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(54) APPARATUS FOR AND METHOD OF SEARCHING AND ORGANIZING INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY INFORMATION UTILIZING AN IP THESAURUS

(75) Inventor: **Eugene M. Lee**, McLean, VA (US)

Correspondence Address:
POSZ LAW GROUP, PLC
12040 SOUTH LAKES DRIVE
SUITE 101
RESTON, VA 20191 (US)

(73) Assignee: **Knowledge Management Objects, LLC**, Arlington, VA

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(60) Provisional application No. 60/277,282, filed on Mar. 21, 2001.

Publication Classification

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

An apparatus for and a method of searching and organizing intellectual property (IP) is provided. In accordance with a preferred embodiment of the invention, an apparatus (and corresponding method) is provided for formulating and facilitating searches for intellectual property, and organizing results of such searches. In an exemplary embodiment, a search and organization server is provided with one or more modules to create and process search queries to be run on local or remote database systems. A class search module, for example, may be provided to provide on-line access to classification information and facilitate searching of intellectual property using select classifications. An IP thesaurus module may be provided for developing a list of elements (e.g., words, textual phrases, concepts, representations, numbers, identifications, pictures, graphics, features, etc.) found in select intellectual property information (e.g., groupings of patents). In accordance with an exemplary embodiment, the list of elements may be used as an aid in learning a new technology, as a search tool to refine search queries or criteria, as a drafting tool to assist in the preparation of technical or legal documents (e.g., proposals, licenses, patent applications, etc.), or any other practical use. A field-of-search module may be provided to creation of a field-of-search based on search information identified from select intellectual property information. Additional modules (e.g., search engine, workspace module, alert generator, report generator, etc.) may be provided in the search server to formulate, store, organize and output results achieved through operation of the search server.

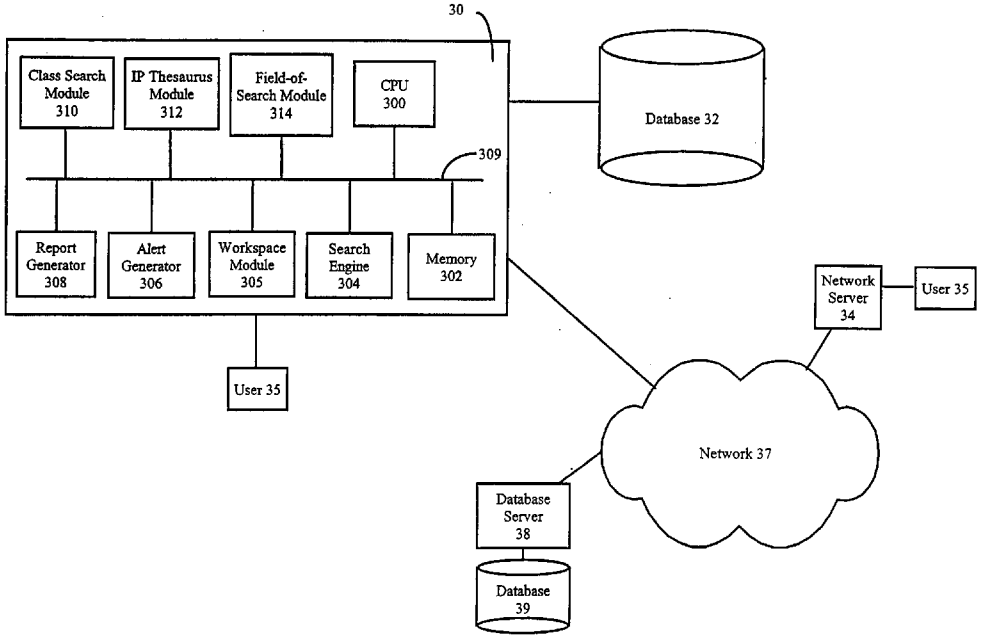


Figure 1

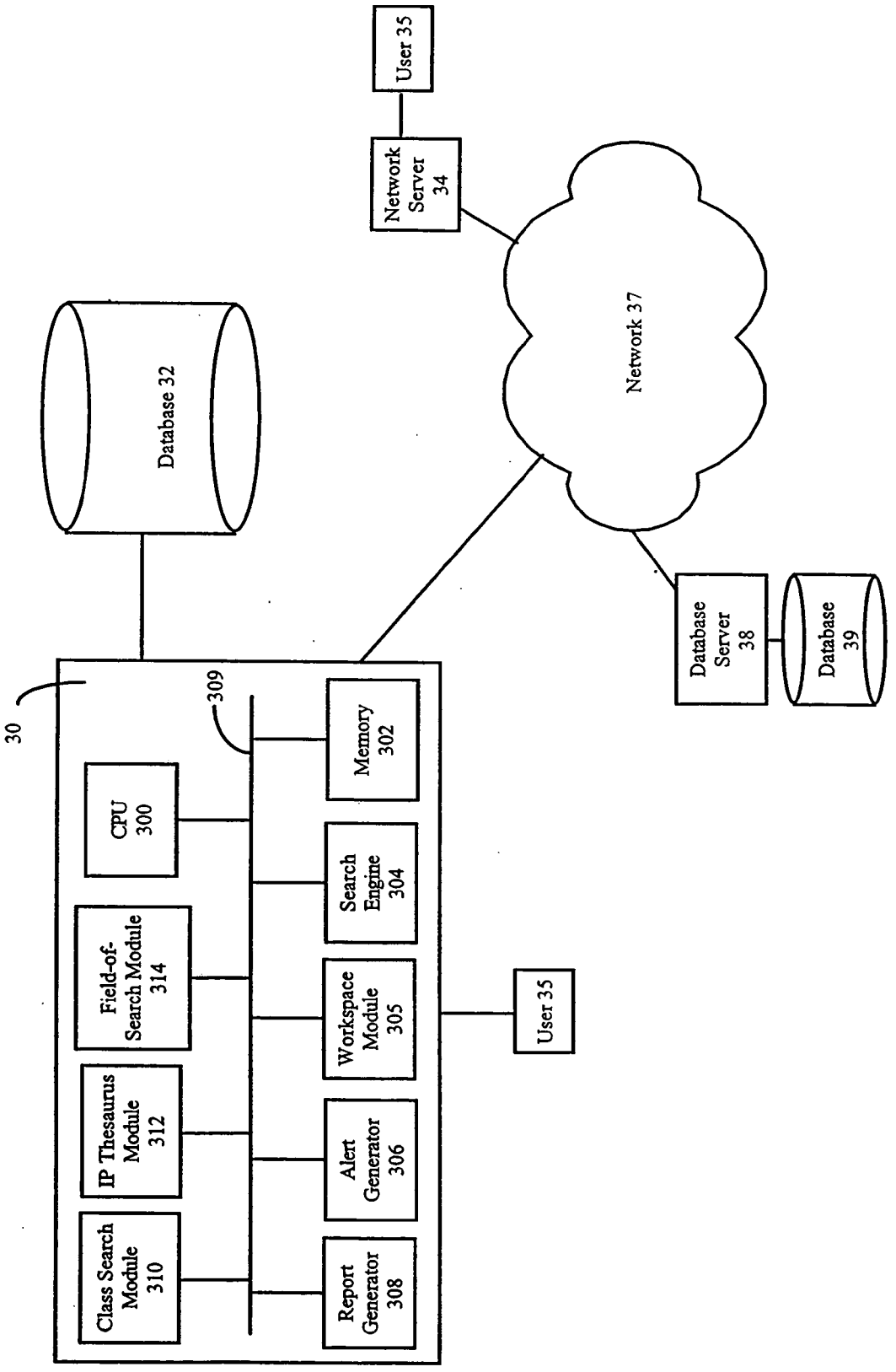

User 35
Network Server 34
Network 37
Database 32
Database Server 38
Database 39
30
309
Memory 302
CPU 300
Search Engine 304
Field-of-Search Module 314
Workspace Module 305
User 35
IP Thesaurus Module 312
Alert Generator 306
Class Search Module 310
Report Generator 308

FIGURE 2

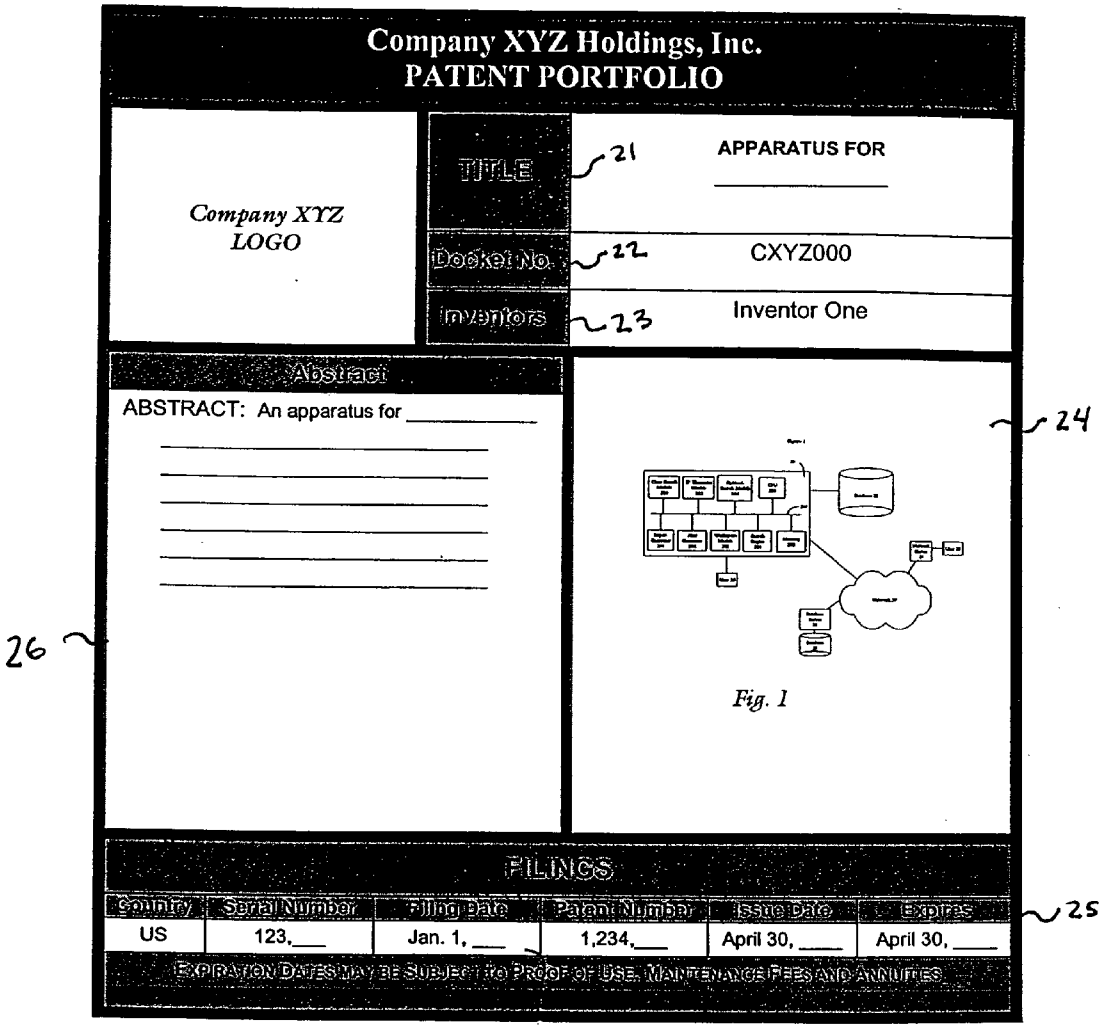


Fig. 1

Figure 3

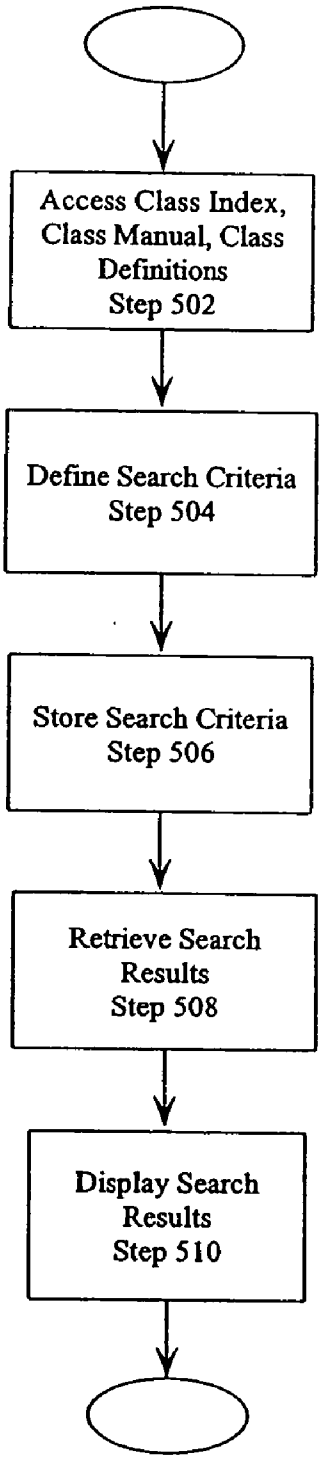

Access Class Index, Class Manual, Class Definitions Step 502
Define Search Criteria Step 504
Store Search Criteria Step 506
Retrieve Search Results Step 508
Display Search Results Step 510

Figure 4

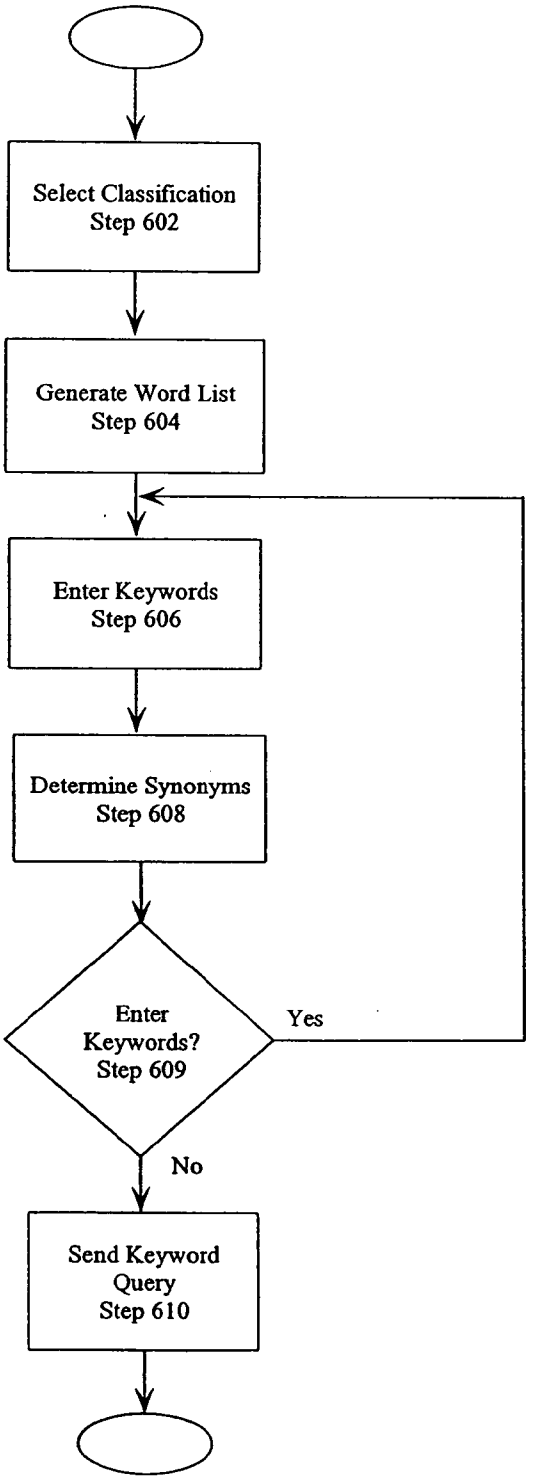
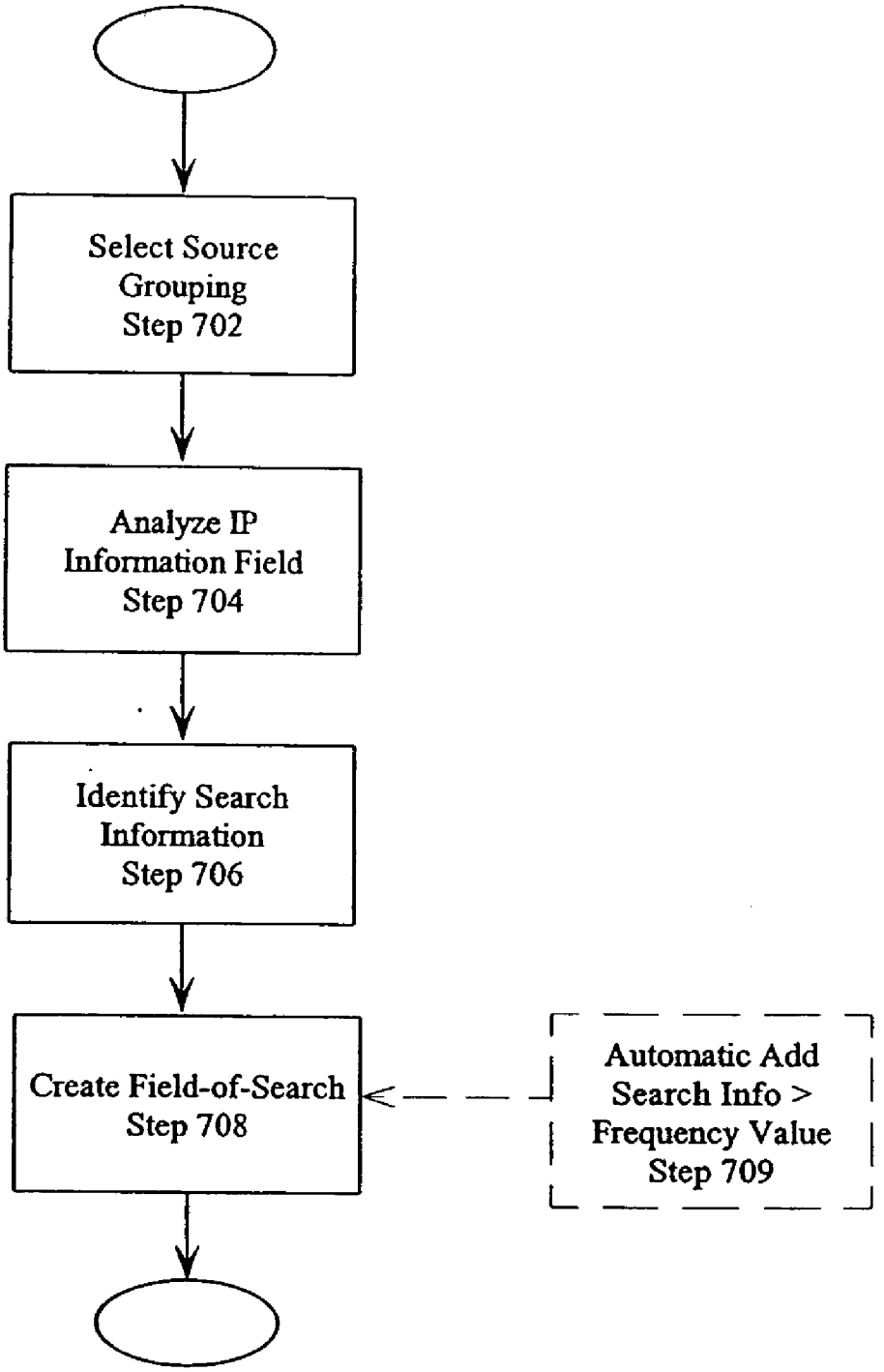

Select Classification
Step 602
Generate Word List
Step 604
Enter Keywords
Step 606
Determine Synonyms
Step 608
Enter
Keywords?
Step 609
Yes
No
Send Keyword
Query
Step 610

Figure 5


Select Source Grouping Step 702
Analyze IP Information Field Step 704
Identify Search Information Step 706
Create Field-of-Search Step 708
Automatic Add Search Info > Frequency Value Step 709

APPARATUS FOR AND METHOD OF SEARCHING AND ORGANIZING INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY INFORMATION UTILIZING AN IP THESAURUS

[0001] This application derives from and claims the benefit of U.S. Provisional Patent Application No. 60/277,282, filed Mar. 21, 2001, which is hereby incorporated by reference in its entirety. This is also related to co-pending U.S. Utility patent application Ser. Nos. 09/875,954 (Attorney Docket No. K7565.0005/P005), filed on Jun. 8, 2001, and Ser. No. 09/875,937 (Attorney Docket No. K7565.0007/P007), filed on Jun. 8, 2001, which are both incorporated herein by reference in their entireties.

BACKGROUND

[0002] Intellectual property (IP) professionals such as patent attorneys, agents, law firms, search firms, corporate IP departments, technology transfer managers, asset-based lenders, and the like perform laborious tasks of searching for, retrieving, analyzing, and organizing various forms of IP, including patents, trademarks, copyrights, and trade secrets.

[0003] Known subscription-based and non-subscription-based search systems provide IP professionals with basic search and retrieval functions. Database hardware and software have been developed for access by IP professionals and other users through personal computers, mainframes, and other processor-based devices. Users may access and view IP information stored locally on CD-ROMs, stored on network storage devices through a local area network, or stored on remote database systems through one or more disparate network paths (e.g., the Internet).

[0004] Electronic searching for intellectual property information has effectively become the preferred searching vehicle given the vast amount of information available, the complexity of the information, the geographical limitations posed, and the technically adeptness of the majority of IP professionals. The known electronic searching systems, however, provide nothing more than rudimentary searching functions that require the IP professionals to formulate the content and direction of their search strategy through previous experience or trial-and-error. The systems are unable to facilitate or automate the creation of search queries and criteria. Nor do the known systems provide for the efficient retrieval, retention, and organization of IP information sought or resulting from the searching process.

SUMMARY

[0005] An apparatus for and a method of searching and organizing intellectual property (IP) is provided. In accordance with a preferred embodiment of the invention, an apparatus (and corresponding method) is provided for formulating and facilitating searches for intellectual property, and organizing results of such searches. In an exemplary embodiment, a search and organization server is provided with one or more modules to create and process search queries to be run on local or remote database systems. A class search module, for example, may be provided to provide on-line access to classification information and facilitate searching of intellectual property information using select classifications. An IP thesaurus module may be provided for developing a list of elements (e.g., words, textual phrases, concepts, representations, numbers, identifications, pictures, graphics, features, etc.) found in select intellectual property information (e.g., groupings of patents). In accordance with an exemplary embodiment, the list of elements may be used as an aid in learning a new technology, as a search tool to refine search queries or criteria, as a drafting tool to assist in the preparation of technical or legal documents (e.g., proposals, licenses, patent applications, etc.), or any other practical use. A field-of-search module may be provided to create a field-of-search based on search information identified from select intellectual property information. Additional modules (e.g., search engine, workspace module, alert generator, report generator, etc.) may be provided in the search server to formulate, store, organize and output results achieved through operation of the search server.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF DRAWINGS

[0006] **FIG. 1** illustrates a system architecture in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the invention;

[0007] **FIG. 2** illustrates a report template created in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the invention;

[0008] **FIG. 3** illustrates an exemplary method of class searching in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the invention;

[0009] **FIG. 4** illustrates an exemplary method of searching utilizing an IP thesaurus in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the invention; and

[0010] **FIG. 5** illustrates an exemplary method of determining a field-of-search in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0011] Preferred embodiments and applications of the invention will now be described. Other embodiments may be realized and structural or logical changes may be made to the disclosed embodiments without departing from the spirit or scope of the invention. Although the preferred embodiments disclosed herein have been particularly described as applied to an apparatus for (and method of) searching and organizing intellectual property in the form of patents, it should be readily apparent that the invention may be embodied to implement any searching or organizing system (or method) having the same or similar problems.

[0012] An exemplary system architecture in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the invention is illustrated in **FIG. 1**. The exemplary system architecture may be used to effectuate any one or more aspects of the searching and organizing operations described in (and apparent from) the specific embodiments, implementations, and illustrations provided herein.

[0013] Some of the many system components that may be employed in the architecture include: one or more searching and organizing servers (symbolically depicted as "SO server **30**"); one or more database units (symbolically depicted as "database **32**"); one or more remote database or other storage units (symbolically depicted as "database **39**"); one or more networks (symbolically depicted as "network **37**"); and one or more users (symbolically depicted as "user or user interface **35**"), as will be described in more detail below.

[0014] In accordance with a preferred embodiment, SO server **30** may include one or more central processing units (CPUs) symbolically represented by CPU **300** used to provide processing of input/output data between SO server **30**, user interface **35**, and/or network **37**, and among the different modules (all connected together via system bus **309**) within SO server **30**. CPU **300**, which may be any known processor or processor-based system, typically executes one or more executable instructions or programs stored in the one or more (local or remote) memory devices (or other articles of manufacture) symbolically represented as memory module **302**. Individual control modules (e.g., search engine **304**, workspace module **305**, alert generator **306**, report generator **308**, class search module **310**, IP thesaurus module **312**, and field-of-search module **314**) may be provided to control processing of the individual searching and/or organizing operations described in (or apparent from) the instant disclosure, as will be described in detail below. The individual control modules may themselves be processors or processor-based systems executing one or more executable programs (locally or remotely) stored in a memory component (or other article of manufacture).

[0015] User interface **35** may include one or more display devices (e.g., CRT, LCD, or other known displays) or other output devices (e.g., printer, etc.), and one or more input devices (e.g., keyboard, mouse, stylus, touch screen interface, or other known input mechanisms) for facilitating interaction of a user with the system via user interface **35**. As illustrated, user interface **35** may be directly coupled to SO server **30**, or indirectly coupled to SO server **30** through one or more interfacing modules (e.g., network server **34**) and one or more direct or indirect transmission paths (e.g., symbolically represented as "network **37**").

[0016] Network **37** may take any wired/wireless form of known connective technology (e.g., corporate or individual LAN, enterprise WAN, intranet, Internet, Virtual Private Network (VPN), combinations of network systems, etc.) to allow SO server **30** to provide local/remote information and control data to/from other locations (e.g., remote database server **38**/remote database **39**, network server **34**/user interface **35**, etc.). In accordance with a preferred embodiment of the invention, SO server **30** may be implemented in standalone or network devices, as well as serving one or more users over a collection of remote and disparate networks (e.g., Internet, intranet, VPN, etc.).

[0017] In accordance with a preferred embodiment of the invention, information related to intellectual property is stored in database **32** and/or in one or more remote database systems (e.g., database **39**). (For simplicity, reference is made herein only to database **32**, although it should be readily apparent that one or more supplementary or alternative storage devices (e.g., remote database **39**) may be employed in lieu of (or in combination with database **32**) for any given implementation of the invention.) In this exemplary embodiment, the stored intellectual property information is related to patents, including text and images of U.S. foreign, international, or multi-national patent publications (e.g., issued patents or equivalents, published patent applications, statutory invention registrations, abstracts, etc.), including Japanese, Patent Cooperation Treaty (PCT), and European Convention patent publications, as well as other related information (e.g., technical publications, sequence listings, file histories, government records, public notices, etc.) that may be associated or otherwise pertinent to such patent publications. The different information may be stored as a continuous set of data, segmented to form a contiguous whole, or separated into different segments to reside in and among one or more server databases, as well as partitioned for storage in one or more files to achieve efficiencies in storage, access, and processing of data.

[0018] The stored intellectual property information may be stored in one or more database structures for use in their raw, natural, or unmodified data states (e.g., as delivered from the data source). In accordance with a preferred embodiment, at least some portion of the information may be modified prior to storage in database **32**. For example, the printed patents and published applications may be marked up using Extensible Markup Language (XML) prior to storage in database **32**. The XML-based information can be easily transformed by the system or user into a variety of formats, including document types such as PDF, RTF, TIF, HTML, as well as interfaces understood by diverse components such as wireless and handheld devices.

[0019] Search engine **304** is provided (alone or in conjunction with other modules) to control the search and retrieval of intellectual property information stored in database **32** based on search criteria or queries formulated in SO server **30** (e.g., by modules **310**, **312**, **314**, etc.) and/or by user **35**. Search engine **304** may provide text-based, graphics-based, code-based, or other search/query mechanisms to produce search results to be viewed, accessed, or otherwise output from SO server **30** (e.g., to user **35**). In an exemplary embodiment, for example, search engine **304** performs searches based on input data such as: identification numbers (e.g., patent number); keywords; text or graphics in select fields (e.g., different segments or information fields of documents such as Publication Number, Publication Date, Title, Inventor, Assignee, Application Number, Filing Date, Related Data, Priority Data, International Classification, U.S. Classification, Cross-Reference Classification, Field of Search, References Cited, Forward References Citing Document, Examiner, Agent, Abstract, Background, Field of Invention, Summary, Brief Description of Drawings, Detailed Description, claims, Drawings, etc.); Boolean logic characters, or other search criteria (e.g., date restrictions, etc.).

[0020] Results of the search or query are compiled for storage, display, or other output (e.g., to user **35**). The results may include a list of intellectual property (e.g., issued patents) or other information corresponding to the search criteria or query developed by (or input to) SO server **30**. The information listed may link to underlying data (e.g., patent images, text, etc.) stored locally or remotely in database **32**, may be links to resources on remote storage systems (e.g., U.S. Patent and Trademark Office database, Web site of commercial database provider, etc.) accessible over an external network (e.g., network **37**), or may be other links or data identifying a location or resource (on or off-line) of information (e.g., name of printed publication, name/address of publisher, or identity of thesis cataloged in library, etc.) corresponding to the search criteria or query. Search engine **304** is programmed to permit editing or refinement of the search criteria or query to perform additional searches on different data sets or the data set produced from the initial search results.

[0021] SO server **30** makes the search results (and any available underlying documents listed) available for viewing or other output (e.g., print, e-mail, fax, etc.) by user **35** (or other systems). In a preferred embodiment, the search results are presented as an ordered list. The search results may be ordered, sorted, and reordered in accordance with one or more known order preferences set by a user (e.g., date, alphabetical by title, inventor, assignee, relevancy, weighted relevancy, scoring formula, etc.).

[0022] In accordance with a preferred embodiment, the resulting information (i.e., results and/or available underlying documents) may be downloaded in one or more textual/graphical formats (e.g., RTF, PDF, TIFF, etc.), or set for alternative delivery to one or more specified locations (e.g., via e-mail, fax, regular mail, courier, etc.) in any desired format (e.g., print, storage on electronic media such as CD-ROM, etc.). SO server **30** is programmed to allow users, that are viewing the search results and underlying documents on user interface **35**, to view one or more documents on the same display, as well as view one or more portions or segments or information fields of different documents (e.g., abstract, drawings, claims, etc.) simultaneously so as to facilitate analysis of the search results.

[0023] In accordance with a preferred embodiment, the individual items or documents listed in the search results, as well as the underlying documents themselves, may include one or more specific references, data fields, links, or other indications of subsequent history of the item or document. The subsequent history information when used in connection with patent information, for example, may refer to the existence of pending or completed reexamination, reissue, opposition, arbitration, litigation, or other proceedings. Where documentation of the subsequent history (e.g., reexamination certificate, file history, complaint, notice, etc.) is available (e.g., from database **32**, remote database **39**, etc.), links or other identification of the resource location of the documentation may be included in the subsequent history information to allow the documentation to be easily accessed, retrieved, and/or output for use (e.g., viewing, printing, etc.) by user **35** or the like. The subsequent history information may be acquired by (or provided to) SO server **30** periodically (e.g., during database updates) for inclusion (e.g., in a subsequent history data field, etc.) with respective items or documents within the data domain of SO server **30**.

[0024] A specialized subsequent history field that may be included is referred to herein as a "Forward Reference" field that is associated with an underlying item or document. The Forward Reference field provides information regarding subsequent items or documents (e.g., patents, publications, notices, etc.) that have cited or otherwise made reference to the underlying item or document.

[0025] Search results, the underlying documents listed in the search results, as well as the search criteria itself may be saved (in local or remote memory units). In a preferred embodiment, users are provided with dedicated workspace areas in which to save, edit and organize saved search results, resulting documents, and search criteria. Workspace module **305** is provided (alone or in conjunction with other modules) to facilitate and control use of the workspace areas by individuals or groups of individuals. Workspace module **305** permits the creation and naming of portfolios or other folder mechanisms that may be useful in the retention and organization of the saved information. Select documents, search results, and search criteria may be moved into different folders for storage and organization purposes. The folders may be organized into different hierarchical arrangements where desired. Users are permitted to annotate individual documents, search results, criteria, as well as folders with notes, comments, and identification data for their own use or group usage. The annotations may themselves include the introduction, importation or link (e.g., URLs) to a variety of information, including documents, images, video, multimedia content, and other data available or stored locally or remotely through the network.

[0026] Alert generator **306** may be used (alone or in conjunction with other modules) to access saved searches (stored in either a user's workspace, or in any other memory unit) and automatically update the searches upon a lapse of a predetermined period (e.g., daily, weekly, monthly, etc.), or upon occurrence of a predetermined event (e.g., database update, etc.). A user requesting that a saved search be automatically updated, can specify how the user is to be alerted of any changes in the search results. Alert generator **306**, for example, can be programmed to provide an alert (e.g., containing the new search results) to a user by sending an email message, voice mail message, pager message, facsimile message, regular mail message, or other mechanism (or combination of such mechanisms) specified by the user. The update search can be performed on only portions (e.g., updated data) of the database or the entire database.

[0027] Report generator **308** may be provided for use (alone or in conjunction with other modules) in providing reports identifying search criteria, search results, or other pertinent information as customized by a user. Report generator **308**, for example, may be programmed to allow users to create and store templates or other forms to be populated during report generation. Reports may then be generated manually or automatically from selected data sets (e.g., identified search results, select documents, etc.), or from contents of one or more workspace folders. Portfolios in a user's workspace storing intellectual property of a given company, for example, can be used to generate reports of the company holdings using a customized template.

[0028] The template may include any textual or graphical content stored or otherwise referenced in the portfolio (or in any other local or remote memory unit) for retrieval and placement in the report as dictated by the customized template. In an exemplary embodiment illustrated in **FIG. 2**, a company logo **20**, is retrieved from storage (e.g., in the portfolio folder, database **32**, remote database **39**, etc.) and positioned in the upper left-hand corner of the report, as dictated by the template. In this exemplary embodiment, the intellectual property information stored in the portfolio pertains to the company patent holdings, and the template has been customized to include only specific portions of each patent. Thus, for each patent stored or otherwise referenced in the workspace portfolio, the patent title **21**, docket number **22**, inventor name **23**, drawing **FIG. 24**, filing data **25**, and abstract **26** are printed in their respective positions as dictated by the customized template.

[0029] In accordance with a preferred embodiment of the invention, class search module **310** (**FIG. 1**) is provided to implement (alone or in conjunction with other nodules) a search system for use with one or more classification sys-

tems (e.g., U.S. Patent and Trademark Office classification of patents, classification of goods and services for trademarks, U.S. Copyright Office classification of copyrighted works, etc.). During a user search, class search module **310** is programmed to gain access to underlying data of a classification system from database **32** (and/or any other accessible remote system having some or all of the underlying data). Class search module **310** may output the underlying data, for example, as a display on user interface **35**. In an exemplary embodiment, the underlying data may be displayed as an on-line classification index for on-line access to a list of subject headings referring to specific classifications made in the classification system. The display may further include an on-line classification manual for on-line access to a list of class titles in the classification system, as well as on-line classification definitions for on-line access to explanations and illustrations of subject matter classified in each classification.

[**0030**] In accordance with a preferred embodiment, class search module **310** is programmed to effectuate the operational steps illustrated in **FIG. 3** and described below. A user performing a desired search is given access to and able to review the different subject headings, titles, and definitions in the classification system to locate and select the most pertinent classifications (step **502**). Class search module **310** receives input data from user interface **35** regarding one or more classifications selected by the user. The classifications selected may be implemented in a variety of forms. The classifications may include, for example, "current classification,""current cross-reference classification," respectively directed to the current primary and secondary classifications (e.g., class\subclass) assigned to intellectual property information to be searched, as well as the "former,""original," or other classification and cross-reference classification data of the information (e.g., at time of publication of the information). The different forms of classification data available (e.g., "classification,""cross-reference classification," etc.) may be selected individually, in combinations, or all at once, as desired by a user.

[**0031**] The selected classifications are used to define search criteria to be used in searching database **32** for desired intellectual property information (step **504**). The search criteria as defined is stored in a user accessible storage bank (step **506**). The search criteria stored in the storage bank may be output by class search module **310** to be displayed, edited (e.g., classifications added or deleted), or further refined at user interface **35**. The stored search criteria is transmitted by class search module **310** itself or other modules (e.g., search engine) to database **32** for execution so as to identify any intellectual property information corresponding to the search criteria. Any intellectual property information corresponding to the search criteria is retrieved (step **508**) by class search module **310** (or other modules) for subsequent processing. The search results may be output to the user in any known fashion, including display on user interface **35** (step **510**), and stored in a user workspace, if desired. Preferably, the search results are displayed as a list of intellectual property information having the same or similar form as that described above in connection with the search results produced from search engine **304**. The listed information may thus be links to underlying intellectual property information (e.g., patent images, text, etc.) stored locally or remotely in database **32**, links to resources on remote storage systems (e.g., U.S. Patent and Trademark Office database, Web site of commercial database provider, etc.) accessible over an external network (e.g., network **37**), or other links or data identifying a location or resource (on or off-line) of information (e.g., name of printed publication, name/address of publisher, or identity of thesis cataloged in library, etc.) corresponding to the search criteria or query.

[**0032**] In accordance with a preferred embodiment, class search module **310** is programmed to display search results from individual classifications separately, ordered in any preference designated by the user (e.g., date, alphabetical by title, inventor, assignee, relevancy, weighted relevancy, scoring formula, etc.). A user may alternatively request that class search module **310** present any two or more selected classifications as a simultaneous listing or single grouping of search results (ordered as desired), with removal of any duplicates arising from commonly classified documents or information.

[**0033**] Class search module **310** is programmed to permit a user to further define or otherwise edit the search criteria to refine or limit the search results. Other search criteria or queries performed by search engine **304** (or other modules) can be added to the stored search criteria (or at least searched in conjunction with the stored search criteria) to effectively narrow the focus of the search. Class search module **310** may retrieve the additional search criteria from stored search criteria (e.g., imported from a user's workspace) or otherwise receive the additional search criteria in the form of input data from user interface **35** (e.g., via keyboard). The additional search criteria may, for example, be additional keywords to be searched in an entire document or in select fields (e.g., detailed description only). Other known limitations (e.g., date restrictions) or search elements (e.g., Boolean logic operators) may be added to further refine the search criteria. The search criteria thus refined or edited may again be transmitted (and/or stored for later transmission) to database **32** (and/or remote systems) for execution on the entire database or only on a selected portion of the database (e.g., the previous search results, updated portions of the database, etc.).

[**0034**] Select documents, search results, and/or search criteria may be stored in a user's workspace in a manner similar to that described above in connection with search engine **304**.

[**0035**] In accordance with a preferred embodiment of the invention, IP Thesaurus module **312** (**FIG. 1**) is provided to implement (alone or in conjunction with other modules) a variety of functions and operations related to the analysis and determination of elements of select intellectual property information (e.g., patents, trademarks, copyrights, mask works, trade secrets, etc.). Preferably, IP Thesaurus module **312** is programmed to receive input data or signals from a user (e.g., via user interface **35**) identifying select intellectual property information to form or otherwise be designated as a source collection or grouping (hereinafter "source grouping") of intellectual property information. In accordance with a preferred embodiment, IP Thesaurus module **312** (directly, or indirectly) effectuates the retrieval and collection of the source grouping of intellectual property information into a memory unit (e.g., memory **302**) that is accessible by IP Thesaurus module **312** (and/or SO server **30**).

[**0036**] In accordance with a preferred embodiment, the select intellectual property information input by the user

may be individual intellectual property (e.g., patents) identified by native indicia (e.g., list of patents identified by patent number, common assignee, date categories, etc.). The select intellectual property information may also be pre-existing groupings such as intellectual property information previously identified in logical organizational constructs (e.g., folders in the user's workspace, saved search results, etc.) stored in a memory unit or system (e.g., memory unit **302**, database **32**, remote memory storage through network **37**, etc.). IP Thesaurus module **312** thus may be programmed to receive input data from the user merely providing the identity or location of the underlying information (or even the underlying information itself) to facilitate retrieval and/or access to the select information.

[**0037**] In accordance with one commercial embodiment, for example, IP Thesaurus module **312** may be used in connection with an established classification system such as the classification system maintained by the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office for patent publications for searching patents, or the classification system for goods/services for searching trademarks. The source grouping, thus, in this exemplary embodiment may represent a field of search (e.g., patent search classes, subclasses, enumerated digests, etc.) of interest to the user.

[**0038**] Once the source grouping is retrieved (or at least accessible) for use by IP Thesaurus module **312**, a review of the select intellectual property information in the source grouping is made (e.g., by IP Thesaurus module **312** itself or by/with other modules) to ascertain the different elements (e.g., words, textual phrases, concepts, representations, numbers, identifications, pictures, graphics, features, etc.) found in the source grouping, and generate a list thereof. Where desired, the list thus generated may be stored for later use or immediately output to the user (e.g., via network **37** to user interface **35**) for viewing, display or other use by the user (e.g., storing in a local/remote memory unit, printing, forwarding, etc.). Additional data related to the different elements derived from the source grouping may be statistically analyzed by IP Thesaurus module **312** (itself or by/with other modules) to produce useful information such as the frequency of occurrence of the different elements in the source grouping, as well as other information (e.g., frequency of occurrence in individual or subsets of documents, frequency of occurrence in segments or information fields of documents, associative relationships or patterns formed among different elements, etc.). The statistical data may be presented to the user, together with the list of elements derived. A list such as a word-frequency list, for example, may be created and displayed on a user interface: the list may present all of the different words found in a given source grouping, along with the frequency of occurrence of each listed word in the source grouping.

[**0039**] A user presented with a word-frequency list (or other useable output) from IP Thesaurus module **312** may use the list as an aid in learning a new technology, as a search tool to refine search queries or criteria, as a drafting tool to assist in the preparation of technical or legal documents (e.g., proposals, licenses, patent applications, etc.), or any other practical use. The outputs (e.g., lists of elements) from IP Thesaurus module **312** may be saved (locally, remotely, etc.) for subsequent use by one or more users.

[**0040**] In accordance with a preferred embodiment of the invention, individual elements (e.g., words, concepts, phrases, etc.) may be selected by one or more users at various times of use for storage in a master collection. Such a master collection facilitates the creation of dynamically evolving associative dictionaries, glossaries, thesauruses, or other knowledge bases of elements for intellectual property information, where individual elements (e.g., words) may be associated or otherwise linked with one or more related elements (e.g., synonyms, antonyms, homonyms, like structures, analogous patterns, pictures, concepts, phrases, meanings, etc.) derived from use of the IP Thesaurus module **312** on various source groupings.

[**0041**] A method derived from the use of the exemplary commercial embodiment described above is illustrated in **FIG. 4**. In accordance with this exemplary embodiment, a user (in step **602**) selects one or more classifications (e.g., patent classes, subclasses, enumerated digests, etc.) to select desired intellectual property information (e.g., patent publications classified in the selected classes/subclasses) for review. The input signals received by IP Thesaurus module **312** (or other modules or systems implementing the method) designate the source grouping for retrieval (if necessary), access, and analysis to generate a list of words (or other elements) found in the selected information constituting the source grouping (step **604**).

[**0042**] As used in a search system, input keywords (or other elements) are input or otherwise entered to form a search query or criteria (step **606**). Preferably, the list of words (or other elements) is output for display simultaneously (or within access) with the display of the search criteria entered. Where a word-frequency list (or other statistically relevant information) is displayed with the search criteria, a user may determine that individual words (or other elements) on the list are synonyms (or otherwise related searchable elements) to keywords entered in the search criteria (step **608**). The synonyms thus determined may be added manually (or automatically) to the search criteria to increase the robustness of any search employing the search criteria. The synonyms may be separately stored in an accrued synonym list as associated with one or more terms (or elements). The accrued synonym list can be added to or function as a dictionary, glossary, IP Thesaurus, or other authoring/analysis tool that can be displayed or accessed by a user during formation of search queries or criteria, or other uses.

[**0043**] A check to determine whether additional keywords are to be entered (step **609**) is made, and the process repeated with any additional entered keywords (return to step **606**). If no other keywords are to be entered, the keyword search query or criteria is sent (step **610**) for output to one or more databases for execution (e.g., database **32**, database **39**, etc.).

[**0044**] Any number of uses may be made of the IP Thesaurus described herein. In accordance with a preferred embodiment, for example, IP Thesaurus module **312** (alone or in conjunction with other modules) may be programmed to formulate one or more libraries of IP Thesauruses so as to provide a host of different categories or classifications of different IP Thesauruses (or other lists or storage of different elements derived in the manner described above). The categories for the IP Thesauruses may be defined in any known manner (e.g., design or industry specific, devoted to different technical aspects, or other criteria). The library may include an IP Thesaurus for general mechanical terminology,

for example, having as its components (or associatively related members) IP Thesauruses devoted to automobile engines in general with subcomponent lists (or thesauruses) for European engines and American engines. The IP Thesauruses may similarly be adapted to include (or dedicated for use with) foreign language terms found in selected intellectual property information. IP Thesaurus module **312** thus may be programmed to ascertain different foreign language elements (e.g., words, concepts, symbols, writings, etc.) for inclusion in one or more knowledge bases (e.g., thesauruses) of elements for intellectual property information.

[**0045**] In accordance with a preferred embodiment of the invention, Field-of-Search Module **314** (**FIG. 1**) is provided to implement (alone or in conjunction with other modules) a variety of functions and operations related to the determination of a field-of-search based on select intellectual property information (e.g., patents, trademarks, copyrights, mask works, trade secrets, etc.). Preferably, Field-of-Search Module **314** is programmed to receive input data or signals from a user (e.g., via user interface **35**) identifying select intellectual property information to form or otherwise be designated as a source grouping of intellectual property information. In accordance with a preferred embodiment, Field-of-Search Module **314** (directly, or indirectly) effectuates the retrieval and collection of the source grouping of intellectual property information in the same or similar manner as that described above in connection with IP Thesaurus Module **312**. Indeed, the same module(s) (e.g., IP Thesaurus Module **312**, Field-of-Search Module **314**, Search Engine **304**, SO server **30**, etc.) may be employed to produce the source grouping for either (or any disclosed) operation, and the same source grouping information may be used (simultaneously, subsequently, or periodically) by or with the various modules and devices disclosed herein. For this reason, no further detailed description of the selection, retrieval, access or other processing (e.g., use of Field-of-Search Module **314** in conjunction with a classification system) of a source grouping is needed.

[**0046**] Once the source grouping is retrieved (or at least accessible) for use by Field-of-Search Module **314**, a review of the select intellectual property information in the source grouping is made (e.g., by Field-of-Search Module **314** itself or by/with other modules) to ascertain the different elements (e.g., words, textual phrases, concepts, representations, numbers, identifications, pictures, graphics, features, etc.) found in the source grouping, and generate a list thereof that will constitute search information. Where desired, the list thus generated may be stored for later use or immediately output to the user (e.g. via network **37** to user interface **35**) for viewing, display or other use by the user (e.g., storing in a local/remote memory unit, printing, forwarding, etc.). Additional data related to the different elements derived from the source grouping may be statistically analyzed by Field-of-Search Module **314** (itself or by/with other modules) to produce useful information such as the frequency of occurrence of the different elements or search information in the source grouping, as well as other information (e.g., frequency of occurrence in individual or subsets of documents, frequency of occurrence in segments or information fields of documents, associative relationships or patterns formed among different elements, etc.).

[**0047**] A user presented with a list of such search information (or other useable output) from Field-of-Search Module **314** may use the list as an aid in determining, preparing, formulating, or otherwise creating a field-of-search (or any other practical use). The outputs (e.g., lists of elements) from Field-of-Search Module **314** may be saved (locally, remotely, etc.) for subsequent use by one or more users. Field-of-Search Module **314** (and/or other modules) may be used to automatically determine or suggest a field-of-search based on the search information identified from one or more source groupings. Field-of-Search Module **314**, for example, may be programmed to determine the frequency of occurrence or appearance of search information (e.g., classes and subclasses) found in select information fields (e.g., Field-of-Search, U.S. Classification, U.S. Cross-Reference Classification, References Cited, Forward Reference fields, etc.) of the intellectual property information in the source grouping. Based on the total frequency value of appearance of certain search information found in the source grouping being greater than a predetermined value, Field-of-Search Module **314** may automatically (or manually) create, add, or suggest such search information (e.g., classes and subclasses) for a field-of-search.

[**0048**] In accordance with an exemplary embodiment, one or more individual elements (e.g., words, concepts, phrases, etc.) may be selected from search information identified from a source grouping and used to indirectly ascertain a field-of-search. Field-of-Search Module **314**, for example, may be programmed to access (alone or in conjunction with other modules) a local or remote database (or other system) containing information on the categories of classification in a given classification system. In an exemplary commercial embodiment, Field-of-Search Module **314** accesses a classification database (or other system) containing classification information in the form of the classification index, classification manual, and classification definitions for the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office classification system used to classify patents. Once accessed, Field-of-Search Module **314** can search for or otherwise associate the search information selected (e.g., words, concepts, phrases, etc.) with the classification information in the classification database to produce enumerated classifications (e.g., classes, subclasses, digests, etc.) that may correspond to the selected search information. Field-of-Search Module **314** may then utilize the enumerated classifications to create, add, or suggest a field-of-search, in the manner described above.

[**0049**] One method that may be derived from the use of the embodiments described above is illustrated in **FIG. 5**. In accordance with this exemplary embodiment, a user (in step **702**) selects one or more source groupings of intellectual property information (e.g., underlying intellectual property such as patents, trademarks, copyrights, mask works, trade secrets, etc.; lists of intellectual property such as search results; enumerated classifications of intellectual property such as patent classes/subclasses, etc.) to be sampled or otherwise used as a basis for determining a field-of-search that may be helpful to the user (e.g., in conducting a subsequent search for intellectual property). Based on the input signals received by Field-of-Search Module **314** (or other modules or systems implementing the method) selecting the source grouping, the selected source grouping is retrieved (if necessary), accessed, and analyzed for elements (e.g., numbers, classifications, words, concepts, phrases, etc.) in one or more informational fields of the intellectual

property information constituting the source grouping (step **704**). The elements detected or otherwise found in the informational fields are identified as search information (step **706**). The search information may be displayed or otherwise output for viewing by the user to assist in the creation of a field-of-search (step **708**). Where desired, the search information may be statistically analyzed for use in automatically generating, adding, or suggesting a field-of-search. As illustrated in **FIG. 5**, for example, search information that has a frequency of appearance in the selected source grouping that is greater than a predetermined frequency value may be automatically added to the field-of-search created (step **709**). As used in a search system, as one example, the field-of-search thus created can form (or be part of) a search query or criteria to be executed by a local or remote database.

[**0050**] While preferred embodiments of the invention have been described and illustrated, it should be apparent that many modifications to the embodiments and implementations of the invention can be made without departing from the spirit or scope of the invention. For example, although the specific illustrations provided herein have pertained to intellectual property in the form of patents, it should be apparent to those of ordinary skill in the art that the invention may similarly be employed to store, search and organize information related to any form or combination of intellectual property (e.g., trademarks, copyrights, mask works, trade secrets, or other equivalent or related intellectual property such as certificates, registrations, etc.). While a client-server architecture has been specifically illustrated herein, the invention may easily be deployed in any form of network or communication technology. While the illustrated embodiments have not specified the type of communication medium (or protocol) used to connect the various modules (e.g., shown in **FIG. 1**), it should be apparent that any known wired/wireless technology may be used to implement the invention (e.g., Internet, intranets, private bulletin boards, individual local or wide area networks, proprietary chat rooms, ICQ, IRC channels, instant messaging systems, WAP, bluetooth, etc.) using real-time or non-real-time systems alone or in combination. The embodiments described in (or apparent from) the instant disclosure may be employed in standalone (or network linked) systems. The embodiments may similarly be implemented in other known systems and platforms (e.g., personal computer, Internet-based devices, PDAs, portable or hand-held electronic devices, etc.).

[**0051**] In accordance with a preferred embodiment, one or more user interfaces (e.g., user interface **15** (**FIG. 1**)) are provided as part of (or in conjunction with) the illustrated systems to permit users to interact with the systems. User interface devices may be any device used to input and/or output information. The user interface device may be implemented as a graphical user interface (GUI) containing a display or the like, or may be a link to other user input/output devices known in the art. Individual ones of a plurality of devices (e.g., network/stand-alone computers, personal digital assistants (PDAs), WebTV (or other Internet-only) terminals, set-top boxes, cellular/PCS phones, screenphones, pagers, kiosks, or other known (wired or wireless) communication devices, etc.) may similarly be used to execute one or more computer programs (e.g., universal Internet browser programs, dedicated interface programs, etc.) to allow users to interface with the systems in the manner described.

[**0052**] The modules described herein, particularly those illustrated or inherent in the instant disclosure, may be one or more hardware, software, or hybrid components residing in (or distributed among) one or more local or remote computer systems. Although the modules may be shown or described herein as physically separated components (e.g., search engine **304**, workspace module **305**, alert generator **306**, etc.), it should be readily apparent that the modules as described herein may be merely logical constructs that are implemented as physical components combined or further separated into a variety of different components, sharing different resources (including processing units, memory, clock devices, software routines, etc.) as required for the particular implementation of the embodiments disclosed herein. Indeed, even a single general purpose computer (or other processor-controlled device) executing a program stored on an article of manufacture (e.g., recording medium or other memory units) to produce the functionality referred to herein may be utilized to implement the illustrated embodiments.

[**0053**] In addition, memory or database units described herein may be any one or more of the known storage devices or systems (e.g., Random Access Memory (RAM), Read Only Memory (ROM), hard disk drive (HDD), floppy drive, zip drive, compact disk-ROM, DVD, bubble memory, redundant array of independent disks (RAID), network accessible storage (NAS) systems, storage area network (SAN) systems, etc.), may also be one or more memory devices embedded within a CPU, or shared with one or more of the other components, and may be deployed locally or remotely relative to one or more components interacting with the memory or database units.

[**0054**] The illustrated embodiments have been described herein in connection with search systems and processes involving search criteria formulated from specific terms or textual phrases. It should be readily apparent, however, that the search criteria formulated may be implemented in any fashion known to those of ordinary skill in the art. The search criteria, for example, may be formulated as graphical or conceptual search criteria that allows for graphics-based or concept based searches of intellectual property information as used by the different embodiments of the invention (e.g., Class Search, IP Thesaurus, Field-of-Search Determination, etc.). Although not specifically mentioned, it should be readily apparent that search engine **304** (and other modules) described herein as accessing database **32** (or other remote database systems) may further include or be used in conjunction with search technology (e.g., spiders, worms, bots, or other known devices) used to access information in remote database systems (or other memory unit) over any internal or external network (e.g., the Internet) to perform the various functions of retrieving, accessing, searching, etc. for stored information.

[**0055**] The illustrated embodiments have further been described in connection with user **35**. It should be readily apparent that a "user" of the various aspects of the inventive systems or methods disclosed herein may be individuals, entities, devices, as well as peer/non-peer systems or technologies, and modules within the same device (e.g., SO server **30**) or system without departing from the scope of the invention. The use of the "intellectual property information" and "source groupings" in the various embodiments described herein should be readily construed to include the

underlying information constituting intellectual property information (e.g., patents, publications, etc.), as well as the numerical, textual, graphical or other indicia identifying the intellectual property information itself, or such indicia identifying the location where such intellectual property information may be retrieved, stored, accessed, located or otherwise found.

[0056] Accordingly, the invention is not to be limited by the foregoing description or drawings, and only by the claims appended hereto.

What is claimed is:

1. A method of developing an element list for intellectual property information, the method comprising the steps of

designating a source grouping containing documents having intellectual property information; and

generating a list of elements found in the documents in the source intellectual property information; and

providing at least a portion of the elements in the list as candidate search criteria for later use in searching.

2. The method of developing an element list for intellectual property information as recited in claim 1, further comprising the step of selecting at least a portion of the elements as search criteria, and searching a plurality of documents including the documents in the source grouping based on the search criteria.

3. The method of developing an element list for intellectual property information as recited in claim 2, wherein the source grouping includes documents logically grouped together in a folder for storage in a memory unit.

4. The method of developing an element list for intellectual property information as recited in claim 2, wherein the source grouping includes documents being commonly assigned to the same entity.

5. The method of developing an element list for intellectual property information as recited in claim 2, wherein the source grouping designated in said designating step includes selected documents commonly classified in a system maintained by the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office.

6. The method of developing an element list for intellectual property information as recited in claim 5, wherein the classification system is the classification of goods and services maintained by the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office.

7. The method of developing an element list for intellectual property information as recited in claim 5, wherein said designating step further comprises the step of designating the source grouping as a field of search that includes intellectual property information in the form of patent publications commonly classified in select classes and subclasses, as maintained by the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office.

8. The method of developing an element list for intellectual property information as recited in claim 2, wherein the list of elements generated in said generating step contains a list of words found in the source grouping of intellectual property information.

9. The method of developing an element list for intellectual property information as recited in claim 2, wherein the list of elements generated in said generating step contains a list of concepts found in the source grouping of intellectual property information.

10. The method of developing an element list for intellectual property information as recited in claim 2, wherein the list of elements generated in said generating step contains a list of graphical elements found in the source grouping of intellectual property information.

11. The method of developing an element list for intellectual property information as recited in claim 1, further comprising the steps of:1

receiving input data from a user over a network identifying the source intellectual property information for designation in said designating step;

outputting from a server the list generated in said generating step to the user over the network.

12. The method of developing an element list for intellectual property information as recited in claim 11, further comprising the step of:

retrieving the source intellectual property information identified in said receiving step from at least one remote database on the network.

13. The method of developing an element list for intellectual property information as recited in claim 12, wherein the input data received from the user in said receiving step is a list of patent numbers identifying select patents as the source of intellectual property information, and wherein the network is the Internet.

14. A method of utilizing an intellectual property thesaurus, the method comprising:

(a) designating a field of search based on selection of at least one of a plurality of classifications of an intellectual property classification system;

(b) generating a list of words found in intellectual property information classified in the field of search designated in said designating step (a);

(c) entering search criteria utilizing keywords; and

(d) determining searchable elements related to keywords in the search criteria based on the list of words generated in said generating step (b).

15. The method of utilizing an intellectual property thesaurus as recited in claim 14, wherein said generating step (b) further comprises the step of determining a frequency of occurrence of each listed word found in the intellectual property information associated with the field of search.

16. The method of utilizing an intellectual property thesaurus as recited in claim 15, further comprising the step of:

(e) displaying, in the form of a word-frequency list, the list of words found in the intellectual property information classified in the field of search, wherein each listed word is associated with a corresponding frequency of occurrence of the listed word.

17. The method of utilizing an intellectual property thesaurus as recited in claim 16 wherein said displaying step (e) comprises simultaneous display of the search criteria during operation of said entering step (c) and the display of the word-frequency list.

18. The method of utilizing an intellectual property thesaurus as recited in claim 14, wherein said entering step (c) comprises entering keywords that formulate a search query; and wherein said determining step (d) comprises:

determining searchable elements related to select keywords in the search query by locating words on the list generated in said generating step (b) that are synonyms of select keywords in the search query; and

storing the synonyms thus determined in an accrued synonym list corresponding to the select keywords in the search query.

19. The method of utilizing an intellectual property thesaurus as recited in claim 18, wherein said determining step (d) is automatically performed to determine synonyms for keywords in the search query.

20. The method of utilizing an intellectual property thesaurus as recited in claim 18, wherein said entering step (c) further comprises the step of automatically incorporating into the search criteria synonyms from the accrued synonym list.

21. The method of utilizing an intellectual property thesaurus as recited in claim 17, further comprising the step of:

(f) submitting the search criteria as a search query to the database.

22. The method of utilizing an intellectual property thesaurus as recited in claim 21, wherein said submitting step (f) includes transmission of the search query to a remote database over the Internet.

23. In a search system for use in searching for intellectual property information, the improvement comprising an article of manufacture having stored thereon an executable program operative to effectuate searching for intellectual property information in connection with the search system, wherein the executable program is executed to perform the steps of:

(a) designating a source grouping comprising at least one document having intellectual property information;

(b) generating a list of words found in the at least one document in the intellectual property information within the source grouping designated in said designating step (a); and providing at least a portion of the elements in the list for later use as search criteria.

24. The article of manufacture of claim 23, wherein the executable program is executed to perform the additional steps of

(c) formulating search criteria utilizing input keywords; and

(d) determining searchable elements related to the input keywords in the search criteria based on the list of words generated in said generating step (b).

25. The article of manufacture of claim 24, wherein said determining step (d) comprises:

determining searchable elements related to select keywords in the search criteria by locating words on the list generated in said generating step (b) that are synonyms of select keywords in the search criteria.

26. The article of manufacture of claim 25, wherein said designating step (a) further comprises:

receiving input signals from a user containing a selection of at least one of a plurality of classifications of an intellectual property classification system; and

designating the source grouping as a field of search based on the input selection from the user.

27. The article of manufacture of claim 26, wherein the classification system is the system used by the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office for classification of patents, and wherein the input signals contain a selection of a plurality of classes and subclasses that form the source grouping.

28. The article of manufacture of claim 25, wherein the source grouping includes selected intellectual property information stored in a database, and wherein said generating step (b) includes the step of retrieving the selected intellectual property information from the database and compiling the list of words found in the retrieved intellectual property information.

29. The article of manufacture of claim 25, wherein said formulating step (c) automatically adds to the search criteria the synonyms determined in said determining step (d) search criteria utilizing input keywords.

30. The article of manufacture of claim 29, wherein the executable program further comprises the step of:

outputting the search criteria to a user interface; and

accessing at least one remote database unit for intellectual property information corresponding to the search criteria.

31. The article of manufacture of claim 30, wherein said outputting step further comprises the step of simultaneously displaying a word-frequency list and the search criteria, wherein the word-frequency list is a list of all the words appearing in the source grouping, together with the frequency of occurrence in the source grouping.

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