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(54) Title: SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR AN ELECTRONIC GIFT KEY

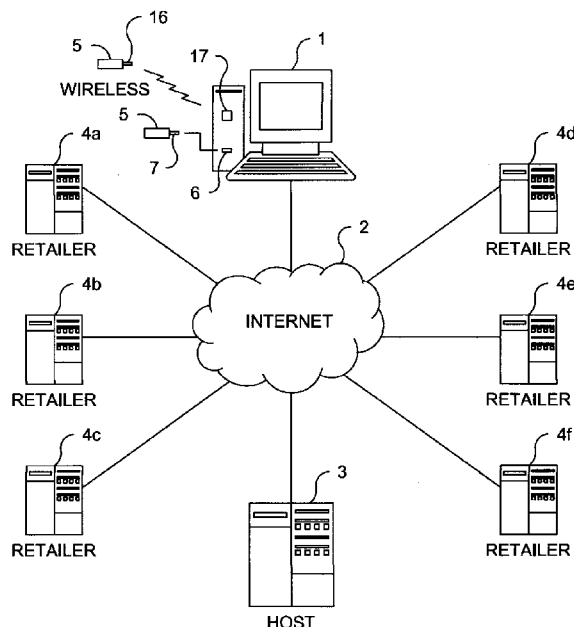


**Fig. 1**

(57) Abstract: A system and method for a physically-based gift key (5) enabling a purchaser to deliver a single, fully-integrated gift item to a recipient and including an electronic greeting card and store credits redeemable on-line is presented. The method includes the steps of activating a gift key (50), customizing an electronic greeting card (51) associated with the gift key (5) at a host site via physical or wireless linkage of a gift key (5) to a first local computer (1), accessing the greeting card (52) at the host site via linkage of the gift key (5) to a second local computer, and redeeming a store credit (53) associated with the gift key (5) at a retail website accessible from the host site. The system includes a gift key (5) and a host computer system (3) directly or indirectly controlling a host site. The gift key (5) has a housing (8a, 8b), an integrated circuit (10) within the housing (8a, 8b), and a connector (7) or wireless interface (16) extending from the housing (8a, 8b) so as to allow linkage of the gift key (5) with a local computer (1) remotely located with respect to the host system (3) and retailer systems (4a-4f). The local computer (1) automatically launches a website at the host or retailer levels when the gift key (5) is linked to the local computer (1).



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**AMENDED CLAIMS**

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1. A method for presenting a gift to a recipient comprising the steps of:
  - (a) activating a gift key, said gift key comprising a housing, an integrated circuit within said housing, and a physical interface or a wireless interface communicating with said integrated circuit; and
  - (b) customizing an electronic greeting card associated with said gift key at a host site from a first local computer, said first local computer communicating with said host site via a network, said gift key launching said host site when said gift key is linked to said first local computer, said gift key having a store credit associated therewith.
2. The method of claim 1, wherein said activating step includes:
  - (i) swiping, scanning, or linking said gift key so as to read an identification number from and unique to each said gift key;
  - (ii) matching said identification number to a database to authenticate the value of said store credit; and
  - (iii) authorizing subsequent use of said gift key.
3. The method of claim 1, wherein said customizing step includes:
  - (i) linking said gift key to said first local computer;
  - (ii) launching a first browser on said first local computer to a web address retrievable from said gift card;
  - (iii) executing a security algorithm to enable interface with said host site;
  - (iv) communicating an identification number from said gift key;
  - (v) matching said identification number to a database to verify the value of said store credit; and
  - (vi) preparing said electronic greeting card via webpages at said host site, said host site displays said store credit.
4. The method of claim 3, wherein said customizing step further includes:
  - (vii) activating said gift key for use via said host site.
5. The method of claim 3, wherein said customizing step further includes:
  - (vii) transferring said gift key to said recipient.
6. The method of claim 1, further comprising the steps of:
  - (c) accessing said greeting card at said host site via linkage of said gift key to a second local computer, said second local computer communicating with said host site via said

network; and

(d) redeeming said store credit at a retail website via said second local computer.

7. The method of claim 6, wherein said first local computer and said second local computer are the same device.

8. The method of claim 6, wherein the accessing step includes:

- (i) linking said gift key to said second local computer;
- (ii) launching a second browser on said second local computer to a web address retrievable from said gift card;
- (iii) executing a security program to enable interface with said host site;
- (iv) communicating an identification number from said gift key;
- (v) matching said identification number to a database to authenticate the value of said store credit; and
- (vi) viewing said greeting card and said store credit at said host site.

9. The method of claim 8, wherein said accessing step further includes:

- (vii) displaying at least one advertisement at said host site.

10. The method of claim 8, wherein said accessing step further includes:

- (vii) displaying theme related content based on said gift key.

11. The method of claim 10, wherein said theme related content is a game, a movie trailer, factual information, or media.

12. The method of claim 6, wherein said redeeming step includes:

- (i) launching a retailer website via said host site;
- (ii) viewing goods and/or services at said retailer website;
- (iii) purchasing goods and/or services at said retailer website; and
- (iv) updating said store credit after said purchasing step.

13. The method of claim 12, further comprising the step of:

- (v) passing an identification number unique to said gift key to said retailer website for online transaction.

14. The method claim 13, wherein said redeeming step further includes:

- (vi) exiting said retailer website; and
- (vii) exiting said host site.

15. A system for presenting a gift to a recipient comprising:

- (a) a gift key including a housing, an integrated circuit within said housing, and a physical interface or a wireless interface electrically attached to said integrated circuit

so as to allow use of said gift key over a network, said gift key having an identification number and at least one web address readable from and a security algorithm executable by said integrated circuit, said gift key linkable to a local computer via said physical interface or said wireless interface; and

(b) a host computer controlling a host site, said host site enabling design of a greeting card associated with said gift key, display of said greeting card, and redemption of a store credit associated with said gift key via at least one retailer computer controlling at least one retailer website, said gift key communicating with said host computer and said at least one retailer computer via said network, said gift key launching a website from said host computer when said gift key is linked to said local computer.

16. The system of claim 15, wherein said physical interface contacts a port attached to said local computer.

17. The system of claim 15, wherein said wireless interface communicates with said local computer via wireless means.

18. The system of claim 17, wherein said wireless interface is enabled via Bluetooth, Wifi, or IrDa.

19. The system of claim 15, wherein said connector is a USB plug and said integrated circuit includes a read-only memory, a flash memory, and a USB controller.

20. The system of claim 15, wherein said housing includes a three-dimensional decorative design.

21. The system of claim 15, further comprising:

(c) at least one appendage attached to said housing.

22. The system of claim 15, wherein said physical interface or said wireless interface is extendable from and retractable into said housing.

23. The system of claim 15, wherein said recipient accesses said retailer website via said host site.

24. The system of claim 15, wherein said network is an internet.

25. The system of claim 15, further comprising:

(c) at least one bar code disposed along said gift key, said at least one bar code corresponding to said identification number.

26. A method for presenting a gift to a recipient comprising the steps of:

(a) activating a gift key for use, said gift key comprising a housing, an integrated circuit within said housing, and a physical interface or a wireless interface

communicable with said integrated circuit, said gift key automatically launching a host website at a host computer when said gift key is linked to a first local computer; and

(b) redeeming a store credit associated with said gift key at a retail website via linkage of said gift key to a second local computer, said gift key automatically launching said host website or a second website at a retailer computer when said gift is linked to said second local computer.

27. The method of claim 26, further comprising the step of:

(c) creating an electronic greeting card at said host website via said first local computer, said greeting card stored by said host computer.

28. The method of claim 27, further comprising the step of:

(d) viewing an electronic greeting card at said host website via said first local computer or said second computer.

29. A method facilitating a transaction at a retail website comprising the step of:

(a) launching said retail website at a remote computer when a gift key is physically linked to a local computer, said gift key comprising a housing, an integrated circuit, and a physical interface facilitating communication between said integrated circuit and said local computer.

30. The method of claim 29, further comprising the step of:

(b) purchasing a product at said retail website.

31. The method of claim 30, wherein said purchasing step includes redeeming a credit associated with said gift key to pay for said product.

32. A method for facilitating a transaction at a retail website comprising the step of:

(a) launching said retail website at a remote computer when a gift key is wirelessly linked to a local computer, said gift key comprising a housing, an integrated circuit, and a wireless interface facilitating communication between said integrated circuit and said local computer.

33. The method of claim 32, further comprising the step of:

(b) purchasing a product at said retail website.

34. The method of claim 33, wherein said purchasing step includes redeeming a credit associated with said gift key to pay for said product.

35. A method for accessing an electronic greeting card comprising the steps of:

(a) launching a retail website at a remote computer when a gift key is physically

linked to a local computer, said gift key comprising a housing, an integrated circuit, and a physical interface facilitating communication between said integrated circuit and said local computer; and

(b) displaying said electronic greeting card associated with said gift key.

36. The method of claim 35, wherein said displaying step includes viewing said electronic greeting card.

37. The method of claim 35, wherein said displaying step includes customizing said electronic greeting card.

38. A method for accessing an electronic greeting card comprising the steps of:

(a) launching a retail website at a remote computer when a gift key is wirelessly linked to a local computer, said gift key comprising a housing, an integrated circuit, and a wireless interface facilitating communication between said integrated circuit and said local computer; and

(b) displaying said electronic greeting card associated with said gift key.

39. The method of claim 38, wherein said displaying step includes viewing said electronic greeting card.

40. The method of claim 38, wherein said displaying step includes customizing said electronic greeting card.

41. A method facilitating a transaction at a website comprising the step of:

(a) launching said website at a remote computer when a gift key is linked to a local computer, said gift key comprising a housing, an integrated circuit, and an interface facilitating communication between said integrated circuit and said local computer; and

(b) displaying content to target and guide purchasing behavior.

42. The method of claim 41, further comprising the step of:

(c) displaying an electronics greeting card associated with said gift key.

43. The method of claim 42, wherein said displaying step includes customizing said electronic greeting card and/or viewing said electronic greeting card.

44. The method of claim 41, wherein said content is advertising, games, movie trailers, factual information, biographical information, or online media.