 64 the program to other local dispensers that are assembly the same product using the same dispensing program. The local dispenser that received the down loaded program may verify 66 that the program works properly. If there is an issue 80, it is
5 communicated to the Host 86, which may send the issue to the originator of the program. The issued may be resolved 84 cooperatively among the participants, the program amended 82 and uploaded 88 to the Host. If no issues are found 68 when the program is verified, the program is run 70 and product assembled. As the program steps are performed data may be sent to the Host 72 are pre-designated steps. The data may
10 include video, or indicators of some other malfunction (like improper motor steps or dripping, etc.), if the operation is proper 76 the program runs until completion and ends 92. If some improper 74 or unexpected issue occurs, the program may be stopped 77 and the local personnel notified. The Host may then communicate the issue to the originator 86. The issue then will be resolved 84, the program amended 82 and up-loaded to the
15 Host for down loading to the other local dispensers.

Advantageously, the Host and more than one local dispenser may cooperate on developing a dispensing program. Real time communication among the local dispensers and the Host allows for multiple designers to uncovered problems or other issues and resolve them quickly. Differences in locale, materials and operating personnel may be
20 more quickly uncovered and resolved.

What is claimed is:

CLAIMS

- 1 1. A fluid dispenser network comprising:
2 a Host in communication with each of one or more dispensers via the network;
3 the Host comprising: a processor, memory, a user interface, video and audio
4 hardware, communications hardware; an operating system, a software application
5 program that details operational steps particular to a dispensing application; and wherein
6 the one or more dispensers comprising a processor, memory, a user interface,
7 communications hardware; a software program to communicate with the Host, wherein
8 the Host downloads the software application program to the one or more dispensers via
9 the network; and wherein the one or more dispensers feed back to the Host information
10 pertaining to the particular operational steps.
- 1 2. The fluid dispenser network of claim 1 wherein the feedback to the Host occurs in
2 real time.
- 1 3. The fluid dispenser network of claim 1 further comprising:
2 a training program developed at the Host or at the one or more dispensers,
3 wherein the training program may be accessed by the one or more dispensers over the
4 network and at other sites connected to the network.
- 1 4. The fluid dispenser network of claim 1 further comprising:
2 tools for developing software, wherein the tools are made available at the Host
3 and at the one of more dispensers; and
4 applications developed by the tools.
- 1 5. The fluid dispenser network of claim 4 wherein one application is directed
2 towards ensuring that the dispensers operates to meet a standard.

1 6. The fluid dispenser of claim 5 wherein the standard may be validated for
2 dispensers at different locations.

1 7. The fluid dispenser of claim 4 wherein one application comprises a Webinar.

1 8. The fluid dispenser of claim 1 wherein the Host comprises a dispenser.

1 9. A process for remotely controlling one or more fluid dispensers, the process
2 comprising the steps of:

3 developing an adhesive dispensing program, the program including the steps of
4 determining dot size for given adhesive fluid, and determining stepping motor steps for
5 dispensing that dot size and back off steps as a function of quantity in syringe; and
6 determining pausing locations at designated steps in the program;
7 uploading the program to a Host via network;
8 downloading of the program to the one or more fluid dispensers;
9 running the program at the one or more fluid dispensers;
10 reaching a step in the process where the dispensing is paused and developing the
11 status of the one or more fluid dispensers and communicating the status to the Host;
12 reviewing the status and, if acceptable, commanding the one or more fluid
13 dispensers to continue, but, if not acceptable, the Host commands the one or more fluid
14 dispensers to halt and notify local personnel.

1 10. The process of claim 9 further comprising the steps of sending the status to an
2 original developer of the process; developing a solution to the unacceptable status and
3 relaying that solution to the one or more fluid dispensers via the Host.

1 11. The process of claim 9 wherein the host compares the status to a standard to
2 determine if the dispensing is acceptable or not.

- 1 12. A process comprising the steps of:
- 2 developing a Webinar using tools at a Host;
- 3 communicating to a local dispenser from a Host;
- 4 sending the Webinar to a fluid dispenser;
- 5 running the Webinar at the fluid dispenser;
- 6 reaching a step in the process where the dispenser communicates to the Host;
- 7 wherein the Host, in response, sends information to the dispenser.