Title
A mobile showroom and method

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ABSTRACT

The present invention relates to a vehicular mobile showroom from which retail and distribution services for blinds can be provided. The mobile showroom suitably, but by no means exclusively, is in the form of a van having a cabin that customers can enter. The cabin has one or more display cabinets that have a plurality of compartments defined by an assembly of upright and horizontal panels. The compartments being sized so that a number of blinds can be mounted in each compartment in an operative condition as if installed on a building.
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Invention Title:
   A MOBILE SHOWROOM AND METHOD

The following statement is a full description of this invention, including the best method for performing it known to me/us:
A MOBILE SHOWROOM AND METHOD

FIELD OF THE PRESENT INVENTION

The present invention relates to a mobile showroom vehicle, such as but by no means limited to a van, in which blinds are displayed. The present invention also relates to a method of providing retail services.

BACKGROUND OF THE PRESENT INVENTION

Retail services in the field of window blinds have traditionally been provided in shop fronts or factory foyers that are opened for business over standard trading hours. Each shop is equipped with the necessary racks for hanging curtains and blinds so that customers can be shown samples of curtains and blinds prior to purchasing. With the advent of the world-wide-web, eBay™ and alike, the provision of retail services and sales online has become popular with customers. From the perspective of a business operator, online retail services have the advantage of lowering overhead costs, and geographic boundaries that are usually only limited by the accessibility to mail services.

One of the disadvantages of online retail services for high cost items, such as window blinds, is that the customers are reluctant to purchase goods without first seeing the blinds. This issue has in part been addressed by consumers going to a shop front to see the item and then purchasing the item online either at the same, or at a discount price. However, this may be problematic for business operators who display goods at a shop front, but do not have customers purchasing via an online purchasing facility.

It is an object of the present invention to provide an alternative means for displaying blinds to customers and a method of providing retail services in respect of blinds.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to a mobile showroom vehicle including:

a cabin having an interior space into which customers can enter and leave; and

at least one display cabinet located in the cabin, the display cabinet has a plurality of compartments and in each compartment at least one blind can be mounted so that a series
of different blinds on offer for sale can be mounted in the cabinet.

Throughout this specification, the term "blinds" embraces any screening or covering and includes indoor and outdoor curtains, blinds and awnings. The blinds may be used to partially cover a window or shade an area from direct sunlight. For example, the term blinds includes, but by no means limited to, aluminium venetians, cellular blinds, dual roller blinds, panel drapes, plantation shutters, pleated blinds, roller blinds, roller screens, roman blinds, holland blinds, sheerline, sheerview blinds, timber venetians, vertical blinds, vertical sunscreens, aluminium hoods, aluminium plantation, shutters, awnings, café blinds, canvas hoods, cassette sunscreens, awnings, folding arm awnings, roller shutters, today awnings, louvers, visionweave, Ziptrak® blinds, all types of curtains and drapes, and so forth.

The mobile showroom vehicle may be part of, or transported by any vehicle, including a non-motorised vehicle such as a trailer, caravan or carriage having wheels that are propelled, and may include a motorised vehicle such as a van, bus, truck or car. The cabin of the mobile showroom may be carried by the vehicle. In the case where the vehicle is a motorised vehicle, the driver's section/seat may be located in the front of the display cabin. The driver's section may or may not be dividable from the remainder of the display cabin, for example, by a retractable partition. In another example, the driver's controls may be housed in the separate cabin to the display cabin.

The blinds may be mounted to the compartments in a working condition in which customers can observe movement of the blinds between different operating positions. The operating positions may include, for instance, when the blinds are closed as if covering a window or area, and when the blinds are opened as if uncovering a window or area. The blinds in the opened positioned include blinds that can be retracted into a stowed position, such as when the blinds are stacked or concertinaed together in a compressed format. The blinds may also be in an opened position when the vertical or horizontal slats of venetian blinds are oriented to reduce or minimise visual obstruction through the blinds or flow of air through the blinds.

The blinds may include mechanisms for changing the position of the blinds in a manner that is the same as if the blinds were installed on a building. For example, the blinds may be raised and lowered, or the orientation of individual slats such as
vertical or horizontal slats of venetian blinds may be pivoted about a longitudinal axis of the slats as desired.

Any one of the blinds may also be moved, for example between a stowed position and an extending position and in another example, the angle of the slats about a longitudinal axis of the slats may be changed. Movement of the blinds may be changed manually, for example, by using draw strings, control rods and alike that may be used to move the blinds as if installed on a building. In addition, the blinds of the mobile showroom vehicle may move by way of a motorisation system. The motorisation system may be powered by an electrical system of the mobile showroom, for example, by connection to a 24 volt circuit of the mobile showroom, and/or by means of connection to mains electricity. Switches may also be used to control operation of the motorisation system and, in turn, movement of the blinds.

The blinds may be releasably mounted in the compartments. This will allow customers to remove the blinds from the compartments and directly handle the blinds.

The blinds may be releasably mounted to the compartments using fittings that can be used to interchangeably mount different types of blinds to the compartments.

The blinds may include an outer assembly that can be detachably fitted to the compartments, and the outer housing of each blind can be positioned in the compartments as desired. The outer housing may be detachably fitted to the compartments by means of co-operating mechanical mechanisms, locks, latches, catches including double ball catches, snap-locking mechanisms, magnetic catches and so forth.

The outer assembly may include a head rail that may be common to different types of the blinds.

The mobile showroom vehicle may include a total inventory of blinds that exceeds the total capacity of the cabinets to hold the blinds, such that all of the blinds are unable to be displayed simultaneously. Suitably the mobile showroom includes storage space in which the blinds not on display can be located. The storage space may include closable housings such as a locker into which the blinds can be stowed. The blinds on display in the cabinet can be interchanged with the blinds of the inventory not on display. One advantage of this aspect is that when it is known that the mobile showroom vehicle visits customers having a particular interest in certain types of blinds, the blinds on
display in the compartments can be changed to reflect the interests of the customers.

The compartments may have an opening and a depth extending away from the opening, and suitably the compartments are sized so that the fittings of at least two, and suitably three or more separate (or different types of) blinds can be mounted within the compartments one in front of the other at different depths in the compartments. For instance, the compartments may be sized so that two, three or four blinds may be mounted one in front of the other.

The cabinets may include an assembly of upright panels that are interconnected by horizontal panels and the compartments have a quadrangular shape defined by the panels. The upright and horizontal panels may form box-shaped frames about the perimeter of the compartments that define an opening to the compartments, the box frames having a depth that extend from the opening that is sized to allow a plurality of the blinds to be mounted one in front of the other in the or each compartment. The openings of the compartments may have a quadrangular shape. The openings of the compartments suitably face in a direction, which when the mobile showroom vehicle travels in a straight forward direction, faces laterally to the direction of travel of the mobile showroom vehicle. The benefit of this feature is that as the vehicle accelerates or decelerates while travelling in one direction, the blinds in the cabinets are less likely to swing or dislodge from the cabinets. The compartments of the cabinets may be arranged in rows and ranks. The compartments may each be of equal, or unequal, in size.

The mobile showroom vehicle may include two or more display cabinets that are located or fixed to opposite side walls of the cabin.

The mobile showroom vehicle may have one or more moveable cabinets within the cabin. For instance, one or more of the display cabinets may be mounted on wheels that are supported on the floor of the cabin, or mounted to tracks on which the cabinets slide. The tracks may be overhead and/or floor based tracks.

The compartments of each display cabinet may be arranged in rows and ranks.

Suitably, each cabinet includes one or more closable cupboard located below the compartments. The cupboard can be used for storage purposes.
The cabinets may also include a hanging rail for hanging samples of the blinds. The samples may, for example, be individual pieces of fabric, books containing multiple samples of fabric bound together and so forth.

The cabin may include a doorway, such as a side and/or a rear doorway through which customers can enter and leave the cabin. The showroom may include a blind over the doorway that can be moved between a storage position in which the blind is retracted and an operative position in which the blind extends outwardly from the doorway. The blind may, for example, be an awning that extends outwardly from the doorway to form a temporary roof over a region adjacent to the doorway. In another example, the blind may extend downwardly and be connected to flooring of the vehicle or the ground, such as a café style blind.

Blinds, such as awnings may also be fitted to the outside of the vehicle, such as along side walls of the vehicle that do not have doors and/or windows.

The doors of the mobile showroom may include hinged doors or sliding doors. The doors and/or walls of the mobile showroom may include windows and blinds that may be fitted to the inside or outside of the windows. For example, the blinds fitted to the outside of the windows may be retractable sun-shading screens.

The present invention also relates to a method of providing retail services for blinds, the method including:

- transporting the mobile showroom vehicle including any one or a combination of the features described herein to selected locations to provide customer access to the showroom;

- displaying blinds in the mobile showroom vehicle to customers; and

- recording purchase orders of blinds from customers who have visited the mobile showroom vehicle.

In the situation in which there are a number of mobile showroom vehicles, the method may also include predefining a geographic region allocated to the (or each) mobile showroom, and the mobile showroom shall only be transported between selected locations within the predefined geographic region. Suitably, the geographic regions of each mobile showroom do not overlap. For example, the geographic region for the mobile showrooms may be based on different suburbs, postcodes, boundaries defines by streets and alike.
Each mobile showroom vehicle may have an associated business, and a single entity may own two or more businesses and mobile showrooms. However suitably, the businesses associated which each mobile showroom may be owned by separate entities, for example, independent franchisees.

Suitably, the purchase orders of each mobile showroom are completed by common blind suppliers. For example, the franchisees who operate each mobile showroom, forward their orders to the same suppliers who supply the blinds to the franchisees. The suppliers may obtain the blinds by any means including manufacturing the blinds on their own premise, subcontracting manufacture of the blinds or importation of the blinds.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

An embodiment will now be described with reference to the accompanying Figures, of which:

Figure 1 is a schematic plan view of a cabin of a mobile showroom vehicle of a preferred embodiment in the form of a van having two display cabinets attached to side walls of an interior of the van;

Figure 2 is a photograph of one of the display cabinets located along a side wall of a driver side of the van shown in Figure 1;

Figure 3 is a photograph of another display cabinet located along a side wall of a passenger side of the van shown in Figure 1;

Figure 4 is a schematic illustration of a single compartment of a display cabinet in which blinds are fitted;

Figures 5 and 6 are drawings of front and end views respectively of the cabinet shown in Figure 2; and

Figures 7 and 8 are drawings of front and end views respectively of the cabinet shown in Figure 3.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

In order to maintain clarity of the Figures, not all of the reference numerals mention in the following text have been included in each Figure.

With reference to the Figures, the preferred embodiment is a mobile showroom vehicle in the form of a van 10 that can be
driven between selected locations. In other embodiments, the mobile showroom may be in the form of a bus, truck or even a trailer that can be towed from location to location.

The van 10 has a cabin which includes a driver seat 11 and the usual features such as a steering wheel 12, control panel, and operating pedals for driving the van 10 from the driver seat 11. The van 10 may also have one or more passenger seats 12 next to the driver seat 11. The position of the seats 11, 12 may be adjustable including, sliding forward and backward, recline backwards, and pivot to face either forwardly or rearwardly. The dashed outline of the passenger seat 12 in Figure 1 represents the passenger seat 12 when pivoted about an upright axis to face rearwardly.

The cabin of the van 10 also has an interior space defined by the side walls 14 and cabinets 13 that are attached to side walls 14. The cabinets 13 have a series of compartments 15 in which the blinds 16 are fitted so as to allow the blinds 16 to move between various positions as if the blinds 16 were fitted to, and in use on, a building. In addition, the blinds 16 are displaying in the compartments 15 in a working condition so that the customers can observe the appearance of the blinds 16 and observe movement of the blinds 16 as if installed on a building. This allows customers to obtain a better appreciation of the blinds 16 prior to placing a purchase ordered.

The compartments 15 are defined between upright side panels having a width which in effect defines the dimension of the compartments 15 in a direction away from the opening of the compartments 15. The compartments 15 may also have upper and lower limits defined by horizontal panels. Suitably the cabinets 13 comprise an assembly of spaced upright panels that are interconnected by horizontal panels, the upright panels and horizontal panels being arranged orthogonally so that the compartments 15 have a quadrangular shape. The upright and horizontal panels form box-shaped frames about the perimeter of the compartments 15 that define an openings to the compartments 15, the box frames have a depth that extends from the opening that is sized to allow a plurality of the blinds to be mounted one in front of the other in the or each compartment 15.

The panels may be made of any suitable material including woods/timbers, or plyboards, and other manufactured materials including MDF, chipboard, melamine, and other laminates.

Lighting, such as 12 volt or 240 volt lighting may be provided in the compartments 15.
A major advantage of the present invention is that the van 10 can be driven between selected locations, such as the houses of prospective customers at various times of the day including prior arranged meeting times.

The cabinets 13 are ideally attached to the side walls 14 of the cabin and suitably along the driver side wall (i.e. the right side wall) and the passenger side wall (i.e. the left side wall). Figures 2 and 5 illustrate the cabinet 13 attached to the driver side wall which extends over the height of the walls 14 of the cabin. Figure 6 illustrates an end view of the cabinet 13 shown in Figures 5.

Figures 3 and 7 illustrate the cabinet 13 attached to the side wall on the passenger side of the van 10. Figure 8 is an end view of the cabinet 13 shown in Figure 7.

The compartments 15 are arranged in rows and ranks including at least 2 rows and at least 2 ranks. The cabinet 13 on the driver's side has 2 rows and five ranks of compartments 15. The cabinet 13 on the passenger's side has two rows and four ranks of compartments 15 for receiving the blinds 16. In addition, although not shown in Figures 5 and 7, the cabinets 13 may include a single taller compartment 15 in which a hanging rail 17 can be provided that extends over the height of two rows of compartments 15. The hanging rail 17 may be used for hanging additional blind samples such as individual fabric samples or bound collections thereof in a book. Suitably, the hanging rail 17 is provided at an end of the cabinets 13 towards a rear door of the van 10.

Figure 4 is a schematic illustration of a single compartment including a set of interconnected panels 18 that define a height dimension (h), a width dimension (w) and a depth (d) extending away from the side wall of the van 10. The panels 18 also define an opening 19 in which that the blinds 16 are fitted. Suitably the blinds 16 are fitted into the compartments 15 so that a plane of the blind 16 is arranged parallel to the opening 19 of the compartments 15. Moreover, as can be seen in Figure 4, the depth of the compartments 15 is sized to receive a plurality of the blinds 16, and suitably, 2 or 3 blinds 16 can be fitted to each compartment 15, one in front of the other. The blinds 16 located behind can be viewed by retracting or removing the blind in front.

The blinds 16 may be installed in the compartments 15 using any suitable fittings including fittings typically used for mounting blinds 16 to buildings. In the situation in which the blinds 16
are venetian blinds or plantation shutters, the blinds will be fitted to the compartments 15 to allow the orientation of slats of the blinds 16 to be moved or rocked about longitudinal axes thereof, for example, by means of control rods that interconnect the slats 20. In addition, in the situation where the blinds can be retracted upwardly, suitably, the blinds include a head rail extending across the compartment on which the blinds can either be rolled or gathered.

In the situation in which the blinds 16 are rolled on a head rail 21, suitably, the head rail 21 may to rotatable mounted by fittings and include a continuous cord that can be pulled to rotate the head rail 21 and roll the blind 16. The head rail 21 may also be driven rotatably via other mechanisms including a gear mechanism that is driven manually or by motorisation. In the situation in which the blind 16 is gathered, suitably, the series of lifting strings may be attached to the blind and the head rails for lifting the blind 16 as desired. In another situation, the head rail may include a track and slider that moves back on forth on the track to allow the blinds 16 to be opened sideways as desired.

The fittings for mounting the blinds 16 may also include an outer frame 22 that is attached to the panels 18 of the compartment 15 and blinds, such as plantation shutters, can be mounted to the frame 22. For example, the blind may be hingedly mounted to the frame 22 which when pivoted outwardly can allow access to a blind behind. In another example, the blind may be releasably fitted to the frame or to the compartment, for instance by means of latches or catches such as magnetic catches, double ball catches, and over centre lever catches.

Irrespective of the mechanism used for mounting the blinds to the compartments, the blinds may be driven by a motorisation system between different operating positions, e.g. opened such a drawn up or drawn to one side, and closed such as lowered down, drawn across or hinged closed. In the case of horizontal or vertical venetians, the slats of the blinds may also be pivoted about their longitudinal axis between a horizontal orientation to allow maximum ventilation and an inclined orientation to reduce ventilation.

The side wall 14 of the passenger side of the van 10 may have a sliding door 23 and a retractable step 24 to allow easy access for customers entering and leaving the cabin. Suitably a blind in the form of an awning 25 may be attached to the outside of the van 10 so as to at least partially cover the sliding door.
23. An awning may also be provided on the opposite driver side of the van 10.

The van 10 may also include one or more rear doors 26 that may also be fitted with an awning or a café style blind that extends downwardly adjacent to or in the doorway of rear doors 26.

The van may also include one or more window (other than a front window of the van or windows of the driver and passenger doors) than may be fitted with internal or external blinds.

Located beneath the rows and ranks of compartments 15 is a series of storage cupboards 22 that can be used for storing a range of items. The cupboards 25 may include conventional latches for securing the doors of the cupboards in a closed position. Lighting may also be provided inside the cupboards and a switch that is operable based whether the doors are opened or closed can be used to turn the lighting on/off.

The cabinet also includes a table 28 that can be moved between an operative position in which the table extends from the cabinet 13 and provides a flat working surface, and a stowed position in which the table is concealed in the cabinet 13.

When concealed in the cabinet, the table 28 may be retracted or folded. The table 28 may be cantilevered from the cabinet and may or may not have legs. Additional compartments 29 located above and below the retractable may also be provide for housing any one or a combination of televisions, microwaves, computer equipment, refrigerators and alike.

Those skilled in the art of the invention will appreciate that many variations and modifications may be made to the preferred embodiment without departing from the spirit and scope of the present invention.
Claims

1. A mobile showroom vehicle including:
   a cabin having an interior space into which customers can enter and leave; and
   at least one display cabinet located in the cabin, the display cabinet has a plurality of compartments and in each compartment at least one blind can be mounted so that a series of different blinds on offer for sale can be mounted in the cabinet.

2. The mobile showroom according to claim 1, wherein the compartments have an opening and a depth extending away from the opening, and the depth of one or more of the compartments is sized so that at least two blinds can be mounted one in front of the other within the compartments.

3. The mobile showroom according to claim 1 or 2, wherein the blinds are mounted in the compartments in a working condition such that movement of the blinds between different operating positions can be observed.

4. The mobile showroom according to claim 3, wherein the operating positions include, a closed position in which the blinds are expanded as if covering a window, an opened position in which the blinds are retracted into a stowed position or when the blinds have vertical or horizontal slats, the slats are oriented to reduce or minimise visual obstruction through the blinds or flow of air through the blinds.

5. The mobile showroom according to any one of claims 1 to 4, wherein the blinds include manual control mechanisms for manually changing the position of the blinds as if the blinds were installed on a building.

6. The mobile showroom according to any one of claims 1 to 5, wherein the showroom includes a motorisation system is operable to change the operating position of one or more of the blinds on display, the motorisation system being controlled by one or more switch that changes the position of the blinds, and wherein the motorisation system is powered by either one or a combination of: 24volt batteries of the mobile showroom vehicle, or mains electricity.

7. The mobile showroom according to claim 1 to 6, wherein the blinds are releasably mounted to the compartments using fittings.
that are compatible with other blinds so the blinds can be interchangeably mount.

8. The mobile showroom according to any one of claims 1 to 7, wherein the blinds include an upper head rail assembly that is common to different types of the blinds, and the blinds are mounted to the compartment via the head rail assembly.

9. The mobile showroom according to any one of claims 1 to 8, wherein the mobile showroom carries a total inventory of blinds that exceeds the capacity of the cabinets to mount the blinds such that all of the blinds are unable to be displayed simultaneously, and the cabin includes one or more cupboard for storing the blinds not on display.

10. The mobile showroom according to any one of claims 1 to 9, wherein the cabinets include an assembly of upright panels that are interconnected by horizontal panels and the compartments have a quadrangular shape defined by the panels.

11. The mobile showroom according to claim 10, wherein the upright and horizontal panels form box-shaped frames about the perimeter of the compartments that define an opening to the compartments, the box-shaped frames having a depth that extends from the opening that is sized to allow a plurality of the blinds to be mounted, one in front of the other in the compartments. 12. The mobile showroom according to any one of claims 1 to 11, wherein the compartments of each display cabinet are arranged in rows and ranks.

13. The mobile showroom according to any one of claims 1 to 12, wherein the mobile showroom includes two or more display cabinets that are located or fixed to opposite side walls of the cabin.

14. The mobile showroom according to any one of claims 1 to 13, including one or more moveable cabinets within the cabin, the moveable cabinets being mounted on wheels that are run on the floor of the cabin, or run to tracks on which the cabinets slide.

15. The mobile showroom according to any one of claims 1 to 14, wherein the cabinets include a hanging rail for hanging samples of the blinds.

16. The mobile showroom according to any one of claims 1 to 15, wherein the cabin includes a doorway through which customers can enter and leave the cabin, and one of the blinds is located over the doorway and can be moved between stored position in which
the blind is retracted and an operative position in which the blind extends outwardly from the doorway.

17. The mobile showroom according to claim 16, wherein the blind over the doorway is either: i) an awning that extends outwardly from the doorway to form a roof over a region adjacent to the doorway, or ii) a café blind that extends downwardly and connects to a flooring of the vehicle or the ground.

18. The mobile showroom according to any one of claims 1 to 17, wherein the blinds in the form of retractable sun-shading screens are fitted to inside or outside windows of the mobile showroom vehicle.

19. The mobile showroom according to any one of claims 1 to 18, in which the mobile showroom vehicle is a motorised vehicle, and the driver's controls are located in a forward portion of the display cabin.

20. A method of providing retail services for blinds, the method including:

   driving the mobile showroom vehicle according to any one of claims 1 to 20 to selected locations to provide customer access to the showroom;

   displaying blinds in the mobile showroom vehicle to customers; and

   recording purchase orders of blinds from customers who have visited the mobile showroom vehicle.

21. The method according to claim 20, wherein the method includes allocating a geographic region to the or each mobile showroom vehicle, and the mobile showrooms are driven only to selected locations within the allocated geographic region.

22. The method according to claim 21, wherein the geographic region of each mobile showroom do not overlap.

23. The method according to any one of claims 20 to 22, wherein the purchase orders of each mobile showroom are completed by one or more common blind supplier who supplies each of the mobile showrooms.

24. A mobile showroom vehicle substantially as hereinbefore described with reference to the accompanying Figures.
25. A method of providing retail services in the mobile showroom vehicle substantially as hereinbefore described with reference to the accompanying Figures.