US 20070088612A1

(19) United States

(12) Patent Application Publication (10) Pub. No.: US 2007/0088612 A1

Simonian (43) Pub. Date: Apr. 19, 2007

(54) SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR ENABLING A FUNDRAISING AND CONTRIBUTIONS PROGRAM USING FUNDRAISING CARDS REDEEMABLE FOR BRANDED STORED-VALUE CARDS

(76) Inventor: **Thomas A. Simonian**, Batavia, IL (US)

Correspondence Address:
COOK, ALEX, MCFARRON, MANZO, CUMMINGS & MEHLER LTD
SUITE 2850
200 WEST ADAMS STREET
CHICAGO, IL 60606 (US)

(21) Appl. No.: **11/234,969**

(22) Filed: **Sep. 26, 2005**

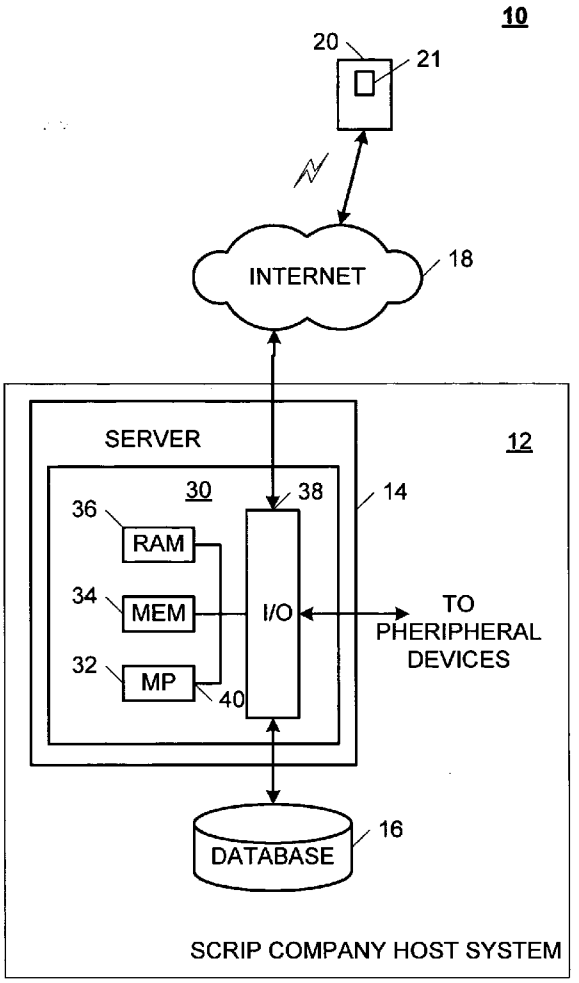
Publication Classification

(51) **Int. Cl.**
G06Q 20/00 (2006.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.** **705/17**

(57) **ABSTRACT**

Disclosed is a system and method for enabling a fundraising program using fundraising cards redeemable by NPO supporters for branded stored-value cards. The system includes a scrip company host system having a server, where the server includes a microcontroller. A remote user device, having a display, is operatively coupled to the scrip company host system and configured to enable access to the scrip company web site. The microcontroller is adapted to detect access to the scrip company web site by a NPO, and cause the plurality of fundraising cards to be distributed to the NPO in response to detecting an order for the plurality of fundraising cards by the NPO. The fundraising cards are distributed to the NPO prior to receiving payment from the NPO for the fundraising cards, thereby making it unnecessary for the NPO to carry a paid-for inventory of fundraising cards.



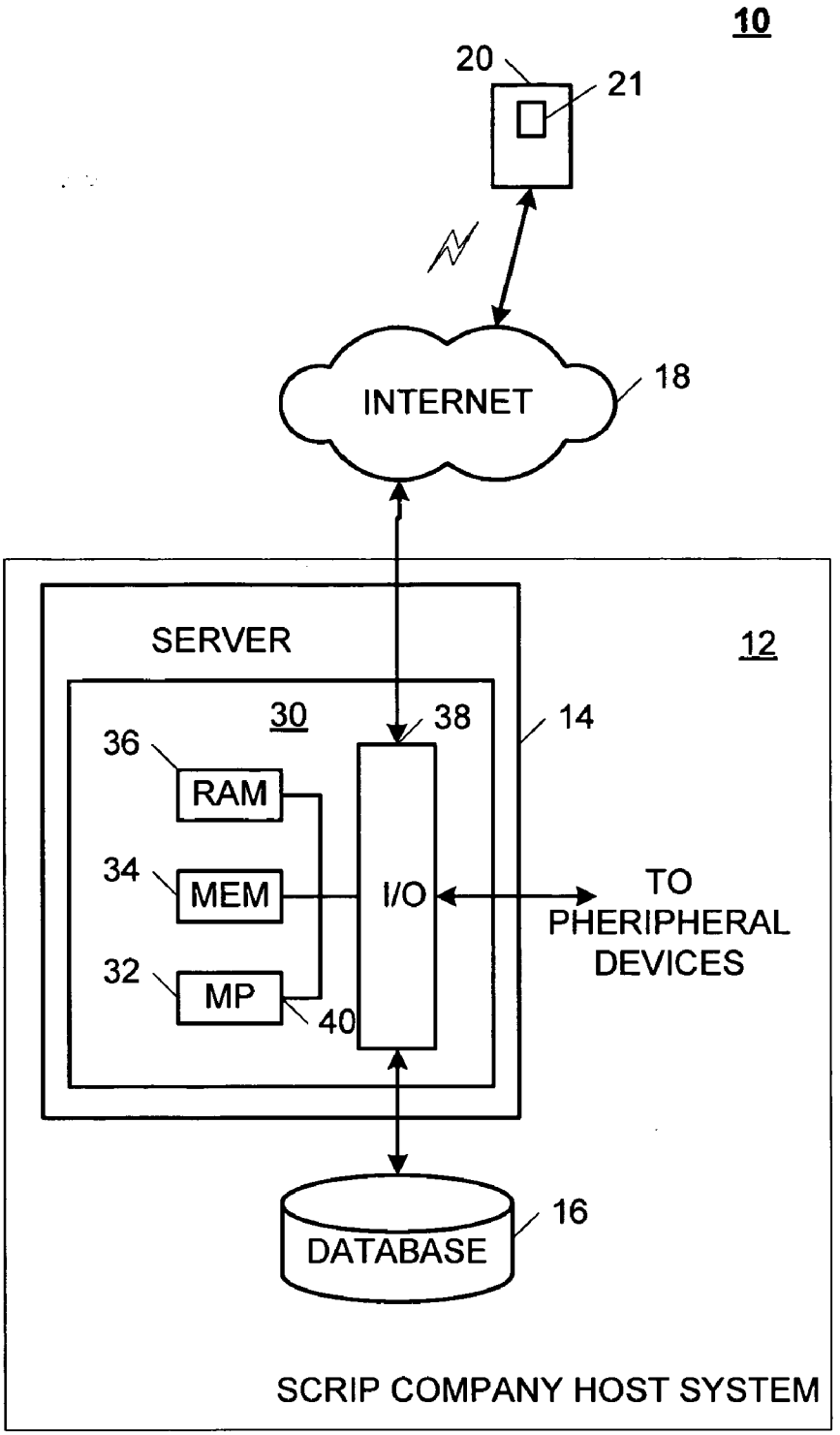

10
20
21
INTERNET
18
SERVER
12
30
38
14
36
RAM
34
MEM
I/O
TO
PHERIPHERAL
DEVICES
32
MP
40
DATABASE
16
SCRIP COMPANY HOST SYSTEM

FIG. 1

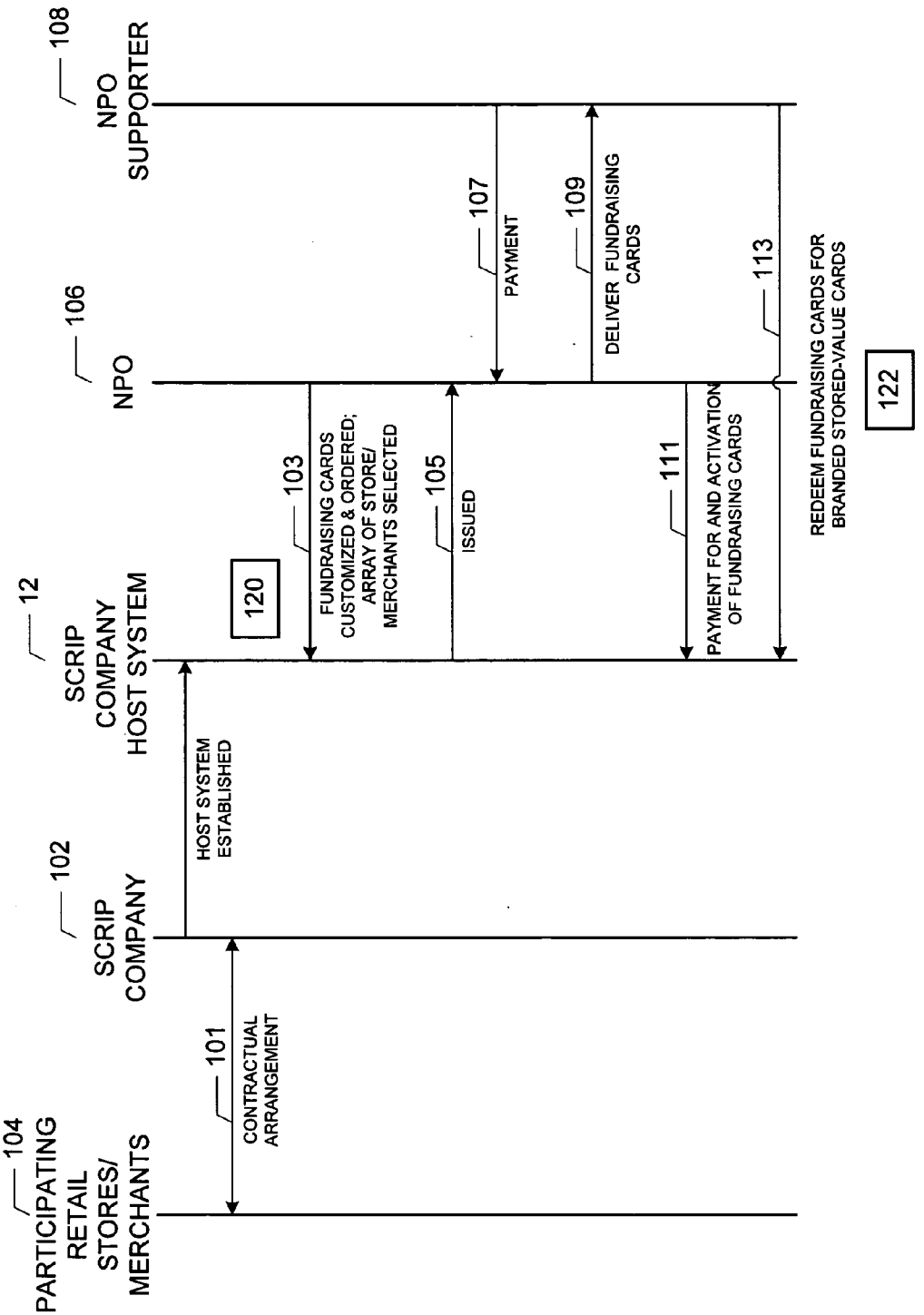

104
PARTICIPATING RETAIL STORES/ MERCHANTS
102
SCRIP COMPANY
12
SCRIP COMPANY HOST SYSTEM
106
NPO
108
NPO SUPPORTER
101
CONTRACTUAL ARRANGEMENT
HOST SYSTEM ESTABLISHED
120
103
FUNDRAISING CARDS CUSTOMIZED & ORDERED; ARRAY OF STORE/ MERCHANTS SELECTED
105
ISSUED
107
PAYMENT
109
DELIVER FUNDRAISING CARDS
111
PAYMENT FOR AND ACTIVATION OF FUNDRAISING CARDS
113
REDEEM FUNDRAISING CARDS FOR BRANDED STORED-VALUE CARDS
122

FIG. 2

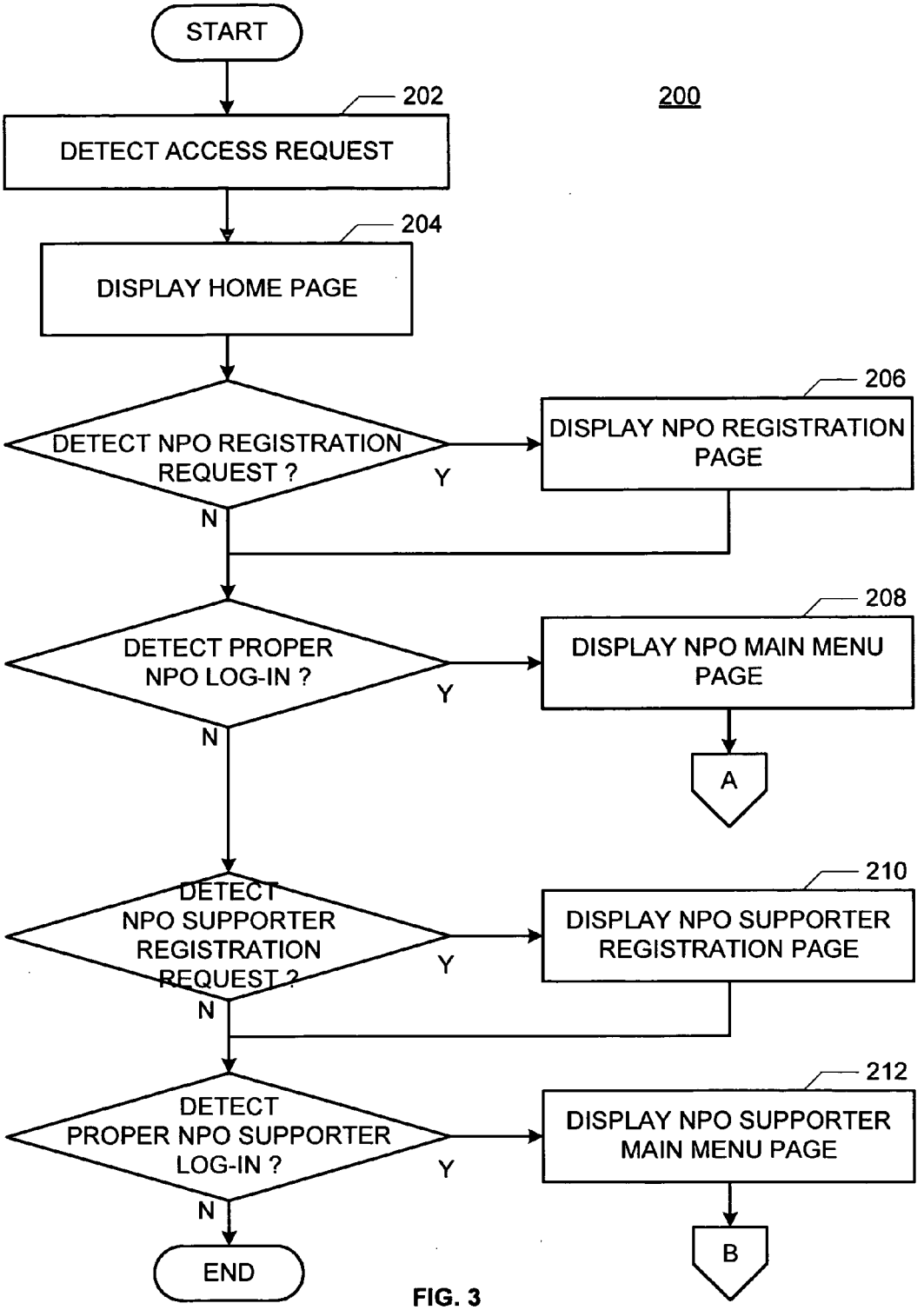

START
200
202
DETECT ACCESS REQUEST
204
DISPLAY HOME PAGE
206
DETECT NPO REGISTRATION REQUEST ?
Y
DISPLAY NPO REGISTRATION PAGE
N
208
DETECT PROPER NPO LOG-IN ?
Y
DISPLAY NPO MAIN MENU PAGE
N
A
210
DETECT NPO SUPPORTER REGISTRATION REQUEST ?
Y
DISPLAY NPO SUPPORTER REGISTRATION PAGE
N
212
DETECT PROPER NPO SUPPORTER LOG-IN ?
Y
DISPLAY NPO SUPPORTER MAIN MENU PAGE
N
B
END

FIG. 3

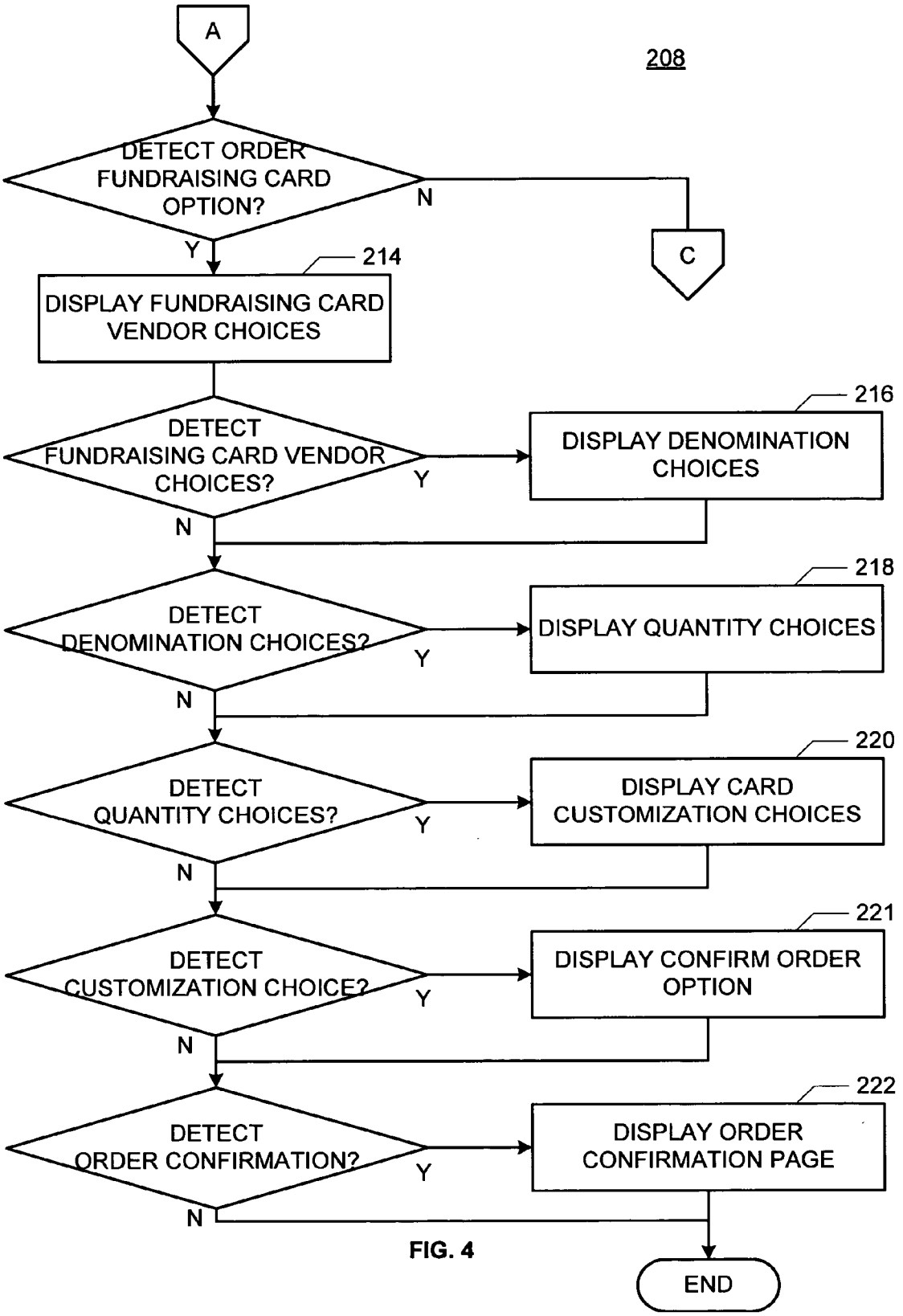

A
208
DETECT ORDER FUNDRAISING CARD OPTION?
N
Y
C
214
DISPLAY FUNDRAISING CARD VENDOR CHOICES
DETECT FUNDRAISING CARD VENDOR CHOICES?
Y
216
DISPLAY DENOMINATION CHOICES
N
DETECT DENOMINATION CHOICES?
Y
218
DISPLAY QUANTITY CHOICES
N
DETECT QUANTITY CHOICES?
Y
220
DISPLAY CARD CUSTOMIZATION CHOICES
N
DETECT CUSTOMIZATION CHOICE?
Y
221
DISPLAY CONFIRM ORDER OPTION
N
DETECT ORDER CONFIRMATION?
Y
222
DISPLAY ORDER CONFIRMATION PAGE
N
END

FIG. 4

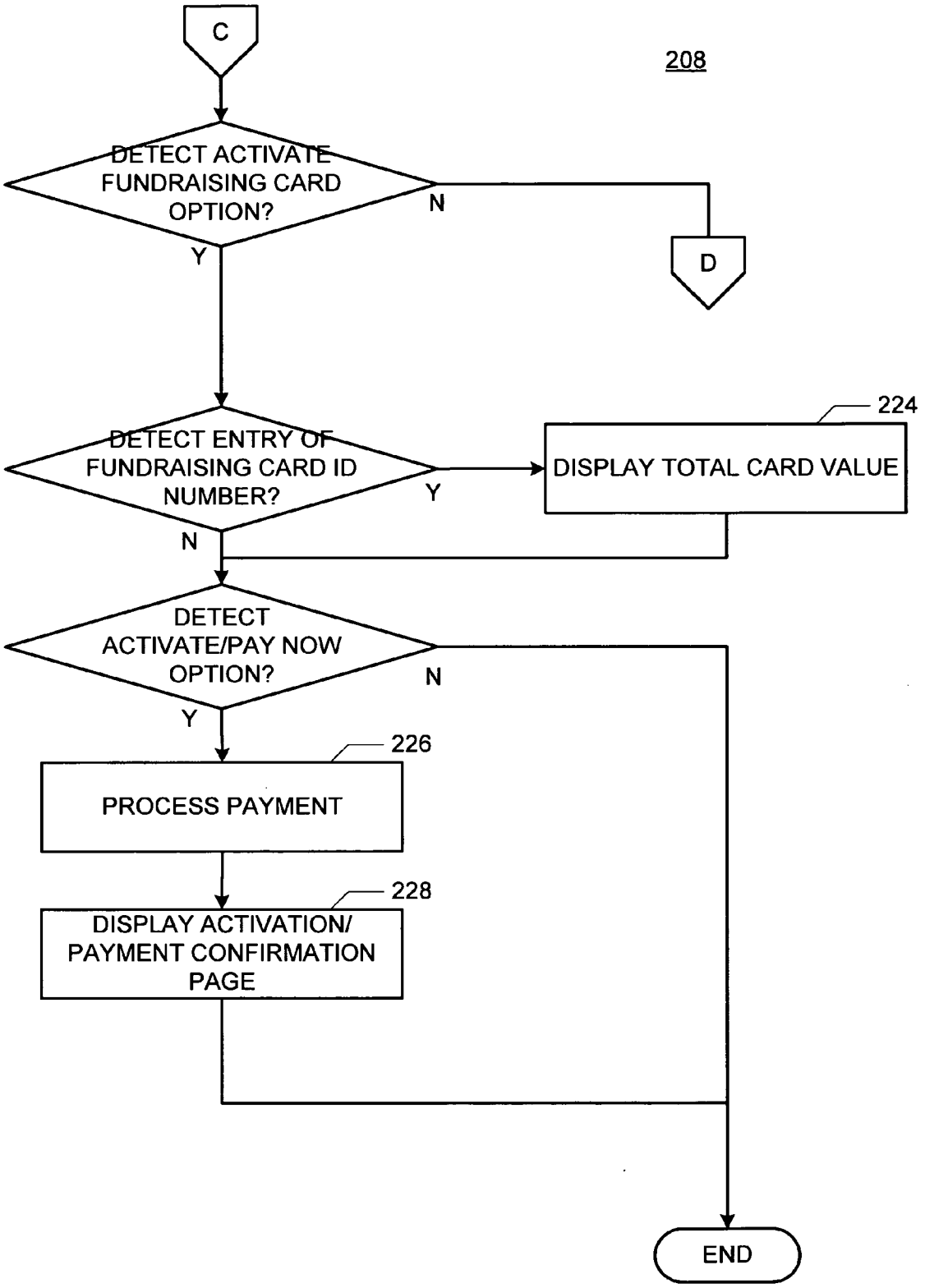

C
208
DETECT ACTIVATE FUNDRAISING CARD OPTION?
N
Y
D
DETECT ENTRY OF FUNDRAISING CARD ID NUMBER?
224
DISPLAY TOTAL CARD VALUE
Y
N
DETECT ACTIVATE/PAY NOW OPTION?
N
Y
226
PROCESS PAYMENT
228
DISPLAY ACTIVATION/ PAYMENT CONFIRMATION PAGE
END

FIG. 5

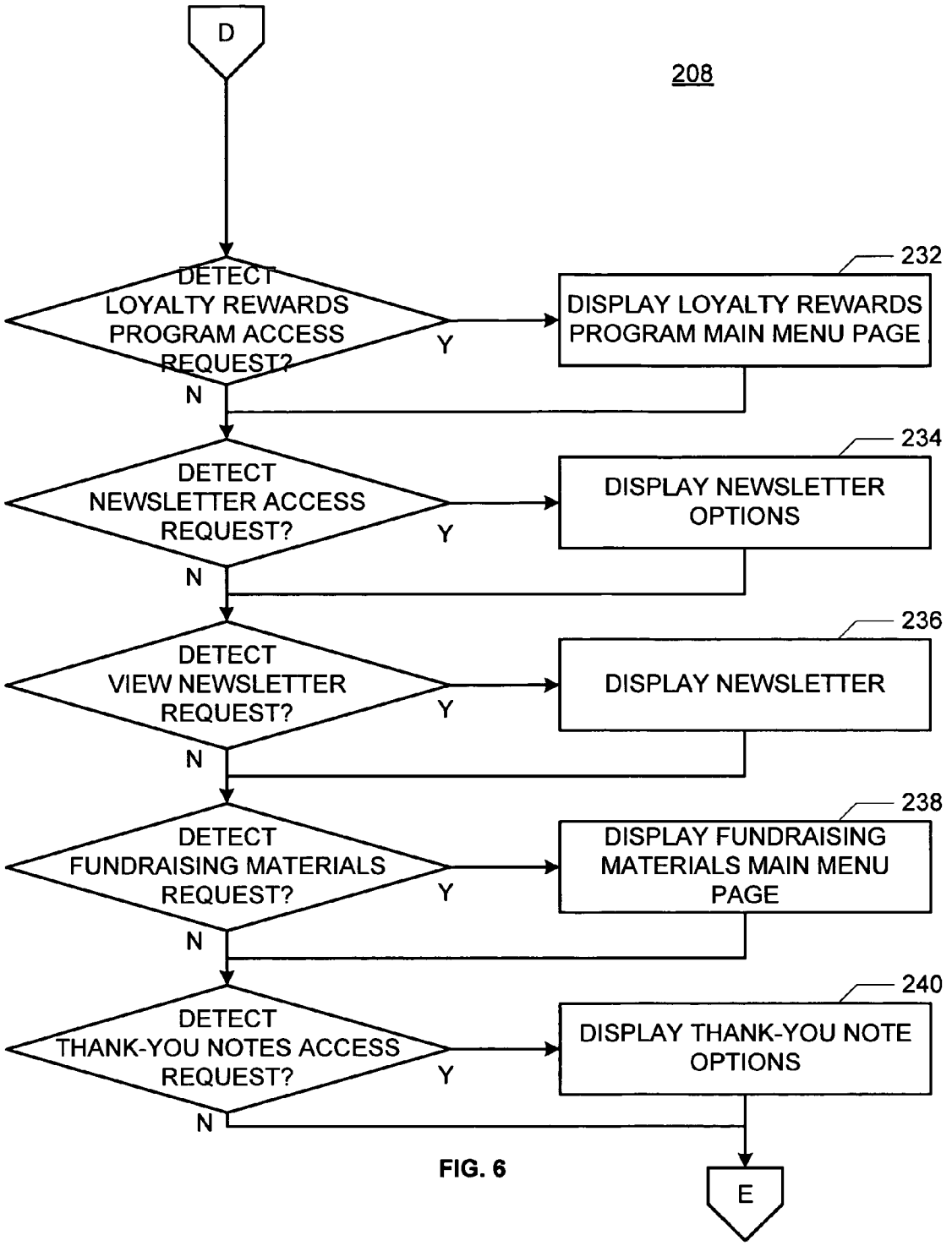

D
208
DETECT LOYALTY REWARDS PROGRAM ACCESS REQUEST?
Y
N
232
DISPLAY LOYALTY REWARDS PROGRAM MAIN MENU PAGE
DETECT NEWSLETTER ACCESS REQUEST?
Y
N
234
DISPLAY NEWSLETTER OPTIONS
DETECT VIEW NEWSLETTER REQUEST?
Y
N
236
DISPLAY NEWSLETTER
DETECT FUNDRAISING MATERIALS REQUEST?
Y
N
238
DISPLAY FUNDRAISING MATERIALS MAIN MENU PAGE
DETECT THANK-YOU NOTES ACCESS REQUEST?
Y
N
240
DISPLAY THANK-YOU NOTE OPTIONS
E

FIG. 6

208

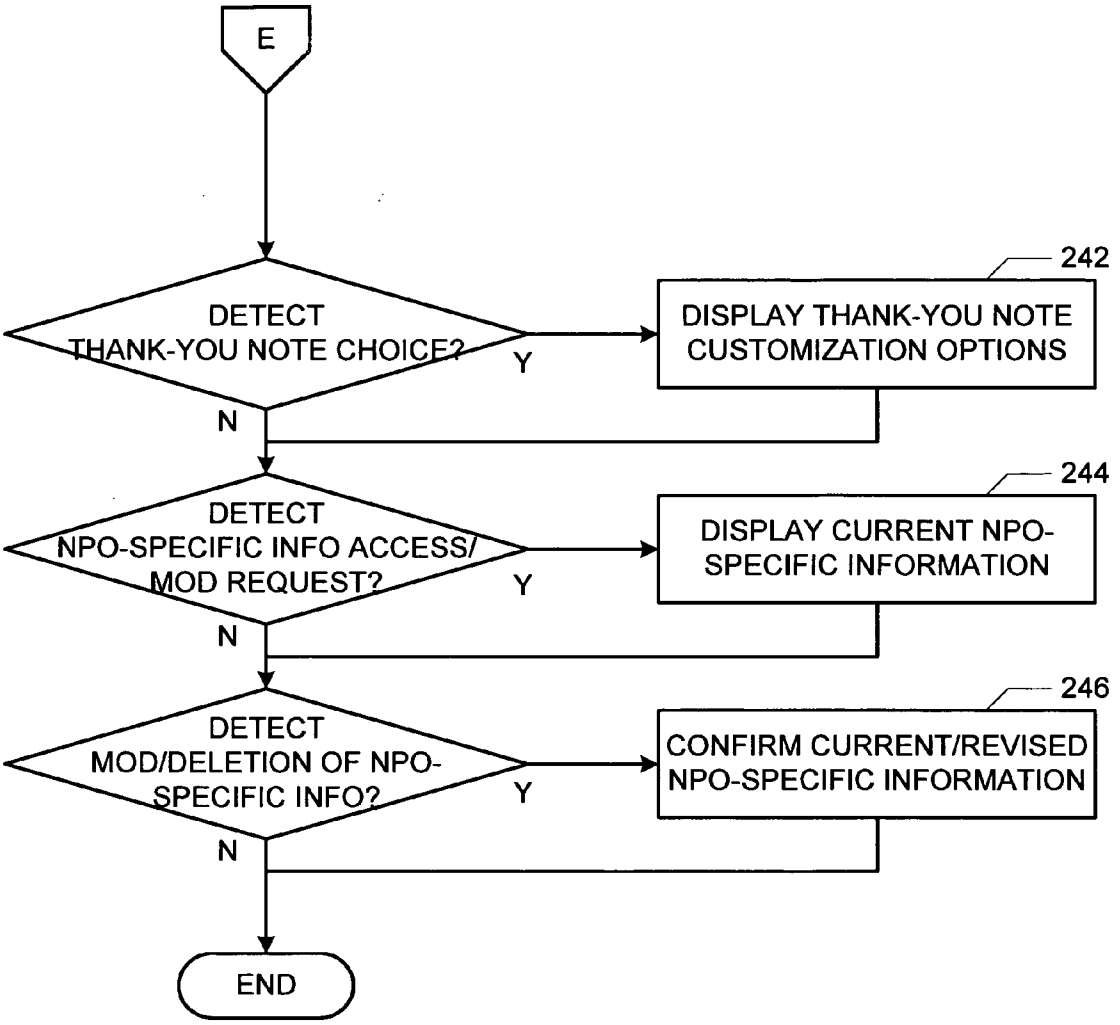

E
DETECT THANK-YOU NOTE CHOICE?
Y
N
242
DISPLAY THANK-YOU NOTE CUSTOMIZATION OPTIONS
DETECT NPO-SPECIFIC INFO ACCESS/ MOD REQUEST?
Y
N
244
DISPLAY CURRENT NPO-SPECIFIC INFORMATION
DETECT MOD/DELETION OF NPO-SPECIFIC INFO?
Y
N
246
CONFIRM CURRENT/REVISED NPO-SPECIFIC INFORMATION
END

FIG. 7

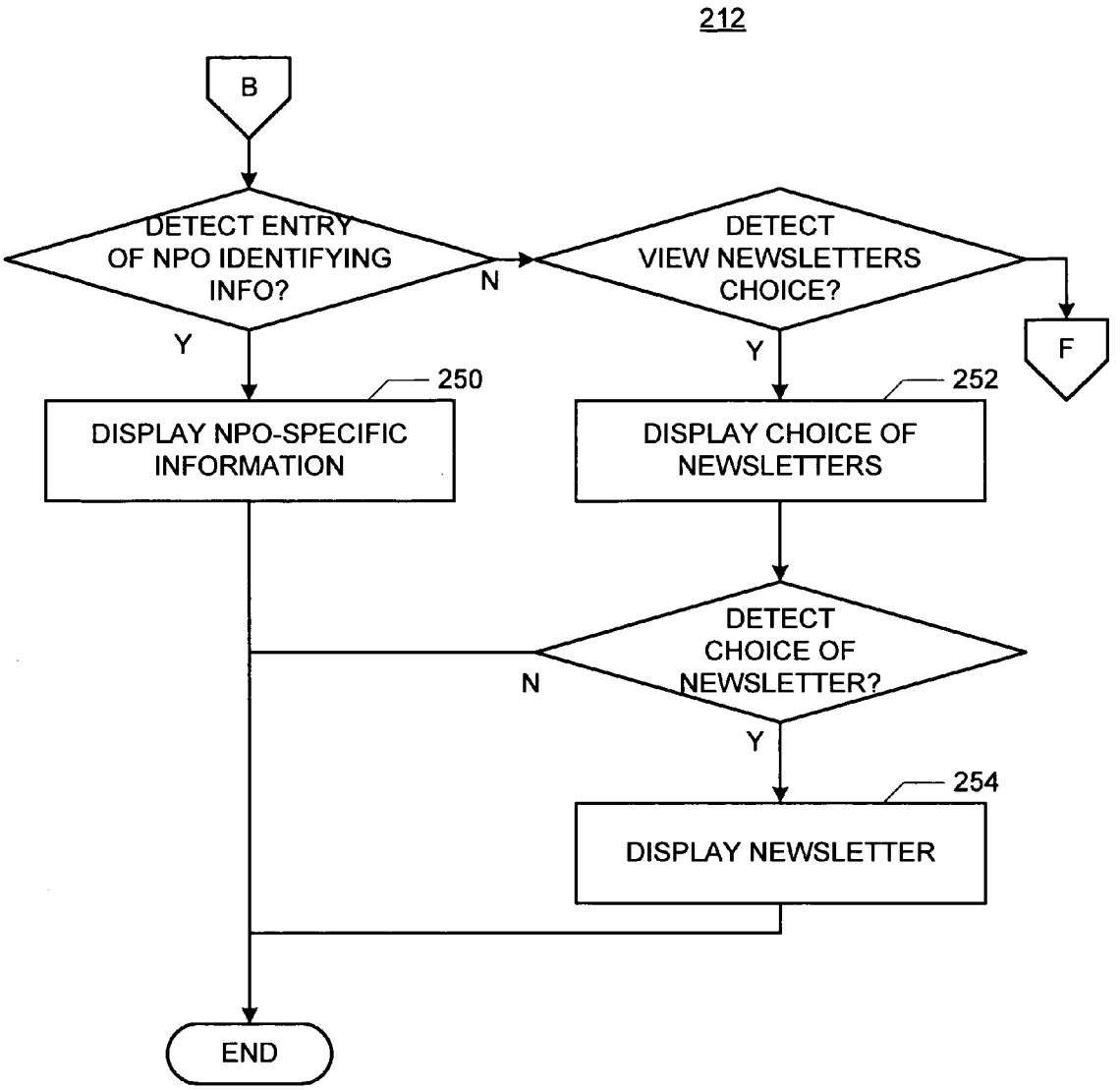

212
B
DETECT ENTRY OF NPO IDENTIFYING INFO?
N
DETECT VIEW NEWSLETTERS CHOICE?
F
Y
Y
250
DISPLAY NPO-SPECIFIC INFORMATION
252
DISPLAY CHOICE OF NEWSLETTERS
DETECT CHOICE OF NEWSLETTER?
N
Y
254
DISPLAY NEWSLETTER
END

FIG. 8

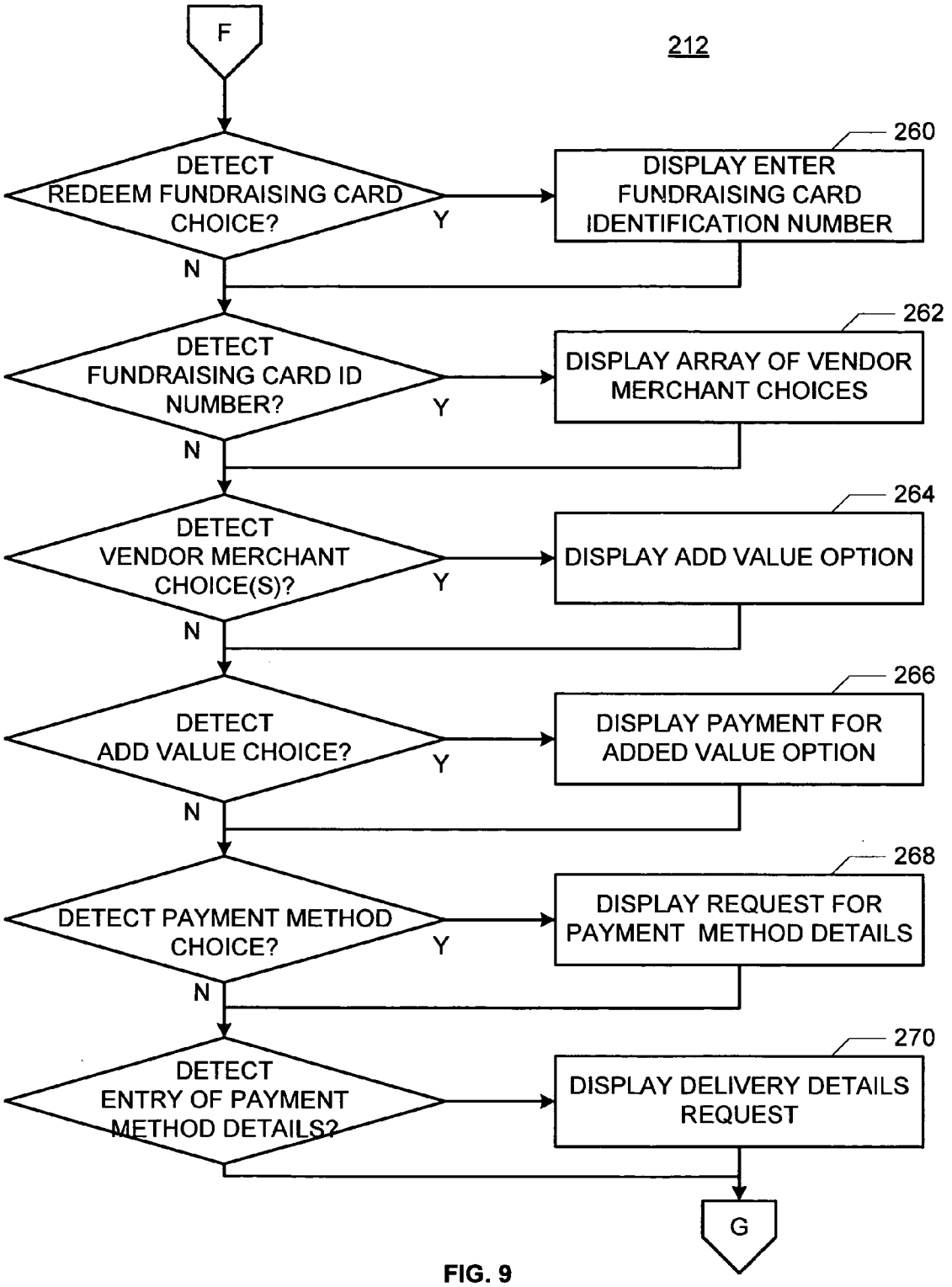

F
212
DETECT REDEEM FUNDRAISING CARD CHOICE?
Y
260
DISPLAY ENTER FUNDRAISING CARD IDENTIFICATION NUMBER
N
DETECT FUNDRAISING CARD ID NUMBER?
Y
262
DISPLAY ARRAY OF VENDOR MERCHANT CHOICES
N
DETECT VENDOR MERCHANT CHOICE(S)?
Y
264
DISPLAY ADD VALUE OPTION
N
DETECT ADD VALUE CHOICE?
Y
266
DISPLAY PAYMENT FOR ADDED VALUE OPTION
N
DETECT PAYMENT METHOD CHOICE?
Y
268
DISPLAY REQUEST FOR PAYMENT METHOD DETAILS
N
DETECT ENTRY OF PAYMENT METHOD DETAILS?
270
DISPLAY DELIVERY DETAILS REQUEST
G

FIG. 9

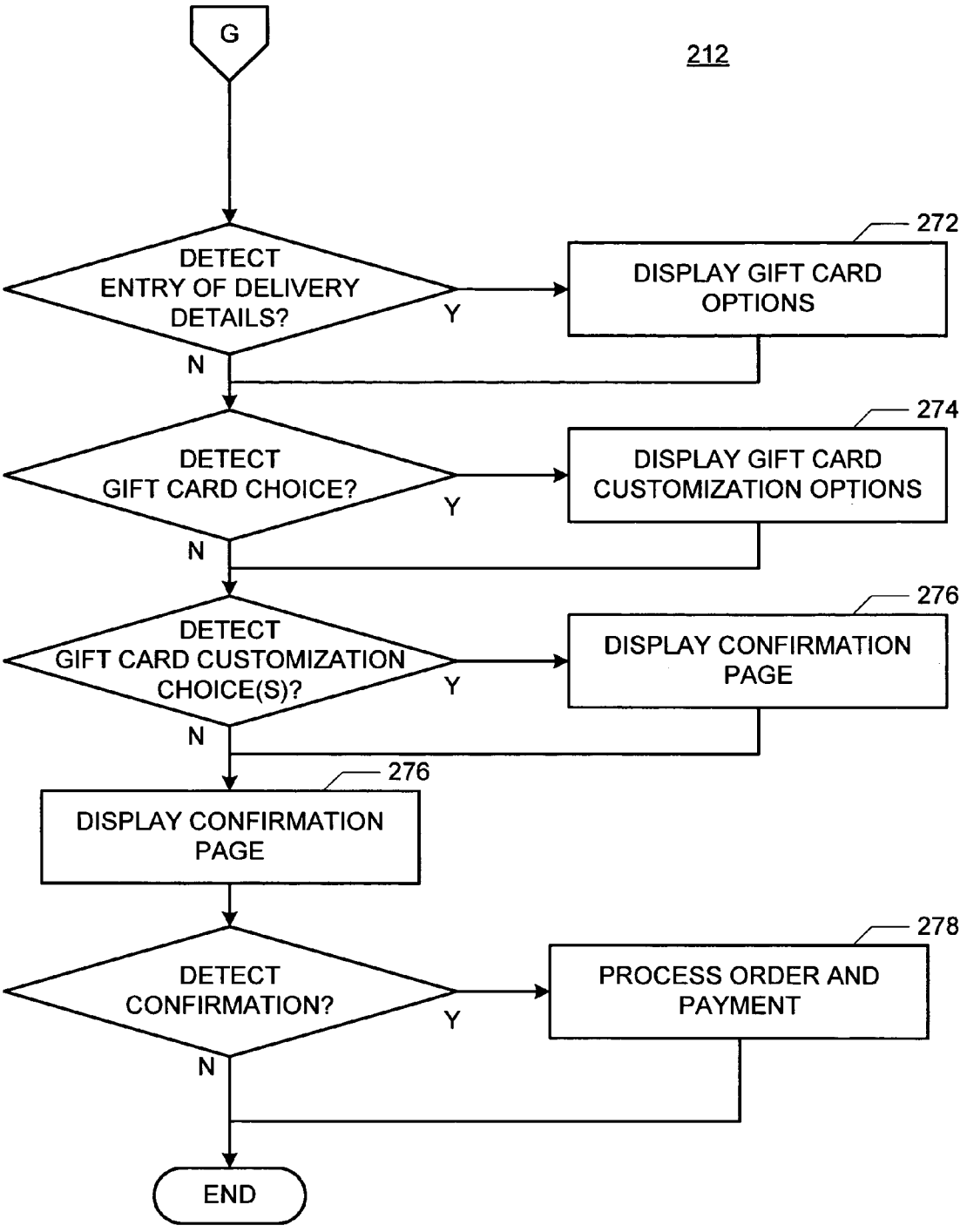

G
212
DETECT ENTRY OF DELIVERY DETAILS?
Y
N
272
DISPLAY GIFT CARD OPTIONS
DETECT GIFT CARD CHOICE?
Y
N
274
DISPLAY GIFT CARD CUSTOMIZATION OPTIONS
DETECT GIFT CARD CUSTOMIZATION CHOICE(S)?
Y
N
276
DISPLAY CONFIRMATION PAGE
276
DISPLAY CONFIRMATION PAGE
DETECT CONFIRMATION?
Y
N
278
PROCESS ORDER AND PAYMENT
END

FIG. 10

SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR ENABLING A FUNDRAISING AND CONTRIBUTIONS PROGRAM USING FUNDRAISING CARDS REDEEMABLE FOR BRANDED STORED-VALUE CARDS

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] None

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0002] The present invention relates generally to fundraising and contributions for not-for-profit organizations (NPOs), and more specifically to a system and method for enabling a fundraising and contributions program by NPOs using fundraising cards redeemable by NPO supporters for branded stored-value cards for use at specified merchant vendor locations.

[0003] Each year, thousands of schools, churches, organizations, associations and other NPOs participate in fundraising programs whereby negotiable gift certificates or cards have identifying means (commonly referred to as "scrip") are issued at a discount by national and local merchant vendors to NPOs, who then distribute the scrip to NPO supporters at an assigned value and/or at a premium price, the dollar value of the discount being retained by the NPO and/or shared with a third party supplier. Scrip programs are effective as fundraising tools because they generate revenue for NPOs, merchant vendors, and intermediary companies through purchases that NPO supporters would normally make in the ordinary course, i.e., they do not require supplemental expenditures from NPO supporters beyond what would be normal in the course of their everyday spending.

[0004] Traditional scrip programs operate via an inventory model whereby NPOs purchase scrip at a discount from the merchant vendors, sell the scrip at the assigned value to the NPO supporters, and retain the difference as fundraising proceeds. The most successful and profitable scrip programs for NPOs are those whereby NPOs stock a "retail store" of branded cards or certificates that a supporter can choose from and purchase on the spot. These programs are successful because there is no lag time between the supporters' payment for and the delivery of the card. The investment necessary, however, to carry an inventory of scrip that encompasses all of their supporters' needs is beyond the scope of most NPO budgets, and therefore relatively few NPOs use this "inventory model." Rather, roughly 95% of NPOs opt for a more cumbersome 6-step model by which the NPO gathers and consolidates scrip orders and corresponding payments from its supporters, places the orders with a scrip broker, waits for and receives the scrip and, finally, distributes the scrip to its supporters, a process which may take up to four weeks. Only truly committed NPO supporters will consistently participate in these programs. Further, because of their labor-intensive nature, these programs offer a relatively limited array of brands and are often poorly administered or abandoned by NPOs, resulting in loss of the fundraising opportunities.

[0005] From the scrip company's point of view, the critical weakness of the traditional model is its razor-thin gross profit margin (approximately 1-2%), which fails to capture potential breakage and float, and difficulty in accurately forecasting inventory needs. In the traditional model, "breakage" (the economic benefit realized when purchased scrip is never or not fully utilized) and "float" (the economic benefit resulting from the passage of time between payment for and redemption of the card) are captured by the merchant vendors and not the scrip company.

[0006] More recently, non-scrip fundraising business models have been adopted which allow NPO supporters to make purchases from a wide array of merchant vendors, either online and/or using a traditional credit card, whereby a percentage of the purchase value is paid by the merchant vendor to a designated NPO. These non-scrip programs obviously reduce the administrative burden on the NPOs: the NPOs are, in fact, nearly eliminated from the fundraising process. That advantage, however, is a double-edged sword, because NPO supporters respond more often and more generously to face-to-face sales pitches encouraging on-the-spot acceptance or refusal, especially if the pitches are made at or in the context of specific NPO events or undertakings in which the NPO supporters have personal interests (e.g., parents being asked to purchase scrip to raise funds for their children's' sporting teams). The abovementioned non-scrip programs are sometimes developed and marketed by intermediate companies charged with administering the programs, where the intermediate company is compensated via a [commission payment] from the merchant vendors. Obviously, there is no potential under these non-scrip models to capture breakage and float.

[0007] Finally, the traditional scrip methods do not effectively leverage existing computer and communications technologies to efficiently provide additional NPO customer service solutions via an easily navigable website administered by the scrip company.

[0008] The market potential for scrip fundraising is estimated at over $1 billion, yet because no existing model offers both NPOs and scrip companies an efficient and profitable alternative, only about 10,000 of the 800,000 registered NPOs in the United States currently take advantage of this fundraising channel, resulting in a gross underrealization of revenues and limitation of resources for NPOs acting generally in the public interest.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0009] The invention is generally directed to a system and method for enabling an NPO fundraising and contributions program using fundraising cards, redeemable by NPO supporters for branded stored-value cards, gift cards, merchandise, travel, etc. While referred to herein as "fundraising cards", it should be appreciated by one skilled in the art that any suitable medium, including a computer medium, capable of associating a unique identifying code with a script transaction, may be used in the system and method for enabling an NPO fundraising and contributions program.

[0010] In an embodiment, provided is a system and method for enabling a fundraising program using fundraising cards redeemable by NPO supporters for branded stored-value cards. The system includes a scrip company host system commissioned by a scrip company. The scrip company host system includes a server configured to host a scrip company web site, where the server includes a microcontroller, and a remote user device operatively coupled to the scrip company host system and is configured to enable

access to the scrip company web site. The remote user device includes a display. The microcontroller is adapted to detect access to the scrip company web site by the NPO, cause the plurality of fundraising cards to be distributed to the NPO in response to detecting an order for the plurality of fundraising cards by the NPO. The fundraising cards are distributed to an NPO prior to receiving payment from the NPO for the fundraising cards. Each of the fundraising cards is then delivered to corresponding NPO supporters upon receipt by the NPO of an assigned value of the each of the plurality of fundraising cards. The microcontroller is also adapted to activate the plurality of fundraising cards to form a plurality of activated fundraising cards upon receipt of a payment from the NPO for the plurality of fundraising cards, where the payment from the NPO equal to the assigned value of the plurality of fundraising cards less a first discount. The microcontroller is further adapted to cause the array of merchant vendors to be paid the assigned value of the plurality of fundraising cards less a second discount, and enable redemption of the plurality of activated fundraising cards for the plurality of branded stored-value cards.

[0011] In another embodiment, provided is a system for enabling a fundraising program using a plurality of unique identifying codes redeemable for a plurality of services for use by not-for-profit organization (NPO) supporters. The plurality of services is provided by an array of service providers. The system includes a scrip company host system commissioned by a scrip company. The scrip company host system includes a server having a microcontroller configured to host a web site. The system also includes a remote user device operatively coupled to the scrip company host system and configured to enable access to the web site. The remote user device includes a display and an input device. The microcontroller is adapted to detect access to the web site by the NPO, and cause the plurality of unique identifying codes to be distributed to the NPO in response to detecting an order for the plurality of unique identifying codes by the NPO via the scrip company. The unique identifying codes are distributed to the NPO prior to receiving payment from the NPO for the unique identifying codes, and each of the plurality of unique identifying codes are delivered to corresponding NPO supporters upon receipt by the NPO of at least a full value payment associated with of each of the plurality of unique identifying codes. The microcontroller is further adapted to activate the plurality of unique identifying codes to form a plurality of activated unique identifying codes upon receipt of an NPO payment from the NPO for the plurality of unique identifying codes, cause the array of service providers to be paid, and enable redemption of the plurality of activated unique identifying codes for the plurality of services.

[0012] In another embodiment, provided is a method for enabling a fundraising program using a plurality of fundraising cards redeemable for a plurality of branded stored-value cards for use by not-for-profit organization (NPO) supporters at an array of merchant vendors. The method includes detecting access to a web site by the NPO, causing the plurality of fundraising cards to be distributed to the NPO in response to detecting an order for the plurality of fundraising cards by the NPO via the web site. The fundraising cards are distributed to the NPO prior to receiving payment from the NPO for the fundraising cards, and each of the plurality of fundraising cards is delivered to corresponding NPO supporters upon receipt by the NPO of at least an assigned value of the each of the plurality of fundraising cards. The method also includes activating the plurality of fundraising cards to form a plurality of activated fundraising cards upon receipt of a payment from the NPO for the plurality of fundraising cards, causing the array of merchant vendors to be paid, and enabling redemption of the plurality of activated fundraising cards for the plurality of branded stored-value cards.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF DRAWINGS

[0013] FIG. **1** is a block diagram of an exemplary system for enabling a fundraising program using fundraising cards redeemable for branded stored-value cards, according to an embodiment of the invention.

[0014] FIG. **2** is a block diagram of fundraising elements and their interaction during the method for enabling a fundraising program using fundraising cards redeemable by NPO supporters for branded stored-value cards, according to an embodiment of the invention.

[0015] FIGS. **3-10** are an exemplary flowchart of a method for enabling a fundraising program using fundraising cards redeemable by NPO supports for branded stored-value cards that may be performed by the system of FIG. **1**, according to an embodiment of the invention.

DESCRIPTION OF PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

[0016] In general, the embodiments of this invention provide a system and method for enabling a fundraising and contributions program using customized fundraising cards redeemable for a branded stored-value card(s), gift cards, merchandise, travel, etc. As noted above, the term fundraising cards is defined herein to include any suitable medium capable of associating a unique identifying code with a script transaction. Utilizing the system and method for the charity fundraising and contributions program enables: (1) an NPO supporter to purchase fundraising cards that may have been customized to include NPO logos, photographs, graphics, information regarding NPO events and fundraising goals, (2) an NPO supporter to purchase a gift card, either in person or online via a particular website, redeemable for any number of valued items including merchandise, travel related items such as airline tickets, hotels and automobile, etc. (3) special merchant offers (4) administration of loyalty rewards programs, (5) NPO special event reminders, (6) newsletter access, (7) access to NPO promotional materials and fundraising advice, and (8) customizable thank-you notes for distribution to NPO supporters.

[0017] More specifically, the embodiments of the invention include a system and a method for (1) providing a scrip company website configured to enable NPOs to choose, design and order fundraising cards, in a specified denominations and quantities, redeemable for branded stored-value cards usable at a wide array of specified retail stores, or redeemable for gift cards, merchandise, travel, etc., (2) detecting entry of the scrip company's website by an NPO (3) in response to an order placed by the NPO for a quantity of fundraising cards, causing the fundraising cards to be delivered to the NPO, (4) enabling electronic activation of the fundraising cards upon verification of receipt of payment for the fundraising cards from the NPO, via the scrip company website and an Automatic Clearing House, of the assigned value of the fundraising cards less a first discount,

(5) enabling redemption of the fundraising cards for branded stored-value cards, which when received by an NPO supporter (or any designee of the NPO supporter), are redeemable for merchandise at one or more associated retail stores selected by the NPO supporter from a wide array of retail stores displayed via the scrip company's website, and (6) enabling payment by the scrip company to the one or more associated retail stores of the assigned value of the branded stored-value card less a second discount. Upon payment to the one or more associated retail stores of the branded stored-value card less the second discount, the branded stored-value card are physically delivered by the scrip company to the NPO supporter (via mail or other courier means). Upon receipt of the branded stored-value card(s), the NPO supporter or designee may redeem the branded stored-value card(s) at the corresponding retail store(s).

[0018] The embodiments of the invention also include a system and a method for hosting a plurality of fundraising and/or contribution websites configured to enable NPO supporters to purchase gift cards redeemable for merchandise, travel, etc, and/or configured to enable selection of a charity from among of plurality of charities to whom any profits or credits will go. The NPO supporter may be directed to the website(s) by the NPO, by the charity, or by any suitable means (e.g., print advertisement, television advertisement). Selection of the various choices may be facilitated using drop-down menus, user selectable links, dialog boxes and the like. Accumulated profits or credits may then be passed along to the selected charities and/or NPO via one of any number of suitable means such as a check, a wire transfer of money, a gift card, etc.

[0019] FIG. **1** is a block diagram of an exemplary system **10** that may be used to enable a fundraising program using fundraising cards, or any suitable medium capable of associating a unique identifying code with a script transaction, redeemable for branded stored-value cards, merchandise, travel, etc., according to an embodiment of the invention. The system **10** allows an NPO supporter with access to the Internet to participate in the fundraising program. As described below, unlike prior art fundraising systems, implementing the system described herein makes it unnecessary for the NPO to carry a paid-for inventory of fundraising cards.

[0020] Referring to FIG. **1**, the system **10** includes a scrip company host system **12** having a server **14** coupled to an optional database **16**. A scrip company or scrip company representative establishes the scrip company host system **12**. Among other things, the server **14** is adapted to host a scrip company website. In general, the system **10** is configured to allow an NPO or NPO supporter, having a suitably configured remote user device **20** such as a laptop computer, desktop computer, a personal digital assistant (PDA), a mobile telephone, to name a few, to access the scrip company website via an access network **18**. Although illustrated as the Internet, the access network **18** may be one of any number of suitable networks (e.g., a wired Ethernet network, a wireless Code Division Multiple Access network) known in the art, enabling communication between the remote user device **20** and the scrip company host system **12**.

[0021] The remote user device **20** includes a microcontroller (not separately illustrated) and a display **21** operatively coupled to the microcontroller. The display **21** is adapted to display images received from, or caused to be displayed by, the scrip company host system **12**. The server **14** includes a microcontroller **30** that may include a microcontroller-based platform or microprocessor (MP) **32**, a program memory **34** (including a read only memory (ROM)), a random-access memory (RAM) **36** and an input/output (I/O) circuit **38**, all of which may be interconnected via a communications link, or an address/data bus **40**.

[0022] The input/output (I/O) circuit **38** provides an interface between the server **14** and the remote user device(s) **20**, and between the server **14** and the optional database **15** using one of any number of well known interface protocols. The I/O circuit **38** may also provide the interface between the server **14** and one or more peripheral devices such as a keyboard, a display, a printer, and a mouse.

[0023] Among other things, the microprocessor **32** is capable of causing scrip company web pages to be displayed on the display **21** to the NPO or NPO supporter. The RAM **40** is capable of storing event data or other data used or generated during execution of the method for enabling the fundraising program using fundraising cards redeemable for branded stored-value cards. The program memory **24** is capable of storing program code that controls the operation of the server **14** during execution of the method for enabling the fundraising program using fundraising cards redeemable for branded stored-value cards.

[0024] Although only one microprocessor **32** is shown, the microcontroller **30** may include multiple microprocessors. Similarly, additional memory (e.g., flash memory) may be included, depending on the requirements of the server **14**. The RAM(s) **36** and program memory(ies) **34** may be implemented as semiconductor memories, magnetically readable memories, and/or optically readable memories, etc. Although an NPO and an NPO supporter likely utilize different remote user devices, for ease of discussion both the NPO and the NPO supporter(s) use the same remote user device **20**.

[0025] One manner in which the server **14** of the scrip company host system **12** may operate is described below in connection with one or more flowchart(s) that represents a number of portions or routines of one or more computer programs, which may be stored in one or more of the memories of the microcontroller **30**. The computer program(s) or portions thereof may also be stored remotely, outside of the server **14** and may therefore control the operation from a remote location.

[0026] For ease of discussion, FIG. **2** illustrates a ladder flow diagram **100** of a fundraising program using fundraising cards redeemable by NPO supporters for branded stored-value cards, according to an embodiment of the invention. The ladder flow diagram **100** illustrates the interaction between the various participants of the fundraising program and the scrip company host system **12**. As mention above, a scrip company **102** or its representative provides the scrip company host system **12** and hosts a scrip company website accessible by NPOs and NPO supporters.

[0027] Referring to FIG. **2**, a contractual arrangement **101** previously established and executed between the scrip company **102** and participating merchant vendors **104** allows the participating merchant vendors **104** to participate in the fundraising program flow **100**. Under such a contractual

arrangement **101**, the scrip company **102** agrees to pay the participating merchant vendors **104** the assigned value of corresponding branded stored-value cards, less an agreed-upon discount. The agreed-upon discount is the scrip company's remuneration and profit.

[**0028**] An NPO **106** wishing to participate in the fundraising program accesses the scrip company's website (hosted by the scrip company host system **12**) via his/her remote user device **20**, and registers or logs-in to select and order **103** fundraising cards **120**, in denominations and quantities specified by the NPO from an array of choices. The NPO chooses an array of merchant vendors from the participating merchant vendors **104** at which the branded stored-value cards (to be issued in exchange for the fundraising cards) may be used. The NPO **106** has an option to customize the fundraising cards with selected graphics. Such customized fundraising cards may therefore reflect the NPO's fundraising goals or upcoming special events for which funds are being raised.

[**0029**] After receiving the order **103** for fundraising cards **120** from the NPO **106**, the scrip company host system **12** causes the fundraising cards **120** to be printed via a printer operatively coupled to the scrip company host system **12**. The fundraising cards **120** are electronically numbered for identity purposes. The fundraising cards **120** are then issued **105** to the NPO **106** without requiring payment therefore. As a result, the NPO **106** is provided with a convenient inventory solution whereby the fundraising cards **120** are inventoried by the NPO **106** without any significant out-of-pocket expense by the NPO **106**.

[**0030**] Upon payment **107** of the full assigned value to the NPO **106**, the fundraising cards **120** are delivered **109** to the NPO supporter **108**. After delivery of the fundraising cards to the NPO supporters **108**, the NPO **106** accesses the scrip company's website and activates **111** the delivered fundraising cards **120**. Activation may be accomplished using one of any number of suitable methods such as entering the identity numbers of the fundraising cards **120** via a web page hosted by the scrip company's website. Activation permits the bearer of the fundraising card **120** (e.g., the NPO supporter **108**) to redeem the fundraising card **120** for a branded stored-value card(s) via the scrip company's website **112**. During or prior to activation of the fundraising cards **120**, the NPO provides payment to the scrip company **102** via the scrip company website (backed by an Automatic Clearing House). As previously mentioned, the payment by the NPO **106** to the scrip company **102** is the assigned value of the fundraising cards, less a first discount. As a result, without bearing the burden of carrying a pre-paid inventory of branded stored-value cards, the NPO **106** realizes a profit based on the difference between the full assigned value amount of the fundraising card(s) **120** paid by the NPO supporter and the lesser amount paid by the NPO **106** to the scrip company.

[**0031**] After the distributed fundraising cards **120** have been activated **111**, an NPO supporter **108** can access the scrip company's website and redeem **113** the distributed fundraising cards for branded stored-value cards **122** usable at the array of retail merchant vendors. In addition, using the scrip company's website, the NPO supporter **108** may use his/her major credit card to add value beyond the value of the fundraising card **120** (i.e., to purchase a branded stored-value card **122** worth more than the original customized fundraising card). The NPO supporter **108** may also elect to have the branded stored-value card **122** delivered to a third party as a gift, along with a customized gift card or message.

[**0032**] FIGS. **3-10** are an exemplary flowchart of method **200** for enabling a fundraising program using fundraising cards **120**, or any suitable medium capable of associating a unique identifying code with a script transaction, redeemable by NPO supports for branded stored-value cards **122** (and/or merchandise, travel, etc.), that may be performed by the microcontroller **30** of FIG. **1**, according to an embodiment of the invention. Unlike prior art fundraising methods, the method **200** makes it unnecessary for the NPO to carry a paid-for inventory of fundraising cards.

[**0033**] Referring to FIG. **3**, the method **200** begins when the microcontroller **30** detects an access request via NPO **106** or NPO supporter **108** entry of the server's **14** unique Uniform Address Locator by means of the remote user device **20** (step **202**). In response to the access request, the microcontroller **30** causes a Scrip Fundraising Home page to be displayed via a display means such as the display **21** (step **204**). The Scrip Fundraising Home page includes, among other things, registration request options selectable by NPOs or NPO supporters for subsequent access to the scrip company website hosted by the scrip company host system **12**.

[**0034**] Upon detection of selection of the NPO registration option from the Scrip Fundraising Home page, the microcontroller **30** causes an NPO Registration page to be displayed to the NPO via the display **21** (step **206**). The NPO Registration page is configured to allow the NPO **106** to enter identifying and payment information about the NPO **106** to gain subsequent access to the scrip company website. After registering via the NPO Registration page, the NPO **106** may log-in to the scrip company website.

[**0035**] Upon detection of proper log-in information from the NPO **106**, the microcontroller **30** causes an NPO Main Menu page to be displayed to the user via a display means such as the display **21** (step **208**). Among other things, the NPO Main Menu page includes a number of selectable options such as, for example, an option to order fundraising cards **120**, an option to activate fundraising cards **120** and an option to display other services to assist the NPO. As a result, the NPO **106** can 1) customize and order fundraising cards, 2) activate and pay for fundraising cards, 3) access related service options such as loyalty rewards programs, newsletters, promotional and fundraising materials and advice and customizable thank-you notes for delivery to NPO supporters, and 4) modify any NPO fundraising or event-specific information specified to the server for communication to the public via the website. Although preferably configured with drop-down menus, it is contemplated that the NPO Main Menu page and associated NPO pages may be configured with one of any number of well-known user-friendly configurations.

[**0036**] Referring to FIG. **4**, upon detecting selection of the order fundraising card option, the microcontroller **30** causes the fundraising card merchant vendor choices to be displayed to the NPO **106** (step **214**). The NPO **106** can then select an array of merchant vendors from the participating merchant vendor choices. Upon detecting selection of the array of retail merchant vendors, the microcontroller **30** causes a number of denomination choices to be displayed to

the NPO **106** (step **216**). The denomination choices enable the NPO **106** to select one or more denominations payable by the NPO supporter(s) **108** for the fundraising cards.

[**0037**] Upon detecting selection of one or more denomination choices, the microcontroller **30** causes a number of quantity choices to be displayed to the NPO **106** (step **218**). The quantity choices enable the NPO **106** to select the quantity of fundraising cards **120** for each of the chosen denominations. For example, the NPO **106** may desire to purchase **100** fundraising cards having a $50 denomination, and **150** fundraising cards having a $25 denomination.

[**0038**] Upon detecting selection of one or more quantity choices, the microcontroller **30** causes a number of card customization choices to be displayed to the NPO **106** (step **220**). The card customization choices enable the NPO **106** to customize the fundraising cards (to form customized fundraising cards) with a variety of logos, themes, artwork and other such design features to make the card informative or attractive to the NPO supporters **108**. Upon detecting selection of one or more customization choices, the microcontroller **30** causes a confirm order option to be displayed to the NPO **106** (step **221**). The confirm order option provides the NPO **106** with an option to confirm the customized fundraising card order. Upon detecting selection of the confirm order option, the microcontroller **30** causes a confirmation page to be displayed to the NPO **106** (step **222**).

[**0039**] As noted in connection with FIG. **3**, the NPO Main Menu page also includes an option to activate the fundraising cards, selectable after the NPO support(s) **108** have paid the NPO **106** the full assigned value of the distributed fundraising cards **120**, and the NPO **106** has paid the scrip company **102** the assigned value of the distributed fundraising cards **120**, less the first discount (see, FIG. **2**). Referring to FIG. **5**, upon detecting selection of the activate fundraising card option and detecting entry of the identification numbers assigned to the distributed fundraising cards **120**, the microcontroller **30** causes the total assigned value of the distributed fundraising cards, less the first discount, to be displayed to the NPO **106** (step **224**). As noted in connection with FIG. **2**, during or prior to activation of the distributed fundraising cards, the NPO **106** provides payment to the scrip company **102** via the scrip company website (backed by an Automatic Clearing House) using, for example, a wire transfer, credit card transaction, telecheck, online bank transfer, or the like.. Thus, upon detecting selection of an activate/pay now option by the NPO, the microcontroller **30** cause the payment by the NPO **106** to be processed (step **226**). Upon completion payment processing, the microcontroller **30** causes an activation/payment confirmation page to be displayed to the NPO **106** (step **228**).

[**0040**] As noted in connection with FIG. **3**, the NPO Main Menu page further includes an option to display services to assist the NPO **106** in administering the fundraising program. Among other things, the services include loyalty rewards programs, newsletters, fundraising materials and advice, and providing NPO-specific fundraising details. Referring to FIG. **6**, upon detecting selection of a loyalty rewards program access request, the microcontroller **30** causes a Loyalty Rewards Program Main Menu page (step **232**).

[**0041**] The Loyalty Rewards Program Main Menu page enables the NPO **106** to participate in a rewards program and also enables the NPO **106** to access newsletters. Upon detecting selection of a newsletter access request, the microcontroller **30** causes newsletter options to be displayed to the NPO **106** (step **234**. Upon detecting selection of a view newsletter request, the microcontroller **30** causes the selected newsletter to be displayed to the NPO **106** (step **236**).

[**0042**] The NPO **106** may also choose to access fundraising materials via the NPO Main Menu page. Accordingly, upon detecting selection of a fundraising materials request, the microcontroller **30** causes a Fundraising Materials Main Menu page to be displayed to the NPO **106** (step **238**). The Fundraising Materials Main Menu page includes a visual presentation of available fundraising material. In addition, the NPO **106** may choose to access thank you note options that include customization options, artwork, etc. Upon detecting selection of a thank-you notes access request, the microcontroller **30** causes thank-you note options to be displayed to the NPO **106** (step **240**). Similarly, upon detection of a thank-you note choice, the microcontroller **30** causes thank-you note customization options to be displayed (step **242**).

[**0043**] The NPO **106** also has access to their NPO-specific information via the NPO Main Menu page. Thus, upon detecting selection of an NPO-specific information access/modification request, the microcontroller **30** causes current NPO-specific information to be displayed (step **242**), and upon detecting modification or deletion of the NPO-specific information, the microcontroller **30** confirms the current or revised NPO-specific information (step **246**).

[**0044**] Referring again to FIG. **3**, upon detection of selection of the NPO Supporter Registration option from the Scrip Fundraising Home page, the microcontroller **30** causes an NPO Supporter Registration page to be displayed to the NPO supporter **108** via a display means such as the display **21** (step **210**). The NPO Supporter Registration page is configured to allow the NPO supporter **108** to enter identifying and payment information for subsequent access to the scrip company website. After registering via the NPO Supporter Registration page, the new NPO supporter **108** may log-in to the scrip company website.

[**0045**] Upon detection of proper log-in information from the registered NPO supporter **108**, the microcontroller **30** causes an NPO Supporter Main Menu page to be displayed to the NPO supporter **108** (step **212**). Among other things, the NPO Supporter Main Menu page includes a number of selectable options such as, for example, an option to redeem fundraising cards, an option to view NPO-specific information and an option to display newsletters. As a result, the NPO supporter **108** can 1) redeem a fundraising card **120** for a corresponding branded stored-value card **122**, 2) access NPO-specific fundraising information communicated via the website, and 3) access available newsletters. Although preferably configured with drop-down menus, it is contemplated that the NPO Supporter Main Menu page may be configured with one of any number of well-known user-friendly configurations.

[**0046**] Referring to FIG. **8**, upon detecting entry of NPO identifying information, the microcontroller **30** causes the NPO-specific information to be displayed to the NPO supporter **108** (step **250**). Similarly, upon detecting entry of a view newsletter choice, the microcontroller **30** causes a

choice of newsletters to be displayed (step **252**), and upon detecting selection of one of the newsletters, the microcontroller **30** causes the newsletter to be displayed (step **254**) to the NPO supporter **108**.

[**0047**] As noted in connection with FIG. **2**, after paying for and receiving the fundraising cards **120**, the NPO supporters **108** can redeem the fundraising cards **120** for branded stored-value cards **122** via accessing the NPO Supporter Main Menu page. Accordingly, upon detecting a redeem fundraising card choice, the microcontroller **30** causes a prompt to be displayed (step **254**) to the NPO supporter **108** to enable the NPO supporter **108** to enter his/her fundraising card(s) identification number(s) (step **260**). Upon detecting entry of the customized card(s) identification number(s), the microcontroller **30** causes the array of merchant vendors to be displayed to the NPO supporter **108** (step **262**). Upon detecting selection of a retail merchant vendor(s) from the array of retail merchant vendors, the microcontroller **30** causes an add value option to be displayed to the NPO supporter **108** (step **264**). This option allows the NPO support **108** to add value to the fundraising card **120**, thereby increasing the value of the branded stored-value card **122**. Such an option may be attractive to an NPO supporter **108** intending to give the branded stored-value card **122** as a gift.

[**0048**] Upon detecting a value choice, the microcontroller **30** causes the payment for the added value option to be displayed to the NPO supporter **108** (step **266**). Upon detecting a payment method choice, the microcontroller **30** causes a request for payment method details to be displayed to the NPO supporter **108** (step **268**). Upon detecting entry of payment method details, the microcontroller **30** causes a delivery details request to be displayed (step **270**), and upon detecting entry of delivery details by the NPO supporter **108**, the microcontroller **30** causes branded stored-value gift card options to be displayed to the NPO supporter **108** (step **272**). The NPO supporter **108** may elect to customize the branded stored-value gift card **122**. Accordingly, upon detecting the gift card choice, the microcontroller **30** causes gift card customization options to be displayed to the NPO supporter **108** (step **274**). The NPO supporter **108** may then select customization options for the branded stored-value gift card.

[**0049**] When all NPO selections are completed, the microcontroller **30** causes a confirmation page to be displayed (step **276**), and upon detecting confirmation of the NPO supporter selections, processes the order and/or additional payments (step **278**). Confirmation pages such as the confirmation page displayed at step **276** may be made available each time an affirmative selection is made.

[**0050**] As may be apparent from the above discussion, the system and method for enabling a fundraising program using fundraising cards **120** redeemable by NPO supporters **108** for branded stored-value cards **122** overcomes the problems associated with prior art scrip fundraising.

[**0051**] While this invention has been described with reference to certain illustrative aspects, it will be understood that this description shall not be construed in a limiting sense. Rather, various changes and modifications can be made to the illustrative embodiments without departing from the true spirit, central characteristics and scope of the invention, including those combinations of features that are individually disclosed or claimed herein. Furthermore, it will be appreciated that any such changes and modifications will be recognized by those skilled in the art as an equivalent to one or more elements of the following claims, and shall be covered by such claims to the fullest extent permitted by law.

It is claimed:

1. A system for enabling a fundraising program using a plurality of fundraising cards redeemable for a plurality of branded stored-value cards for use by not-for-profit organization (NPO) supporters at an array of merchant vendors, the system comprising:

a scrip company host system commissioned by a scrip company, the scrip company host system including a server configured to host a scrip company web site, the server including a microcontroller; and

a remote user device operatively coupled to the scrip company host system and configured to enable access to the scrip company web site, the remote user device including a display and an input device, wherein the microcontroller is adapted to:

detect access to the scrip company web site by the NPO,

cause the plurality of fundraising cards to be distributed to the NPO in response to detecting an order for the plurality of fundraising cards by the NPO, the fundraising cards distributed to the NPO prior to receiving payment from the NPO for an assigned value of the fundraising cards, each of the plurality of fundraising cards delivered to corresponding NPO supporters upon receipt by the NPO of payment for each of the plurality of fundraising cards,

activate the plurality of fundraising cards to form a plurality of activated fundraising cards upon receipt of a payment from the NPO for the plurality of fundraising cards, and

enable redemption of the plurality of activated fundraising cards for the plurality of branded stored-value cards.

2. The system of claim 1, wherein the microcontroller is further adapted to cause the array of merchant vendors to be paid.

3. The system of claim 1, wherein the payment from the NPO is equal to the assigned value of the plurality of fundraising cards less a first discount.

4. The system of claim 3, wherein the first discount is determined via a contractual arrangement between the NPO and the scrip company prior to detecting access to the scrip company web site by the NPO.

5. The system of claim 3, wherein the first discount is variable based on a denomination of the each of the plurality of fundraising cards.

6. The system of claim 1, wherein the array of merchant vendors is paid at least the assigned value of the plurality of fundraising cards less a second discount.

7. The system of claim 6, wherein the second discount is determined via a contractual arrangement between the scrip company and the array of merchant vendors prior to detecting access to the scrip company web site by the NPO.

8. The system of claim 1, wherein the array of merchant vendors is selected by the NPO from a plurality of participating merchant vendors.

9. The system of claim 1, wherein the microcontroller is further adapted to:

cause a NPO Registration page to be displayed in response to detecting an NPO registration request, the NPO Registration page enabling the NPO to enter identifying and payment information; and

cause a NPO Main Menu page to be displayed in response to detecting proper NPO log-in information based on the NPO identifying information.

10. The system of claim 9, wherein the NPO Main Menu page includes an order fundraising card option, an activate fundraising card option and a display other NPO services option.

11. A system for enabling a fundraising program using a plurality of unique identifying codes redeemable for a plurality of services for use by not-for-profit organization (NPO) supporters, the plurality of services provided by an array of service providers, the system comprising:

a scrip company host system commissioned by a scrip company, the scrip company host system including a server configured to host a web site, the server including a microcontroller; and

a remote user device operatively coupled to the scrip company host system and configured to enable access to the web site, the remote user device including a display and an input device, wherein the microcontroller is adapted to:

detect access to the web site by the NPO,

cause the plurality of unique identifying codes to be distributed to the NPO in response to detecting an order for the plurality of unique identifying codes by the NPO via the scrip company, the unique identifying codes distributed to the NPO prior to receiving payment from the NPO for the assigned value of the unique identifying codes, each of the plurality of unique identifying codes delivered to corresponding NPO supporters upon receipt by the NPO of payment for each of the plurality of unique identifying codes,

activate the plurality of unique identifying codes to form a plurality of activated unique identifying codes upon receipt of an NPO payment from the NPO for the plurality of unique identifying codes,

enable redemption of the plurality of activated unique identifying codes for the plurality of services.

12. The system of claim 11, wherein the microcontroller is further adapted to cause the array of service providers to be paid.

13. The system of claim 11, wherein the NPO payment is equal to the full value of the plurality of unique identifying codes less a first discount.

14. The system of claim 13, wherein the first discount is determined via a contractual arrangement between the NPO and the scrip company prior to detecting access to the web site by the NPO.

15. The system of claim 14, wherein the first discount is variable based on a denomination associated with of the each of the plurality of unique identifying codes.

16. The system of claim 11, wherein the array of service providers is paid at least the full value of the plurality of unique identifying codes less a second discount.

17. The system of claim 16, wherein the second discount is determined via a contractual arrangement between the scrip company and the array of service providers prior to detecting access to the web site by the NPO.

18. The system of claim 11, wherein the array of service providers is selected by the NPO from a plurality of participating service providers.

19. The system of claim 11, wherein the array of service providers includes an airline.

20. The system of claim 11, wherein the array of service providers includes a hotel.

21. A method for enabling a fundraising program using a plurality of fundraising cards redeemable for a plurality of branded stored-value cards for use by not-for-profit organization (NPO) supporters at an array of merchant vendors, the method comprising:

detecting access to a web site by the NPO;

causing the plurality of fundraising cards to be distributed to the NPO in response to detecting an order for the plurality of fundraising cards by the NPO via the web site, the fundraising cards distributed to the NPO prior to receiving payment from the NPO for the assigned value of the fundraising cards, each of the plurality of fundraising cards delivered to corresponding NPO supporters upon receipt by the NPO of payment for each of the plurality of fundraising cards;

activating the plurality of fundraising cards to form a plurality of activated fundraising cards upon receipt of a payment from the NPO for the plurality of fundraising cards;

causing the array of merchant vendors to be paid; and

enabling redemption of the plurality of activated fundraising cards for the plurality of branded stored-value cards.

22. The method of claim 21, wherein the payment from the NPO is equal to the assigned value of the plurality of fundraising cards less a first discount.

23. The method of claim 22, wherein the first discount is determined via a contractual arrangement between the NPO and the scrip company prior to detecting access to the scrip company web site by the NPO.

24. The method of claim 22, wherein the first discount is variable based on a denomination of the each of the plurality of fundraising cards.

25. The method of claim 21, wherein the array of merchant vendors is paid at least the assigned value of the plurality of fundraising cards less a second discount.

26. The method of claim 25, wherein the second discount is determined via a contractual arrangement between the scrip company and the array of merchant vendors prior to detecting access to the scrip company web site by the NPO.

27. The method of claim 21, wherein the array of merchant vendors is selected by the NPO from a plurality of participating merchant vendors.

28. The method of claim 21, further comprising:

causing a NPO Registration page to be displayed in response to detecting an NPO registration request, the NPO Registration page enabling the NPO to enter identifying and payment information; and

causing a NPO Main Menu page to be displayed in response to detecting proper NPO log-in information based on the NPO identifying information.

29. The method of claim 28, wherein the NPO Main Menu page includes an order fundraising card option, an activate fundraising card option and a display other NPO services option.

30. The method of claim 26, further comprising:

causing fundraising card vendor choices to be displayed in response to detecting selection of the order fundraising card option;

causing fundraising card denomination choices to be displayed in response to detecting selection of at least one fundraising card vendor choice from the fundraising card vendor choices;

causing fundraising card quantity choices to be displayed in response to detecting selection of at least one fund raising card denomination from the fundraising card denomination choices;

causing fundraising card customization choices to be displayed in response to detecting selection of at least one fundraising card quantity choice from the fundraising card quantity choices;

causing a confirm order option to be displayed in response to detecting selection of at least one fundraising card customization choice from the fundraising card customization choices; and

causing an order confirmation page to be displayed in response to detecting selection of the confirm order option.

31. The method of claim 29, further comprising:

causing a total value of the plurality of fundraising cards to be displayed in response to detecting selection of the activate fundraising card option and entry of fundraising card numbers associated with the plurality of fundraising cards;

processing the payment from the NPO for the plurality of fundraising cards in response to detecting selection of an activate/pay now option; and

causing an activation/payment confirmation page to be displayed.

32. The method of claim 29, further comprising:

causing a Loyalty Rewards Program Main Menu page to be displayed in response to detecting a request for loyalty rewards program access;

causing newsletter options to be displayed in response to detecting a request for newsletter access;

causing a newsletter of the newsletter options to be displayed in response to detecting a view newsletter request;

causing a Fundraising Materials Main Menu page to be displayed in response to detecting a fundraising materials request;

causing thank-you note options to be displayed in response to detecting a thank-you notes access request;

causing thank-you note customization options to be displayed in response to detecting selection of at least one thank-you note choice from the thank-you note options;

causing current NPO-specific information to be displayed in response to detecting a NPO-specific information access/modification request; and

confirming current and revised NPO-specific information in response to detecting selection of modification of the current NPO-specific information.

33. The method of claim 21, further comprising:

causing a NPO Supporter Registration page to be displayed in response to detecting an NPO supporter registration request, the NPO Supporter Registration page enabling the NPO supporter to enter NPO supporter identifying and payment information; and

causing a NPO Supporter Main Menu page to be displayed in response to detecting proper NPO supporter log-in information based on the NPO supporter identifying information.

34. The method of claim 33, wherein the NPO Supporter Main Menu page includes a redeem fundraising cards option, a view NPO-specific information option and a display newsletters option.

35. The method of claim 34, further comprising:

causing NPO-specific information to be displayed in response to detecting entry of a NPO-specific identifying information;

causing choice of newsletters to be displayed in response to detecting selection of a view newsletters choice; and

causing a newsletter to be displayed in response to detecting selection of the newsletter from the choice of newsletters.

36. The method of claim 34, further comprising:

causing an enter fundraising card identification number prompt to be displayed in response to detecting selection of a redeem fundraising card choice;

causing an array of merchant vendor choices to be displayed in response to detecting entry of a fundraising card identification number;

causing an add value option to be displayed in response to detecting selection of a merchant vendor from the array of merchant vendor choices;

causing a payment for added value option to be displayed in response to detecting selection of an add value choice;

causing a request for payment method details to be displayed in response to detecting a payment method choice;

causing a delivery details request to be displayed in response to detecting entry of payment method details;

causing gift card options to be displayed in response to detecting entry of delivery details;

causing gift card customization options to be displayed in response to detecting selection of a gift card choice;

detecting gift card customization choices;

causing confirmation page to be displayed; and

processing order and payment in response to detecting confirmation.

* * * * *