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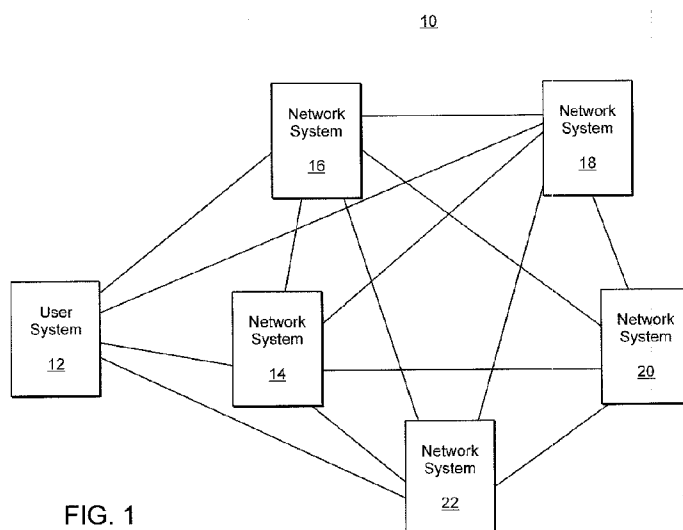


FIG. 1

(57) Abstract: Methods and apparatus, including computer program products, for selective data forwarding storage. A method includes, in a network of interconnected computer system nodes, receiving a request from a source system to store data, the request comprising an ownership and a data type, if the ownership and the data type match a corresponding entry in a store, directing the data to a computer memory, and continuously forwarding the data from one computer memory to another computer memory in the network of interconnected computer system nodes without storing on any physical storage device in the network.

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SELECTIVE DATA FORWARDING STORAGE

Field of Invention

5 The present invention relates to a method; a tangible computer readable medium embodying instructions for causing a data processing apparatus to perform operations; and a computing system. For example, at least some embodiments disclosed herein relate to data storage, and more particularly, to selective data forwarding storage.

10 Background of Invention

The volume of data that must be stored by individuals, organizations, businesses and government is growing every year. In addition to just keeping up with demand, organizations face other storage challenges. With the move to on-line, real-time business and government, critical data must be protected from loss or inaccessibility due to software or hardware failure. Today, many storage products do not provide complete failure protection and expose users to the risk of data loss or unavailability. For example, many storage solutions on the market today offer protection against some failure modes, such as processor failure, but not against others, such as disk drive failure. Many organizations are exposed to the risk of data loss or data unavailability due to component failure in their data storage system.

The data storage market is typically divided into two major segments, i.e., Direct Attached Storage (DAS) and Network Storage. DAS includes disks connected directly to a server.

25 Network Storage includes disks that are attached to a network rather than a specific server and can then be accessed and shared by other devices and applications on that network. Network Storage is typically divided into two segments, i.e., Storage Area Networks (SANs) and Network Attached Storage (NAS).

30 A SAN is a high-speed special-purpose network (or subnetwork) that interconnects different kinds of data storage devices with associated data servers on behalf of a larger

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network of users. Typically, a SAN is part of the overall network of computing resources for an enterprise. A storage area network is usually clustered in close proximity to other computing resources but may also extend to remote locations for backup and archival storage, using wide area (WAN) network carrier technologies.

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NAS is hard disk storage that is set up with its own network address rather than being attached to the local computer that is serving applications to a network's workstation users. By removing storage access and its management from the local server, both application programming and files can be served faster because they are not competing for the same processor resources. The NAS is attached to a local area network (typically, an Ethernet network) and assigned an IP address. File requests are mapped by the main server to the NAS file server.

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All of the above share one common feature that can be an Achilles tendon in more ways than one, i.e., data is stored on a physical medium, such as a disk drive, CD drive, and so forth.

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It is generally desirable to overcome or ameliorate one or more of the above described difficulties, or to at least provide a useful alternative.

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Summary of Invention

According to the present invention, there is provided a method comprising:

receiving a request from a source system to store at least one data item;

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forwarding the at least one data item between computer system nodes in a network of interconnected computer system nodes without storing the forwarded at least one data item on any fixed storage medium in the network, the forwarded at least one data item being routed within the network from computer system node to computer system node, the forwarded at least one data item being available for retrieval if a request to retrieve the at least one data item is received, the forwarding comprising:

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determining an address of a computer system node available to receive the at least one data item based on one or more of a type of the one or more data item, a level of encryption, a network traffic analysis, or available memory of respective nodes;

5 sending a message to the source system with the address of a specific computer system node;

detecting presence of the at least one data item at the specific computer system node; and

10 forwarding the at least one data item to the determined computer system node in the network of interconnected computer system nodes without storing the forwarded at least one data item on any fixed storage medium.

According to the present invention, there is also provided a tangible computer readable medium embodying instructions for causing a data processing apparatus to perform operations comprising:

15 receiving a request from a source system to store at least one data item;

forwarding the at least one data between computer system nodes in a network of interconnected computer system nodes without storing the forwarded at least one data item on any fixed storage medium in the network, the forwarded at least one data item being routed within the network from computer system node to computer system node, the
20 forwarded at least one data item being available for retrieval if a request to retrieve the at least one data item is received, the forwarding comprising:

determining an address of a computer system node available to receive the at least one data item based on one or more of a type of the one or more data item, a level of encryption, a network traffic analysis, or available memory of respective nodes;

25 sending a message to the source system with the address of a specific computer system node;

detecting presence of the at least one data item at the specific computer system node; and

30 forwarding the at least one data item to the determined computer system node in the network of interconnected computer system nodes without storing the forwarded at least one data item on any fixed storage medium.

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According to the present invention, there is also provided a computing system comprising:

- means for receiving a request from a source system to store at least one data item;
- means for forwarding the at least one data between computer system nodes in a network of interconnected computer system nodes without storing the forwarded at least one data item on any fixed storage medium in the network, the forwarded at least one data item being routed within the network from computer system node to computer system node, the forwarded at least one data item being available for retrieval if a request to retrieve the at least one data item is received, the means for forwarding comprising:
 - means for determining an address of a computer system node available to receive the at least one data item based on one or more of a type of the one or more data item, a level of encryption, a network traffic analysis, or available memory of respective nodes;
 - means for sending a message to the source system with the address of a specific computer system node;
 - means for detecting presence of the at least one data item at the specific computer system node; and
 - means for forwarding the at least one data item to the determined computer system node in the network of interconnected computer system nodes without storing the forwarded at least one data item on any fixed storage medium.

Preferred embodiments of the present invention provide methods and apparatus, including computer program products, for selective data forwarding storage.

- In general, in one preferred embodiment, the invention features, a network of interconnected computer system nodes each configured to forward data from point to point based upon one of data types, relatively high levels of encryption protocol, other factors, or a combination thereof, and receiving from a source system a request to store data. The method further includes continuously forwarding the data from one computer memory to another computer memory in the network of interconnected computer system nodes without storing on any physical storage device in the network. The continuously forwarding includes determining an address of a node available to receive the data to be

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forwarded from point to point, and sending a message to the source system with the address of a specific node for the requester to forward the data. The method further includes detecting a presence of the data in memory of the specific node, and forwarding the data to another computer memory of a node in the network of interconnected computer system nodes without storing on any physical storage device.

One or more of the following features may also be included in various embodiments. The nodes can be designed to handle specific data types including an office productivity suite file data type, an audio file data type, a visual file data type, a video file data type, an object oriented file data type or a database file data type. The factors can include network traffic analysis and available memory. The method can further include receiving the request from the source system to retrieve data being continuously forwarded in the network of interconnected computer system nodes, and retrieving the data from node memory in response to the request to retrieve data. Retrieving can include matching the data request at a central server using a hash mark representing the data entering a node memory, sending a message to a node that is predicted to have the data in memory, the message instructing the node to forward the data in memory to the requester, and sending a confirmation message to the central server that the data has been forwarded to the requester. The method can further include segmenting node types by file type. Determining node type by file size. Determining node type by one of file use frequency, user history, or a combination thereof. Determining node type based on one of user preferences, premiums paid by user, or a combination thereof. Shifting a file to a slower or faster node state based upon one of user preferences, file usage, premiums paid by user, or a combination thereof.

In another preferred embodiment, the present invention features a computer program product, which can be tangibly embodied in a computer readable medium, for storing and retrieving data in computer memories of a network of interconnected computer system nodes. The computer system nodes can be configured to forward data from point to point. The computer program product can permit a data processing apparatus to receive from a source system, in communication with the network of interconnected computer system nodes, a request to store data. The data processing apparatus can continuously forward the

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data from one computer memory to another computer memory in the network of interconnected computer system nodes, based upon one of data types, relatively high levels of encryption protocol, other factors, or a combination thereof, and without storing on any physical storage device in the network. Continuously forwarding the data can include
5 determining an address of a node available to receive the data to be forwarded from point to point, sending a message to the source system with the address of a specific node for the requester to forward the data, detecting a presence of the data in memory of the specific node, and forwarding the data to another computer memory of a node in the network of interconnected computer system nodes without storing any physical storage device.

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The details of one or more implementations of the invention are set forth in the accompanying drawings and the description below. Further features, aspects, and advantages of the invention will become apparent from the description, the drawings, and the claims.

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Brief Description of the Drawings

Preferred embodiments of the present invention are hereafter described, by way of non-limiting example only, with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which:

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FIG. 1 is a block diagram of an exemplary network.

FIG. 2 is a block diagram of an exemplary user system.

FIG. 3 is a block diagram of an exemplary network system.

FIG. 4 is a flow diagram of a process.

25 FIG. 5 is a flow diagram of a process.

Detailed Description of Preferred Embodiments of the Invention

Unlike peer to peer networks, which use data forwarding in a transient fashion so that data
30 is eventually stored on a physical medium such as a disk drive, preferred embodiments of the present invention provide a continuous data forwarding system, i.e., data is stored by continually forwarding it from one node memory to another node memory.

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As shown in FIG. 1, an exemplary network 10 includes a user system 12 and a number of network systems, for instance, systems 14, 16, 18, 20, 22. Each of the network systems 14, 16, 18, 20, 22, in an embodiment, can be considered to be a node in the network 10. In addition, one such network system, such as network system 14, may be designated as a central server, and may assume a control position in network 10. Each of the nodes 14, 16, 18, 20, 22 may be established as a privately controlled network of peers under direct control of the central server 14. The network 10 may also be wholly public

where the central server 14 (or servers) has no direct ownership or direct physical control of any of the nodes. Alternatively, the nodes may also be a mix of private and public nodes, and thus not under the direct physical control of the central server 14.

[0021] As a privately controlled network a user may have free access to the peered nodes or paid access through a subscription service or other arrangement. In a mixed environment, i.e., a network having a combination of private and public nodes, the central server 14 can dictate whether data is to be forwarded to the private network or the public network. In one example, the central server 14 identifies the type of data and forwards the data to the private network or public network according to identified type. For example, data that represents video or audio files may be sent to the public network while data that represents documents (e.g., a Microsoft® Word document) may be sent to the private network.

[0022] In another example, the central server 14 enables a user to select where user-owned data is to be forwarded, i.e., to the private network or the public network.

[0023] In one example, nodes 14, 16, 18, 20 and 22 can be considered a private network. In a private network, an administrator controls the nodes and may designate which node is the central server. The system 10 can also include one or more additional nodes that may be considered to be part of one or more public networks in which the administrator has little or no control. It should be appreciated that in such an embodiment, where the nodes may be a mixture of private and public nodes, the private nodes, or node states, can still be controlled by a central server. Such a central server, however, may be within the control of the private owner who may be running a cordoned off system.

[0024] The user system 12, as shown in FIG. 2, can include a processor 30, memory 32 and input/output (I/O) device 34. Memory 32, in an embodiment, can include an operating system (OS) 36, such as Linux, Apple® OS or Windows®, one or more application processes 38, and a storage process 100, explained in detail below. In accordance with one embodiment of the present invention, application processes 38 can include user productivity software, such as OpenOffice or Microsoft® Office. The I/O

device 34, on the other hand, can include a graphical user interface (GUI) 40 for display to a user 42.

[0025] Looking now at FIG. 3, each of the network systems, such as network system 14, can include a processor 50 and memory 52. Memory 52, in one embodiment, can include an OS 54, such as Linux, Apple® OS or Windows®. Memory 52 can further include a data forwarding process 200, explained in detail below.

[0026] In traditional systems, application processes 38 need to store and retrieve data. In these traditional systems, data is stored on local or remote physical devices. In some systems, this data can be segmented into different pieces or packets and stored locally or remotely on physical mediums of storage. However, use of fixed physical data storage devices can add cost, maintenance, management and generate a fixed physical record of the data, whether or not that is the desire of the user 42.

[0027] The present invention, unlike traditional systems, does not use fixed physical data storage to store data. For example, when a request to store data is received by the central server 14 from storage process 100, data can be directed to a node in the network 10, where it is then continuously forwarded from node memory to node memory in the network 10 by the data forwarding process 200 in each of the network nodes 14, 16, 18, 20, 22 without storing on any physical storage medium, such as a disk drive. The forwarded data resides only for a very brief period of time in the memory of any one node 14, 16, 18, 20, 22 in the network 10. It should be appreciated that, the forwarded data is not stored on any physical storage medium in any network node.

[0028] In addition, when a request to store data is received, its ownership and/or data type can be checked against entries in a store maintained by the central server 14. For example, data owned by a paid subscriber may be forwarded from node memory to node memory, and/or data of a particular type, such as office productivity file data type, an audio data file type, a visual data file type, a video data file type, an object oriented file type and/or a database data file type. Thus, data forwarding is selective based on ownership and/or type. Certain users can have data forwarded from node memory to node memory, and/or certain types of data can be forwarded from node memory to node

memory. Entries in the store can be added, modified or deleted, enabling even more flexibility in selectively forwarding data from node memory to node memory. Such a store can reside locally at the central server 14 or be forwarded from node memory to node memory without storing on any physical storage medium such as a disk drive. In addition to ownership and file type, other data parameters that can be evaluated include file size, file use frequency, user history, user preferences, and premiums paid by users.

[0029] In a like manner, when a request to retrieve data is received by the central server 14 from storage process 100, the requested data, which is being forwarded from node memory to node memory in the network 10, is retrieved.

[0030] Data forwarded in this manner can be segmented and the resulting segments of data forwarded as described above. Specifically, the segmented data is not stored on any physical storage medium in any network node, but merely forwarded from the memory of one node to the memory of another node.

[0031] With reference now to FIG. 4, storage process 100 includes, in an embodiment, sending (102) a request to a central server, such as network system 14, to store or retrieve data. If the request is a retrieve data request, storage process 100 receives the requested data from the central server 14 or node in the network.

[0032] If the request to the central server 14 is a store data request, storage process 100 receives (104) an address of a node from the central server 14 if the data ownership and/or type matches a corresponding entry in the store and forwards (106) the data to the node memory represented by the received address.

[0033] As shown in FIG. 5, data forwarding process 200 includes receiving (202) a request to store or retrieve data. If the received request is a request to store data, data forwarding process 200 determines (203) whether the data ownership and/or type match an entry in the store. If the data ownership and/or type match an entry in the store, process 200 determines (204) an address of a node available to receive the data in memory. This determination (204) can include pinging the network and determining which of the nodes in a network is available, or determining which node in the network has the least traffic, or determining which node in the network has the largest available

memory, or any combination of these or other factors.

[0034] Process 200 can then send (206) a message to the user system with the address of a specific node for the requester to forward the data.

[0035] Process 200 next detects (208) the presence of data in node memory. Process 200 forwards (210) the data in memory to another node in the network of nodes and continues to repeat detecting (208) and forwarding (210) of the data from node memory to node memory. When data arrives in any node memory, process 200 affixes (212) a time stamp to the data.

[0036] Forwarding (210), in one embodiment, can include pinging the nodes in the network 10 to determine which of the nodes in the network is available, or determining which node in the network has the least traffic, or determining which node in the network has the largest available memory, or any combination of these or other factors.

[0037] In one specific example, at the point of entry to a node, data undergoes an encrypted “handshake” with the node or central server 14 or user. This can be a public or private encryption system, such as the Cashmere system, which can use public-private keys. The encryption system decouples the encrypted forwarding path and message payload, which improves the performance as the source only needs to perform a single public key encryption on each message that uses the destination’s unique public key. This has the benefit that only the true destination node will be able to decrypt the message payload and not every node in the corresponding relay group. The encryption system provides the capability that the destination can send anonymous reply messages without knowing the identity of the source. This can be done in a similar way, where the source creates a reply path and encrypts it in a similar manner as the forwarding path.

[0038] In another example, other routing schemes are utilized. Any combination of the routing schemes provided above can also be utilized.

[0039] If the received request is a request to retrieve data being continuously forwarded from node memory to node memory, data forwarding process 200 matches (214) at the central server 14 using a hash mark or other unique code that can be “sniffed” by the node upon the data entering the node via the encryption handshake. This can occur

by pinging the nodes in the network 10. Process 200 then sends (216) the message to return the data to the user directly to the node or node state where the central server 14 believes the data will likely appear. The more the central server 14 can narrow the node state that it pings to, then the more efficient the retrieval will become and the less burdened by unnecessary messaging traffic to nodes that are not necessary for a transaction between the central server 14 and the node capable of forwarding the data.

[0040] Once the correct node receives the message to forward the data in node memory to the requester, process 200 forwards (218), in node memory, the data to the requester and forwards (220) a confirmation message that the data has been sent to the user. This routing message may be sent directly to the central server 14 or may be passed to the central server 14 or servers via other node(s) or supernode(s) in the network 10.

Upon the user receiving the requested data, the user's application functions to automatically ping the central server 14 that the data requested has been received. Thus, the network 10 creates data storage without caching, downloading and/or storing the data on any physical storage medium. Data storage and management can be accomplished via a continuous routing of the data from node memory to node memory, the forwarded data only downloaded when the user requests the data to be returned to the user from the network 10.

[0041] New nodes and node states may be added and/or deleted from the network 10 based upon performance. Users may have access to all nodes or may be segmented to certain nodes or "node states" by the central server(s) or via the specific architecture of the private, public or private-public network.

[0042] Individual nodes, nodes states and supernodes may also be extranet peers, wireless network peers, satellite peered nodes, Wi-Fi peered nodes, broadband networks, and so forth, in public or private networks. Peered nodes or users may be used as routing participants in the network 10 from any valid peer point with the same security systems employed, as well as custom solutions suitable for the rigors of specific deployments, such as wireless encryption schemes for wireless peers, and so forth.

[0043] In process 200, rather than have data cached or held in remote servers, hard

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drives or other fixed storage medium, the data can be passed, routed, or forwarded from node memory to node memory. The forwarded data not downloaded until the authorized user calls for the data. In an embodiment, a user on the system may authorize more than one user to have access to the data.

- 5 [0044] A primary goal in process 200 is to generate a data storage and management system where the data is never fixed in physical storage, but in fact, is continually being routed/forwarded from node memory to node memory in the network. The path of the nodes to which data is forwarded may also be altered by the central server 14 to adjust for system capacities and to eliminate redundant paths of data that may weaken the security of
- 10 the network due to the increased probability of data path without this feature.

[0045] The invention can be implemented to realize one or more of the following advantages. A network creates data storage without caching or downloads. Data storage and management are accomplished via a constant routing of the data.

- [0046] Embodiments of the invention can be implemented in digital electronic circuitry, or
- 15 in computer hardware, firmware, software, or in combinations of them. Embodiments of the invention can be implemented as a computer program product, i.e., a computer program tangibly embodied in an information carrier, e.g., in a machine readable storage device, for execution by, or to control the operation of, data processing apparatus, e.g., a programmable processor, a computer, or multiple computers. A computer program can be
- 20 written in any form of programming language, including compiled or interpreted languages, and it can be deployed in any form, including as a stand alone program or as a module, component, subroutine, or other unit suitable for use in a computing environment. A computer program can be deployed to be executed on one computer or on multiple computers at one site or distributed across multiple sites and interconnected by a
- 25 communication network.

[0047] Method steps of embodiments of the invention can be performed by one or more programmable processors executing a computer program to perform functions of the invention by operating on input data and generating output. Method steps can also be performed by, and apparatus of the invention can be implemented as, special purpose

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logic circuitry, e.g., an FPGA (field programmable gate array) or an ASIC (application specific integrated circuit).

Processors suitable for the execution of a computer program include, by way of example, both general and special purpose microprocessors, and any one or more processors of any kind of digital computer. Generally, a processor will receive instructions and data from a read only memory or a random access memory or both. The essential elements of a computer are a processor for executing instructions and one or more memory devices for storing instructions and data. Generally, a computer will also include, or be operatively coupled to receive data from or transfer data to, or both, one or more mass storage devices for storing data, e.g., magnetic, magneto optical disks, or optical disks. Information carriers suitable for embodying computer program instructions and data include all forms of non volatile memory, including by way of example semiconductor memory devices, e.g., EPROM, EEPROM, and flash memory devices; magnetic disks, e.g., internal hard disks or removable disks; magneto optical disks; and CD ROM and DVD-ROM disks. The processor and the memory can be supplemented by, or incorporated in special purpose logic circuitry.

It is to be understood that the foregoing description is intended to illustrate and not to limit the scope of the invention, which is defined by the scope of the appended claims. Other embodiments are within the scope of the following claims.

Throughout this specification and the claims which follow, unless the context requires otherwise, the word "comprise", and variations such as "comprises" and "comprising", will be understood to imply the inclusion of a stated integer or step or group of integers or steps but not the exclusion of any other integer or step or group of integers or steps.

The reference in this specification to any prior publication (or information derived from it), or to any matter which is known, is not, and should not be taken as an acknowledgment or admission or any form of suggestion that that prior publication (or information derived from it) or known matter forms part of the common general knowledge in the field of endeavour to which this specification relates.

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THE CLAIMS DEFINING THE INVENTION ARE AS FOLLOWS:

1. A method comprising:
 - receiving a request from a source system to store at least one data item;
 - 5 forwarding the at least one data item between computer system nodes in a network of interconnected computer system nodes without storing the forwarded at least one data item on any fixed storage medium in the network, the forwarded at least one data item being routed within the network from computer system node to computer system node, the forwarded at least one data item being available for retrieval if a request to retrieve the at
 - 10 least one data item is received, the forwarding comprising:
 - determining an address of a computer system node available to receive the at least one data item based on one or more of a type of the one or more data item, a level of encryption, a network traffic analysis, or available memory of respective nodes;
 - sending a message to the source system with the address of a specific computer
 - 15 system node;
 - detecting presence of the at least one data item at the specific computer system node; and
 - forwarding the at least one data item to the determined computer system node in the network of interconnected computer system nodes without storing the forwarded at
 - 20 least one data item on any fixed storage medium.
2. The method of Claim 1, wherein respective computer system nodes are configured to handle specific data types, including an office productivity suite file data type, an audio file data type, a visual file data type, a video file data type, an object oriented file data type
- 25 or a database file data type.
3. The method of Claim 1, further comprising determining one or more types of computer system nodes to which the one or more data item will be forwarded based on one or more of a file size, a file use frequency, a user history, a user preferences, or premiums
- 30 paid by the user.

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4. The method of Claim 1, further comprising shifting a data item to a slower or faster computer system node based upon one or more of user preferences, file usage, or premiums paid by a user.
- 5 5. The method of Claim 1, wherein the network of interconnected computer system nodes comprises one or more private computer system nodes and one or more public computer system nodes.
6. The method of Claim 1, further comprising selectively forwarding the one or more
10 data items between the private computer system nodes or the public computer system nodes based on a type of the data item or user preferences.
7. The method of Claim 1, further comprising:
determining a type of the one or more data items;
15 in response to determining that the one or more data items are a first type,
forwarding the at least one data items between computer system nodes of a private network; and
in response to determining that the one or more data items are a second type,
forwarding the at least one data items between computer system nodes of a public network.
20
8. The method of Claim 1, further comprising:
determining a user preference for storage of the one or more data items in a public network or a private network; and
forwarding the at least one data items between computer system nodes of a private
25 network or a public network in accordance with the determined user preference.
9. A tangible computer readable medium embodying instructions for causing a data processing apparatus to perform operations comprising:
receiving a request from a source system to store at least one data item;
30 forwarding the at least one data between computer system nodes in a network of interconnected computer system nodes without storing the forwarded at least one data item

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on any fixed storage medium in the network, the forwarded at least one data item being routed within the network from computer system node to computer system node, the forwarded at least one data item being available for retrieval if a request to retrieve the at least one data item is received, the forwarding comprising:

- 5 determining an address of a computer system node available to receive the at least one data item based on one or more of a type of the one or more data item, a level of encryption, a network traffic analysis, or available memory of respective nodes;

 sending a message to the source system with the address of a specific computer system node;

- 10 detecting presence of the at least one data item at the specific computer system node; and

 forwarding the at least one data item to the determined computer system node in the network of interconnected computer system nodes without storing the forwarded at least one data item on any fixed storage medium.

15

10. The computer readable medium of Claim 9, wherein respective computer system nodes are configured to handle specific data types, including an office productivity file data type, an audio data file type, a visual data file type, a video data file type, an object oriented file type or a database data file type.

20

11. The computer readable medium of Claim 9, further comprising determining one or more types of computer system nodes to which the one or more data item will be forwarded based on one or more of a file size, a file use frequency, a user history, a user preference, or premiums paid by the user.

25

12. A computing system comprising:

 means for receiving a request from a source system to store at least one data item;

 means for forwarding the at least one data between computer system nodes in a network of interconnected computer system nodes without storing the forwarded at least one data item

- 30 on any fixed storage medium in the network, the forwarded at least one data item being routed within the network from computer system node to computer system

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node, the forwarded at least one data item being available for retrieval if a request to retrieve the at least one data item is received, the means for forwarding comprising:

means for determining an address of a computer system node available to receive the at least one data item based on one or more of a type of the one or more data item, a
5 level of encryption, a network traffic analysis, or available memory of respective nodes;

means for sending a message to the source system with the address of a specific computer system node;

means for detecting presence of the at least one data item at the specific computer system node; and

10 means for forwarding the at least one data item to the determined computer system node in the network of interconnected computer system nodes without storing the forwarded at least one data item on any fixed storage medium.

13. The method of Claim 12, wherein respective computer system nodes are configured
15 to handle specific data types, including an office productivity suite file data type, an audio file data type, a visual file data type, a video file data type, an object oriented file data type or a database file data type.

14. The method of Claim 12, further comprising determining one or more types of
20 computer system nodes to which the one or more data item will be forwarded based on one or more of a file size, a file use frequency, a user history, a user preference, or premiums paid by the user.

15. The method of Claim 12, further comprising shifting a data item to a slower or
25 faster computer system node based upon one or more of user preferences, file usage, or premiums paid by user.

16. A method substantially as hereinbefore described, with reference to the accompanying drawings.

30

17. A tangible computer readable medium embodying instructions for causing a data

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processing apparatus to perform operations substantially as hereinbefore described, with reference to the accompanying drawings.

18. A computing system substantially as hereinbefore described, with reference to the
5 accompanying drawings.

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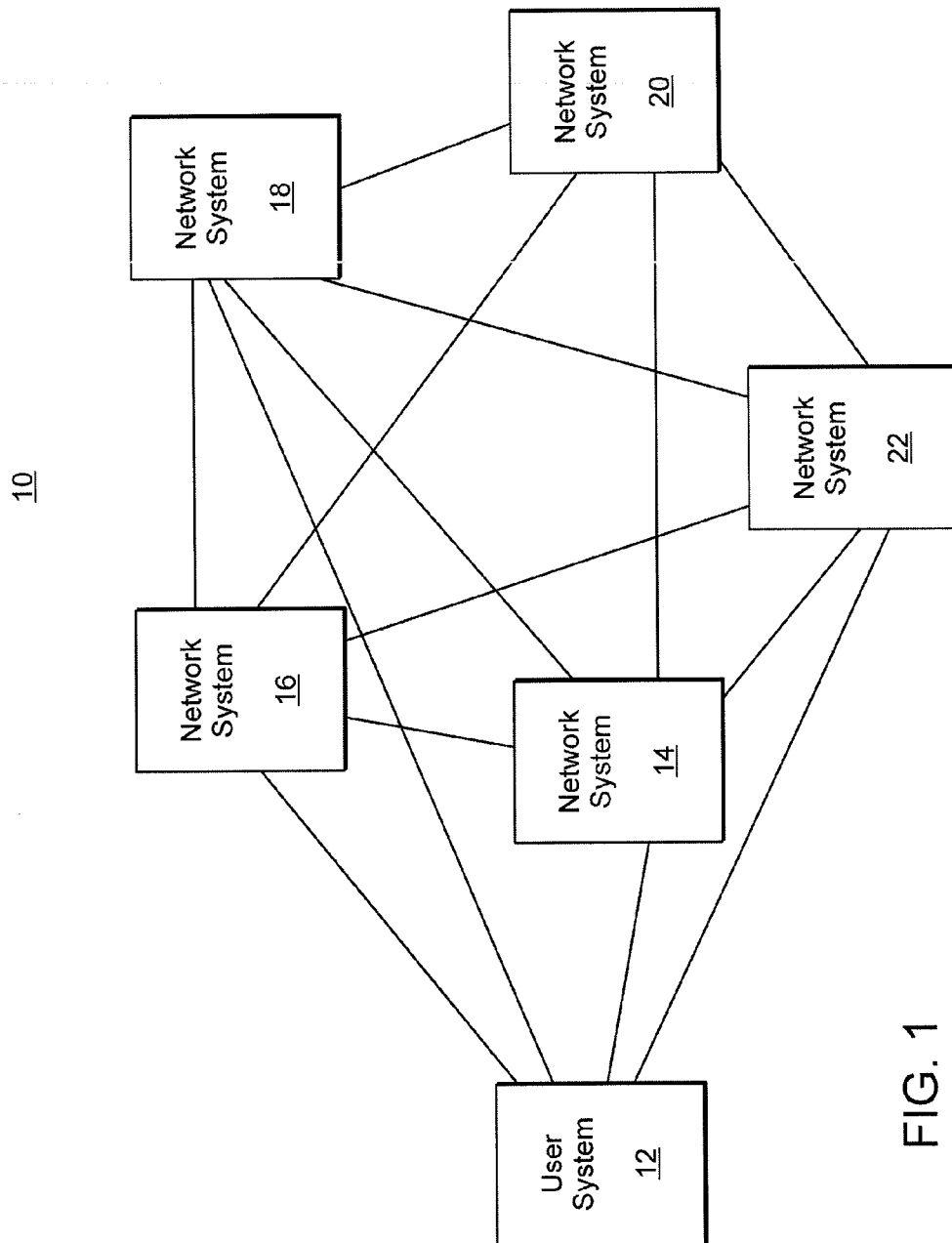


FIG. 1

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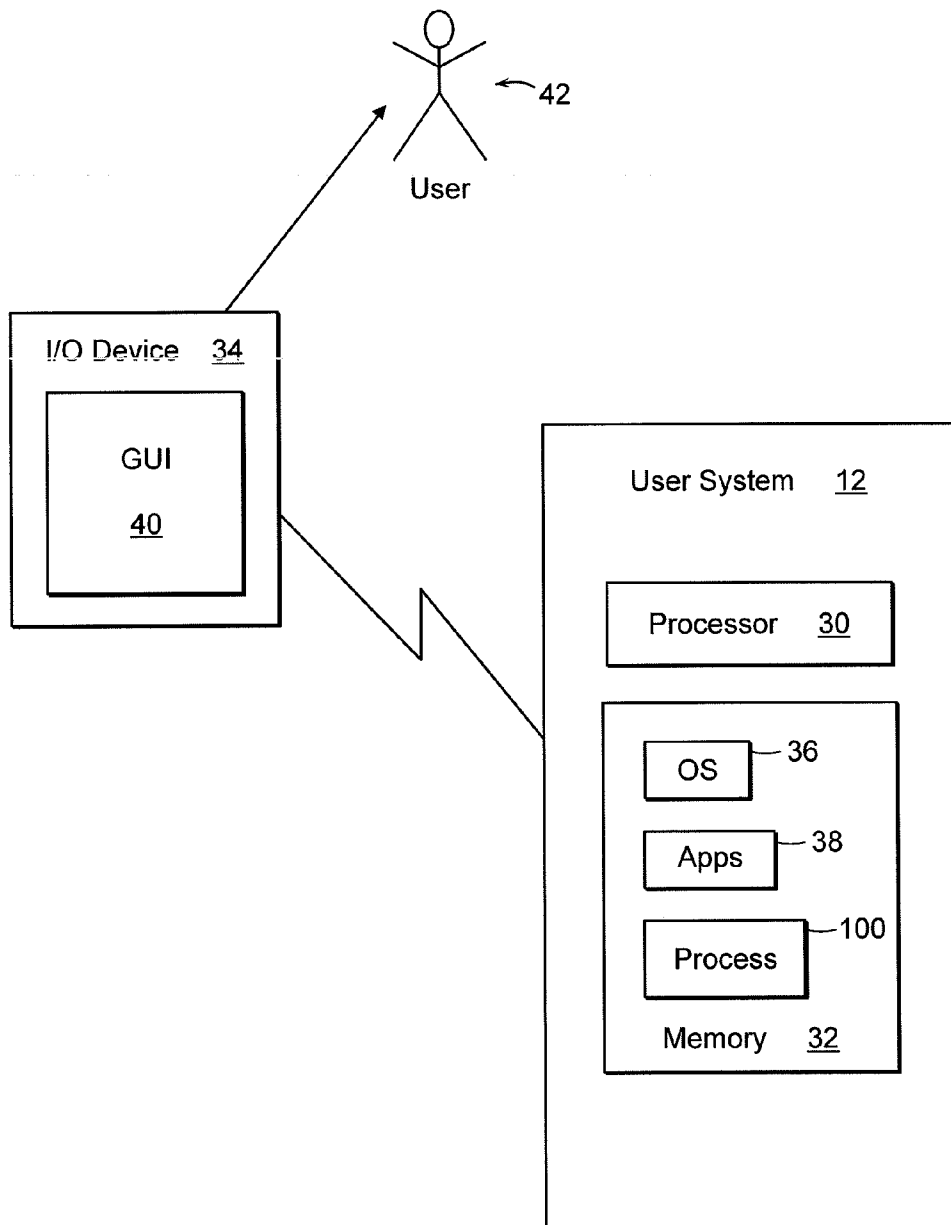


FIG. 2

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100

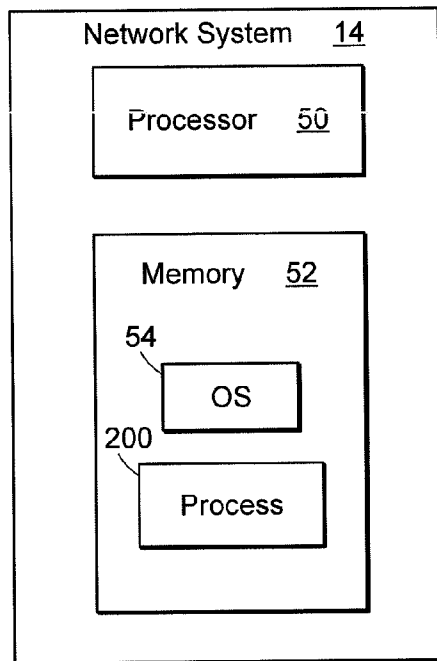


FIG. 3

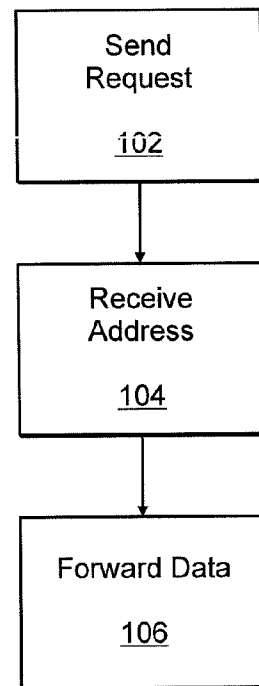


FIG. 4

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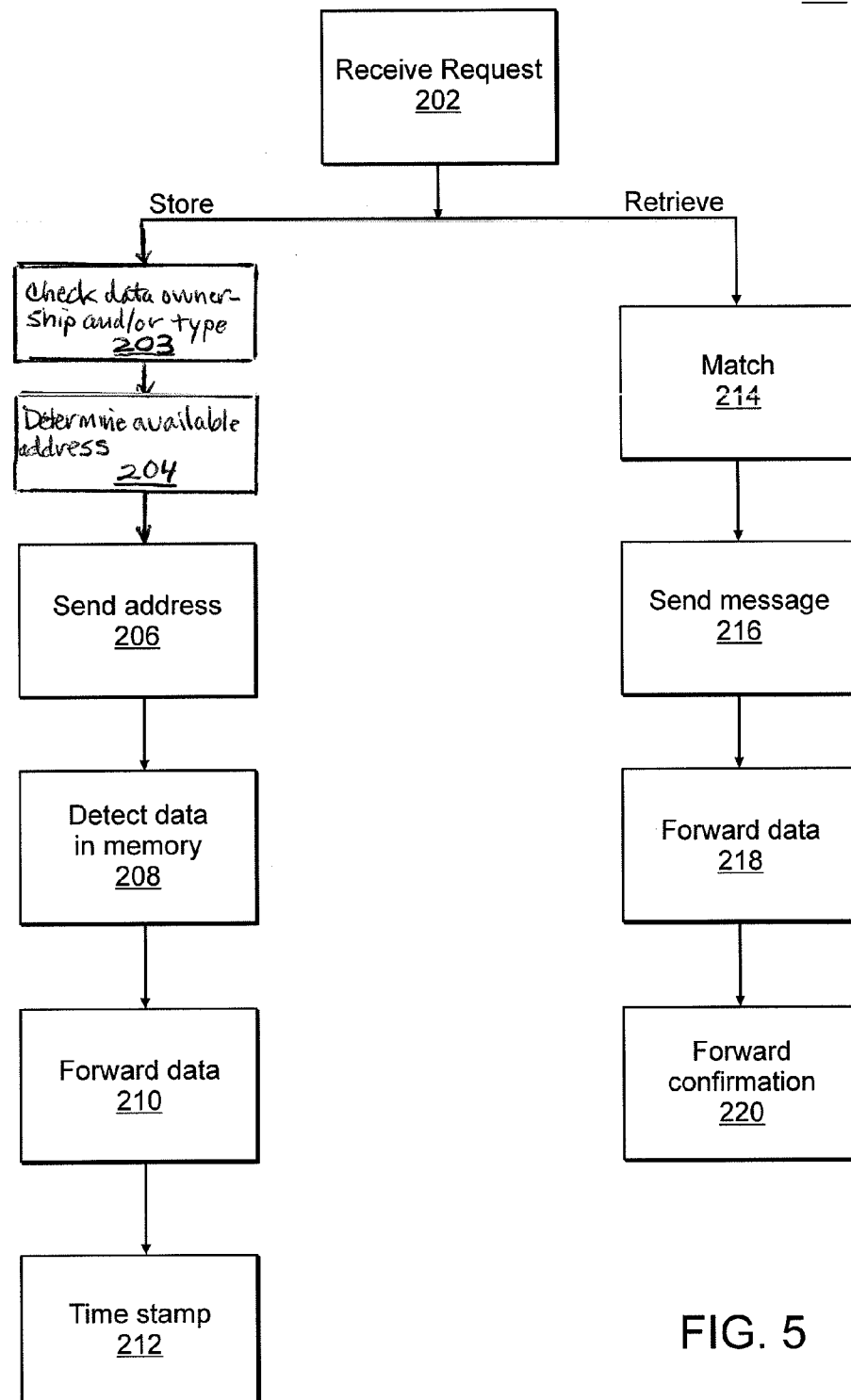
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FIG. 5