FOOD BROKERING SYSTEM AND METHOD

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Continuation of application No. 11/082,450, filed on Mar. 17, 2005, now Pat. No. 8,281,899.

Methods and apparatus for brokering food services are disclosed. The methods and apparatus described herein provide quality controlled room service to guests of hotels that do not otherwise have traditional room service available. A call center operator routes each call to the appropriate restaurant and stays on the phone line to monitor the call. The restaurant delivers the order and collects the appropriate fee. Menus used by the system are generated by a process that maintains a consistent look and feel despite the fact that each area uses a unique menu.
Hotel guest calls toll-free number printed on his in-room menu

Call center operator takes guest's basic information (e.g., guest's name, hotel's name, room #, etc.)

Call center operator connects hotel guest to restaurant for that area and stays on the line to gather additional data (e.g., quoted delivery time, quoted price, notes on rude order takers, etc.)

Restaurant delivers order to hotel guest

Hotel guest pays restaurant delivery person

Call center sends data to broker (e.g., daily batch or interactively as data is recorded)

Broker generates report for restaurant (e.g., amount of money to be transferred, promised delivery times, etc.)

Broker causes a transfer of funds of a portion of the collected money (e.g., EFT 40%)

FIG. 2
(Normal Order)
Hotel guest calls 1-800 number again to complain (e.g., no cheese on my burger)

Call center operator records guest's complaint and optionally contacts the restaurant

Call center sends data to broker (e.g., daily batch or interactively as data is recorded)

Order Inn customer service agent calls guest, hotel management, local rep, and/or restaurant to resolve the issue (e.g., comp the meal)

Order Inn generates report for restaurant

FIG. 4
(Complaint)
FIG. 5
(Non-integrated Call Center)
Soup & Salads

Our dressings: Our Homemade Caesar, Flat-Free Italian, Honey-Mustard, 100% Salad, Soy Ginger, Caesar & Fat-Free Italian.

- Minestrone Soup: A soup of Minestrone Serve with a breadstick. 3.99
- Soup of the Day: Our Soup of the Day is served with a breadstick. Please ask your server for today's special! 3.99
- Caesar Salad: Our Caesar Salad is served with our Classic Caesar Dressing. 5.19
- Caesar Salad Roman Style: Our Roman Style Caesar Salad is served with our Classic Caesar Dressing. 7.25
- Caesar Salad w/Chicken: Our Chicken Caesar Salad is served with our Classic Caesar Dressing. 10.70
- Spinach Salad: Our Spinach Salad is served with our Classic Dressing. 5.19
- Spinach Salad w/Chicken: Our Chicken Spinach Salad is served with our Classic Caesar Dressing. 10.70
- Chicken Caesar Salad Platter: Our Chicken Caesar Salad Platter is served with our Classic Dressing. 15.79

Sides and Appetizers

- Garlic Breadsticks: Served with our Classic Dressing. 3.70
- Garlic Cheese Breadsticks: Served with our Classic Dressing. 4.40
- TatorTot Fries: Served with our Classic Dressing. 6.60
- Stuffed Mushrooms (4 Pieces): Our Stuffed Mushrooms are served with our Classic Dressing. 9.00
- Stuffed Mushrooms (2 Pieces): Served with our Classic Dressing. 5.99
- Buffalo Wings & Spicy Wings: Served with our Classic Dressing. 7.75

Deluxe Sandwiches

- Chicago Panino: Our deluxe Panino is served with our Classic Dressing. 7.55
- The Chicago Panino: Our deluxe Panino is served with our Classic Dressing. 7.55
- The French: Our deluxe French is served with our Classic Dressing. 7.55
- The Parisian: Our deluxe Parisian is served with our Classic Dressing. 7.55
- The Italian: Our deluxe Italian is served with our Classic Dressing. 7.55
- The Swedish: Our deluxe Swedish is served with our Classic Dressing. 7.55

Pasta Entrees

- Lasagna: Our Lasagna is served with our Classic Dressing. 18.90
- Fontina Parmesan Chicken with Cappuccino Sauce: Our Fontina Parmesan Chicken is served with our Classic Dressing. 12.70
- Angel Hair Pasta: Angel Hair Pasta is served with our Classic Dressing. 9.90
- Fettucini Alfredo: Our Fettucini Alfredo is served with our Classic Dressing. 9.90
- Calzones

- The Deluxe Calzone: Our Deluxe Calzone is served with our Classic Dressing. 9.40
- Create your Own Calzone: Our Create your Own Calzone is served with our Classic Dressing. 9.40

Try the Order Inn Favorites, Our Specialties!

- No phone orders are accepted. All quality meals are prepared to order. Please allow approximately 45 minutes for your order, your actual delivery time will be quoted by your server. A 15-20 minute window is required to deliver. Prices do not include sales tax. Gratuity of 15% is suggested. No cash allowed, all major credit cards accepted. Sorry, no checks.
### FIG. 10

#### Daily Orders Report For: Order Inn

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ref#</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Call Type</th>
<th>Minutes</th>
<th>Order Taker</th>
<th>Hotel Name And Address</th>
<th>Room#</th>
<th>Comment - Resolution</th>
<th>Code 1</th>
<th>Code 2</th>
<th>Code 3</th>
<th>DefEQ</th>
<th>HetCn</th>
<th>Total Difference</th>
<th>Order Total</th>
<th>Rest Total</th>
<th>C.L Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1002</td>
<td>1/28/2004</td>
<td>14:40</td>
<td>ORDER</td>
<td>3:67</td>
<td>JUSTIN</td>
<td>HOLIDAY INN EXPRESS - 17 W HALEY ST (805)903-9767</td>
<td>304</td>
<td></td>
<td>GUE</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>$0.27</td>
<td>$19.42</td>
<td>$14.50</td>
<td>$4.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1003</td>
<td>1/28/2004</td>
<td>16:10</td>
<td>ORDER</td>
<td>3:08</td>
<td>JUSTIN</td>
<td>BEST WESTERN SOUTHCOAST INN - 5622 CALLE REAL (805)967-3203</td>
<td>257</td>
<td></td>
<td>GUE</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>$22.85</td>
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<td>$5.59</td>
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<tr>
<td>1005</td>
<td>1/28/2004</td>
<td>19:41</td>
<td>ORDER</td>
<td>8:27</td>
<td>GEORGE</td>
<td>BEST WESTERN BEACHSIDE INN 236 W CABRILLO BLVD (805)965-8556</td>
<td>314</td>
<td></td>
<td>GUE</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>$0.04</td>
<td>$23.19</td>
<td>$17.44</td>
<td>$5.74</td>
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<tr>
<td>1006</td>
<td>1/28/2004</td>
<td>19:56</td>
<td>ORDER</td>
<td>2:22</td>
<td>GEORGE</td>
<td>MARINA BEACH MOTEL - 21 BATH ST (805)960-4311</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td>GUE</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>$0.20</td>
<td>$21.51</td>
<td>$16.01</td>
<td>$5.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1007</td>
<td>1/28/2004</td>
<td>20:06</td>
<td>ORDER</td>
<td>4:15</td>
<td>GEORGE</td>
<td>BEST WESTERN BEACHSIDE INN 236 W CABRILLO BLVD (805)965-8556</td>
<td>217</td>
<td></td>
<td>GUE</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>$0.30</td>
<td>$40.04</td>
<td>$30.33</td>
<td>$9.71</td>
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<tr>
<td>1008</td>
<td>1/28/2004</td>
<td>20:10</td>
<td>ORDER</td>
<td>3:32</td>
<td>CHRISTINA</td>
<td>HOLIDAY INN EXPRESS - 17 W HALEY ST (805)963-9767</td>
<td>105</td>
<td></td>
<td>GUE</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>($1.52)</td>
<td>$14.36</td>
<td>$12.84</td>
<td>$5.57</td>
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<tr>
<td>1009</td>
<td>1/28/2004</td>
<td>20:40</td>
<td>STATUS</td>
<td>3:05</td>
<td>REFUSED</td>
<td>MARINA BEACH MOTEL - 21 BATH ST (805)963-9311</td>
<td>FT DE</td>
<td>ORDERED OVER AN HOUR AGO IT WAS ON IT'S WAY THEN - REST HANDED</td>
<td>EMP</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$0.00</td>
<td>$0.00</td>
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<td>$0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1010</td>
<td>1/28/2004</td>
<td>20:48</td>
<td>ORDER</td>
<td>4:55</td>
<td>GEORGE</td>
<td>HOLIDAY INN EXPRESS - 17 W HALEY ST (805)963-9767</td>
<td>220</td>
<td></td>
<td>GUE</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>($1.79)</td>
<td>$24.17</td>
<td>$19.38</td>
<td>$4.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1011</td>
<td>1/28/2004</td>
<td>20:51</td>
<td>CUST SVC</td>
<td>0:67</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>CX , CN</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>$0.00</td>
<td>$0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1012</td>
<td>1/28/2004</td>
<td>20:53</td>
<td>CUST SVC</td>
<td>3:05</td>
<td>GEORGE</td>
<td>MARINA BEACH MOTEL - 21 BATH ST (805)963-9311</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>GUE</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td></td>
<td>$0.00</td>
<td>$0.00</td>
<td>$0.00</td>
<td>$0.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Daily Orders Report For:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Order Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Address</th>
<th>Order Number</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>ID Number</th>
<th>Restaurant ID</th>
<th>ID</th>
<th>Price</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1/28/2004</td>
<td>20:56</td>
<td>1.87</td>
<td>George</td>
<td>Best Western Beachside Inn 336 W Cabrillo Blvd (805) 965-6556</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>REST HANDLED</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/29/2004</td>
<td>20:59</td>
<td>8.38</td>
<td>George</td>
<td>Holiday Inn Express - 17 W Haley St (805) 962-9757</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>3.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/29/2004</td>
<td>21:00</td>
<td>4.52</td>
<td>George</td>
<td>Best Western Southcoast Inn - 6520 Calle Real 805-967-3200</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>3.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/29/2004</td>
<td>21:03</td>
<td>7.38</td>
<td>George</td>
<td>Best Western Southcoast Inn - 6520 Calle Real 805-967-3200</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>3.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/29/2004</td>
<td>21:28</td>
<td>1.58</td>
<td>George</td>
<td>Holiday Inn Express - 17 W Haley St (805) 962-9757</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>CHECKING ON ORDER, IT WAS ON ITS WAY - REST HANDLED</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/29/2004</td>
<td>21:41</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>Christina</td>
<td>Brisas Del Mar - 223 Castillo ST (805) 966-2219</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>2.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/29/2004</td>
<td>21:56</td>
<td>2.77</td>
<td></td>
<td>Best Western Southcoast Inn 6520 Calle Real 805-967-3200</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>REST HANDLED</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/29/2004</td>
<td>23:07</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>George</td>
<td>Best Western Beachside Inn 336 W Cabrillo Blvd (805) 965-6556</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>3.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/29/2004</td>
<td>23:13</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>George</td>
<td>Best Western Beachside Inn 336 W Cabrillo Blvd (805) 965-6556</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>WANTS TO MAKE SURE SHE WILL BE ABLE TO OPEN THE WINE BOTTLE - REST HANDLED</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### FIG. 12

#### Order Inn

**HOTEL ROOM SERVICE**

Providing Quality Meals & Service Nationwide

**Daily Orders Report For:**

Restaurant ID Number: 101

---

**Call Code Definitions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regular Codes</th>
<th>Regular Codes</th>
<th>System Codes</th>
<th>Additional Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CC</td>
<td>CO</td>
<td>CM</td>
<td>EMP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CF</td>
<td>RB</td>
<td>CH</td>
<td>EOE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CM</td>
<td>RC</td>
<td>IN</td>
<td>QUES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CX</td>
<td>RM</td>
<td>DS</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HJ</td>
<td>RM</td>
<td>TS</td>
<td>Store Op Confirmed Hotel Name &amp; Rm. #</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LT</td>
<td>RT</td>
<td></td>
<td>Store Op Did Not Confirm Hotel Name &amp; Rm. #</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D3</td>
<td>VO</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Handling Descriptions**

- **Order Taker** = Restaurant order taker name
- **Dish** = Delivery time quoted by rest. Order taker
- **Check** = Did Restaurant order taker confirm hotel name & room number

**Note:** The following numbers reflect delivery times quoted:
- .50 = 1/2 hour
- .75 = ¾ hour
- 1.00 = 1 hour
- 1.25 = 1 hour & 15 min.
- 1.50 = 1 hour & a half
- 1.75 = over 1½ hours

**Finance Descriptions**

- **Order Total** = Total order amount calculated by Call Center operator
- **Restaurant Total** = Total restaurant revenue plus all sales tax
- **Order Inn Total** = Total Order Inn revenue
- **Total Difference** = If difference is in a credit position Restaurant charged more than Order Inn. If difference is in a debit position Restaurant charged less than Order Inn.

**Note:** The Order Inn revenue is calculated from the "order total" figure.
**Order Inn, Inc.**

**HOTEL ROOM SERVICE**

*Providing Quality Meals & Service Nationwide*

**Weekly Invoice For: RID 101**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of EFT:</th>
<th>01/10/04</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day Total</th>
<th>Total Due</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$48.32</td>
<td>$108.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$324.15</td>
<td>$76.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$122.92</td>
<td>$36.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$79.70</td>
<td>$16.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$205.34</td>
<td>$49.85</td>
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<tr>
<td>$168.72</td>
<td>$41.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$188.15</td>
<td>$46.82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total for 7 orders: $735.34

**Credit One:** $9.00

**Credit Two:** $9.00

**Total:** $735.34
Broker's rep and restaurant owner A complete form for menu information (e.g., food descriptions, restaurant's price, etc.)

Broker's rep and restaurant owner A select stock photos and/or take digital photos of at least one meal item for each menu section (e.g., sandwiches, pizzas, salads, etc.)

Broker's rep sends digital photos to Order Inn

Broker recreates food item(s) in a mock up for professional photo

Broker creates menu A with photos, descriptions, and marked up prices (e.g., Order Inn adds 40%)

Broker's rep and restaurant owner B complete form for menu information (e.g., food descriptions, restaurant's price, etc.)

Broker's rep and restaurant owner B select stock photos and/or take digital photos of at least one meal item in each of a plurality of categories (e.g., sandwiches, pizzas, salads, etc.)

Broker's rep sends digital photos to Order Inn

Broker recreates meal item(s) in a mock up for professional photo

Broker creates menu B with photos, descriptions, and marked up prices (e.g., Order Inn adds 40%)

FIG. 14
FIG. 15A

Guide Line
Attractions & Services

Restaurants
Nightlife
Places to Go
Things to Do
Local Services
Shopping

Call Toll Free
800-XXX-XXXX

Guide Line is a Free Service to Guests of this Fine Hotel.
FIG. 15B

Restaurants & Nightlife
- Pizza Delivery
- Breakfast & Brunches
- Casual Lunch & Dinner
- Coffee Houses & Bakeries
- Nightclubs & Sports Bars
- Fine Dining & International Cuisine
- Top Five Restaurants & Local Favorites
- Stearns Wharf, Dinner Cruises & Ocean Front
- Catering Services

Places to Go & Things to Do
- Golf Courses & Pro Shops
  - Favorite Local Courses
  - Driving & Putting Ranges
  - Lessons
- Unique Local Attractions
  - Museums & Missions
  - Art Galleries, Theatre & Movies
- California's Favorite Destination Attractions
  - Theme Parks
  - Zoos & Animal Parks
  - Amusement & Water Parks
  - Lakes & River Rafting
- Snow Skiing & Mtn. Resorts
  - Castles & Island Tours
- Aquariums & Museums
- Water Sports & Activities
  - Fishing & Charters
  - Parasailing
- Scuba Diving & Sailing
  - Surfing & Windsurfing
  - Jet Skis & Water Skiing
  - Kayaking
  - Boating & Island Cruises
- Outdoor Sports & Recreation
  - Bicycle & Roller Blading
  - Horseback Riding
- Hiking & Snowboarding
  - Motorcycle & Jeep Rentals
- Fun In The Sky
  - Helicopter Tours
  - Hang Gliding & Gliders
  - Balloon Flights
  - Sky Diving & Sky Surfing
- Wineries, Tasting Rooms & Vineyards
  - Central Santa Barbara County
  - Northern Santa Barbara County
- Destinations
- Current & Special Events

For Guide Line, Call Toll Free: 800-XXX-XXXX
### FIG. 15C

#### Local Services & Shops

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Services</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shopping &amp; General Merchandise</td>
<td>Gymnasiums, Department Stores &amp; Factories, Gift Shops, Fine Jewelers, Shopping Centers, Destination Shopping Centers, Sporting &amp; Outdoor Stores</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Services</td>
<td>Tanning Salons, Beauty Salons &amp; Hair Salons, Hairdressers, Barbershops, Banking &amp; Money Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Services</td>
<td>Computer Repair &amp; Shops, Web &amp; Local ISP Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massage &amp; Entertainment</td>
<td>Massage, Adult Entertainment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation &amp; Travel</td>
<td>Airport &amp; Bus Shuttles, Limousine Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical</td>
<td>Chiropractors, Veterinarians, Acupuncturists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real Estate &amp; Vacation Rentals</td>
<td>Chamber of Commerce</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Using the Guide Line

- Dial the toll free Guide Line Number: 800-XXX-XXXX
- When Guide Line Answers, enter 1 and your two digit extension.
- Once you make a selection you may press 1 to go back or 2 to go forward to the next selection.
- Dial 1 to return to the main menu.
- To connect directly to a business, dial 1 at any time.

If you have suggestions or comments about Guide Line or one of its featured services, or inquiries about advertising, please leave a message at Extension 36.
FOOD BROKERING SYSTEM AND METHOD
CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This application claims priority to U.S. patent application Ser. No. 11/082,450, filed Mar. 17, 2005, which claims the benefit of U.S. Provisional Application No. 60/614,301, filed Sep. 29, 2004.

TECHNICAL FIELD

[0002] The present application relates in general to methods and apparatus for brokering food services and, in particular, to methods and apparatus for handling customer service issues associated with brokering food services.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0003] Many hotels do not offer traditional room service. Guests of these hotels who want to eat in their rooms must bring their own meals or use a traditional delivery service. Traditional delivery services include many pizzerias, local restaurants with a delivery service, and “meta-delivery” services.

[0004] Local restaurants and pizzerias with a delivery service operate in a well-known manner. The customer discovers the restaurant from a flyer placed by the hotel room door or via a yellow pages advertisement. The customer then calls the restaurant to place an order. An order taker at the restaurant records the order, and a delivery person associated with the restaurant delivers the order and collects the money from the customer.

[0005] Meta-delivery services act as a middle-man between the customer and a plurality of restaurants. The meta-delivery service typically prints a menu that includes the menus of several different local restaurants. Often, the included restaurants do not include a delivery service of their own. The customer then calls the meta-delivery service to place his order. An order taker at the meta-delivery service records the customer’s order and location information. The order taker at the meta-delivery service then hangs up with the customer and calls the restaurant to relay the order. A delivery person associated with the meta-delivery service pays for and picks up the order at the restaurant. The delivery person then delivers the order to the customer and charges a higher fee than he pays the restaurant.

[0006] Both of these traditional delivery services suffer from certain drawbacks. Local restaurants and pizzerias with a delivery service have poor customer service because the order taker and the delivery person typically have no stake in the operation and are not closely monitored by the restaurant owner. As a result, hotel guests become upset by late deliveries, missing items, incorrect charges, rude employees, etc. Hotel managers do not like upset guests, so they typically try to keep the menus of these restaurants out of their rooms.

[0007] Meta-delivery services do not “directly connect” the consumer to the restaurant. Therefore, the meta-delivery service order taker (acting as a middle-man) often makes mistakes. For example, the restaurant may be temporarily out of stock on a certain menu item. However, the meta-delivery service order taker takes the order anyway, because he is not at the restaurant and does not know they are out of that item. Similarly, the meta-delivery service order taker cannot reliably quote the customer a delivery time, because he does not know how busy the restaurant is at the time the order is taken.

Again, these mistakes result in upset hotel guests and hotel managers. The present invention is provided to solve these and other problems.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0008] To understand the present invention, it will now be described by way of example, with reference to the accompanying drawings in which:

[0009] FIG. 1 illustrates an example of the overall order management system.

[0010] FIG. 2 is a flowchart of an example process for processing a normal order using the order management system.

[0011] FIGS. 3-4 illustrate an example use of the order management system for recording customer complaints.

[0012] FIG. 5 is a block diagram illustrating an example call center arrangement that is “not integrated” with the broker.

[0013] FIG. 6 is a block diagram illustrating an example call center arrangement that is “integrated” with the broker.

[0014] FIGS. 7-9 illustrate an example in-room menu.

[0015] FIGS. 10-12 illustrate an example restaurant report.

[0016] FIG. 13 illustrates an example restaurant invoice.

[0017] FIG. 14 is a flowchart of an example process for generating a “repackaged” menu.

[0018] FIGS. 15a-15c are examples of a services directory.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0019] While this invention is susceptible of embodiments in many different forms, there is shown in the drawings and will herein be described in detail preferred embodiments of the invention with the understanding that the present disclosure is to be considered as an exemplification of the principles of the invention and is not intended to limit the broad aspect of the invention to the embodiments illustrated.

[0020] In general, the methods and apparatus described herein provide quality controlled room service to guests of hotels that do not otherwise have traditional room service available. A call center operator routes each call to the appropriate restaurant and stays on the phone line to monitor the call. The restaurant delivers the order and collects the appropriate fee. Data captured by the call center is transmitted to a broker, and the broker uses this data to maintain customer service and to determine the amount of money each restaurant collected on behalf of the broker.

[0021] FIG. 1 illustrates an example of the overall order management system 100. Generally, room service orders coming from guests of hotels 102 are routed to an area restaurant 104 via a call center 106. An operator employed by the call center 106 connects a hotel guest to the appropriate restaurant 104 for that geographical area 108, and stays on the phone line to monitor the call. A order taker employed by the restaurant 104 takes the hotel guest’s order. A delivery person employed by the restaurant 104 delivers the order to the hotel guest and collects the appropriate fee from the hotel guest. In this manner, there is a “direct connection” between the hotel guest and the restaurant order taker. This direct connection reduces order taking errors caused by menu ambiguities, temporary food unavailabilitys, fluctuating delivery times, etc.

By staying on the phone line to monitor the call, the call center operator is able to record important data related to customer service and brokerage fees which are important to the broker.
110 that is running the order management system 100 (e.g., Order Inn, Inc). Each of these aspects of the order management system 100 is described in more detail below.

[0022] In the example of FIG. 1, two geographical areas 108 are shown. Of course, a person of ordinary skill in the art will readily appreciate that a large number of geographical areas 108 are typically used in practice (e.g., hundreds of areas covering a large portion of the United States). Each geographical area 108 includes a plurality of hotels 102. Preferably, each of these hotels 102 is a “limited service” hotel that does not have its own kitchen and does not provide traditional room service. Each room of each hotel 102 in the order management system 100 receives a menu. This menu preferably includes a unique toll free telephone number for that area or area number identifier 108.

[0023] Each hotel 102 in an area 108 is preferably located within a reasonable delivery range of a restaurant 104. Preferably, a single restaurant 104 services a particular area 108. However, a person of ordinary skill in the art will readily appreciate that any number of restaurants 104 may service a single area 108 having an area number identifier. Similarly, a single restaurant 104 may service more than one area 108. The menu placed in each hotel room shows food items available from the area restaurant 104. However, the menu is preferably modified from the restaurant’s typical delivery menu in that the prices are marked up beyond the restaurant’s typical delivery prices, and the logos and style typically used by the restaurant 104 are replaced by a nationwide logo and menu style format (e.g., Order Inn, Inc.).

[0024] In order to coordinate the efforts of a restaurant 104 with the orders coming from the hotels 102 in the restaurant’s area 108, one or more call centers 106 are used. Preferably, the call center 106 is associated with one toll-free telephone number for each geographical area 108. However, a person of ordinary skill in the art will readily appreciate that any number of toll-free and/or toll-based telephone numbers may be associated with a single geographical area 108. Similarly, a single toll-free or toll-based telephone number may be associated with a plurality of geographical areas 108. Likewise, multiple toll-free and/or toll-based telephone numbers may be associated with each call center 106.

[0025] The call center 106 performs three primary functions. First, the call center 106 connects incoming telephone calls for order placement from hotel guests with the appropriate restaurant 104 for the area 108. Second, the call center monitors each phone call for customer service reasons. For example, the call center operator records delivery times promised, rude order taker comments, follow up on complaint calls from hotel guests, etc. Third, the call center records the items ordered by the hotel guest and the price quoted by the restaurant order taker. This information is used to calculate a “cut” which is owed to the broker 110 (e.g., Order Inn, Inc). Although the first function (connecting hotel guest phone calls to restaurant order takers) could be accomplished by simply placing the restaurant’s telephone number in the room service menu (instead of the toll free telephone number associated with the area 108 by the order management system 100), doing so would defeat at least the second and third primary functions (customer service monitoring, brokerage fee calculation, and other quality control functions).

[0026] FIG. 2 is a flowchart of an example process 200 for processing a normal order using the order management system 100. One or more of the steps of the process 200 may be embodied in one or more software programs which are stored in one or more memories and executed by one or more processors. In addition, one or more of the steps of the process 200 may be performed by one or more people. Although the process 200 is described with reference to the flowchart illustrated in FIG. 2, a person of ordinary skill in the art will readily appreciate that many other methods of performing the acts associated with process 200 may be used. For example, the order of many of the steps may be changed. In addition, many of the steps described are optional.

[0027] Generally, a call center operator receives a call from a hotel guest, takes down some basic information and connects the hotel guest to the appropriate restaurant 104 for that geographical area 108. The call center operator then stays on the phone line to monitor the call and record additional data. Subsequently, the restaurant 104 delivers the order to the hotel guest and collects the appropriate fee from the hotel guest. The data captured by the call center 106 is transmitted to the broker 110, and the broker 110 uses this data to generate reports for the restaurant 104 and to determine the amount of money each restaurant 104 collected on behalf of the broker 110. Each of these steps is described in more detail below.

[0028] The example process 200 begins when a hotel guest calls the toll-free (or toll based) telephone number printed on his in-room menu (block 202). An example of an in-room menu is illustrated in FIGS. 7-9. Preferably, each area 108 is associated with its own toll-free telephone number and menu. In fact, the menu items available in one area 108 are typically different than the menu items available in another area 108. This is a result of “repackaging” the menu of the restaurant 104 associated with that area 108, wherein the restaurant 104 associated with one area 108 may be a different style of restaurant 104 with different owners than a restaurant 104 in another area 108. In order to “repackage” a menu, the menu normally used by a restaurant 104 is modified from the restaurant’s typical delivery menu in that the prices are marked up beyond the restaurant’s typical delivery prices, and the logos and style typically used by the restaurant 104 are replaced by a nationwide logo and menu style format.

[0029] Once the call center operator receives a call from a hotel guest, the call center operator asks the hotel guest for some basic information such as the guest’s name, the name of the hotel the guest is calling from, an area number or identifier printed on the menu, and the room number the guest is staying in (block 204). Preferably, the call center operator’s computer displays a list of possible hotels for the area 108 based on the toll-free telephone number used by the guest. In other words, the call center operator preferably sees one list of hotels to choose from when a call comes in from one area and another list of hotels to choose from when a call comes in from another area.

[0030] In addition, the call center operator may see “ambiguity hints” displayed on her computer screen. Ambiguity hints are questions the call center operator may ask the guest in order to clarify the hotel the guest is staying at. For example, if the guest indicates he is staying at the La Quinta in Charleston, and there are two La Quinta hotels in (or near) Charleston that are both serviced by the same restaurant (i.e., they are in the same area 108 and use the same toll-free telephone number for ordering), the call center operator may be prompted to ask the guest if he is near the lake in order to resolve the ambiguity.

[0031] Similarly, the call center operator may see “hotel aliases” displayed on her computer screen. For example, the caller may say he is at the La Quinta in Arlington Heights. If
there is no La Quinta in Arlington Heights, but people at the La Quinta in Palatine frequently refer to it as the La Quinta in Arlington Heights, then the call center operator may select the alias in order to avoid confusion.

[0032] Of course, the operator may ask for the address of the hotel, but often guests do not know the address of the hotel they are staying at without referencing printed materials that may not be readily accessible. In addition, the call center operator may use caller identification information to identify the hotel. A more detailed discussion of call center operations is discussed in detail below.

[0033] Once the call center operator records certain basic information, the call center operator connects the guest to an order taker at the restaurant associated with that area 108 (block 206). When making this connection, the call center operator preferably indicates to the order taker that she has a hotel guest on the line. Alternatively, the restaurant 104 may use a separate phone line and/or caller identification technology to know that the incoming call is via the broker 110 as opposed to the restaurant’s normal delivery business. As a result, the order taker knows to use the modified menu when responding to questions and/or calculating the appropriate price (i.e., the marked up price). For example, the hotel guest may ask what types of calzones are available. Knowing to use the modified menu, the order taker lists three prearranged calzone combinations (even though that restaurant’s normal delivery menu allows a build your own calzone option).

[0034] The restaurant order taker preferably repeats certain questions already asked by the call center operator. For example, the order taker may confirm the guest’s name, hotel, and room number. Once the order taker has the basic information, the order taker asks the guest what they would like to order. Because the guest is “directly connected” to the actual restaurant that prepares and delivers his food items (as opposed to a middle-man order taker that delivers from multiple restaurants), the order taker may be able to better satisfy the guest. For example, the order taker may be aware that the restaurant is temporarily out of a certain menu item, or the order taker may know to ask the guest if he means the sandwich or the dinner when he ordered the “chicken parmesan.” After taking the order, the order taker preferably quotes the guest a price for the order and an estimated delivery time.

[0035] The call center operator records the price quote and the estimated delivery time given by the order taker in her computer for several reasons. First, the delivery time estimate may be used in the event that the guest calls back to check the status of his order. In addition, the delivery time estimate (as well as other data described below) may be used as part of a report generated for the restaurant 104. The total charge quoted to the guest and/or the menu items ordered (as entered by the call center operator) may be used to determine the amount of money the restaurant 104 owes to the broker 110. In addition, the call center operator records notes regarding the order taker’s performance. For example, if the order taker placed the guest on hold for a long period of time and/or the order taker was rude to the guest, the call center operator makes a note of the circumstances in her computer. For example, the call center operator may enter the amount of time the guest was on hold and/or phrases and/or demeanor used by the order taker. In addition, the amount of time the guest is on the call and/or on hold (by the call operator and/or the restaurant order taker) may be automatically recorded by the call center software.

[0036] Once the order is taken and prepared, the restaurant 104 delivers the order to the hotel guest (block 208). Upon delivery, the hotel guest pays the restaurant delivery person (block 210).

[0037] At some point, the data collected by the call center 204 is transmitted to the broker 110 (block 212). For example, the call center data may be collected locally via a local software program and stored in a call center database. Periodically (e.g., daily), the call center data may be transmitted to the broker 110. In such an instance, the broker 110 preferably adds the data to a broker database each time the broker receives an update from the call center 204. This type of “non-integrated” call center is described in more detail below with reference to FIG. 5. Alternatively, the call center data may be stored in the broker database in real-time. For example, the call center computer may interact with a broker website to produce call center script prompts and receive operator inputs such as drop-down selections and notes. This type of integrated call center is described in more detail below with reference to FIG. 6.

[0038] Once the broker 110 receives a predetermined amount of call center data (e.g., one day’s worth of data), the broker 110 generates a report for each restaurant (block 214). An example of a restaurant report is illustrated in FIGS. 10-12. Each report preferably includes a line item for each call processed by the call center 106. In this example, each line item shows the date and time of the call, the order taker name, the hotel, comments entered by the call center operator, the promised delivery time, and the total price, among other information as described in detail below. The generated reports are periodically (e.g., daily) sent to the restaurants 104 by fax and/or e-mail.

[0039] Each report also includes the amount of money collected by the restaurant 104 on behalf of the broker 110 (as calculated by the broker 110 based on the call center data). Preferably, this amount of money is periodically (e.g., weekly) transferred to the restaurant’s account to the broker’s account (block 216). For example, the broker may initiate an electronic funds transfer (EFT) for the amount. Of course, each restaurant 104 is given a period of time (e.g., one week) in which to dispute and resolve any discrepancies before the funds are transferred.

[0040] FIGS. 3-4 illustrate an example use of the order management system 100 for recording customer complaints. A complaining guest may call the same toll-free (or toll-based) telephone number printed on his in-room menu that he used to place his order (block 402). For example, the guest may be calling to find out the status of his order, or the guest may be calling to complain that one or more of the food items he ordered were not included with the delivery.

[0041] The call center operator records the guest’s complaint(s) and optionally contacts the restaurant 104 (block 404). For example, if the guest’s complaint is that the food has not arrived, the call center operator may check the time of the order and the promised delivery time. If the order is late, the call center operator preferably contacts the restaurant 104 to determine the status of the order. The status is preferably recorded in the call center database. If the order is not late, the call center operator may simply inform the guest when to expect the order. In another example, if the guest’s complaint is directed to the food (e.g., missing an item, cold, or tastes bad), the call center operator preferably contacts the restaur-
rant 104 in an effort to resolve the problem immediately (e.g., the restaurant 104 follows up with new food items and “comps” the entire meal).

[0042] In addition, the data collected by the call center 106 is transmitted to the broker 110 (block 406). Again, the call center data may be collected locally via a local software program and stored in a call center database which is periodically transmitted to the broker 110 (i.e., a “non-integrated” call center), or the call center data may be stored in the broker database in real-time (i.e., an “integrated” call center).

[0043] Once the call center data is received, a customer service agent at the broker 110 scans the data for complaints, rude service, etc. The customer service agent then calls the guest, the hotel management, a local representative, and/or the restaurant 104 in order to resolve the issue (block 408). For example, the customer service agent may call the guest to apologize and better understand the problem. Subsequently, the customer service agent may call the restaurant 104 to see how the restaurant 104 resolved or plans to resolve the issue. Next, the customer service agent may call the hotel manager to inform him that an issue arose with one of his guests and how the issue is being resolved.

[0044] Finally, as described above, once the broker 110 receives a predetermined amount of call center data (e.g., one day’s worth of data), the broker 110 generates a report for each restaurant (block 410). An example of a restaurant report is illustrated in FIGS. 10-12.

[0045] FIG. 5 is a block diagram illustrating an example call center arrangement 500 that is “not integrated” with the broker 110. In this example, the hotel phone system and the restaurant phone system connect to the call center over conventional phone lines and a telephone switching device 502. When a hotel guest calls the telephone number printed on his in-room menu, the call causes a telephone window 504 to appear to one of the call center operators on a computer workstation 506. The telephone window 504 is a standard call center tool used to identify incoming calls, make outgoing calls, connect incoming calls to outgoing calls, etc.

[0046] In addition, the call center operator sees a locally-generated script window 508. The script window 508 prompts the call center operator with what to say to the hotel guest including questions for the hotel guest. For example, the operator may thank the hotel guest for calling “Order Inn” and ask the guest what hotel they are calling from. A more detailed discussion of call center operations is discussed in detail below.

[0047] In the non-integrated call center system 500, the script window 508 is generated by a local software application running at the call center 106. As a result, changes to the call center script require call center based programming. For example, the addition of a hotel to an area requires the broker 110 to contact the call center 106, and the call center 106 to reliably enter the data associated with the new hotel (e.g., address, telephone number, area, etc.). Similarly, a change in the order the questions are asked, the phrases used to ask those questions, and/or the addition or deletion of questions requires a change to the call center program.

[0048] In the non-integrated call center system 500, information gathered by the call center operator (e.g., the guest’s name, location, etc.) is stored in a call center database 510. The call center database 510 may be any type of data store such as a simple text file, an Oracle database file, a Microsoft Access database file, a Microsoft SQL database, etc.

[0049] Periodically, this data is transferred to the broker 110. For example, a call center 106 may e-mail one day’s worth of data to the broker 110 each morning. Once the broker 110 receives a predetermined amount of call center data (e.g., one day’s worth of data), the broker 110 generates a report 512 for each restaurant. An example of a restaurant report 512 is illustrated in FIGS. 10-12. The generated reports are periodically (e.g., daily) sent to the restaurants 104 by fax, e-mail and/or ftp file transaction.

[0050] FIG. 6 is a block diagram illustrating an example call center arrangement 600 that is “integrated” with the broker 110. Again, the hotel phone system and the restaurant phone system connect to the call center over conventional phone lines and a telephone switching device 502. When a hotel guest calls the telephone number printed on his in-room menu, the call causes a telephone window 504 to appear to one of the call center operators on a computer workstation 506. The telephone window 504 is a standard call center tool used to identify incoming calls, make outgoing calls, connect incoming calls to outgoing calls, etc.

[0051] In the integrated call center system 600, the call center operator sees a web-based script window 602. Like the locally generated script window 508 of the non-integrated call center system 500, the web-based script window 602 prompts the call center operator with what to say to the hotel guest including questions for the hotel guest. For example, the operator may thank the hotel guest for calling “Order Inn” and ask the guest what hotel they are calling from.

[0052] However, in the integrated call center system 600, the content for the script window 602 is sent to the call center workstation 506 in real-time from a broker web server 604 via the Internet 606 (or some other wide area network). In this manner, changes to the call center script may be made by the broker 110 without the need for call center based data changes and/or programming. For example, the broker 110 may add data associated with a new hotel in an area by simply adding the hotel data (e.g., address, telephone number, area, etc.) to the broker web server database 608. The next time a call center operator services a call from that area, the hotel is automatically added to the list of hotels (e.g., it shows up in a drop-down box for selection by the call center operator). Similarly, the broker 110 may change the order the questions are asked, the phrases used to ask those questions, and/or add or delete questions by simply changing the web pages served by the broker web server 604. Of course, such changes may require supplemental call center operator training.

[0053] In the integrated call center arrangement, information gathered by the call center operator (e.g., the guest’s name, location, etc.) is stored in the broker database 608 in real-time. For example, when the call center operator advances from one page of the script to another, the form-based inputs are submitted to the broker web server 604, which stores the data in the broker database 608. The broker web server 604 then serves the next page of the script to the call center workstation 506. As with the call center database 510, the broker database 608 may be any type of data store such as a simple text file, an Oracle database file, a Microsoft Access database file, a Microsoft SQL database, etc.

[0054] Because the broker database 608 is always up to date (i.e., no periodic data updates from the call center 106 are needed), the broker 110 (or any other authorized entity 610) may generate a report 512 at any time. For example, a restaurant may log in to a web page to generate a web-based restaurant report. An example of a restaurant report 512 is illus-
Regardless of the type of call center used (integrated or non-integrated), the broker 110 preferably maintains the quality of the call center operations by performing tests. For example, the broker 110 may periodically call each call center 106 and record certain information such as the amount of time or number of rings it took to respond to the call, the amount of time he is placed on hold, whether the appropriate recordings come on during the appropriate hours of operation, requesting updated holiday hours, whether the call center operators are rude, whether the call center operators speak loudly and clearly, whether the call center operators are following the script, etc.

The section headers 804 indicate groupings of food items. For example, for a menu 700 may include a “Soup & Salad” section, a “Sides & Appetizers” section, etc. Preferably all the sections in the menu 700 include a section header. The section pictures 805 reflect an example food item from the associated section. For example, the “Soup & Salad” section may be associated with a picture of a salad. All sections necessarily include a section picture 805.

Each section includes a list of meal item titles 806, meal item descriptions 808, and meal item prices 810. For example, in the sandwiches section of this example menu 700 there is a food item titled “Chicago Pocket.” The description 808 associated with the “Chicago Pocket” is “A pizza dough sandwich stuffed With . . . .” The price 810 of the “Chicago Pocket” in this example is $7.95.

Some of the meal item titles 806 are preceded by a specialty marker 812 (e.g., a star). As described in the menu by the specialty item legend 814, the food items associated with this specialty marker 812 are considered favorites and/or specialties of the restaurant 104. Of course, other designations for specialty markers 812 may be conveyed by the specialty item legend 814. For example, low-calorie, low-carbohydrate, and/or low-fat food items may be designated by one or more different specialty markers 812.

As described above, the toll-free telephone number 904 is preferably unique to a certain geographical area 108. In this example, the area 108 may also be identified by the area number 906 or any other geographical identifier (e.g., area 176). Of course, a toll-based number may be used. In addition, an area 108 may be associated with multiple telephone numbers and/or multiple areas may be associated with the same telephone number.

The service hours section 908 indicates the hours the restaurant 104 for that area 108 is normally open. In addition, the service hours section 908 indicates that seasonal hours may vary and that the restaurant 104 is closed on most major holidays. When a hotel guest calls the toll-free telephone number 904 outside the hours of operation for that restaurant 104, a prerecorded message informs the guest that the restaurant 104 is currently closed. In addition, the prerecorded message informs the guest how to connect to a call center operator despite the closed status of the restaurant 104. For example, the guest may need to press a certain touch-tone button and/or simply stay on the line to be connected to a call center operator. In this manner, a guest calling with a question or a complaint (as opposed to an order) may still get through to a call center operator for assistance. In order to ensure that the prerecorded messages come on at the appropriate times (and not at the inappropriate times), the broker 110 may periodically contact the restaurant 104 to ask about the hours of operation (e.g., prior to each holiday period). The restaurant’s responses are then entered into a database which feeds into the call center’s prerecorded message system.
integrated call center 500. For an integrated call center 600, all of the above described menu updates may be made in the broker database 608. The next time the webpage associated with the change is served to the call center operator, the change is reflected in the webpage (e.g., a drop-down menu of food items includes an added food item).

The marked-up prices (i.e., the prices on the in-room menu) associated with the items ordered by the hotel guest are then totaled (along with any normal delivery charges, extended range delivery charges, etc.) to determine the order total 1030 (i.e., the amount owed by the guest according to the call center operator’s list of menu items), and a predetermined portion of the marked-up prices is used to determine the restaurant total 1032 (i.e., the amount collected for the restaurant 104 according to the call center operator’s list of menu items). The difference between the order total 1030 and the restaurant total 1032 is the broker total 1034 (i.e., the amount collected for the broker 110 according to the call center operator’s list of menu items).

In addition, the call center operator records the total quoted by the restaurant order taker (not shown). The total difference 1028 is the difference (if any) between the order total 1030 (based on the call center operator’s version of the items ordered) and the total quoted by the restaurant order taker (not shown). As shown in the example of Figs. 10-12, if the total difference 1028 is in a credit position, then the restaurant 104 charged the hotel guest more than the call center operator would have charged. If the total difference 1028 is in a debit position, then the restaurant 104 charged the hotel guest less than the call center operator would have charged. If the total difference 1028 is zero, then the restaurant 104 charged the hotel guest the same amount the call center operator would have charged. If the total difference 1028 is the same as the order total 1030 (i.e., the amount owed by the guest according to the call center operator’s list of menu items), then the restaurant 104 did not give a quoted price and/or the call center operator failed to record the restaurant’s quoted price.

The code(s) 1022 recorded by the call center operator help to classify certain types of lines items. In this manner, database queries designed to look for certain situations (e.g., problems that need to be resolved by a customer service agent) may be run against the database. Some examples of codes are listed in Fig. 12. Although specific codes are discussed herein, a person of ordinary skill in the art will readily appreciate that any type of coding system may be used without departing from the scope or spirit of the presently disclosed system.

As mentioned above, some codes may be used to flag potential problems. For example, a CF code may be used for complaints about the food quality or food service. A customer service agent may then quickly bring up just these line items (e.g., from the previous day) and read the call center operator’s comments in order to investigate the problem. Similarly, an O3 or O4 code may be used to indicate a restaurant order taker problem (e.g., the order taker needs additional training and/or the order taker was rude to the hotel guest). In another example, an RB code may be used to indicate that the restaurant 104 was closed during normal business hours. In one example, the call center 106 may make a digital audio recording of the conversation between the hotel guest and the restaurant order taker. Certain ones of these recordings may then be sent to the broker 110 based on an associated flag.

Other codes may be used for billing purposes. For example, an EMP code may be used to designate the order was from a hotel employee, and a GUIE code may be used to designate that the order was from a hotel guest. By recording this distinction in the database, a discount may be given to hotel employees. For example, hotel employees may be given a 50% discount as a perk to using the order management system 100. Preferably, the restaurants 104 agree to write off the cost of this discount as part of their participation in the order management system 100. However, the broker 110 may agree to take on some or all of the burden of employee discounted food orders. For example, the broker may agree to cover these discounts during an initial period of operation (to shoulder the burden during its heaviest use “try out” time) and/or if the percentage of discounted orders ever exceeds some threshold of overall orders.

FIG. 13 illustrates an example invoice 1300. The example invoice 1300 is a weekly invoice showing a total 1302 for each day’s orders in dollars as well as a daily total due 1304 and a weekly total due 1306. The total due amounts 1304, 1306 are the amounts of money the restaurant 104 collected on behalf of the broker 110. Preferably, total due amount 1304 is transferred from the restaurant’s account to the broker’s account via an electronic funds transfer (EFT) on a particular date 1308 which, in this example, is one week after the invoice date 1310. During the time between the invoice date 1310 and the EFT date 1308, the restaurant 104 may dispute any of the total due amounts 1304, 1306.

As described above, the menu 700 placed in each hotel room shows food items available from the restaurant 104 associated with that area 108. In fact, the menu items available in one area 108 are typically different than the menu items available in another area 108. This is a result of “repackaging” the menu of the restaurant 104 associated with that area 108, wherein the restaurant 104 associated with one area 108 may be a different style of restaurant 104 with different owners than a restaurant 104 in another area 108. In order to “repackage” a menu, the menu normally used by a restaurant 104 is modified from the restaurant’s typical delivery menu in that the prices are marked up beyond the restaurant’s typical delivery prices, and the logos and style typically used by the restaurant 104 are replaced by a nationwide logo and menu style format.

FIG. 14 is a flowchart of an example process 1400 for generating a “repackaged” menu 700. One or more of the steps of the process 1400 may be embodied in one or more software programs which are stored in one or more memories and executed by one or more processors. In addition, one or more of the steps of the process 1400 may be performed by one or more people. Although the process 1400 is described with reference to the flowchart illustrated in FIG. 14, a person of ordinary skill in the art will readily appreciate that many other methods of performing the acts associated with process 1400 may be used. For example, the order of many of the steps may be changed. In addition, many of the steps described are optional.

Generally, the process 1400 requires a representative of the broker 110 to receive menu information from the restaurant 104 associated with that menu 700. As part of this information, the restaurant 104 approves a stock photograph for each section of the menu 700 and/or a digital photograph is taken of one or more actual food items produced by the restaurant 104. These photographs are then used by the broker 110 to mockup the food items and produce professional pho-
tographs. Preferably, the broker 110 makes the ultimate decision as to which of the approved photographs to use (i.e., not all menu categories necessarily receive an associated section picture 805).

[0075] The example process 1400 begins when a representative of the broker 110 sits down with an owner of a restaurant 104 to complete a form requesting certain restaurant and menu information (block 1402). The restaurant information may be any information needed to conduct business with the restaurant 104. For example, the name of the restaurant owner, the address of the restaurant, the telephone number of the restaurant, etc. The menu information may be any information needed to construct the menu 700. For example, the information preferably includes meal item titles 806, meal item descriptions 808, meal item prices (before any markup), meal item specialties, service hours, etc.

[0076] In addition, the representative of the broker 110 and the owner of the restaurant 104 select a stock photograph and/or take a digital photograph of at least one meal item for each section of the menu 700 (block 1404). For example, if the menu 700 is to include a sandwiches section which includes a chicken sandwich, the representative of the broker 110 may show the owner of the restaurant 104 a plurality of stock photographs of chicken sandwiches. If one of the stock photographs looks similar to the restaurant’s chicken sandwich, the restaurant owner may approve that photograph for inclusion in the menu 700. However, as discussed below, the broker 110 may choose not to include a photograph for the sandwiches section at all, despite the pre-approval of a particular photograph for that section.

[0077] If none of the stock photographs looks similar to the restaurant’s food item(s), or the restaurant owner simply does not like any of the stock photographs associated with that menu section, a digital photograph of one or more actual food items associated with that menu section is taken, and the representative of the broker 110 sends the digital photograph(s) back to the broker 110 along with the other restaurant and menu information (block 1406). Once the broker 110 receives the digital photograph(s), the broker 110 recreates the food items in a mockup for a professional photograph (1408).

[0078] Once all of the menu information is ready, the broker 110 creates a “repackaged” menu 700 for that restaurant 104 with section photos, food descriptions, etc. (block 1410). In addition, the “repackaged” menu 700 includes marked-up prices. For example, the “repackaged” menu 700 may mark up all of the restaurant supplied prices by 40%. Alternatively, the “repackaged” menu 700 may mark up different food items by different amounts as hand-selected by the broker 110.

[0079] The above-described process (blocks 1402-1410) may then be repeated for any number of different restaurants 104 resulting in many different menus 700 as shown by blocks 1412-1420 of FIG. 14. However, each of the different menus 700 preferably has a similar “look and feel.” For example, although two menus for two different restaurants 104 may have different food items and prices, both menus preferably share similar layouts, fonts, logos, color schemes, etc.

[0080] FIGS. 15a-15c are an example of a services directory 1500. The example services directory 1500 includes a toll-free telephone number 1502 and a plurality of extension numbers 1504. Each extension number is associated with a service 1506 that may be of interest to a hotel guest. The services 1506 may be categorized. For example, a restaurant category may include a pizza delivery extension, a breakfast extension, a lunch extension, etc.

[0081] In order to use the directory 1500, a hotel guest simply dials the toll-free telephone number 1502 and enters the extension number 1504 associated with the service he is interested in. The hotel guest may navigate back through the menu systems by pressing the # key. Similarly, the hotel guest may navigate forward through the menu systems by pressing the # key. The hotel guest may return to the main menu by pressing the 0 key.

[0082] In some instances, the hotel guest is connected directly to a business in response to entering the extension number 1504. In other instances, the hotel guest is given a recorded message associated with the selected extension. In such an instance, the guest may press the 1 key to connect directly to a person at the selected business. Recorded messages may be produced by the broker 110 and/or changed at any time by the business associated with the recorded message.

[0083] Depending on the service 1506 selected, different businesses are used by the system. Preferably, business names are not included in the directory 1500. In this manner, service providers may be changed without the need to reprint the directory 1500.

[0084] Each business that provides one of the listed services 1506 pays the broker 110 a fee. Fees may be based on the number of listings, the positions of listings, the number of directories, recorded message duration, number of calls, number of paying customers, and/or any other metric associated with use of the directory 1500.

[0085] As discussed with respect to the food ordering system 100, providing other services via the services directory 1500 may employ a call center 106. In any event, and as discussed above with reference to FIGS. 5 and 6, the call center operator sees a locally generated script window 508 or a web-based script window 602. The script window 508, 602 prompts the call center operator with what to say to the hotel guest including questions for the hotel guest. For example, the operator may thank the hotel guest for calling “Order Inn” and ask the guest what hotel they are calling from. In addition, the script window 508, 602 receives inputs from the call center script operator such as what food items the hotel guest ordered.

[0086] As part of this order taking process, information identifying the call center operator is entered. The information identifying the call center operator may be entered by the call center operator, by the call center workstation 506, or by the broker web server 604. For example, the call center operator may enter his/her initials. The information identifying the call center operator may be used for customer services purposes (e.g., following up on a rude order taker). Preferably, all of the information entered into the script window 508, 602 is stored in the database 510, 608.

[0087] In this example script, the script window 508, 602 displays a prompt to the call center operator instructing the call center operator to ask the caller, “Are you calling to place a room service order?” The call center operator is then given a drop-down box of choices. In this example, the first choice is “ORDER ROOM SERVICE.” If the call center operator selects this choice, “ORDER” is entered into the script window 508, 602 (and the database 510, 608).
then given a drop-down box of choices. In this example, the choices are three digit numbers (or none). Of course, the call center operator may manually enter the extension and/or any other information described herein.

When the caller orders a food item, the call center operator selects the food item from the food item selection menu (even though the order taker at the restaurant 104 is actually taking the order for the purpose of preparation and delivery). Each time the call center operator selects a food item from the food item selection menu, the script window 508, 602 preferably adds the food item to an order list and shows a more detailed view of the selected food item. The food item in the order list preferably includes a unique item number, a short description, a price, a quantity, and a line item total. The detailed view of the selected food preferably includes a detailed description of the food item.

The detailed description helps resolve ambiguities in the order. For example, if the caller orders the 1 lb. brisket, a side of coleslaw, and a side of baked beans, the call center operator can see from the detailed description that the side dishes are included in the price of the brisket order. Similarly, if the caller in the previous example ordered three side dishes, the call center operator would know to add one side dish charge to the order because only two side dishes are included.

When the caller is finished ordering, the script window 508, 602 prompts the call center operator to enter the total price quoted to the caller by the restaurant order taker. This information is provided to the caller by the restaurant order taker and merely recorded by the call center operator. If the restaurant order taker does not provide a price quote, the call center operator is instructed to bypass the restaurant quote field by pressing enter. In addition, the script window 508, 602 prompts the call center operator to select the type of payment (e.g., cash, credit, unknown, travelers check, airline voucher, etc.).

Any discrepancy that may exist between the total price quoted by the restaurant order taker and the total price determined from the food item selections made by the call center operator. Preferably, the amount of money due to the broker 110 is determined using the total price determined from the food item selections made by the call center operator. However, either total may be used to determine the amount of money due to the broker 110. Preferably, small discrepancies are ignored and large discrepancies are resolved after an investigation by the broker 110, the restaurant 104, and/or the call center 106.

In addition to a price quote, the script window 508, 602 prompts the call center operator to enter a delivery time quote (e.g., 30 minutes). Again, this information is provided to the caller by the restaurant order taker and merely recorded by the call center operator. If the restaurant order taker does not provide a delivery time quote, the call center operator may select “not quoted.” This information may be used for customer service issues. For example, if a complaint is received about the delivery time, the broker may determine who is to blame based on the call time of the order, the call time of the complaint, and the delivery time quote. Restaurants 104 that receive a number of complaints above a predetermined threshold for a predetermined period of time may be warned and/or replaced by the broker 110.

The script window 508, 602 displays a prompt asking the call center operator to classify the call. For example, a call may be classified as a food order, a status check, a customer service issue, an addition to a previous order, or the cancellation of a previous order. By entering a code associated with the status of a call, the broker 110, the restaurant owner, and/or any other person with the appropriate access permission may quickly find certain types of calls in the
database 510, 608. For example, a customer service agent of the broker 110 may wish to retrieve all customer service related calls from the previous day in order to follow up, investigate, and resolve any issues associated with those calls.

Similarly, the call center operator may enter a comment code. For example, the call center operator may enter a comment code indicating the hotel guest is wondering why their order has not arrived, indicating that the restaurant 104 was closed when it should have been open, indicating the restaurant 104 was closed because it was after their normal hours, indicating a caller complained about the food quality or service, indicating that the restaurant order taker needs training, indicating that the restaurant order taker was rude to the customer, etc. By entering a comment code, the broker 110, the restaurant owner, and/or any other person with the appropriate access permission may quickly find certain types of calls in the database 510, 608. For example, a customer service agent of the broker 110 may wish to retrieve all complaint-related calls from the previous day in order to follow up, investigate, and resolve any issues associated with those calls.

In addition, the call center operator may enter free-form comments. Free-form comments provide the call center operator with the flexibility to enter any type of information. For example, the call center operator may enter actual words used by a rude order taker. Of course, comment codes, free-form comments, and any other field may be used together for information gathering. For example, a customer service agent of the broker 110 may be reviewing all records associated with rude order taker comment codes to see if a pattern exists as to who the order taker was and what the order taker said to the hotel guest.

Once the call is completed, the script window 508, 602 displays a message indicating the end of the script has been reached. At this point, the call center operator is free to handle another call for the broker 110 or any other client of the call center 106.

Again, information identifying the call center operator is entered. The information identifying the call center operator may be entered by the call center operator, by the call center workstation 506, or by the broker web server 604. For example, the call center operator may enter his/her initials. Preferably, all of the information entered into the script window 508, 602 is stored in the database 510, 608.

In this example script, the script window 508, 602 displays the prompt to the call center operator instructing the call center operator to ask the caller, “Are you calling to place a room service order?” The call center operator is then given the drop-down box of choices. In this example, the second choice is “STATUS OF DELIVERY.” If the call center operator selects this choice, “STATUS” is entered into the script window 508, 602 (and the database 510, 608).

Next, the script window 508, 602 displays the prompt to the call center operator instructing the call center operator to ask the caller, “What's the extension number after the phone number on your menu?” The call center operator is then given the drop-down box of choices. In this example, the choices are three digit numbers (or none). Of course, the call center operator may manually enter the extension and/or any other information described herein.

The script window 508, 602 displays the prompt to the call center operator instructing the call center operator to ask the caller, “What hotel are you calling from?” Again, the call center operator is given the drop-down box of choices. Each choice in the list of choices includes a hotel name, a hotel address, and a hotel telephone number. The selected hotel is entered.

Next, the script window 508, 602 displays the prompt to the call center operator instructing the call center operator to ask the caller, “What is your hotel room/unit?” The room number is then entered by the call center operator. In addition, the script window 508, 602 displays the prompt to the call center operator instructing the call center operator to ask the caller, “Are you a guest at the hotel?” In this case, the drop-down box of choices includes a “yes” choice and a “no” choice. Again, as with all of the operator inputs, the choice is displayed in the script window 508, 602 and stored in the database 510, 608.

The script window 508, 602 displays the prompt to the call center operator instructing the call center operator to ask the caller for his/her first and last name. In addition, the call center operator is prompted to see if he/she should continue with the status request, or if he/she would like to skip to a comment entering portion of the script. If the call center operator chooses to continue with the status request, the script window 508, 602 displays a message prompting the call center operator to introduce himself/herself to the order taker and to tell the order taker he/she has a status inquiry from a specific person’s name in a particular room number at a particular hotel. At this point, or after the call center operator discusses the situation with the order taker, the call center operator may choose to connect the caller to the order taker or to relay the answer to the caller. The call center operator is then prompted to enter a comment describing the situation (e.g., the caller wondered where her order is and the restaurant indicated it is on its way).

The script window 508, 602 displays a prompt asking the call center operator to get the order taker’s name. The script window 508, 602 also displays a message instructing the call center operator to enter “REFUSED” if the order taker does not give his/her name. If the issue appears to be resolved, the call center operator enters a “yes” response for a prompt asking if the issue is resolved. Otherwise, the call center operator enters a “no” response to the prompt.

Once the call is completed, the script window 508, 602 displays a message indicating the end of the script has been reached. At this point, the call center operator is free to handle another call for the broker 110 or any other client of the call center 106.

The process for adding to an order is very similar to the process for taking an order described above. As part of this process, information identifying the call center operator is entered. The information identifying the call center operator may be entered by the call center operator, by the call center workstation 506, or by the broker web server 604. For example, the call center operator may enter his/her initials. Preferably, all of the information entered into the script window 508, 602 is stored in the database 510, 608.

In this example script, the script window 508, 602 displays the prompt to the call center operator instructing the call center operator to ask the caller, “Are you calling to place a room service order?” The call center operator is then given
the drop-down box of choices. In this example, the third choice is “ADD TO ORDER.” If the call center operator selects this choice, “ADD” is entered into the script window 508, 602 (and the database 510, 608).

Next, the script window 508, 602 displays the prompt to the call center operator instructing the call center operator to ask the caller, “What’s the extension number after the phone number on your menu?” The call center operator is then given the drop-down box of choices. In this example, the choices are three digit numbers (or none). Of course, the call center operator may manually enter the extension and/or any other information described herein.

The script window 508, 602 displays the prompt to the call center operator instructing the call center operator to ask the caller, “What hotelare you calling from?” Again, the call center operator is given the drop-down box of choices. Each choice in the list of choices includes a hotel name, a hotel address, and a hotel telephone number. The selected hotel is entered.

Next, the script window 508, 602 displays the prompt 1904 to the call center operator instructing the call center operator to ask the caller, “What’s your hotel room/unit #?” The room number is then entered by the call center operator. In addition, the script window 508, 602 displays a prompt to the call center operator instructing the call center operator to ask the caller, “Are you a guest at the hotel?” In this case, the drop-down box of choices includes a “yes” choice and a “no” choice. Again, as with all of the operator inputs, the choice is displayed in the script window 508, 602 and stored in the database 510, 608.

The script window 508, 602 displays the prompt to the call center operator instructing the call center operator to ask the caller for his/her first and last name. In addition, the call center operator is prompted to see if he/she should continue with the order, or if he/she would like to skip to a comment entering portion of the script. If the call center operator chooses to continue with the order, the script window 508, 602 displays a confirmation page. The confirmation page prompts the call center operator to confirm the caller’s room number, hotel, and phone number.

Once the guest information is confirmed, the script window 508, 602 prompts the call center operator to thank the caller for the order and to please remain on the line while he/she is connected with an order taker. In addition, the script window 508, 602 displays the message reminding the call center operator to get the order taker’s name (i.e., the name of the person at the restaurant 104). The script window 508, 602 also displays the message prompting the call center operator to introduce himself/herself to the order taker and to tell the order taker he/she has a room service order from a specific person’s name in a particular room number at a particular hotel.

In addition, the script window 508, 602 displays the message prompting the call center operator to ask for the order taker’s name and to remind the order taker to confirm the hotel and room number associated with the order. The script window 508, 602 asks the call center operator to confirm that the restaurant order taker did confirm the hotel and room number with the guest. Again, the call center operator is prompted to see if he/she should continue with the order, or if he/she would like to skip to a comment entering portion of the script.

If the call center operator chooses to continue with the order, the script window 508, 602 displays the menu page with the food item selection menu. The food item selection menu displays a list of all of the food items specific to the menu for the restaurant 104 in the area 108 associated with the hotel 102 identified by the caller. Many of the food items are listed more than once under alternate titles in order to help the call center operator find the food items ordered by the caller. For example, a cheeseburger may be listed as “cheeseburger” and as “burger, with cheese.”

When the caller orders a food item, the call center operator selects the food item from the food item selection menu (even though the order taker at the restaurant 104 actually taking the order for the purpose of preparation and delivery). Each time the call center operator selects a food item from the food item selection menu, the script window 508, 602 preferably adds the food item to an order list and shows a more detailed view of the selected food item. The food item in the order list preferably includes a unique item number, a short description, a price, a quantity, and a line item total.

The detailed view of the selected food preferably includes a detailed description of the food item. The detailed description helps resolve ambiguities in the order. For example, if the caller orders the 1 lb. brisket, a side of cole-slaw, and a side of baked beans, the call center operator can see from the detailed description that the side dishes are included in the price of the brisket order. Similarly, if the caller in the previous example ordered three side dishes, the call center operator would know to add one side dish charge to the order because only two side dishes are included.

When the caller is finished ordering, the script window 508, 602 prompts the call center operator to enter the total price quoted to the caller by the restaurant order taker. This information is provided to the caller by the restaurant order taker and merely recorded by the call center operator. If the restaurant order taker does not provide a price quote, the call center operator is instructed to bypass the restaurant quote field by pressing enter.

Any discrepancy in that may exist between the total price quoted by the restaurant order taker and the total price determined from the food item selections made by the call center operator. Preferably, the amount of money due to the broker 110 is determined using the total price determined from the food item selections made by the call center operator. However, either total may be used to determine the amount of money due to the broker 110. Preferably, small discrepancies are ignored and large discrepancies are resolved after an investigation by the broker 110, the restaurant 104, and/or the call center 106. In this example, the restaurant 104 failed to provide a price quote (or the call center operator failed to enter it), therefore the discrepancy is the total amount determined from the food item selections made by the call center operator.

In addition to a price quote, the script window 508, 602 prompts the call center operator to enter a delivery time quote (e.g., 30 minutes). Again, this information is provided to the caller by the restaurant order taker and merely recorded by the call center operator. If the restaurant order taker does not provide a delivery time quote, the call center operator may select “not quoted.” This information may be used for customer service issues. For example, if a complaint is received about the delivery time, the broker may determine who is to blame based on the call time of the order, the call time of the complaint, and the delivery time quote. Restaurants 104 that receive a number of complaints above a predetermined
threshold for a predetermined period of time may be warned and/or replaced by the broker 110.

[0127] The script window 508, 602 displays the prompt asking the call center operator to classify the call. For example, a call may be classified as a food order, a status check, a customer service issue, an addition to a previous order, or the cancellation of a previous order. By entering a code associated with the status of a call, the broker 110, the restaurant owner, and/or any other person with the appropriate access permission may quickly find certain types of calls in the database 510, 608. For example, a customer service agent of the broker 110 may wish to retrieve all customer service related calls from the previous day in order to follow up, investigate, and resolve any issues associated with those calls.

[0128] Similarly, the call center operator may enter a comment code. For example, the call center operator may enter a comment code indicating the hotel guest is wondering why their order has not arrived, indicating that the restaurant 104 was closed when it should have been open, indicating the restaurant 104 was closed because it was after their normal hours, indicating a caller complained about the food quality or service, indicating that the restaurant order taker needs training, indicating that the restaurant order taker was rude to the customer, etc. By entering a comment code, the broker 110, the restaurant owner, and/or any other person with the appropriate access permission may quickly find certain types of calls in the database 510, 608. For example, a customer service agent of the broker 110 may wish to retrieve all complaint related calls from the previous day in order to follow up, investigate, and resolve any issues associated with those calls.

[0129] In addition, the call center operator may enter free form comments. Free-form comments provide the call center operator with the flexibility to enter any type of information. For example, the call center operator may enter actual words used by a rude order taker. Of course, comment codes, free-form comments, and any other field may be used together for information gathering. For example, a customer service agent of the broker 110 may be reviewing all records associated with rude order taker comment codes to see if a pattern exists as to who the order taker was and what the order taker said to the hotel guest.

[0130] Once the call is completed, the script window 508, 602 displays a message indicating the end of the script has been reached. At this point, the call center operator is free to handle another call for the broker 110 or any other client of the call center 106.

[0131] As part of this process, information identifying the call center operator is entered. The information identifying the call center operator may be entered by the call center operator, by the call center workstation 506, or by the broker web server 604. For example, the call center operator may enter his/her initials. Preferably, all of the information entered into the script window 508, 602 is stored in the database 510, 608.

[0132] In this example script, the script window 508, 602 displays the prompt to the call center operator instructing the call center operator to ask the caller, “Are you calling to place a room service order?” The call center operator is then given the drop-down box of choices. In this example, the fourth choice is “CANCEL MY ORDER.” If the call center operator selects this choice, “CANCEL” is entered into the script window 508, 602 (and the database 510, 608).

[0133] Next, the script window 508, 602 displays the prompt to the call center operator instructing the call center operator to ask the caller, “What’s the extension number after the phone number on your menu?” The call center operator is then given the drop-down box of choices. In this example, the choices are three digit numbers (or none). Of course, the call center operator may manually enter the extension and/or any other information described herein.

[0134] The script window 508, 602 displays the prompt to the call center operator instructing the call center operator to ask the caller, “What hotel are you calling from?” Again, the call center operator is given the drop-down box of choices. Each choice in the list of choices includes a hotel name, a hotel address, and a hotel telephone number. The selected hotel is entered.

[0135] Next, the script window 508, 602 displays the prompt to the call center operator instructing the call center operator to ask the caller, “What is your hotel room/unit #?” The room number is then entered by the call center operator. In addition, the script window 508, 602 displays a prompt to the call center operator instructing the call center operator to ask the caller, “Are you a guest at the hotel?” In this case, the drop-down box of choices includes a “yes” choice and a “no” choice. Again, as with all of the operator inputs, the choice is displayed in the script window 508, 602 and stored in the database 510, 608.

[0136] The script window 508, 602 displays the prompt to the call center operator instructing the call center operator to ask the caller for his/her first and last name. In addition, the call center operator is prompted to see if he/she should continue with the order, or if he/she would like to skip to a comment entering portion of the script. If the call center operator chooses to continue with the order, the script window 508, 602 displays a confirmation page. The confirmation page prompts the call center operator to confirm the callers room number, hotel, and phone number.

[0137] Once the guest information is confirmed, the script window 508, 602 prompts the call center operator for a cancellation reason. If the reason for the cancellation is listed in an associated drop down list (e.g., delivery taking too long, changed mind, etc), the call center operator selects that reason. If the reason for the cancellation is not listed in the associated drop down list, the call center operator selects “other” and types in a specific reason given by the hotel guest (e.g., “Guest forgot about dinner meeting”).

[0138] The call center operator is prompted to thank the hotel guest and tell him/her that their order has been canceled. The call center operator is then prompted to hang up with the hotel guest, call the restaurant 104 associated with that area 108, and inform the restaurant 104 that there has been a cancellation. The call center operator identifies the canceled order to the restaurant 104 by hotel name and room number. In addition, the script window 508, 602 prompts the call center operator to get the name of the person at the restaurant 104.

[0139] If the restaurant delivery person received a cancellation reason from the hotel guest, that reason is also entered into the system via a drop-down list of choices. Similarly, other comments from the restaurant delivery person may be entered via another drop-down list of choices and/or via a free-form text entry box. Once the call is completed, the script window 508, 602 displays a message indicating the end of the
script has been reached. At this point, the call center operator is free to handle another call for the broker 110 or any other client of the call center 106.

[0140] Again, information identifying the call center operator is entered by the call center operator, by the call center workstation 506, or by the broker web server 604. For example, the call center operator may enter his/her initials. Preferably, all of the information entered into the script window 508, 602 is stored in the database 510, 608.

[0141] In this example script, the script window 508, 602 displays the prompt to the call center operator instructing the call center operator to ask the caller, “Are you calling to place a room service order?” The call center operator is then given the drop-down box of choices. In this example, the fifth choice is “OTHER.” If the call center operator selects this choice, “CUST SVC” is entered into the script window 508, 602 (and the database 510, 608).

[0142] Next, the script window 508, 602 displays the prompt to the call center operator instructing the call center operator to ask the caller, “What’s the extension number after the phone number on your menu?” The call center operator is then given the drop-down box of choices. In this example, the choices are three digit numbers (or none). Of course, the call center operator may manually enter the extension and/or any other information described herein.

[0143] The script window 508, 602 displays the prompt to the call center operator instructing the call center operator to ask the caller, “What hotel are you calling from?” Again, the call center operator is given the drop-down box of choices. Each choice in the list of choices includes a hotel name, a hotel address, and a hotel telephone number. The selected hotel is entered.

[0144] Next, the script window 508, 602 displays the prompt to the call center operator instructing the call center operator to ask the caller, “What is your hotel room/unit #?” The room number is then entered by the call center operator. In addition, the script window 508, 602 displays a prompt to the call center operator instructing the call center operator to ask the caller, “Are you a guest at the hotel?” In this case, the drop-down box of choices includes a “yes” choice and a “no” choice. Again, as with all of the other inputs, the choice is displayed in the script window 508, 602 and stored in the database 510, 608.

[0145] The script window 508, 602 displays the prompt to the call center operator instructing the call center operator to ask the caller for his/her first and last name. In addition, the call center operator is prompted to see if he/she should continue with the order, or if he/she would like to skip to a comment entering portion of the script. If the call center operator chooses to continue with the order, the script window 508, 602 displays a confirmation page. The confirmation page prompts the call center operator to confirm the caller’s room number, hotel, and phone number.

[0146] Once the guest information is confirmed, the script window 508, 602 prompts the call center operator to tell the caller to please wait one moment while he/she is connected with their order taker. The script window 508, 602 also displays a message prompting the call center operator to introduce himself/herself to the order taker and to tell the order taker he/she has a status inquiry from a specific person’s name in a particular room number at a particular hotel. At this point, or after the call center operator discusses the situation with the order taker, the call center operator may choose to connect the caller to the order taker or to relay the answer to the caller. The call center operator is then prompted to enter a comment describing the situation (e.g., the hotel guest was double charged).

[0147] The script window 508, 602 displays a prompt asking the call center operator to get the order taker’s name. The script window 508, 602 also displays a message instructing the call center operator to enter “REFUSED” if the order taker does not give his/her name. If the issue appears to be resolved, the call center operator enters a “yes” response to a prompt asking if the issue is resolved. Otherwise, the call center operator enters a “no” response to the prompt.

[0148] Once the call is completed, the script window 508, 602 displays a message indicating the end of the script has been reached. At this point, the call center operator is free to handle another call for the broker 110 or any other client of the call center 106.

[0149] As part of this order taking process, information identifying the call center operator is entered. The information identifying the call center operator may be entered by the call center operator, by the call center workstation 506, or by the broker web server 604. For example, the call center operator may enter his/her initials. Preferably, all of the information entered into the script window 508, 602 is stored in the database 510, 608.

[0150] In this example script, the script window 508, 602 displays a prompt to the call center operator instructing the call center operator to ask the caller, “Are you calling to place a room service order?” The call center operator is then given a drop-down box of choices. In this example, the choices are three digit numbers (or none). Of course, the call center operator may manually enter the extension and/or any other information described herein.

[0151] Next, the script window 508, 602 displays a prompt to the call center operator instructing the call center operator to ask the caller, “What’s the extension number after the phone number on your menu?” The call center operator is then given a drop-down box of choices. In this example, the choices are three digit numbers (or none). Of course, the call center operator may manually enter the extension and/or any other information described herein.

[0152] The script window 508, 602 displays a prompt to the call center operator instructing the call center operator to ask the caller, “What hotel are you calling from?” Again, the call center operator is given a drop-down box of choices. Each choice in the list of choices includes a hotel name, a hotel address, and a hotel telephone number. The selected hotel is entered.

[0153] Next, the script window 508, 602 displays a prompt to the call center operator instructing the call center operator to ask the caller, “Are you a guest at the hotel?” In this case, the drop-down box of choices includes a “yes” choice and a “no” choice. If the call center operator chooses the “no” choice, “FRONT” is entered as the room number.

[0154] In other words, this is not a hotel guest calling, it is an employee of the hotel. In one embodiment, hotel employees are given a discount (e.g., 50%) on room service orders as a perk and as a way to promote the service via the hotel employees. Preferably, the restaurant 104 agrees to cover the cost of this discount as part of their agreement to participate in the program. However, the broker 110 may agree to cover this cost during an initial time period (e.g., 90 days) in order to remove the burden of handling the large number of employee orders that may occur at the beginning of opening up a new area 108. In addition, the broker 110 may agree to cover this
cost if the number of orders exceeds a predetermined threshold in a predetermined amount of time (e.g., if more than 2% of the orders are employee orders in any given month based on number of orders and/or dollars of orders).

The script window 508, 602 displays a prompt to the call center operator instructing the call center operator to ask the caller for his/her first and last name. In addition, the call center operator is prompted to see if he/she should continue with the order, or if he/she would like to skip to a comment entering portion of the script. If the call center operator chooses to continue with the order, the script window 508, 602 displays a confirmation page. The confirmation page prompts the call center operator to confirm the caller’s room number, hotel, and phone number.

Once the guest information is confirmed, the script window 508, 602 prompts the call center operator to thank the caller for the order and to please remain on the line while he/she is connected with an order taker. In addition, the script window 508, 602 displays a message reminding the call center operator to get the order taker’s name (i.e., the name of the person at the restaurant 104). The script window 508, 602 also displays a message prompting the call center operator to introduce himself/herself to the order taker and to tell the order taker he/she has a room service order from a specific person’s name in a particular room number at a particular hotel.

In addition, the script window 508, 602 displays a message prompting the call center operator to ask for the order taker’s name and to remind the order taker to confirm the hotel and room number associated with the order. The script window 508, 602 asks the call center operator to confirm that the restaurant order taker did confirm the hotel and room number with the guest. Again, the call center operator is prompted to see if he/she should continue with the order, or if he/she would like to skip to a comment entering portion of the script.

If the call center operator chooses to continue with the order, the script window 508, 602 displays a menu page with a food item selection menu. The food item selection menu displays a list of all of the food items specific to the menu for the restaurant 104 in the area 108 associated with the hotel 102 identified by the caller. Many of the food items are listed more than once under alternate titles in order to help the call center operator find the food items ordered by the caller. For example, a cheeseburger may be listed as “cheeseburger” and as “burger, with cheese.”

When the caller orders a food item, the call center operator selects the food item from the food item selection menu (even though the order taker at the restaurant 104 actually taking the order for the purpose of preparation and delivery). Each time the call center operator selects a food item from the food item selection menu, the script window 508, 602 preferably adds the food item to an order list. The food item in the order list preferably includes a unique item number, a short description, a price, a quantity, and a line item total.

In addition, a detailed view (not shown) of the selected food preferably includes a detailed description of the food item. The detailed description helps resolve ambiguities in the order. For example, if the caller orders the 1 lb. brisket, a side of coleslaw, and a side of baked beans, the call center operator can see from the detailed description that the side dishes are included in the price of the brisket order. Similarly, if the caller in the previous example ordered three side dishes, the call center operator would know to add one side dish charge to the order because only two side dishes are included.

Any discrepancy in that may exist between the total price quoted by the restaurant order taker and the total price determined from the food item selections made by the call center operator. Preferably, the amount of money due to the broker 110 is determined using the total price determined from the food item selections made by the call center operator. However, either total may be used to determine the amount of money due to the broker 110. Preferably, small discrepancies are ignored and large discrepancies are resolved after an investigation by the broker 110, the restaurant 104, and/or the call center 106.

In addition to a price quote, the script window 508, 602 prompts the call center operator to enter a delivery time quote (e.g., 30 minutes). Again, this information is provided to the caller by the restaurant order taker and merely recorded by the call center operator. If the restaurant order taker does not provide a delivery time quote, the call center operator may select “not quoted.” This information may be used for customer service issues. For example, if a complaint is received about the delivery time, the broker may determine who is to blame based on the call time of the order, the call time of the complaint, and the delivery time quote. Restaurants 104 that receive a number of complaints above a predetermined threshold for a predetermined period of time may be warned and/or replaced by the broker 110.

The script window 508, 602 displays a prompt asking the call center operator to classify the call. For example, a call may be classified as a food order, a status check, a customer service issue, an addition to a previous order, or the cancellation of a previous order. By entering a code associated with the status of a call, the broker 110, the restaurant owner, and/or any other person with the appropriate access permission may quickly find certain types of calls in the database 510, 608. For example, a customer service agent of the broker 110 may wish to retrieve all customer service related calls from the previous day in order to follow up, investigate, and resolve any issues associated with those calls.

Similarly, the call center operator may enter a comment code. For example, the call center operator may enter a comment code indicating the hotel guest is wondering why their order has not arrived, indicating that the restaurant 104 was closed when it should have been open, indicating the restaurant 104 was closed because it was after their normal hours, indicating a caller complained about the food quality or service, indicating that the restaurant order taker needs training, indicating that the restaurant order taker was rude to the customer, etc. By entering a comment code, the broker 110, the restaurant owner, and/or any other person with the appropriate access permission may quickly find certain types of calls in the database 510, 608. For example, a customer service agent of the broker 110 may wish to retrieve all complaint related calls from the previous day in order to follow up, investigate, and resolve any issues associated with those calls.

In addition, the call center operator may enter free-form comments. Free-form comments provide the call center operator with the flexibility to enter any type of information. For example, the call center operator may enter actual words used by a rude order taker. Of course, comment codes, free-form comments, and any other field may be used together for information gathering. For example, a customer service agent of the broker 110 may be reviewing all records associated
with rude order taker comment codes to see if a pattern exists as to who the order taker was and what the order taker said to the hotel guest.

[0160] Once the call is completed, the script window 508, 602 displays a message indicating the end of the script has been reached. At this point, the call center operator is free to handle another call for the broker 110 or any other client of the call center 106.

[0161] Menus for residential delivery may be the same as the menus described above, or they may be hybrid menus. For example, the broker 110 may create a menu including food items from a plurality of different restaurants. Preferably, each of the plurality of restaurants already operates a food delivery service. These menus may then be mailed to a plurality of homes. Under this arrangement, the restaurants may pay the food service broker a fee based on a number of food orders received and/or a periodic broker fee. Preferably, these menus do not include a markup.

[0162] As part of this order taking process, information identifying the call center operator is entered. The information identifying the call center operator may be entered by the call center operator, by the call center workstation 506, or by the broker web server 604. For example, the call center operator may enter his/her initials. Preferably, all of the information entered into the script window 508, 602 is stored in the database 510, 608.

[0163] In this example script, the script window 508, 602 displays a prompt to the call center operator instructing the call center operator to ask the caller, “Are you calling to place a room service order?” The call center operator is then given a drop-down box of choices. In this example, the first choice is “ORDER ROOM SERVICE.” If the call center operator selects this choice, “ORDER” is entered into the script window 508, 602 (and the database 510, 608).

[0170] Next, the script window 508, 602 displays a prompt to the call center operator instructing the call center operator to ask the caller, “What’s the extension number after the phone number on your menu?” The call center operator is then given a drop-down box of choices. In this example, the choices are three digit numbers (or none). Of course, the call center operator may manually enter the extension and/or any other information described herein.

[0171] The script window 508, 602 displays a prompt to the call center operator instructing the call center operator to ask the caller, “What hotel are you calling from?” Again, the call center operator is given a drop-down box of choices. Each choice in the list of choices includes a hotel name, a hotel address, and a hotel telephone number. In addition, the list of choices includes a “house delivery” option. If the “house delivery” option is selected, “HOUSE DELIVERY (PUT ADDRESS IN COMMENT FIELD)” is entered.

[0172] The “house delivery” option may be used to differentiate delivery to non-rented homes, rented homes, non-rented condominiums, rented condominiums, etc. from delivery to hotel rooms. One reason for this distinction is that additional address information not already stored in the database 510, 608 may be required to complete the delivery. Another reason for this distinction is the potential lack of a “front desk” telephone number used to resolve problems with the room service order.

[0173] Next, the script window 508, 602 displays a prompt to the call center operator instructing the call center operator to ask the caller, “What is your hotel room/unit #?” If there is a unit number associated with the hotel/condo, the unit number is entered by the call center operator. In addition, the script window 508, 602 displays a prompt to the call center operator instructing the call center operator to ask the caller, “Are you a guest?” If in this case, the drop-down box of choices includes a “yes” choice and a “no” choice. Again, as with all of the operator inputs, the choice is displayed in the script window 508, 602 and stored in the database 510, 608.

[0174] Because “home” deliveries may have problems that cannot be corrected via a front desk telephone number, the script window 508, 602 displays a prompt to the call center operator instructing the call center operator to ask the caller, “What number can we reach you at in the event we need to contact you?” In addition, the prompt instructs the call center operator to use the caller identification information associated with the call if the caller does not know the number he is calling from. The phone number given by the caller is preferred over the caller identification information, because the caller may be using a cellular phone or the call may have been routed via a switch.

[0175] The script window 508, 602 displays a prompt to the call center operator instructing the call center operator to ask the caller for his/her first and last name. In addition, the call center operator is prompted to see if he/she should continue with the order, or if he/she would like to skip to a comment entering portion of the script. If the call center operator chooses to continue with the order, the script window 508, 602 displays a confirmation page. The confirmation page prompts the call center operator to confirm the callers room number (if any) and reminds the call center operator that this is a home delivery. Therefore, the address needs to be entered (e.g., in the comment field).

[0176] Once the guest information is confirmed, the script window 508, 602 prompts the call center operator to thank the caller for the order and to please remain on the line while he/she is connected with an order. In addition, the script window 508, 602 displays a message reminding the call center operator to get the order taker’s name (i.e., the name of the person at the restaurant 104). The script window 508, 602 also displays a message prompting the call center operator to introduce himself/herself to the order taker and to tell the order taker he/she has room service order from a specific person’s name for home delivery.

[0177] In addition, the script window 508, 602 displays a message prompting the call center operator to ask for the order taker’s name and to remind the order taker to confirm the address associated with the order. The script window 508, 602 asks the call center operator to confirm that the restaurant order taker did confirm the address associated with the order. Again, the call center operator is prompted to see if he/she should continue with the order, or if he/she would like to skip to a comment entering portion of the script.

[0178] If the call center operator chooses to continue with the order, the script window 508, 602 displays a menu page with a food item selection menu. The food item selection menu displays a list of all of the food items specific to the menu for the restaurant 104 in the area 108 associated with the hotel 102 identified by the caller. Many of the food items are listed more than once under alternate titles in order to help the call center operator find the food items ordered by the caller. For example, a cheeseburger may be listed as “cheeseburger” and as “burger, with cheese.”

[0179] When the caller orders a food item, the call center operator selects the food item from the food item selection menu (even though the order taker at the restaurant 104 actu-
ally taking the order for the purpose of preparation and delivery). Each time the call center operator selects a food item from the food item selection menu, the script window 508, 602 preferably adds the food item to an order list. The food item in the order list preferably includes a unique item number, a short description, a price, a quantity, and a line item total. In addition, the script window 508, 602 prompts the call center operator to select the type of payment (e.g., cash, credit, unknown, travelers check, airline voucher, etc.).

[0180] Any discrepancy in that may exist between the total price quoted by the restaurant order taker and the total price determined from the food item selections made by the call center operator. Preferably, the amount of money due to the broker 110 is determined using the total price determined from the food item selections made by the call center operator. However, either total may be used to determine the amount of money due to the broker 110. Preferably, small discrepancies are ignored and large discrepancies are resolved after an investigation by the broker 110, the restaurant 104, and/or the call center 106.

[0181] In addition to a price quote, the script window 508, 602 prompts the call center operator to enter a delivery time quote (e.g., 30 minutes). Again, this information is provided to the caller by the restaurant order taker and merely recorded by the call center operator. If the restaurant order taker does not provide a delivery time quote, the call center operator may select “not quoted.” This information may be used for customer service issues. For example, if a complaint is received about the delivery time, the broker may determine who is to blame based on the call time of the order, the call time of the complaint, and the delivery time quote. Restaurants 104 that receive a number of complaints above a predetermined threshold for a predetermined period of time may be warned and/or replaced by the broker 110.

[0182] The script window 508, 602 displays a prompt asking the call center operator to classify the call. For example, a call may be classified as a food order, a status check, a customer service issue, an addition to a previous order, or the cancellation of a previous order. By entering a code associated with the status of a call, the broker 110, the restaurant owner, and/or any other person with the appropriate access permission may quickly find certain types of calls in the database 510, 608. For example, a customer service agent of the broker 110 may wish to retrieve all customer service related calls from the previous day in order to follow up, investigate, and resolve any issues associated with those calls.

[0183] Similarly, the call center operator may enter a comment code. For example, the call center operator may enter a comment code indicating the hotel guest is wondering why their order has not arrived, indicating that the restaurant 104 was closed when it should have been open, indicating the restaurant 104 was closed because it was after their normal hours, indicating a caller complained about the food quality or service, indicating that the restaurant order taker needs training, indicating that the restaurant order taker was rude to the customer, etc. By entering a comment code, the broker 110, the restaurant owner, and/or any other person with the appropriate access permission may quickly find certain types of calls in the database 510, 608. For example, a customer service agent of the broker 110 may wish to retrieve all complaint-related calls from the previous day in order to follow up, investigate, and resolve any issues associated with those calls.

[0184] Because this is a home delivery, the call center operator enters the address of the customer manually. For example, the call center operator may enter the address of the customer in the comment field. Of course, a dedicated address field could also be used.

[0185] Once the call is completed, the script window 508, 602 displays a message indicating the end of the script has been reached. At this point, the call center operator is free to handle another call for the broker 110 or any other client of the call center 106.

[0186] In summary, persons of ordinary skill in the art will readily appreciate that methods and apparatus for brokering services have been provided. The foregoing description has been presented for the purposes of illustration and description. It is not intended to be exhaustive or to limit the invention to the exemplary embodiments disclosed. Many modifications and variations are possible in light of the above teachings. It is intended that the scope of the invention be limited not by this detailed description of examples, but rather by the claims appended hereto.

1. A method of brokering food services, the method comprising the steps of:
   - facilitating a first call from a customer to a call center operator associated with a food broker;
   - selecting a restaurant for fulfilling a food order placed by said customer;
   - facilitating a second call from the call center operator to an order taker associated with the restaurant;
   - connecting the customer, the call center operator, and the order taker in an at least three-way call; and
   - facilitating a recording of information by the call center operator during the at least three-way call, the information being associated with a food order given to the order taker by the customer.

2. The method in accordance with claim 1 further comprising the step of facilitating a second call from a customer service agent associated with a food broker to said customer regarding said food order.

3. The method in accordance with claim 2 wherein said second call is placed using information recorded during said three-way call.

4. The method in accordance with claim 2 further comprising the step of recording information obtained from said customer during said second call.

5. The method in accordance with claim 1 wherein said step of selecting comprises determining a restaurant having a food services agreement with said broker which is located in a geographic service area which includes a location of said customer.

6. The method in accordance with claim 5 further comprising the step of receiving information from said customer regarding the customer’s geographic location and utilizing said information to select said restaurant.

7. The method in accordance with claim 1 wherein said step of facilitating a recording of information comprises making a digital recording of at least a portion of a verbal exchange between said customer and said order taker.

8. A method of brokering food services, the method comprising the steps of:
   - providing a menu identifying food items and contact information;
   - facilitating a first communication link from a customer to a broker using said contact information;
determining a restaurant for fulfilling an order placed by said customer from said menu;
facilitating a second communication link from the broker to said restaurant;
transmitting order information from said customer to said restaurant via said first and second communication links through said broker;
sto\nging information by said broker regarding a food order placed by said customer with said restaurant; and
utilizing said stored information to determine the amount of a commission payable by said restaurant to said broker associated with brokering of said food order to said restaurant.

9. The method in accordance with claim 8 further comprising the steps of facilitating a third communication link between a customer service agent associated with said broker and said customer and utilizing said stored information regarding said food order to obtain customer service information from said customer.

10. The method in accordance with claim 9 wherein said customer service information comprises satisfaction of said customer with food delivered by said restaurant in response to said food order.

11. The method in accordance with claim 8 wherein said first and second communication links comprise telephone links over which verbal information is transmitted.

12. The method in accordance with claim 8 wherein said information is stored in a database associated with a computing system of said broker.

13. The method in accordance with claim 8 further comprising the step of receiving funds into an account belonging to said broker from a financial account belonging to said restaurant for paying said commission.

14. A method of brokering food services, the method comprising the steps of:
facilitating a first call from a customer to a call center;
determining a geographical identifier associated with the customer;
determining a restaurant based on the geographical identifier;
facilitating a second call from the call center to an order taker associated with the restaurant; and
recording information by said call center regarding a food order given to the order taker by the customer.

15. The method in accordance with claim 14 wherein said second call forwards said first call from said customer to said order taker through said call center.

16. The method in accordance with claim 14 wherein said step of recording information comprises recording verbal communications between said customer and said order taker.

17. The method in accordance with claim 14 wherein said step of determining a restaurant comprises locating a restaurant within a geographic area associated with said identifier.

18. The method in accordance with claim 14 further comprising the step of said order taker taking an order from said customer in response to said second call.

19. The method in accordance with claim 18 further comprising said restaurant delivering a food order based upon said order taken by said order taker.

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