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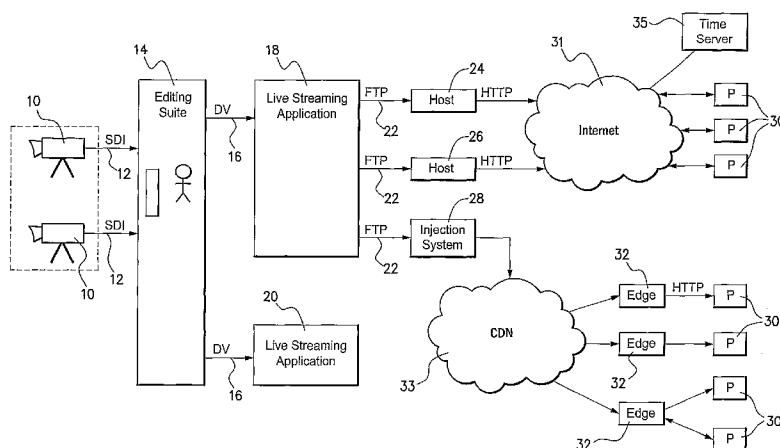
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(54) Title: METHOD, SYSTEM AND SOFTWARE PRODUCT FOR STREAMING CONTENT



(57) Abstract: The present invention relates to methods and systems for streaming content and in particular, live content. The method includes the steps of: receiving a content stream; periodically encoding the received stream into a sequence of content files to thereby create a plurality of sequential content files; assigning a sequence identifier to each content file; storing the files on a host; delivering a data file to a media player responsive to a request for live content, said data file including information enabling the media player to sequentially and individually request each content file from the host and play the requested content file; and delivering requested content files responsive to each request.

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Method, system and software product for streaming content

Field of the Invention

The present invention relates to the field of data communications. In particular, the present invention relates to a method, system and software product for streaming
5 content, and in particular live content, over communication networks.

Background of the Invention

In this specification, where a document, act or item of knowledge is referred to or discussed, this reference or discussion is not an admission that the document, act or item of knowledge or any combination thereof was at the priority date:

- 10 (i) part of common general knowledge; or
- (ii) known to be relevant to an attempt to solve any problem with which this specification is concerned.

With the uptake of broadband connections has come a corresponding increase in the volume of audiovisual material viewed over point-to-point communication networks, such
15 as the Internet. This increase in viewer numbers is in turn motivating content providers to release more content onto the Internet for viewing. Moreover, in view of developing applications such as IPTV and wireless connection technologies and devices, it is likely that point-to-point networks will grow in stature as communications platforms for audiovisual content, even to the point of rivalling traditional broadcast networks.

20 Software and hardware architectures for audiovisual streaming have largely developed around the delivery of pre-recorded content – a process known as 'on-demand' streaming – with less consideration given to the task of streaming live content.

An example of a live streaming system is described in *A Transport Layer for Live Streaming in a Content Delivery Network* Proceedings of the IEEE, Volume: 92, Issue: 9
25 page(s): 1408-1419 in which a complex Content Delivery Network (CDN) is deployed to transport live streams to end users.

As known to those skilled in the art, CDNs operate by replicating content on network nodes that are strategically distributed throughout the globe to be closer to end users in terms of network hops. The nodes - each of which may comprise a number of servers -
30 tend to be privately owned by enterprises that offer content delivery services to large web sites, and cooperate with each other to satisfy requests for content by end users, transparently moving content behind the scenes to optimise the delivery process.

Optimization can take the form of reducing bandwidth costs, improving end-user performance, or both.

When optimizing for end-user performance, locations that can serve content quickly to the user may be selected. This selection may be realised by choosing locations that are
5 the fewest number of hops or fewest number of network seconds away from the requestor, so as to optimize delivery across local networks. When optimizing for cost, locations that are less expensive to serve from may be selected.

Broadly speaking, the live streaming CDN includes: Entry Point Machines that act as origin proxies for the encoded multimedia data comprising the live stream; Set Reflectors to
10 which the stream data is fanned from the Entry Points; and Streaming Servers, which are themselves grouped in regions and linked by a private multicast network. Streams are supplied to the individual users from the Streaming Servers via a unicast protocol.

Every effort is made to maintain a continuous flow of stream data from the Entry Points to the Streaming Servers, through various packet recovery techniques, including inserting
15 parity packets within a stream or across a combination of streams, Reed-Solomon codes and retransmits, as well as adaptive multipath transmission across various Set Reflectors.

The present invention aims to provide an alternative approach to the task of streaming content, and in particular live content over communication networks.

Summary of the Invention

20 According to a first aspect of the present invention there is provided a method for streaming content, including the steps of:

receiving a content stream;

periodically encoding the received stream into a sequence of files to thereby create
a plurality of sequential content files;

25 assigning a sequence identifier to each content file;

storing the content files on a host;

delivering a data file to a media player responsive to a request for content, said
data file including information enabling the media player to sequentially and individually
request each content file from the host and play the requested content file; and

30 delivering requested content files responsive to each request.

The present invention may be utilised to transport both on-demand and live streams. In the case of live streaming, in contrast to the prior art, the present invention does not

attempt to preserve the continuity of a live stream, but instead stores (or caches) the stream as a plurality of sequential files that are individually requested by, and delivered to, end users. Ostensibly, the solution appears somewhat counterintuitive, in that live media – which is essentially dynamic – is delivered as a set of static files, and in fact the prior art teaches that live streaming does not lend itself to caching. However, the inventors have found that the solution provides a satisfactory end user experience notwithstanding the possible break in continuity of the live stream.

Another key advantage of the present invention, is that by converting live streams into a sequence of static files, allows delivery of the stream to end users using existing Internet protocols, and in particular the FTP and HTTP protocols. As known in the art, FTP and HTTP are both almost universally implemented and supported, open standards, which work with almost all acceleration, caching and proxying technologies.

Converting live streams to static files has enabled the inventors to leverage off established technology, thereby avoiding the enormous expense of creating and maintaining dedicated live streaming CDNs, as suggested by conventional approaches.

Other advantages arise from the present invention, such as the ability for live streams to be watched as on-demand streams immediately after their completion, and for live streams to be picked up and viewed by a viewer other than from the current position (by requesting files earlier in the sequence), both of which are not possible with prior art systems, without actually recording the live stream on the media player.

A further distinguishing feature of the present invention is that it operates as a "pull" solution, wherein portions of the live stream are continually requested by, and delivered to the player, rather than opening a single data connection over which the entire stream is delivered, as occurs in the prior art. This enables flow control means to be conveniently adopted to match the incoming data rate with the rate of decoding occurring at the Player.

Preferably, the sequence identifier is recorded in the file name of each content file.

Optimally, the data file includes the file name of the first sequential content file and the network location of the host.

In preferred embodiments, the data file includes information enabling the media player to calculate the sequence number of, and thereby request, the last sequential content file in the sequence. For example, the information may include:

the commencement time (t_c) of the requested live content;

details of a facility from which a current time (t_r) is available;
 the frame rate (FPs) of the live content stored in each file; and
 the number of frames stored in each file,
 wherein the sequence number of the last sequential content file (S_L) may be calculated
 5 according to the following formula and requested from the host:

$$S_L = F_e / F_{\text{block}}$$

$$F_e = t_e / \text{FPs}$$

$$t_e = t_c - t_r$$

Optionally, the data file includes the network location of one or more additional hosts
 10 from which a media player may request content files in the event of unsuccessful delivery
 from the host.

Typically, the host is a web server, streaming live content to one or more directly
 connected media players. However, in alternative embodiments, the host is an ingestion
 system for a content delivery network.

15 Optimally, the encoding step comprises cyclically directing the content stream through
 two or more encoders. This often allows the encoders to simultaneously encode
 individual portions of the content stream.

According to a second aspect of the present invention, there is provided a content
 streaming system, including:

20 a streaming application; and
 a host communicatively coupled to the streaming application,

wherein content received by the streaming application is periodically encoded into a
 sequence of content files to thereby create a plurality of sequential files, each file being
 assigned a sequence number upon its creation and being transferred to the host along
 25 with a data file including information enabling a media player to sequentially and
 individually request each content file from the host and play the requested content file.

Typically, the content received by the streaming application is live content.

According to a third aspect of the present invention, there is provided a method for
 receiving and playing streamed content, said content having been periodically encoded

into a plurality of sequential content files, each of which having a sequence identifier, and stored on a host, the method including the steps of:

downloading a data file including information enabling the sequential content files to be individually requested in sequence;

- 5 requesting each content file from the host; and
 playing each content files.

Typically, the content is live content.

- In preferred embodiments, the method includes the further step of requesting the next content file in the sequence, in the event that a requested content file is not received
10 within a specified timeframe.

According to a fourth aspect of the present invention there is provided a method for encoding a live audiovisual stream for transmission over a point to point communications network in, or close to, real time, the method including the steps of:

- receiving a live audiovisual stream;
- 15 after a predetermined time period, dividing the portion of the live stream which arrived during the time period into one or more segments;
- concurrently encoding the segments in parallel on separate processors; and
 returning to step (a) in the event that the live stream continues to arrive after completion of the encoding step.

- 20 According to a fifth aspect of the present invention there is provided a method for streaming live audiovisual media over a point to point communications network in, or close to, real time, the method including the steps of:

- receiving a live audiovisual stream;
- dividing the live stream into segments;
- 25 dividing each segment into two or more subsegments;
- encoding the subsegments in parallel on separate processors; and
 uploading each encoded subsegment to one or more edge servers to be stored at said server as discrete files with sequence information to enable viewers to commence viewing the live stream from the edge server from any selected file.

The present invention also provides computer software products including computer-executable instructions for carrying out the methods and implementing the systems according to the other aspects of the invention.

Further aspects and advantages of the present invention will become evident from
5 consideration of the illustrations and examples that follow.

Description of the Drawings

A preferred embodiment of the present invention will now be described with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which:

10 Figure 1 is a schematic illustration of a suitable network architecture upon which the present invention may be implemented;

Figure 2 is a flowchart illustrating the steps of a preferred encoding scheme adopted for use in the present invention;

Figure 3 is a flowchart illustrating the steps executed by a media player in receiving and playing live content, streamed to the player in accordance with the present invention;

15 Figure 3A is a screen shot illustrating the use of multiple software encoders; and

Figures 4 and 5 are flowcharts, illustrating media player recovery methods employed if stream files are not received within an acceptable timeframe.

Detailed Description of the Drawings

Turning to Figure 1, cameras and sound recording equipment 10 capture content, which
20 is transmitted via a suitable Serial Data Interface (SDI) 12 to an Editing Suite 14, where the various audio and video feeds are combined into a composite broadcast signal. The composite signal 16 is transmitted via a suitable Digital Video (DV) Interface to a computer system, upon which a Live Streaming Application 18 according to the present invention is installed.

25 Redundancy is provided by a second Live Streaming Application 20 to which the composite signal 16 is simultaneously transmitted. The secondary application 20 may be utilised in the event of failure of either the primary application 18 or the DV connection 16. Of course any number of such parallel Applications can be provided for enhanced quality of service.

30 As discussed below in further detail, the Live Streaming Application 18 receives the composite signal and sequentially encodes the signal into a series of files 22. These files

are simultaneously transferred over the Internet via the File Transfer Protocol (FTP) to Hosts 24, 26, 28.

Hosts 24 and 26 are Web Servers, whereas Host 28 is an Injection System for a Content Delivery Network (CDN) 33. The Web Servers 24 make the files 22 directly available to Media Players 30 over the Internet 31, via the Hypertext Transfer Protocol. Multiple Web Servers 24, 26 are deployed to provide further redundancy to the system, such that a secondary server 26 may be utilised in the event of failure of a primary server or Internet network congestion.

The Injection System 28 serves as a front end to a Content Delivery Network (CDN) 33. As discussed in the introductory section above, CDNs operate by replicating content – in this case the files 22 – on a series of Edge Servers 32 (which are themselves Web Servers), that are operatively connected through the Internet 31 and/or a private CDN 33 to the Injection System 28. There may of course be numerous network nodes made up of routers, switches etc separating the Injection System 28 and the Edge Servers 32. In addition, some of the Edge Servers 32 may be linked together in regions through a private multicast network interface shared by each Edge Server 32 in that region.

The present invention operates independently of whatever replication methods and CDN architecture that may be deployed. The series of files 22 are merely transferred to the Injection System 28 via FTP, whereupon they are fanned out to the Edge Servers 32. Once at the Edge Servers 32, the files are made available to Media Players 30 via HTTP in the same way as a direct connection by way of Web Servers 24 and 26.

Turning to Figure 2, the encoding method adopted by the Live Streaming Application 18 in converting a continuous, real-time live stream 16 into a sequence of individual files is illustrated. Each file contains a portion of the live stream captured over a time interval of predetermined length. The inventors have found the task of interval selection to involve a trade off between preserving the real time quality of a stream (which is achieved by long intervals), and encoder efficiency (which is provided by short intervals). A length of about 4 seconds has been found to be suitable for most live streams.

Multiple Encoders 34, 36, 38 and 40, (in this case four, but of course any number could be used) are deployed to encode the live stream according to any suitable codec (Windows Media, Quicktime, Real, MPEG, etc). Each Encoder 34, 36, 38 and 40 may be a separate software process running on the same hardware, or separate hardware modules.

The Live Stream 16 is received at the Application 18 and directed into the first Encoder 34. After expiry of the selected time interval, the stream 16 is directed into the second

Encoder 36, with the first Encoder 34 then commencing its encoding task on the received stream. After expiry of the second and then third time interval, the stream is respectively directed to the third 38 and fourth 40 Encoders, with the previous encoder commencing its encoding task.

- 5 Upon expiry of the next time interval, the stream is directed once again to the first Encoder 34, to commence a second iteration of the encoding method. The method continues to iterate through the loop of cyclic encoding until no further data is received at the Application 18, indicating that the stream has finished.

Typically, a stream of length 'm' seconds, takes longer than 'm' seconds to encode.

- 10 Therefore, in later iterations of the loop, each of the Encoders 34, 36, 38, 40 operates to simultaneously encode a separate portion of the stream. Streams are directed to a buffer 34A, 36A, 38A, 40A, respectively maintained by each Encoder 34, 36, 38, 40 in the event that an Encoder has not finished encoding from a previous iteration.

- 15 Figure 3A is a screen shot illustrating simultaneous encoding and related CPU performance data when ten software encoders are employed.

During each iteration, each encoder 34, 36, 38, 40, stores its encoded stream portion as a file 34B, 36B, 38B, 40B, which are named by the encoder according to a naming convention. For this purpose, a variable 'x', is maintained by the Application 18, and incremented after each iteration of the cyclic encoding loop.

- 20 The naming convention operates by Encoder 'n' inserting the value:

$$x + (n-1),$$

in the file name of the created file.

In the illustrated example of four Encoders:

- Encoder 1 inserts values 0, 4, 8, 12
 25 Encoder 2 inserts values 1, 5, 9, 13 ...
 Encoder 3 inserts values 2, 6, 10, 14 ...
 Encoder 4 inserts values 3, 7, 11, 15.

It will be realised that the naming convention assigns a sequence identifier to each encoded files that preserves the timing of the original live stream.

- 30 As discussed above, each file is transferred to a Host 24 via FTP after its creation. As different portions of the stream may take longer to encode than others, files are not necessarily uploaded to the Host 24, nor stored on the Host 24, in sequence order.

A portion of a typical file listing from a Host 24 after upload of sequential encoded video (.lsp) files, using ten encoders, is:

	-rw-rw-r--	1	livestreaming	livestreaming	20	Feb	1	16:03	LS_Demo1_0000000.1.lsp
	-rw-rw-r--	1	livestreaming	livestreaming	11	Feb	1	16:03	LS_Demo1_0000022.1.lsp
5	-rw-rw-r--	1	livestreaming	livestreaming	11	Feb	1	16:03	LS_Demo1_0000019.1.lsp
	-rw-rw-r--	1	livestreaming	livestreaming	11	Feb	1	16:03	LS_Demo1_0000021.1.lsp
	-rw-rw-r--	1	livestreaming	livestreaming	36608	Feb	1	16:03	LS_Demo1_0000012.1.lsp
	-rw-rw-r--	1	livestreaming	livestreaming	11	Feb	1	16:03	LS_Demo1_0000013.1.lsp
	-rw-rw-r--	1	livestreaming	livestreaming	11	Feb	1	16:03	LS_Demo1_0000014.1.lsp
10	-rw-rw-r--	1	livestreaming	livestreaming	11	Feb	1	16:03	LS_Demo1_0000015.1.lsp
	-rw-rw-r--	1	livestreaming	livestreaming	11	Feb	1	16:03	LS_Demo1_0000016.1.lsp
	-rw-rw-r--	1	livestreaming	livestreaming	11	Feb	1	16:03	LS_Demo1_0000017.1.lsp
	-rw-rw-r--	1	livestreaming	livestreaming	11	Feb	1	16:03	LS_Demo1_0000018.1.lsp
15	-rw-rw-r--	1	livestreaming	livestreaming	118856	Feb	1	16:03	LS_Demo1_0000011.1.lsp
	-rw-rw-r--	1	livestreaming	livestreaming	271400	Feb	1	16:03	LS_Demo1_0000009.1.lsp
	-rw-rw-r--	1	livestreaming	livestreaming	272842	Feb	1	16:03	LS_Demo1_0000008.1.lsp
	-rw-rw-r--	1	livestreaming	livestreaming	280009	Feb	1	16:03	LS_Demo1_0000007.1.lsp
	-rw-rw-r--	1	livestreaming	livestreaming	268628	Feb	1	16:02	LS_Demo1_0000006.1.lsp
	-rw-rw-r--	1	livestreaming	livestreaming	268130	Feb	1	16:02	LS_Demo1_0000004.1.lsp
20	-rw-rw-r--	1	livestreaming	livestreaming	272430	Feb	1	16:02	LS_Demo1_0000005.1.lsp
	-rw-rw-r--	1	livestreaming	livestreaming	279759	Feb	1	16:02	LS_Demo1_0000003.1.lsp
	-rw-rw-r--	1	livestreaming	livestreaming	272226	Feb	1	16:02	LS_Demo1_0000002.1.lsp
	-rw-rw-r--	1	livestreaming	livestreaming	274749	Feb	1	16:02	LS_Demo1_0000001.1.lsp
	-rw-rw-r--	1	livestreaming	livestreaming	4794	Feb	1	16:02	LS_Demo1_0000000.v.v

25 Turning to Figure 3, the steps executed by a Media Player 30 in receiving and playing live content, are schematically illustrated. At step 40, a viewer enters a request into the Media Player 30 to watch a selected stream of live content. If the selected event is yet to commence – such as sporting event or concert – the viewer is notified of the commencement time. Otherwise, the viewer is asked whether they wish to watch the event from its current position, or from the beginning.

30 At step 42 a Data File (known as the Header, or .viv file) is received from the Host 24. The Header file is created and uploaded to the Host 24 before any of the video files and is also the first file to be downloaded to the Media Player 30.

The Header File includes the following information:

- 35 • Cryptographic Keys, used to decode the video files;
- Client tracking information;
- Statistics Data;
- Time of live stream commencement (t_c);
- Audio codec initialisation data;
- 40 • Video codec initialisation data;
- Frame rate (FPS) of encoded video;
- Number of frames encoded in each file (F_{block});
- URL of first sequential file (including file name);

- URL of end file (.lsf file above)
- Alternative Host URL
- Performance Optimisation Data; and
- URL of Time Server

5 In the event that a viewer wishes to watch a live stream from its current position, the Media Player 30 must, at step 44, calculate sequence number of the last file in the sequence S_L , the file of course encoding the most recently received portion of the live stream. This is achieved by the Media Player 30 first obtaining the current time (t_r) from a Time Server 35 (Figure 1), the URL of which is included in the Header file.

10 Subtracting the stream commencement time stream (t_c) (which is provided in the Header File) from the current time (t_r) allows the elapsed time (t_e) of the live stream to be calculated.

Dividing the elapsed time (t_e) by the frame rate (FPS) of the encoded video (also provided in the Header file) yields the total number of frames (F_e) of live content
15 captured since its commencement.

Finally, dividing F_e by the number of frames in each file (F_{block}), yields the highest desired sequence number S_L .

The formula may be written as:

$$S_L = F_e / F_{block}$$

20 $F_e = t_e / FPS$

$$t_e = t_c - t_r$$

At step 46, the Media Player 30 requests the file with the calculated sequence number from the URL of the Host (which is provided in the Header File). This file is then
25 downloaded to the Media Player at step 48.

At step 50 the Media Player determines whether the live stream has ended. Completion of a live stream is indicated by delivering a special purpose (.lsf) video file to the Media Player.

If the stream has not ended, the Media Player at step 52 extracts the audiovisual data from the file, decodes the data using the information in the Header File, and commences playing the decoded data. The Media Player may append decoded data to the end of a buffer where previously received data is still being decoded or played.

- 5 After playing, at step 54, about 75% of decoded data in a file, the Media Player at step 56, increments the sequence number, and returns to step 46 and requests the file containing the new sequence number from the Host.

The period between incrementing the sequence number and requesting the next file, can be varied in accordance with the length of the video contained in each file, and the speed
10 of connection between the Media Player and the Host.

Figures 4 and 5 are flowcharts illustrating two Media Player strategies for dealing with the non-arrival of requested sequential files. At step 60, the Media Player requests a sequential file. If the file is not received within a predetermined time (step 62), the method returns to step 60 and the same file is requested again. If the file again fails to
15 arrive - possibly because it was never encoded or successfully uploaded to the Host - the current sequence number is incremented at step 66.

The method then returns to step 60 where the file with the incremented sequence number is requested.

Turning to Figure 5, an alternative method is illustrated. At step 60 a sequential file is
20 requested. If the file is not received within a predetermined time frame (step 62), the file is requested from an alternative server (step 65), the URL of which is provided in the Header File. If the file is not received within a predetermined time frame (step 66) the method described in Figure 4, may be adopted. If the file delivery is successful, the sequence number is incremented (step 66), and the method returns to step 60 to request
25 the next sequential file.

The above description is by way of illustration only and modifications and improvements obvious to the person skilled in the art are intended to fall with the spirit and scope of the present invention.

The word 'comprising' and forms of the word 'comprising' as used in this description and
30 in the claims do not limit the invention claimed to exclude any variants or additions. Modifications and improvements to the invention will be readily apparent to those skilled in the art. Such modifications and improvements are intended to be within the scope of this invention.

Claims:

1. A method for streaming content, including the steps of:
 - receiving a content stream;
 - periodically encoding the received stream into a sequence of files to
 - 5 thereby create a plurality of sequential content files;
 - assigning a sequence identifier to each content file;
 - storing the content files on a host;
 - delivering a data file to a media player responsive to a request for content, said data file including information enabling the media player to sequentially and
 - 10 individually request each content file from the host and play the requested content file; and
 - delivering requested content files responsive to each request.
2. A method according to claim 1 wherein the content stream comprises live content.
3. A method according to claim 1 or claim 2, wherein the sequence identifier is
- 15 recorded in the file name of each content file.
4. A method according to claim 3, wherein the data file includes the file name of the first sequential content file, and the network location of the host.
5. A method according to any one of claims 1 to 4, wherein the data file includes information enabling the media player to calculate the sequence number of, and
- 20 thereby request, the last content file in the sequence.
6. A method according to claim 5 wherein the information includes:
 - the commencement time (t_c) of the requested content;
 - details of a facility from which a current time (t_r) is available;
 - the frame rate (FPs) of the content stored in each content file; and
 - 25 the number of frames stored in each content file,
 wherein the sequence number of the last content file in the sequence (S_L) is calculated according to the following formula:

$$S_L = F_c / F_{\text{block}}$$

$$F_c = t_c / \text{FPs}$$

$$t_e = t_c - t_r$$

7. A method according to any one of claims 4 to 6 wherein the data file includes the network location of one or more additional hosts from which a media player may request a content file, in the event of non-arrival of a previously requested content file within a specified timeframe.
8. A method according to any one of claims 1 to 7, wherein the host is a web server streaming content to one or more media players coupled to the web server over the Internet.
9. A method according to any one of claims 1 to 7, wherein the host is an ingestion system for a content delivery network.
10. A method according to any one of claims 1 to 9, wherein the encoding step comprises cyclically directing the content stream through two or more encoders.
11. A method according to claim 10 wherein the two or more encoders simultaneously encode individual portions of the content stream.
12. A content streaming system, including:
a streaming application; and
a host communicatively coupled to the streaming application,
wherein, content received by the streaming application is periodically encoded into a sequence of content files to thereby create a plurality of sequential files, each content file being assigned a sequence identifier upon its creation and being transferred to the host along with a data file including information enabling a media player to sequentially and individually request each content file from the host and play the requested content file.
13. A content streaming system according to claim 12 wherein the content received by the streaming application is live content.
14. A content streaming system according to claim 12 or claim 13, wherein the sequence identifier is recorded in the file name of each content file.
15. A content streaming system according to any one of claims 12 to 14, wherein the data file includes the file name of the first sequential content file and the network location of the host.

16. A content streaming system according to any one of claims 12 to 15, wherein the data file includes information enabling the media player to calculate the sequence number of, and thereby request, the last sequential content file in the sequence.
17. A content streaming system according to claim 16 wherein the information includes:
- 5 the commencement time (t_c) of the content;
- details of a facility from which a current time (t_r) is available;
- the frame rate (FPs) of the content stored in each content file; and
- the number of frames stored in each content file,
- 10 wherein the sequence number of the last sequential content file in the sequence (S_L) is calculated according to the following formula:
- $$S_L = F_c / F_{\text{block}}$$
- $$F_c = t_c / \text{FPs}$$
- $$t_c = t_c - t_r$$
- 15 18. A content streaming system according to claim 15, wherein the data file includes the network location of one or more additional hosts from which a media player may request a content file in the event of non-arrival of a previously requested content file.
19. A content streaming system according to any one of claims 12 to 18, wherein the host is a web server, streaming content to one or more media players coupled to the web server over the Internet.
20. A content streaming system according to any one of claims 12 to 18, wherein the host is an ingestion system for a content delivery network.
21. A content streaming system according to any one of claims 12 to 20, wherein the content is periodically encoded by cyclically directing the content stream through two or more encoders.
- 25 22. A content streaming system according to claim 21, wherein the encoders simultaneously encode individual portions of the content stream.
23. A method for receiving and playing streamed content, said content having been periodically encoded into a plurality of sequential content files, each having a
- 30

sequence identifier, and each having been stored on a host, the method including the steps of:

downloading a data file including information enabling the sequential content files to be individually requested in sequence;

5 requesting each content file from the host; and

playing each content file.

24. A method according to claim 23, wherein the content is live content.

25. A method according to claim 23 or claim 24, wherein the data file includes information enabling calculation of the sequence number of the last sequential content file in the sequence.

10 26. A method according to claim 25, wherein the information includes:

the commencement time (t_c) of the content;

details of a facility from which a current time (t_r) is available;

the frame rate (FPs) of the content stored in each content file; and

15 the number of frames stored in each content file,

wherein the sequence number of the last sequential content file (S_L) in the sequence is calculated according to the following formula:

$$S_L = F_c / F_{\text{block}}$$

$$F_c = t_c / \text{FPs}$$

20 $t_e = t_c - t_r$

27. A method according to any one of claims 23 to 26, including the further step of requesting the next content file in the sequence, in the event that a requested content file is not received within a specified timeframe.

28. A computer software product including computer-executable instructions for carrying out the method according to any one of claims 1 to 11 or any one of claims 23 to 27.

29. A computer software product including computer-executable instructions implementing the system according to any one of claims 11 to 22.

30. A method for encoding a live audiovisual stream for transmission over a point to point communications network in, or close to, real time, the method including the steps of:
- receiving a live audiovisual stream;
 - 5 after a predetermined time period, dividing the portion of the live stream which arrived during the time period into one or more segments;
 - concurrently encoding the segments in parallel on separate processors;
 - and
 - 10 returning to step (a) in the event that the live stream continues to arrive after completion of the encoding step.
31. A method for streaming live audiovisual media over a point to point communications network in, or close to, real time, the method including the steps of:
- receiving a live audiovisual stream;
 - 15 dividing the live stream into segments;
 - dividing each segment into two or more subsegments;
 - encoding the subsegments in parallel on separate processors; and
 - uploading each encoded subsegment to one or more edge servers, to be stored at said server as discrete files with sequence information to enable
 - 20 viewers to commence viewing the live stream from the edge server from any selected file.

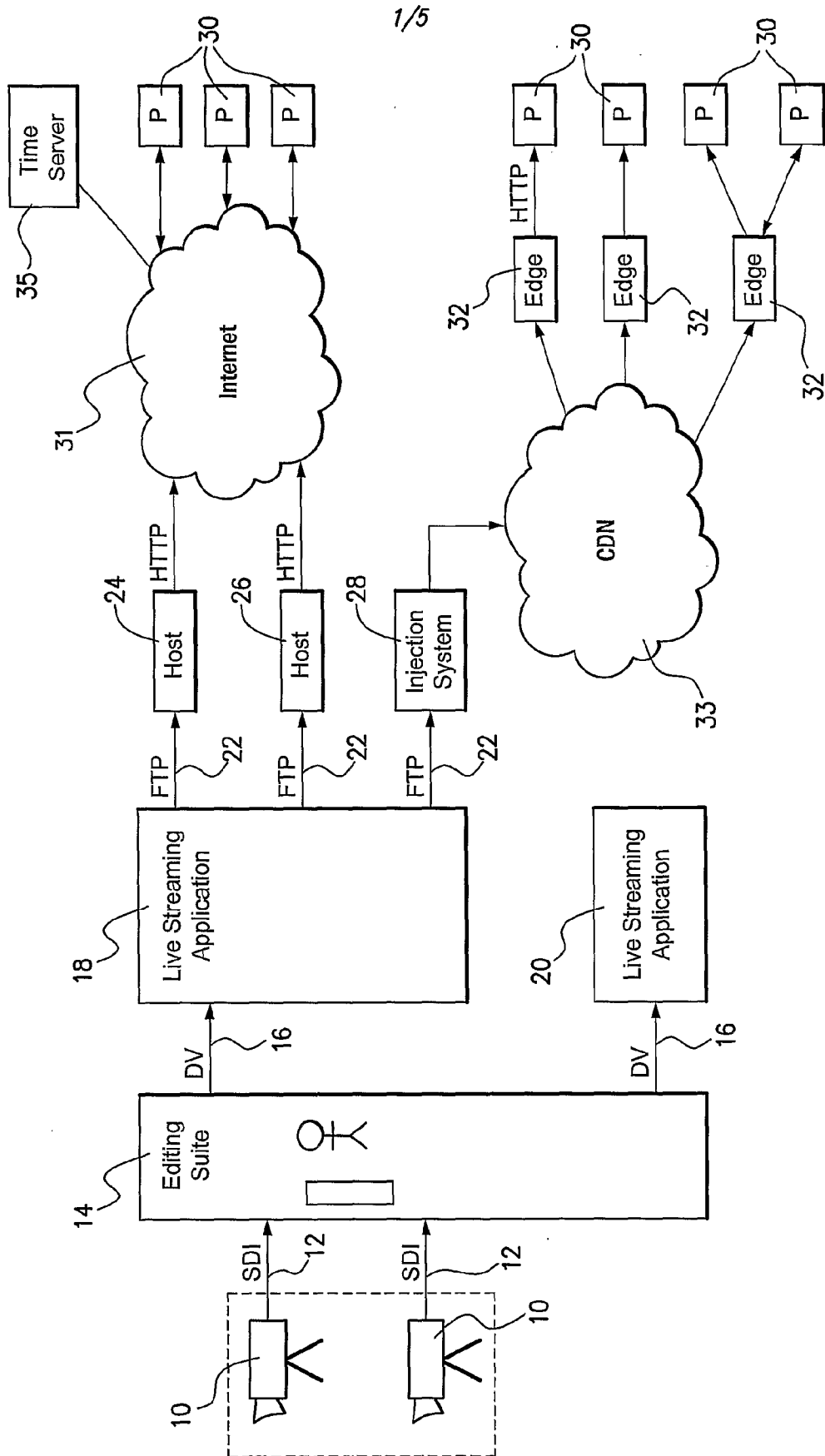


FIG. 1

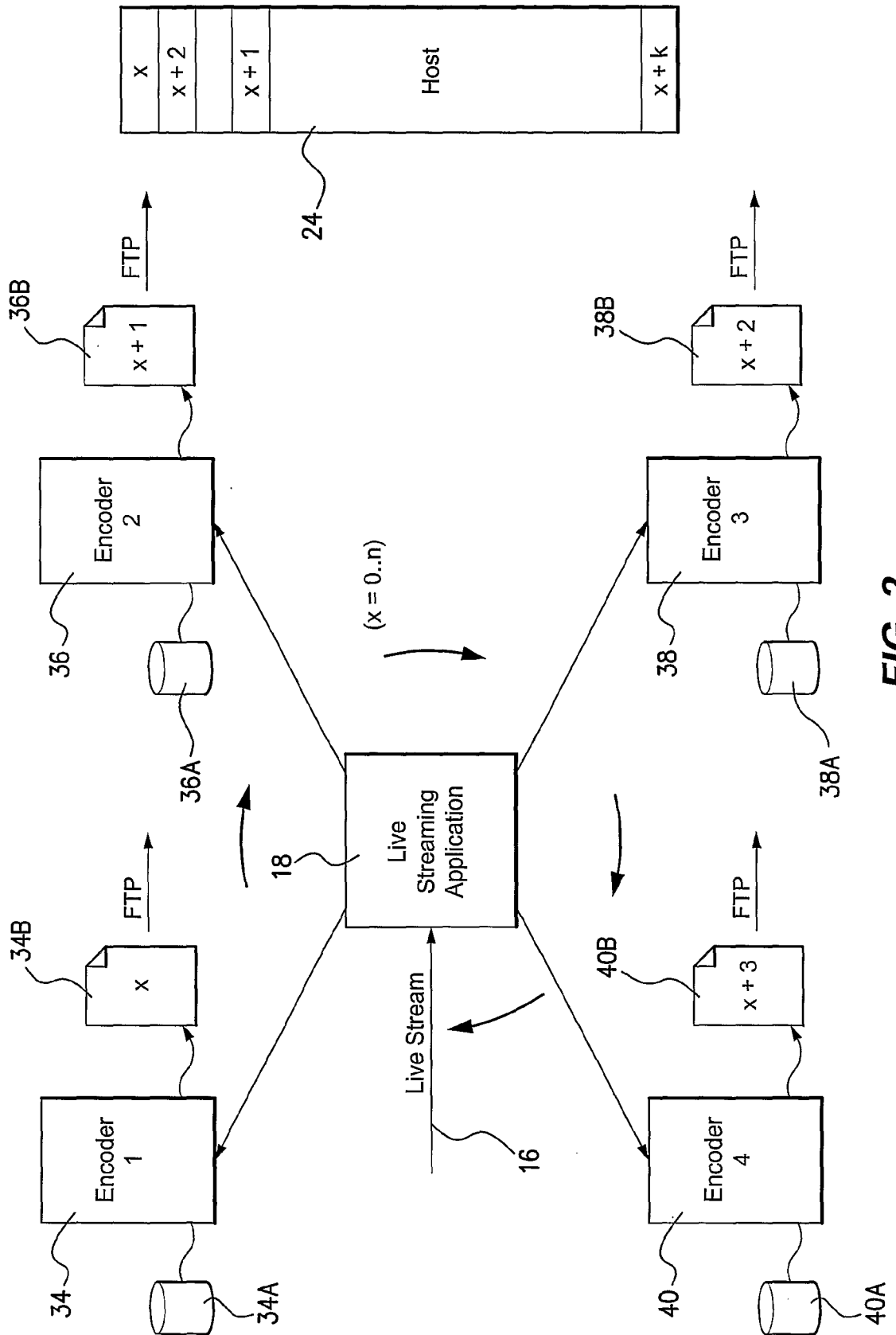


FIG. 2

FIG. 3A

Capture Toolkit Dialog		No TimeCode Data	
RUNNING		Drop: 0, F: 2947	

1. Encoder Toolkit Dialog (1/10)		End	Preview
STOPPED	S:66766ms, E:70070ms, FID: 2000		
FileID: 31	TID :-1, TL :THREAD_PRIORITY_BELOW_NORMAL		

2. Encoder Toolkit Dialog (2/10)		End	Preview
STOPPED	S:70103ms, E:73406ms, FID: 2100		
FileID: 22	TID :-1, TL :THREAD_PRIORITY_BELOW_NORMAL		

3. Encoder Toolkit Dialog (3/10)		End	Preview
STOPPED	S:73440ms, E:76743ms, FID: 2200		
FileID: 23	TID :-1, TL :THREAD_PRIORITY_BELOW_NORMAL		

4. Encoder Toolkit Dialog (4/10)		End	Preview
STOPPED	S:76776ms, E:80080ms, FID: 2300		
FileID: 24	TID :-1, TL :THREAD_PRIORITY_BELOW_NORMAL		

5. Encoder Toolkit Dialog (5/10)		End	Preview
STOPPED	S:80113ms, E:83416ms, FID: 2400		
FileID: 25	TID :-2, TL :THREAD_PRIORITY_LOWEST		

6. Encoder Toolkit Dialog (6/10)		End	Preview
STOPPED	S:83450ms, E:86753ms, FID: 2500		
FileID: 26	TID :-2, TL :THREAD_PRIORITY_LOWEST		

7. Encoder Toolkit Dialog (7/10)		End	Preview
RUNNING	S:86786ms, E:90090ms, FID: 2600		
FileID: 27	TID :-15, TL :THREAD_PRIORITY_IDLE		

8. Encoder Toolkit Dialog (8/10)		End	Preview
RUNNING	S:90123ms, E:93426ms, FID: 2700		
FileID: 28	TID :-15, TL :THREAD_PRIORITY_IDLE		

9. Encoder Toolkit Dialog (9/10)		End	Preview
RUNNING	S:93460ms, E:96763ms, FID: 2800		
FileID: 29	TID :-15, TL :THREAD_PRIORITY_IDLE		

10. Encoder Toolkit Dialog (10/10)		End	Preview
RUNNING	S:96796ms, E:100100ms, FID: 2900		
FileID: 30	TID :-0, TL :THREAD_PRIORITY_NORMAL		

VivCast ver.1.0.9.60		Stop Capture	Encoder Properties	Main Properties
----------------------	--	--------------	--------------------	-----------------

Windows Task Manager

File Options View Shut Down Help

Applications Processes Performance Networking Users

CPU Usage: 7.9 %

PF Usage: 524 MB

Physical Memory (K): 2095736 Total, 1512276 Available, 598416 System Cache

Totals: Handles 7072, Threads 411, Processes 29

Page File Usage History

1. Encod... 2. Encod... 3. Encod... 4. Encod... 5. Encod... 6. Encod... 7. Encod... 8. Encod... 9. Encod... 10. Encod...

4:13 PM

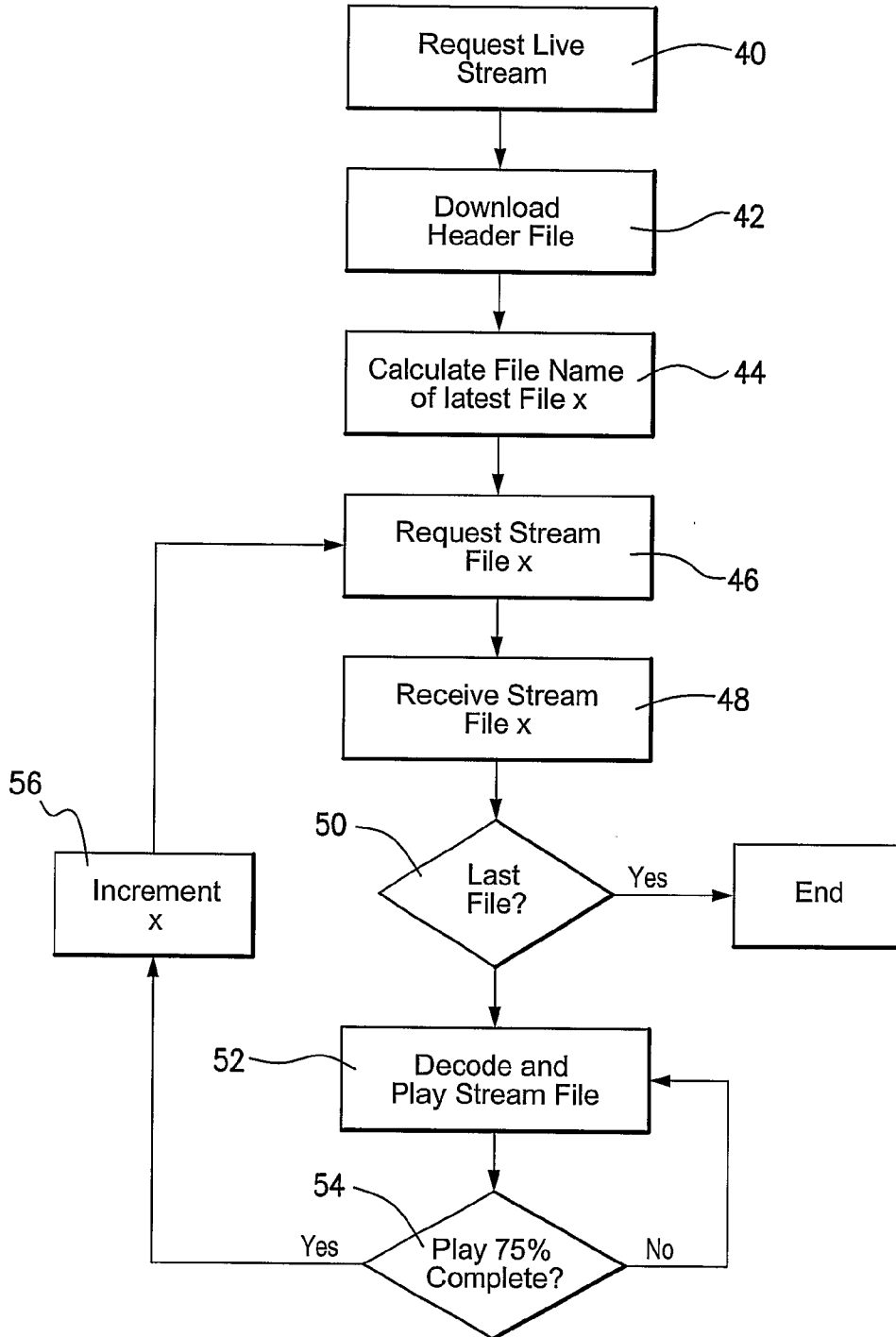


FIG. 3

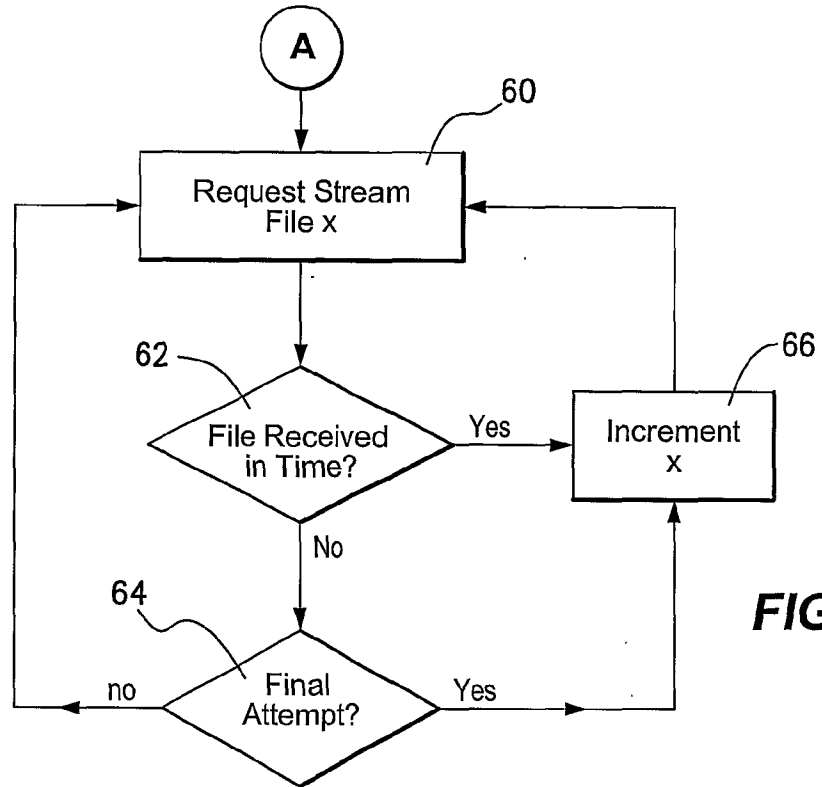


FIG. 4

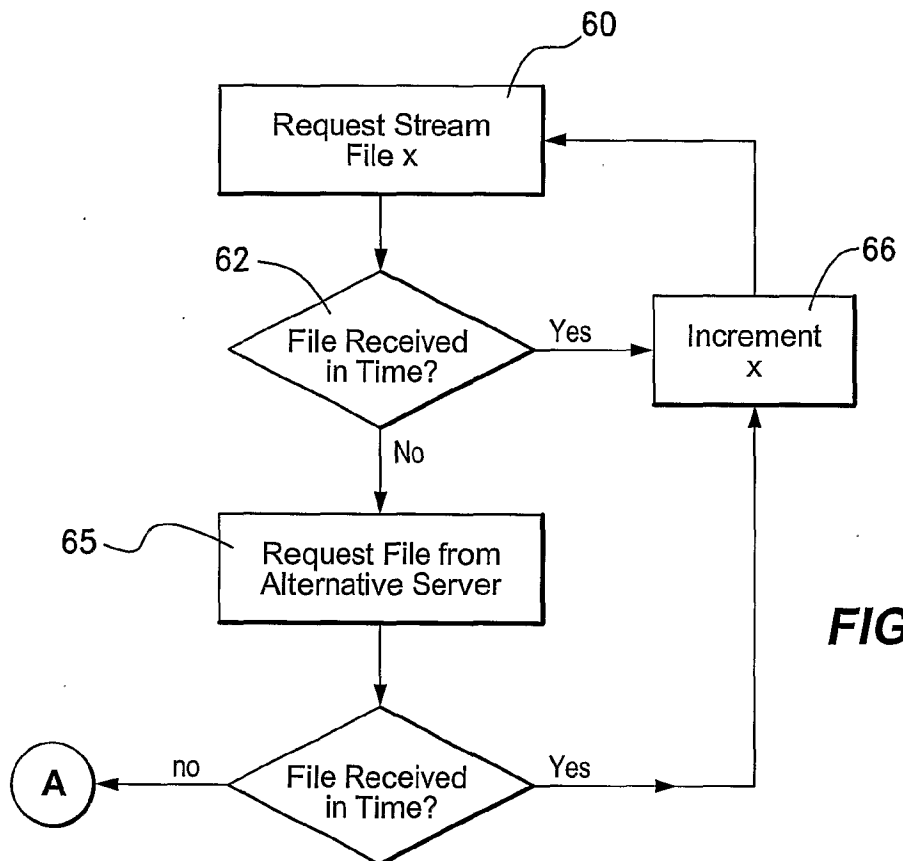


FIG. 5

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.

PCT/AU2007/000193

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER		
Int. Cl.		
<i>G06F 13/14</i> (2006.01) <i>H04N 1/21</i> (2006.01)		
<i>H04L 12/18</i> (2006.01) <i>H04N 7/16</i> (2006.01)		
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)		
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) DWPI, ESP@CE, USPTO and INTERNET: Keywords (multimedia, content, real time, live, period, interval, sequence, files, host, user, request, download) and similar terms.		
C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT		
Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X	US 2002/0120675 A1 (EVERETT et al.) 29 August 2002 See whole document	1-5, 8-16, 19-25, 28, 29 30, 31
Y		31
Y	US 2005/0005000 A1 (YOSHIMOTO) 6 January 2005 See whole document especially paragraphs 10 and 28	31
Y	US 2003/0185297 A1 (GREENFIELD et al) 2 October 2003 See whole document especially paragraphs 11 and 24	30, 31
A	GB 2398467 A (ROBERT BOSCH GMBH) 18 August 2004	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> See patent family annex		
* Special categories of cited documents:		
"A" document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance	"T" later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention	
"E" earlier application or patent but published on or after the international filing date	"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	
"L" document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)	"Y" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art	
"O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means	"&" document member of the same patent family	
"P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed		
Date of the actual completion of the international search 27 March 2007	Date of mailing of the international search report 02 APR 2007	
Name and mailing address of the ISA/AU AUSTRALIAN PATENT OFFICE PO BOX 200, WODEN ACT 2606, AUSTRALIA E-mail address: pct@ipaustralia.gov.au Facsimile No. (02) 6285 3929	Authorized officer BEN TUOHY AUSTRALIAN PATENT OFFICE (ISO 9001 Quality Certified Service) Telephone No : (02) 6283 7918	

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.

PCT/AU2007/000193

C (Continuation). DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT		
Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
A	US 2002/0085713 A1 (FEIG et al.) 4 July 2002	

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

Information on patent family members

International application No.

PCT/AU2007/000193

This Annex lists the known "A" publication level patent family members relating to the patent documents cited in the above-mentioned international search report. The Australian Patent Office is in no way liable for these particulars which are merely given for the purpose of information.

Patent Document Cited in Search Report		Patent Family Member					
US	2002120675	AU	57832/98	CA	2279631	CN	1256045
		EP	0962097	WO	9833320	ZA	9800690
US	2002005000	AU	55076/01				
US	2003185297	JP	2004007530				
GB	2398467	CN	1521966	DE	10305657		
US	2002085713						
Due to data integration issues this family listing may not include 10 digit Australian applications filed since May 2001.							
END OF ANNEX							