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<p>(54) Title: METHOD FOR MATCHING PROFILES IN A TELECOMMUNICATION SYSTEM</p>		
<p>(57) Abstract</p> <p>A telecommunications system can be adapted to provided a competence mediation service. The telecommunications system includes a plurality of user terminals, some of which are operated by competence seekers and some of which are operated by competence providers. The user terminals communicate with service provider's file server over a data transmission network. The file server is able to receive and host agents originating from competence seekers and competence providers. In addition, the file server has databases which contain details of competence providers, competence seekers, authenticated qualifications for competence providers, etc. Details of a given competence provider are supplied to competence seekers in accordance with instructions contained in said competence seekers, agent. A data processor within the file server can access the various databases and assemble reports on available competence seekers and/or competence providers in accordance with instructions contained in the appropriate agent. The data transmission network may employ TCP/IP protocols. Access to data relating to competence seekers is controlled by competence seekers' agents, and access to data relating to competence providers is controlled by competence providers' agents.</p> <div style="text-align: right;"> </div>		

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METHOD FOR MATCHING PROFILES IN A TELECOMMUNICATION SYSTEM

5 The present invention relates to a telecommunications system adapted to provide an employment mediation service, a method of operating such a system, and a service provider's file server adapted to provide an employment mediation service.

10 At the present time there are no services available which create an opportunity for employers and job-seekers, or competence providers, to identify each other in real time when a need for cooperation arises. More specifically, there are no opportunities for a job-seeker to market his, or her, competence and employment availability globally and in a manner which is appropriate for both the job seeker and potential employer.

15 Job seekers and those requiring staff must, at the present time, resort to the use of job centres, head hunting firms, or advertisements. Any system, which is used to replace the existing methods used for marketing skills and matching skills and competence to available employment opportunities, should take account of future developments in telecommunications and data processing and not simply rely on face-to-face knowledge exchange taking place between individuals. The present invention can be regarded as an agent based competence mediation system operating in cyberspace.

20 In the developing information society, there is a clear need for flexible employment structures where the job-seeker has a strong self-interest in publicising his, or her, own competence. An individual may be simultaneously engaged in performing multiple tasks for a number of different companies for shorter periods of time than those which are now customary. These engagements may, in many instances, be operated via a specific company where global
25 networks of the Internet type form the platform over which the employment market operates. To facilitate this, companies and individuals need to determine, match, and control their requirement specifications and definitions of competence, both regionally, nationally, and internationally, in ways which are entirely different from
30 those normally adopted at the present time.

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Major multinational companies will need to mediate competence/knowledge for the manning of projects, or provision of services, teams, or processes. At the present time it is by no means unusual for such information to flow in an entirely uncontrolled manner within a company, or be controlled in an ad hoc manner on a purely voluntary basis. In other words, information which is potentially of great value to the coordination of a company's activities, is totally uncontrolled.

Employment/manning for a given project can, at the present time, take many months to achieve in a satisfactory manner. All too frequently an employment campaign ends with negative results, i.e. no individual with the competence needed for a particular task, or tasks, is identified. Furthermore, an individual with a particular set of skills and competences may not place a high priority on seeking future partners/employers if he/she is currently engaged with satisfactory work tasks, or he/she has a full work loading.

To increase the employment level on the employment market, improve the opportunities for global interaction, and give small dynamic companies better opportunities for mutual interaction, thereby enabling them to undertake larger projects, or contracts, a more effective handling method is needed for mediating competence. Current competence mediation, via job centre services, www-based job seeking, etc., implies an excessive overhead cost for both selling and purchasing players on the competence market in respect of the most critical parameters, i.e. running time and reduced working time during the search and evaluation phase.

Furthermore, today's competence mediation services do not give automated support for ensuring quality in respect of the trustworthiness, and/or creditworthiness, etc., in relation to the competence sought.

The service provided by the present invention should be viewed against the background of current trends on the employment market:

- towards a growing number of imaginary organisations, or virtual companies i.e temporary collaborative groupings of companies

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and/or individuals dedicated to meeting well defined and temporally limited tasks; and

- the growing numbers of people transferring from full-time employment to self-employment in which they operate their own companies and simultaneously divide their working time between different imaginary organisations, etc.

From this perspective, it can be foreseen that a fast, rational, global, and cost-effective competence mediation service integrated into the workflow processes of companies and fully utilising modern telecommunications and data processing technologies will represent a key factor in market progress.

In its broadest terms, the present invention provides a system and method for enabling a communication system to connect two, or more parties, in such a way that their mutual compatible needs can be readily identified in real time, thus facilitating mutual cooperation.

The present invention is characterised by an agent-based competence mediation service which, gives the person seeking specific competence the opportunity to specify the competence profile sought, time period, for which that competence is required etc.. The system also allows an assurance of personal integrity and automated support for secure handling of data between interactive partners.

The present invention facilitates the provision of a service which can be offered to subscribers wishing to make use of competence mediation between companies, or between companies and private persons.

Simpler electronic competence mediation services are available on the Internet/WWW, but they offer only advertising space to companies wishing to sell, or purchase, consultancy services, or to engage labour. The service provided by the present invention integrates automated information collection, a credit/suitability/trustworthiness investigation and agreement handling in

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dynamically changing (agent-based) workflow applications for purchasing/selling companies.

Collection, prioritising, packaging, and presentation take place automatically, which saves both competence-purchasing and competence-selling companies further working time, at the same time as the system controls and enhances the quality of procurement.

According to a first aspect of the present invention, there is provided a telecommunications system adapted to provided a competence mediation service, said telecommunications system including a first plurality of user terminals for subscribers seeking individuals, or entities, having a particular competence, herein referred to as competence seekers, a second plurality of user terminals for subscribers having a particular competence to offer, herein referred to as competence providers, a data transmission network and a file server, characterised in that said file server includes means adapted to receive agents originating from competence seekers and competence providers, a data base including details of competence providers, authentication means adapted to maintain a database of authenticated qualifications for said competence providers, in that security means are provided to automatically ensure that details of a given competence provider are supplied to competence seekers in accordance with instructions contained in said competence seekers agent, and in that data processing means are provided for accessing said databases, selectively retrieving data therefrom and assembling reports, based on said selectively retrieved data, on available competence seekers in accordance with instruction contained in competence seekers' agents.

Said data transmission network may employ TCP/IP protocols.

Said data transmission network may be an Internet, an Intranet, or an Extranet.

Said file server may include a database of competence seeker's requirements.

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Access to data relating to competence seekers may be controlled by competence seekers' agents, and access to data relating to competence providers may be controlled by competence providers' agents.

5 Information relating to a competence seeker, or competence provider, may be released to a competence provider, or competence seeker, as a result of a negotiation between a competence seeker's agent and a competence provider's agent, said file server may include means adapted to facilitate said negotiation, and said data processing means may be adapted for assembling reports on available competence providers in accordance with instructions contained in
10 competence provider's agents.

Said file server may include means for evaluating a competence seeker's, or provider's, specification of requirements.

15 Said file server may include means adapted to facilitate confidentiality control between agents seeking information and agents controlling information access.

Said file server may have means for receiving data from a variety of sources and storing said data on appropriate databases.

Said file server may include a report writer adapted to prepare reports in accordance with instructions carried in an agent.

20 Said file server may include means for ranking data collected by an agent in a priority order determined by instructions carried by said agent.

Said file server may include means for alerting an enquiry originator that a report is ready for collection.

25 An enquiry originator may be alerted that a report is ready for collection via GSM/SMS, Minicall, or e-mail.

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Said file server may have means adapted to prepare a draft outline agreement between two subscribers to said competence mediation service.

Said file server may be adapted to receive and store data supplied by a competence seeker relating to a competence seeker's requirements and including parameters specifying one, or more, of the following:

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- a required competence profile;
- time periods during which said competence is required;
- trustworthiness of a competence provider;
- costs that the competence seeker is prepared to incur;
- details of an assignment, or project, for which competence is required; and
- the form of a final report,

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and in that said file server is adapted to host an agent associated with said data.

Said file server may be adapted to receive and store data supplied by a competence provider relating to a competence provider's:

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- competence profile;
- time period of availability;
- operating location;
- charge rates; and
- terms of business,

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and in that said file server is adapted to host an agent associated with said data.

A competence seeker, or competence provider, may store either data, or a reference to a location at which data is stored, in said file server.

5 Said file server may be adapted to verify an electronic signature included with an agent.

Said file server may be adapted to release certain information only after receipt of an electronically signed confidentiality agreement.

10 According to a second aspect to the present invention, there is provided a file server, for use in a telecommunications system, adapted to provided a competence mediation service, said telecommunications system including a first plurality of user terminals for subscribers seeking individuals, or entities, having a particular competence, herein referred to as competence seekers, a second plurality of user terminals for subscribers having a particular competence to offer, herein referred to as competence providers, and a data transmission network, characterised in that said file server includes means adapted to receive agents
15 originating from competence seekers and competence providers, a data base including details of competence providers, authentication means adapted to maintain a database of authenticated qualifications for said competence providers, in that security means are provided to automatically ensure that details of a given
20 competence provider are supplied to competence seekers in accordance with instructions contained in said competence seekers agent, and in that data processing means are provided for accessing said databases, selectively retrieving data therefrom and assembling reports, based on said selectively retrieved data, on available competence seekers in accordance with instruction contained in
25 competence seekers' agents.

Said file server may include a database of competence seeker's requirements.

According to a third aspect of the present invention, there is provided, In

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5 a telecommunications system including a first plurality of user terminals for subscribers seeking individuals, or entities, having a particular competence, herein referred to as competence seekers, a second plurality of user terminals for subscribers having a particular competence to offer, herein referred to as competence providers, a data transmission network and a file server, a method of providing a competence mediation service characterised by said file server:

- receiving agents originating from competence seekers and competence providers;
- verifying that a received agent's principle is an authorised user;
- 10 - supplying data to a competence seeker's agent only in accordance with conditions imposed by a competence provider's agent appropriate to said data; and
- assembling data retrieved by said competence seeker's agent into a report in accordance with instructions contained in said
15 competence seeker's agent.

20 According to a fourth aspect of the present invention, there is provided, in a telecommunications system including a first plurality of user terminals for subscribers seeking individuals, or entities, having a particular competence, herein referred to as competence seekers, a second plurality of user terminals for subscribers having a particular competence to offer, herein referred to as competence providers, a data transmission network and a file server, a method of providing a competence mediation service characterised by said file server:

- receiving agents originating from competence seekers and competence providers;
- 25 - verifying that a received agent's principle is an authorised user;

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- supplying data to a competence provider's agent only in accordance with conditions imposed by a competence seeker's agent appropriate to said data; and
- assembling data retrieved by said competence provider's agent into a report in accordance with instructions contained in said competence provider's agent.

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A competence seekers' agents may control access to data relating to said competence seeker, and a competence providers' agents may control access to data relating to said competence provider.

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A competence seeker's agent and a competence provider's agent may negotiate for release of information relating to a competence seeker, or competence provider, to a competence provider, or competence seeker, as the case may be, said negotiation determining which, if any, data is released.

15

Data may be supplied to a competence provider's, or competence seeker's agent only in accordance with conditions, as to the recipient and class of information, imposed by a competence seeker's, or confidence provider's, agent appropriate to said data.

Said file server may prepare a report in accordance with instructions carried in an agent.

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Data collected by an agent may be ranked in a priority order determined by instructions carried by said agent.

An enquiry originator may be alerted that a report is ready for collection.

Said file server may automatically prepare a draft outline agreement between two subscribers to said competence mediation service.

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Said file server may receive and store data supplied by a competence

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seeker relating to a competence seeker's requirements and including parameters specifying one, or more, of the following:

- a required competence profile;
- time periods during which said competence is required;
- 5 - trustworthiness of a competence provider;
- costs that the competence seeker is prepared to incur;
- details of an assignment, or project, for which said competence is required; and
- the form of a final report,

10 and in that said file server is adapted to host an agent associated with said data.

Said file server may receive and store data supplied by a competence provider relating to a competence provider's:

- competence profile;
- time period of availability;
- 15 - operating location;
- charge rates; and
- terms of business,

and in that said file server is adapted to host an agent associated with said data.

Said file server may verify an electronic signature included with an agent,

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in order to authenticate an agent, or document attached to said agent.

Said file server may release certain information to an agent only after receipt of an electronically signed confidentiality agreement from said agent's principle.

5 Embodiments of the invention will now be described, by way of example, with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which:

Figure 1 illustrates the use of agents in a system according to the present invention.

10 Figure 2 illustrates the production of reports by a system according to the present invention.

Figure 3 illustrates, in schematic form, a service provider's file server according to the present invention.

15 The present invention can be implemented on a network platform employing TCP/IP protocols such as the Internet, Intranets, and Extranets. The invention is not, however, limited to implementation on such a platform. The present patent specification refers to individuals, or entities, who are seeking other individuals, or entities, having a particular competence, as competence seekers. Individuals, or entities, who have a particular competence and are prepared to make this available are referred to as competence providers. The term
20 competence includes skills, qualifications and experience which may suit an individual, or entity, for the performance of a particular task, project, or work function. A given interaction, with the system of the present invention, may be initiated by either a competence provider, or a competence seeker. The individual, or entity, who initiates a given interaction is, herein, referred to as the originator of
25 that interaction.

The agent-based competence mediation service provided by the present invention is based on the use of functional sub-systems for:

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- storage of authenticated qualifications;
 - evaluation of customer assignments;
 - assurance and verification of personal integrity/credit ratings, especially in those cases where the competence-seeker, i.e. potential employer, is an individual and not a company
 - automated security for handling data exchanges between interactive partners;
 - automated collection of references for companies, including consultancies, one-man companies, etc., and individuals with special competence;
 - automated verification that a proposed interactive partner has the competence sought and the ability to undertake and complete a given assignment within the specified time period;
 - automated credit verification of proposed interactive partners;
 - automated collection, ranking, packaging, and presentation of proposed candidates for an interactive partnership and/or employment;
 - notifying a customer that information gathering has been concluded; and
 - automated handling of internal agreements, i.e. within a company, and agreements with selected players.
- The system employs a user-friendly method for specifying:
- the competence sought by an individual; and

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- the competence which a competence-provider possesses;

by use of interactive forms which, inter alia, provides the data needed to define the scope of a contract for employment, provision of services, or some other contractual relationship between competence seeker and provider.

5 The present invention enables a person seeking specific competence for employment, or a time-limited assignment, e.g. consulting, etc., to interact with the service by means of a user-friendly form which can be transmitted via a medium such as the WWW. The competence seeker is given the opportunity to specify the competence profile, time period, cost frames, etc., which is required, and to
10 attach an assignment description, project description, etc. The user can further indicate guidance parameters for the form of a final report and the way in which potential competence providers should be prioritised. These parameters may include cost, work loading, the trustworthiness of the interactive partners, or competence providers, etc..

15 Because the present invention employs agents, once a competence seeker has defined his/her requirements, he/she may disconnect from the system. Agent-based information collection then takes place via the competence mediation operator's server environment.

20 A competence provider can specify his, or her, own specific competence profile, time period of availability, cost frames, etc, by means of a user-friendly form which can be transmitted via a medium such as the WWW. The competence provider may also indicate the general terms of engagement he/she is prepared to accept, for example:

- 25 - employment until further notice;
- supportive activity, as in the case of a specialist only willing, or able, to work for a small number of hours;
- in the case of agreements with multinational companies, the scope

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of existing assignments and the amount of time which can be made available by a competence provider, e.g. only 75% work-loaded at the present time;

- 5
- terms appropriate for a self-employed entrepreneur wishing to interact under his/her own identity;
 - terms appropriate for self-employed entrepreneurs wishing to interact within the frame of an imaginary organisation.
 - interaction parameters relating to distance over which a
- .0
- competence provider is prepared to operate and the place, or locality, in which a competence provider is prepared to operate, e.g. locally, regionally, or internationally.

A competence seeker will have the opportunity to authenticate a competence provider's qualifications.

15

When a user has completed a form specifying his/her competence requirements, or available competence, the form may be transmitted in an agent to the service provider's file server. The user need not maintain a connection to the service provider via the Internet, since agent-based information collection takes place via the competence mediation operator's, i.e. service provider's, server

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environment.

In those cases where legal statutes prevent the central storage of personal data, a competence seeker/provider has the opportunity to store information locally, or use a web hotel such as that provided by Telia's Passagen service. In this case, only a reference identifying the location where appropriate data is

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stored, e.g. a WWW address, need be passed to the service provider's server.

For multinational companies, information may be stored in the company's own servers.

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Since Internet-type nets are global in scope, provision must be made to ensure that personal integrity is not infringed and, in particular, sensitive personal data is maintained in a secure manner. Internet-type networks have proved that they can provide effective protection for such information, for example, because
5 an individual has a telephone number, this does not mean that everyone has access to that individual's TCP/IP address, or telephone number.

Blocking mechanisms are provided for the competence mediation service of the present invention, both for those who have access to personal information and for information which is generally available, but subject to some restriction,
10 e.g. to be disclosed to certain named companies.

It is, therefore, necessary to provide an authentication procedure which operates when an individual first logs on to the system, i.e. a person requesting access to information must identify himself. In the case where electronic agents are seeking information, the originator must transmit, with his agent, his own
15 unique and verifiable electronic identity documents. This enables the individual to set up access lists. For example, a competence provider can list those companies, or individuals, who may access data relating to him/her, or may indicate that certain entities, e.g. his/her current employer, may not be given access to his/her data. If a competence seeker is not included in the access list,
20 the job-seeker's personal agent can inform him, or her, about the person seeking access, or alternatively the agent carrying the originator's enquiry can inform the job-seeker about the request for information. It is also possible to provide full open access for certain classes of information. To maintain personal integrity, aliases for both names and TCP/IP addresses can be used.

At the present time, when a job-seeker contacts a company, copies of certificates and qualifications are attached. Since telecommunications operators, such, as Telia, currently plan to issue smart cards, it is thus possible for telecommunications operators to offer a service facilitating the storage of electronically signed qualifications. This means that companies and individuals
25 can distribute their qualifications electronically signed by a document authenticator. Document authenticators may be universities, companies,
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customers, etc.. Use of such a service will strengthen confidence in a competence provider's qualifications. This may be of the utmost importance in global network interaction where a local company may be quite unknown in an international context and it is necessary to provide confidence guarantees in respect of the company. The need for paper distribution between the parties is, thus, also rationalised. The storage of authenticated qualifications represents an adjunct to a customer complaint database.

Via an accessible database from, e.g. an independent third party supplier (e.g. the competence mediation operator's own information database), proposals from companies and/or private persons with enhanced competence can be obtained. Enquiries for references can also be handled automatically from other, more conventional, computer-based competence mediation services.

The originator's (the person who has taken the initiative for an interaction) agent operates at different levels so that each agent level automatically contacts proposed companies, or the agents representing the companies, with help from the references previously obtained. Before an agent hands over any confidential information, such as project plans, etc., as the basis of the assignment for which the competence is to be used, it is necessary to ensure that the company contact/job-seeker has signed, using an electronic signature, a secrecy obligation provided by the interested party's agent. When the interested party's agent has received the requested information, the information is transferred to the interested party's original agent from the agent levels. The companies and/or private persons who have not provided the required information, perhaps because they lack free resources during the time period, require higher remuneration than the interested party has indicated he is prepared to pay, or does not find the assignments sufficiently interesting, are rejected.

An automatic check of the parties' qualifications is also made through access to the qualifications database.

For the companies and/or private persons whose profile corresponds to a competence requirement search profile, an automatic credit check is made via e.g.

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Telia's Preventel service. Companies with payment observations on their record are rejected. It is also possible to build up databases which contain claims and complaints about the efforts of consultants. In such cases, an automatic check can also be made on these databases to ensure that interested parties are actually offering high-quality service.

Those companies which are not rejected by the various check procedures referred to above, are automatically ranked by the agent on the basis of the preferences specified at assignment instigation. A report is automatically generated, which presents one chapter per interactive party, based on the collected information. The highest prioritised company is ranked highest in the report, after which other companies are described in descending order of priority. Transfer of information occurs according to the mechanisms which the interested party has explicitly indicated for the assignment, or which represent a default for the user in question and/or the company in which he is employed. This may, for example, be pointcast for direct downloading to the interested party's hard disc, or via e-mail (with, or without, an attached report).

When information collection is concluded, the interested party is notified thereof in the way specified when the collection was initiated. This may be by, for example, GSM/SMS, Minicall, and/or e-mail.

When the originator, i.e. the person who has taken the interaction initiative, has coupled to the agent-based competence mediation service operator's server to obtain the result of a search and when, for example, a personal dialogue via telephone, video conferencing, etc., has established sufficient confidence for the finally selected interactive partner, it is necessary to sign an agreement. The originator receives an outline agreement from the server completed with information specified in the initial search. When the originator has modified the agreement with any further particulars, the agent may automatically distribute the agreement to the originator's superior, who, according to a company's normal certification rules, may be required to sign the agreement. Such an arrangement can be regarded as a dynamic agent-based workflow concept. If the certification-authorising superior has any queries about particular details, these are

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electronically put to the agent, who retrieves the particulars sought from, for example, a project database. When the agreement is signed, the agent automatically distributes the electronically signed agreement to the previously determined interactive partner. When the originator has received the signed agreement, with electronic signature and time stamp, other contacted interactive partners are automatically notified that another supplier has been selected. If the selected interactive partner has been recommended by an independent third party broker, the agent pays the agreed commission to the broker via electronic payment and distributes the electronic receipt to the company's handling system for filing together with the signed final agreement from the finally selected interactive partner.

Turning now to the drawings, there is illustrated, in schematic form, one example of a system according to the present invention. Referring to Figure 1, service users, who may be either competence providers, or competence seekers, communicate with a service provider's, i.e. a mediation broker's, file server by means of agents. The agents may be transmitted to the service provider's file server via the Internet, or some other appropriate data network, as referred to previously. The use of agents enables a system user to disconnect from the system once an enquiry has been initiated. Furthermore, the agent, once it has been received by the service provider's file server, can act, in an intelligent manner, for its principle with regard to such matters as information access control. The form of agent employed will depend on the function being actuated by the user.

If the agent is tasked with initiating an enquiry, on behalf of a competence seeker, say, the service provider's file server, once the agent has finished its assigned task, notifies the enquiry originator that a report is available for collection and, see Figure 2, the enquiry originator's agent will then arrange for:

- the enquiry originator to be alerted; and
- the report to be transmitted to the enquiry originator's terminal.

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Figure 3 illustrates the structure of the service provider's file server. Before an agent is accepted by the system it must negotiate its way past a security and authentication module, 5, which verifies the identity of the agent's principle and ensures that the principle is an authorised user and is correctly identified. This process may be mediated by the use of a PIN, or electronic signature. Once properly authenticated, the agent is passed to the file server's data processing unit, 6, which can give the agent access to a range of data bases, for example, database, 8, holding details of competence data for competence providers, database, 9, holding details of verified qualifications and data base, 10, holding details of credit worthiness. Additional databases, not shown, may be provided for holding details of complaints etc.. Access to data relating to a particular company, entity, or individual, is guarded by the agent for that company, entity, or individual. To obtain access to such data, the competence seeker's agent must negotiate with the competence providers' agents. As previously explained, this enables competence provider's to exercise a high degree of control over who can obtain access to particular classes of information they have placed on the service providers database. When a competence seeker's agent has completed its task, it passes the information it has gathered to a report writing module, 7, which prepares a report for the competence seeker in accordance with a specification contained in the agent.

The databases 8, 9 and 10 may receive information from a variety of sources, 1, 2 and 3. For example source 1, may be a credit rating agency supplying information on credit worthiness, source 2, may be a qualification authenticator, such as a university, and source 3 may be individual competence providers. Received data may be time stamped by module 4 before being entered on the databases.

The present invention can be expected to find wide application in the future. With the trend for progressively more individuals to transfer from fixed employment in large and medium sized companies to smaller knowledge-based companies and consultancy-oriented one-man companies with an activity consistent with the increasingly stronger dynamics of the market, it is reasonable to assume that 30% of the employed population works in activities at which the

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agent-based competence mediation service of the present invention is aimed. In Sweden alone, this is around 1 million people.

5 The remaining 70% of the working population, a good 2 million people, have the opportunity to use the service of the present invention to engage in global marketing of their competence. It may be advantageous to operate the service on a free basis for private individuals to encourage a rapid build of the competence on offer. The service can then be financed through the sale of advertising space. Even if companies are offered the opportunity for PR marketing, there remains a need for offensive advertising efforts with global coverage to market their own companies. Competence mediation via the Internet is now no longer just a national marketplace.

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CLAIMS

1. A telecommunications system adapted to provided a competence mediation service, said telecommunications system including a first plurality of user terminals for subscribers seeking individuals, or entities, having a particular competence, herein referred to as competence seekers, a second plurality of user terminals for subscribers having a particular competence to offer, herein referred to as competence providers, a data transmission network and a file server, characterised in that said file server includes means adapted to receive agents originating from competence seekers and competence providers, a data base including details of competence providers, authentication means adapted to maintain a database of authenticated qualifications for said competence providers, in that security means are provided to automatically ensure that details of a given competence provider are supplied to competence seekers in accordance with instructions contained in said competence seekers agent, and in that data processing means are provided for accessing said databases, selectively retrieving data therefrom and assembling reports, based on said selectively retrieved data, on available competence seekers in accordance with instruction contained in competence seekers' agents.

2. A telecommunications system, as claimed in claim 1, characterised in that said data transmission network employs TCP/IP protocols.

3. A telecommunications system, as claimed in claim 2, characterised in that said data transmission network is an Internet, an Intranet, or an Extranet.

4. A telecommunications system, as claimed in any previous claim, characterised in that said file server includes a database of competence seeker's requirements.

5. A telecommunications system, as claimed in claim 4, characterised in that access to data relating to competence seeker's is controlled by competence seekers' agents, and in that access to data relating to competence providers is

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controlled by competence providers' agents.

5 6. A telecommunications system, as claimed in claim 5, characterised in that information relating to a competence seeker, or competence provider, is released to a competence provider, or competence seeker, as a result of a negotiation between a competence seeker's agent and a competence provider's agent, in that said file server includes means adapted to facilitate said negotiation, and in that said data processing means is adapted for assembling reports on available competence providers in accordance with instructions contained in competence provider's agents.

0 7. A telecommunications system, as claimed in any previous claim, characterised in that said file server includes means for evaluating a competence seeker's, or provider's, specification of requirements.

15 8. A telecommunications system, as claimed in any previous claim, characterised in that said file server includes means adapted to facilitate confidentiality control between agents seeking information and agents controlling information access.

9. A telecommunications system, as claimed in any previous claim, characterised in that said file server has means for receiving data from a variety of sources and storing said data on appropriate databases.

0 10 A telecommunications system, as claimed in any previous claim, characterised in that said file server includes a report writer adapted to prepare reports in accordance with instructions carried in an agent.

25 11. A telecommunications system, as claimed in any previous claim, characterised in that said file server includes means for ranking data collected by an agent in a priority order determined by instructions carried by said agent.

12. A telecommunications system, as claimed in any previous claim, characterised in that said file server includes means for alerting an enquiry

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originator that a report is ready for collection.

13. A telecommunications system, as claimed in any previous claim, characterised in that an enquiry originator is alerted that a report is ready for collection via GSM/SMS, Minicall, or e-mail.

5 14. A telecommunications system, as claimed in any previous claim, characterised in that said file server has means adapted to prepare a draft outline agreement between two subscribers to said competence mediation service.

10 15. A telecommunications system, as claimed in any previous claim, characterised in that said file server is adapted to receive and store data supplied by a competence seeker relating to a competence seeker's requirements and including parameters specifying one, or more, of the following:

- a required competence profile;
- time periods during which said competence is required;
- trustworthiness of a competence provider;
- 5 - costs that the competence seeker is prepared to incur;
- details of an assignment, or project, for which competence is required; and
- the form of a final report,

and in that said file server is adapted to host an agent associated with said data.

20 16. A telecommunications system, as claimed in any previous claim, characterised in that said file server is adapted to receive and store data supplied by a competence provider relating to a competence provider's:

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- competence profile;
- time period of availability;
- operating location;
- charge rates; and
- 5 - terms of business,

and in that said file server is adapted to host an agent associated with said data.

17. A telecommunications system, as claimed in any previous claim, characterised in that a competence seeker, or competence provider, may store either data, or a reference to a location at which data is stored, in said file server.

10 18. A telecommunications system, as claimed in any previous claim, characterised in that said file server is adapted to verify an electronic signature included with an agent.

15 19. A telecommunications system, as claimed in any previous claim, characterised in that said file server is adapted to release certain information only after receipt of an electronically signed confidentiality agreement.

20 20. A file server, for use in a telecommunications system, adapted to provided a competence mediation service, said telecommunications system including a first plurality of user terminals for subscribers seeking individuals, or entities, having a particular competence, herein referred to as competence seekers, a second
20 plurality of user terminals for subscribers having a particular competence to offer, herein referred to as competence providers, and a data transmission network, characterised in that said file server includes means adapted to receive agents originating from competence seekers and competence providers, a data base including details of competence providers, authentication means adapted to
25 maintain a database of authenticated qualifications for said competence providers,

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5 in that security means are provided to automatically ensure that details of a given competence provider are supplied to competence seekers in accordance with instructions contained in said competence seekers agent, and in that data processing means are provided for accessing said databases, selectively retrieving data therefrom and assembling reports, based on said selectively retrieved data, on available competence seekers in accordance with instruction contained in competence seekers' agents.

21. A file server, as claimed in claim 20, characterised in that said file server includes a database of competence seeker's requirements.

10 22. A file server, as claimed in claim 21, characterised in that access to data relating to competence seeker's is controlled by competence seekers' agents, in that access to data relating to competence providers is controlled by competence providers' agents and in that said data processing means is adapted to assemble reports on competence providers in accordance with instructions contained in
15 competence providers' agents.

23. A file server, as claimed in claim 22, characterised in that information relating to a competence seeker, or competence provider, is released to a competence provider, or competence seeker, as a result of a negotiation between a competence seeker's agent and a competence provider's agent, and in that said
20 file server includes means adapted to host said agents and facilitate said negotiation.

24. A file server, as claimed in any of claims 20 to 23, characterised in that said file server includes means for evaluating a competence seeker's, or provider's, specification of requirements.

25 25. A file server, as claimed in any of claims 20 to 24, characterised in that said file server includes means adapted to facilitate confidentiality control between agents seeking information and agents controlling information access.

26. A file server, as claimed in any of claims 20 to 25, characterised in that said

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file server has means for receiving data from a variety of sources and storing said data on appropriate databases.

5 27 A file server, as claimed in any of claims 20 to 26, characterised in that said file server includes a report writer adapted to prepare reports in accordance with instructions carried in an agent.

28. A file server, as claimed in any of claims 20 to 27, characterised in that said file server includes means for ranking data collected by an agent in a priority order determined by instructions carried by said agent.

10 29. A file server, as claimed in any of claims 20 to 28, characterised in that said file server includes means for alerting an enquiry originator that a report is ready for collection.

30. A file server, as claimed in any of claims 20 to 29, characterised in that said file server has means adapted to prepare a draft outline agreement between two subscribers to said competence mediation service.

15 31. A file server, as claimed in any of claims 20 to 30, characterised in that said file server is adapted to receive and store data supplied by a competence seeker relating to a competence seeker's requirements and including parameters specifying one, or more, of the following:

- a required competence profile;
- 20 - time periods during which said competence is required;
- trustworthiness of a competence provider;
- costs that the competence seeker is prepared to incur;
- details of an assignment, or project, for which competence is required; and

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- the form of a final report,

and in that said file server is adapted to host an agent associated with said data.

32. A file server, as claimed in any of claims 20 to 31, characterised in that said file server is adapted to receive and store data supplied by a competence provider relating to a competence provider's:

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- competence profile;
- time period of availability;
- operating location;
- charge rates; and

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- terms of business,

and in that said file server is adapted to host an agent associated with said data.

33. A file server, as claimed in any of claims 20 to 32, characterised in that a competence seeker, or competence provider, may store either data, or a reference to a location at which data is stored, in said file server.

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34. A file server, as claimed in any of claims 20 to 33, characterised in that said file server is adapted to verify an electronic signature included with an agent.

35. A file server, as claimed in any of claims 20 to 34, characterised in that said file server is adapted to release certain information only after receipt of an electronically signed confidentiality agreement.

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36. In a telecommunications system including a first plurality of user terminals for subscribers seeking individuals, or entities, having a particular competence, herein referred to as competence seekers, a second plurality of user terminals for

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subscribers having a particular competence to offer, herein referred to as competence providers, a data transmission network and a file server, a method of providing a competence mediation service characterised by said file server:

- 5 - receiving agents originating from competence seekers and competence providers;
- verifying that a received agent's principle is an authorised user;
- supplying data to a competence seeker's agent only in accordance with conditions imposed by a competence provider's agent appropriate to said data; and
- 10 - assembling data retrieved by said competence seeker's agent into a report in accordance with instructions contained in said competence seeker's agent.

37. In a telecommunications system including a first plurality of user terminals for subscribers seeking individuals, or entities, having a particular competence, herein referred to as competence seekers, a second plurality of user terminals for subscribers having a particular competence to offer, herein referred to as competence providers, a data transmission network and a file server, a method of providing a competence mediation service characterised by said file server:

- 20 - receiving agents originating from competence seekers and competence providers;
- verifying that a received agent's principle is an authorised user;
- supplying data to a competence provider's agent only in accordance with conditions imposed by a competence seeker's agent appropriate to said data; and
- 25 - assembling data retrieved by said competence provider's agent into

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a report in accordance with instructions contained in said competence provider's agent.

5 38. A method, as claimed in either claim 36, or 37, characterised by a competence seekers' agents controlling access to data relating to said competence seeker, and by a competence providers' agent controlling access to data relating to said competence provider.

10 39. A method, as claimed in claim 38, characterised by a competence seeker's agent and a competence provider's agent negotiating for release of information relating to a competence seeker, or competence provider, to a competence provider, or competence seeker, as the case may be, said negotiation determining which, if any, data is released.

15 40. A method, as claimed in any of claims 36 to 39, characterised by supplying data to a competence provider's, or competence seeker's, agent only in accordance with conditions, as to the recipient and class of information, imposed by a competence seeker's, or confidence provider's, agent appropriate to said data

41 A method, as claimed in any of claims 36 to 40, characterised by said file server preparing a report in accordance with instructions carried in an agent.

20 42. A method, as claimed in any of claims 36 to 41, characterised by ranking data collected by an agent in a priority order determined by instructions carried by said agent.

43. A method, as claimed in any of claims 36 to 42, characterised by alerting an enquiry originator that a report is ready for collection.

25 44. A method, as claimed in any of claims 36 to 43, characterised by alerting an enquiry originator that a report is ready for collection via GSM/SMS, Minicall, or e-mail.

45. A method, as claimed in any of claims 36 to 44, characterised by said file

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server automatically preparing a draft outline agreement between two subscribers to said competence mediation service.

5 46. A method, as claimed in any of claims 36 to 45, characterised by said file server receiving and storing data supplied by a competence seeker relating to a competence seeker's requirements and including parameters specifying one, or more, of the following:

- a required competence profile;
- time periods during which said competence is required;
- trustworthiness of a competence provider;
- 10 - costs that the competence seeker is prepared to incur;
- details of an assignment, or project, for which said competence is required; and
- the form of a final report,

and in that said file server is adapted to host an agent associated with said data.

15 47. A method, as claimed in any of claims 36 to 46, characterised by said file server receiving and storing data supplied by a competence provider relating to a competence provider's:

- competence profile;
- time period of availability;
- 20 - operating location;
- charge rates; and

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- terms of business,

and in that said file server is adapted to host an agent associated with said data.

48. A method, as claimed in any of claims 36 to 47, characterised by a competence seeker, or competence provider, storing, in said file server, either data, or a reference to a location at which data is stored.

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49. A method, as claimed in any of claims 36 to 48, characterised by said file server verifying an electronic signature included with an agent in order to authenticate an agent, or document attached to said agent.

50. A method, as claimed in any of claims 36 to 50, characterised by said file server releasing certain information to an agent only after receipt of an electronically signed confidentiality agreement from said agent's principle.

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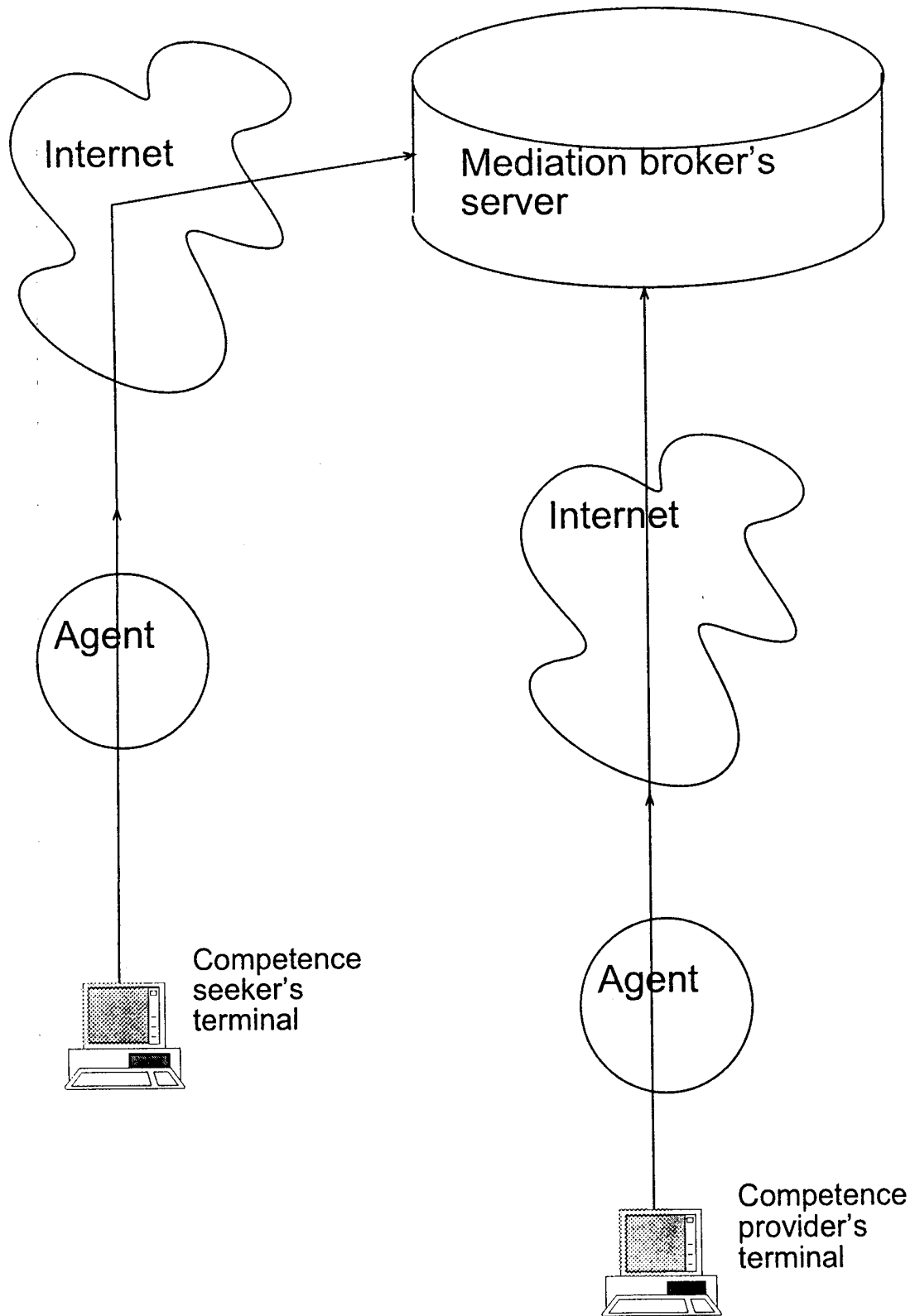


Figure 1

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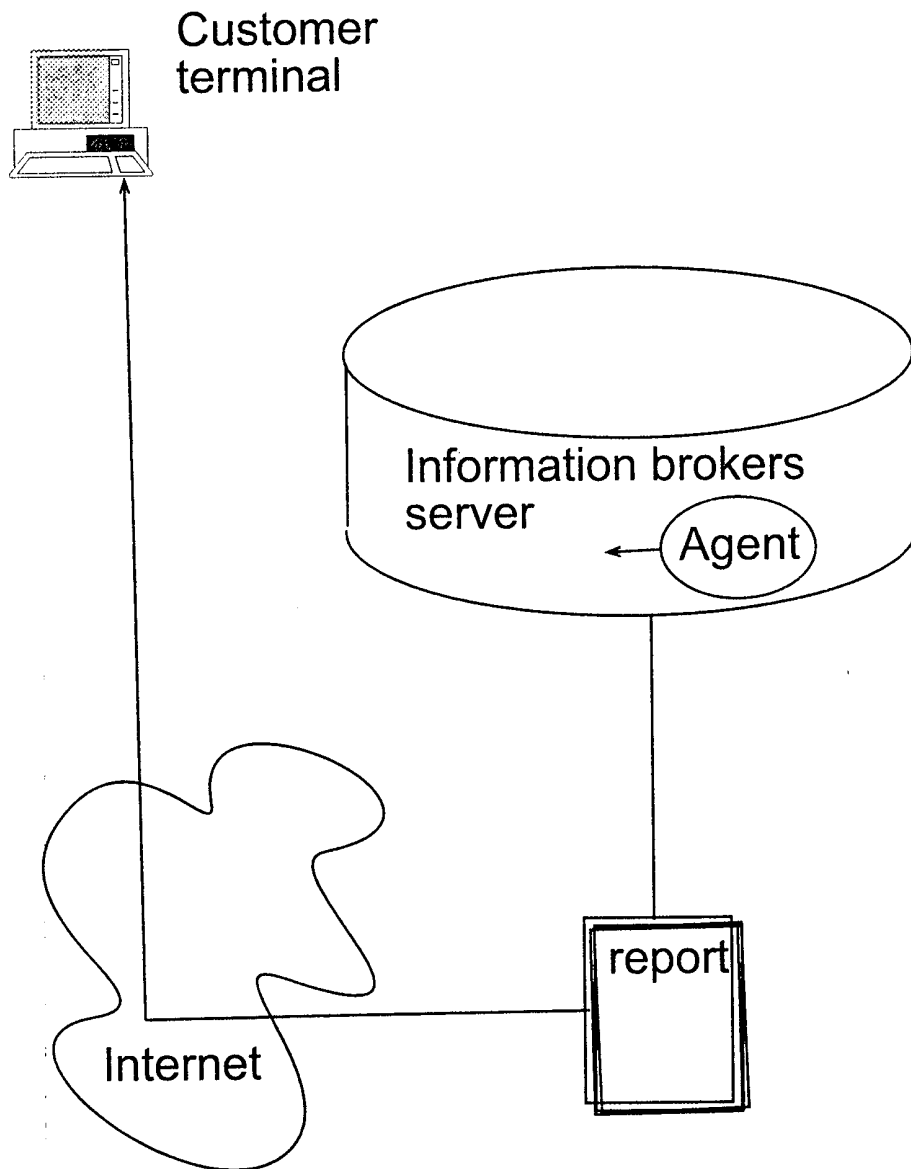


Figure 2

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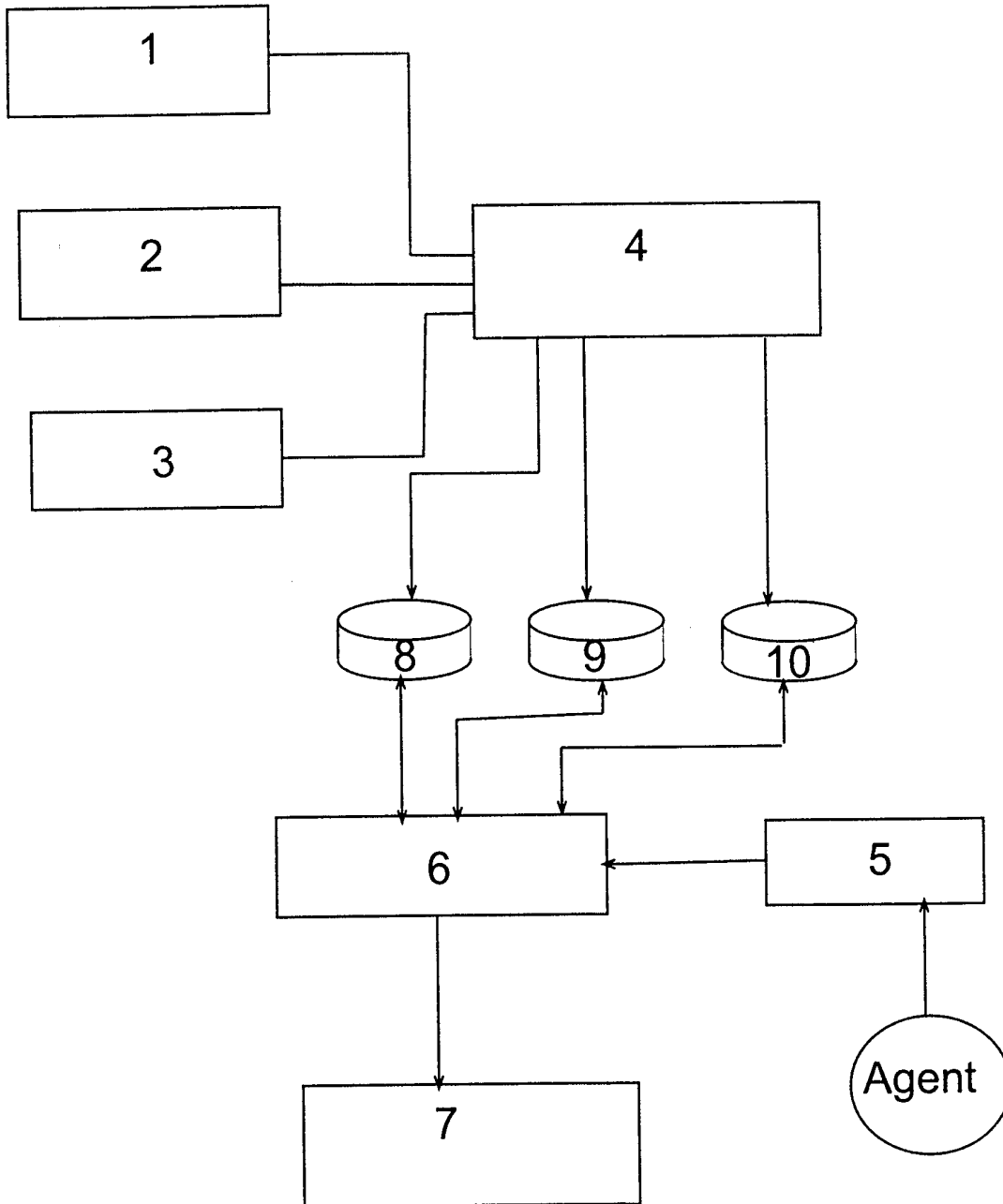


Figure 3