

etry, size, and/or any other suitable feature. Each of the plurality of cavities 125 are preferably able to outwardly deform independently from each other, allowing the user interface system 100 to be adapted to a variety of user input scenarios. Alternatively, the plurality of cavities 125 may be grouped into a plurality of portions, wherein the cavities 125 within one group will outwardly deform together. This may be applied to scenarios wherein a group of cavities 125 are assigned to a particular user input scenario, for example, as a dial pad on a mobile phone or as a QWERTY keyboard. The processor 160 preferably selectively controls the outward deformation of the particular region 113 of each cavity 125. However, any other suitable method of controlling the cavities 125 may be used.

[0069] The processor 160 preferably also selectively receives and/or interprets signals representing the presence of a force applied by a user to any cavity 125. The sensor 140 for each cavity 125 is preferably arranged in an array network that preferably communicates the location of each sensor 140 to the processor 160 to allow the processor 160 to selectively receive and/or interpret signals coming from each cavity 125. In the variation of the sensor 140 as a capacitive sensor, as shown in FIGS. 22 and 23, the array includes a first number of X-conductors 142 and a second number of Y-conductors 144. In a first variation, as shown in FIG. 22, the first number of X-conductors 142 is preferably equivalent to the number of cavities 125, wherein each X-first conductor 142 corresponds to one cavity 125, and the second number of Y-conductors 144 is preferably equivalent to the number of columns of cavities 125, wherein each Y-conductor 144 corresponds to all the cavities 125 within one column of cavities 125. In this first variation, the location of a user touch is preferably determined by detecting a change in the measured capacitance value between one X-first conductor 142 and the corresponding Y-conductor 144 for a particular cavity 125. Because each cavity 125 is associated with one X-first conductor 142, the processor 160 is able to detect the location of the cavity 125 over which the user had applied a force. In a second variation, as shown in FIG. 23, the first number of X-conductors 142 is preferably equivalent to the number of rows of cavities 125, wherein each X-first conductor 142 corresponds to all the cavities 125 within one row of cavities 125, and the second number of Y-conductors 144 is preferably equivalent to the number of columns of cavities 113, wherein each Y-conductor 144 corresponds to all the cavities 113 within one column of cavities 144. In this second variation, the location of a user touch is preferably determined by detecting a change in the measured capacitance value between one X-first conductor 142 and one Y-conductor 144. Because each cavity 125 corresponds to a different intersection of the X-conductors 142 and the Y-conductors 144, the processor 160 is able to detect the location of the cavity 125 over which the user had applied force. In a third variation, the first number of X-conductors 142 and the second number of Y-conductors 144 are both preferably equivalent to the number of cavities 125, one X-first conductor 142 and one Y-conductor 144 correspond to one cavity 125. In this third variation, the location of a user touch is preferably determined by detecting a change in the measured capacitance value between one X-first conductor 142 and one Y-conductor 144. Because each cavity 125 corresponds to a different pair of the X-conductors 142 and the Y-conductors 144, the processor 160 is able to detect the location of the cavity 125 over which the user had applied force.

[0070] Alternatively, the array network of sensors 140 may include a plurality of sensors 140, each coupled to a cavity 125, that each output a signal specific to the cavity 125. For example, in the capacitive sensor variation of the sensor 140, the sensor 140 for a first cavity 125 may send a signal of 0.5 nF when a user input is detected and a signal of 1 nF when no user input is detected, the sensor 140 for a second cavity 125 may send a signal of 5 nF when a user input is detected and a signal of 10 nF when no user input is detected, the sensor 140 for a third cavity 125 may send a signal of 50 nF when a user input is detected and a signal of 100 nF when no user input is detected, and the sensor 140 for a fourth cavity 125 may send a signal of 500 nF when a user input is detected and a signal of 1000 nF when no user input is detected. Because each cavity 125 sends a different signal, the processor 160 is able to detect the location of the user input based upon the type and/or value of the signal that is received from the sensors 140. The plurality of sensors 140 for the cavities 125 may also be arranged in a parallel relationship (such that the overall capacitive value for a plurality of capacitors in parallel equate to the sum of the individual capacitive values) to facilitate the processor 160 in sensing the location of the user input. For example, using the aforementioned example values for the signals from the sensors 140 of a first, second, third, and fourth cavities 140, the processor 160 may receive a combined signal of 555.5 nF from the sensors 140 when a user input is detected from all of the first, second, third, and fourth cavities 125 and a signal of 1111 nF from the sensors 140 when no user input is detected from any of the first, second, third, and fourth cavities 125. When a user input is detected from the third cavity 125 and not from the first, second, and fourth cavities 125, then the combined signal to the processor 160 may be 1061 nF. Similarly, when a user input is detected from both the second and third cavities 125, then the combined signal to the processor 160 may be 1056 nF. The processor 160 is then able to interpret the locations of the user input directly from the value of the signal that is received from a plurality of sensors 140 of the cavities 125, simplifying electrical routing, mechanical components, and programming in the user interface system 100. The sensors 140 may also be arranged in series or in any other suitable electrical arrangement.

[0071] The array arrangements described above also provide the advantage of utilizing multiple sensors 140 to more accurately locate the presence of a user input. User input onto a first expanded particular region 113 may affect the sensor 140 readings for a second expanded particular region 113. By collectively analyzing readings from multiple sensors 140, the particular region 113 upon which the user provides an input may be more accurately determined. For example, in the variation wherein the sensor 140 is a pressure sensor, the pressure sensed by other sensors 140 within the system may be increased when a user provides input at a first particular region 113. By sensing the increase of pressure sensed by sensors 140 adjacent to a particular region 113, the location of the user input may be more accurately determined. Additionally, the array arrangements described above allows for multiple inputs provided at a single time to be detected by the system.

[0072] The sensors 140 are preferably located within the cavities 125, but may alternatively be located adjacent to the cavities 125 or both within and adjacent to the cavities 125. By placing sensors 140 both within and adjacent to the cavities 125, user inputs provided to locations other than the