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(54) **ONLINE PURCHASING SYSTEM
SUPPORTING SELLERS WITH
AFFORDABILITY SCREENING**

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(52) **U.S. Cl.**
USPC **705/26.1**

(57) **ABSTRACT**

An online system uses, in various embodiments of the invention, credit report information, loan affordability screening and credit approval and management functionality to facilitate the purchase and finance of products online. The online system may include both sellers of products and lenders that offer financing to buyers seeking to purchase the products. The system may automatically obtain a buyer's credit report information and use that information to determine if the buyer is pre-approved, for example, to obtain financing for a particular product or products. The system also enables use of buyer credit information to identify only those of a seller's products for which the buyer is pre-approved, for example, to finance using one or more loans. The system then enables selection of an identified product or products for purchase, and selection of a loan, for example, for financing of the selected product or products. Credit approval (or pre-approval) may be performed automatically, and along with credit processing, may be performed completely online.

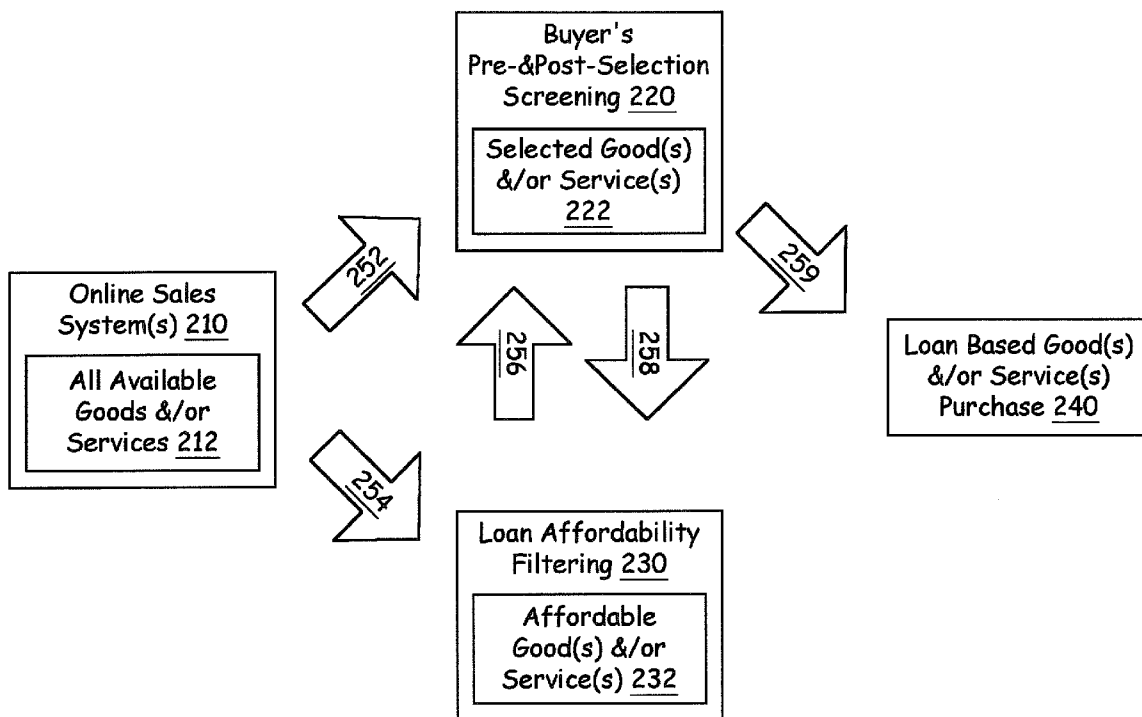
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Related U.S. Application Data

(63) Continuation of application No. 13/472,111, filed on May 15, 2012, now Pat. No. 8,306,898, which is a continuation of application No. 13/104,311, filed on May 10, 2011, now Pat. No. 8,177,124, which is a continuation of application No. 12/467,664, filed on May 18, 2009, now Pat. No. 7,938,316, which is a continuation of application No. 09/808,723, filed on Mar. 14, 2001, now Pat. No. 7,542,922.

(60) Provisional application No. 60/214,188, filed on Jun. 26, 2000, provisional application No. 60/214,183,



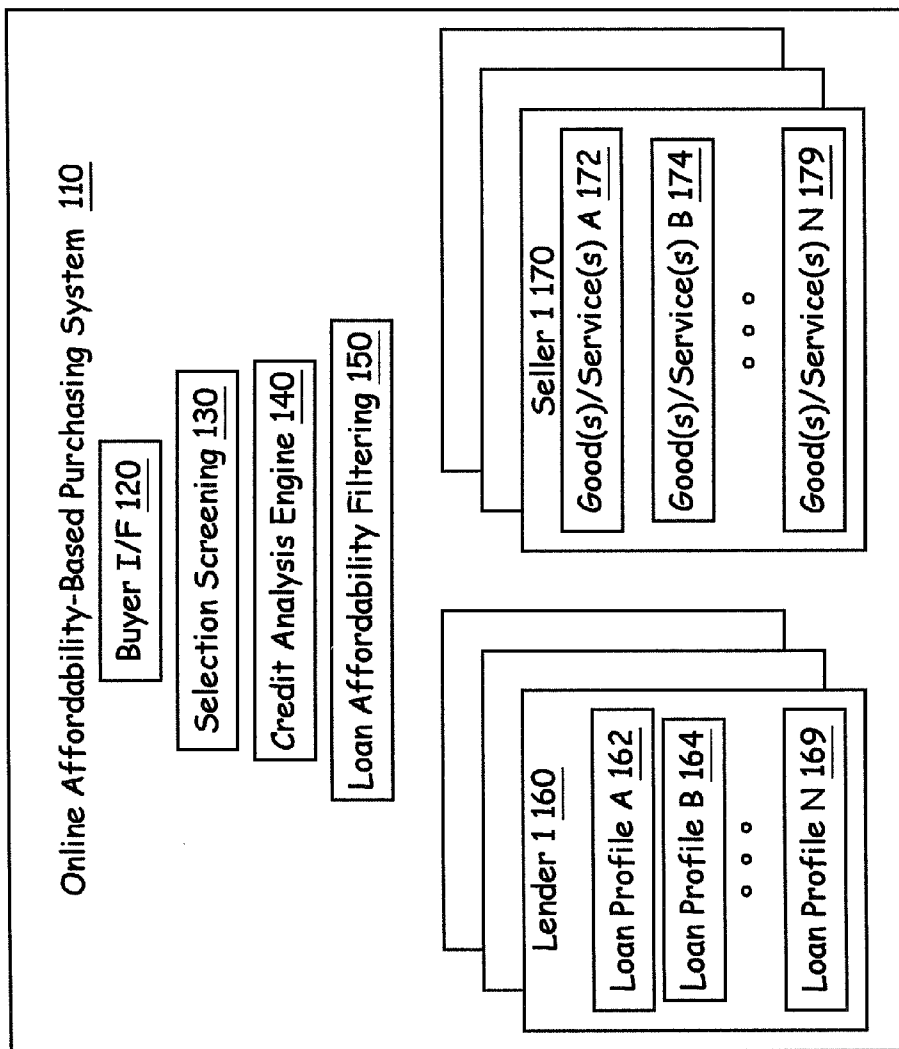


Fig. 1

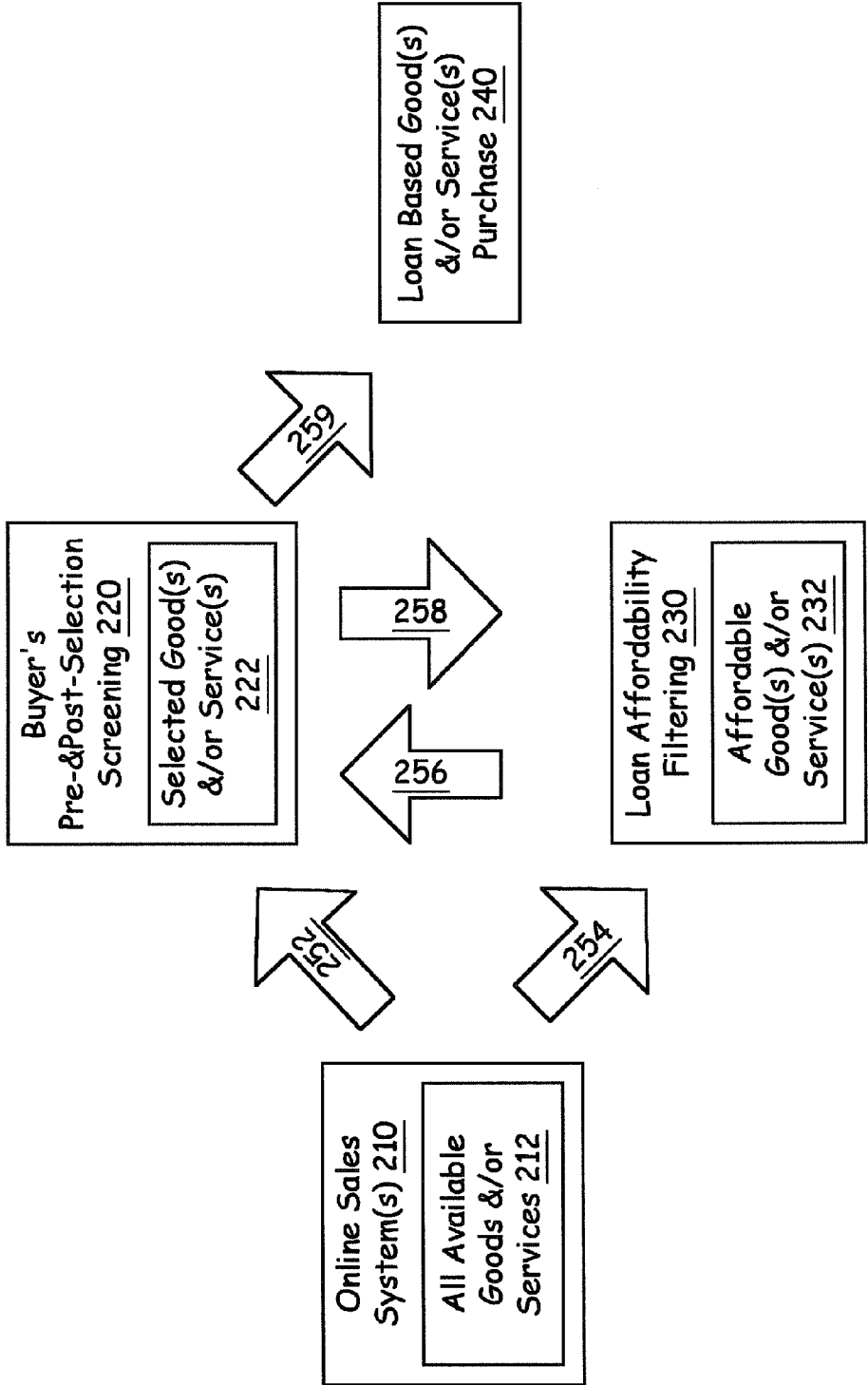


Fig. 2

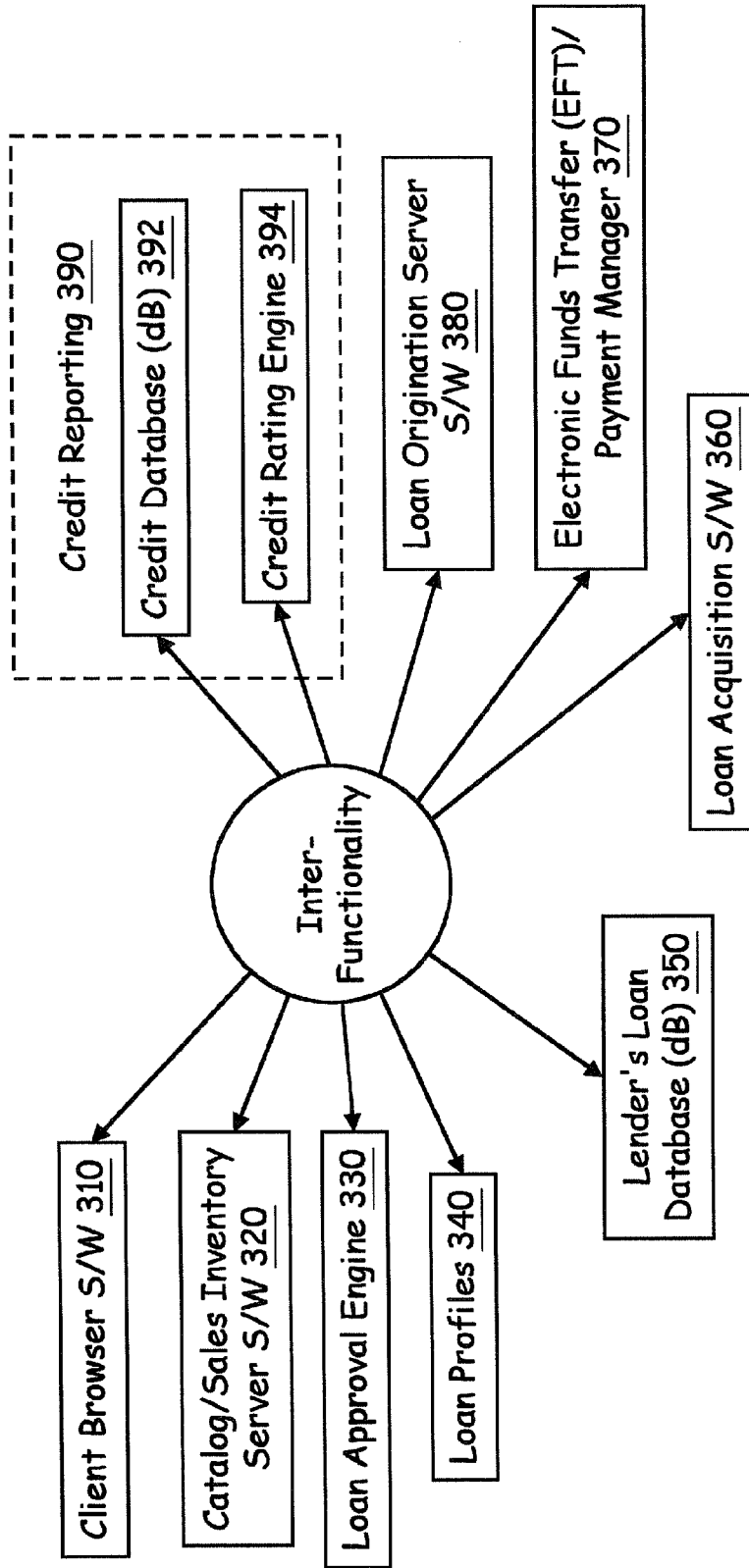


Fig. 3

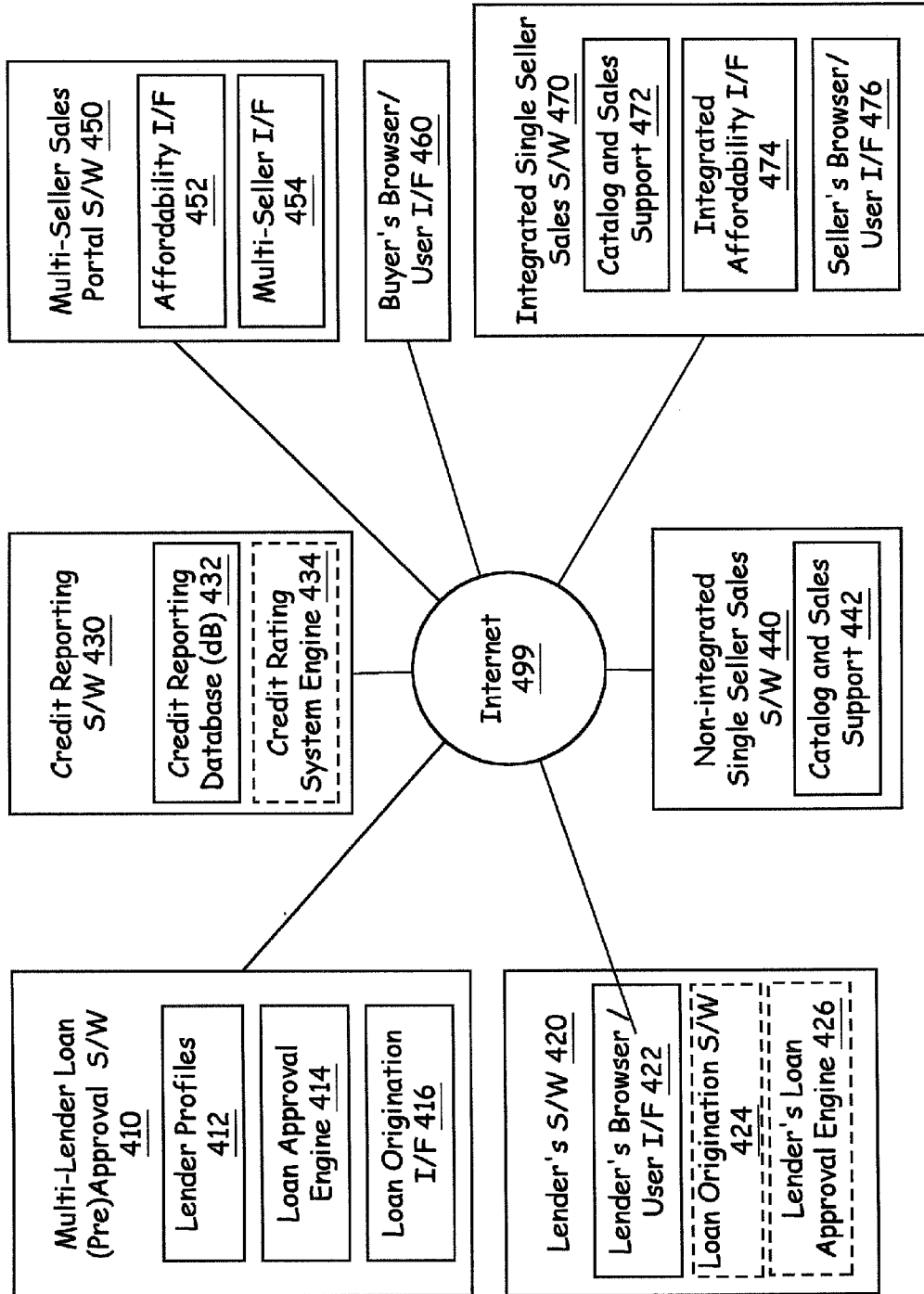
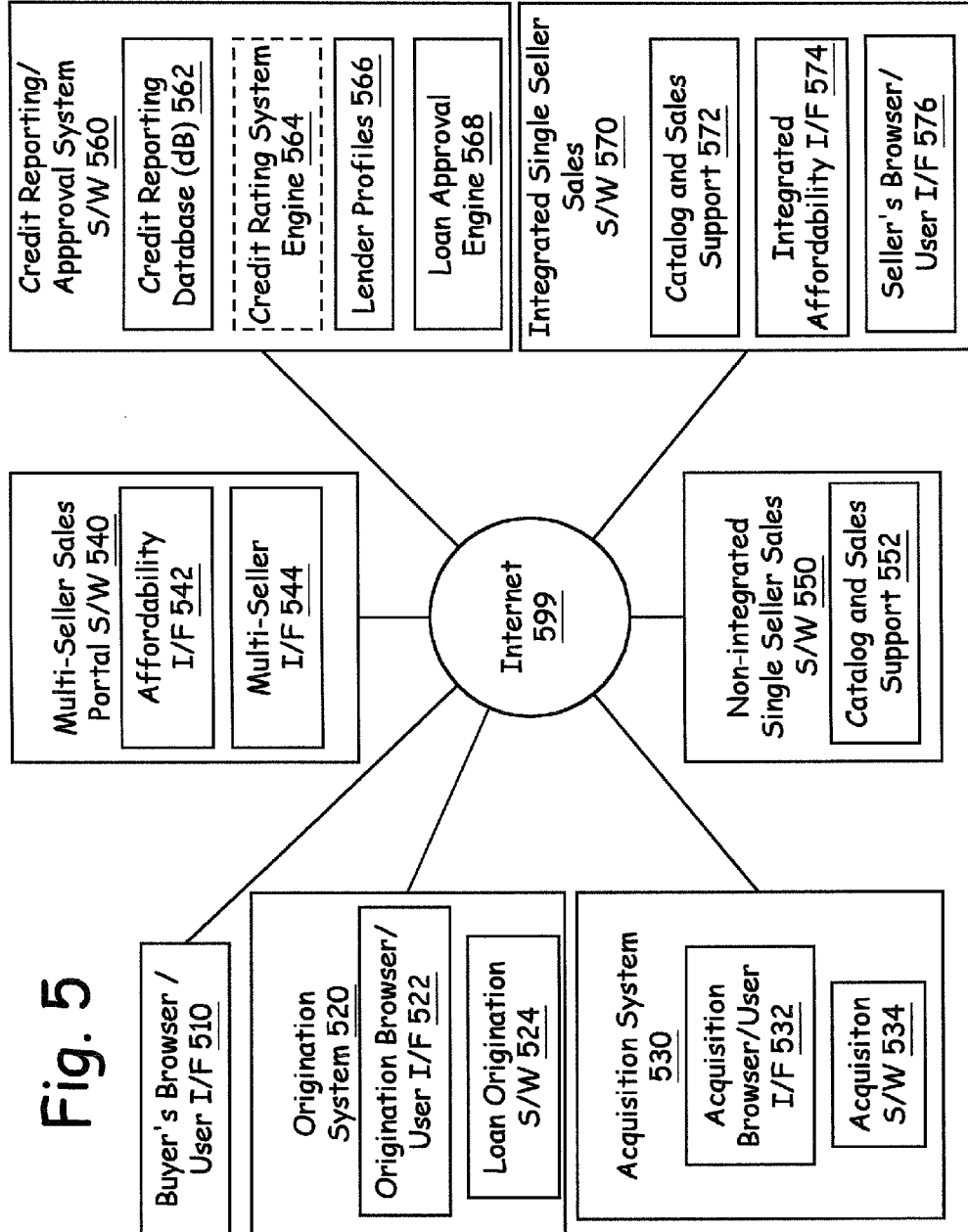


Fig. 4



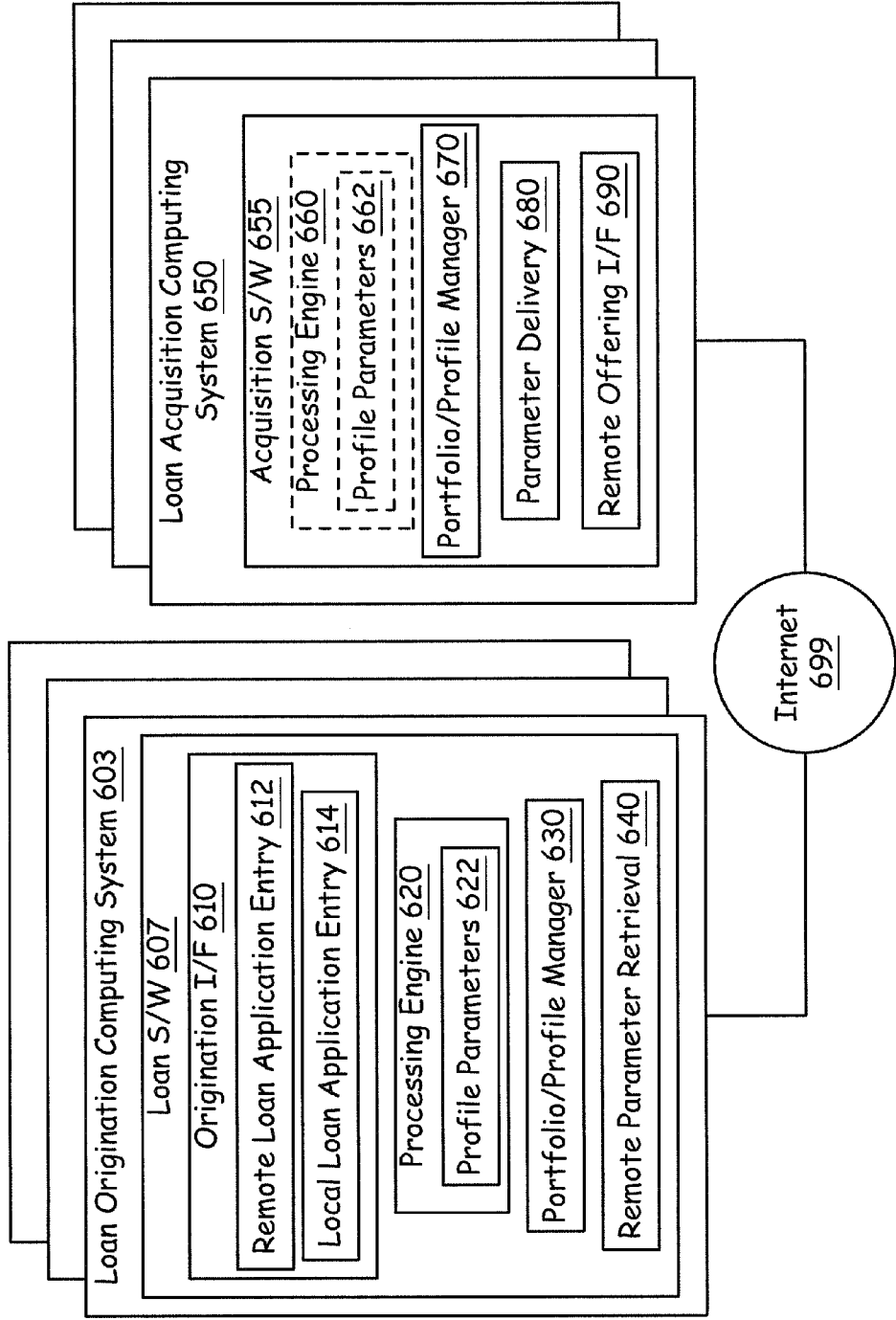


Fig. 6

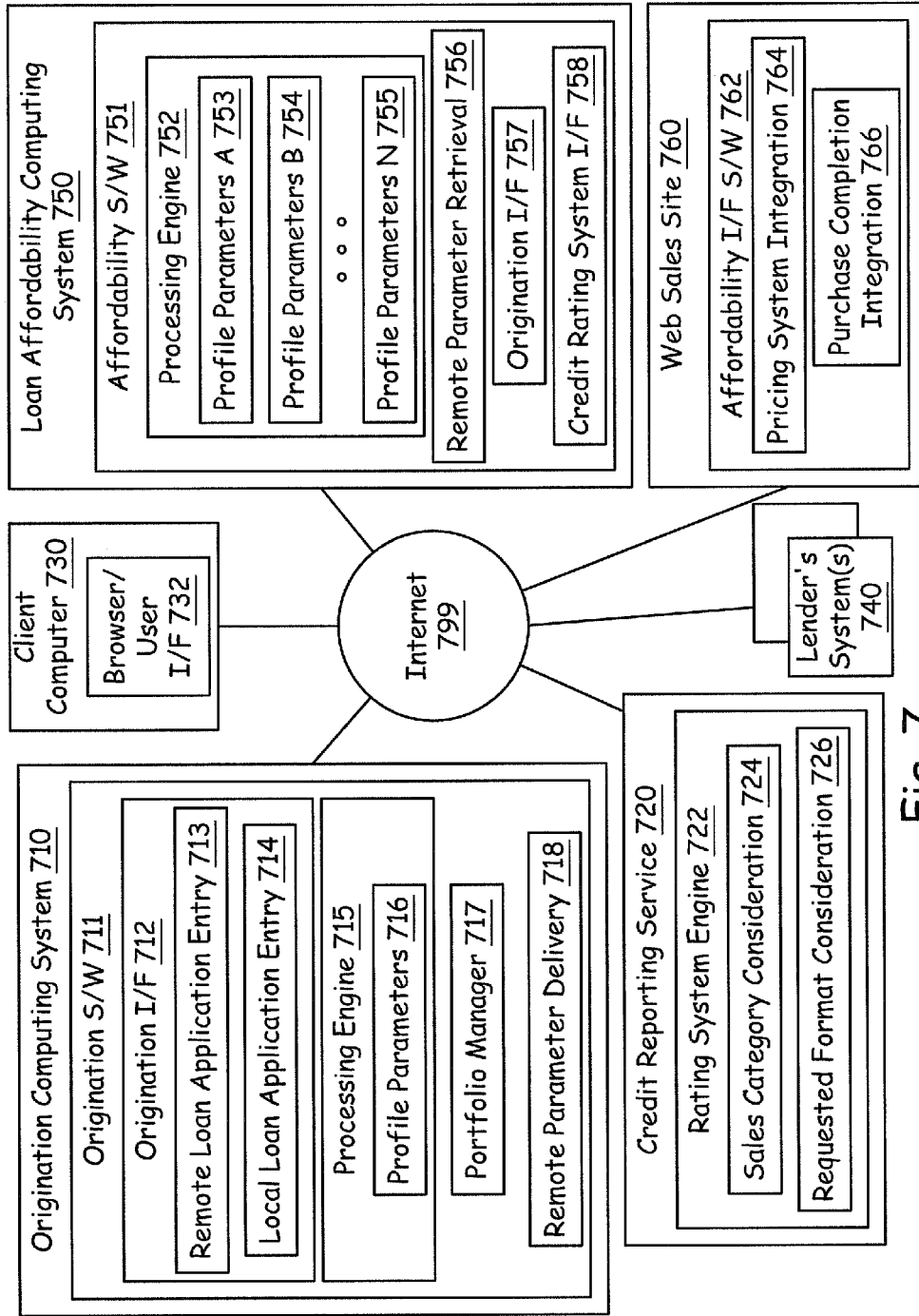


Fig. 7

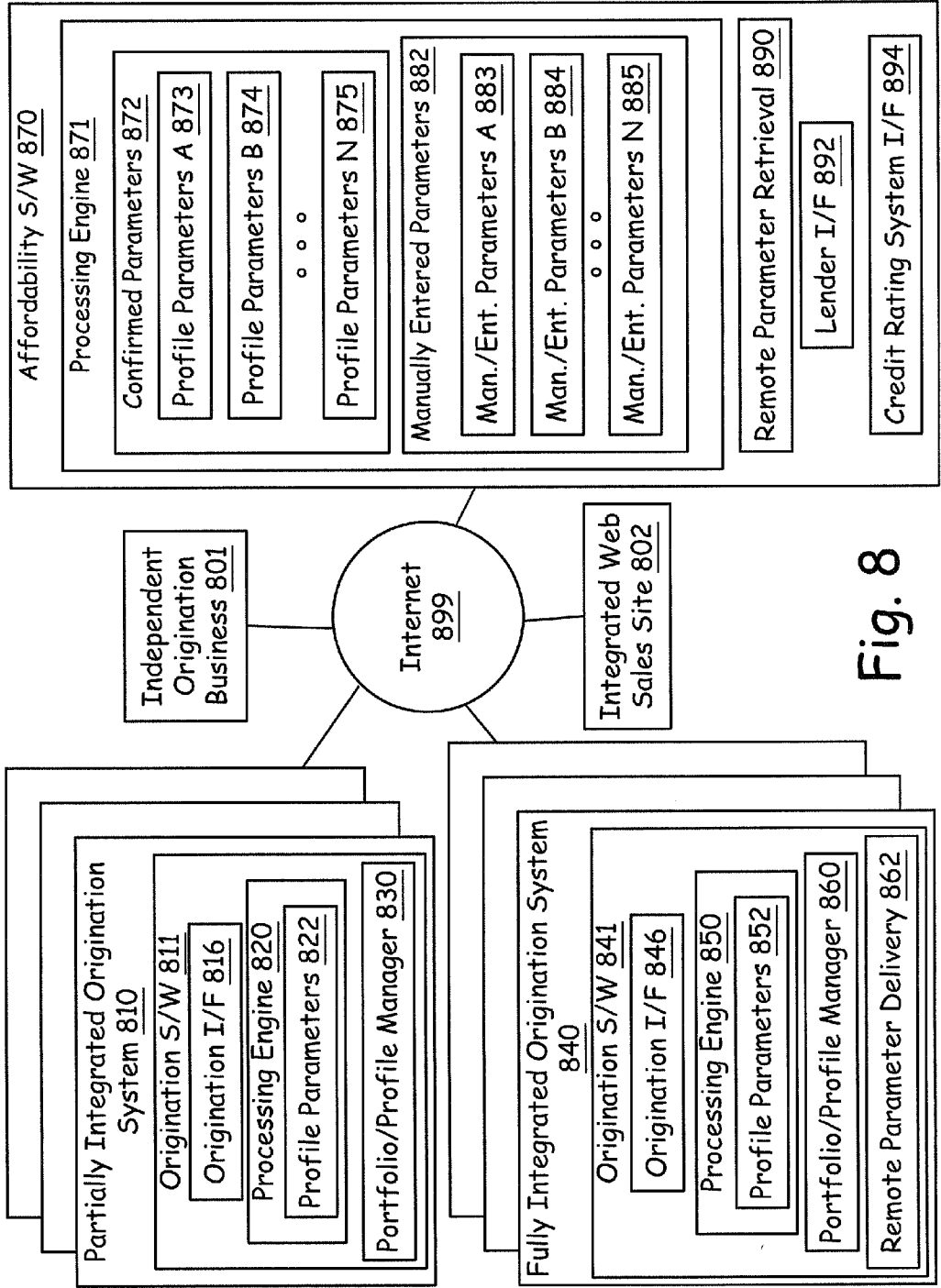


Fig. 8

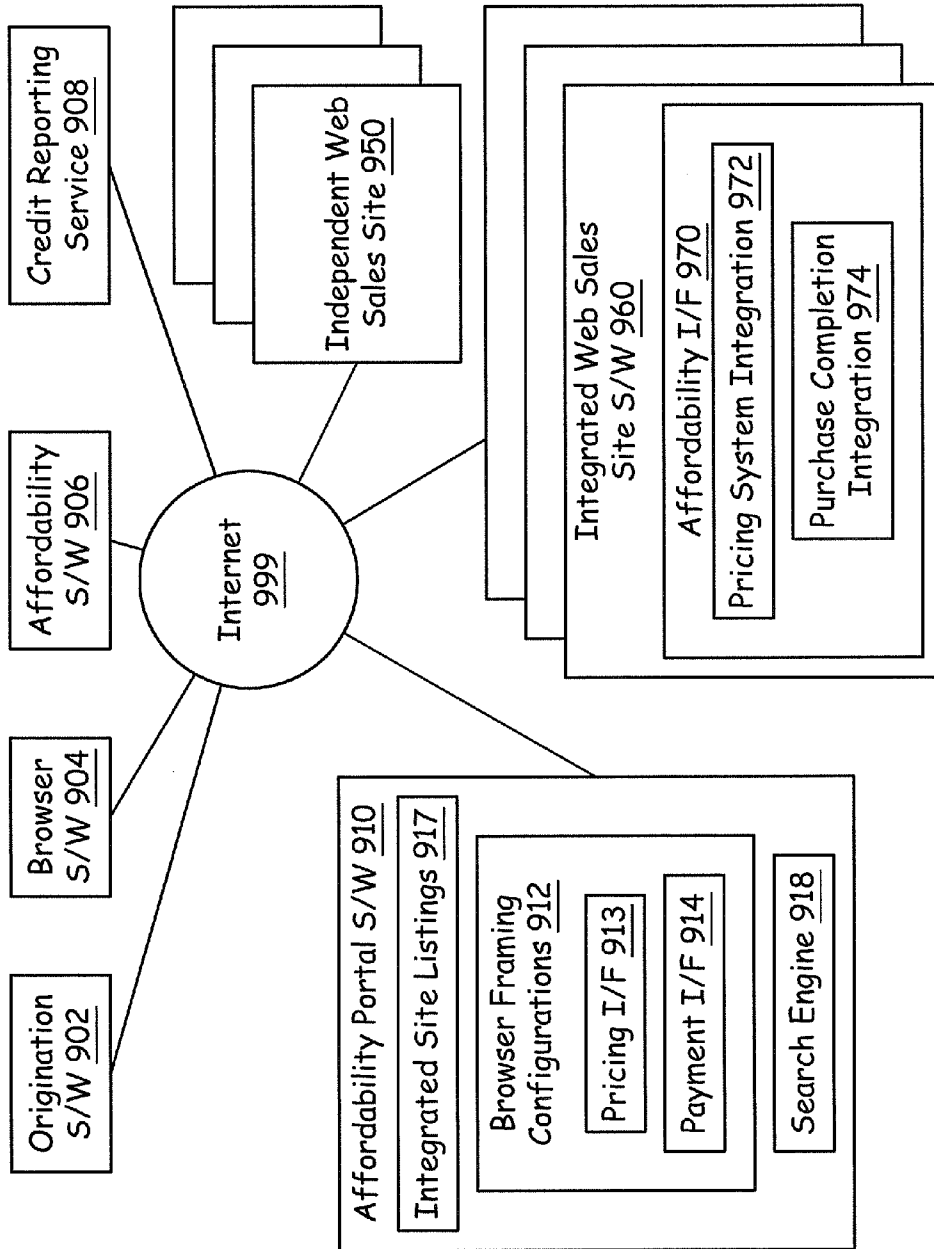


Fig. 9

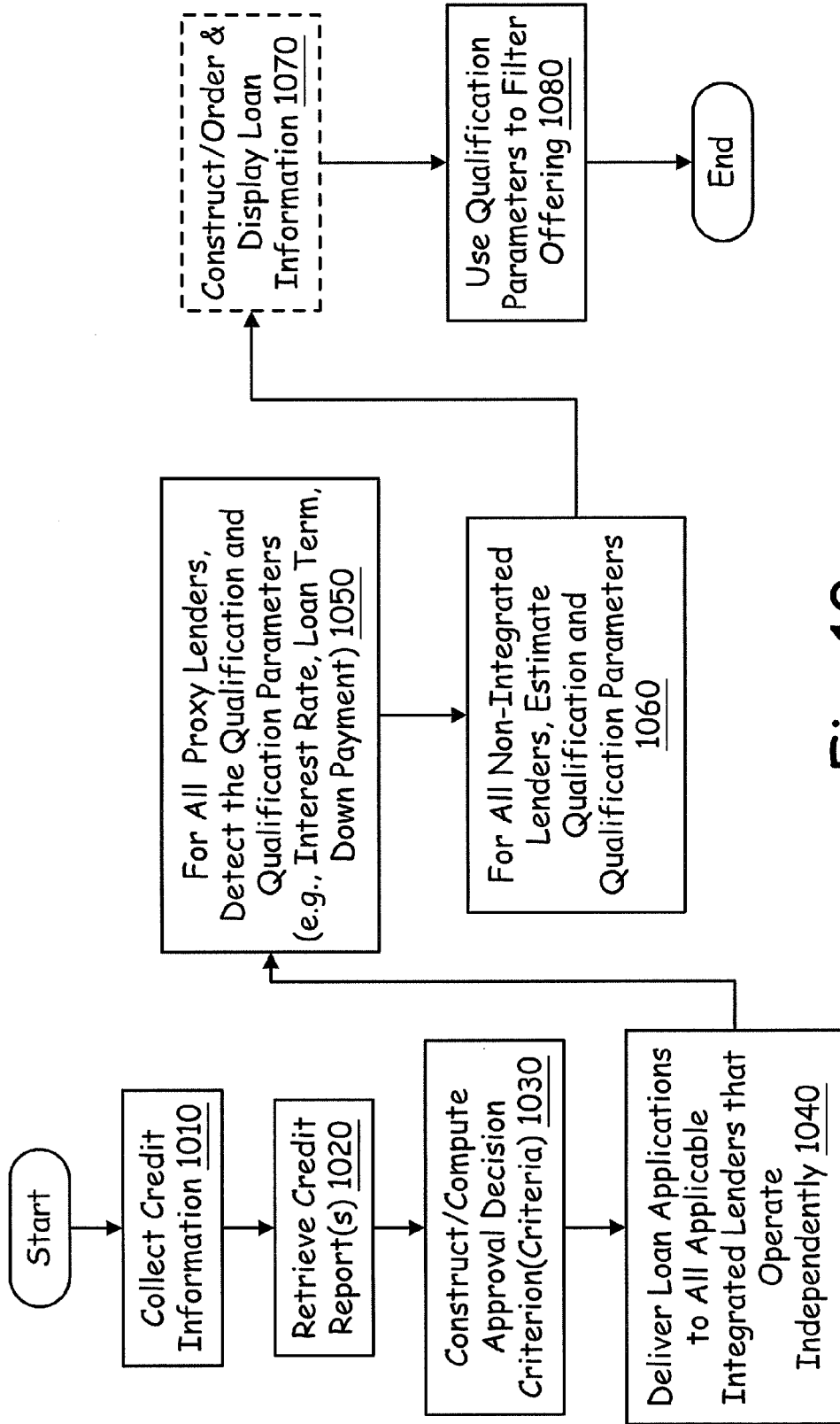


Fig. 10

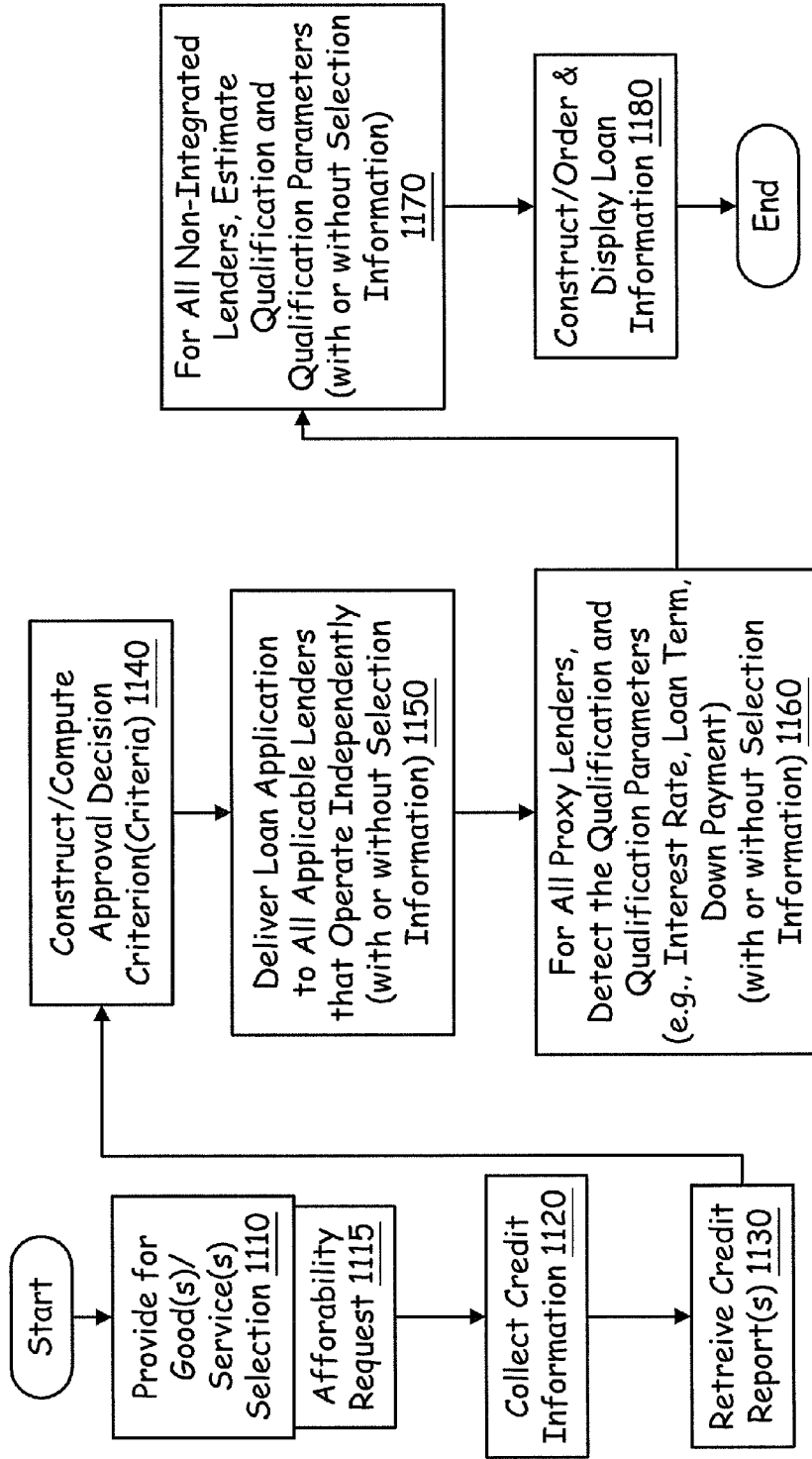


Fig. 11

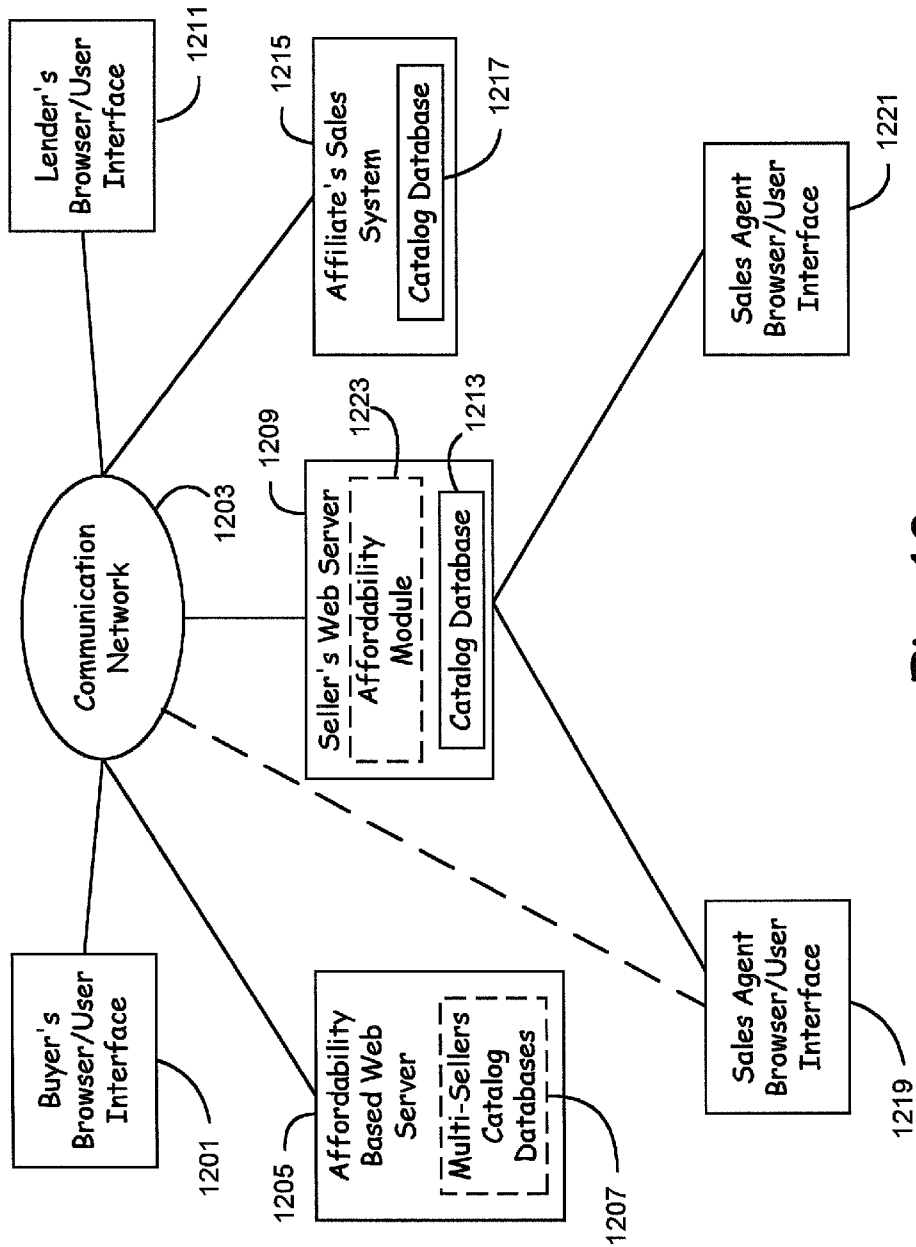


Fig. 12

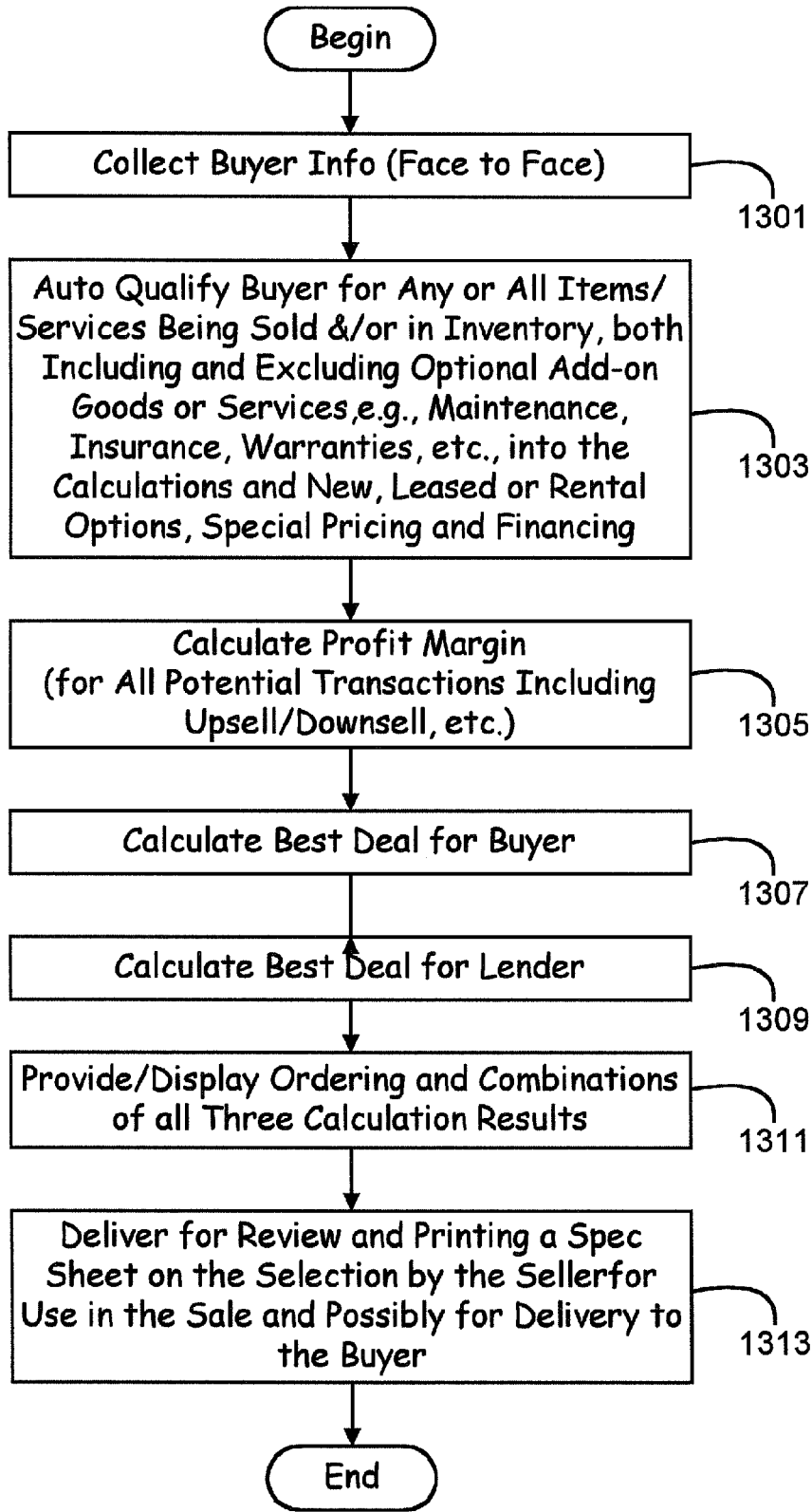


Fig. 13

**ONLINE PURCHASING SYSTEM
SUPPORTING SELLERS WITH
AFFORDABILITY SCREENING**

**CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED
APPLICATIONS**

[0001] The present application is a continuation of Ser. No. 09/808,723 filed Mar. 14, 2001, which makes reference to, and claims priority to and the benefit of, U.S. provisional application Ser. No. 60/190,825 filed Mar. 21, 2000, Ser. No. 60/214,183 filed Jun. 26, 2000, and Ser. No. 60/214,188 filed Jun. 26, 2000.

INCORPORATION BY REFERENCE

[0002] U.S. provisional application Ser. No. 60/190,825 filed Mar. 21, 2000, Ser. No. 60/214,183 filed Jun. 26, 2000, Ser. No. 60/214,136 filed Jun. 26, 2000, Ser. No. 60/213,912 filed Jun. 26, 2000, and Ser. No. 60/214,188 filed Jun. 26, 2000, Ser. No. 09/808,723 filed Mar. 14, 2001, are all hereby incorporated by reference herein in their entirety.

**STATEMENT REGARDING FEDERALLY
SPONSORED RESEARCH**

[0003] N/A

BACKGROUND

[0004] 1. Technical Field

[0005] The present invention relates generally to an online purchasing system; and, more particularly, it relates to an online affordability-based purchasing system that is operable to perform screening, filtering, and analysis for purchases and potential purchases among various lenders and sellers of good (s) and/or service(s).

[0006] 2. Related Art

[0007] Conventional loan approval methods are time-consuming and often involve a considerable amount of wasted effort on the part of buyers, sellers and lenders alike. Typically, when a buyer desires to finance a purchase, the buyer initially spends a significant amount of time researching and analyzing various products, often with the assistance of a seller, before selecting a desired product. The buyer then typically spends additional time researching and analyzing various loans of one or more lenders, again often with the assistance of a seller, before selecting a desired loan. The buyer provides the lender or seller with extensive personal financial information, which the lender or seller uses to calculate whether or not the buyer is qualified to finance the selected product with the selected loan.

[0008] If the buyer is not qualified, as is often the case, the buyer must select a different product, a different loan, or both, requiring that the entire time-consuming process be repeated. In many cases, the buyer and the lender or seller undertake several iterations of the process before achieving loan approval.

[0009] In addition, once loan approval is finally achieved using conventional methods, the seller is not able to upsell without having to start over. In other words, if a seller desires to sell upgrades for a selected product or a more expensive product, the buyer and seller must again undertake the entire time-consuming loan approval process before knowing whether the buyer qualifies to finance the upgrades or the more expensive product.

[0010] Conventional loan approval methods are also rigid, requiring that the same steps be performed regardless of the type of product the buyer seeks to finance. Such methods do not permit the seller or lender to modify loan approval processing, or perform different processing altogether, depending on the type of product sought to be financed.

[0011] Obtaining loan approval using conventional methods is also very labor-intensive. This is particularly true in situations where the seller is assisting the buyer in the loan approval process without lender involvement. Ordinarily in such situations, sellers associate with one or more lenders, and obtain loan parameters from each lender. The seller uses these parameters in calculating, often manually using an adding machine or calculator, to determine whether or not the buyer qualifies for a particular loan. Lenders modify their parameters regularly, forcing the seller to keep track of all modifications. In some instances, a seller approves a buyer for a particular loan, only to find out later that the parameters used for approval are no longer valid. The seller must then recalculate whether or not the buyer is approved using modified parameters, and if not, select a different lender and/or loan, or have the buyer select a different product entirely, to ultimately achieve loan approval. The process is time-consuming and often frustrating for both the seller and the buyer.

[0012] Also, in such situations where a seller is assisting a buyer in the loan approval process without lender involvement, the buyer is often unknowingly placed in an adverse financial position relative to the seller. Specifically, a seller typically receives a percentage of the financial amount (i.e., points) for originating a loan with a lender. As mentioned above, a seller usually associates with multiple lenders, and will attempt to "sell" to the buyer a loan that provides the seller with the greatest amount of points, regardless of whether the interest rate or other parameters of the loan are the best available to the buyer. Conventional loan approval methods do not provide financial incentive to the seller to identify and present loans most favorable to the buyer.

[0013] Conventional online loan platforms also suffer from similar problems. For example, such platforms typically provide a buyer with a credit application that, upon completion and submission by the buyer, is forwarded to a lender or lenders. The application is not processed in real time, but instead is placed in queue where it is eventually processed by a loan officer, often several hours to several days later. The buyer must wait for a response from each lender, and is not permitted to ascertain the effect that varying loan parameters may have on the amount the buyer is qualified to finance. If a buyer desires to modify the down payment amount or the loan term, the buyer must start all over again by completing and submitting another application. The delay inherent in such online platforms often causes buyers to simply walk away from the purchase.

[0014] Even those conventional online loan platforms that claim to offer "automated loan processing" still typically only provide a buyer with means for automated data entry. These platforms still typically require participation by a loan officer, and still take several hours to several days for loan approval.

[0015] Further limitations and disadvantages of conventional and traditional systems will become apparent to one of skill in the art through comparison of such systems with the present invention as set forth in the remainder of the present application with reference to the drawings.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0016] Aspects of the present invention may be found in an online affordability-based purchasing system that comprises a first web server used by an individual, such as a buyer, seller or lender, for example, to review, via a computer running browser software, product information regarding products being offered online. The first web server may be that used by a single seller's sales site or by a single lender's system, or may be that of a third party multi-seller sales system or multi-lender system, for example. The computer enables the individual to enter personal information about a buyer, and upon request, to obtain financing parameter information regarding one or more financing vehicles (such as, for example, loans, revolving credit, leases, etc.). The financing parameter information, and all or a portion of the personal information, is then used to identify one or more products the buyer is at least likely to be approved to purchase using one or more of the financing vehicles.

[0017] In one embodiment, the individual enters the buyer's personal information and makes the request via a web page (or pages) interface that is delivered by the first web server, or a second web server, to the computer. The second web server may be that of a third party affordability portal, for example. A software engine, which may be associated with any of the web servers or the computer, determines at least the likelihood of the buyer being approved for purchasing one or more products using one or more financing vehicles. The computer may then display an indication to the individual of such likelihood.

[0018] In one embodiment, the indication may be a list of products and one or more financing vehicles associated with each product, which indicates that the buyer is at least pre-approved to purchase each product using the associated financing vehicle. In an embodiment where the software engine is associated with one of the web servers, the indication may be delivered to the computer via a web page or pages. The computer may then respond to input via the web page or pages to initiate purchase of one or more of the products using financing. For example, the individual can select a desired financing vehicle, and initiate purchase of a product using the selected financing vehicle.

[0019] Other aspects, advantages and novel features of the present invention will become apparent from the following detailed description of the invention when considered in conjunction with the accompanying drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0020] A better understanding of the present invention can be obtained when the following detailed description of various exemplary embodiments are considered in conjunction with the following drawings.

[0021] FIG. 1 is a system diagram illustrating an online, affordability-based purchasing system in accordance with the present invention.

[0022] FIG. 2 is a flow diagram illustrating exemplary operational flow of the online, affordability-based purchasing system of FIG. 1.

[0023] FIG. 3 is a functional diagram illustrating the interaction of various components of the online, affordability-based purchasing system of FIGS. 1 and 2.

[0024] FIG. 4 is a system diagram illustrating another embodiment of the online, affordability-based purchasing system of FIG. 1.

[0025] FIG. 5 is a system diagram illustrating a further embodiment of the online, affordability-based purchasing system of FIG. 1.

[0026] FIG. 6 is a system diagram illustrating an embodiment of a loan origination and acquisition system in accordance with the present invention, which may be a stand alone system or incorporated into the online, affordability-based purchasing system of the present invention.

[0027] FIG. 7 is a system diagram illustrating yet another embodiment of the online affordability-based purchasing system of FIG. 1.

[0028] FIG. 8 is a system diagram illustrating a still further embodiment of the online, affordability-based purchasing system of FIG. 1.

[0029] FIG. 9 is a system diagram illustrating another embodiment of the online, affordability-based purchasing system of FIG. 1 that utilizes an affordability portal.

[0030] FIG. 10 is a functional block diagram illustrating one embodiment of online, affordability-based filtering performed in accordance with the present invention.

[0031] FIG. 11 is a functional block diagram illustrating another embodiment of online, affordability-based filtering performed in accordance with the present invention.

[0032] FIG. 12 is a block diagram illustrating exemplary operation of one embodiment of an online, affordability-based purchasing system built in accordance with the present invention.

[0033] FIG. 13 is a flow diagram illustrating various functionality of the online, affordability-based system of FIG. 12, as used by a sales agent upon a buyer's visit.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0034] FIG. 1 is a system diagram illustrating an online, affordability-based purchasing system 110 in accordance with the present invention. The online affordability-based purchasing system 110 enables a buyer to peruse a number of available good(s) and/or service(s) ("product(s)") to determine which of the products the buyer would like to purchase. Within the context of the detailed description of the invention contained herein, reference to a buyer also includes a potential buyer, as well as a buyer/potential buyer who is invoking the system to determine the availability of products for purchase or potential purchase. The online, affordability-based purchasing system 110 also enables a buyer to obtain financing for those products the buyer desires to purchase on credit. Within the context of the detailed description of the invention contained herein, reference to a loan, financing or credit also includes lease.

[0035] The online, affordability-based purchasing system 110 may include, among other components, a buyer interface (I/F) 120 that is operative to enable a buyer to interface with a lender 1 160 and a seller 1 170. The lender 1 160 contains a number of loan profiles illustrated by, for example, a loan profile A 162, a loan profile B 164, and a loan profile N 169. In addition, multiple lenders are included within the scope and spirit of the invention as illustrated in the FIG. 1, each containing a number of loan profiles in similar fashion to the lender 1 160. The buyer interface (I/F) 120 is operable to interface with each of these lenders as well.

[0036] Similarly, the seller 1 170 offers a number of good(s) and/or service(s) illustrated by, for example, a good(s) and/or service(s) A 172, a good(s) and/or service(s) B 174, and a good(s) and/or service(s) N 179. In addition, multiple sellers are included within the scope and spirit of the inven-

tion as illustrated in the FIG. 1, each containing a number of good(s) and/or service(s) in similar fashion to the seller 1 170. The buyer interface (I/F) 120 is operable to interface with each of these sellers as well.

[0037] The online, affordability-based purchasing system 110 includes, for example, a selection screening component 130, a credit analysis engine 140 and loan affordability filtering component 150. The selection screening component 130 enables a buyer to select desired products for analysis or purchase as well select desired loans. A buyer, via the buyer interface (IF) 120, provides buyer information to the credit analysis engine 140. The credit analysis engine 140 uses the buyer information, loan profile or parameter information of one or more lenders, and buyer credit information to determine the specific product(s) the buyer can afford to finance. The loan affordability filtering screening component 150 then indicates to the buyer those specific product(s) and the specific loan(s) that can be used to finance those product(s).

[0038] The loan profile or parameter information used by the credit analysis engine 140 may or may not require that the specific product(s) of interest and/or the seller(s) of those product(s) be considered in affordability calculations. For example, for loans that apply to all product(s) and seller(s), the credit analysis engine 140 simply calculates a maximum loan amount that the buyer can afford for each particular loan of each lender, without considering the specific product(s) of interest and/or the seller(s) of those product(s). The calculated maximum loan amount for each loan is then beat against the products of interest, and the specific product(s) that the buyer can afford to finance are identified or selected. The identified product(s), and the loan(s) applicable to each, are then displayed.

[0039] Some loan profiles may, however, require that the product(s) and/or the seller(s) be considered. In other words, a loan may only apply to a particular product, to a particular model of a product and/or to a particular seller. For example, in the case where the product of interest is an automobile or other vehicle, a lender may only offer a certain interest rate (e.g., 2.9%) for a specific manufacturer's model (e.g., Ford Explorer). Alternatively, a lender may only offer loans for specific manufacturer's products, because, for example, those products typically have a higher residual or resale value. Or a lender may only finance a certain type of product, such as an automobile or home, for example. In any case, the credit analysis engine 140 is "smart" in that it uses this type of limiting information in calculating affordability.

[0040] Specifically, the credit analysis engine 140 is operable to beat the various loan profiles, for example, the loan profile A 162, the loan profile B 164, up to the loan profile N 169 of FIG. 1, against the available good(s) and/or service(s), for example, the good(s) and/or service(s) A 172, the good(s) and/or service(s) B 174, up to the good(s) and/or service(s) N 179 of FIG. 1, to identify or select those good(s) and/or service(s) that a buyer is qualified to finance. Only those good(s) and/or service(s) that a buyer is qualified to finance are then displayed to the buyer. Alternatively, all of the good(s) and/or service(s) selected by the buyer are displayed, and those good(s) and/or service(s) for which the buyer does not qualify for financing are indicated as such upon display.

[0041] In any case, the buyer may select a product and an associated loan using the selection screening component 130 and close the deal. As discussed more completely below, the buyer may also use the selection screening component 130 prior to the credit analysis and affordability functionality to

pre-select only a portion of all the available products. Only these pre-selected products are then used in the affordability analysis.

[0042] The online, affordability-based purchasing system 110 may also be used to provide credit advice to a buyer. For example, the online, affordability-based purchasing system 110 may be implemented to enable the buyer to better manage the buyer's own finances so that the buyer may maximize his/her affordability-based financing. In one instance, for example, the credit analysis engine 140 may identify that if a buyer changes certain financial variables, such as, for example, reducing his/her revolving debt by a certain amount, increasing the down payment being offered by a certain amount, and/or modifying the loan term, the buyer would then qualify to finance more expensive or a greater number of product(s), or qualify for a greater number of loans. The credit analysis engine 140 may then cause all or a portion of this information to be displayed to the buyer to enable the buyer to modify the buyer's personal financial variables, if desired.

[0043] Of course, it should be understood that the functionality of the credit analysis engine 140 and the affordability filtering component 150 may be incorporated into a single engine or component.

[0044] FIG. 2 is a flow diagram illustrating exemplary operational flow of the online, affordability-based purchasing system of FIG. 1. The system is operable for a buyer to first enter an online sales system(s) 210. In choosing a path 254, the buyer elects loan affordability filtering 230 based on all available good(s) and/or service(s) 212 that are offered within the system. The loan affordability filtering 230 determines those affordable good(s) and/or service(s) 232 from all available good(s) and/or service(s) 212. The buyer is provided with only those good(s) and/or service(s) that the buyer can afford with or without financing. In other words, the system performs loan affordability filtering and displays only those good(s) and/or service(s) for which the buyer can qualify for financing, and/or good(s) and/or service(s) that the buyer may purchase outright without financing. Then, following a path 258, the buyer selects the desired goods and/or service(s) 222 using post-selection screening 220. Finally, following a path 259, the buyer purchases the selected, affordable good(s) and/or service(s), as indicated at loan based good(s) and/or service(s) purchase 240. The sequence via the paths 254, 258, and 259 represents one embodiment of the operational flow of the invention that provides for no pre-selection of good(s) and/or service(s).

[0045] Alternatively, the buyer enters the online sales system(s) 210 and, following a path 252, elects to perform pre-selection screening 220. The buyer pre-selects certain good(s) and/or service(s) from all available good(s) and/or service(s) 212 that are offered within the system. The buyer may then purchase the pre-selected goods via the loan based good(s) and/or service(s) purchase 240 if the buyer already has financing for the purchase. Alternatively, following a path 256, the buyer may elect loan affordability filtering 230, which selects and displays only those of the pre-selected good(s) and/or service(s) 222 that the buyer can afford to finance. The buyer may then select one of the affordable good(s) and/or service(s) 232, and purchase, following path 259, the selected good(s) and/or service(s).

[0046] As can be seen, the selection screening 220 may be performed by the buyer either before and/or after performing the loan affordability filtering 230. In addition, loan affordability filtering may be performed a number of times before a

buyer selects goods for purchase. For example, after loan affordability is performed once, a buyer may use post-selection screening to select a subset of affordable products, and then may decide to modify certain financial variables, such as down payment or loan term, and then perform loan affordability filtering again to see which of the subset of affordable products the buyer can still afford. This process may be repeated as desired by the buyer.

[0047] As mentioned above, in one embodiment, loan affordability filtering permits display of only those good(s) and/or service(s) that the buyer is qualified to finance. In another embodiment, loan affordability filtering permits displays of all selected good(s) and/or service(s), but indicates to the buyer those that the buyer is not qualified to finance. For example, those good(s) and/or service(s) for which financing cannot be secured may be highlighted or printed in a pre-determined color, such as red, for example. Those good(s) and/or service(s) for which the buyer is qualified to finance may similarly be highlighted or printed in another pre-determined color, such as green, for example. In addition, a third category may also be used. Specifically, for example, "borderline" good(s) and/or service(s) may be highlighted or printed in a third predetermined color, such as yellow, for example. A third category as such may represent those good(s) and/or service(s) that the buyer could potentially finance if the buyer were to change one or more loan parameters, such as, for example, increasing the buyer's down payment or reducing a certain amount of the buyer's pre-existing debt. In any case, any number of ways to indicate loan affordability filtering results are possible, and are included within the scope of the invention.

[0048] FIG. 3 is a functional diagram illustrating the interaction of various components of the online, affordability-based purchasing system of FIGS. 1 and 2. The online, affordability-based purchasing system includes client browser software (S/W) 310 that is used by a client, such as a buyer, lender or seller, for example, to interact with the other components of the system. For example, using the client browser software (S/W) 310, a client may interact with catalog/sales inventory server software (S/W) 320 to access what good(s) and/or service(s) are available from any number of providers of good(s) and/or service(s) in accordance with any of the various embodiments of the invention. Similarly, a client may interact with loan acquisition software (S/W) 360 and loan origination server software (S/W) 380 to perform loan acquisition and loan origination, respectively.

[0049] The system also includes a loan approval engine 330 that determines whether the buyer qualifies for financing to assist in any purchase, and in the event the buyer does qualify for financing, determines the amount and degree of financing for which the buyer is qualified. To perform these determinations, the loan approval engine 330 uses, among other things, multiple loan profiles 340 and a lender's loan database (dB) 350. The loan approval engine 330 is operable to perform loan approval analysis for the buyer on a good and/or service basis.

[0050] In addition, the loan approval engine 330 is operable to perform loan approval analysis for a buyer on a category basis. More particularly, various categories of products typically have different qualifications standards. For example, different parameters are considered to qualify a buyer for a home purchase, as compared to those considered to qualify a buyer for an automobile purchase, as compared to those considered to qualify a buyer for a consumer product purchase, and so on. The loan approval engine 330 is capable of per-

forming different analyses as a function of the specific purchase for which financing is being sought and on a category basis.

[0051] The multiple loan profiles 340 correspond to the different loan profiles provided by various lenders, some or all of which are contained within the lender's loan database (dB) 350. In one embodiment, the multiple loan profiles 340 and the loan approval engine 330 are co-located. In another embodiment, they are located in different locations.

[0052] As mentioned above, to originate a loan using traditional approaches, a loan approval officer or seller must execute a large amount of paperwork and verify certain buyer related parameters (such as, for example, the employment of a buyer who seeks the loan) before the loan can be approved for that buyer. The loan origination server software (S/W) 380 is operative, in conjunction with the loan approval engine 330, the multiple loan profiles 340, and the lender's loan database (dB) 350, to perform automated loan approval. The loan origination server software 380 performs all of the processing and paperwork that is required to perform loan approval, and may also include buyer signature capture functionality. The automated system enables loan origination without the assistance of a loan approval officer, and enables an employee having lower qualifications to assist a buyer in interfacing with the system to secure financing for a purchase. In fact, the loan origination server software (S/W) 380 is operable to perform automated loan origination without the necessity of any employee whatsoever. In other words, a buyer may perform loan origination on his/her own, subject, of course, to verification by the lender/seller of information provided by the buyer.

[0053] As mentioned above, lenders may use the loan acquisition software 360 to analyze and purchase desirable loans. The loan origination acquisition software (S/W) 360 is further operable to transfer loans that a lender sells to the purchasing institutions.

[0054] The system also includes an electronic funds transfer (EFT)/payment manager 370 that is operable to coordinate with the buyer to repay a loan that is originated within the system through EFT from a buyer's account at a financial institution.

[0055] If desired, the system also provides a credit reporting function 390 that uses a credit database (dB) 392 and a credit rating engine 394. These components are used in performing credit analysis, as described above. These components may also be implemented to perform anonymous credit reporting for the buyer. A buyer has the option of determining if he/she is qualified for a loan, and in the event the buyer is not qualified, the system does not issue a negative credit report (a rejection) against the buyer's credit record.

[0056] FIG. 4 is a system diagram illustrating another embodiment of the online, affordability-based purchasing system of FIG. 1. Multi-lender loan (pre)approval software (S/W) 410, lender's software (S/W) 420, credit reporting software (S/W) 430, non-integrated single seller sales software (S/W) 440, multi-sales portal software (S/W) 450, and integrated single seller sales software (S/W) 470 all interconnect to the internet 499. A buyer can access all of the softwares (S/Ws) 410, 420, 430, 440, 450, and 470 using a buyer's browser/user interface (I/F) 460.

[0057] The multi-lender loan (pre)approval software (S/W) 410 itself may contain, among other components, multiple lender profiles 412, a loan approval engine 414, and a loan origination interface (I/F) 416. The multi-lender loan (pre)

approval software (S/W) 410 is contained on a server connected to the Internet 499, in one embodiment of the invention. The multiple lender profiles 412 correspond to various loan providers who are integrated into the system. The loan approval engine 414 uses the multiple lender profiles 412 to perform pre-approval of a buyer's loan request for any of the multiple lenders who are integrated into the system. In one embodiment of the invention, the loan origination interface (I/F) 416 enables a buyer, lender or seller to pre-approve the buyer for loans of any lenders within the system.

[0058] The lender's software (S/W) 420 may contain, among other components, a lender's browser/user interface (I/F) 422, loan origination software (S/W) 424, and a lender's approval engine 426, in one embodiment of the invention. A lender's browser/user interface (I/F) 422 enables a lender to access, via the Internet 499, any of the other functionality within the system. If desired, the loan origination software (S/W) 424 and the lender's approval engine 426 may not be contained within the lender's software (S/W) 420. Parallel loan approval engines may also be included in various embodiments of the invention, as shown by the loan approval engine 414 and the lender's loan approval engine 426. If desired, the lender's software (S/W) 420 is operable to invoke the loan approval engine 414 via the Internet 499 when the lender's loan approval engine 426 is not contained within the lender's software (S/W) 420. Also, the loan origination interface (I/F) 416 and the loan origination software (S/W) 424 are operable in a parallel and cooperative manner as well, in that the loan origination interface (I/F) 416 may utilize the loan origination software (S/W) 424.

[0059] The credit reporting software (S/W) 430 may contain, among other components, a credit reporting database (dB) 432 and a credit rating system engine 434, in one embodiment of the invention. Alternatively, the credit rating system engine 434 may be located within other components in the system. For example, the functionality provided by the credit rating system engine 434 may be performed using one or both of the loan approval engine 414 and the lender's loan approval engine 426 when the credit rating system engine 434 is not included within the credit reporting software (S/W) 430.

[0060] The multi-seller sales portal 450 employs an affordability interface (I/F) 452 and a multi-seller interface (I/F) 454 to allow the buyer using the system to interact with other components within the system. The multi-seller sales portal 450 also allows any seller within the system to access other components within the system. For example, a seller within the system determines whether or not a buyer soliciting the seller qualifies for certain financing as provided by any lender participating within the system for any of the good(s) and/or service(s) offered by the seller.

[0061] The non-integrated single seller sales software (S/W) 440 may contain, among other things, a catalog and sales support function 442. The non-integrated single seller sales software (S/W) 440 is operable to perform framing on non-integrated single sellers as requested by a buyer using the system. For example, framing allows one web page to "frame" the contents of another web page. If desired, the non-integrated single seller sales software (S/W) 440 surrounds the framed web page with other information as desired by the various other functional blocks within the system. For example, a seller frames his own information such as the inventory of his own good(s) and/or service(s) using the non-integrated single seller sales software (S/W) 440. The fram-

ing performed in accordance with the present invention may be either dumb or intelligent. Intelligent framing extracts information from the non-integrated single seller sales web site and processes that information, while the dumb framing simply displays the information from the non-integrated single seller sales web site.

[0062] The integrated single seller sales software (S/W) 470 may contain, among other things, a catalog and sales support function 472, an integrated affordability interface (I/F) 474, and a seller's browser/user interface (I/F) 476. The catalog and sales support function 472 enables the integrated single seller to provide to a potential buyer access to all of the good(s) and/or service(s) within his inventory to a potential buyer. The integrated affordability interface (I/F) 474 allows a user of the system to perform affordability analysis for one or all of the integrated sellers coupled to the system. The seller's browser/user interface (I/F) 476 enables, like many of the other browser/user interfaces within the various embodiments of the invention, individual sellers or buyers can access via the internet all of the functionality provided by the various components within the system.

[0063] In the system of FIG. 4, a buyer may use the buyer's browser to access the multi-seller sales portal software 450. The buyer may then use the multi-seller interface 454 to view various products of multiple sellers, including integrated (i.e., participating) sellers, such as that represented by the integrated single seller sales software 470, and non-integrated (i.e., non-participating) sellers, such as that represented by the non-integrated single seller sales software 440. In the former case, the buyer is able to view products that are within the inventories of the sellers and are available for purchase. In the latter, the buyer is only able to view products that are listed on the sellers' website, which products may or may not be available for purchase, depending upon how up to date the sellers' websites are relative to their actual inventories.

[0064] In either case, the seller may then perform affordability analysis via the affordability interface 452 for all or a selected portion of the products, as mentioned above. In this situation, the multi-seller sales portal 450 may access, via the loan origination interface 416, the multi-lender loan (pre) approval software 410 to perform the analysis with multiple loans. The loan approval engine 414 uses the lender profiles 412, information provided by the buyer, and the credit reporting software 430 to determine the loans that are applicable for the selected product(s). Specifically, the loan approval engine 414 accesses the credit reporting software 430, which may be that of a third party credit agency, to obtain buyer credit information from the credit reporting database 432. Alternatively, the credit approval engine 414 simply obtains a credit rating for the buyer calculated by the credit rating system engine 434. In either case, the loan approval engine 414 uses the information obtained, as well as information provided by the buyer and the lender profiles 412, to determine whether the buyer qualifies to purchase the selected product for each of the multiple lenders' loans, as discussed above.

[0065] In another embodiment, the multi-lender loan (pre) approval software 410 accesses the systems of multiple lenders, which systems themselves perform the loan approval. For example, the lender's software 420 may perform such an analysis using the lender's loan approval engine 426, similarly as discussed above. In either case, the results of the analysis are communicated for display to the buyer.

[0066] Of course, the functionality of the multi-seller sales portal software 450 and that of the multi-lender loan (pre)

approval software **410** may be incorporated into a single component within the system.

[0067] The multi-seller sales portal **450** may instead (or additionally), at the buyer's request, for example, access a single lender, such as that represented by the lender's software **420**, to perform the analysis with the loan(s) of a single lender. In this situation, loan approval may be performed, similarly as discussed above, by the lender's system, such as that represented by the lender's software **420**. The lender uses its current loan profiles, information provided by the buyer, and information obtained from the credit reporting software **430**, as discussed above, to determine loan approval. Again, the information is communicated for display to the buyer.

[0068] At this point, the buyer may select a product and a loan, and complete the purchase via the buyer's browser/user interface **460**. For example, if the buyer selects a loan via the multi-lender loan (pre)approval software **410**, the loan origination interface **416** accesses loan origination software of the selected lender, such as the loan origination software **424**. The loan origination software **424** provides to the buyer for completion via the buyer's browser/user interface **460**, all the necessary financing forms, etc., and even provides for buyer signature capture. Thus, using the system of FIG. 4, a buyer can complete a financed purchase without the assistance of a seller or lender, subject to confirmation of the financial information provided by the buyer.

[0069] Alternatively, after the buyer performs affordability analysis on the buyer's browser/user interface **460**, the buyer may suspend the transaction session, and proceed to a seller or sellers to view product(s) of interest. The system saves the buyer's profile information and affordability analysis results, so that the buyer may have a seller simply pull up the information on the seller's browser, such as the seller's browser/user interface **476**, to view and discuss product(s) or loan(s) of interest, a specific product or loan pre-selected by the buyer via the buyer's browser/user interface **460**, or even the products of another seller. The buyer may then, with the assistance of the seller via the seller's browser/user interface **476**, select a product(s) for purchase and a loan(s) (or confirm previous selections) and complete the transaction. Again, the system provides for completion by the buyer and/or seller via the seller's browser/user interface **476** all the necessary financing forms, etc., eliminating the time-consuming paperwork that sellers must often undertake to complete a sale involving financing, particularly when sellers typically deal with multiple lenders and have different paperwork for each.

[0070] Instead of proceeding to a seller, the buyer may instead (or additionally) proceed to a lender or lenders to discuss financing options and continue the transaction session. The buyer may have a lender simply pull up the information on the lender's browser, such as the lender's browser user interface **422**, to view and discuss loans or product(s) of interest, a specific loan or product pre-selected by the buyer via the buyer's browser/user interface **460**, or even the loans of another lender. Similarly as above with respect to the seller, the buyer may, this time with the assistance of the lender via the lender's browser user interface **422**, select a product(s) for purchase and a loan (or confirm previous selections) and complete the transaction. Once again, the system provides for completion by the buyer and/or lender via the lender's browser/user interface **422** all the necessary financing forms, etc.

[0071] A buyer may also start the whole process without ever using the buyer's browser/user interface **460**. In other

words, the buyer may proceed directly to a seller and/or lender to initiate a transaction session. In this case, the seller/lender may access the multi-seller sales portal software **450** and/or the multi-lender loan (pre)approval software **410** and assist the buyer in entering the buyer's financial information and perform affordability analysis via their respective browsers/user interfaces.

[0072] FIG. 5 is a system diagram illustrating a further embodiment of the online, affordability-based purchasing system of FIG. 1. An origination system **520**, an acquisition system **530**, a multi-seller sales portal software (S/W) **540**, a non-integrated single seller sales software (S/W) **550**, a credit reporting/approval system software (S/W) **560**, and an integrated single seller sales software (S/W) **570** all interconnect to the internet **599**. A buyer can access all of the functionality of FIG. 5 using a buyer's browser/user interface (I/F) **510**.

[0073] The origination system **520** may contain, among other things, an origination browser/user interface (I/F) **522** and a loan origination software (S/W) **524**. The acquisition system **530** may contain, among other things, an acquisition browser/user interface (I/F) **532** and an acquisition software (S/W) **534**. The multi-seller sales portal software (S/W) **540** may contain, among other things, an affordability interface (I/F) **542** and a multi-seller interface (I/F) **544**. The credit reporting/approval system software (S/W) **560** may contain, among other things, a credit reporting database (dB) **562**, multiple lender profiles **566**, a loan approval engine **568** and a credit rating system engine **564** in certain embodiments of the invention. The non-integrated single seller sales software (S/W) **550** performs, among other things, a catalog and sales support function **552**. The integrated single seller sales software (S/W) **570** performs, among other things, a catalog and sales support function **572** and contains, among other things, an integrated affordability interface (I/F) **574** and a seller's browser **576**. The functionality of the components in FIG. 5 may be similar to that discussed above with respect to earlier figures.

[0074] The origination system **520** operates with any number of existing lenders integrated into the system. For example, certain lenders target and seek certain risk profiles representative of a certain class of buyers. In addition, the origination system **520** eliminates the paperwork that is typically executed to perform loan processing. The origination system **520** may wait for verification of certain parameters provided by a buyer, such as verification of employment information. The acquisition system **530** is operable to purchase loans from the origination system **520**. The credit reporting/approval system software (S/W) **560** may be a single software system or a distributed software system. In addition, the credit reporting/approval system software (S/W) **560** is operable to generate anonymous credit reports for various users of the system. The credit reporting/approval system software (S/W) **560** is also operable to determine the maximum value of a loan for which a buyer is approved. The multi-seller sales portal software (S/W) **540** is operable to use the maximum loan value for which a buyer is qualified and beat that maximum loan value against an inventory of good(s) and/or service(s) for a seller or a selected number of sellers to determine which of those good(s) and/or service(s) the buyer can afford to finance.

[0075] In addition, a selected number of good(s) and/or service(s) are provided to the system, and the credit reporting/approval system software (S/W) **560** is operable to perform different credit analysis as a function of the item for which the

loan is being sought. For example, depending on whether the loan is being sought to purchase an automobile, a home, or to repay revolving credit, the credit reporting/approval system software (S/W) **560** is operable to accommodate the different manner in which parameters corresponding to the buyer are handled.

[0076] The non-integrated single seller sales software (S/W) **550** is operable to perform framing on non-integrated single sellers as requested by a buyer using the system. For example, framing allows one web page to “frame” the contents of another web page. If desired, the non-integrated single seller sales software (S/W) **550** surrounds the framed web page with other information, as desired, by the various other functional blocks within the system. For example, a seller frames his own information, such as the inventory of his own good(s) and/or service(s), using the non-integrated single seller sales software (S/W) **550**. The framing performed in accordance with the present invention may be either dumb or intelligent. Intelligent framing extracts information from the non-integrated single seller sales web site and processes that provided information, while the dumb framing simply displays the information from the non-integrated single seller sales web site.

[0077] In the system of FIG. **5**, a buyer may use the buyer’s browser to access the multi-seller sales portal software **540**. The buyer may then use the multi-seller interface **544** to view various products of multiple sellers, including integrated (i.e., participating) sellers, such as that represented by the integrated single seller sales software **570**, and non-integrated (i.e., non-participating) sellers, such as that represented by the non-integrated single seller sales software **550**. In the former case, as mentioned above with respect to FIG. **4**, the buyer is able to view products that are within the inventories of the sellers and are available for purchase. In the latter, the buyer is only able to view products that are listed on the sellers website, which products may or may not be available for purchase, depending upon how up to date the sellers’ websites are relative to their actual inventories.

[0078] In either case, the seller may then perform affordability analysis via the affordability interface **542** for all or a selected portion of the products, as mentioned above. In this situation, the multi-seller sales portal software **540** may access, via the affordability interface **542**, the credit reporting/approval system software **560** to perform the analysis with multiple loans. The loan approval engine **568** uses the lender profiles **566**, information provided by the buyer, and the credit reporting database **562** to determine the loans that are applicable for the selected product(s). Specifically, the loan approval engine **568** accesses the credit reporting database **562**, to obtain buyer credit information. Alternatively, the loan approval engine **568** simply obtains a credit rating for the buyer calculated by the credit rating system engine **564**, which may be part of the credit reporting approval system software **560** or part of the system of a third-party credit agency. In either case, the loan approval engine **568** uses the information obtained, as well as information provided by the buyer and the lender profiles **566**, to determine whether the buyer qualifies to purchase the selected product for each of the multiple lenders’ loans, as discussed above. The results of the analysis, i.e., the product(s) that the buyer can finance and the loans applicable to each, are communicated to the buyer for display.

[0079] At this point, the buyer may select a product and a loan, and complete the purchase via the buyer’s browser/user

interface **510**. If the buyer selects a loan, the buyer may access loan origination software of the selected lender. Specifically, for example, the buyer may access, via the origination browser/user interface **522**, the loan origination software **524** in the origination system **520**. The loan origination software **524** provides to the buyer for completion via the buyer’s browser/user interface **510**, all the necessary financing forms, etc., and provides for buyer signature capture, similarly as discussed above.

[0080] The origination system **520** may be that of a single lender or part of a separate system that services multiple lenders. In addition, the functionality of the origination system **520**, the multi-seller sales portal **540**, and the credit reporting/approval system software **560** may be combined into one or two components within the system.

[0081] After the buyer performs affordability analysis via the buyer’s browser/user interface **510**, the buyer may suspend the transaction session, and proceed to a seller or sellers to view product(s) of interest. The system saves the buyer’s profile information and affordability analysis results, so that the buyer may have a seller simply pull up the information on the seller’s browser, such as the seller’s browser/user interface **576**, to view and discuss product(s) or loan(s) of interest, a specific product or loan pre-selected by the buyer via the buyer’s browser/user interface **510**, or even the products of another seller. The buyer may then, with the assistance of the seller via the seller’s browser/user interface **576**, select a product(s) for purchase and a loan(s) (or confirm previous selections) and complete the transaction. Again, the system provides for completion by the buyer and/or seller via the seller’s browser/user interface **576** all the necessary financing forms, etc.

[0082] Also, as mentioned above, the buyer may initiate a transaction session by proceeding directly to a seller and/or lender to initiate a transaction session. For example, the seller/lender may, via their respective browsers/user interfaces, access the multi-seller sales portal software **540** and assist the buyer in entering the buyer’s financial information and perform affordability analysis. Alternatively, the seller/lender may be integrated into the overall system, and be able to perform affordability analysis via their own systems, rather than through the multi-seller sales portal **540**. Specifically, for example, the buyer may proceed to an integrated seller, such as that represented by the integrated single seller sales software **570**, and perform affordability analysis using the seller’s browser/user interface **576**. In this situation, the seller, using the seller’s browser/user interface **574** and via the seller’s integrated affordability interface **574**, accesses the credit reporting/approval system software **560**, which performs the affordability analysis as discussed above.

[0083] FIG. **6** is a system diagram illustrating an embodiment of a loan origination and acquisition system in accordance with the present invention, which may be incorporated into the online, affordability-based purchasing system of the present invention, such as shown in FIG. **5** above, or may be a stand alone system. A loan origination computing system **603** and a loan acquisition computing system **650** both interconnect to the Internet **699**. The loan origination system **603**, as well as the loan acquisition computing system **650**, may be part of a lender’s system, part of a separate system accessed by the lender (or buyer or seller) via the lender’s browser/user interface, or may each be a part of separate systems of different lenders.

[0084] The loan origination computing system **603** itself may contain, among other things, a loan software (S/W) **607**. The loan software (S/W) **607** itself may contain, among other things, an origination interface (I/F) **610**, a processing engine **620** having access to multiple profile parameters **622**, a portfolio/profile manager **630**, and a remote parameter retrieval function **640**. The origination interface (I/F) **610** itself may contain, among other things, a remote loan application entry function **612** and a local loan application entry function **614**.

[0085] The loan acquisition computing system **650** itself may contain, among other things, an acquisition software (S/W) **655**. The acquisition software (S/W) **655** contains at least a portfolio/profile manager **670**, a parameter delivery function **680**, and a remote offering interface (I/F) **690**. If desired, the acquisition software (S/W) **655** contains a processing engine **660** that employs multiple profile parameters **662**. The processing engine **660** employing the multiple profile parameters **662** may be a parallel engine to the processing engine **620** employing the multiple profile parameters **622**.

[0086] The system of FIG. 6 provides for evaluation of the risk of issuing a loan to a buyer after considering all of the parameters represented by the profile parameters **662**, in such a way as to provide significant improvement over conventional methods that employ human employees who attempt to perform real time evaluation. The computer implementation of the invention does not limit the number of parameters that may be included in the risk evaluation that is performed for a specific buyer.

[0087] As mentioned above, the loan origination computing system **603** includes loan software **607** for analyzing risk and originating loans. The loan origination interface **610** enables remote loan application entry **612** via the browser/interface of other systems, and local loan application entry **614**, if, for example, the loan origination computing system **603** is incorporated into a lender's system. The processing engine **620** uses the information provided via the origination interface **610** and the profile parameters **622** to evaluate whether the buyer should be approved for a loan, similarly as discussed above.

[0088] In addition, the processing engine **620** may likewise retrieve remote parameters via remote parameter retrieval **640** that are delivered by the loan acquisition computing system **650** via parameter delivery **680**. The processing engine **620** may then use this information to determine whether or not to approve the buyer. In some cases as such, origination may depend, at least partially, on whether or not the loan fits within parameters of loans previously purchased by the lender or some other entity, or those that the lender or other entity has been successful in selling in the past. This information may be generated/maintained by the portfolio/profile manager **670**.

[0089] The loan software **607** may also include a portfolio/profile manager **630**. The manager **630** keeps track of the portfolio of loans, and their respective profiles and buyer information, being carried by the lender, which information may also be considered in evaluating the relative risks of issuing a loan to a particular buyer. If, for example, the buyer's financial condition and loan requested matches those of others within the lender's portfolio that are deemed desirable (e.g., low risk) by the lender, the lender may consider this information in determining approval or the amount the lender is willing to finance.

[0090] The information may also be used to determine whether or not a lender should sell any loan being carried by the lender. If the lender approves a buyer for a loan, or previ-

ously acquired that loan, the portfolio/profile manager **630** may evaluate that buyer/loan relative to others within the lender's portfolio to evaluate the relative risks of continuing to carry that loan. If the manager **630** determines that the risk is too high, it may designate the loan as one that should be sold by the lender. The manager **630** may also evaluate loans within the lender's portfolio, and use loan history to modify the profile parameters used by the lender, as necessary, in order to lower risk or increase origination while maintaining low risk.

[0091] The loan acquisition computing system **650** includes acquisition software **655** that may be used by a lender (or other entity) to acquire loans deemed desirable and to sell loans deemed undesirable. The acquisition software **655** includes a portfolio/profile manager **670** that keeps track of the portfolio of loans, and their respective profiles and buyer information, being carried by the lender, which information may be considered in evaluating the relative risks of acquiring certain loans and desirability of selling certain loans.

[0092] The acquisition software **655** also includes a remote offering interface **690** for sending or receiving loan acquisition offers. For example, the acquisition software **650** may receive, in response to a request or otherwise, an offer to sell a particular loan. The acquisition software **655** may include a processing engine **660** that uses profile parameters **622**, and, if desired, information generated/maintained by the portfolio/profile manager **670** to analyze relative risks and determine whether the offered loan is approved for acquisition. Alternatively, the acquisition software **655** uses information generated by a remote processing engine, such as processing engine **620**, and/or information generated/maintained by the portfolio/profile manager **670**, to analyze relative risks and determine whether the offered loan is approved for acquisition.

[0093] The loan acquisition software **655** may also communicate, via the remote offering interface **690**, a request to acquire certain loans. The acquisition software **655** delivers the required parameters via parameter delivery **680** to, for example, the loan origination computing system **603**, which retrieves the parameters via remote parameter retrieval **640** and uses the parameters retrieved to determine whether or not any of the loans in the profile meet those parameters. If at least one does, and the loan origination computing system **603** desires to sell the identified loan(s), the loan acquisition computing system **650** completes the transaction with the loan origination computing system **603**, assuming the terms of sale are otherwise acceptable.

[0094] In addition, the system of FIG. 6 enables a user (e.g., a buyer, lender or seller) to define an interest rate, decide whether to increase or decrease a down payment, or to increase or decrease the number of months of the term of the loan, among other parameters, dealing with the approval of the loan for a buyer. This allows for intelligent advising, where suggestions are made to the buyer to assist the buyer in determining what loan parameters should be changed so that the buyer can qualify for a loan having a larger maximum ceiling. For example, in certain cases, the re-payment of a predetermined amount of a buyer's existing revolving debt will significantly increase the maximum loan for which the buyer will qualify.

[0095] FIG. 7 is a system diagram illustrating yet another embodiment of the online affordability-based purchasing system of FIG. 1. An origination computing system **710**, a

credit reporting service 720, a single or multiple lender's system(s) 740, a loan affordability computing system 750, and a the web sales site 760 all interconnect to the internet 799. A client using the system can access all of the components of the system using a browser/user interface (I/F) 732, which may be contained within, for example, a client computer 730.

[0096] The origination computing system 710 may contain, among other things, an origination software (S/W) 711. The origination software (S/W) 711 may contain, among other things, an origination interface (I/F) 712, a processing engine 715, a portfolio manager 717, and a remote parameter delivery function 718. The origination interface (I/F) 712 itself may perform, among other functions, a remote loan application entry function 713 and a local loan application entry function 714. The processing engine 715 itself may contain, among other things, multiple profile parameters 716. The credit reporting service 720 itself may contain, among other things, a rating system engine 722. The rating system engine 722 itself may perform, among other functions, a sales category consideration function 724 and a requested format consideration function 726. The origination computing system 710 may have the same or similar functionality as the loan origination computing system 603 of FIG. 6.

[0097] The loan affordability computing system 750 itself may contain, among other things, an affordability software (S/W) 751. The affordability software (S/W) 751 itself may contain, among other things, a processing engine 752, an origination interface (I/F) 757, and a credit rating system interface (I/F) 758. The affordability software (S/W) 751 itself may perform, among other functions, a remote parameter retrieval function 756. The processing engine 752 itself may contain, among other things, multiple profile parameters A 753, multiple profile parameters B 754, and multiple profile parameters N 755. The web sales site 760 itself may contain, among other things, an affordability interface (I/F) software (S/W) 762. The affordability interface (I/F) software (S/W) 762 itself may perform, among other things, a pricing system integration function 764 and a purchase completion integration function 766.

[0098] The interconnection between the credit reporting service 720 and the Internet 799 may be a low bandwidth connection in certain embodiments of the invention. The credit reporting service 720 may generate a specific type of report or rating, using the sales category consideration 724 component of the credit rating engine 722, pertaining to the type of good(s) and/or service(s) for which financing is sought. For example, the credit reporting service 720 can handle different types of good(s) and/or service(s) in different manners to ensure that the maximum loan value for those specific good(s) and/or service(s) is found. When dealing with different good(s) and/or service(s), such as an automobile or a home, or with repayment of revolving credit, the credit reporting/ service 720 is operable to accommodate the different manner in which parameters corresponding to the buyer are entered.

[0099] In addition, the credit reporting service 720 may provide for anonymity in the loan approval process. When a buyer uses conventional methods employed in purchasing good(s) and/or service(s), such as automobiles, whenever a loan analysis is performed wherein the buyer is denied financing, the buyer receives an undesirable rejection on his personal credit history. If a buyer goes from one provider of good(s) and/or service(s) to another and the buyer is continu-

ally rejected for financing, the buyer's personal credit history can be significantly compromised. In response to the requested format consideration 726 component, the credit reporting service 720 may provide to the buyer multiple, anonymous credit reports, if so requested by the buyer. In addition, a full credit report is sent to a seller's system, as shown in the various embodiments of the system, but only after the buyer's loan has been approved.

[0100] In addition the credit reporting service 720 may, in response to the requested format consideration 726 component, generate only a credit rating and nothing else, if requested by the client. For example, the credit reporting service 720 does not generate a large file having all of the buyer's account information listed. Rather, the credit reporting service 720 generates only a single value indicative of the buyer's credit rating. This reduction of information provides for a significant savings of bandwidth within the system.

[0101] In the system of FIG. 7, a client, such as a buyer, for example, uses the browser/user interface 732 of client computer 730 to access a web sales site 760 of a single seller or one that interfaces with multiple sellers. The buyer can view products and then select a product or products to perform an affordability analysis. The buyer may, for example, select a button or icon on the web sales site 760, which vectors the buyer to the loan affordability computing system 750. The buyer then uses the affordability software 751 and information provided via the affordability interface software 762 to perform affordability analysis, as discussed above.

[0102] For example, the processing engine 752 may access the credit reporting service 720, via the credit rating system interface 758, to obtain a buyer credit rating. The processing engine 752 then uses the credit rating obtained, pricing information from pricing system integration 764 component, and the profile parameters of multiple lenders stored in memory, for example, to determine the product(s) that the buyer qualifies to purchase and the loan(s) applicable to each. The processing engine 752 may also retrieve, via the remote parameter retrieval 756 component, remote parameters of other lenders, which parameters may be located in the origination computing system 710 or the lender's system(s) 740, to consider the loans of those lenders in the analysis. The remote parameter retrieval 756 component may also be used to obtain updated parameter information from multiple lenders so that the loan affordability computing system 750 may update the multiple profile parameters used by the processing engine 752. In either case, the remote parameter retrieval 756 component may interface with a remote parameter delivery component, such as remote parameter delivery 718 component of origination computing system 710 or that of the lender's system(s) 740.

[0103] Once the buyer performs the affordability analysis, the buyer may select a product and a loan, and complete the purchase. The affordability software 751 may access the origination computing system 710 via the origination interface 757, and the origination computing system 710 may originate the loan, similarly as discussed above. The web sales site 760 includes purchase completion integration 766 so that the buyer can purchase the selected product from the web sales site 760, using the loan originated via the loan affordability computing system 750.

[0104] FIG. 8 is a system diagram illustrating a still further embodiment of the online, affordability-based purchasing system of FIG. 1. The system of FIG. 8 illustrates one embodiment of the invention wherein certain lenders need not

necessarily directly participate with the system, yet their information is nevertheless provided to a user. A partially integrated origination system **810**, an independent origination business **801**, a fully integrated origination system **840**, an integrated web sales site **802**, and an affordability software (S/W) **870** all interconnect to the Internet **899**.

[0105] The partially integrated origination system **810** itself may contain, among other things, an origination software (S/W) **811**. The origination software (S/W) **811** itself may contain, among other things, an origination interface (I/F) **816**, a processing engine **820**, and a portfolio/profile manager **830**. The processing engine **820** itself may contain, among other things, multiple profile parameters **822**.

[0106] The fully integrated origination system **840** itself may contain, among other things, an origination software (S/W) **841**. The origination software (S/W) **841** itself may contain, among other things, an origination interface (I/F) **846**, a processing engine **850** having multiple profile parameters **852**, a portfolio/profile manager **860**, and a remote parameter delivery function **862**. The affordability software (S/W) **870** itself may contain, among other things, a processing engine **871**, a lender interface (I/F) **892**, that may perform, among other things, a remote parameter retrieval function **890**, and a credit rating system interface (I/F) **894**.

[0107] The processing engine **871** utilizes confirmed parameters **872** and manually entered parameters **882**. The confirmed parameters **872** contains multiple profiles, as illustrated by multiple profile parameters A **873**, multiple profile parameters B **874**, and multiple profile parameters N **875**, corresponding to different lenders integrated into the system, such as, for example, that represented by fully integrated origination system **840**. The parameters of integrated systems as such may be delivered remotely, via a remote parameter delivery function, such as remote parameter delivery **862** function of system **840**. The affordability software **870** uses the parameters delivered to update the confirmed parameters **872**. The affordability software **870** may also retrieve such parameters, via the remote parameter retrieval **890** function, and similarly update the confirmed parameters **872**. Since the confirmed parameters are those of integrated lenders, they do not need separate confirmation before loan origination.

[0108] The manually entered parameters **882**, illustrated by manually entered parameters A **883**, manually entered parameters B **884**, and manually entered parameters N **885**, are those of non-integrated lenders, which parameters are manually entered. Parameters as such should be confirmed with the relevant lender before loan origination to determine whether they are still valid.

[0109] The independent origination business **801** is illustrative of one business, which may also be a provider of good(s) and/or service(s), that is not directly integrated nor participating in the system. The parameters for such an independent origination business may be added manually to the system. The integrated web sales site **802** is illustrative of a business that is fully integrated, or participating, in the system. A client may therefore access the affordability software **870** via the integrated web sales site **802**.

[0110] The multiple profile parameters **822** within the processing engine **820** are pulled, not pushed. However, the multiple profile parameters **852** within the processing engine **850** are pushed within the system. The effects of any changes of the multiple profile parameters **852** within the processing engine **850** take effect immediately due to the full integration of the fully integrated origination system **840**. The confirmed

parameters **872** within the affordability software (S/W) **870** are confirmed to be exactly those parameters corresponding to various lenders. The manually entered parameters **882** within the affordability software (S/W) **870** are entered manually after verifying, if desired, that the parameters are actually indicative and representative of the parameters provided by the various lenders cooperating with the system. Also, the processing engine **871** within the affordability software (S/W) **870** performs actual affordability analysis, and it is operable to perform estimated affordability analysis wherein a full credit report is not generated if not all of the parameters are available.

[0111] FIG. 9 is a system diagram illustrating another embodiment of the online, affordability-based purchasing system of FIG. 1 that utilizes an affordability portal. An origination software (S/W) **902**, a browser software (S/W) **904**, an affordability software (S/W) **906**, a credit reporting service **908**, a number of independent web sales sites **950**, an affordability portal software (S/W) **910**, and a number of integrated web sales site softwares (S/Ws) **960** all interconnect to the internet **999**.

[0112] The affordability portal software (S/W) **910** itself may contain, among other things, a number of integrated site listings **917**, a search engine **918**, and a number of browser framing configurations **912** each having a pricing interface (I/F) **913** and a payment interface (I/F) **914**. The integrated web sales site software (S/W) **960** itself may contain, among other things, an affordability interface (I/F) **970**. The affordability interface (I/F) **970** may have, among other things, pricing system integration **972** and a purchase completion integration **974**.

[0113] The affordability portal software (S/W) **910** is operable to serve as a front end for a number of different sellers. The affordability portal software (S/W) **910** serves to provide a buyer using the system, access to a number of different sellers providing various good(s) and/or service(s). The affordability portal software (S/W) **910** also is operable to perform framing for any of the various independent web sales sites **950**. Again, the framing performed here may be intelligent or dumb. For example, the framing may extract information from certain of the various independent web sales sites **950**, or may simply display the information provided from certain of the various independent web sales sites **950**. The extracted information in the intelligent framing embodiments of the invention is used by the affordability software (S/W) **906** to perform analysis for loan approval and loan acquisition by a buyer using the system.

[0114] The origination software **902** affordability software **906** and the credit reporting service **908** may have the same functionality of similar components discussed above.

[0115] In the system of FIG. 9, a buyer may, via the buyer's browser software **904** access the affordability portal software **910**, which contains integrated site listings **917**. The buyer may access the integrated sites listed, or perform a search of all sites, integrated or independent, using the search engine **918**.

[0116] When a buyer accesses an integrated site, such as that represented by the integrated web sales site software **960**, the buyer may perform an affordability analysis using the affordability software **906**. The affordability interface **970** enables pricing information to be accessed by the affordability software **906**, and enables the purchase to be completed, via the affordability portal **910**, if desired, using a loan originated via the origination software **902**.

[0117] When a buyer desires to purchase a product from an independent web sales site **950**, the affordability software **910** frames pricing and payment information, via the pricing interface **913** and payment interface **914**, respectively. The pricing information obtained may be used to perform an affordability analysis using the affordability software **906**. The payment interface **914** may be used to complete a purchase of a product from the independent web sales site **950** via the affordability portal software **910**.

[0118] FIG. **10** is a functional block diagram illustrating one embodiment of online, affordability-based filtering performed in accordance with the present invention. In a block **1010**, credit information is collected. Subsequently, in a block **1020**, a predetermined number of credit reports are retrieved. The credit reports are contained within any of the locations for storage of credit reports in any of the various embodiments of the invention. Then, in a block **1030**, an approval decision criterion is generated or constructed. If desired, multiple approval decision criteria may be generated or constructed in the block **1030**. Then, in a block **1040**, loan applications are delivered to all applicable integrated lenders that operate independently. Those integrated lenders that do not operate independently, but that operate within the system performing the method **1000**, automatically receive loan applications corresponding to the buyer.

[0119] Then, in a block **1050**, qualification and qualification parameters are detected for all proxy lenders. Examples of qualification parameters include interest rate of a loan, the term of a loan, and the down payment to be paid for the loan. For all of the lenders that are not integrated, the qualification and qualification parameters corresponding to those lenders are estimated in a block **1060**. If desired, in a block **1070**, the loan information is constructed/ordered and displayed to a buyer. Here, the system may display such information as whether the local area network is approved, the particular lenders from whom the buyer can secure financing, and other information pertaining to the securing of a loan for the buyer. Finally, in a block **1080**, the qualification parameters that are either detected in the block **1050** or are estimated in the block **1060** are used to filter the offering.

[0120] FIG. **11** is a functional block diagram illustrating another embodiment of online, affordability-based filtering performed in accordance with the present invention. The method **1100** provides for the option of selection. In a block **1110**, all of the available good(s) and/or service(s) are provided for selection. Then, when an affordability request **1115** is made, the method proceeds to collect credit information in a block **1120**. Subsequently, in a block **1130**, a predetermined number of credit reports are retrieved.

[0121] Then, in a block **1140**, an approval decision criterion is generated or constructed. If desired, multiple approval decision criteria may be generated or constructed in the block **1140**.

[0122] Then, in a block **1150**, loan applications are delivered to all applicable integrated lenders that operate independently. Those integrated lenders that do not operate independently, but that operate within the system performing the method **1100**, automatically receive loan applications corresponding to the buyer. The delivering of the loan applications in the block **1150** may be performed with or without selection information. For example, the information provided to the applicable lenders that operate independently may or may not contain any information pertaining to any selection of good(s) and/or service(s) performed in the block **1110**.

[0123] Then, in a block **1160**, qualification and qualification parameters are detected for all proxy lenders. Examples of qualification parameters include interest rate of a loan, the term of a loan, and the down payment to be paid for the loan. For all of the lenders that are not integrated, the qualification and qualification parameters corresponding to those lenders are estimated in a block **1170**. Again, this can be done with or without selection information. Then, in a block **1180**, the loan information is constructed/ordered and displayed to a buyer. The system may display such information as whether or not the local area network is approved, the particular lenders for whom the buyer can secure financing, and other information pertaining to the securing of a loan for the buyer. Finally, while not shown in FIG. **11**, the qualification parameters that are either detected in the block **1150** or are estimated in the block **1160** may be used to filter the offering.

[0124] FIG. **12** is a block diagram illustrating exemplary operation of one embodiment of an online, affordability-based purchasing system built in accordance with the present invention. Using a buyer's browser **1201**, a buyer may interact via a communication network **1203**, such as Internet or an intranet, with an affordability-based web server **1205**. As previously described, such interaction may involve affordability screening of goods or services offered by one or more sellers that the buyer cannot afford to finance. A lender, via a lender's browser **1211**, may interact with the affordability-based web server **1205** to establish, monitor, and modify finance offerings used in the affordability screening by the affordability-based web server **1205**. Although a seller's server **1209** and the seller's affiliates server **1215** may store their respective goods or services catalogs **1213** and **1217**, respectively, such catalogs may alternatively or additionally be stored by the affordability-based web server **1205** within a multi-seller database **1207** or by a third party system (not shown). Similarly, the affordability-based web server functionality may exist on the seller's web server **1209** with an affordability module **1223**. A plurality of sales agents interact with the online, affordability-based purchasing system through browsers such as the sales agent browsers **1219** and **1221**. The sales agent browsers **1219** and **1221** may interact via a direct link to the communication network **1203** or indirectly via the seller's web server **1209**.

[0125] As previously described, the affordability-based web server **1205** maintains within a buyer's profile the entire purchasing and sales transaction through a single or multiple sessions established, continued, and closed at any of the buyer's, lender's or sales agent browsers **1201**, **1211**, or **1219**. For example, the buyer may initiate the purchasing transaction at home on the buyer's browser **1201**, receive an affordable list of goods or services via the affordability-based web server **1205**, and then postpone the transaction for several days. Thereafter, the buyer may visit an identified lender and continue the transaction session with the lender's assistance via the lender's browser **1211**. The lender may not only give the buyer advice regarding financing, but may also direct the buyer in the selection of a seller's good or service, in effect acting as a seller's agent. Again, the buyer may decide to postpone completing the transaction for several more days. Upon visiting a sales agent, the buyer may inspect the goods or services and close the transaction with the assistance of the sales agent on the sales agent browser **1219**.

[0126] Not only can the sales agent attempt to convince the buyer to purchase goods or services from that seller's current inventory or offerings, the sales agent may also attempt to sell

goods or services from an affiliates goods or services catalog **1217** via the affordability-based web server **1205**. Similarly, the sales agent may assist the lender associated with the lender's browser **1211** by convincing the buyer to select a financing offering from such lender over other lenders offering financing via the affordability-based web server **1205**.

[**0127**] In addition to the multiple session online process described above, the sales agent may also, or alternately, interact via telephone with the buyer and/or the lender while one or more of the parties are viewing various aspects of the current transaction as retrieved from the affordability-based web server **1205**.

[**0128**] The sales agent via the sales agent browser **1219** can also attempt to up-sell or down-sell the buyer if the opportunity proves more profitable. For example, the sales agent may determine, by viewing the buyer's affordability screening of their present inventory, that the buyer could afford to finance a much more expensive product. Through conventional sales techniques, such as promotional incentives or pricing adjustments, the sales agent may convince the buyer to complete the transaction, or to complete a transaction based on another good or service. The sales agent may also convince the buyer to select additional goods or add-ons, such as maintenance packages, insurance, etc., comfortably knowing that the buyer can afford the financing.

[**0129**] The sales agent may also use the affordability-based web server **1205** to identify the highest profit purchasing transaction for the buyer. For example, a more expensive good may require a finance offering that proves to be not as profitable to the sales agent as a slightly less expensive good because of alternate financing that is more favorable to the sales agent due to higher origination point allocations from a given lender.

[**0130**] FIG. **13** is a flow diagram illustrating various functionality of the online, affordability-based system of FIG. **12**, as used by a sales agent upon a buyer's visit. At a block **1301**, a sales agent, via the sales agent's browser, e.g., sales agent browsers **1219** or **1221** of FIG. **12**, collects standard buyer information such as the buyer's name, address, social security number, monthly sources of income, monthly housing costs, etc. Such information is submitted to the affordability-based web server **1205** which, at a block **1303**, establishes a buyer's profile and performs an affordability search on the seller's current goods or service offerings. The sales agent may view on the sales agent's browser such goods or services and the associated financing options offered. The sales agent may also view whether standard options and add-ons will cause the buyer to lose financing or favorable financing offerings.

[**0131**] The affordability-based web server **1205** also calculates the financing profit margin for both the lender and the seller for origination of the financing. Applications may also be written specifically for the sales agents to calculate the overall profit margin for each of the seller's "affordable" goods or services. By quickly glancing through the profit margins, the sales agent can identify the good or service to attempt to sell to the buyer. Similarly, the affordability-based web server **1205** will calculate the best deal for the buyer at a block **1307**, and the best deal for a lender at a block **1309**. The highest profit or "best deal" for the seller, buyer, and lender may be displayed by the sales agent at a block **1311**. The sales agent may review or print such and other "tip" information at a block **1313**.

[**0132**] The functionality described with reference to FIG. **13** may also be applied by the sales agent for a buyer that

begins the transaction himself/herself online through a buyer's browser or with a lender's assistance. Such continued efforts in the buyer's purchasing transaction can occur when the buyer visits the seller in a face-to-face interaction, when the buyer is on the telephone, or in response to receipt of the transaction information from the affordability-based web server **1205**. Internet based interaction between the buyer and seller may also or alternatively be established between the parties to assist the seller in closing the deal.

[**0133**] Ordinarily, without the affordability-based purchasing system of the present invention, a sales agent might only have access to several or a dozen or so lenders. Such limits occur for many reasons, including the seller's desire to focus on few lender's to develop a preferred business relationship therewith, or because increasing the number of lenders will make a sales agents efforts too complex and time consuming with the associated calculations needed to determine whether financing is available for a particular buyer for a particular good or service offered. In fact, often times, the seller will forego all seller originated financing because the effort is not justified in view of the purchase price of the good. However, with the online, affordability-based purchasing system doing all of the calculations for many lenders automatically, a seller of a relatively inexpensive good may find purchasing with financing a more viable option. Similarly, current sellers having a single or only a few lenders through which they conduct financing, will easily be able to extend their financing options using the aspects of the affordability-based purchasing system of the present inventions.

[**0134**] Even so, the affordability-based web server will permit a seller to select only a subset of the available participating lenders for selling its goods or services. For example, a seller may choose to offer its goods or services via the affordability-based web server in association with a single lender selected from the plurality of participating lenders. Having done so, when a buyer interacts with the affordability-based web server via their browser, the buyer will only receive the seller's goods or services that are affordable through finance offerings from that selected lender.

[**0135**] Of course, the seller may choose to lift the restriction to expose its goods or services to finance offerings of the other of the plurality of participating lenders upon contact with the buyer in an effort to complete the transaction. The seller may also use this strategy to attempt to displace a finance offering selected by a buyer from the seller's "preferred list" by considering the other of the participating lenders.

[**0136**] For example, referring to FIG. **12**, the buyer may initiate a transaction via a buyer's browser **1201** by interfacing with the affordability-based web server **1205**. The affordability-based web server **1205** responds to the credit information captured from the buyer or retrieved from the buyer's profile to screen goods or services offered by the seller that the seller's preferred list of lenders will not finance. The buyer, via the buyer's browser **1201**, may then select one of the offered goods or services along with a particular finance offering before contacting a sales agent. In an attempt to close the transaction or increase the seller's profit, the sales agent via the sales agent browser **1219** may lift the lender's restriction and have the affordability-based web server **1205** respond with additional finance offerings for the selected good or service.

[**0137**] Likewise, when a buyer visits a lender, the lender via the lender's browser **1211** may lift a seller's lender restric-

tions to add that lender's particular financing offerings when considering the seller's current goods or services offerings. In fact, the lender, via the lender's browser **1211**, may restrict the affordability-based web server **1205** to only consider that lender's finance offerings when determining the affordability of the seller's goods or services.

[0138] In view of the above detailed description of the present invention and associated drawings, other modifications and variations will now become apparent to those skilled in the art. It should also be apparent that such other modifications and variations may be effected without departing from the spirit and scope of the present invention.

1. (canceled)

2. A method supporting a transaction, the method comprising:

receiving, by a multi-seller system, first input from a potential buyer, the first input received from a computing device of the potential buyer;

identifying, by the multi-seller system and responsive to the first input, a plurality of products being offered for sale by a corresponding plurality of sellers;

delivering, by the multi-seller system for display on the computing device of the potential buyer, an identification of the plurality of products; and

receiving, by the multi-seller system, second input from the potential buyer, the second input received from the computing device of the potential buyer, the second input selecting one of the plurality of products corresponding to a particular seller;

supporting, by the multi-seller system, establishment of Internet based communication between the potential buyer and the particular seller, to enable interaction between the potential buyer and the particular seller regarding the selected one of the plurality of products; and

receiving, by the multi-seller system, third input from the potential buyer, the third input consummating a transaction involving the selected one of the plurality of products.

3. The method of claim of claim **2** wherein the first input comprises a search input.

4. The method of claim of claim **2** wherein the first input comprises information regarding the buyer.

5. The method of claim of claim **2** wherein the third input is received from the computing device of the potential buyer.

6. The method of claim of claim **2** wherein the third input is received from a system of the particular seller.

7. The method of claim of claim **2** comprising saving, by the multi-seller system, a record including an identification of the selected one of the plurality of products, to enable the transaction to occur over multiple sessions with the potential buyer.

8. The method of claim of claim **2** wherein the Internet based communication occurs in real-time.

9. The method of claim of claim **2** wherein the transaction is consummated in a single transaction session with the potential buyer.

10. The method of claim of claim **9** wherein the Internet based communication occurs in real-time during the single transaction session with the potential buyer.

11. The method of claim of claim **2** comprising presenting, by the multi-seller system, to the potential buyer, at least one financing option that can be used in connection with consummating the transaction.

12. The method of claim of claim **11** wherein the at least one financing option comprises a loan.

13. A method supporting a transaction, the method comprising:

receiving, by a seller system, first input from a potential buyer, the first input received from a computing device of the potential buyer;

identifying, by the seller system and responsive to the first input, a plurality of products being offered for sale by the seller;

delivering, by the seller system for display on the computing device of the potential buyer, an identification of the plurality of products; and

receiving, by the seller system, second input from the potential buyer, the second input received from the computing device of the potential buyer, the second input selecting one of the plurality of products;

supporting, by the seller system, establishment of Internet based communication between the potential buyer and the seller, to enable interaction between the potential buyer and the seller regarding the selected one of the plurality of products; and

receiving, by the seller system, third input from the potential buyer, the third input consummating a transaction involving the selected one of the plurality of products.

14. The method of claim of claim **13** wherein the first input comprises a search input.

15. The method of claim of claim **13** wherein the first input comprises information regarding the buyer.

16. The method of claim of claim **13** wherein the third input is received from the computing device of the potential buyer.

17. The method of claim of claim **13** wherein the third input is received via the seller system.

18. The method of claim of claim **13** comprising saving, by the seller system, a record including an identification of the selected one of the plurality of products, to enable the transaction to occur over multiple sessions with the potential buyer.

19. The method of claim of claim **13** wherein the Internet based communication occurs in real-time.

20. The method of claim of claim **13** wherein the transaction is consummated in a single transaction session with the potential buyer.

21. The method of claim of claim **20** wherein the Internet based communication occurs in real-time during the single transaction session with the potential buyer.

22. The method of claim of claim **13** comprising presenting, by the seller system, to the potential buyer, at least one financing option that can be used in connection with consummating the transaction.

23. The method of claim of claim **22** wherein the at least one financing option comprises a loan.

24. A method supporting a transaction, the method comprising:

delivering, by the multi-seller system for display on the computing device of the potential buyer, an identification of a plurality of products being offered for sale by a corresponding plurality of sellers;

receiving, by the multi-seller system, first input from the potential buyer, the first input received from the computing device of the potential buyer, the first input selecting one of the plurality of products corresponding to a particular seller;

supporting, by the multi-seller system, establishment of Internet based communication between the potential buyer and the particular seller, to enable interaction between the potential buyer and the particular seller regarding the selected one of the plurality of products; and

receiving, by the multi-seller system, second input from the potential buyer, the second input consummating a transaction involving the selected one of the plurality of products.

25. The method of claim of claim **24** wherein the second input is received from the computing device of the potential buyer.

26. The method of claim of claim **24** wherein the second input is received from a system of the particular seller.

27. The method of claim of claim **24** comprising saving, by the multi-seller system, a record including an identification of the selected one of the plurality of products, to enable the transaction to occur over multiple sessions with the potential buyer.

28. The method of claim of claim **24** wherein the Internet based communication occurs in real-time.

29. The method of claim of claim **24** wherein the transaction is consummated in a single transaction session with the potential buyer.

30. The method of claim of claim **29** wherein the Internet based communication occurs in real-time during the single transaction session with the potential buyer.

31. The method of claim of claim **24** comprising presenting, by the multi-seller system, to the potential buyer, at least one financing option that can be used in connection with consummating the transaction.

32. The method of claim of claim **31** wherein the at least one financing option comprises a loan.

33. A method supporting a transaction, the method comprising:

delivering, by the seller system for display on the computing device of the potential buyer, an identification of a plurality of products being offered for sale by the seller;

receiving, by the seller system, first input from the potential buyer, the first input received from the computing device of the potential buyer, the first input selecting one of the plurality of products;

supporting, by the seller system, establishment of Internet based communication between the potential buyer and the particular seller, to enable interaction between the potential buyer and the seller regarding the selected one of the plurality of products; and

receiving, by the seller system, second input from the potential buyer, the second input consummating a transaction involving the selected one of the plurality of products.

34. The method of claim of claim **33** wherein the second input is received from the computing device of the potential buyer.

35. The method of claim of claim **33** wherein the second input is received via the seller system.

36. The method of claim of claim **33** comprising saving, by the seller system, a record including an identification of the selected one of the plurality of products, to enable the transaction to occur over multiple sessions with the potential buyer.

37. The method of claim of claim **33** wherein the Internet based communication occurs in real-time.

38. The method of claim of claim **33** wherein the transaction is consummated in a single transaction session with the potential buyer.

39. The method of claim of claim **38** wherein the Internet based communication occurs in real-time during the single transaction session with the potential buyer.

40. The method of claim of claim **33** comprising presenting, by the seller system, to the potential buyer, at least one financing option that can be used in connection with consummating the transaction.

41. The method of claim of claim **40** wherein the at least one financing option comprises a loan.

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