

(19) World Intellectual Property Organization
International Bureau



(43) International Publication Date
16 October 2008 (16.10.2008)

PCT

(10) International Publication Number
WO 2008/124385 A1

(51) International Patent Classification:
G06F 19/00 (2006.01)

(21) International Application Number:

PCT/US2008/058995

(22) International Filing Date: 1 April 2008 (01.04.2008)

(25) Filing Language: English

(26) Publication Language: English

(30) Priority Data:

60/909,745 3 April 2007 (03.04.2007) US

12/060,327 1 April 2008 (01.04.2008) US

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(81) Designated States (unless otherwise indicated, for every kind of national protection available): AE, AG, AL, AM, AO, AT, AU, AZ, BA, BB, BG, BH, BR, BW, BY, BZ, CA, CH, CN, CO, CR, CU, CZ, DE, DK, DM, DO, DZ, EC, EE, EG, ES, FI, GB, GD, GE, GH, GM, GT, HN, HR, HU, ID, IL, IN, IS, JP, KE, KG, KM, KN, KP, KR, KZ, LA, LC, LK, LR, LS, LT, LU, LY, MA, MD, ME, MG, MK, MN, MW, MX, MY, MZ, NA, NG, NI, NO, NZ, OM, PG, PH, PL, PT, RO, RS, RU, SC, SD, SE, SG, SK, SL, SM, SV, SY, TJ, TM, TN, TR, TT, TZ, UA, UG, US, UZ, VC, VN, ZA, ZM, ZW.

(84) Designated States (unless otherwise indicated, for every kind of regional protection available): ARIPO (BW, GH, GM, KE, LS, MW, MZ, NA, SD, SL, SZ, TZ, UG, ZM, ZW), Eurasian (AM, AZ, BY, KG, KZ, MD, RU, TJ, TM), European (AT, BE, BG, CH, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, GB, GR, HR, HU, IE, IS, IT, LT, LU, LV, MC, MT, NL, NO, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, TR), OAPI (BF, BJ, CF, CG, CI, CM, GA, GN, GQ, GW, ML, MR, NE, SN, TD, TG).

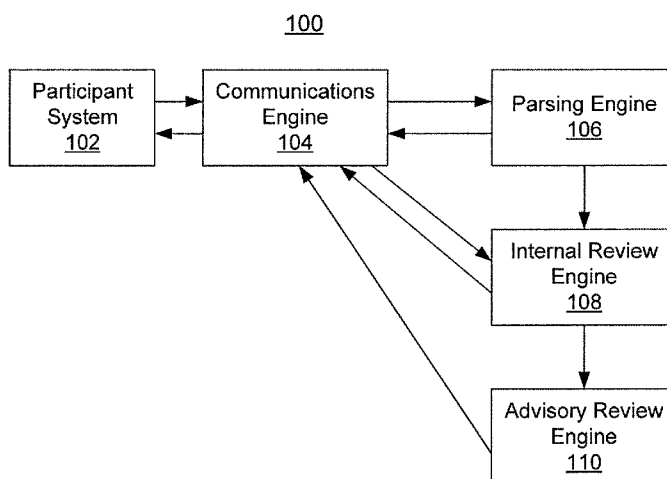
Published:

— with international search report

[Continued on next page]

(54) Title: METHODS FOR RUNNING A MULTI-STAGE ONLINE ELIMINATION COMPETITION BASED ON MEMBER GENERATED CONTENT

FIG. 1



(57) Abstract: Methods, systems and computer program products provide a multi-stage online elimination competition based on member generated content that involves members submitting content for consideration, then preliminary multi-level screening of the submission with passing content published for consideration. Published content is evaluated and considered by members, who can rate each content submission, leave a submission unrated, or flag a submission for eligibility review. The submissions are then iteratively narrowed down rated using internal guidelines and member ratings. The submissions are then further narrowed down by an advisory committee. The remaining submissions are then voted on by members, in at least one elimination rounds, and a winner or group of winners is chosen.

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- *before the expiration of the time limit for amending the claims and to be republished in the event of receipt of amendments*

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TITLE

**METHODS FOR RUNNING A MULTI-STAGE ONLINE ELIMINATION
COMPETITION BASED ON MEMBER GENERATED CONTENT**

CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This application claims priority to, and the benefit of, U.S. Provisional Patent Application Serial No. 60/909,745, filed April 3, 2007, which is hereby incorporated by reference in its entirety.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Field Of The Invention

[0002] The present invention generally relates online competitions, and more particularly to systems, methods, and computer products for running a multi-stage online elimination competition based on member generated content.

Related Art

[0003] There are many considerations inherent in running an online elimination competition. For instance, online competitions must contend with securing the involvement and interest of the general public. Moreover, since online competitions have a potential to generate a multitude of entries, competitions must

narrow down the entries to choose a winner in both a money-conscious and resource-effective way. Still, competitors have a great potential for enjoyment through competitions, and the use of an online competition has the benefit of reaching many potential users.

[0004] It would be useful to have a multi-stage online elimination competition based on member generated content which includes member evaluation, vender evaluation, expert evaluation, as well as automatic parsing all in combination to arrive at a competition winner. Such a method could be used to implement a competition for a variety of socially beneficial goals, such as choosing a worthy charity project for a large vender, and result in the very real consequences of putting corporate money to good use by providing necessities, such as much needed safe drinking water to the children of the world's poorest countries.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0005] The present invention provides systems, methods and computer program products for running a multi-stage online elimination competition based on member generated content. Content is submitted by and voted on, in part, by members, after the content survives a multi-stage filtering process involving predetermined evaluation criteria and evaluated by members, automated screening procedures, internal competition staff, and an advisory committee.

[0006] A member can enter member-generated content for consideration in the competition. A first evaluation stage subjects the content to automated word-based screening and preliminary vendor screening before being accepted into submission. In the second stage, all members rate submitted content, and can report objectionable content to have it flagged for vendor review and possible removal. The third stage has a succession of iterative internal vendor reviews of the top member voted content from each distinct succession of predefined voting periods. The fourth stage matches content with potential implementation of the content to provide a check on feasibility of the content winning, with feasibility determined by the purposes, aims, and scopes of each individual competition. The fifth stage submits the content to an advisory committee for voting and narrowing down the potential winners. The members again vote on the remaining content to determine a winner.

[0007] Such member submissions may take place over any technology that allows for an electronic parsing of the contained information, such as e-mail, filling in of a web-based vendor generated form, an SMS text message, or similar means of communication. Member voting may take place over any technology that allows communication with the members, such as mail, e-mail, conventional phone, cellular phone, SMS text message, web pages, or similar means of communication.

[0008] Further features and advantages of the present invention as well as the structure and operation of various embodiments of the present invention are described in detail below with reference to the accompanying drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0009] The features and advantages of the present invention will become more apparent from the detailed description set forth below when taken in conjunction with the drawings in which like reference numbers indicate identical or functionally similar elements.

[0010] Figure 1 is a block diagram of a competition system in accordance with an example embodiment of the present invention.

[0011] Figure 2 is a flowchart illustrating the flow of a piece of content through the submission and judging process according to an example embodiment of the present invention.

[0012] Figure 3 is a flowchart illustrating the content submission process according to an example embodiment of the present invention.

[0013] Figure 4 is a flowchart illustrating a member reported violation of competition rules of a particular piece of submitted content according to an example embodiment of the present invention.

[0014] Figure 5 is a flowchart illustrating an elimination decision flow during one period of an iterative judging process according to an example embodiment of the present invention.

[0015] Figure 6 is an example computer system used in one embodiment of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0016] The present invention is directed to systems, methods, and computer products for running a multi-stage online elimination competition based on

member generated content and is now described in more detail herein in terms of an exemplary competition system for selecting a community service report, as described below. This is for convenience only and is not intended to limit the application of the present invention. In fact, after reading the following description, it will be apparent to one skilled in the relevant art(s) how to implement the following invention in alternative embodiments (*e.g.*, competitions for best member generated artwork, or best member generated fictional short stories, *etc.*).

[0017] The main participants in the competition are cardmembers, and non-cardmembers are encouraged to become a cardmember in order to participate. Generally, ideas for community service projects are solicited from cardmembers and other cardmembers are allowed to review and vote on the projects. In addition, projects are internally narrowed down to a list of the top (*e.g.*, 100) projects. The top projects are submitted to an advisory committee of judges, such as high profile celebrities and and/or experts. The advisory committee narrows the projects down further (*e.g.*, top 50), the results of which are then submitted to the cardmembers for several rounds of voting on which project should win an endowment from the card provider for third-party sponsor. Competition system 100 could be used, for example, to select as a winning charity project idea a plan to distribute water purification devices to some of the world's poorest countries and train the denizens on how to use the devices.

[0018] The terms "cardmember," "member," "participant," "competitor," "user," and/or the plural form of these terms are used interchangeably throughout herein to refer to those persons or entities capable of accessing, using, being affected by and/or benefiting from the tool that the present invention provides for a multi-stage online elimination competition based on member generated content.

[0019] "Content" may encompass any amalgamation of material that is discernable to the public at large and transmittable, such as text, images, video, audio, links to websites, or anything else communicative. Exact limits on types of eligible content may be enforced on a competition specific basis. "Member generated content" includes any competition-eligible content generated by a particular member personally, as well as any content that the member has appropriate permission to represent as his or her own in the competition.

[0020] More detailed descriptions of the function of each component will be discussed in relation to later figures.

[0021] A participant system 102 represents an interface a member utilizes to communicate with and participate in the competition. Such a system can encompass a myriad of devices that facilitate communication, such as, but not limited to: a personal computer connected to the Internet, a conventional telephone, a fax machine, a cellular phone, a mailbox, or a personal digital assistant (PDA) or similar digital personal device capable of external communication.

[0022] A communications engine 104 facilitates communication between participant system 102 and the other components of competition system 100, such as a parsing engine 106, an internal review engine 108, and an advisory review engine 110. Communications engine 104 may consist of any form of communications technology, both automated such as fax machines, network routers, personal computers connected to the Internet, and the like, and manual such as telephone operators and the postal system, and the like.

[0023] Parsing engine 106 parses the content submitted by the participant system 102 and screen out any content that fails a set of predefined criteria. The predefined criteria used by the parsing engine 106 may be distinct, overlapping, or similar to the predefined criteria utilized by the internal review engine 108 and the advisory review engine 110, described below. Moreover, such a screening may be automated or manual. If content passes screening performed by the parsing engine 106, it is then submitted to internal review engine 108 for a more detailed review of submitted content.

[0024] An internal review engine 108 performs a more detailed review and screening of the submitted content utilizing predefined criteria. In addition the review is conducted with the aim of narrowing down the entries in the competition utilizing the predefined criteria. Such a review may be automated or manual, and may utilize any number of distinct or overlapping sets of predefined criteria. Further, such a review may be conducted during any part of the competition to cause the removal, combination, reclassification, or other similar alteration of a plurality of content submissions. Moreover, the predefined criteria used by the internal review engine 108 may be distinct, overlapping, or similar to the predefined criteria utilized by parsing engine 106 and advisory review engine 110. Internal review engine 108 may analyze content obtained for different sources within competition system 100, such as communications engine 104 or the parsing engine 106. Moreover, content within a specific competition may be reviewed by

the internal review engine 108 one time or a plurality of times, and either with a simple review or an iterative review (described below), depending on the design of the competition.

[0025] Advisory review engine 110 performs a high-level review and screening of the submitted content utilizing predefined criteria. Such a review is conducted with the aim of narrowing down the entries in the competition which have passed through one or more applications of internal review engine 108 described above. Such a review may also be automated or manual. In addition, the predefined criteria used by the advisory review engine 108 may be distinct, overlapping, or similar to the predefined criteria utilized by parsing engine 106 and internal review engine 108.

[0026] Figure 2 represents a flowchart illustrating a process flow of content through competition system 100 in accordance with an example embodiment of the present invention. Blocks 224 collectively represent an example content submission process, which is defined in greater detail with respect to Figure 3 below. Blocks 226 collectively represent an example for gradually eliminating competition entries until a single entry or a group of entries is determined to be the competition winner.

[0027] In block 202, the member submits content through participant system 102 to the communications engine 104 for inclusion in the competition. The type of content, form of submission, and method of submission may take on multiple configurations. In an example embodiment, a member is any potential user that has gone through a registration process and submits a community service project idea to the competition through a form on the competition's website.

[0028] In block 204, parsing engine 106 parses the member submitted content and flags content that contained certain pre-determined content, for instance text containing profanity. If such content is flagged, the process proceeds to block 206, where the submitting member is prompted to resubmit a competition entry if they desire further consideration in the competition, otherwise the submission method then ends.

[0029] If content passes the screening in block 204, it then proceeds to the competition vendor's preliminary screening in block 208 utilizing the internal review engine 108. Block 208 utilizes a higher level of review than block 204, and can analyze the content and compare it to a set of pre-defined submission criteria.

Examples of such criteria that would prompt entry rejection include, but are not limited to, the inclusion of offensive or divisive material, the use of propaganda, the inclusion of third party references within the content, the inclusion of personal information in the content, the inclusion of a URL or other online reference in the content, the inclusion of content that violates the law, the inclusion of content that violates the rules of the particular competition, and the like.

[0030] Upon successful passing of the vendor preliminary screening in block 208, the content moves on to public availability through communications engine 104, which would enable review and voting on by all members, possible including the content-submitting member, in block 210. During this block, members may flag specific entries for further review, which will be explained in greater detail in connection with Figure 4. Otherwise, the member may review content which has passed the content submission process 224. Further, members may rate the content in accordance with their own preference. These ratings are used such that content must achieve a certain member rating threshold in order to advance on to block 214, such as being within a specific number or percentage from the top when the content is arranged by numeric ranking, receiving at least a specified minimum of rankings which would indicate member interest, or a weighted combination of any comparison factors (including those discussed above). The term “top ranked” refers to those content entries which have passed this threshold.

[0031] In one exemplary embodiment, cardmembers may log on to the competition webpage, view a list of all submitted projects, and view a detailed profile of each individual submitted charity idea. Cardmembers may then rate each idea, such as with a 1-5 star rating, where 1 star is least desirable and 5 stars is most desirable. The average star ratings of each project are evaluated in conjunction with the number of total rankings that each submitted project received, such that there is a bias toward projects with significant numbers of ratings over those with an equal average rating but fewer total ratings.

[0032] In block 214, the top ranked content from block 210 is subjected to a feasibility check for the consequences of the specific content winning the overall competition by internal review engine 108. Any content submissions rejected during this step will be removed from the competition in block 222. The content submissions that are qualified in block 214 will be passed along to block 216, detailed below.

[0033] Block 214 is iterative because all content passed on from block 210 is not examined at once, but rather several times over the course of the competition. The time the iterative judging process runs is described in terms of a submission period. In an example embodiment of the invention, during submission period 1 the top X ranked content entries are evaluated and either qualified or rejected. During period 2, the top X+Y ranked content entries from periods 1 and 2 are evaluated, with those entries evaluated during period 1 keeping their previously determined qualified or rejected status. These entries are not reevaluated. During period 3, the top X+Y+Z ranked content entries are evaluated from periods 1-3, with those entries evaluated during periods 1 and 2 keeping their previously determined qualified or rejected status. These entries also are not reevaluated. This process continues until the submission periods are over. Thus, the total number of submissions qualified from block 210 is reduced, and the submissions qualified under block 214 are then passed on to block 216.

[0034] The evaluative criteria used in block 214 can be different from the criteria utilized in block 208. In addition, the iterative review in block 214 can be layered with multiple sets of evaluative criteria, where only content submissions that are qualified under an iterative review using a first set of evaluative criteria are entered into consideration of an iterative review using a second set of evaluative criteria. For instance, the first set of evaluative criteria is used to provide a feasibility check on the foreseeable ability to implement a charity project in the content submission. The second set of evaluative criteria is used to match each charity project with an organization that can effectively implement the described project. After being qualified content qualified in both will be promoted to the next level of the competition. An example round of the iterative content feasibility check can be seen in Figure 5 and its related discussion.

[0035] In block 216, the content that is qualified from block 214 is presented to an advisory review engine 110 for evaluation and ranking. Advisory review engine 110 utilizes a set of predefined evaluative criteria to analyze, rate, and narrow down the remaining content submissions through, for example, a conventional scoring of the content. This evaluation may be either automated or manual. Moreover, the evaluative criteria may vary between different embodiments. In an example embodiment advisory review engine 110 is a small committee with high profile members, possibly including such people as celebrities or respected

participants in a community relevant to the competition; this allows the competition to receive several benefits, such as increased publicity, respectability, or accuracy in determining which submissions deserve to win the competition.

[0036] The advisory review engine 110 evaluates and ranks the content submissions that were qualified from block 214 based on predetermined criteria. After receiving the rankings of the advisory review engine 110, the specific content submissions are again separated out by the competition system 100 so that a predetermined number of “top ranking” submissions may be made publicly available by the communications engine 104 and passed along to block 218, with all other submissions being eliminated from the contest in block 222.

[0037] In block 218, the member community votes on the top ranked content submissions from block 216. The voting may take place in a multitude of fashions through communications engine 104, from clicking on a web page selection button, to sending an SMS text message, to calling a specified phone number, to other similar technologies. The voting also can take place in any number of voting rounds, so that content submissions are narrowed down after the first vote in some fashion and members may vote again on the newly narrowed list of top ranked content submissions, with this repeating until a winner or a group of winners is chosen. Content submissions that win the member vote in block 218 proceed to block 220 as winners of the competition. All other content submissions lose the competition, progressing to block 222. However, any rankings obtained during block 218 of content submissions that progress to block 222 could be utilized in providing tiered awards for the non-winners of the competition (*e.g.*, a second place prize, a finalists’ prize, an honorable mention prize, etc.).

[0038] Figure 3 is a flowchart illustrating a content submission process 300 method according to an example embodiment of the present invention. In block 302, a registered member submits content from the participant system 102 to the competition system 100 for consideration. Such content can take on many forms, so long as it conveys information and is capable of being parsed by electronic systems. In one exemplary embodiment, such content takes on the form of descriptions of potential community service projects and brief biographies of the member submitting the project.

[0039] Parsing engine 106 performs a screening of the content in block 304 to rule out any submissions that fail a previously identified set of criteria. Example

criteria that qualify an entry for rejection by the automated screening include the use of profanity or other unacceptable words.

[0040] If the content fails the screening in block 304, the process proceeds to block 306 where the member is notified of the rejection and prompted to resubmit alternate content if they wish to be considered in the competition. The method thus proceeds to block 308, where the member may either resubmit alternate content, taking them back to block 302, or quitting the method altogether.

[0041] If the content passes the screening in block 304, it proceeds to the screening that takes place in block 310 through the internal review engine 108. Example decision criteria that can be used in block 310 include, but are not limited to, the inclusion of offensive or divisive material, the use of propaganda, the inclusion of third party references within the content, the inclusion of personal information in the content, the inclusion of a URL or other online reference in the content, the inclusion of content that violates the law, or inclusion of content that violates the rules of the particular competition.

[0042] If the content fails the screening in block 310, the method will proceed to block 313 wherein an appropriate communication is sent to the participant system 102 through the communications engine 104. Such a process can be automated by having the internal review engine 108 in block 310 specify a rejection type and having that rejection type elicit a pre-determined response which varies by rejection type. For example, if the content is rejected because of the inclusion of a third party reference, the communication in block 313 could read: "Thank you for your contribution. Unfortunately, the project you submitted did not meet our submission criteria. References to third parties – including people, companies, and brands – are not permitted due to Copyright and Trademark concerns. We invite you to revise your entry, which is included below, and try again." The process would then proceed to block 306, as described above.

[0043] If the content passes the screening in block 310, in block 316 the internal review engine 108 conducts a rating of content according to pre-established competition criteria.

[0044] If the internal review engine 108 cannot determine whether the content passes or fails the screening in block 310, the method would pass into block 312, wherein an escalated review of the content could take place by the internal review engine 108. Such a review could be 'escalated' as compared to the review in block

310 by, for example, having multiple manual reviewers examine the content or utilizing a different algorithm to review the content.

[0045] If content is rejected by the escalated review in block 312, the method would proceed to the above described block 313. If the content is accepted by the escalated review in block 312, the method would proceed to the above described block 316. If the escalated review in block 312 still cannot determine whether the content fails to meet the pre-defined criteria, the method would proceed to block 314 wherein a higher level is requested to review the content. Examples of the higher level include the designer of the pre-defined criteria, the client of the competition provider, or the management of the competition provider. For instance, the reviewers could contact the credit card issuer sponsoring the community project competition for their decision on the content. After block 314, the method proceeds to block 326 where it stops.

[0046] Once the method has progressed to block 316 and has been rated according to program criteria, the method moves on to block 318, wherein the approved content is displayed publicly through communications engine 104. Next the method moves on to block 320, wherein an appropriate communication is sent to the participant system 102 through the communications engine 104. Both Steps 318 and 320 can be automated to increase efficiency, although automation is not required.

[0047] In block 322 the content is made available for perusal, comment, and rating (and possible flagging for review as described below in more detail with respect to Figure 4) by any member through communications engine 104. After block 322, the method proceeds to block 324, wherein a submission is considered complete.

[0048] Figure 4 is a flowchart illustrating a process 400 for providing a member reported violation of competition rules of a particular piece of submitted content according to an example embodiment of the present invention. After the content has been submitted (described above with respect to Figure 3), it is available through the communications engine 104 for members to view and comment on. If a member believes that a specific content has been accepted into submission in violation of the rules, they may contact the communications engine 104 as provided in block 402 to initiate a review of the content.

[0049] After the member has initiated the report in block 402, the content in question is automatically appended to the report or otherwise displayed in block

404 so as to be capable of review by the internal review engine 108. Following block 404, the report with the appended or otherwise displayed content submission is communicated to the internal review engine 108 in block 406 to again judge the submission against a set of pre-defined contest eligibility criteria, which may or may not be the same as utilized in block 310 in Fig. 3 as described above.

[0050] If the decision in block 406 is to reject the submitted content as a violation of the pre-defined contest eligibility criteria utilized in block 406, then the process proceeds to block 410 wherein the submitted content is removed from the list of accepted submissions and the public listing of such submissions as accessible through the communications engine 104. Next, the process proceeds to block 412, wherein a communication is sent through the communications engine 104 both to the member who reported a problem with the content in question and the member who submitted the content in question. Both blocks 410 and 412 can be automated so as to increase efficiency, yet this is not required. Next, the process proceeds to block 414, where the submitting member is prompted through the communications engine 104 to submit other content into the contest if so desired. The method then progresses to block 416, where the user reported violation portion ends.

[0051] If the decision in block 406 is to accept the submitted content as in accord with the pre-defined contest eligibility criteria utilized in block 406, then the process proceeds to block 420, where a message is sent to the reporting member through the communications engine 104 indicating that the content has been reviewed but still deemed acceptable. Following block 420, the process proceeds to block 422 where the user reported violation portion ends. Both blocks 420 and 422 could be automated to increase efficiency, but this is not required.

[0052] If the internal review engine 108 in block 406 is unable to determine if the submitted content is in violation of the pre-defined contest eligibility criteria utilized in block 406, the process progresses to block 408 where an escalated review of the content by the internal review engine 108 takes place. Such a review could be 'escalated' in comparison to the review in block 406 by having, for instance, multiple reviewers examine the content, a different algorithm examine the content, or a reviewer higher up within the organization examine the content.

[0053] If the escalated review in block 408 results in rejection of the content, the process proceeds to block 410 as described above. If the escalated review in block

408 results in the acceptance of the content, the process proceeds to block 420, as described above.

[0054] If the escalated review in block 408 cannot determine whether the content submission should be accepted or rejected, the process proceeds to block 418 wherein a higher level is requested to review the content. Examples of the higher level include the designer of the pre-defined criteria, the client of the competition provider, or the management of the competition provider. For instance, in the charity project competition, the internal review engine 108 contacts the card issuer for their decision on the content. After block 418, the method proceeds to block 424 where it stops.

[0055] Figure 5 is a flowchart illustrating a process 500 providing elimination decision flow during one period of an iterative judging step in the internal review engine according to an example of the present invention. Here, the review period consists of a week, and the second review period 500 is depicted.

[0056] In block 502, the top ranked content submissions from the preliminary member rankings are selected for review. These top ranked submissions may include submissions that have been submitted during any submission period to date, in this case within week 1 or week 2, even if the submissions were qualified or disqualified in week 1. In block 504, the submissions that were reviewed in the previous submission period, week 1, are removed from consideration during this period and keep their qualified or rejected status assigned to them in week 1. In block 506, the remaining non-evaluated projects are assigned to individual reviewers within the internal review engine 108. In block 508, those individual reviewers will compare each project against a set of predefined criteria, such as in this embodiment where the criteria are the feasibility of enacting the suggested charity project detailed in the content submission. In block 510, the individual reviewers must decide whether to accept, reject, or further examine a content submission.

[0057] If the individual reviewer in block 510 decides to accept the content submission as in conformance with their evaluation criteria, the process proceeds to block 512, where the content submission is added to a "qualified list", which is maintained in block 518. This qualified list will be utilized in future iterative judging submission rounds in block 504 in order to avoid reviewing already qualified ideas.

[0058] If the individual reviewer in block 510 decides to reject the content submission as not in conformance with their evaluation criteria, the process proceeds to block 516, where the content submission is added to a “disqualified list”, which is maintained in block 520. This disqualified list will be utilized in future iterative judging submission rounds in block 504 in order to avoid reviewing already disqualified ideas, even if they still rank in the top specified portion of rated content submissions for that particular review period.

[0059] After blocks 518 and 520, the method proceeds to block 522. If this is not the last submission period, the method will return to block 502 where it will recommence during the next submission period. If this is the last submission period and there are no more iterations to proceed through, the method proceeds to block 524 where it stops and the qualified list functions as the list of content submissions that have passed through this iterative screening.

[0060] If the individual reviewer in block 510 is unable to determine with sufficient certainty whether the content submission satisfied the predetermined evaluation criteria, they may defer the content submission to an escalated review in block 514. In the present embodiment, the escalated review is a panel made up of all of the individual reviewers who were assigned content submissions in block 506, but this could also possibly include other reviewers, different reviewing algorithms, utilizing different evaluative criteria, etc. Determination of acceptance of the content submission will lead to block 512, described above, and determination of rejection of the content submission will lead to block 516, also described above.

[0061] The present invention (*i.e.*, systems 100, 102, engines 104, 106, 108, 110, or any part(s) or function(s) thereof) may be implemented using hardware, software or a combination thereof and may be implemented in one or more computer systems or other processing systems. However, the manipulations performed by the present invention were often referred to in terms, such as reviewing, screening, or flagging, which are commonly associated with mental operations performed by a human operator. No such capability of a human operator is necessary, or desirable in most cases, in any of the operations described herein which form part of the present invention. Rather, the operations are machine operations. Useful machines for performing the operation of the present invention include general purpose digital computers or similar devices.

[0062] In fact, in one embodiment, the invention is directed toward one or more computer systems capable of carrying out the functionality described herein. An example of a computer system 600 is shown in Figure 6.

[0063] The computer system 600 includes one or more processors, such as processor 604. The processor 604 is connected to a communication infrastructure 606 (*e.g.*, a communications bus, cross-over bar, or network). Various software embodiments are described in terms of this exemplary computer system. After reading this description, it will become apparent to a person skilled in the relevant art(s) how to implement the invention using other computer systems and/or architectures.

[0064] Computer system 600 can include a display interface 602 that forwards graphics, text, and other data from the communication infrastructure 606 (or from a frame buffer not shown) for display on the display unit 630.

[0065] Computer system 600 also includes a main memory 608, preferably random access memory (RAM), and may also include a secondary memory 610. The secondary memory 610 may include, for example, a hard disk drive 612 and/or a removable storage drive 614, representing a floppy disk drive, a magnetic tape drive, an optical disk drive, etc. The removable storage drive 614 reads from and/or writes to a removable storage unit 618 in a well known manner. Removable storage unit 618 represents a floppy disk, magnetic tape, optical disk, etc. which is read by and written to by removable storage drive 614. As will be appreciated, the removable storage unit 618 includes a computer usable storage medium having stored therein computer software and/or data.

[0066] In alternative embodiments, secondary memory 610 may include other similar devices for allowing computer programs or other instructions to be loaded into computer system 600. Such devices may include, for example, a removable storage unit 622 and an interface 620. Examples of such may include a program cartridge and cartridge interface (such as that found in video game devices), a removable memory chip (such as an erasable programmable read only memory (EPROM), or programmable read only memory (PROM)) and associated socket, and other removable storage units 622 and interfaces 620, which allow software and data to be transferred from the removable storage unit 622 to computer system 600.

[0067] Computer system 600 may also include a communications interface 624. Communications interface 624 allows software and data to be transferred between computer system 600 and external devices. Examples of communications interface 624 may include a modem, a network interface (such as an Ethernet card), a communications port, a Personal Computer Memory Card International Association (PCMCIA) slot and card, etc. Software and data transferred via communications interface 624 are in the form of signals 628 which may be electronic, electromagnetic, optical or other signals capable of being received by communications interface 624. These signals 628 are provided to communications interface 624 via a communications path (*e.g.*, channel) 626. This channel 626 carries signals 628 and may be implemented using wire or cable, fiber optics, a telephone line, a cellular link, a radio frequency (RF) link and other communications channels.

[0068] In this document, the terms “computer program medium” and “computer usable medium” are used to generally refer to media such as removable storage drive 614, a hard disk installed in hard disk drive 612, and signals 628. These computer program products provide software to computer system 600. The invention is directed to such computer program products.

[0069] Computer programs (also referred to as computer control logic) are stored in main memory 608 and/or secondary memory 610. Computer programs may also be received via communications interface 624. Such computer programs, when executed, enable the computer system 600 to perform the features of the present invention, as discussed herein. In particular, the computer programs, when executed, enable the processor 604 to perform the features of the present invention. Accordingly, such computer programs represent controllers of the computer system 600.

[0070] In an embodiment where the invention is implemented using software, the software may be stored in a computer program product and loaded into computer system 600 using removable storage drive 614, hard drive 612 or communications interface 624. The control logic (software), when executed by the processor 604, causes the processor 604 to perform the functions of the invention as described herein.

[0071] In another embodiment, the invention is implemented primarily in hardware using, for example, hardware components such as application

specific integrated circuits (ASICs). Implementation of the hardware state machine so as to perform the functions described herein will be apparent to persons skilled in the relevant art(s).

[0072] In yet another embodiment, the invention is implemented using a combination of both hardware and software.

[0073] While various embodiments of the present invention have been described above, it should be understood that they have been presented by way of example, and not limitation. It will be apparent to persons skilled in the relevant art(s) that various changes in form and detail can be made therein without departing from the spirit and scope of the present invention. Thus, the present invention should not be limited by any of the above described exemplary embodiments, but should be defined only in accordance with the following claims and their equivalents.

[0074] In addition, it should be understood that the Figures 1-6, which highlight the functionality and advantages of the present invention, are presented for example purposes only. The architecture of the present invention is sufficiently flexible and configurable, such that it may be utilized (and navigated) in ways other than that shown in the accompanying figures.

[0075] Further, the purpose of the foregoing Abstract is to enable the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office and the public generally, and especially the scientists, engineers and practitioners in the art who are not familiar with patent or legal terms or phraseology, to determine quickly from a cursory inspection the nature and essence of the technical disclosure of the application. The Abstract is not intended to be limiting as to the scope of the present invention in any way. It is also to be understood that the blocks and procedures recited in the claims need not be performed in the order presented.

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WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method for running a multi-stage online elimination competition comprising the steps of:
 - receiving via a communications engine a plurality of content submissions submitted by members;
 - screening the plurality of content submissions against a first set of predefined criteria;
 - creating a first subset of content submissions from the plurality of content submissions that did not fail the screening;
 - generating at least one of a rating of the first subset of content submissions and a request for re-screening of the plurality of content submissions contained in the first subset of content submissions based on an evaluation of the first subset of content submissions by members;
 - evaluating iteratively the first subset of content submissions utilizing the ratings by members and a second set of predefined criteria, and removing one or more of the plurality of content submissions, resulting in a second subset of content submissions;
 - evaluating of the second subset of content submissions by an advisory committee utilizing a third set of predefined criteria and removing one or more of the plurality of content submissions resulting in a third subset of content submissions, with said advisory committee comprising committee components selected by a competition sponsor; and
 - evaluating and voting on the third subset of content submissions by members.
2. The method of Claim 1, wherein a plurality of said content submissions are combined into a single content submission based on a fourth set of predefined criteria.
3. The method of Claim 1, wherein said members are the subset of potential users that have registered with the provider of said competition.

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4. The method of Claim 1, wherein said screening includes screening for at least one of profane and offensive content.

5. The method of Claim 1, wherein said screening is performed at least in part using a text-matching parsing algorithm.

6. The method of Claim 1, wherein said second set of predefined criteria includes screening for the feasibility of implementing a particular content submission.

7. The method of Claim 1, wherein said content submission includes a proposed charity sponsorship and a profile of the plurality of submitting members.

8. The method of Claim 1, wherein said third set of predefined criteria includes a personal preference based score.

9. The method of Claim 1, wherein said evaluating and voting on the third subset of content submissions by members occurs in a plurality of elimination rounds.

10. The method of Claim 1, wherein said evaluating is biased in favor of content submissions that receive quantitatively more member ratings over content submissions that receive an equivalent average rating.

11. A system for running a multi-stage online elimination competition, the system, comprising:

a communications engine configured to receive a plurality of content submissions submitted by members;

a parsing engine configured to screen the plurality of content submissions against a first set of predefined criteria;

an internal review engine configured to:

create a first subset of content submissions from the plurality of content submissions that did not fail the screening,

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generate at least one of a rating of the first subset of content submissions and a request for re-screening of the plurality of content submissions contained in the first subset of content submissions based on an evaluation of the first subset of content submissions by members, and

evaluate iteratively the first subset of content submissions utilizing the ratings by members and a second set of predefined criteria, and removing one or more of the plurality of content submissions, resulting in a second subset of content submissions; and

an advisory review engine configured to evaluate the second subset of content submissions by an advisory committee utilizing a third set of predefined criteria and removing one or more of the plurality of content submissions resulting in a third subset of content submissions, with said advisory committee comprising committee components selected by a competition sponsor and evaluate and vote on the third subset of content submissions by members.

12. The system of Claim 11, wherein one or more of the plurality of said content submissions are combined into a single content submission based on a fourth set of predefined criteria.

13. The system of Claim 11, wherein said members are the subset of potential users that have registered with the provider of said competition.

14. The system of Claim 11, wherein said first set of predefined criteria includes screening for at least one of profane and offensive content.

15. The system of Claim 11, wherein said screening module is configured to parse text based on a text-matching parsing algorithm.

16. The system of Claim 11, wherein said second set of predefined criteria includes screening for the feasibility of implementing a particular content submission.

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17. The system of Claim 11, wherein said content submission includes an idea to sponsor a particular charity project or organization and a profile of the plurality of submitting members.

18. The system of Claim 11, wherein said third set of predefined criteria includes a personal preference based scoring.

19. The system of Claim 11, wherein said module to evaluate and vote on the third subset of content submissions by members occurs in a plurality of elimination rounds.

20. The system of Claim 11, wherein said evaluating iteratively the first subset of content submissions utilizing the ratings by members is biased in favor of content submissions that receive quantitatively more member ratings over content submissions that receive an equivalent average rating.

21. A computer-readable medium having stored thereon sequences of instructions, the sequences of instructions including instructions which when executed by a computer system causes the computer system to perform:

receiving via a communications engine a plurality of content submissions submitted by members;

screening the plurality of content submissions against a first set of predefined criteria;

creating a first subset of content submissions from the plurality of content submissions that did not fail the screening;

generating at least one of a rating of the first subset of content submissions and a request for re-screening of the plurality of content submissions contained in the first subset of content submissions based on an evaluation of the first subset of content submissions by members;

evaluating iteratively the first subset of content submissions utilizing the ratings by members and a second set of predefined criteria, and removing a plurality of content submissions, resulting in a second subset of content

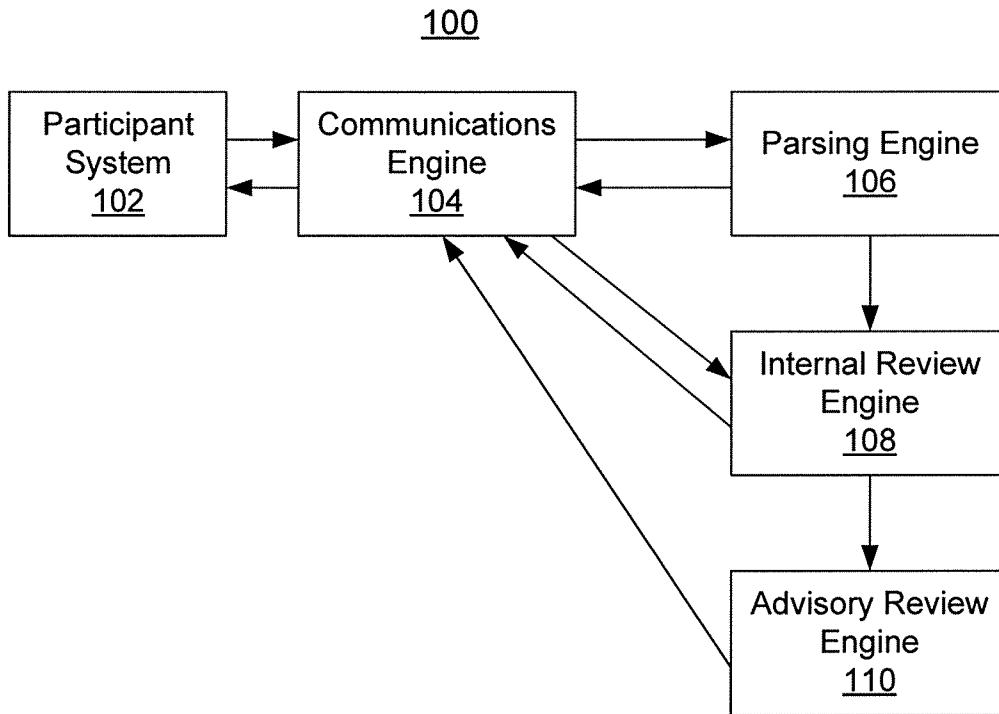
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submissions;

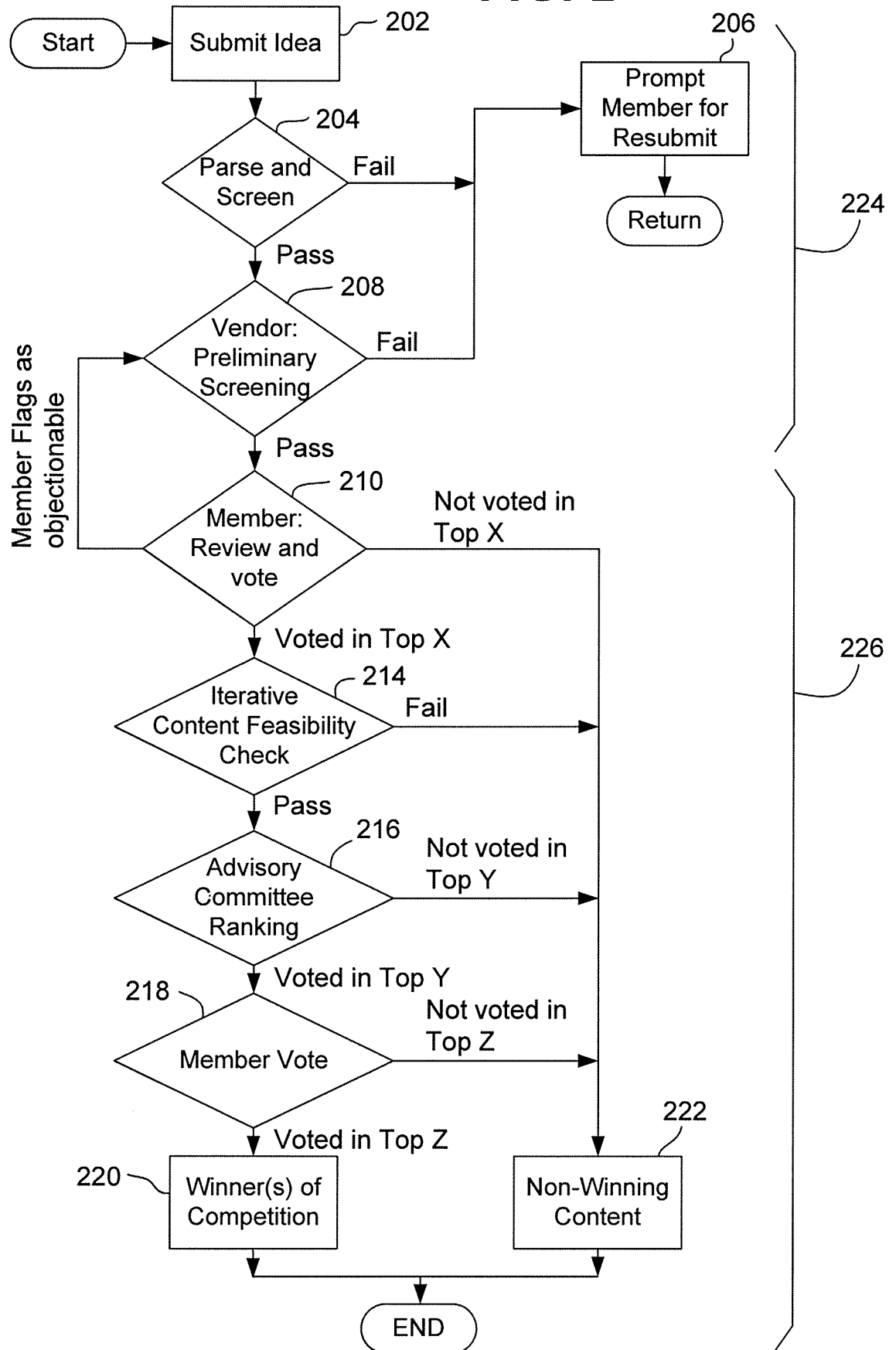
evaluating of the second subset of content submissions by an advisory committee utilizing a third set of predefined criteria and resulting in a third subset of content submissions, with said advisory committee comprising committee components selected by a competition sponsor; and

evaluating and voting on the third subset of content submissions by members.

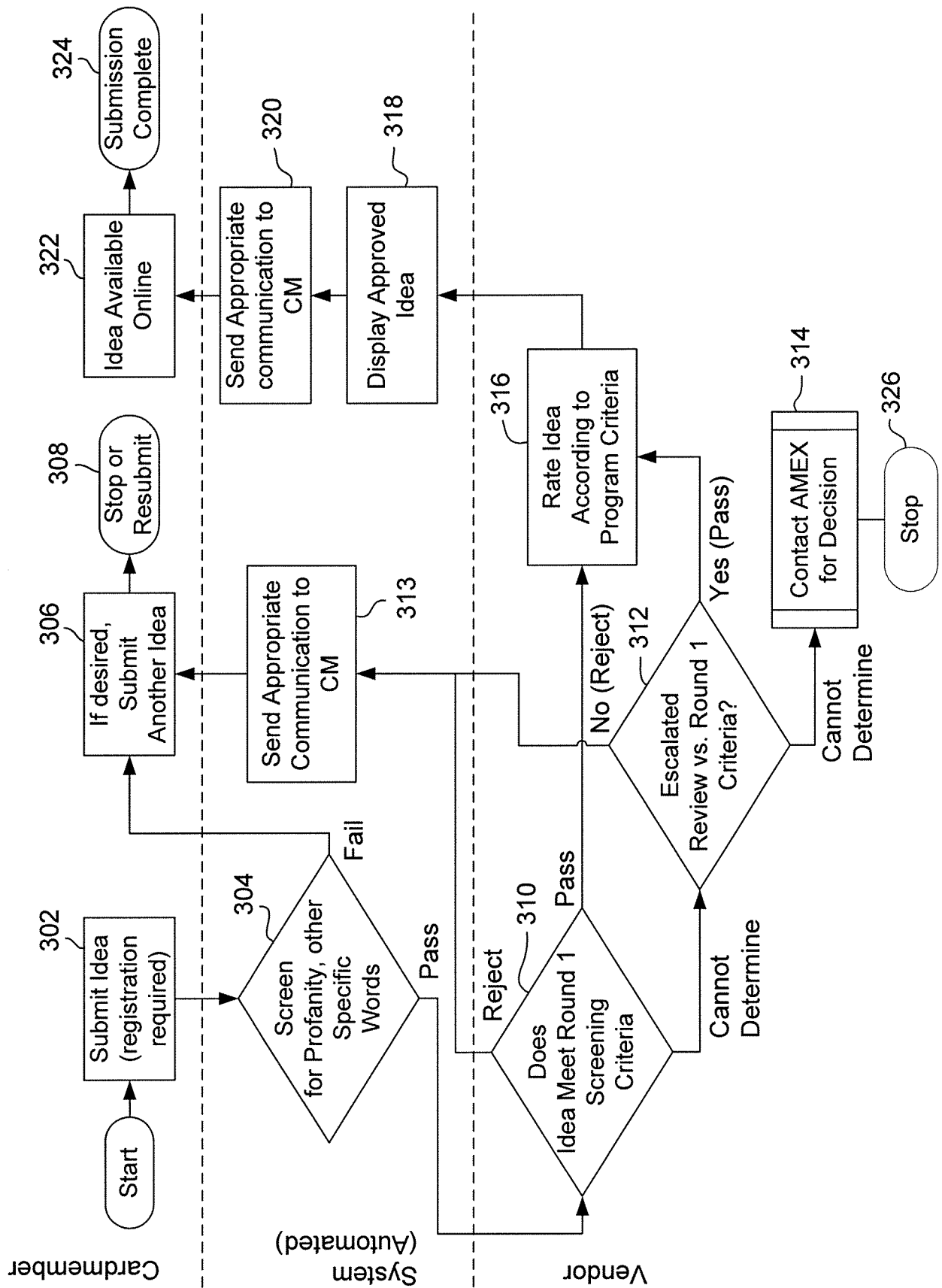
1/6

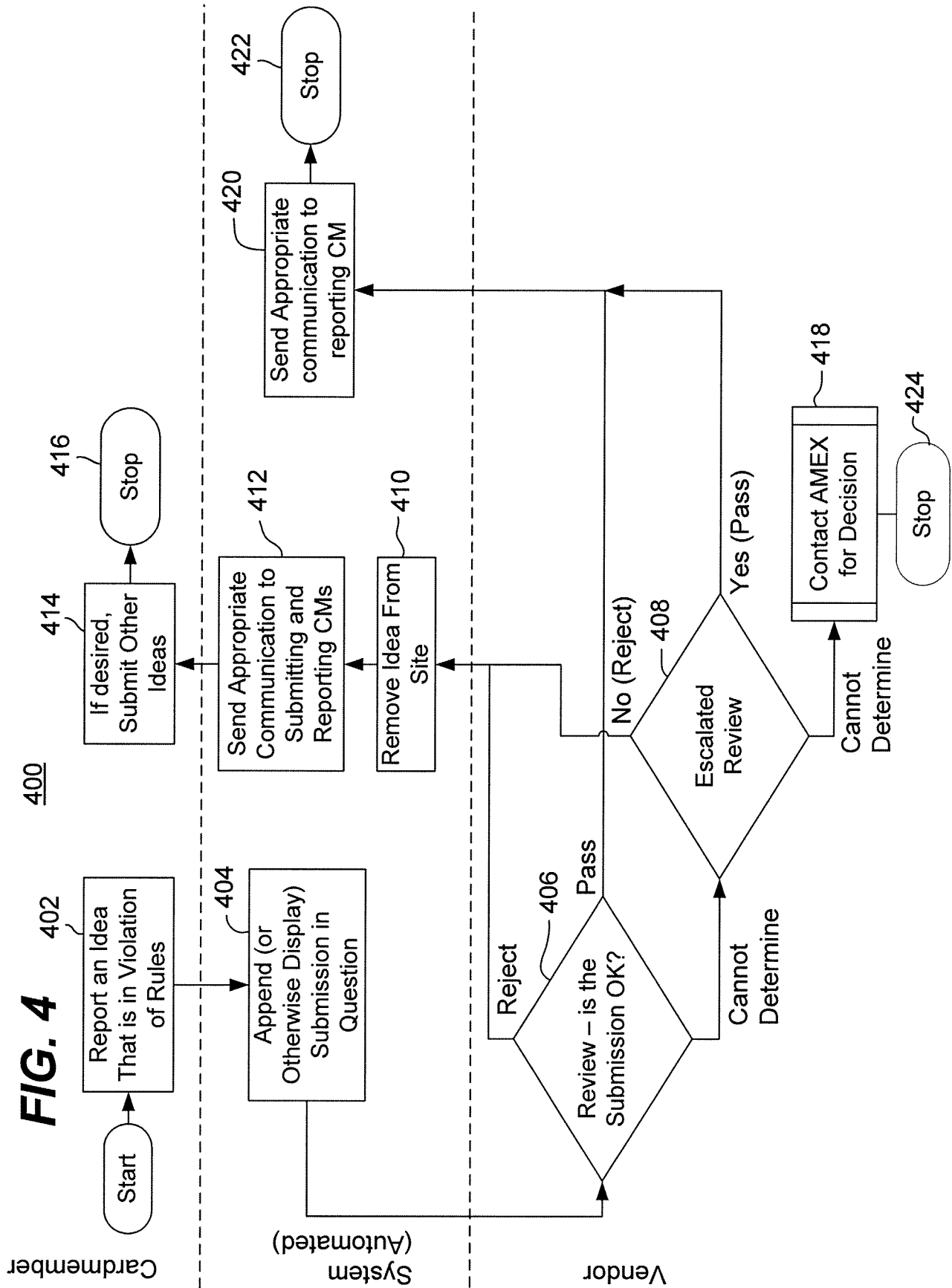
FIG. 1

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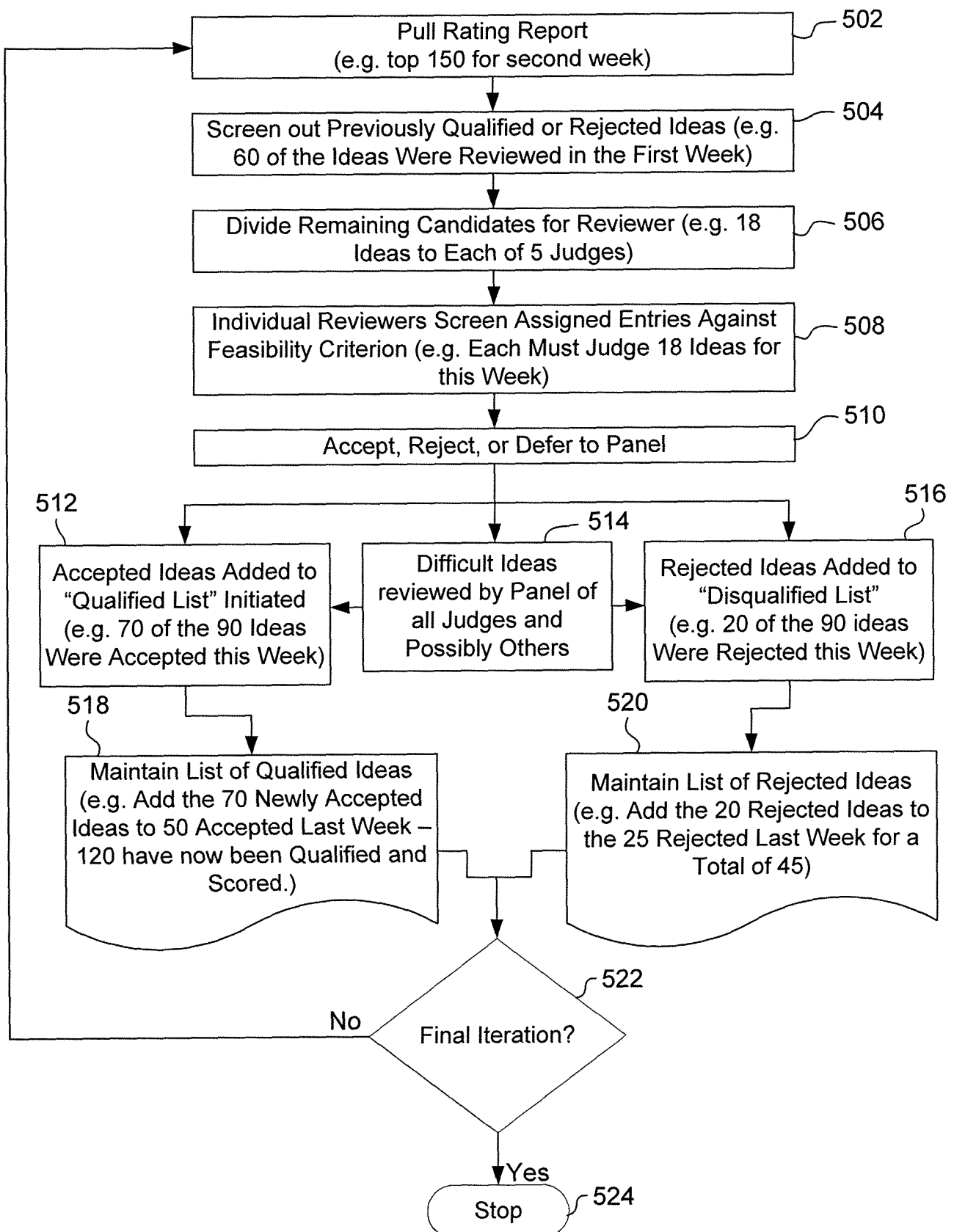
FIG. 2

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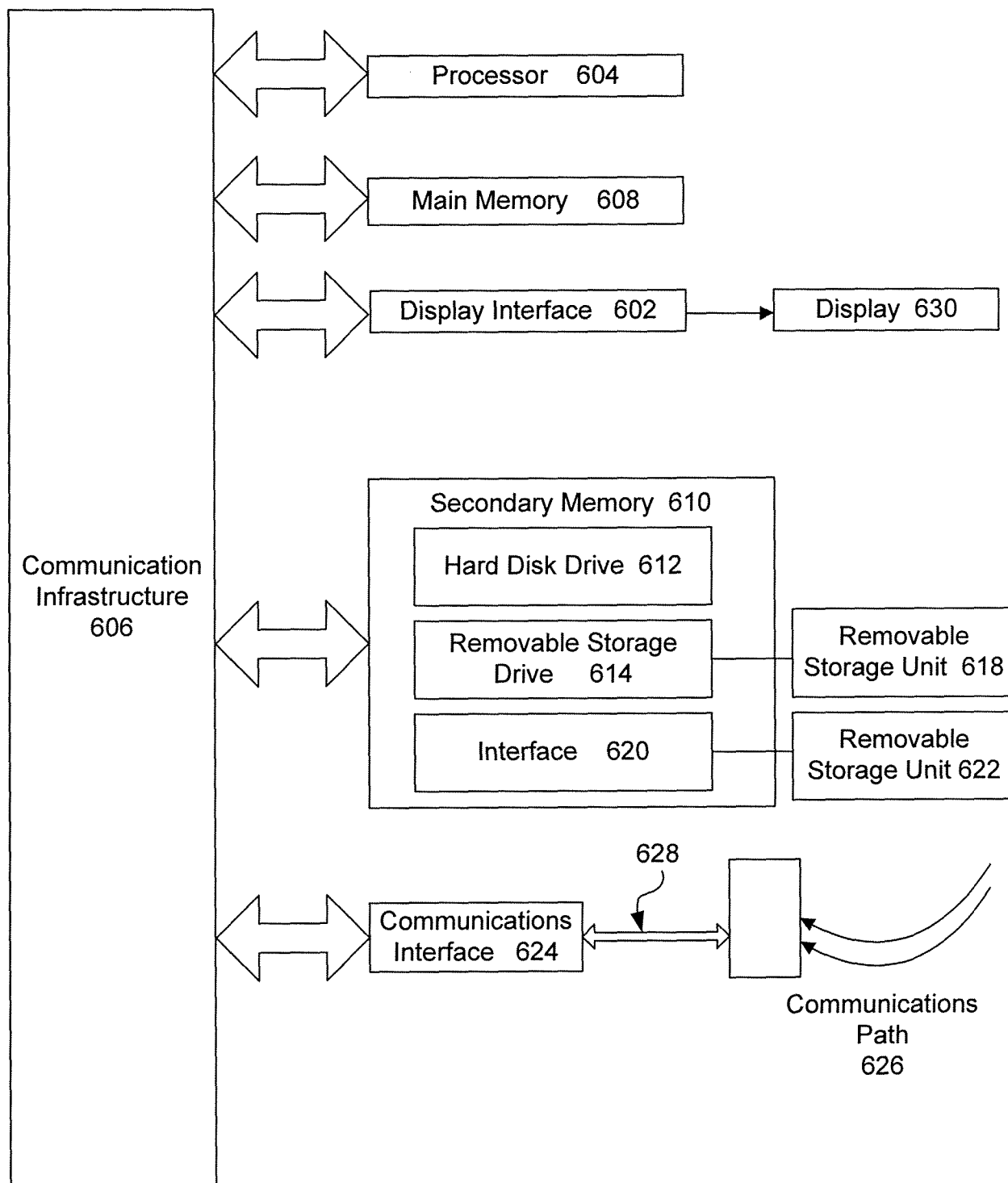
FIG. 3



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FIG. 5500

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Computer System
600**FIG. 6**

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.

PCT/US 08/58995

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

IPC(8) - G06F 19/00 (2008.04)

USPC - 700/91

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)
700/91Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched
USPC: 705/1, 12, 500

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)

PubWEST: (PGPB,USPT,EPAB,JPAB); Google Scholar

Search Terms: online compete, online competing, online competition, online contest, online game, web competition, web contest, web game, Internet competition, Internet contest, Internet game, submit content, content submission, offer content, deliver content, transmit content

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X --- Y	US 7,162,433 B1 (FOROUTAN) 09 January 2007 (09.01.2007), col. 3, ln 15 - col. 4, ln 44, col. 4, ln 61 - col. 5, ln 17, col. 10, ln 12-62, col. 13, ln 11-24, col. 14, ln 4-13, col. 14, ln 14 - col. 15, ln 4, col. 18, ln 33-55, col. 18, ln 61 - col. 19, ln 11, col. 19, ln 42-57, col. 20, ln 4-67, col. 21, ln 8-24, col. 22, ln 12-46, col. 23, ln 45-59, col. 24, ln 28-41, col. 24, ln 58 - col. 25, ln 12, col. 25, ln 40-62, col. 28, ln 20-29, col. 33, ln 43-55, col. 37, ln 57-67, col. 39, ln 23-39.	1-3, 6, 8-13, 16 and 18-21 ----- 4-5, 7, 14-15 and 17
Y	US 2003/0033161 A1 (WALKER et al.) 13 February 2003 (13.02.2003), abstract and para [0090], [0156], [0203], [0227].	4-5 and 14-15
Y	US 2004/0225569 A1 (BUNNELL) 11 November 2004 (11.11.2004), abstract and para [0028], [0083]-[0085], [0105].	7 and 17
A	US 2006/0252547 A1 (MIZRAHI et al.) 09 November 2006 (09.11.2006), entire document, especially abstract and para [0014]-[0060], [0082]-[0109], [0111]-[0126], [0140]-[0147], [0160]-[0171], [0242]-[0258], [0266], [0466]-[0467].	1-21

☐ Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C.

* Special categories of cited documents:

"A" document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance

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"O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means

"P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed

"T" later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention

"X" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone

"Y" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art

"&" document member of the same patent family

Date of the actual completion of the international search

08 August 2008 (08.08.2008)

Date of mailing of the international search report

15 AUG 2008

Name and mailing address of the ISA/US

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