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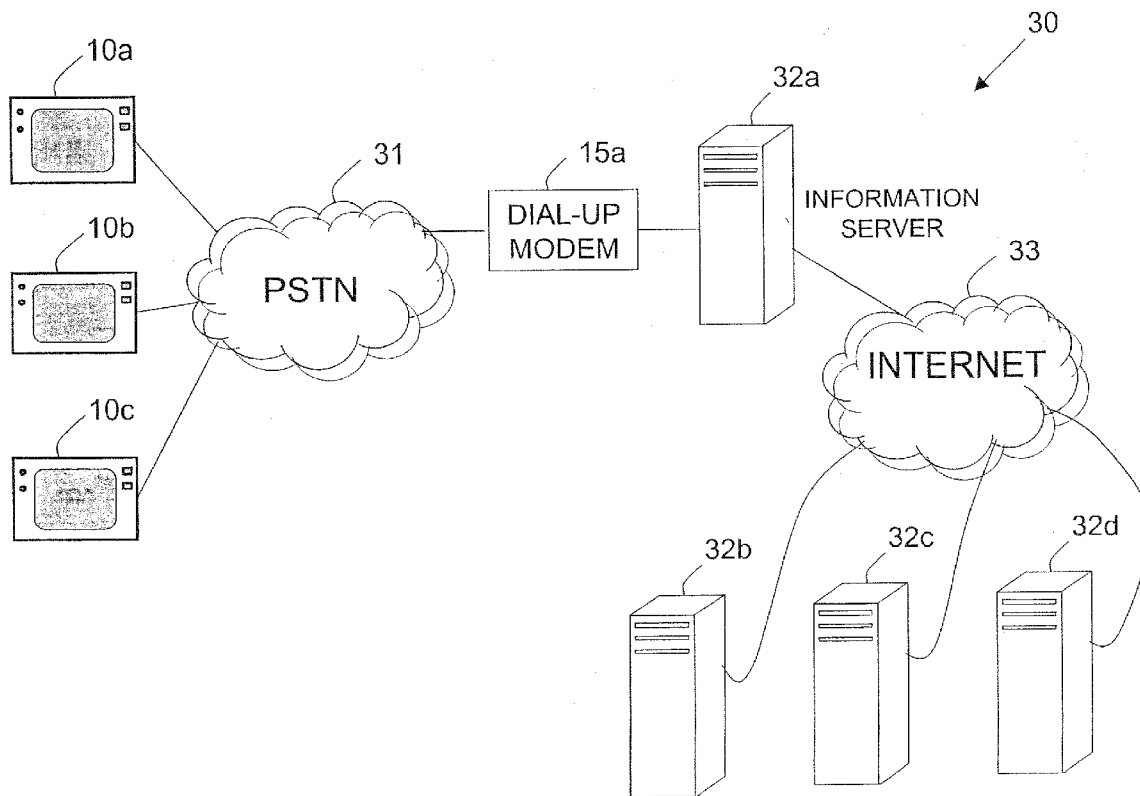
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G06F 15/16 (2006.01)(52) **U.S. Cl.** **709/219**(21) Appl. No.: **12/372,023**(57) **ABSTRACT**(22) Filed: **Feb. 17, 2009****Related U.S. Application Data**

(63) Continuation of application No. 11/506,907, filed on Aug. 21, 2006, which is a continuation of application No. 11/017,060, filed on Dec. 21, 2004, now abandoned.

A device for obtaining, storing and displaying information from a remote server, the device has a modem for establishing communication sessions with the remote server. A memory coupled to the modem stores the obtained information, and a display is coupled to the memory for displaying the stored information. The device automatically and periodically communicates with the remote server for obtaining the information.



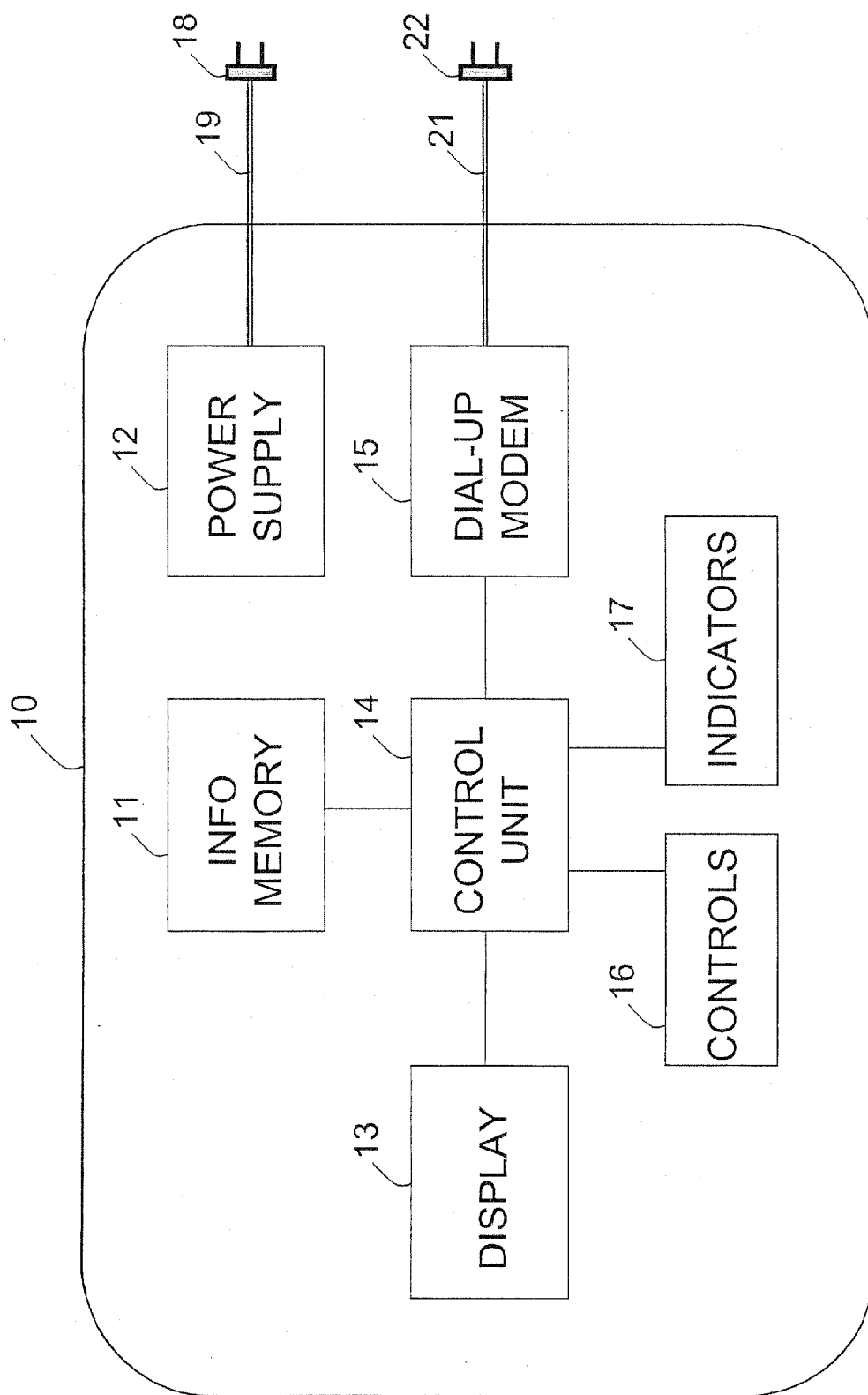


Figure 1

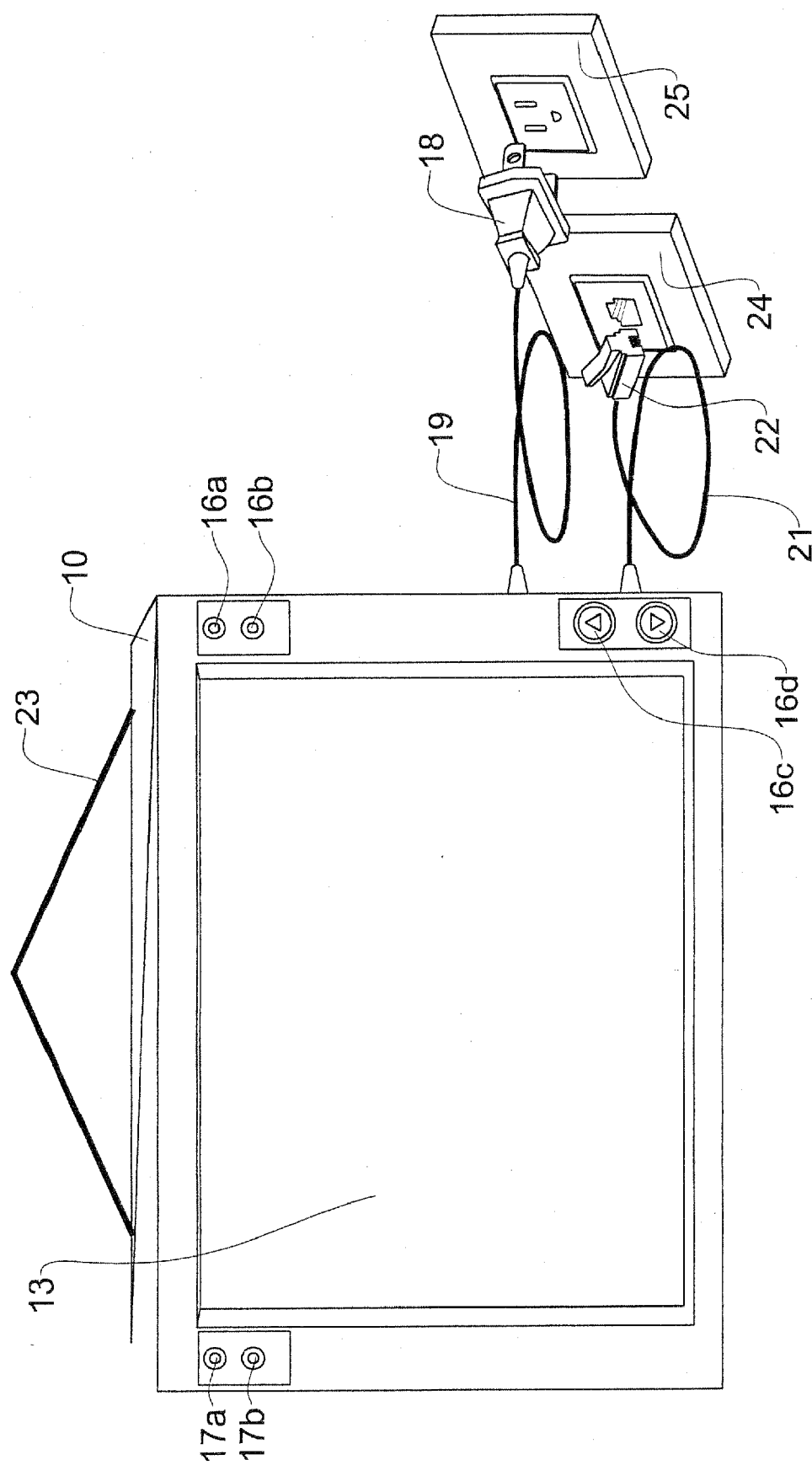


Figure 2

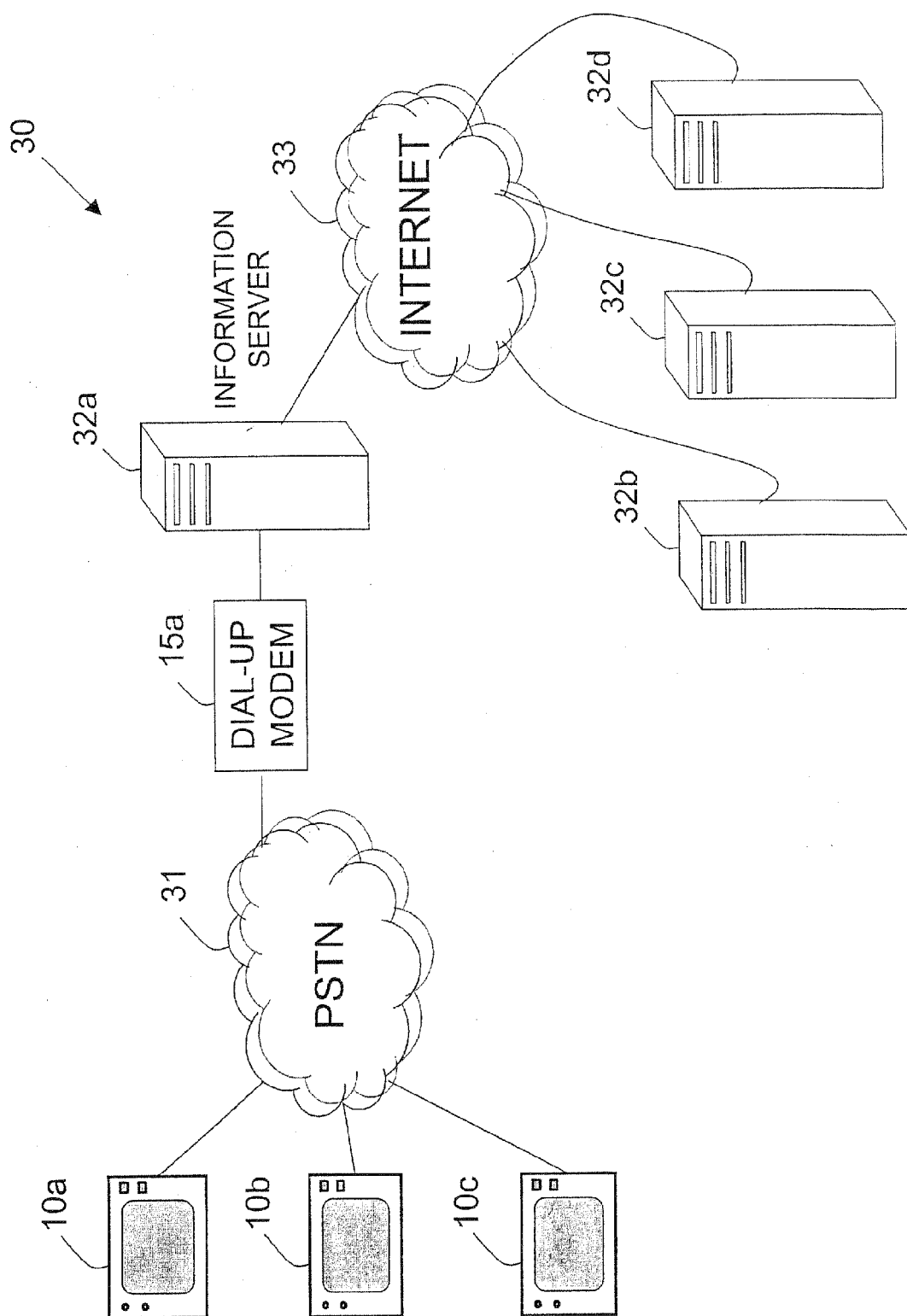


Figure 3

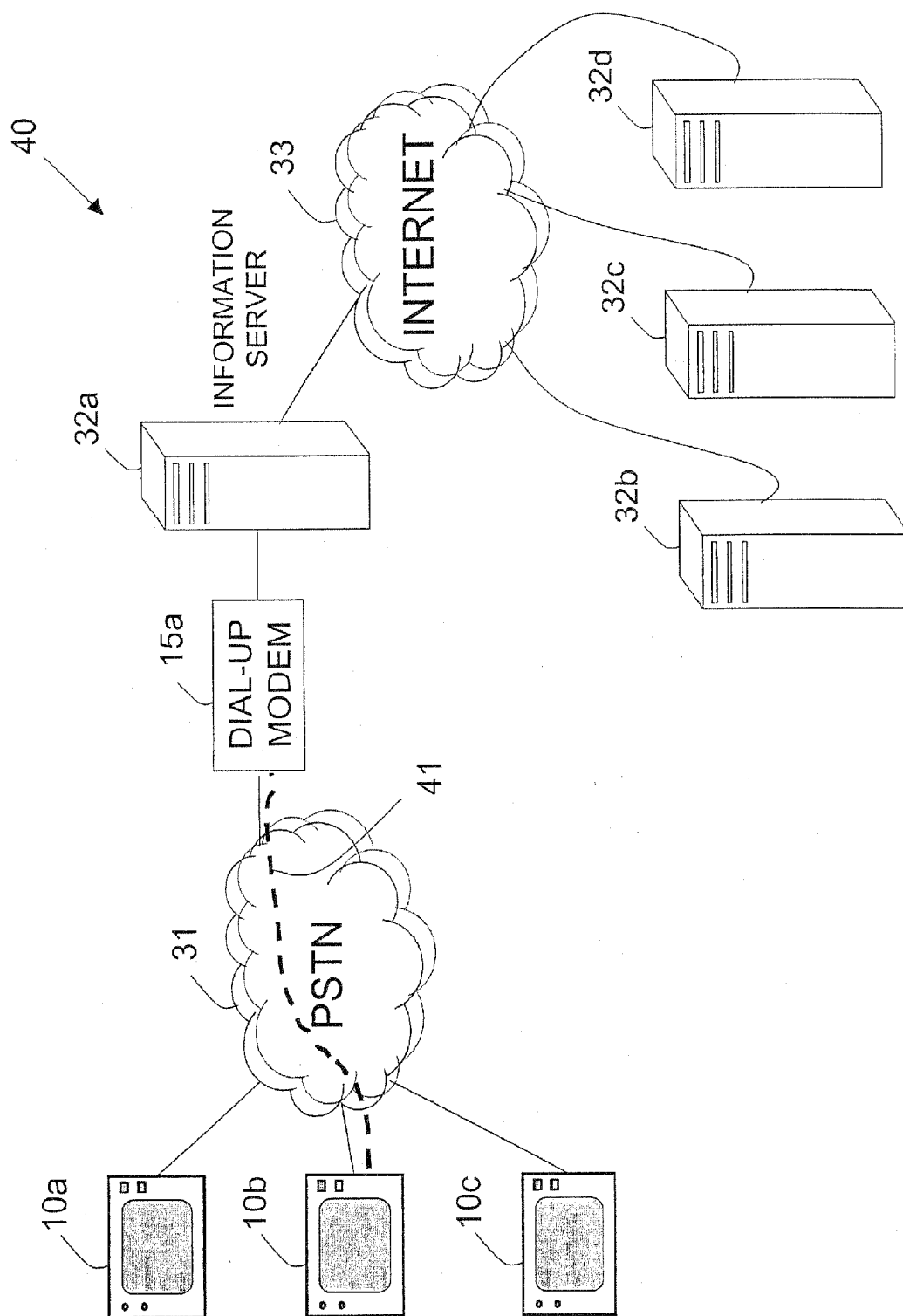


Figure 4

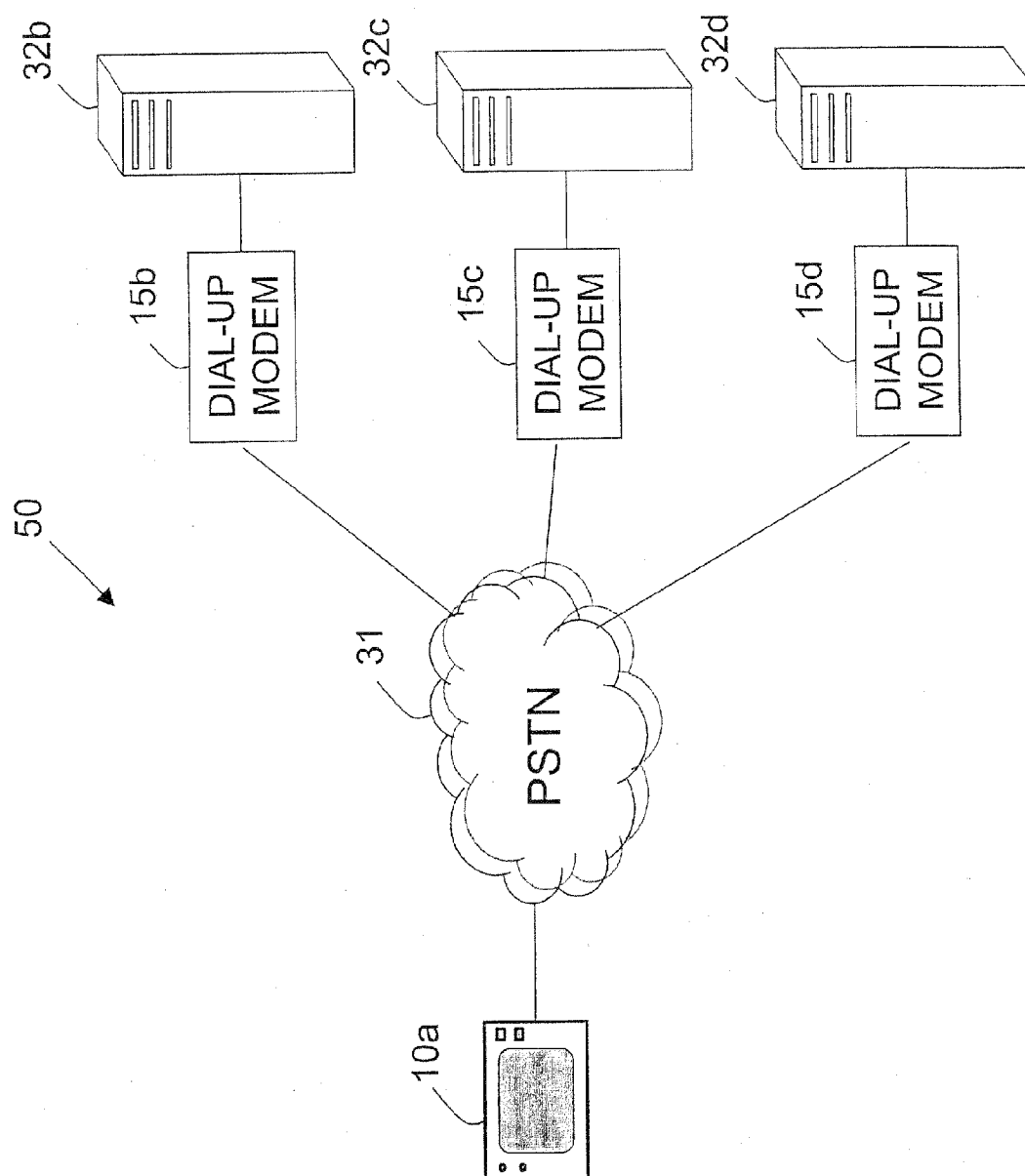


Figure 5

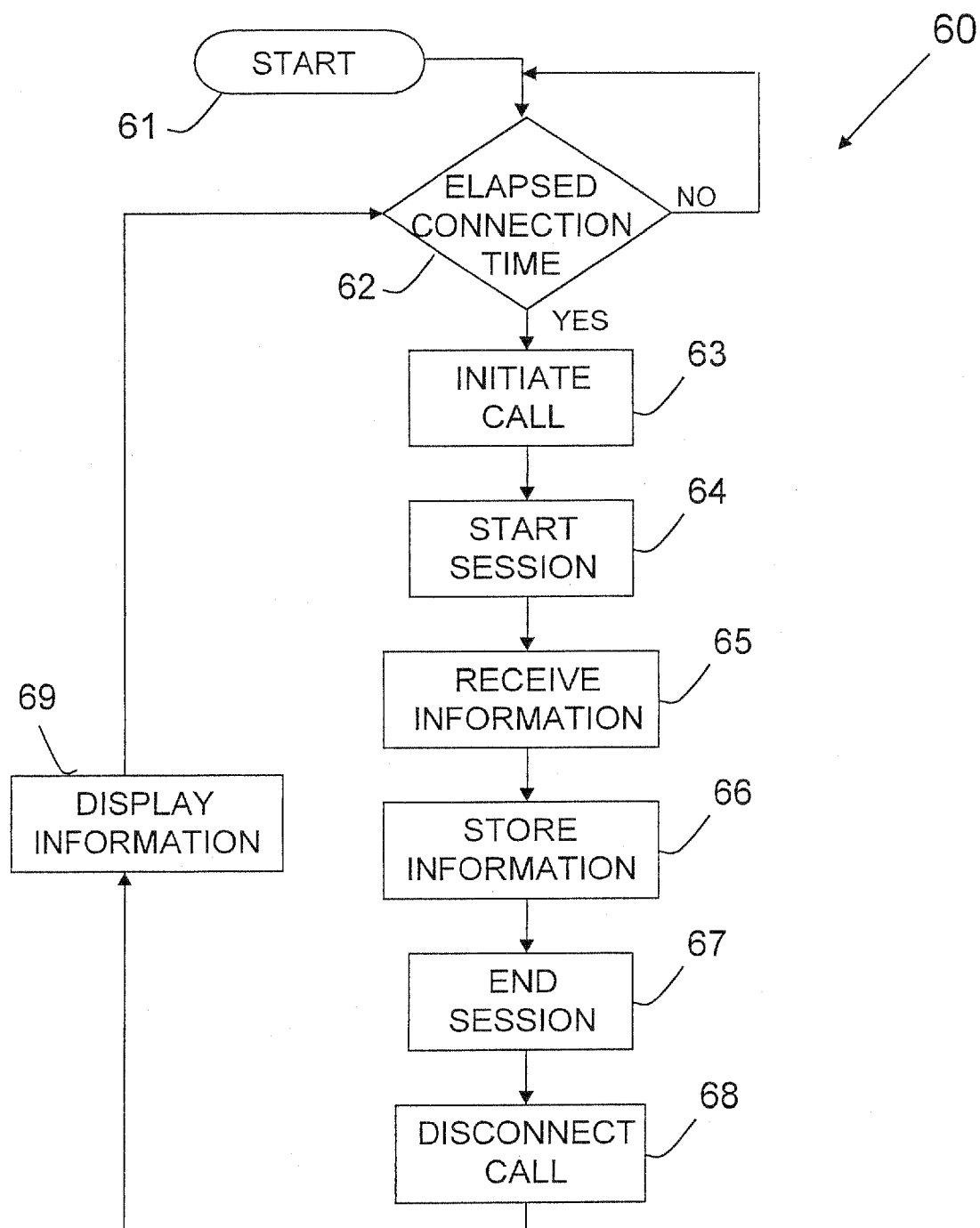


Figure 6

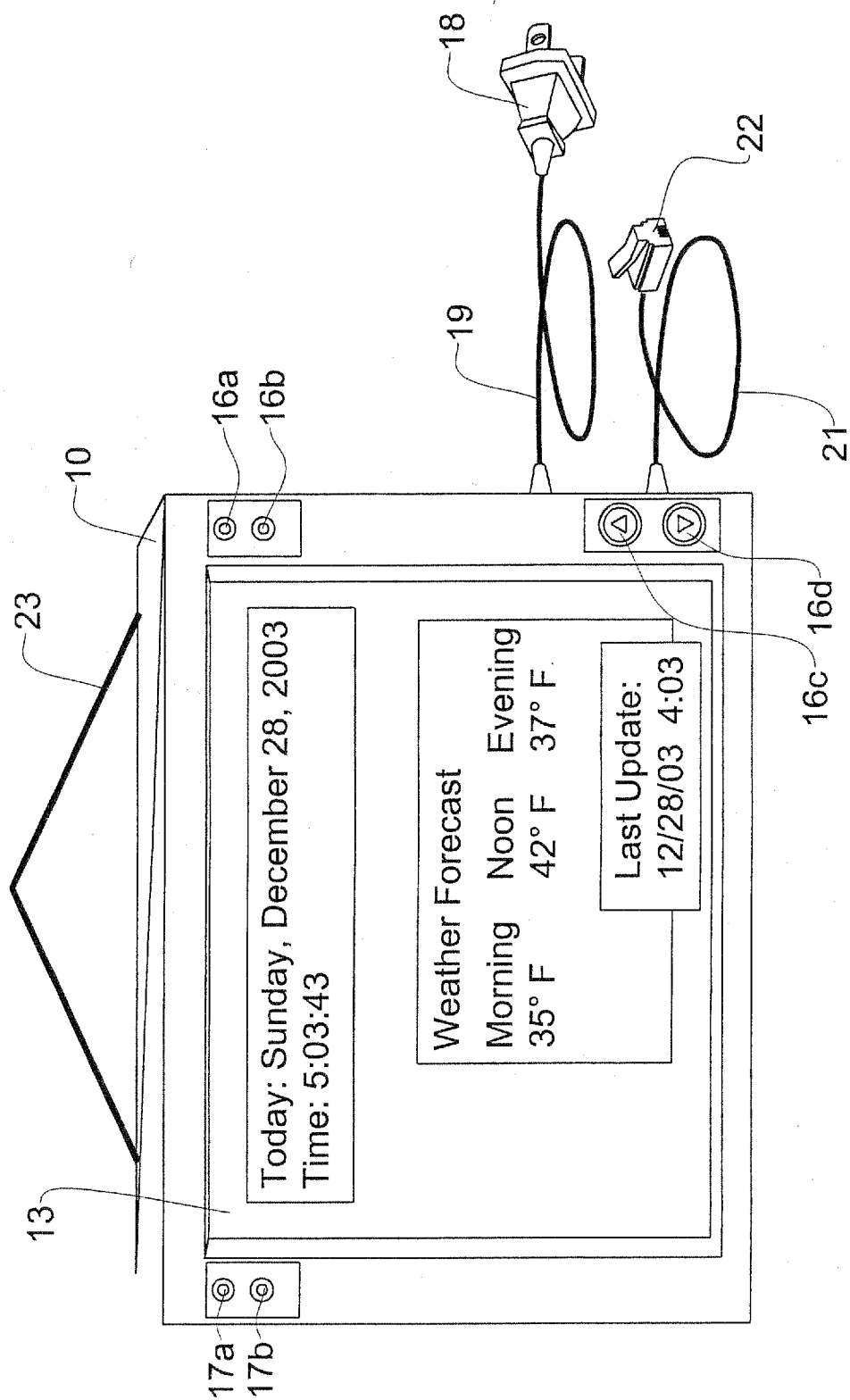


Figure 6a

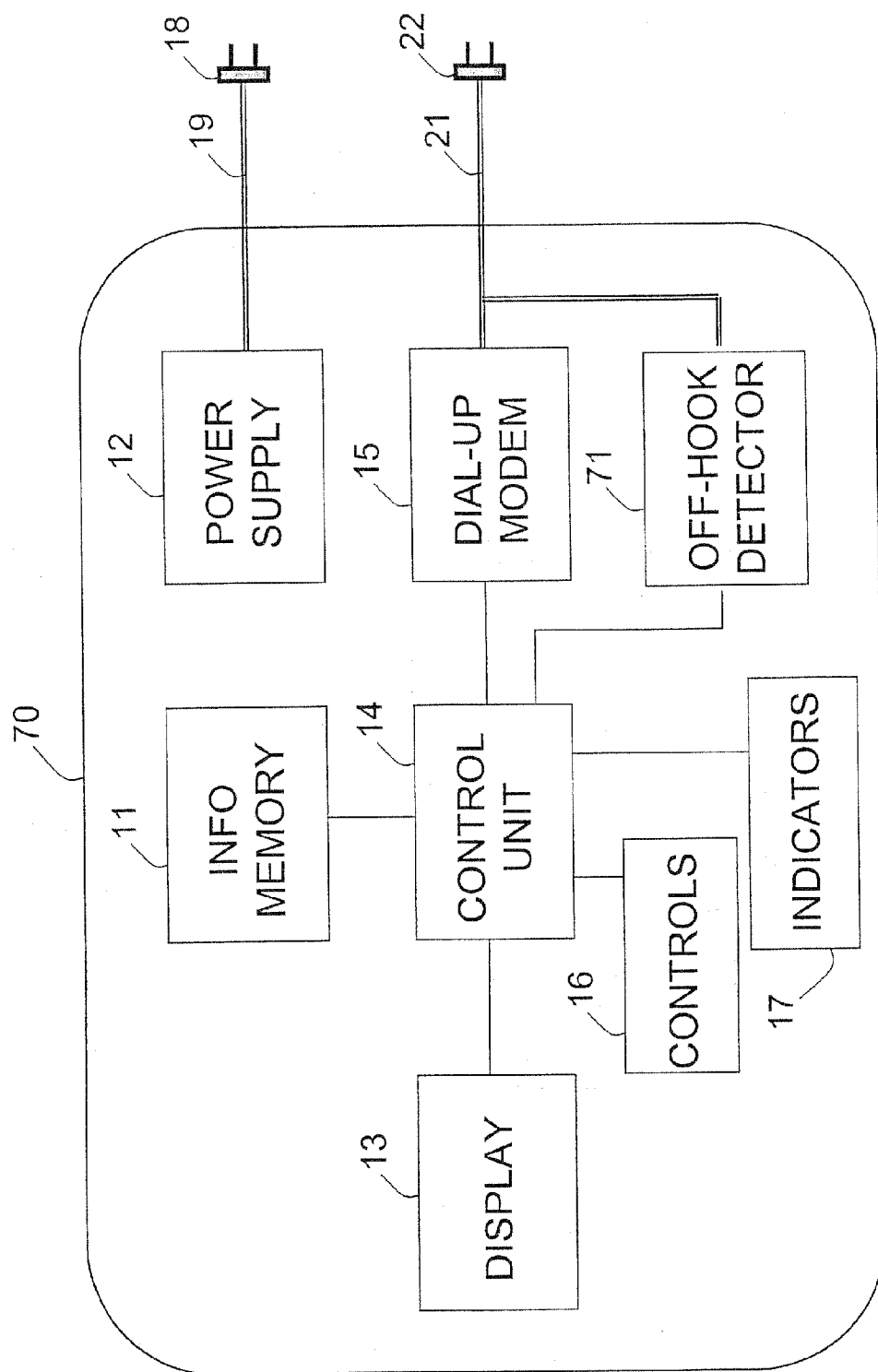


Figure 7

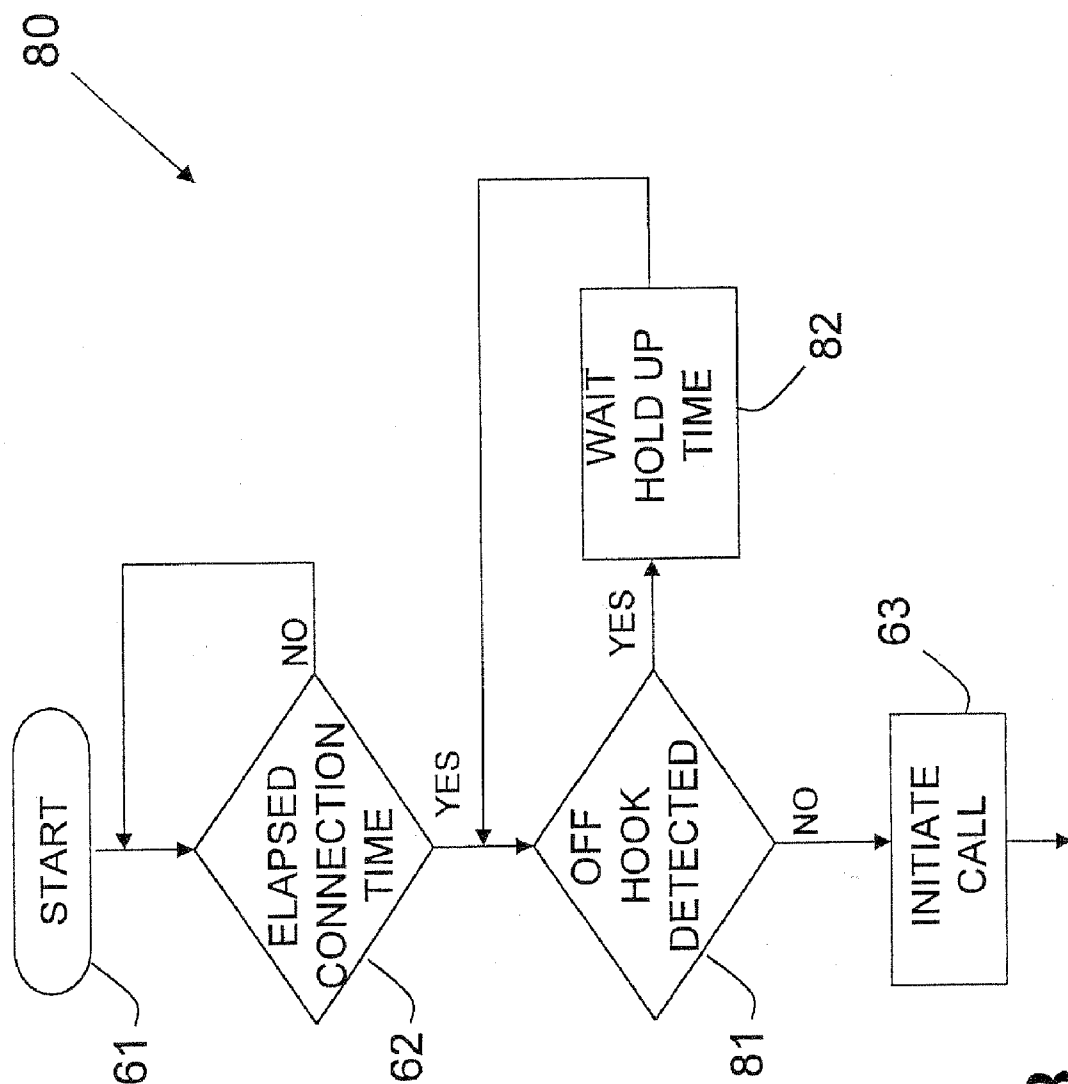


Figure 8

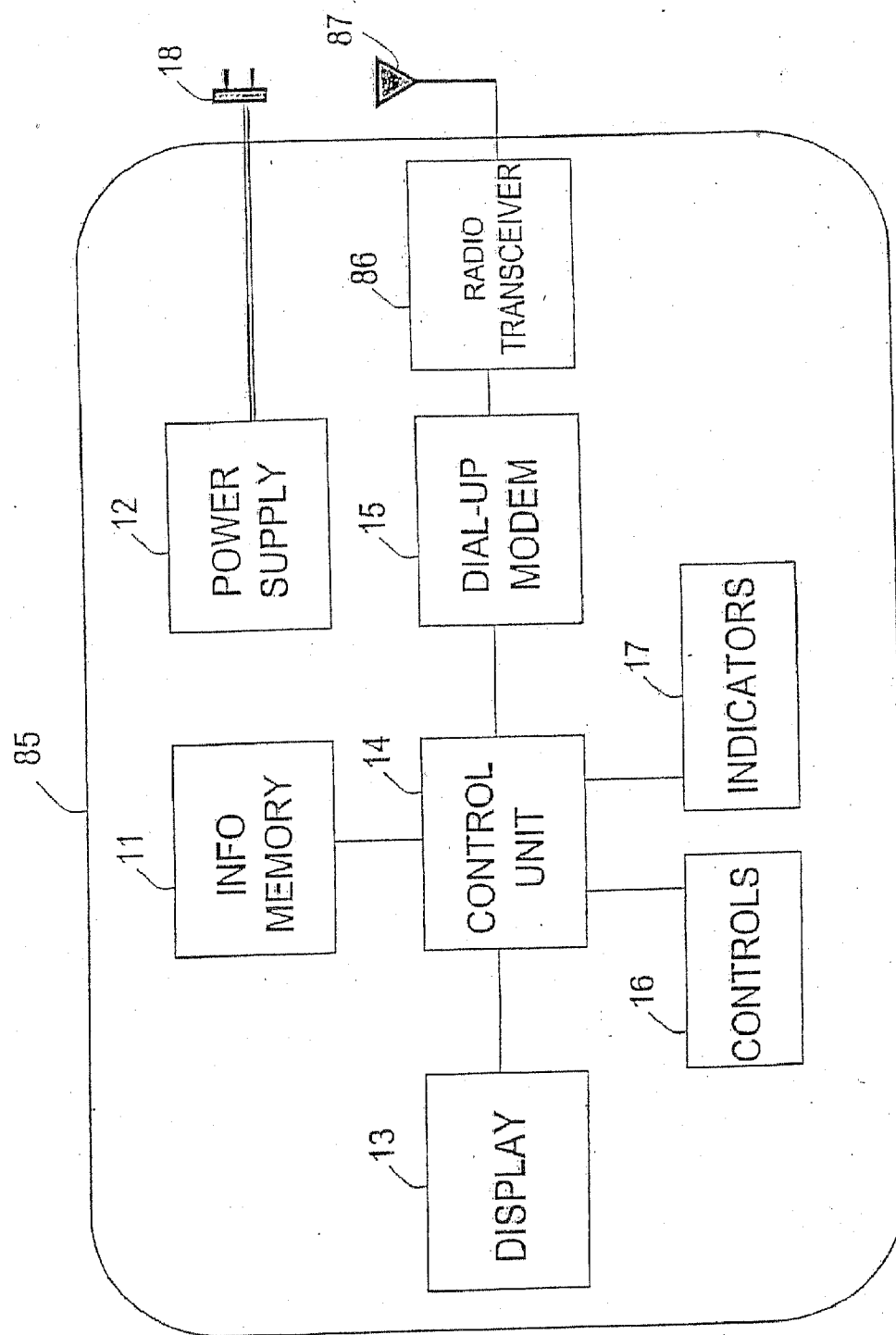


Figure 8a

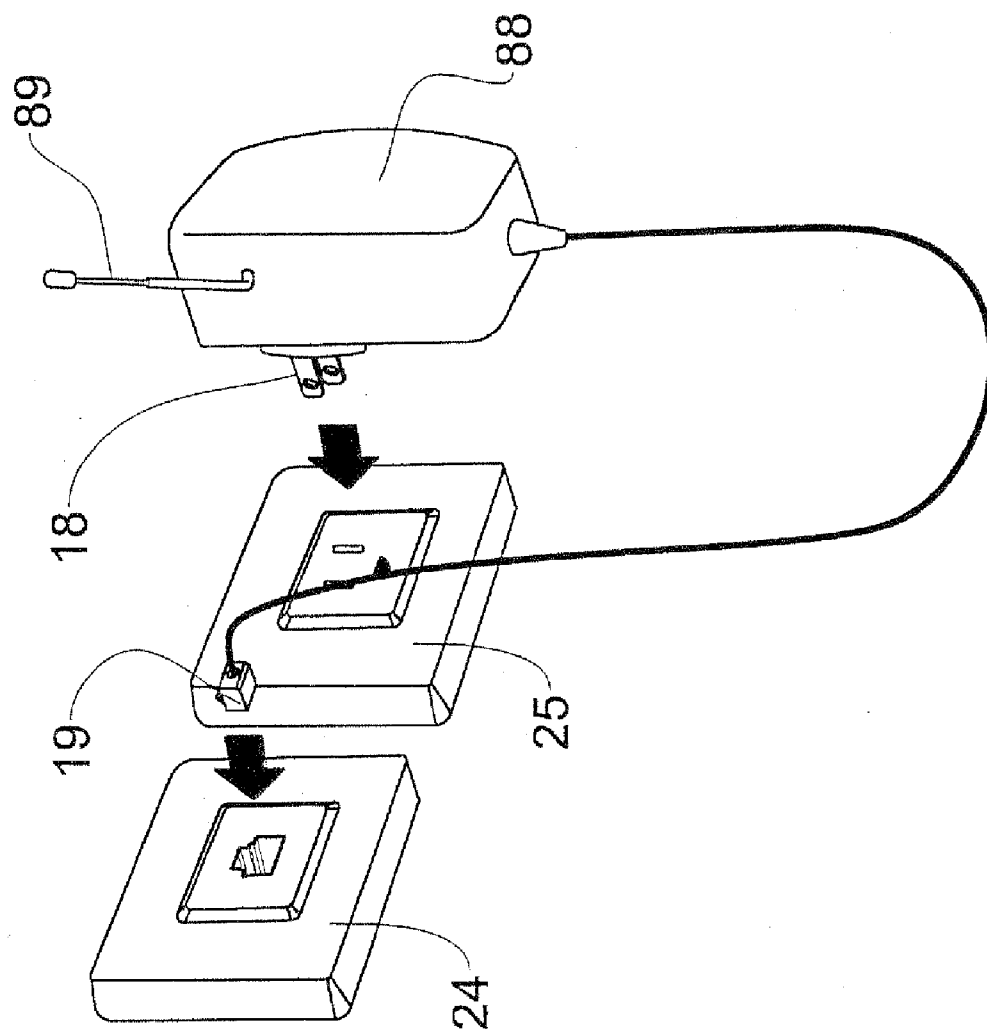


Figure 8b

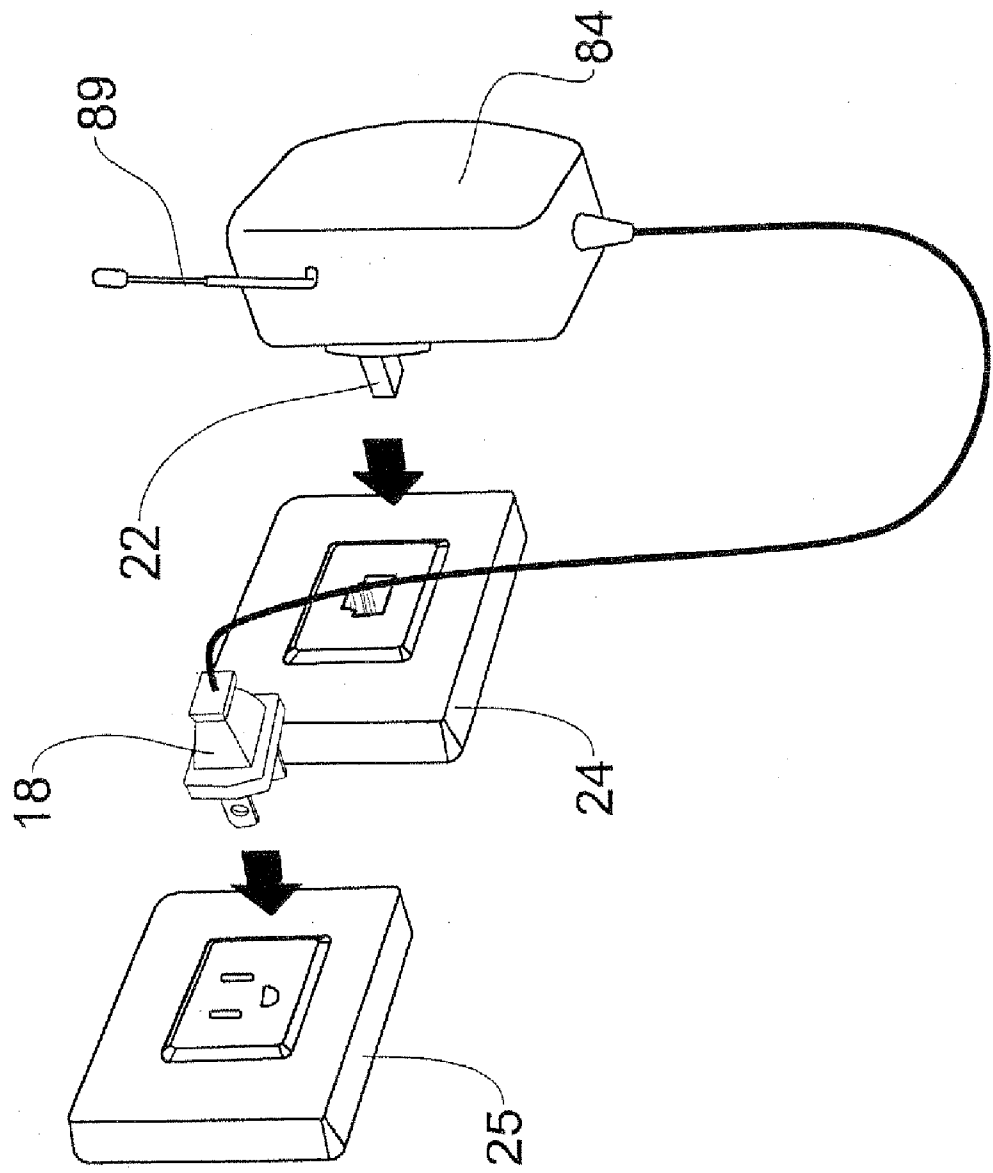


Figure 8c

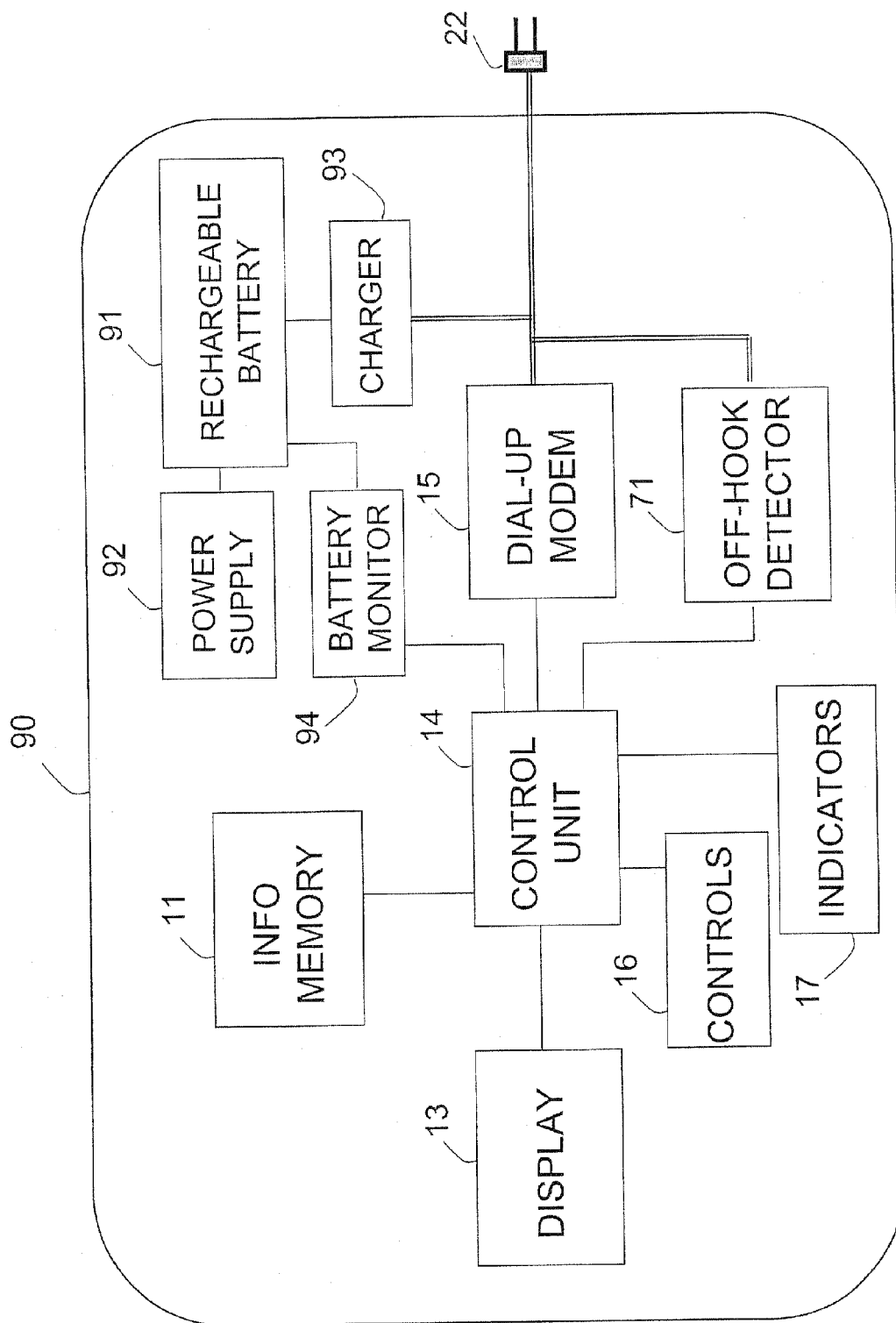


Figure 9

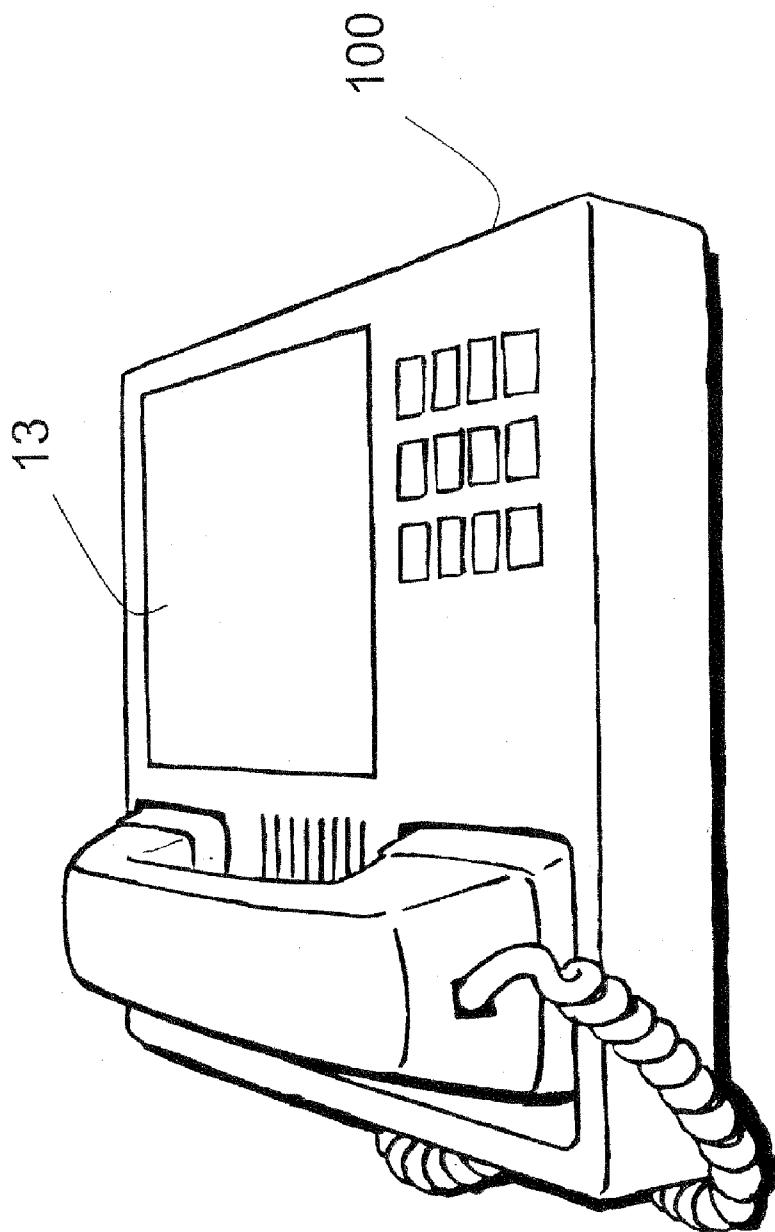


Figure 10

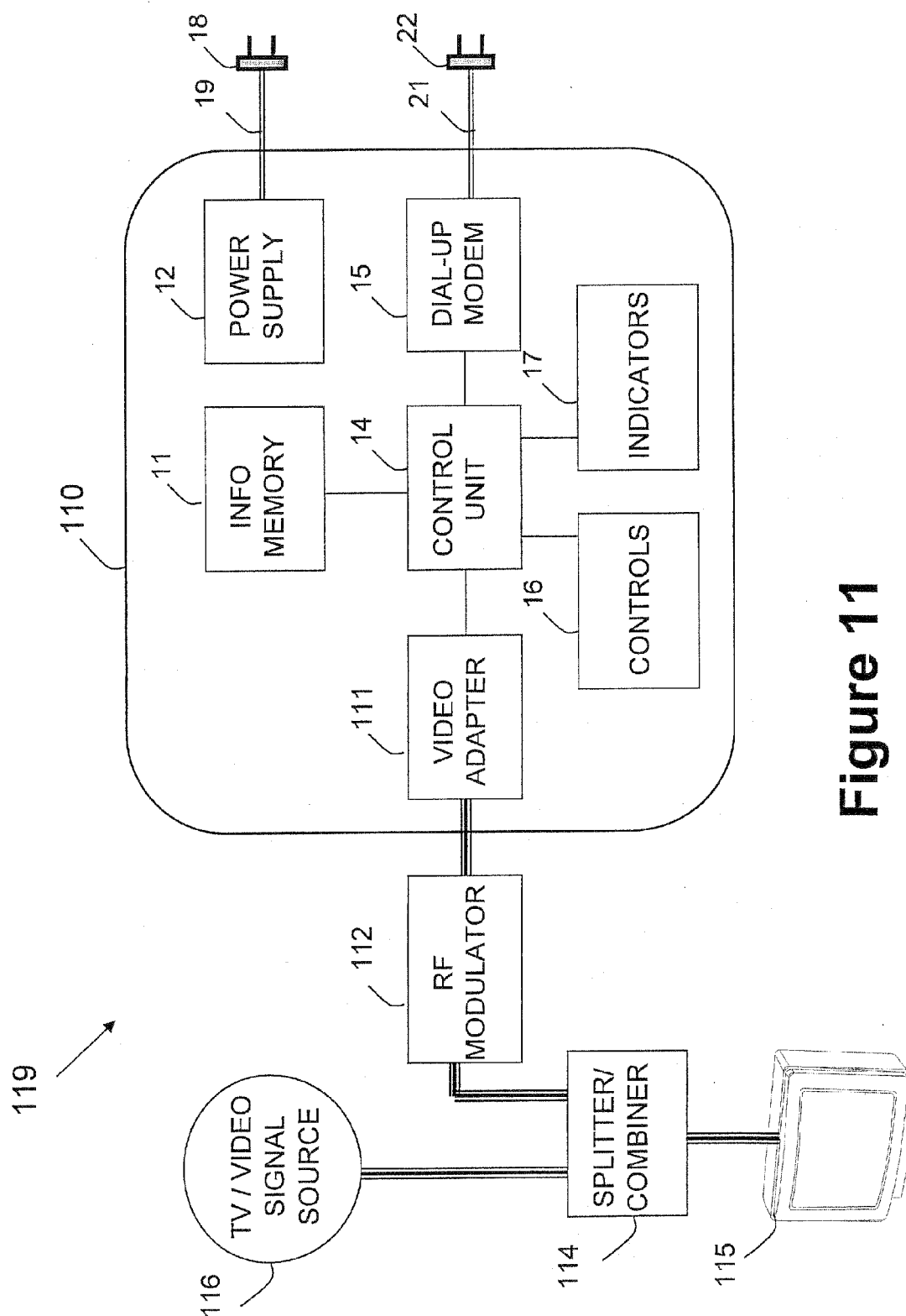


Figure 11

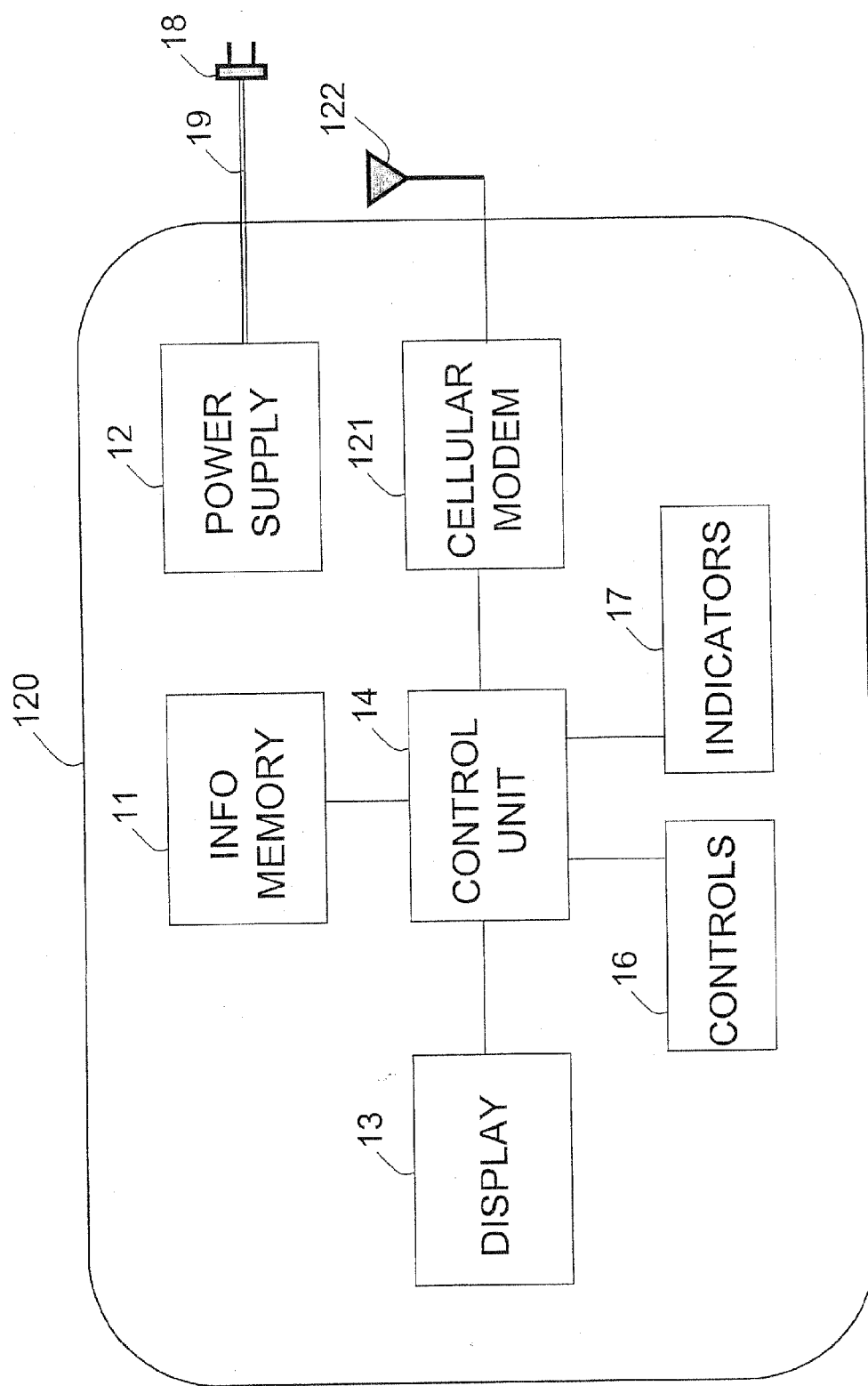


Figure 12

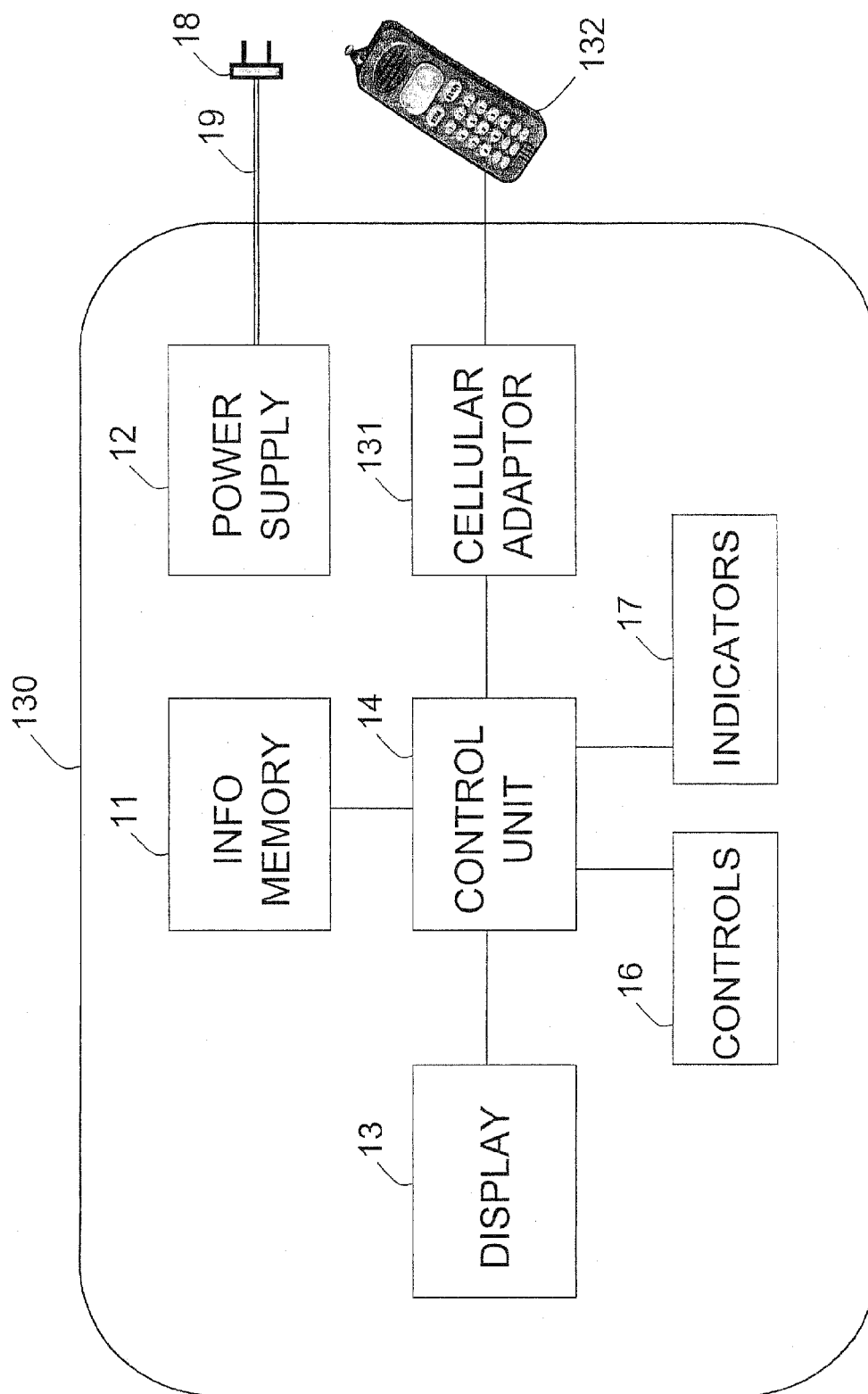


Figure 13

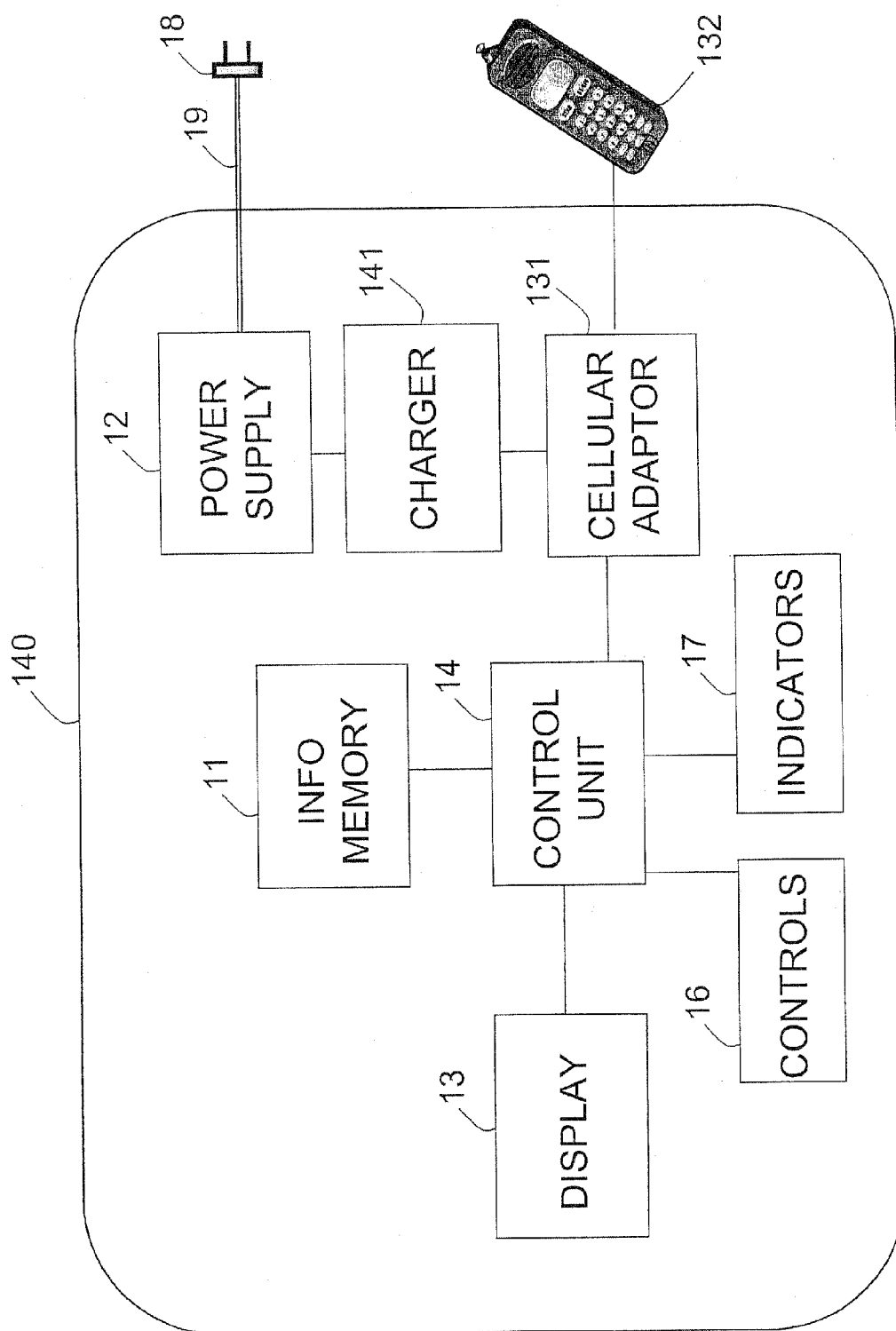


Figure 14

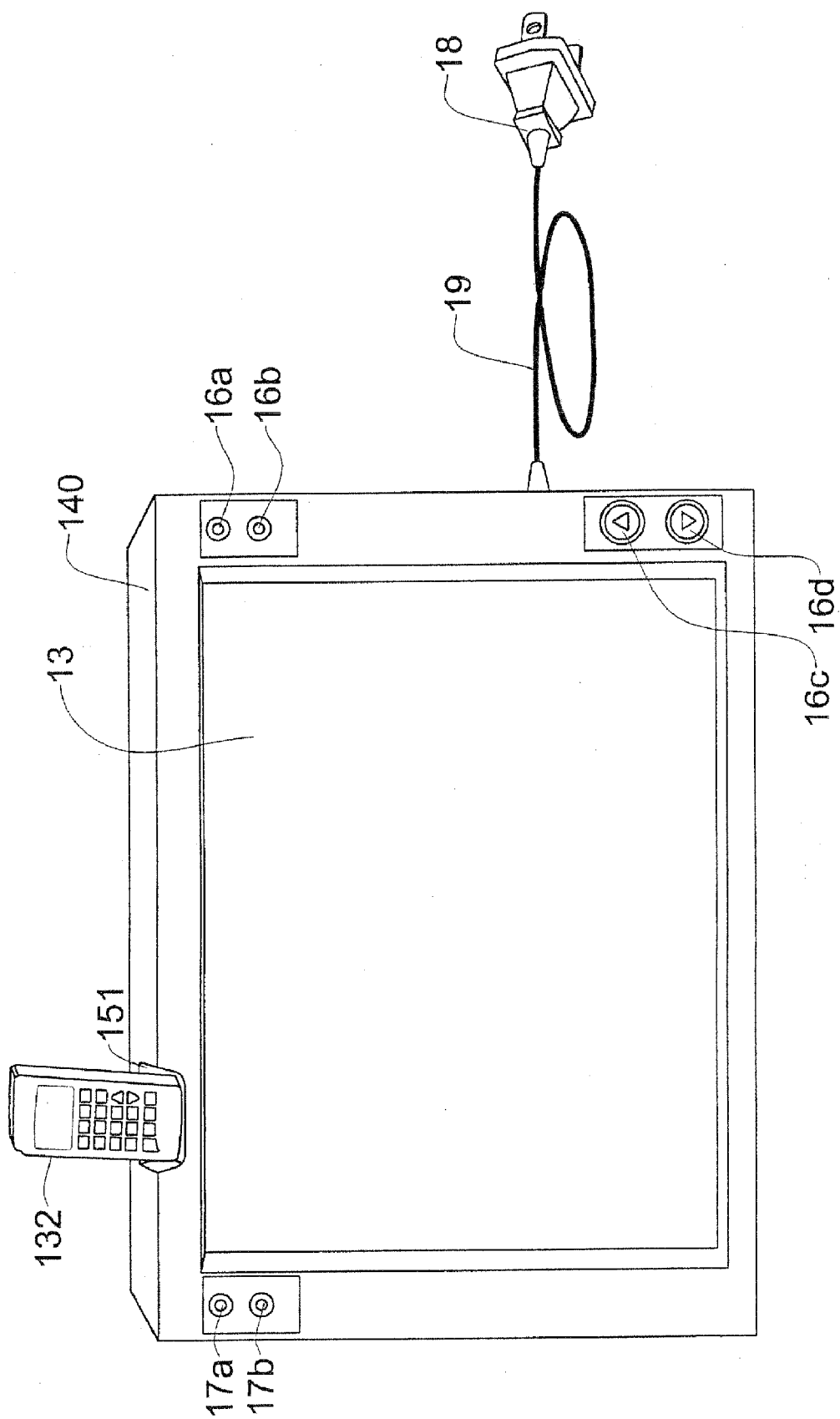


Figure 15

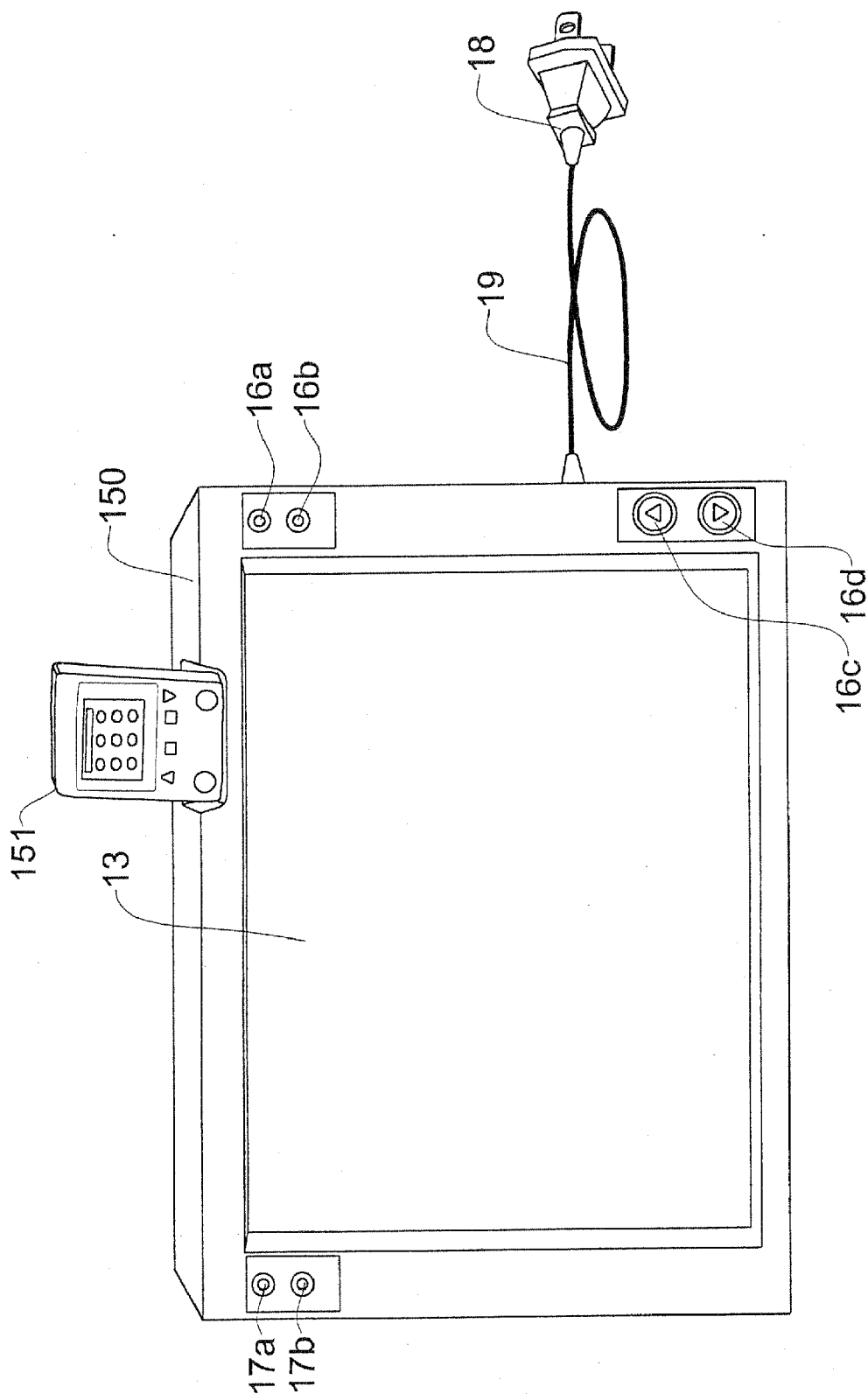


Figure 15a

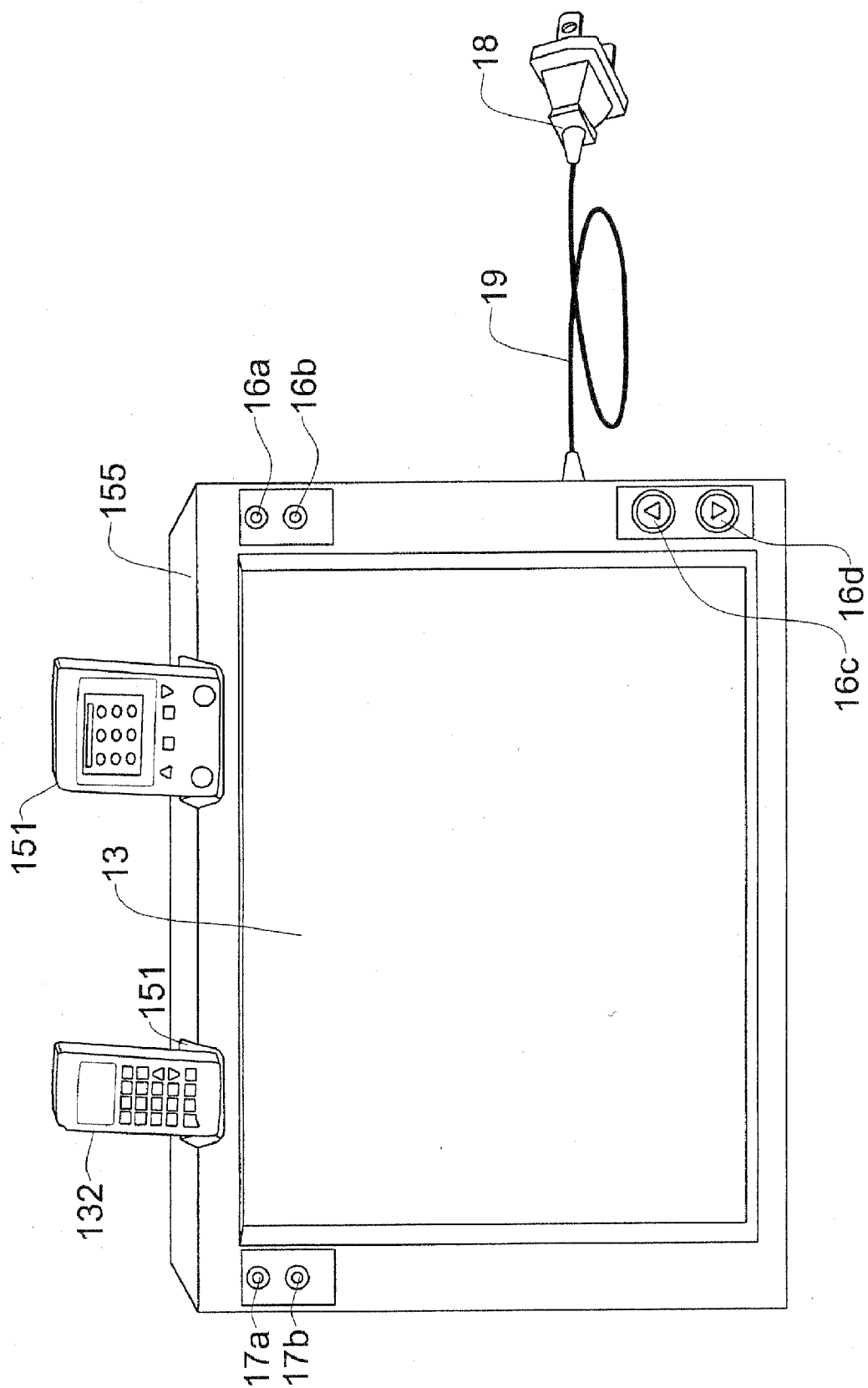


Figure 15b

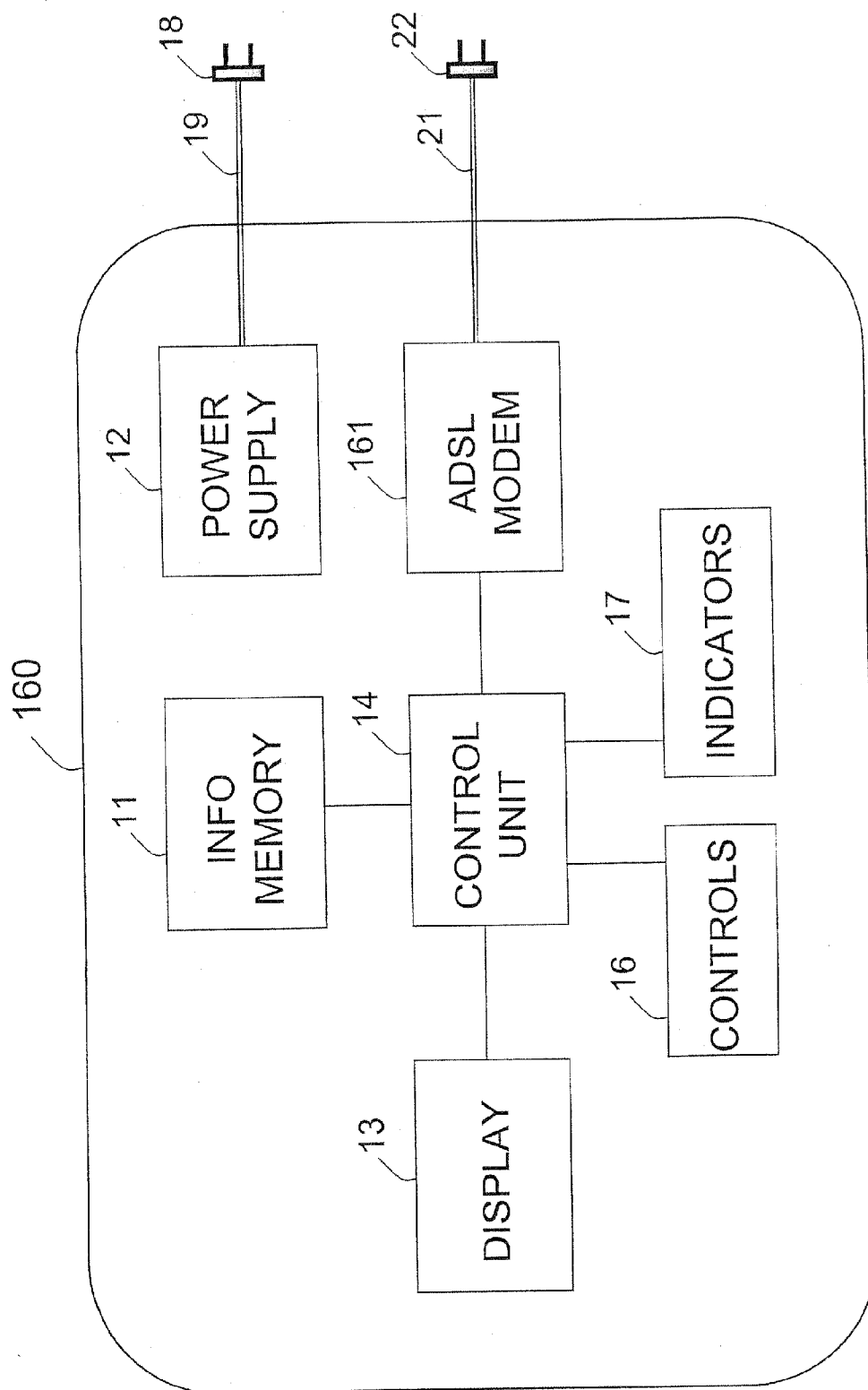


Figure 16

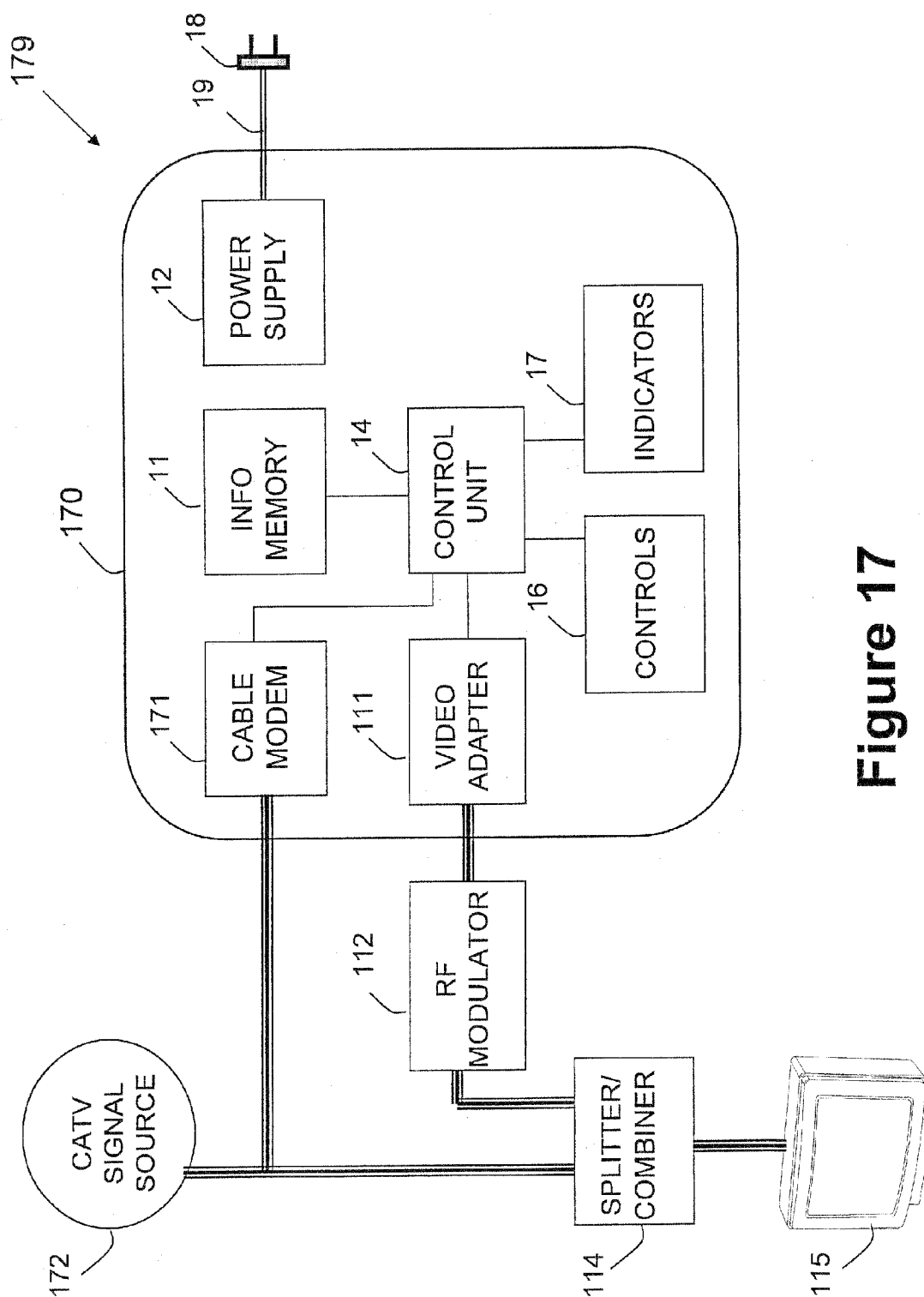


Figure 17

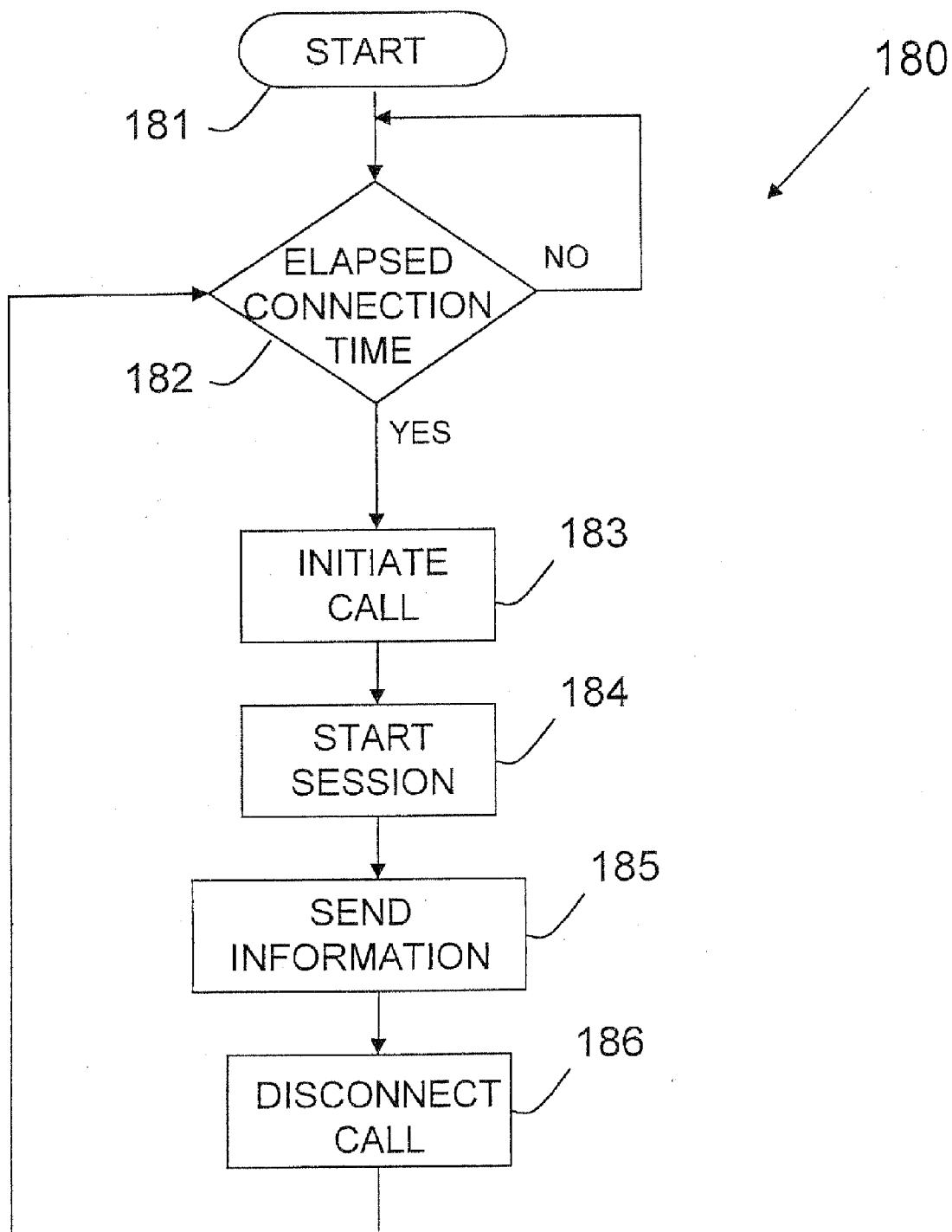


Figure 18

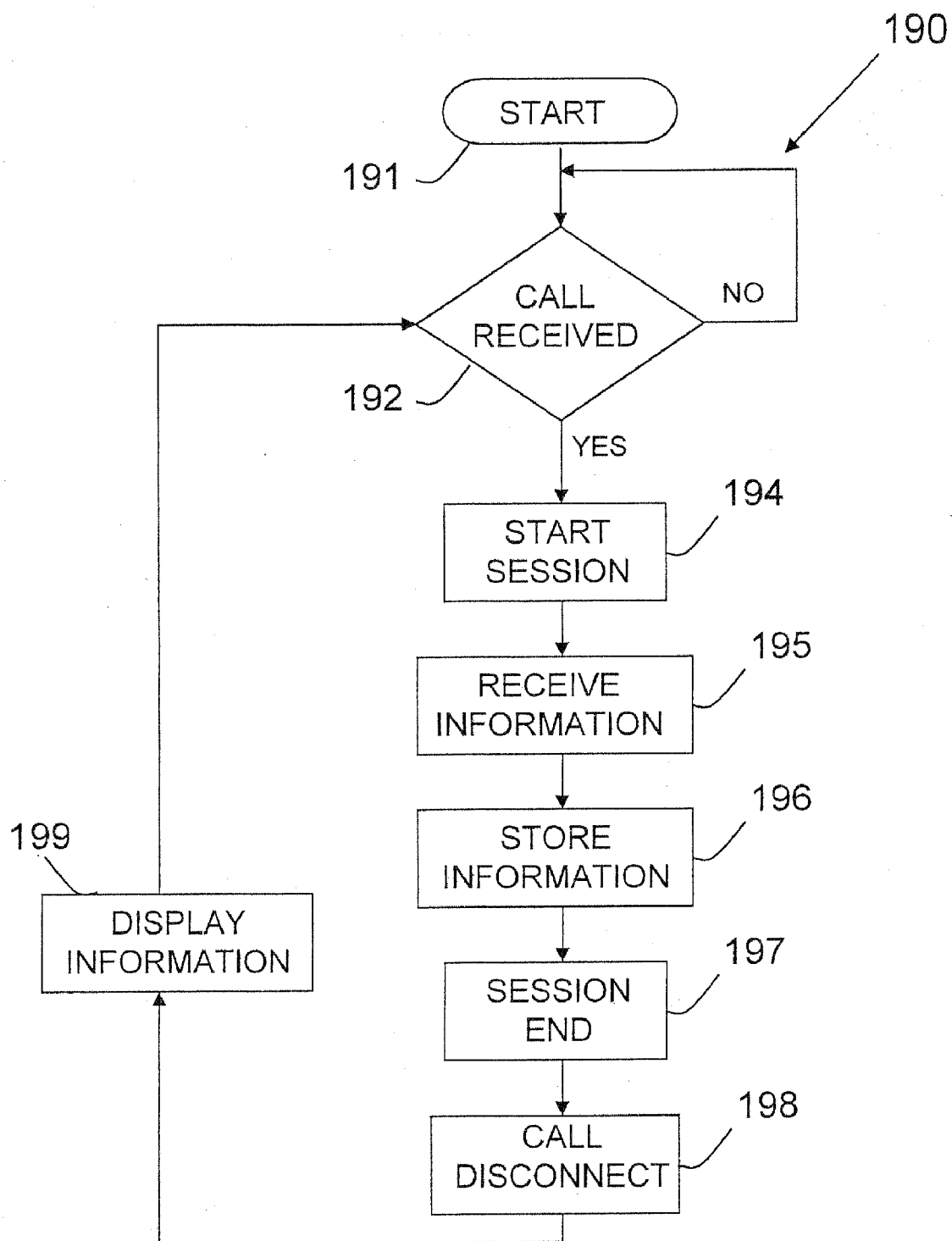


Figure 19

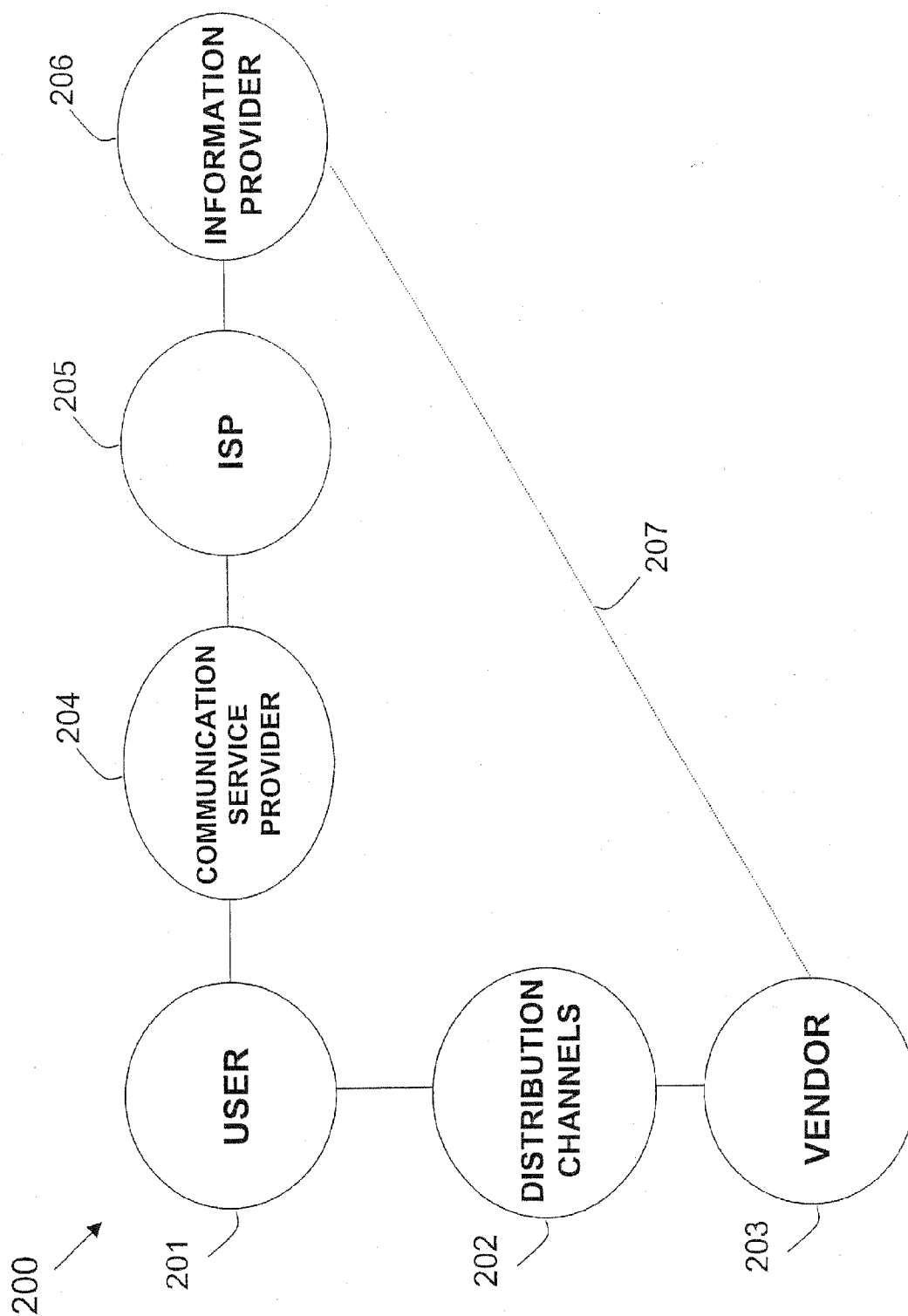


Figure 20

INFORMATION DEVICE

[0001] This is a continuation of application Ser. No. 11/506,907, filed on Aug. 21, 2006, which is itself a continuation of parent application Ser. No. 11/017,060 filed on Dec. 21, 2004.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0002] This invention relates information devices. More specifically, the invention relates to a method, device and system for obtaining information from a remote location to an information device.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0003] In modern life there is a continuous need for updated information, such as weather forecasts, traffic reports, stock market quotes, sports results and general news. Such information may be obtained in various ways using many types of media and communication means. Such communication means may include physical delivery such as newspapers, or using networking such as landline telephony, cellular telephony, radio and television. The Internet is gradually being recognized as an important, reliable and rich source of information.

[0004] In order to obtain updated information, and specifically to obtain specific information required by a specific user, the user is required to actively and repetitively seek for the information. For example, in order to get the weather forecast via the television the user is required to turn on the television set, select a weather channel and watch until the relevant information appears on the screen. Using the Internet to obtain a weather forecast requires turning on a computer, connecting to the Internet, running a web browser and selecting the relevant web site.

[0005] It would be more convenient to obtain and display information, and specifically information tailored towards specific user preferences, automatically and periodically without any user intervention. U.S. Pat. No. 6,442,573 to Schiller et al. discloses an appliance which automatically and periodically connects to a remote server for obtaining information. However, the appliance and system taught by Schiller et al. is oriented towards mailing images between users being part of a community.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0006] It is therefore an object of the invention to provide a method, device and system for periodically and automatically obtaining information from a remote location.

[0007] An information device according to the present invention comprises a communication unit for connecting to the remote location, an info memory for storing the information obtained and a display unit for displaying the stored obtained information. The device periodically and automatically initiates a communication session with the information-storing server in the remote location, during which selected information is downloaded to the information device.

[0008] The communication with the remote site may use the PSTN, to which the information device is connected, by a dial up modem or a cellular network, to which the device connected thereto by a cellular modem. Other telephony connections or any other medium may also be employed. Connection to a telephone outlet may either use cable or be

cordless. In addition to narrowband, any broadband connection such as ADSL or cable modem may be employed. The communication may be direct point-to-point connection (such as in telephony) or via the Internet.

[0009] The information device may connect to a single remote site, or alternatively may connect to multiple such sites, such as for retrieving distinct information from each site. The communication session may be initiated by the information device or by the remote location.

[0010] Settings and parameters such as the telephone number to dial or the URL to download from, the connection period interval as well as the selection of required information may be set in production, by the user (using on device controls) or by the remote location.

[0011] In the case wherein the communication unit is a dial up modem or cellular modem, various means may be employed in order to avoid interference with other devices and services using the same connection. The device may include means for delaying and stopping the call initiation in the case wherein other devices (of higher priority) requires the connection medium.

[0012] The information device may be powered from a regular AC power, batteries or by extracting power from the telephone connection.

[0013] The information device may be housed within a self-contained stand-alone enclosure, or may be integrated with another appliance. In such integration additional functionalities may be integrated added to the shared housing. For example, the communication means may be shared, the display, the control and the information memory or any combination of the above. As such, the information device may be integrated within a telephone set (either landline or cellular), a PDA or a television set. Similarly, the information device may share other appliances display or connection means.

[0014] A system according to the present invention comprises one or more user sites, each employing an information device as described below, and one or more remote sites, each comprising an information server storing the information to download and connection means for connecting to the information devices.

[0015] It is understood that other embodiments of the present invention will become readily apparent to those skilled in the art from the following detailed description, wherein are shown and described only embodiments of the invention by way of illustration. As will be realized, the invention is capable of other and different embodiments and its several details are capable of modification in various other respects, all without departing from the scope of the present invention as defined by the appended claims. Accordingly, the drawings and the detailed description are to be regarded as illustrative in nature and not as restrictive.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0016] The invention is herein described, by way of non-limiting example only, with reference to the accompanying drawings, wherein:

[0017] FIG. 1 shows a functional block diagram of exemplary information device according to the present invention.

[0018] FIG. 2 shows a pictorial view of an exemplary information device according to the present invention.

[0019] FIG. 3 shows an exemplary single provider system according to the present invention.

[0020] FIG. 4 shows a communication link in an exemplary single provider system according to the present invention.

[0021] FIG. 5 shows an exemplary multiple providers system according to the present invention.

[0022] FIG. 6 shows an exemplary flow chart to be executed by an information device according to the present invention.

[0023] FIG. 6a shows a pictorial view of an exemplary operating information device according to the present invention.

[0024] FIG. 7 shows a functional block diagram of exemplary information device according to the present invention.

[0025] FIG. 8 shows part of an exemplary flow chart to be executed by an information device according to the present invention.

[0026] FIG. 8a shows a functional block diagram of exemplary information device according to the present invention.

[0027] FIG. 8b shows a pictorial view of an exemplary cordless base unit according to the present invention.

[0028] FIG. 8c shows a pictorial view of an exemplary cordless base unit according to the present invention.

[0029] FIG. 9 shows a functional block diagram of exemplary information device according to the present invention.

[0030] FIG. 10 shows a pictorial view of an exemplary telephone set integrated information device according to the present invention.

[0031] FIG. 11 shows a functional block diagram of exemplary information device using television set as a display according to the present invention.

[0032] FIG. 12 shows a functional block diagram of exemplary information device according to the present invention.

[0033] FIG. 13 shows a functional block diagram of exemplary information device according to the present invention.

[0034] FIG. 14 shows a functional block diagram of exemplary information device according to the present invention.

[0035] FIG. 15 shows a pictorial view of an exemplary cellular telephone set attachable information device according to the present invention.

[0036] FIG. 15a shows a pictorial view of an exemplary PDA attachable information device according to the present invention.

[0037] FIG. 15b shows a pictorial view of an exemplary PDA and cellular telephone set attachable information device according to the present invention.

[0038] FIG. 16 shows a functional block diagram of exemplary information device according to the present invention.

[0039] FIG. 17 shows a functional block diagram of exemplary information device using television set as a display according to the present invention.

[0040] FIG. 18 shows an exemplary flow chart to be executed by the provider site according to the present invention.

[0041] FIG. 19 shows an exemplary flow chart to be executed by an information device according to the present invention.

[0042] FIG. 20 shows a chart of exemplary business entities involved with the information device providing and operating according to the present invention.

DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0043] In the following description numerous specific details are set forth in order to provide a more thorough understanding of the present invention. It will be apparent, however, to one skilled in the art, that the present invention may be practiced without these specific details. In other instances, well-known features have not been described in detail so as not to obscure the invention.

[0044] The principles and operation of a device, system and method according to the present invention may be understood with reference to the drawings and the accompanying description. The drawings and descriptions are conceptual only. In actual practice, a single component can implement one or more functions; alternatively, each function can be implemented by a plurality of components and circuits. In the drawings and descriptions, identical reference numerals indicate those components that are common to different embodiments or configurations.

[0045] Information Device

[0046] A functional block diagram according to one or more embodiments of the invention is shown in FIG. 1. The information device 10 shown comprises a dial-up modem 15 for connecting the information device 10 to a remote location over the PSTN (Public Switched Telephone Network). The dial-up modem may use standard common protocols such as ITU-T V.34, V.90 and V.92 known in the art. The dial-up modem 15 connects to a telephone outlet 24 by telephone plug 22 via cable 21. The information received from the remote location is stored in the info memory 11, and displayed to the user by display means 13. The display means 13 may be alpha-numeric only or analog video display, and may use technologies such as LCD (Liquid Crystal Display), FED (Field Emission Display, or CRT (Cathode Ray Tube). The memory may be volatile or non-volatile type, such as Flash, DRAM and RAM. In many cases, an adaptor (not shown) is required in order to connect the analog display to digital data device. For example, the adaptor may convert to composite video (PAL, NTSC) or S-Video or HDTV signal. The information device 10 is powered by the local AC power (110VAC in North America, 220VAC in Europe) from a standard wall outlet 25, connected thereto by a power plug 18 and power cable 19, feeding a power supply 12 within the information device 10. The power supply converts the AC power to the various voltages, usually DC type, required for proper operation of the active circuits within the device 10. In one or more embodiments, a small outlet plug-in transformer may be used.

[0047] Operations of the information device 10 are controlled and managed by a control unit 14, comprising a microprocessor as known in the art. Various user controls 16 are available to allow the user to control and effect the device 10 operations, such as on/off switch, reset button and others. Other exemplary controls involve display 13 settings such as contrast, brightness and zoom. Other controls may involve selecting specific information to be shown, changing the language displayed and so forth. Various indicators 17 are available to visually indicate to the user the status of the device 10, such as power indication showing that the unit is properly powered, indication when the device 10 communicates with the remote location and so on. The control unit 14 couples to most or all device components either for getting data and status information, or for controlling/activating the sub-systems. The control unit 14 may be based on CPU (Central Processing Unit) such as a microprocessor or microcomputer, and coupling to the other components may be serial or shared bus type.

[0048] An exemplary illustrative configuration of an information device 10 is shown in FIG. 2. A 'hanging picture' like unit is shown, suitable for hanging on a wall using wire 23. A screen 13 serves as the display means, located in the center of the unit. Four controls named ON/OFF 16a, UPDATE 16b, UP 16c and DOWN 16d pushbuttons are shown as examples

of controls **16**. Similarly, indicators **17** are shown as POWER indicator **17a** and STATUS indicators **17b**, illustrated as a small round shaped illuminating units, such as common LEDs. A physical cables and connectors are also shown, such as plug **18** and cable **19** connecting the device **10** to a power outlet and plug **22** and cable **21** connecting to telephone outlet.

[0049] Information Network.

[0050] The information device **10** connects to an information provider in a remote location for downloading information and displaying it. An exemplary network **30** illustrating user and provider equipments is shown in FIG. **3**. Single provider location comprising an information server **32a** is described, serving multiple information devices **10a**, **10b** and **10c**, wherein each may be located in a different premises and thus serving different users. Information server **32** is any apparatus (e.g. computer) storing information and connectable to an information device **10** for transmitting the information thereto. Each such information device, such as device **10a**, connects to the PSTN **31** (via its dial up modem **15**, cable **21** and telephone connector **22** shown in FIG. **1**). Similarly, the information server **32a** in the information provider location connects to the PSTN **31** via dial up modem **15a**. In the case wherein the information server **32a** contains all the required information to send to the information devices **10**, no other connections are required. However, in most cases the information may not be available, thus requiring the information server **32a** to connect to other providers to get additional information. Network **30** suggests that information server **32a** connects to other servers **32b**, **32c** and **32d** via the Internet network **33** in order to receive the required information. For example, server **32b** may provide weather related information, server **32c** may contain news and server **32d** may contain sport results information. In this case, each such server may support an Internet web page providing the dedicated information, gathered by the providers' information server **32a**. It should be understood that any other type of communication may be employed in order to allow the information provider to get the required information into the information server **32a**, wherein it can be retrieved by any information device **10** connected thereto via the PSTN network **31**.

[0051] As shown in system **40** in FIG. **4**, in order to obtain information from server **32a**, information device **10b** (for example) communicates via the PSTN network **31** with the dial up modem **15a**, thus creating a communication link **41**, enabling data transfer between the information device **10b** and server **32a**.

[0052] An alternative exemplary embodiment of a network **50** is shown in FIG. **5**. In such configuration, the information device **10** directly connects to multiple providers (or a single provider operating multiple locations/servers). Dedicated information servers **32b**, **32c** and **32d** are connected to the PSTN **31** via respectively dial up modems **15b**, **15c** and **15d**. In such a case, information device **10a** connects one at a time to each server **32** to receive dedicated information.

[0053] While the invention has been described above with respect to direct telephone connection between the user and the provider, it will be appreciated that any other type of connection can be used, allowing data communication session between the information device **10** and the provider server **32**. In the particular case where the connection uses the Internet, the user connects (through the PSTN, ISDN or any other means) to an ISP (Internet service Provider) for connection to the Internet. Similarly, the server **32** also connects

the Internet, thus allowing a communication session between the information device **10** and the information server **10** using the Internet.

[0054] Operational Sequence.

[0055] The operations carried out by an information device **10** are shown in FIG. **6** as flow-chart **60**. In most cases, the control unit **14** executes these operations. The general principle of operation involves periodically contacting the information provider server, downloading information therefrom, and displaying the received information. Upon powering up or following device rest, the device starts at step **61**. A pre-determined connection-time is established. In step **62**, the device waits for the connection time to expire before commencing communication. The connection timing may be defined and executed in various forms:

[0056] a. A fixed time-of-day (TOD). In this configuration, the device is set to communicate at a specific time of the day, preferably during the night wherein the telephone traffic is low. For example, a device **10** can be set to communicate on daily basis at 2.00 AM. In such a case, every day at 2.00 AM the device will commence communication (moving to step **63** in the flow chart **60**). It will be obvious that the device can be set to communicate a plurality of times during a 24-hour day, or alternatively, to commence communication less frequently than daily, such as once a week, once a month and so forth. In such configuration, the control unit **14** within device **10** should comprise a real-time clock keeping track of the time, and store (preferably in non-volatile memory) the parameter of the time of day wherein the communication should be initiated.

[0057] b. Time interval. In this configuration, the next communication is commenced as a fixed time interval after the last communication session. For example, an interval period of 6 hours may be selected, wherein every 6 hours the device commences a communication session. The control unit **14** includes a timer being reset after each communication session, and counting towards the next session until the stored period value has elapsed.

[0058] One or both the above timing mechanisms may be supported. Selection of the timing mechanism, as well as the values associated (time of day or period value), may each be selected by:

[0059] a. Production set. In this configuration, the timing mechanism is set during production and cannot be modified later.

[0060] b. User set. In this scenario the user may select the timing method (if such selection is available and is not production set) as well as the timing value. Such programming may use the device controls **16** or a dedicated setting interface (not shown).

[0061] c. Provider set. In this case the provider may, during communication session, access and modify the device timing mechanism.

[0062] In the case wherein multiple information servers are discussed as shown in network **50**, a different timing mechanism may be associated with each such server.

[0063] Upon a decision by the timing mechanism to commence a communication session, the device **10** shifts to step **63**, in which the device dials the telephone number of the provider. Such a number may be a toll-free number (1-800 in the U.S.). Upon an off-hook response from the called dial-up modem (such as **15a** in network **30**), physical layer communication is completed, and both the calling device **10** and the called server **32** start a communication session as part of step

64, during which the authorization for information access is checked, for example. Upon decision of the server 32 to provide information, the information flows from the server 32 through the PSTN to the calling device 10, as part of step 65, using agreed upon or standard protocol. For example, the popular TCP/IP protocol may be used. In another one or more embodiments, the World Wide Web (WWW) system using the Internet protocol (commonly known as TCP/IP) is used, wherein the provider uses a web server having a URL (Uniform Resource Locator) and the information device 10 client software is based on a common web browser such as Microsoft Internet Explorer, used to transmit and access the URL of the web site stored by the information server. The information received is stored in the info memory 11 of the device 10. After completing the information downloading, device 10 and the called server 32 end the session, as shown in step 67. At this point, the calling device 10 or the respective called server 32 dial up modem 15 disconnects the call as shown in step 68, thus ending the communication session. The calling device 10 then displays the new information received (step 69), and shifts to step 62, waiting again until the time for the next session elapse.

[0064] It will be understood that the operation sequence described above results in a periodic automatic device operation to obtain and display information, without the need for any manual intervention. Furthermore, the information device 10 may be operated in an 'always on' mode, wherein it is continuously powered and operative, obviating the need for turning it on and off.

[0065] For example, the information device may be used to get local weather forecast. The device 10 contacts a weather server 32 daily in 5.00 AM while the user is asleep. Upon getting up in 6.00 AM, the device 10 displays the most updated weather forecast for the day, as shown for example in FIG. 6a, enabling the user to plan his activities accordingly.

[0066] While the invention has been so far described with respect to automatic information obtaining without any user intervention, alternative embodiments of the invention involve initiating a communication session upon a user request. For example, a button 'UPDATE' shown as control 16b in FIG. 2 may be used for such a function. Upon user pushing this button, the information device 10 will immediately initiate a communication session by executing step 63 in the flow chart 60, rather than waiting for the next scheduled communication session. In one or more embodiments, the information device 10 initiates a communication session only upon user request. Yet in another one or more embodiment, both mechanisms are supported. In the latter case, a session is initiated by either a scheduled operation or by a user request.

[0067] Information Types and Selection.

[0068] 'Public information' is any information that is available to the general public. Public information may be available for free ("free public information"), such as information available in most of the Internet WWW web sites. Major newspapers, radio stations and television stations, as well as other information providers frequently operate a web site wherein updated information may be accessed. Printed newspapers and other some web sites in the Internet require payment in exchange for providing access to the information ("paid public information"). Public information includes any information which may accessed, either for free or for a fee.

[0069] 'Non-public information' is information which is not included in the above definition of public information. For example, information which is owned by a person who is not

willing to share this information with the public, but rather to a small pre-selected group (e.g. family, friend) or with no one. The term 'information' as used herein includes both public information (both free and paid) as well as non-public information.

[0070] Updated information with respect to the present invention refers to information which was not available in the last communication session, but was created since.

[0071] Non-limiting examples of public and updated information types may include any information found in periodicals such as newspapers, such as:

[0072] Weather forecast.

[0073] Sport event results.

[0074] Stock market quotes.

[0075] News.

[0076] Traffic information.

[0077] Lottery results.

[0078] Personal ads.

[0079] Exchange rates.

[0080] Travel information.

[0081] Future events (sport, culture, entertainment)

[0082] TV/radio guide.

[0083] The term information herein includes both public information (both free and paid) as well as non-public information. In one or more embodiment, the information includes updated information.

[0084] The information device 10 comprises inherently limited info memory 11, and a display 13 of limited visual area, and in order to reduce communication session length, the size of the information content to be downloaded in a single communication session is limited. Hence, in most cases there is a need to clearly define the required information to be obtained from the server 32. Such selection can make use of:

[0085] a. No selection. In this case the user cannot select the required information, and the content is fixed and determined by the server 32 settings.

[0086] b. User set. In this scenario the user may select the information to obtain. Such programming may use the device controls 16 or a dedicated setting interface (not shown).

[0087] c. Information provider set. In this case the information provider transmits the selected information based on the identification of the specific information device 10.

[0088] Dial-Up Connection.

[0089] In many cases, an external telephone connection is shared between few telephone devices such as telephone sets, facsimile and answering machines and others. In the case wherein the telephone connection is in use, for example by a person having a telephone conversation using a telephone device connected thereto, the information device 10 will interfere with the telephone connection usage upon its trying to connect. In order to obviate such scenario, an off-hook detector 71 is added to the information device 70 shown in FIG. 7. The off-hook detector 71 connects to the external telephone connection (using cable 21 and connector 22) and couples to the control unit 14. Basically, the off-hook detector 71 measures the voltage over the telephone lines. While nominally the voltage is about 40-60VDC, in the case of any connected device switching to off-hook state, the voltage drops under 15VDC. As such, the information device 70 first measures the voltage over the telephone lines by the off-hook detector 71, and if low voltage is detected, meaning off-hook condition of a connected device, the dial-up modem 15 opera-

tion is postponed by a pre-determined time. Most existing dial-up modems integrate the off-hook detector functionality described above.

[0090] The operational sequence 60 described above applies also to the information device 70, wherein steps 81 and 82 are added between steps 62 and 63, as described in the partial flow chart 80 in FIG. 8. In step 81, the device 70 checks the telephone connection status using the off-hook detector 71. In the case wherein on-hook status is detected, the device continues to initiate the communication session. Detection of off-hook state will cause the device to shift to step 82, wherein the communication initiation is delayed by a fixed period. The time delay may be set in the production phase, by the user or by the provider as described above.

[0091] In most cases, the operation of the information device 10 is considered to be of low priority versus other uses of a telephone connection. As such, in the case wherein other devices connected to the telephone line switch to off-hook, as is the case wherein a user picks up a telephone headset, the information device should halt its operation to allow the other device to use the telephone connection.

[0092] In one or more embodiments, the device 10 stores multiple telephone numbers for connecting to a provider. In the case wherein a telephone connection cannot be obtained after a few attempts (such as due to a busy line or malfunctioning connection), the device 10 dials alternate telephone numbers according to a predefined priority.

[0093] Cordless Connection.

[0094] As explained and shown in FIGS. 1 and 2 above, the information device 10 requires two cables for proper connection, one for telephony and the other for power. Such cabling may be not aesthetic and also complicates the installation and operation of the device. Telephone cable may be eliminated by using non-wired telephone connection such as cellular telephony, as will be described below. In one or more embodiments, a cordless telephone scheme is used.

[0095] Cordless telephones are long known as means to eliminate the telephone cord. A cordless telephone is basically a combination of a telephone and radio transmitter/receiver, and has two major parts: a base unit and a handset. The base is connected to the phone jack and to a power jack, and converts the telephone signals to radio frequency signals. The handset converts the radio frequency signals to audio signals. The radio frequency used may be 27, 43-50, 900, 2400 or 5800 MHz, and the communication may use Digital Spread Spectrum (DSS) scheme.

[0096] In one or more embodiments, an ordinary cordless base unit is used. Part of the handset functionality is integrated into the information device 10. In such a configuration, the dial up modem 15 communicates cordlessly with the base unit, eliminating the need for a connecting cable. Such information device 85 is shown in FIG. 8a. The dial-up modem 15 is coupled to a radio transceiver 86, cordlessly communicating with the base unit (not shown) via antenna 87. In addition to the full duplex audio/telephony carried between the device 85 and the base unit, various control signals such as on-hook, off-hook, ring, dial-tone, busy tones and other telephony related signals are communicated as known in the art. In such a way, the same functionality of corded coupling is obtained, yet without using any cable.

[0097] Cordless telephone set base units commonly employ, in addition to the radio transceiver and the telephony associated functionalities, a charger which is used to charge a rechargeable battery within the handset. Since in most cases

there may not be a direct contact between the base unit and the information device 85, such charger is not required. As such, a dedicated base unit may be used, pictorially shown in FIG. 8b. The base unit 88 is shaped as a power outlet plug-in unit, plugged into a power outlet 25 using the power prongs 18. The base unit 88 connects to the telephone outlet 24 via a cable and telephone connector 22, and communicates wirelessly with the information device 85 via antenna 88. Similarly, the base unit may be shaped as telephone plug-in unit 84 as shown in FIG. 8c.

[0098] While the above cordless related apparatus and method have been so far described with respect to information device 10, it will be appreciated that such cordless apparatuses and methods are applicable to other types of devices, including any devices which automatically or periodically communicate with a remote location.

[0099] Powering.

[0100] While the invention has been described wherein the information device is being AC powered, in one or more embodiments the information device 10 is powered by batteries.

[0101] Other embodiments may involve extracting power from the telephone line. In most cases, only limited power may be extracted from a telephone line in an on-hook state, since the current flow is also used as an off-hook indication. Such limitation is imposed by the FCC in the USA. However, in the case of a very low power consumption implementation of the information device 10, the allowed power may suffice for its operation. Much higher power consumption from a telephone connection may be obtained during off-hook state. Hence, the device 10 may extract power during its communication session or when other devices connected to the same telephone line switch into off-hook state, as detected by the off-hook detector 71 or any other means.

[0102] It should be understood that any combination of the above powering schemes may be used. In one or more embodiments, a combination of off-hook power extraction and rechargeable batteries is used, as shown as device 90 in FIG. 9. The information device 90 connects solely to the telephone connection via telephone connector 22, obviating the need for AC power connection 18. During off-hook state, a charger 93 (connected to the telephone connection) is operated to extract power from the telephone line and charge rechargeable battery 91. The battery 91 in turn feeds a power supply 92 which in turn feeds all power consuming components of the device 90. Whenever off-hook state is detected by detector 71, either initiated by the device 90 itself or by any other device connected to the same telephone connection, and as long as the battery 91 is not fully charged, power is consumed to charge the battery 91.

[0103] In order not to allow the battery stored energy to be reduced below the level enabling proper operation of the device 90, a battery energy monitor 94 may be used. The monitor 94 detects low energy level in the battery 91, and signals the control unit 14 accordingly. Upon detection that the stored power is lower than a predefined threshold, the device initiates an off-hook state in order to consume power to charge the battery. Upon the predefined energy level being restored, the device disconnects itself and resumes on-hook state. These 'dial for power' powering cycles preferably coincides with the communication sessions described above. However, some embodiments may require more powering cycles than information ones, or vice versa.

[0104] It should be understood that such the above powering mechanisms may be used in any appliance having a telephone connection, and are not limited to the information device 90 described above. Furthermore, any combination of the above powering schemes may be used.

[0105] While the above powering related apparatus and method have been so far described with respect to information device 10, it will be appreciated that such powering apparatuses and methods are applicable to other types of devices, including any devices which automatically or periodically communicate with a remote location.

[0106] Appliance Integration.

[0107] While the information device 10 has been described above as a stand-alone self-contained dedicated appliance, it will readily be understood that the device may be integrated with various other appliances. In one exemplary embodiment shown in FIG. 10, the device is integrated into the housing of a telephone device 100. Display 13 of the device 10 is shown. Similarly, the information device 10 may be integrated into any appliance, and preferably into devices which also require telephone connection such as fax, answering machine and personal computer with dial-up modem, as well as ADSL modem and Residential Gateway known in the art.

[0108] Several levels of integration with appliances may be implemented:

[0109] a. Mechanical integration. This type of basic level of integration involves the housing of the device 10 and the appliance in a single physical packaging, and sharing the same telephone connection (if also required by the appliance). No additional components or functionality are involved.

[0110] b. HMI (Human Machine Interface) sharing. In these embodiments various HMI components are shared and are used by both the device 10 and the other appliance. For example, the device 100 shown in FIG. 10 may share the screen 13 for displaying both device-related information and telephone-related information (such as Caller-ID telephone number). Similarly, telephone numbers buttons may be doubly used as controls 16, and dual-function visual indicators may also be used.

[0111] c. Information sharing. This configuration involves interface between the device 10 and the appliance allowing for sharing at least part of the available information. For example, the device 10 housed within the device 100 may download telephone numbers, which are programmed into speed dialing within the telephone set.

[0112] d. Full integration. In these embodiments various components are used for both functions. For example, a processing unit within an appliance may also implement the control unit 14 functionalities. In such a case, all or part of the above integration levels are also implemented.

[0113] Display Appliance Integration.

[0114] In other embodiments, the device 10 uses other appliances display, preferably existing ones. Such configuration can reduce the cost, complexity and space requirements of a device 10. Common existing displays within premises include a personal computer screen and television sets. An exemplary embodiment of the latter case is described in FIG. 11. The information device 110 shown in the figure does not comprise any display means 13, but rather only employ a video adapter 111, connectable to any external video monitor. Such device 110 may be used with a dedicated external video

monitor. Another embodiment using existing television set is shown as system 119 in FIG. 11. The video output of device 110 is connected to an RF modulator 112 producing a video signal carried over a television channel. The signal is multiplexed with the existing TV signal by a splitter/combiner 114, whereby the multiplexed signal is fed to the television set 115. The information received by the information device 110 may then be shown on one of the television channels. System 119 may be fed from any TV signal source 116, which may be a set top box connected to a CATV or satellite network, or local video source such as VCR and DVD players.

[0115] Information Personalization.

[0116] The information downloaded by an information device 10 can be general and identical to all information devices 10 connected to a provider. Alternatively, the information can be 'personalized': different information being tailored for the requirements of each user. For example, a user may be interested in the weather forecast in his local neighborhood, rather than nation-wide general weather forecast.

[0117] In order to support the providing of personalized information, the information server 32 needs to identify the calling device 10 and to accordingly provide the relevant information. An information device 10 may be individually identified or as part of a group, all group members requiring the same information type. Identification of a calling information device 10 (either as individual or as a group member) may be communication related, such as:

[0118] a. Using Caller-ID: The user is identified by her calling telephone number using Caller-ID feature. For example, by identifying the caller telephone number, the provider can associate a relevant geographical location (e.g. zip code info), and provide weather forecast specifically for that location.

[0119] b. Time of dialing in: Each group (or individual) is assigned a specific time for dialing in. Hence, by noting the calling time the provider can associate and identify the caller or its group. For example, all users calling between 2.00 AM and 2.10 AM are all located in a specific geographical region, hence the relevant weather forecast for that location will be provided.

[0120] c. Telephone number dialed: The provider uses a plurality of telephone numbers, wherein the information is dependent upon the telephone number called. For example, telephone number XXX-XXX-XX01 will relate to a specific region or county, and number XXX-XXX-XXX-XX02 to another defined geographical region.

[0121] In communication related identification, all the information devices 10 are identical to each other, thus easy to manufacture and handle.

[0122] In alternative embodiments, the information 10 device transmits its identification as part of the communication session, during the start session step 64. The identification may consist of:

[0123] a. A unique identification code ('address'), associated with a single information device 10. Such mechanism may be based on the popular and standard IP/Ethernet MAC/IP address structure, or may be of a proprietary nature. Similarly, a user name, password and other personalization techniques known in the art may be used.

[0124] b. A code identifying the type of information requested. In this configuration, the information device 10 transmits a code that identifies the required info rather than the individual user. For example, a device 10 may request the info about the weather in a specific location, and the results of a specific sport event.

[0125] In both cases, each information device **10** may be different from other ones, having a specific identification value (or values). Furthermore, multiple communication sessions and the information types obtained may be different for the same device **10** during different sessions based on parameters or values. Such values (or parameters) may be assigned to the device by any of the following:

[0126] a. Production set. In this configuration, the identification value is set during production and cannot be modified later.

[0127] b. User set. In this scenario the user may change the identification value. Such programming may use the device controls **16** or a dedicated setting interface (not shown).

[0128] c. Provider set. In this case the provider may, during communication session, access and modify the identification value.

[0129] The above identification mechanism may also serve for authorization and billing purposes. After the above values or parameters are set, all following communication sessions will use the set parameters/values.

[0130] Community Application.

[0131] While personalization has been described above relating to a single user/information device, the same may be applied to a group of users/information devices. Such community may all be personalized for a specific type of information, either exclusively or in addition to another information (which may also be individually personalized or not). For example, all students in a school may subscribe to school-related information such as no-school announcements. Similarly, a municipality may broadcast emergency information to all its residents. In addition to geographically grouping, interest-based groups may be formed, allowing all group members to obtain the same information simultaneously.

[0132] While the personalization related apparatus and method has been so far described with respect to information device **10**, it will be appreciated that such apparatuses and methods are applicable to other types of devices, including any devices which automatically or periodically communicate with a remote location.

[0133] Cellular Connection.

[0134] While the invention has been so far described with respect to wired telephone connection, it should be understood that the invention can be equally applied to any other telephone connection, including non-wired based telephone service such as cellular telephony.

[0135] Information device **120** modified to use a cellular telephone service rather than wired telephony is shown in FIG. **12**. The dial up modem **15** (together with the wired connection cable **21** and connector **22**) are eliminated and substituted with a cellular modem **121**, connected to a cellular antenna **122**. In such a configuration, the information device **120** uses the cellular medium to communication with the information provider.

[0136] FIG. **13** shows another embodiment where, instead of a dedicated cellular modem **121** and antenna **122**, a cellular telephone set **132** is used as the communication means. While the mechanical and electrical connections to the telephone set **132** may be fixed, this limits the usage of the telephone set **132** as a mobile device. In a one preferred embodiment, the cellular telephone set **132** is detachable from the device **130**. Cellular adaptor **131** is used to electrically mediate between the device **130** and the cellular telephone **132**. This mediation

can make use of known implementations commonly used for telephone cradles and 'hands-free' systems.

[0137] In the case wherein a cellular telephone set **132** is used as the communication means, and assuming this is the sole communication means, the information device **130** may be required to operate only upon attaching the cellular telephone set **132** thereto. Since cellular telephone sets **132** commonly require periodic charging time, the device **130** may be modified to comprise such a charger. In such configuration, attaching a cellular telephone set **132** to an information device supports two functions: charging and communication. Such a device **140** is shown in FIG. **14**. The power supply **13** feeds a charger **141**, connected to the cellular telephone **132** via the adaptor **131**. An exemplary pictorial view is shown in FIG. **15**. Mechanical adaptor **152** is shown, enabling attaching and detaching the cellular telephone set **132** to the information device **140**. Upon attaching the telephone set **132**, the telephone is charged and may be also used by the device **140** for communication purposes.

[0138] In one or more embodiments, the information device **120** is partially or fully integrated with the cellular telephone set **132**. All the functions of the device **120** are available in a cellular telephone set **132**. The number keys and other function buttons can also serve as controls **16**, and existing visual indicators may doubly function as indicators **17**. Since commonly cellular telephone set **132** comprises at least small alphanumeric screen for displaying the dialed number, this screen can doubly function as display means **13**. Similarly, the microcontroller controlling the telephone set **132** functions can double to perform the control unit **14**. As such, adding the information device **120** functionality to an existing design of a telephone set **132** may only require software update in order to execute at least part of flow chart **60**.

[0139] While the invention has been described above with respect to cellular telephone set, it will be appreciated that PDA (Personal Digital Assistant) may be equally used. Such a device **130** is shown in FIG. **15a**, involving PDA **151**. In one or more embodiments, the PDA charger is included in the device **150**. In one or more embodiments, the PDA **151** is used as communication means, utilizing its built-in communication means (e.g. cellular modem, wireless modem or wired network connection). In one or more embodiments, the PDA **151** doubles to implement part or all of the information device **10** functionalities. Similarly, other devices may be employed with the information device **10**. Furthermore, multiple devices may be employed either independently or in combination, as shown in FIG. **15b** describing an information device **155** and both a PDA **151** and cellular telephone set **132**.

[0140] Broadband Connection: ADSL.

[0141] While the invention has been so far described with respect to cases wherein the connection to the information provider uses dial-up or cellular telephony, it will be appreciated that any connection may be used, either narrow- or broadband, and being either wired-based or wireless. One common telephone-line based broadband connection uses xDSL (Digital Subscriber Line) technology. ADSL (Asymmetric DSL) is popular for residential and office connections. Other versions include VDSL (Very high speed DSL), RADSL (Rate Adaptive DSL), HDSL (High speed DSL) and others. While ADSL will be discussed hereinafter, any other xDSL may as well be used.

[0142] An information device **160** comprising an ADSL modem **161** is shown in FIG. **16**. The ADSL modem **161**

substitutes the dial-up modem **15** described above, still connecting via a telephone connection. In one or more embodiments, the information device **160** periodically initiates physical layer ADSL connection, and disconnect the connection upon session completion. Such implementation requires a 'start up' period for modem training in the beginning of each such session. However, multiple ADSL modems may connect to a single telephone connection one at a time. Alternative embodiments use the 'always on' feature of the ADSL connection, wherein the physical layer ADSL connection is always on, but higher layers remain inoperative until being 'logged on' by the connected device. In this case, there is no need for any 'start up' period, but no other ADSL modem can concurrently use the telephone connection.

[0143] Similar to the above description, the information device can be integrated with any other device having ADSL modem such as stand-alone dedicated ADSL modem, Residential Gateway and so forth.

[0144] Broadband Connection: CATV.

[0145] Another popular broadband connection is based on the CATV (Cable Television) cabling, dedicating part of the carried spectrum to data networking in addition to the video channels. Most available systems are based on CableLabs™ DOCSIS standards. Information device **170** comprising a cable modem **171** is shown in FIG. **17**. The device **170** shown comprises video adapter **111** for connecting to an external video display. However, built in display means **13** may alternatively be used. The cable modem **171** typically connects to a CATV outlet for connecting to the CATV in-building wiring, connected in turn to external CATV signal source **172**, for coupling to the data channel carried over the CATV wiring.

[0146] FIG. **17** further illustrates a system **179**, wherein the television set is used for both displaying the video channels carried as part of the CATV network, and as a display means of the information received by the information device **170**. The splitter/combiner **114** combines the video signal from the information device **170** modulated by the RF modulator **112** with the CATV video channels enabling displaying of all channels in the television set **115** (it is assumed that the television set is 'Cable Ready' and there is no need for converter or set top box). The various components shown, such as the information device **170**, the RF modulator **112** and the splitter/combiner **114** may be in full or in part integrated into television set, to a set top box or to a stand alone cable modem.

[0147] While the invention has been so far described with respect to modem embedded within the information device **10** which connects directly to the remote server **32**, it will be appreciated that such external connection (either narrow or broadband, Local- or Wide area network) may be shared with other networked appliances over a home network. As known in the art, in such a configuration a single device, commonly known as Residential Gateway connects to the external connection, whereby multiple in-home appliances share this external pipe by means of an in-home network. Home networks may use dedicated wiring commonly known as 'structured wiring' and employing Ethernet IEEE802.3 protocols. Other implementations involve wireless RF based network such as standardized in IEEE802.11x or BlueTooth. Other alternatives involve using existing wiring structure such as telephone wiring (e.g. HomePNA technology), powerlines (e.g. HomePlug) and CATV wiring. Adapting the information device **10** to support a home network basically requires substituting the dial-up modem **15** with a modem appropriate for the home network media, such as Ethernet transceiver or

wired Ethernet network, IEEE802.11x wireless transceiver or HomePlug compliant transceiver.

[0148] Provider Push.

[0149] While the invention has been so far described with respect to 'user pull', wherein the periodic communication session is initiated by the information device **10**, it will be appreciated that the communication sessions can be equally initiated by the information provider ('provider push'). In such a case, the communication can be charged to the provider (being the call initiator) and not to the user. In one or more embodiments, the provider server **32a** (together with the provider site dial-up modem **15a**) executes the flow chart **180** shown in FIG. **18**. After starting (e.g. power up or reset) step **181** the server **32a** executes step **182** which results in waiting until expiry of the time to the next session schedule as explained above. Then the server initiates a call as part of the step **183**, and starts the session in step **184**. During the communication session the pre-defined information is transmitted (step **185**) to the user information device **10**. After the required information has been submitted, the server **32a** disconnects and the communication session is terminated. This operational sequence is periodically repeated as explained above.

[0150] In the case of 'provider push' the operational sequence executed by the information device **10** is similar to the 'user pull' sequence described above in flow chart **60** (shown in FIG. **6**). The modified flow chart **190** is shown in FIG. **19**. Rather than initiating a call, the device **10** waits until being called by the provider as shown in step **192**. Session start **192**, and receive information **195** respectively correlates with the provider states **184** start session **184** and send information **185**. The received information is stored (step **196**). Thereafter the communication session is ended **197** and the communication disconnected **198**, as a response to provider disconnect call step **186**. Then the information is displayed **199**, and the device **10** rests until the next session initiation.

[0151] In the case wherein 'always on' broadband connection type is employed such as ADSL or cable modem, the provider can initiate the communication session by accessing the device **10** identification value, as discussed above. In the case wherein the Internet is used, the IP (Internet Protocol) address of the device **10** may be used to target the information to a specific device **10**.

[0152] In the case wherein telephone connection (such as landline or cellular telephony) is used for linking the provider server **32a** to a user information device **10**, an inherent unique telephone number is assigned to each such connection: a telephone number for a cellular telephone set and a telephone number for each landline telephone connection. In such a case, the provider server **32a** dials the telephone number assigned to the information device **10**, using dial up modem **15a**, in order to establish the communication link.

[0153] In the case the telephone connection is solely used by the information device **10**, no other entities may respond to the provider dialing in signal. Such configuration may be expensive since the telephone connection costs are not shared. However, in the case wherein multiple appliances share the same connection, such as in a residence wherein multiple telephone sets (or answering or facsimile machines) are connected in parallel to the same telephone lines, calling in will possibly interfere with the normal operation. Furthermore, calling in will produce a disturbing telephone ringing. In a similar way, regular cellular telephony service may be disturbed.

[0154] In one or more embodiments, the information device 10 is caller-ID capable and can identify the calling provider telephone number (or numbers). The device 10 responds immediately to an incoming call only if the information provider call is identified, and is silent in all other calls. Hence, minimum intervention with the regular telephony (either landline or cellular) is obtained.

[0155] While the invention has been so far described with respect to exclusive ‘user pull’ or ‘provider push’, wherein in the former the user device 10 initiates the call and in the latter the provider server 32a initiates the call, it will be appreciated that any combination of both may also be considered. In one or more such embodiments, the user device 10 initiates the call and starts communication session. During the session, the server 32a identifies the device 10 calling number either automatically by Caller-ID or by the information sent to the server 32a. As a response, the server 32a initiates a call to this number (either immediately or after a pre-defined delay) and starts a session as described above. One advantage of such mechanism is that the longer session is billed to the provider (being the caller) and not to the user.

[0156] While the ‘provider-push’ apparatus and method has been so far described with respect to information device 10, it will be appreciated that such apparatuses and methods are applicable to other types of devices, including any devices which automatically or periodically communicate with a remote location.

[0157] Business Method.

[0158] The entities involved in the business aspects of the information device according to the invention are described in diagram 200 in FIG. 20. The vendor 203 provides the information device 10, and may be the actual manufacturer (either directly or via subcontracting) of the device. The user 201 may purchase the information device 10 through any distribution channels 202, such as wholesale or retail stores. However, the user may or may not be the owner of the device 10. However, the terms ‘user’ and ‘owner’ are used interchangeably hereinafter. Any distribution channel dealing with electronic or electrical appliances, in particular those channels involving distribution of communication equipment, may include the information device 10 as part of their product portfolio. Generally, any business model or method used to in distributing appliances may be used for the information device 10.

[0159] In the cases described below wherein the information device 10 is not self-contained dedicated device but rather is integrated with other appliances such as telephone set 100, cellular telephone set 132 or PDA, the same business channels and methods used for distributing the attached appliance may be used for the added information device 10 functionality, either for free (as improved appliance) or for increased price.

[0160] In order to allow for the communication session to take place, the information device 10 connects to the ‘external’ world by connection through a communication service provider 204. In the case of connecting using dial-up (or ISDN) modem as well as ADSL modem, the communication service provider is the local telephone company (‘telco’) owning the connecting telephone wiring. In the case of cellular modem, the cellular telephone company is the communication service provider 204. Similarly, the CATV provider is the communication service provider in the case of DOCSIS based cable modem. The information server 32, owned by the information provider 206, may be directly connected to (e.g.

through the PSTN), such as described in configurations 30 and 50 above. In other embodiments, the Internet is used for communication between the information device 10 and the information server 32. In such a case, Information Service Provider (ISP) 206 is involved for connecting the user to the Internet.

[0161] In addition to the equipment cost, the costs associated with the operation of the information device are as follows:

[0162] a. Communication service. The costs associated with the communication sessions.

[0163] b. ISP, in the case of using the Internet.

[0164] c. Information service. The costs associated with operating the information provider’s site, including obtaining the information, storing it and allowing for communication with the information devices 10.

[0165] In general, these costs are to be covered by the user 201, as described below.

[0166] Communication Service Costs.

[0167] a. In one or more business methods, the information device 10 uses no user associated cost communication, such as toll-free (1-800 numbers in the U.S.). In such a case, the communication cost is usually paid for by the vendor 203.

[0168] b. In one or more business methods, wherein the information device 10 uses direct communication method such as PSTN wherein the information device 10 dials an associated specific information provider 206 number, the information provides 206 may use a service paid number, such as area code 900 in the U.S.

[0169] c. In one or more business methods, the user 201 pays to the communication service provider 204 for the communication services. For example, in the case wherein the information device 10 uses telephony communication method such as PSTN or cellular telephony, communication charge are imposed by the provider 204. Since periodical calls are initiated, a constant and continuous charge is incurred.

[0170] Such Added Revenue Per User (ARPU) is mostly beneficial to most communication service provider, since the additional revenues do not require any additional infrastructure investment. As such, a business method wherein the communication service provider (e.g. Telco) 204 provides the information device 10 for nominal cost or even lower than nominal (e.g. free) is viable, wherein the ARPU covers the initial cost after a time.

[0171] Furthermore, since in some embodiments the dialing time may be set to be in low telephone traffic periods (e.g. nights, weekends), the additional traffic due to information device 10 initiated traffic do not degrade the regular service and does not require any upgrade or additional investment in the existing infrastructure.

[0172] In general, billing the user 201 for communication services by the provider 204 may be:

[0173] a. One time fee.

[0174] b. Flat fee for a period (e.g. monthly).

[0175] c. Per communication session.

[0176] d. Per lengths of communication sessions.

[0177] e. Any combination of the above.

[0178] Furthermore, the provider 204 may use a contract to provide the user 201 with the information device 10, in order to ‘lock’ for a predetermined period (wherein changing provider will result in a fee). Such a model is commonly employed by many communication service providers in order to reduce chum (e.g. cellular telephone service providers with respect to cellular telephone set).

[0179] The business methods associated with selling via distribution channels 202 (e.g. retail store) commonly involve changing ownership of the information device 10, wherein after completion of the buying transaction the device 10 is fully owned by the user 201. However, common to other communication service associated devices, one or more business methods involved the ownership of an information device 10 may comprise owning by the communication service provider. Such a model is commonly used regarding Set Top Boxes provided by CATV providers. In some of these methods, the user is requested to pay a periodic (e.g. monthly) fee for renting the device.

[0180] In one or more business methods, the information device 10 may comprise a unique addressing means, allowing it to communicate only through a specific service provider. This is similar to cellular telephone sets which may work only in conjunction with a specific cellular telephony provider.

[0181] ISP Service Costs.

[0182] ISP 205 is required wherein the communication uses the Internet. However, the term ISP should be interpreted to include any network (additional to the communication network described above) required to be used in order to access the server 32. All business methods described above with respect to communication service provider 204 may equally be employed with respect to ISPs. The costs associated with the ISP 205 may also be covered by the vendor 203. Most ISPs charge a flat fee for their services.

[0183] Information Service Costs.

[0184] a. Free information service. In this case, there is no cost to the user 201 due to the information obtained. Most existing Internet web pages are available at no charge, including most of the major newspaper and radio/TV news stations. Hence, in one or more embodiments, the information device 10 may download information from such web pages.

[0185] In one or more embodiments, the vendor 203 serves also as information provider 206 (line 207). For example, the vendor 203 may operate a web page containing information to be downloaded to the information devices 10.

[0186] b. Commercial publication based service. In this case the information obtained comprises publicity information. Such a business method is commonly used in television and radio station broadcasting.

[0187] c. Paid information service. In this case the user 201 is charged for the information obtained. In general, billing the user 201 for information services by the provider 206 may be:

[0188] a. One time fee.

[0189] b. Flat fee for a period (e.g. monthly).

[0190] c. Per communication session.

[0191] d. Per lengths of communication sessions.

[0192] e. Per the information required: Type and quantity.

[0193] f. Any combination of the above.

[0194] In order to allow such paid information the connecting information device should be authorized to obtain the required information, such as a password or transmitting device address or other identification means as described above and as known in the art.

[0195] The invention embraces any combination of the above embodiments. Furthermore, while the above business methods have been so far described with respect to the information device 10, it will be appreciated that such methods are applicable to other types of devices, including any devices which automatically or periodically communicate with a remote location.

[0196] Distinction Over Prior Art.

[0197] U.S. Pat. No. 6,442,573 to Schiller et al describes a device which automatically and periodically communicates to obtain and display information. However, the following aspects distinguish the present invention over Schiller et al.:

[0198] a. The system described by Schiller et al. is oriented towards sending data (images) from one user to another through a provider server, while the present invention relates to information sent solely from a provider to a user.

[0199] b. In Schiller et al. the information received is considered private and is solely targeted towards a specific user, and uses secured mechanism in order not to be shared by any other users, while the present invention refers to public information that may be accessed by multiple users.

[0200] c. The information discussed by Schiller et al. comprises images. Images are known to require large files, hence requiring large memory and long communication sessions. Furthermore, the display means oriented towards displaying images requires high quality, high resolution and large screens. In contrast, the information transported as part of the present invention may be of any type, such as simple text data requiring relatively small, low-resolution display means.

[0201] d. The system described by Schiller et al. is based on mail delivery system over the Internet. No such limitation is imposed by the present invention since no mailing services are discussed.

[0202] e. The information transported in the system described by Schiller et al. (e.g. the images) is generated by a user, and is usually not of interest to the general public. The information in the present invention is mostly oriented towards general public (or a user's group) interest information, which in most cases may be accessed through other communication channels.

[0203] f. The system described by Schiller et al. is based on multiple devices working in concert (community/family type). Devices according to the present invention are not related to each other in any way.

[0204] There are many prior-art solutions known as 'push technology', such as by PointCast (currently Infogate Inc., of San-Diego, Calif. USA). Such solutions involve 'pushing' information to a personal computer via the Internet using an Internet browser. It will be appreciated that the present invention is distinguished over such solutions since a dedicated device is used rather than a personal computer. Furthermore, the information device according to the present invention is 'always on' and obtains the information continuously while a personal computer needs to be manually turned on and the browser must be operative for obtaining data.

[0205] Although exemplary embodiments of the present invention have been described, this should not be construed to limit the scope of the appended claims. Those skilled in the art will understand that various modifications may be made to the described embodiment. Moreover, to those skilled in the various arts, the invention itself as described herein will suggest solutions to other tasks and adaptations for other applications. It is therefore desired that the present embodiments be considered in all respects as illustrative and not restrictive, reference being made to appended claims rather than the foregoing description to indicate the scope of the invention.

What is claimed is:

1. A device for obtaining, storing and displaying personalized information from a first remote information server via AC power wiring that is part of or connected to a Wide Area Network (WAN), the AC power wiring being connected for carrying an AC power signal at an AC power frequency and a digital data signal in a digital data frequency band that is distinct from, and higher than, the AC power frequency, said device comprising:

- an AC power plug for connecting to the AC power wiring;
- a powerline modem coupled to said AC power plug for transmitting digital data to, and receiving digital data from the AC power wiring;
- a first memory coupled to said powerline modem for storing digital data received from the AC power wiring;
- a display for visually presenting information, said display being coupled for displaying information stored in said first memory; and
- a single enclosure housing said powerline modem, said first memory and said display, said single enclosure having dimensions and an appearance of a conventional flat, wall-mountable framed picture;

wherein said device is addressable in a Local Area Network (LAN), and said device is operative for communicating with the first remote information server via the Internet through the AC power wiring for receiving the information therefrom, and for storing and displaying the received information.

2. The device according to claim 1, wherein said device is operative for automatically and periodically communicating with the first remote information server at all times when said device is in operation.

3. The device according to claim 1, wherein communication over said AC power wiring is substantially based on HomePlug standard.

4. The device according to claim 1, wherein said device is further adapted to communicate with the Internet via a gateway.

5. The device according to claim 1, wherein the AC power wiring is part of a Wide Area Network (WAN) and the connection to said device over the AC power wiring is always on.

6. The device according to claim 1, wherein the AC power wiring is part of a Local Area Network (LAN).

7. The device according to claim 6, wherein the AC power wiring is part of a LAN in a building.

8. The device according to claim 1, wherein said device is further operative to periodically retrieve and display information from said first memory.

9. The device according to claim 1, wherein said display comprises a flat screen that is based on Liquid Crystal Display (LCD) technology.

10. The device according to claim 1, wherein said display is an analog video display.

11. The device according to claim 10, wherein said display is coupled to said first memory via a composite video interface, and the composite video interface is one of a PAL interface and an NTSC interface.

12. The device according to claim 1, wherein said display is a digital display.

13. The device according to claim 12, wherein said display is an HDTV display.

14. The device according to claim 1, wherein said first memory is non-volatile.

15. The device according to claim 1, wherein said first memory is based on one of: a Flash memory; a DRAM memory; and a RAM memory.

16. The device according to claim 1, further comprising a power supply connected to said AC power plug to be powered by power supplied from an AC power outlet, said power supply comprising an AC to DC converter for DC powering at least part of said device.

17. The device according to claim 1, further comprising a battery, wherein said device is operative to be at least in part powered from said battery, and wherein said battery is a primary battery or a rechargeable battery.

18. The device according to claim 1, further supporting an information pushing from the first remote information server, wherein said device is further operative to respond to, and communicate with, the first remote information server, when the first remote information server initiates a communication session and said device receives information from the first remote server and displays the received information.

19. The device according to claim 1, wherein said single enclosure is constructed to have at least one of the following:

- a form substantially similar to that of a standard picture frame;
- wall mounting elements substantially similar to those of a standard picture frame for hanging on a wall; and
- a shape to at least in part substitute for a standard picture frame.

20. The device according to claim 1, further comprising firmware and a processor for executing said firmware, said processor being coupled to control at least said powerline modem and said display.

21. The device according to claim 20, wherein said processor is one of: a microprocessor; and a microcomputer, and said device further comprises at least one user operated button or switch coupled to said processor, for user control of operation of said device.

22. The device according to claim 21, wherein the user control of operation of said device comprises at least one out of:

- turning said device on and off;
- resetting said device to default values;
- changing the contrast of said display;
- changing the brightness of said display;
- changing the zoom of images presented on said display;
- selecting a language; and
- selecting the information to be presented on said display.

23. The device according to claim 20, wherein said firmware include at least part of a web client for communication with, and accessing information stored in, the first remote information server.

24. The device according to claim 23 wherein said at least part of a web client includes at least part of a graphical web browser.

25. The device according to claim 23 wherein said at least part of a graphical web browser is based on Windows Internet Explorer.

26. The device according to claim 1, wherein the first remote server information is organized as a web site having a Uniform Resource Locator (URL) and including web pages as part of the World Wide Web (WWW), and is further identified by said device using the web site URL.

27. The device according to claim 1, wherein said device is operative for communicating with a second remote information server via the Internet for receiving information there-

from, and for storing and displaying the received information from the second remote information server.

28. The device according to claim **27**, wherein said device is adapted to communicate with the first and second remote information servers for obtaining respectively different selected information from each remote information server.

29. The device according to claim **27**, wherein said device communicates with the first and second remote information servers one at a time.

30. The device according to claim **1**, wherein said device is located in a building and is operative for communicating with only a single remote information server external to the building.

31. The device according to claim **1**, wherein communication with the first remote information server is based on Internet protocol suite.

32. The device according to claim **31**, wherein communication with the first remote information server is based on TCP/IP.

33. The device according to claim **1**, wherein said device is operative to initiate a communication with the first remote information server after a set period following a prior communication session.

34. The device according to claim **33**, wherein the set period is at least one of: set by the user; set previously in said device; and set by the first remote information server in a previous communication session.

35. The device according to claim **1**, wherein said device is operative to initiate a communication with the first remote information server on a daily basis at a pre-set time of day (TOD).

36. The device according to claim **35**, wherein the pre-set time of day is at least one of: set by the user; set previously in the device; and set by the first remote information server in a previous communication session.

37. The device according to claim **1**, wherein the first remote information server is a dedicated remote information server, and said device is further operative to initiate a communication with the dedicated remote information server based on a user request.

38. The device according to claim **1**, wherein the information received from the first remote information server is publicly available for free.

39. The device according to claim **38**, wherein the information received from the first remote information server is also available in other mediums.

40. The device according to claim **39**, wherein the first remote information server is associated with one of: a newspaper; a radio station; and a television station.

41. The device according to claim **1**, wherein the information received from the first remote information server and displayed relates to a future event, a planned activity or a forecast of a situation.

42. The device according to claim **41**, wherein the information received from the first remote information server includes at least one of: a weather forecast; a future sports event; a future cultural event; a future entertainment event; a TV station guide; and a radio station guide.

43. The device according to claim **1**, wherein the information received from the first remote information server and displayed relates to a past event, a past activity, or a former situation.

44. The device according to claim **43**, wherein the information received from the first remote information server

includes at least one of: sports event results; a stock quote; lottery results; and a currency exchange rate.

45. The device according to claim **1**, wherein the information received from the first remote information server and displayed relates to an ongoing or recent event, a current or recent activity, or an existing situation.

46. The device according to claim **45**, wherein the information received from the first remote information server includes at least one of: public news; and traffic related information.

47. The device according to claim **1**, wherein said device is operative to delay a communication with the first remote information server for a set period, in the case that such communication cannot be properly executed within a selected time period.

48. The device according to claim **47**, wherein the set period is at least one of: set by the user; set previously in said device; and set by the first remote information server in a previous communication session.

49. The device according to claim **1**, wherein said device is operative to communicate with an alternative second distinct remote information server via the Internet, in the case the communication with the first remote information server cannot be properly executed in a selected time period or after a set delay.

50. The device according to claim **1**, wherein said device is addressable by a digital address, and further is operative to send the digital address and a request for information to, and to obtain and display the received information from, the first remote information server in response to the sent request for information.

51. The device according to claim **1**, wherein said device is configured for wall mounting in a residential building, and the first remote information server is located outside the residential building.

52. The device according to claim **1**, wherein said display is alphanumeric.

53. The device according to claim **1**, wherein said display is based on Field Emission Display (FED) technology or Cathode Ray Tube (CRT) technology.

54. The device according to claim **1**, wherein said display comprises a flat screen that is based on Liquid Crystal Display (LCD) technology.

55. The device according to claim **1**, wherein said device is dedicated only for obtaining, storing and displaying information from the first remote information server.

56. The device according to claim **1**, further comprising a second memory for storing a digital address uniquely identifying said device in the WAN, and in the Local Area Network (LAN), or on the Internet.

57. The device according to claim **55**, wherein the digital address is either a MAC address or an IP address.

58. The device according to claim **1**, further comprising a second memory for storing a digital address uniquely identifying said device in the WAN, and wherein said second memory is operative for storing the personalized information.

59. The device according to claim **57**, wherein the personalized information is a user name or a password.

60. The device according to claim **57**, wherein the personalized information is set by the user.

61. The device according to claim **57**, wherein the personalized information is set by the remote information server.

61. The device according to claim 57, wherein the personalized information is associated with the physical geographical location of said device.

62. The device according to claim 57, wherein the personalized information comprises a code identifying specific information requested by the user, and wherein said device is operative to send the code to the first remote information server for obtaining and displaying specific information received from the first remote information server in response to the request sent.

63. The device according to claim 62, wherein the personalized information is set by the user or by the first remote information server.

64. The device according to claim 1, wherein said device is further operative to store and play digital audio data.

65. The device according to claim 1, wherein: said device is further operative to receive and display information from a connected unit; said device further comprises a connector coupled to said first memory for connecting to the unit; and said device is operative to receive digital data comprising information from the unit and displaying the information on said display.

66. The device according to claim 65, wherein said device is further operative to transmit digital data to the unit.

67. The device according to claim 66, wherein communication with the unit via said connector takes place over a standard serial digital data bus.

68. The device according to claim 65, further comprising a power supply connected to said AC power plug to be powered by power carried by the AC power wiring and to provide DC power for DC powering said first memory and said display, and wherein said connector is further coupled to said power supply for DC powering the unit via said connector.

69. The device according to claim 68, wherein the unit is a battery operated unit having a battery, and said power supply further comprises a charger for charging the battery of the battery operated unit.

70. The device according to claim 68, wherein the unit is a handheld unit and said device is further adapted to mechanically dock, supply power to, and communicate with, the handheld unit.

71. The device according to claim 70, in combination with a cradle for detachable mounting of the handheld unit, the handheld unit having a mating connector, wherein the mating connector is part of said cradle, and said connector connects with the handheld unit mating connector when the handheld unit is mounted in said cradle.

72. The device according to claim 71, wherein the handheld unit is a Personal Digital Assistant (PDA), or a cellular telephone.

73. The device according to claim 68, wherein: said device is further adapted so that the unit is removably mechanically attached to said device; and said power supply is operative to supply DC power to the unit when the unit is mechanically attached via said connector.

74. The device according to claim 1, further operative as a clock for maintaining and displaying the time, and wherein said device is further operative to display the current hour, minute and second.

75. The device according to claim 74, further operative to display the current year, the current month and the current day of the month.

76. The device according to claim 74, further operative to display the time of a last information update or a last communication session.

77. The device according to claim 1, further comprising a digital to analog converter coupled to said first memory for converting digital data stored in said first memory to an analog signal.

78. The device according to claim 77, wherein the analog signal is an analog video signal for connecting to an analog video display.

79. The device according to claim 78, wherein the analog video signal is an S-Video signal or a composite video signal in a PAL or NTSC format.

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