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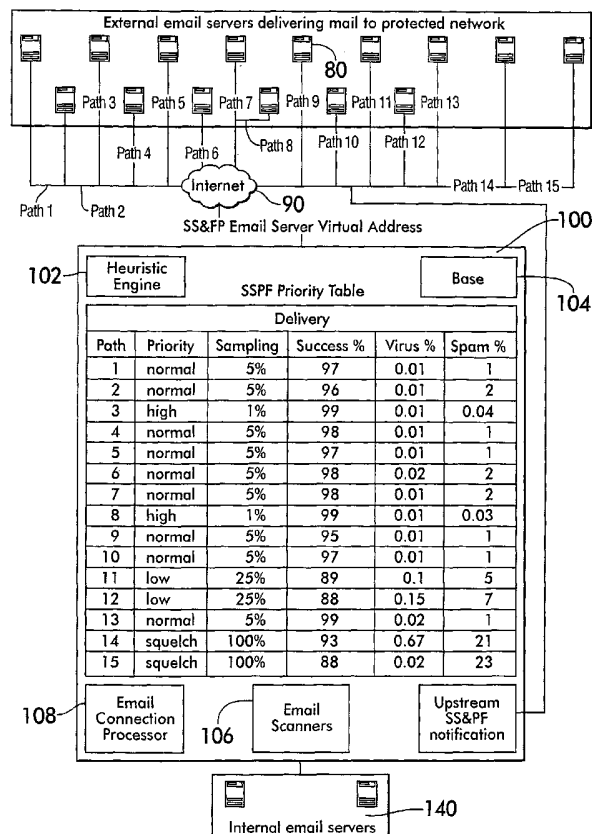
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[Continued on next page]

(54) Title: SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR CONTROLLING DISTRIBUTION OF NETWORK COMMUNICATIONS



(57) Abstract: A method for controlling distribution of network communications. An incoming message either carries priority information, or is assigned priority information based on a shared characteristic with other messages. The priority information is used to determine how and/or when to deliver the message, e.g. by delaying the message for a fixed time. Preferences for receipt of messages by priority level may be communication to upstream hosts along a network path. Accordingly, an intermediary host between a communication network (90) and a internal e-mail servers (140) may reject and/or delay messages that the intended recipient does not wish to receive. This pushes the burden of low-priority messages back to the sender, thereby reducing or eliminating burdens on network/system resources of the recipient and/or intermediaries between the recipient and the sender. Accordingly, it can "squelch" spam messages at or close to their source. Trusted senders complying with prescribed practices may include priority information allowing for delivery of their messages with higher priority.

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(BF, BJ, CF, CG, CI, CM, GA, GN, GQ, GW, ML, MR, NE, SN, TD, TG).

**Declarations under Rule 4.17:**

- as to applicant's entitlement to apply for and be granted a patent (Rule 4.17(ii)) for the following designations AE, AG, AL, AM, AT, AU, AZ, BA, BB, BG, BR, BY, BZ, CA, CH, CN, CO, CR, CU, CZ, DE, DK, DM, DZ, EC, 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, MA, MD, MG, MK, MN, MW, MX, MZ, NO, NZ, OM, PH, PL, PT, RO, RU, SD, SE, SG, SI, SK, SL, TJ, TM, TN, TR, TT, TZ, UA, UG, UZ, VN, YU, ZA, ZM, ZW, ARIPO patent (GH, GM, KE, LS, MW, MZ, SD, SL, SZ, TZ, UG, ZM, 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, TR), OAPI patent (BF, BJ, CF, CG, CI, CM, GA, GN, GQ, GW, ML, MR, NE, SN, TD, TG)
- as to the applicant's entitlement to claim the priority of the earlier application (Rule 4.17(iii)) for the following designations AE, AG, AL, AM, AT, AU, AZ, BA, BB, BG, BR, BY, BZ, CA, CH, CN, CO, CR, CU, CZ, DE, DK, DM, DZ, EC, 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,

MA, MD, MG, MK, MN, MW, MX, MZ, NO, NZ, OM, PH, PL, PT, RO, RU, SD, SE, SG, SI, SK, SL, TJ, TM, TN, TR, TT, TZ, UA, UG, UZ, VN, YU, ZA, ZM, ZW, ARIPO patent (GH, GM, KE, LS, MW, MZ, SD, SL, SZ, TZ, UG, ZM, 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, TR), OAPI patent (BF, BJ, CF, CG, CI, CM, GA, GN, GQ, GW, ML, MR, NE, SN, TD, TG)

- of inventorship (Rule 4.17(iv)) for US only

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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.  
PCT/US02/05960

**A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER**  
 IPC(7) :G06F 15/16  
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 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)  
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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)  
 Please See Extra Sheet.

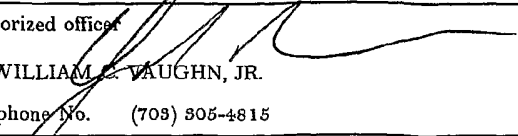
**C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT**

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
Y	US 5,911,048 A (GRAF) 08 JUNE 1999, ABSTRACT, FIGURES 1, 6, 8A, COL. 4, LINES 20-65, COL. 5, LINES 19-67, COL. 6, LINES 1-67, COL. 7, LINES 1-67, COL. 17, LINES 19-35	1-7
Y	US 6,073,142 A (GEIGER et al) 06 JUNE 2000, ABSTRACT, FIGURES 1 THRU, 22, COL. 3, LINES 1-67, COL. 4, LINES 1-54, COL. 5, LINES 43-67, COL. 6, LINES 1-67, COL. 7, LINES 1-67, COL. 8, LINES 1-67, COL. 9, LINES 1-57.	1-7
Y	US 6,185,603 B1 (HENDERSON et al) 06 FEBRUARY 2001, ABSTRACT, FIGURES 1, 2, COL. 2, LINES 14-67, COL. 2, LINES 39-67, COL. 5, LINES 1-67, COL. 6, LINES 1-59.	1-7

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

* Special categories of cited documents:	"I" 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
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"L" document which may throw doubt on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)	"G" document member of the same patent family
"O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means	
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Date of the actual completion of the international search 12 AUGUST 2002	Date of mailing of the international search report 10 SEP 2002
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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  WILLIAM E. VAUGHN, JR. Telephone No. (703) 305-4815
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International application No.  
PCT/US02/05960

C (Continuation). DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT		
Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
Y	US 5,377,354 A (SCANNELL et al) 27 DECEMBER 1994, ABSTRACT, COL 2, LINES 34-67, COL 3, LINES 1-11, COL 4, LINES 6-67, COL 1-67, COL 6, LINES 1-67.	1-7

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International application No.  
PCT/US02/05960

## B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Electronic data bases consulted (Name of data base and where practicable terms used):

EAST, NPL AND INTERNET

search terms: email, priority, levels, preference, profile, rules, message, controlling distribution, controlling access, servers