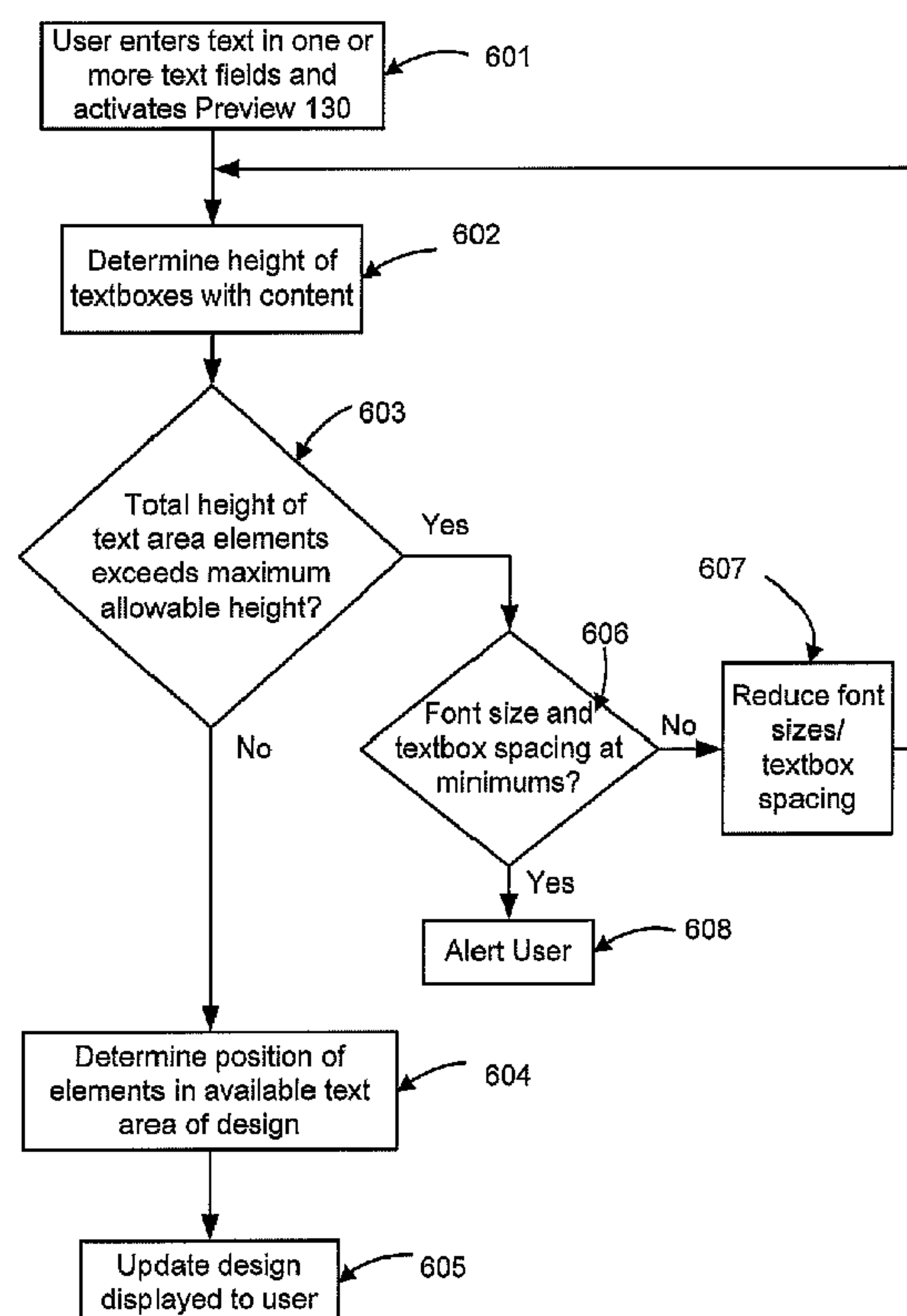




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(54) Titre : DISPOSITION AUTOMATIQUE DE PRODUIT
(54) Title: AUTOMATED PRODUCT LAYOUT



(57) Abrégé/Abstract:

Methods and computer programs for automatically creating a text layout in an electronic design for a product to be printed. A number of defined text elements (101-1 11) are available for user text entries. The product layout is based a user-selected image (1101), if any, and on the text elements (101-111) having user-supplied text content. Text elements without text content are

(57) **Abrégé(suite)/Abstract(continued):**

disregarded. Positioning of user text entries is determined based on the size of the text entries, defined text element spacing distances, and defined positioning rules. Creating a layout incorporating user-supplied text entries and/or image may include cropping or resizing of other design elements in the product design and wrapping of relatively long text entries onto multiple lines.

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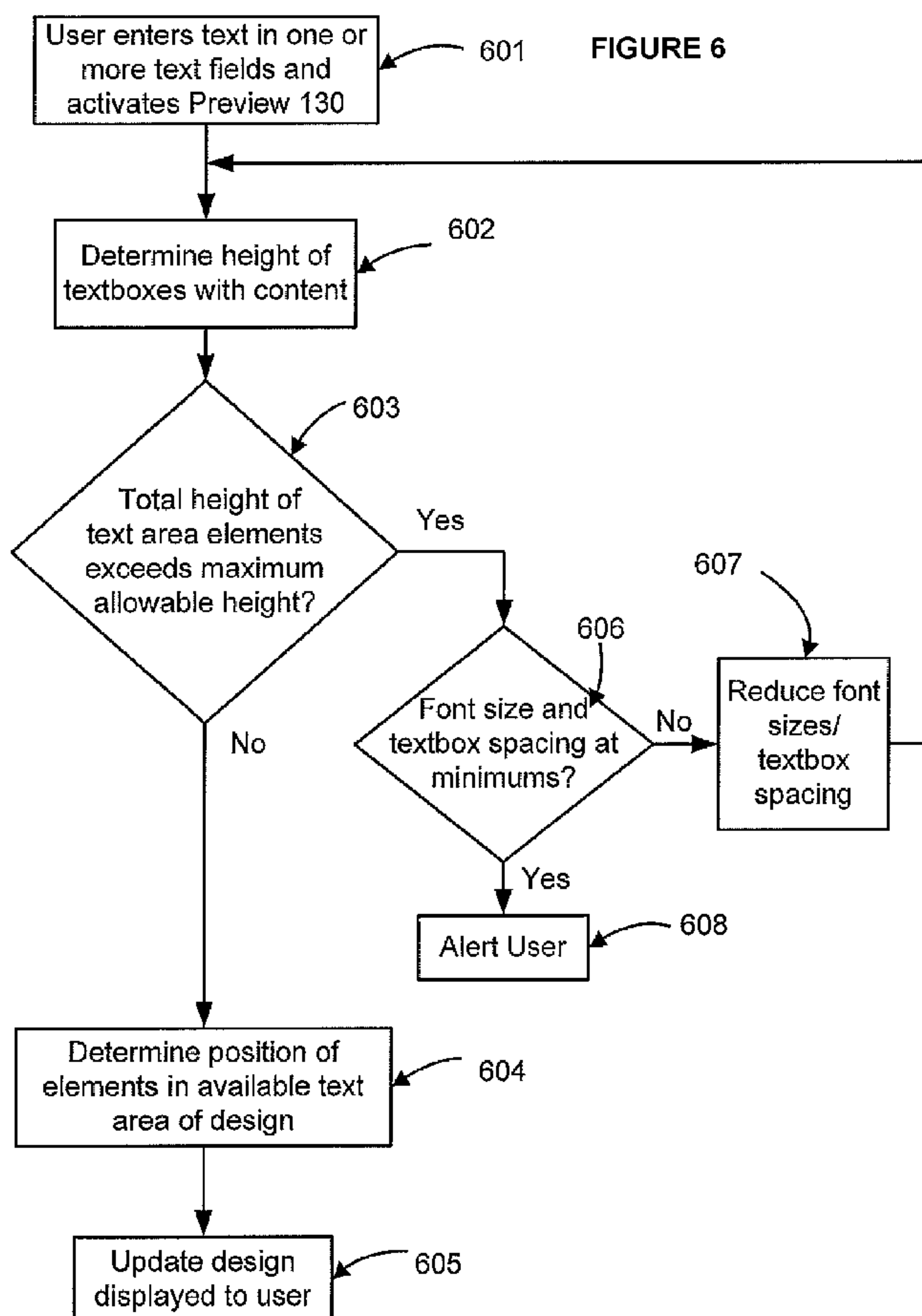
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[Continued on next page]

(54) Title: AUTOMATED PRODUCT LAYOUT



(57) Abstract: Methods and computer programs for automatically creating a text layout in an electronic design for a product to be printed. A number of defined text elements (101-111) are available for user text entries. The product layout is based a user-selected image (1101), if any, and on the text elements (101-111) having user-supplied text content. Text elements without text content are disregarded. Positioning of user text entries is determined based on the size of the text entries, defined text element spacing distances, and defined positioning rules. Creating a layout incorporating user-supplied text entries and/or image may include cropping or resizing of other design elements in the product design and wrapping of relatively long text entries onto multiple lines.

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AUTOMATED PRODUCT LAYOUT

Field of the Invention

[0001] This invention relates to the online creation of customized product designs.

Background of the Invention

[0002] Printing services Web sites that allow a user to access the site from the user's home or work and design a personalized document are well known and widely used by many consumers, professionals, and businesses. Typically, these types of sites allow the user to review thumbnail images of a number of customizable designs prepared by the site operator with a variety of different styles, formats, backgrounds, color schemes, fonts and designs from which the user may choose. When the user has selected a specific template design to customize, the sites typically provide online tools allowing the user to incorporate the user's personal information into the selected template to create a custom document design. When the design is completed to the user's satisfaction, the user can place an order through the site for production and delivery of a desired quantity of the corresponding printed product.

[0003] One very common printed product that is often ordered through printing services sites is the business card. The type of information that is normally provided on a typical business card is well known and can be fairly reliably predicted. To facilitate the easy and rapid preparation of a business card, printing services sites often provide a simple text entry tool that can be easily used by customers with little or no online product design experience.

[0004] Referring to Fig. 1, a representative online business card creation screen displayed to a user at the user's computer system is depicted. In this example, text entry fields 101-111 into which the user can type the desired information are

provided. To assist the user, each text entry field 101-111 has an associated text label indicating the specific information the services provider recommends that the user enter into that field. For example, field 101 is indicated as the field for entering the user's company name, field 102 is the field for the user's company message, and so forth. The fields are normally empty when initially displayed to the user.

[0005] Template image 120 is the particular business card design template selected by the user for customization. In the example shown in Fig. 1, template image 120 contains an image area 121 and a text entry area 122. Template 120 is merely representative and other template designs could have one or more images of different sizes and/or positions or no images at all.

[0006] The service provider will typically have specified a default font, font size, and other font characteristics in which each user text entry will be displayed. To illustrate to the user the location and appearance of the user's information as it will appear in the design, generic text entries such as "Company Name", "Full Name" and so forth are initially displayed in template 120. Preview button 130 is provided to allow the user to cause template 120 to be updated to replace the default generic text information in text area 122 with the information entered by the user in fields 101-111. Display 100 may also include various other items, not shown, such as informational, navigational, and promotional banners, messages and links.

[0007] Because the user is interacting with the service provider's site using a Web browser program running on the user's computer system, the document creation tools and displays are provided by the server to the user's computer in a markup language such as XHTML (eXtensible Hypertext Markup Language) suitable for execution by the browser program. What the user sees on the user's display as the design of a business card is the result of the browser's rendering of a collection of discrete markup language elements.

[0008] Each text entry field 101-111 is associated with an individual textbox. The individual textbox elements of template 120 are depicted for illustration in Fig. 2.

Text entry fields 101-111 correspond to textboxes 201-211. As is well understood by those of skill in the art, each textbox element will have a number of associated parameters. Some parameters relate to the displaying of the text in the textbox, such as the font to be used, font size, font color, and font attributes such as bolding or italics. Other parameters relate to the textbox itself, such as the width of the textbox, the absolute or relative position of the textbox, and whether or not text wrapping is enabled.

[0009] In a typical prior art application of this type of design system, each textbox element is assigned a fixed absolute position within the overall template 120 design. For example, the horizontal and vertical pixel offset of the upper left corner of each textbox, such as corner 220 of text box 201, relative to the upper left corner 221 of the template 120 image is defined for each textbox 201-211. While this type of inflexible design may result in an acceptable finished product in many cases, in some situations the product design will be aesthetically unpleasing or possibly so defective as to be completely unusable.

[0010] While template 120 has been designed to yield a pleasing card containing eleven common business card data entries, some users have no use or desire for eleven different entries. The user is not forced to make an entry in each field and may choose to leave one or more fields empty. If a user makes entries in only a few of the fields, spacing between entries in the product design may be uneven and unattractive. For example, if a user entered only a company name in text field 101, a name in text field 103, and a Web address in field 111, the resulting three lines of information displayed in textboxes 201, 203 and 211 would be widely separated over almost the entire height of the card.

[0011] Another drawback in the prior art is that the template 120 layout design anticipates that all entries by a user will fit on one line. A problem is created if the user enters more text than the textbox can accommodate on a single line. If text wrapping for a textbox is not enabled, the user's desired text will exceed the line capacity and will be truncated. If text wrapping is enabled, when the user's text

exceeds the capacity of a single line, the text will be wrapped onto a second line, often resulting in the text content of one textbox overlapping the text content of another textbox, creating an unusable design. Both of these situations are clearly undesirable.

[0012] There is, therefore, a need for a flexible design layout method that automatically adjusts the design according to the text entries made by the user.

Summary

[0013] The present invention is directed at satisfying the need for automated generation of aesthetically pleasing text layouts in a markup language design.

[0014] In accordance with one aspect of the invention, a plurality of text elements are defined for receiving user text for incorporation into a markup language design. In creating a text layout, text elements having no text content are disregarded. Positions of the text elements having text content are determined based on the heights of the text elements, defined spacing distances between adjacent text elements, and the defined text element positioning order.

[0015] It is an advantage of the invention that attractive text layouts can be automatically created for a wide variety of user text entry choices.

[0015a] In a preferred aspect there is provided a method of incorporating at least user-supplied text into an electronic product design having a first content area containing one or more content elements. The method comprises: receiving a plurality of user text entries, the plurality of text entries comprising at least one text entry being of a first horizontal alignment type and at least one text entry being of a second horizontal alignment type; determining a first height, the first height being the height of all received text entries of the first horizontal alignment type positioned in a vertical arrangement, and a second height, the second height being the height of all received text entries of the second horizontal alignment type positioned in a vertical arrangement; modifying the electronic product design by sizing a second content area outside the first content area according to the larger of the first and second heights, positioning the plurality of user text entries in the product design in the second content area,

and resizing the first content area to accommodate the second content area in the electronic product design.

[0015b] In another aspect there is provided a computer readable storage medium tangibly embodying program instructions which, when executed by a computer, implement a method for incorporating at least user-supplied text into an electronic product design having a first content area containing one or more content elements. The method comprises: receiving a plurality of user text entries, the plurality of text entries comprising at least one text entry being of a first horizontal alignment type and at least one text entry being of a second horizontal alignment type; determining a first height, the first height being the height of all received text entries of the first horizontal alignment type positioned in a vertical arrangement, and a second height, the second height being the height of all received text entries of the second horizontal alignment type positioned in a vertical arrangement; modifying the electronic product design by sizing a second content area outside the first content area according to the larger of the first and second heights, positioning the plurality of user text entries in the product design in the second content area, and resizing the first content area to accommodate the second content area in the electronic product design.

[0015c] In yet another aspect there is provided a system for incorporating at least user-supplied text into an electronic product design having a first content area containing one or more content elements, comprising: a processor, and computer readable storage medium tangibly embodying program instructions. The instructions, when executed by the processor, implement steps of receiving a plurality of user text entries, the plurality of text entries comprising at least one text entry being of a first horizontal alignment type and at least one text entry being of a second horizontal alignment type, determining a first height, the first height being the height of all received text entries of the first horizontal alignment type positioned in a vertical arrangement, and a second height, the second height being the height of all received text entries of the second horizontal alignment type positioned in a vertical arrangement, modifying the electronic product design by sizing a second content area outside the first content area according to the larger of the first and second heights, positioning the plurality of user text entries in the product design in the second content area, and resizing the first content area to accommodate the second content area in the electronic product design.

[0016] These and other objects, features and advantages of the invention will be better understood with reference to the accompanying drawings, description and claims.

Brief Description of the Drawings

[0017] Fig. 1 shows an initial document customization screen.

[0018] Fig. 2 shows the textbox elements of template 120.

[0019] Fig. 3 shows a representative system with which the invention may be employed

[0020] Fig. 4 shows a document customization screen.

[0021] Fig. 5 shows the textbox elements and spacing of template 120 according to one embodiment of the invention.

[0022] Fig. 6 shows a flow chart of one embodiment of the invention.

[0023] Figs. 7A – 7D depict illustrative product designs created according to one embodiment of the invention.

[0024] Fig. 8A – 8B depict an alternate embodiment incorporating a design element in the template text area.

[0025] Fig. 9 shows an initial document customization screen for product 900.

[0026] Fig. 10 shows the document customization screen of Fig. 9 wherein the design of product 900 contains image/text area 911.

[0027] Figs. 11A-11G depict illustrative examples of various image/text areas 911 containing different combinations of user-supplied image and text.

[0028] Figs 12A-12C illustrate the incorporation of an image into an image/text area.

[0029] Fig. 13 is a flow diagram illustrating a method for incorporating user inputs into an image/text area in a product design.

[0030] Fig. 14 illustrates one technique for determining text positions in the

available text area in an image/text area.

[0031] Fig. 15 is a flow diagram illustrating a method for processing user-provided content in accordance with the technique of Fig. 14.

[0032] Figs. 16A-16D illustrate another technique for determining text positions in the available text area in image/text area 911.

[0033] Fig. 17 is a flow diagram illustrating additional steps for processing user-provided content in accordance with the technique of Figs. 16A-16C.

Detailed Description

[0034] For the purposes of illustration and discussion, the invention will be described in the context of the online design of a business card. It will be understood that the invention is not so limited and can be employed in any type of customization application where there is a requirement or desire to automatically create a layout within a defined area of a markup language design.

[0035] Fig. 3 depicts a typical system with which the invention may be employed. User computer system UCS 300 includes processor 301 and memory 302. Memory 302 represents all UCS 300 components and subsystems that provide data storage, such as RAM, ROM, and hard drives. In addition to providing permanent storage for all programs installed on UCS 300, memory 302 also provides temporary storage required by the operating system and the applications while they are executing. In a preferred embodiment, UCS 300 is a typically equipped personal computer, but UCS 300 could also be a portable computer, a tablet computer, or other device. The user views images from UCS 300 on display 340, such as a CRT or LCD screen, and provides inputs to UCS 300 via input devices 330, such as a keyboard and a mouse.

[0036] When UCS 300 is operating, an instance of the USC 300 operating system,

for example a version of the Microsoft Windows operating system, will be running, represented in Fig. 3 by operating system 303. In addition, the user may be running one or more application programs Applications 304. In Fig. 3, UCS 300 is running Web browser 305, such as Internet Explorer from Microsoft Corporation. In the depicted embodiment, design tools 306 is a product design program downloaded to UCS 300 via network 320 from remote server 310, such as downloadable design tools provided by VistaPrint Limited and publicly available at vistaprint.com. Design tools 306 runs in browser 305 and exchanges information and instructions with server 310 during a design session to support the user's preparation of a customized product design in electronic form. When the customer is satisfied with the design of the product, the design can be uploaded to server 310 for storage and, if desired by the user, subsequent production of the desired quantity of the physical product on appropriate printing and post-print processing systems.

[0037] While server 310 is shown in Fig. 3 as a single block, it will be understood that server 310 could be multiple servers configured to communicate and operate cooperatively to support Web site operations. Server 310 will typically be interacting with many user computer systems, such as UCS 300, simultaneously. Memory 311 represents all components and subsystems that provide server data storage, such as RAM, ROM, and disk drives or arrays. Memory 311 includes the various layouts, designs, colors, fonts, and other information provided by the service provider to enable the creation and rendering of templates. As used in the embodiment described herein, a markup language product design, such as template 120, is an XML description that specifies the size, position and other attributes of all product elements such as text containers, image containers, graphics, z-index values and so forth.

[0038] Referring now to Figs. 4-7D, representative examples of the application of the current invention will be discussed. For illustrative purposes, the text fields and templates are shown with generic information representing the type of data entries that might be made by users. The entries made by a user in the text fields will be generally referred to herein as "text", which will be understood to encompass all characters entered by the user including letters, numbers, punctuation marks, symbols,

and the like. Fig. 4 depicts the status of display 100 after the entries shown have been made in text fields 101-111, Preview button 130 has been activated, and template 120 has been updated to reflect the information entered in text fields 101-111. It will be understood that the computer system where the updated template 120 image is generated is a design choice of the service provider. Generation of the updated template 120 image could be performed by browser program 305 using downloaded design tools 306 or design tools 306 could be adapted to transfer the user's text entries to server 310 where the updated template 120 image description is prepared and returned to UCS 300 for displaying to the user.

[0039] Referring to Fig. 5, the textbox arrangement of template 120 according to an illustrative embodiment of the invention is depicted. Unlike the prior art technique described above in relation to Fig. 2, the positions of the textboxes displayed in template 120 are not fixed in advance, but are automatically and dynamically determined each time the user clicks Preview button 130 based on the user-entered information in text fields 501-511. Each textbox element 501-511 includes a parameter specifying its relative position in the textbox order. Spacing distances between adjacent displayed textboxes are also specified. A single standard spacing distance between adjacent text elements could be employed or multiple different distances could be used to provide greater layout flexibility. In the example depicted in Figs. 4 and 5, the textboxes are organized into four groups. The spacing distance between adjacent groups is relatively larger than the spacing between adjacent textboxes within a group. That is, spacing distances S2, S4 and S7 are relatively larger than spacing distances S1, S3, S5, S6, S8, S9 and S10 such that four visually distinct groups are formed. As will be discussed in more detail below, this group spacing is maintained as long as even one textbox in a group contains text. To avoid placing text extremely close to the upper or lower edge of the design, textboxes cannot be located in defined minimum top (MT) and minimum bottom (MB) spaces.

[0040] Referring now to Fig. 6, a representative process for automatically positioning elements will be discussed. At step 601, the user enters any desired text in any one or more of the available text entry fields 101-111. The user is not forced

to make any entries and, therefore, one or more of the text fields may be empty when the user requests to view an updated template 120 by selecting Preview 130.

[0041] At step 602, the height in pixels of each textbox containing user-supplied text is determined. In the disclosed embodiment, this textbox height value is requested from operating system 303 via a rich text edit control. Alternatively, the value could be obtained from browser program 305. At step 603, the heights of all elements to be displayed in the available text area are combined to determine their total height. In this example, the heights of all textboxes containing user text are added to the defined spacing between the textboxes and this value is compared with the maximum allowable height available for user text. For the purposes of this calculation, all empty textboxes, and the related textbox separation spacing distances, are ignored. In template 120, the maximum height available for user text placement is the height of the template minus the minimum top and bottom spaces MT and MB that must remain empty. If a template design includes an image or other design element across the top and/or bottom of the template, the available vertical text area would be correspondingly reduced.

[0042] If the calculated height of the textboxes having text content and related spacing distances does not exceed the maximum allowable height, at step 604 the positions of the textboxes in the available text area 122 are determined. The textboxes are arranged in the appropriate vertical sequence and positioned such that approximately one-half of the total calculated height is above the horizontal centerline of the text area and one-half is below the centerline. At step 605, display 100 is updated to display template 120 with the user's text.

[0043] By way of illustration, Fig. 7A depicts the automatically generated layout result if the user were to enter "My Name" in text field 103, leaving all other text fields empty, and select Preview 130. In this situation, because only textbox 503 contains text, the total height H of the elements to be displayed in text area 122 is the height of textbox 503 and textbox 503 is substantially centered vertically in available text area 122.

[0044] In Figs 7B-7D, discussed below, the outlines of the textboxes containing the text entries are omitted for clarity of illustration. Fig. 7B illustrates the layout result if the user were to enter "My Company" in text field 101, "My Message" in text field 102 and "My Name" in text field 103, leaving all other text fields empty, and select Preview 130. In this case, the total height H is the sum of the heights of the associated textboxes 501, 502, and 503 plus the spacing distances $S1$ and $S2$. The textboxes are then positioned in text area 122 such that substantially one-half of the total height H is above the horizontal centerline of the text area and one-half is below.

[0045] As mentioned above, the group spacing is maintained as long as even one textbox of a group contains text. For example, if the user were to have entered text only in text fields 101, 106, 110 and 111, that text would be arranged as shown in Fig. 7C. The text "My address 2" in textbox 506 is separated from "My Company" in textbox 501 by group spacing distance $S4$. Similarly, the entry "xxx@xxxx.xxx" in textbox 510 is separated from "My address 2" in textbox 506 by group spacing distance $S7$. The total height H in this situation is therefore equal to the total of the heights of the four textboxes 501, 506, 510 and 511 plus the spacing distances $S4$, $S7$ and $S10$. Again, the four textboxes are positioned in text area 122 such that substantially one-half of H is above the horizontal centerline and one-half below. It will be appreciated that it is not essential that the textboxes always be vertically centered in text area 122. Other positioning techniques could be employed, if desired by the service provider.

[0046] Referring again to Fig. 6, it is possible that the total height of the textboxes and textbox spacing determined at step 603 will exceed the maximum allowable height. This would typically occur because the user entered more text in one or more text fields 101-111 than can be rendered on a single line at the default font size and font characteristics for that textbox. Each textbox has a defined width that is, of course, limited by the physical boundaries of the product being designed. If a user enters more text than can be printed on a single line, the text will automatically wrap onto another line, thereby increasing the height of the textbox.

[0047] It can be appreciated that textboxes with multiple lines will not automatically require a reduction in the font size or textbox spacing. In some situations, the user may have left one or more text fields 101-111 empty, thereby leaving sufficient vertical space available to accommodate one or more multi-line textboxes. Font size and spacing reductions are only needed if the total of the heights of the textboxes with text, plus the spacing distances, exceeds the maximum height available for user text.

[0048] If it is detected at step 603 that the total height of the textboxes and spacing exceeds the maximum allowable height, the current font sizes and spacing distances are checked at step 606 to determine if they are already at the size identified by the printing services provider as being the minimum that provides an attractive and legible product. If the font sizes and spacing distances are not at the minimum, at step 607 the font size for all textboxes are reduced by one point size or, if font sizes are defined in pixels, by one pixel. If the font sizes have been reduced to their minimums, the spacing distances between all textboxes are incrementally reduced by one pixel until the spacing distances reach their defined minimums. If the fonts and spacing are both at the minimums, an alert is generated at step 608 to notify the user that an acceptable automated layout cannot be generated. It will be understood that various alternate techniques of incremental reductions could be employed, for example: maintaining fixed spacing distances and incrementally reducing only the font sizes, alternately reducing font size and spacing size until both are at their minimums, reducing the font sizes or spacing for only some textboxes instead of all, or reducing font sizes in a proportional manner such that larger fonts sizes are reduced by a proportionally greater number of pixels than smaller font sizes.

[0049] After each reduction at step 607, the combined heights of the textboxes and spacing distances are then recalculated at step 602 to determine if they no longer exceed the maximum allowable height at step 603. Steps 602, 603, 606 and 607 are repeated until either the total height no longer exceeds the maximum allowable height or the fonts and spacing distances are at the minimum allowable size as identified by

the service provider.

[0050] As an example, if all text fields 101-111 contain text entries and a text string that is too long to be rendered on a single line at the initial font size specified for textbox 502, such as, for illustration, “Message Message Message Message Message”, were entered in text field 102, the text would be wrapped onto two lines in textbox 502. The resulting increased height of textbox 502 would, in this case, cause the overall total height of all textboxes to exceed to the maximum. The font size and spacing of all textboxes would then be reduced incrementally until either the total height of all textboxes does not exceed the maximum available height, for example as depicted in Fig. 7D, or the font size and spacing distances are at the predefined minimums and cannot be further reduced without unacceptable degradation in the quality or usefulness of the design.

[0051] The invention is not limited to dynamic positioning only of textboxes. One or more design elements, for example lines, shapes, images, or other design features, could be similarly vertically positioned within text area 122 according to which and how many text fields are completed by the user. Figs. 8A and 8B show two examples of a business card template 800 containing design element 801. Element 801 is assigned a relative position and spacing distance between the user entries in the top four textboxes and the user entries in the bottom seven textboxes. Like the vertical positions of the textboxes containing user text, the vertical position of element 801 in template 800 is not fixed, but is determined by the number and heights of the textboxes containing user data. Referring to step 603 of Fig. 6, the height and associated spacing of element 801 is added to the heights of the textboxes and related spacing to calculate the total height of all text area elements.

[0052] The above described techniques for text positioning can be used in combination with resizable and/or croppable content elements to automatically position text and content elements in an electronic product design. Fig. 9 depicts a representative design display 900 for allowing a user to design a custom product with user-supplied text and/or a user selected image in addition to content already

incorporated into the product design by the printing services provider. Screen 900 displays the initial design of a product 901 for user review. Product 901 could be, for example, a page of a calendar, a page of a photobook, or other product or portion of a product. Product 901 contains content area 902, which could be filled with a single element, for example a photograph or a calendar, or could contain multiple elements, for example a photograph and a calendar arranged side by side, depending on the type of product selected by the user from the products offered by the printing services provider.

[0053] In the situation depicted in Fig. 9, content area 902 has a content width CW and, because no user content has been incorporated into the design of product 901, has the maximum possible content area height, indicated in Fig. 9 as CHmax. As will be discussed below, the width of content area 902 will remain constant as the user adds content, but the height of area 902 can vary. In this example, content area 902 is separated from the physical edge of product 901 by a top distance T, a right side distance R, a left side distance L, and a minimum bottom distance Bmin. The size of these distances is determined by the printing services provider and can be different for different product designs. As the user supplies content for incorporation into the product 901 design, T, L and R will remain constant, but the bottom distance B between the lower edge of content area 902 and the lower edge of the product 901 will vary as necessary to accommodate the user's content.

[0054] Text entry fields 903-908 are provided for the user on screen 900. In this example, the fields are intended to assist a business user in preparing a customized product for the user's commercial or promotional use. Each field has an informative label identifying the suggested content of that text field, though the user is free to enter whatever information the user desires and free to leave some or all of the fields empty. Each text field has associated default font parameters that will control how the text entered into that field will be rendered in product design 901. For example, the company name and message entries in fields 903 and 904 would typically be rendered in larger fonts than the contact information entries in fields 905-908.

[0055] When the user has entered the user's text in fields 903-908, the user can click Update button 909 to cause Design Tools 306 to update product design 901 with the user's text. As will be described below, Add Image button 910 allows the user to select an image for incorporation into product design 901.

[0056] The user's text and added image will be incorporated into product design 901 in an area of the product design represented in Fig. 10 as image/text area 911. In this example, the width of image/text area 911 is set to be equal to the width of content area 902. The height of the width/text area (ITH) can be one of several different possible heights varying between a minimum height of zero, as depicted in Fig. 9, which will be the case if the user has not entered any text and has not added an image, and a maximum height of ITHmax, as depicted in Fig. 10. As the height of image/text area 911 increases, the height CH of content area 902 is correspondingly reduced. The printing services provider can place a limit on the range within which the heights of content area 902 and image/text area 911 can vary. For example, the service provider could establish that CHmin is 80% of CHmax.

[0057] The manner of modifying the image content of content area 902 will depend on the type of content. For example, if content area 902 contains a photograph, a cropped version of the photograph having the appropriate height could be created. Various cropping techniques could be employed. For example, a single cropping technique could be used for all images, such as cropping equally from the top and bottom, or the printing service provider could provide individual cropping rules for each image based on image content to cause the image to be cropped only from the top, only from the bottom, or cropped from both top and bottom in unequal amounts. If content area 902 contains content that can be readily resized, such as a vector description of a calendar, a new version of the content having the appropriate aspect ratio can be generated to fit the available content area 902. Both methods can be employed if content area 902 contains both types of content.

[0058] Image/text area 911 is separated from content area 902 by separation distance ITT and is separated from the bottom edge of product design 901 by

separation distance ITB. These distances can be set to whatever values are desired by the printing services provider.

[0059] Because the user can enter text in none, all, or any combination of text fields 903-908 and because the user can choose to add or not add an image, many possible image/text area 911 configurations are possible. For illustration, Figs. 11A-G depict examples of image/text areas 911 created from various user input combinations. Referring to Fig. 11A, an example of an area 911 with user content supplied in all fields and an added image is depicted. As discussed above in connection with Fig. 5, each text entry will have an associated text height, depending on the font size and other parameters associated with that text field by the service provider.

[0060] User inputs are divided into one of three types: an added image 1101, left justified text entries 1102, and right justified text entries 1103. In this embodiment, the added image, if any, is positioned at the left edge of image/text area 911. If an image has been added, text entered in fields 903 and 904 is left justified relative to the added image, as depicted in Figs. 11A-11C. If no image has been added, text entered in fields 903 and 904 is left justified relative to the left edge of area 911, as depicted in Figs. 11D and 11E. Text entered in fields 905-908 is right justified relative to the right edge of area 911. It will be appreciated that other arrangements of added images and text could be employed.

[0061] The height ITH of area 911 will vary based on the particular user-supplied content. For example, as depicted in Fig. 11g, if the user only supplied an entry in field 908, ITH would be the height of that one text entry.

[0062] The height of image/text area 911 is determined by whichever of the types of user input has the greatest height. Based on the particular user inputs, this could be the added image, the left justified text entries or the right justified text entries. The content of the entries with less height are substantially centered vertically within the overall area 911 height, for example as illustrated in Figs. 11C, 11E and 11F.

[0063] Referring to Figs. 12A-12C, any image added by the user must fit within a maximum added image area 1201, set by the service provider. The maximum added image height AIH_{max} will typically be equal to the maximum image/text area height ITH_{max} , but could be different if desired by the service provider. The added image is resized to fit entirely within image area 1201. Depending on the aspect ratio of the added image, the resulting image incorporated into design 901 could be smaller than the maximum area 1201 either horizontally, as indicated in Fig. 12B, or vertically, as indicated in Fig. 12 C.

[0064] The portion of the image/text area that is available for displaying the user's text is referred to herein as available text width (ATW). The ATW is determined by subtracting the width of the user's added image AIW , if any, from the width of the image/text area. If no user image has been added, the entire width of the image/text area is available for user text.

[0065] An illustrative embodiment of the method for modifying product design 901 to accommodate user input is shown in Fig. 13. At step 1301, the printing service provider makes tools available to allow the user to provide custom content for the product. In this example, the user can supply text entries using text fields 903-908 and/or select an image for incorporation using Add Image button 910. The user inputs are received at step 1302 and the height and layout of the image/text area is determined at step 1303, as will be discussed in more detail below. At step 1304, the other content elements in the product design are sized or cropped, as appropriate for the type of content element involved, according to the height of the image/text area determined at step 1303. At step 1305, a revised product design incorporating the user's inputs is provided for user review.

[0066] Because the right justified and left justified text entries are positioned in a horizontal arrangement, constraints must be applied to prevent the user from inadvertently entering creating an unsatisfactory design by entering lengthy strings of characters such that the right end of a left justified text string overlaps the left end of

the right justified text. One possible constraint technique is depicted in Fig. 14. Once the ATW is determined by subtracting the width of the user's added image, if any, from the maximum width of the image/test area, the ATW is divided into a maximum left justified text width (LJTWmax) and a maximum right justified text width (RJTWmax). LJTWmax and RJTWmax could be set to be equal or could be different. To ensure that text strings in the two text areas do not appear unacceptably close to each other, a minimum text separation distance TS is established.

[0067] Fig. 15 depicts an embodiment of step 1303 for the technique example illustrated in Fig. 14. After the user's inputs have been received (step 1302 in Fig. 13), LJTWmax and RJTWmax are determined at step 1501, as mentioned above. At step 1502, the left justified text width LJTW is determined by determining the longest length of any user-supplied text in the text fields to be left justified, in this example, fields 903 and 904. It is possible that the user has entered relatively long strings of text in one or both of fields 903 and 904 such that the length of one or both text strings exceeds LJTWmax. If LJTW exceeds LJTWmax at step 1503, the final word or other set of related characters at the end of the longest of the left justified text strings is wrapped onto another line. Because wrapping divides the longest text entry onto two lines, this has the effect of reducing the LJTW. After a wrapping operation, the new LJTW may still exceed the LJTWmax, therefore steps 1503 and 1504 are repeated until the text entries in fields 903 and 904 have been wrapped such that LJTW is less than or equal to LJTWmax. Of course, wrapping of text onto multiple lines causes the overall height of the left justified text entries LJTH to increase, therefore LJTH must also be checked at step 1505 to determine if the wrapping operation has resulted in an LJTH that exceeds the allowable maximum height ITHmax of the image/text area. If LJTH exceeds ITHmax, the user is notified at step 1506 that the user's text entries are too large to be accommodated. Steps 1507-1510 relating to the right justified text entries are similar to the left justified text steps 1503-1507. It will be understood that the depicted sequence of executing these steps is not essential.

[0068] Step 1511 in Fig. 15 represents additional processing steps that are not

required for the technique depicted in Fig. 14, but may be combined with the other steps of Fig. 15 to handle an alternate technique discussed below in connection with Figs. 16 and 17.

[0069] At step 1508, ITH, the height of the image/text area, is determined as being the largest of LJTH, RJTH and the added image height IH. The vertical position of the user's content in the image/text area is then determined based on this ITH. As mentioned above in connection with Figs. 11A-11G, the user input types having a height less than ITH are substantially centered vertically within the image/text area.

[0070] An alternative technique for determining text position in the available text width ATW is depicted in Fig. 16A. In this example, to provide greater flexibility for user inputs, the service provider can establish values of the maximum left justified text width (LJTWmax) and the maximum right justified text width (RJTWmax) that exceed ATW. In other words, both LJTWmax and RJTWmax could be set to be greater than 50% of ATW and could, if desired by the service provider, be set to be equal to the entire width of the image/text area. This would allow for a wider range of text lengths and text arrangements, such as illustrated in Figs. 16B and 16C, but creates the possible of undesirable overlapping of left and right justified text entries, even in the situation where LJTW is less than LJTWmax and RJTW is less than RJTWmax. To avoid this outcome requires additional steps not required in the method of Fig. 15 where RJTWmax and LJTWmax could not exceed ATW.

[0071] One embodiment of the additional steps, indicated as step 1511 in Fig. 15, is depicted in Fig. 17. At step 1701, if LJTW plus RJTW plus any required separation distance TS established by the service provider does not exceed ATW, there is no overlapping issue and processing can proceed to step 1508. If, however, ATW is exceeded, the final word or character group in the longest text line is wrapped onto another line at step 1703 to reduce LJTW or RJTW and the sum of LJTW, RJTW and TS is again calculated at step 1703. This iterative wrapping and testing

process repeats until the sum of LJTW, RJTW and TS meets the total length constraint at step 1704. As discussed above, each wrap of text onto a new line increases the total height of the text entries of that type, therefore the height of both the left justified text entries and the right justified text entries must be checked to ensure that the maximum allowable height ITHmax constraint is met. The amount of wrapping that can be tolerated depends on the number of fields 903-908 that contain user text entries. For example, in a case where fields 905-908 all have text entries, for example as shown in Fig. 11A, wrapping of any of the four text entries may violate the height constraint. On the other hand, if one or more text fields in a text type have been left empty by the user, for example as shown in Figs. 11E-11G, this provides vertical space for the fields that do contain text to be wrapped onto additional lines without violating the overall height constraint of ITHmax. If the user's text cannot be incorporated into the image/text area without violating the height constraint, the user is notified at step 1706 that the user's text entries cannot be accommodated. To illustrate a possible final layout, Fig. 16D illustrates a simple example where the user entered the long left justified text string shown in Fig. 16B (LJ1 – LJ7) in text field 903 or 904 and entered the long right justified text string shown in Fig. 16C (RJ1 – RJ7) in text field 905, 906, 907 or 908.

[0072] While the invention has been shown and described in various exemplary embodiments, the described embodiment is to be considered as illustrative rather than restrictive. For example, the design being customized could be for a product to be printed on paper or on any other printable medium such as cloth, glass, plastic, rubber, or wood. The design could be for a complete product, or intended to be incorporated into a larger product, such as a section, side, or page. The scope of the invention is as indicated in the following claims and all equivalent methods and apparatus.

What is claimed is:

1. A method of incorporating at least user-supplied text into an electronic product design having a first content area containing one or more content elements, the method comprising
receiving a plurality of user text entries, the plurality of text entries comprising at least one text entry being of a first horizontal alignment type and at least one text entry being of a second horizontal alignment type,
determining a first height, the first height being the height of all received text entries of the first horizontal alignment type positioned in a vertical arrangement, and a second height, the second height being the height of all received text entries of the second horizontal alignment type positioned in a vertical arrangement,
modifying the electronic product design by sizing a second content area outside the first content area according to the larger of the first and second heights, positioning the plurality of user text entries in the product design in the second content area, and resizing the first content area to accommodate the second content area in the electronic product design.
2. The method of claim 1 wherein the first horizontal alignment type is text to be positioned in a first position relative to the content area and the second horizontal alignment type is text to be positioned in a second position relative to the content area.
3. The method of claim 2 wherein the first position is left justified and the second position is right justified.
4. The method of claim 1 further comprising
determining the height of a user-selected image and modifying the electronic product design by resizing the content area according to the larger of the first height, the second height, and the image height.
5. The method of claim 3, further comprising
determining an available text width in the second content area,

partitioning the available text width into a maximum left justified text width and a maximum right justified text width, and

left-justifying the one or more user text entries of the first horizontal alignment type on the left edge of the second content area, wrapping such text entries as exceed the maximum left justified text width, and

right-justifying the one or more user text entries of the second horizontal alignment type on the right edge of the second content area, wrapping such text entries as exceed the maximum right justified text width.

6. The method of claim 5, further comprising setting a minimum text separation width between the maximum left justified text width and the maximum right justified text width.

7. The method of claim 5, further comprising re-determining the first height, comparing the re-determined first height to a maximum height of the second content area, and notifying a user that the one or more user text entries of the first horizontal alignment type are too large to be accommodated if the re-determined first height exceeds the maximum height of the second content area, and

re-determining the second height, comparing the re-determined second height to the maximum height of the second content area, and notifying the user that the one or more user text entries of the second horizontal alignment type are too large to be accommodated if the re-determined second height exceeds the maximum height of the second content area.

8. The method of claim 1, wherein resizing of the content area comprises cropping at least one of the content elements in the first content area.

9. The method of claim 1, wherein resizing of the content area comprises resizing at least one of the content elements in the first content area while maintaining an aspect ratio of the respective at least one content element.

10. A computer readable storage medium tangibly embodying program instructions which, when executed by a computer, implement a method for incorporating at least user-supplied text into an electronic product design having a first content area containing one or more content elements, the method comprising

receiving a plurality of user text entries, the plurality of text entries comprising at least one text entry being of a first horizontal alignment type and at least one text entry being of a second horizontal alignment type,

determining a first height, the first height being the height of all received text entries of the first horizontal alignment type positioned in a vertical arrangement, and a second height, the second height being the height of all received text entries of the second horizontal alignment type positioned in a vertical arrangement,

modifying the electronic product design by sizing a second content area outside the first content area according to the larger of the first and second heights, positioning the plurality of user text entries in the product design in the second content area, and resizing the first content area to accommodate the second content area in the electronic product design.

11. The computer readable storage medium of claim 10 wherein the first horizontal alignment type is text to be positioned in a first position relative to the content area and the second horizontal alignment type is text to be positioned in a second position relative to the content area.

12. The computer readable storage medium of claim 11 wherein the first position is left justified and the second position is right justified.

13. The computer readable storage medium of claim 10, the method further comprising determining the height of a user-selected image and modifying the electronic product design by resizing the content area according to the larger of the first height, the second height, and the image height.

14. The computer readable storage medium of claim 12, the method further comprising determining an available text width in the second content area,

partitioning the available text width into a maximum left justified text width and a maximum right justified text width, and

left-justifying the one or more user text entries of the first horizontal alignment type on the left edge of the second content area, wrapping such text entries as exceed the maximum left justified text width, and

right-justifying the one or more user text entries of the second horizontal alignment type on the right edge of the second content area, wrapping such text entries as exceed the maximum right justified text width.

15. The computer readable storage medium of claim 14, the method further comprising setting a minimum text separation width between the maximum left justified text width and the maximum right justified text width.

16. The computer readable storage medium of claim 14, the method further comprising re-determining the first height, comparing the re-determined first height to a maximum height of the second content area, and notifying a user that the one or more user text entries of the first horizontal alignment type are too large to be accommodated if the re-determined first height exceeds the maximum height of the second content area, and

re-determining the second height, comparing the re-determined second height to the maximum height of the second content area, and notifying the user that the one or more user text entries of the second horizontal alignment type are too large to be accommodated if the re-determined second height exceeds the maximum height of the second content area.

17. The computer readable storage medium of claim 10, wherein resizing of the content area comprises cropping at least one of the content elements in the first content area.

18. The computer readable storage medium of claim 10, wherein resizing of the content area comprises resizing at least one of the content elements in the first content area while maintaining an aspect ratio of the respective at least one content element.

19. A system for incorporating at least user-supplied text into an electronic product design having a first content area containing one or more content elements, comprising
a processor,
computer readable storage medium tangibly embodying program instructions which,
when executed by the processor, implement steps of

receiving a plurality of user text entries, the plurality of text entries comprising at least one text entry being of a first horizontal alignment type and at least one text entry being of a second horizontal alignment type,

determining a first height, the first height being the height of all received text entries of the first horizontal alignment type positioned in a vertical arrangement, and a second height, the second height being the height of all received text entries of the second horizontal alignment type positioned in a vertical arrangement,

modifying the electronic product design by sizing a second content area outside the first content area according to the larger of the first and second heights, positioning the plurality of user text entries in the product design in the second content area, and resizing the first content area to accommodate the second content area in the electronic product design.

20. The system of claim 19 wherein the first horizontal alignment type is text to be left-justified relative to the content area and the second horizontal alignment type is text to be right-justified relative to the content area, the program instructions further implementing steps of
determining an available text width in the second content area,
partitioning the available text width into a maximum left justified text width and a maximum right justified text width, and

left-justifying the one or more user text entries of the first horizontal alignment type on the left edge of the second content area, wrapping such text entries as exceed the maximum left justified text width, and

right-justifying the one or more user text entries of the second horizontal alignment type on the right edge of the second content area, wrapping such text entries as exceed the maximum right justified text width.

The diagram illustrates a data entry form and its corresponding preview. On the left, a vertical list of input fields is shown, each with a label and a numerical identifier:

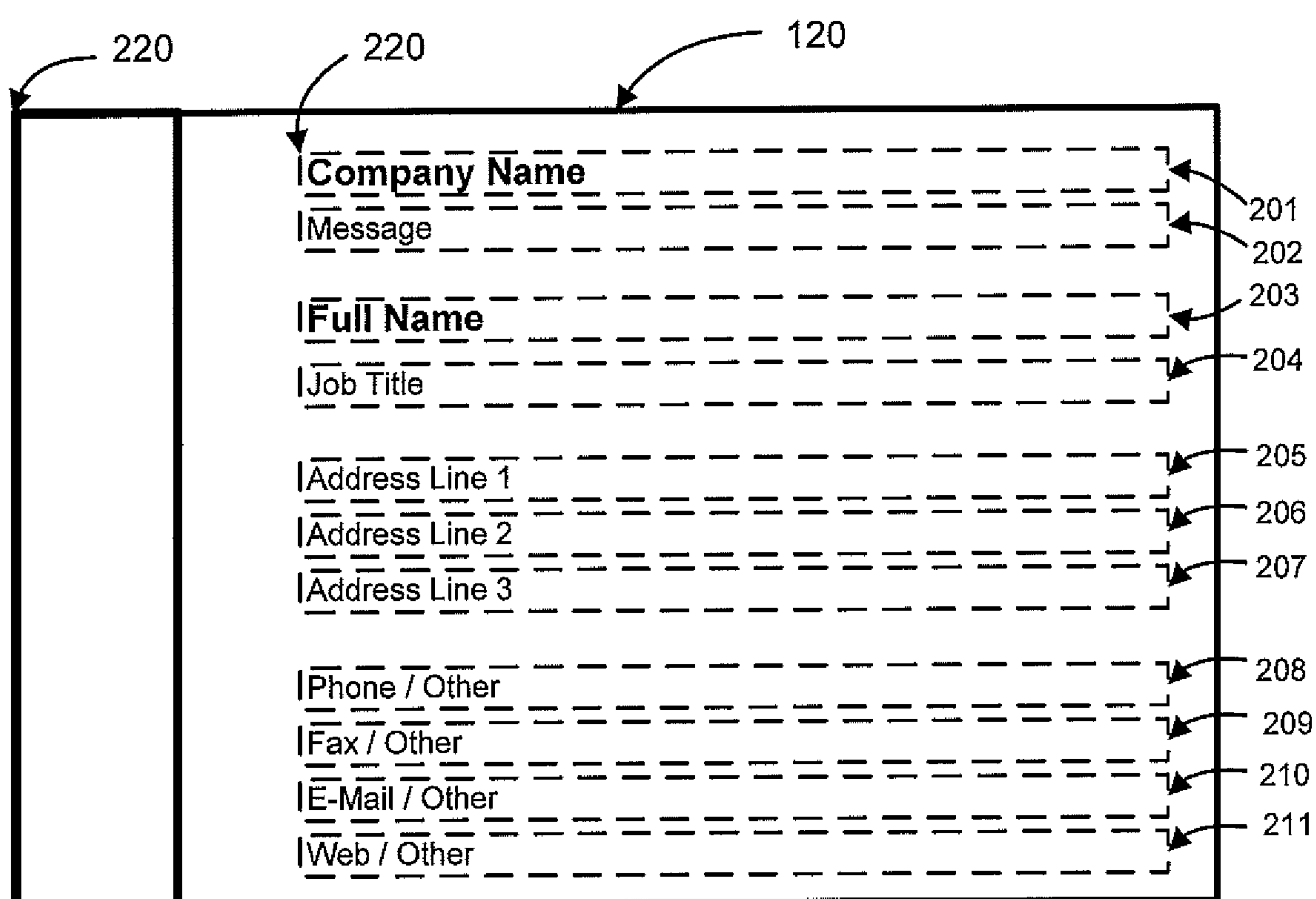
- Company Name (101)
- Message (102)
- Full Name (103)
- Job Title (104)
- Address Line 1 (105)
- Address Line 2 (106)
- Address Line 3 (107)
- Phone / Other (108)
- Fax / Other (109)
- E-Mail / Other (110)
- Web / Other (111)

To the right of these fields is a large rectangular area labeled "Display 100". This area is divided into two sections by a vertical line. The left section, labeled 121, is a narrow column. The right section, labeled 122, is a wider area containing a preview of the data entered in the fields on the left. The preview is titled "Company Name" and "Message" and lists the following fields: "Full Name", "Job Title", "Address Line 1", "Address Line 2", "Address Line 3", "Phone / Other", "Fax / Other", "E-Mail / Other", and "Web / Other". A curved arrow labeled 120 points from the "PREVIEW" button to the preview area. A curved arrow labeled 130 points from the "PREVIEW" button to the "Display 100" label.

PREVIEW

Display 100

Fig. 1



The diagram shows a form layout with a main container labeled 120. On the left side of the container is a vertical bar labeled 220. The form contains several input fields, each with a label and a dashed line indicating the input area. The labels are: Company Name (201), Message (202), Full Name (203), Job Title (204), Address Line 1 (205), Address Line 2 (206), Address Line 3 (207), Phone / Other (208), Fax / Other (209), E-Mail / Other (210), and Web / Other (211). The labels 201 through 211 are positioned to the right of the input fields, with arrows pointing to the corresponding dashed lines.

220	Company Name	201
	Message	202
	Full Name	203
	Job Title	204
	Address Line 1	205
	Address Line 2	206
	Address Line 3	207
	Phone / Other	208
	Fax / Other	209
	E-Mail / Other	210
	Web / Other	211

Fig. 2

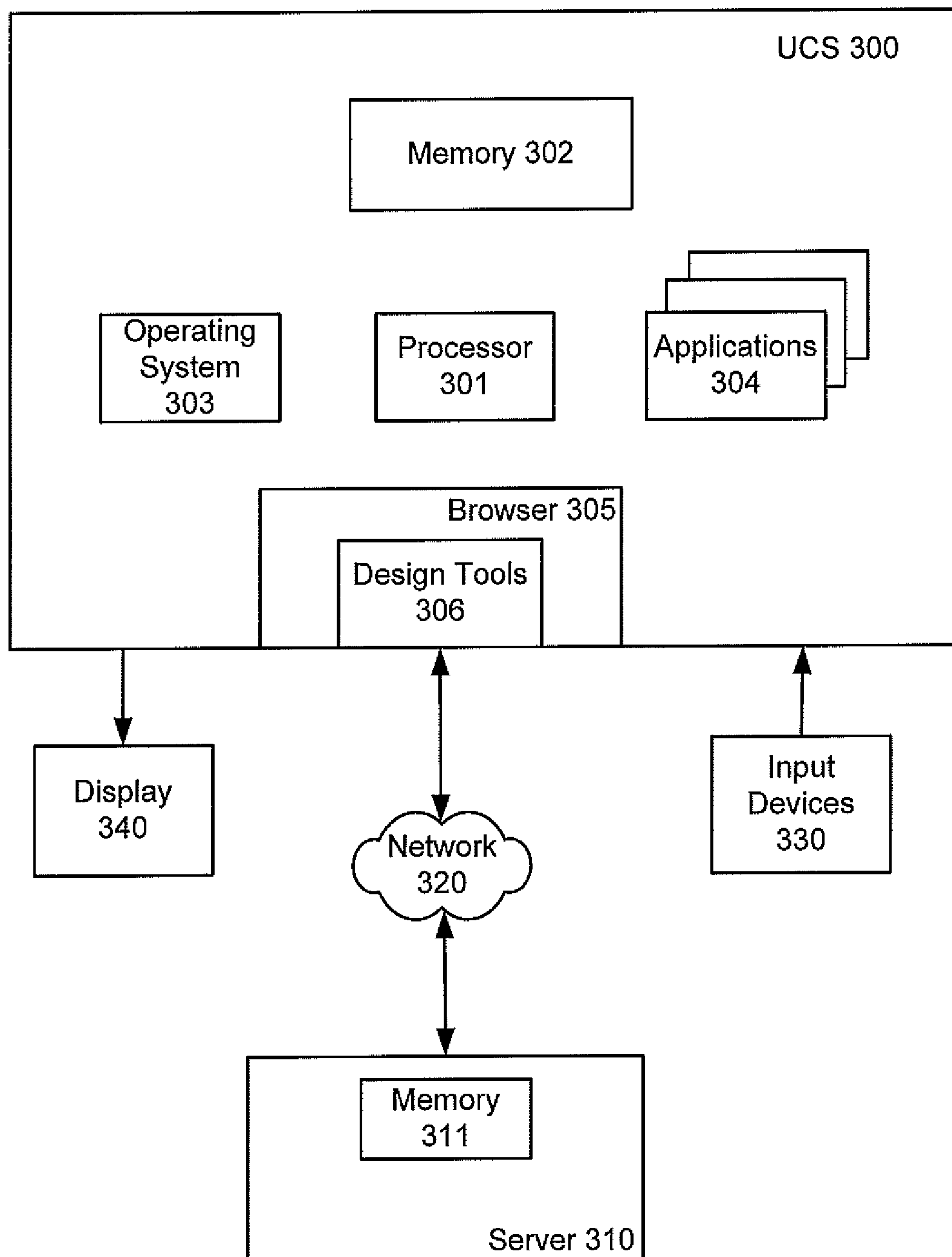


FIG. 3

Company Name	
My Company	101
Message	
My Message	102
Full Name	
My Name	103
Job Title	
My Title	104
Address Line 1	
My address 1	105
Address Line 2	
My address 2	106
Address Line 3	
My address 3	107
Phone / Other	
(xxx) xxx-xxxx	108
Fax / Other	
(xxx) xxx-xxxx	109
E-Mail / Other	
xxxx@xxxx.xxx	110
Web / Other	
www.xxxx.xxx	111

121

122

My Company
My Message

My Name
My Title

My address 1
My address 2
My address 3

(xxx) xxx-xxxx
(xxx) xxx-xxxx
xxxx@xxxx.xxx
www.xxxx.xxx

120

130

Display 100

Fig. 4

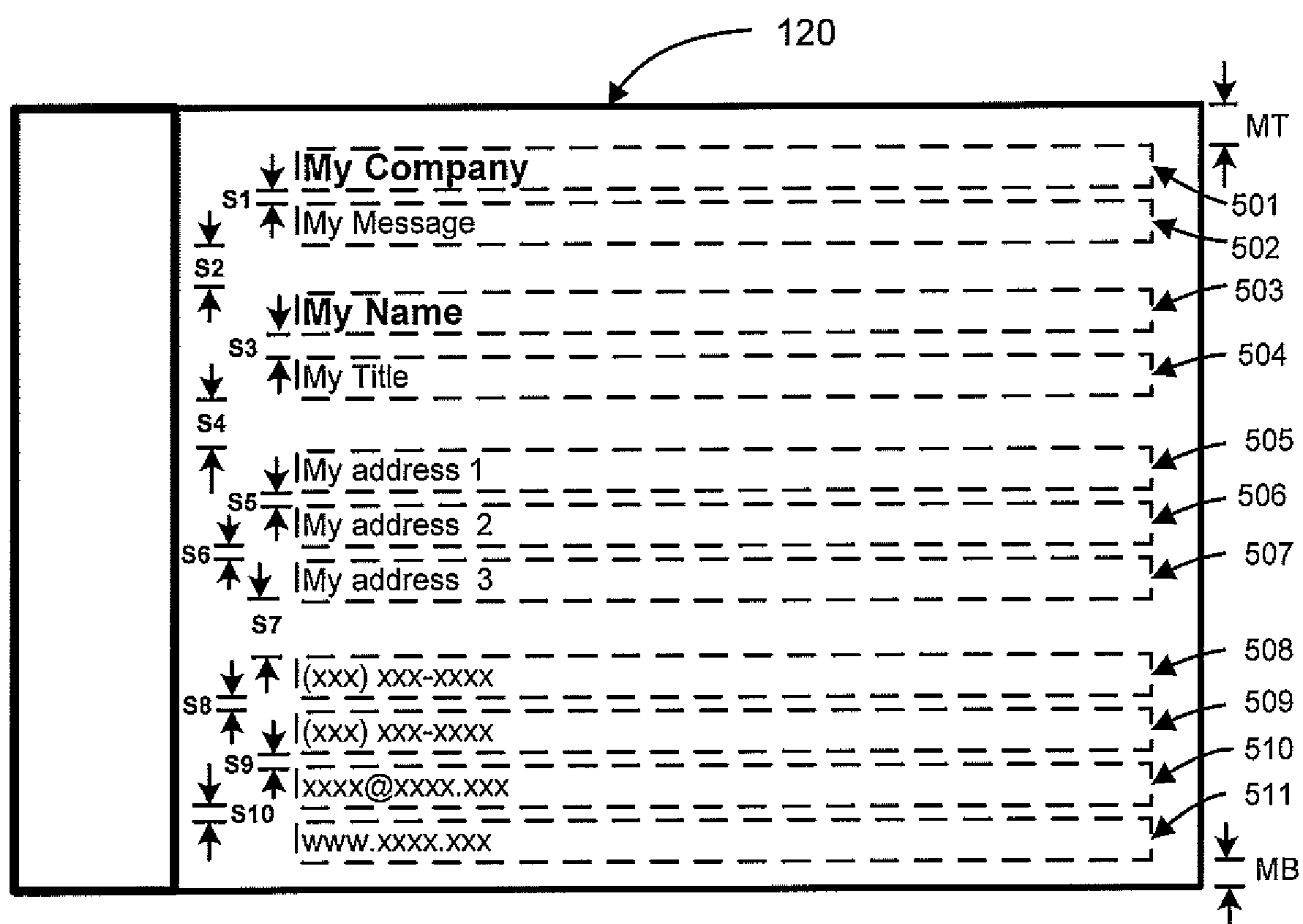


Fig. 5

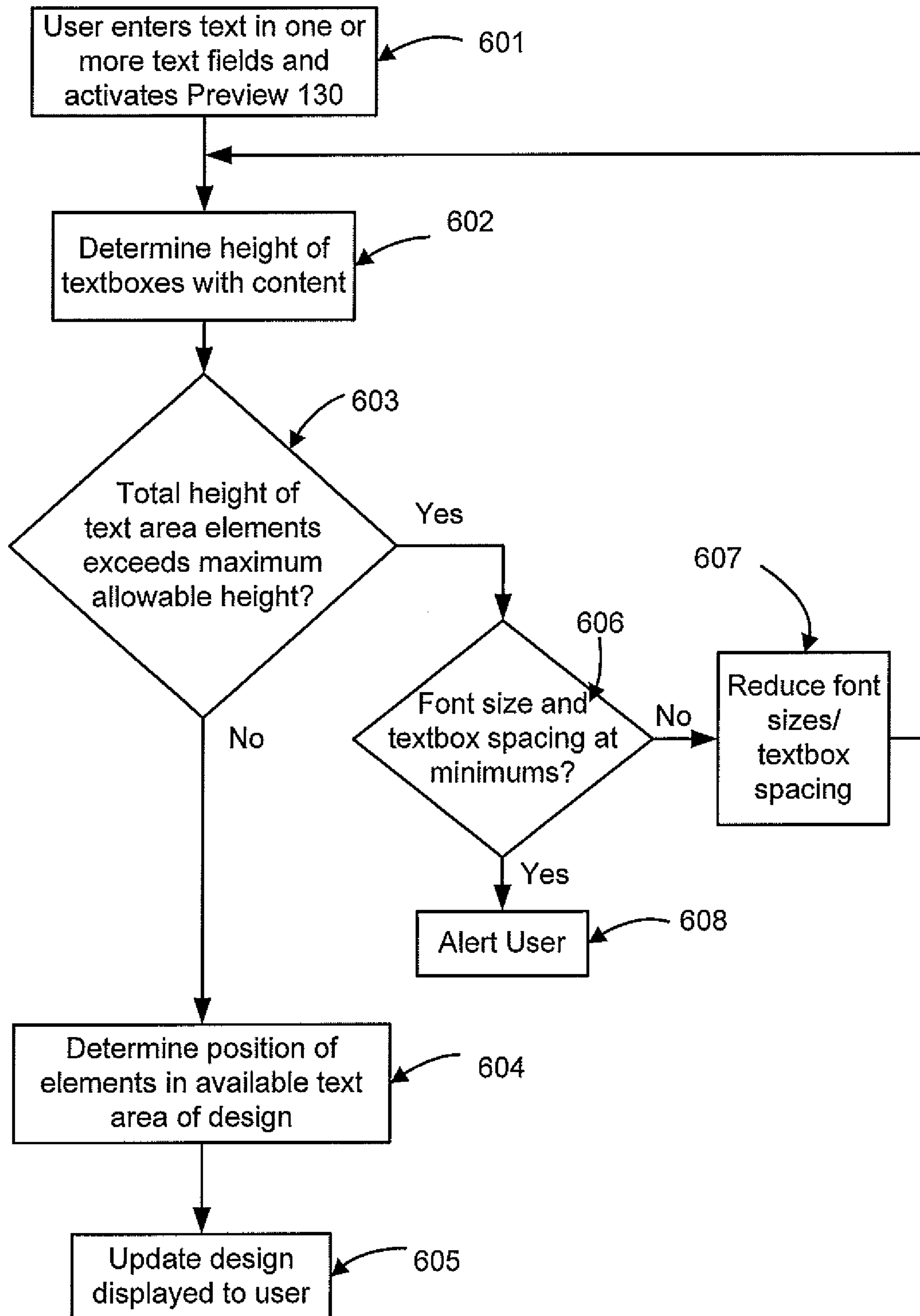


Fig. 6

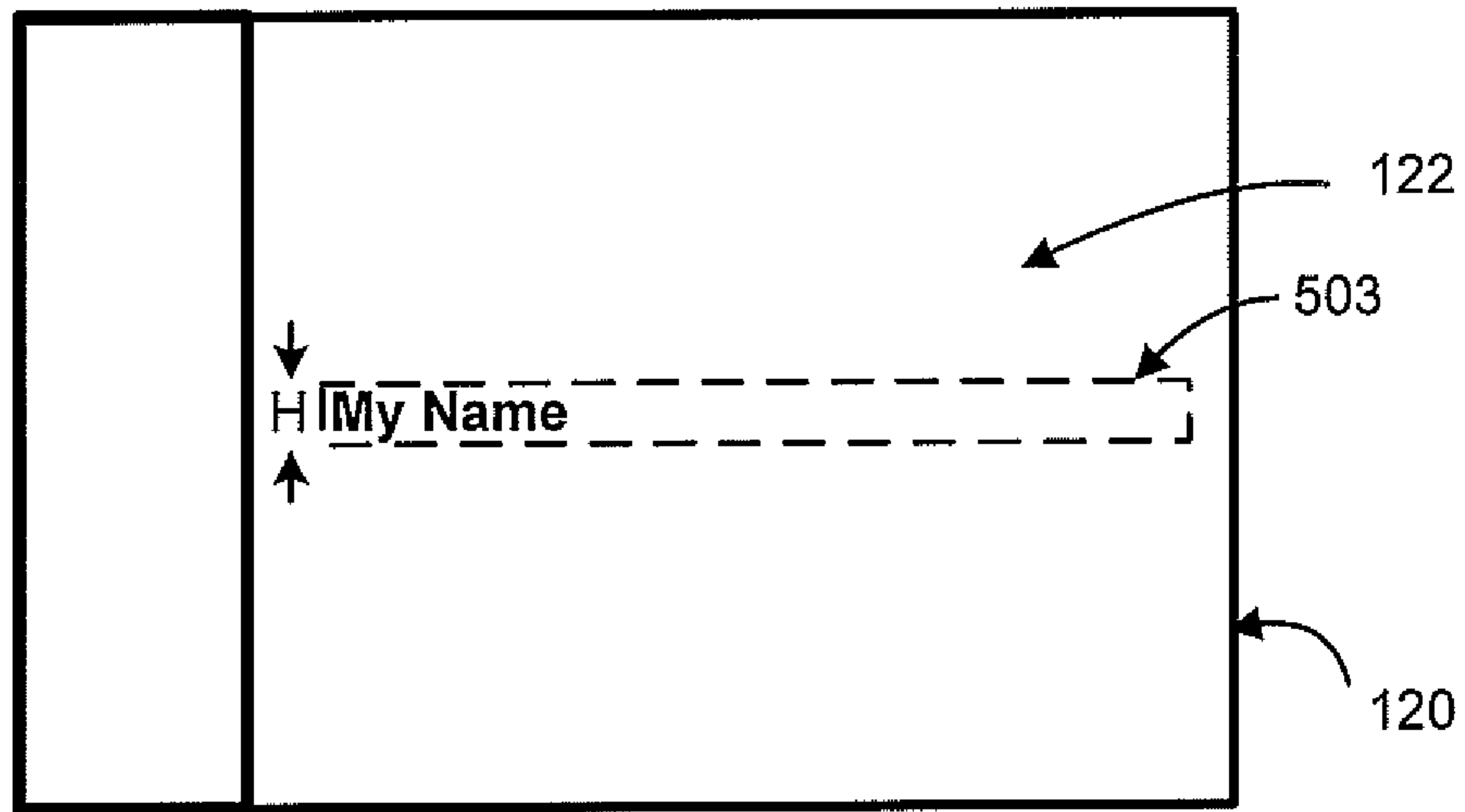


Fig. 7A

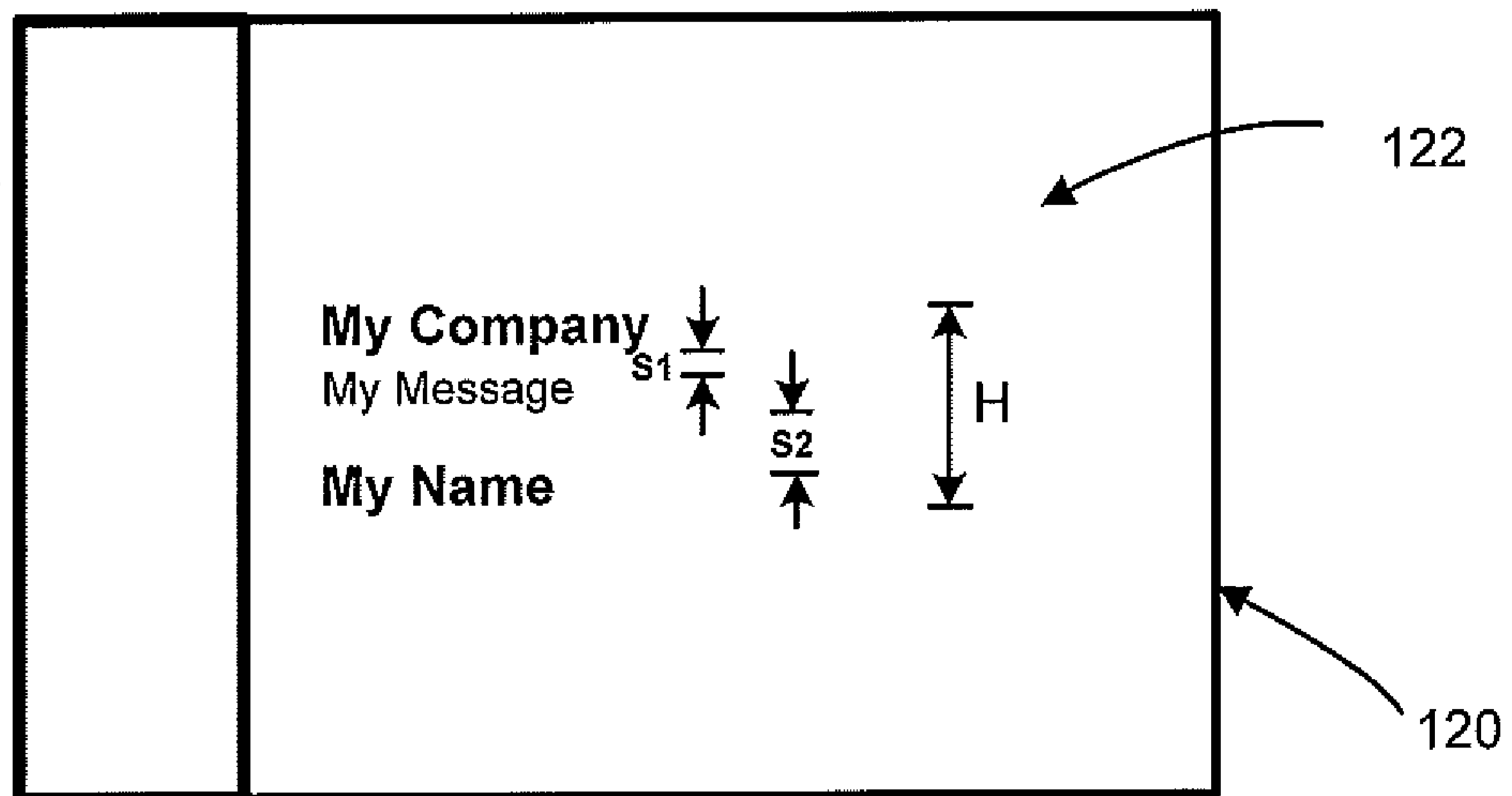


Fig. 7B

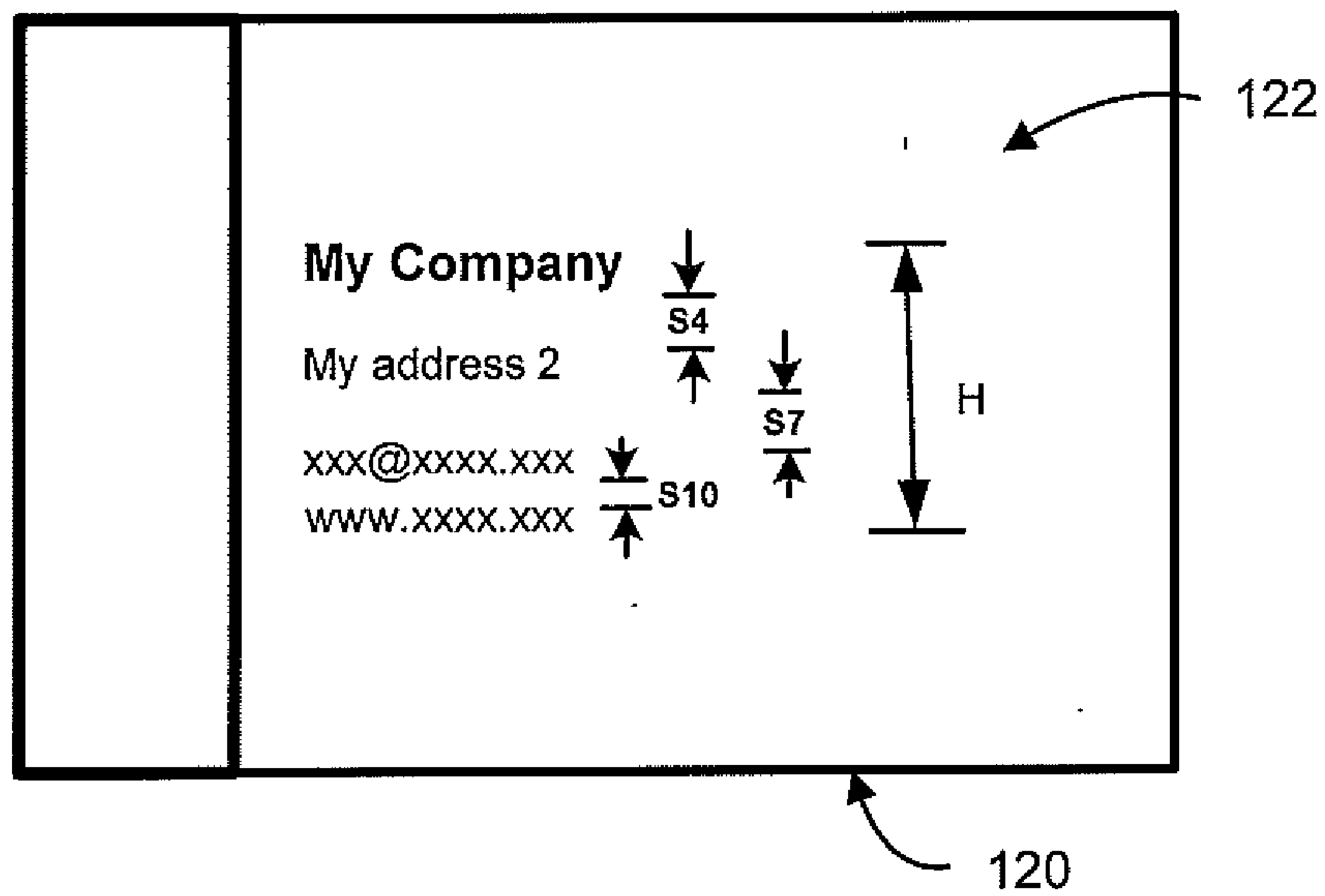


Fig. 7C

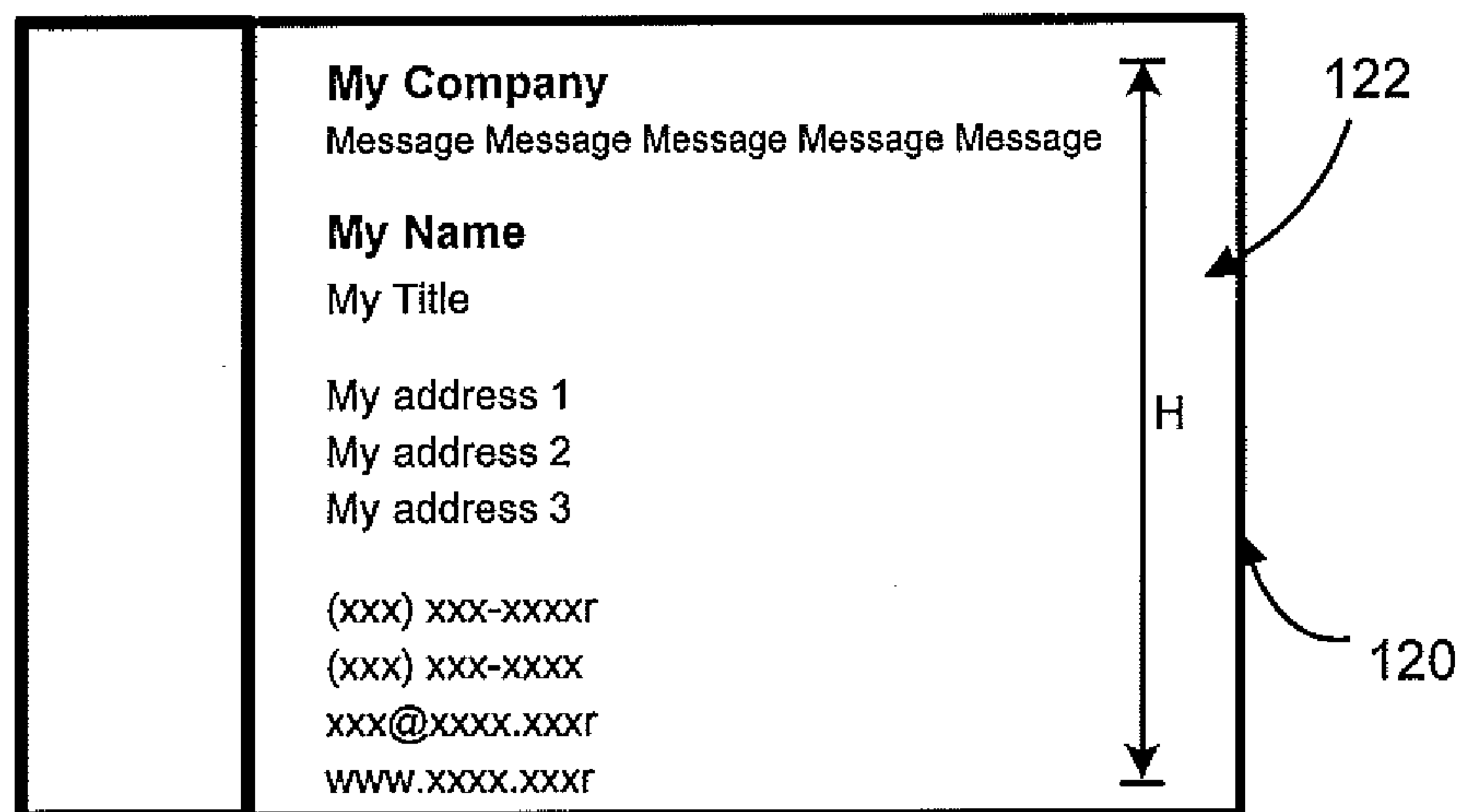
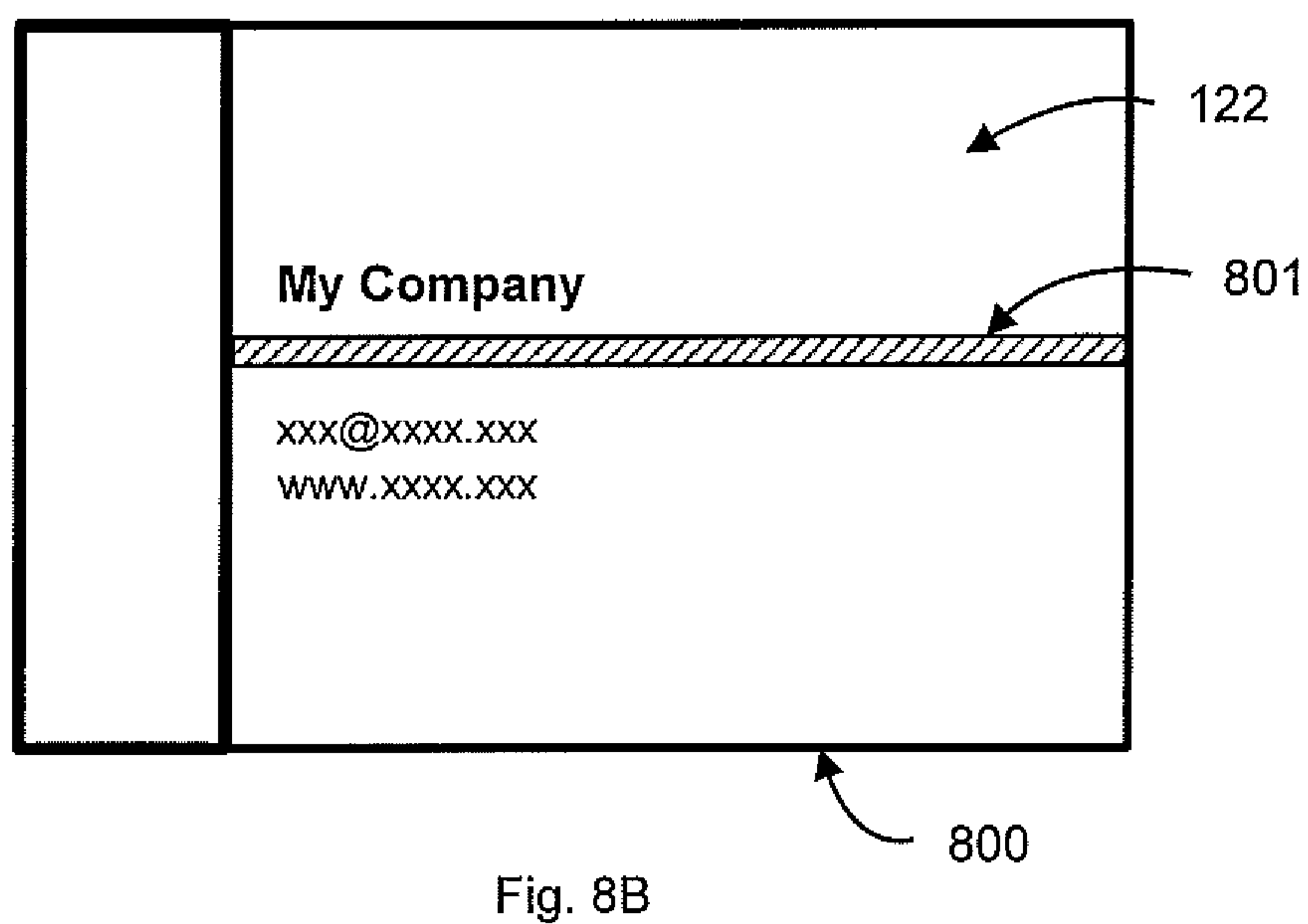
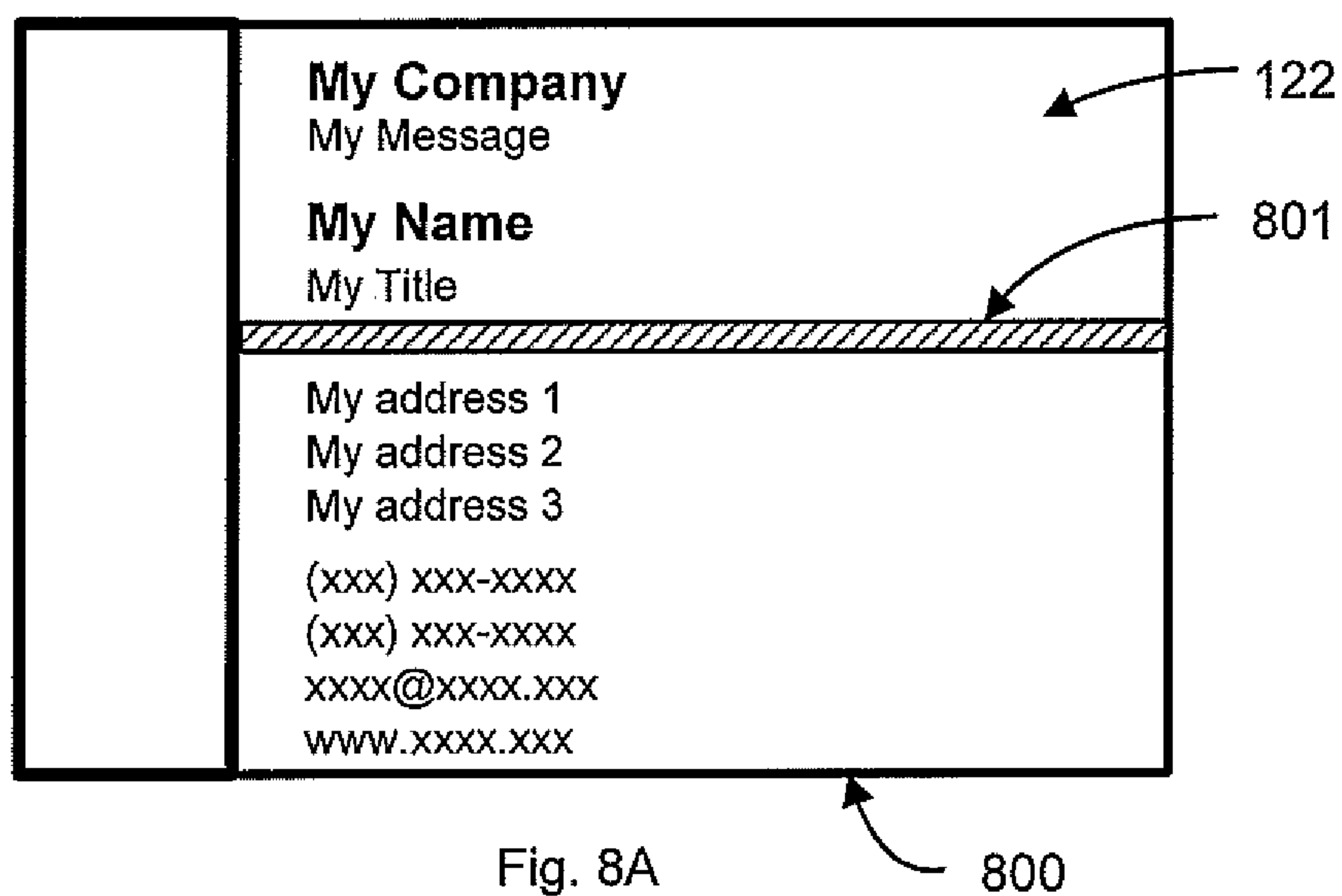
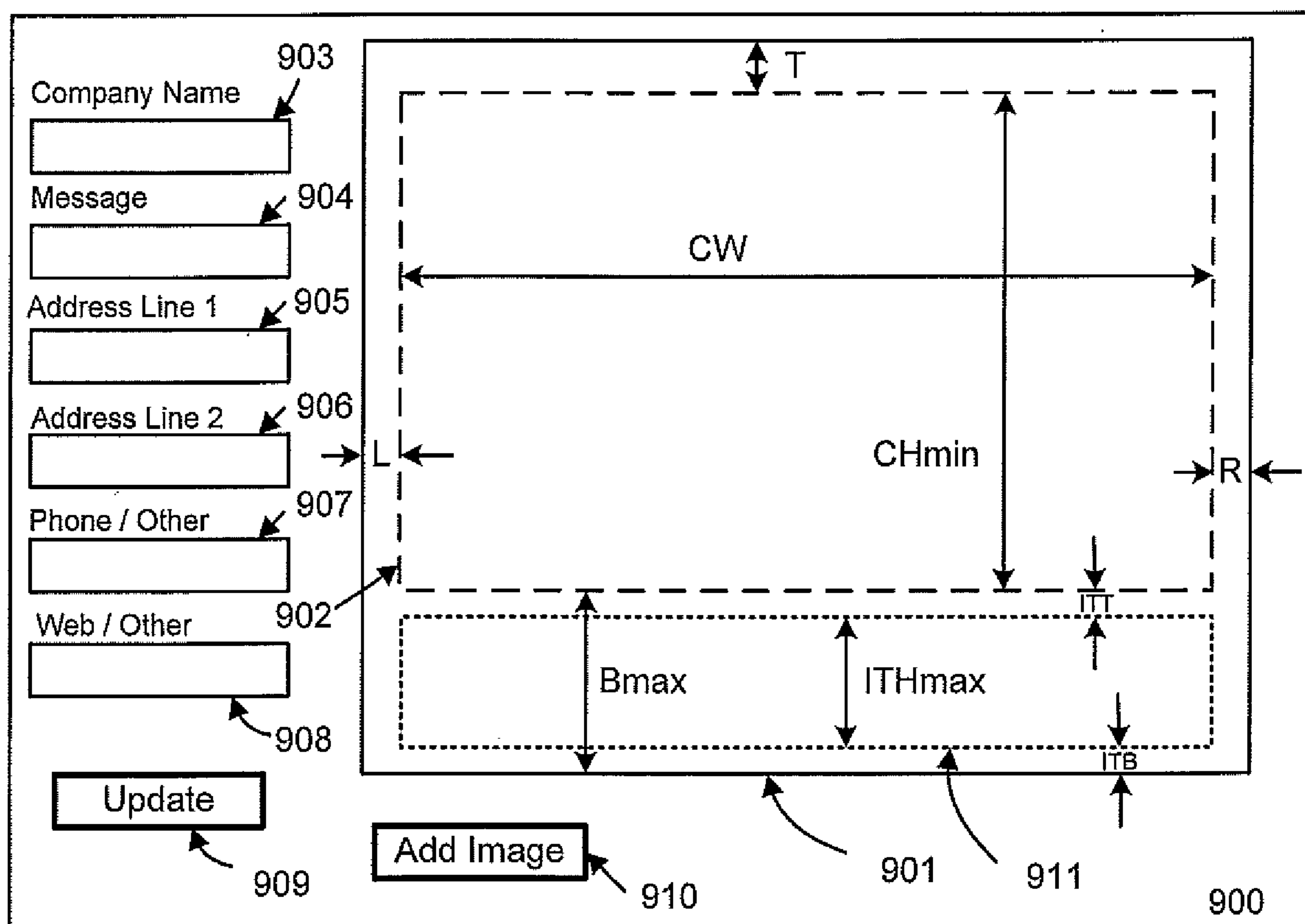
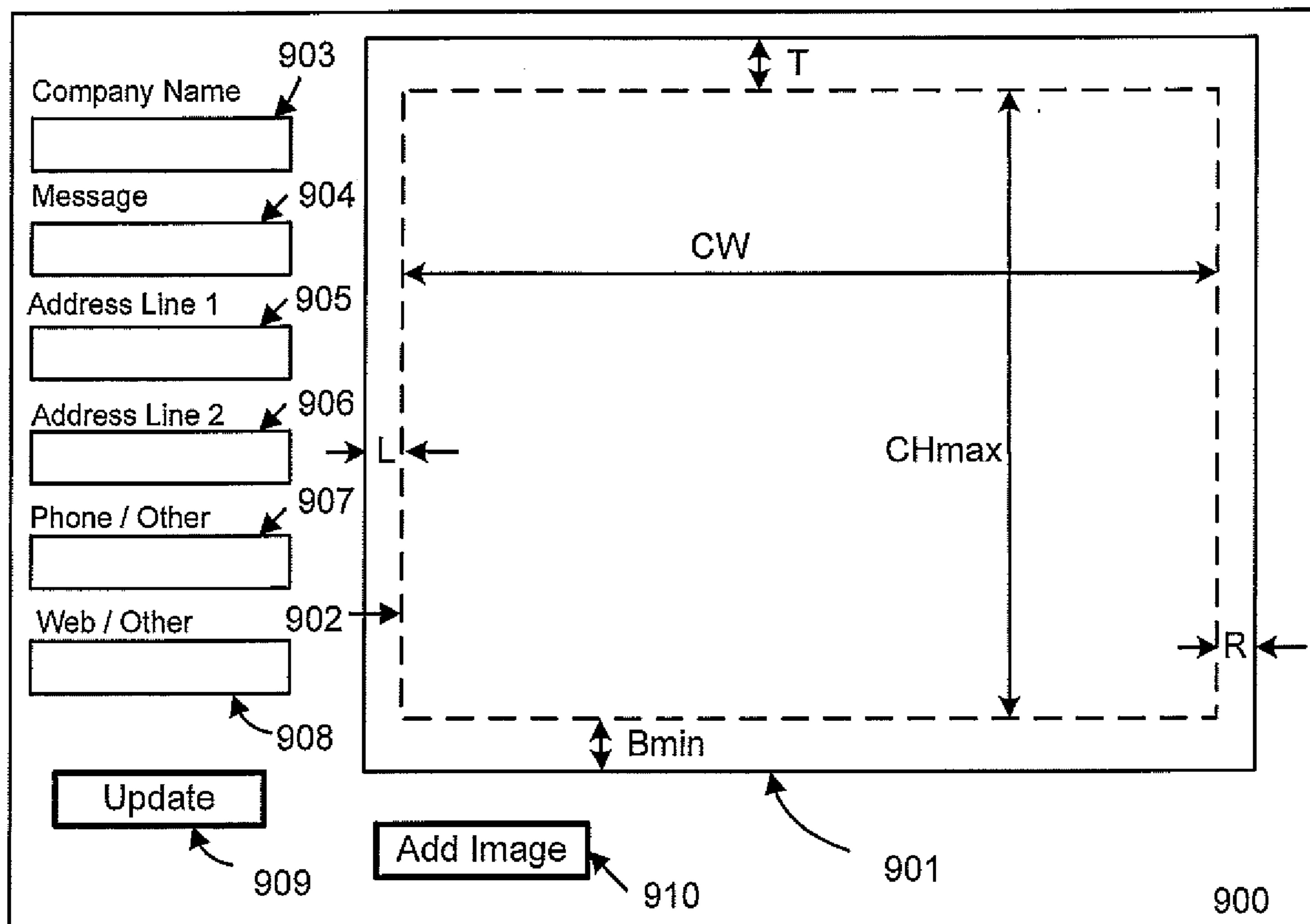
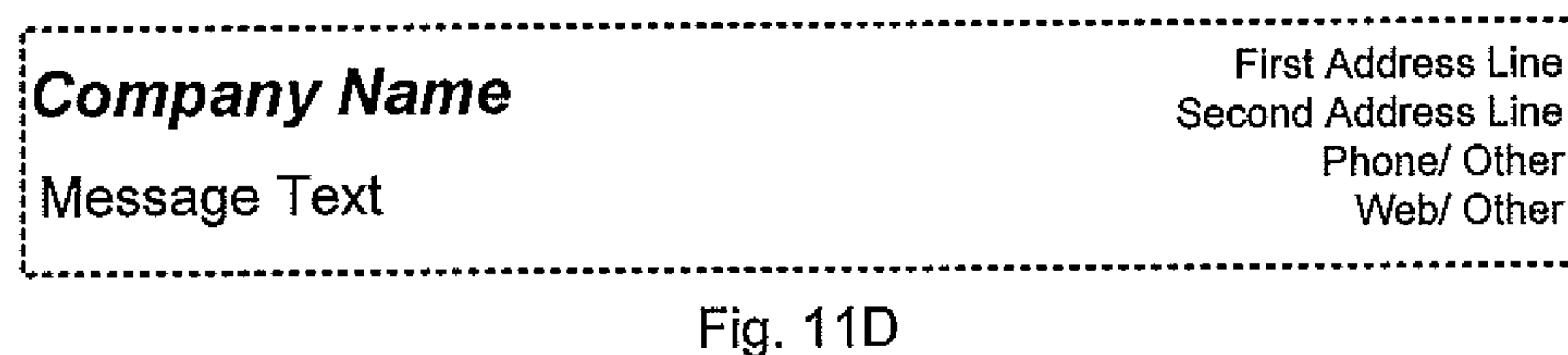
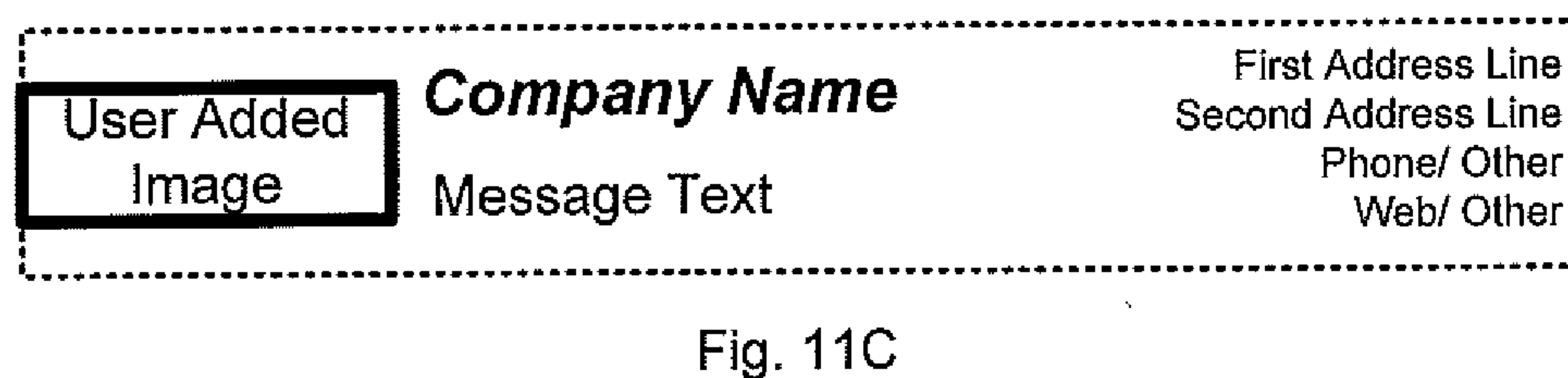
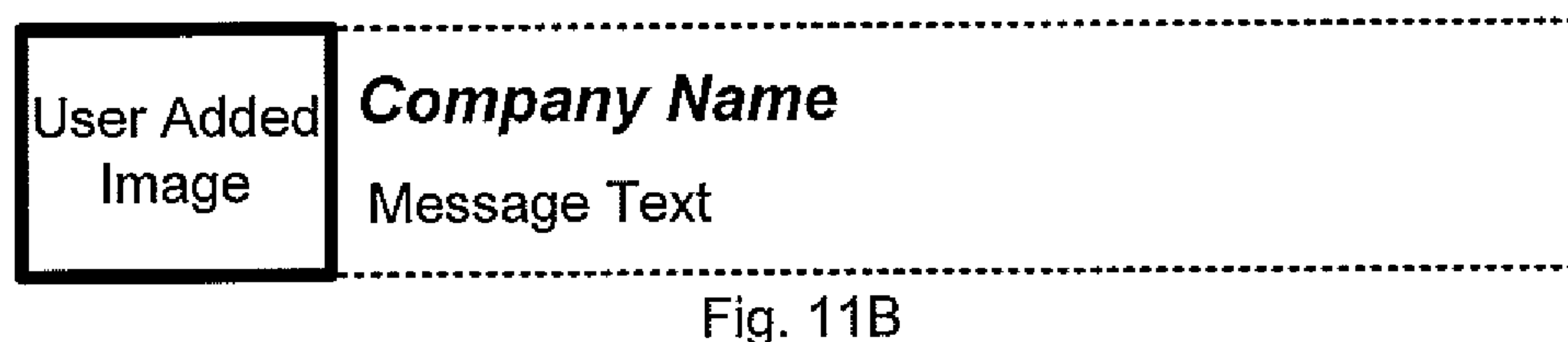
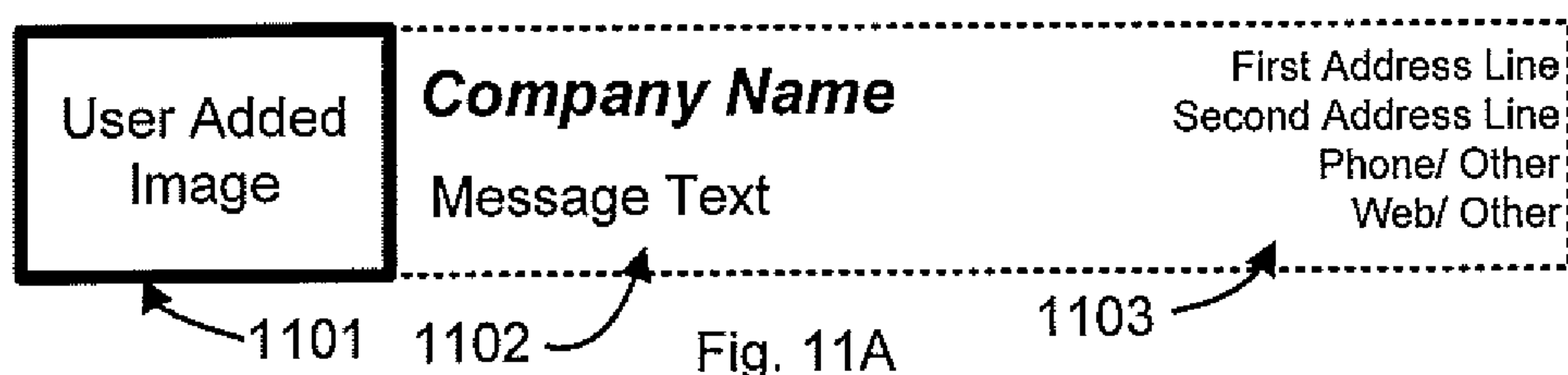
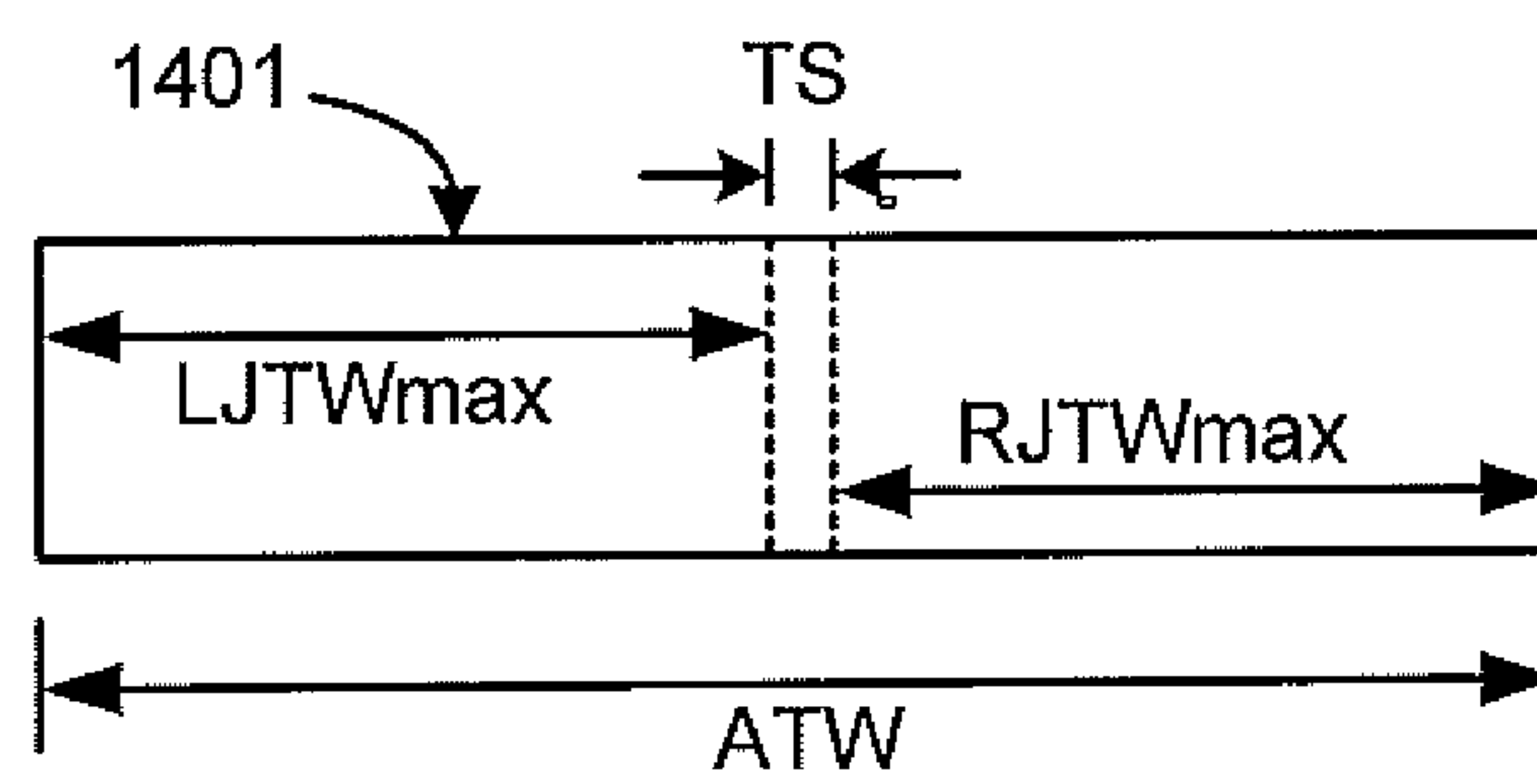
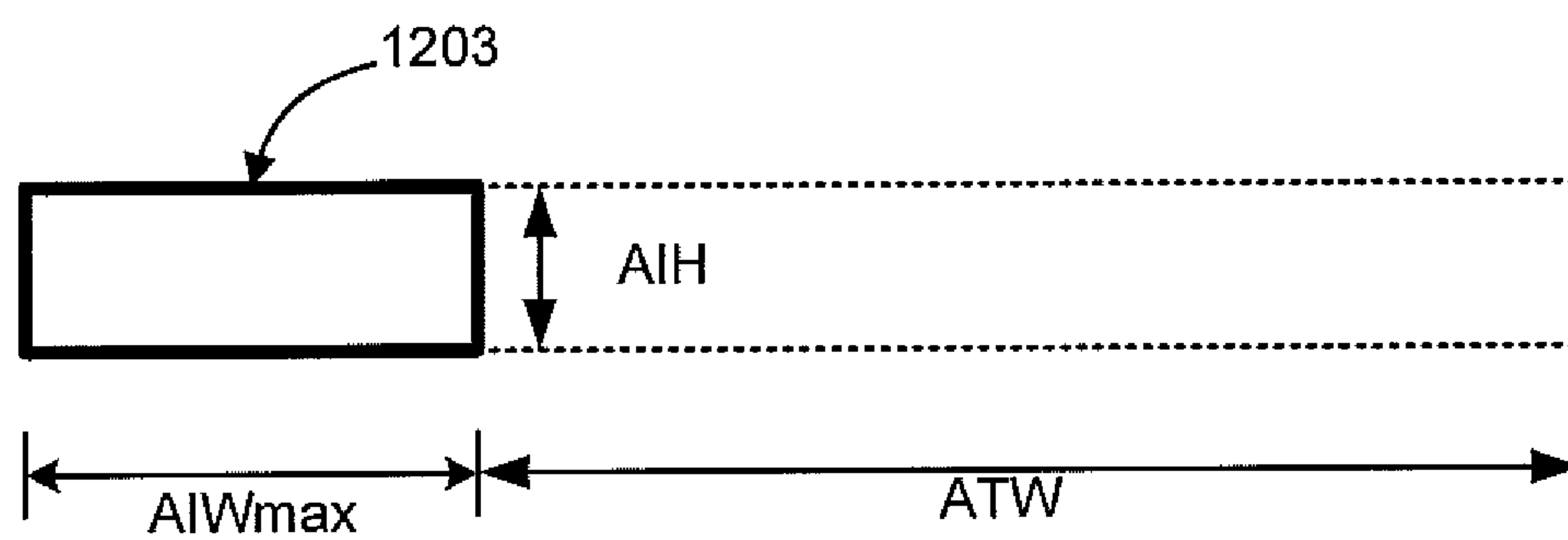
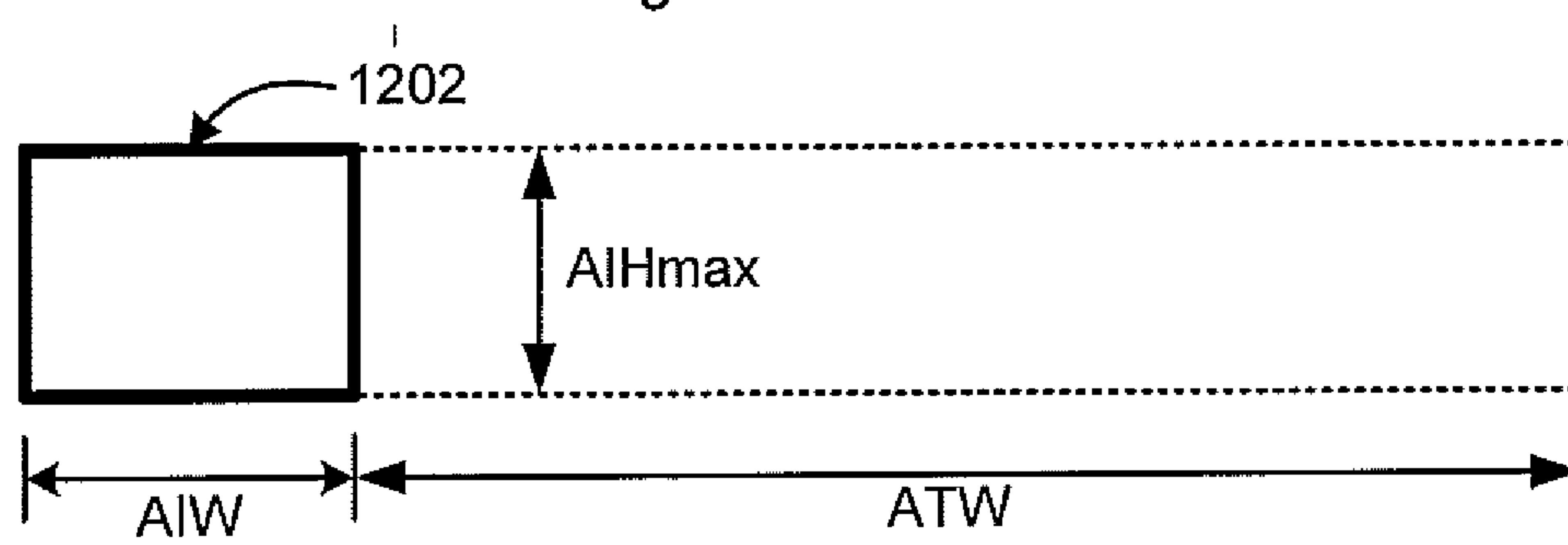
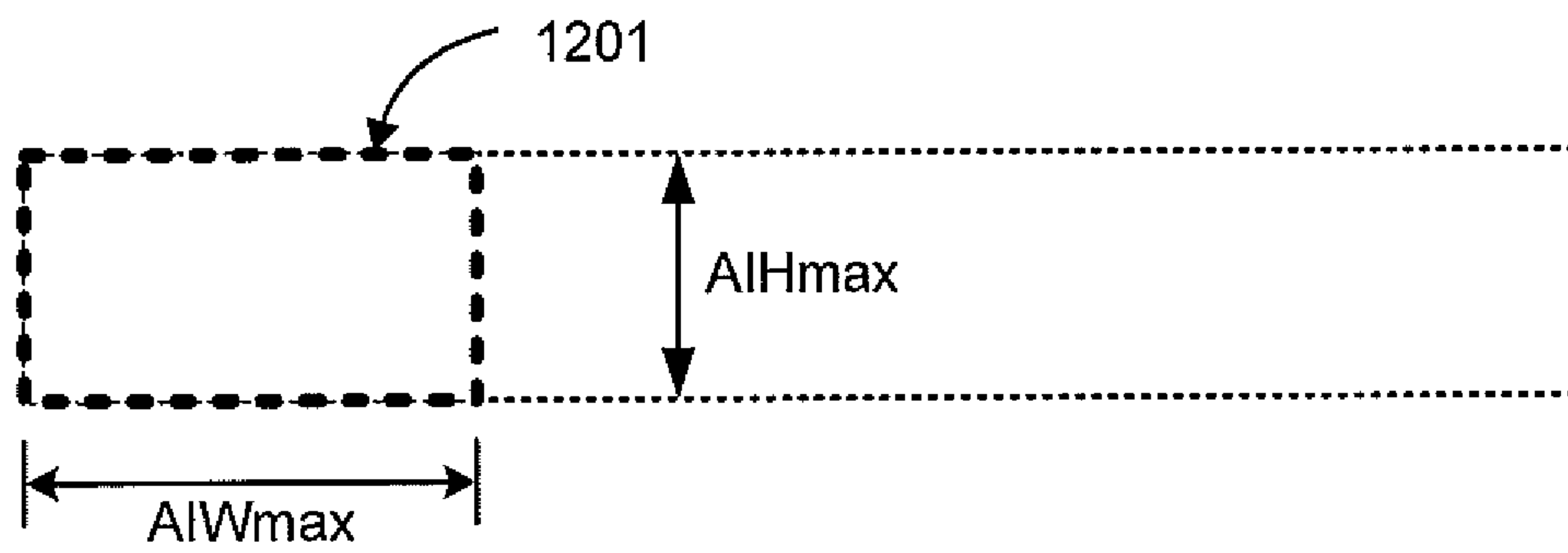


Fig. 7D









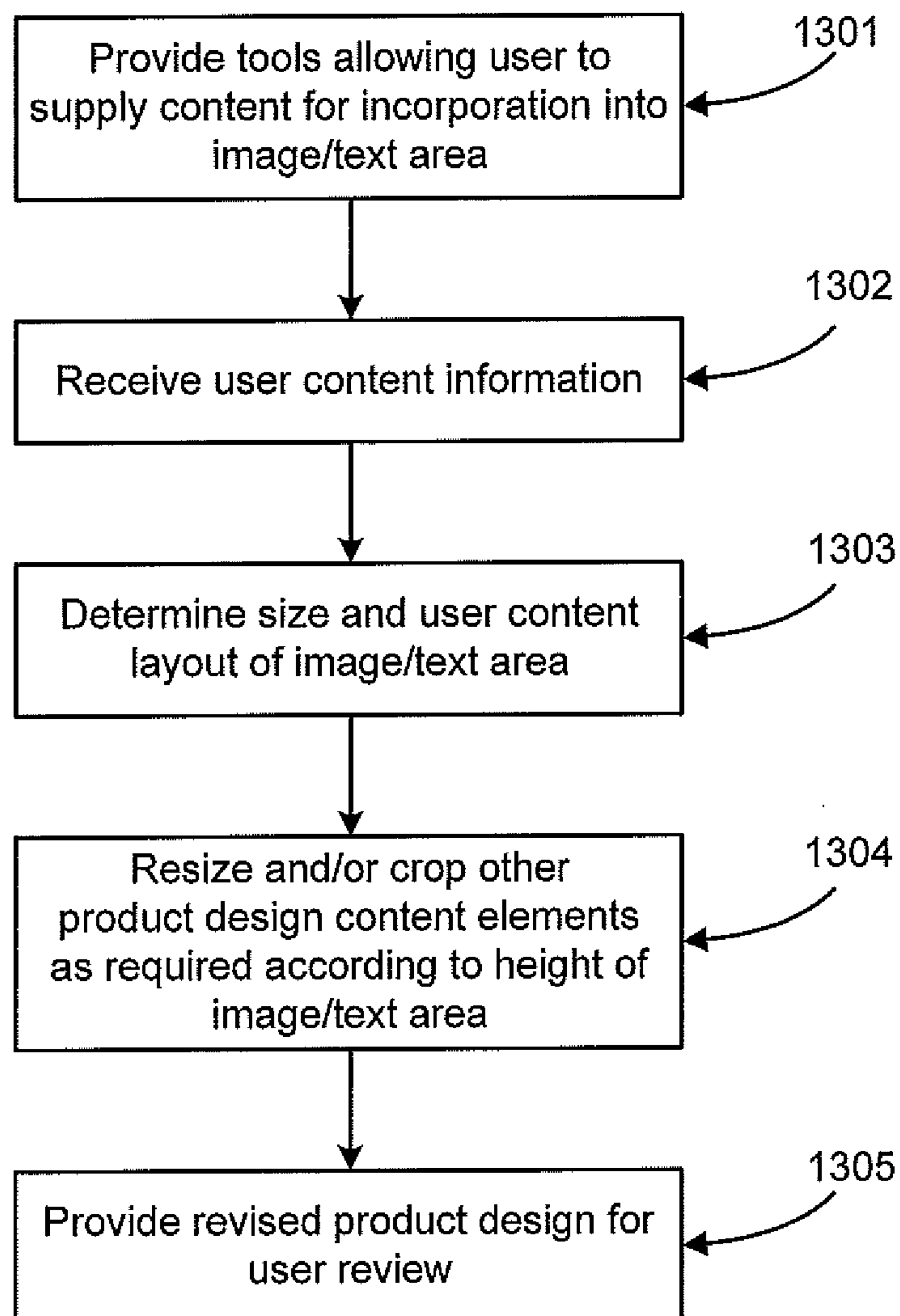


Fig. 13

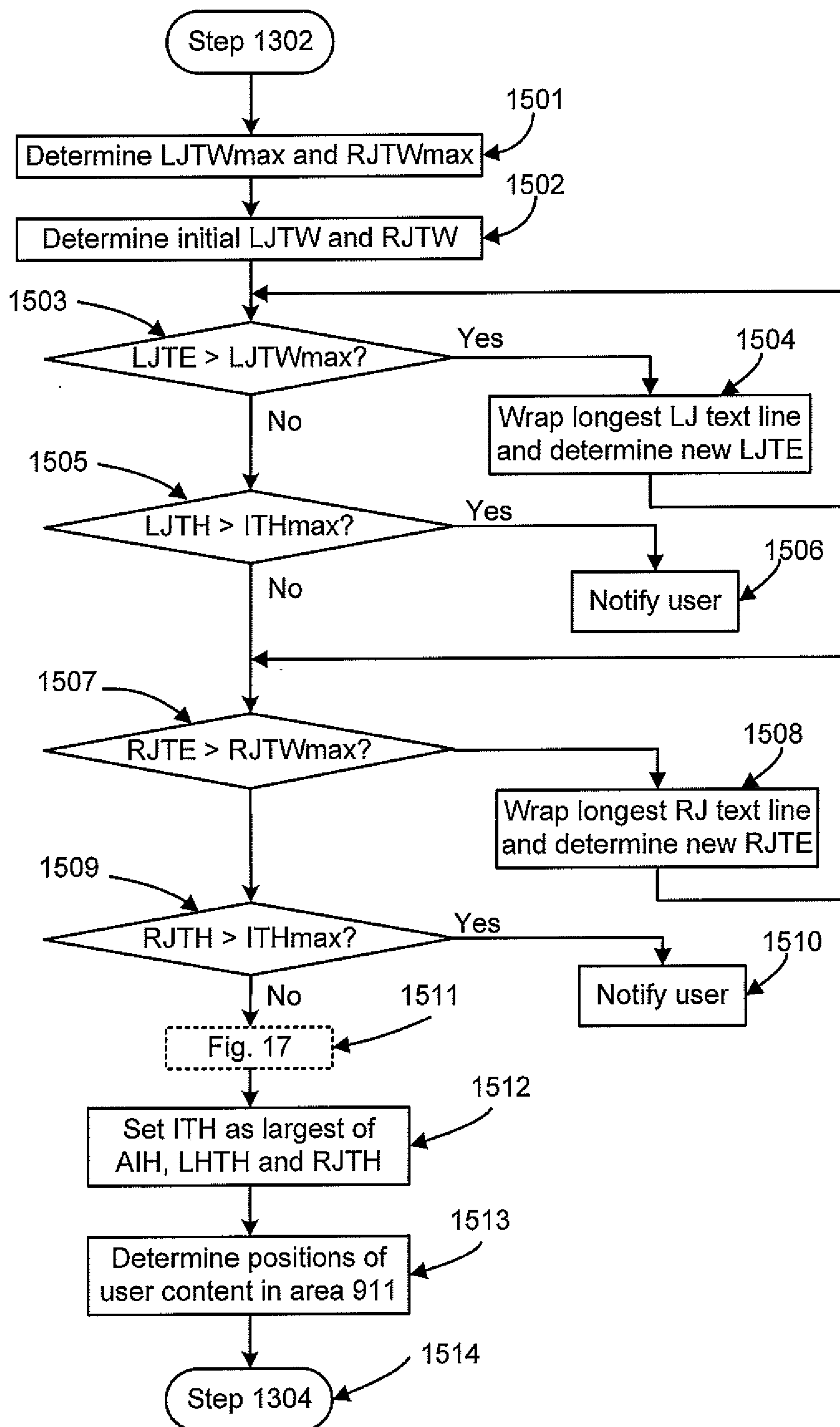


Fig. 15

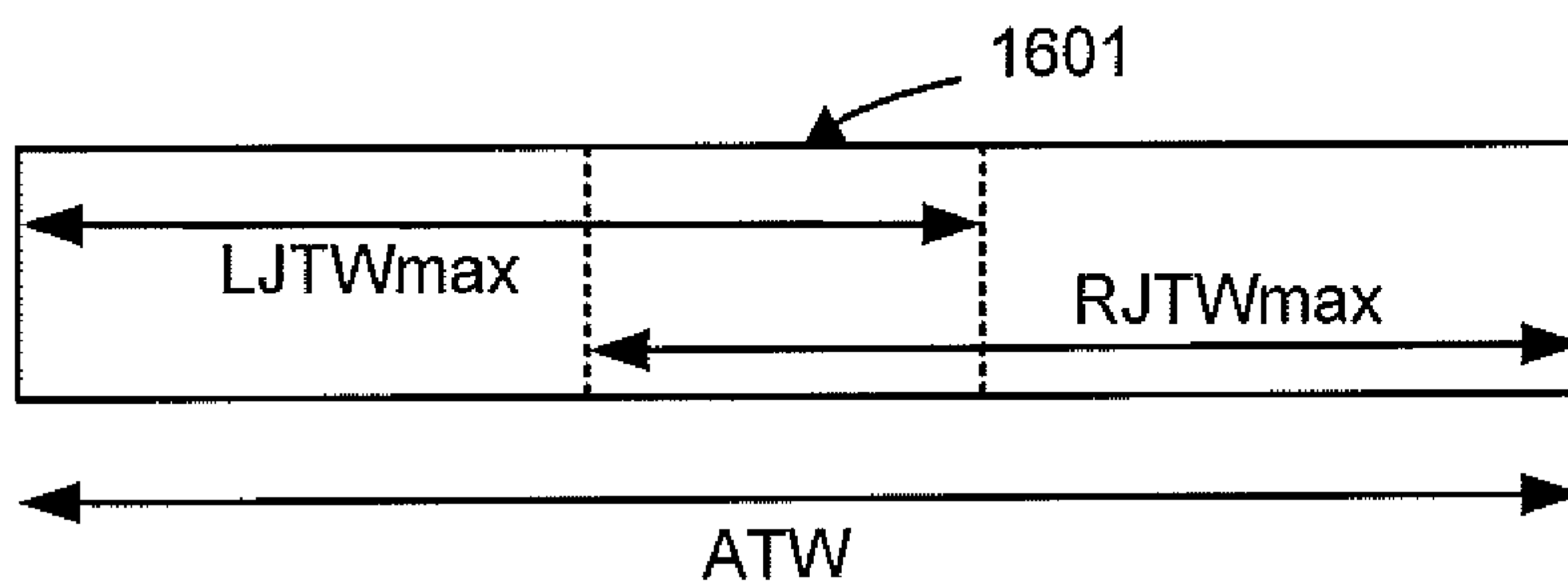


Fig. 16A

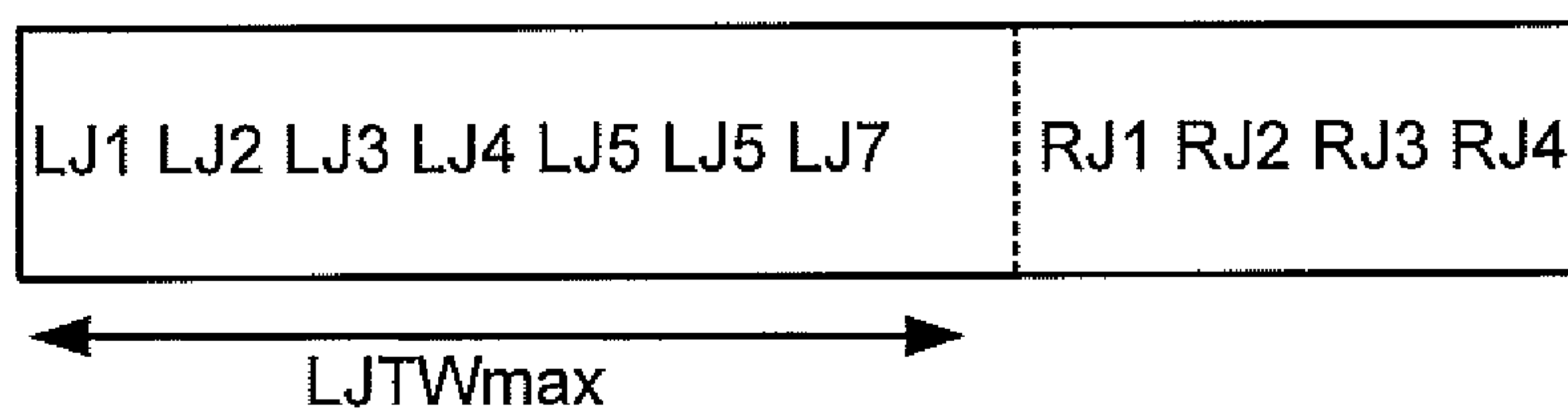


Fig. 16B

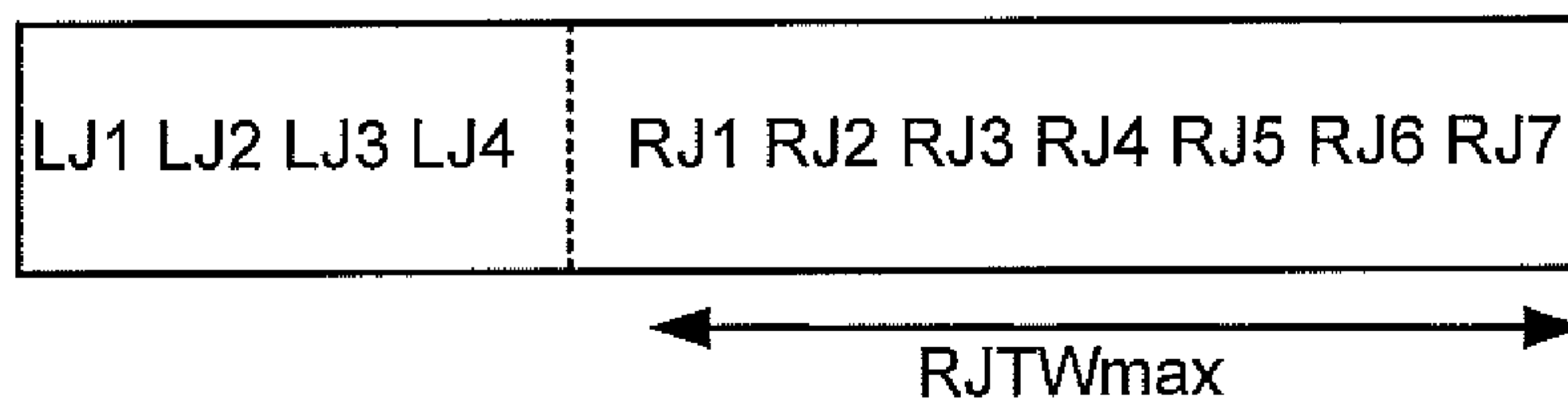


Fig. 16C

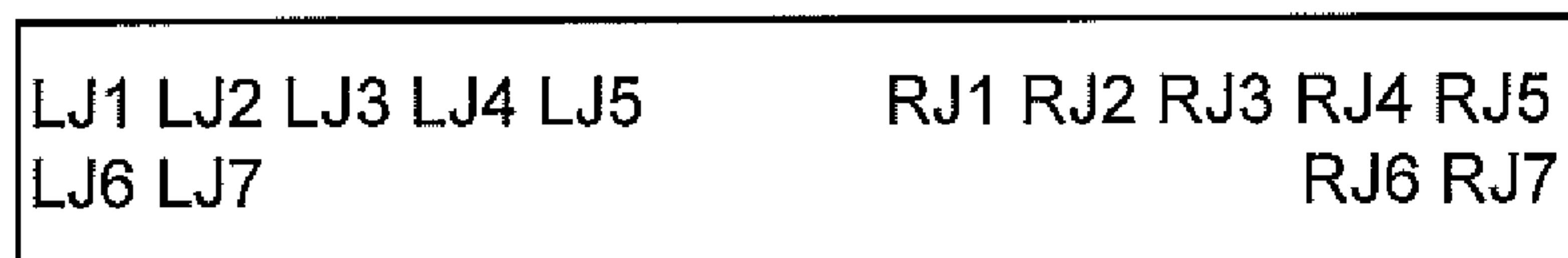


Fig. 16D

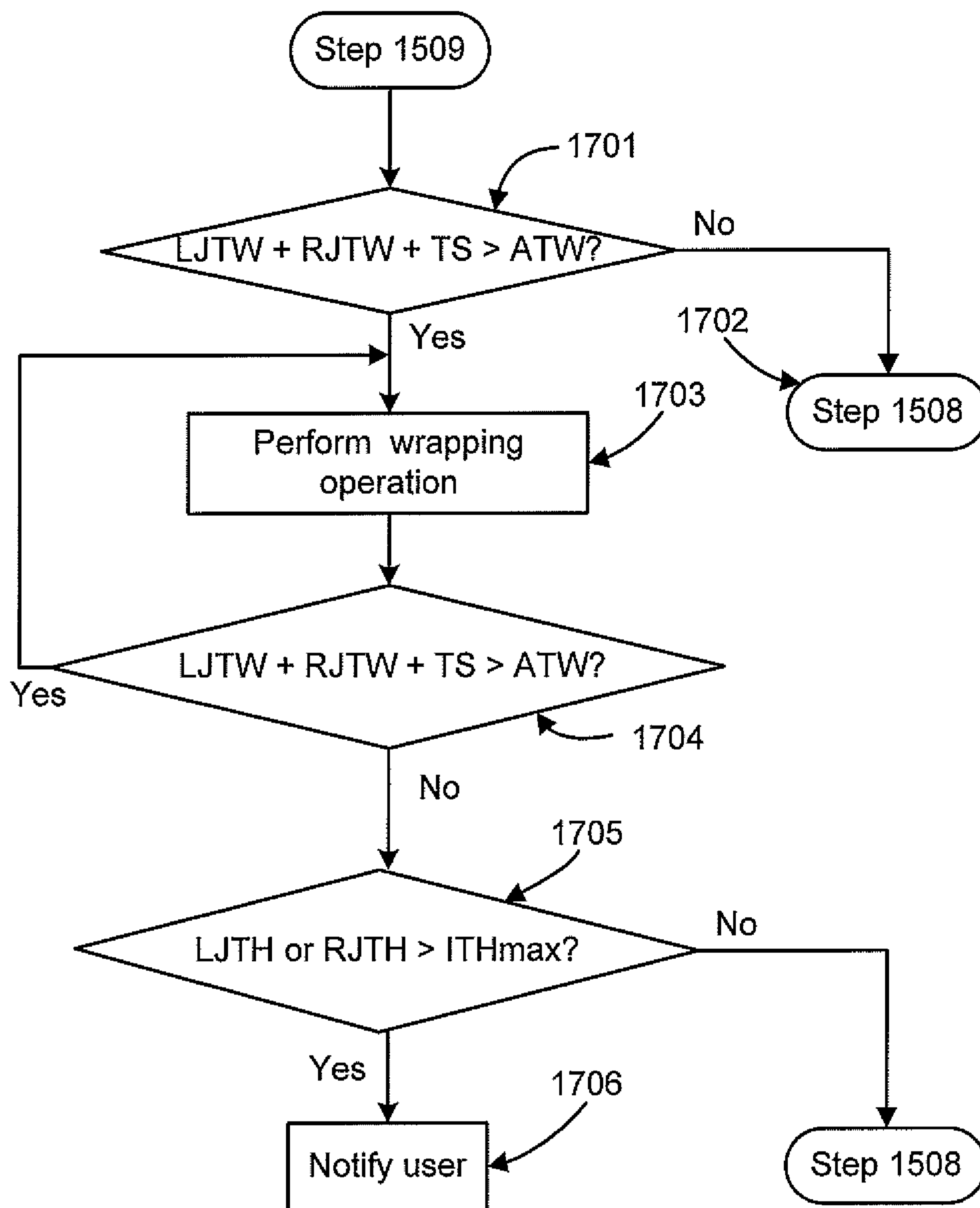


Fig. 17

