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**United States Patent**  
**Vargas , et al.**

**9,239,590**  
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Apparatus comprising a pistol grip

## Abstract

A pistol-grip module includes a handle and a coupling member that is configured to couple, mechanically and electrically, to a battery compartment of an active frame. The active frame, which includes at least one electrically powered device, is intended to receive a data-capture device, such as a smart phone. In versions of the pistol-grip module that include a trigger, the trigger can be used to actuate the electrically powered device of the active frame.

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### Parent Case Text

This case claims priority of U.S. Provisional Patent application 61/765,239, filed Feb. 15, 2013, which is incorporated by reference herein.

## Claims

What is claimed:

1. An apparatus comprising a pistol-grip module, wherein the pistol-grip module includes: a handle; a battery, wherein the battery is disposed in the handle; and a coupling member, wherein the coupling member is attached to an end of the handle, and further wherein: (a) at least a first portion of the coupling member is dimensioned and structurally configured to couple to a battery compartment of a first device; (b) the first portion of the coupling member includes a plurality of electrical contacts, wherein at least a first electrical contact of the plurality thereof is electrically coupled to the battery; and (c) when the first portion of the coupling member is coupled to the battery compartment of the first device, the plurality of electrical contacts electrically engage electrical contacts in the battery compartment, thereby providing power from the battery to the first device.
2. The pistol-grip module of claim 1 and further comprising a trigger, wherein the trigger is disposed on the handle, and wherein the trigger is electrically coupled to a second electrical contact of the plurality thereof on the first portion of the coupling member.
3. The pistol-grip module of claim 1 and further comprising charging electronics for charging the battery.
4. The apparatus of claim 1 and further comprising an active frame, wherein the active frame is the first device, and further wherein the active frame includes at least one electrically powered device, wherein the electrically powered device is powered via power delivered from the battery.
5. The apparatus of claim 4 wherein the electrically powered device is an optical scanner.
6. The apparatus of claim 5 wherein the optical scanner is actuated via the trigger.
7. The apparatus of claim 4 further comprising an engine, wherein the active frame is dimensioned and arranged to receive and mechanically couple to the engine.
8. The apparatus of claim 7 wherein the engine is a smart phone.
9. The apparatus of claim 8 wherein the apparatus is a handheld medical computer, wherein stored in a memory of the engine is an APP that enables the engine to access electronic medical records.

20. The system of claim 16 wherein the first portion of the coupling member includes electrical contacts that engage electrical contacts in the battery compartment of the active frame.

Most of these hand-held data-capture devices include keys and a screen and are intended to be held like a phone. As a consequence, when a user holds the device for use, the wrist is rotated so the hand is in a palm-up orientation and the device is supported by the palm and four fingers (index through pinky). The buttons can be "pressed" using the thumb or the fingers of the free hand.

The pistol grip places the wrist in a neutral (i.e., non-rotated), "hand-shake" orientation, which results in less discomfort and user fatigue. Furthermore, the trigger of the pistol grip is actuated using the index finger whereas the thumb is used when the device is held in a palm-up configuration. The latter is the far-more fatiguing approach. Alternatively, fingers of the free hand can be used when the device is held in a palm-up configuration. Although not particularly fatiguing, that requires the use of a second hand to operate the data capture device.

## SUMMARY

In the illustrative embodiment of the invention, the pistol grip is used in conjunction with an active frame. The active frame is configured to receive and operatively couple to an "engine," which, in the illustrative embodiment, is a smart phone (e.g., the "iPhone.TM." by Apple, Inc., etc.). The active frame supplements or enhances the capabilities of the engine for use in specific applications. For example, the active frame and engine can be coupled to provide a device particularly useful in medical settings, such as disclosed in U.S. application Ser. No. 61/765,239.

The active frame includes features that require power and, as such, some embodiments of the active frame include a power source. In some embodiments, the active frame is battery powered, wherein the active frame includes a removable battery pack. The battery pack resides in the active frame in an appropriately sized and shaped battery compartment or recess. The compartment includes plural electrical contacts. When a battery pack is inserted in the compartment, contacts on the battery pack engage the electrical contacts in the battery compartment, thereby enabling power to be delivered to the active frame and/or data-capture device.

In the accordance with the illustrative embodiment, a pistol-grip module is provided that includes a coupling member that is sized and configured to be received by the battery compartment in the active frame. The pistol grip module also includes a trigger that actuates at least one function of the active frame and/or data-capture device. For example, some embodiments of the active frame include an optical scanner wherein the trigger of the pistol grip module can be used to actuate the scanner. A battery is disposed in a handle of the pistol-grip module.

The plural electrical contacts in the battery compartment of the active frame include, in addition to power and ground contacts, a contact intended to receive a signal from the trigger for actuating the scanner. Electrical contacts are accessible from the exterior of the coupling member on the pistol-grip module. Once coupled to the active frame, these electrical contacts abut the contacts in the battery compartment of the active frame and are therefore operable to route signal and power to the active frame/data-capture device.

Thus, the battery compartment of the active frame and the coupling member of the pistol-grip module (which has essentially the same shape and size as that of the actual battery pack) form the elements of an interface, both mechanical and electrical, for coupling the pistol grip to the active frame/data-capture device.

By virtue of the aforementioned arrangement, the user can readily reconfigure the active frame/data-capture device from a non-grip implementation to a pistol-grip implementation, as suits a particular work flow. For example, for scan-intensive tasks, a user will typically use the pistol-grip; for communications-intensive tasks, a user might prefer the non-grip implementation.

Consider a setting, such as a hospital or other facility, which will have many data-capture devices in use. When the battery in a dedicated/single purpose data-capture device is depleted, a user will have to exchange that device for one with a charged battery to complete their work shift. In contrast, once the integral battery in a pistol-grip module is depleted, the pistol-grip module can be removed and replaced with another pistol-grip module having a charged battery. In the former case, the facility must have a sufficient number of extra data-capture devices at the ready, costing perhaps \$1500 per unit, to replace depleted units. In the latter case, the facility stocks a sufficient number of extra pistol grip modules, costing about \$100 per unit, to replace depleted units. When large numbers of units are involved, the cost savings resulting from the pistol-grip module is significant.

Since the pistol-grip module is removable and charged while separated from the data-capture device, a user can keep their data-capture device running nearly 100% of the time by simply exchanging a depleted pistol-grip module for a charged one.

As a function of the intended application, data-capture devices may also be required to meet certain protection standards (i.e., IP protection class). For example, a handheld medical computer for use in a hospital will likely be required to satisfy IP54, which requires protection against contact, dust deposit, and splashed water. In accordance with the illustrative embodiment, the coupling member of the pistol-grip module completes an IP54 seal for the active frame/data-capture device.

Embodiments of the invention provide, among other systems, apparatuses or articles: an apparatus comprising a pistol-grip module; an apparatus comprising an active frame and pistol-grip module; a handheld medical computer; and a system comprising plural pistol-grip modules, plural active frames, and a charging system for charging the pistol-grip modules.

## BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a top three-quarters perspective view of an active frame coupled to an engine in accordance with the illustrative embodiment of the invention.

FIG. 2 is a bottom three-quarters perspective view of the active frame of FIG. 1, wherein the orientation of the active frame is rotated 180 degrees with respect to FIG. 1.

FIG. 3 is a bottom three-quarters perspective view of the active frame of FIG. 1, wherein the battery pack is removed.

FIG. 4 depicts a bottom perspective view of a pistol-grip module and the active frame.

FIG. 5 depicts a top perspective view of the pistol-grip module and the active frame.

FIG. 6 depicts a top, three-quarters perspective view of a mobile handheld medical computer including an engine, active frame, and a pistol-grip module coupled to the active frame.

FIG. 7 depicts a top, three-quarters perspective view of the medical computer of FIG. 6, wherein the view is rotated 180 degrees with respect to FIG. 6.

FIG. 8 depicts a bottom three-quarters perspective view of the medical computer of FIG. 6.

FIG. 9 depicts a system in accordance with an embodiment of the invention.

## Definitions

FIG. 6 depicts device 600 in accordance with the illustrative embodiment of the invention. Device 600 includes engine 102, active frame 104, and pistol-grip module 466.

By downloading appropriate software applications "APPS" to engine 102, particularly as functionally enhanced by active frame 104, the engine and active frame become suitable for various specialty uses, such as a handheld medical computer, a mobile handheld POS terminal, an inventory/price check device, and so forth. In the illustrative embodiment, device 600 is a handheld medical computer that, for example and without limitation, is capable of optical scanning (e.g., a wrist tag, the label on a vial of medicine, etc.), accessing medical records, and of providing alerts.

As previously discussed, pistol-grip module 466 provides improved ergonomics to the active frames and engines that it is used with. The pistol-grip module also improves work flow and logistics, providing potential cost savings. It is to be understood that a pistol-grip module in accordance with the present disclosure can be coupled to other active frames, as suitably modified to receive other engines, intended for use in the same (i.e., medical) or different applications. After reading this disclosure, it will be within the capabilities of those skilled in art to modify the pistol-grip module for use with such other active frames.

Active frame 104 and pistol-grip module 466 are now described in detail.

### Active Frame.

FIG. 1 depicts medical device 100, which comprises active frame 104 and appropriately programmed engine or data-capture device 102.

Active frame 104 includes upper housing 106 and lower housing 108. The upper and lower housings are attached to one another. This can be accomplished in a variety of ways, such as, for example, using screws 114. The screws pass through holes 112 in upper housing 106 and are received by threaded openings (not depicted) in lower housing 108.

Bumper 110 overlies the lip (not depicted) of lower housing 108 and the lip (not depicted) of upper housing 106. When the upper housing and the lower housing are attached to one another, bumper 110 is compressed, thereby providing a dust-tight and water-tight seal. The bumper comprises a resilient material, such as silicone, TPU, or the like. In addition to serving as a seal, the bumper provides a measure of shock protection

Upper housing 106 comprises opening 116 that enables a user to view a screen of engine 102. In embodiments, such as for use as a medical computer, when dust and liquid protection is important, opening 116 is not "open;" rather, transparent screen protector 118 is attached to the undersurface of the upper housing 106 and "covers" opening 116. In some embodiments, transparent screen protector 118 is a tempered glass that is specially adapted not to interfere with the capacitive touch screen function of the underlying screen of the data-capture device, as appropriate. Such glass is available, for example, from Incipio Technologies, Inc. of Irvine, Calif.

Upper housing 106 also includes front speaker 124, microphone 126, and visual indicators 128A and 128B. In the illustrative embodiment, the indicators comprise LED light pipes with multiple color LEDs. The indicators can be used to provide a number of visual alerts/indications to a user. For example, one color indication (e.g., green, etc.) can be used to indicate when device 100 is plugged in and being charged. A second color indication (e.g., blue, etc.) can be used to indicate when the rear speaker is turned on. A third color indication (e.g., red, etc.) can be used as a low battery warning.

Lower housing 108 includes bump-out 130, which accommodates optical scanner 132. Scan window 134 is disposed near one end of active frame 104.

Button 136 is the power button and buttons 144A/B are volume "increase" and "decrease" buttons (the actual buttons are not depicted in FIG. 1 since they are located on an obscured sides of active frame 104). Port cover 140 covers a mini USB port.

FIG. 2 depicts the back of active frame 104, showing a further view of lower housing 108 and some of its features.

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Upper portion 484 is the portion of coupling member 478 that actually engages and couples to active frame 104. In this regard, upper portion 484 is sized and shaped to fit battery compartment 282; that is, it has the same form factor as battery pack 254. Upper portion 484 includes protuberances 486, which are identical to protuberances 364 and are intended to engage complementary features (e.g., notches, etc.) in battery compartment 252 to secure the upper portion 484 of coupling member 478 in the battery compartment in conjunction with latch 260. Protuberances 486 are depicted more clearly in FIG. 5.

As depicted in FIG. 5, the uppermost surface of upper portion 484 of coupling member 478 includes electrical contacts 588. At least one of these contacts is electrically coupled to the battery within handle 470 and at least one of these contacts is electrically coupled to trigger 476.

When upper portion 484 is inserted in and coupled to battery compartment 252, electrical contacts 588 engaged electrical contacts 362 in battery compartment 252. In this fashion, power from the battery in handle 470 is delivered to active frame 104/engine 102. And when trigger 476 is pressed, a signal generated by the trigger is electrically coupled through the appropriate contact to actuate optical scanner 132 (or other device) of active frame 104 or engine 102.

FIGS. 6 through 8 depict several views of device 600 in accordance with the illustrative embodiment of the invention. Device 600 includes engine 102, active frame 104, and pistol-grip module 466. As previously discussed, in the illustrative embodiment, device 600 is a handheld medical computer capable of optical scanning (e.g., a wrist tag, the label on a vial of medicine, etc.) via optical scanner 132 of active frame 104, accessing medical records via Apps stored on engine 102 and via the telecommunications capabilities thereof, and providing alerts to a nurse or other user via indicators 128A/B, among any other capabilities.

FIG. 9 depicts facility 990 in which a plurality of devices 600 are in use. The facility is divided into four wings, 900A, 900B, 900C, and 900D. Seven devices 600A-i, i=1,7 are in use in wing 900A, five devices 600B-i, i=1,5 are in use in wing 900B, eight devices 600C-i, i=1,8 are in use in wing 900C, and six devices 600D-i, i=1,6 are in use in wing 900D. Each wing has its own charging station 992A, 992B, 992C, or 992D.

As a shift starts and devices 600 are deployed for use, a number of pistol-grip modules 446 are charging (or fully charged) in the respective charging stations. In the illustrative embodiment, there is a 1:1 ratio, for each wing, between the number of devices 600 in use and the number of pistol-grip modules 446 in charging station 992. As such, there are seven pistol-grip modules 446A-i, i=8,14 charging in charging station 992A, five pistol-grip modules 446B-i, i=6,10 charging in charging station 992B, eight pistol-grip modules 446C-i, i=9,16 charging in charging station 992C, and six pistol-grip modules 446D-i, i=7,12 charging in charging station 992D. In other embodiments, there can be a different ratio between the number of deployed device 600 and charging/charged replacement pistol-grip modules 446.

Thus, wing 600A has seven devices 600A in use and there are seven pistol-grip modules 446A charging or charged at the start of a shift. This provides one spare pistol-grip module 446A for each deployed device 600A. As the battery charge becomes depleted on a particular deployed device 600A-i, the pistol-grip module 466A-i in that device (in which the battery resides) is replaced with a pistol-grip module have a charged battery.

It is to be understood that many variations of the invention can easily be devised by those skilled in the art after reading this disclosure and that the scope of the present invention is to be determined by the following claims.

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