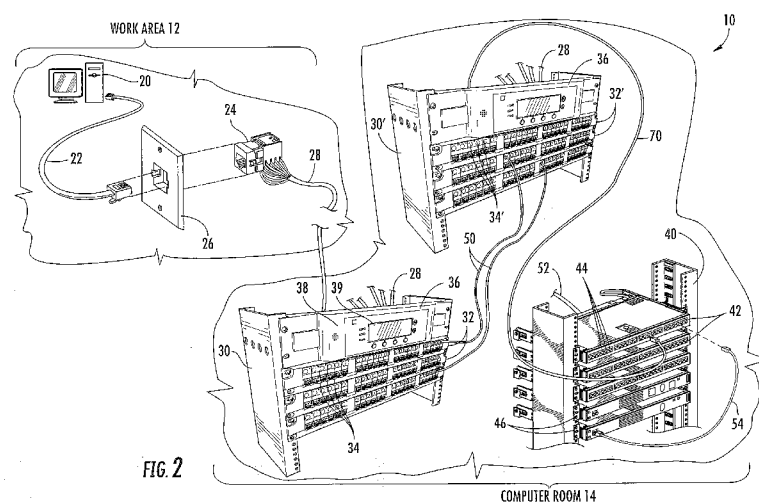




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- (71) Applicant (for all designated States except US): **COMMSCOPE, INC. OF NORTH CAROLINA** [US/US]; 1100 CommScope Place, SE, Hickory, North Carolina 28601 (US).
- (72) Inventors; and
- (75) Inventors/Applicants (for US only): **MICHAELIS, Scott Lynn** [US/US]; 1524 Bamburgh Drive, Plano, Texas 75075 (US). **HASHIM, Amid I.** [US/US]; 3900 Sundew Court, Plano, Texas 75093 (US). **HECKMANN, David** [US/US]; 2511 Buttercup Drive, Richardson, Texas 75082 (US). **OBERSKI, Jeff** [US/US]; 225 Rising Sun Road, Lucas, Texas 75002 (US). **ENGE, Ryan** [US/US]; 1009 Wiltshire Drive, Carrollton, Texas 75007 (US).
- (74) Agent: **MYERS BIGEL SIBLEY & SAJOVEC, P.A.**; P.O. Box 37428, Raleigh, North Carolina 27627 (US).
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(57) Abstract: Communications connectors are provided that include a plurality of input ports, a plurality of output ports and a plurality of conductive paths. Each of the conductive paths connects a respective one of the input ports to a respective one of the output ports. The conductive paths are arranged as a plurality of differential pairs of conductive paths that are each configured to carry a differential signal. These connectors further include a control signal input circuit that is configured to capacitively couple a phantom mode control signal onto at least a first and a second of the differential pairs of conductive paths.



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INTELLIGENT PATCHING SYSTEMS AND METHODS USING PHANTOM MODE CONTROL SIGNALS AND RELATED COMMUNICATIONS CONNECTORS

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] The present application claims priority under 35 U.S.C. § 119(e) to U.S. Provisional Patent Application Serial No. 61/435,248, filed January 21, 2011, and to U.S. Provisional Patent Application Serial No. 61/475,251, filed April 14, 2011. The entire contents of each of these applications are incorporated by reference herein as if set forth in their entireties. This application is related to U.S. Patent Application No. 13/111,112, filed May 19, 2011 (Attorney Docket No. 9457-295), and to U.S. Patent Application No. 13/111,015, filed May 19, 2011 (Attorney Docket No. 9457-297).

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0002] The present invention relates generally to communications systems and, more particularly, to automatically tracking cabling connections in communications systems.

BACKGROUND

[0003] Most businesses, government agencies, schools and other organizations employ dedicated communications systems (also referred to herein as "networks") that enable computers, servers, printers, facsimile machines, telephones, security cameras and the like to communicate with each other, through a private network, and with remote locations via a telecommunications service provider. Such communications system may be hard-wired through, for example, the walls and/or ceilings of a building using communications cables and connectors. Typically, the communications cables contain eight insulated conductors such as copper wires that are arranged as four differential twisted pairs of conductors. Each twisted pair may be used to transmit a separate differential communications signal. Individual communications connectors (which are also referred to herein as "connector ports") such as RJ-45 style modular wall jacks are mounted in offices, conference rooms and other work areas throughout the building. The communications cables and any intervening connectors provide communications paths from the connector ports (e.g., modular wall jacks)

in offices and other rooms, hallways and common areas of the building (referred to herein as "work area outlets") to network equipment (e.g., network switches, servers, memory storage devices, etc.) that may be located in a computer room, telecommunications closet or the like. Communications cables from external telecommunication service providers may also terminate within the computer room or telecommunications closet.

[0004] A commercial data center is a facility that may be used to run the computer-based applications that handle the core electronic business and operational data of one or more organizations. The expansion of the Internet has also led to a growing need for a so-called "Internet data centers," which are data centers that are used by online retailers, Internet portals, search engine companies and the like to provide large numbers of users simultaneous, secure, high-speed, fail-safe access to their web sites. Both types of data centers may host hundreds, thousands or even tens of thousands of servers, routers, memory storage systems and other associated equipment. In these data centers, fiber optic communications cables and/or communications cables that include four differential pairs of insulated conductive (e.g., copper) wires are typically used to provide a hard-wired communications system that interconnects the data center equipment.

[0005] As noted above, the communications cables and connectors in conductive wire-based communication systems that are installed in both office buildings and data centers usually include eight conductors that are arranged as four differential pairs of conductors. Such communications systems typically use RJ-45 plugs and jacks to ensure industry-wide compatibility. Pursuant to certain industry standards (e.g., the TIA/EIA-568-B.2-1 standard approved June 20, 2002 by the Telecommunications Industry Association), the eight conductors in RJ-45 plug and jack connectors are aligned in a row in the connection region where the contacts of the plug mate with the contacts of the jack. **FIG. 1** is a schematic view of the front portion of an RJ-45 jack that illustrates the pair arrangement and positions of the eight conductors in this connection region that are specified in the type B configuration of the TIA/EIA-568-B.2-1 standard, which is the most widely used configuration. As shown in **FIG. 1**, under the TIA/EIA 568 type B configuration, conductors 4 and 5 comprise differential pair 1, conductors 1 and 2 comprise differential pair 2, conductors 3 and 6 comprise differential pair 3, and conductors 7 and 8 comprise differential pair 4. Herein, a differential pair of conductors may be referred to simply as a "pair."

[0006] In both office network and data center communications systems, the communications cables that are connected to end devices (e.g., network servers, memory storage devices, network switches, work area computers, printers, facsimile machines,

telephones, etc.) may terminate into one or more communications patching systems that may simplify later connectivity changes. Typically, a communications patching system includes one or more "patch panels" that are mounted on equipment rack(s) or in cabinet(s), and a plurality of "patch cords" that are used to make interconnections between different pieces of equipment. As is known to those of skill in the art, a "patch cord" refers to a communications cable (e.g., a cable that includes four differential pairs of copper wires or a fiber optic cable) that has a connector such as, for example, an RJ-45 plug or a fiber optic connector, on at least one end thereof. A "patch panel" refers to an inter-connection device that includes a plurality (e.g., 24 or 48) of connector ports. Each connector port (e.g., an RJ-45 jack or a fiber optic adapter) on a patch panel may have a plug aperture on a front side thereof that is configured to receive the connector of a patch cord (e.g., an RJ-45 plug), and the back end of each connector port may be configured to receive a communications cable. With respect to RJ-45 connector ports, each communications cable is typically terminated into the back end of the RJ-45 connector port by terminating the eight conductive wires of the cable into corresponding insulation displacement contacts ("IDCs") or other wire connection terminals of the connector port. Consequently, each RJ-45 connector port on a patch panel acts to connect the eight conductors of the patch cord that is plugged into the front side of the connector port with the corresponding eight conductors of the communications cable that is terminated into the back end of the connector port. The patching system may optionally include a variety of additional equipment such as rack managers, system managers and other devices that facilitate making and/or tracking patching connections.

[0007] In a typical office network, "horizontal" cables are used to connect each work area outlet (which typically are RJ-45 jacks) to the back end of a respective connector port (which also typically are RJ-45 jacks) on a first set of patch panels. The first end of each of these horizontal cables is terminated into the IDCs of a respective one of the work area outlets, and the second end of each of these horizontal cables is terminated into the IDCs of a respective one of the connector ports on the patch panel. In an "inter-connect" patching system, a single set of patch cords is used to directly connect the connector ports on a first set of patch panels to respective connector ports on network switches. In a "cross-connect" patching system, a second set of patch panels is provided, and the first set of patch cords is used to connect the connector ports on the first set of patch panels to respective connector ports on the second set of patch panels, and the second set of typically single-ended patch cords is used to connect the connector ports on the second set of patch panels to respective connector ports on the network switches. In both inter-connect and cross-connect patching

systems the cascaded set of plugs, jacks and cable segments that connect a connector port on a network switch to a work area end device is typically referred to as a channel. Thus, if RJ-45 jacks are used as the connector ports, each channel includes four communications paths (since each jack and cable has four differential pairs of conductors).

[0008] The connections between the work area end devices and the network switches may need to be changed for a variety of reasons, including equipment changes, adding or deleting users, office moves, etc. In an inter-connect patching system, these connections are typically changed by rearranging the patch cords in the set of patch cords that run between the first set of patch panels and the network switches. In a cross-connect patching system, the connections between the work area end devices and the network switches are typically changed by rearranging the patch cords in the set of patch cords that run between the first set of patch panels and the second set of patch panels. Both types of patching systems allow a network manager to easily implement connectivity changes by simply unplugging one end of a patch cord from a first connector port on one of the patch panels in the first set of patch panels and then plugging that end of the patch cord into a second connector port on one of the patch panels in the first set of patch panels.

[0009] The connectivity between the connector ports on the network switches and the work area outlets is typically recorded in a computer-based log. Each time patching changes are made, this computer-based log is updated to reflect the new patching connections. Unfortunately, in practice technicians may neglect to update the log each and every time a change is made, and/or may make errors in logging changes. As such, the logs may not be complete and/or accurate.

[0010] In order to reduce or eliminate such logging errors, a variety of systems have been proposed that automatically log the patch cord connections in a communications patching system. These automated patching systems typically use special "intelligent" patch panels that employ sensors, radio frequency identification tags, serial ID chips and the like and/or special patch cords that include an additional conductor to detect patch cord insertions and removals and/or to automatically track patching connections. Typically, these systems require that all of the patch panels in the patching system have these automatic tracking capabilities and, in inter-connect systems, may also require that the network switches include automatic tracking capabilities as well.

[0011] The use of common mode signalling has also been explored as a means for automatically tracking patch cord connections in a communications patching system. As noted above, communications systems that use conductive wires as the cabling media

typically transmit each communications signal as a differential signal. As known to those of skill in the art, differential signalling refers to a technique whereby an information signal is transmitted between devices over a pair of conductors rather than over a single conductor. With differential signalling, the signals transmitted on each conductor of the differential pair have equal magnitudes, but opposite phases, and the information signal is embedded as the voltage difference between the signals carried on the two conductors of the pair. Differential signalling is used because it can reduce the impact that external noise sources may have on the transmitted signal. In particular, when signals are transmitted over a tightly twisted differential pair of conductors, electrical noise from external sources will typically be picked up by each conductor of the pair in approximately equal amounts. As the information signal is extracted from the differential pair by taking the difference of the signals carried on the two conductors of the pair, the approximately equal amounts of noise that are picked up by each conductor cancel out in the subtraction process. As such, the use of differential signalling can reduce the impact of external noise sources on a transmitted signal.

[0012] In a communications system that includes multiple differential pairs per cable/connector, such as RJ-45 communications systems, "common mode" signalling may be used to transmit one or more additional signals over the cables and connectors. As known to those of skill in the art, a common mode signal refers to the part of a signal that is transmitted between devices over two (or more) conductors that is extracted from the transmitted signal by taking the voltage average of the signals carried on the two (or more) conductors. Theoretically, a common mode and a differential signal may be transmitted over a differential pair without interfering with each other. In particular, since the differential information signal is extracted from the differential pair by taking the difference between the signals carried by the two conductors of the pair, the common mode signal is theoretically removed by the subtraction process. Likewise, the differential signal does not theoretically interfere with the common mode signal as the differential signal adds equal but opposite signals that cancel out when the signals on each conductor of the pair are averaged to recover the common mode signal.

[0013] In a communications cable that includes multiple pairs of conductors, multiple common mode signals may be transmitted along with the differential signals. By way of example, in a communications cable that includes two differential pairs (four conductors total), a differential signal may be transmitted over each differential pair and a common mode signal may also be transmitted over each differential pair for a total of four transmitted information signals. Alternatively, the two common mode signals may be

replaced with a third differential signal that is simultaneously transmitted over all four conductors. In particular, the third differential signal may be transmitted by transmitting its negative component as a common mode signal over both conductors of the first differential pair, and by transmitting its positive component as a common mode signal over both conductors of the second differential pair. As the transmission of the negative component of the third differential signal adds the exact same signal to each conductor of the first differential pair, the negative component of the third differential signal is effectively removed from the first differential pair during the subtraction process that is used to recover the first differential signal. The same is true for the positive component of the third differential signal that is transmitted over the second differential pair. Thus, in the above-described manner two differential pairs may be used to transmit a total of three differential signals. Although it cannot be characterized as a common mode signal, the third differential signal is comprised of two oppositely polarized common mode components, and thus it involves the use of common mode signalling. In order to distinguish signals such as the above-described third differential signal from both standard differential signals that are carried on two conductors and from true common mode signals, herein differential signals that are comprised of two oppositely polarized common mode components are referred to as "phantom mode" signals.

[0014] U.S. Patent No. 7,573,254 to Cobb et al. ("the '254 patent") discloses patch panels that include port identification circuits that transmit control signals over a phantom mode transmission path to track patch cord connections. In an embodiment disclosed in the '254 patent, a center tap inductor is used to inductively couple the phantom mode signal onto two of the differential pairs in a communications channel. U.S. Patent Publication No. 2010/0008482 to Tucker discloses techniques in which phantom mode signalling is used to discover the patch panel connector ports in first and second patching zones to which backbone cables are connected. U.S. Patent Application No. 2010/0244998 to Peyton et al. discloses injecting phantom mode signals onto a communications cable in order to determine interconnections within a local area network.

SUMMARY

[0015] Pursuant to embodiments of the present invention, communications connectors are provided that include a plurality of input ports, a plurality of output ports and a plurality of conductive paths. Each of the conductive paths connects a respective one of the input ports to a respective one of the output ports. The conductive paths are arranged as a plurality of differential pairs of conductive paths that are each configured to carry a

differential signal. These connectors further include a control signal input circuit that is configured to capacitively couple a phantom mode control signal onto at least a first and a second of the differential pairs of conductive paths.

[0016] In some embodiments, the connectors are configured so that a positive component of the phantom mode control signal is capacitively coupled onto the first of the differential pairs of conductive paths via a first capacitive circuit of the control signal input circuit, and a negative component of the phantom mode control signal is capacitively coupled onto the second of the differential pairs of conductive paths via a second capacitive circuit of the control signal input circuit. In some cases, the first and second capacitive circuits may each be three-terminal capacitors. In other embodiments, a positive component of the phantom mode control signal may be capacitively coupled onto both the first and second of the differential pairs of conductive paths via a first capacitive circuit (e.g., a five-terminal capacitor) of the control signal input circuit, and a negative component of the phantom mode control signal capacitively coupled onto both a third and a fourth of the differential pairs of conductive paths via a second capacitive circuit (e.g., another five-terminal capacitor) of the control signal input circuit. The communications connector may be, for example, an RJ-45 jack that has four differential pairs of conductive paths, and the third differential pair of conductive paths may be sandwiched between the fourth differential pair of conductive paths in a plug contact region of the conductive paths.

[0017] In some embodiments, the first capacitive circuit may comprise first and second capacitors. A conductive plate that is common to the first and second capacitors comprises a first electrode of each capacitor, a first contact pad comprises a second electrode of the first capacitor, and a second contact pad comprises a second electrode of the second capacitor. In such embodiments, the input ports may be spring contacts, and the first contact pad may be configured to mate with a first of the spring contacts and the second contact pad may be configured to mate with a second of the spring contacts. In some embodiments, the communications connector may be a jack that is configured so that insertion of a plug within the jack causes transfer of the phantom mode control signal onto spring contacts of the jack.

[0018] According to further embodiments of the present invention, methods of providing identification information for a communications connector are provided in which a phantom mode control signal is generated that includes identification information for the communications connector. A first component of the phantom mode control signal is capacitively coupled onto both of the conductive paths of a first differential pair of conductive paths of the communications connector, and a second component of the phantom

mode control signal is capacitively coupled onto both of the conductive paths of a second differential pair of conductive paths of the communications connector, where the polarity of the first component is opposite the polarity of the second component

[0019] In some embodiments, the phantom mode control signal may be a modulated digital signal. The phantom mode control signal may be transmitted in response to detecting that a plug has been inserted into a plug aperture of the communications connector. The phantom mode control signal may include a unique identifier that identifies the communications connector. The first component of the phantom mode control signal may be capacitively coupled onto both of the conductive paths of the first differential pair of conductive paths (e.g., via a first three-terminal capacitor) and the second component of the phantom mode control signal may be capacitively coupled onto both of the conductive paths of the second differential pair of conductive paths (e.g., via a second three-terminal capacitor).

[0020] In some embodiments, these methods may further include capacitively coupling the first component of the phantom mode control signal onto both of the conductive paths of a third differential pair of conductive paths of the communications connector at the same time that the first component of the phantom mode control signal is coupled onto both of the conductive paths of the first differential pair of conductive paths of the communications connector, and may similarly include capacitively coupling the second component of the phantom mode control signal onto both of the conductive paths of a fourth differential pair of conductive paths of the communications connector at the same time that the second component of the phantom mode control signal is coupled onto both of the conductive paths of the second differential pair of conductive paths of the communications connector.

[0021] According to further embodiments of the present invention, methods of identifying connectivity in a communications network are provided in which a phantom mode control signal that includes a unique identifier that is associated with a connector port on a network switch is transmitted to a patch panel connector port over at least two differential pairs of conductors that are included in a patch cord that connects the connector port on the network switch to the connector port of the patch panel. A first component of the phantom mode control signal is coupled to a phantom mode control signal receiver via a first capacitive circuit included the patch panel connector port. A second component of the phantom mode control signal is coupled to the phantom mode control signal receiver via a second capacitive circuit included the patch panel connector port. The unique identifier

associated with the connector port on the network switch is extracted from the phantom mode control signal at the patch panel. The connection between the connector port on the network switch and the patch panel connector port may then be logged in a connectivity database.

[0022] In some embodiments, the phantom mode control signal may be transmitted in response to detecting that a plug has been inserted into a plug aperture of the connector port on the network switch. The first capacitive circuit may be a first capacitor having an input terminal, a first output terminal and a second output terminal that is configured to couple the first component of the phantom mode control signal onto a first of the differential pairs of conductors that are included in the patch cord, and the second capacitive circuit may be a second capacitor having an input terminal, a first output terminal and a second output terminal that is configured to couple the second component of the phantom mode control signal onto a second of the differential pairs of conductors that are included in the patch cord. The first component of the phantom mode control signal may have a polarity that is opposite the polarity of the second component of the phantom mode control signal.

[0023] According to further embodiments of the present invention, "interposer" communications connectors are provided that include a housing, a plurality of plug blades that are mounted in a first portion of the housing, a plurality of spring contacts that are mounted in a second portion of the housing, and a plurality of conductive paths. Each of the conductive paths includes a respective one of the plug blades and a respective one of the spring contacts and one or more conductive elements that electrically connect each plug blade to its respective spring contact. These connectors further include a control signal input circuit that is configured to capacitively and/or inductively couple a control signal onto at least one of the plurality of conductive paths.

[0024] These interposer connectors may include eight conductive paths that are arranged as first through fourth differential pairs of conductive paths. In some embodiments, the control signal input circuit may be configured to capacitively couple the control signal onto both of the conductive paths of the first differential pair of conductive paths. In other embodiments, the control signal may be a phantom mode control signal, and the control signal input circuit may be configured to couple a first component of the phantom mode control signal onto both of the conductive paths of the first differential pair of conductive paths and a second component of the phantom mode control signal onto both of the conductive paths of the second differential pair of conductive paths, where the polarity of the second component is opposite the polarity of the first component.

[0025] In some embodiments, the control signal input circuit may be a first capacitor

having an input terminal, a first output terminal and a second output terminal that is configured to couple the first component of the phantom mode control signal onto the first differential pair of conductive paths and a second capacitor having an input terminal, a first output terminal and a second output terminal that is configured to couple the second component of the phantom mode control signal onto the second differential pair of conductive paths. In other embodiments, the control signal input circuit may be a first capacitor having an input terminal and first through fourth output terminals that is configured to couple the first component of the phantom mode control signal onto the first and second differential pairs of conductive paths and a second capacitor having an input terminal and first through fourth output terminals that is configured to couple the second component of the phantom mode control signal onto the third and fourth differential pairs of conductive paths.

[0026] According to further embodiments of the present invention, methods of operating a network switch are provided in which a plug insertion detection circuit may be used to automatically detect that a first end device is connected to a first end of a first channel that runs through a first of the connector ports of the network switch. A phantom mode control channel is used to determine a first identifier that is associated with the first end device. A determination is made that the first end device is within a set of authorized end devices. In response to this determination, the first of the connector ports is automatically enabled. In some embodiments, the method may further involve identifying a service that is to be provided to the first end device based at least in part on the first identifier, and then automatically reconfiguring the network to provision the identified service to the first channel.

[0027] According to further embodiments of the present invention, methods of automatically identifying an end device that is connected to a communications network are provided in which an interposer is mounted within a connector port on the end device. This interposer may include a plug end that mounts within the connector port on the end device and a jack end that is configured to receive a patch cord. A phantom mode control signal may be transmitted from the interposer to a connector port on a patch panel of the communications network over a phantom mode control channel that runs from the interposer to the connector port on the patch panel. The phantom mode control signal may be transmitted, for example, in response to sensing that the patch cord has been plugged into the interposer. Alternatively or additionally, the phantom mode control signal may be transmitted in response to a control signal that is transmitted over the control channel from the connector port on the patch panel to the interposer. The phantom mode control signal

may include identifying information for the end device.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0028] **FIG. 1** is a schematic diagram illustrating the contact arrangement for a conventional 8-position communications jack (TIA 568B) as viewed from the front opening (plug aperture) of the jack.

[0029] **FIG. 2** is a simplified, schematic view of an exemplary cross-connect communications system on which the phantom mode signalling techniques according to certain embodiments of the present invention may be implemented.

[0030] **FIG. 3** is a block diagram of a simplified cross-connect communications patching system according to embodiments of the present invention that illustrates how common mode control signals may be used to track patching connections and end-to-end channel connectivity.

[0031] **FIG. 4A** is a schematic front view of a patch panel according to embodiments of the present invention that may be used as one of the patch panels in **FIGS. 2** or **3**.

[0032] **FIG. 4B** is an enlarged front view of a portion of a printed circuit board of the patch panel of **FIG. 4A**.

[0033] **FIG. 5A** is a partial perspective view of a jack according to certain embodiments of the present invention.

[0034] **FIG. 5B** is a partial perspective view of a communications assembly that is included in the jack of **FIG. 5A**.

[0035] **FIG. 5C** is a simplified, enlarged perspective view of a portion of the communications assembly of **FIG. 5B**.

[0036] **FIGS. 6A-6B** are views of alternative communications assemblies according to embodiments of the present invention that may be used in the jack of **FIG. 5A**.

[0037] **FIG. 7** is a schematic view of an inter-connect communications patching system according to certain embodiments of the present invention.

[0038] **FIG. 8A** is a schematic perspective view of an interposer according to embodiments of the present invention.

[0039] **FIG. 8B** is a top view of a communications assembly of one of the connectors of the interposer of **FIG. 8A**.

[0040] **FIG. 8C** is a side view of the communications assembly of **FIG. 8B**.

[0041] **FIG. 8D** is a schematic block diagram that illustrates phantom mode control signalling circuitry that may be included in the interposer of **FIGS. 8A-8C**.

[0042] **FIG. 9** is a simplified perspective view of a communications assembly of a jack that includes a plug insertion/removal detection circuit according to certain embodiments of the present invention.

[0043] **FIG. 10A** is a schematic front view of part of a plug aperture of a jack that includes a plug insertion/removal detection circuit according to further embodiments of the present invention that illustrates the positions of the distal ends of the spring contacts when no plug is received within the plug aperture.

[0044] **FIG. 10B** is a schematic front view of the plug aperture of the jack of **FIG. 10A** that illustrates the positions of the distal ends of the spring contacts when a plug is present within the plug aperture.

[0045] **FIG. 10C** is a block diagram illustrating how the phantom mode control signalling circuitry may be used to send an excitation signal to the plug insertion/removal detection circuit of **FIGS. 10A-10B**.

[0046] **FIG. 11A** is a schematic front view of the plug aperture of a jack that includes a plug insertion/removal detection circuit according to still further embodiments of the present invention.

[0047] **FIG. 11B** is a schematic front view of the plug aperture of the jack of **FIG. 11A** that illustrates the plug aperture when a plug is present within the plug aperture.

[0048] **FIG. 12** is a block diagram of the cable, connector ports, devices and control elements associated with a portion of one exemplary channel in an interconnect communications patching system.

[0049] **FIG. 13** is a flow chart diagram illustrating a method of automatically identifying an end device that is connected to a communications network according to certain embodiments of the present invention.

[0050] **FIG. 14** is a flow chart that illustrates a method of operating a network switch according to certain embodiments of the present invention.

[0051] **FIG. 15** is a flow chart that illustrates a method of identifying connectivity in a communications network according to certain embodiments of the present invention.

[0052] **FIG. 16** is a block diagram illustrating the different types of low voltage cabling that may be wired to typical rooms in a commercial office building.

[0053] **FIG. 17** illustrates how consolidator/encoder units and phantom mode control signalling techniques according to embodiments of the present invention may be used

to reduce the amount of low voltage cabling required in certain commercial office buildings.

[0054] **FIG. 18** is a flow chart diagram illustrating methods of detecting the insertion and/or removal of a plug from a communications connector according to embodiments of the present invention.

[0055] **FIG. 19** is a flow chart diagram illustrating methods of detecting the insertion and/or removal of a plug from a communications connector according to further embodiments of the present invention.

[0056] **FIG. 20** is a flow chart diagram illustrating methods of detecting the insertion and/or removal of a plug from a communications connector according to still further embodiments of the present invention.

[0057] **FIG. 21A** is a schematic front view of a jack that includes a plug insertion/removal detection circuit according to further embodiments of the present invention.

[0058] **FIG. 21B** is a top schematic view of two electrodes that form a capacitor that is part of the plug insertion/removal detection circuit of the jack of **FIG. 21A**.

[0059] **FIG. 22A** is a schematic front view of a jack that includes a plug insertion/removal detection circuit according to still further embodiments of the present invention.

[0060] **FIG. 22B** is a top schematic view of a capacitor that is part of the plug insertion/removal detection circuit of the jack of **FIG. 22A**.

[0061] **FIG. 23A** is a schematic block diagram of an interposer according to further embodiments of the present invention.

[0062] **FIG. 23B** is a schematic diagram illustrating the electrical connections for one of the patch cords that is connected to a network device using the interposer of **FIG. 23A**.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0063] Pursuant to embodiments of the present invention, methods and systems (and related connectors and equipment) for tracking connectivity in a communications system are provided that use phantom mode control signals. These methods and systems may be used to track patching connections between two patch panel fields (i.e., in cross-connect patching systems) or between a patch panel field and a plurality of network switches (i.e., in inter-connect patching systems). Additionally, in some embodiments, the methods and systems may be used to track connections all the way to individual modular wall jacks and/or to end devices in the work area and/or in the computer room. Thus, the communications systems

according to certain embodiments of the present invention can automatically (1) track patching connections between patch panels and/or between patch panels and network switches, (2) monitor connectivity of horizontal cabling to work area outlets and (3) track end devices in order to determine the end-to-end connectivity of a channel. The methods and systems disclosed herein may be implemented on both unshielded and shielded twisted pair communications systems.

[0064] In some embodiments, the phantom mode control signals that are used to track connectivity may be inserted into a communications channel by capacitively coupling the phantom mode control signal onto various of the conductors of the channel at one of the connector ports along the channel. Such capacitive coupling techniques may be implemented at very low cost within the connector ports, and may not require any changes to the communications cables (including patch cords) that are used in the communications system. This is in stark contrast to many other existing and proposed intelligent patching solutions, which often require specialized patch cords that include extra conductors and modified plug connectors. In some embodiments, the phantom mode control signaling may be combined with technology that detects plug insertions and removals at, for example, some or all of the connector ports in the communications system. Such plug insertion and removal detection technology may provide a number of additional advantages, which will be discussed below.

[0065] FIG. 2 is a schematic view of a cross-connect communications system 10 that may be used to connect computers, printers, Internet telephones and other end devices that are located in work areas throughout a building to network equipment that is located, for example, in a computer room of the building. The phantom mode control signalling techniques discussed herein may be implemented on some or all of the channels of the communications system 10 of FIG. 2. As shown in FIG. 2, an exemplary computer 20 or other end device is located in a work area 12 of the building. The computer 20 is connected by a patch cord 22 to a modular wall jack 24 that is mounted in a wall plate 26 in work area 12. A communications cable 28 is routed from the back end of the wall jack 24 through, for example, the walls and/or ceiling of the building, to a computer room 14. As there may be hundreds or thousands of work area wall jacks 24 in an office building, a large number of cables 28 may be routed into the computer room 14. While only a single work area end device (computer 20) is shown in FIG. 2 to simplify the drawing, it will be appreciated that there would be dozens, hundreds or thousands of work area end devices in a typical communications system.

[0066] A first equipment rack 30 is provided in the computer room 14. A plurality

of patch panels **32** are mounted on the first equipment rack **30**. Each patch panel **32** includes a plurality of connector ports **34**. Each cable **28** from the wall jacks **24** in the work area **12** is terminated onto the back end of one of the connector ports **34** of one of the patch panels **32**. In **FIG. 2**, each connector port **34** comprises an RJ-45 jack. However, it will be appreciated that other types of connector ports may be used such as, for example, RJ-11 connector ports.

[0067] A rack controller **36** may also be mounted on the first equipment rack **30**. The rack controller **36** may include a central processing unit ("CPU") **38** and a display **39**. The rack controller **36** may be interconnected with rack controllers that are provided on other patch panel equipment racks of the communications system (only two such rack controllers **36** are shown in the example of **FIG. 2**) so that the rack controllers **36** can communicate in a common network as if they were a single controller. The CPU **38** of rack controller **36** may include a remote access port that enables the CPU **38** to be accessed by a remote computer such as, for example, a system administrator computer (not shown in **FIG. 2**). The rack controller **36** may, for example, gather data from intelligent tracking capabilities of the patch panels **32**, as will be explained herein.

[0068] The communications patching system **10** further includes a second set of patch panels **32'** that are mounted on a second equipment rack **30'**. Each patch panel **32'** includes a plurality of connector ports **34'**, and a rack controller **36** may also be mounted on the second equipment rack **30'**. A first set of patch cords **50** is used to interconnect the connector ports **34** on the patch panels **32** to respective ones of connector ports **34'** on the patch panels **32'**.

[0069] As is further shown in **FIG. 2**, network devices such as, for example, one or more network switches **42** and network routers and/or servers **46** are mounted, for example, on a third equipment rack **40**. Each of the switches **42** may include a plurality of connector ports **44**, and each network router and/or server **46** may also include one or more connector ports. One or more external communications lines **52** are connected to at least some of the network devices **46** (either directly or through a patch panel that is not shown in **FIG. 2**). A second set of single-ended patch cords **70** connects the connector ports **44** on the switches **42** to respective ones of the back ends of the connector ports **34'** on the patch panels **32'**. A third set of patch cords **54** may be used to interconnect other of the connector ports **44** on the switches **42** with the connector ports provided on the network routers/servers **46**. In order to simplify **FIG. 2**, only two patch cords **50**, a single patch cord **70** and a single patch cord **54** are shown.

[0070] The communications patching system of **FIG. 2** may be used to connect each

work area computer **20** or other work area end device to the network switches **42**, the network switches **42** to the network routers and servers **46**, and the network routers/servers **46** to external communications lines **52**, thereby establishing the physical connectivity required to give devices **20** access to both local and wide area networks. In the cross-connect patching system of **FIG. 2**, connectivity changes are typically made by rearranging the patch cords **50** that interconnect the connector ports **34** on the patch panels **32** with respective of the connector ports **34'** on the patch panels **32'**. It should also be noted that in many cases the patching connections may be between patch panels that are mounted on the same equipment rack or even between connector ports on the same patch panel. Thus, it will be understood that **FIG. 2** illustrates the work area outlets being connected to patch panels that are on a first equipment rack and the network switches being connected to patch panels on a second equipment rack to provide a simple, easy to understand example. The present invention is not limited to such configurations.

[0071] **FIG. 2** illustrates one exemplary, rather simple, communications system **10**. It will be appreciated that many changes may be made to the communication system **10** without departing from the scope of the present invention. For example, the techniques disclosed herein can be employed on communications systems that are simpler than the exemplary communications system of **FIG. 2**. In other embodiments, the end-to-end connectivity between work area end devices and network end devices may be more complicated than shown in **FIG. 2**, with additional intervening patch panels, consolidation points, horizontal cables, patch cords, etc. As will be discussed in more detail below, phantom mode control signals may be used to automatically determine and/or confirm patching connections between the patch panels **32** mounted on the first equipment rack **30** and the patch panels **32'** mounted on the second equipment rack **30'**, thereby allowing a network administrator to automatically generate and subsequently maintain the computer-based log of patching connections. Additionally, in some embodiments, the communications system **10** may also automatically track connections to the modular wall jacks **24** and/or end-to-end device connectivity, as will be explained in further detail below.

[0072] **FIG. 3** is a block diagram illustrating a simplified communications patching system **100** that will be used to describe how phantom mode control signals may be used to track patch cord and/or cabling connections in communications systems according to certain embodiments of the present invention. Note that herein the terms "phantom mode control signal" and "phantom mode communications signal" are used interchangeably, and refer to a signal that is transmitted using phantom mode signalling techniques that includes control

information therein such as, for example, information that may be used to track cabling connections. It will be appreciated that the phantom mode control signals may also carry data in some embodiments.

[0073] As shown in **FIG. 3**, the communications patching system **100** includes a first patch panel **110**, a second patch panel **120**, a network switch **130**, a plurality of work area modular wall jacks **140** and various work area end devices **150**, **160**. Network end devices (not shown in **FIG. 3**) would also be provided that are connected through the network switch **130**. Patch cords **142** are used to interconnect connector ports **111-114** on the first patch panel **110** with connector ports **121-124** on the second patch panel **120**. The back ends of the connector ports **111-114** on the first patch panel **110** are connected to the wall jacks **140** by respective horizontal cables **144**. Patch cords **146** are used to connect the wall jacks **140** to the respective connector ports **151**, **161** on the end devices **150**, **160**. The back ends of the connector ports **121-124** on the second patch panel **120** are connected to respective connector ports **131-134** on the switch **130** by respective single-ended patch cords **148**. It will be noted that the block diagram of **FIG. 3** shows a very simple communications patching system with two four-connector port patch panels **110**, **120** and a single network switch **130** for purposes of illustrating operation of embodiments of the present invention, and it will be appreciated that typical communications patching systems in which the present invention will be employed will be much larger and far more complex than the exemplary system shown in **FIG. 3**.

[0074] As shown in **FIG. 3**, a phantom mode transmitter **115**, a processor **116** and a phantom mode receiver **117** are provided on the first patch panel **110**, and a phantom mode transmitter **125**, a processor **126** and a phantom mode receiver **127** are provided on the second patch panel **120**. A switch, multiplexer or the like (not shown in **FIG. 3**) may also be provided on each of the first and second patch panels **110**, **120** so that the phantom mode transmitters **115**, **125** and phantom mode receivers **117**, **127** may be used to send/receive signals from each of the connector ports **111-114**, **121-124** on the respective patch panels **110**, **120**. In other embodiments, each connector port **111-114**, **121-124** may have its own phantom mode transmitter and/or phantom mode receiver, and the switch or multiplexer may be omitted. Herein, the phantom mode transmitters, phantom mode receivers, processors and any associated switches or multiplexers that are used to generate, receive and/or distribute phantom mode control signals are referred to generically as "phantom mode control signalling circuitry."

[0075] As is also shown in **FIG. 3**, in some embodiments, a phantom mode

transmitter **135**, a processor **136** and a phantom mode receiver **137** may also be provided on or at the network switch **130**, although these components may be omitted in other embodiments. A switch or multiplexer (not shown in **FIG. 3**) may likewise be provided on network switch **130** so that the phantom mode transmitter **135** and/or the phantom mode receiver **137** may be shared across all of the connector ports **131-134** on network switch **130**. As is further shown in **FIG. 3**, the work area end device **150** may (optionally) include a phantom mode transmitter **152**, a processor **154** and/or a phantom mode receiver **156**. Other work area devices such as the depicted work area devices **160** may not include any phantom mode control signalling circuitry.

[0076] Operation of the phantom mode control channel will now be described with reference to **FIG. 3**. Operations may begin with the processor **116** on the first patch panel **110** sending a control signal to the phantom mode transmitter **115**. In response to this control signal, the phantom mode transmitter **115** may generate and transmit a first phantom mode control signal **170** over a first phantom mode communications path that extends from the first connector port **111** on the first patch panel **110** to the first connector port **121** on the second patch panel **120**. As discussed above, this first phantom mode communications path may comprise two of the differential pairs of the patch cord **142** that extends between connector port **111** and connector port **121**, and the phantom mode control signal **170** may be carried over this first phantom mode communications path simultaneously with differential communications signals that are transmitted over the two differential pairs. (As will be discussed below, in other embodiments the phantom mode communications path may use more than two of the differential pairs of the patch cord **142**.) The phantom mode control signal **170** may include, among other things, a unique identifier that is associated with the connector port **111**. For example, in some embodiments, the unique identifier could be the serial number or MAC ID of the first patch panel **110** combined with a port number that identifies the connector port **111**.

[0077] The first phantom mode control signal **170** is received at the connector port **121** on the second patch panel **120**, and then is extracted from the connector port **121** in an appropriate manner (exemplary methods of extracting phantom mode control signals from a phantom mode communications path will be described later herein). The first phantom mode control signal **170** is then routed to the phantom mode receiver **127** on the second patch panel **120** (e.g., via a switch or multiplexer) where the signal is received and demodulated (if necessary). The received/demodulated version of the first phantom mode control signal **170** is then provided to the processor **126** on the second patch panel **120**. As the processor **126** is

able to determine that the received first phantom mode control signal **170** was routed through connector port **121**, the processor **126** may use the first phantom mode control signal **170** to discover and/or confirm that a patch cord connection exists between the first connector port **111** on the first patch panel **110** (since the unique identifier for this connector port is contained in the first phantom mode control signal **170**) and the first connector port **121** on the second patch panel **120**. The processor **126** may provide this information to, for example, a rack manager (e.g., rack manager **36** of **FIG. 2**), a system manager (not shown) and/or other processing devices that create and/or maintain a log of the patch cord and cabling connections in the communications patching system **100**.

[0078] In a similar fashion, the processor **126** on the second patch panel **120** may send a control signal to the phantom mode transmitter **125** on the second patch panel **120**. In response to this control signal, the phantom mode transmitter **125** may generate a second phantom mode control signal **171** and transmit this second phantom mode control signal **171** over the first phantom mode communications path that extends between the first connector port **111** on the first patch panel **110** and the first connector port **121** on the second patch panel **120**. The second phantom mode control signal **171** may include a unique identifier that is associated with the connector port **121**.

[0079] The second phantom mode control signal **171** is received at the connector port **111** on the first patch panel **110**, and then is extracted from the connector port **111** in an appropriate manner. The second phantom mode control signal **171** may then be routed to the phantom mode receiver **117** on the first patch panel **110**, where the phantom mode control signal **171** is received and demodulated (if necessary). The received/demodulated version of the second phantom mode control signal **171** is then provided to the processor **116** on the first patch panel **110**. As the processor **116** is able to determine that the received second phantom mode control signal **171** was routed through connector port **111**, the processor **116** may use the second phantom mode control signal **171** to discover and/or confirm that a patch cord connection exists between the first connector port **111** on the first patch panel **110** and the first connector port **121** on the second patch panel **120** (based on the unique identifier for the first connector port **121** on the second patch panel **120** that is included in the second phantom mode control signal **171**). The processor **116** may provide this information to, for example, a rack manager (e.g., rack manager **36** of **FIG. 2**), a system manager (not shown) and/or other processing devices that create and/or maintain a log of the patch cord and cabling connections in the communications patching system **100**. By sending phantom mode control signals over each connector port included on the patch panels **110**, **120**, the processors **116**, **126** can

determine the connections between the patch panels **110** and **120**.

[0080] In the above description of the operation of the automatic connection tracking capabilities of communications patching system **100**, both the first patch panel **110** and the second patch panel **120** transmit phantom mode control signals that are used to discover and/or confirm the patching connections therebetween. However, it will be appreciated that in other embodiments the number of phantom mode control signals may be reduced or changed. By way of example, in some embodiments, only the first patch panel **110** (or, in a more complex system, each of the patch panels in the work area side patching field) will send phantom mode control signals to the second patch panel **120**, as this may be sufficient to discover and provide to a connection database all of the patching connections between the first patch panel **110** and the second patch panel **120**. As another example, the system may alternatively be designed so that only the second patch panel **120** (or, in the more complex system mentioned above, each of the patch panels in the network side patching field) sends phantom mode control signals to the first patch panel **110**. Other configurations are also obviously possible. Thus, it will be appreciated that the description herein simply provides examples as to how the phantom mode control signalling techniques according to embodiments of the present invention may be used to automatically track patching connections, and that these examples are not intended to be exhaustive or limiting.

[0081] While changes in connectivity will typically be implemented in the communications system **100** by rearranging the connections formed by the patch cords **142** between the connector ports **111-114** and **121-124** on the first and second patch panels **110**, **120**, connection changes may occur in other locations. By way of example, network switches such as switch **130** typically include RJ-45 connector ports, and hence patch cords **148** are used to connect the connector ports **121-124** on the second patch panel to the respective connector ports **131-134** on the switch **130** (these patch cords **148** typically are one-sided patch cords that each have a first end that is directly terminated into the IDC array of one of the connector ports **121-124** of the second patch panel **120**, and a second end that includes an RJ-45 plug that is plugged into one of the RJ-45 connector ports **131-134** on switch **130**). The inclusion of patch cord connections at the connector ports **131-134** of switch **130** leaves the possibility that someone may intentionally or inadvertently rearrange the patching connections into the switch **130**, and hence it may be desirable to automatically track the patching connections between the patch panels in the cross-connect field (e.g., patch panel **120** in the simplified example of **FIG. 3**) and the switch **130**.

[0082] This tracking may be performed, for example, by having the processor **126**

on the second patch panel **120** send a control signal to the phantom mode transmitter **125** that causes the phantom mode transmitter **125** to generate and transmit a third phantom mode control signal **172** over a second phantom mode communications path that extends from, for example, the first connector port **121** on the second patch panel **120** to the first connector port **131** on the switch **130**. The second phantom mode communications path may comprise two of the differential pairs of the patch cord **148** that extends between connector port **121** and connector port **131**. The third phantom mode control signal **172** may include a unique identifier that is associated with the connector port **121**. For example, in some embodiments, the unique identifier could be the serial number or MAC ID of the second patch panel **120** combined with a port number that identifies the first connector port **121**.

[0083] The third phantom mode control signal **172** is received at the connector port **131** on the switch **130**, and then is extracted from the connector port **131** and routed to the phantom mode receiver **137** on the switch **130**, where it is received and demodulated (if necessary). The received/demodulated version of the third phantom mode control signal **172** is then provided to the processor **136** on the switch **130**. As the processor **136** is able to determine that the received signal was routed through the connector port **131**, the processor **136** may use the third phantom mode control signal **172** to discover and/or confirm that a patch cord connection exists between the first connector port **121** on the second patch panel **120** and the first connector port **131** on the switch **130**. The processor **136** may provide this information to, for example, a rack manager (not shown), a system manager (not shown) and/or other processing devices that create and/or maintain a log of the patch cord and cabling connections in the communications patching system **100**.

[0084] The processor **136** on the switch **130** may also (or alternatively) send a control signal to the phantom mode transmitter **135** that causes the phantom mode transmitter **135** to generate and transmit a fourth phantom mode control signal **173** over the second phantom mode communications path that extends between the first connector port **121** on the second patch panel **120** and the first connector port **131** on the switch **130**. This fourth phantom mode control signal **173** may include a unique identifier that is associated with the connector port **131** (e.g., the serial number or MAC ID of the switch **130** combined with a port number that identifies the first connector port **131**). The fourth phantom mode control signal **173** is received at, and extracted from, the connector port **121** on the second patch panel **120**, and is then routed to the phantom mode receiver **127** on the second patch panel **120**, where it is received and demodulated (if necessary). The received/demodulated version of the fourth phantom mode control signal **173** is then provided to the processor **126** on the

second patch panel **120**, thereby allowing the processor **126** to discover and/or confirm that a patch cord connection exists between the first connector port **121** on the second patch panel **120** and the first connector port **131** on the switch **130**. The processor **126** may provide this information to, for example, a rack manager (e.g., rack manager **36** of **FIG. 2**), a system manager (not shown) and/or other processing devices that create and/or maintain a log of the patch cord and cabling connections in the communications patching system **100**.

[0085] It will be appreciated that while the above discussion envisions sending phantom mode control signals in both directions between the second patch panel **120** and the switch **130**, in other embodiments the phantom mode control signals might only be sent in one direction. Thus, it will be appreciated that, in other embodiments, some of the hardware depicted in **FIG. 3** may be omitted without degrading the capabilities of the system. As one example, the phantom mode receiver **137** on switch **130** (and perhaps the phantom mode transmitter **125** on the second patch panel **120**) may be omitted and the connections between the second patch panel **120** and the switch **130** may be discovered solely by transmitting phantom mode control signals such as signal **173** from the switch **130** to the second patch panel **120**.

[0086] As is further shown in **FIG. 3**, at least some of the wall jacks **140** may include a phantom mode transmitter **142**, a processor **144** and/or a phantom mode receiver **146**. The provision of phantom mode signalling capabilities at the wall jacks **140** may allow the automatic discovery and/or confirmation of the connections of the horizontal cables **144** that connect the wall jacks **140** (or other work area outlets) to the patch panels in the work area patch panel field (e.g., patch panel **110**) in the computer room, and various other capabilities may also be provided over such a phantom mode control channel (e.g., the ability for a system administrator to determine from a remote location whether or not a patch cord is plugged into one of the wall jacks **140**).

[0087] A horizontal cabling connection such as the connection between connector port **112** on the first patch panel **110** and wall jack **140** may be tracked as follows. First, the processor **116** on the first patch panel **110** sends a control signal to the phantom mode transmitter **115** that causes the phantom mode transmitter **115** to generate and transmit a fifth phantom mode control signal **174** over a third phantom mode communications path that extends from the connector port **112** on the first patch panel **110** to the wall jack **140**. The third phantom mode communications path may comprise two of the differential pairs of the horizontal cable **144** that extends between connector port **112** and wall jack **140**.

[0088] The fifth phantom mode control signal **174** is received at the wall jack **140**,

and then is extracted from the channel and routed to the phantom mode receiver **146**, where it is received and demodulated (if necessary). The received/demodulated version of the fifth phantom mode control signal **174** is then provided to the processor **144**. The fifth phantom mode control signal **174** prompts the processor **144** to send a control signal to the phantom mode transmitter **142** that causes the phantom mode transmitter **142** to generate and transmit a sixth phantom mode control signal **175** over the third phantom mode communications path that extends between the wall jack **140** the connector port **112**. This sixth phantom mode control signal **175** may include a unique identifier that is associated with the wall jack **140** (e.g., an office number where the wall jack is located and the port number of the wall jack). The sixth phantom mode control signal **175** is received at, and extracted from, the connector port **112** on the first patch panel **110**, and is then routed to the phantom mode receiver **117** on the first patch panel **110**, where it is received and demodulated (if necessary). The received/demodulated version of the sixth phantom mode control signal **175** is then provided to the processor **116** on the first patch panel **110**, thereby allowing the processor **116** to discover and/or confirm the horizontal cabling connection between connector port **112** and wall jack **140**. The processor **116** may provide this information to, for example, a rack manager (e.g., rack manager **36** of **FIG. 2**) or a system manager (not shown).

[0089] The horizontal cables **144** that extend between the work area wall jacks **140** and the work area patch panel field (i.e., patch panel **110** in the simplified example of **FIG. 3**) are typically directly terminated into back end wire connection assemblies of the connector ports **111-114** on the first patch panel **110** and on the wall jacks **140**, and hence cannot readily be removed and connected to other connector ports or jacks. Consequently, the horizontal cables **144** typically are not rearranged, and hence once a communications network has been installed, there may not be a compelling need to automatically track the connections between the first patch panel **110** and the wall jacks **140** that is sufficient to justify the added expense of providing phantom mode signalling capabilities at each wall jack **140**. However, if phantom mode signalling capabilities are provided at the wall jacks **140**, they may be used for a variety of purposes such as, for example, confirming that all of the horizontal cables were properly connected during the installation of the network and/or for detecting patch cord insertions and/or removals using various techniques that are described below.

[0090] Most intelligent communications patching systems do not have the capability to track connections to work area end devices such as the end devices **150, 160** of **FIG. 3**. However, according to some embodiments of the present invention, phantom mode control channels may be provided that extend all the way to work area end devices which may be

used to automatically identify the work area end devices that are connected to a communications network. While not shown in **FIG. 3**, phantom mode control channels may also be provided that extend to network end devices such as network servers, memory storage devices, etc. These phantom mode control channels may be used to track the actual end devices that are connected to the communications system **100**. This may be advantageous for a variety of reasons, as it allows a system administrator to discover the full end-to-end connectivity of the devices that are communicating over the communications system **100**. This information may be used to, for example, provide enhanced security, automatically provision services to certain end devices, confirm that redundancy requirements and other network rules are being followed, and prohibit unauthorized access to the network, as will be discussed in greater detail below.

[0091] The capability of communications systems according to embodiments of the present invention to discover and track end devices will now be described with respect to the work area end device **150** of **FIG. 3**. As shown in **FIG. 3**, the processor **116** on the first patch panel **110** may send a control signal to the phantom mode transmitter **115** that causes the phantom mode transmitter **115** to generate and transmit a seventh phantom mode control signal **176** over a fourth phantom mode communications path that extends from the first connector port **111** on the first patch panel **110**, through a wall jack **140**, to a connector port **151** that is provided on the end device **150**. The fourth phantom mode communications path may comprise, for example, two of the differential pairs on the horizontal cable **144** that extends between connector port **111** and wall jack **140**, the corresponding two differential pairs in the wall jack **140**, and the corresponding two differential pairs on the patch cord **146** that extends between wall jack **140** and connector port **151**. The seventh phantom mode control signal **176** is received at the connector port **151** on the end device **150**, and then is extracted from the connector port **151** and routed to the phantom mode receiver **156**, where it is received and demodulated (if necessary). The received version of the seventh phantom mode control signal **176** is provided to the processor **154** on the work area end device **150**, and is used to prompt the processor **154** to cause the phantom mode transmitter **152** to send an eighth phantom mode control signal **177** back to the first patch panel **110** over the fourth phantom mode communications path. This eighth phantom mode control signal **177** may include a unique identifier that is associated with the end device **150** such as, for example, the MAC ID of the device. The eighth phantom mode control signal **177** is received at, and extracted from, the connector port **111** on the first patch panel **110**, and is then routed to the phantom mode receiver **117** on the first patch panel **110**, where it is received and

demodulated (if necessary). The received/demodulated version of the eighth phantom mode control signal 177 is then provided to the processor 116 on the first patch panel 110, thereby allowing the processor 116 to discover which particular work area end device 150 is connected through connector port 111. The processor 116 may provide this information to, for example, a rack manager (e.g., rack manager 36 of FIG. 2), a system manager (not shown) and/or other processing devices that create and/or maintain a log of the patch cord and cabling connections in the communications patching system 100. It will be appreciated that in some embodiments, the control signal 176 may be omitted, and the processor 154 on work area device may instead simply periodically (or non-periodically) transmit the eighth phantom mode control signal 177 without prompting.

[0092] Thus, in the exemplary manner described above, phantom mode control signals may be used to discover and/or confirm patching connections in the communications patching system 100, and/or to discover which specific end devices are connected on each channel.

[0093] While the discussion above regarding operation of the communications system of FIG. 3 discusses having modulated signals that include a data stream therein, it will be appreciated that the present invention is not so limited. For example, in other embodiments, the presence of a carrier or a phantom mode control signal can be used in of itself to, for example, confirm a patching connection.

[0094] It will be appreciated that once a phantom mode control signal is injected onto one or more of the differential pairs of a particular channel, that phantom mode control signal may propagate all the way from one end of the channel to the other end of the channel through multiple cable segments and connectors. By way of example, in the communications patching system of FIG. 3, the eighth phantom mode control signal 177 will propagate all the way from the end device 150 to the connector port 131 on the network switch 130 over the channel extending therebetween. Moreover, as shown in FIG. 3, more than one device can inject phantom mode control signals onto a particular channel. For example, in the communications patching system 100 of FIG. 3, the end device 150, the first patch panel 110, the second patch 120, and the switch 130 (and even the wall jacks 140 in some embodiments) can inject phantom mode control signals onto the channel extending, for example, between connector port 151 on end device 150 and connector port 131 on switch 130. Consequently, techniques may be used that prevent the multiple phantom mode control signals that may be transmitted on a particular channel from interfering with each other, and/or which allow the devices in the communications system 100 to distinguish between

these different phantom mode control signals. For example, in one such embodiment, each device on a particular channel may be assigned a particular time slot in a time division multiple access communication scheme that allows the devices on a particular channel to send phantom mode control signals without interference and which allows each device to distinguish between the different phantom mode control signals. In other embodiments, frequency division multiple access schemes may be used. In still other embodiments, arbitration procedures may be used that prevent the transmission of interfering signals, and identification information may be included in the phantom mode control signals that allow the devices that receive such signals to determine the source of the signal. Other procedures and techniques may also be used.

[0095] A variety of different phantom mode control signals may be used. For example, the phantom mode control signal may or may not be modulated onto a carrier frequency. In one particular embodiment, the phantom mode control signal may comprise a frequency shift keyed ("FSK") alternating current signal that is modulated onto, for example, a 50 MHz carrier signal. In other embodiments, higher, out-of-band frequencies may be used (e.g., 800 MHz) to reduce the possibility that the phantom mode control signals interfere with the differential information signals that are also carried on the conductors of the phantom mode communications path. It will also be appreciated that other carrier frequencies and/or modulation types may be used. Modulated signals may be preferred in some embodiments because the magnitude of the phantom mode control signal may be reduced significantly (e.g., by 70 dB) through the capacitive coupling techniques that may be used to both inject the phantom mode control signal into a channel and to extract the phantom mode control signal from the channel in certain embodiments of the present invention. Such modulated signals may be less susceptible to corruption by noise. The magnitude of the phantom mode control signal may be set at a variety of levels. In some embodiments, the magnitude may be between about 0.5 volts and 3 volts, although a wide variety of magnitudes may be used. In typical implementations the phantom mode control signal is an alternating current signal, as such a signal will not be blocked by coupling capacitors and is compatible with Power-over-Ethernet patching systems.

[0096] It has further been discovered that in some embodiments the use of phantom mode control signals having a carrier frequency of between 25 MHz and 100 MHz may be preferred in certain situations. In particular, if higher frequency phantom mode control signals are used, excessive mode conversion may occur where a portion of the phantom mode control signal is converted to a differential mode signal that can potentially interfere with an

information signal being transmitted differentially on a pair of conductors in the channel due to, for example, an imbalance in the transmission lines. This mode conversion can deleteriously impact channel performance, and can also lead to alien crosstalk problems on other channels in cabling that is bundled with the cables that carry the phantom mode control signal. Such mode conversion problems may be reduced for phantom mode control signals in the 25 MHz to 100 MHz range. Additionally, while even higher frequencies may be used such as, for example, frequencies greater than 800 MHz or 1 GHz that may fall outside of the band of the information signals carried on the differential pairs, the transmission losses over copper conductors may be prohibitively high at these frequencies, particularly where long cabling runs are used as may be commonplace in data centers and large commercial office buildings.

[0097] **FIGS. 4A-4B** illustrate a patch panel **200** that may be used, for example, as one of the patch panels **32, 32'** of **FIG. 2** or as one of the patch panels **110, 120** of **FIG. 3**. **FIG. 4A** is a front view of the patch panel **200**, while **FIG. 4B** is a schematic front view of a portion of a printed circuit board **230** of patch panel **200**.

[0098] As shown in **FIG. 4A**, the exemplary patch panel **200** includes a mounting frame **210** and twenty-four connector ports **220** that are, in this embodiment, arranged as four groups of six connector ports **220**. Each connector port **220** is implemented as an RJ-45 jack. A printed circuit board **230** is mounted on the front face of the mounting frame **210** and includes cut-out areas for each of the connector ports **220**. The printed circuit board **230** is shown in outline representation in **FIG. 4A** as it may be partly or completely hidden beneath a cover or other protective or aesthetic housing. Trace buttons **240** and light emitting diodes ("LED") **250** may be mounted on the printed circuit board **230** adjacent each of the connector ports **220**. The trace buttons **240** and LEDs **250** may be electrically connected to a microprocessor **280** (see **FIG. 4B**), and may be used, for example, to perform line tracing functions. In some embodiments, the trace buttons **240** and/or the LEDs **250** may be omitted. As is also shown in **FIG. 3**, the patch panel **200** further includes a connection **260** that receives one end of a communications cable **270** (e.g., a ribbon cable, an RJ-45 patch cord, etc.). The other end of the communications cable **270** may be connected directly or indirectly to, for example, a rack manager **36** (see **FIG. 2**). The connection **260** and communications cable **270** provide a communications path that allows information to be communicated to and from the components that are mounted on the printed circuit board **230** of patch panel **200** and the rack controller **36** (or other external processing device). A power connection may also be provided (not shown) that provides power to the patch panel **200**.

[0099] FIG. 4B is an enlarged schematic front view of a portion of the printed circuit board 230 of the intelligent patch panel 200 of FIG. 4A. The printed circuit board 230 may be generally rectangular in shape, and is mounted on top of the connector ports 210 (which are accessible through apertures in the printed circuit board 230 in the particular embodiment of FIGS. 4A-4B). The trace buttons 240 and the LEDs 250 are mounted on the printed circuit board 230 and are positioned to be above a respective one of the connector ports 220. The patch panel 200 may also include a plug insertion/removal detection circuit for each of the connector ports 220 (not shown in FIGS. 4A-4B). Exemplary embodiments of such plug insertion/removal detection circuits will be described below.

[0100] As shown in FIG. 4B, a phantom mode transmitter 260, a phantom mode receiver 270, a microprocessor 280 and a multiplexer 290 may also be mounted on the printed circuit board 230. The printed circuit board 230 may also include first and second contact pads 265 for each connector port 220 that are mounted on a back side of printed circuit board 230 (and hence are shown using dotted lines in FIG. 4B). Each pair of contact pads 265 is configured to mate with a pair of phantom mode contacts that are provided on each connector port 220 included on the patch panel 200 (see FIG. 5A, which shows phantom mode contacts 366, 376 that are implemented on a modular RJ-45 wall jack that may be used to implement each connector port 220). As will be discussed in detail below, the phantom mode contacts may be used to couple phantom mode control signals to and from the connector ports 220 and the phantom mode transmitter 260 and/or the phantom mode receiver 270.

[0101] As shown in FIG. 4B, the microprocessor 280 includes an output that is connected to the phantom mode transmitter 260. This output may be used to send control signals to the phantom mode transmitter 260 that control operation of the phantom mode transmitter 260. The microprocessor 280 further includes an input (which may be a serial or parallel input) that may receive data that is extracted from phantom mode control signals that are received by the phantom mode receiver 270. The multiplexer 290 is coupled to both the phantom mode transmitter 260 and the phantom mode receiver 270, and includes input/output lines (not shown in FIGS. 4A-4B) that are coupled to each pair of contact pads 265. The multiplexer 290 may be used to pass a phantom mode control signal that is transmitted by the phantom mode transmitter 260 to the pair of contact pads 265 that are associated with a specific connector port 220. The multiplexer 290 may also be used to pass a phantom mode control signal that is received at a specific one of the connector ports 220 by connecting the pair of contact pads 265 associated with that specific connector port 220 to the phantom

mode receiver **270**. The microprocessor **280** may be used to control the settings on the multiplexer **290**. By providing the multiplexer **290**, which is used to selectively connect the pair of contact pads **265** associated with the various connector ports **220** to the phantom mode transmitter **260** and/or the phantom mode receiver **270**, it may only be necessary to provide a single phantom mode transmitter **260** and phantom mode receiver **270** per patch panel **200**. This can substantially reduce the cost of the patch panel **200**. The multiplexer **290** may comprise, for example, an analog multiplexer (or a cascaded set of analog multiplexers).

[0102] While in the particular embodiment depicted in **FIG. 4B** the multiplexer **290** is used as a switching device that allows the phantom mode transmitter **260** and/or the phantom mode receiver **270** to be selectively connected to the connector ports **220**, it will be appreciated that any appropriate switching device may be used. By way of example, the switching circuits disclosed in co-pending U.S. Patent Application Serial No. 11/871,448, filed October 12, 2007, that are used to selectively connect an RFID transceiver to the connector ports on a patch panel could be used in place of the multiplexer **290** in alternative embodiments of the present invention. The disclosure of U.S. Patent Application Serial No. 11/871,448 is incorporated by reference here in its entirety.

[0103] While not shown in **FIG. 4B** to simplify the drawing, it will be appreciated that the microprocessor **280** may include control lines that are used to send and receive control and/or power signals to the trace buttons **240** and/or the LEDs **250**. Individual control lines may be provided for each trace button/LED, and or common control lines may be provided that are selectively routed through a multiplexer or switching circuit.

[0104] While in the embodiment of **FIGS. 4A-4B** the phantom mode transmitter **260**, the phantom mode receiver **270**, the microprocessor **280** and the multiplexer **290** are mounted on the patch panel **200**, it will be appreciated that some or all of these components may be mounted in other places. As one example, some or all of these components could be mounted on the rack manager and the signals could be routed to and from the patch panels on the rack via a bus or other means. Such an implementation could further reduce the number of active components required (although perhaps with a corresponding increase in the size of the multiplexer/switching circuits).

[0105] **FIGS. 5A-5C** illustrate a modular jack **300** according to certain embodiments of the present invention. In particular, **FIG. 5A** is a perspective view of the jack **300**, **FIG. 5B** is a partial perspective view of a communications assembly **320** that is included in the jack **300** of **FIG. 5A**, and **FIG. 5C** is a simplified and enlarged perspective view of a portion of the communications assembly **320** of **FIG. 5B**. The modular jack **300** may be used, for

example, as the connector ports **34, 34'** that are included on patch panels **32, 32'** of **FIG. 2**, as the connector ports **111-114, 121-124** on the patch panels **110, 120** of the communications patching system **100** of **FIG. 3** (and also as the wall jacks **140**), and/or as the connector ports **220** on the patch panel **200** of **FIG. 4**.

[0106] Turning first to **FIG. 5A**, it can be seen that the jack **300** includes an electrically insulative or dielectric jack housing **312**, terminal housing **314** and cover **316**. The parts **312, 314** and **316** may be collectively referred to herein as the "connector housing." The jack housing **312** includes a plug aperture opening **313** that is sized and configured to receive a modular plug (not shown in the figures) that is inserted into the jack housing **312**. The jack housing **312** receives a front part of the communications assembly **320**, which is inserted into an opening in the rear of the jack housing **312**. The terminal housing **314** is fitted over and protects a first surface of the communications assembly **320**. Cover **316** fits beneath the communications assembly **320** and attaches to the terminal housing **314** to protect a second surface of the communications assembly **320** that is opposite the first surface.

[0107] As is further shown in **FIG. 5A**, the jack **300** also includes a pair of phantom mode contacts **366, 376**. Each of the phantom mode contacts **366, 376** may comprise a conductive wire. A termination end of each of these conductive wires may be mounted into the bottom surface of a printed circuit board **330** (see **FIGS. 5B** and **5C**) of the communications assembly **320**. The termination ends of the phantom mode contacts **366, 376** may each have, for example, an eye-of-the-needle configuration so that they may be press fit into respective metal-plated apertures in the printed circuit board **330**. Those skilled in the art will appreciate, however, that as an alternative to the method illustrated in **FIGS. 5A-5C**, the termination ends of the phantom mode contacts **366** may form spring contacts that are configured to contact respective pads, located on the bottom surface **334** of the printed circuit board **330**, which are connected by conductive traces to the posts **364** and **374**. In some embodiments, the termination ends of the phantom mode contacts **366, 376** may form the respective posts **364, 374** that are discussed below with respect to **FIGS. 5B** and **5C**. The conductive wires that form the respective phantom mode contacts **366, 376** make a 90-degree bend as they exit the printed circuit board **330** so that they run along the bottom of the printed circuit board **330** towards the front of the jack **300**. At the front of the jack **300**, each of the phantom mode contacts **366, 376** is bent downwardly to form a shallow "V" shape. The distal end of each of the phantom mode contacts **366, 376** rests against a front part of the jack housing **312**. As such, the V-shaped portion of each phantom mode contacts **366, 376** forms

a spring contact that is configured to contact a respective one of the contact pads **265** that are mounted on the reverse side of the patch panel printed circuit board **230**. Thus, the phantom mode contacts **366**, **376** provide electrical paths that may be used to transmit the two components of a phantom mode control signal between the patch panel printed circuit board **230** and the printed circuit board **330** of the jack **300** when the jack **300** is used to form the connector ports **220** of patch panel **200**.

[0108] Turning to **FIGS. 5B-5C**, it can be seen that the communications assembly **320** includes a printed circuit board **330**. The printed circuit board **330** may comprise any conventional or non-conventional printed circuit or wiring board. In the depicted embodiment, the printed circuit board **330** is a conventional printed circuit board that includes a multi-layered dielectric substrate that has a top surface **332**, a bottom surface **334**, a forward edge **336** and a rear edge (note that the printed circuit board **330** is inverted in **FIGS. 5B** and **5C** as compared to its orientation in **FIG. 5A**; for ease of description the discussion of **FIGS. 5A-5C** below will use words such as "top," "bottom," etc. to match the orientation shown in **FIGS. 5B** and **5C**). A plurality of spring contacts **341-348** are mounted in cantilevered fashion to extend from the top surface **332** of printed circuit board **330**. Each spring contact **341-348** may be mounted in a metal-plated hole in the top surface **332** of the printed circuit board **330**. Herein, the term "contact", when used as a noun, refers to an electrically conductive element that is designed to establish physical and electrical contact with an external electrically conductive element. The contacts **341-348** are referred to as "spring" contacts because the contacts **341-348** are configured to resiliently deflect from a resting position when contacted by a mating plug, then spring back to the resting position when the plug is removed. The free ends of the spring contacts **341-348** terminate near the forward edge **336** of printed circuit board **330**, and may be offset vertically from the top surface **332** of printed circuit board when the spring contacts **341-348** are in their normal resting position (i.e., in the position that they assume when not engaged by a mating plug). The spring contacts **341-348** may be formed, for example, of a copper alloy such as spring-tempered phosphor bronze, beryllium copper, or the like. A typical cross-section of each spring contact **341-348** may be, for example, 0.015 inch wide by 0.010 inch thick, although other sized and/or shaped (e.g., round) contacts may be used.

[0109] The communications assembly **320** also includes a plurality of wire connection terminals **368** (see **FIG. 5A**) that are likewise mounted into respective ones of additional plurality of metal-plated holes in the top surface **332** of printed circuit board **330**. The wire connection terminals **368** may be implemented, for example, as conventional

insulation displacement contact terminals (IDCs). The IDCs **368** may include a base having a "needle-eye" construction that allows the base to be press-fit into its respective metal-plated hole in the printed circuit board **330** or, alternatively, may be soldered in place. While the IDCs **368** are not depicted in **FIGS. 5B-5C** (and are barely visible in **FIG. 5A** as they are recessed within the terminal housing **314**) in order to simplify the drawings, the IDCs may, for example, be identical to the IDCs **242, 244, 246, 248** illustrated in U.S. Patent No. 7,204,722, the contents of which are incorporated herein by reference. The IDCs **368** may be positioned in two rows located along the side edges of the printed circuit board **330**, where each row extends from approximately the middle of the printed circuit board **330** to the rear edge of the board **330** (i.e., in the same configuration as the IDCs depicted in the above-mentioned U.S. Patent No. 7,204,722). As shown in **FIG. 5A**, the terminal housing **314** mounts over the IDCs **368** to protect the IDCs **368** and the top surface **332** of the printed circuit board **330**. The terminal housing **314** also includes slots that allow the conductors of a communications cable to be inserted into the respective IDCs **368**.

[0110] The cover **316** may protect the bottom surface **334** of at least part of the printed circuit board **330**. The cover **316** may be permanently joined to the terminal housing **314** (e.g., by ultrasonic welding) such that the communications assembly **320** is "sandwiched" or captured between the terminal housing **314** and the cover **316**.

[0111] As also shown in **FIG. 5A**, the jack housing **312** has a latch **315** protruding below its rear opening. The bottom forward edge of the cover **316** includes a raised protrusion that mates with the latch **315**. The terminal housing **314** likewise has a pair of side catches **322** protruding from the forward part of both sides of the housing **314** (only one side catch **322** is visible in **FIG. 5A**). The side catches **322** may comprise, for example, snap clips that have hooked projecting ends that are configured to snap into and lock within respective recesses provided in the side walls of the jack housing **312**. The terminal housing **314** may be joined to the cover **316** with the communications assembly **320** captured therebetween, and then the forward edge **336** of the communications assembly **320** may be inserted into the rear opening in the jack housing **312** until the side catches **322** of terminal housing **314** snap into place in their respective recesses in the jack housing **312** and until the latch **315** snaps over and onto the raised protrusion on the bottom of cover **316** to securely join the jack housing **312** to the remainder of the jack **300**.

[0112] The jack housing **312**, the terminal housing **314** and the cover **316** may be formed, for example, of a plastic material that meets applicable standards with respect to electrical insulation and flammability, such as Polyvinyl Chloride (PVC), Acrylonitrile

Butadiene Styrene (ABS), or polycarbonate. It will be appreciated that many other electrically insulative or dielectric materials may be used.

[0113] While the jack housing **312**, the terminal housing **314** and the cover **316** provide one example of a housing structure that may enclose the communications assembly **320**, it will be appreciated that a wide variety of different housing structures could be used, and/or that the communications assembly **320** may be constructed as part of the housing itself as opposed to as a separate piece or pieces. Thus, embodiments of the present invention need not be limited to any particular housing structure, and the above-provided detailed description of one particular housing structure is only provided so that the present disclosure will be thorough and complete.

[0114] The printed circuit board **330** further includes a plurality of additional elements. These elements may include a plurality of conductive traces or paths **349** (shown partially in **FIG. 5B**) that extend between and electrically connect the metal-plated holes that receive the spring contacts **341-348** to a respective one of the metal-plated holes that receive the IDCs **368**. Each conductive trace/path **349** provides a communications path that allows an information signal that is input on a respective one of the spring contacts **341-348** to be carried through the jack **300** and output onto a respective one of the IDCs **368**, and vice versa. The conductive trace/paths **349** may simply comprise a copper trace that resides on a single layer of the printed circuit board **330**, or alternatively may comprise, for example, a series of conductive vias and conductive trace segments that reside on multiple layers of the printed circuit board **330** that together electrically connect one of the metal-plated holes that receive the spring contacts **341-348** to a respective one of the metal-plated holes that receive the IDCs **368**. A plurality of crosstalk compensation circuits (e.g., element **333**) and alien crosstalk compensation circuits (e.g., element **335**) may also be provided on or within the printed circuit board **330**. For example, crosstalk compensation circuits such as those depicted in U.S. Patent No. 7,190,594 may be provided, and alien crosstalk compensation circuits such as those depicted in U.S. Patent No. 7,179,115 may be provided. The entire contents of the aforementioned U.S. Patent Nos. 7,190,594 and 7,179,115 are incorporated in their entireties herein by reference.

[0115] Turning again to **FIGS. 5B-5C**, it can be seen that a plurality of contact pads **351-358** are provided on the top surface **332** of the printed circuit board **330** (and/or within the printed circuit board **330**). Each of the contact pads **351-358** is arranged so as to mate with the distal end of a respective one of the spring contacts **341-348** when a modular plug is inserted into plug aperture **313** of the jack **300**. When the modular plug is inserted, the distal

ends of each of the spring contacts **341-348** are deflected downwardly so as to come into mechanical and electrical contact with a respective one of the contact pads **351-358**. In the particular embodiment depicted in **FIGS. 5A-5C**, the middle four contact pads **353-356** are used to electrically connect the middle four contact wires **343-346** to crosstalk compensation capacitors **333** (see **FIG. 5B**) that are embedded within the printed circuit board **330** near the front edge **336** thereof. The remaining four contact pads **351-352** and **357-358** are used to capacitively couple a phantom mode control signal either onto, or off of, pairs 2 and 4 of the connector **300** (as discussed with respect to **FIG. 1** above, pairs 2 and 4 are the outside pairs of contacts in the TIA/EIA 568 type B contact configuration), as will be discussed in further detail below. The contact pads **351-358** may be implemented as any conductive pad or other structure that makes reliable electrical contact with its respective one of the spring contacts **341-348** under appropriate conditions (e.g., when a plug is inserted into the jack). The contact pads **351-358** may comprise generally two-dimensional plated metal pads or may comprise three-dimensional structures such as, for example, conductive nails, blocks, columns or the like that extend above the top surface **332** of the printed circuit board **330**.

[0116] The distal ends of the spring contacts **341-348** are normally not in contact with their respective contact pads **351-358**. However, when a modular plug (not shown in the figures) is inserted into the plug aperture **313**, blades or other contacts of the plug physically contact respective ones of the spring contacts **341-348**. The spring contacts **341-348** are resiliently deflected by the plug blades downwardly toward the top surface **332** of the printed circuit board **330**, thereby bringing each spring contact **341-348** into mechanical and electrical contact with a respective one of the contact pads **351-358**.

[0117] When the spring contacts **341-348** mate with respective ones of the contact pads **351-358**, an electrical connection is established such that an electrical signal may pass from each spring contact **341-348** to its respective contact pad **351-358** (or vice versa). The contact pads **351-358** may be formed of a variety of conductive materials such as, for example, copper or copper alloys (with or without plating). In certain embodiments of the present invention, the contact pads **351-358** may comprise a gold or nickel plated copper alloy. In the particular embodiment depicted in **FIGS. 5A-5C**, the contact pads **351-358** comprise generally rectangular pads that are deposited on the top surface **332** of the printed circuit board **330**. While an insulative layer is typically deposited on top of the conductive traces **349** that are provided on the top surface **332** or bottom surface **334** of a printed circuit board **330** in order to, among other things, protect such traces **349** and/or to prevent inadvertent short circuits, it will be appreciated that such an insulative layer, if provided, is

not present at the location of each contact pad **351-358**. This allows each contact pad **351-358** to make an electrical connection with a respective one of the spring contacts **341-348** when a modular plug is inserted in the jack **300**.

[0118] As shown in **FIGS. 5B** and **5C**, first and second plates **360, 370** are embedded in interior layers of the printed circuit board **330**. The first plate **360** is positioned under the contact pads **351-352**, and the second plate **370** is positioned under the contact pads **357-358**. Plate **360** is electrically connected by a printed circuit board trace **362** to a conductive post **364**. This conductive post **364** is electrically connected to a phantom mode contact **366** (see **FIG. 5A**) which, as discussed above, mates with one of the contact pads **265** that are associated with the jack **300** on the patch panel printed circuit board **230**. Likewise, plate **370** is electrically connected by a printed circuit board trace **372** to a conductive post **374**. This conductive post **374** is electrically connected to a phantom mode contact **376** (see **FIG. 5A**) which, as discussed above, mates with the other one of the contact pads **265** that are associated with the jack **300** on the patch panel printed circuit board **230**. In some embodiments, the conductive posts **364, 374** may be replaced with, for example, respective metal-plated vias, and the phantom mode contacts **366, 376** may be mounted in the respective metal-plated vias to establish the electrical connections between the phantom mode contacts **366, 376** and the respective printed circuit board traces **362, 372**.

[0119] The plate **360** and the contact pads **351** and **352** reside on different layers of the printed circuit board **330**, and are thus separated by a dielectric substrate from each other. These components together form a first capacitor that may be used to capacitively couple a portion of a phantom mode control signal to and/or from one of the four differential pairs of conductive paths that run through jack **300**. In particular, the plate **360** forms a first capacitor electrode and the contact pads **351** and **352** form respective second and third electrodes of the capacitor that may be used to connect to two of the conductive paths through the jack **300**. The capacitor formed by plate **360** and contact pads **351-352** comprises a "three-terminal" capacitor as it capacitively couples energy between three distinct electrical paths. The plate **370** and the contact pads **357-358** form a second three-terminal capacitor that may be used to capacitively couple another portion of a phantom mode control signal to and/or from another one of the four differential pairs of conductive paths that run through jack **300**. The first capacitor formed by elements **360, 351, 352**, the second capacitor formed by elements **370, 357, 358** and the corresponding electrical connections (e.g., traces **362, 372** and posts **364, 374** and phantom mode contacts **366, 376**) together form a control signal input circuit that may be used to inject a control signal into the channel that passes through jack **300**. Note that

the above-described three-terminal capacitors may also be viewed as two separate standard capacitors (e.g., the first three-terminal capacitor described above may alternatively be viewed as a first capacitor that has electrodes **360** and **351** and a second capacitor that has electrodes **360** and **352**).

[0120] A phantom mode control signal that is carried into the jack **300** on pairs 2 and 4 of a patch cord that is plugged into jack **300** may be coupled from the channel that passes through the jack **300** as follows. For the purposes of this example, it will be assumed that the positive component of the phantom mode control signal is carried on pair 2 and the negative component of the phantom mode control signal is carried on pair 4. Note that since the phantom mode control signal may be an alternating current signal, in some cases the signal on each pair may oscillate between being a positive signal and a negative signal. Consequently, it will be appreciated that references herein to a "positive component" or a "negative component" of a phantom mode signal are used to refer to the components of the phantom mode signal at a given point in time in order to conveniently be able to distinguish between the two components of the differential phantom mode signal.

[0121] The positive component of the phantom mode control signal passes through the plug blades of pair 2 onto spring contacts **341-342**, and the negative component of the phantom mode control signal passes through the plug blades of pair 4 onto spring contacts **347-348**. The plug blades press the spring contacts **341-348** downwardly so that the distal end of each spring contact **341-348** makes firm mechanical and electrical contact with its respective mating contact pad **351-358**. Some of the signal energy of the positive component of the phantom mode control signal that is present on spring contacts **341-342** and mating contact pads **351-352** will capacitively couple from the contact pads **351-352** through the dielectric substrate of printed circuit board **330** to the plate **360**. Likewise, some of the signal energy of the negative component of the phantom mode signal that is present on spring contacts **347-348** and mating contact pads **357-358** will capacitively couple from the contact pads **357-358** through the dielectric substrate of printed circuit board **330** to the plate **370**. In this manner, a reduced magnitude version of the positive component of the phantom mode control signal (e.g., a magnitude that is reduced by 70 dB) is transferred to plate **360** and a reduced magnitude version of the negative component of the phantom mode control signal (e.g., a magnitude that is reduced by 70 dB) is transferred to plate **370**.

[0122] The positive and negative components of the reduced magnitude version of the phantom mode control signal are then coupled to the patch panel printed circuit board **230** via their respective printed circuit board traces **362, 372**, posts **364, 374**, phantom mode

contacts **366, 376** and contact pads **265**. From the contact pads **265**, the phantom mode control signal may be provided to the phantom mode receiver **270** via circuit traces on the patch panel printed circuit board **230** (not shown on **FIG. 4B**) and the multiplexer **290** (or other switching circuit). Thus, the contact pads **351-352, 357-358**, the plates **360, 370**, the printed circuit board traces **362, 372**, the posts **364, 374**, the phantom mode contacts **366, 376**, the contact pads **265**, and the multiplexer **290** (and associated traces on patch panel printed circuit board **230**) provide a communications path that allows a phantom mode control signal that is present on the channel associated with jack **300** to be received and demodulated (if necessary) by the phantom mode receiver **270** on the patch panel **200**. The same communications path from the multiplexer **290** to the spring contacts **341-342** and **347-348** may be used (in the reverse direction) to transfer phantom mode control signals that are generated by the phantom mode transmitter **260** onto the spring contacts **341-342** and **347-348** of pairs 2 and 4 of the jack **300**.

[0123] While **FIGS. 5A-5C** illustrate one exemplary jack that includes circuitry for capacitively coupling a phantom mode control signal to and/or from the contact wires **341-342** and **347-348** of pairs 2 and 4 of jack **300**, it will be appreciated that (1) any suitable connector port design may be used, (2) that numerous different control signal input circuits may be used to inductively and/or capacitively couple the phantom mode control signals to and from the channel at the connector port and/or (3) that numerous different capacitor designs may be employed which may result in different amounts of loss without departing from the scope of the present invention.

[0124] By way of example, in other embodiments, different control signal input circuits may be used that capacitively couple the phantom mode control signal directly to or from conductive traces on printed circuit board **330**, metal-plated apertures in printed circuit boards **330**, and/or onto the IDCs **368** and/or the spring contacts **341-348** that are mounted on printed circuit board **330** as opposed to (or in addition to) using the contact pads **351-352** and **357-358**. Thus, it will be appreciated that the contact pads **351-352** and **357-358** are not required, but merely provide one convenient way for capacitively coupling a phantom mode control signal to/from the phantom mode transmitter/receiver and the channel. It will likewise be appreciated that the plates **360, 370**, the printed circuit board traces **362, 372**, the posts **364, 374**, the phantom mode contacts **366, 376** and/or the contact pads **265** may be removed or replaced with other structures. Likewise, the coupling structures could couple to signal current carrying portions of the conductive paths through the jack **300** (as opposed to dead-end branches that are not on the direct path between spring contacts and their

corresponding IDCs) such that the phantom mode control signal may be both capacitively and inductively coupled to or from the jack. Thus, it will be appreciated that the present invention is not limited to any particular circuit structure that is used to, for example, capacitively couple the phantom mode signal to and/or from the jack **300**.

[0125] **FIGS. 6A-6B** illustrate communications assemblies (or portions thereof) of communications connectors according to further embodiments of the present invention that illustrate additional exemplary changes that may be made to the jack **300**.

[0126] Turning first to **FIG. 6A**, a partial view of a printed circuit board **330-1** of a communications assembly **320-1** is illustrated. The communications assembly **320-1** may be used in place of the communications assembly **320** of **FIGS. 5B-5C** in the jack of **FIG. 5A**.

[0127] As shown in **FIG. 6A**, the communications assembly **320-1** is very similar to the communications assembly **320** that is discussed above with respect to **FIG. 5B**. In particular, communications assembly **320-1** includes a plurality of spring contacts **341-348** which may be identical to the spring contacts **341-348** that are discussed above with respect to **FIG. 5B**.

[0128] The communications assembly **320-1** also includes a printed circuit board **330-1** that is similar to the printed circuit board **330** that is discussed above with reference to **FIG. 5B**. The printed circuit board **330-1** may include traces/paths, crosstalk compensation circuits and alien crosstalk compensation circuits, which are not shown to simplify the figure. The printed circuit board **330-1** may further include contact pads **351-358** and plates **360, 370** that are discussed above with reference to **FIG. 5B**. As these elements may be identical to their correspondingly numbered elements in **FIG. 5B**, further description of these elements will be omitted.

[0129] The printed circuit board **330-1** differs from the printed circuit board **330**, however, in that printed circuit board **330-1** further includes a third plate **361** and a fourth plate **371** that are embedded in an interior layer of the printed circuit board **330-1**. The third plate **361** is positioned under the contact pads **354-355** that electrically connect to the conductors of pair 1, and the fourth plate **371** is positioned under the contact pads **353** and **356** that electrically connect to the conductors of pair 3. As contact pads **353** and **356** are not adjacent to each other, plate **371** comprises two smaller plates **371a** and **371b** that are positioned underneath contact pads **353** and **356**, respectively, that are connected by a conductive connector **371c**. The callout in **FIG. 6A** is a plan view of the front portion of printed circuit board **330-1** that better illustrates the shapes and locations of plates **360, 361, 370, 371** in relationship to the contact pads **351-358**.

[0130] As is further shown in **FIG. 6A**, conductive posts **364** and **374** are provided on printed circuit board **330-1**, and may be similar or identical to the correspondingly numbered posts included in the printed circuit board **330** of **FIG. 5B**. Plate **360** is electrically connected by a printed circuit board trace **362** to the conductive post **364**, and plate **370** is electrically connected by a printed circuit board trace **372** to the conductive post **364** (which differs from printed circuit board **330**, where trace **372** connects plate **370** a second conductive post **374**). A second conductive post **374** is provided, and a third printed circuit board trace **363** is provided that electrically connects plate **361** to post **374** and a fourth printed circuit board trace **373** is provided that electrically connects plate **371** to post **374**. The conductive posts **364**, **374** may be electrically connected to respective phantom mode contacts **366**, **376** (see **FIG. 5A**) that mate with the respective contact pads **265** on patch panel printed circuit board **230** that are associated with the jack **300**.

[0131] The communications assembly **320-1** of **FIG. 6A** may operate as follows. A phantom mode control signal may be coupled into the communications assembly via the phantom mode contacts **366**, **376**. In particular, the positive component of the phantom mode control signal may be carried, for example, by phantom mode contact **366** and the negative component of the phantom mode control signal may be carried by phantom mode contact **376**. The positive component of the phantom mode control signal travels through conductive post **364** and conductive traces **362**, **372** to plates **360** and **370**, where it capacitively couples to contact pads **351-352** and **357-358**. So long as a plug is present in the plug aperture of jack **300** (thereby resiliently deflecting the spring contacts **341-348** into physical contact with their respective contact pads **351-358**), then the capacitively coupled component of the positive component of the phantom mode control signal will be transferred onto the spring contacts **341-342** and **347-348**, where it can travel along the conductors of pairs 2 and 4 of the patch cord inserted into jack **300** and along the conductors of pairs 2 and 4 of any cable that is terminated into the back end of jack **300**. Similarly, the negative component of the phantom mode control signal travels from the phantom mode contact **376**, through the contact post **374** and conductive traces **363**, **373** to plates **361** and **371**, where it capacitively couples to contact pads **353-356**. So long as a plug is present in the plug aperture of jack **300** (thereby resiliently deflecting the spring contacts **341-348** into physical contact with their respective contact pads **351-358**), then the capacitively coupled component of the negative component of the phantom mode control signal will be transferred onto the spring contacts **343-346** where it can travel along the conductors of pairs 1 and 3 of the patch cord inserted into jack **300** and along the conductors of pairs 1 and 3 of any cable that is terminated into the back

end of jack 300.

[0132] Thus, with the communications assembly 320-1 of FIG. 6A, a reduced magnitude version of the positive component of the phantom mode control signal is transferred onto each of the four conductors included in pairs 2 and 4 of the channel, and a reduced magnitude version of the negative component of the phantom mode control signal is transferred onto each of the four conductors included in pairs 1 and 3 of the channel. The same communications path may be used (in the reverse direction) to transfer a phantom mode control signal that is carried into jack 300 on a patch cord or cable to the phantom mode contacts 366, 376, which can carry the signal to a phantom mode receiver such as, for example, the phantom mode receiver 270 on the printed circuit board 230 of patch panel 200.

[0133] The printed circuit board 330-1 may be advantageous in some implementations because it can be used to approximately double the magnitude of the phantom mode control signal that is coupled to and from a particular channel. In particular, in many cases the small printed circuit boards that are commonly used in communications connectors such as, for example, Category 6 and Category 6A RJ-45 jacks, can become quite crowded or "real estate limited" due to the space required for the input terminals, the output terminals, crosstalk compensation circuits and the like. Additionally, care must be taken to appropriately locate the various terminals, traces, circuits and the like with respect to each other to avoid, for example, undesired capacitive and/or inductive couplings between different elements on the printed circuit board that may negatively impact the crosstalk performance, return loss performance or other performance characteristics of the connector. The above considerations may make it difficult to increase the size of the capacitors that are used to capacitively couple the phantom mode control signal to and from the connector.

[0134] Unfortunately, since capacitive coupling is used to inject and extract the phantom mode control signal from the channel, only a small portion of the phantom mode control signal is passed through the capacitor. For example, it is estimated that the capacitor formed by the plate 360 and the contact pads 351, 352 will have a total injection capacitance of approximately $2 \times 0.37 \text{ pF} = 0.74 \text{ pF}$. Such a capacitor value may be too low to ensure that the received phantom mode control signal reception will be distinguishable over other noise that may be added in the channel. Consequently, it may be desirable in certain embodiments to increase the capacitance of the capacitors that are used to inject/extract the phantom mode control signals from the connectors according to embodiments of the present invention or to otherwise increase the coupling (e.g., by increasing an inductive coupling element).

[0135] The capacitance of the printed circuit board capacitors that are used in the

illustrative embodiments provided above may be increased in a variety of ways. By way of example, the size of the plates **360**, **370** and the contact pads **351-352**, **357-358** could be increased and/or the capacitors could be implemented across multiple layers of the printed circuit board to provide increased capacitance. However, the aforementioned crowding problems on printed circuit boards may limit this option, as the larger capacitors may negatively impact various performance characteristics due to, for example, increased coupling between the larger capacitor electrodes and other elements on the connector printed circuit board. While there are potential ways of mitigating such performance degradation, including increasing the size of the printed circuit board or the number of layers included in the printed circuit board, these solutions have their own potential drawbacks in terms of larger connector footprints and/or increased connector cost. Likewise, higher dielectric constant printed circuits boards could be used, or special dielectric materials could be deposited on the printed circuit board between the electrodes of the capacitors used in the control signal input circuit. These options, however, also tend to increase the cost of the connector.

[0136] The printed circuit board **330-1** of **FIG. 6A** takes advantage of the fact that the phantom mode control signal may, if desired, be transmitted over all four differential pairs of conductors of jack **300** instead of over only two of the differential pairs. In particular, with the printed circuit board **330-1**, one component of the phantom mode control signal (e.g., the positive component) is coupled onto all four conductors of pairs 2 and 4 while the other component of the phantom mode control signal (e.g., the negative component) is coupled onto all four conductors of pairs 1 and 3. While two additional capacitors (or other coupling elements) are required to allow coupling one component of the phantom mode control signal onto (or off of) pairs 1 and 3, the contact pads **353-356** that are used to implement part of these capacitors may already be provided on the printed circuit board **330-1** in order to couple the spring contacts **343-346** to crosstalk compensation capacitors (capacitors **333** in **FIG. 5B**) that are located near the front of printed circuit boards **330** and **330-1**. Thus, the only extra components required to add these capacitors are the plates **361**, **371** – which are located in otherwise unused real estate on the printed circuit board, and the small traces **363**, **373**. The number of added components using this method may be further reduced, and the printed circuit board conductive trace artwork further simplified, by replacing plates **361** and **371** and the conductive traces **363** and **372** connecting them to the contact post **374** with a single plate that is positioned under, and spanning, the four contact pads **353-356** and a single trace (e.g., trace **373**) connecting this plate to the contact post **374**.

Thus, pursuant to embodiments of the present invention, the amount of signal energy coupled to and from the connector **300** on the phantom mode control channel may be approximately doubled by implementing the phantom mode control signal on all four differential pairs without requiring significant additional real estate on the printed circuit board.

[0137] As the phantom mode control signal is injected as a differential signal having a component (e.g., the positive component) that is injected as a common mode signal onto pairs 2 and 4, the differential information signals that are carried by pairs 2 and 4 will not be disturbed, as this common mode component is subtracted off of each differential pair during the subtraction processes that are used to recover the respective differential information signals. The component of the phantom mode control signal (e.g., the negative component) that is injected as a common mode signal onto pairs 1 and 3 will likewise not disturb the underlying differential information signals that are carried by pairs 1 and 3 as this common mode component is subtracted off of each differential pair during the subtraction processes that are used to recover the respective differential information signals.

[0138] As noted above, the capacitor formed by the contact pads **351, 352** and the plate **360** and the capacitor formed by the contact pads **357, 358** and the plate **370** that are provided on printed circuit board **330** of **FIG. 5B** are referred to herein as 3-terminal capacitors as these capacitors have a total of three electrodes (e.g., contact pads **351** and **352** and plate **360**). In contrast, the capacitor formed by the contact pads **351, 352, 357, 358** and the plates **360/370** and the capacitor formed by the contact pads **353, 354, 355, 356** and the plates **361/371** that are provided on printed circuit board **330-1** of **FIG. 6A** are referred to as "5-terminal capacitors" as these capacitors have a total of five electrodes (e.g., contact pads **351, 352, 357** and **358** and the electrically interconnected plates **360/370**). Alternatively, each 5-terminal capacitor may be viewed as four separate capacitors.

[0139] Tables I-III below compare the simulated performance of a prototype jack **300** that includes the communications assembly **320** versus another prototype jack that includes the communications assembly **320-1**. In particular, Table I illustrates the capacitance values of the 3-terminal and 5-terminal capacitors (labeled "Capacitor 1" and "Capacitor 2" in Table I) that are used to inject/extract the phantom mode control signal from the connector. As shown in Table I, use of the 5-terminal capacitors that are provided in communications assembly **320-1** approximately doubles the capacitance. Table II illustrates the near end crosstalk ("NEXT") margins relative to the ISO connector specification for each combination of differential pairs. Here, the performance of the two prototype jacks is

virtually indistinguishable for all pair combinations with the exception pairs 1 and 3, where the communications assembly **320-1** exhibits an improvement of over 1 dB in near end crosstalk performance. Finally, Table III illustrates the return loss performance for each pair of the communications assemblies **320** and **320-1**. As shown in Table III, the use of the 5-terminal capacitor designs degrades the return loss on pairs 1 and 3 by about 0.5-1.0 dB, with somewhat smaller reductions on the other two pairs. However, the return loss on all four pairs is still well within the specified margins.

TABLE I

<i>Connector</i>	<i>Capacitance of Phantom Mode Injection Circuit (pF)</i>	
	<i>Capacitor 1</i>	<i>Capacitor 2</i>
<i>Jack with Assembly 320</i>	0.72	0.77
<i>Jack with Assembly 320-1</i>	1.80	1.49

TABLE II

<i>Connector</i>	<i>NEXT Margins (dB) for Each Pair Combination</i>					
	<i>1&2</i>	<i>1&3</i>	<i>1&4</i>	<i>2&3</i>	<i>2&4</i>	<i>3&4</i>
<i>Jack with Assembly 320</i>	5.66	0.08	-0.65	-0.45	6.48	0.65
<i>Jack with Assembly 320-1</i>	5.66	1.25	-0.66	-0.45	6.46	0.64

TABLE III

<i>Connector</i>	<i>Return Loss Margins (dB)</i>			
	<i>Pair 1</i>	<i>Pair 2</i>	<i>Pair 3</i>	<i>Pair 4</i>
<i>Jack with Assembly 320</i>	2.98	6.55	2.67	4.37
<i>Jack with Assembly 320-1</i>	1.89	6.21	2.10	4.07

[0140] FIG. 6B is a schematic perspective view of a portion of a communications assembly **420** of an alternative jack that could be used to implement each connector port **220** on patch panel **200**. The communications assembly **420** differs from the communications assembly **320** in that it includes two printed circuit boards **430**, **432** instead of the single printed circuit board **330** provided in communications assembly **320**. In communications assembly **420**, the spring contacts **441-448** and IDCs (not shown) are mounted in printed circuit board **430**, and the conductive traces/paths **449** connecting the spring contacts **441-448** to the IDCs are likewise provided on printed circuit board **430**. The printed circuit board **432** includes contact pads **451-452**, **457-458** and plates **460**, **470** that may be identical to contact

pads **351-352**, **357-358** and plates **360**, **370** of communications assembly **320**. The communications assembly **420** further includes conductive connections (not shown) that connect the plates **460**, **470** to the contact pads **265** on patch panel printed circuit board **230**.

[0141] The jack **300** of **FIGS. 5A-5C** (or the alternative versions of the jack **300** discussed with respect to **FIGS. 6A-6B**) provide examples of jacks that could be used as the connector ports **220** of patch panel **200** in order to provide a communication system having the phantom mode control signaling capabilities according to embodiments of the present invention. It will likewise be appreciated, however, that the jacks of **FIGS. 5A-5C** and **FIGS. 6A-6B** may likewise be used in other environments such as, for example, in consolidation points, as connector ports on a network switch, as modular wall jacks, and/or as the connector ports of end devices. In each case, appropriate electrical connections would be made to any phantom mode control signaling circuitry in a similar fashion to the electrical connections that are shown above with respect to **FIGS. 5A-5C** in order to connect the control signal input circuit on jack **300** to the phantom mode control signaling circuitry on patch panel **200**.

[0142] The discussion with respect to **FIGS. 4A-4B**, **FIGS. 5A-5C** and **FIGS. 6A-6B** illustrates several exemplary ways of implementing a patch panel having phantom mode control signaling capabilities. A cross-connect communications patching system that uses, for example, the above-described patch panel **200** of **FIGS. 4A-4B** that is populated with the jacks **300** of **FIGS. 5A-5C** may automatically track patch cord connections between two or more such patch panels **200** in the manner described above with respect to patch panels **110**, **120** of **FIG. 3** (i.e., the patch panel **200** may be used to automatically track patch cord connections in a cross-connect patching system). Pursuant to further embodiments of the present invention, the phantom mode control signaling techniques disclosed herein may also be used to automatically track patching connections in inter-connect communications patching systems and/or to track patching connections between patch panels and network switches such as, for example, the patch panel **120** and switch **130** of **FIG. 3**.

[0143] In particular, **FIG. 7** is a schematic view of an inter-connect communications system **11** according to certain embodiments of the present invention that may be used to connect computers, printers, Internet telephones and other end devices that are located in work areas throughout a building to network equipment that is located, for example, in a computer room of the building. The exemplary inter-connect communications system **11** depicted in **FIG. 7** is quite similar to the exemplary cross-connect communications system **10** illustrated in **FIG. 2**, and hence like reference numerals will be used to identify like elements

in these figures, and the description below will focus on the differences between the systems **10**, **11** depicted in **FIGS. 2** and **7**, respectively.

[0144] Specifically, as shown in **FIG. 7**, the inter-connect communications system **11** omits the second equipment rack **30'** that is provided in the cross-connect communication system **10** of **FIG. 2**. Consequently, in the communications system **11** of **FIG. 7**, the connector ports **34** on the patch panels **32** on equipment rack **30** are directly connected to respective ones of the connector ports **44** on the network switches **42** by the first set of patch cords **50**. Connectivity changes are typically made in the communication system **11** by rearranging the patch cords **50** that interconnect the patch panels **32** and the network switches **42**.

[0145] Unfortunately, network switches are not available that include the phantom mode control signal circuitry discussed above that may be provided on the patch panels according to embodiments of the present invention. As such, pursuant to further embodiments of the present invention, "interposer" communications connectors are provided that may be used on network switches or other network equipment (and also on work area end devices, as will be discussed below) to facilitate automatically tracking patching connections and/or automatically identifying end devices according to certain embodiments of the present invention.

[0146] **FIGS. 8A-8D** illustrate one exemplary interposer **500** according to embodiments of the present invention. **FIG. 8A** is a schematic perspective view of the interposer **500** that includes six (6) connectors **510**, **FIG. 8B** is a top view of a communications assembly **520** of one of the connectors **510** of interposer **500**, and **FIG. 8C** is a side view of the communications assembly **520** of **FIG. 8B**. **FIG. 8D** is a schematic block diagram that illustrates a phantom mode control signal circuit that may be included within or on the interposer **500**.

[0147] Referring first to **FIG. 8A**, it can be seen that interposer **500** includes a plurality of connectors **510**. Each connector **510** comprises a combination plug-jack connector that includes a plug end **512** that is terminated with a communications plug (e.g., an RJ-45 plug) and a jack end **514** that is terminated with a communications jack (e.g., an RJ-45 jack). Each plug-jack connector **510** may comprise a communications assembly **520** (see **FIGS. 8B-8C**) and a protective dielectric housing **515**. The plug end **512** of each plug-jack connector **510** may be plugged into a connector port (e.g., an RJ-45 jack) on a network switch or other piece of network equipment. While the interposer **500** includes a total of six plug-jack connectors **510** that are linearly arranged, it will be appreciated that interposers may be

provided that have any number of plug-jack connectors **510**, and that the spacing and arrangement of the connectors **510** may be varied. Typically, the number, spacing and arrangement of the connectors **510** on interposer **500** will be designed to match the number, spacing and arrangement of the connector ports on the network equipment that the interposer **500** is to be used with. As will be explained in more detail below, the interposer **500** may include circuitry that facilitates sending and/or receiving phantom mode control signals, and thus the interposer **500** may facilitate tracking patching connections between network switches and patch panels such as the connections formed by patch cords **50** in the interconnect communications system **11** of **FIG. 7**. It will also be appreciated that interposers **500** may be used on work area end devices and or network end devices in addition to on network switches.

[0148] Turning now to **FIGS. 8B-8C**, it can be seen that the jack end portion **514** of each communications assembly **520** may be nearly identical to the communications assembly **320** of jack **300** of **FIGS. 5A-5C**. The primary difference between the communications assembly **320** of jack **300** and the communications assembly **520** of connector **510** is that assembly **520** does not include any IDCs. Instead, in communications assembly **520**, the conductive printed circuit board traces/paths **349** of printed circuit board **530** electrically connect the respective spring contacts **541-548** to a plurality of plug blades **570** that are provided on the plug end **512** of assembly **520**. Note that the spring contacts **541-548** are shown schematically in **FIG. 8B** (and hence the crossovers therein are not illustrated in **FIG. 8B**). Any appropriate design may be used for spring contacts **541-548**, specifically including the design of contacts **341-348** of jack **300** of **FIGS. 5A-5C**. It will also be appreciated that the connector **510** will typically include other appropriate circuitry such as crosstalk compensation circuits.

[0149] When the plug end **512** of connector **510** is inserted into a connector port on the network switch, the plug blades **570** and conductive printed circuit board traces **349** electrically connect the spring contacts of the connector port on the network switch to the spring contacts **541-548** of connector **510**. While not visible in **FIGS. 8A-8C**, connector **510** further includes the contact pads **351-352** and **357-358** and plates **360, 370** that are discussed above with respect to jack **300**, which operate in the same manner described above with respect to **FIGS. 5A-5C**.

[0150] Referring now to **FIG. 8D**, it can be seen that the interposer **500** may include circuitry similar to the circuitry included on patch panel printed circuit board **230**. In particular, the interposer **500** may also include a phantom mode transmitter **560**, a phantom

mode receiver **570**, a microprocessor **580** and a multiplexer **590**. While these components are not illustrated in **FIGS. 8A-8C** in order to simplify the drawings, it will be appreciated that they can be built in or added to the interposer **500** in a variety of ways. For example, in one embodiment, the connectors **510** of interposer **500** could be designed to share a single, common printed circuit board (in the embodiment depicted in **FIGS. 8A-8C** each connector **510** includes its own printed circuit board **530**), and the phantom mode transmitter **560**, phantom mode receiver **570**, microprocessor **580** and multiplexer **590** could be mounted on this common printed circuit board and connected by conductive traces/paths to plates similar to the plates **360, 370** shown in **FIGS. 5B-5C**. In such an embodiment, features similar to the printed circuit board traces **362, 372**, the conductive posts **364, 374** (or, alternatively, metal-plated vias) and the phantom mode contacts **366, 376** of **FIGS. 5A-5C** could potentially be omitted from the interposer **500**. In other embodiments, the phantom mode transmitter **560**, phantom mode receiver **570**, microprocessor **580** and multiplexer **590** could be mounted on a separate "phantom mode" printed circuit board that is connected, for example, to the top sides or the bottom sides of the connector housings **515**. In such an embodiment, additional circuitry will be necessary that electrically connects the phantom mode circuit board to the printed circuit boards **530** of the individual connectors **510** so that the phantom mode control signals may be passed between the individual connectors **510** and the phantom mode circuitry on the phantom mode circuit board.

[0151] In any event, regardless of the specific implementation, each connector **510** on interposer **500** may include a pair of conductive paths that electrically connect the respective plates **360, 370** (see **FIG. 5C**) to the multiplexer **590** (or other selective switching circuit). One such exemplary pair of conductive paths is illustrated in the schematic block diagram of **FIG. 8D**. It will thus be understood that the interposer **500** may be used to upgrade a network switch to have the capability to transmit and/or receive phantom mode control signals in the same fashion that the patch panel **200** described above can transmit and/or receive phantom mode control signals to automatically track patching connections. Given that a network switch that includes an interposer **500** may function in exactly the same manner as the patch panel **200** described above, further discussion of the operation of the interposer **500** will be omitted.

[0152] It will be appreciated that the phantom mode transmitters **260, 560**, the phantom mode receivers **270, 570**, the microprocessors **280, 580** and the multiplexers **290, 590** that are described above may all comprise active components that require a direct current operating voltage. Current intelligent patch panels (i.e., patch panels that have the ability to

automatically track patching connections) already typically include active components, and connections for providing power to such intelligent patch panels are already well known in the art and need not be described further herein. Power may be provided to the phantom mode transmitter **560**, the phantom mode receiver **570**, the microprocessor **580** and the multiplexer **590** of interposer **500** in a variety of ways. For example, in some embodiments a power cord may be used that connects the active circuits on interposer **500** to a power or operating voltage connection on the equipment rack on which the network switch that the interposer **500** is used with is mounted. In other embodiments, Power-over-Ethernet technology may be used to provide power to the active components of interposer **500**.

[0153] It should be noted that the interposer **500** preferably should be nearly invisible electrically so that the inclusion of the interposer **500** does not appear as another connection in the channel. This may be accomplished, for example, by designing different interposers **500** for use with different network switches, where the connector **510** is specifically tuned to provide a high degree of crosstalk cancellation and low return losses when used in the connector port on the switch at issue.

[0154] It will also be appreciated that the interposer **500** depicted in **FIGS. 8A-8D** simply illustrates one possible interposer design; and that numerous other interposers could be used in place of the interposer **500**. By way of example, **FIGS. 23A** and **23B** illustrate an interposer **1200** according to further embodiments of the present invention. In particular, **FIG. 23A** is a schematic block diagram of an interposer **1200**, while **FIG. 23B** is a schematic diagram illustrating the electrical connections for one of the patch cords (not shown) that is connected to a network device using the interposer **1200**. The interposer **1200** may be used to track patching connections between network switches and patch panels such as the connections formed by patch cords **50** in the interconnect communications system **11** of **FIG. 7**. It will also be appreciated that interposers **1200** may be used on work area end devices and or network end devices in addition to on network switches.

[0155] As shown in **FIGS. 23A** and **23B**, the interposer **1200** includes a printed circuit board **1210**. In the particular embodiment shown, the eight conductors (not shown) of each of six patch cords **1230** (i.e., a total of 48 conductors) are terminated into respective wire connection terminals such as insulation piercing contacts or IDCs that are mounted in the printed circuit board **1210**. While the wire connection terminals are not shown in **FIGS. 23A** and **23B** to simplify the diagrams, apertures **1212** in which the eight wire connection terminals for one of the six patch cords are illustrated in **FIG. 23B**. Each patch cord **1230** may comprise a standard patch cord. However, in the embodiment of **FIGS. 23A** and **23B**,

the patch cords **1230** would only have a plug connector on one side thereof, since the conductors of the patch cord are connected to the printed circuit board **1210** using wire connection terminals such as insulation piercing contacts or IDCs.

[0156] The interposer **1200** also include a plurality (here 6) of plug connectors **1220** that each include eight plug blades **1221**. Each plug connector **1220** acts as the plug connector for a respective one of the patch cords **1230**. While not shown in **FIG. 23A-23B**, each plug connector **1220** would include a conventional RJ-45 plug housing and would be configured to mate with a conventional RJ-45 connector port on, for example, a network switch. As shown in **FIG. 23B**, the aperture **1212** for each wire connection terminal for a particular patch cord **1230** is connected to a respective one of the plug blades **1221** for its corresponding plug connector **1220**, thereby providing the electrical connections between each patch cord **1230** and a connector port that the respective plug connector **1220** is plugged into.

[0157] The spacing between the plug connectors **1220** may be designed to match the spacings between connector ports on conventional network switches (note that more than one design would be necessary as different switch manufacturers have different connector port configurations). The printed circuit board **1210** may also be encased in a protective housing (not shown) that may hold the conductors of the patch cords **1230** in place once those conductors are attached to their respective wire connection terminals. While the interposer **1200** includes a total of six plug connectors **1220** that are linearly arranged, it will be appreciated that interposers **1200** may be provided that have any number of plug connectors **1220**, and that the spacing and arrangement of the plug connectors **1220** may be varied.

[0158] As is also shown in **FIG. 23A**, a phantom mode transmitter **1260**, a phantom mode receiver **1270**, a microprocessor **1280** and a multiplexer **1290** may be mounted on the printed circuit board **1210** and interconnected by conductive traces on the printed circuit board **1210**. The phantom mode transmitter **1260**, the phantom mode receiver **1270**, the microprocessor **1280** and the multiplexer **1290** may be identical to the phantom mode transmitter **560**, phantom mode receiver **570**, microprocessor **580** and multiplexer **590** of the interposer **500** of **FIGS. 8A-D**, and hence additional description of these components and the operation thereof will be omitted here. As shown in **FIG. 23A**, the multiplexer **1290** has a pair of outputs for each plug connector **1220** that are connected to respective ones of a pair of conductive plates **1213**, **1214** for each plug connector **1220** (the multiplexer outputs and conductive plates **1213**, **1214** are illustrated for only one of the six plug connectors **1220** in **FIG. 23A** to simplify the drawing).

[0159] FIG. 23B illustrates how the conductive plates 1213, 1214 may be used to couple a phantom mode control signal from phantom mode transmitter 1260 onto two of the differential pairs of one of the plug connectors 1220. As shown in FIG. 23, the conductive plates 1213 that receive the first component (e.g., the positive component) of a phantom mode control signal are electrically connected to each other by a trace 1215. Likewise, the conductive plates 1214 that receive the second component (e.g., the negative component) of the phantom mode control signal are electrically connected to each other by a trace 1216. Additionally, the conductive traces 1211 for a first of the differential pairs (i.e., the traces that connect each wire connection terminal of the pair to its respective plug blade) each have a widened area 1217 that is located directly above a respective one of the conductive plates 1213. The plates 1213 and the widened areas 1217 act like plate capacitors to couple the first component of a phantom mode control signal transmitted by phantom mode transmitter 1260 onto the first differential pair (and hence into the channel). The conductive traces 1211 for a second of the differential pairs each similarly have a widened area 1218 that is located directly above a respective one of the conductive plates 1214. The plates 1214 and the widened areas 1218 also act like plate capacitors that may be used to couple the second component of the phantom mode control signal transmitted by phantom mode transmitter 1260 onto the second differential pair (and hence into the channel). These structures likewise may be used to couple a phantom mode control signal from the channel to the phantom mode receiver 1270 through multiplexer 1290.

[0160] Thus, the interposer 1200 can be used to upgrade a network switch or an end device to have the capability to transmit and/or receive phantom mode control signals in the same fashion that the patch panel 200 described above can transmit and/or receive phantom mode control signals to automatically track patching connections. Given that a network switch that includes an interposer 1200 may function in exactly the same manner as the patch panel 200 described above, further discussion of the operation of the interposer 1200 will be omitted.

[0161] The interposer 1200 may have an advantage over the interposer 500 in that it can more easily be designed to be nearly invisible electrically so that the inclusion of the interposer 1200 does not appear as another connection in the channel (this may be more difficult with the interposer 500 of FIGS. 8A-D). However, the interposer 1200 requires an added installation/assembly step, as the six patch cords must be terminated into the wire connection terminals of the interposer 1200. An appropriate interposer design may be selected based on the considerations of any given communications system.

[0162] Pursuant to further embodiments of the present invention, circuits may be provided that can be used to detect the insertion and/or removal of patch cords at various connector ports in a communications channel. By automatically identifying such plug insertions and removals, the connection tracking systems according to embodiments of the present invention may operate as event-driven systems and may generate additional tracking information that may be used by, for example, network administrators.

[0163] FIG. 9 is a simplified perspective view of a communications assembly 620 of a jack 600 that includes a plug insertion/removal detection circuit 690. The jack 600 may be identical to the jack 300 discussed above with respect to FIGS. 5A-5C (or to the alternative embodiments thereof shown in FIGS. 6A-6B) except that the jack 600 additionally includes the plug insertion/removal detection circuit 690. In order to simplify the drawings, all of the internal electrical connections on the printed circuit board 630 of communications assembly 620 have been omitted in FIG. 9 except for the electrical connection to the plug insertion/removal detection circuit 690. It will also be appreciated that the plug insertion/removal detection circuit 690 may be implemented on any other conventional or non-conventional jack. In some embodiments, the jack 600 may be used, for example, as one of the connector ports 220 on patch panel 200, as a connector port that is used in a modular wall jack or consolidation point (e.g., wall jack 140 of FIG. 2), as one of the connectors 510 (suitably modified to have a plurality of plug blade output terminals as opposed to IDCs) of interposer 500, or as a connector port of an interposer that is installed on a work area or network end device. Typically, the jack 600 will have an associated phantom mode transmitter, phantom mode receiver and microprocessor (not shown in FIG. 9). By way of example, if the jack 600 is used as one of the connector ports on patch panel 200, the jack 600 may operate in conjunction with the phantom mode transmitter 260, phantom mode receiver 270 and microprocessor 280 that are mounted on patch panel printed circuit board 230.

[0164] As shown in FIG. 9, the communications assembly 620 includes a printed circuit board 630. The plug insertion/removal detection circuit 690 comprises an externally accessible contact 692 and a conductive trace 694 that may be implemented on printed circuit board 630. The conductive trace 694 is physically and electrically connected to a spur off of one of the conductive paths that connects spring contact 348 to its corresponding IDC. Consequently, any signal that is present on spring contact 348 will flow through conductive trace 694 to the externally accessible contact 692. The plug insertion/removal detection circuit 690 further includes a contacting structure 696 (which is schematically depicted and

only partially shown in **FIG. 9**) that electrically connects the externally accessible contact **692** to the microprocessor **280** via the multiplexer **290** (not shown in **FIG. 9**). In the depicted embodiment, the contact **692** is located near the front of the printed circuit board **630** so that the externally accessible contact **692** may be in close proximity to the patch panel printed circuit board **230** on which multiplexer **290** may be mounted. As further shown in **FIG. 9**, the communications assembly **620** may also include a second externally accessible contact **692'**, a second conductive trace **694'** and a second contacting structure **696'** that are identical to elements **692**, **694** and **696**, respectively, except that they are connected to one of the conductive paths of a different one of the differential pairs of conductive paths through the communications assembly **620**. These additional structures **692'**, **694'** and **696'** may be used to map horizontal cabling connections, as will be discussed in further detail later in this application

[0165] Operation of the plug insertion/removal detection circuit **690** will now be described with reference to **FIGS. 4A-4B, 5A-5C** and **9**.

[0166] When the phantom mode transmitter **260** transmits a phantom mode control signal to the jack **600**, that signal is input to the plates **360, 370** of jack **600** via the contact pads **265** on the patch panel printed circuit board **230**, the phantom mode contacts **366, 376**, the conductive posts **364, 374** and the circuit traces **362, 372**. If a plug is inserted within the plug aperture of jack **600**, then the spring contacts **341-348** will be deflected downwardly to come into contact with the contact pads **351-358** in the manner discussed above with reference to **FIGS. 5A-5C**. In such a case, the phantom mode control signal that is input from the phantom mode transmitter **260** to the plates **360, 370** is capacitively coupled to the pads **351-352** and **357-358**, where it is then coupled to the spring contacts **341-342** and **347-348**. This capacitively coupled phantom mode control signal, which may have a magnitude that is, for example, on the order of 70 dB less than the magnitude of the phantom mode control signal that is input to jack **600**, is then coupled onto the conductive traces/paths **349** (only one of which is shown in **FIG. 9**) associated with each of spring contacts **341-342** and **347-348**, and hence will travel to the externally accessible contact **692** and contacting structure **696** (since contact **692** and contacting structure **696** are electrically connected to the conductive path through the jack **600** that connects spring contact **348** to its respective IDC). As discussed above, the contacting structure **696** connects the externally accessible contact **692** to an input port on the microprocessor **280**. Thus, if a plug is received within the plug aperture of jack **600**, a phantom mode control signal that is generated by phantom mode transmitter **280** and injected into jack **600** via the plates **360, 370** will pass back out of the

jack via contacting structure **696** and is fed to the microprocessor **280**, where it can be detected.

[0167] If, on the other hand, a plug is not inserted within the plug aperture of jack **600**, then the spring contacts **341-348** will remain in their normal resting position where they do not come into contact with the contact pads **351-358** (which are shown best in **FIG. 5B**, and which are also present in **FIG. 9**, but hidden from view by the distal ends of the spring contacts **341-348**). As such, the phantom mode control signal that is input from phantom mode transmitter **260** to the plates **360, 370** is not capacitively coupled onto the spring contacts **341-342** and **347-348**, and hence no phantom mode control signal will travel to the microprocessor **280** via the externally accessible contact **692** and contacting structure **696** and other connecting structures.

[0168] In light of the above operating characteristics, the microprocessor **280** may use the signal provided via the contacting structure **696** to make a determination as to whether or not a plug is presently inserted in jack **600**. This determination may be performed in a variety of different ways. In some embodiments, the microprocessor **280** may perform an analog comparison of the relevant portion (e.g., positive or negative) of the phantom mode control signal that it provides to the jack **600** with any signal that is present on the contacting structure **696**. By way of example, if the phantom mode control signal that is injected into the phantom mode control channel of jack **600** comprises a 50 MHz FSK modulated signal, the presence of the positive or negative component of such a 50 MHz FSK modulated signal on the contacting structure **696** (reduced in magnitude due to the capacitive coupling) may indicate that a plug is currently inserted in the plug aperture of jack **600**, since such a signal should not be present if no plug is inserted because the injected phantom mode control signal will only be injected onto the spring contacts if a plug is present in the plug aperture and therefore forcing the spring contacts **341-348** into direct contact with the contact pads **351-358**.

[0169] In other embodiments, the signal present on contacting structure **696** may be provided to the phantom mode receiver **270** where it is demodulated. The demodulated baseband packetized digital data stream may be compared to the digital data stream that was sent by the phantom mode transmitter **260** to jack **600** or, alternatively, can be scanned for identification information embedded therein that indicates that the signal originated from the patch panel associated with jack **600**. In this manner, the microprocessor **280** may reliably identify plug insertions and removals from the plug aperture of jack **600**.

[0170] As should be clear from the above discussion, in some embodiments, the

communications jack **600** may include a plurality of spring contacts **341-348** that have plug contact regions that comprise input ports of the jack **600** and a plurality of wire connection contacts that include wire contact regions that comprise output ports of the jack **600**. A plurality of conductive paths **349** (e.g., printed circuit board traces and layer transferring structures) may connect respective ones of the spring contacts to respective ones of the wire connection contacts. These conductive paths **349** may be arranged as a plurality of differential pairs of conductive paths. A control signal input circuit such as a capacitor may be provided that is used to inject a common mode control signal onto a first of the differential pairs of conductive paths. A control signal output circuit is provided (e.g., an externally accessible contact **692** and/or contacting structure **696**) that is configured to output at least a portion of the injected common mode control signal. A plug insertion detection circuit is provided (e.g., the phantom mode receiver and associated processor) that is coupled to the control signal output circuit.

[0171] As should be clear from the above discussion, the plug insertion/removal detection circuit **690** may detect the presence or absence of a plug regardless of whether or not the far end of the patch cord that includes the plug in question is plugged into another connector port. This may be advantageous in that it may, for example, help network administrators identify improperly installed patch cords where one of the plugs on the patch cord was not fully inserted into the plug aperture on the connector port the plug was supposed to mate with. Moreover, the plug insertion/removal detection circuit **690** may be implemented quite cheaply. In the depicted embodiment, all that is required are a trace **694**, a contact pad **692** and a contacting structure **696**, each of which may be very inexpensive, along with software that analyzes the signal received on contacting structure **696** to determine if it corresponds to the transmitted phantom mode signal (or a component thereof).

[0172] Approaches that demodulate the signal present on contacting structure **696** and extract unique data therefrom may be preferred in embodiments where more than one phantom mode transmitter is provided along a channel, to avoid the possibility that the microprocessor **280** detects a phantom mode control signal on contacting structure **696** that was injected by a phantom mode transmitter other than the phantom mode transmitter associated with microprocessor **280** (i.e., the phantom mode transmitter **260**). In addition, noise and/or electromagnetic interference may be present that may distort the above-described direct analog comparison (particularly as the capacitively coupled phantom mode control signal may be reduced in magnitude on the order of 70 dB and hence more susceptible to noise). The impact of such noise may be reduced by demodulating the

received signal.

[0173] A method of detecting the insertion and/or removal of a plug from a communications connector according to embodiments of the present invention will now be described with reference to the flow chart diagram of **FIG. 18**. This method may be performed, for example, using the plug insertion/removal detection circuit **690** depicted in **FIG. 9**.

[0174] As shown in **FIG. 18**, operations may begin with a control signal being transmitted to a control signal input circuit of the communications connector (block **1000**). This control signal may then be electromagnetically coupled through the control signal input circuit (block **1005**). A determination may then be made as whether or not the electromagnetically coupled control signal is present on a first differential pair of conductive paths that are included in the communications connector (block **1010**). If they are not, operations may proceed back to block **1000**. If it is determined at block **1010** that the electromagnetically coupled control signal is present on the first differential pair of conductive paths, then a determination is made that a mating plug is present in the plug aperture (block **1015**). This determination may be based at least in part on detecting the electromagnetically coupled control signal on the first differential pair of conductive paths through the communications connector.

[0175] In some embodiments, the control signal may be a common mode control signal that is electromagnetically coupled onto both conductive paths of the first differential pair of conductive paths. In some embodiments, a second control signal may be electromagnetically coupled from a second control signal input circuit onto a second differential pair of conductive paths through the connector, and the control signal and the second control signal may together comprise a differential control signal such as, for example, a phantom mode control signal. In such embodiments, the control signal input circuit may be a first three-terminal capacitor that electromagnetically couples a first component of the phantom mode control circuit onto the first differential pair of conductive paths and a second three-terminal capacitor that electromagnetically couples the a second component of the phantom mode control circuit onto the second differential pair of conductive paths.

[0176] It will be appreciated that the plug insertion/removal detection circuit **690** depicted in **FIG. 9** is exemplary in nature, and that numerous possible modifications thereto are possible. For example, while the externally accessible contact **692** is implemented as a contact pad on the lower surface of the jack printed circuit board **630** in the depicted

embodiment, it will be appreciated that any conductive contact can be used such as, for example, a conductive post or a metal plated aperture that receives the contacting structure **696** (e.g., the contacting structure **696** may include an eye-of-the-needle termination that is mounted in such a metal-plated aperture in printed circuit board **630**). It will likewise be appreciated that the conductive trace **694** may have a different configuration or may be omitted (i.e., if the externally accessible contact **692** or contacting structure **696** is connected directly to the conductive path for spring contact **348**). It will likewise be understood that the plug insertion/removal detection circuit **690** may connect directly to a portion of the conductive path for spring contact **348** that is not on the printed circuit board **630** such as, for example, the spring contact **348** or its corresponding IDC. Moreover, while the plug insertion/removal detection circuit **690** is depicted as connecting to the conductive path for spring contact **348**, it will be appreciated that it can be implemented as any circuit that provides access to one or more of the conductive paths through jack **600** that are configured to carry a phantom mode control signal so that the path may be monitored to determine if a control signal is in fact present. While in the above example, a conductive trace **694** is used to connect the externally accessible contact **692** to the conductive path **349** that connects the appropriate spring contact to the corresponding IDC, it will be appreciated that a capacitor can be used instead. Such a capacitor can be implemented in a number of ways such as for example by depositing parallel plates on different layers of the printed wiring board.

[0177] As another example, the plug insertion/removal detection circuit **690** depicted in **FIG. 9** could be modified to provide a differential plug insertion/detection signal that is less immune to noise. For instance, a second externally accessible contact **692'** (not shown), a second conductive trace **694'** (not shown), and a second contacting structure **696'** (not shown), that may be substantially identical to contacts and traces **692**, **694**, **696**, except that contacts/traces **692'**, **694'**, **696'** are electrically connected to a spur off of one of the conductive paths that connects, for example, spring contact **341** to its corresponding IDC. In such an embodiment, the plug insertion/removal detection signal will comprise a differential signal in that it will include, for example, the positive component of the phantom mode control signal on externally accessible contact **692'** and the negative component of the phantom mode control signal on externally accessible contact **692**. This differential plug insertion/removal detection signal may then be fed to the microprocessor **280** via, for example, the multiplexer **290**. The use of a differential plug insertion/removal detection signal may be preferred in some embodiments because it may be less susceptible to corruption by noise.

[0178] It will also be appreciated that different signals may be transmitted over the phantom mode control channel for purposes of detecting plug insertions/removals versus phantom mode control signals that are transmitted to identify patching connectivity. Moreover, in some embodiments, each patch panel, interposer and other device on a channel that has a phantom mode transmitter may use a different frequency to transmit the phantom mode control signals that are used to detect plug insertions and removals by setting the phantom mode transmitter on each such device to transmit, for example, at slightly different frequencies. Such an approach may be advantageous because the phantom mode control signals that are transmitted on a channel may traverse the entire channel, and hence in some cases it may not otherwise be apparent which phantom mode transmitter is transmitting a plug insertion/removal detection signal. By having the phantom mode transmitters transmit at pre-defined frequencies, the frequency of the received signal may be used to identify the corresponding transmitter, which in turn may be used to determine which connector port along a channel a plug was inserted into. In other embodiments, other identification means may be used such as, for example, having each phantom mode transmitter include a unique identifier when sending a plug insertion/removal detection signal.

[0179] FIGS. 10A-10B are schematic diagrams that illustrate a jack 300-1 that includes a plug insertion/removal detection circuit 700-1 according to further embodiments of the present invention that may be used to detect when a plug is inserted into, or removed from, a connector port. The jack 300-1 may be identical to the jack 300 of FIGS. 5A-5C (or the modified versions of jack 300 explained above with reference to FIGS. 6A-6B) with the exception that the jack 300-1 further includes the plug insertion/removal detection circuit 700-1, and hence further description of the features of jack 300-1 will be omitted herein. FIG. 10C is a block diagram illustrating how the phantom mode control signalling circuitry may be used to send an excitation signal to the plug insertion/removal detection circuit 700-1.

[0180] Starting first with FIG. 10A, this schematic front view of the plug aperture of jack 300-1 illustrates the positions of the distal ends of spring contacts 341-348 when no plug is inserted in the plug aperture 313 of jack 300-1. As shown in FIG. 10A, structures such as conductive posts, plates or the like 302, 304 may be mounted on or embedded in the printed circuit board 330 on either side of the spring contacts 341-348 (or alternatively, mounted on sidewalls of the jack housing or in any other appropriate manner). These conductive structures 302, 304 may be viewed as two electrodes of a capacitor. The dielectric constant of the whatever is between the structures 302, 304 will necessarily change based on whether or not the spring contacts 341-348 have or have not been deflected downwardly to reside

between the structures **302, 304**. As shown in **FIG. 10A**, if no plug is received within the plug aperture **313** of jack **300-1**, then air is disposed between the structures **302, 304**, and hence the dielectric constant of the capacitor formed by structures **302, 304** and the air therebetween will be the dielectric constant of air (here secondary effects, such as the effect the top surface of printed circuit board **330** will have on the dielectric constant, are ignored to simplify the explanation).

[0181] **FIG. 10B** is a similar schematic front view of the plug aperture of the jack **300-1** that illustrates the positions of the distal ends of spring contacts **341-348** when a plug is present in the plug aperture **313** of jack **300-1**. As shown in **FIG. 10B**, when a plug is present, the distal end portions of the spring contacts **341-348** are forced downwardly toward the printed circuit board **330** so that they occupy the space between the conductive structures **302, 304**. When this occurs, the dielectric constant for the capacitor formed by structures **302, 304** changes, as the spring contacts **341-348** have a dielectric constant that differs from the dielectric constant of air.

[0182] Referring now to the block diagram of **FIG. 10C**, a control signal can be transmitted to structure **302** from, for example, the phantom mode transmitter **260** of patch panel **200**. The phantom mode transmitter **260** may be coupled to structure **302** via any appropriate electrical connection such as, for example, the multiplexer **290** (see **FIG. 4B**), the contacts **265** (see **FIG. 4B**), the phantom mode contact **366** (see **FIG. 5A**), the post **364** (see **FIG. 5B**) and a conductive trace (not shown in the figures) that connects the post **364** to structure **302**. Some portion of the signal from the phantom mode transmitter **260** that is received at structure **302** is capacitively coupled to structure **304**. The signal that is received on structure **304** may then be provided to, for example, the phantom mode receiver **270** and/or processor **280** of patch panel **200** via any appropriate electrical connection such as, for example, a conductive trace (not shown in the figures) that connects the structure **304** to the post **374** (see **FIG. 5B**) so that the signal may be passed to the phantom mode contact **376** (see **FIG. 5A**), to the contacts **265** (see **FIG. 4B**) to the multiplexer **290** (see **FIG. 4B**) and on to the phantom mode receiver **270**. As the magnitude of the received signal will vary based on whether or not the spring contacts **341-348** are in the position of **FIG. 10A** or in the position of **FIG. 10B** due to the above-described variation in the dielectric constant, the magnitude of the signal received on structure **304** that is passed on to the phantom mode receiver **270** may be used to determine whether or not a plug is inserted in the plug aperture **313** of jack **300-1**.

[0183] Note that it may be necessary to take steps to ensure that the magnitude of the

signal on structure **304** that is measured is the signal energy of the signal that was transmitted to structure **302** that capacitively couples to structure **304**. This may be accomplished in some embodiments by, for example, transmitting the signal to structure **302** at an out-of-band frequency (e.g., 800 MHz) and then filtering out other frequencies at the receiver in order to measure the magnitude of the signal that is capacitively coupled to structure **304**.

[0184] **FIGS. 11A-11B** are schematic diagrams that illustrate a jack **300-2** that includes another plug insertion/removal detection circuit **700-2** that is similar to the circuit **700-1** shown in **FIGS. 10A-10B**. In particular, **FIG. 11A** is a schematic front view of a jack **300-2** with no plug inserted therein, and **FIG. 11B** is a schematic front view of a jack **300-2** with a plug inserted in the plug aperture. The plug detection circuit **700-2** may be coupled to the phantom mode transmitter **270** and the phantom mode receiver **260** in the same manner, discussed above with reference to **FIG. 10C**, that plug detection circuit **700-1** is coupled to the phantom mode transmitter **270** and the phantom mode receiver **260**.

[0185] As shown in **FIGS. 11A-11B**, the plug insertion/removal detection circuit **700-2** comprises a first plate **302'** of a capacitor that is mounted at the top of the plug aperture and a second plate **304'** of the capacitor that is mounted at the bottom of the plug aperture. The plug insertion/removal detection circuit **700-2** may operate in essentially the same fashion as the plug insertion/removal detection circuit **700-1** of **FIGS. 10A-10B**. In particular, the dielectric constant of the plug insertion/removal detection circuit **700-2** changes based on whether or not a plug or air is present in the plug aperture. An out-of-band control signal is transmitted to plate **302'**, and some portion of that control signal is capacitively coupled to plate **304'**. The signal on plate **304'** may then be provided to a receiver where, for example, the magnitude of the received signal is determined. As the magnitude of the received signal will vary based on the dielectric constant of the material (i.e., either air or a plug) that is present in the plug aperture, the magnitude of the received signal may be used to determine whether or not a plug is inserted in the plug aperture **313** of jack **300-2**.

[0186] While **FIGS. 11A-11B** illustrate an embodiment in which the structures **302'**, **304'** are located at the top and bottom of the plug aperture, it will be appreciated that these structures may be located in different positions and/or sized differently in various alternative embodiments. By way of example, in one alternative embodiment the structures **302'**, **304'** may be located on the opposing left and right sides of the plug aperture **313**.

[0187] It should also be noted that the plug insertion/removal detection circuit **700-2** of **FIGS. 11A-11B** works on fiber optic connectors as well as on RJ-45 (and RJ-11) style

connectors. Thus, it will be appreciated that the "plug" referred to in the description above may comprise, for example, a fiber optic connector that is mounted on the end of a fiber optic patch cord. Additionally, in some embodiments, the plug may not actually be inserted directly between the structures 302', 304'. Instead, the structures 302', 304' may be positioned so that when the plug is inserted into the plug aperture the plug comes close to the structures 302', 304', but does not actually end up between the structures (or is only partially between the structures). As long as the plug comes relatively close to the structures 302', 304', it will cause "fringe" effects that change the capacitance between the structures 302', 304' in a manner that can be detected.

[0188] FIGS. 21A-21B are schematic diagrams that illustrate a jack 300-3 that includes yet another plug insertion/removal detection circuit 700-3 according to embodiments of the present invention. In particular, FIG. 21A is a schematic front view of the jack 300-3 with no plug inserted therein, and FIG. 21B is a top schematic view of two electrodes 1104, 1108 that form a capacitor when a plug is inserted within the plug aperture of jack 300-3. The plug detection circuit 700-3 may be coupled to the phantom mode transmitter 270 and the phantom mode receiver 260 in the same manner, discussed above with reference to FIG. 10C, that plug detection circuit 700-1 is coupled to the phantom mode transmitter 270 and the phantom mode receiver 260.

[0189] As shown in FIGS. 21A-21B, the plug insertion/removal detection circuit 700-3 comprises a hinged flap mechanism 1102 that includes a plate portion 1104 and a hinge 1106. The hinged flap mechanism 1102 may be spring loaded by a spring (not shown) that contacts the back surface of plate portion 1104. The hinge 1106 may comprise any suitable hinge structure including one piece hinges that are formed using a resilient and/or flexible material. The hinge 1106 may be used to move the plate portion 1104 between a resting position (which is the position illustrated in FIG. 21A) and an activated position in which the plate portion 1104 is rotated 90 degrees backwards into the plug aperture (such that the plate portion 1104 would no longer be visible in FIG. 21A). The reverse side of plate portion 1104 (i.e., the major surface of plate 1104 that is not visible in FIG. 21A) may be coated with a conductive material such as copper. The plug insertion/removal detection circuit 700-3 further comprises a conductive plate 1108. The conductive plate 1108 is positioned so that it is parallel to and slightly spaced apart from plate portion 1104 when plate portion 1104 is in its activated position. The plate portion 1104 and the conductive plate 1108 may form the electrodes of a capacitor. The plate portion 1104 and the conductive plate 1108 may be coupled to the phantom mode transmitter 270 and the phantom mode receiver

260 by any suitable electrical connections (not shown) so that a signal may be transmitted through the capacitor formed by plate portion **1104** and the conductive plate **1108**.

[0190] The plug insertion/removal detection circuit **700-3** may operate as follows. When no plug is present in the plug aperture of jack **300-3**, the plate portion **1104** of hinged flap mechanism **1102** will be biased by the spring (not shown) in its resting position. When an out-of-band control signal is transmitted from the phantom mode transmitter **270** to the phantom mode receiver **260** through the capacitor formed by plate portion **1104** and the conductive plate **1108** the received signal will be very weak (if even detectable), since the electrodes **1104**, **1108** of the capacitor will be positioned at a 90 degree angle with respect to each other, and hence very little signal energy will couple from electrode **1104** to electrode **1108**. In contrast, when a plug is inserted into the plug aperture, the front portion of the plug housing forces the plate portion **1104** to rotate backwardly 90 degrees into the plug aperture into its activated position. When this occurs, as shown in **FIG. 21B**, the plate portion **1104** is located parallel to, and directly below, the conductive plate **1108** so that plates **1104** and **1108** will operate like a conventional plate capacitor. When plate portion **1104** is in this activated position, the coupling between electrodes **1104** and **1108** will be significantly greater than the coupling that occurs between these two electrodes when plate portion **1104** is in its resting position. The phantom mode receiver **260** may sense this difference in received signal strength and interpret this difference as meaning that a plug has been inserted into the plug aperture of jack **300-3**.

[0191] **FIGS. 22A-22B** are schematic diagrams that illustrate a jack **300-4** that includes a plug insertion/removal detection circuit **700-4** according to still further embodiments of the present invention. The plug insertion/removal detection circuit **700-4** is quite similar to the plug insertion/removal detection circuit **700-3** discussed above. **FIG. 22A** is a schematic front view of the jack **300-4** with no plug inserted therein, and **FIG. 22B** is a top schematic view of two electrodes **1110**, **1112** that, in conjunction with plate portion **1104**, form a capacitor when a plug is inserted within the plug aperture of jack **300-4**. The plug detection circuit **700-4** may be coupled to the phantom mode transmitter **270** and the phantom mode receiver **260** in the same manner, discussed above with reference to **FIG. 10C**, that plug detection circuit **700-1** is coupled to the phantom mode transmitter **270** and the phantom mode receiver **260**.

[0192] As shown in **FIGS. 22A-22B**, the plug insertion/removal detection circuit **700-4** comprises a hinged flap mechanism **1102** that may be identical to the hinged flap mechanism **1102** discussed above with respect to **FIGS. 21A-21B**, and hence further

description thereof will be omitted. The plug insertion/removal detection circuit **700-4** further comprises a pair of conductive plates **1110**, **1112** that replace the conductive plate **1108** of plug insertion/detection circuit **700-3** of **FIGS. 21A-21B**. The conductive plates **1110**, **1112** are positioned adjacent to each other in the same plane, and serve as the two electrodes of a capacitor. The conductive plates **1110**, **1112** may be coupled to the phantom mode transmitter **270** and the phantom mode receiver **260** by any suitable electrical connections (not shown) so that a signal may be transmitted through the capacitor formed by plates **1110** and **1112**.

[0193] The plug insertion/removal detection circuit **700-4** may operate as follows. When no plug is present in the plug aperture of jack **300-4**, the plate portion **1104** of hinged flap mechanism **1102** will be biased by the spring (not shown) in its resting position. When an out-of-band control signal is transmitted from the phantom mode transmitter **270** to the phantom mode receiver **260** through the capacitor formed by the conductive plates **1110**, **1112**, the received signal will be very weak (if even detectable), since the electrodes **1110**, **1112** of the capacitor, while located adjacent to each other, are positioned end-to-end and hence will only exhibit fringe coupling. In contrast, when a plug is inserted into the plug aperture, the front portion of the plug housing forces the plate portion **1104** to rotate backwardly 90 degrees into the plug aperture into its activated position. When this occurs, as shown in **FIG. 22B**, the plate portion **1104** is located parallel to, and directly below, the adjacent conductive plates **1110**, **1112**. Consequently, significant capacitive coupling will occur between plate **1104** and plate **1110** and between plate **1104** and plate **1112**. Thus, an out-of-band control signal that is transmitted from the phantom mode transmitter **270** to the plate **1110** will capacitively couple to plate portion **1104**, and may then capacitively couple from plate portion **1104** to plate **1112** where it is carried to the phantom mode receiver **260**. Thus, when plate portion **1104** is in its activated position, the coupling between electrodes **1110** and **1112** will be significantly greater than the coupling that occurs between these two electrodes when plate portion **1104** is in its resting position. The phantom mode receiver **260** may sense this difference in received signal strength and interpret this difference as meaning that a plug has been inserted into the plug aperture of jack **300-4**.

[0194] While the plug insertion/removal detection circuits **700-3** and **700-4** are positioned in the top of the jacks **300-3** and **300-4**, it will be appreciated that in other embodiments, these circuits could be positioned elsewhere within the plug aperture. It will likewise be understood that components other than the phantom mode transmitter **270** and the phantom mode receiver **260** could be used to transmit the sensing signal through the various

plug insertion/removal detection circuits described above. Any other suitable capacitive sensing circuit could alternatively be used to sense the change in capacitance. Alternatively, It will also be appreciated that the plug insertion/removal detection circuits **700-3** and **700-4** illustrated with respect to **FIGS. 21A-22B** may be used with both copper patch cords and fiber optic patch cords. It will also be appreciated that the hinged flap mechanism **1102** that is included in these circuits may be mounted on the housing of the jack or, alternatively, may be mounted on another structure such as face plate for a wall jack or a printed circuit board for an intelligent patch panel.

[0195] Method of detecting the insertion and/or removal of a plug from a communications connector according to further embodiments of the present invention will now be described with reference to the flow chart diagrams of **FIGS. 19-20**.

[0196] As shown in **FIG. 19**, operations for one of these methods may begin with a control signal being received that was electromagnetically coupled through a reactive coupling element of the communications connector (block **1020**). This received control signal may then be analyzed (block **1025**). If this analysis determines that one or more criteria are met (block **1030**), then a determination may be made that a mating plug has been inserted into the plug aperture (block **1035**). The criteria may comprise, for example, a signal strength of the received control signal meeting a threshold or merely the detection of the presence of the received control signal.

[0197] In some embodiments, the reactive coupling element may be a capacitor that has a first electrode that is mounted adjacent a first side of the plug aperture (e.g., a side wall or a top surface) and a second electrode that is mounted adjacent a second side of the plug aperture (e.g. the other side wall or the bottom surface), where the second side is opposite the first side. In some embodiments, the connector may be an RJ-45 jack that has a plurality of spring contacts, and the first and second electrodes may be mounted such that the plurality of spring contacts are not positioned between the first and second electrodes when the plurality of spring contacts are in their respective resting positions, and portions of the plurality of spring contacts are positioned between the first and second electrodes when the mating plug is received within the plug aperture.

[0198] The flow chart of **FIG. 20** illustrates methods of detecting plug insertions into a plug aperture of a communications jack according to still further embodiments of the present invention. As shown in **FIG. 20**, operations may begin with the transmission of a plug insertion detection signal to a plug insertion detection circuit that includes a switch that selectively opens and closes the plug insertion detection circuit (block **1040**). Thereafter, a

determination is made as to whether or not the plug insertion detection signal has been received at a receiver (block **1045**). If it has not, operations return to block **1040**. If the plug insertion detection signal is received at the receiver at block **1045**, then it may be determined that the plug is present within the plug aperture (block **1050**).

[0199] In some embodiments of these methods, the plug insertion detection circuit may include a capacitor that capacitively couples the plug insertion detection signal onto at least a first conductor of a first differential pair of conductive paths through the communications jack. Moreover, the switch may be a spring contact and a mating contact pad, where the contact pad is positioned so that insertion of a mating plug within the plug aperture resiliently deflects the spring contact into physical and electrical contact with the contact pad.

[0200] It will be appreciated that in further embodiments of the present invention a variety of other plug insertion/removal detection circuits may be used other than the exemplary circuits **690**, **700-1** and **700-2** that are described above. By way of example, in other embodiments, plug insertions and/or removals may be detected using infrared emitters and detectors that are provided across each plug aperture or through the use of a combined infrared emitter/detector that detects the presence or absence of a reflected infrared signal, both of which techniques are disclosed, for example, in the above-referenced U.S. Patent Application Serial No. 12/787,486 and in U.S. Patent No. 6,424,710. Likewise, in still further embodiments, the plug insertion/removal detection circuit may be implemented using, for example, optical emitters and detectors, magnetic detectors, mechanical and/or electromechanical switches and the like that are triggered when plugs are inserted into, or removed from, the jack **600**. However, the exemplary circuits **690**, **700-1** and **700-2** that are described above may be advantageous in certain embodiments as the added cost per connector port may be very small when such circuits are added to devices that already include phantom mode control signalling circuitry (or other circuitry that may be used to transmit and receive a signal that capacitively couples through the plug aperture).

[0201] One potential advantage of including plug insertion/removal detection circuits on some or all of the connector ports of a channel is that it permits the intelligent tracking system to operate as an event-driven system. In particular, instead of performing periodic scans to determine all patching connections in a communications network, the system can monitor for plug insertions and/or removals and only send common mode and/or phantom mode control signals after the detection of such plug insertions and removals to update the connectivity information. In some embodiments, connectivity information could

be tracked and updated using both event driven signalling and periodic scans that may be performed on a less frequent basis.

[0202] A simplified, exemplary method by which an event driven scan may be performed will now be discussed with reference to **FIG. 12**, which is a schematic block diagram of two patch panels **200-1**, **200-2** that are part of a cross-connect communications patching system **720**.

[0203] As shown in **FIG. 12**, the patch panels **200-1**, **200-2** each include a plurality of connector ports **220** (only a single connector port **220-1**, **220-2** is shown on the respective patch panels **200-1**, **200-2** in **FIG. 12** to simplify the drawing). Additionally, each of the patch panels **200-1** further includes a phantom mode transmitter **260**, a processor **280** and a phantom mode receiver **270**. A patch cord **730** having plugs **731**, **732** on either end thereof is used to interconnect connector port **220-1** of the first patch panel **200-1** with connector port **220-2** of the second patch panel **200-2**. For purposes of this example, it will be assumed that the connector ports **220-1**, **200-2** are each implemented using the jack **600** described earlier herein.

[0204] When the plug **731** on patch cord **730** is inserted into connector port **220-1** (which, as noted above, is assumed to have the design of jack **600** of **FIG. 9**) of the first patch panel **200-1**, the plug will deflect the spring contacts **341-348** of connector port **220-1** downwardly, driving them into direct physical contact with the corresponding contact pads **351-358**. A phantom mode control signal is periodically transmitted from the phantom mode transmitter **260** to the connector port **220-1**. If a plug is present in the connector port **220-1**, this phantom mode signal is capacitively coupled via plates **360**, **370** onto contact pads **351-352** and **357-358**, from which it is coupled onto the signal carrying paths through connector port **220-1**. Thus, when plug **731** is inserted into connector port **220-1**, the relevant component of the phantom mode control signal from phantom mode transmitter **260** (i.e., the positive or negative component of the phantom mode control signal) will appear on contacting structure **696** which feeds this signal to the phantom mode receiver **270** and/or microprocessor **280** on patch panel **200-1**. A comparison or analysis is performed on this signal (see above discussion) and, based on that comparison/analysis, a determination is made that a plug has been inserted into the connector port **220-1**. The microprocessor **280** may then notify its associated rack manager **36** (see **FIG. 2**) that a patch cord has been plugged into connector port **220-1**.

[0205] Once the plug **731** is inserted into connector port **220-1**, the phantom mode control signal which is being periodically injected into connector port **220-1** by phantom

mode transmitter **260** will be injected onto the patch cord **730** via the plug **731**, and will travel down the conductors of pairs 2 and 4 of the patch cord **730**. Once the plug **732** on the far end of the patch cord is plugged into the connector port **220-2** on the second patch panel **200-2**, the injected phantom mode control signal will travel from the blades of the plug **732** onto the spring contacts **341-348** of the connector port **220-2** on the second patch panel **200-2**. This phantom mode control signal may be capacitively coupled onto the plates **360, 370** of the connector port **220-2**, and is then coupled to the phantom mode receiver **270** on the second patch panel **200-2**, where it is demodulated to provide a digital data stream. This data stream includes a unique identifier that identifies the first patch panel **200-1** and the connector port **220-1** thereof that plug **731** is plugged into. The microprocessor **280** on the second patch panel **200-2** already knows the unique identifier associated with the connector port **220-2** that plug **732** is plugged into, and hence it may then pass to its associated rack manager **36** (see **FIG. 2**) the unique identifiers of the two connector ports **220-1, 220-2** that are connected by the patch cord **730** for logging in a database or table of patch cord connections. In this fashion, the insertion of a plug into a connector port may automatically result in an update to the connectivity database.

[0206] The above example that is described with reference to **FIG. 12** illustrates how patching connections may be automatically tracked between two connector ports. It will be appreciated that the connector ports may be patch panel connector ports, network switch connector ports, modular wall jack connector ports (or other work area outlets) so that patch cord or horizontal cabling connections can likewise be automatically tracked between these additional devices.

[0207] Another capability that is enabled by providing plug insertion/removal detection circuits is the ability to detect and track plug insertions and/or removals in the work areas of a commercial office building and/or in data centers. By tracking such insertions and/or removals network administrators may be able to detect potential security breaches and/or resolve problems remotely. For example, if a plug on a patch cord that connects a user's computer to a modular wall jack becomes loose, the user may report computer problems to a network administrator. The network administrator may consult a log and see that the system detected a plug removal when the plug loosened from the connector port on the computer. By automatically gathering this information, the system may make it easier for network administrators to resolve various problems.

[0208] One issue with extending the phantom mode control signalling capability to the work areas is that the phantom mode transmitter, the phantom mode receiver and/or the

processor that is used to transmit and/or receive such signals generally require power to operate. Typically, such power will not be readily available at all modular wall jacks and other connector ports throughout the work areas. Accordingly, in some embodiments of the present invention, power-over Ethernet techniques may be used to provide a power signal to each work area connector port in order to provide power to the phantom mode control circuit elements included at the connector port. In other embodiments, the work area connector ports could be located in close proximity to standard 110-volt alternating current power outlets and power could be inductively coupled from the alternating current power lines that are connected to these power outlets. In still other embodiments, power could be wired directly to each work area connector port or, alternatively, batteries could be provided at each connector port that provide the necessary operating voltage. In still further embodiments, the phantom mode control signal could be sent continuously, and a rectifier could be included at the connector port that uses the received signal to charge a capacitor that powers the phantom mode control signalling circuitry. Thus, it will be appreciated that power could be provided to the work area connector ports in a variety of different ways.

[0209] As discussed above with respect to **FIGS. 8A-8D**, in addition to tracking cable and patch cord connections, embodiments of the present invention also may provide capabilities for tracking work area and/or network end devices. In particular, when an interposer **500** (see **FIGS. 8A-8D**) is mounted on an end device, in some embodiments, the microprocessor **580** that is included on the interposer **500** may be programmed with the MAC ID of the end device or other identifying information, and the microprocessor **580** may further be programmed to include this identifying information in the phantom mode control signals that are generated by the interposer **500** and transmitted onto the phantom mode control channel. As the manner in which an interposer **500** may send a phantom mode control signal to a system manager or other controller has been described above, a description of this process will be omitted here for the sake of brevity. The relevant point is that interposers **500** that are mounted on, for example, work area end devices may use the same process to provide information to the system manager, thereby allowing the system manager to track end-to-end connectivity information for each channel. As discussed below, this end-to-end information may be used for a variety of purposes such as enhanced network security.

[0210] **FIG. 13** is a flow chart illustrating a method of automatically identifying an end device that is connected to a communications network according to certain embodiments of the present invention. As shown in **FIG. 13**, operations may begin with an interposer being mounted within a connector port of an end device (block **740**). The interposer may

include a plug end that mounts within a connector port on the end device and a jack end that is configured to receive a patch cord. Next, a determination may be made as to whether or not a patch cord has been connected (i.e., plugged into) the interposer (block **745**). This may be accomplished, for example, using any of the above-described plug insertion/removal detection circuits. If at block **745** it is determined that a patch cord has not been connected to the interposer, then operations proceed back to block **745** where the system may continue to monitor for a plug insertion into the interposer. If instead at block **745** it is determined that a patch cord has been connected to the interposer, then operations may proceed to block **750**, where a phantom mode control signal may be transmitted from the interposer to a connector port on a patch panel of the communications network over a phantom mode control channel that runs from the interposer to the connector port on the patch panel. The phantom mode control signal may include identifying information for the end device. This identifying information may be accumulated in a central database that tracks the end devices that are connected to each channel in the communications network.

[0211] The above-discussed identifying information for end devices such as work area end devices that may be collected according to embodiments of the present invention may also be used to perform network security operations. By way of example, a system manager or other control processor could monitor some or all of the work area end devices that are connected to a network and make sure that those end devices only have access to appropriate network equipment, services, virtual local area networks and the like. However, one potential problem with using the interposers **500** for such network security applications is that users could remove an interposer **500** from a first work area end device (e.g., a corporate computer that is authorized access to the network) and then place the interposer **500** on another device (e.g., an employee's personal laptop computer that is not authorized access to the network). Thus, so long as such unauthorized use of the interposers **500** is readily possible, it may be difficult to use the interposers **500** to implement network security techniques. However, pursuant to further embodiments of the present invention, the plug portion of the interposers **500** may include a locking mechanism that a network administrator may use to lock the interposer **500** into a connector port on an end device. This locking mechanism may be designed such that it is difficult (or impossible) for someone without an unlocking key to remove the interposer **500** from an end device without damaging the interposer **500** and rendering it inoperable. In this fashion, unauthorized use of the interposers **500** may be made difficult, allowing the interposers **500** to be used to provide enhanced network security.

[0212] In some embodiments, the plug end of the interposer may be provided with a locking mechanism such as the locking mechanisms disclosed in U.S. Patent Application Publication No. 2010/0136809. In such embodiments, the microprocessor **580** could be embedded in the locking mechanism in such a way that anyone breaking the locking mechanism to remove the interposer **500** would also break the electrical connection between the microprocessor **580** and the remaining circuitry of the interposer **500**.

[0213] As noted above, using the interposers **500** to automatically discover the MAC IDs (or other identifying information) of end devices that connect to a network may allow for enhanced security procedures. In particular, in current communications systems, MAC ID filtering is sometimes used to prevent unauthorized access of end devices to the network. With MAC ID filtering, a connector port on a network switch may be configured to only allow MAC IDs within a certain range to have access to the switch connector port. If an end device having a MAC ID outside of the authorized range attempts to connect to the network via the switch connector port, the connector port automatically shuts down and a system administrator is notified. The system administrator may then determine whether or not the end device should be given access to the network, and may reprogram the connector port on the switch to accept the MAC ID of the end device if the end device should be allowed access. Network access control technology may also be used instead of MAC filtering to enforce corporate network security policies for access to a network.

[0214] As discussed above, pursuant to embodiments of the present invention, it may be possible to automatically identify the MAC ID of end devices that are connected to a network using phantom mode control signals and interposers **500**. In some embodiments, the network switches that are not in use could be set to a disabled state. When the system discovers that a new end device has been connected to the network, the system can determine the MAC ID of the end device and compare that MAC ID to a list of approved devices. If the MAC ID is included on the approved list, the system may then automatically enable the switch port, thereby providing the end device access to the network. In this manner, the network could automatically only provide access to approved devices, providing enhanced network security as compared to current MAC ID filtering or network access control techniques. In some embodiments, the connector port at the network switch will only be automatically enabled if the MAC ID of the end device is on an authorized list of MAC IDs. In other embodiments, the switch port may be automatically enabled for any end device having an interposer that provides phantom mode control channel signalling capabilities, regardless of the specific MAC ID of the end device. The ability to only enable a particular

connector port on a network switch upon detecting that an end device has been connected to the connector port (through cabling and intermediate jacks) may also result in power savings, particularly in the data center environment.

[0215] Moreover, since the system can track the MAC IDs or other identifying information associated with the end devices, this identifying information may be used to restrict the access of certain devices to particular resources within the network. The MAC IDs or other identifying information that are transmitted by end devices over the phantom mode control channel may also be used to identify a specific service that needs to be provided to a connected device. The system could automatically be reconfigured to assign the required service to the switch port to which the end device is connected. By way of example, an Internet telephone typically requires access to Voice Over Internet Protocol ("VOIP") service. Upon detecting by, for example, by a MAC ID, that an Internet telephone has been connected to a particular switch port, the system can cause a virtual local area network ("VLAN") to provision VOIP service to the identified switch port. Thus, by automatically tracking the MAC IDs of end devices, the system can be configured to automatically provision certain services to connector ports on network switches in response to end devices being connected to the network, thereby avoiding the need to manually perform such provisioning operations.

[0216] By way of example, the flow chart of **FIG. 14** illustrates a method of operating a network switch according to certain embodiments of the present invention. As shown in **FIG. 14**, operations may (optionally) begin with a plug insertion detection circuit being used to automatically detect that a first end device is connected to a first end of a first channel that runs through a first of the connector ports on the network switch (block **900**). A determination may then be made as to whether or not the first end device is within a set of authorized end devices (block **905**). In some embodiments, this determination may be made using a phantom mode control channel to determine a first identifier that is associated with the first end device and then determining if the first identifier is within a set of authorized identifiers (e.g., determining that a MAC ID of the first end device is within a set of authorized MAC IDs). In other embodiments, this determination may be made simply by the fact that the first end device includes a phantom mode control channel. If at block **905** it is determined that the first end device is not within a set of authorized end devices, operations may end. If at block **905** it instead is determined that the first end device is within the set of authorized end devices, then the first of the plurality of connector ports may be enabled (block **910**).

[0217] In some embodiments, once the connector port is enabled (or before enabling, in some embodiments), a service that is to be provided to the first end device may then be identified based at least in part on the first identifier (block 915). The network may then be automatically reconfigured to provision the identified service to the first channel (block 920).

[0218] As discussed above, pursuant to embodiments of the present invention, various methods of identifying connectivity in a communications network are provided. The flow chart of **FIG. 15** illustrates one such exemplary method. As shown in **FIG. 15**, operations may begin with a phantom mode control signal being transmitted from a connector port on a network switch to a connector port on a patch panel via a patch cord that extends therebetween (block 930). The phantom mode control signal includes a unique identifier that is associated with the connector port on the network switch, and may be transmitted over at least two differential pairs of conductors of the patch cord. Next a first component of the phantom mode control signal is coupled to a phantom mode control signal receiver via a first capacitor included in the connector port of the patch panel (block 935). A second component of the phantom mode control signal is likewise coupled to the phantom mode control signal receiver via a second capacitor that is included in the connector port of the patch panel (block 940). The unique identifier associated with the connector port on the network switch may then be extracted from the phantom mode control signal at the patch panel (block 945). Finally, the connection between the connector port on the network switch and the connector port on the patch panel may be logged in a connectivity database (block 950).

[0219] According to still further embodiments of the present invention, the phantom mode control signalling techniques and equipment disclosed herein may be used to map the horizontal cabling for a communications network. If the work area outlets include phantom mode control signalling capability, then such capabilities may be used to automatically map the horizontal cabling topology at the time the cabling is installed.

[0220] For example, referring back to **FIG. 3**, a communications system 100 is depicted that connects a network switch 130 to a plurality of wall jacks 140. As shown in **FIG. 3** with respect to one exemplary wall jack 140, each wall jack 140 may include a phantom mode transmitter, a processor and/or a phantom mode receiver. These capabilities may be used to automatically map the connections of the horizontal cables 144 that connect the modular wall jacks 140 to the connector ports 111-114 on the first patch panel 110 to confirm that each horizontal cable 144 has been connected to the intended ones of the connector ports 111-114. To accomplish this, the microprocessor 116 on patch panel 110 may instruct each microprocessor 144 on the modular wall jacks 140 to send a phantom mode

control signal with the identifying information for the wall jack **140** (e.g., office and outlet number). When each wall jack **140** receives its respective control signal, it responds by sending a responsive control signal back over the phantom mode control channel that includes the identifying information for the wall jack **140**. This information may then be compared to a desired topology to determine if the horizontal cabling was correctly installed. In some embodiments, it may be necessary to have patch cords plugged into each connector port **111-114** on the patch panel **110** in order to map the horizontal cabling since the plugs of the patch cords push the contact wires of the connector ports **111-114** into mechanical and electrical contact with corresponding contact pads that are used to couple the phantom mode control signal onto the channel.

[0221] According to still further embodiments of the present invention, the phantom mode control signalling techniques and equipment disclosed herein may be used to map a communications cabling network before patch cords are plugged in at either end of the network. In particular, after the horizontal cabling for a communications network has been installed, it may be desirable to automatically map the topology of the horizontal cabling. In many situations, it may be desirable to perform this mapping before end devices or network switches have been connected to the network.

[0222] In particular, as discussed above with respect to **FIG. 9**, jacks according to certain embodiments of the present invention may include a plug insertion/removal detection circuit **690** that includes an externally accessible contacting structure **696** that is electrically connected to one of the conductive paths of a first of the differential pairs of conductive paths through the jack. As is also mentioned above, these jacks may further include a second externally accessible contact **692'**, a second conductive trace **694'** and a second contacting structure **696'** that are electrically connected to one of the conductive paths of a second of the differential pairs of conductive paths through the jack. These structures may provide a pair of electrical paths that may be used to transmit a differential (non-phantom mode) control signal from, for example, a patch panel connector port to a wall jack. This differential control signal may be used to discover the connection between the patch panel connector port and the wall jack even if no patch cords have yet been connected to the patch panel. It will be appreciated that one or both the conductive trace **694** and/or the conductive trace **694'** may be replaced with a respective capacitive connection in further embodiments.

[0223] A transmitter on the patch panel (or alternatively, a transmitter on a handheld device, a rack manager, etc.) may be electrically connected to the externally accessible contacts **696, 696'** so that the differential control signal may be injected onto two of the

conductive paths of the horizontal cable extending between the patch panel connector port and the wall jack. In some embodiments, the same transmitter may be used that is used to generate the phantom mode control signals (e.g., transmitter **115** of **FIG. 3**), although it may be necessary to suitably multiplex the different signals generated by the transmitter to deliver these signals to the appropriate contact structures. The externally accessible contacts **696**, **696'** that are similarly provided on each modular wall jack may be used to couple the differential control signal off of the channel and to pass that signal to a receiver of the wall jack. In response to receiving the differential control signal, the processor at the wall jack may cause a transmitter at the wall jack to generate a responsive differential control signal that may be similarly injected onto the horizontal cable using the contact structures **696**, **696'** of the wall jack. This responsive differential control signal may be extracted from the horizontal cable at the patch panel connector port using the contact structures **696**, **696'** thereof, where it may be passed, for example, via a multiplexer to a receiver mounted on the patch panel. The responsive differential control signal may include identifying information for the modular wall jack which may be used to ascertain which wall jack the patch panel connector port has been connected to. Thus, it will be appreciated that the externally accessible contacts **696**, **696'** that may be provided on the patch panel connector ports and modular wall jacks according to certain embodiments of the present invention may be used to map the horizontal cabling connections even before any patch cords are connected in the communication system.

[0224] It should be noted that any differential control signal that is injected onto a channel using the contacting structures **696**, **696'** may interfere with any underlying traffic signals that are being carried on the various differential pairs of the channel. Accordingly, in some embodiments, a plug insertion/detection circuit may be used to confirm that no plug is plugged into the patch panel connector port and/or the modular wall jack before the differential control signal is injected into the channel.

[0225] Pursuant to still further embodiments of the present invention, the phantom mode control signalling capabilities that are disclosed herein may be used to carry control signals that are unrelated to the communications network. These capabilities are described with respect to **FIGS. 16** and **17**. In particular, **FIG. 16** is a schematic diagram illustrating the different low voltage wiring that may be provided to a typical office in a commercial building to support various building infrastructure systems. **FIG. 17** illustrates how the phantom mode control signals according to embodiments of the present invention may be used to reduce the amount of wiring that is necessary.

[0226] Turning first to **FIG. 16**, it can be seen that as many as five different types of cables may run to a given office in a commercial office building. These cables include (1) Ethernet communications cables, such as the cables discussed above in the present disclosure, (2) paging cables for a paging system, (3) security cables that carry signals for a security system (e.g., cameras), (4) lighting control cables that carry control signals for intelligent lighting systems, and (5) control cables for heating and air conditioning controls ("HVAC cables") such as the wires that run to thermostats. Low-voltage cables may also be provided for other and/or additional building infrastructure systems. Typically the paging cables, the security cables, the lighting control cables and the HVAC cables are implemented using thin copper wires that are similar to speaker wires. The need to run such a large number of cables – often over long distances – into many if not most offices in a commercial building can greatly increase both the material costs and construction costs of the building. **FIG. 16** schematically illustrates how a long "horizontal" run may be required for each different type of cabling to wire the cable into each office (the cables that extend to a single office are shown in **FIG. 16** in order to simplify the drawing).

[0227] Pursuant to further embodiments of the present invention, the phantom mode control channels that are present on the Ethernet cables in the communications systems disclosed herein may be used to reduce the amount of low voltage cabling required. In particular, as illustrated schematically in **FIG. 17**, the control systems for the paging system, the security system, the lighting system (e.g., a control system that automatically turns lights on and off based on certain criteria such as time of day, the sensed presence of certain individuals within a building, etc.) and the HVAC system may be located in or near the computer room for the building. A decoder/extractor unit **960** (which may also be referred to herein as a "distributor" unit) is located in the computer room, and a first set of short cables may connect each of the lighting control system, the HVAC control system, the paging system, the security system to the decoder/extractor unit **960**. A short Ethernet communications cable may also run to the decoder/extractor unit **960**. Consolidator/encoder units **965** (only one is shown in **FIG. 17**) may be added in selected locations in the work areas throughout the building. A longer Ethernet communications cable may run from the decoder/extractor unit **960** to a consolidator/encoder unit **965** that may be located, for example, in or adjacent to one of the offices in the building. A second set of short cables may run from the consolidator/encoder unit **965** into the office to provide the control signals to the various systems.

[0228] In operation, the control signals that are to be sent to remote units of the

paging system, the security system, the lighting system and the HVAC system that are located in a particular office are generated by the appropriate systems in the computer room and then are provided to the decoder/extractor **960** which multiplexes these signals onto the phantom mode control channel of an Ethernet communications cable that is likewise being sent to the office at issue. The decoder/extractor unit **960** may include a connector port that receives a short Ethernet cable from, for example, one of the connector ports on a patch panel. This connector port at the decoder/extractor unit **960** may include a control signal input circuit such as the circuit provided on jack **300** discussed above, and the decoder/extractor unit **960** may further include phantom mode control signalling circuitry that may be used to inject a phantom mode control signal into the Ethernet channel (in other embodiments, a common mode signal may be used that is transmitted over one or more of the differential pairs of the Ethernet cable). The decoder/extractor unit **960** may receive control signals from the various systems (e.g., paging, security, etc.), process these (if necessary) into an appropriate format, and then multiplex these systems onto the phantom mode control channel in order to transmit the signals to the consolidator/encoder unit **965**. Any appropriate multiplexing scheme such as, for example, time division multiplexing may be used to multiplex multiple control signals onto each phantom mode control channel.

[0229] The consolidator/encoder units **965** in the individual offices may have phantom mode control circuitry that may be used to extract the phantom mode control signal from the phantom mode control channel and then demultiplex the phantom mode control signal to extract the individual control signals for the security system, the paging system, the lighting system and/or the HVAC system. The system may also be designed to allow for two way communications over the phantom mode control channel. Thus, it will be appreciated that in some embodiments the decoder/extractor unit **960** and the consolidator/encoder unit **965** may be identical units that consolidate a plurality of control signals and transmit them over a phantom mode control channel and may also extract a plurality of control signals from a phantom mode control channel and route each signal to its appropriate location.

[0230] Thus, pursuant to embodiments of the present invention, the phantom mode control channels may be used to reduce the amount of non-Ethernet cabling required in commercial office buildings. While short cabling runs may be required to connect the security system, the paging system, the lighting control system and the HVAC system to the decoder/extractor unit **960** and to run from the consolidator/encoder unit **965** into each individual office, the long horizontal cabling runs for these different control systems, an exemplary one of which is illustrated in **FIG. 16**, may be eliminated through the use of the

phantom mode control channel on the Ethernet communications cable.

[0231] In some embodiments, the consolidator/encoder unit **965** may be implemented as part of the modular wall jacks that are provided in offices and other rooms of most commercial office buildings. The consolidator/encoder unit **965** may include the above-described phantom mode control signalling circuitry that is used to receive a phantom mode control signal such as a phantom mode transceiver and a phantom mode processor, and may also include a phantom mode processor for transmitting control information back to a central location (such control information may include both cabling or connectivity information or control signals for the security, paging, lighting or HVAC systems such as, for example, a control signal indicating that a user has changed a setting on a thermostat). The receiver and/or processor on the consolidator/encoder units **965** may be configured to perform the multiplexing and demultiplexing of the control signals, and may feed the appropriate control signals to the short cables that extend between the consolidator/encoder unit **965** and each of the systems in the office.

[0232] As made clear from the above discussion, pursuant to embodiments of the present invention, methods of distributing signals from a master unit of a building infrastructure system to a remote unit of the building infrastructure system are provided in which a signal from the master unit is multiplexed onto a phantom mode communications path of an Ethernet cable. In some embodiments, the signal may be one of a plurality of control and/or data signals for one or more building infrastructure systems (other than computer systems) such as, for example, a lighting control system, an HVAC control system, a security system, a fire detection system, a wireless network system, a paging system, etc., that are, for example, time division multiplexed or frequency division multiplex onto the Ethernet cable. The multiplexed signal may thereafter be extracted from the Ethernet cable. The extracted signal may then be distributed to the remote unit. In some embodiments, the remote unit may be powered with power provided over the Ethernet cable.

[0233] By using Ethernet cabling to replace, for example, long horizontal cabling runs for other building infrastructure systems, the installation material and expense for wiring a new building and/or rewiring an existing building can be significantly reduced. Many building infrastructure systems use low data rate control and/or data signals and thus, in many instances, it may be possible to multiplex the signalling for multiple such systems onto a common mode control channel or a phantom mode control channel that is provided on existing Ethernet cabling. Moreover, power can be provided to these systems in at least some instances using power supplied from the switch using conventional Power-over-Ethernet

techniques. The above-described integration of Ethernet systems and other building infrastructure systems also allows integrating intelligent building software (e.g., software that automatically controls lighting systems, HVAC systems etc. to reduce energy usage or the like) into network management software to provide a more efficient overall solution. With such integrated systems, the plug insertions and/or removals that may be detected using, for example, the plug insertion/removal circuits according to embodiments of the invention could be provided to the control software for the various building infrastructure systems, thereby providing a single, integrated notification system.

[0234] While the communications patching systems and the components thereof have primarily been described above with respect to a few exemplary embodiments, it will be appreciated that numerous modifications are also within the scope of the present invention. For example, while the illustrated connector ports inject and remove the phantom mode control signals from a main printed circuit board of the communications connector, it will be appreciated that in other embodiments the phantom mode control signal may be injected into (and/or extracted from) the connector at other locations including, for example, from an auxiliary printed circuit board, an external printed circuit board that includes intelligent patching circuitry (e.g., a phantom mode transmitter or receiver), or in the input contacts (e.g., spring contacts) or output contacts (e.g., IDCs) of the connector.

[0235] As another example, various of the embodiments that are discussed above couple the phantom mode control signal onto pairs 2 and 4 (see **FIGS. 5A-C**) or all four pairs (see **FIG. 6B**). However, it will be appreciated that the phantom mode control signal could be coupled onto other pair combinations in other embodiments, specifically including (1) pairs 1 and 3, (2) pairs 1 and 2, (3) pairs 1 and 4 and (4) pairs 3 and 4. In such embodiments Pairs 2 and 4 may be preferred pairs in many connector designs as these pairs may have fewer crosstalk and return loss issues (e.g., increased margins) and hence using these pairs to carry the phantom mode control signal may be advantageous in some connector designs. Combinations involving transmitting the phantom control signal onto four pairs by coupling its positive component onto two of the pairs and its negative onto the other two of the pairs are also possible, as are unbalanced pair combinations that use, for example, three of the differential pairs (e.g., coupling the positive component of the phantom mode control signal onto pairs 2 and 4 and the negative component onto pair 1 or pair 3).

[0236] In various of the embodiments discussed above either 3-terminal or 5-terminal plate capacitors are used to inject/extract the phantom mode control signal to and from the connector. It will be appreciated, however, that numerous other capacitive elements

could be used. For example, in further embodiments, a vertically-oriented plate or plates (where the major plane of the printed circuit board defines a horizontal plane) could be mounted adjacent to the metal plated vias that hold the wire connection terminals for a differential pair to provide, for example, a 3-terminal capacitor. In other embodiments, inter-digitated finger capacitors could be used instead of plate capacitors.

[0237] It will likewise be appreciated that any appropriate connection contacts such as phantom mode contacts 366, 376 may be used to carry the phantom mode control signal from the printed circuit board of a communications jack to another printed circuit board or other mounting structure that includes the phantom mode control signal transmitter and/or receiver and/or an intervening multiplexer, switching circuit or the like. In fact, the connection contacts 366, 376 may be implemented as any conductive contact that electrically connects the phantom mode transmitter and/or receiver to the capacitors that are used to inject/extract the phantom mode control signal to and from the connector. In some embodiments, the connection contact may include a first end that has, for example, an eye-of-the-needle termination or other suitable termination that can be press-fit into a metal-plated aperture on the connector printed circuit board. The connection contact may further include a second end that likewise has, for example, an eye-of-the-needle termination or other suitable termination that can be press-fit into a metal-plated aperture on, for example, the patch panel printed circuit board. In other embodiments, the second end may use a spring contact structure that electrically mates with a conductive element on, for example, the patch panel printed circuit board. Other mechanisms may likewise be used. Thus, it will be appreciated that the depicted connection contacts are exemplary in nature and are not limiting with respect to the present invention.

[0238] It will likewise be appreciated that in some embodiments, a common printed circuit board may be provided that serves as the printed circuit board for each of the connectors on a multi-connector structure and this common printed circuit board may likewise hold the phantom mode control signal circuitry. By way of example, a 24-connector port patch panel could include a single printed circuit board that receives the spring contacts and IDCs for each connector port, the signal traces and crosstalk compensation circuitry for each connector port, the capacitors that are used to inject/extract phantom mode signals from each connector port, as well as the phantom mode transmitter, the phantom mode receiver, the processor and a multiplexer or switching circuit. In such embodiments, the connection contacts may simply be implemented as traces on a printed circuit board.

[0239] As yet another example, it will be appreciated that in some embodiments the

network switches that are used could be upgraded to include phantom mode control signal circuitry similar to the circuitry provided on patch panels according to embodiments of the present invention. In such embodiments, any need for interposers according to embodiments of the present invention may be eliminated, as the phantom mode control signal circuitry would be included in the switch.

[0240] While embodiments of the present invention have primarily been discussed above with respect to tracking patching connections between two patch panels as would be done in cross-connect communications systems and between a patch panel and a network, switch as would be done in an inter-connect communications system, embodiments of the present invention are not limited to these cases. For example, the phantom mode control signalling capabilities described herein can be used in a variety of other situations including identifying end devices and/or tracking horizontal cabling connections between patch panels and work area outlets. Yet another area where the techniques of the present invention may be used is in tracking connections to consolidation points. As known to those of skill in the art, a consolidation point refers to a connection device that may be similar to a patch panel that is mounted in work areas of a building such as in modular furniture and/or work areas. The consolidation may include a plurality of connector ports. A plurality of horizontal cables may run from a patch panel field in the computer room to the back end of respective ones of the consolidation point connector ports. Patch cords may be plugged into the other end of each of the consolidation point connector ports. A plurality of RJ-45-to-RJ-45 modular wall jacks may be mounted in the modular furniture and/or work areas. Each patch cord that is plugged into the consolidation point connector ports may run to a respective one of these RJ-45-to-RJ-45 modular wall jacks. End devices may be connected to each RJ-45-to-RJ-45 modular wall jack by another patch cord.

[0241] While embodiments of the present invention have primarily been discussed above with respect to the use of phantom mode control signals, which are control signals that each include two common mode signal components, it will be appreciated that other types of control signals may be used. For example, as discussed above, a single common mode control signal that is transmitted over a single differential pair may be used in place of the phantom mode control signal. Likewise, multiple common mode signals (that do not together comprise a phantom mode control signal) could be used as the control signal, or a single common mode control signal could be used that is transmitted over multiple differential pairs. Thus, it will be appreciated that embodiments of the present invention are not limited to the use of phantom mode control signals.

[0242] Pursuant to embodiments of the present invention, the consolidation points and/or the RJ-45-to-RJ-45 modular wall jacks may include the above-described phantom mode control signalling capabilities. In some embodiments, essentially the same equipment that is used to provide the phantom mode signalling capabilities on a patch panel may be used to provide the capabilities to the consolidation point.

[0243] Embodiments of the present invention may have a number of distinct advantages over prior art intelligent patching approaches. For example, some embodiments of the present invention may use conventional communications cables and patch cords that do not include extra conductors, identification chips, special contacts and the like. The inclusion of such extra elements as required by various prior art intelligent patching approaches increase the cost of the cabling infrastructure, prevents use of the already installed cabling and patch cord base, may increase the size, weight and cost of the cabling and has various other potential disadvantages. Some embodiments of the present invention also may require only minimal changes to the connector ports in a communications system such as, for example, the provision of capacitors or other capacitive elements that are used to transfer the phantom mode control signal to and from the connectors along with appropriate electrical connections to the phantom mode control signal circuitry. Such capacitors may be implemented at almost zero cost, and the contacts or other electrical connections may typically be implemented as simple conductive traces or contacting structures that add very little to the cost of the connector. The systems according to embodiments of the present invention work in both shielded and unshielded twisted pair communications systems, and provide solutions for tracking of patch cord connections in both cross-connect and inter-connect communications systems.

[0244] Moreover, while the provision of the phantom mode control signal circuitry such as the phantom mode transmitters and receivers and associated processors may increase the cost of the systems according to embodiments of the present invention, at the patch panels, consolidation points and the network switches (via the use of interposers, for example), these components may be shared across many connector ports using multiplexers or switching circuits, and hence the overall impact on the cost of the system may be manageable. Moreover, the intelligent tracking capabilities of the communications systems according to embodiments of the present invention may extend to the work area in order to track patch cord and cabling connections to consolidation points and wall jacks, and interposers or other techniques may be used to perform tracking all the way to end devices in both the work area and the computer room to provide full end-to-end tracking. Such tracking

of end devices may also enable a host of other capabilities such as, for example, automatic enablement of switch ports upon detection of the connection of an authorized device, the automatic deployment of services in response to detection of the connection of an authorized device, etc. Such capabilities may, for example, simplify network operation and/or provide power savings (by allowing unused switch ports to be set to a non-enabled state).

[0245] The present invention has been described with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which certain embodiments of the invention are shown. This invention may, however, be embodied in many different forms and should not be construed as limited to the embodiments that are pictured and described herein; rather, these embodiments are provided so that this disclosure will be thorough and complete, and will fully convey the scope of the invention to those skilled in the art. It will also be appreciated that the embodiments disclosed above can be combined in any way and/or combination to provide many additional embodiments.

[0246] Unless otherwise defined, all technical and scientific terms that are used in this disclosure have the same meaning as commonly understood by one of ordinary skill in the art to which this invention belongs. The terminology used in the above description is for the purpose of describing particular embodiments only and is not intended to be limiting of the invention. As used in this disclosure, the singular forms "a", "an" and "the" are intended to include the plural forms as well, unless the context clearly indicates otherwise. It will also be understood that when an element (e.g., a device, circuit, etc.) is referred to as being "connected" or "coupled" to another element, it can be directly connected or coupled to the other element or intervening elements may be present. In contrast, when an element is referred to as being "directly connected" or "directly coupled" to another element, there are no intervening elements present.

[0247] Herein, the term "Ethernet cable" refers to a cable that includes at least four twisted pairs of insulated conductors that are suitable for use as a transmission medium for computer communications.

[0248] Certain embodiments of the present invention have been described above with reference to flowchart illustrations. It will be understood that some blocks of the flowchart illustrations may be combined or split into multiple blocks, and that the blocks in the flow chart diagrams need not necessarily be performed in the order illustrated in the flow charts.

[0249] In the drawings and specification, there have been disclosed typical embodiments of the invention and, although specific terms are employed, they are used in a

generic and descriptive sense only and not for purposes of limitation, the scope of the invention being set forth in the following claims.

THAT WHICH IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A communications connector, comprising:
a plurality of input ports;
a plurality of output ports;
a plurality of conductive paths, each of the conductive paths connecting a respective one of the input ports to a respective one of the output ports, the conductive paths being arranged as a plurality of differential pairs of conductive paths that are each configured to carry differential signals; and
a control signal input circuit that is configured to capacitively couple a phantom mode control signal that includes a unique identifier that is associated with the communications connector onto at least a first and a second of the differential pairs of conductive paths.
2. The communications connector of Claim 1, wherein a positive component of the phantom mode control signal is capacitively coupled onto the first of the differential pairs of conductive paths via a first capacitive circuit of the control signal input circuit, and wherein a negative component of the phantom mode control signal is capacitively coupled onto the second of the differential pairs of conductive paths via a second capacitive circuit of the control signal input circuit.
3. The communications connector of Claim 2, wherein the first capacitive circuit comprises a first capacitor having an input terminal and a first output terminal and a second output terminal, and wherein the second capacitive circuit comprises a second capacitor having an input terminal and a first output terminal and a second output terminal.
4. The communications connector of Claim 2, wherein the communications connector comprises an RJ-45 jack, and wherein the plurality of conductive paths comprises first through fourth differential pairs of conductive paths, and wherein the conductive paths of the third differential pair of conductive paths are sandwiched between the conductive paths of the fourth differential pair of conductive paths in a plug contact region of the conductive paths.
5. The communications connector of Claim 1, wherein a positive component of the phantom mode control signal is capacitively coupled onto the first and second of the differential pairs of conductive paths via a first capacitive circuit of the control signal input circuit, and wherein a negative component of the phantom mode control signal is capacitively

coupled onto a third and a fourth of the differential pairs of conductive paths via a second capacitive circuit of the control signal input circuit.

6. The communications connector of Claim 1, wherein the positive component of the phantom mode control signal is capacitively coupled onto the first and second of the differential pairs of conductive paths via a first capacitor of the control signal input circuit that has an input terminal and first through fourth output terminals, and wherein the negative component of the phantom mode control signal is capacitively coupled onto the third and fourth of the differential pairs of conductive paths via a second capacitor of the control signal input circuit that has an input terminal and first through fourth output terminals.

7. The communications connector of Claim 2, wherein the first capacitive circuit comprises a first capacitor and a second capacitor, the first and second capacitors including a conductive plate that comprises a first electrode of the first capacitor and a first electrode of the second capacitor, a first contact pad that comprises a second electrode of the first capacitor and a second contact pad that comprises a second electrode of the second capacitor.

8. The communications connector of Claim 7, wherein the plurality of input ports comprise a plurality of spring contacts, and wherein the first contact pad is configured to mate with a first of the plurality of spring contacts and the second contact pad is configured to mate with a second of the plurality of spring contacts.

9. The communications connector of Claim 1, wherein the communications connector comprises a jack having a plurality of spring contacts, wherein the jack is configured so that insertion of a plug within the jack causes transfer of the phantom mode control signal onto the spring contacts.

10. The communications connector of Claim 1, wherein the phantom mode control signal comprises a digitally modulated signal.

11. A method of providing identification information for a communications connector, the method comprising:

generating a phantom mode control signal that includes a unique identifier that is associated with the communications connector;

capacitively coupling a first component of the phantom mode control signal onto both of the conductive paths of a first differential pair of conductive paths of the communications

connector; and

simultaneously capacitively coupling a second component of the phantom mode control signal onto both of the conductive paths of a second differential pair of conductive paths of the communications connector, wherein the polarity of second component is opposite the polarity of the first component.

12. The method of Claim 11, wherein the phantom mode control signal comprises a digitally modulated signal.

13. The method of Claim 11, wherein the phantom mode control signal is transmitted in response to detecting that a plug has been inserted into a plug aperture of the communications connector.

14. The method of Claim 11, further comprising:
capacitively coupling the first component of the phantom mode control signal onto both of the conductive paths of a third differential pair of conductive paths of the communications connector at the same time that the first component of the phantom mode control signal is coupled onto both of the conductive paths of the first differential pair of conductive paths of the communications connector; and

capacitively coupling the second component of the phantom mode control signal onto both of the conductive paths of a fourth differential pair of conductive paths of the communications connector at the same time that the second component of the phantom mode control signal is coupled onto both of the conductive paths of the second differential pair of conductive paths of the communications connector.

15. The method of Claim 11, wherein the first component of the phantom mode control signal is capacitively coupled onto both of the conductive paths of the first differential pair of conductive paths of the communications connector via a first capacitor having an input terminal, a first output terminal and a second output terminal, and wherein the second component of the phantom mode control signal is capacitively coupled onto both of the conductive paths of the second differential pair of conductive paths of the communications connector via a second capacitor having an input terminal, a first output terminal and a second output terminal.

16. A method of identifying connectivity in a communications network, the method comprising:

transmitting a phantom mode control signal that includes a unique identifier that is associated with a connector port on a network switch to a connector port of a patch panel of the communications network over at least two differential pairs of conductors that are included in a patch cord that connects the connector port on the network switch to the connector port of the patch panel;

coupling a first component of the phantom mode control signal to a phantom mode control signal receiver via a first capacitive circuit included the connector port of the patch panel;

coupling a second component of the phantom mode control signal to the phantom mode control signal receiver via a second capacitive circuit included the connector port of the patch panel;

extracting the unique identifier associated with the connector port on the network switch from the phantom mode control signal at the patch panel; and

logging the connection between the connector port on the network switch and the connector port on the patch panel in a connectivity database.

17. The method of Claim 16, wherein the phantom mode control signal is transmitted in response to detecting that a plug has been inserted into a plug aperture of the connector port on the network switch.

18. The method of Claim 16, wherein the first capacitive circuit comprises a first capacitor having an input terminal, a first output terminal and a second output terminal that is configured to couple the first component of the phantom mode control signal onto a first of the differential pairs of conductors that are included in the patch cord, and wherein the second capacitive circuit comprises a second capacitor having an input terminal, a first output terminal and a second output terminal that is configured to couple the second component of the phantom mode control signal onto a second of the differential pairs of conductors that are included in the patch cord.

19. The method of Claim 16, wherein the first component of the phantom mode control signal has a polarity that is opposite the second component of the phantom mode control signal.

20. A communications connector, comprising:
a housing;

a plurality of plug blades mounted in a first portion of the housing;
a plurality of spring contacts mounted in a second portion of the housing;
a plurality of conductive paths, each of which includes a respective one of the plug blades and a respective one of the spring contacts and one or more conductive elements that electrically connect each plug blade to its respective spring contact; and
a control signal input circuit for capacitively and/or inductively coupling a control signal onto at least one of the plurality of conductive paths.

21. The communications connector of Claim 20, wherein the conductive paths comprise eight conductive paths that are arranged as first through fourth differential pairs of conductive paths, and wherein the control signal input circuit is configured to capacitively couple the control signal onto both of the conductive paths of the first differential pair of conductive paths.

22. The communications connector of Claim 20, wherein the conductive paths comprise eight conductive paths that are arranged as first through fourth differential pairs of conductive paths, wherein the control signal comprises a phantom mode control signal, wherein the control signal input circuit is configured to couple a first component of the phantom mode control signal onto both of the conductive paths of the first differential pair of conductive paths and a second component of the phantom mode control signal onto both of the conductive paths of the second differential pair of conductive paths, wherein the polarity of the second component is opposite the polarity of the first component.

23. The communications connector of Claim 22, wherein the control signal input circuit comprises a first capacitor having an input terminal, a first output terminal and a second output terminal that is configured to couple the first component of the phantom mode control signal onto the first differential pair of conductive paths and a second capacitor having an input terminal, a first output terminal and a second output terminal that is configured to couple the second component of the phantom mode control signal onto the second differential pair of conductive paths.

24. The communications connector of Claim 22, wherein the control signal input circuit comprises a first capacitor having an input terminal and first through fourth output terminals that is configured to couple the first component of the phantom mode control signal onto the first and second differential pairs of conductive paths and a second capacitor having

an input terminal and first through fourth output terminals that is configured to couple the second component of the phantom mode control signal onto the third and fourth differential pairs of conductive paths.

25. A method of operating a network switch that includes a plurality of connector ports, the method comprising:

automatically detecting that a first end device is connected to a first end of a first channel that runs through a first of the plurality of connector ports of the network switch using a plug insertion detection circuit;

using a phantom mode control channel to determine a first identifier that is associated with the first end device; and

automatically enabling the first of the plurality of connector ports in response to determining that the first end device is within a set of authorized end devices.

26. The method of Claim 25, further comprising:

identifying a service that is to be provided to the first end device based at least in part on the first identifier; and

automatically reconfiguring the network to provision the identified service to the first channel.

27. The method of Claim 25, wherein automatically enabling the first of the plurality of connector ports in response to determining that the first end device is within the set of authorized end devices comprises automatically enabling the first of the plurality of connector ports in response to determining that the first end device includes the phantom mode control channel.

28. The method of Claim 25, wherein automatically enabling the first of the plurality of connector ports in response to determining that the first end device is within the set of authorized end devices comprises automatically enabling the first of the plurality of connector ports in response to determining that the first identifier is within the set of authorized identifiers.

29. A method of automatically identifying an end device that is connected to a communications network, the method comprising:

mounting an interposer within a connector port on the end device, the interposer including a plug end that mounts within the connector port on the end device and a jack end

that is configured to receive a patch cord; and

transmitting a phantom mode control signal from the interposer to a connector port on a patch panel of the communications network over a phantom mode control channel that runs from the interposer to the connector port on the patch panel.

30. The method of Claim 29, wherein the phantom mode control signal is transmitted in response to sensing that the patch cord has been plugged into the interposer.

31. The method of Claim 29, wherein the phantom mode control signal is transmitted in response to a control signal that is transmitted over the control channel from the connector port on the patch panel to the interposer.

32. The method of Claim 19, wherein the phantom mode control signal includes identifying information for the end device.

33. A communications connector, comprising:
a housing having a plug aperture;
a plurality of input ports;
a plurality of output ports;
a plurality of conductive paths, each of the conductive paths connecting a respective one of the input ports to a respective one of the output ports, the conductive paths being arranged as a plurality of differential pairs of conductive paths that are each configured to carry differential signals; and
a capacitive circuit that is configured to capacitively couple a signal onto a first of the differential pairs of conductive paths, the capacitive circuit including a conductive plate and at least two contact pads, wherein the conductive plate and a first of the at least two contact pads forms a first capacitor and the conductive plate and a second of the at least two contact pads forms a second capacitor.

34. The communications connector of Claim 33, wherein the communications connector is configured so that contact is established between a first of the at least two contact pads and a first conductive path of the first of the differential pairs of conductive paths when a plug is inserted into the plug aperture.

35. A system for of distributing a plurality of signals from a plurality of building infrastructure systems, the system comprising:

an Ethernet cable that includes at least four differential pairs of conductors;
a consolidator that is configured to multiplex signals from the plurality of building infrastructure systems onto the Ethernet cable; and
a distributor for extracting the signals from the plurality of building infrastructure systems from the Ethernet cable,
wherein the consolidator is configured to inject the signals from the plurality of building infrastructure systems as a common mode signal onto at least a first of the differential pairs of conductors of the Ethernet cable.

36. The communications system of Claim 35, wherein the consolidator is configured to inject the signals from the plurality of building infrastructure systems as a phantom mode signal that is injected onto at least the first and a second of the differential pairs of conductor of the Ethernet cable.

37. The communications system of Claim 35, wherein the consolidator is configured to time division multiplex the signals from the plurality of building infrastructure systems onto at least the first of the differential pairs of conductors of the Ethernet cable.

38. The communications system of Claim 35, wherein the consolidator is configured to frequency division multiplex the signals from the plurality of building infrastructure systems onto at least the first of the differential pairs of conductors of the Ethernet cable.

39. The communications system of Claim 35, wherein the building infrastructure systems comprise at least two of a lighting control system, an HVAC control system, a security system, a fire detection system, a wireless network system and a paging system.

40. The communications system of Claim 35, further comprising at least one cable extending between the distributor and a remote unit of one of the building infrastructure systems, wherein the distributor is configured to distribute power to the remote unit that is supplied to the distributor over the Ethernet cable.

41. The communications system of Claim 36, wherein the signals from the plurality of building infrastructure are multiplexed onto the first and a second of the differential pairs of conductor of the Ethernet cable at a connector port of a patch panel of the communications system.

42. A method of distributing signals from a master unit of a building infrastructure system to a remote unit of the building infrastructure system, the method comprising:

multiplexing a signal from the master unit onto a phantom mode communications path of an Ethernet cable;

extracting the multiplexed signal from the Ethernet cable; and

distributing the extracted signal to the remote unit.

43. The method of Claim 42, wherein the signal comprises one of a plurality of signals that are multiplexed onto the phantom mode communications path from a plurality of master units of respective ones of a plurality of building infrastructure systems.

44. The method of Claim 43, wherein the plurality of signals are time division multiplexed onto the phantom mode communications path.

45. The method of Claim 43, wherein the plurality of signals are frequency division multiplexed onto the phantom mode communications path.

46. The method of Claim 42, wherein the building infrastructure system comprises one of a lighting control system, an HVAC control system, a security system, a fire detection system, a wireless network system and a paging system.

47. The method of Claim 42, further comprising powering the remote unit with power provided over the Ethernet cable.

48. A method of detecting a plug insertion into a plug aperture of a communications connector that includes a plurality of input ports, a plurality of output ports, and a plurality of conductive paths that connect respective ones of the input ports to respective ones of the output ports, where the conductive paths are configured as a plurality of differential pairs of conductive paths, the method comprising:

transmitting a control signal to a control signal input circuit on the communications connector that includes a reactive coupling element;

electromagnetically coupling the control signal through the control signal input circuit;

detecting the electromagnetically coupled control signal on a first of the differential pairs of conductive paths; and

determining that a plug is present in the plug aperture based at least in part on

detecting the electromagnetically coupled control signal on the first of the differential pairs of conductive paths.

49. The method of Claim 48, wherein the control signal is electromagnetically coupled onto the first of the differential pairs of conductive paths as a common mode signal.

50. The method of Claim 48, wherein the control signal input circuit comprises a first control signal input circuit and the control signal comprises a first control signal, the method further comprising electromagnetically coupling a second control signal from a second control signal input circuit onto a second of the differential pairs of conductive paths.

51. The method of Claim 50, wherein the first and second control signals together comprise a differential control signal.

52. The method of Claim 48, wherein the control signal comprises a first component of a phantom mode control signal, and wherein a second component of the phantom mode control signal that is oppositely phased from the first component is electromagnetically coupled onto a second of the differential pairs of conductive paths.

53. The method of Claim 52, wherein the first component of the phantom mode control signal is electromagnetically coupled onto the first of the differential pairs of conductive paths via a first capacitive circuit having an input terminal, a first output terminal and a second output terminal, and wherein the second component of the phantom mode control signal is electromagnetically coupled onto the second of the differential pairs of conductive paths via a second capacitive circuit having an input terminal, a first output terminal and a second output terminal.

54. The method of Claim 53, wherein the input ports comprise first through eighth spring contacts that each mate with a respective one of first through eighth contact pads, wherein the first and second spring contacts are part of the first differential pair of conductive paths, and wherein the first and second contact pads that mate with the respective first and second spring contacts comprise first and second output terminals of the first capacitive circuit.

55. The method of Claim 48, wherein the communications connector is configured such that the insertion of a plug into a plug aperture of the communications connector

completes an electrical connection between the first of the differential pairs of conductive paths and the control signal input circuit.

56. A communications jack, comprising:

a plurality of spring contacts that have plug contact regions that comprise input ports of the communications jack;

a plurality of wire connection contacts that include wire contact regions that comprise output ports of the communications jack;

a plurality of conductive paths that connect respective ones of the spring contacts to respective ones of the wire connection contacts, where the conductive paths are arranged as a plurality of differential pairs of conductive paths;

a control signal input circuit that is configured to inject a common mode control signal onto a first of the differential pairs of conductive paths;

a control signal output circuit that is configured to output at least a portion of the injected common mode control signal; and

a plug insertion detection circuit that is coupled to the control signal output circuit.

57. The communications jack of Claim 56, wherein the control signal circuit input is configured to electromagnetically couple the common mode control signal onto the first of the differential pairs of conductive paths.

58. The communications jack of Claim 57, wherein the control signal input circuit comprises a capacitor.

59. The communications jack of Claim 56, wherein the control signal input circuit is separate from the input ports for the first of the differential pairs of conductive paths and the output ports for the first of the differential pairs of conductive paths.

60. The communications jack of Claim 56, wherein the control signal input circuit comprises a capacitor having an input terminal, a first output terminal and a second output terminal, wherein the input terminal is coupled to a control signal generator and first and second output terminals are coupled to the respective conductive paths of the first of the differential pairs of conductive paths.

61. The communications jack of Claim 56, further comprising:

a first contact pad that is positioned adjacent a first of the spring contacts that is

connected to a first of the conductive paths of the first differential pair of conductive paths, wherein the first contact pad is positioned so that it does not contact the first of the spring contacts when the first of the spring contacts is in a resting position and so that it contacts the first of the spring contacts when a mating plug is inserted within the plug aperture to resiliently deflect the first of the spring contacts;

wherein the control signal input circuit is electrically connected to the control signal output circuit when the first contact pad contacts the first of the spring contacts.

62. The communications jack of Claim 56, wherein the control signal output circuit comprises an externally accessible contact that is electrically connected to at least one of the conductive paths of the first of the differential pairs of conductive paths via a capacitor.

63. The communications jack of Claim 56, wherein the control signal output circuit comprises an externally accessible contact that is directly electrically connected to at least one of the conductive paths of the first of the differential pairs of conductive paths via a conductive path.

64. A method of detecting insertion of a plug into a plug aperture of a communications jack, the method comprising:

transmitting a plug insertion detection signal to a plug insertion detection circuit that includes a switch that selectively opens and closes the plug insertion detection circuit;

receiving a received version of the plug insertion detection signal at a receiver; and

determining that the plug is present within the plug aperture based on receipt of the received version of the plug insertion detection signal.

65. The method of Claim 64, wherein the plug insertion detection circuit includes a capacitor that capacitively couples the plug insertion detection signal onto at least a first conductor of a first differential pair of conductive paths through the communications jack.

66. The method of Claim 64, wherein the switch comprises a spring contact and a mating contact pad.

67. The method of Claim 66, wherein the contact pad is positioned so that insertion of a mating plug within the plug aperture resiliently deflects the spring contact into physical and electrical contact with the contact pad.

68. A communications jack, comprising:

- a plurality of spring contacts that have plug contact regions that comprise input ports of the communications jack;
- a plurality of wire connection contacts that include wire contact regions that comprise output ports of the communications jack;
- a plurality of conductive paths that connect respective ones of the spring contacts to respective ones of the wire connection contacts, where the conductive paths are arranged as a plurality of differential pairs of conductive paths;
- a first contact pad that is positioned adjacent a first of the spring contacts that is connected to a first of the conductive paths of the first differential pair of conductive paths, wherein the first contact pad is positioned so that it does not contact the first of the spring contacts when the first of the spring contacts is in a resting position and so that it contacts the first of the spring contacts when a mating plug is inserted within a plug aperture of the communications jack to resiliently deflect the first of the spring contacts; and
- a control signal input circuit that is configured transfer a signal onto at least one conductive path of a first of the differential pairs of conductive paths, independent of whether a mating plug is inserted within the plug aperture.

69. The communications jack of Claim 68, wherein the control signal input circuit comprises a pair of contact structures that are configured to receive a differential signal and inject the received differential signal onto two of the plurality of conductive paths.

70. The communications jack of Claim 68, wherein the control signal input circuit is configured to receive a control signal that is used to map a cabling connection between the communications jack and a second communications jack.

71. The communications jack of Claim 68, wherein the control signal input circuit is configured to transfer a signal from a building infrastructure system onto at least one of a plurality of differential pairs of conductors of an Ethernet cable as a common mode signal or as a phantom mode signal.

72. The communications connector of Claim 71, wherein the building infrastructure system comprise at least two of a lighting control system, an HVAC control system, a security system, a fire detection system, a wireless network system and a paging system.

73. A method of detecting a horizontal cabling connection between a patch panel connector port and a remote connector port, the method comprising:

sensing that a plug is not present in at least one of the patch panel connector port and the remote connector port; and then

injecting a control signal from the patch panel connector port to the remote connector port onto one or more of the eight insulated conductors of a horizontal communications cable that extends between the patch panel connector port and the remote connector port, wherein each of the eight insulated conductors of the horizontal communications cable is terminated into a respective wire connection terminal of the remote connector port;

forwarding the control signal from the patch panel connector port to the remote connector port; and then

receiving a responsive control signal from the remote connector port over at least one of the conductors of the horizontal communications cable that includes identification information for the remote connector port.

74. The method of Claim 73, wherein the control signal comprises a differential control signal.

75. The method of Claim 74, wherein the differential control signal is injected onto first and second of the eight insulated conductors of the horizontal communications cable via first and second contact structures, wherein the first and second contact structures are electrically connected to respective first and second communications paths through the remote connector port, and wherein the first and second communications paths are electrically connected to the respective first and second of the eight insulated conductors.

76. The method of Claim 75, wherein sensing that the plug is not present in at least one of the patch panel connector port and the remote connector port comprises sensing the absence of a plug detection control signal on at least one of the first and second contact structures.

77. The method of Claim 76, wherein the plug detection control signal comprises a phantom mode signal.

78. A method of detecting a plug insertion into a plug aperture of a communications connector, the method comprising:

receiving a control signal that is electromagnetically coupled across a plug aperture of

the communications connector using a reactive coupling element; and

detecting that a mating plug has been inserted into the plug aperture based on the received control signal.

79. The method of Claim 78, where the reactive coupling element comprises a capacitor.

80. The method of Claim 79, wherein the reactive coupling element comprises a capacitor that has a first electrode that is mounted adjacent a first side of the plug aperture and a second electrode that is mounted adjacent a second side of the plug aperture, wherein the second side is opposite the first side.

81. The method of Claim 80, wherein the first side comprises a top surface of the plug aperture and the second side comprises a bottom surface of the plug aperture.

82. The method of Claim 80, wherein the communications connector comprises an RJ-45 jack that has a plurality of spring contacts, and wherein the first and second electrodes are mounted such that the plurality of spring contacts are not positioned between the first and second electrodes when the plurality of spring contacts are in their respective resting positions, and portions of the plurality of spring contacts are positioned between the first and second electrodes when the mating plug is received within the plug aperture.

83. The method of Claim 78, wherein detecting that a mating plug has been inserted into the plug aperture based on the received control signal comprises detecting that the mating plug has been inserted into the plug aperture based on a signal strength of the received control signal.

84. The method of Claim 78, wherein detecting that a mating plug has been inserted into the plug aperture based on the received control signal comprises detecting that the mating plug has been inserted into the plug aperture based on detecting the presence of the received control signal.

85. The method of Claim 78, wherein the mating plug comprises an RJ-45 plug.

86. The method of Claim 78, wherein the mating plug comprises a termination on a fiber optic jumper cable.

87. A communications connector, comprising:
a housing that defines a plug aperture;
a capacitor that has a first electrode that is mounted adjacent a first side of the plug aperture and a second electrode that is mounted adjacent a second side of the plug aperture, wherein the second side is opposite the first side;
a plug insertion detection circuit that is configured to couple a plug insertion detection signal through the capacitor.

88. The communications connector of Claim 87, wherein the communications connector comprises an RJ-45 jack.

89. The communications connector of Claim 88, wherein the RJ-45 jack includes a plurality of spring contacts that extend into the plug aperture, and wherein the first and second electrodes are mounted such that the plurality of spring contacts are not positioned between the first and second electrodes when the plurality of spring contacts are in their respective resting positions, and portions of the plurality of spring contacts are positioned between the first and second electrodes when a mating plug is received within the plug aperture.

90. The communications connector of Claim 87, further comprising:
a receiver that is configured to receive the plug insertion detection signal that was coupled through the capacitor; and
a processor that is configured to determine if a mating plug is present in the plug aperture based on a measured characteristic of the received plug insertion detection signal.

91. The communications connector of Claim 87, wherein the first side comprises a top surface of the plug aperture and the second side comprises a bottom surface of the plug aperture.

92. The communications connector of Claim 87, wherein the communications connector comprises a fiber optic adapter.

93. A communications connector, comprising:
a housing that defines a plug aperture;
a capacitor;
a plug insertion detection circuit that is configured to couple a plug insertion detection

signal through the capacitor; and

a movable element that moves between a resting position and an activated position in response to the insertion of a plug within the plug aperture, wherein the capacitor exhibits a first capacitance when the movable element is in the resting position and a second capacitance when the movable element is in the activated position.

94. The communications connector of Claim 93, where the movable element comprises a first electrode of the capacitor.

95. The communications connector of Claim 93, where the movable element comprises a conductive element that capacitively couples with a first electrode of the capacitor when the movable element is in the activated position.

96. The communications connector of Claim 95, where the conductive element also capacitively couples with a second electrode of the capacitor when the movable element is in the activated position.

1/24

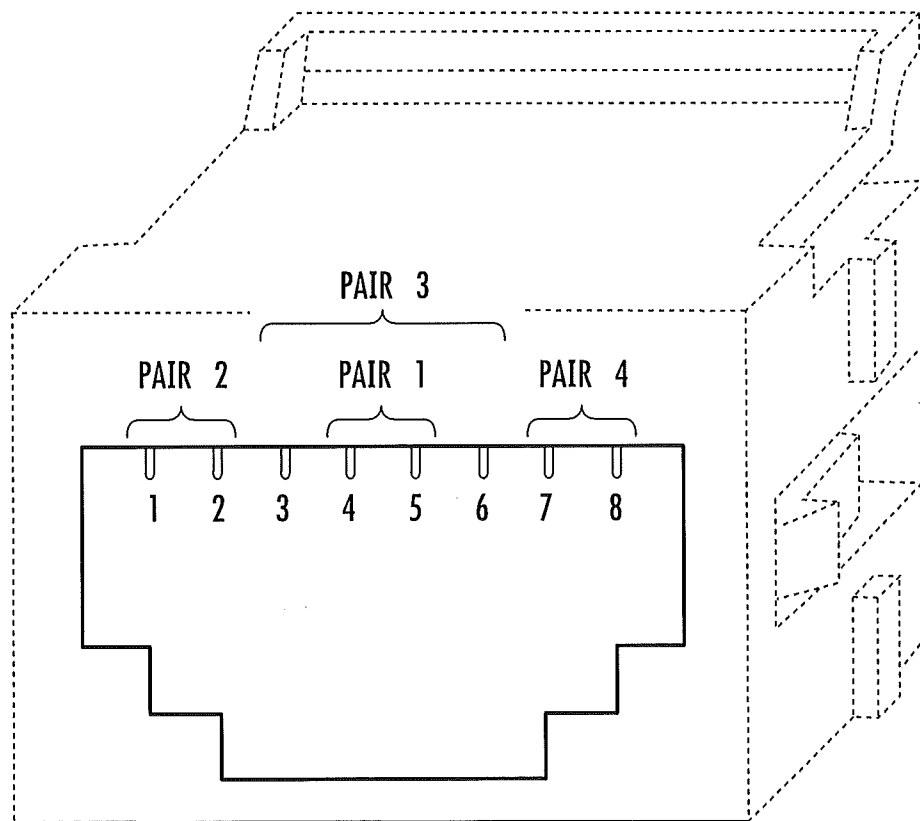
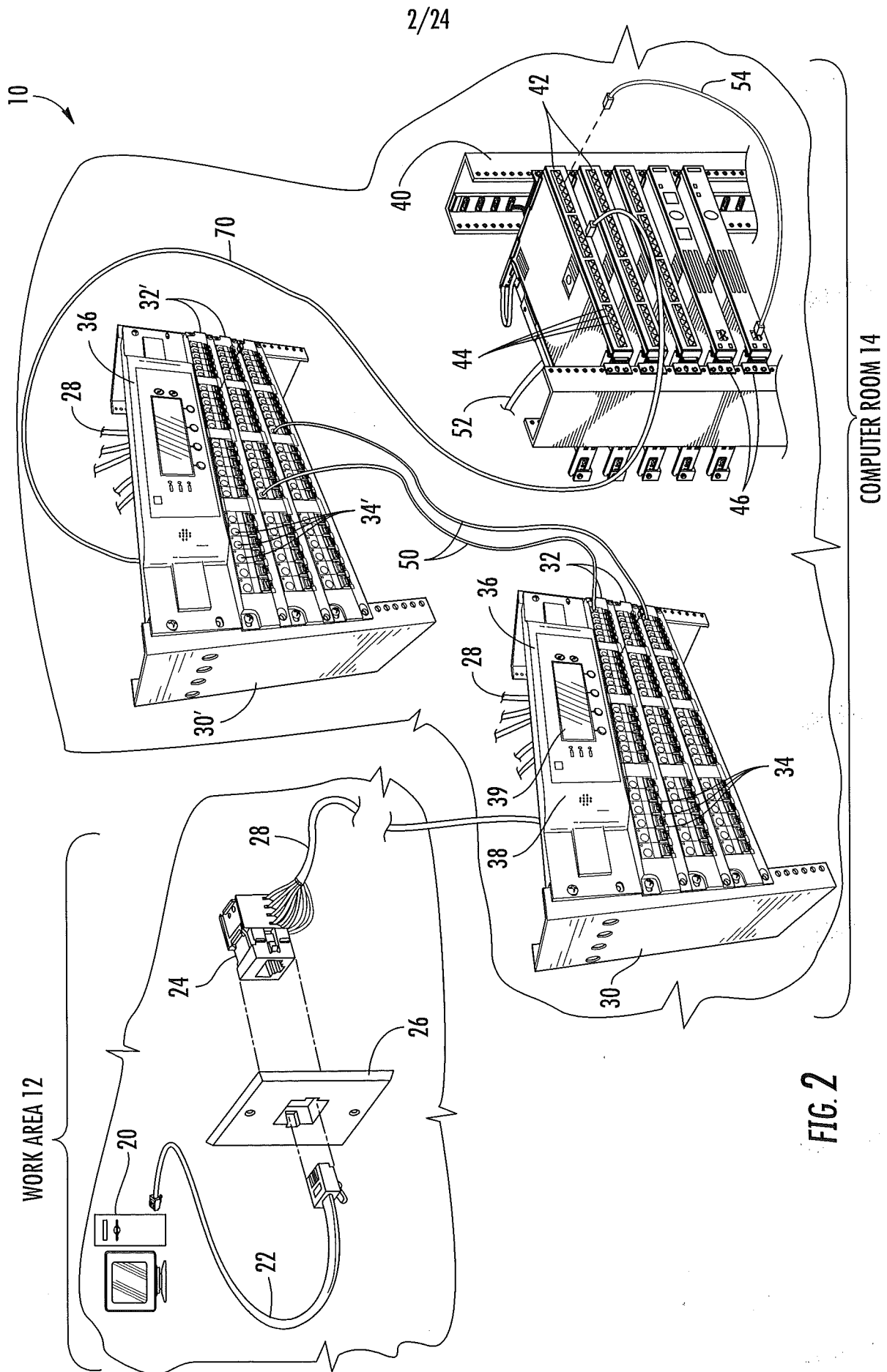


FIG. 1
(PRIOR ART)



3/24

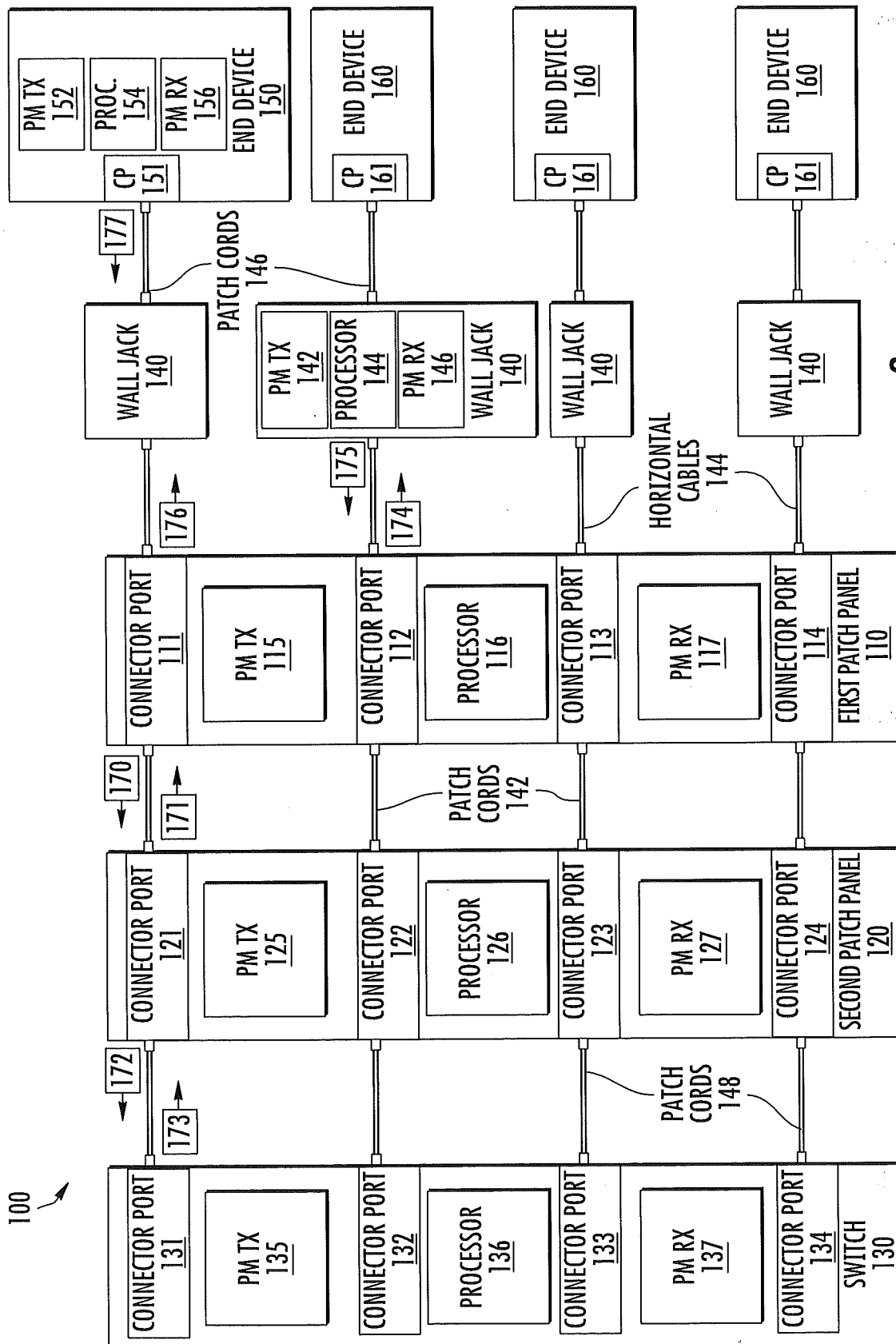


FIG. 3

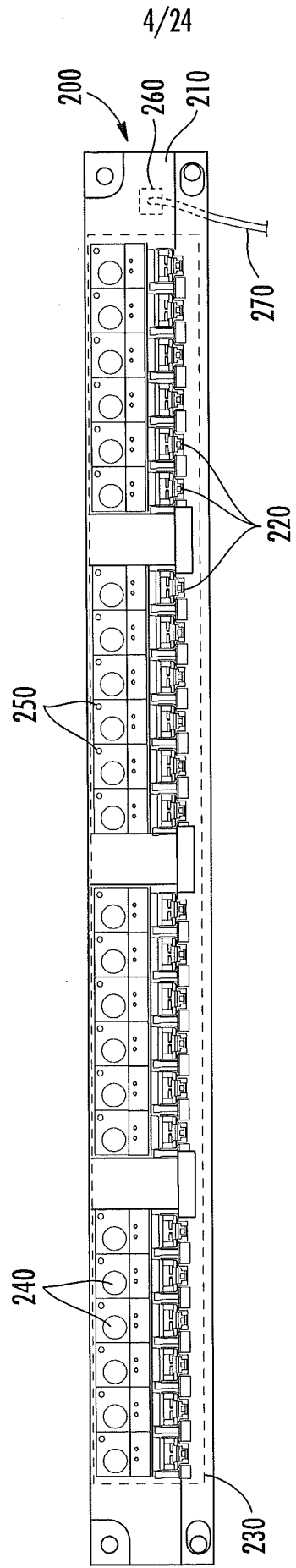


FIG. 4A

5/24

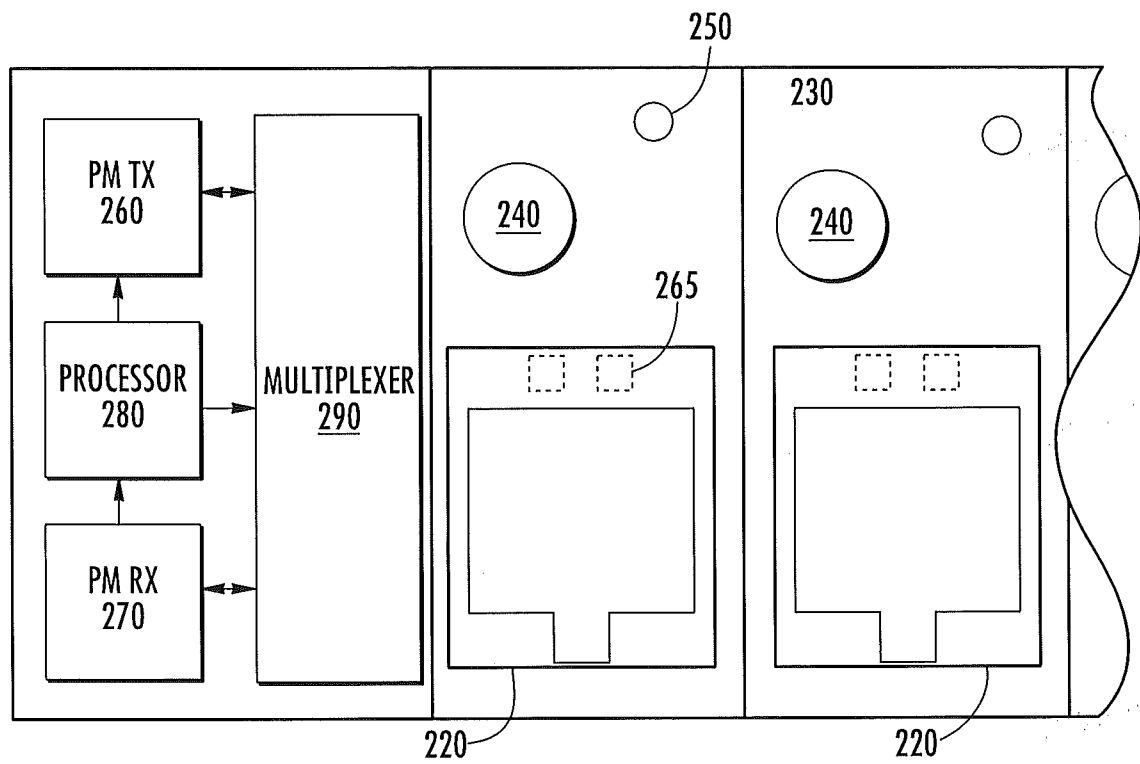


FIG. 4B

6/24

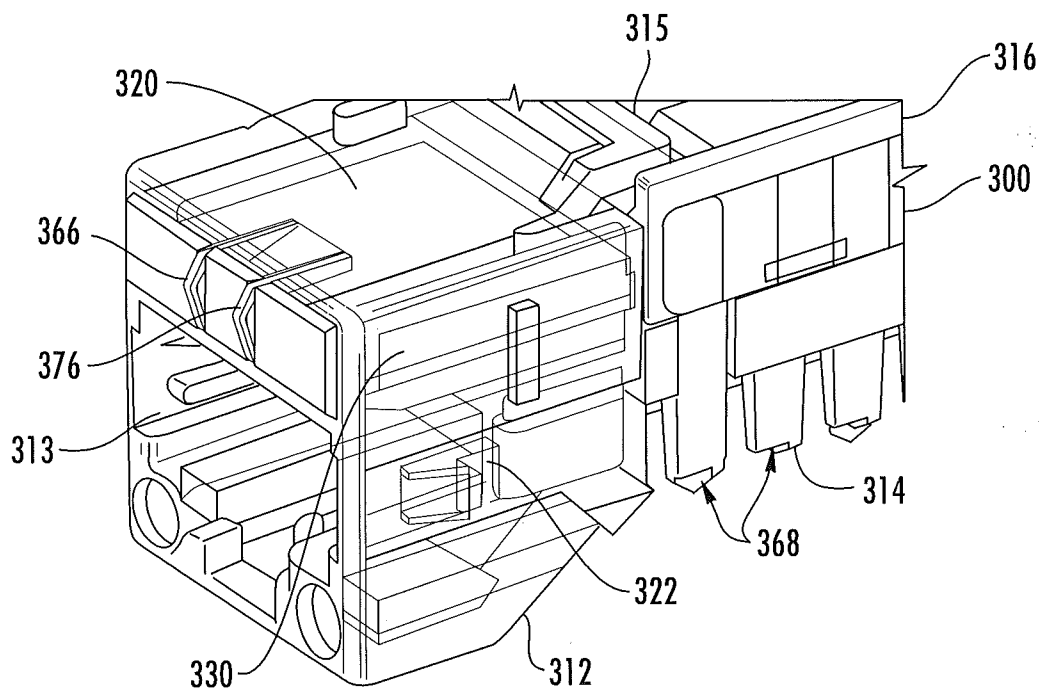


FIG. 5A

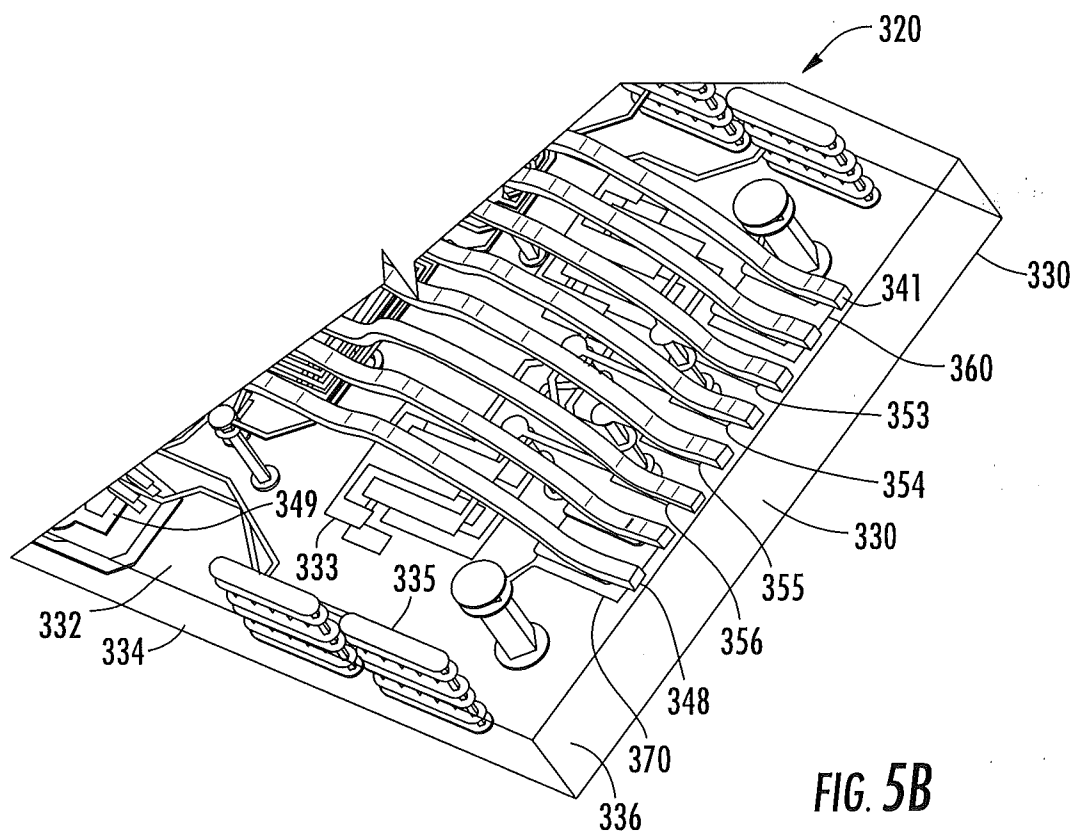


FIG. 5B

7/24

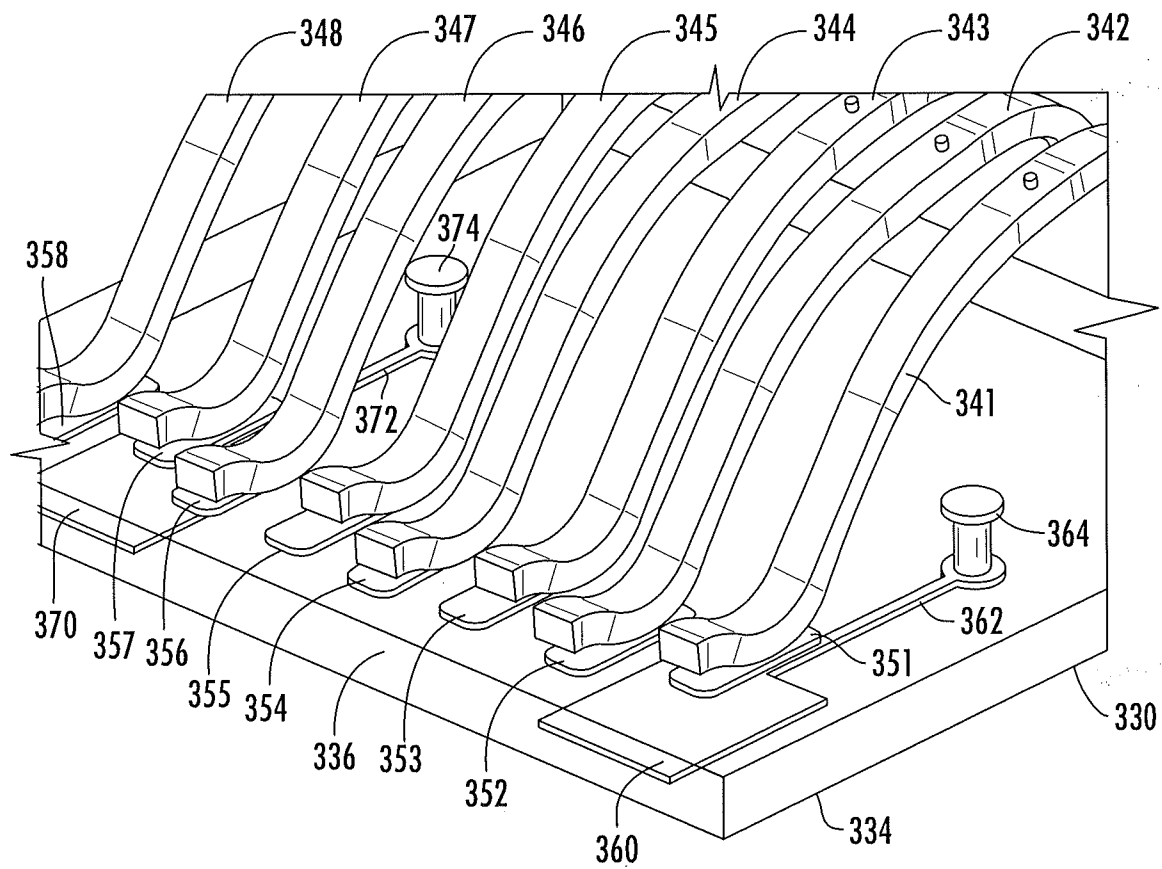
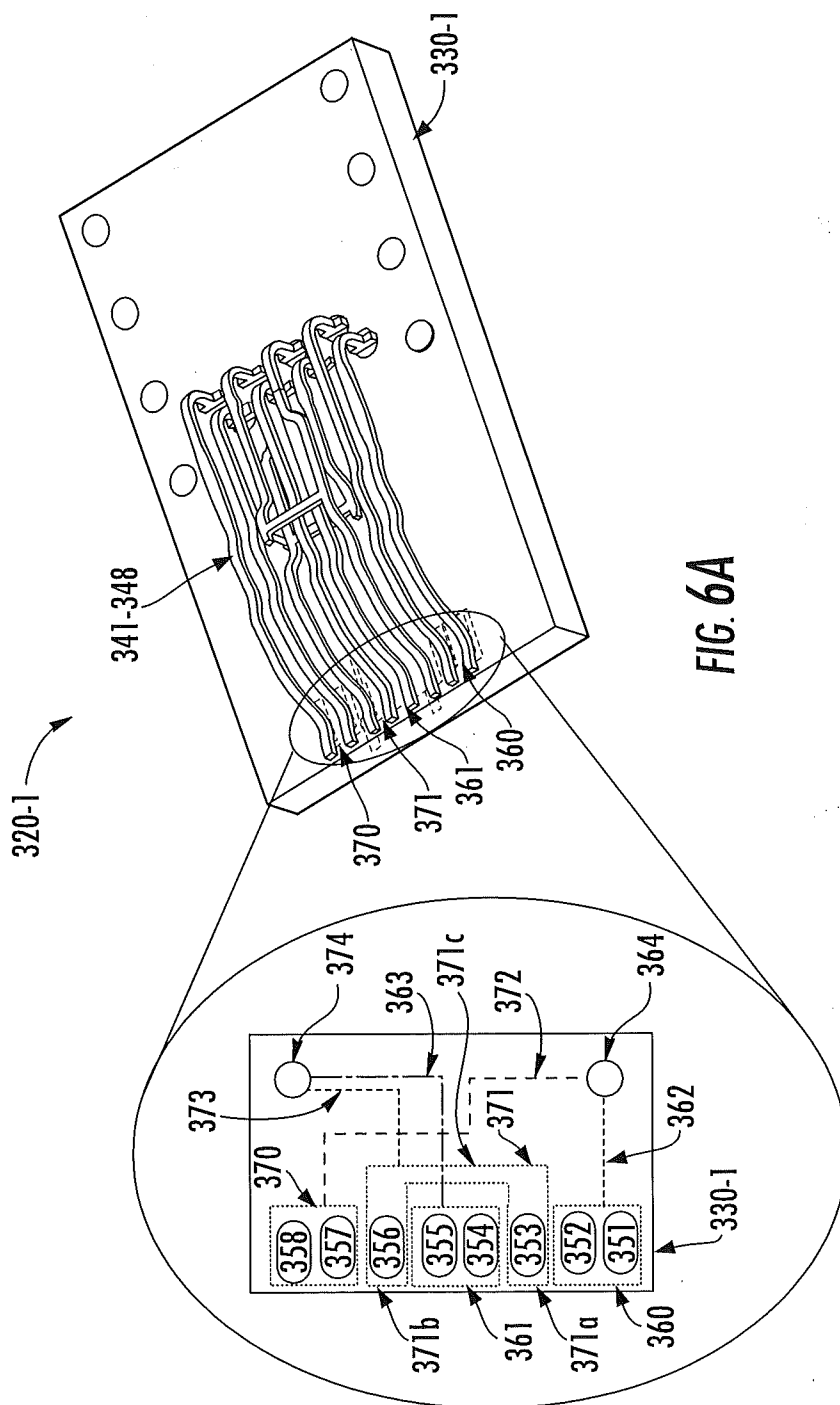


FIG. 5C

8/24



9/24

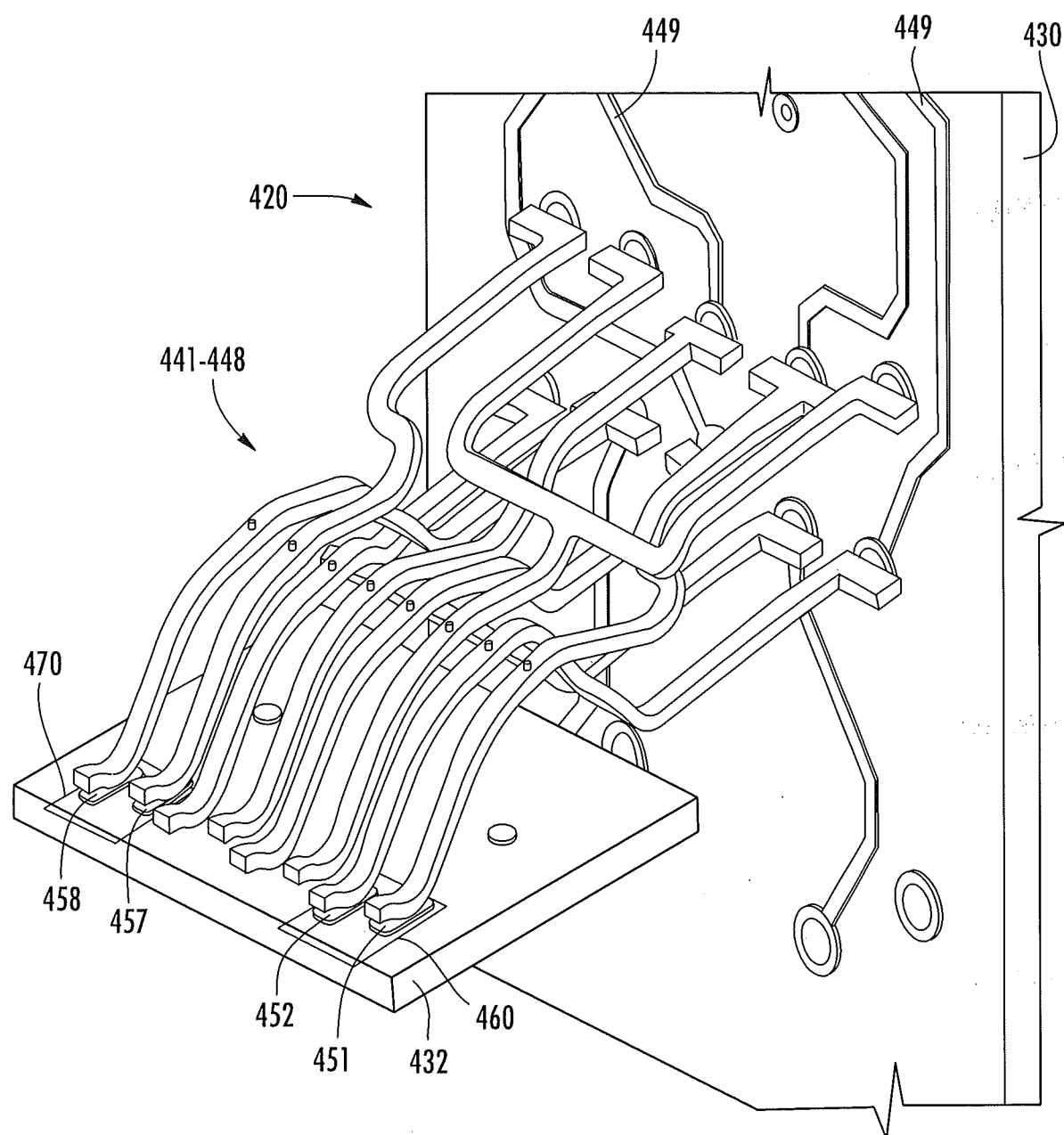


FIG. 6B

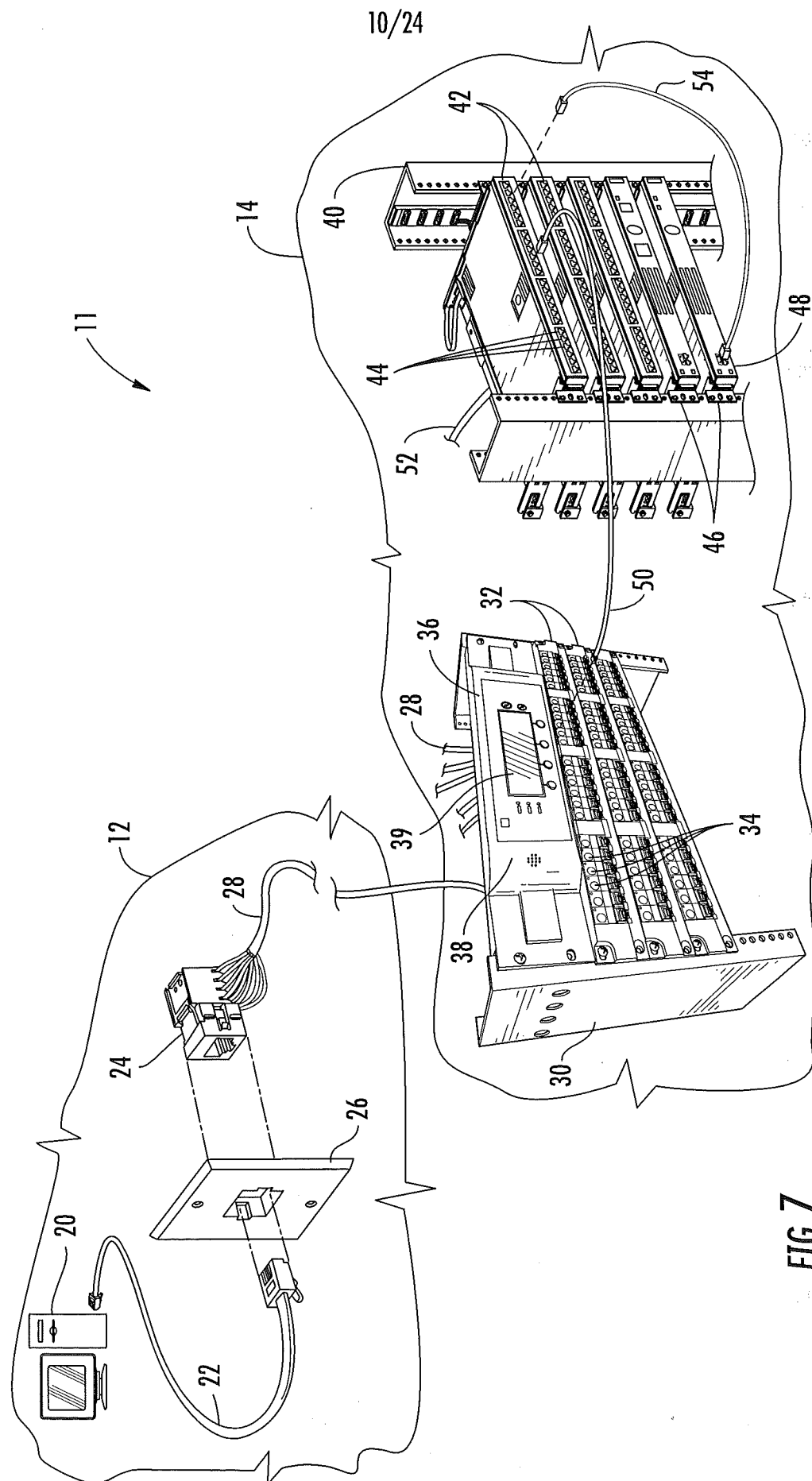


FIG. 7

11/24

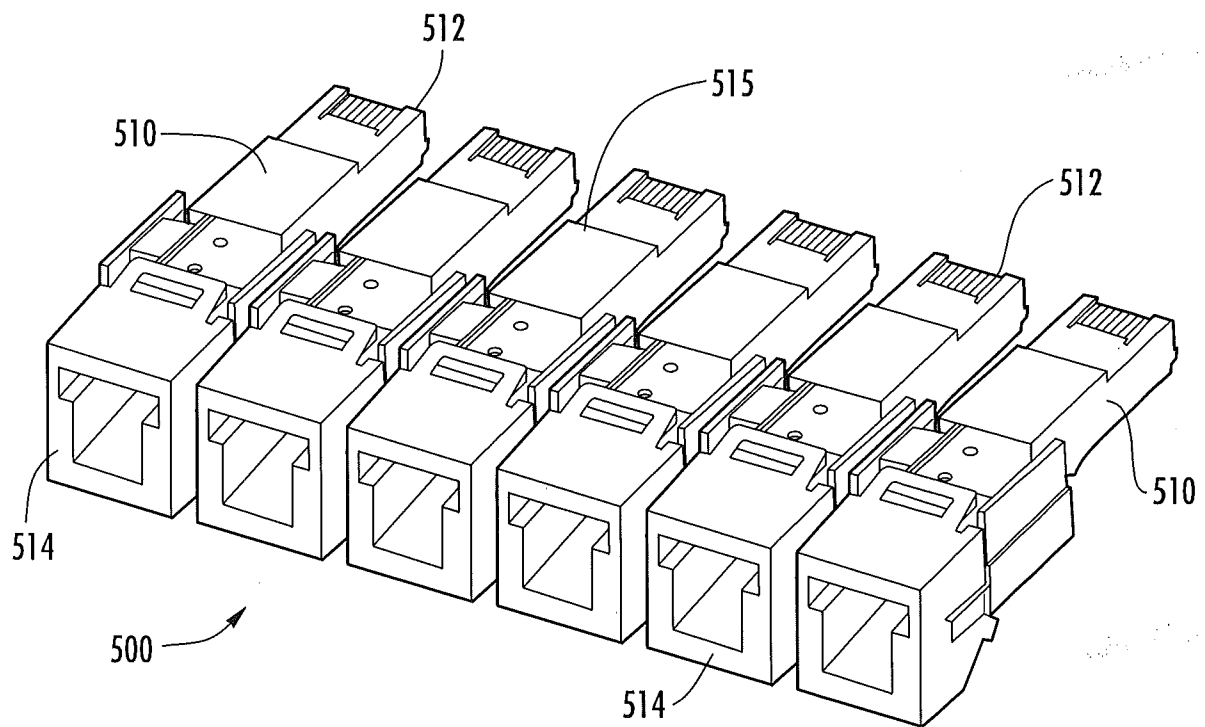


FIG. 8A

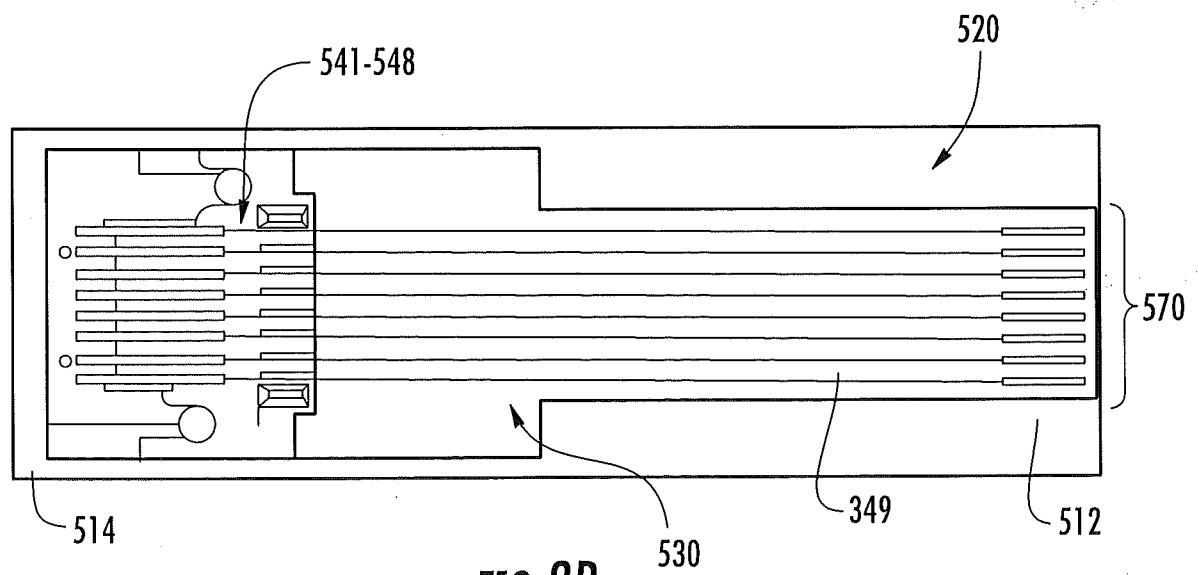


FIG. 8B

12/24

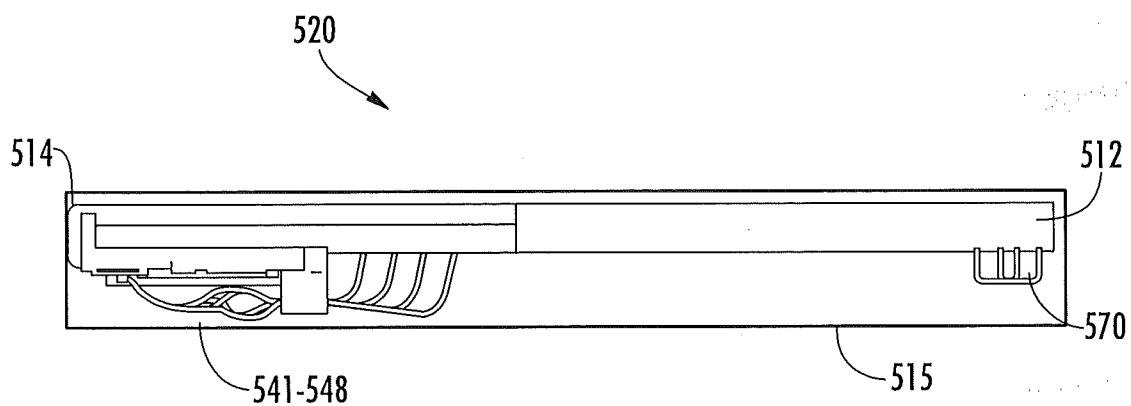


FIG. 8C

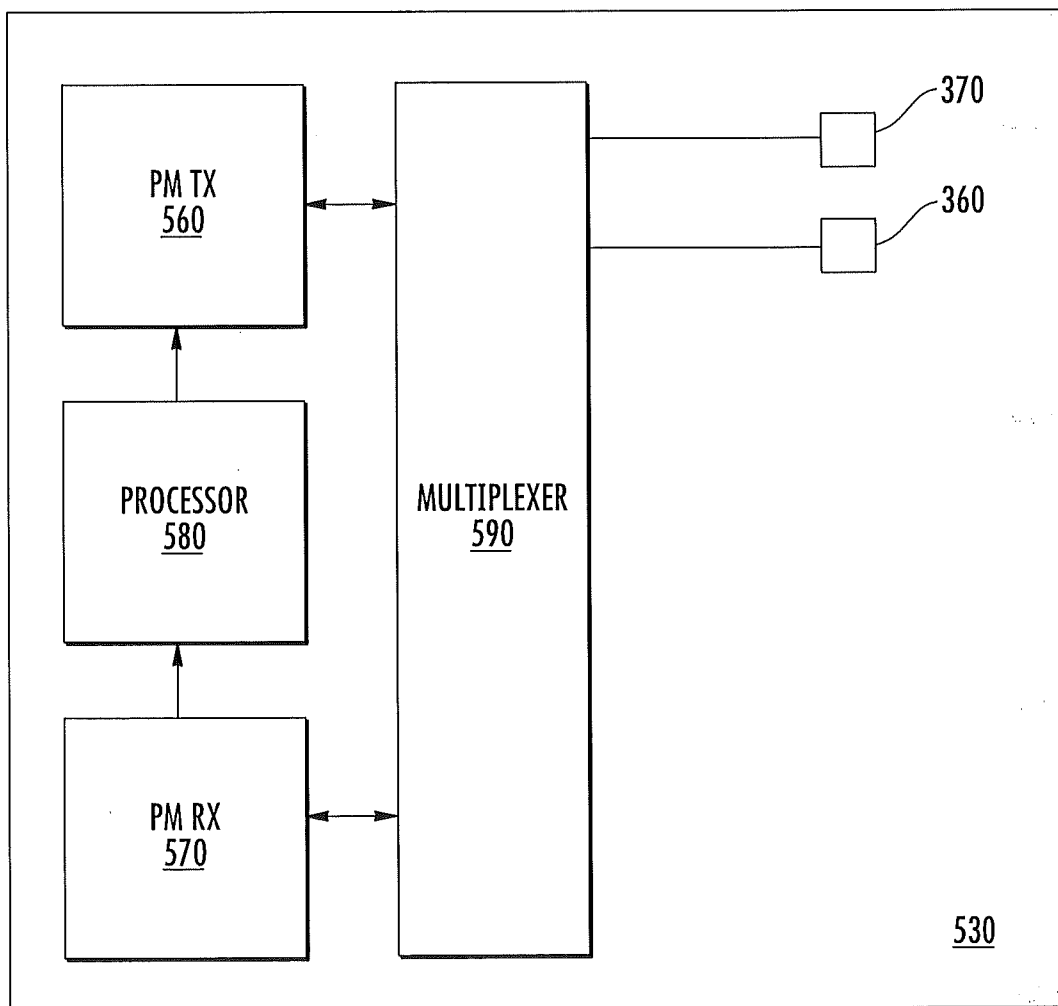
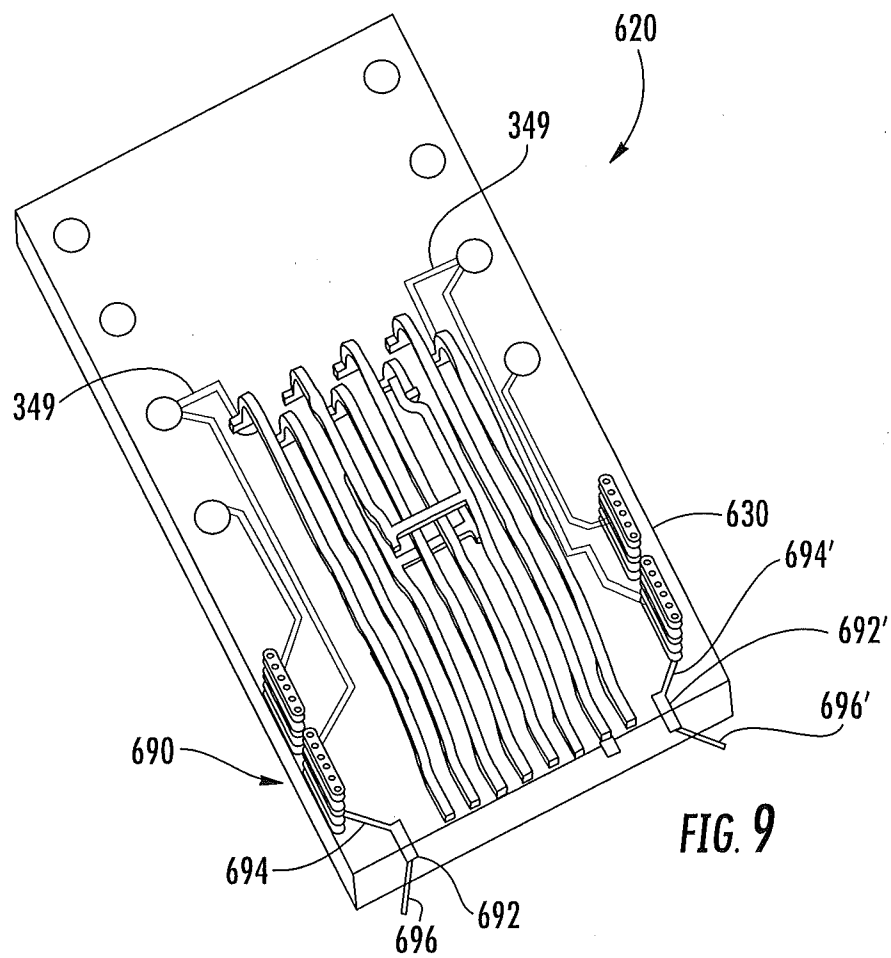


FIG. 8D

13/24



14/24

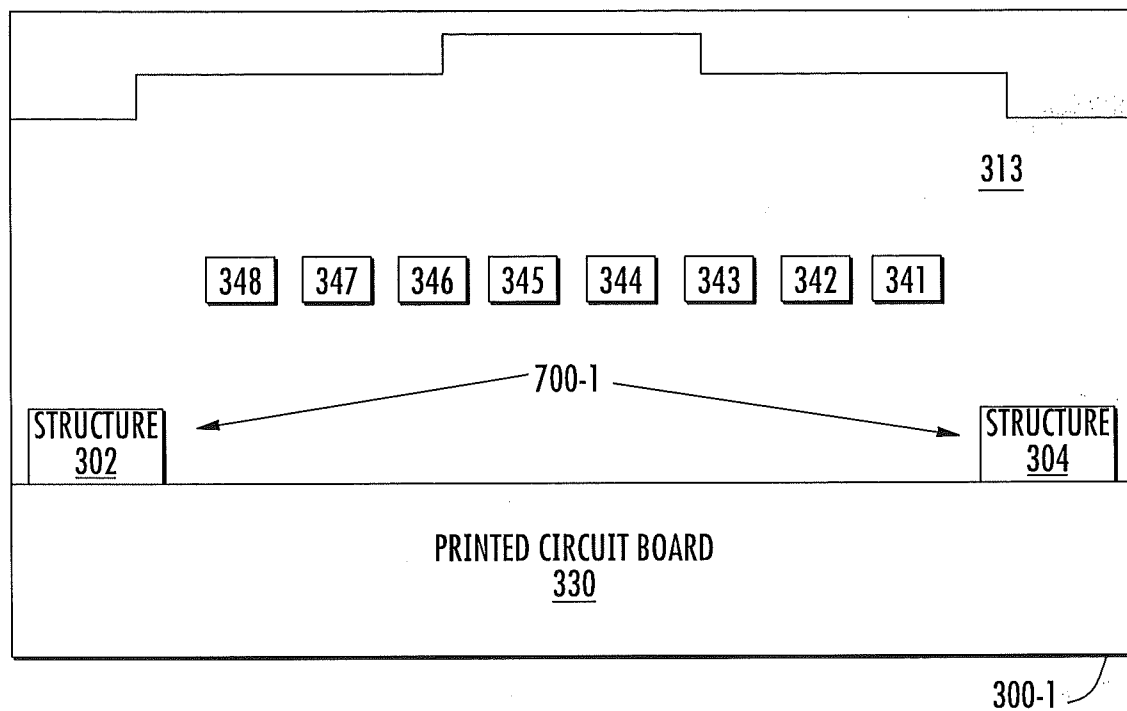


FIG. 10A

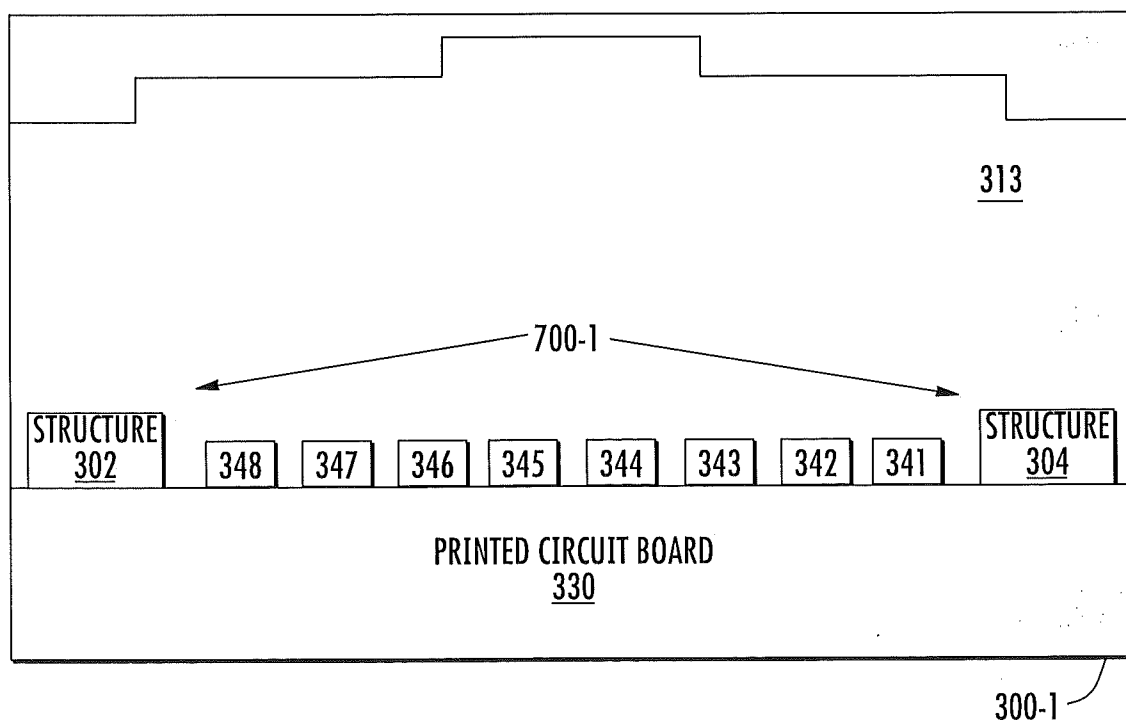


FIG. 10B

15/24

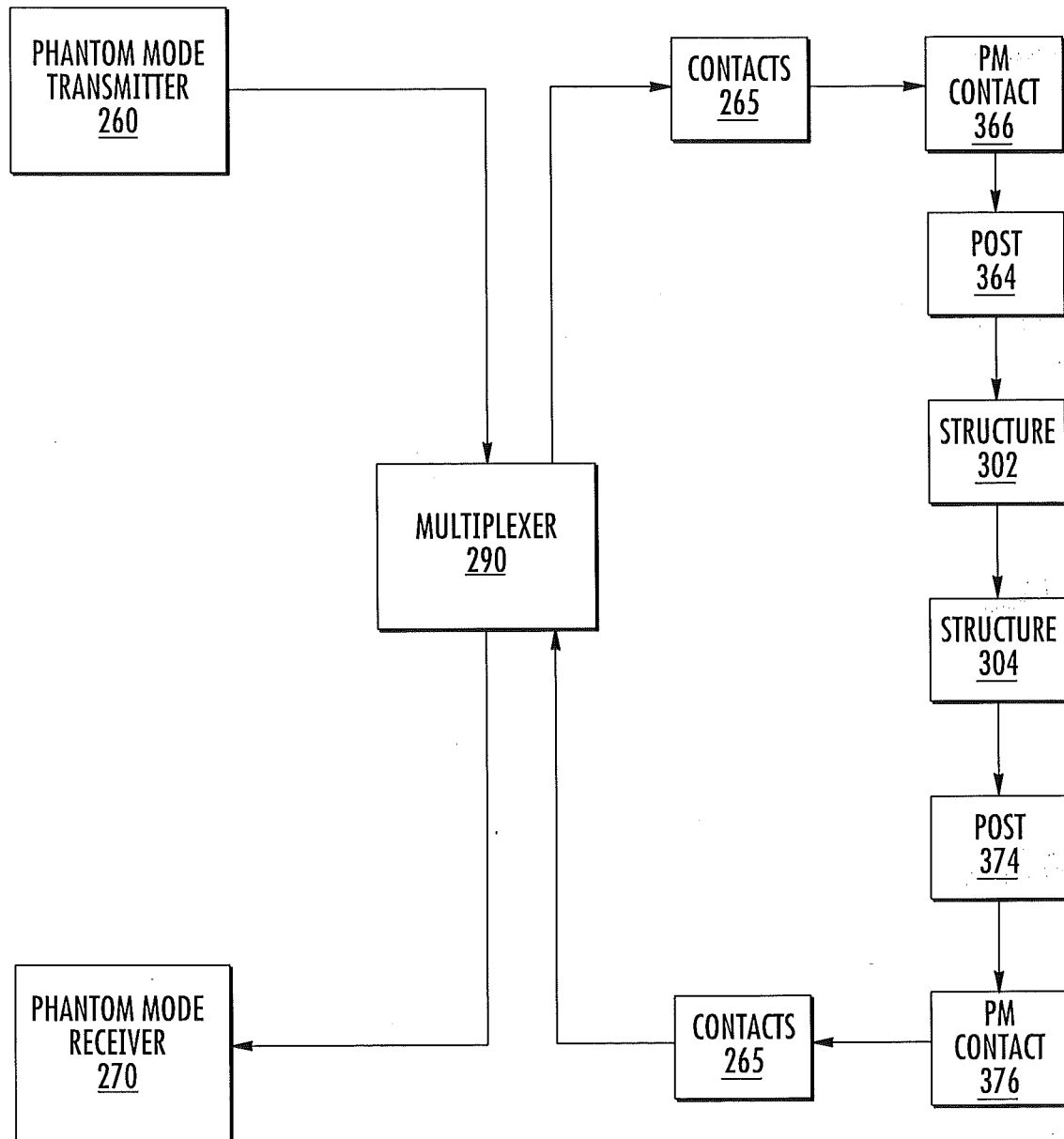


FIG. 10C

16/24

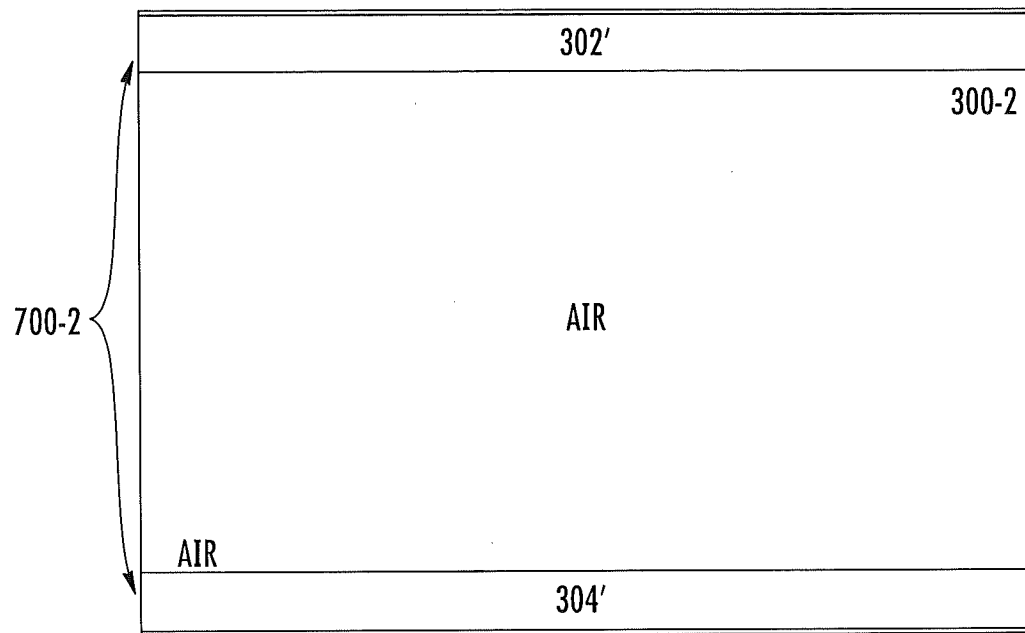


FIG. 11A

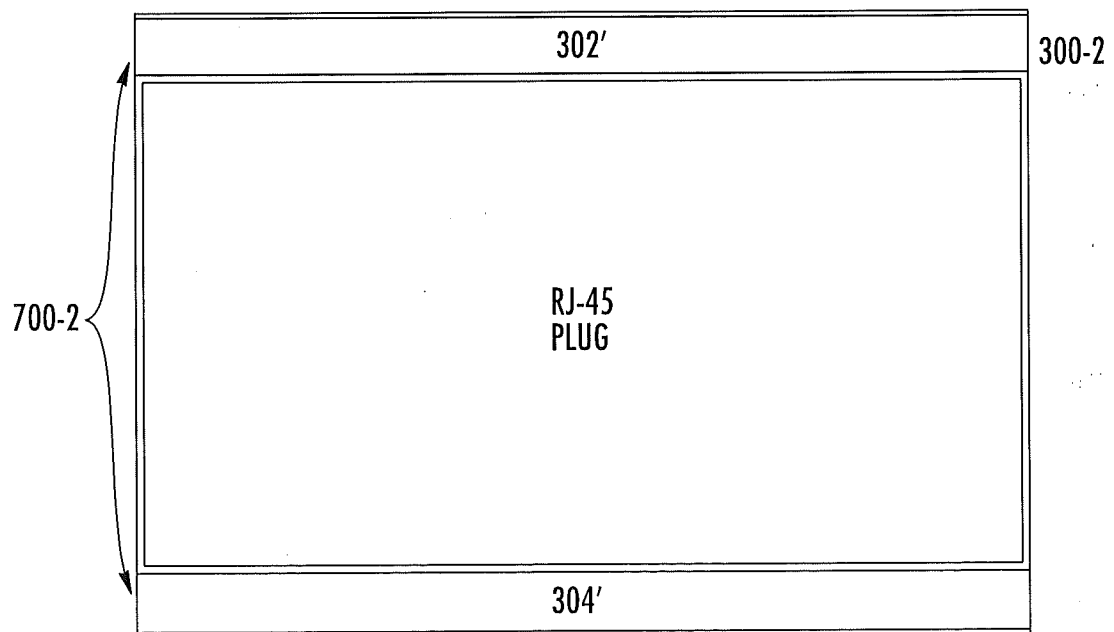


FIG. 11B

17/24

720

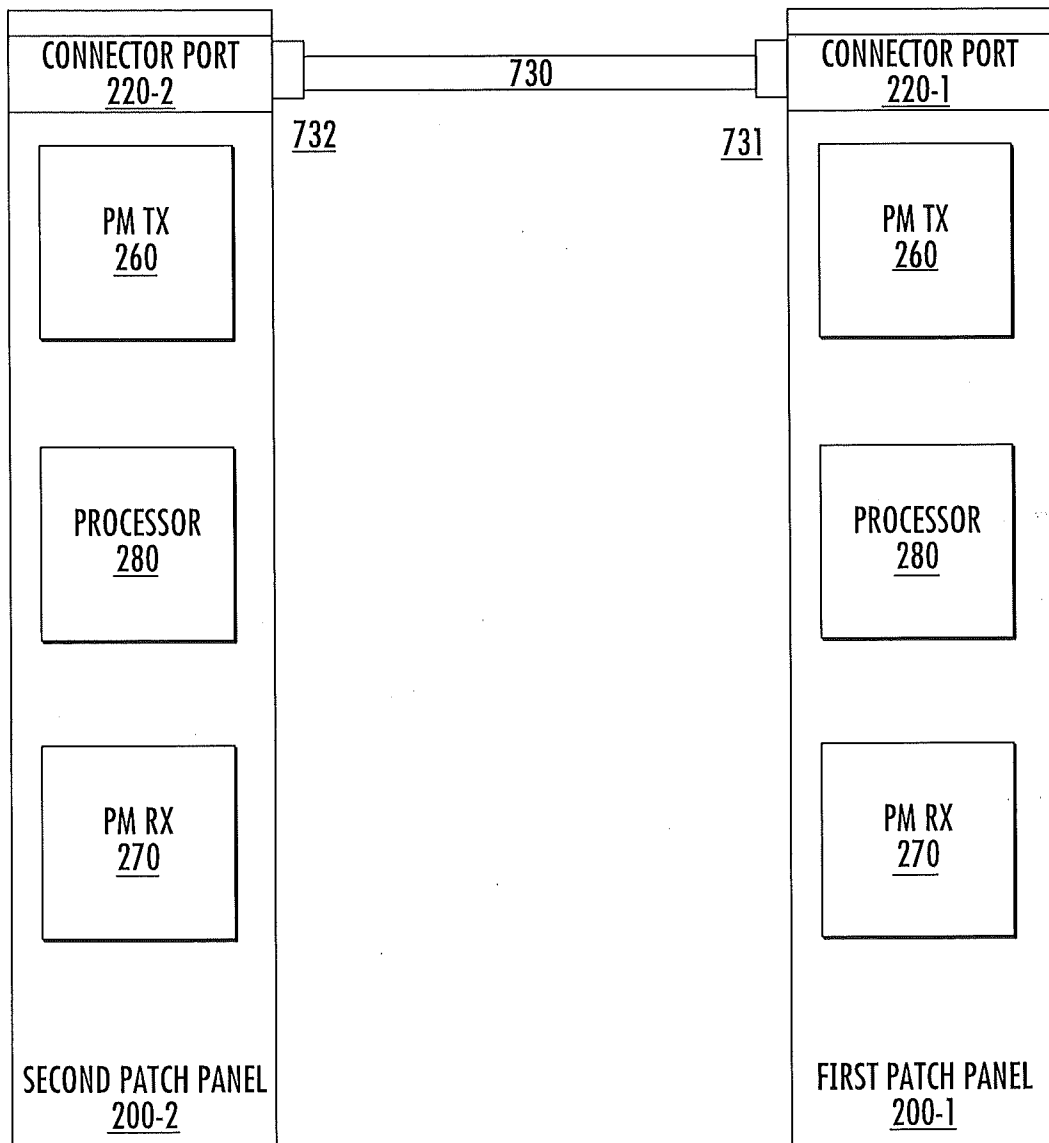
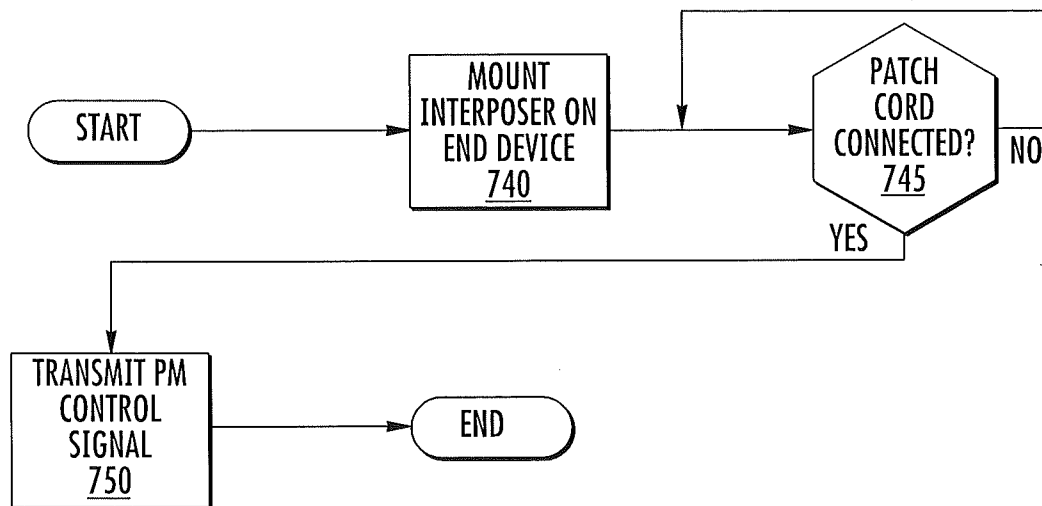


FIG. 12

18/24

**FIG. 13**

19/24

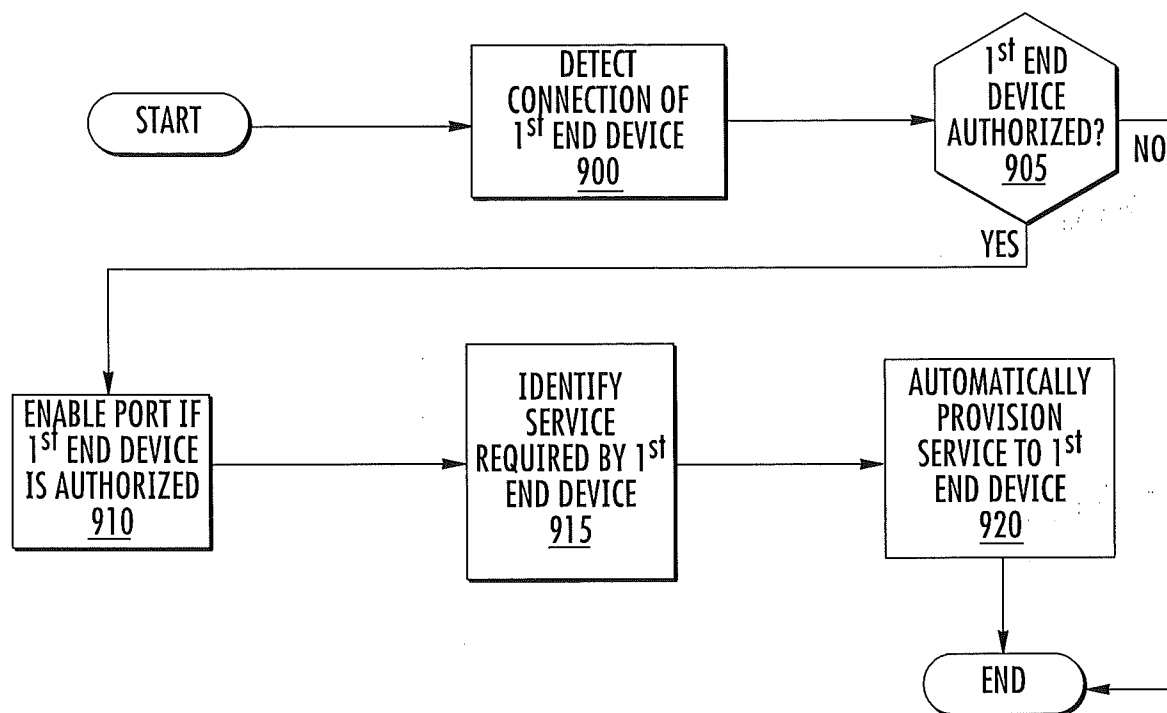


FIG. 14

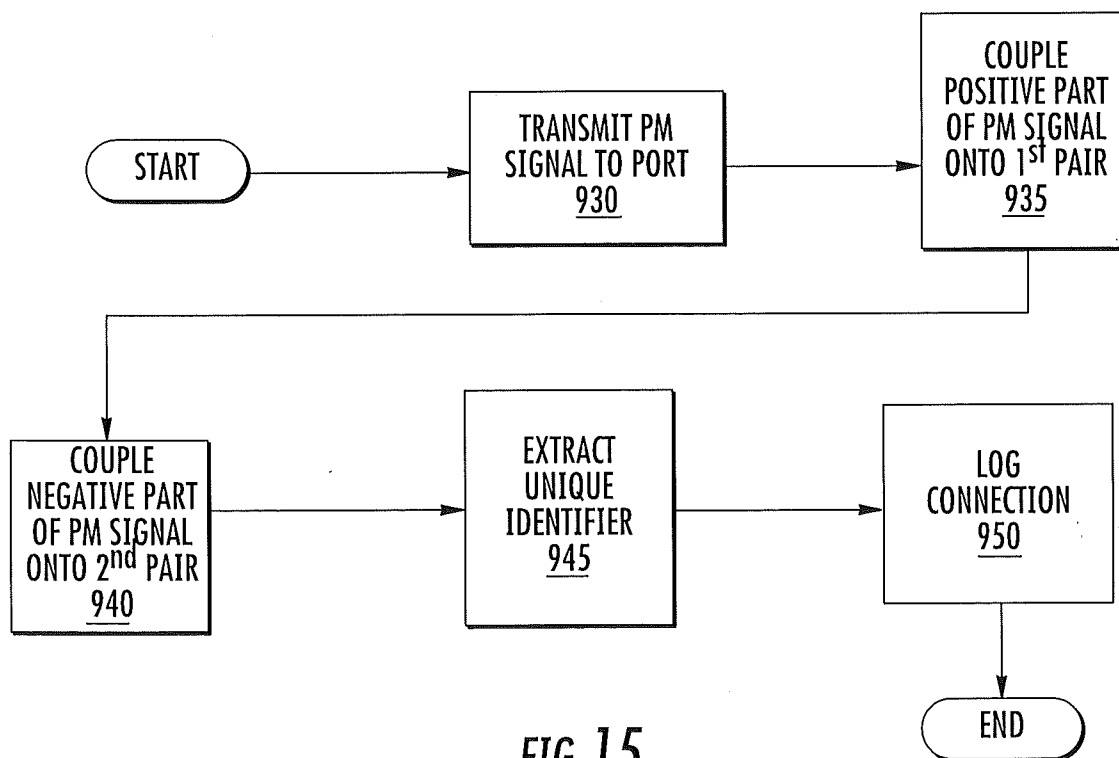


FIG. 15

20/24

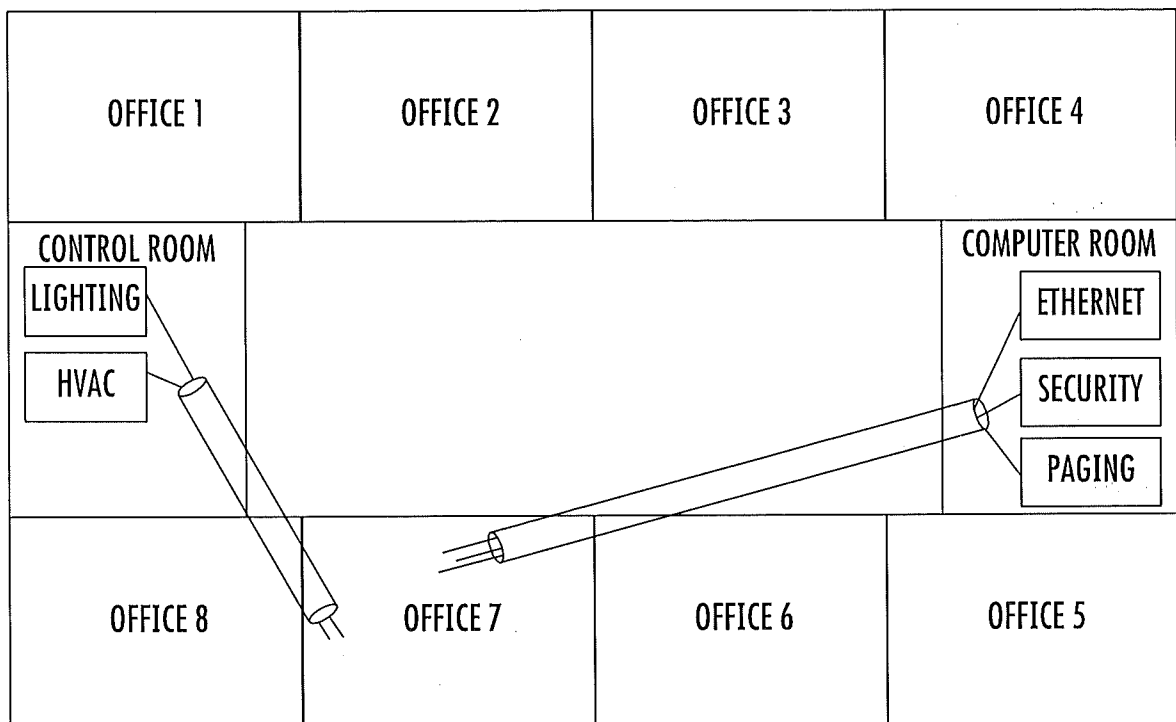


FIG. 16

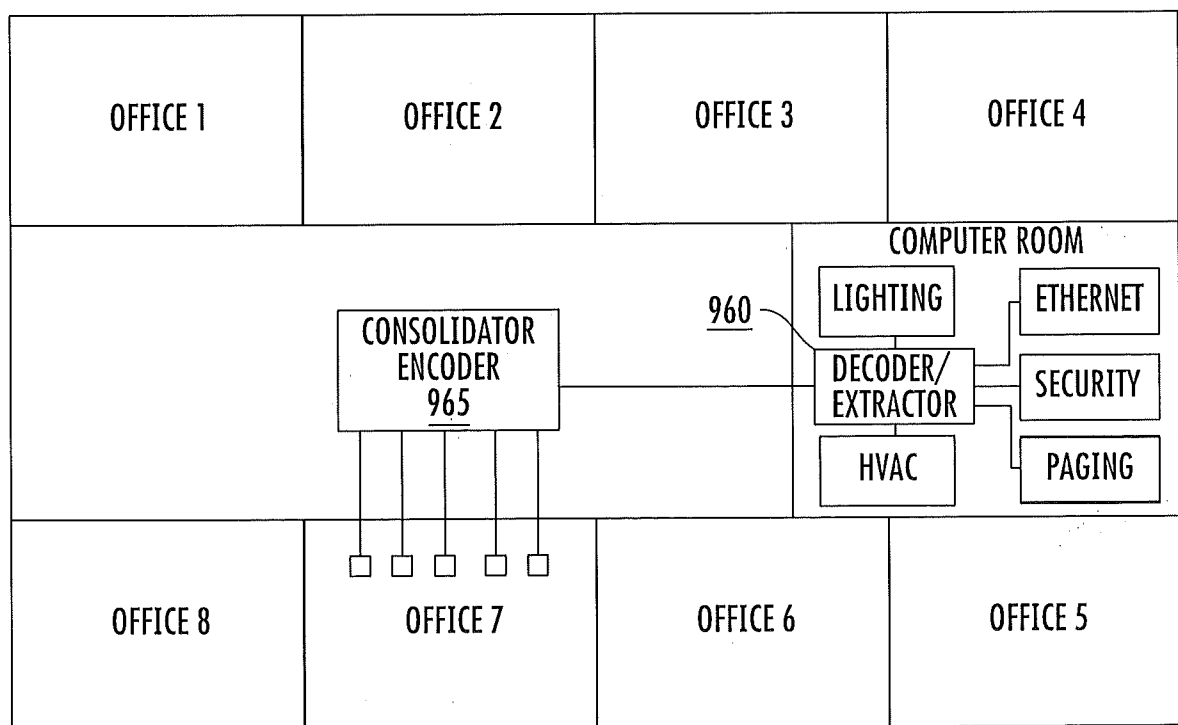


FIG. 17

21/24

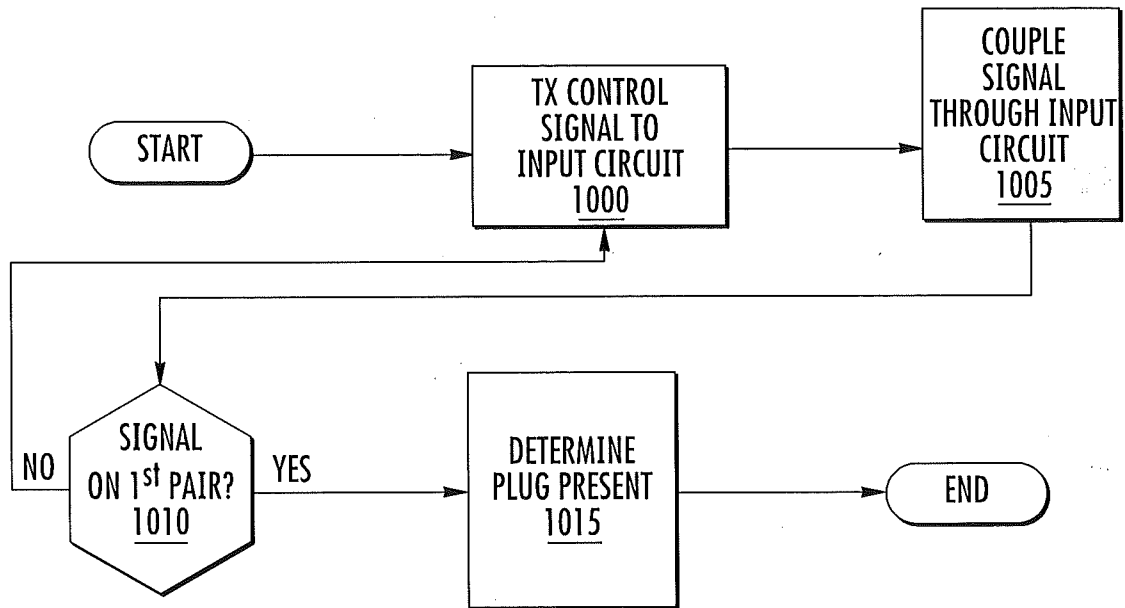


FIG. 18

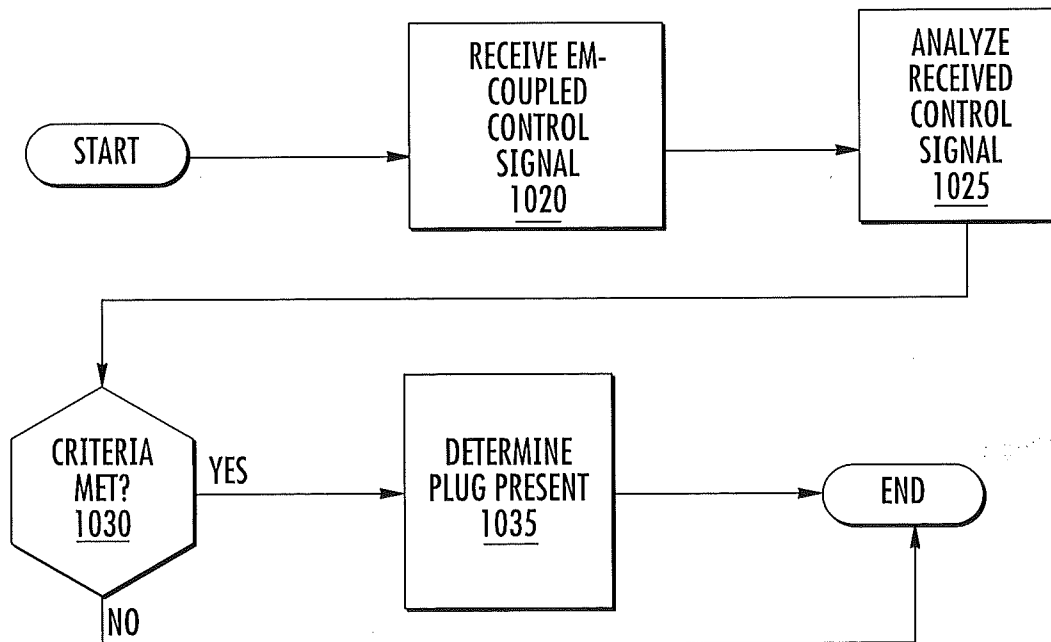
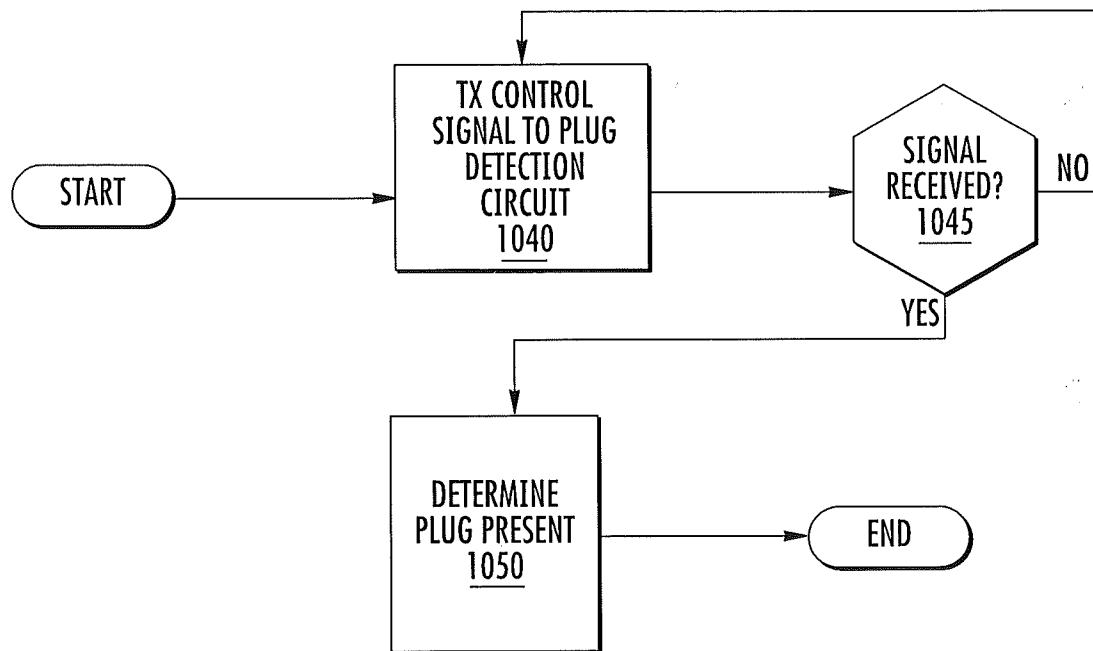


FIG. 19

22/24

**FIG. 20**

23/24

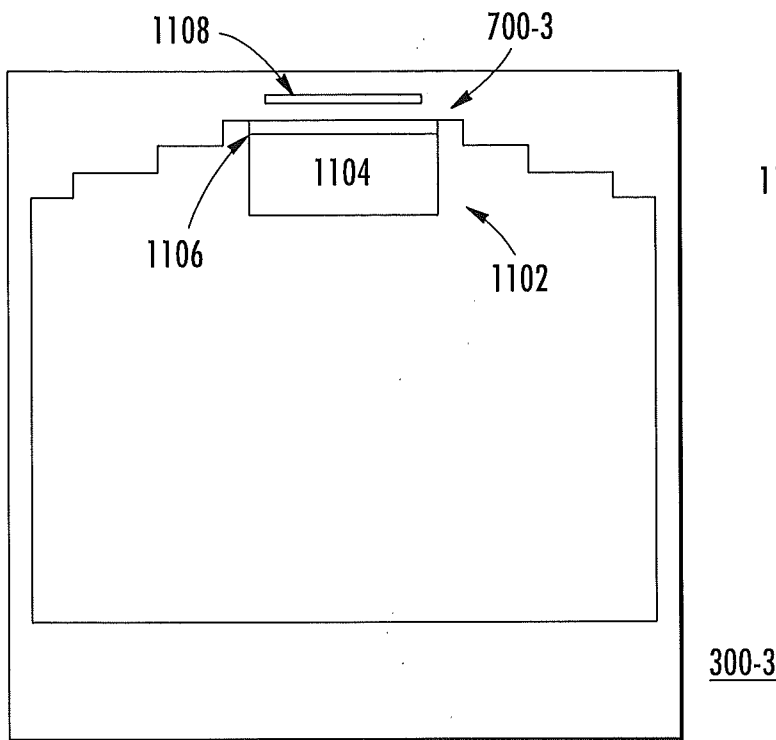


FIG. 21A

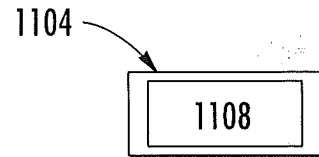


FIG. 21B

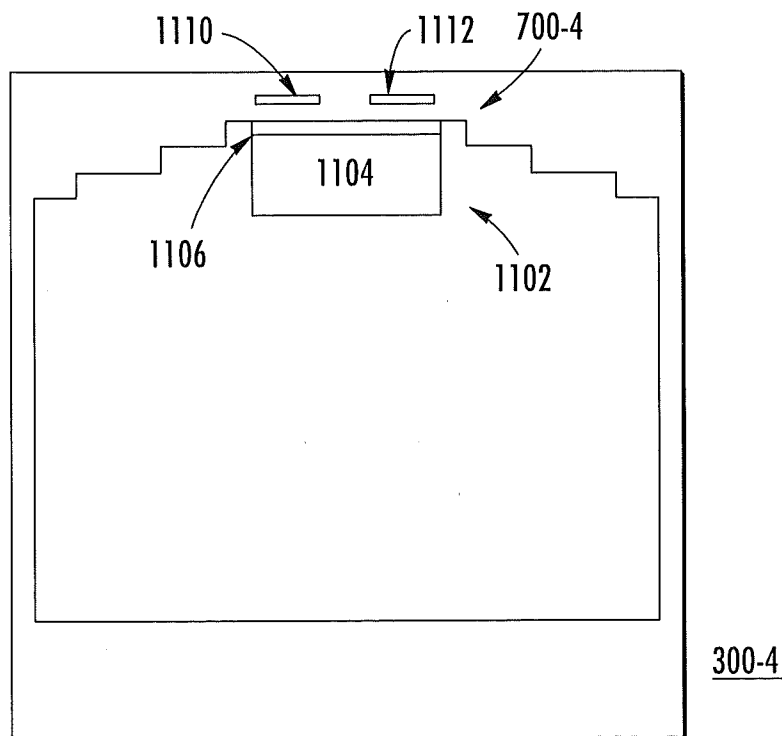


FIG. 22A

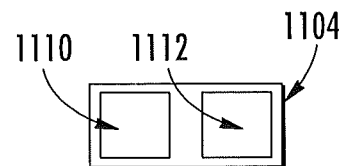


FIG. 22B

24/24

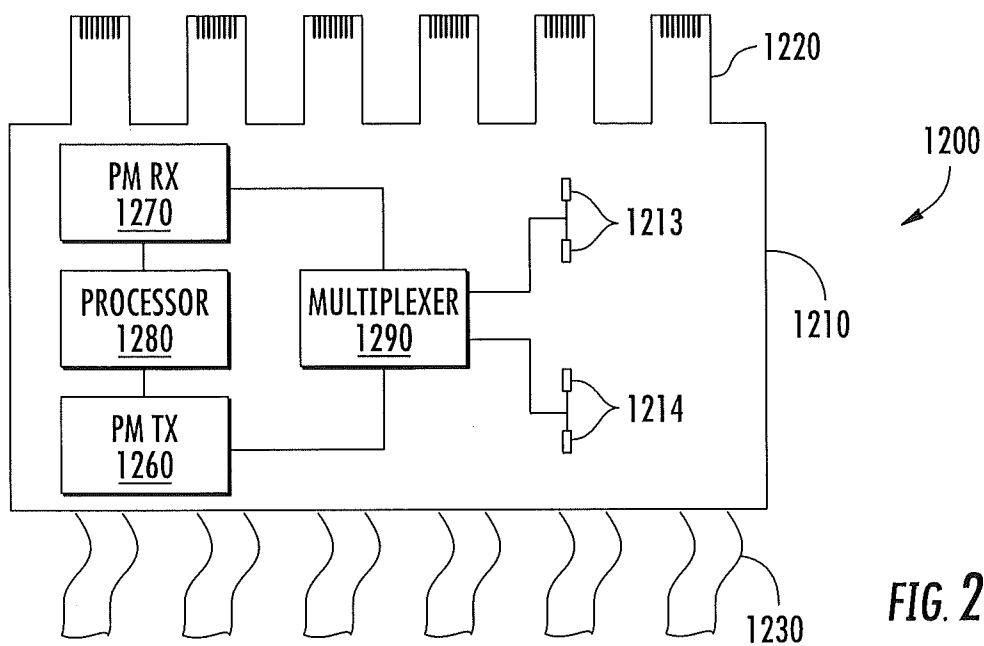


FIG. 23A

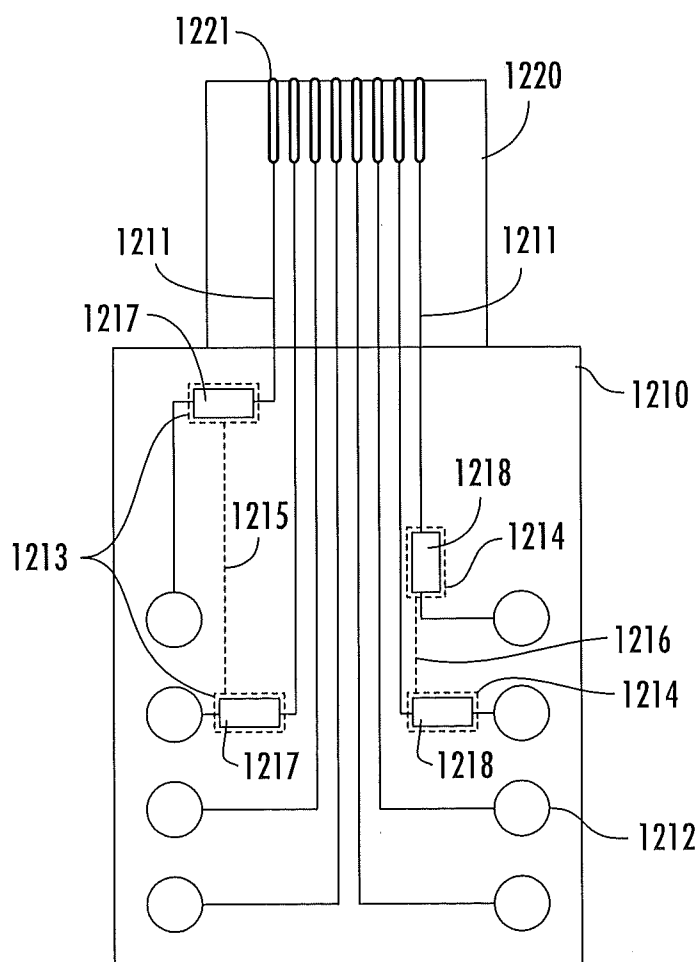


FIG. 23B