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(54) **METHODS AND SYSTEMS FOR PROVIDING CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION**

(52) **U.S. Cl.**
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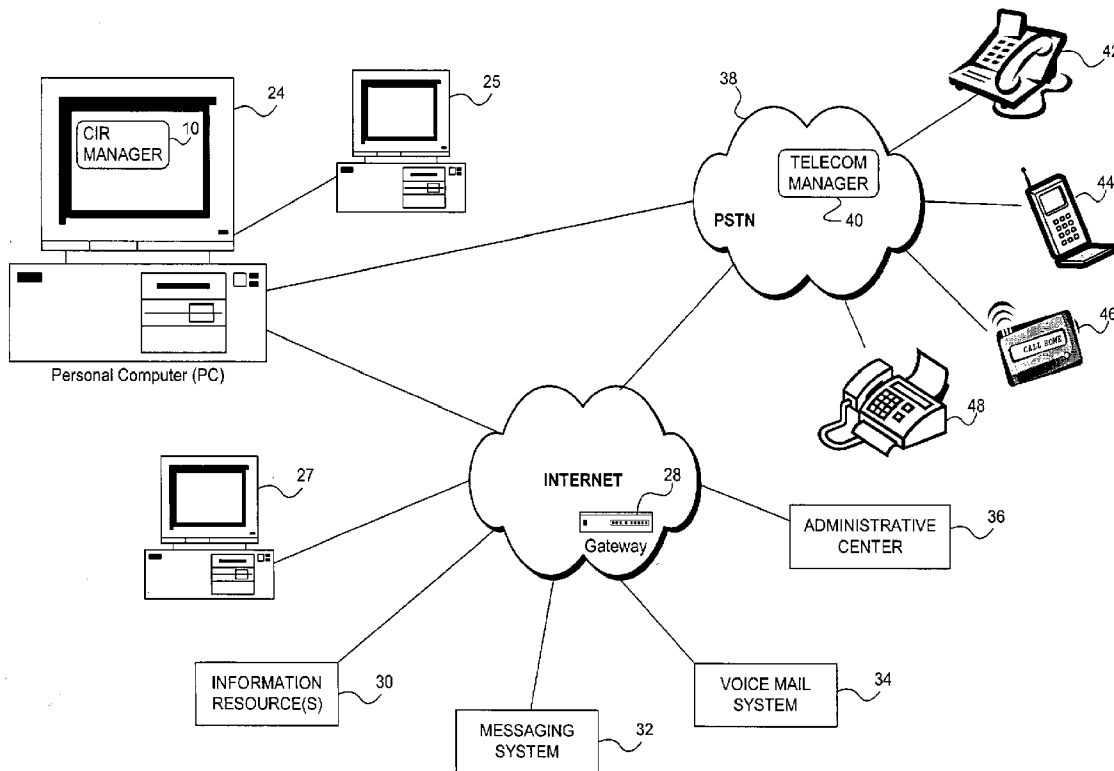
Related U.S. Application Data

(63) Continuation of application No. 10/184,670, filed on Jun. 28, 2002, which is a continuation-in-part of application No. 09/966,703, filed on Sep. 28, 2001, now Pat. No. 7,313,617.

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(57) **ABSTRACT**
Methods for providing contextual information about communication devices and/or services. Profile information indicating a user's communication devices and/or services is stored. When profile information or a message log is displayed, the user may identify a communication device and/or service. A query inquires whether the user would like contextual information. The contextual information may be obtained from a gateway in a data network or a telecommunications manager in a telecommunication network. The contextual information is displayed. Profile information about a user's communicating partner may be stored. When the user makes an effort to communicate with the partner, a check may be made of the partner's profile information for a preferred communication device and/or service. If the user does not have a communication device and/or service corresponding to that of the communicating partner, a query may inquire whether the user would like contextual information. If so, the contextual information is presented.



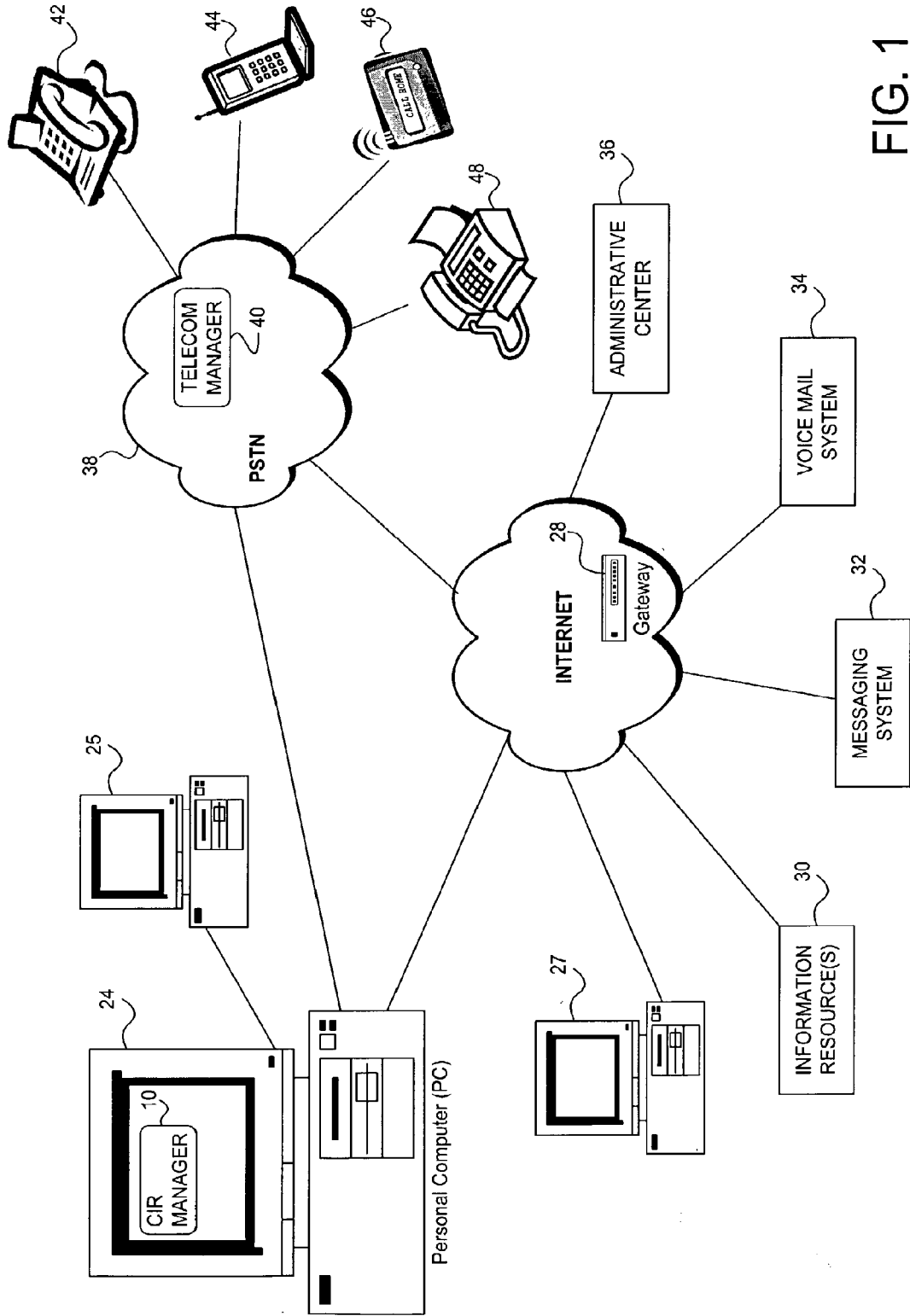


FIG. 1

FROM	TYPE	SUBJECT	DATE
MAUDE DAVIS	E-MAIL	CHEF JEAN-LOUIS RESTAURANT	5-21-99
BILL JONES	VOICE MESSAGE	(703) 345-6789	5-20-99
JOHN ELLIOT	FAX	CLOSING	5-15-99
DALE MALIK	WIRELESS CALL	(404) 234-5678	5-14-99
EMILY GUIDA	INSTANT MESSAGE	HOME SICK	5-14-99
USER	CHAT ROOM MESSAGE	ADOPTION	5-13-99
MARCUS DELGADO	PAGE	(770) 249-0972	5-12-99
NANCY WOODARD	I-PAGE	STATUS REPORT	5-5-99

FIG. 2

102

PROFILE INFORMATION - USER	
COMMUNICATION DEVICES	SERVICES
TELEPHONE	BRAND X
LOCAL SERVICE	BELLSOUTH
LONG DISTANCE SERVICE	AT&T
WIRELESS UNIT	MOTOROLA
SERVICE	CINGULAR
COMPUTER	DELL
E-MAIL SERVICE	MICROSOFT

104

110

112

106

114

108

116

FIG. 3

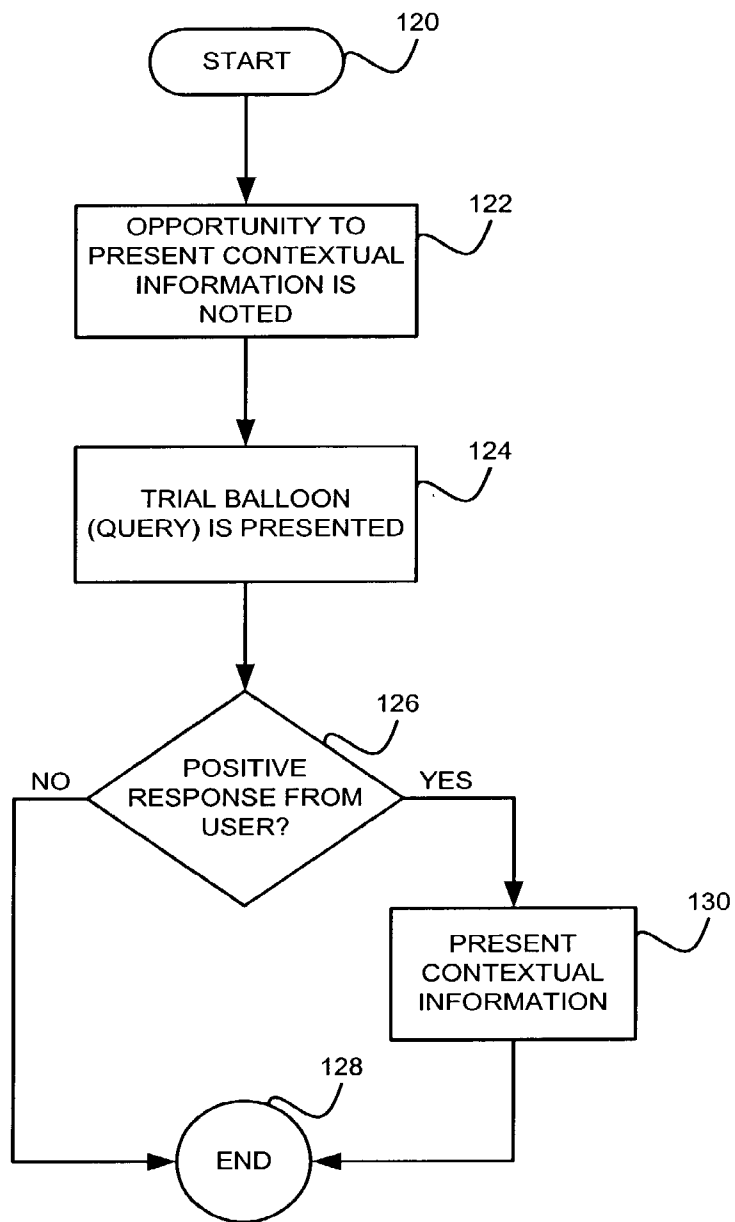


FIG. 4

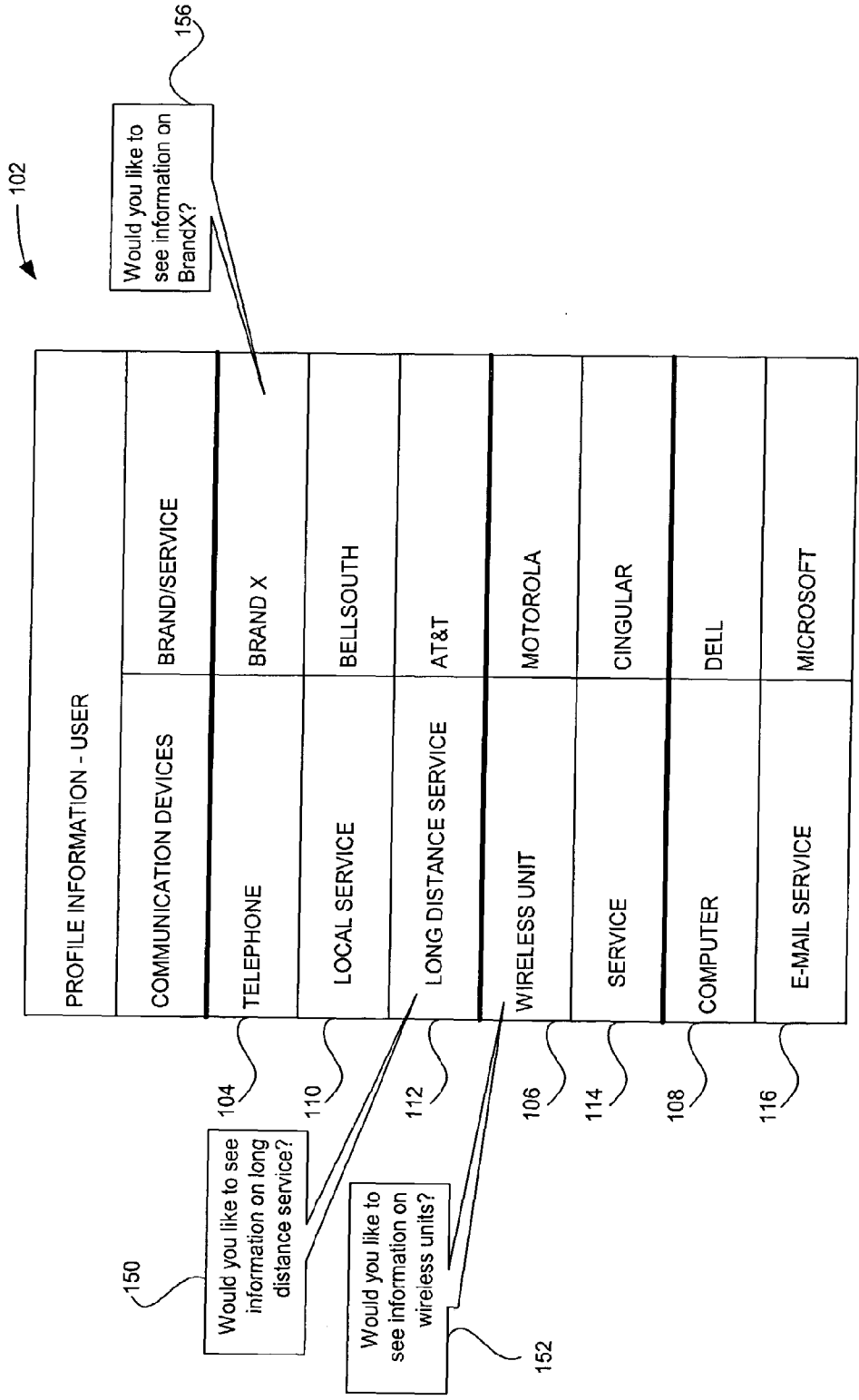


FIG. 5

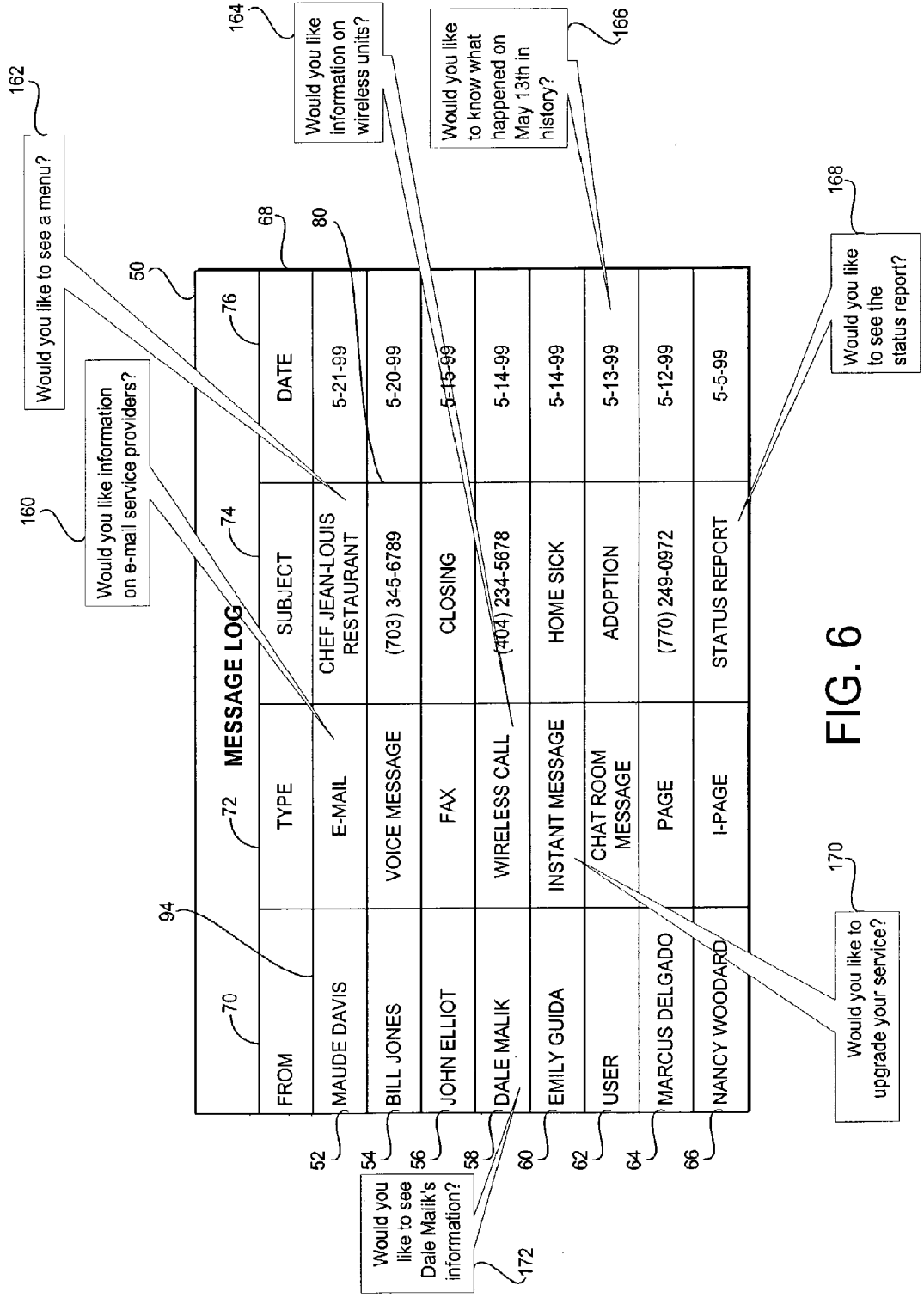


FIG. 6

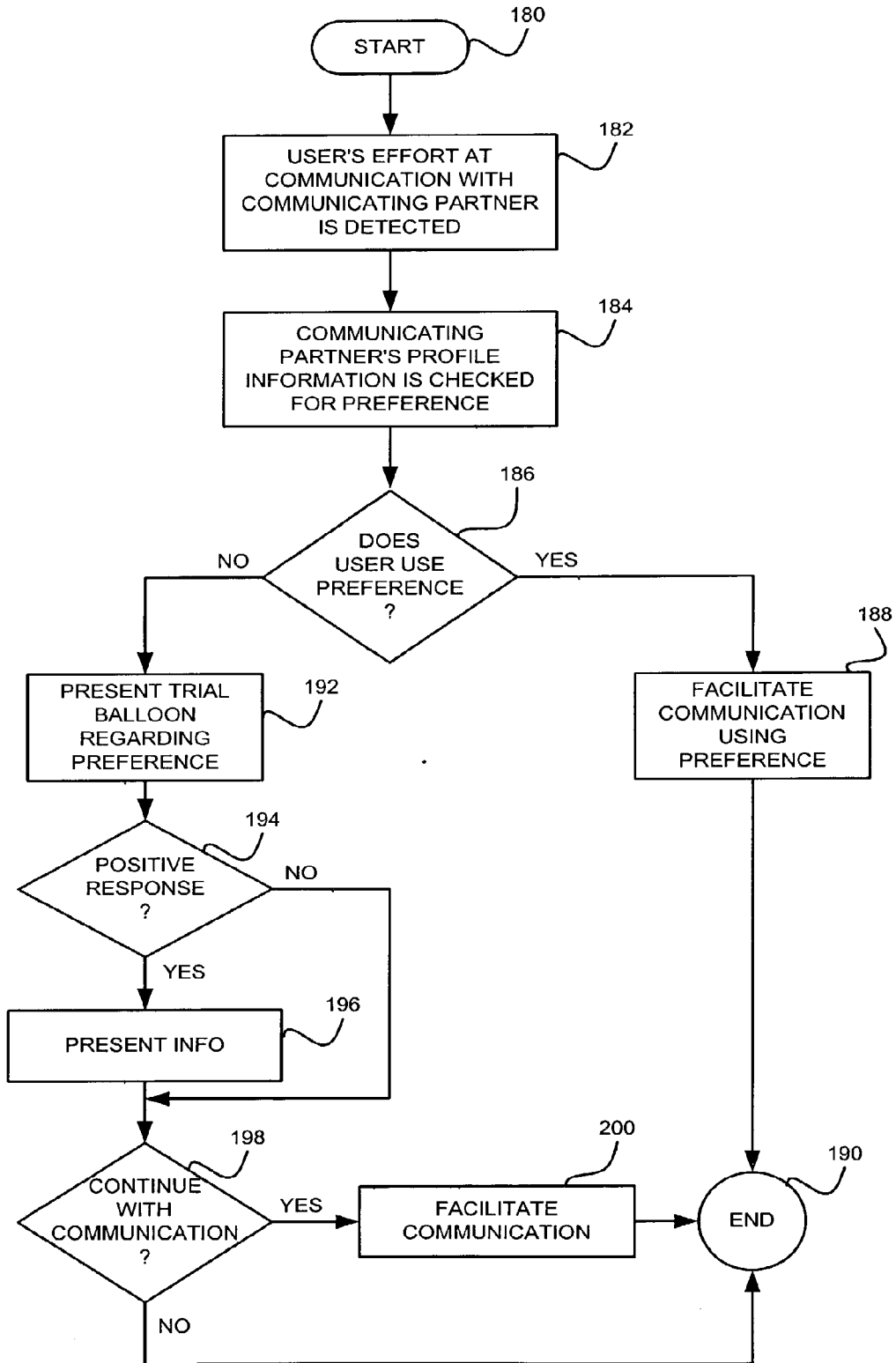


FIG. 7

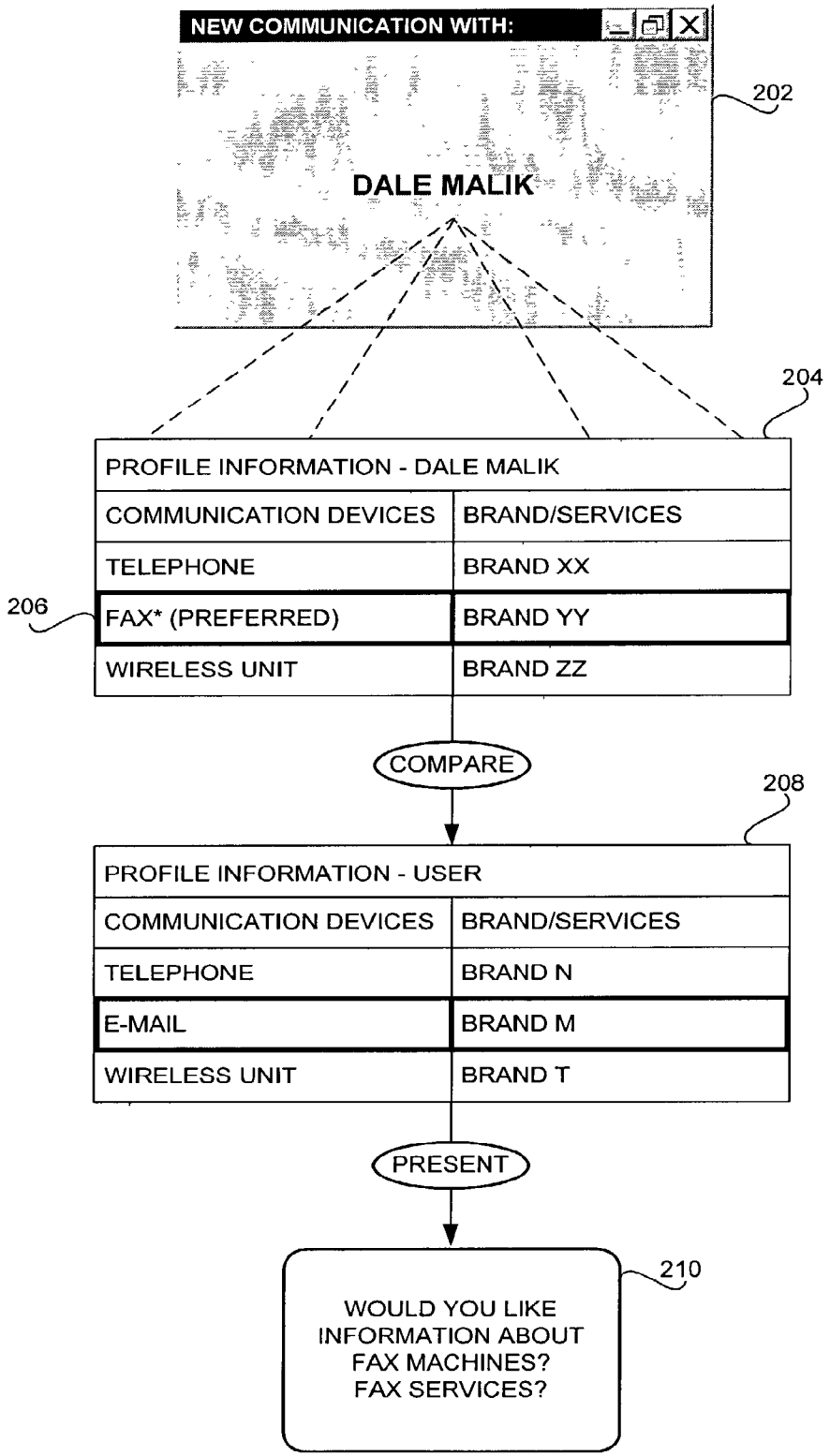


FIG. 8

METHODS AND SYSTEMS FOR PROVIDING CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION

RELATED APPLICATION

[0001] The present application is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 10/184,670, filed Jun. 28, 2006, which is a continuation in part of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 09/966,703, filed on Sep. 28, 2001 now issued as U.S. Pat. No. 7,313,617. Each of the aforementioned patent(s) and application(s) is hereby incorporated by reference in its entirety.

FIELD OF THE INVENTIONS

[0002] The inventions relate to methods and systems of providing contextual information relating to communication devices and/or communication services to a user.

BACKGROUND

[0003] Consumers are inundated with marketing and the advertising of new products and services. A lot of this advertising is wasted because consumers do not always pay attention to the advertising. The trick then, as marketing executives have known for a long time, is to get the consumers to pay attention.

[0004] When would a consumer pay attention to advertising? A consumer may pay attention to advertising if the products or services being advertised have some relevance to the consumer. For example, a consumer may pay attention to advertising presented at a time when the consumer's interest is heightened with respect to the products or services being advertised. A consumer's interest generally is heightened when he or she is using or thinking about a product or service. Thus, advertising presented when the consumer is using or thinking about a product or service may be more successful in grabbing the consumer's attention than when the same advertising is presented at other times. Advertising presented when the consumer is using or thinking about a product or service is referred to as "contextual advertising".

[0005] With respect to communication devices and services, it has been difficult to present contextual advertising to a consumer. As noted, contextual advertising is advertising that is relevant to the consumer when presented. Contextual advertising of communication devices or services could be presented when a consumer is using a communication device and/or service. But when a consumer is using a communication device and/or service, generally most of the consumer's attention is given to the communication in progress. The consumer talking on a telephone or wireless unit typically is fully engaged in a conversation, and advertising presented during the conversation, even though it is contextual advertising, goes largely unnoticed.

[0006] Accordingly, there is a need for a method or system to deliver contextual advertising of communication devices and/or services in such a manner as to gain the attention of consumers.

SUMMARY

[0007] Stated generally, the inventions provide a user with contextual information such as contextual advertising of communication devices and/or services. Advantageously, the contextual information is presented to a user at a time when the user's interest in the communication devices and/or services is heightened. As a result, the user may pay more atten-

tion to the information than otherwise, and it is more likely the user may act on the information.

[0008] The inventions take advantage of a user's heightened interest in communication devices and services demonstrated at various times in the use of features of a communications manager. For example, a user's interest is interpreted as a heightened interest when the user accesses his or her profile information or message log in the communications manager. As another example, the user's interest is interpreted as heightened when the user makes an effort or otherwise initiates a communication with a communicating partner. During the user's heightened interest, the user is provided with the option of being presented with contextual information. The user is presented with the option so as not to cause the contextual information to be considered as annoying or bothersome. If the user responds positively, then the contextual information presented.

[0009] More particularly, the inventions may be implemented through the use of a communications ("com") manager operating in a personal computer (PC) of a user. The com manager may store profile information relating to the user. The profile information may indicate the communication devices and/or communication services of the user. In particular, the profile information may indicate the type, brand, features, functionalities, specifications, configurations, etc. of the communication device or service.

[0010] The user may cause the com manager to display the profile information on the screen of the computer. If the user activates an entry in the profile information, such activation is noted, and a determination is made as to whether the activated entry identifies a communication device and/or communication service. The identification may include the type, brand, features, functions, specifications, configurations, etc. of the communication device and/or communication service. At this point, the user's interest in identified communication devices and/or communication services is heightened because the user has activated an entry including the identified communication devices and/or communication services in his or her profile information. With the user's interest heightened, it is a good time to present contextual advertising to the user.

[0011] The user, however, may find it annoying or bothersome to be presented with contextual advertising when the user activates an entry in his or her profile information. If the user finds the contextual information to be annoying or bothersome, then the presentation of the contextual information may have an undesirable negative impact on the user.

[0012] Advantageously, the inventions include a mechanism with respect to the presentation of the contextual information so that any annoyance or bother is minimized. As a convenience to the user, a query appears on the computer screen inquiring whether the user would like contextual information about the communication device and/or communication service. Thus, a user may avoid the presentation of the contextual information or select such presentation.

[0013] The query presented to the user may inquire whether the user would like to see contextual information about the type, brand, features, functions, specifications, etc. of the communication device and/or communication service. If the user responds positively, then the contextual information may be presented to the user. The user's positive response to the query also may be interpreted as a demonstration of a particularly heightened interest in the contextual information. Thus, the presentation of the contextual information may be particularly effective.

[0014] As explained above, the com manager may store profile information about the user, and the user may be presented with contextual information through the use of his or her profile information. But the user may be presented with contextual information in other ways. For example, the user may be presented with contextual information through the use of a message log provided by the com manager. The com manager may provide the message log including, respectively, entries for communications of the user. Each entry may include types of data relating to a communication. The user can display the message log on a computer screen. The user may activate a type of data in an entry of the message log relating to a communication. At this point, the user's interest in the data in the entry in the message log is heightened because the user has activated the data in the entry in his or her message log. With the user's interest heightened, it is a good time to present contextual advertising to the user.

[0015] With respect to the message log, the type of data in an entry that may be activated may include an identification of a communicator, a communication device, a communication service, a subject, and/or a date. The activation is noted and a query is displayed. Advantageously, as with the profile information, the user is provided with an opportunity to accept or decline the presentation of the contextual information through the mechanism of the query. The query inquires whether the user would like to be presented with contextual information based on the activated type of data in the entry. If the user responds positively to the query, then the contextual information is presented to the user.

[0016] Another instance of a user's heightened interest in communication devices and/or services is the user's effort at communication with a communicating partner. To take advantage of this instance of heightened interest, the inventions provide mechanisms for presenting contextual information to the user.

[0017] The com manager may store profile information relating to a communicating partner of the user. The profile information may indicate a preferred communication device and/or communication service of the communicating partner. The com manager notes an effort by the user to communicate with the communicating partner. The identification of the communicating partner is used to check the profile information of the communicating partner for the preferred communication device and/or communication service of the communicating partner. The preferred communication device and/or service of the communicating partner is compared with the communication devices and/or services of the user.

[0018] Based on the comparison, a determination may be made that the user has or does not have a communication device and/or a communication service corresponding to the preferred communication device of the communicating partner. If the user does not have such a communication device and/or communication service, the inventions take advantage of the situation to ask whether the user would like to see contextual information. If the response is positive, then the contextual information is presented.

[0019] As with the profile information and the message log, the user is not automatically presented with contextual information when a comparison yields a difference between the user's devices/services and the communicating partner's preferred device/service. Instead, so as not to annoy the user with unwanted contextual information, the user is presented with a query. The user is asked whether the user would like contextual information on the preferred communication device and/

or service of the communicating partner. If a positive response is received, then the contextual information is presented to the user.

[0020] Generally, with respect to contextual information, the com manager may be in direct or functional control of the contextual information to be presented to the user. Alternatively, the com manager may take action to obtain the contextual information. For example, the com manager may obtain the contextual information from a gateway in a data network or from a telecommunications manager in a communications network. As yet another alternative, the com manager may be provided with particular contextual information to present to the user as the opportunity arises. For example, a service provider of wireless service may provide an updated service program advertisement to the com manager. Of course, the service provider may post the contextual information with a telecom manager in the PSTN or a server in a data network for retrieval by the com manager.

[0021] In sum, the inventions allow for the delivery of contextual information such as advertising of communication devices and/or services in such a manner as to gain the attention of a user. The inventions take advantage of instances of a user's heightened interest in the subject matter. For example, the contextual information may be delivered in connection with a user's activation of an entry in profile information or message log relating to the user's communications. Further, the contextual information may be presented in connection with a communication initiated by the user to a communicating partner. Moreover, the contextual information is presented at the direction of the user in response to a query to avoid being annoying or burdensome to the user. Thus, the contextual information is presented to a user at a time when the user's interest in the communication devices and/or services is heightened, and the user is more likely to act on the presented information.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0022] FIG. 1 illustrates an exemplary environment for operation of the inventions.

[0023] FIG. 2 illustrates an exemplary message log as may be used with the inventions.

[0024] FIG. 3 illustrates an example of profile information as may be used with the inventions.

[0025] FIG. 4 is a flow chart illustrating exemplary actions of the inventions.

[0026] FIG. 5 illustrates an example of profile information including contextual information as may be used with the inventions.

[0027] FIG. 6 illustrates an exemplary message log including contextual information as may be used with the inventions.

[0028] FIG. 7 is a flow chart illustrating exemplary actions of the inventions.

[0029] FIG. 8 illustrates an example of the presentation of contextual information.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0030] The inventions provide contextual information regarding communication devices and/or services. For example, a user may review his or her communication devices and/or services by reviewing his or her profile information stored by a communications ("com") manager. The user may activate an entry in the profile information such as an entry

relating to wireless units. As a result, a query appears inquiring whether the user would like information about wireless units. If the response is positive, then information about wireless units is presented.

[0031] Advantageously, the information regarding wireless units is provided at a time when the user's interest in wireless units is heightened as a result of the user's check of the profile information. Thus, the likelihood of the user's paying attention to, and acting on, the information presented about wireless units is heightened.

[0032] In addition to the inventions described herein, additional inventions relating to the presentation of contextual information are described in the commonly owned and assigned patent application entitled *Methods and Systems for Providing Contextual Information on Communication Devices and Services*, filed concurrently with this application in the United States Patent and Trademark Office, and which is incorporated herein by reference.

[0033] As noted, the inventions may be implemented through the use of a communications ("com") manager. In a related patent application, a communications and information resource (CIR) manager is described. See U.S. patent application Ser. No. 09/966,703, entitled "Methods and Systems for a Communications and Information Resource Manager," filed Sep. 28, 2001, which is incorporated herein by this reference. The CIR manager may be used to implement the inventions described in this application. Prior to describing the inventions, some background about the CIR manager is provided.

The CIR Manager

[0034] A CIR manager may function as a "super" manager with respect to the communications devices, services, and systems of a user. In particular, the CIR manager may be used to centralize communications activities and information such that the user does not have to (but may) use multiple communications devices. For example, the CIR manager may be used to keep a log of all types of communications related to the user—whatever the device, whatever the service, whatever the network.

[0035] An advantage of the CIR manager is the user does not have to check or use each type of device for its own type of messages. Another advantage is the CIR manager may obtain information from resources including third party resources so as to facilitate communications and information gathering activities of the user. With the CIR manager, the user is provided with a centralized, efficient, and user-friendly way to handle communications activities including ways to receive, view, listen to, play, respond to, store, log, monitor, delete, copy, forward, obtain, create, and to take other actions. Moreover, the CIR manager provides the user with personalized management of communications and information resources.

[0036] In addition, in managing the communications and information resources of the user, the CIR manager may provide the user with one or more of the following features and advantages:

- [0037]** Recognition of the user and of others as authorized by the user;
- [0038]** Remembrance and implementation of authorized users' preferences;
- [0039]** Aid in finding information and resources;

[0040] Information related to an authorized users' activities and communications including call management and detail;

[0041] Service set-ups, configurations, changes, deletions, additions, updates, and synchronizations;

[0042] Maintenance of user account and preference information, logs, activity logs, schedules, calendars, general directories, personal directories, and the like;

[0043] Unified messaging including notice to the user relating to communications and/or other actions; and

[0044] Suggestions, help, updates, reminders, warnings, alerts, and other comments. The CIR manager may integrate the features described above pursuant to a user's preferences so as to provide efficient, organized, and user-friendly communications and information resource management.

[0045] Even though the inventions are described herein by reference to a CIR manager installed in a personal computer (PC), the inventions may be practiced with other computer system configurations, including hand-held devices, multi-processor systems, microprocessor based or programmable consumer electronics, mini-computers, mainframe computers, etc.

Exemplary Operating Environment of a CIR Manager—FIG. 1

[0046] Exemplary functions of a CIR manager **10** are described above. To provide these functions and others, the CIR manager **10** may interact with a variety of systems, networks, and elements that may be directly connected to the CIR manager **10**, may be hosted by the same host(s) as the CIR manager **10**, may be functionally connected to the CIR manager **10**, and/or may be accessible to the CIR manager **10** either directly and/or through other systems, networks, and/or elements.

[0047] FIG. 1 illustrates an exemplary operating environment of a CIR manager **10** implemented on a personal computer (PC) **24**. For details of an exemplary PC **24** as may be used with the CIR manager **10**, see the previously referenced related application U.S. patent application Ser. No. 09/966,703, entitled "Methods and Systems for a Communications and Information Resource Manager," filed Sep. 28, 2001.

[0048] The operating environment of FIG. 1 illustrates the CIR manager **10** may communicate through the PC **24** with another computer(s) **25** connected or otherwise networked with the PC **24**. The CIR manager **10** also may communicate through the Internet **26** with one or more of the following or other devices:

- [0049]** Other computer(s) **27**;
- [0050]** A gateway **28** serving the CIR manager **10**;
- [0051]** An information resource **30** such as a database;
- [0052]** A messaging system **32**;
- [0053]** A voicemail system **34**;
- [0054]** An administrative center **36**; and
- [0055]** The public switched telephone network (PSTN) **38**.

[0056] In addition, the CIR manager **10** may communicate through the PSTN **38** with one or more of the following or other devices:

- [0057]** A telecommunications manager **40**;
- [0058]** A telephone (wireline unit) **42**;
- [0059]** A wireless unit **44**;
- [0060]** A pager **46**; and
- [0061]** A fax device (not illustrated).

[0062] The CIR manager 10 may have access to other computers 25 through local area networks (LANs), wide area networks (WANs), direct connections, and other networks.

[0063] The CIR manager 10 also may have access through the PC 24 to a global communications network such as the Internet 26, and through the Internet 26 to other units, networks, and systems. Particularly, the CIR manager 10 may communicate with a gateway 28 connected to or operating on the Internet. The gateway 28 may be a service platform, server, or other device. The gateway 28 may be provided by the service provider of the CIR manager 10, and may serve the CIR manager 10. Communications activities to and from the CIR manager 10 on the PC 24 may be directed to the gateway 28 and/or may pass through the gateway 28 to other systems, networks, and/or elements. In passing through the gateway 28, the communications activities may be facilitated by the gateway 28.

[0064] For example, assume a user is a new subscriber to the CIR manager 10. In setting up the user for services available through the CIR manager 10, the CIR manager 10 may send a communication to the gateway 28 for routing to the appropriate element to handle such set-up activities. In an exemplary embodiment, Administrative Center 36 may handle administrative matters including set-up activities for the service provider. The gateway 28 delivers or otherwise routes the communication to the Administrative Center 36 for the set-up activity. The Administrative Center 36 may respond to the gateway 28 with questions, information, and instructions for the CIR manager 10.

[0065] Another way in which the gateway 28 may facilitate communications activities of the CIR manager 10 is to function as a router or director of communications and messages. For example, the CIR manager 10 may forward a request for data to the gateway 28. The gateway 28 may determine the data may be obtained from the information resource 30. The gateway 28 then forwards the request for data or the appropriate message to the information resource 30. The information resource 30 may respond to the CIR manager 10 or to the gateway 28, which then communicates with the CIR manager 10.

[0066] Further, the gateway 28 may facilitate communications activities between the CIR manager 10 and the PSTN 38, and other elements reached through the PSTN 38 such as the telecom manager 40, and the communications devices including the wireline unit 42, the wireless unit 44, the pager 46, and the fax device 48. Generally, the telecom manager 40 provides general functions and features related to communications of a user. Specifically, the telecom manager 40 may be implemented in a computer, on a service platform, in a network node, or other device. The telecom manager 40 may include connections to devices and networks through integrated services digital network (ISDN) lines and signaling system 7 (SS7) data links. The telecom manager 40 may be capable of functions similar to those of a service switching point (SSP) or service node (SN) of an Advanced Intelligent Network (AIN). For example, the telecom manager 40 may have the following capabilities: signaling, call set-up, routing, and access to databases.

Exemplary Message Log—FIG. 2

[0067] FIG. 2 illustrates an exemplary message log 50 such as may be provided by the CIR manager 10 and used in connection with the inventions described herein. Message log 50 includes entries relating to the exemplary user's commu-

nications using the CIR manager 10. Specifically, message log 50 includes eight entries 52, 54, 56, 58, 60, 62, 64, and 66. Each entry includes data 68, and in this example, each entry includes four types of data: "from" 70; "type" 72; "subject" 74; and "date" 76. The from data 70 refers to the source or origin of the communication. The type data 72 refers to the type or kind of communication. The subject data 74 refers to the content, the substance, or other feature of the communication. The date data 76 refers to the date of receipt (or transmittal if from the user) of the communication.

Exemplary Profile Information—FIG. 3

[0068] The CIR manager may store profile information 102 about a user. Profile information about the user's communicating partners also may be stored as is described below in connection with FIG. 8. FIG. 2 illustrates in block diagram form the profile information 102 that may be stored about a user.

[0069] The profile information 102 for the user may include, among other things, a list of the communication devices and services used by the user. In this example, the user has three communication devices: a telephone 104; a wireless unit 106; and a computer (PC) 108. Each of the entries for the respective devices may include a description of the respective device. For example, the telephone 104 is described as Brand X. The wireless unit 106 is described as a Motorola unit. The computer 108 is described as a Dell unit. The descriptions of the devices provided herein are minimal as they are examples only. Generally, the description of a device includes as much information as necessary to be useful in the comparison process described below. For example, the description of a wireless unit may include its brand, trademark, type, operating specifications, functions, and features.

[0070] Also in this example, the user makes use of four communication services. Each service is included in the profile information relating to the user and associated with the appropriate device. Further, each of the services is described in the profile information. As FIG. 2 illustrates, the telephone 104 is associated with local (communication) service 110 from BellSouth and long distance service 112 from AT&T. The wireless unit 106 is associated with service 114 from Cingular. The computer 108 is associated with e-mail service 116 from Microsoft. As with the communication devices, the description of a communication service in the profile information includes as much information as necessary to be useful in the comparison process described below. For example, the description of a long distance service may identify the service provider and operating specifications, functions and features.

An Exemplary Process of the Presentation of Contextual Information—FIG. 4

[0071] FIG. 4 is a flow chart illustrating exemplary actions of the inventions in presenting contextual information to a user. The actions described in connection with FIG. 4 are further referenced through the description of examples provided below in connection with FIGS. 5-6.

[0072] After start action 120, an opportunity to present contextual information is noted in action 122. Such an opportunity may be presented by the user's access to his or her profile information or message log, by the user's initiation of a communication, or other event. In response to noting the opportunity, preliminary information is presented to the user

in action **124**. The preliminary information may be a query inquiring of the user whether he or she desires to be presented with contextual information. The query also may be referred to as a “trial balloon” when the query is presented on a computer screen such as text in the form of a circumscribed question.

[0073] In decision action **126**, if the user provides a negative response to the query, then the process ends in end action **128**. A failure to respond to the query may be set as a default negative response to the query. But if the user provides a positive response to the query, then the contextual information is presented in action **130**. Thereafter, the process ends in end action **128**.

Exemplary Presentation of Contextual Information with Profile Information—FIG. 5

[0074] The above-described exemplary process of the presentation of contextual information is now described in further detail by reference to an example including the profile information of the user originally described above in connection with FIG. 3.

[0075] FIG. 5 illustrates the profile information **102** of the user as illustrated in FIG. 3, but FIG. 5 also illustrates three trial balloons **150**, **152**, **154** that may be presented to the user with regard to the presentation of contextual information. As a first example, assume the user is checking his or her profile information **102**. The user activates the entry **112** corresponding to long distance service in the profile information **102**. The activation of the entry may indicate an opportunity to present the user with contextual information. As a result of the activation, the user is presented with a query as to whether the user would like contextual information on the activated entry. In this example, trial balloon **150** includes text that asks the user: “Would you like to see information on long distance service?” This particular trial balloon **150** is presented to the user because the user activated the entry **112** corresponding to long distance service in the profile information. If the user had activated a different entry, then a different query may be presented in the trial balloon.

[0076] The user may decline or accept through use of yes/no options (not illustrated) or otherwise. If the user declines, then the trial balloon **150** disappears. If the user accepts, then the trial balloon **150** disappears and is replaced with a presentation of contextual information. Alternatively, the trial balloon **150** remains on the screen, for example, until the user finishes with the contextual information or the trial balloon **150** is otherwise is caused to disappear from the screen.

[0077] In this example, the contextual information relates to long distance service such as advertising for a particular long distance carrier. The contextual information may be stored by or readily obtainable by the com manager. Alternatively, the contextual information may be obtained by or provided to the com manager through a telecommunications manager **40** in the PSTN **38**, or through a gateway **28** in a data network **26** (see FIG. 1). For example, the com manager may present the contextual information on long distance service by linking to a web site of a particular long distance carrier.

[0078] As another example, assume the user is interested in acquiring a new or different wireless unit. The user activates the entry **106** corresponding to wireless units in the profile information **102**. The user’s activation of the entry **106** corresponding to wireless units is interpreted as showing a

heightened interest in wireless units. If the user’s interest is understood to be heightened, then an opportunity to present contextual information exists.

[0079] In this example, the user is presented with trial balloon **152** that includes the following text: “Would you like to see information on wireless units?” The presentation (or non-presentation) of contextual information proceeds as described above in connection with the previous example of a user’s activation of the entry **112** relating to long distance service in the profile information **102**.

[0080] As yet another example, assume the user is interested in a particular manufacturer, provider or brand of telephone. Advantageously, the inventions allow the user to “drill down” and obtain contextual information on particular elements in an entry of the profile information. In this example, the entry **102** for “telephone” in the profile information **102** identifies the user’s telephone as “Brand X”. The user may activate a particular element of an entry, such as the “Brand X” element, and obtain contextual information on that element.

[0081] In this example, the user is presented with trial balloon **154** that includes the following text: “Would you like to see information on Brand X?” If the user answers positively, then more drill-down possibilities may exist. Another trial balloon (not illustrated) may be presented to the user that presents the user with models of Brand X and asks whether the user would like to have information on any of the models. The drill-down trial balloons may continue until the appropriate level of details is reached. The presentation (or non-presentation) of contextual information proceeds as described above in connection with the previous examples of a user’s activation of the entry **112** relating to long distance service or the entry **106** relating to wireless units in the profile information **102**.

[0082] In the three examples described in connection with FIG. 5, three different kinds of contextual information are made available to the user, to-wit: long distance service information; wireless unit information; and information about Brand X. By these three examples, the generality of the definition of contextual information is made apparent. Contextual information generally is any type of information that may be associated with or related to a term or element identified by the user. Contextual information may include advertising, marketing, education, consumer, technical, sales, service, safety, quantity, cost, or quality information, etc.

Exemplary Presentation of Contextual Information with a Message Log—FIG. 6

[0083] The general process of the presentation of contextual information in connection with a message log is the same as with the profile information **102** described above. Thus, the seven examples presented in association with a message log are set forth in abbreviated form below.

[0084] FIG. 6 illustrates a message log **50** of the user as illustrated in FIG. 2, but FIG. 6 also illustrates seven trial balloons **160**, **162**, **164**, **166**, **168**, **170**, and **172** that may be presented to the user with regard to the presentation of contextual information. As a first example, assume the user is checking his or her message log and notes the entry **52** regarding Maude Davis’ e-mail. The user activates the part of entry **52** corresponding to the identification of the type of communication from Maude Davis, i.e., e-mail. In this example, trial balloon **160** includes text that asks the user: “Would you like to see information on e-mail service providers?”

[0085] Typically, the query or trial balloon presented to the user relates to the contextual information to be provided. The query or trial balloon may include a general question about the activated term, i.e., “Would you like information about e-mail?” The query or trial balloon may include a more particular or directed question about the activated term, i.e., “Would you like information about e-mail service?” or “service providers?” or “technical description of e-mail?” Of course, the query or trial balloon may include more than one question. In fact, as noted above, the query may provide a set of questions that “drill down” from the general to the specific so as to determine with greater particularity the type of contextual information sought by the user. For example, if the user responds positively to trial balloon 160 (“Would you like information on e-mail service providers?”), the trial balloon 160 may substitute a specific question such as: “Which e-mail service providers would you like information on?” or “Which of the following three e-mail service providers (A, B, C) would you like information on?”. Advantageously, the inventions provide the contextual information based on the responses of the user.

[0086] Referring again to FIG. 6, an additional six examples of queries/contextual information are described that may be presented to the user as follows:

[0087] User activates the “subject” in entry 52 corresponding to Maude Davis’ e-mail. The “subject” is “Chef Jean-Louis Restaurant”. The following query 162 is presented: “Would you like to see a menu?” If the answer is “yes”, then the inventions may link to the restaurant’s website so as to present a menu.

[0088] User activates the “subject” in entry 54 corresponding to Bill Jones’ voice message. The “subject” is a wireless number: “(703) 345-6789”.

[0089] The following query 164 is presented: “Would you like information on wireless units?”

[0090] User activates the “date” in entry 62 corresponding to the user’s chat room message. The “date” is “5-13-99”. The following query 166 is presented: “Would you like to know what happened on May 13th in history?”

[0091] User activates the “subject” in entry 66 corresponding to Nancy Woodard’s i-page. The “subject” is “status report”. The following query 168 is presented: “Would you like to see the status reports?” If the answer is “yes”, then the user may be presented with the status reports. For example, the user may keep electronic versions of the status reports in his or her word processing program stored in the PC. The com manager may have a path set up so as to be able to retrieve the status reports for presentation to the user in response to an affirmative answer to the query 168.

[0092] User activates the “type” in entry 60 corresponding to Emily Guida’s instant message. The “type” is “instant message”. The following query is presented to the user: “Would you like to upgrade your service?” If the answer is “yes”, then the com manager may compare the version of the user’s service (as detailed in the user’s profile information in the com manager) to upgraded versions. The com manager may offer the user various options. With the user’s selection, the com manager may contact the appropriate service provider and cause the user’s service to be upgraded.

[0093] User activates the “from” in entry 58 corresponding to Dale Malik’s wireless call. The “from” is “Dale Malik”. The following query is presented to the user:

“Would you like to see Dale Malik’s information?” The com manager may store profile information on communicating partners of the user. If the user responds positively to the query, then the com manager may present the user with Dale Malik’s profile information as the contextual information.

An Exemplary Process of the Presentation of Contextual Information—FIG. 7

[0094] FIG. 7 is a flow chart illustrating exemplary actions of the inventions in presenting contextual information to a user. The actions described in connection with FIG. 7 are further referenced through the description of examples provided below in connection with FIG. 8.

[0095] As noted, the inventions take advantage of the user’s heightened interest in certain subject matter to ask the user whether he or she would like information, and if the answer is yes, then to present the information. An instance of a user’s heightened interest in communication devices and/or services may be the user’s effort at communication with a communicating partner. For example, a user’s effort to send an e-mail to a customer may be a good opportunity to present information to the user on the customer’s favorite method of communication, especially if the customer’s favorite is not e-mail. If the user chooses to communicate via the customer’s preference, then the inventions may present the user with a template or otherwise facilitate the user’s communications with the customer. If the user does not have facility to communicate using the customer’s preference, then the user may be presented with information on how to gain such facility.

[0096] FIG. 7 is a flow chart illustrating exemplary actions of the inventions in seizing the opportunity of a user’s effort at communication to present the user with contextual information. After start action 180, in action 182 the user’s effort at communication with a communicating partner is detected. For example, if a user is using the com manager, the user may click on or otherwise activate a “new communication” feature of the com manager. The user supplies the identity of the communicating partner.

[0097] In action 184, the profile information is checked to determine whether the communicating partner has a profile, and if so, whether the communicating partner has a preference for communicating. A preference may relate to communication devices and/or communication services, and may include details about such preference(s). For example, the communicating partner may prefer to communicate by e-mail, and by e-mail as provided by Service Provider X. If the communicating partner has no preference, the lack of preference may be presented to the user and the user may continue the communication effort without the presentation of additional information.

[0098] In action 186, the communicating partner’s preference(s) is/are compared to the information in the user’s profile. Specifically, the comparison is made to determine whether the user has available the preference(s) of the communicating partner for the user’s own use. For example, the user may have an e-mail system provided by Service Provider X. If the user has the preference or can make use of it, then in action 188 the user’s communication with the communicating partner is facilitated. Facilitation may include any action taken to help the user with the communication. As an example, if the communicating partner’s preference is for e-mail, then an e-mail template may be presented to the user for the user’s use. Information in the template regarding the

communicating partner, the user, etc. may be supplied so as to further facilitate the user's communication. The process then ends in action 190.

[0099] Referring again to action 186 wherein a comparison is carried out to determine whether the user uses the communicating partner's preference(s). If the user does not use one or more of the preference(s), then the inventions take advantage of the situation to ask whether the user would like to see contextual information. In action 192 the user is presented with a trial balloon.

[0100] Advantageously, the user is not automatically presented with contextual information when a comparison yields a difference between the user's devices/services and the communicating partner's preferred device(s)/service(s). Instead, so as not to annoy the user with unwanted contextual information, the user is presented with a query in the form of the trial balloon in action 192. The user is asked whether the user would like contextual information on the preferred communication devices and/or services of the communicating partner. In this example, the user may be asked whether he or she would like information on the preferred e-mail system or service provider of the communicating partner.

[0101] In action 194 a determination is made as to whether the user responded positively or negatively to the query of action 192. If a positive response is received, then the contextual information is presented to the user in action 196 and the process progresses to action 198. But if a negative response is received to the query of action 192, then the process does not present the contextual information, but proceeds to action 198.

[0102] In action 198, a check whether the user desires to continue with the communication may be made in action 198. If the check is negative, then the process ends in action 190. On the other hand, if the check in action 198 is positive, then in action 200 the communication of the user is facilitated.

An Exemplary Presentation of Contextual Information—FIG. 8

[0103] The exemplary process of the presentation of contextual information described in connection with FIG. 7 is now further illustrated with an example discussed in connection with FIG. 8.

[0104] Assume the user desires to communicate with a communicating partner—Dale Malik and makes an effort at such communication as illustrated by the new communication 202. The user's com manager includes profile information on Dale Malik 204. A preference for fax communication 206 is indicated in Dale Malik's profile information 205. The preference for fax communication 206 is compared to the user's profile information 208. The result of the comparison is that the user does not have a facility for fax communication. Thus, the user is presented with a query 210 as follows: "Would you like information about fax machines? fax service?" If the user responds positively, then contextual information is presented to the user. Advantageously, the inventions allow a fax service provider to present Dale Malik with information on their fax machines or service at a time Dale Malik's interest in faxing is heightened. Thus, Dale Malik is more likely to act on the advertising.

CONCLUSION

[0105] In sum, the inventions allow for the delivery of contextual information such as advertising of communication

devices and/or services in such a manner as to gain the attention of a user. The inventions take advantage of instances of a user's heightened interest in the subject matter. For example, the contextual information may be delivered in connection with a user's activation of an entry in profile information or message log relating to the user's communications. Further, the contextual information may be presented in connection with a communication initiated by the user to a communicating partner. Moreover, the contextual information is presented at the direction of the user in response to a query to avoid being annoying or burdensome to the user. Thus, the contextual information is presented to a user at a time when the user's interest in the communication devices and/or services is heightened, and the user is more likely to act on the presented information.

[0106] The exemplary embodiments of the inventions described herein were chosen and described in order to explain the principles of the inventions and their practical applications so as to enable others skilled in the art to utilize the inventions including various embodiments and various modifications as are suited to the particular uses contemplated. The examples provided herein in the written description or in the drawings are not intended as limitations of the inventions. Other embodiments will suggest themselves to those skilled in the art. Therefore, the scope of the inventions is to be limited only by the claims below.

We claim:

1. With respect to a communications manager that stores profile information about a user, a method to provide the user with information when interest of the user is heightened in the information, the method comprising:

- causing the profile information to indicate communication devices of the user;
- displaying the profile information about the user on a computer screen;
- noting heightened interest of the user in an entry in the profile information ;
- determining the entry identifies a communication device;
- displaying a query on the computer screen with the query inquiring whether the user would like contextual information about the communication device;
- receiving a positive response to the query; and
- presenting the contextual information to the user.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein the profile information indicates communication services of the user;

wherein the entry identifies a communication service of the user; and

wherein the query inquires whether the user would like contextual information about the communication service.

3. The method of claim 1, wherein presenting the contextual information comprises obtaining the contextual information from a gateway in a data network.

4. The method of claim 1, wherein presenting the contextual information comprises obtaining the contextual information from a telecommunications manager in a communications network.

5. The method of claim 1, wherein the identification of the communication device comprises a type of the communication device; and

wherein determining the entry identifies the communication device comprises determining the entry identifies the type of the communication device; and

wherein displaying the query comprises displaying the query inquiring whether the user would like contextual information about the type of the communication device.

6. The method of claim **1**, wherein the identification of the communication device comprises a brand of the communication device; and

wherein determining the entry identifies the communication device comprises determining the entry identifies the brand of the communication device; and

wherein displaying the query comprises displaying the query inquiring whether the user would like the contextual information about the brand of the communication device.

7. The method of claim **1**, wherein the identification of the communication device comprises a feature of the communication device; and

Wherein determining the entry identifies the communication device comprises determining the entry identifies the feature of the communication device; and

wherein determining the entry displaying the query comprises displaying the query inquiring whether the user would like the contextual information about the feature of the communication device.

8. With respect to a communications manager that provides a message log of communications of a user, the message log including entries, respectively, for the communications of the user, and with each entry including types of data relating to a communication, a method to provide the user with contextual information, the method comprising:

displaying the message log of the user on a computer screen;

noting activation of a type of data in an entry relating to a communication;

displaying a query on the computer screen with the query inquiring whether the user would like contextual information based on the activated type of data in the entry;

receiving a positive response to the query; and

presenting the contextual information to the user.

9. The method of claim **8**, wherein presenting the contextual information comprises obtaining the contextual information from a gateway in a data network.

10. The method of claim **8**, wherein presenting the contextual information comprises obtaining the contextual information from a telecommunications manager in a communications network.

11. The method of claim **8**, wherein the activated type of data in the entry comprises an identification of a communicator; and

wherein displaying the query comprises displaying the query inquiring whether the user would like the contextual information based on the identification of the communicator.

12. The method of claim **8**, wherein the activated type of data in the entry comprises an identification of a communication device or a communication service; and

wherein displaying the query comprises displaying the query inquiring whether the user would like the contextual information based on the identification of the communication device or the communication service.

13. The method of claim **8**, wherein the activated type of data in the entry comprises an identification of a subject; and

wherein displaying the query comprises displaying the query inquiring whether the user would like the contextual information based on the identification of the subject.

14. The method of claim **8**, wherein the activated type of data in the entry comprises an identification of a date; and wherein displaying the query comprises displaying the query inquiring whether the user would like the contextual information based on the identification of the date.

15. With respect to a communications manager that stores profile information about a user and about communicating partners of the user, a method to provide the user with contextual information, the method comprising:

causing the profile information of the user to identify communication devices of the user;

causing the profile information of a communicating partner to indicate a preferred communication device of the communicating partner;

noting an effort by the user to communicate with the communicating partner with the effort including an identification of the communicating partner;

using the identification of the communicating partner to check the profile information of the communicating partner for the preferred communication device of the communicating partner;

comparing the preferred communication device of the communicating partner with the communicating devices of the user;

based on the comparison, determining the user has a communication device corresponding to the preferred communication device of the communicating partner;

inquiring whether the user would like contextual information on the preferred communication device of the communicating partner;

receiving a positive response to the query; and

presenting the contextual information to the user.

16. The method of claim **15**, wherein the profile information of the user identifies communication services of the user; wherein the profile information of the communicating partner indicates a preferred communication service of the communicating partner;

wherein the identification of the communicating partner is used to check the profile information of the communicating partner for the preferred communication service of the communicating partner;

wherein the preferred communication service of the communicating partner is compared with the communication services of the user;

wherein the comparison determines the user does not have a communication service corresponding to the preferred communication service of the communicating partner; and

wherein the inquiry inquires whether the user would like the contextual information on the preferred communication service of the communicating partner.

17. The method of claim **15**, wherein presenting the contextual information comprises obtaining the contextual information from a gateway in a data network.

18. The method of claim **15**, wherein presenting the contextual information comprises obtaining the contextual information from a telecommunications manager in a communications network.

19. The method of claim **15**, wherein the profile information of the user indicates, respectively, configurations of the communication devices of the user;

wherein the profile information of the communicating partner indicates a configuration of the preferred communication of the communicating partner;

wherein comparing the preferred communication device of the communicating partner with the communication devices of the user comprises comparing the configuration of the preferred communication device of the communicating partner with the configurations of the communication devices of the user;

wherein, based on the comparison, determining the user does not have the communication device corresponding to the preferred communication device of the communicating partner comprises determining the user does not have the communication device corresponding to the configuration of the preferred communication device of the communicating partner; and

wherein inquiring whether the user would like the contextual information on the preferred communication device of the communicating partner comprises inquiring whether the user would like the contextual information on the configuration of the preferred communication device of the communicating partner.

20. The method of claim **15**, wherein noting the effort by the user to communicate with the communicating partner comprises noting a heightened interest in the user.

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