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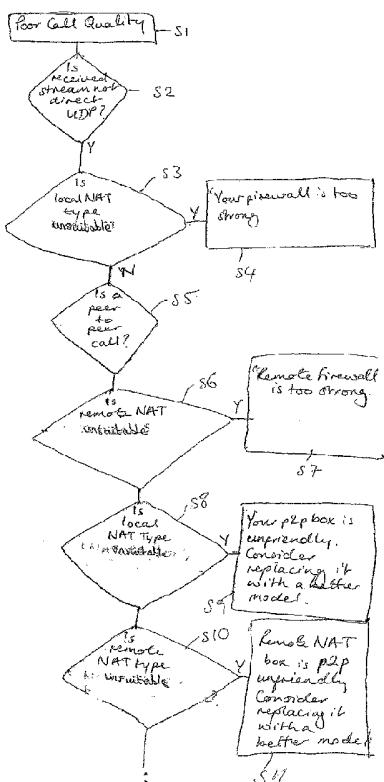
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(54) Title: USER INTERFACE FOR HANDLING CALL QUALITY IN A COMMUNICATION SYSTEM



(57) Abstract: A method of controlling communication quality between one node and at least one other node in a packet switched communication system, the method comprising the steps of detecting at one of said nodes a condition that indicates that communication quality is below an acceptable threshold, automatically generating instructions based on the detected condition for a user of the at least one node, said instructions intended to provide a remedy to improve the communication quality, and receiving input from a user of the at least one node responsive to the instructions to implement the remedy and thereby improve the communication quality.

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USER INTERFACEField of the Invention

10 The present invention relates to a method for handling call quality in a communication system.

Background of the Invention

15 In a communication system a communication network is provided, which can link together two communication terminals so that the terminals can send information to each other in a call or other communication event. Information may include voice, text, images or video.

20 One such communication system is a peer to peer communication system, in which a plurality of end users can be connected for communication purposes via a communications structure such as the internet. The communications structure is substantially decentralised with regard to communication route switching therein for connecting the end users. That is, the end users can establish their
25 own communication routes through the structure based on exchange of one or more authorisation certificates (user identity certificates – UIC) to acquire access to the structure. The structure includes an administration arrangement issuing the certificates to the end users. Such a communication system is described in WO 2005/009019.

30

Peer-to-peer telecommunications are beneficial to the user as they are often of significantly lower cost than traditional telephony networks, such as fixed line or mobile networks. This may particularly be the case for long distance calls. These systems may utilise voice over internet protocol ("VoIP") over an existing network

5 (e.g. the Internet) to provide these services, although alternative protocols can also be used.

Communication systems employing VoIP, or similar protocols are subject to many factors which may adversely affect call quality. For example, data packets
10 may be lost when communication data is transmitted across the network, thereby affecting call quality. If the round trip time (RTT) for the data to be transmitted between users is great, a user may experience delay in receiving information.

Call quality may also be affected by factors attributable to the device on which
15 the user receives data. For example if the device is a personal computer (PC), the number of applications running will affect the degree to which the central processing unit (CPU) may process communication data, thereby affecting call quality.

20 Poor call quality can be frustrating for a caller, and can cause him to seek alternative communication methods.

It is therefore an aim of embodiments of the invention to address at least one of the above identified problems.

25 Throughout this specification the word "comprise", or variations such as "comprises" or "comprising", will be understood to imply the inclusion of a stated element, integer or step, or group of elements, integers or steps, but not the exclusion of any other element, integer or step, or group of elements, integers or
30 steps.

Any discussion of documents, acts, materials, devices, articles or the like which has been included in the present specification is not to be taken as an admission that any or all of these matters form part of the prior art base or were common

5 general knowledge in the field relevant to the present invention as it existed before the priority date of each claim of this application.

Summary of the Invention

10 In particular the invention relates, but not exclusively to providing an interface to enable a caller to control the call quality.

According to the present invention, there is provided a method of controlling communication quality between one user terminal and at least one other user

15 terminal in a packet switched communication system, the method comprising the steps of:

detecting at one of said user terminals a condition that indicates that communication quality is below an acceptable threshold;

20 automatically generating instructions based on the detected condition for a user of the at least one user terminal, said instructions intended to provide a remedy to improve the communication quality;

receiving input from a user of the at least one user terminal responsive to the instructions to implement the remedy and thereby improve the communication quality.

25 According to the present invention, there is further provided a user terminal in a packet switched communication system, said user terminal having means for effecting a communication to at least one other terminal in the communication system, the user terminal comprising means for:

30 detecting at one of said user terminals a condition that indicates that communication quality is below an acceptable threshold;

means for automatically generating instructions based on the detected condition for a user of the at least one user terminal, said instructions intended to provide a remedy to improve the communication quality; and

5 means for receiving input from a user of the at least one user terminal responsive to the instructions to implement the remedy and thereby improve the communication quality.

10 According to the present invention there is further provided a computer program product comprising program code means which when executed by a computer implements the method described above.

Brief Description of Drawings

15 For a better understanding of the present invention and to show how the same may be carried into effect, embodiments of the present invention will now be described with reference to the following drawings:

20 Figure 1 is a schematic representation of a peer to peer telephony system;

Figure 2 is a further schematic representation of a peer to peer telephony system;

25 Figure 3 shows a client stack according to an embodiment of the present invention;

5 Figure 4 is a schematic representation of a display screen of a user terminal according to an embodiment of the present invention;

10 Figure 5 shows the steps of an algorithm according to the present invention.

Detailed Description

15 Reference will first be made to Figure 1, in which is shown a peer-to-peer exemplifying telecommunications network shown and described in more detail uses the terminology of a peer to peer network, embodiments of the present invention can be used in any other suitable form of network.

20 A user terminal 102 is shown connected to a network 104. The user terminal may be, for example, a personal computer, a gaming device, a personal digital assistant, a suitably enabled mobile phone, a television or other device able to connect to the network 104. The user terminal 102 is connected to the network 104 via a network port 105, and may be via a cable (wired) connection or a wireless connection. The network 104 may be a network such as the Internet.

25 Client software 112 is installed on the user terminal 102 to allow the end users to communicate via the communications network. A user interface of terminal 102 may be controlled by the client software program 112, hereinafter referred to as the client, to display user facilities and to indicate events occurring, such as an incoming call. According to an embodiment of the invention the client 112 may also be arranged to display communication quality options as will be described hereinafter.

5 If the user terminal is connected to the network 104, then it may be running a client program 112 provided by the operator of the peer-to-peer telephony system. The client 112 is executed on a local processor in the user terminal 102.

10 The client 112 has a number of different components or layers for implementing various functions, including a protocol layer 402 (Figure 3) for managing the network interface. In the present embodiment the protocol layer monitors the call quality parameters, but it will be appreciated that other divisions of layers are possible.

15 Figure 3 shows a client stack according to an embodiment of the present invention. As shown the client protocol layer sits on top of the operating system 401 of the device. Above the protocol layer 402 is the client engine 404. The client engine 404 is used to control the client user interface layer 406. The control of the client user interface 406 will be explained in more detail hereinafter.

20

A user of a second user terminal 110 can make a telephone call to the user of the user terminal 102 across the network 104. To initiate the call, the second user 108 can click on the contact listed for the user 106 operating terminal 102 displayed in a client running on the second user terminal 110 similar to the client running on the user terminal 102. Alternatively the user 108 can type in a telephone number or username for the user 106. The client then sets up the call to the user 106. The telephone call may be made using VoIP, in accordance with methods known in the art, such as disclosed in WO 2005/009019. The telephone call may comprise voice, video, instant messaging ("IM"), short message service (SMS) or a combination thereof.

In an alternative embodiment the second user terminal 110 may be connected to a different network such as the public switched telephone network ("PSTN") or a mobile network (not shown in Figure 1). If connected to the PSTN, the second

5 user terminal may be a fixed line telephone, and if connected to a mobile network, the second user terminal may be a mobile telephone.

In a further alternative embodiment of the invention, as shown in Figure 2, more than two user terminals (102, 110, 130, 140 and 150) may be connected across 10 the network 104 such that the communication data is shared between each of the users in a conference call.

In a further alternative embodiment, in the case where there are more than two users involved in a conference call, one or more users may be connected to a 15 different network such as a PSTN or a mobile network.

As shown in Figure 1, in one embodiment a back end server 122 and a web application 124 may also be connected to the network 104. The backend server 122 and the web application 124 may be located within the private network 128 20 of the operator of the telephony system. The backend server 122 and the web application 124 may be geographically co-located, or may be geographically separated. The backend server 122 is located between the web application 124 and the network 104, and is responsible for exchanging messages between the web application 124 and the client 112. The backend 122 and the client 112 25 communicate using a proprietary protocol, and do not use HTTP. This is to avoid the detection and blocking of HTTP messages by third parties and firewalls. Furthermore, the backend server 122 also blocks HTTP.

In order to be able to communicate across the network, the user 106 must be 30 suitably registered and authenticated. Access is checked using public key cryptography. The protocol layer of the client 112 may be arranged to periodically poll the backend server 122 using the protocol for a new version of the public key. The backend server 122 forwards the request to the web application 124. The web application 124 returns the key to the backend server 122 in step, and 35 this is passed to the client 112 using the protocol in a user identity certificate

5 (UIC). The above steps are performed periodically, without the user being aware of its operation, in order to ensure that the key information is always up to date in the client 112.

10 In an embodiment of the invention the client 112 provided on terminal 102 is arranged to monitor at the terminal at least one parameter indicative of call quality. The parameter monitored may be dependent on the type of user terminal and/or on the type of communication.

15 According to one embodiment of the invention the client monitors the proportion of the CPU of terminal 102 that is used in handling the communication with user terminal 110. The client may also be arranged to additionally monitor the usage of the CPU by other applications that are not involved in handling the communication. The amount that the CPU is used by the communication may then be compared to the usage of the CPU by other applications in order to 20 determine if there is a sufficient proportion of the CPU dedicated to handling the communication. The client may determine that there is a sufficient proportion of the CPU dedicated to handling the communication by comparing the monitored amount to a predefined threshold amount.

25 According to an embodiment of the invention, if it is determined that an insufficient proportion of the CPU is dedicated to handling the call, the client may be arranged to control the user interface to indicate to the user that the communication quality is poor. The user may then be prompted to remedy the situation. In accordance with an embodiment of the invention the client may also 30 provide the user with instructions for remedying the situation.

In one embodiment of the invention the client engine is arranged to control the user interface to display a communication quality indicator. This may appear as a 35 icon, otherwise referred to as a graphic button 302, 303 on a display screen 301 of the terminal 102 as shown in Figure 4. In an alternative embodiment of the

5 invention, if it is not possible to display the indicator on a screen the indicator
may be provided by an LED.

If client engine receives notification from the client protocol layer that an
insufficient proportion of the CPU is dedicated to handling the call, the client
10 engine will control the user interface to display a graphic button 303 indicating
that the call quality is poor.

The client engine may also be arranged to control the user interface to display a
help text message, in a window, notifying the user of how to remedy the problem.

15 In the case where the user device is a PC, this may be accessed by the user
selecting the graphic button 303 using a mouse. Alternatively the message may
be displayed automatically, together with the call indicator. The message may for
example state that:

20 *'If you are experiencing call problems, closing other applications may improve the
call quality.'*

In an alternative embodiment of the invention the client engine may be arranged
to control the client user interface to run an audio message to the user using a
25 speaker in the device describing how to remedy the problem.

In an embodiment of the invention it is possible to select the degree of technical
detail described in the help message provided to the user. For example the user
may be able to select whether or not he or she wants a detailed message by
30 selecting an option provided in a window which is displayed when the user
selects the graphic button. Alternatively the user may select an advanced help
option in the window showing the original help message. In the case where the
problem with the communication is detected as being due to usage of the CPU
by other applications the advanced message may state for example that:

5 'The CPU usage is very high. To resolve this problem please close other applications and stop any downloads'

The client running on the second user terminal 110 which the first user terminal 102 is in communication with may be arranged to display a message to user 108 indicating that the first user terminal is experiencing communication problems. 10 This can be communicated to the second user terminal 110 via the communications protocol.

Accordingly the user may close other applications and terminate any downloads 15 in order to receive a better quality call.

In the case where a number of users are involved in a conference call as shown in Figure 2, each caller sends its data to the user who started the call (conference host) which in turn sends it to other participants in the call.

20 In one embodiment of the invention the user terminals 102 and 110 may be arranged to transfer video data from a webcam during a call, otherwise known as 'video chat'. During a video chat session the client monitors the proportion of the CPU of terminal 102 that is being used to run the webcam's application. The 25 amount that the CPU is used for the audio part of the communication may then be compared to the usage of the CPU by the webcam application, and indeed any other applications running on the CPU, in order to determine if there is a sufficient proportion of the CPU dedicated to handling the communication. The client may determine that there is a sufficient proportion of the CPU dedicated to 30 handling the audio part of the communication by comparing the monitored amount to a predefined threshold amount.

According to an embodiment of the invention, if it is determined that an 35 insufficient proportion of the CPU is dedicated to handling the call, the client may be arranged to control the user interface to indicate to the user that the

5 communication quality is poor. The user may then be prompted to remedy the situation. In accordance with an embodiment of the invention the client may also provide the user with instructions for remedying the situation.

In one embodiment of the invention the client engine is arranged to control the
10 user interface to display a communication quality indicator. This may appear as a graphic button on a display screen of the display device as shown in Figure 4. In an alternative embodiment of the invention, if it is not possible to display the indicator on a screen the indicator may be provided by an LED or similar alternative interface.

15 If client engine receives notification from the client protocol layer that an insufficient proportion of the CPU is dedicated to handling the call, the client engine will control the user interface to display a graphic button 303 indicating that the call quality is poor.

20 The client engine may also be arranged to control the user interface to display a help text message, in a window, notifying the user of how to remedy the problem. In the case where the user device is a PC, this may be accessed by the user selecting the graphic button 303 using a mouse. Alternatively the message may
25 be displayed automatically, together with the call indicator. The message may for example state that:

'You may be experiencing call problems. Stopping video and closing other applications may improve your call quality.'

30 In an alternative embodiment of the invention the client engine may be arranged to control the client user interface to run an audio message to the user using a speaker in the device describing how to remedy the problem.

5 In an embodiment of the invention it is possible to select the degree of technical detail described in the help message provided to the user. For example the user may be able to select whether or not he or she wants a detailed message by selecting an option provided in a window which is displayed when the user selects the graphic button. Alternatively the user may select an advanced help

10 10 option in the window showing the original help message. In the case where the problem with the communication is detected as being due to usage of the CPU by other applications the advanced message may state for example that:

'Please make sure that your video software is not running in the background.'

15 The client running on the second user terminal which the first user terminal 102 is in communication with may be arranged to display a message indicating that the first user terminal is experiencing communication problems.

20 Accordingly the user of terminal 102 may then close the video application in order to improve the call quality.

According to another embodiment of the invention the client determines the speed of the CPU of terminal 102. The performance of the CPU is measured

25 before the call by all participants and this information is sent to the other party at call set up.

The number of processor performance units measured in MHz utilised by the client, should be less than 700, regardless of the performance of the CPU. Thus

30 if it is evident that there is insufficient CPU performance available, this formula can be used to check whether the reason is that the client is using more CPU than it normally should. If not, the problem may be something else, such as the CPU performance being too low to handle calls.

5 According to an embodiment of the invention, if it is determined that the speed of the CPU is too slow to handle the call, the client may be arranged to control the user interface to indicate to the user that the communication quality is poor and the reason for the poor communication.

10 In one embodiment of the invention the client engine is arranged to control the user interface to display a communication quality indicator. This may appear as a graphic button 302, 303 on a display screen 301 of the terminal 102 as shown in Figure 4. In an alternative embodiment of the invention, if it is not possible to display the indicator on a screen the indicator may be provided by an LED or a further alternative user interface.

15

If client engine receives notification from the client protocol layer that the CPU speed is too slow to handle the call, the client engine will control the user interface to display a graphic button 303 indicating that the call quality is poor.

20 The client engine may also be arranged to control the user interface to display a help text message, in a window, notifying the user of how to remedy the problem. In the case where the user device is a PC, this may be accessed by the user selecting the graphic button 303 using a mouse. Alternatively the message may 25 be displayed automatically, together with the call indicator. The message may for example state that:

'Your computer's processing speed may be too slow to make clear calls'

30 In an alternative embodiment of the invention the client engine may be arranged to control the client user interface to run an audio message to the user using a speaker in the device describing reasons for the problem.

35 In an embodiment of the invention it is possible to select the degree of technical detail described in the help message provided to the user. For example the user

5 may be able to select whether or not he or she wants a detailed message by selecting an option provided in a window which is displayed when the user selects the graphic button. Alternatively the user may select an advanced help option in the window showing the original help message. In the case where the problem with the communication is detected as being due to the speed of the

10 CPU the advanced message may provide recommended system requirements.

10 Where the terminal is a PC the message may state for example that:

'Recommended system requirements: 1GHz processor, 256MB RAM.'

15 Where the terminal is a Mac the message may state for example that:

'Recommended system requirements: Macintosh with PowerPC G4 running Mac OS X v 10.3, 400MHz processor, 256 MB RAM'

20 The client running on the second user terminal which the first user terminal 102 is in communication with may be arranged to display a message indicating that the first user terminal is experiencing communication problems.

25 In one embodiment of the invention the terminal may be involved on a conference call as shown in Figure 2. In this case the client running on each user terminal 110, 130, 140 and 150 is arranged to display a message indicating that the first user terminal 102 is experiencing communication problems.

30 According to a further embodiment of the invention the client may detect that the CPU resource consumption by the application handling the call is too high, as discussed earlier.

35 According to an embodiment of the invention, if it is determined the resource consumption of the CPU by the application handling the call is too high, the client may be arranged to control the user interface to indicate to the user that the

5 communication quality is poor. In accordance with an embodiment of the invention the client may also provide the user with instructions for remedying the situation.

In one embodiment of the invention the client engine is arranged to control the 10 user interface to display a communication quality indicator. This may appear as a graphic button 302, 303 on a display screen 301 of the display device as shown in Figure 4. In an alternative embodiment of the invention, if it is not possible to display the indicator on a screen the indicator may be provided by an LED, or any other suitable user interface.

15 If client engine receives notification from the client protocol layer that the resource consumption of the CPU by the application handling the call is too high, the client engine will control the user interface to display a graphic button 303 indicating that the call quality is poor.

20 The client engine may also be arranged to control the user interface to display a help text message, in a window, notifying the user of how to remedy the problem. In the case where the user device is a PC, this may be accessed by the user 25 selecting the graphic button 303 using a mouse. Alternatively the message may be displayed automatically, together with the call indicator. The message may for example state that:

'The call application is using a high amount of resources. We suggest restarting the application.'

30 In an alternative embodiment of the invention the client engine may be arranged to control the client user interface to run an audio message to the user using a speaker in the device describing how to remedy the problem.

5 In an embodiment of the invention it is possible to select the degree of technical detail described in the help message provided to the user. For example the user may be able to select whether or not he or she wants a detailed message by selecting an option provided in a window which is displayed when the user selects the graphic button. Alternatively the user may select an advanced help
10 option in the window showing the original help message. In the case where the problem with the communication is detected as being due to usage of the CPU by the application handling the call the advanced message may state for example that:

15 *'The call application is using more system resources than it should be. Try disabling any other application that may be using the call application. If the problem persists please contact your operators customer services.'*

20 The client running on the second user terminal which the first user terminal 102 is in communication with may be arranged to display a message indicating that the first user terminal is experiencing communication problems.

25 According to a further embodiment of the invention the client is arranged to measure the round trip time (RTT) for the communication. RTT may be measured by periodically sending a special test packet to the remote party and measuring the time it takes for the reply to arrive.

30 If it is determined the RTT exceeds a threshold, the client may be arranged to control the user interface to indicate to the user that the communication quality is poor. In accordance with an embodiment of the invention the client may also provide the user with instructions for remedying the situation.

35 In one embodiment of the invention the client engine is arranged to control the user interface to display a communication quality indicator. This may appear as a graphic button on a display screen of the display device as shown in Figure 4. In

5 an alternative embodiment of the invention, if it is not possible to display the indicator on a screen the indicator may be provided by an LED, or any other suitable user interface.

If client engine receives notification from the client protocol layer that the RTT is
10 too high, the client engine will control the user interface to display a graphic button 303 indicating that the call quality is poor.

The client engine may also be arranged to control the user interface to display a help text message, in a window, notifying the user of how to remedy the problem.

15 In the case where the user device is a PC, this may be accessed by the user selecting the graphic button 303 using a mouse. Alternatively the message may be displayed automatically, together with the call indicator. The message may for example state that:

20 *'If you are experiencing call problems, please redial for better call quality.'*

In an alternative embodiment of the invention the client engine may be arranged to control the client user interface to run an audio message to the user using a speaker in the device describing how to remedy the problem.

25 In an embodiment of the invention it is possible to select the degree of technical detail described in the help message provided to the user. For example the user may be able to select whether or not he or she wants a detailed message by selecting an option provided in a window which is displayed when the user
30 selects the graphic button. Alternatively the user may select an advanced help option in the window showing the original help message. In the case where the problem with the communication is detected as being due to RTT the advanced message may state for example that:

5 'If you are experiencing sound delays echo or unwanted noise it may be caused by other applications using the internet and consuming bandwidth. Please close applications or stop downloads to help resolve this problem.'

10 The client running on the second user terminal which the first user terminal 102 is in communication with may be arranged to display a message indicating that the first user terminal is experiencing communication problems.

15 The user may then close other applications that are using the internet in order to obtain better call quality.

According to a further embodiment of the invention the client is arranged to monitor the packet loss for the communication. Packet loss may be monitored by keeping track of the number of packets sent, and periodically receiving information from the other party indicating the number of packets received. By 20 comparing these two numbers, it is possible to deduce the number of packets lost in communication, and calculate the packet loss as the ratio between packets lost and packets sent.

25 If it is determined the packet loss exceeds a threshold, the client may be arranged to control the user interface to indicate to the user that the communication quality is poor. In accordance with an embodiment of the invention the client may also provide the user with instructions for remedying the situation.

30 In one embodiment of the invention the client engine is arranged to control the user interface to display a communication quality indicator. This may appear as a graphic button 302, 303 on a display screen 301 of the user terminal 102 as shown in Figure 4. In an alternative embodiment of the invention, if it is not possible to display the indicator on a screen the indicator may be provided by an 35 LED, or any other suitable user interface.

5

If client engine receives notification from the client protocol layer that the loss of data packets is too high, the client engine will control the user interface to display a graphic button 303 indicating that the call quality is poor.

10 The client engine may also be arranged to control the user interface to display a help text message, in a window, notifying the user of how to remedy the problem. In the case where the user device is a PC, this may be accessed by the user selecting the graphic button 303 using a mouse. Alternatively the message may be displayed automatically, together with the call indicator. The message may for example state that:

'You may be experiencing call problems. Closing other applications may improve your call quality.'

20 In an alternative embodiment of the invention the client engine may be arranged to control the client user interface to run an audio message to the user using a speaker in the device describing how to remedy the problem.

25 In an embodiment of the invention it is possible to select the degree of technical detail described in the help message provided to the user. For example the user may be able to select whether or not he or she wants a detailed message by selecting an option provided in a window which is displayed when the user selects the graphic button. Alternatively the user may select an advanced help option in the window showing the original help message. In the case where the 30 problem with the communication is detected as being due to packet loss the advanced message may state for example that:

'If you are experiencing sound delays echo or unwanted noise it may be caused by other applications using the internet and consuming bandwidth. Please close 35 applications or stop downloads to help resolve this problem.'

5

The client running on the second user terminal which the first user terminal 102 is in communication with may be arranged to display a message indicating that the first user terminal is experiencing communication problems.

10 According to a further embodiment of the invention the client is arranged to detect the local NAT (Network Address Translation) router involved in the communication.

15 Two NAT types will be referred to herein: suitable and unsuitable, expressed in relation to send quality communications between computers.

20 If it is determined the local NAT type is unsuitable, the client may be arranged to control the user interface to indicate to the user that the communication quality is poor. In accordance with an embodiment of the invention the client may also provide the user with instructions for remedying the situation.

25 In one embodiment of the invention the client engine is arranged to control the user interface to display a communication quality indicator. This may appear as a graphic button on a display screen of the display device as shown in Figure 4. In an alternative embodiment of the invention, if it is not possible to display the indicator on a screen the indicator may be provided by an LED, or any other suitable user interface.

30 If client engine receives notification from the client protocol layer that the local NAT type is unsuitable, the client engine will control the user interface to display a graphic button 303 indicating that the call quality is poor.

The client engine may also be arranged to control the user interface to display a help text message, in a window, notifying the user of how to remedy the problem.

35 In the case where the user device is a PC, this may be accessed by the user

5 selecting the graphic button 303 using a mouse. Alternatively the message may be displayed automatically, together with the call indicator. The message may for example state that:

'You may be experiencing call problems. Please redial for better quality.'

10

In an alternative embodiment of the invention the client engine may be arranged to control the client user interface to run an audio message to the user using a speaker in the device describing how to remedy the problem.

15

In an embodiment of the invention it is possible to select the degree of technical detail described in the help message provided to the user. For example the user may be able to select whether or not he or she wants a detailed message by selecting an option provided in a window which is displayed when the user selects the graphic button. Alternatively the user may select an advanced help 20 option in the window showing the original help message. In the case where the problem with the communication is detected as being due the detected NAT type the advanced message may state for example that:

'Your calls are relayed through the internet. Call quality could be poor if your router configuration prevents the application handling your call from achieving the optimum relay for calls. For better call quality you could change your firewall or router settings. An online guide will help you do this, or you can seek the help of your system administrator.'

30

The client running on the second user terminal which the first user terminal 102 is in communication with may be arranged to display a message indicating that the first user terminal is experiencing communication problems.

5 The user of terminal 102 may then either redial immediately or change firewall and router settings of the device before redialling in order to improve the quality of the connection with the user of terminal 110.

10 According to a further aspect of the invention the client is arranged to detect whether or not the received data stream is direct User Datagram Protocol UDP in addition to detecting the local NAT router type.

15 If it is determined that the received data stream is not direct UDP and the local NAT type is detected as being unsuitable, the client may be arranged to control the user interface to indicate to the user that the communication quality is poor. In accordance with an embodiment of the invention the client may also provide the user with instructions for remedying the situation.

20 In one embodiment of the invention the client engine is arranged to control the user interface to display a communication quality indicator. This may appear as a graphic button on a display screen of the display device as shown in Figure 4. In an alternative embodiment of the invention, if it is not possible to display the indicator on a screen the indicator may be provided by an LED, or any other suitable user interface.

25

If client engine receives notification from the client protocol layer that the received data stream is not direct UDP and the local NAT type is detected as being unsuitable, the client engine will control the user interface to display a graphic button 303 indicating that the call quality is poor.

30

The client engine may also be arranged to control the user interface to display a help text message, in a window, notifying the user of how to remedy the problem. In the case where the user device is a PC, this may be accessed by the user selecting the graphic button 303 using a mouse. Alternatively the message may

5 be displayed automatically, together with the call indicator. The message may for example state that:

'If you are experiencing call problems this may be because your call application may have restricted access to the internet. Please review your firewall or security settings to ensure that the call application is not restricted from accessing the internet.'

10 In an alternative embodiment of the invention the client engine may be arranged to control the client user interface to run an audio message to the user using a 15 speaker in the device describing how to remedy the problem.

15 In an embodiment of the invention it is possible to select the degree of technical detail described in the help message provided to the user. For example the user may be able to select whether or not he or she wants a detailed message by 20 selecting an option provided in a window which is displayed when the user selects the graphic button. Alternatively the user may select an advanced help option in the window showing the original help message. In the case where the problem with the communication is detected as being due the detected NAT type 25 the advanced message may direct the user to an website which provides information on how to remedy the problem. The message may state for example that:

'To learn more about changing your firewall settings please consult our online guide to firewalls. Our guide will tell you how to optimise your settings.'

30 The client running on the second user terminal which the first user terminal 102 is in communication with may be arranged to display a message indicating that the first user terminal is experiencing communication problems.

5 The user of terminal 102 may then either redial immediately or change firewall and router settings of the device before redialling in order to improve the quality of the connection with the user of terminal 110.

According to a further embodiment of the invention if the client detects that the 10 call quality is poor the client may be arranged to run an algorithm to determine whether the quality is due to NAT (Network Address Translation) routers or relayed calls and to provide more specific help messages. Whether the network transport quality is good or bad is determined by a formula calculated from the monitored parameters such as RTT and packet loss.

15 This algorithm will be described with respect to Figure 5.

At step S1 the client determines that the call quality is poor.

20 At step S2 it is determined if the received data stream at the terminal is not direct UDP.

If the received data stream is not direct UDP, at step S3 it is determined if the local NAT type is unsuitable.

25 If the NAT type is unsuitable, at step S4 the client is arranged to control the user interface to indicate to the user that the communication quality is poor. The client engine may also be arranged to control the user interface to display a help text message, in a window, notifying the user of how to remedy the problem. In the 30 case where the user device is a PC, this may be accessed by the user selecting the graphic button 303 using a mouse. Alternatively the message may be displayed automatically, together with the call indicator. The message displayed at step S4 states that:

35 *'Your firewall is too strong, consider opening up UDPout.'*

5

If the NAT type is not unsuitable, at step S5 it is determined if the call is a peer to peer call.

10 If the call is not a peer to peer call the algorithm continues to step S14. If however the call is a peer to peer call the algorithm continues to step S6.

At step 6 it is determined if the remote NAT type is unsuitable. If so the algorithm continues to step S7.

15 At step S7 the client is arranged to control the user interface to indicate to the user that the communication quality is poor. The client engine is also arranged to control the user interface to display a help text message, in a window, notifying the user of how to remedy the problem. In the case where the user device is a PC, this may be accessed by the user selecting the graphic button 303 (shown in 20 Figure 4) using a mouse. Alternatively the message may be displayed automatically, together with the call indicator. The message displayed at step S4 states that:

25 *'Your Remote Firewall is too strong. You should consider opening an alternative port.'*

If it is determined at step S6 that the remote NAT type is not unsuitable the algorithm continues to step S8.

30 At step S8 it is determined if the local NAT type is unsuitable. If so the algorithm continues to step S9.

35 At step S9 the client is arranged to control the user interface to indicate to the user that the communication quality is poor. The client engine is also arranged to control the user interface to display a help text message, in a window, notifying

5 the user of how to remedy the problem. In the case where the user device is a PC, this may be accessed by the user selecting the graphic button 303 (shown in Figure 4) using a mouse. Alternatively the message may be displayed automatically, together with the call indicator. The message displayed at step S9 states that:

10

'Your NAT box is p2p [peer to peer] unfriendly. Consider replacing it with a better model.'

If it is determined at step S7 that the NAT type is not unsuitable the algorithm
15 continues to step S9.

At step S10 it is determined if the remote NAT type is unsuitable. If so the algorithm continues to step S10. The remote NAT is the NAT at the internet connection of the other party involved in the call, whereas the local NAT is at the
20 local computer.

At step S11 the client is arranged to control the user interface to indicate to the user that the communication quality is poor. The client engine is also arranged to control the user interface to display a help text message, in a window, notifying
25 the user of how to remedy the problem. In the case where the user device is a PC, this may be accessed by the user selecting the graphic button 303 (shown in Figure 4) using a mouse. Alternatively the message may be displayed automatically, together with the call indicator. The message displayed at step S11 states that:

30

'Your remote NAT box is p2p unfriendly. Consider replacing it with a better model.'

If it is determined at step S10 that the remote NAT type is not unsuitable, the
35 algorithm continues to step S12.

5

At step 12 the client determines if neither the local nor, in the case of a peer to peer call, the remote NAT type is 'untested'. If this is the case the algorithm continues to step S13. Otherwise the algorithm continues to step 14.

- 10 At step 13 the client is arranged to control the user interface to indicate to the user that the communication quality is poor. The client engine is also arranged to control the user interface to display a help text message, in a window, notifying the user of how to remedy the problem. In the case where the user device is a PC, this may be accessed by the user selecting the graphic button 303 (shown in Figure 4) using a mouse. Alternatively the message may be displayed automatically, together with the call indicator. The message displayed at step S13 states that:
- 15

'Direct UDP connection could not be established for unknown reason.'

20

At step 14 the client is arranged to check the local bandwidth, i.e. the bandwidth of the internet connection of the local computer. If the bandwidth is found to be less than 5kbytes/sec the bandwidth is determined to be too slow and the algorithm continues to step 15.

25

- At step 15 the client is arranged to control the user interface to indicate to the user that the communication quality is poor. The client engine is also arranged to control the user interface to display a help text message, in a window, notifying the user of how to remedy the problem. In the case where the user device is a PC, this may be accessed by the user selecting the graphic button 303 (shown in Figure 4) using a mouse. Alternatively the message may be displayed automatically, together with the call indicator. The message displayed at step S15 states that:
- 30

35 *'Your internet connection is too slow.'*

5

The remedy is to obtain a further connection.

If however the local detected bandwidth is found to be greater than 5kbytes/sec the algorithm continues to step S16.

10

At step S16 it is determined if the call is a peer to peer call. If so the algorithm continues to step S17.

15

At step S17 the client is arranged to detect the remote bandwidth. If the remote bandwidth is found to be less than 5kbytes/sec the algorithm continues to step S18.

20

At step 18 the client is arranged to control the user interface to indicate to the user that the communication quality is poor. The client engine is also arranged to control the user interface to display a help text message, in a window, notifying the user of how to remedy the problem. In the case where the user device is a PC, this may be accessed by the user selecting the graphic button 303 (shown in Figure 4) using a mouse. Alternatively the message may be displayed automatically, together with the call indicator. The message displayed at step

25

S18 states that:

'Your remote internet connection is too slow'.

30

If however the remote bandwidth is found to be greater than 5kbytes/sec the algorithm continues to step S19.

At step 19 it is determined if the speed of the remote CPU, i.e. the CPU of the other party involved in the call is less than 500 MHz. If so the algorithm continues to step 20.

5 At step 20 the client is arranged to control the user interface to indicate to the user that the communication quality is poor. The client engine is also arranged to control the user interface to display a help text message, in a window, notifying the user of how to remedy the problem. In the case where the user device is a PC, this may be accessed by the user selecting the graphic button 303 (shown in 10 Figure 4) using a mouse. Alternatively the message may be displayed automatically, together with the call indicator. The message displayed at step S20 states that:

'Remote CPU has too slow connection'.

15

In the case where the user terminal 102 is connected to the network with a wireless connection, according to a further embodiment of the invention, the client is arranged to monitor the signal strength of the wireless connection.

20

If it is determined that the wireless signal strength is below a predetermined threshold, the client may be arranged to control the user interface to indicate to the user that the communication quality is poor. In accordance with an embodiment of the invention the client may also provide the user with instructions for remedying the situation.

25

In one embodiment of the invention the client engine is arranged to control the user interface to display a communication quality indicator. This may appear as a graphic button on a display screen of the display device as shown in Figure 4. In an alternative embodiment of the invention, if it is not possible to display the 30 indicator on a screen the indicator may be provided by an LED, or any other suitable user interface.

If client engine receives notification from the client protocol layer that the wireless signal strength is too low, the client engine will control the user interface to 35 display a graphic button 303 indicating that the call quality is poor.

5

The client engine may also be arranged to control the user interface to display a help text message, in a window, notifying the user of how to remedy the problem. In the case where the user device is a PC, this may be accessed by the user selecting the graphic button 303 using a mouse. Alternatively the message may be displayed automatically, together with the call indicator. The message may for example state that:

'If you are experiencing call problems, moving closer to the wireless router or plugging in your network cable may improve your call quality.'

15

In an alternative embodiment of the invention the client engine may be arranged to control the client user interface to run an audio message to the user using a speaker in the device describing how to remedy the problem.

20 The client running on the second user terminal which the first user terminal 102 is in communication with may be arranged to display a message indicating that the first user terminal is experiencing communication problems.

25 Accordingly the user may move closer to the wireless router in order to improve the signal strength and improve the call quality. Alternatively the user may connect to the network with a wired connection in order to improve the quality of the call.

30 According to a further embodiment of the invention the client is arranged to monitor the local bandwidth of the network connection.

If it is determined that the local detected bandwidth is below a predefined threshold, the client may be arranged to control the user interface to indicate to the user that the communication quality is poor. In accordance with an

5 embodiment of the invention the client may also provide the user with instructions for remedying the situation.

In one embodiment of the invention the client engine is arranged to control the user interface to display a communication quality indicator. This may appear as a 10 graphic button on a display screen of the display device as shown in Figure 4. In an alternative embodiment of the invention, if it is not possible to display the indicator on a screen the indicator may be provided by an LED, or any other suitable user interface.

15 If client engine receives notification from the client protocol layer that the local bandwidth of the network connection is too low, the client engine will control the user interface to display a graphic button 303 indicating that the call quality is poor.

20 The client engine may also be arranged to control the user interface to display a help text message, in a window, notifying the user of how to remedy the problem. In the case where the user device is a PC, this may be accessed by the user selecting the graphic button 303 using a mouse. Alternatively the message may be displayed automatically, together with the call indicator. The message may for 25 example state that:

'If you are experiencing call problems this may be caused by a slow internet connection.'

30 In an alternative embodiment of the invention the client engine may be arranged to control the client user interface to run an audio message to the user using a speaker in the device describing how to remedy the problem.

In an embodiment of the invention it is possible to select the degree of technical 35 detail described in the help message provided to the user. For example the user

5 may be able to select whether or not he or she wants a detailed message by selecting an option provided in a window which is displayed when the user selects the graphic button. Alternatively the user may select an advanced help option in the window showing the original help message. In the case where the problem with the communication is detected as being due slow internet
10 connection the advanced message may state for example that:

'The minimum network requirements to use the calling application are a dial up connection with at least a 33.6Kbps modem. The best call quality is provided by a broadband internet connection.'

15 The client running on the second user terminal which the first user terminal 102 is in communication with may be arranged to display a message indicating that the first user terminal is experiencing communication problems.

20 Accordingly the user can review their network connection and switch to a broadband connection for better call quality.

According to a further embodiment of the invention, if the second user terminal 110 is connected to the network 104 via a different network such as a PSTN it
25 may be that the reason for poor communication quality is due to the other network. In this case the user may be prompted to report the problem to the operator. In one embodiment of the invention statistics may be collected based on the call length to a particular country. Short calls may indicate that the network provider in that country is bad. These statistics may be used to inform the user of
30 why the quality is poor.

If it is determined that the network provider of the called user terminal 110 is the reason for the poor quality of the call, the client may be arranged to control the user interface to indicate to the user that the communication quality is poor. In

5 accordance with an embodiment of the invention the client may also provide the user with instructions for remedying the situation.

In one embodiment of the invention the client engine is arranged to control the user interface to display a communication quality indicator. This may appear as a 10 graphic button on a display screen of the display device as shown in Figure 4. In an alternative embodiment of the invention, if it is not possible to display the indicator on a screen the indicator may be provided by an LED, or any other suitable user interface.

15 If client engine receives notification from the client protocol layer that the network provider of the called user is at fault, the client engine will control the user interface to display a graphic button 303 indicating that the call quality is poor.

The client engine may also be arranged to control the user interface to display a 20 help text message, in a window, notifying the user of how to remedy the problem. In the case where the user device is a PC, this may be accessed by the user selecting the graphic button 303 using a mouse. Alternatively the message may be displayed automatically, together with the call indicator. The message may for example state that:

25 *'Network conditions may be causing poor quality to this particular number Please try redialling now.'*

In an alternative embodiment of the invention the client engine may be arranged 30 to control the client user interface to run an audio message to the user using a speaker in the device describing how to remedy the problem.

In an embodiment of the invention it is possible to select the degree of technical detail described in the help message provided to the user. For example the user 35 may be able to select whether or not he or she wants a detailed message by

5 selecting an option provided in a window which is displayed when the user selects the graphic button. Alternatively the user may select an advanced help option in the window showing the original help message. In the case where the problem with the communication is detected as being due to the network provider of the called user the advanced message may state for example that:

10

'Some calls are made through other telephone networks. Fluctuations in these networks cause the call quality to vary. Please redial to improve your call quality. If this problem persists, please report this destination to the operator services.'

15

Accordingly the user can redial to achieve a call with better call quality.

In an embodiment of the invention the client may be arranged to determine a plurality of call quality factors in accordance with the steps of an algorithm which implement the steps of the flowchart of Figure 5.

20

In an embodiment of the invention when the detected call quality is good the device is arranged to indicate this to the user. Referring to Figure 4, this may be good call quality may be indicated by icon 302.

25

As stated previously, the help messages may be automatically displayed to a user when a problem is identified by the client. Alternatively the message may only be provided to the user when the user clicks on an icon.

30

In one embodiment of the invention, if the detected call quality is bad the icon may turn a different colour to indicate a problem and to further indicate that there is a help message available.

35

In an alternative embodiment of the invention the icon may sequentially change in appearance to indicate that there is a help message available. This is referred to as a glow sequence. An example of a glow sequence is shown in Figure 6.

5

In a further embodiment of the invention when a user rolls over a call quality icon with the mouse a text string may be displayed indicating that the call quality may be enhanced.

10 A list of possible text strings for the when the user either rolls over an icon with the mouse, left clicks or right clicks an icon with the mouse is shown in Appendix A

15 A representation of display screens showing how help messages may appear on the screen during a call is shown in Appendix B.

20 While this invention has been particularly shown and described with reference to preferred embodiments, it will be understood to those skilled in the art that various changes in form and detail may be made without departing from the scope of the invention as defined by the claims.

25

30

35

5 Claims

1. A method of controlling communication quality between one user terminal and at least one other user terminal in a packet switched communication system, the method comprising the steps of:

10 detecting at one of said user terminals a condition that indicates that communication quality is below an acceptable threshold;

automatically generating instructions based on the detected condition for a user of the at least one user terminal, said instructions intended to provide a remedy to improve the communication quality;

15 receiving input from a user of the at least one user terminal responsive to the instructions to implement the remedy and thereby improve the communication quality.

20 2. A method as claimed in claim 1 wherein the instructions are provided to a user of the terminal.

3. A method as claimed in claim 2 wherein the instructions are carried out by the user.

25 4. A method as claimed in claim 1 wherein the user terminal includes a processor.

5. A method as claimed in claim 4 wherein the condition relates to the use of the processor during the communication.

30 6. A method as claimed in claim 5 wherein the user is instructed to close any applications running on the processor that are not involved in handling the communication.

5 7. A method as claimed in claim 4 wherein the condition relates to the round trip time of data in the communication.

10 8. A method as claimed in claim 7 wherein the user is instructed to close any applications running on the processor that are not involved in handling the communication.

9. A method as claimed in claim 7 wherein the user is instructed to disconnect and reconnect to the communication.

15 10. A method as claimed in claim 1 wherein the condition relates to the degree of data packets lost from data packets transmitted in the communication.

11. A method as claimed in claim 7 or 10 wherein the user is instructed to stop downloads from the internet.

20 12. A method as claimed in claim 1 wherein the condition relates to the type of router used in the communication.

25 13. A method as claimed in claim 1 wherein the first user terminal is connected to a network via a wireless link.

14. A method as claimed in claim 1 wherein the first user terminal and the at least one other user terminal is connected to the same network.

30 15. A method as claimed in claim 1 wherein the first user terminal and the at least one other user terminal are connected to different networks.

16. A method as claimed in claim 13 wherein the condition relates to a signal strength of the wireless link.

- 5 17. A method as claimed in claim 16 wherein the user is instructed to move the terminal closer to a router providing the signal.
- 10 18. A method as claimed in claim 1 wherein the condition relates to the speed of the processor.
- 15 19. A method as claimed in claim 1 wherein the instructions are provided on a display screen of the user terminal.
- 20 20. A method as claimed in claim 1 wherein the instructions are provided in an audio message.
- 25 21. A method as claimed in claim 19 wherein the instructions appear as a text message.
- 30 22. A method as claimed in claim 2 wherein the instructions are provided only after an instructions option is selected by the user.
23. A method as claimed in claim 2 wherein the instructions are provided as soon as the condition is detected.
- 35 24. A method as claimed in claim 2 wherein the user is able to select whether or not the instructions are provided.
25. A method as claimed in claim 1 wherein when a condition is detected at a first user terminal information is provided at the at least one other user terminal indicating poor call quality condition.
26. A user terminal in a packet switched communication system, said user terminal having means for effecting a communication to at least one other terminal in the communication system, the user terminal comprising means for:

5 detecting at one of said user terminals a condition that indicates that communication quality is below an acceptable threshold;

 means for automatically generating instructions based on the detected condition for a user of the at least one user terminal, said instructions intended to provide a remedy to improve the communication quality; and

10 means for receiving input from a user of the at least one user terminal responsive to the instructions to implement the remedy and thereby improve the communication quality.

27. A terminal as claimed in claimed in claim 26 which includes a processor.

15 28. A terminal as claimed in claim 27 wherein the condition relates to the use of the processor during the communication.

20 29. A terminal as claimed in claim 28 wherein the receiving means is arranged to receive an instruction to close any applications running on the processor that are not involved in handling the communication.

30 30. A terminal as claimed in claim 26 which includes a router and wherein the condition relates to the type of router used in the communication.

25 31. A terminal as claimed in any of claims 26 to 30 comprising a wireless link effecting the communication, and wherein the condition relates to a signal strength of the wireless link.

30 32. A terminal as claimed in any of claims 26 to 31 wherein the instructions are provided on a display screen of the user terminal.

35 33. A computer program product comprising program code means which when executed by a computer implement the steps according to the method of any of claims 1 to 25.

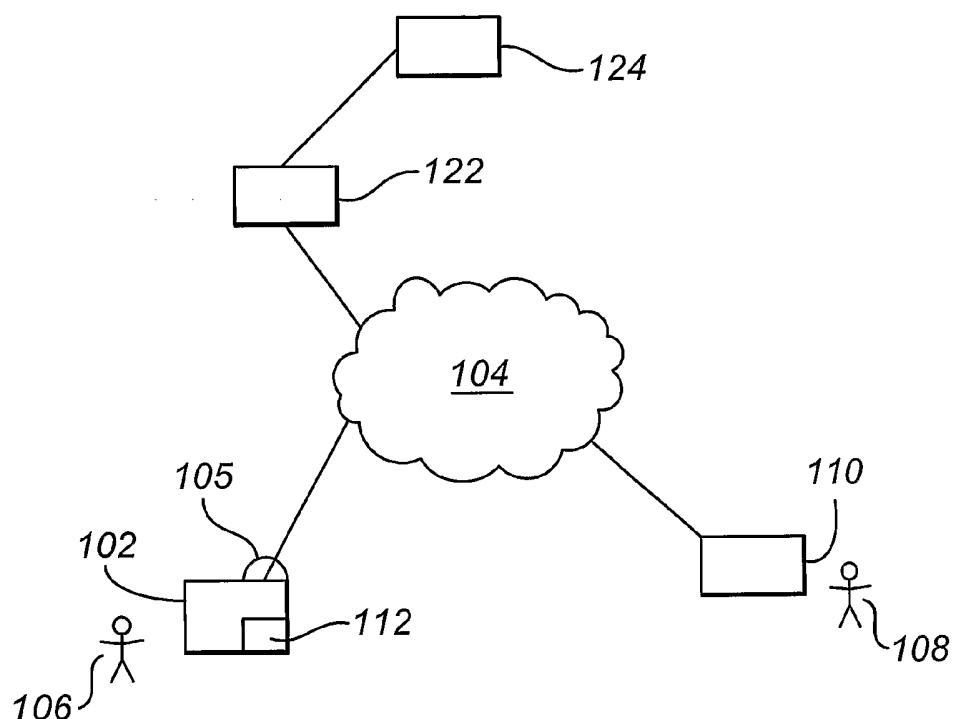
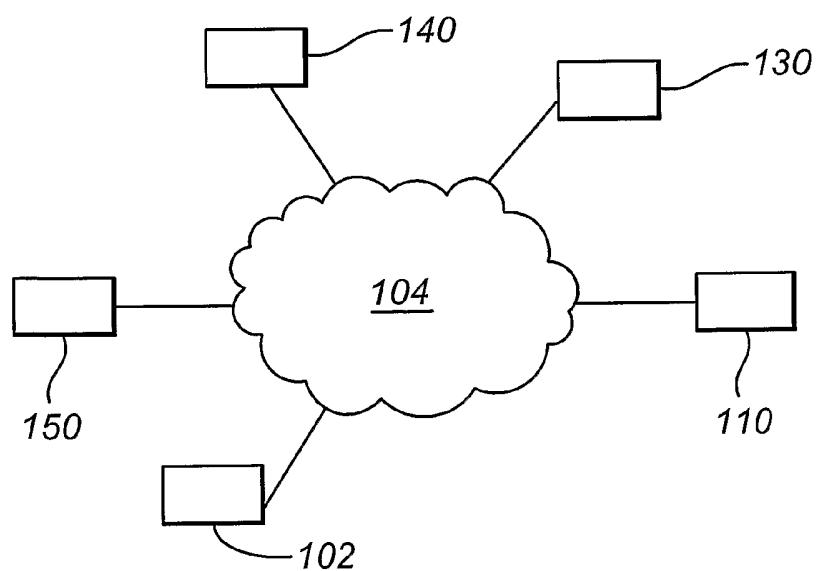
5

34. A method of controlling communication quality between one user terminal and at least one other user terminal in a packet switched communication system substantially as hereinbefore described with reference to the accompanying drawings.

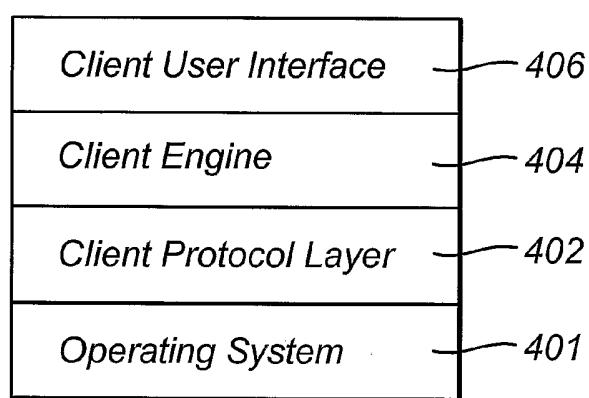
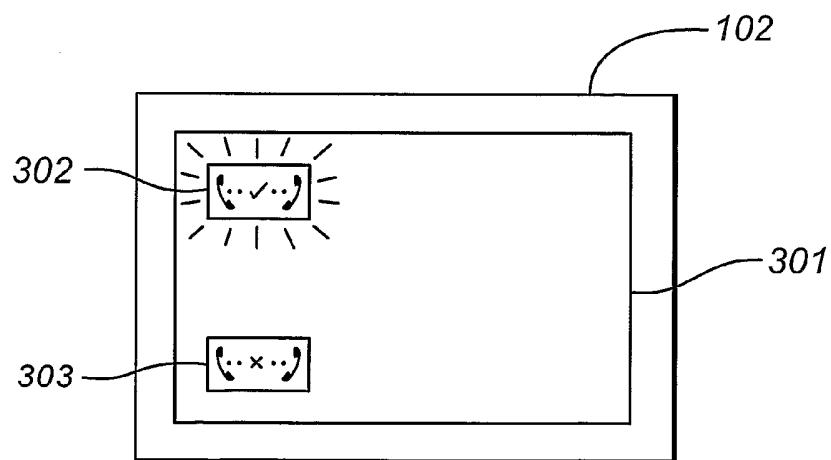
10

35. A user terminal in a packet switched communication system substantially as hereinbefore described with reference to the accompanying drawings.

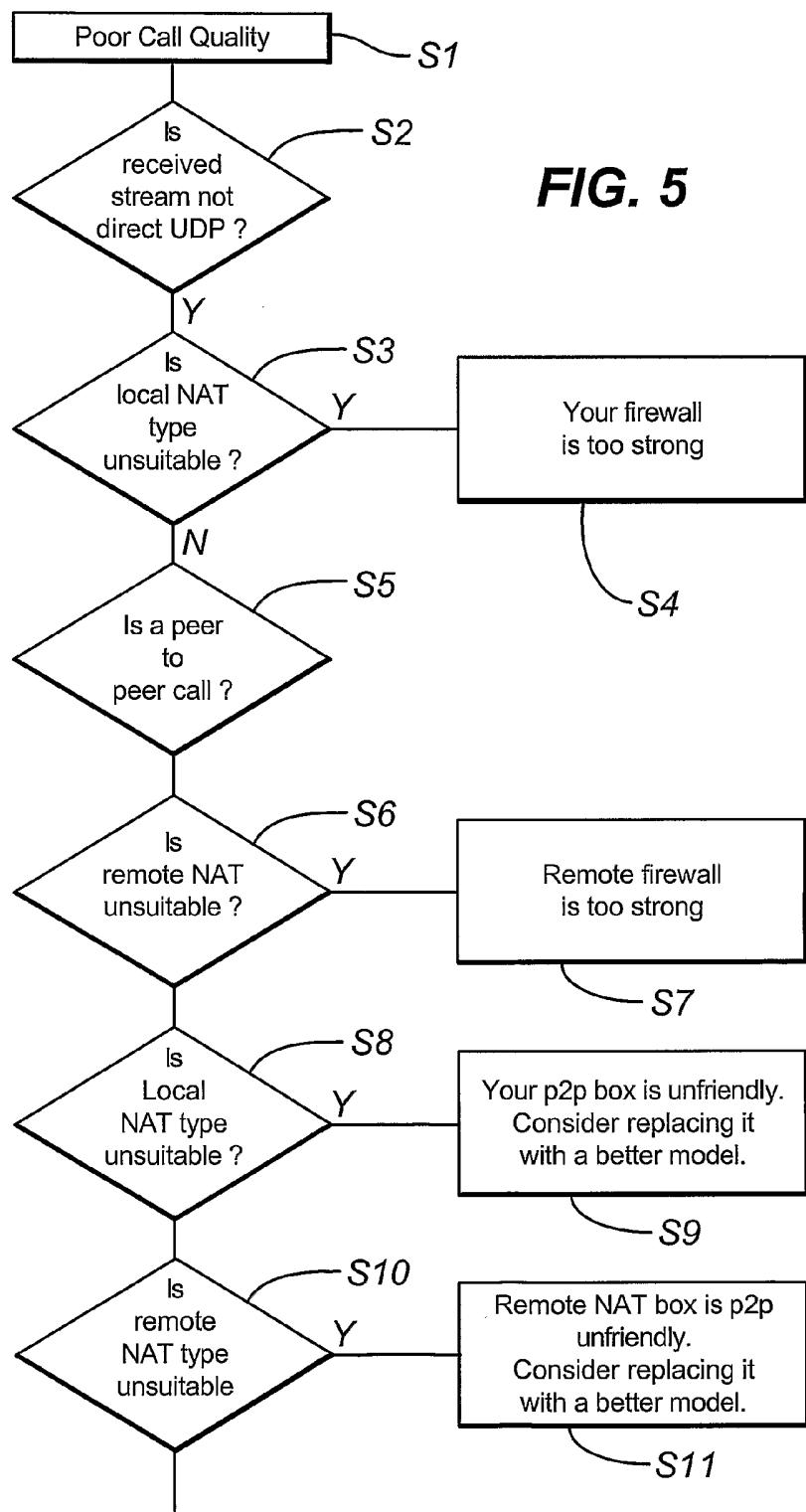
1/17

FIG. 1**FIG. 2**

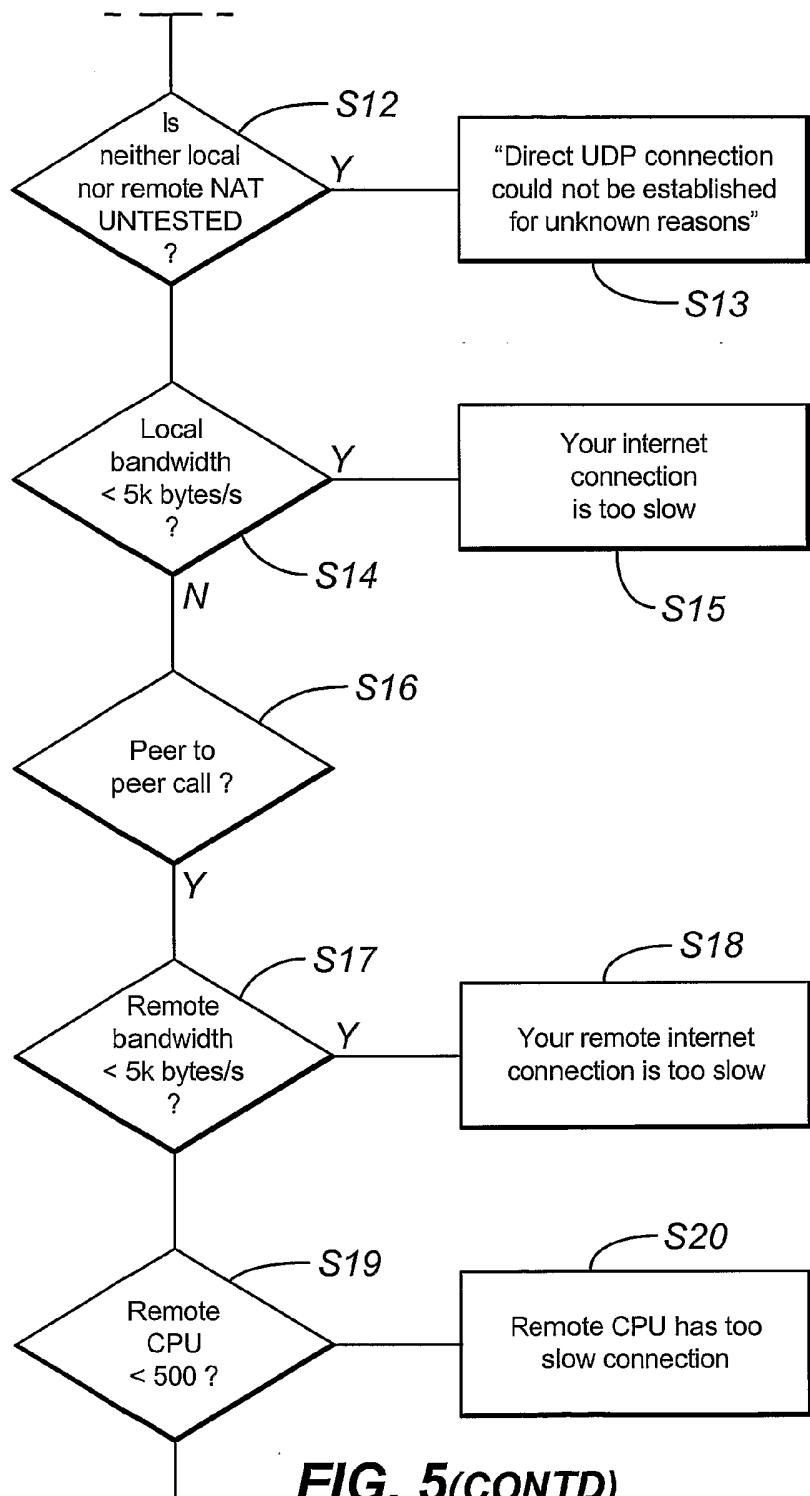
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FIG. 3**FIG. 4**

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**FIG. 5(CONTD)**

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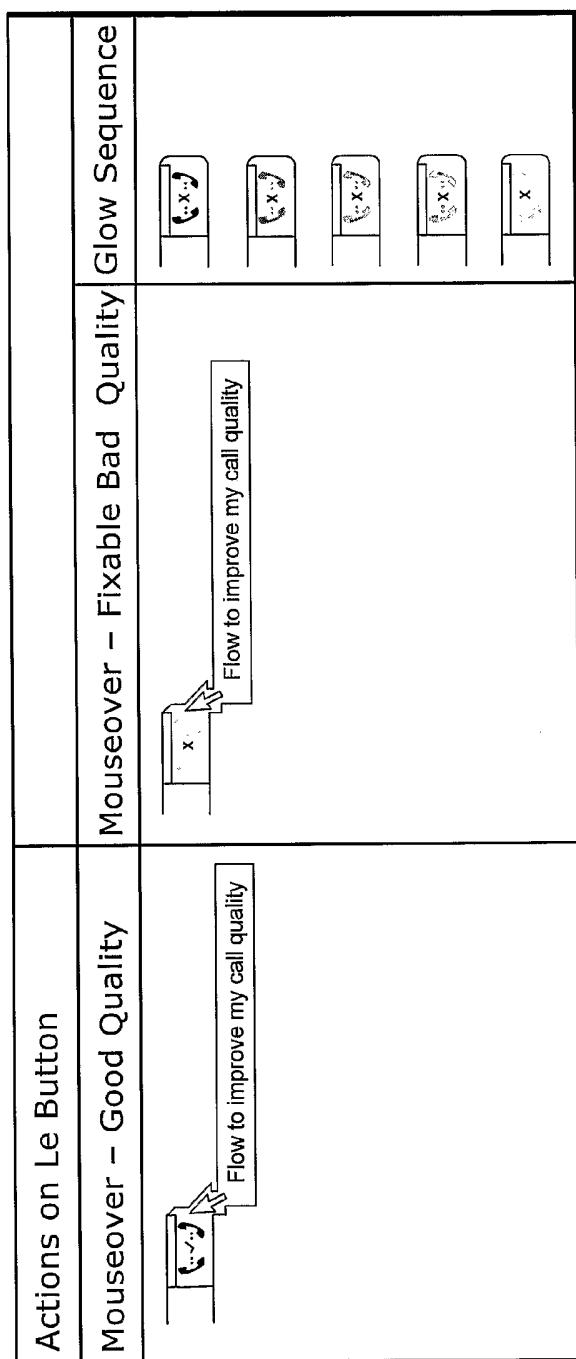
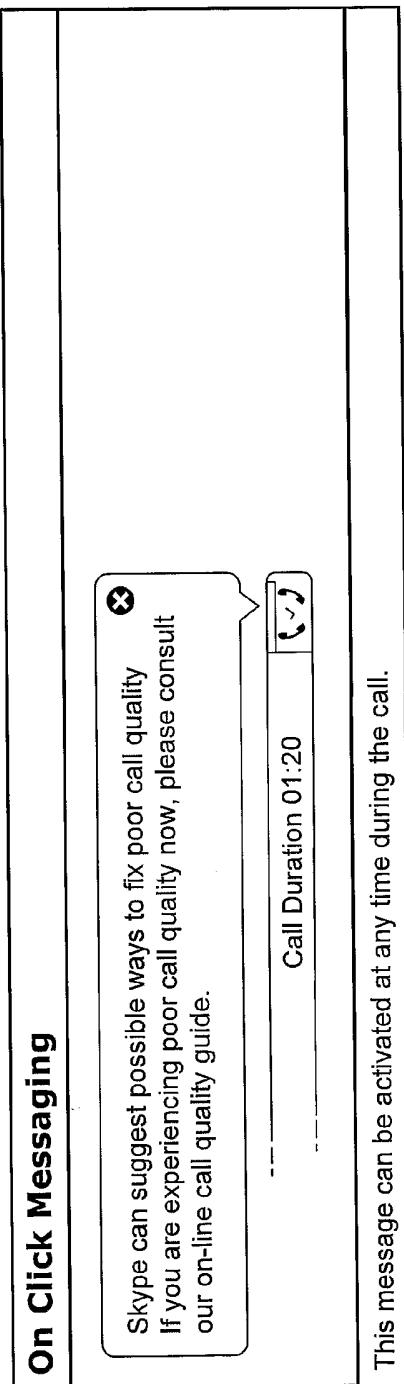
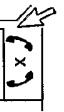
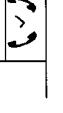
FIG. 6

FIG. 7A



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FIG. 7A CONTD.

Cases that might occur		
Call is good	Indicator shows its bad 	This situation should not occur
Call is good	Indicator shows its good 	<p>This is a proper indication on mouseover </p> <p>Flow to improve my call quality</p> <p>on click</p> <p>Skype can suggest possible ways to fix poor call quality If you are experiencing poor call quality now, please consult our on-line call quality guide.</p>
Call is bad	Indicator shows its good We did not detect its bad 	<p>This is problematic situation. Proposed to be addressed via:</p> <p>Skype can suggest possible ways to fix poor call quality If you are experiencing poor call quality now, please consult our on-line call quality guide.</p> <p>on click</p>

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FIG. 7B

Cases that might occur	
Call is good	Indicator shows its bad 

Skype can suggest possible ways to fix poor call quality
If you are experiencing poor call quality now, please consult
our on-line call quality guide.

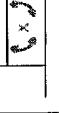
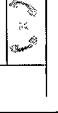
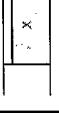
Call Duration 01:20 

FIG. 7B CONTD.

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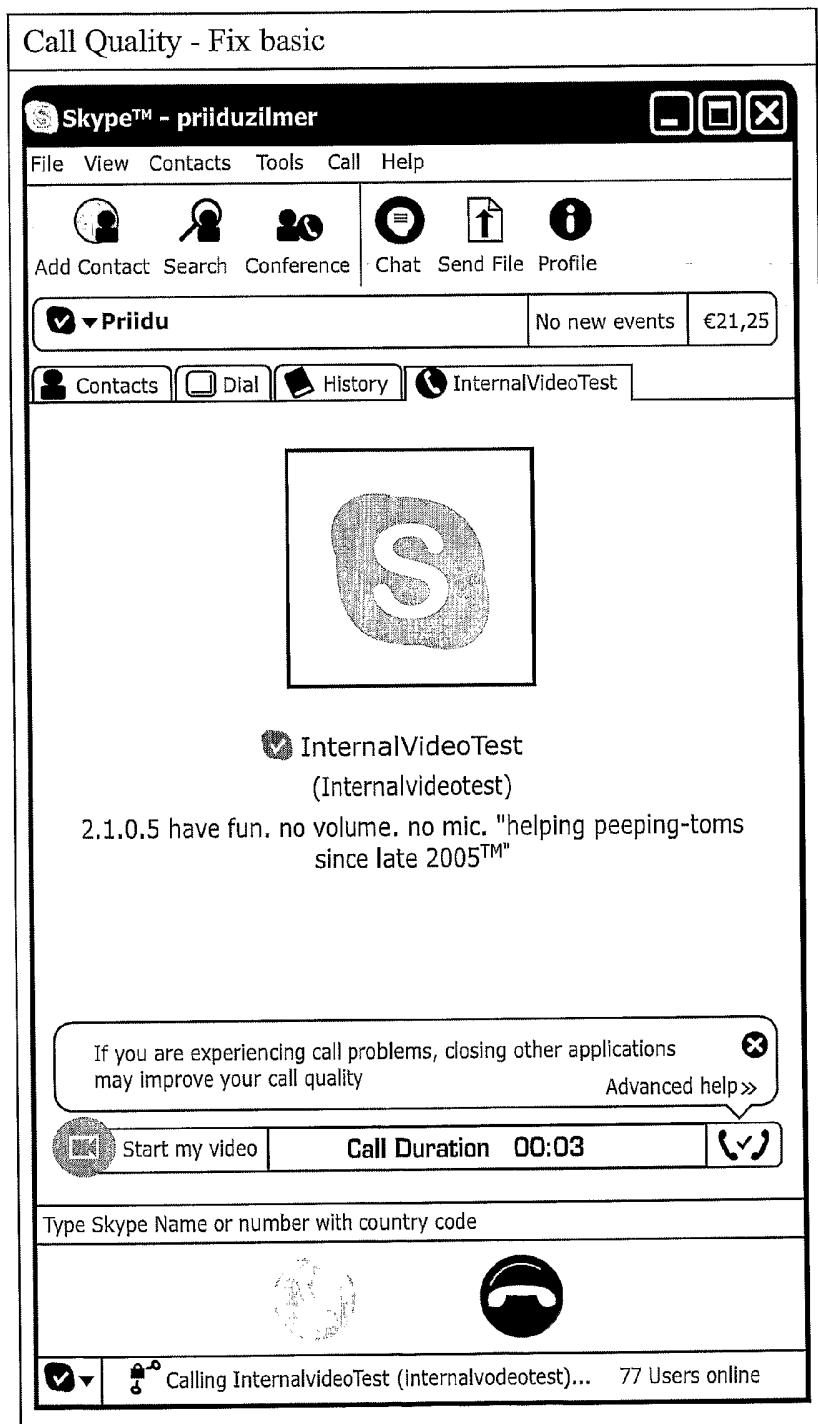
Call is bad	Indicator shows its bad 	This is a proper situation  If you are experiencing call problems, closing other applications may improve your call quality Advanced help
		<p>If user disables help pop-ups:</p>      <p>on mouseover:</p>  How to improve my cal quality

Help Messaging

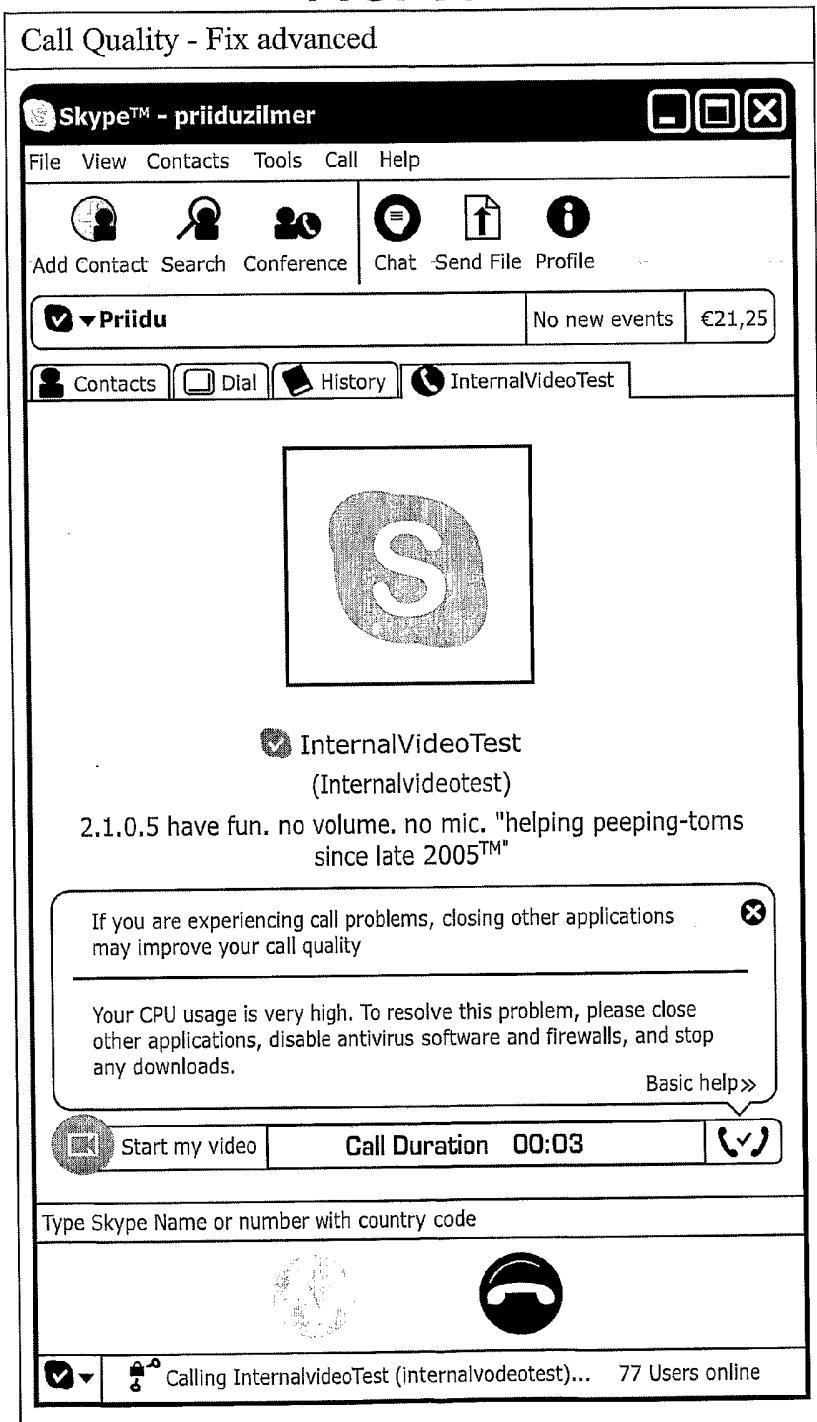
FIG. 8**Text Strings**

Dialogue	Description	String
Call tab	Mouse over - Good	
Call tab	Mouse over - Bad quality	Call quality can be enhanced
Call tab	Right-click - Enable	Enable call help tips
Call tab	Right-click - Enable	Disable call help tips

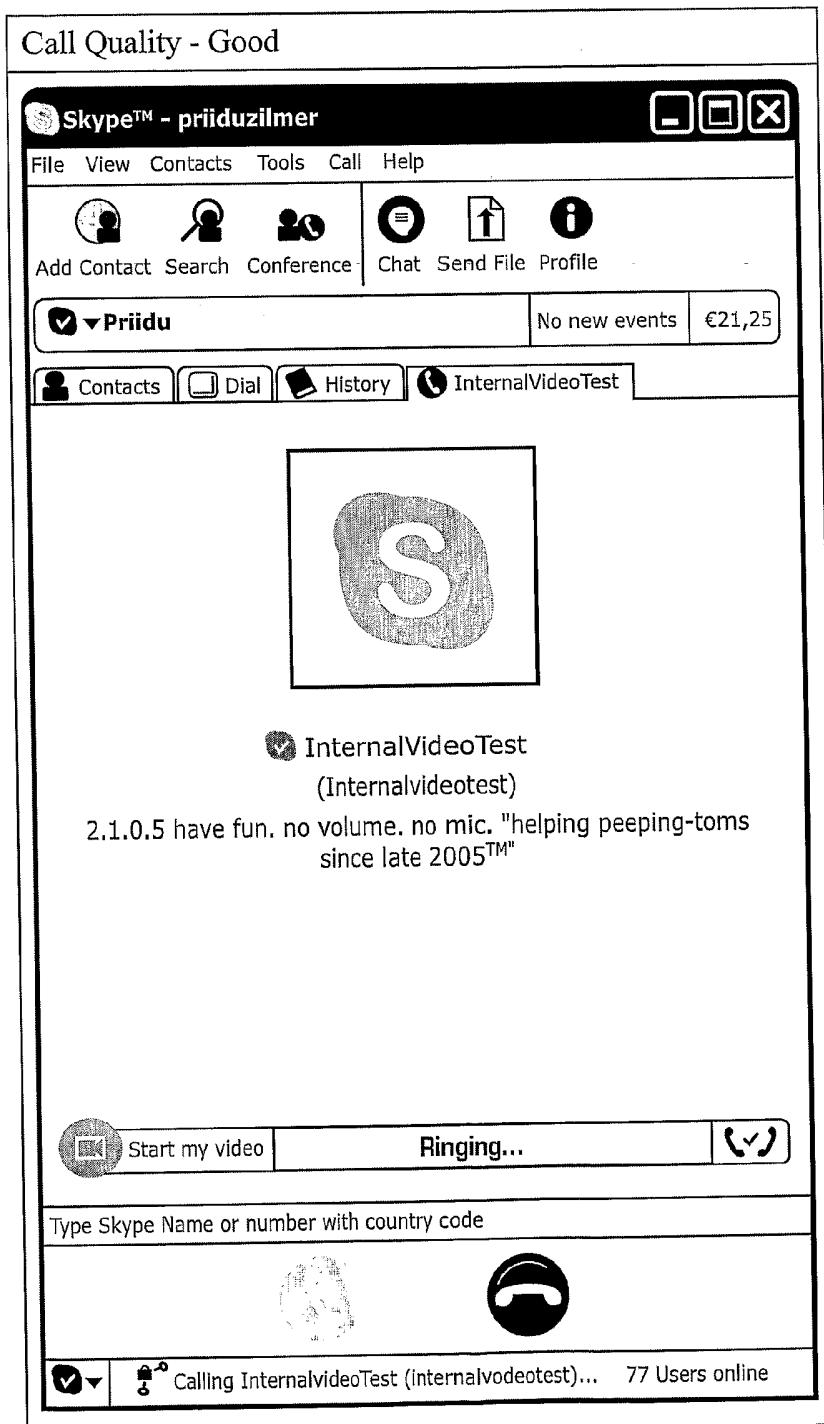
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FIG. 9

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FIG. 10

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FIG. 11

=In the client (one to one window) small window=

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FIG. 12
=In the client (Conference call)=

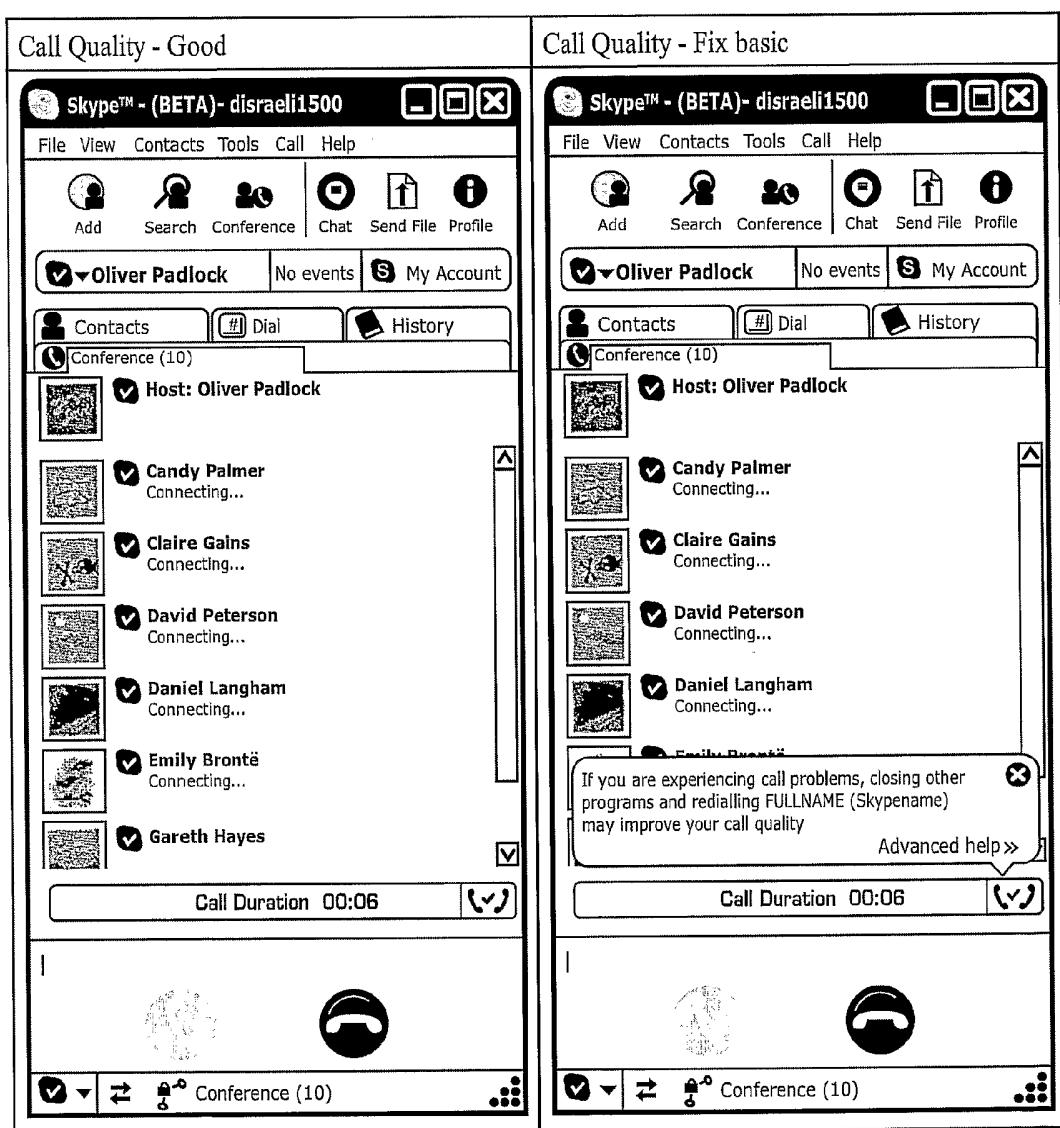
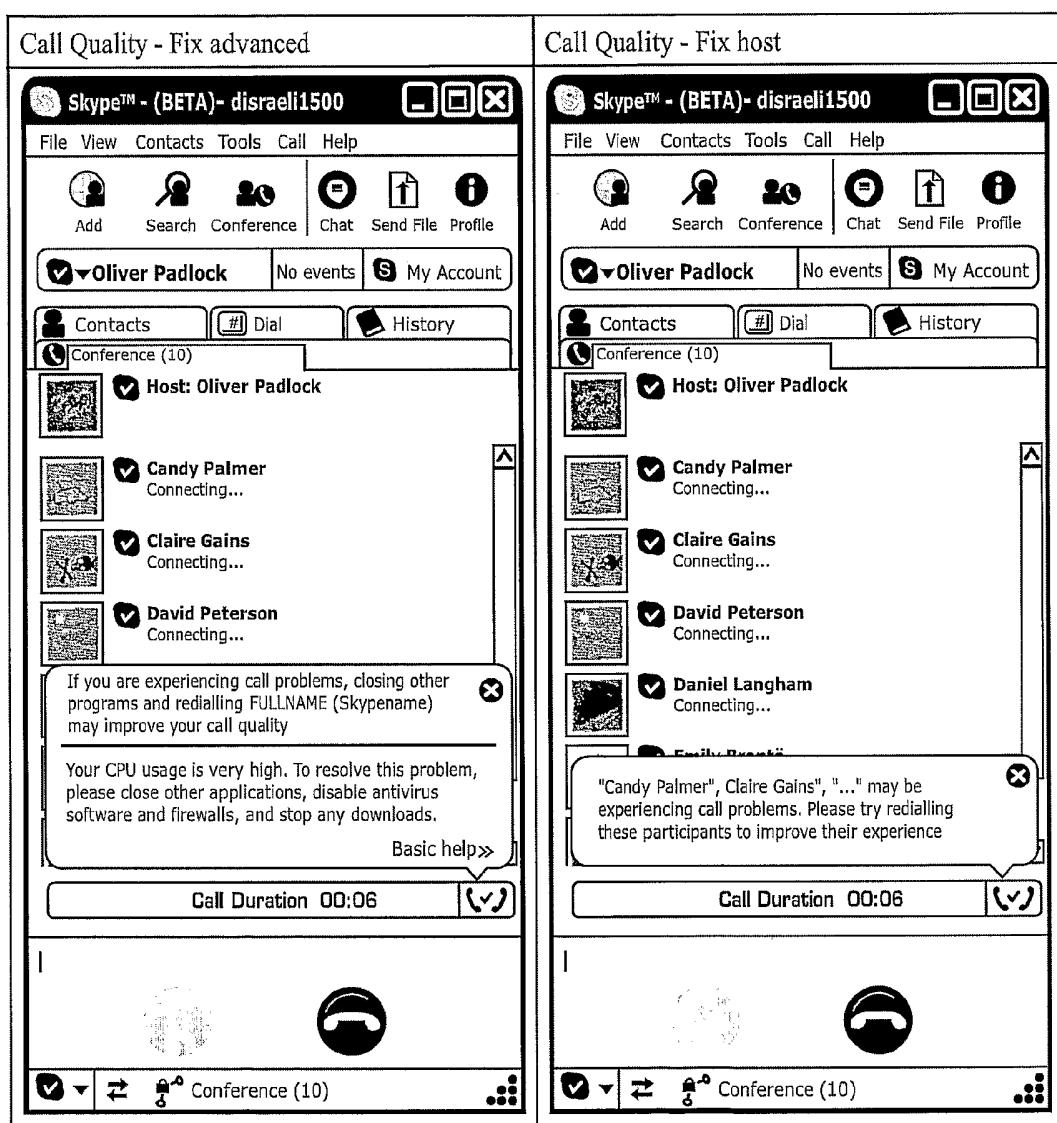
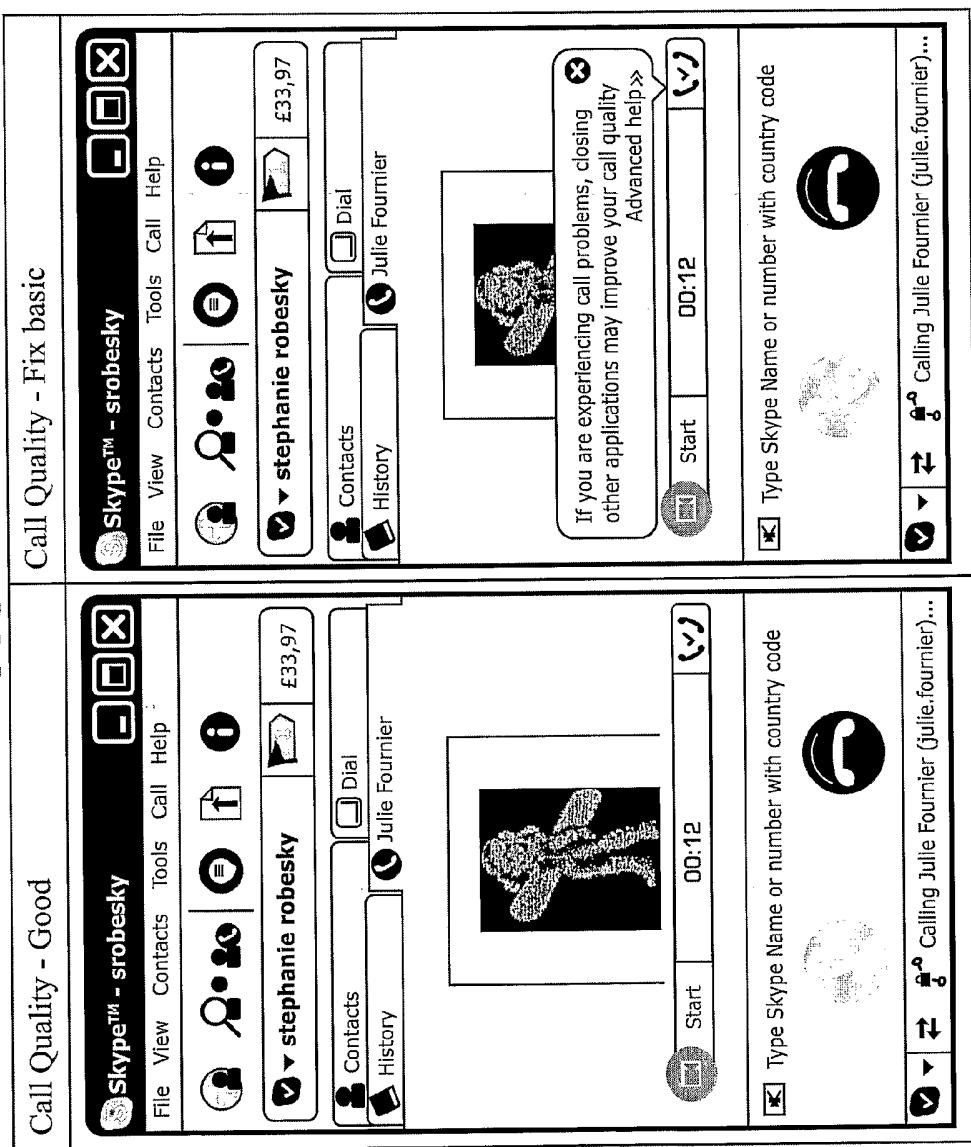


FIG. 13

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FIG. 14



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FIG. 15