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(54) Title: A COOPERATIVE RESIDUAL-BENEFIT BUSINESS METHOD

(57) Abstract: A cooperative residual-benefit business method (especially useful for travel agency systems) operable in conjunction with a computer communications network, the method including the computer program driven steps of (A) registering a first party having a potential residual benefit; (B) for at least one second party capable of actualizing the potential residual benefit, matching the at least one second party to the first party; (C) actualizing the residual benefit; and (D) respectively allocating a first portion of the actualized residual benefit to the first party and a second portion of the actualized residual benefit to the at least one second party.

A COOPERATIVE RESIDUAL-BENEFIT BUSINESS METHOD

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention generally relates to business methods for matching parties having symbiotic mercantile interests. More specifically, the present invention relates to creating a forum for matching such parties and thereby facilitating actualization of otherwise dormant incentive aspects.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

It is common practice in today's competitive markets for wholesalers and retailers alike to creative incentive programs – in order to secure decisive customer transactions. For example, in the travel agency services there is often an incentive of "two for the price of one" (known in the industry as "two for 1" deals or flights) – or at least a substantial discount for booking a group (of more than one persons) with a single itinerary. This is typically the case for airline tickets on generally under-subscribed flights, for cruises on grand size luxury liners, for hotel booking which prefer higher occupancy, etc. In other market sectors, incentives may be less homogeneous – such as offering a free ice cream with every third swim suit purchased, or offering a set of cutlery with every 500 gallons of gasoline purchased, or offering limited movie rental privileges for frequent club visitors, etc.

The ratio between the value of the benefit and that of the conditions for eligibility are arbitrary, and are typically according to market share factors that the consumer may not be sensitive to. Simply stated, for example, nothing forces the merchant to offer a two-for-the-price-of-one incentive in circumstances where he believes that a buy-two-and-get-the-third-free would accomplish his objectives, etc. What is frustrating for the consumer is that he may be eligible to receive the benefit but has no use for it, or he may almost be eligible for the benefit but have no rational way to reach the threshold of eligibility, etc. For example, the offer may be for those staying in a hotel for two nights – to get the third night free – and the customer may not be available to be at the hotel for that third night; or the offer may be for those booking a travel itinerary valued at over $1000 to get booking for a second identical itinerary at a 30% discount – and the customer does not have a companion to travel with on the identical itinerary, etc.

In these and similar circumstances, there is a long felt consumer need in the market for a means for consumer actualizing of these potential benefits and/or of any respective residuals portions thereof that the consumer might have "rights" to. More specifically, it would be a sufficient improvement over the current circumstances if the consumer were provided with some means to accrue some value in exchange for these unfulfilled rights, equivalent options, or the likes.

ADVANTAGES, OBJECTS AND BENEFITS OF THE INVENTION

Technical Issues: an organized use of matching algorithms between a user and a database (or between two users – or between two databases) allows facilitation of logically-complementing mutual benefit between users – and eventual benefit residual value accrual or benefit actualization per se.

Ergonomic Issues: In the context of typical consumer frustration, allowing actualization of marketing rights threshold achievement in a facile way would enhance consumer

satisfaction and may eventually contribute to stabilization of consumer-to-merchant loyalty patterns for some portion of the market – which is the long term goal of merchants offering such incentive schemes in the first place.

Economic Issues: Certainly, from the consumer vantage, actualization of incentive rights or receipt of value in lieu of them constitutes an economic improvement for the consumer – simultaneously increasing his self-appraised consumer intelligence quotient, since innately he "feels" that he has gotten a better transaction than would normally be the case.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The aforesaid longstanding needs are significantly addressed by embodiments of the present invention, which specifically relates to a cooperative residual-benefit business method. The instant method is especially useful in man-computer communications-systems interactions wherein there exists a long felt need to provide a means to accrue some value in exchange for unfulfilled rights options.

Principal embodiments of the present invention relate to a cooperative residual-benefit business method, operable in conjunction with a computer communications network, the method including the computer program driven steps of: (A) registering a first party having a potential residual benefit; (B) for at least one second party capable of actualizing the potential residual benefit, matching the at least one second party to the first party; (C) actualizing the residual benefit; and (D) respectively allocating a first portion of the actualized residual benefit to the first party and a second portion of the actualized residual benefit to the at least one second party.

More specifically, "operable in conjunction with a computer communications network" includes configuring software, algorithms, user interfaces, databases and database products in a means that complies with standards of telecommunications including by modem, Local

Area Network, internet, and the likes; with encryption and other security features as deemed reasonable to the respective market using the instant method – all substantially according to the normal variations of ordinary practitioners of the art.

Furthermore, the first computer program driven step "(A) registering a first party having a potential residual benefit" typically includes sub-steps of identifying the party, validating the potential residual benefit, recording particulars in a database (that may be centralized or decentralized), and formalizing a contractual relationship between this party and an operator of the instant method.

The next computer program driven step "(B) for at least one second party capable of actualizing the potential residual benefit, matching the at least one second party to the first party" typically includes sub-steps of identifying this party, validating the potential residual benefit actualizing capability, recording these respective particulars in a database (that may be centralized or decentralized), and formalizing a contractual relationship between this party and an operator of the instant method.

The next successive computer program driven step "(C) actualizing the residual benefit" typically includes sub-steps of an operator of the instant method exchanging data particulars from the aforementioned databases with a provider of the benefit or with an agent thereof, and securing "ownership" to the right thus actualized.

The concluding computer program driven step "(D) respectively allocating a first portion of the actualized residual benefit to the first party and a second portion of the actualized residual benefit to the at least one second party" typically includes either transfer of the right to one of the parties, sale of the right external to any of these parties and transferring some portion of the sale value to the respective parties – either leaving a portion of the rights value as a profit to the operator or (in agent-less decentralized embodiments) dividing the benefit according to predetermined contractual relationships.

Simply stated, the instant method is a systemized way to match people (or equivalent customer entities) in a market environment that creates offers, specials, fare deals, or packages wherein a discount or prize is given for increasing the volume or value of a purchase order being executed. For example, in travel booking (airline, bus, train, ocean cruise, hotels and schedulable appurtenances therewith, or the likes) there are often discounts or incentives offered for increased bookings – substantially because the vehicle or infrastructure will incur ordinary use and depreciation regardless of the efficiency or inefficiency of actual use. Again, simply stated, for example, the train will depart from A to B with few or many passengers, the night will pass regardless of the rate of the hotel's occupancy, etc. In other words, from the vantage of the service provider, there are ordinary business expenses that are substantially independent of customer subscription – and thus there is instant or distant profit to be made with each additional customer bonding; including reduces profit on instant customer transactions and/or ordinary profit on future transactions that have been motivated by customer loyalty purchased thereby.

An easy example to appreciate a two-for-one (typically airline) travel-booking discount – applied if there is the same itinerary exactly for the "two" as for the "one". In a business context, if these two travelers are respectively anonymous, then each will be satisfied to benefit from some part of the discount value that "happens" when they are matched – for example allocating to each of the two travelers 40% of the benefit – thus leaving the agency doing matching to get 20% of benefit. However, just as the incentive system proportions were arbitrarily set by the merchant according to his perception of instant consumer satisfaction and long term consumer loyalty, so too the allocation to the agency for performing the matching and residual benefit value realization may be arbitrarily set by the agency according to competitive conditions between agencies and agency substitutes. Furthermore, there is no essential mercantile justification for evenly dividing residual benefit portions between the two travelers. Actually, it is reasonable to postulate that the closer the loss of residual benefit actualization is, the more precious is the value of the compliment traveler whose participation in the matching allows agent and co-traveler for getting any residual benefit whatsoever. Simply stated, if this threshold-contributing traveler did not come along at the last minute,

then there would be no discount for the pre-scheduled traveler and no commission for the matching agent. Continuing in the direction of asymmetric value distribution, a traveler who is willing to alter his intentions to match with one or a series of other itinerary components is worthy of extra benefit receipt weighting at least in proportion for the inconvenience that he is offering to undertake to "evolve" into a match-able party, etc. Thus, variations of the current method include matching --- with or without a merchant/vendor cooperation; proportional or disproportional division of residual benefits; direct party to party matching, agent facilitated matching, and multi-agent by-proxy matching too.

Accordingly, it is appropriate to characterize the instant method as centrally including a data record matching step that allows acquisition and division of residual benefits, discount or promotional addition that come to fruition as a consequence of the matching step. Furthermore, the use of a data base to find discount or promotional packages, benefit or promotion in same class of goods or service or information or in different classes (mutatis mutandis) would constitute a contributory appurtenance – in that the purpose of the data base is to make a critical value added aspect to the matching.

The instant invention is a facile business promotion tool in markets outside the scope of the travel agent activity. For example, bundling of rights and/or privileges to residual or optional cargo space in a container, newspaper/magazine ad space, classes, theater, movies, events, tours, or the likes. Also, upon the actualization of a market platform according to the instant invention for any of the rights or and/privileges to residuals (or options) as herein described, these rights and/or privileges become a commodity subject to all of the real market speculative mercantile transactions heretofore associated with physical commodities (corn, soy, etc.), their "futures", options, and risks – as commercial ownership certificates subject to sale or barter, etc.

NOTICES: Numbers, alphabetic characters, and roman symbols are designated in the following sections for convenience of explanations only, and should by no means be regarded as imposing particular order on any method steps. Likewise, the present invention will forthwith be described with a certain degree of particularity, however those versed in the art

will readily appreciate that various modifications and alterations may be carried out without departing from either the spirit or scope, as hereinafter claimed.

In describing the present invention, explanations are presented in light of currently accepted Algorithmic and/or Mercantile theories/models. Such theories and models are subject to changes, both adiabatic and radical. Often these changes occur because representations for fundamental component elements are innovated, because new transformations between these elements are conceived, or because new interpretations arise for these elements or for their transformations. Therefore, it is important to note that the present invention relates to specific technological actualization in embodiments. Accordingly, theory or model dependent explanations herein, related to these embodiments, are presented for the purpose of teaching, the current man of the art or the current team of the art, how these embodiments may be substantially realized in practice. Alternative or equivalent explanations for these embodiments may neither deny nor alter their realization.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

In order to understand the invention and to see how it may be carried out in practice, embodiments including the preferred embodiment will now be described, by way of non-limiting example only, with reference to the accompanying drawings. Furthermore, a more complete understanding of the present invention and the advantages thereof may be acquired by referring to the following description in consideration of the accompanying drawings, in which like reference numbers indicate like features and wherein:

Figure 1 illustrates a schematic diagram of the most basic embodiment of the instant method; and

Figure 2 illustrates a schematic diagram of a most basic embodiment of a program storage device capable of performing steps of the instant method.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

Principal embodiments of the present invention (as shown in figure 1) relate to a cooperative residual-benefit business method, operable in conjunction with a computer communications network (100), the method including the computer program driven steps of: (A) registering (110) a first party having a potential residual benefit; (B) for at least one second party capable of actualizing the potential residual benefit, matching (120) the at least one second party to the first party; (C) actualizing (130) the residual benefit; and (D) respectively allocating (140) a first portion of the actualized residual benefit to the first party and a second portion of the actualized residual benefit to the at least one second party.

According to the preferred embodiment of the instant invention, the first party is registered for a travel itinerary and the potential residual benefit is provided for registering the at least one second party with a substantially identical itinerary.

According to another embodiment of the instant invention, the step of respectively allocating includes allocating a third portion of the actualized residual benefit to a third party. For example, matching John's itinerary with the first week of Jack's itinerary, and the matching Jane's itinerary with the remainder of Jack's itinerary. Furthermore, according to one variation of this embodiment, the third party is an agent for the first party – for example – the John and Jack itinerary may match sufficiently if the agent is diligent in his matching activity; and according to another variation of this embodiment, the third party is an agent for the at least one second party – for example – if it is acceptable for the lion's share of the commission to go to the agent who accomplishes a successful matching rather than to the agent who established an initial registration for a heretofore unmatched booking. Narrow variations having contributions from portions of the aforesaid collectively encompass countless weighting and combinations – such as for registering parties for matching even when those parties will not actually book their itinerary until they have found benefit from substantially complete itinerary matching with one or more other parties, etc.

In compliance with still a further embodiment of the instant invention, matching the second party to the first party is accomplished by proxy between an agent for the at least one second party and an agent for the first party. In this context, the agents may be physical travel agents or virtual software agents or mistunes, etc.

In many practical circumstances, the instant invention relates to yet another embodiment wherein the instant method is further including the computer driven steps of (A-3) in a database, registering vendor discount conditions-for-qualifying for a potential residual benefit and respective vendor discount terms and values of the potential residual benefit; (A-2) facilitating query activity on the database by the first party; and (A-1) contingent on the success of said activity, permitting the first party to enroll for the potential residual benefit. Collectively, these preferred preliminary steps permit potential users to express their willingness to participate in a benefit actualizing and value sharing method in compliance with any of the aforesaid embodiments or variations thereof.

Finally, the pith and marrow of the instant invention relates to embodiments facilitating a cooperative residual-benefit business method wherein the residual benefit is selected from the list: goods, services, information, monetary payment, monetary credit, discount, rebate, gift, any other benefit two potentially cooperating parties might consider desirable, or the likes. Simply stated, all of the aforesaid travel and itinerary examples are illustrative of a much broader strata of mercantile inventive and matching for realization thereof that is to be found in countless market sectors – especially those that are amenable to internet or equivalent telecommunications facilitation – since virtually all preferred actualizations provide real time confirmation rather than deferred background transactions processing.

Contributory embodiments of the present invention (a seen in figure 2) relate to a program storage device (200) readable by machine, tangibly embodying a program of instructions executable by the machine to perform method steps for facilitating a cooperative residual-benefit business method, said method steps including: (A) registering (210) a first

party having a potential residual benefit; (B) for at least one second party capable of actualizing the potential residual benefit, matching (220) the at least one second party to the first party; (C) actualizing (230) the residual benefit; and (D) respectively allocating (240) a first portion of the actualized residual benefit to the first party and a second portion of the actualized residual benefit to the at least one second party.

Furthermore, the preferred variation of the contributory embodiment is, per se, a program storage device readable by machine, tangibly embodying a program of instructions executable by the machine to perform method steps for facilitating a cooperative residual-benefit business method, said method steps further including: (A-3) in a database, registering vendor discount conditions-for-qualifying for a potential residual benefit and respective vendor discount terms and values of the potential residual benefit; (A-2) facilitating query activity on the database by the first party; and (A-1) contingent on the success of said activity, permitting the first party to enroll for the potential residual benefit.

Notwithstanding the aforementioned embodiments, generic embodiments of the present invention relate to a cooperative residual-benefit business method that is characterized by matching of parties for the purpose of allocating residual benefits substantially actualized thereby.

While the invention has been described with respect to specific examples including presently preferred modes of carrying out the invention, those skilled in the art will appreciate that there are numerous variations and permutations of the above described systems and techniques that fall within the spirit and scope of the invention as set forth in the appended claims.

I/We Claim:

1. A cooperative residual-benefit business method, operable in conjunction with a computer communications network, the method including the computer program driven steps of: (A) registering a first party having a potential residual benefit; (B) for at least one second party capable of actualizing the potential residual benefit, matching the at least one second party to the first party; (C) actualizing the residual benefit; and (D) respectively allocating a first portion of the actualized residual benefit to the first party and a second portion of the actualized residual benefit to the at least one second party.

2. The method according to claim 1 wherein the first party is registered for a travel itinerary and the potential residual benefit is provided for registering the at least one second party with a substantially identical itinerary.

3. The method according to claim 1 wherein the step of respectively allocating includes allocating a third portion of the actualized residual benefit to a third party.

4. The method according to claim 3 wherein the third party is an agent for the first party.

5. The method according to claim 3 wherein the third party is an agent for the at least one second party.

6. The method according to claim 1 wherein matching the second party to the first party is accomplished by proxy between an agent for the at least one second party and an agent for the first party.

7. The method according to claim 1 wherein the residual benefit is selected from the list: goods, services, information, monetary payment, monetary credit, discount, rebate, and gift.

8. The method according to claim 1 further including the computer driven steps of (A-3) in a database, registering vendor discount conditions-for-qualifying for a potential residual benefit and respective vendor discount terms and values of the potential residual benefit; (A-2) facilitating query activity on the database by the first party; and (A-1) contingent on the success of said activity, permitting the first party to enroll for the potential residual benefit.

9. A program storage device readable by machine, tangibly embodying a program of instructions executable by the machine to perform method steps for facilitating a cooperative residual-benefit business method, said method steps including: (A) registering a first party having a potential residual benefit; (B) for at least one second party capable of actualizing the potential residual benefit, matching the at least one second party to the first party; (C) actualizing the residual benefit; and (D) respectively allocating a first portion of the actualized residual benefit to the first party and a second portion of the actualized residual benefit to the at least one second party.

10. The program storage device readable by machine according to claim 9, tangibly embodying a program of instructions executable by the machine to perform method steps for facilitating a cooperative residual-benefit business method, said method steps further including: (A-3) in a database, registering vendor discount conditions-for-qualifying for a potential residual benefit and respective vendor discount terms and values of the potential residual benefit; (A-2) facilitating query activity on the database by the first party; and (A-1) contingent on the success of said activity, permitting the first party to enroll for the potential residual benefit.

11. A cooperative residual-benefit business method, substantially as herein before described and illustrated, and characterized by matching of parties for the purpose of allocating residual benefits substantially actualized thereby.

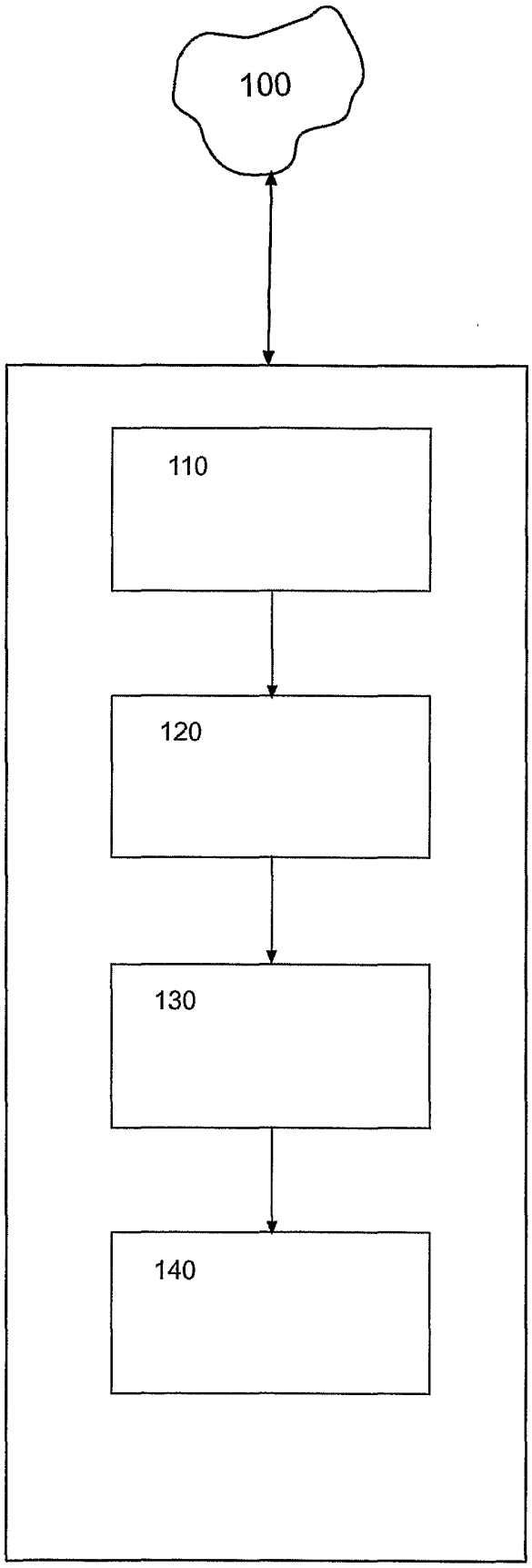

FIG. 1

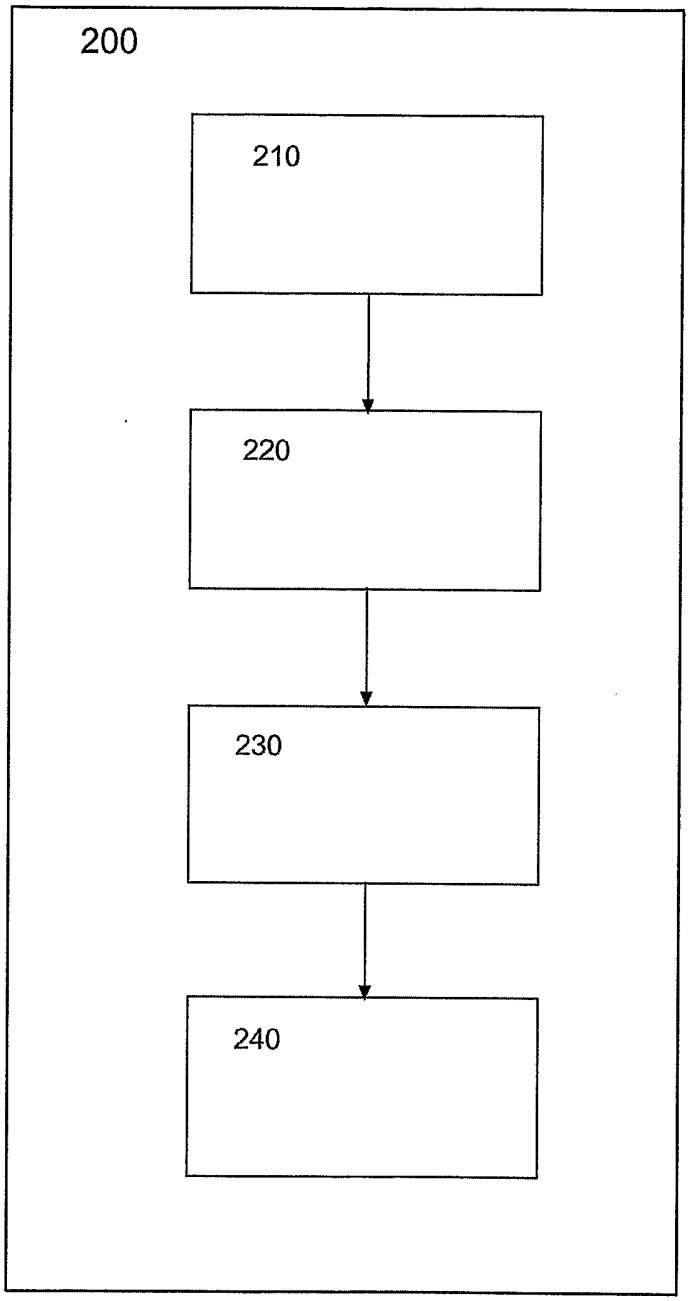

FIG. 2