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INTERNATIONAL APPLICATION PUBLISHED UNDER THE PATENT COOPERATION TREATY (PCT)

(51) International Patent Classification 7 : G06F 17/30 — A1

(11) International Publication Number: **WO 00/28438**

(43) International Publication Date: 18 May 2000 (18.05.00)

(21) International Application Number: PCT/US99/25886

(22) International Filing Date: 4 November 1999 (04.11.99)

(30) Priority Data:

09/186,927	6 November 1998 (06.11.98)	US
09/253,112	19 February 1999 (19.02.99)	US

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(81) Designated States: AE, AL, AM, AT, AU, AZ, BA, BB, BG, BR, BY, CA, CH, CN, CR, CU, CZ, DE, DK, DM, EE, ES, FI, GB, GD, GE, GH, GM, HR, HU, ID, IL, IN, IS, JP, KE, KG, KP, KR, KZ, LC, LK, LR, LS, LT, LU, LV, MD, MG, MK, MN, MW, MX, NO, NZ, PL, PT, RO, RU, SD, SE, SG, SI, SK, SL, TJ, TM, TR, TT, UA, UG, US, UZ, VN, YU, ZA, ZW, ARIPO patent (GH, GM, KE, LS, MW, SD, SL, SZ, TZ, UG, ZW), Eurasian patent (AM, AZ, BY, KG, KZ, MD, RU, TJ, TM), European patent (AT, BE, CH, CY, DE, DK, ES, FI, FR, GB, GR, IE, IT, LU, MC, NL, PT, SE), OAPI patent (BF, BJ, CF, CG, CI, CM, GA, GN, GW, ML, MR, NE, SN, TD, TG).

Published

With international search report.

Before the expiration of the time limit for amending the claims and to be republished in the event of the receipt of amendments.

(54) Title: SYSTEM FOR PROVIDING BUSINESS INFORMATION

(57) Abstract

An apparatus, method and data structure for communicating business information, including outsourcing information. Contractors provide information regarding their products and services into the system (170). Outsourcing companies search a database (220) containing contractor information (230) to determine which contractors meet a particular search criteria. Selected contractors receive project information (240) and, optionally, a bid template (270). Bid information is supplied to the system. The system prepares a table of bid information that is sent to the outsourcing companies for review. Evaluation information relating to contractors and outsourcing companies is obtained from both outsourcing companies and contractors and is provided to outsourcing companies and contractors as part of the bid and project information.

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SYSTEM FOR PROVIDING BUSINESS INFORMATION

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The invention relates in general to an apparatus, method and data structure for providing business information, including outsourcing information, to assist businesses in meeting their needs for providing and obtaining a variety of services. More particularly, the invention relates to an apparatus, method and data structure for facilitating communications between contractors and outsourcing companies that include marketing and search mechanisms, bid management, contractor and outsourcing company assessment, and other various features.

Recently, businesses have turned increasingly to outsourcing work that would be either cost-prohibitive to do in-house or outside of their primary business. Because most outsourcing companies currently use only a few, select contractors with whom they have close ties, significant inefficiencies exist that result in a glut of smaller firms not having access to these outsourcing companies. Further, outsourcing companies are denied competitive pricing due to a limited pool of contractors and occasionally have difficulty finding qualified applicants to perform highly skilled work.

Businesses can also use a middleman or broker to aide their procurement of services. A broker's success is highly dependent on access to market information regarding various goods or services. Although brokers can procure goods and services at reasonable rates and can save time for outsourcing companies, brokers are expensive and their expertise is typically limited to a particular industry or a limited number of industries. To the extent that buyers and sellers of goods and services have access to market information, they can procure goods and services at market; however, gaining such access is a time-intensive activity.

Buyers and sellers can also use umbrella firms to outsource various projects. Umbrella firms seek to establish a contractual relationship with outsourcing firms, who are generally searching for six- to thirty-six-month contracts. The umbrella firms profit by receiving contracts and distributing the contracts to the firms working under their umbrellas. Often, the umbrella firms provide some traditional business services such as bookkeeping, accounting, and billing to the other firms under the umbrella.

The deficiencies associated with past methods, including the use of brokers and umbrella firms, are that they are time intensive, utilize slow processes, draw from a limited pool of contractors, are expensive, and are inefficient.

The foregoing demonstrates that there is a need for an invention which greatly reduces the time required to identify and procure services, improves pricing due to substantial competition, and accomplishes these goals at competitive prices.

The invention also relates to an apparatus, method and data structure for providing business information, including job posting information, to assist businesses in meeting their needs for providing and obtaining a variety of services. More particularly, the invention relates to an apparatus, method and data structure for facilitating communications between potential employers and potential employees that include marketing and search mechanisms, application and job posting management, employer and employee assessment, and other features.

Recently, businesses have turned increasingly to use of databases, such as those found on the Internet, to post job opportunities and/or positions available for both temporary and longer-term needs. The known processes lack a manner by which an employer can readily screen job applicants and whereby potential employees can easily obtain information relating to the assessment of particular employers. Additionally, a job seeker is unaware of jobs that are posted on a database after the job seeker conducts a search of the database.

The foregoing demonstrates that there is a need for an invention which allows an employer to efficiently identify suitable job applicants and permits applicants to assess multiple positions and employers and to receive updates regarding new job postings.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The invention satisfies the need and avoids the drawbacks of the prior art by providing an apparatus, method and data structure that set forth an interactive venue for firms of all sizes, both to showcase their talent and to identify contractors meeting their outsourcing requirements. Outsourcing companies may be provided with access to a network of independent contractors, both in order to find new business and to contract work out. Access to this network condenses the process of locating and hiring independent contractors from weeks or months into an afternoon. In addition to the

time savings associated with the procurement of services, the invention provides cost benefits in that the existence of a substantial pool of available contractors eliminates the inflated billing rates that may result from a lack of competition. Due to the economies of scale for business information, the invention can accomplish the above goals at a competitive cost. The invention also offers an assortment of databases to enable firms to locate information and solutions to an abundance of business problems and opportunities.

According to one aspect of the invention, an apparatus for and a method of communicating outsourcing information between an outsourcing company and a plurality of contractors are set forth. The apparatus and method may include the structure for and steps of logging onto an on-line database by each of the plurality of contractors, inserting contractor information into a plurality of requisite fields in a form provided by the on-line database by each of the plurality of contractors, and storing the contractor information in the on-line database. A user—such as an outsourcing company—may conduct a search on the on-line database for outsourcing information using skill criteria and may select a subset of contractors to receive outsourcing information associated with the outsourcing opportunity. The system may then preferentially transmit the outsourcing information and a bid form to the subset of contractors, accept bid information from a further subset of contractors, place the bid information in a report, and send the outsourcing company the report or an address identifying the location of the report on the database to permit the outsourcing company to compare and contrast the bid information received from the contractors.

The outsourcing company may limit its search to a specific universe of contractors or may choose to simply identify all contractors meeting its search criteria. System users, including contractors and outsourcing companies, may provide an assessment of a project, contractor or outsourcing company by entering information into an evaluation form which may be accessed by future users. The apparatus and method may include assigning passwords to users to allow future use of the system and the option of entering a sales associate identification number so that sales commissions may be tracked.

In another aspect of the invention, a system for communicating outsourcing information between an outsourcing company and a contractor contains a computer-

readable memory for storing data for access by an application program and includes a data structure stored in the computer-readable memory. The data structure may include information used by the application program and may contain a log-in field having log-in information associated with each of the plurality of contractors; a plurality of contractor information fields for inserting contractor information into a form by each of the plurality of contractors; and a plurality of specific skill criteria fields for searching the plurality of contractor information fields. Additionally, the data structure may include a plurality of first subset fields for identifying a first subset of the plurality of contractors to receive the outsourcing information; a plurality of outsourcing information fields for sending the outsourcing information and, optionally, a bid form to the first subset of the plurality of contractors; a plurality of bid fields for accepting bid information from a second subset of the plurality of contractors on the bid form; a bid information table field for placing the bid information; and an address field for identifying an address of the bid information table to permit the outsourcing company to compare and contrast the bid information received from the second subset of the contractors.

The data structure of the computer-readable memory may include a password assigning field for assigning a password to outsourcing companies and contractors; and a sales associate field for entering a sales associate number. The data structure of the computer-readable memory may also include a plurality of evaluation fields for providing evaluation forms to permit a plurality of users to comment on and evaluate the on-line database and the plurality of users, including outsourcing companies and contractors, wherein the completed evaluation forms may be routed to a controller of the on-line database for future access by users.

The plurality of first subset fields may be used for selecting a first subset of contractors in an automatic or manual mode. The automatic mode permits selection of a set number of contractors meeting the specific skill criteria of the outsourcing company. In the manual mode, the outsourcing company may limit its search to specifically identified contractors.

The invention also satisfies the need and avoids the drawbacks of the prior art by providing an apparatus, method and data structure that set forth an interactive venue for firms of all sizes to advertise and identify various job opportunities for all types of

positions and durations while persons seeking job opportunities are given access to a network of employers having available positions. Access to this network greatly reduces the time and costs associated with the process of locating and hiring employees as the invention provides employers with a comprehensive transmission of promising job candidates. For job seekers, the invention provides a easy and reliable tool to identify job opportunities. A job seeker may receive a ranked, comprehensive listing of available positions meeting the job seeker's criteria from employers that post jobs before—and after—the job seeker searches the database of job opportunities.

According to one aspect of the invention, an apparatus for and a method of communicating job information between a job seeker and a plurality of employers are set forth. The apparatus and method may include the structure for and steps of logging onto an on-line database by each of a plurality of employers, inserting job information into a plurality of requisite fields in a form provided by the on-line database by each of the plurality of employers, and storing the job information in the on-line database. A user—such as a job seeker—may conduct a search on the on-line database for job information using specific criteria and may select a subset of employers to receive information relating to the job seeker. The system may then preferentially transmit the job seeker information to the subset of employers, accept reply information from a further subset of contractors, place the reply information in a report, and send the job seeker the report or an address identifying the location of the report on the database to permit the job seeker to compare and contrast the reply information received from the employers.

The invention may also permit an employer the option of creating a mini-application—specific to the employer's needs—from a database of job seeker application questions in another aspect. The questions selected by the employer may be referenced to the employer's job posting and stored on the database. The mini-application may be made available to job seekers who may complete and store responses on the database and then may be made available to employers. Additionally, system users, including employers and job seekers, may provide an assessment of other system users by entering information into an evaluation form which may be accessed by future users. The apparatus and method may include assigning passwords to users to allow

future use of the system and the option of entering a sales associate identification number so that sales commissions may be tracked.

In another aspect of the invention, a system for communicating job information between a job seeker and an employer or employers contains a computer-readable memory for storing data for access by an application program and includes a data structure stored in the computer-readable memory. The data structure may include information used by the application program and may contain a log-in field having log-in information associated with each of the plurality of employers; a plurality of employer information fields for inserting employer information into a form by each of the plurality of employers; and a plurality of specific skill criteria fields for searching the plurality of employer information fields. Additionally, the data structure may include a plurality of first subset fields for identifying a first subset of the plurality of employers to receive job seeker information; a plurality of job seeker information fields for sending the job seeker information to the first subset of the plurality of employers; a plurality of reply fields for accepting reply information from a second subset of the plurality of employers; a reply information table field for placing the reply information; and an address field for identifying an address of the reply information table to permit the job seeker to compare and contrast the reply information received from the second subset of the contractors.

The data structure of the computer-readable memory may include a password assigning field for assigning a password to job seekers and employers; and a sales associate field for entering a sales associate number. The data structure of the computer-readable memory may also include a plurality of evaluation fields for providing evaluation forms to permit a plurality of users to comment on and evaluate the on-line database and the plurality of users, including job seekers and employers, wherein the completed evaluation forms may be routed to a controller of the on-line database for future access by users and insertion into tables and reports transmitted between employers and job seekers. The data structure may also include a plurality of application question fields for selection by employers, mini-application question fields for eliciting responses from job seekers, job seeker information fields for inserting job seeker information, and job seeker specific criteria fields for storing job seeker search information.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Figure 1 illustrates a client-server network for a preferred embodiment of the invention.

Figure 2A and 2B illustrate a flow of data entry and transmission for a preferred embodiment of the invention.

Figure 3 illustrates typical data entered by a contractor and transmitted to the database according to the principles of the invention.

Figure 4 illustrates typical skill criteria entered by an outsourcing company and transmitted to the database according to the principles of the invention.

Figure 5 illustrates a typical search results template that is transmitted to an outsourcing company according to the principles of the invention.

Figure 6 illustrates a typical bid template transmitted to a selected contractor according to the principles of the invention.

Figures 7A and 7B illustrate bid information reports generated based upon contractors' submitted bid information according to the principles of the invention.

Figure 8 illustrates a contractor evaluation template useful for providing contractor assessment by outsourcing companies according to the principles of the invention.

Figure 9 illustrates an evaluation report for contractors according to the principles of the invention.

Figure 10 illustrates an outsourcing company evaluation template for providing assessment of an outsourcing company by contractors according to the principles of the invention.

Figure 11 illustrates an evaluation report for outsourcing companies according to the principles of the invention.

Figure 12 illustrates a sales associate template for entering pertinent sales associate information according to the principles of the invention.

Figure 13 illustrates the flow of data entry and transmission for another preferred embodiment of the invention.

Figure 14 illustrates typical data entered by an employer and transmitted to the database according to the principles of the invention.

Figure 15 illustrates typical job search criteria entered by a job seeker and transmitted to the database according to the principles of the invention.

Figure 16 illustrates a typical search results template that is transmitted to a job seeker according to the principles of the invention.

Figure 17 illustrates a reply information report generated based upon employers' submitted information according to the principles of the invention.

Figure 18 illustrates a portion of an application question template according to the principles of the invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Figure 1 shows a system 10 for communicating outsourcing information according to one aspect of the invention. The system 10 depicted in Figure 1 includes a server 12 having a memory 14, and a database 16 defined in the memory 14. The server 12 may be an ALPHA server, a minicomputer, a microcomputer, a UNIX machine, a mainframe computer, a personal computer with an Intel Pentium processor, a Macintosh personal computer, or any other suitable computer. The memory 14 is preferably non-volatile (e.g., CD-ROM, hard disk, tape drive, etc.). The server 12 has a central processing unit (CPU) 18, input devices such as a keyboard and mouse (not shown), output devices such as a monitor and printer (not shown), random access memory (RAM) 20, read-only memory (ROM) 22, serial and parallel ports (not shown), and communication hardware 24. The communication hardware 24 may connect the server 12 to the Internet. In a preferred embodiment, the server 12 is a World Wide Web server connected to the Internet. Preferably, the server 12 has an operating system that is capable of multiple users and multi-tasking, such as UNIX, Windows NT, or LINUX. Figure 1 also demonstrates the inclusion of one or more client machines 26 which communicate with the server 12. Figure 1 does not disclose the specific interconnections between and among the various components in the server as this information is well known.

The client machines 26 may be connected to the server 12 by communication links 28. The communication links 28 between the server 12 and the client machines 26 may include a large variety of connections, including a telephone link, a hard-wired connection, a satellite link or other wireless connection, an Internet connection, a local

area network (LAN), a wide area network (WAN), any combination of the preceding, or any other suitable type of connection. Multiple client machines 26 may communicate simultaneously with the server 12, and each connection may be by a different type of link (e.g., one connection may be by telephone while another may be by the Internet). As discussed above, the server 12 connects to communication links 28 via communication hardware 24.

After a link is established between the server 12 and a client machine 26, communication may take place via a variety of communication protocols, including file transfer protocol (FTP), electronic mail (e-mail), transfer control protocol/Internet protocol (TCP/IP), ASCII, X-MODEM, Y-MODEM, KERMIT, any combination of the preceding protocols, or any other suitable type of protocol.

In a preferred embodiment, the server 12 is an ALPHA server. With this platform, CPUs, memory, networking capabilities, storage, and software may be modified as appropriate to meet specific requirements. One preferred platform is an ALPHA 2000 4/275, which features 128 MB of memory, a CD-ROM drive, a 4.3 GB redundant array of independent disks (RAID), an 8 GB tape backup, and a 100 base-T network interface. The selection of a suitable server requires consideration of CPU speed as well as disk subsystem performance and network bandwidth. For example, a disk with a 7200 RPM rotational speed may be a suitable disk subsystem. Once the RAID is selected (RAID 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5), the size of the database and its projected growth must be analyzed as part of the known design considerations.

The database on the server 12 may be of any suitable type. One type of server commonly used for large database applications is Oracle. Oracle is an extremely powerful and flexible relational database system. Procedural Language/Standard Query Language (PL/SQL) is a sophisticated programming language used to access the Oracle database from various environments. The Oracle database combines the power and flexibility of SQL (a fourth generation language (4GL)) with the procedural constructs of a third generation language (3GL). PL/SQL is integrated with the database server, so that the PL/SQL code may be processed quickly and efficiently. Another important tool that PL/SQL provides is designed for data manipulation both internally (i.e., within Oracle) and externally in applications.

PL/SQL extends regular SQL by adding constructs found in other procedural languages. Another advantage of PL/SQL is that several SQL statements may be bundled together into one PL/SQL block and sent to the server as a single unit. This results in considerably lowered network traffic and a much faster application.

Another preferred database that may be employed is Oracle8i. The Oracle8i database is useful for Internet applications and manages the content, data and files typically managed by an operating system. Oracle8i has a Java Virtual Machine, a native Java compiler and a feature called Internet File System (iFS), which provides the ability to store, query and manage a wide range of relational and non-relational data within the database. iFS, written in Java, allows users to store 164 data types, including spreadsheets, word processing documents, Web pages and e-mail, within the database and retrieve them either in native file format or in HyperText Markup Language (HTML) through a browser. iFS indexes each file automatically and gives users enhanced security, database search capabilities, backup and recovery.

Other features in Oracle8i include WebDB, a environment run through a browser that enables developers to dynamically generate Web content and pages; SQLJ, a programming syntax that embeds SQL database statements into client or server Java code; and interMedia, a system for managing rich data types used over the Web. Of course, other database systems may be utilized according to the invention.

In a preferred embodiment, as seen in Figs. 1, 2A, and 2B, a contractor uses a client machine 26 to connect to the server 12 via a communication link 28. The contractor may then log onto the database 16, as seen at step 100. Optionally, a password may be required of the contractor, as seen at step 110. If a password is required and the contractor has not used the system previously, as seen at step 120, the contractor is given a password by the server 12, as seen at step 130; otherwise the contractor must enter a password, as seen at step 140. Another optional feature is that the contractor may enter a sales associate identification number corresponding to an agent who procured the contractor's use of the system, as seen at steps 150 and 160. Figure 2A does not illustrate additional steps for repeating the requests for a password and a sales associate number if the contractor enters incorrect data, as these additional steps are known. A contractor who has used the system previously has the option of editing or deleting the contractor's record (not shown).

After logging onto the server 12, a contractor may enter pertinent information into the database 16 concerning the contractor, including the contractor's field of business, length of time in business, number of employees, dates and times of availability, etc., as seen at step 170. An example of the various data entered by the contractor at step 170 is shown in Figure 3. A wide variety of data may be entered at step 170 and is not limited to the types listed above. For example, other information may include placing the fee for routine services in the contractor's business description, pricing for limited periods of time, special offers, and the like.

An outsourcing company may connect to the server 12 from a client machine 26 via a communication link 28, as is seen at step 200. Optionally, the outsourcing company may also be required to enter a password or other identifying information, including a sales associate identification number, as discussed above (not shown). Once connected, the outsourcing company may enter specific skill criteria indicating the qualifications required of a contractor into the database 16. This is seen at step 210. An example of skill criteria that may be entered by the outsourcing company is demonstrated in Figure 4. Steps 200 and 210 are independent from steps 100-170. Therefore, steps 200 and 210 may be performed by one or more outsourcing companies before, during or after any of steps 100-170 are performed by one or more contractors.

Once the contractor information is entered into the database 16 by one or more contractors, a search may be performed using server 12 to identify contractors meeting the skill criteria specified by the outsourcing company at step 210. This search is seen at step 220. For example, the outsourcing company may be seeking contractors who (1) perform carpentry work, (2) have more than 25 employees, (3) are available during January 1999, and (4) have more than ten years' experience. Other examples include looking for a programmer to provide a payroll program in C++ in two weeks, a designer to provide a graphic design of a logo in a month, and the like. It is understood that this search may take place on the server 12 whether or not any contractors or outsourcing companies are currently logged into the server 12. Once the search of the database 16 is performed for the specific skill criteria, a list of contractors may be identified who will receive the outsourcing information requested by the outsourcing company, as is seen at step 230. One form of a typical listing of contractors identified in a search is illustrated in Figure 5.

The server 12 may then transmit the outsourcing information to the selected contractors along with a bid template, as is seen at step 240. The bid template may be a form which contains data fields that must be filled in by a contractor if that contractor is interested in bidding on a job, as is seen in Figure 6. The transmission of outsourcing information to the selected contractors is preferably done via e-mail but may be accomplished using another type of communication protocol.

Once those in the group of selected contractors that choose to submit a bid have done so, the bid information may be transmitted back to the server 12, and accepted by the server 12, as is seen at step 250. The accepted bids are processed and may then be placed in a table of bid information, as is seen at step 260. An example of the contents of the table of bid information is shown in Figures 7A and 7B.

The table of bid information or, alternatively, an address of the location of such a table is then sent to the outsourcing company via a communication protocol such as e-mail. This is seen at step 270. From this table, the outsourcing company may then select a contractor with whom it wishes to do business. Even if the outsourcing company is unable to immediately select a contractor, the outsourcing company has substantially reduced the pool of possibilities to a select number of "choice" contractors.

As discussed above, contractors may place outsourcing information regarding services into the system. An example of a useful contractor template 2100 that may be employed according to the principles of the invention is depicted in Figure 3. Contractor template 2100 supplies a contact name field 2110; company name field 2120; contact title field 2125; address fields 2130, 2131, 2132, 2133, 2134; e-mail address field 2140; phone field 2150; and fax field 2160. Occupational classification field 2170 preferably contains a menu of occupations, such as Accountants and Auditors, Advertising and Promotions Managers, Aerospace Engineers, and the like. Products and/or services field 2180 permits the contractor to submit key words and phrases describing offered services. Territory field 2190 provides menu choices, such as local, statewide, nationwide, and global, to allow the contractor to communicate the size of the market serviced. Company description 2200 contains information similar to that of products and/or services field 2180, but allows for prose. Password field 2210 allows the contractor to enter a password that may be used to re-enter the system at a later time without the necessity of again providing company information, such as company

address, phone number, and the like. Selection of the submit button 2220 permits the contractor information to be placed on the system. Save button 2230 allows the contractor to save entered information without submitting the information to the system. This permits the contractor to save a partially completed template 2100, re-enter the system at some time in the future, complete the contractor information and submit the contractor information to the system without having to resubmit any information previously entered.

As described above, when a company seeks to outsource work, it may log onto the system 10 to search for contractors. An example of an outsourcing search template 2300 is depicted in Figure 4. In this embodiment, the outsourcing company may enter corporate information in contact name field 2310; company name field 2320; contact title field 2330; address fields 2340, 2341, 2342, 2343, 2344; e-mail address field 2350; phone field 2360; and fax field 2370. With respect to the outsourced work or project, the outsourcing company may enter general information in outsourcing title field 2380, outsourcing description field 2390, cost estimate field 2400, and time estimate field 2410. Outsourcing occupational classification field 2420 tracks occupational classification field 2170 and preferably contains a similar menu, such as Accountants and Auditors, Advertising and Promotions Managers, Aerospace Engineers, and the like. A products and/or services field 2430 may be provided for the entry of key words and phrases describing required services. Results field 2440 includes two choices: automatic and manual. In the automatic mode, the outsourcing company selects the maximum number of contractors it would like to consider. In contrast, the manual mode permits the outsourcing company to select the specific contractors it wishes to consider. Search template 2300 employs a member identification number field 2450 and a password field 2460 which allows subsequent access to the outsourcing search request. Search now button 2470 initiates an immediate search, and save button 2480 permits partially created search criteria to be saved for a future search.

Figure 5 demonstrates one manner of communicating the search results according to the invention through the employment of search results template 2700. Search results template 2700 includes company fields 2710, 2720, 2730, 2740; location fields 2711, 2721, 2731, 2741; territory fields 2712, 2722, 2732, 2742; occupational classification fields 2713, 2723, 2733, 2743; products and/or services fields 2714, 2724,

2734, 2744; and company description fields 2715, 2725, 2735, 2745, which correspond to fields 2120, 2130-34, 2190, 2170, 2180 and 2200, respectively, as discussed above. Figure 5 is illustrative of a search that produced four contractors. It is understood that a greater or fewer number of contractors may be found based on the search criteria of the outsourcing company.

Figure 6 illustrates a preferred bid template 2500 according to the principles of the invention. Bid template 2500 may be utilized to provide the outsourcing information submitted by an outsourcing company to each contractor meeting the search criteria of the outsourcing company. Bid template 2500 includes an outsourcing company field 2510; location field 2520; outsourcing title field 2530; outsourcing description field 2540; cost estimate field 2550; time estimate field 2560; and occupational classification field 2570. These fields contain information as received from an outsourcing company and correspond to fields 2320, 2340-44, 2380, 2390, 2400, 2410 and 2420, respectively, as discussed above. The contractor may enter information responsive to the outsourcing request in contractor company field 2580, contractor cost estimate field 2590, contractor time estimate field 2600, and contractor comments field 2610. Contractor company field 2580 may be a menu of contractors selected by the outsourcing company. Submit button 2620 may be provided to permit a contractor's bid information to be conveyed to the system 10.

Figure 7A depicts a bid information report 2900, which provides a suitable form to convey bid information from contractors to an outsourcing company. The outsourcing company may select a contractor from the bidding company field 2910, which may include a menu of bidding contractors. Based on this selection, cost estimate fields 2920, 2921, time estimate fields 2930, 2931, bidding contractor's comments field 2940, bidding contractor's name field 2950, e-mail field 2951, phone field 2952, and fax field 2953 are displayed to correspond with the selected contractor. Using bid information report 2900, an outsourcing company may quickly obtain a bidding contractor's cost, time, comments and contact information. Another manner of reporting bid information is demonstrated in Figure 7B. As illustrated, bid information table 3000 simultaneously presents bid information from a plurality of contractors. Alternatively, the system 10 could send the outsourcing company an address to view bid information

report 2900, bid information table 3000, or the like. The address could be, for example, a uniform resource locator (URL).

Figure 8 provides a contractor evaluation template 4000 according to the principles of the invention. After the outsourced work is completed, an outsourcing company may enter evaluation information into the contractor evaluation template 4000 so that the contractor performance may be reviewed by other users. It is understood that an evaluation may include any number of considerations and that the following are merely illustrative. For example, the contractor evaluation template 4000 depicted in Figure 8 includes a contractor name field 4100, outsourcing company contact name 4110, outsourcing company name field 4120, and outsourcing company contact title 4130. In this example, contractor evaluation template 4000 permits the outsourcing company to assess contractor performance, including overall performance field 4140, timing field 4150, budget field 4160, managerial role field 4170, contract term field 4180, recommendation field 4190 and comments field 4191. After entering information in the above fields, the outsourcing company may select the submit button 4195 to transfer its assessment of a contractor's work on a particular project to the system 10.

A user may enter the system 10 to gather information regarding a particular contractor. For example, an outsourcing company may want an assessment of a contractor before accepting a bid from that contractor on a given project. Figure 9 presents one suitable report form 5000 which includes a performance field 5010, timing field 5020, budget field 5030, managerial role field 5040, recommendation field 5050 and comments field 5060 for a selected contractor entered into contractor field 5070. These fields correspond to the fields illustrated in Figure 8. Of course, report form 5000 may include a statistical analysis of the reported fields of a particular company and a comparison to all contractors, contractors within a particular class, contractors evaluated by a particular outsourcing company, and the like that may facilitate understanding of the reported information.

Likewise a contractor may enter evaluation information regarding an outsourcing company to allow review by other users. One suitable outsourcing evaluation template 6000 is demonstrated in Figure 10 according to the principles of the invention. After the outsourced work is completed, a contractor may enter evaluation information into the outsourcing company evaluation template 6000 so that the outsourcing company

performance may be reviewed by other users. It is understood that outsourcing company evaluation template 6000 is merely illustrative and that a variety of other of considerations may be useful according to the principles of the invention. The outsourcing company evaluation template 6000 depicted in Figure 10 includes outsourcing company name field 6100, contractor contact name field 6110, contractor name field 6120, and contractor contact title field 6130. In this example, outsourcing company evaluation template 6000 permits a contractor to assess outsourcing company performance, including recommendation field 6140, timely payment field 6150, defined goals/objectives field 6160, availability and readiness to aid and assist field 6170, importance field 6180, openness to suggestions field 6190, compatibility field 6200 and comments field 6210. After entering information in the above fields, the contractor may select the submit button 6220 to transfer its assessment of an outsourcing company on a particular project to the system 10.

A user may enter the system 10 to obtain information regarding a particular outsourcing company. A contractor may review assessments of an outsourcing company before deciding whether to bid on a particular project or may use the assessment information as factor in estimating the time or pricing of a bid. Figure 11 presents one suitable report form 7000 for an outsourcing company that includes a recommendation field 7010, timely payment field 7020, defined goals/objectives field 7030, availability and readiness to aid and assist field 7040, importance field 7050, openness to suggestions field 7060, compatibility field 7070 and comments field 7080 for a selected outsourcing company entered into outsourcing company field 7090. These fields correspond to the fields illustrated in Figure 10. As described above, report form 7000 may include a statistical analysis of the reported fields of a particular company and a comparison to all outsourcing companies, those within a particular class, those as evaluated by a particular user, and the like that may facilitate understanding of the reported information.

Sales associates earn commissions and awards based on their level of developed business. As such, when users employ the system 10, as a result of communication with a particular sales associate, users may be requested to enter a sales associate identification number. These numbers are typically provided by the system 10. In a preferred embodiment, a sales associate completes a sales associate template 9000,

which is illustrated in Figure 12, and receives an identification number thereafter. Sales associate template 9000 provides name fields 9010, 9011, 9012; address fields 9020, 9021, 9022, 9023; phone field 9030; e-mail address field 9040; and, for tax purposes, Social Security number field 9050.

The invention may be advantageously combined with a number of databases, such as a résumé database, an on-line stock statistics database, an interactive bulletin board database, and an on-line newspaper database. An example of a résumé database system is disclosed in U.S. Patent No. 5,758,324, to Hartman et al., the disclosure of which is incorporated by reference in its entirety, which may enable firms to determine solutions to their long-term labor needs. A stock statistics database would allow a user to run a regression of various stocks to evaluate the cyclical nature of a given stock and compare the results with, for example, the Dow Jones Average or the New York Stock Exchange Total Market Index. An electronic bulletin board database may be used to create a national business forum, focusing on Internet commerce, to provide a platform for the growth of corporations that need access to networks and venture capital. An on-line newspaper database may be used in conjunction with a searching device to conduct searches of on-line news archives and newspapers of the world and to e-mail the link (e.g., the URL) identified by the searching device to a results template that categorizes the location of identified articles of interest for each user into such headings as financial, world news, sports, etc. The combination of these databases with the invention provides a diversity of services that allows a one-stop-shopping venue for businesses. The invention also allows users to specialize their research within one domain, thus allowing them the ability to perform more efficient searches from a larger pool of information. Thus, the invention provides a node for those wishing to offer services to the global marketplace, and those seeking work, employees, venture capital, important news, and extensive business information.

Another database useful in combination with the invention is an on-line business journal database. The business journal database, in combination with system 10, may preferably commission and publish articles on topics receiving the greatest interest on the bulletin board through the utilization of a screening mechanism. For example, the screening mechanism may alphabetize all words entered into the bulletin board along with the number of times each word appears. A list of words organized from the

greatest use to least use may then be prepared in a report form after eliminating words such as "a," "the," "that," and the like. The most commonly used words, which correspond to current topics, may form the basis of research and publication by the system 10. Additionally, the system 10 may publish graduate work relating to economics and business.

The invention may also be useful for facilitating firms seeking venture capital funds and those seeking to invest in such firms. Firms seeking venture capital funding may enter their business plans or key information into a database which may then be searched by investors who select firms, send information to those firms through the database, and receive responses using modified forms, templates and reports of the invention. Conversely, investors may enter investment criteria onto a database, and firms seeking capital may search the database to identify appropriate investors. The transmission of templates between the firms and investors may then be accomplished according to the principles of the invention. In a similar fashion, firms seeking to identify joint venture partners, or merger and acquisition targets, may enter company information so that others may search this information to identify potential partners and acquisition targets. Of course, the system 10 would necessarily need to comply with state and federal laws and regulations, and it is likely that confidentiality agreements and the like would be supplied.

In another aspect, insurance companies may enter general information regarding health care, disability, automobile, home, and the like, into a database that may be searched by individuals and companies. Individual and company information may be transmitted to selected insurers that respond via the database using modified templates that are particular to the insurance industry according to the invention. The invention may also be useful to match shipping companies with those having shipping needs and those wishing to identify firms and forward and spot rates for the exchange of foreign currency.

In still another aspect, companies may enter job openings that may be searched by potential employees who may send skill information and/or résumés to the companies using the templates and methods of the invention modified to the area of job openings. For example, as described using Figs. 1, 2A and 13, an employer may use a client machine 26 to connect to the server 12 via a communication link 28. The

employer may then log onto the database 16 at step 100. Optionally, a password may be required of the employer at step 110. As described above, if a password is required and the employer has not used the system previously, as seen at step 120, the employer is given a password by the server 12, as seen at step 130; otherwise the employer must enter a password, as seen at step 140. Another optional feature is that the employer may enter a sales associate identification number corresponding to an agent who procured the employer's use of the system 10, as seen at steps 150 and 160.

After logging onto the server 12, an employer may enter pertinent information into the database 16 concerning a job opening, including the employer's field of business, position available, work schedule, wage, and the like, as represented by step 1170 in Figure 13. An example of the various data entered by the employer at step 1170 is shown in Figure 14. It is understood that a wide variety of data may be entered at step 1170 that is not limited to the types listed with respect to Figure 14, which is merely illustrative. For example, other information may include the date the position will become available, the employer's location, whether the position is temporary or permanent, and the like.

A job seeker may connect to the server 12 from a client machine 26 via a communication link 28, as depicted in step 1200 in Figure 13. As discussed above, the job seeker may also be required to enter a password or other identifying information, including a sales associate identification number. Once connected, the job seeker may enter into the database 16 specific occupation, industry or other criteria indicating the type of position sought. This is represented by step 1210. An example of criteria that may be entered by a job seeker is demonstrated in Figure 15. Of course, other criteria may be substituted or added as the information disclosed in Figure 15 is illustrative. As described above with respect to steps 200 and 210, steps 1200 and 1210 may be performed by one or more job seekers before, during or after step 1170 is performed by one or more employers.

After job information regarding available positions is entered into the database 16 by one or more employers, a search designated as step 1220 in Figure 13 may be performed using server 12 to identify job postings meeting the criteria specified by a job seeker at step 1210. Once the search of the database 16 is performed for the specified criteria, a list of employers may be identified who will receive information about the job

seeker as is represented by step 1230. One form of a typical listing of employers identified in a search is illustrated in Figure 16.

The server 12 may then transmit job seeker information to selected employers as is depicted by step 1240. The transmission may include a job template. The job template may be a form containing data fields that must be filled in by an employer if the employer is interested in continuing to pursue the job seeker or in hiring the job seeker. The transmission of job seeker information to the selected employers is preferably done via e-mail but may be accomplished using another type of communication protocol or method.

Once those in the group of selected employers choosing to pursue a job seeker have done so, reply information may be transmitted back to the server 12, and accepted by the server 12, as is represented by step 1250. The reply information may be processed if necessary and may then be placed in a table of reply information, as is represented by step 1260. An example of the contents of a reply information report 1600 is shown in Figure 17.

The table of reply information or, alternatively, an address of the location of such a table may then be sent to a job seeker via a communication protocol such as e-mail. This is depicted at step 1270. Using this table, a job seeker may then select an employer for whom he or she wishes to work or one or more employers for which he or she desires to continue to pursue.

As discussed above, employers may place information regarding job opportunities into the server 12. An example of a useful job opening template 1300 that may be employed according to the principles of the invention is depicted in Figure 14. Job opening template 1300 supplies a contact name field 1310; company name field 1311; address fields 1312; e-mail address field 1313; phone field 1314; and fax field 1315. Industry classification field 1320 preferably contains a menu of industries such as Banking, Consulting, Manufacturing, and the like. Occupational classification field 1321 preferably contains a menu of occupations, such as Accountants and Auditors, Advertising and Promotions Managers, Aerospace Engineers, and the like. Job description field 1322 permits the employer to submit information about the job opportunity in key words and phrases or in prose. Work schedule filed 1323 permits entry of work days and hours. Length of contract field 1324 allows an employer to enter

the duration of the available job. Post active field 1325 permits the employer to indicate the length of time the job posting should remain active on the server 12. The server 12 may automatically remove the job information from the database when it ceases to be active. Reset button 1330 allows the employer to instantly clear all fields on the job opening template 1300. Selection of the submit button 1340 permits the job opening information to be placed on the server 12. Continue to mini-application button 1350 allows the employer to create an application for a job seeker which is further described in detail below.

As described above, when an individual seeks available job opportunities, he or she may log onto the server 12 to search for posted jobs. An example of job search template 1400 is depicted in Figure 15. Using this template, a job seeker may enter personal information in name field 1410; address field 1411; e-mail address field 1412; phone field 1413; and fax field 1414. Occupational specification fields 1420, 1421, 1422, 1423, 1424 track occupational classification field 1321 and preferably contain similar menus, such as Accountants and Auditors, Advertising and Promotions Managers, Aerospace Engineers, and the like. A products and/or services field 2430 may be provided for the entry of key words and phrases describing required services. Industry specification fields 1425, 1426, 1427 track industry classification field 1320 and preferably contain menus of industries, such as Banking, Consulting, Manufacturing, and the like. Skills field 1428 permits a job seeker to enter keywords and phrases or prose. As described above with respect to outsourcing, job search template 1400 employs a member identification number field 1430 and a password field 1431 which allow subsequent access to the search request. Search now button 1432 initiates an immediate search, and save button 1433 permits entered search criteria to be saved for a future search.

Figure 16 demonstrates one manner of communicating the search results according to the invention through the employment of job search results template 1500. Job search results template 1500 includes job classification field 1510, company name field 1511, link to mini-application button 1512, link to company evaluation button 1513, and job description field 1514. Job classification field 1510, company name field 1511, and job description field correspond to occupational classification 1321, company name field 1311, and job description 1322, respectively. Selection of button 1512 or

1513 results in the display of the employer's job application or the employer's evaluation, respectively. Figure 16 is illustrative of a search that produced four posted jobs. It is understood that a greater or fewer number of jobs may be found based on the search criteria of the job seeker and the nature and quantity of the posted jobs.

Figure 17 illustrates a reply information report 1600, which provides a suitable manner of communicating a summary of reply information from employers to a job seeker. Reply information report may include employer field 1610, address field 1611, position field 1612, schedule field 1613, wage field 1614, e-mail field 1615, phone filed 1616, and fax field 1617. Of course, any of the recited fields may be deleted and other fields added as dictated by design considerations or the practical needs of employers, positions, or job seekers. Report 1600 allows a job seeker to quickly compare potential positions. As described above, with respect to other tables, the server 12 could send a job seeker an address, such as a URL, to view the contents of reply information report 1600. Additionally a ranking algorithm may be utilized to present positions in an order beginning with positions which most closely match the criteria of a job seeker. It is understood that ranking algorithms may be employed in any report or table of the invention where a list of alternatives is presented.

In one preferred embodiment, an employer may create a mini-application. This may be accomplished as part of step 1170 by selection of the continue to mini-application button 1350 of job opening template 1300, as depicted in Figure 14. One manner of creating a mini-application is by selecting application questions from an application question template that lists hundreds or even thousands of questions. A portion of such an application question template is illustrated in Figure 18. An employer may choose questions from the application question template by clicking a mouse pointer on the question of box adjacent to the question or on the question. The question fields 1700 illustrated in Figure 18 are of a general nature and it is understood that question fields of a more specific nature maybe included such as specific questions regarding skills and experience, such as programming languages, supervisory skills, budget responsibility and the like. Of course, a mini-application may be created by an outsourcing company for each service or product for which they are in need. The application for services may be generated in the same manner that a mini-application for

a job applicant is created. The template may be stored in the database and completed by contractors or others desirous of providing the requested services or products.

The application question template may use Active Server Page technology or other suitable software to create a mini-application where every field is a text field that is marked in the database as it is selected. The selected fields may be marked with an identifier that is indexed to the job opening template completed by the employer. Another method of generating a mini-application is to create the mini-application using an application question template and then to save the created mini-application as a HTML file using Oracle 8i or other suitable software.

After an employer chooses all of the question fields desired for use in the mini-application for the particular job the employer is posting, the employer may select the post job button 1730 to have the job information and mini-application posted on the server 12. The reset button 1740 may be selected to clear all selected question fields so that an employer may restart the question field selection process. If an employer decides not to create a mini-application after entering the application question template, then the employer may choose the back button 1750 to exit the application question template and return to job opening template 1300. Therefore, an employer may create and store a job opening template 1300 and mini-application on the server 12. Thus, according to this embodiment, at step 1240 a job seeker's transmission to selected employers includes information responsive to the job opening template as well as answers to questions from the mini-application.

In another preferred embodiment, the employer may create the mini-application at step 1250 after receiving job seeker information at step 1240. According to this embodiment, the employer only provides application questions to job seekers that are interested in the employer. The job seeker may then answer the mini-application questions and the server 12 may prepare a table of information relating to the job seekers for review by the employer according to the principles of the invention.

In another preferred embodiment, the server 12 saves job seeker information and search criteria of each job seeker who uses the server 12. After a job seeker performs a search, the server 12 will perform the same search and send matching employer information to the job seeker on a periodic basis, e.g., daily, weekly, monthly, as specified by the job seeker. This embodiment eliminates the need for a job seeker

continually perform searches to identify job opportunities that post after the job seeker conducts a search of the database 16.

As described above in the context of contractors and outsourcing companies, evaluations of employers and job seekers may provide useful information to users of the invention. Thus, employers may evaluate employees that they engage using the system 10, and, in a similar manner, employers may be evaluated by job seekers. The evaluation information allows all system users to assess one another during the process of searching for job opportunities, selecting of employers to receive job seeker information, completing a mini-application, and making and accepting a job offer. The evaluation information may be incorporated into the job search results template 1500, reply information report 1600, and other tables and reports according to the principles of the invention.

Regarding the depicted templates, forms and reports of the invention, it is understood that a fewer or greater number of fields may be employed by adding or subtracting choices or by consolidating or expanding choices as desired. Additionally, it is further understood that certain of the fields may substitute menu selections or a lookup table for text entry fields or vice versa, according to the design criteria of the application. Save and reset buttons may be used in combination with one or more of the templates, forms, and reports. A sales associate number field may also be provided in job opening template 1300, job search template 1400, contractor template 2100, outsourcing search template 2300 or any other template to facilitate the award of commissions and incentives to the appropriate sales associate, representative or agent. A field may be provided to allow files to be entered into a template, such as a building plan, schematic diagram, job description, or resume, to facilitate understanding of a project or a user. A feedback submission field may be preferably provided so that users may convey assessment information of the system 10 to the controller of the system 10 so that the system 10 may be continually improved.

What is claimed is:

1. A method of communicating outsourcing information between an outsourcing company and a plurality of contractors comprising:

storing contractor information into a database;

searching the database to identify a first subset of contractors meeting specific criteria;

transmitting outsourcing information to the first subset of contractors from the database;

accepting bid information at the database from a second subset of contractors; and

transmitting processed bid information to the outsourcing company from the database.

2. The method of claim 1 wherein transmitting outsourcing information to the first subset of contractors further comprises transmitting evaluations of outsourcing companies.

3. The method of claim 1 wherein transmitting processed bid information to the outsourcing company further comprises transmitting evaluations of contractors.

4. An apparatus for communicating outsourcing information between an outsourcing company and a plurality of contractors comprising:

a server computer having a storage area;

a plurality of contractor computers, each of said plurality of contractor computers communicating contractor information to said storage area of said server computer; and

an outsourcing computer, said outsourcing computer communicating specific criteria to said server computer;

wherein said server computer identifies and transmits outsourcing information to a first subset of said plurality of contractor computers, accepts bid information from a second subset of said plurality of contractor computers, and transmits processed bid information to said outsourcing computer.

5. The apparatus of claim 4 wherein said server computer transmits performance evaluations to said contractor computers.

6. The apparatus of claim 4 wherein said server computer transmits performance evaluations to said outsourcing computer.

7. The apparatus of claim 4 wherein said server computer transmits a location in said storage area containing said bid information to said outsourcing computer.

8. In a system for communicating outsourcing information between an outsourcing company and a plurality of contractors, a computer-readable memory for storing data for access by an application program comprising:

a data structure stored in said computer-readable memory, said data structure including information used by said application program and including:

a plurality of contractor information fields;

a plurality of criteria fields used to search said plurality of contractor information fields;

a plurality of first subset fields for identifying a first subset of said plurality of contractors;

a plurality of outsourcing information fields for sending said outsourcing information to said first subset of said plurality of contractors;

a plurality of bid fields for accepting bid information from a second subset of said plurality of contractors; and

a plurality of bid information table fields for placing bid information for review by said outsourcing company.

9. The data structure of said computer-readable memory of claim 8 further comprising an address field for sending said outsourcing company an address location of said plurality of bid information table fields.

10. The data structure of said computer-readable memory of claim 8 further comprising a plurality of evaluation fields to permit evaluation of said plurality of contractors.

11. The data structure of said computer-readable memory of claim 8 further comprising a plurality of evaluation fields to permit evaluation of said outsourcing company.

12. A method of communicating job information between a job seeker and a plurality of employers comprising:

storing employer information on a database;

searching the database to identify a first subset of employers meeting job seeker criteria;

making job seeker information accessible to the first subset of employers from the database;

accepting reply information at the database from a second subset of employers; and

making processed reply information accessible to the job seeker from the database.

13. The method of claim 12 further comprising creating a mini-application; and storing the mini-application on the database.

14. The method of claim 13 further comprising making the mini-application accessible to the job seeker by transmitting the mini-application to the job seeker.

15. The method of claim 14 further comprising completing the mini-application and storing the completed mini-application on the database.

16. The method of claim 12 wherein making job seeker information accessible to the first subset of employers from the database further comprises making evaluations of job seekers accessible to the first subset of employers.

17. The method of claim 12 wherein making processed reply information accessible to the job seeker from the database further comprises making evaluations of employers accessible to the job seeker.

18. The method of claim 13 wherein creating a mini-application further comprises selecting questions from an application question template stored in the database.

19. An apparatus for communicating job information between a job seeker and a plurality of employers comprising:

a server computer having a storage area;

a plurality of employer computers, each of said plurality of employer computers communicating job information to said storage area of said server computer; and

a job seeker computer, said job seeker computer communicating job seeker information and specific criteria to said storage area of said server computer;

wherein said server computer makes job information accessible to the job seeker and makes job seeker information accessible to a first subset of said plurality of employer computers.

20. The apparatus of claim 19 wherein said server computer transmits to said job seeker computer a location in said storage area containing said processed reply information.

21. The apparatus of claim 19 wherein said storage area comprises an application question template.

22. The apparatus of claim 19 wherein said server computer stores a mini-application in said storage area.

23. The apparatus of claim 19 wherein said server computer stores a completed mini-application in said storage area.

24. The apparatus of claim 19 wherein said server computer stores evaluations from said employer computers in said storage area and transmits the evaluations to said employer computers.

25. The apparatus of claim 19 wherein said server computer stores evaluations from said job seeker computer in said storage area and transmits the evaluations to said job seeker computer.

26. In a system for communicating job information between a job seeker and a plurality of employers, a computer-readable memory for storing data for access by an application program comprising:

a data structure stored in said computer-readable memory, said data structure including information used by said application program and including:

a plurality of employer information fields;

a plurality of job seeker information fields;

a plurality of criteria fields used to search said plurality of employer information fields;

a plurality of first subset fields for identifying a first subset of said plurality of employers;

a plurality of job seeker information fields for sending said job seeker information to said first subset of said plurality of employers;

a plurality of reply fields for accepting reply information from a second subset of said plurality of employers; and

a plurality of reply information table fields for placing reply information for review by the job seeker.

27. The data structure of said computer-readable memory of claim 26 further comprising a plurality of application question fields.

28. The data structure of said computer-readable memory of claim 26 further comprising a plurality of mini-application question fields.

29. The data structure of said computer-readable memory of claim 26 further comprising a plurality of evaluation fields to permit evaluation of said plurality of employers.

30. The data structure of said computer-readable memory of claim 26 further comprising a plurality of evaluation fields to permit evaluation of said job seeker.

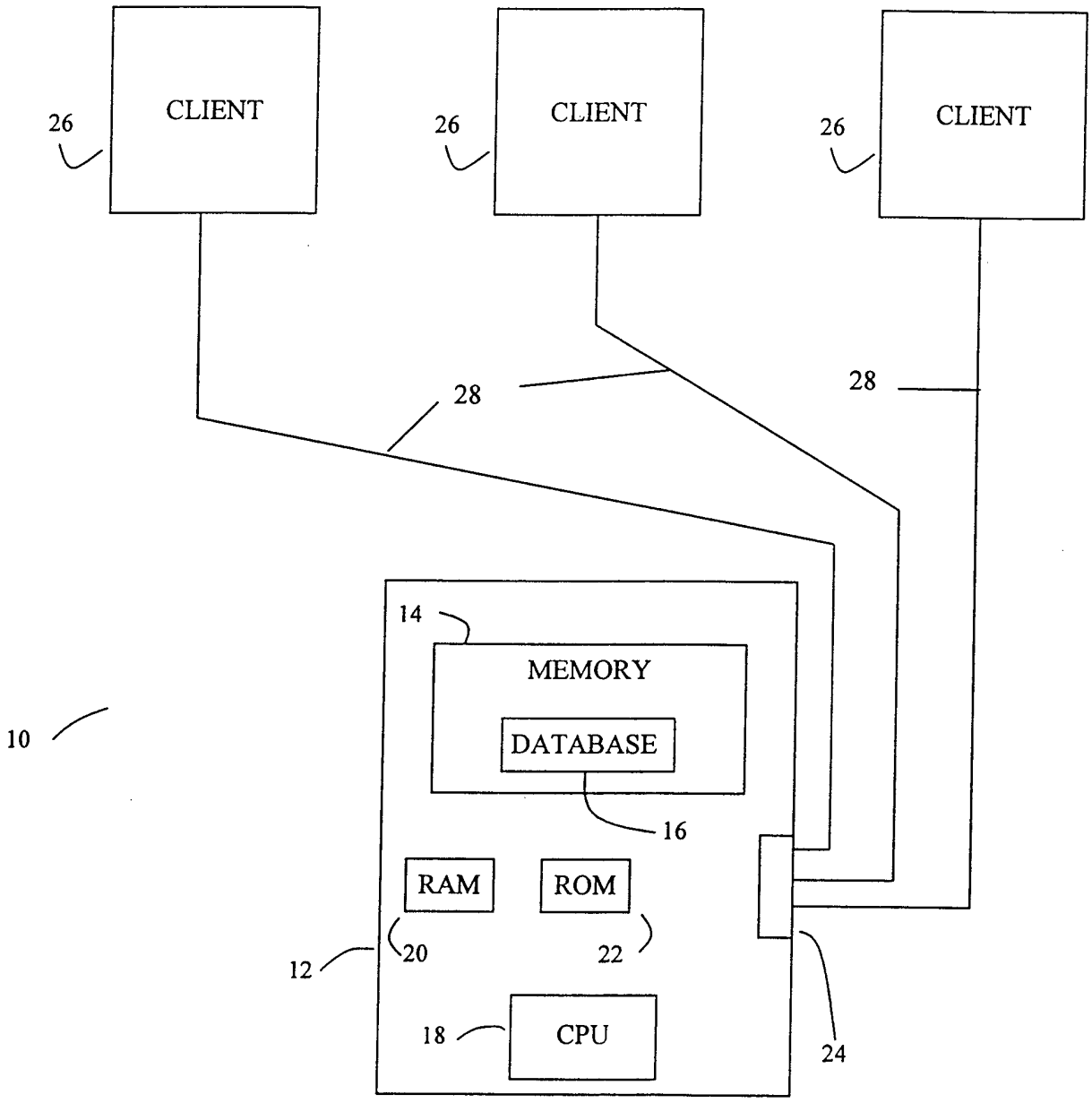

CLIENT
CLIENT
CLIENT
26
26
26
28
28
10
14
MEMORY
DATABASE
16
RAM
ROM
20
22
12
18
CPU
24
SERVER

FIGURE 1

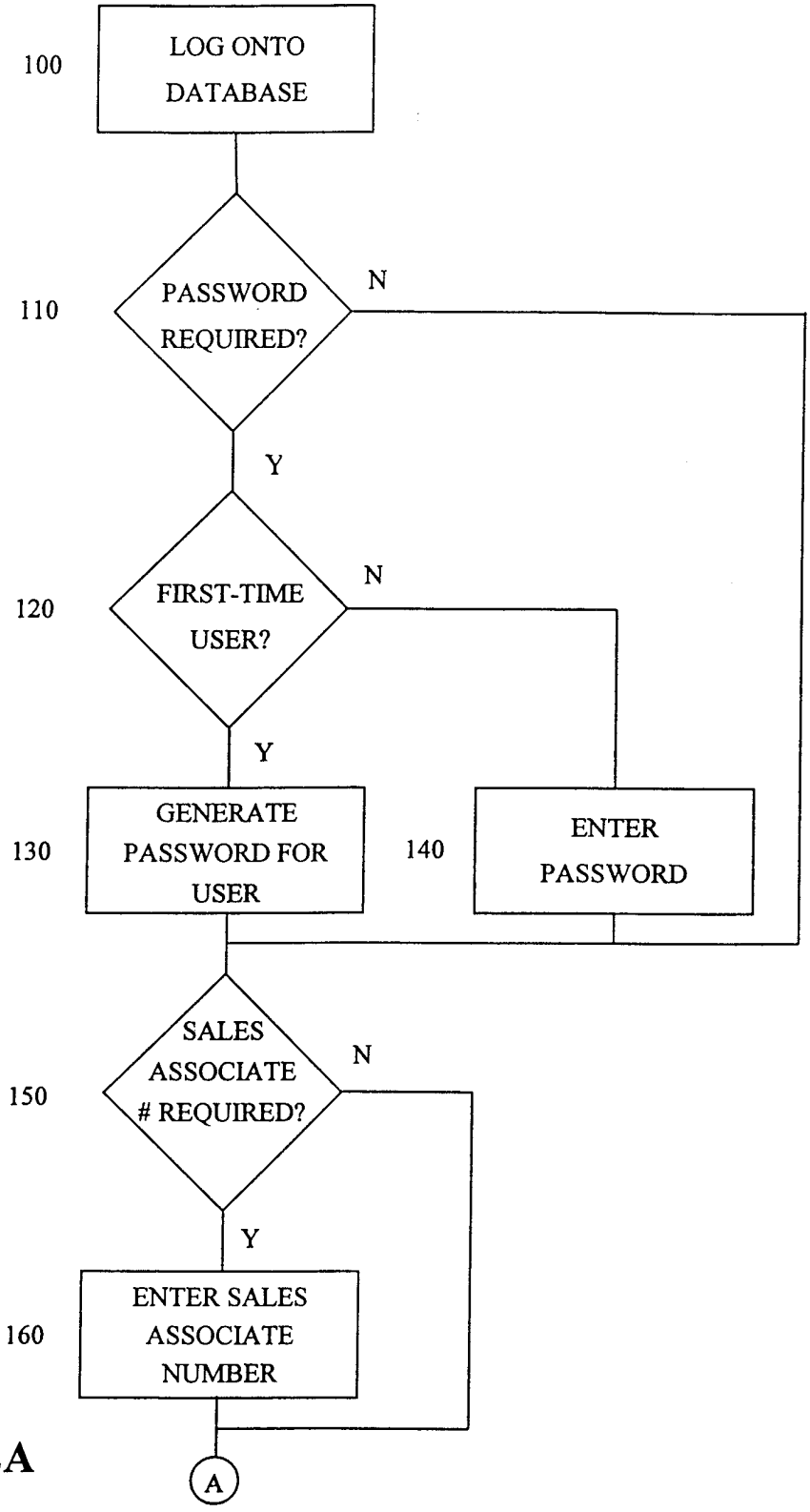

100
LOG ONTO DATABASE
110
PASSWORD REQUIRED?
N
Y
120
FIRST-TIME USER?
N
Y
130
GENERATE PASSWORD FOR USER
140
ENTER PASSWORD
150
SALES ASSOCIATE # REQUIRED?
N
Y
160
ENTER SALES ASSOCIATE NUMBER
A

FIGURE 2A

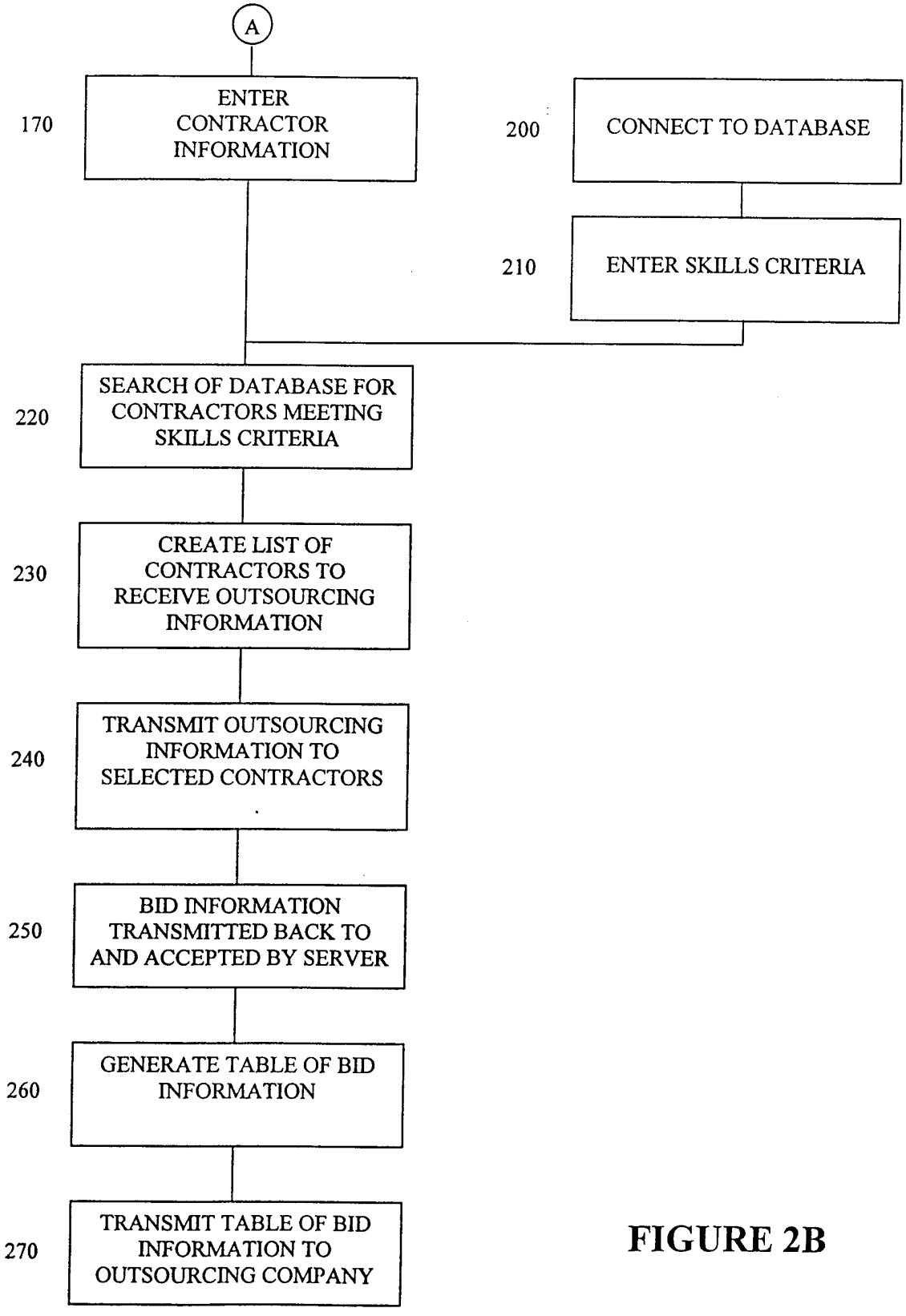
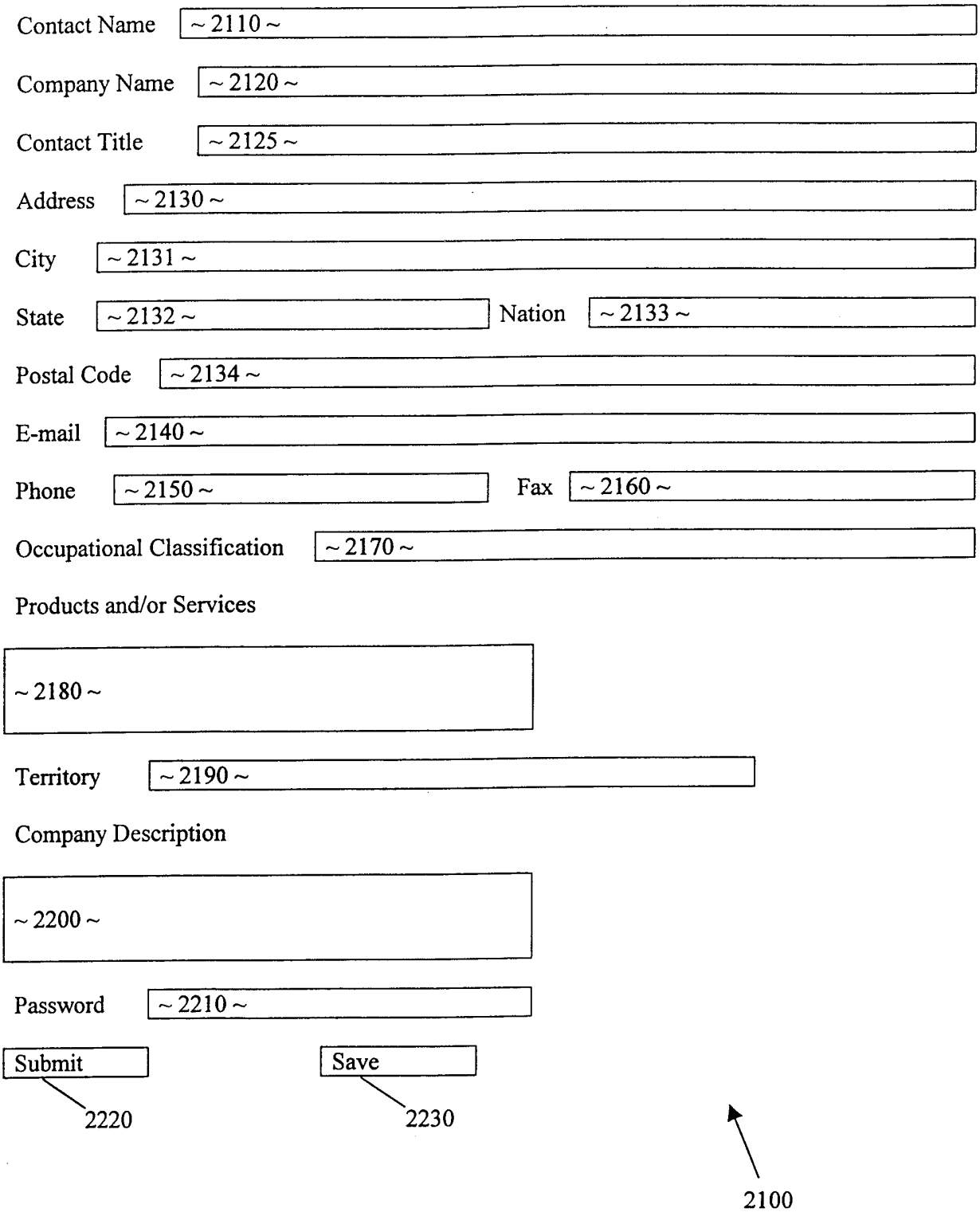

A
170
ENTER CONTRACTOR INFORMATION
200
CONNECT TO DATABASE
210
ENTER SKILLS CRITERIA
220
SEARCH OF DATABASE FOR CONTRACTORS MEETING SKILLS CRITERIA
230
CREATE LIST OF CONTRACTORS TO RECEIVE OUTSOURCING INFORMATION
240
TRANSMIT OUTSOURCING INFORMATION TO SELECTED CONTRACTORS
250
BID INFORMATION TRANSMITTED BACK TO AND ACCEPTED BY SERVER
260
GENERATE TABLE OF BID INFORMATION
270
TRANSMIT TABLE OF BID INFORMATION TO OUTSOURCING COMPANY

FIGURE 2B

FIGURE 3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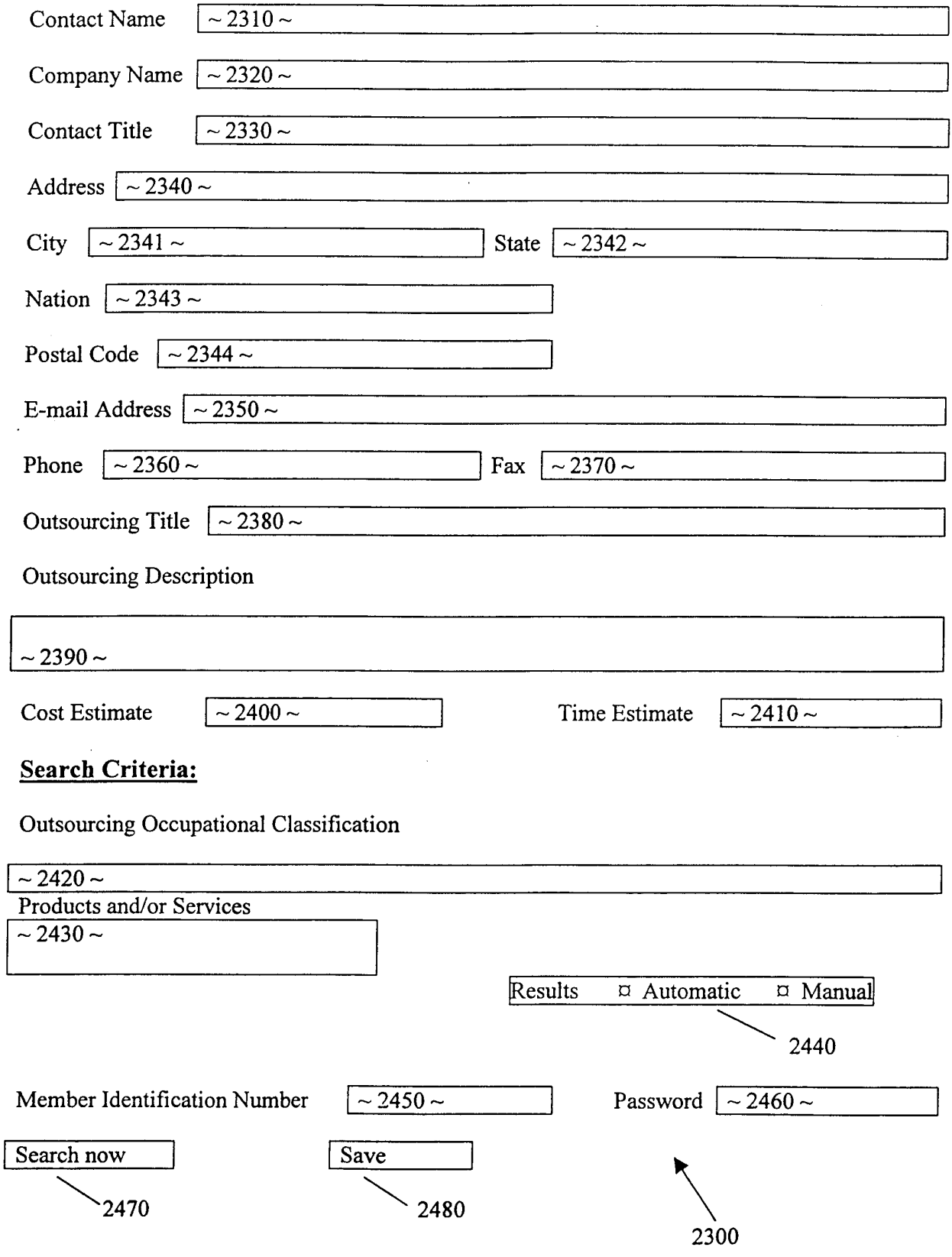
~ 2110 ~
Company Name
~ 2120 ~
Contact Title
~ 2125 ~
Address
~ 2130 ~
City
~ 2131 ~
State
~ 2132 ~
Nation
~ 2133 ~
Postal Code
~ 2134 ~
E-mail
~ 2140 ~
Phone
~ 2150 ~
Fax
~ 2160 ~
Occupational Classification
~ 2170 ~
Products and/or Services
~ 2180 ~
Territory
~ 2190 ~
Company Description
~ 2200 ~
Password
~ 2210 ~
Submit
Save
2220
2230
2100

FIGURE 4


Contact Name ~ 2310 ~
Company Name ~ 2320 ~
Contact Title ~ 2330 ~
Address ~ 2340 ~
City ~ 2341 ~
State ~ 2342 ~
Nation ~ 2343 ~
Postal Code ~ 2344 ~
E-mail Address ~ 2350 ~
Phone ~ 2360 ~
Fax ~ 2370 ~
Outsourcing Title ~ 2380 ~
Outsourcing Description
~ 2390 ~
Cost Estimate ~ 2400 ~
Time Estimate ~ 2410 ~
Search Criteria:
Outsourcing Occupational Classification
~ 2420 ~
Products and/or Services
~ 2430 ~
Results ¤ Automatic ¤ Manual
2440
Member Identification Number ~ 2450 ~
Password ~ 2460 ~
Search now
Save
2470
2480
2300

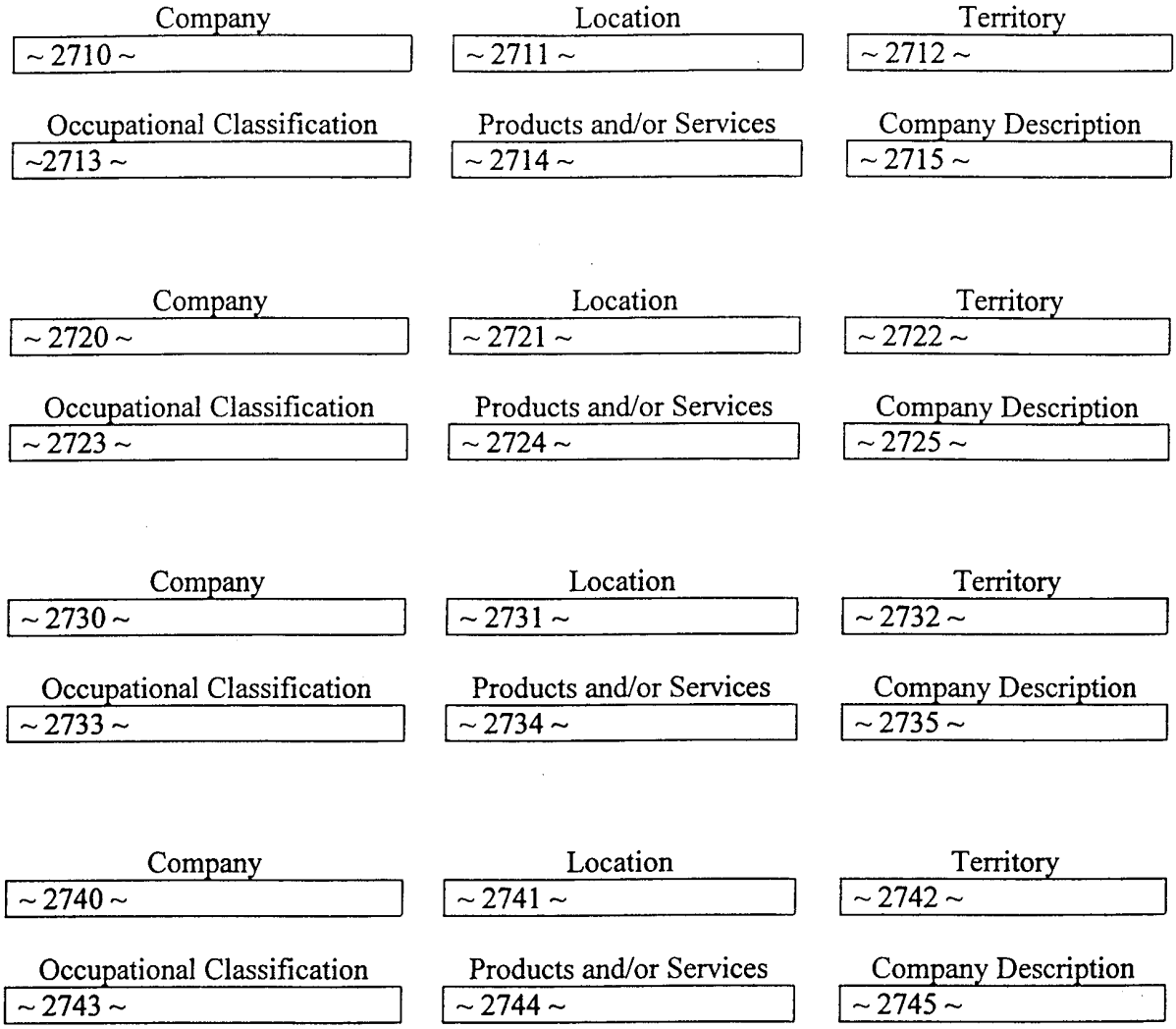


FIGURE 5

2700

Outsourcing Request Information

Outsourcing Company ~ 2510 ~

Location ~ 2520 ~

Outsourcing Title ~ 2530 ~

Outsourcing Description ~ 2540 ~

Cost Estimate ~ 2550 ~

Time Estimate ~ 2560 ~

Occupational Classification ~ 2570 ~

Select your company from list ~ 2580 ~

Your proposed cost estimate ~ 2590 ~

Your proposed time estimate ~ 2600 ~

Additional comments to be sent to outsourcing company

~ 2610 ~

Submit

2620

2500

FIGURE 6

Select a bidding contractor	~ 2910 ~
Your cost estimate	~ 2920 ~
Bidding contractor cost estimate	~ 2921 ~
Your time estimate	~ 2930 ~
Bidding contractor time estimate	~ 2931 ~
Bidding contractor's comments	~ 2940 ~

Bidding contractor's contact information

Name	~ 2950 ~
E-Mail	~ 2951 ~
Phone	~ 2952 ~
Fax	~ 2953 ~

FIGURE 7A

Contractor	Estimated Cost	Estimated Time	Comments	Name	e-mail	Phone	Fax
~ 2910 ~	~ 2921 ~	~ 2931 ~	~ 2940 ~	~ 2950 ~	~ 2951 ~	~ 2952 ~	~ 2953 ~

FIGURE 7B

3000

Contractor Company Name ~4100~

Contact Name ~4110~
Company Name ~4120~
Contact Title ~4130~

Please rate the overall performance of this contractor (1 lowest to 5 highest)

○ 1 ○ 2 ⊙ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

4140

This task was completed _____ schedule 4150

○ far behind ○ behind ⊙ on ○ ahead of ○ far ahead of

This project was _____ budget 4160

○ far over ○ over ⊙ on ○ under ○ far under

Your company's managerial role was mostly
Passive <----------> Active 4170

○ 1 ○ 2 ⊙ 3 ○ 4 ○ 5

The term of the contract was [ ] 4180

Would you recommend this contractor?

○ Yes ○ No 4190

Please make any additional comments here

~4191~

Submit

4195

4000

FIGURE 8

Contractor ~ 5070 ~

Performance (Scale of 1-5) ~ 5010 ~	Time Completed ~ 5020 ~	Budget ~ 5030 ~	Company Managerial Role (Scale of 1-5) ~5040 ~	Recommend? ~5050 ~
Comments ~ 5060 ~				

FIGURE 9

5000

FIGURE 10

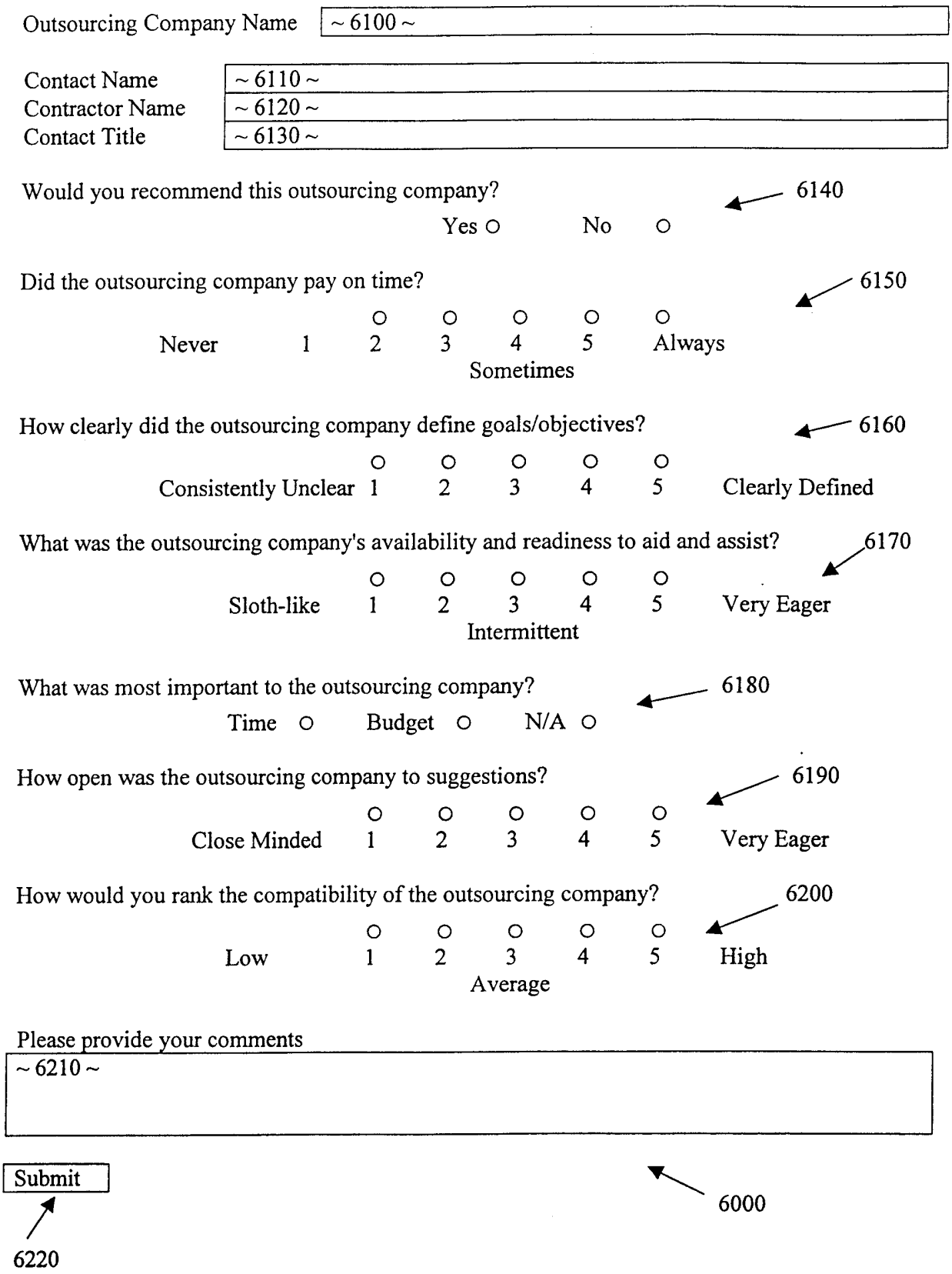

Outsourcing Company Name
~ 6100 ~
Contact Name
~ 6110 ~
Contractor Name
~ 6120 ~
Contact Title
~ 6130 ~
Would you recommend this outsourcing company?
6140
Yes O
No O
Did the outsourcing company pay on time?
6150
O O O O O
Never 1 2 3 4 5 Always
Sometimes
How clearly did the outsourcing company define goals/objectives?
6160
O O O O O
Consistently Unclear 1 2 3 4 5 Clearly Defined
What was the outsourcing company's availability and readiness to aid and assist?
6170
O O O O O
Sloth-like 1 2 3 4 5 Very Eager
Intermittent
What was most important to the outsourcing company?
6180
Time O
Budget O
N/A O
How open was the outsourcing company to suggestions?
6190
O O O O O
Close Minded 1 2 3 4 5 Very Eager
How would you rank the compatibility of the outsourcing company?
6200
O O O O O
Low 1 2 3 4 5 High
Average
Please provide your comments
~ 6210 ~
Submit
6220
6000

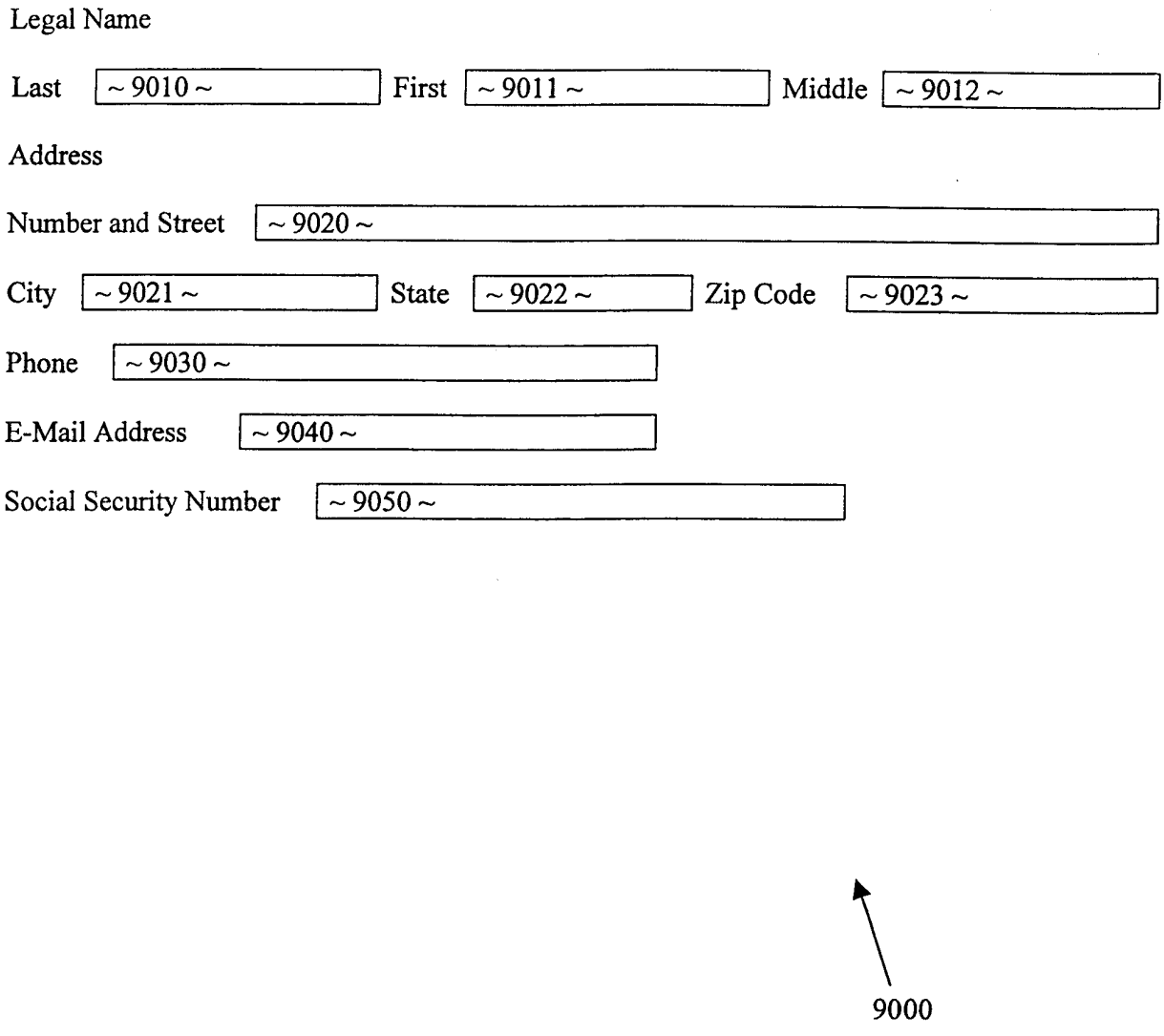
FIGURE 11

Outsourcing Company ~ 7090 ~

Recommend? ~ 7010 ~	Paid on Time (Scale of 1-5) ~ 7020 ~	Defined Goals (Scale of 1-5) ~7030 ~	Availability and Readiness to Aid and Assist (Scale of 1-5) ~ 7040 ~	Most important to Outsourcing Company ~7050 ~	Openness to Suggestions (Scale of 1-5) ~ 7060 ~	Compatibility (Scale of 1-5) ~ 7070 ~
Comments ~ 7080 ~						

7000

FIGURE 12


Legal Name
Last ~ 9010 ~
First ~ 9011 ~
Middle ~ 9012 ~
Address
Number and Street ~ 9020 ~
City ~ 9021 ~
State ~ 9022 ~
Zip Code ~ 9023 ~
Phone ~ 9030 ~
E-Mail Address ~ 9040 ~
Social Security Number ~ 9050 ~
9000

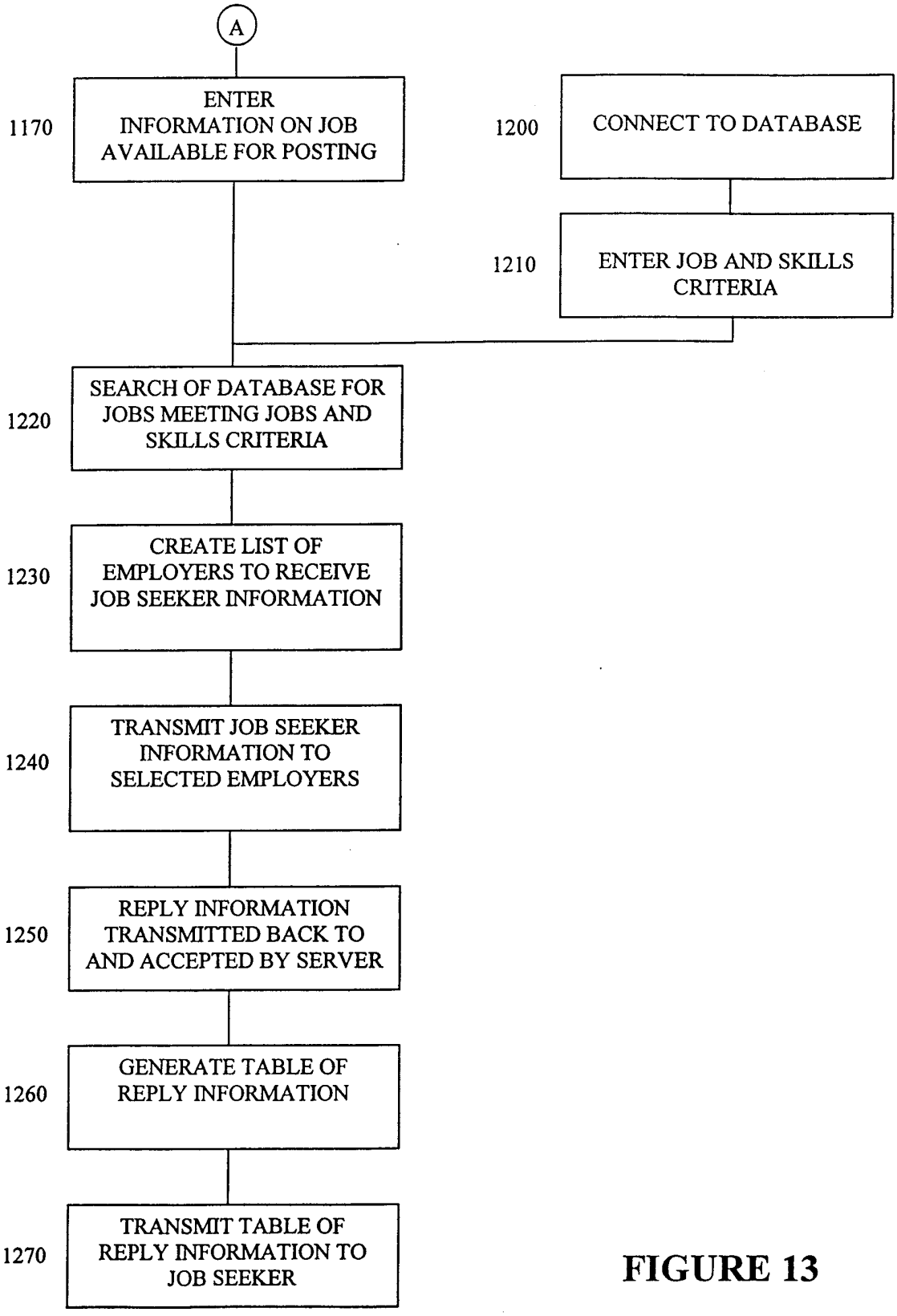

A
1170
ENTER INFORMATION ON JOB AVAILABLE FOR POSTING
1200
CONNECT TO DATABASE
1210
ENTER JOB AND SKILLS CRITERIA
1220
SEARCH OF DATABASE FOR JOBS MEETING JOBS AND SKILLS CRITERIA
1230
CREATE LIST OF EMPLOYERS TO RECEIVE JOB SEEKER INFORMATION
1240
TRANSMIT JOB SEEKER INFORMATION TO SELECTED EMPLOYERS
1250
REPLY INFORMATION TRANSMITTED BACK TO AND ACCEPTED BY SERVER
1260
GENERATE TABLE OF REPLY INFORMATION
1270
TRANSMIT TABLE OF REPLY INFORMATION TO JOB SEEKER

FIGURE 13

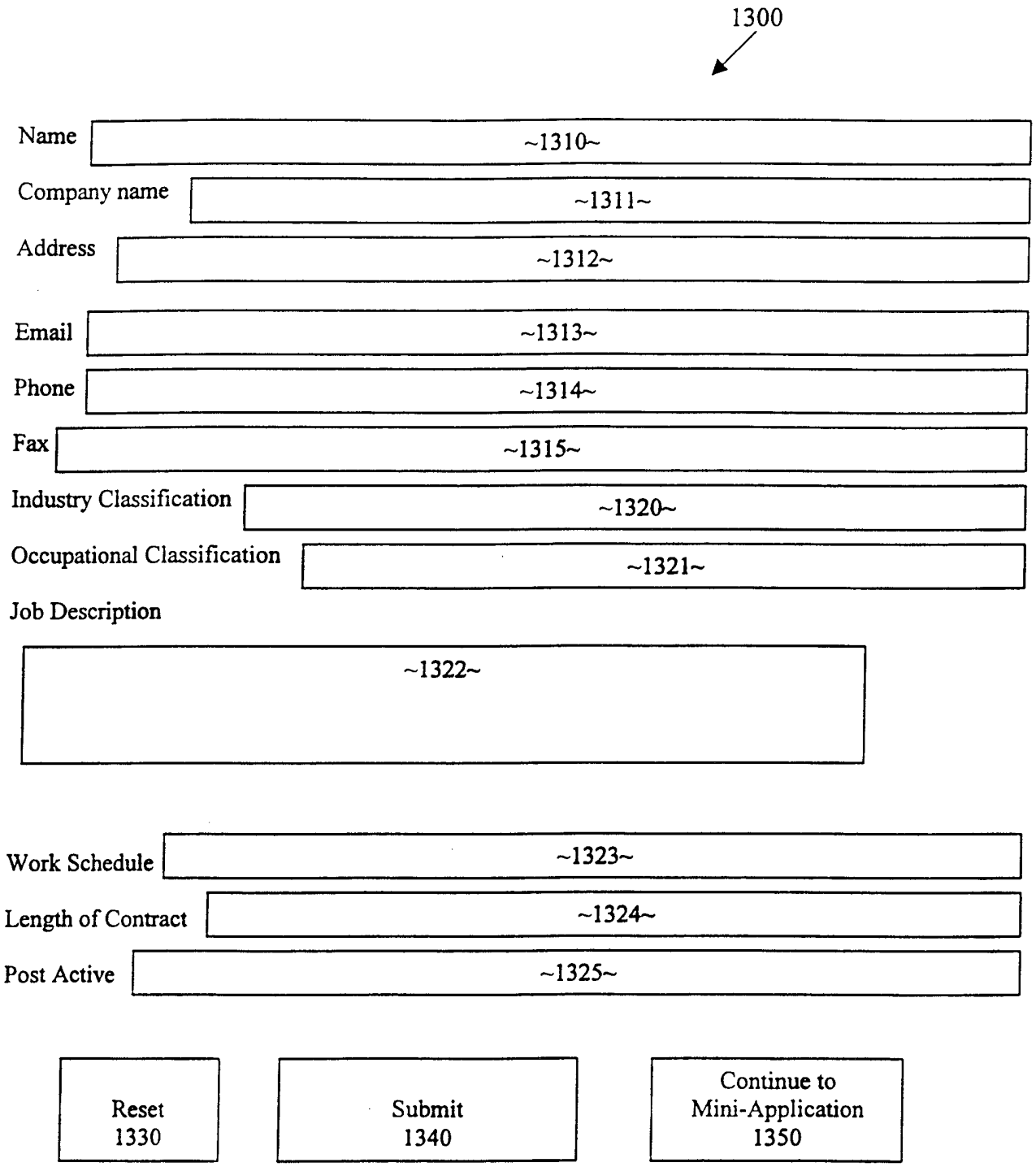

1300
Name
~1310~
Company name
~1311~
Address
~1312~
Email
~1313~
Phone
~1314~
Fax
~1315~
Industry Classification
~1320~
Occupational Classification
~1321~
Job Description
~1322~
Work Schedule
~1323~
Length of Contract
~1324~
Post Active
~1325~
Reset 1330
Submit 1340
Continue to Mini-Application 1350

FIGURE 14

FIGURE 15

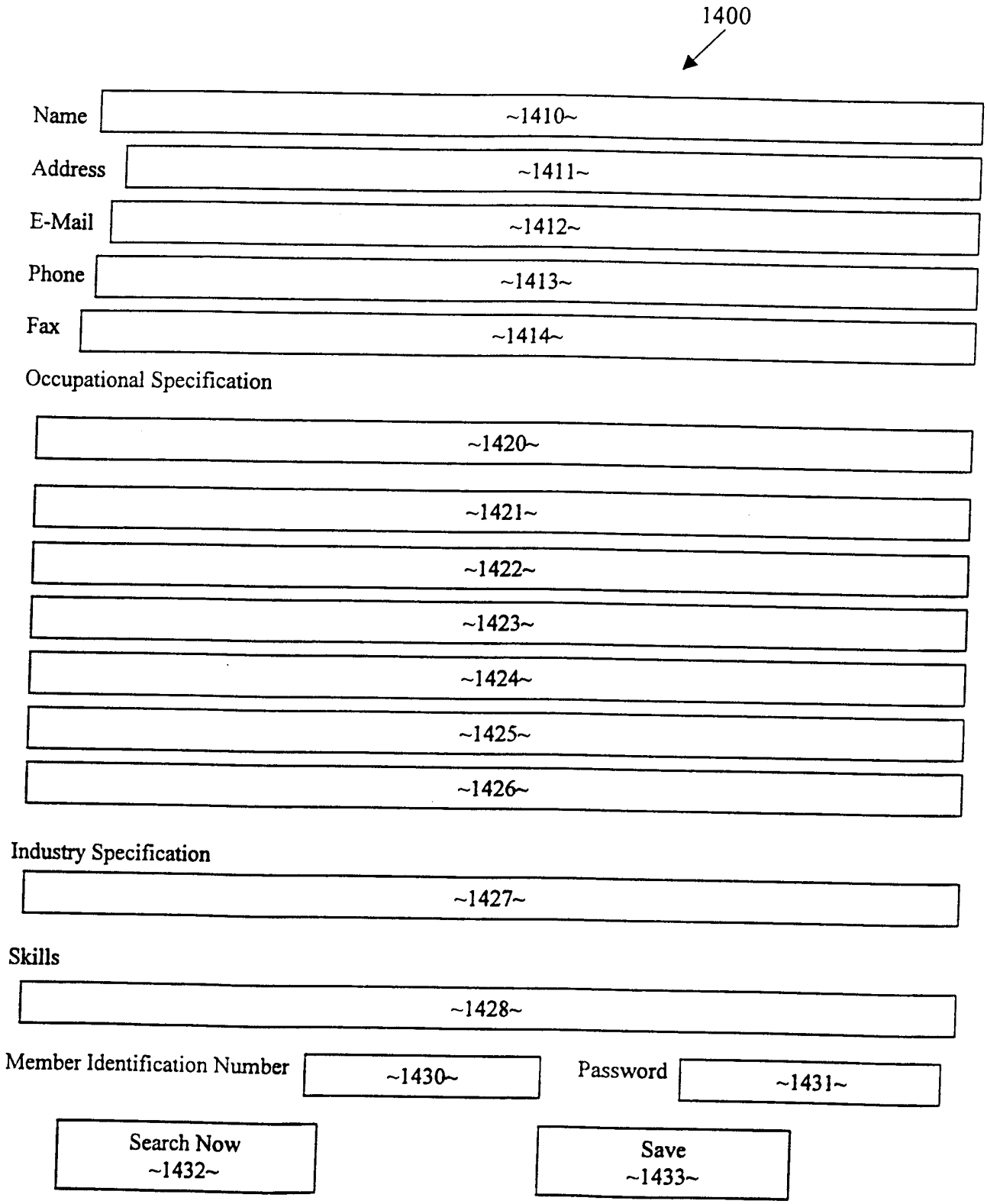

1400
Name
~1410~
Address
~1411~
E-Mail
~1412~
Phone
~1413~
Fax
~1414~
Occupational Specification
~1420~
~1421~
~1422~
~1423~
~1424~
~1425~
~1426~
Industry Specification
~1427~
Skills
~1428~
Member Identification Number
~1430~
Password
~1431~
Search Now
~1432~
Save
~1433~

FIGURE 16

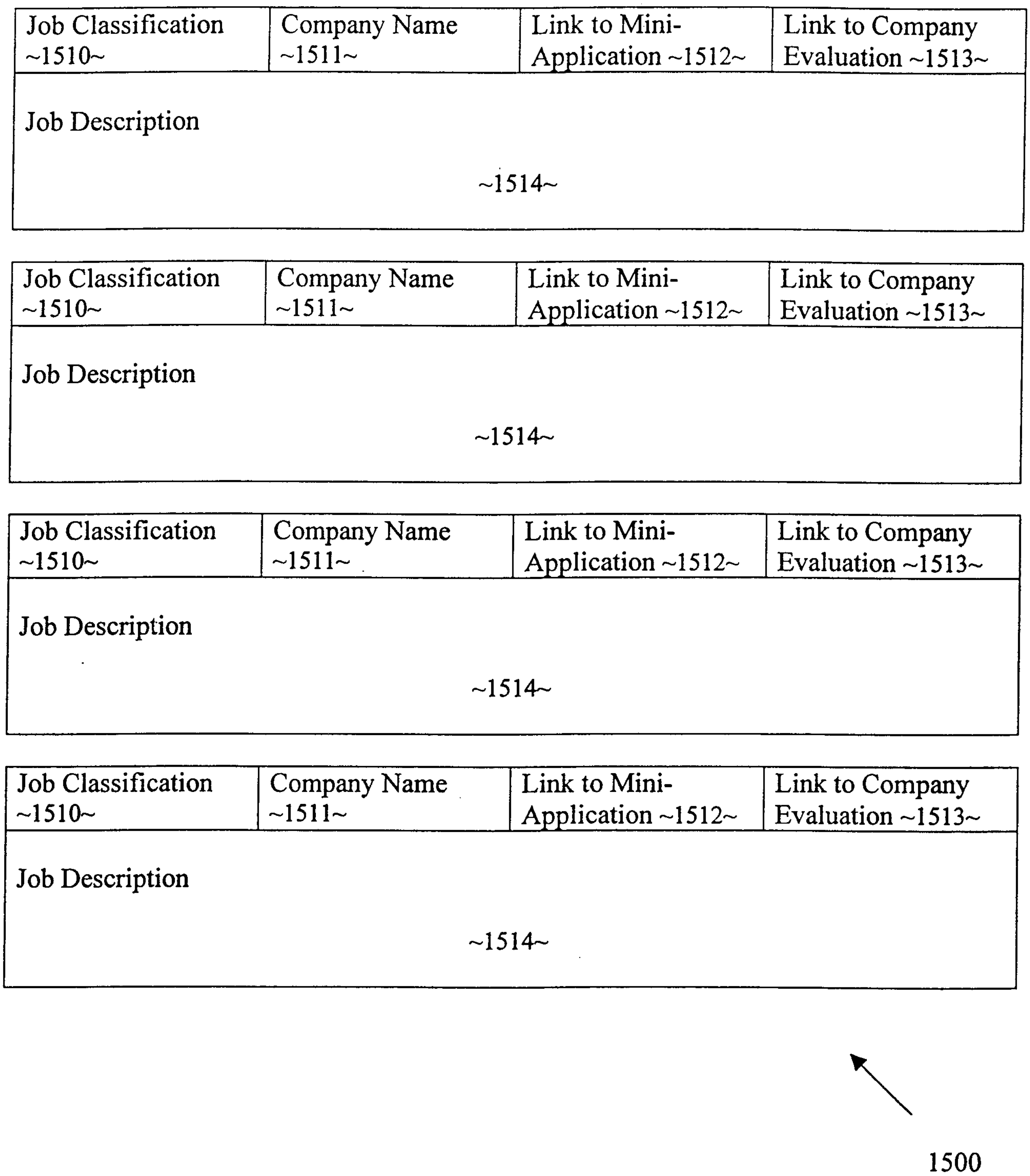
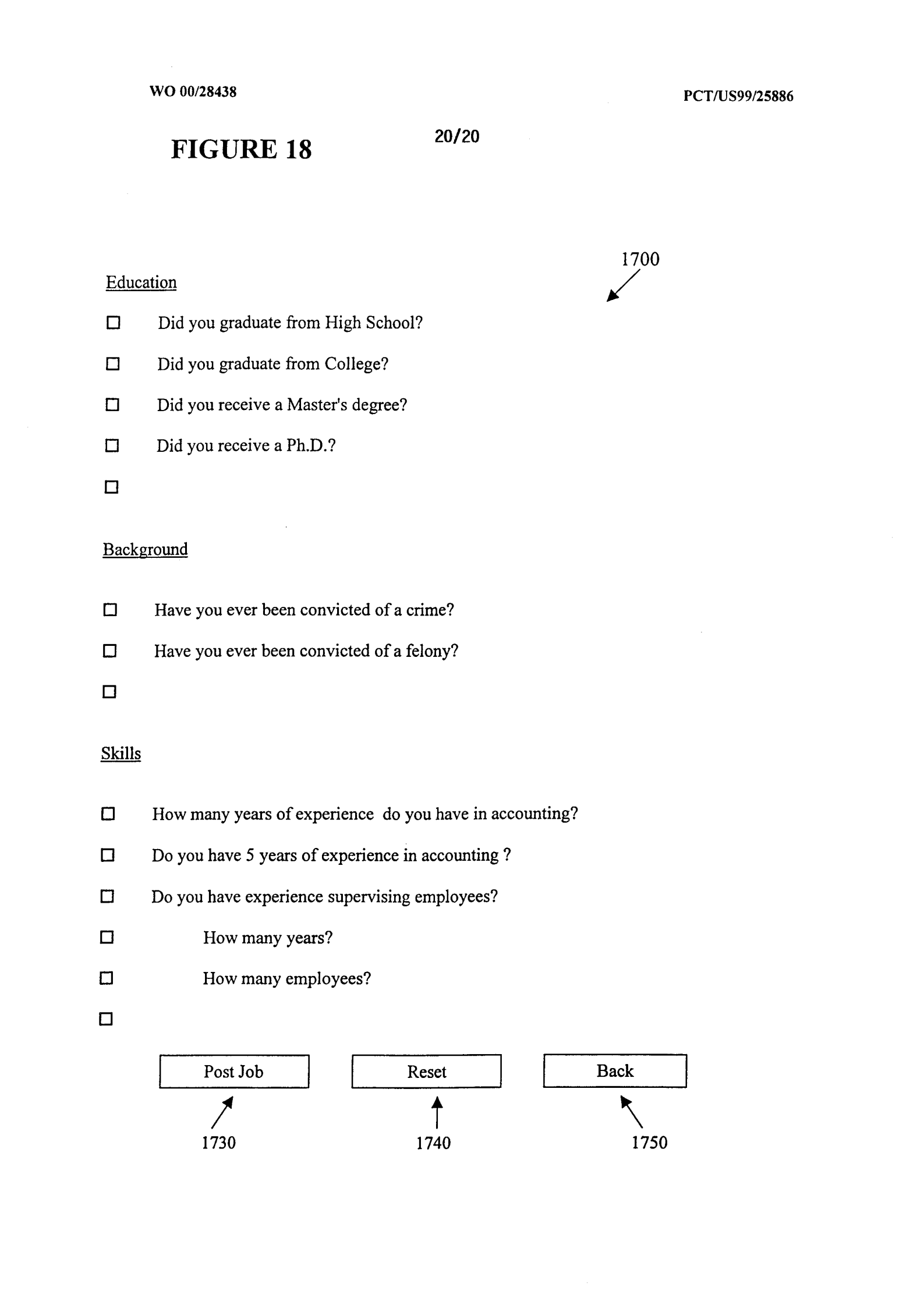

Job Classification ~1510~
Company Name ~1511~
Link to Mini-Application ~1512~
Link to Company Evaluation ~1513~
Job Description
~1514~
Job Classification ~1510~
Company Name ~1511~
Link to Mini-Application ~1512~
Link to Company Evaluation ~1513~
Job Description
~1514~
Job Classification ~1510~
Company Name ~1511~
Link to Mini-Application ~1512~
Link to Company Evaluation ~1513~
Job Description
~1514~
Job Classification ~1510~
Company Name ~1511~
Link to Mini-Application ~1512~
Link to Company Evaluation ~1513~
Job Description
~1514~
1500

FIGURE 17

Employer	Address	Position	Schedule	Wage	e-mail	Phone Number	Fax
~1610~	~1611~	~1612~	~1613~	~1614~	~1615~	~1616~	~1617~

1600

FIGURE 18


1700
Education
Did you graduate from High School?
Did you graduate from College?
Did you receive a Master's degree?
Did you receive a Ph.D.?
Background
Have you ever been convicted of a crime?
Have you ever been convicted of a felony?
Skills
How many years of experience do you have in accounting?
Do you have 5 years of experience in accounting ?
Do you have experience supervising employees?
How many years?
How many employees?
Post Job
Reset
Back
1730
1740
1750

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.
PCT/US99/25886

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

IPC(7) :G06F 17/30
US CL :707/001

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

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

U.S. : 707/001, 7, 205, 503, 505, 509, 516, 531

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

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

West, CAS Online

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X	US 5,692,206 A [SHIRLEY et al.] 25 November 1997, See abstract.	1-11
A		12-30
A	US 5,526,520 A [KRAUSE] 11 June 1996, See abstract.	1-30

☐ Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C. ☐ See patent family annex.

*	Special categories of cited documents:	"T"	later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention
"A"	document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance	"X"	document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone
"E"	earlier document published on or after the international filing date	"Y"	document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art
"L"	document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)	"&"	document member of the same patent family
"O"	document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means		
"P"	document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed		

Date of the actual completion of the international search 11 MARCH 2000	Date of mailing of the international search report 14 APR 2000
Name and mailing address of the ISA/US Commissioner of Patents and Trademarks Box PCT Washington, D.C. 20231 Facsimile No. (703) 305-3230	Authorized officer SANJIV SHAH Telephone No. (703) 305-8355

Form PCT/ISA/210 (second sheet) (July 1998) ★

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.
PCT/US99/25886

Box I Observations where certain claims were found unsearchable (Continuation of item 1 of first sheet)

This international report has not been established in respect of certain claims under Article 17(2)(a) for the following reasons:

1. ☐ Claims Nos.:
because they relate to subject matter not required to be searched by this Authority, namely:

2. ☐ Claims Nos.:
because they relate to parts of the international application that do not comply with the prescribed requirements to such an extent that no meaningful international search can be carried out, specifically:

3. ☐ Claims Nos.:
because they are dependent claims and are not drafted in accordance with the second and third sentences of Rule 6.4(a).

Box II Observations where unity of invention is lacking (Continuation of item 2 of first sheet)

This International Searching Authority found multiple inventions in this international application, as follows:

Please See Extra Sheet.

1. ☒ As all required additional search fees were timely paid by the applicant, this international search report covers all searchable claims.

2. ☐ As all searchable claims could be searched without effort justifying an additional fee, this Authority did not invite payment of any additional fee.

3. ☐ As only some of the required additional search fees were timely paid by the applicant, this international search report covers only those claims for which fees were paid, specifically claims Nos.:

4. ☐ No required additional search fees were timely paid by the applicant. Consequently, this international search report is restricted to the invention first mentioned in the claims; it is covered by claims Nos.:

Remark on Protest

☐ The additional search fees were accompanied by the applicant's protest.

☒ No protest accompanied the payment of additional search fees.

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.
PCT/US99/25886

BOX II. OBSERVATIONS WHERE UNITY OF INVENTION WAS LACKING
This ISA found multiple inventions as follows:

This application contains the following inventions or groups of inventions which are not so linked as to form a single inventive concept under PCT Rule 13.1. In order for all inventions to be searched, the appropriate additional search fees must be paid.

Group I, claim(s)1-11, drawn to a method for communicating outsourcing information between an outsourcing company and a contractors.
Group II, claim(s) 12-30, drawn to a method of communicating job information between jobseeker and employers.

The inventions listed as Groups I and II do not relate to a single inventive concept under PCT Rule 13.1 because, under PCT Rule 13.2, they lack the same or corresponding special technical features for the following reasons: Invention II lacks the special technical feature of accepting bid information from contractors as claimed in invention I. Similarly Invention I lacks the special technical feature of making jobseeker information available to the employers.