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(54) **SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR TRACKING WEB CAMPAIGN EFFECTIVENESS**

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

Events generated by customer interaction during an internet-based session are made available for use by a system for tracking the effectiveness of web advertising campaigns. Event occurrences are collected for evaluation to determine whether campaign goals are being met. Campaigns are defined by rules indicating which ad content is to be displayed to which customers. Event types to be reported are selected depending on the needs of the particular campaign.

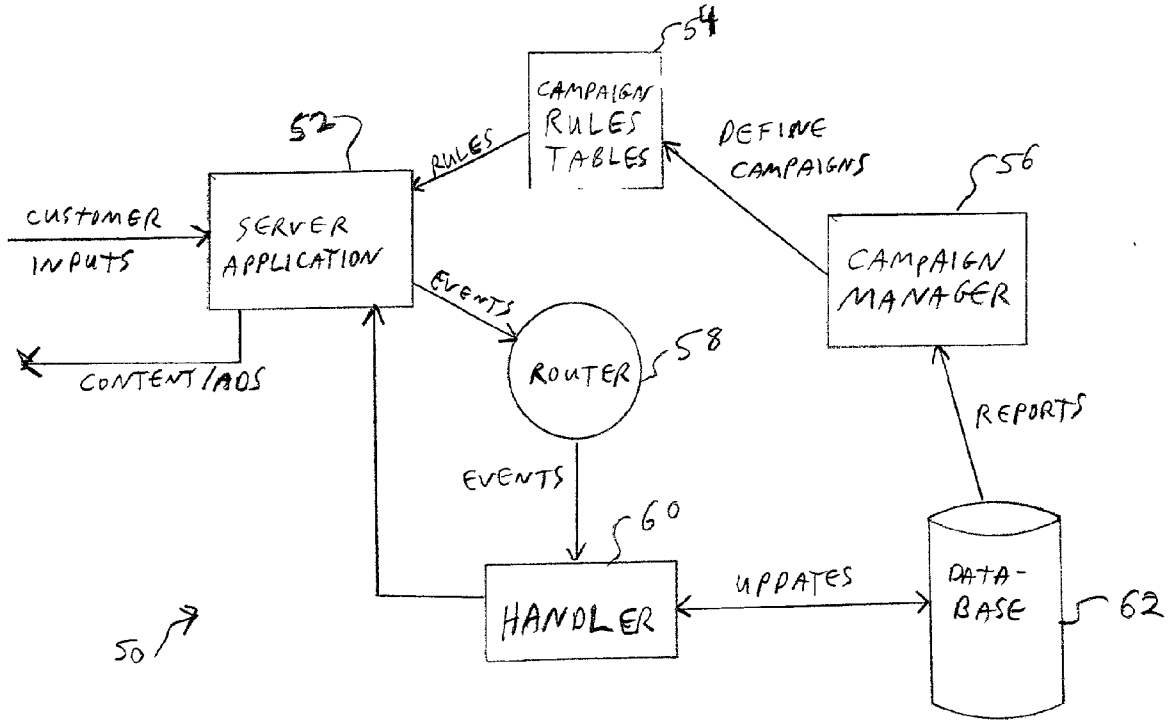


FIG 1

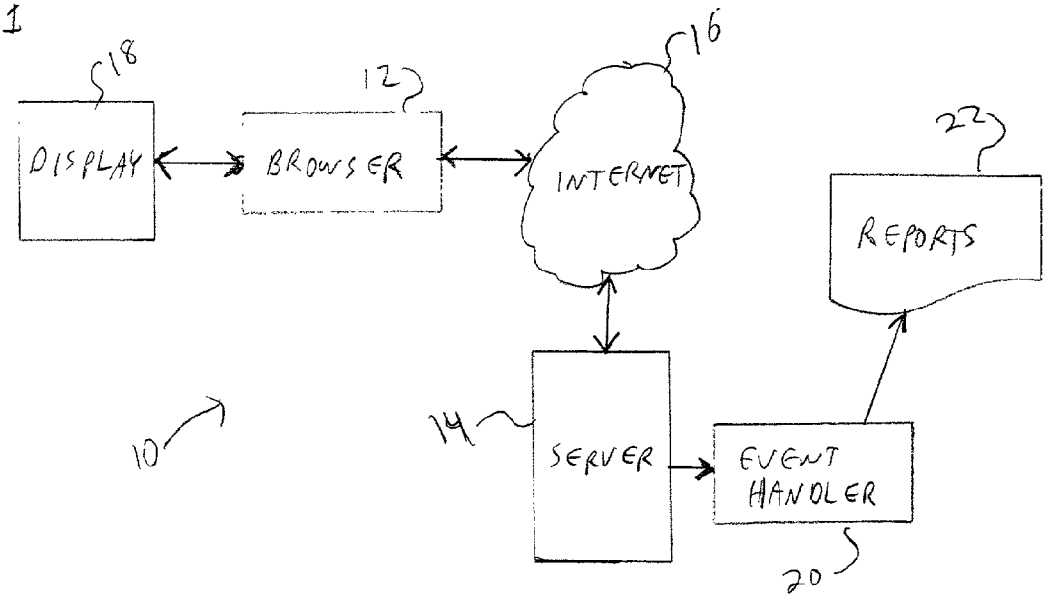


FIG 2

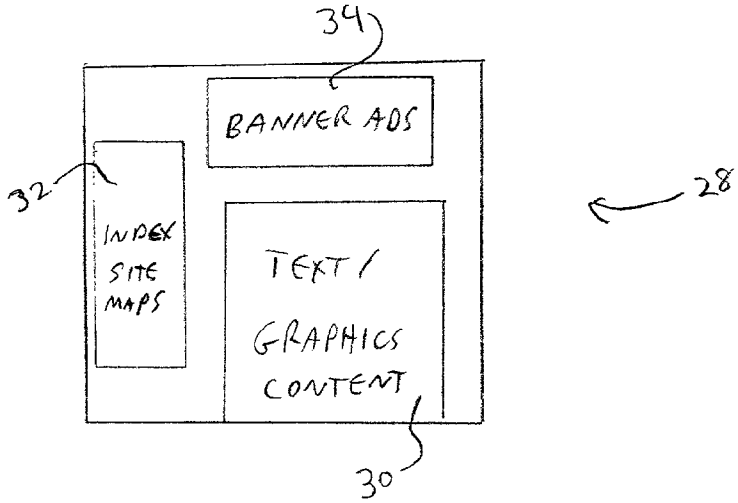


FIG 3

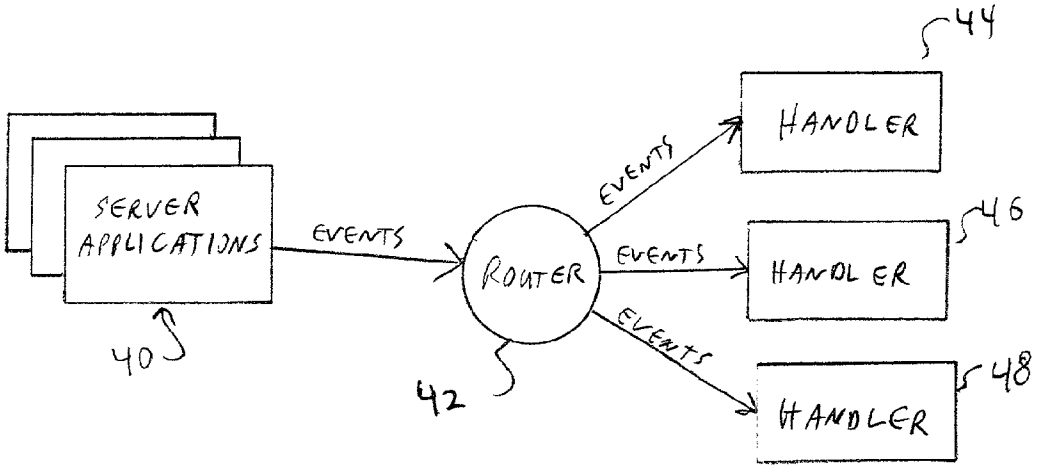
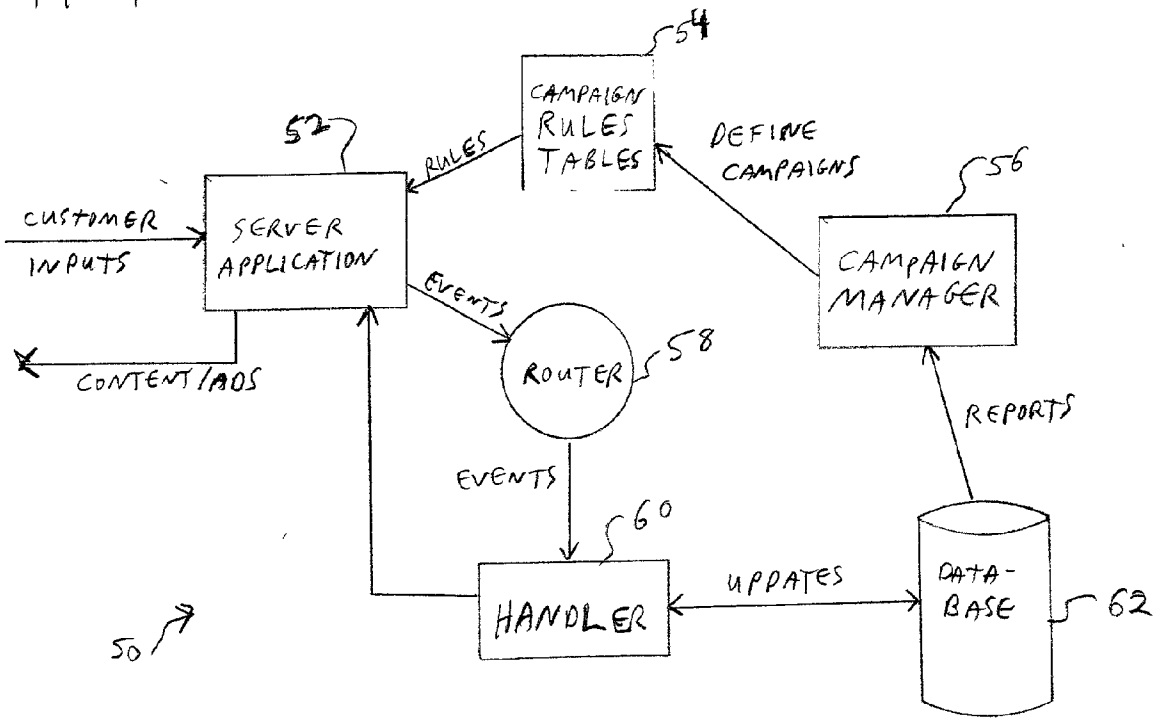


FIG 4


54
CAMPAIGN RULES TABLES
52
RULES
DEFINE CAMPAIGNS
56
CUSTOMER INPUTS
SERVER APPLICATION
CAMPAIGN MANAGER
EVENTS
CONTENT/ADS
ROUTER
58
REPORTS
EVENTS
60
HANDLER
UPDATES
DATA-BASE
62
50

SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR TRACKING WEB CAMPAIGN EFFECTIVENESS

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION

[0001] This application claims priority based upon Provisional Application Filing No. 60/172,279 filed Dec. 17, 1999 titled PERSONALIZED WEB CAMPAIGN PROMOTION SYSTEM WITH CAMPAIGN EFFECTIVENESS TRACKING.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0002] 1. Field of the Invention

[0003] The present invention relates generally to computer systems that communicate of the internet, and more specifically to a system and method for tracking the effectiveness of advertising campaigns over internet systems.

[0004] 2. Description of the Prior Art

[0005] Advertising over the internet has become extremely common. In many cases, paid advertising is the primary source of revenue for internet content providers. For others, advertisements can direct potential customers to additional products available, and promote products that the content provider wants or needs to sell.

[0006] An important goal of advertising, especially in a medium such as the internet, is to direct the advertising to customers most likely to buy the product. Various types of customer profiling is becoming common, with choice of advertisements dynamically selected based upon information collected about the person accessing a web page, and upon purchasing or viewing patterns that person is currently demonstrating. An example of such advertising technique is found in U.S. Pat. No. 5,710,887, issued to Chelliah et al. Many other examples of advertising based upon purchaser identification are known in the art.

[0007] One common advertising technique is to provide a selected portion of a web page for displaying advertisements. This portion is usually at the top of a displayed page, where a potential purchaser will encounter it when the page is first loaded. If the person viewing the page is interested in the product or service depicted I the advertisement, usually clicking on the advertisement will take that person to another web page where the product or service can be purchased, or additional information found. This approach is often generally referred to as banner advertising, because the selected portion is a rectangular banner shape at the top of the page.

[0008] Numerous approaches are in use for selecting the particular ads to be displayed to a particular customer. A common problem with many approaches is determining how effective they are, during and after an advertising campaign. Although various purchaser profiles can be selected in advance to determine which customers will be shown which advertisements, it is often difficult to find out after the fact whether the campaign was, in fact, effective.

[0009] It would be desirable to provide a system and method that not only allowed advertising campaigns to be defined, but that allowed the effectiveness of the campaign to be monitored. It would further be desirable for such a system and method to be compatible with current web-based internet systems, and be easy to use.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0010] In accordance with the present invention, events generated by customer interaction during an internet-based session are made available for use by a system for tracking the effectiveness of web advertising campaigns. Event occurrences are collected for evaluation to determine whether campaign goals are being met. Campaigns are defined by rules indicating which ad content is to be displayed to which customers. Events types to be reported are selected depending on the needs of the particular campaign.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0011] The novel features believed characteristic of the invention are set forth in the appended claims. The invention itself however, as well as a preferred mode of use, further objects and advantages thereof, will best be understood by reference to the following detailed description of an illustrative embodiment when read in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, wherein:

[0012] **FIG. 1** is a block diagram of a communication system for use over the internet;

[0013] **FIG. 2** is a simplified diagram of a display;

[0014] **FIG. 3** is a block diagram of a system for handling events generated by numerous applications; and

[0015] **FIG. 4** is a block diagram of a preferred system for managing advertising campaigns.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

[0016] The present invention is described in the context of the following implementation. Those skilled in the art will recognize that numerous alternative implementations can be used to accomplish the following described results and goals.

[0017] **FIG. 1** illustrates, at a high level, a typical system **10** used to implement the preferred embodiment. A browser **12**, used by a customer, connects to a server **14** through the internet **16**, or other suitable communications network. Server **14** is responsible for responding to requests received from browser **12**, and provides content to be displayed on display **18**.

[0018] As described below, server **14** also provides advertisements to be displayed. The selection of advertisements to be displayed depends upon several factors, including what ad campaigns are currently in effect and who the customer is. In response to actions taken by the customer, selected events are generated by applications running on server **14**, and are forwarded to event handler **20**. In the preferred embodiment, event handler **20** is an application dedicated to supporting one or more advertising campaigns, and deals with the various events in a manner that will facilitate analysis of the effectiveness of the campaigns. Various reports **22** are generated using the data processed by event handler **20**.

[0019] **FIG. 2** shows a typical web page layout that is suitable for use in the preferred embodiment. Numerous

alternative arrangements are known to those skilled in the art, but layout **28** will serve to demonstrate features of interest for all layouts. Typically, each web page includes content **30**, which may include text, graphics, and additional items such as dialog boxes and various controls that may be manipulated by the viewer. It is common for index and other information **32** to be included in some portion of the page layout. For purposes of the present invention, a portion of the page is reserved for banner advertisements **34**. As known in the art, such advertisements are generally selected dynamically, potentially being different for every different viewer of the same page.

[**0020**] Each time a page is selected for viewing, server **14** includes a graphic that will be located in the banner ad region **34**. The graphic to be displayed is preferably selected according to campaign rules provided by a campaign manager (not shown). Each ad will have a type, and other information to enable effectiveness tracking to be performed, as described below. As is known in the art, a viewer can select (click on) the banner ad **34**, and will be connected with another web page.

[**0021**] **FIG. 3** illustrates a preferred technique for handling events such as those used to track the effectiveness of web advertising campaigns. Several server applications **40** execute on server **14**, or associated hardware. During the course of that execution, various events occur that need to be reported. These events include those related to the advertising campaign, as well as others. In the preferred embodiment, every event generates a message to a router **42**, which distributes them to event handler applications **44**, **46**, **48**.

[**0022**] Event messages received by router **42** all have a type, and other identifying information. Handlers **44-46** register to receive events of selected types, with tables in router **42** maintaining the registration information. Several handlers can register to receive the same events, and router **42** forwards the messages to every register handler each time an event is received from an application **40**. Thus, the system shown in **FIG. 3** is a generic event routing system that is also used for applications other than the web advertising campaign described herein.

[**0023**] Each campaign can have one or more handlers **44-46**, or several campaigns can use the same handler. Correspondence of handlers to campaigns is selected to meet the needs of each installation. In a simple implementation, each separate campaign uses a separate event handler to deal with all events related to the campaign. When an advertising campaign is started, a new handler is defined and instantiated to handle events for that campaign. The handler registers with event router **42** to receive all events that are of interest to the campaign, as described below. Because different campaigns may be interested in different types of events, the use of a generic router **42** can simplify the overall implementation of the campaign management system. However, any system that can generate message as described below can be utilized to implement the effectiveness tracking system.

[**0024**] **FIG. 4** illustrates the major parts of a preferred system to implement and track advertising campaigns. Server application **52** receives customer inputs, and generates content to be returned to the customer over the internet. The returned content includes advertisements for selected pages, and does not for others. As server application **52** generates events, messages are sent through router **58** to an event handler **60** designated for use by this campaign. Handler **60** verifies the events it receives, performs some processing on them and updates data stored in a database **62**. For example, if handler **60** is registered to receive events generated when a customer actually purchases an advertised product, it can then update database **62** each time a purchase is made.

[**0025**] Server application **52** uses rules from rules tables **54** to determine which ads to include with the content being sent to the customer. These rules are defined by a campaign manager application **56**, which works with one or more business users to define the campaigns to be run. The manager **56** also receives feedback from database **62**; that feedback indicates how the campaign is doing. In response to such feedback, campaigns can be modified, cancelled, and so forth.

[**0026**] In addition, handler **60** can modify operation of content display handled by application **52**. For example, a product discount can be given to those customers who purchase a product in response to the ad campaign. For example, an event referred to as a "click-through" occurs when a customer responds to a banner ad by clicking on it, and is taken to a page from which the product can be purchased. By watching for such click-through events, handler **60** can notify application **52** that a discount is to given to a customer for a session that generated the click-through. Other modifications can be made in response to campaign events, and can modify the content sent to customers, and the terms of the product sales, in a similar manner.

[**0027**] Each campaign therefore includes two major parts; a set of rules defining what ads will be shown and under what circumstances, and a selection of events to be retained to analyze the results of the campaign. The business user managing the campaign has a number of capabilities to manage it. These include defining ad content and associating it with products. Also included is the ability to associate discounts with a click-through as described above. Rules can be defined to evaluate system and customer data, which then allows ads to be displayed for selected customers meeting certain criteria. Criteria can be based on customer information, including individual information such as personal buying history. It may also be based on broader profiles, such as age, sex, and income.

[**0028**] A campaign is made up of sets of rules used to define what products are covered, what discounts, if any, will be offered and to whom, to whom the ads will be displayed, and a time period in which the campaign is active. Additional rules may be included if desired. Default ad content must be defined in the system so that all banners contain ad content. If none of the ad campaigns currently in effect match a rule, the default content can be displayed.

[**0029**] Campaigns are preferably defined for specified dates and time periods. A campaign can also be defined until specified events, internal or external, occur. For example, if a campaign is run to sell products in an overstock condition, the campaign can be defined to run until the overstock condition disappears. In a similar manner, rules can preferably be defined that take into consideration conditions in the supply chain. A sale can be suspended if suppliers run into short supply on sale items or components for them. A

campaign can be suspended at any time in response to input from a person working with the campaign manager application **56**.

[**0030**] Generally several campaigns will be running concurrently. It is possible that several campaigns will contain rules that would call for add banners to be displayed for more than one at a given time. Such conflicts can be handled by additional rules that define a preference for one over the other. Another approach is to define a weighting factor, so that overlapping campaigns will share ad time before the customer base. Such scheduling and preference algorithms are generally known in the art, and will not be described here in detail.

[**0031**] A campaign also specifies what will be tracked in order to determine its effectiveness. This can involve simple data collection, such as collecting only the number of times a banner for the product is displayed and the number of purchases made of the product. Somewhat more sophisticated information will generally be desired, however. For example, a count of the number of click-throughs that occur tends to indicate the actual effectiveness of an ad banner. Also, subsequent purchases by the same customer who viewed an ad banner is more useful than a simple count of sales. Data tracking the number of inquiries for detailed information in response to a click-through, and the time such information is displayed before being replaced by another page, can provide highly detailed information regarding the success of the campaign in attracting customer attention.

[**0032**] Although click-throughs have been described in conjunction with ad banners at the top of a web page, it will be recognized by those skilled in the art that ad content can be displayed in other circumstances. For example, when a customer is browsing through products or services offered by a business, indications of special offers can be displayed in any format. Selection (click-through) for these indicators acts in a manner similar to that described above for banner ads. In fact, in many campaigns, the rules for display of special offers and sales will limit ad display to customers who have already shown that they are serious about buying from the company. IN a similar manner, one common rule that can be used to define a campaign is to make special offers to customers who have already purchased one or more products, or placed them in a shopping cart for purchase.

[**0033**] As described above, numerous types of events are used to control the campaign, and to track its effectiveness. Some events are used primarily for campaign control, while others are used for effectiveness tracking. Many events are used for both, depending on the rules used to control the campaign, and the degree of tracking desired. Some of the types of events preferably included are:

[**0034**] Session start and session end, when a session is established or completed for a customer. A timestamp is preferably included.

[**0035**] Authentication, when a user is successfully identified.

[**0036**] Begin shopping and end shopping, when a user enters or leaves a shopping workflow.

[**0037**] Product details requested, when so requested by a user.

[**0038**] Events indicating that a product is added to, or removed from, the customer's shopping cart.

[**0039**] Purchase of a product, or order of a product to be shipped.

[**0040**] Beginning or ending a product configuration session.

[**0041**] An impression event when an ad is rendered for a customer.

[**0042**] Profile match, when a profile match is found as a result of a rules evaluation.

[**0043**] Click-through events for any click-throughs, including those for up-sell ads and cross-sell ads.

[**0044**] Remote system events, including click-through to a remote URL, and a referral from another domain to the local domain.

[**0045**] Effectiveness tracking may only apply to some of the above events. The selected events can vary from campaign to campaign. Occurrences of selected events are logged in tables provided for the purpose in database **62**, and statistical evaluations can be created and studied at leisure through the campaign manager application **56**. If any events are not recognized by handler **60** when they are received, they can be included in a table reserved for unrecognized or otherwise untracked events.

[**0046**] Tracking events for a campaign can be turned on and off independently from a campaign itself. This can be useful when tracking data is not needed, or only a subset is needed. Once a campaign has been shown to be satisfactorily effective, tracking can be minimized, or even eliminated except for periodic reviews. This simplifies reporting by avoiding the need to record every event when doing so is not very useful.

[**0047**] To attain the above objectives requires only minimal modification of existing code. Events, or a similar reporting system, are already included in most sophisticated web hosting system. They need merely be modified to ensure that an appropriate handler receives them for effectiveness tracking to be implemented. Defining the campaign is a little more complicated, but again can be done without significantly altering existing code.

[**0048**] In addition, each web page must have an area set aside to display the campaign content. In many cases, this is already provided. In other systems, an area will need to be set aside for campaign content to be inserted. In either case, a default content, which could be blank, can be used whenever no campaigns are active, or whenever no campaigns are triggered to include an ad by the rules used to define the campaign.

[**0049**] The described system allows the effectiveness of the campaign to be easily tracked by capturing events and storing them to a database or other persistent storage. Once the appropriate raw data has been collected, it is easily analyzed using widely available techniques to indicate to a business whether or not the campaign is actually effective, and how quickly its goals are being reached.

[**0050**] While the invention has been particularly shown and described with reference to a preferred embodiment, it will be understood by those skilled in the art that various

changes in form and detail may be made therein without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention.

What is claimed is:

1. A method for tracking the effectiveness of an advertising campaign, comprising the steps of:

providing a set of rules defining when advertisement content for the campaign will be displayed on a web page;

generating event messages when selected events occur as a result of customer input;

sending the generated messages to a message handler associated with the campaign;

storing a selected subset of messages; and

reporting statistics of campaign effectiveness based upon analysis of the stored subset of messages.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein the selected subset includes messages indicating that an ad has been displayed to a customer, that a customer has selected the ad, and that a customer has purchased a product associated with the ad.

3. The method of claim 1, wherein the generated event messages are routed through an event router to the message handler.

4. A system for managing a web-based advertising campaign, comprising:

an interface for providing content to a customer over a computer network;

a plurality of rules defining a campaign, wherein the rules control when an advertisement corresponding to the campaign will be displayed to a customer;

means for generating messages when an event of a selected type occurs, wherein the event is based upon an action taken by the customer;

a message handler for receiving the messages and storing data relating to a selected subset thereof; and

a storage device for retaining the data relating to the selected subset of messages, wherein analysis of the effectiveness of the advertising campaign can be conducted on the stored data.

5. The system of claim 4, wherein the selected subset includes messages indicating that an ad has been displayed to a customer, that a customer has selected the ad, and that a customer has purchased a product associated with the ad.

* * * * *