Abstract: According to an aspect of the present invention, there is provided a content proliferation computer system comprising: a plurality of content generator profiles, each content generator profile having associated with it at least one user class profile, each user class profile characterised by certain predefined attributes relating to the content generator profile; and a communications interface capable of supporting the population of said profiles by remote users. According to an aspect of the present invention, there is provided a method of operating a content proliferation computer system, the method comprising: defining a plurality of content generator profiles, each content generator profile having associated with it at least one user class profile, each user class profile characterised by certain predefined attributes relating to the content generator profile; and enabling the population of said profiles by remote users via a communications interface.
METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR ORGANISING CONTENT

TECHNICAL FIELD

This invention relates to a system of dynamically ranking content, for example, songs and/or artists within a social network. Embodiments of the invention also relate to commissioning users of the social network for sales of content based on functions performed in relation to the content, according to pre-defined user classes.

BACKGROUND

Social networking websites allow people to communicate in various ways over the internet. A social network is an online community comprising a multitude of 'nodes', which are generally individuals, but may also be organisations, groups or teams. The structure and nodes are managed by a variety of internet applications, which help to connect friends, business partners, or other individuals together using a range of tools, which allow them to interact in various ways.

In general, social networking websites allow users to create a profile for themselves. Upon creation of such a profile, users are given the opportunity to upload a picture of themselves, along with other media, and can often make 'friends' with other online users. Users are often linked to a large number of friends, creating large or small sub-networks within the structure of the host network.

Some established social networks have introduced additional features into their applications, such as the ability to create common-interest groups or hold discussions.

One of these additional features is termed a 'blog'. The blog (or 'web log') is a form of online journal belonging to a particular person or group. A blog is normally a single page of entries created by an individual or group (or 'blogger'), organised in reverse-
chronological order, from most recent to least recent, and may contain archives of older entries. The tools that are available to most bloggers make it easy to add entries at any time and the entries in a blog are usually regarded as a "stream-of-consciousness", as opposed to anything professionally edited according to any strict form. Many blogs go beyond being a simple homepage or online diary, however, and allow other users to comment on the entries, thereby creating a type of dynamic communication environment.

Some social networks also employ internet forums, also commonly referred to as web forums, message boards, discussion boards, (electronic) discussion groups, discussion forums and bulletin boards. An internet forum is a facility for holding discussions and posting user-generated content on a central server which can be accessed by the general public or be exclusive to registered users or subscribers. Technology, computer games, politics and music are popular areas for forum themes, but forums exist for any number of different topics.

A typical social network may also deploy an application which is related to the blog and forum, and which allows friends to leave comments on each other's profile page. Once submitted, the comment may be read by all authorised users. The system of placing comments on another user's profile pages is quickly becoming a primary means of communication, whereby members of a network use such means to, for example, keep in touch, organise events or spread gossip.

As a result of the above-listed features, in recent years online social networks have rapidly expanded into flourishing virtual online communities, where users are able to post pictures, write blogs and send messages to one another.

Due to the explosive growth in online music in recent years, the internet has become the primary means of delivering music to end-users. This growth has been driven by a combination of affordable broadband, increase in portable music player usage and an increase in internet piracy. A combination of these factors has had a dramatic
effect on the record industry, causing a decline in many major and independent record labels, and the CD format in general.

Leading social networks such as Bebo and Myspace have already implemented applications which enable users to upload media content to their profile, allowing others access to this media. Such media generally includes music and video in various compressed formats. Users may download such media, typically by streaming, to their computers or other browsing means.

This type of application has become a particularly useful outlet for content generators such as bands and recording artists. A major element of many social networks is the ability for bands or artists to register and create a profile to showcase their music, which is usually in the form of a downloaded or streamed music or video file. The profile pages also typically include; a band member list, a list of 'groupies' (or fans), tour dates, a blog and a list of available songs. Additionally, there may be a built-in music player, user ratings and reviews, artists rankings (based on page views) etc.

In the past, unsigned content generators, such as bands, have largely depended on word-of-mouth to gather a following. With social networks such as Bebo and MySpace, they have instant access to potential fans outside their immediate geographic region, e.g. a London-based band can end up in the friend network of a fan in Munich in a matter of minutes. Social networks therefore give content generators an opportunity to showcase their work and build up a fan-base, which may have otherwise gone unnoticed.

SUMMARY

According to an aspect of the present invention, there is provided a content proliferation computer system comprising: a plurality of content generator profiles, each content generator profile having associated with it at least one user class profile, each user class profile characterised by certain predefined attributes relating
to the content generator profile; and a communications interface capable of supporting the population of said profiles by remote users.

According to an aspect of the present invention, there is provided a method of operating a content proliferation computer system, the method comprising: defining a plurality of content generator profiles, each content generator profile having associated with it at least one user class profile, each user class profile characterised by certain predefined attributes relating to the content generator profile; and enabling the population of said profiles by remote users via a communications interface.

According to an aspect of the present invention, there is provided a content proliferation computer system configurable remotely by a plurality of users, comprising: a content generator profile and a plurality of user class profiles, each user class profile being logically associated with said content generator profile and being defined in terms of different predefined attributes relating to said content generator profile; and an interface for users to configure said profiles.

According to an aspect of the present invention, there is provided a method for monitoring proliferation effectiveness of one or more user classes associated with a content generator, the method comprising: measuring the popularity of content attributed to a content generator and/or determining from an audit function proliferation events performed by individual users from among said user classes.

According to an aspect of the present invention, there is provided a computer system comprising: a database of content and/or content generator profiles; an analysis module for measuring popularity of content among content consumers, and/or a monitoring module for monitoring proliferation events performed by individual user class profiles affiliated with said content.

According to an aspect of the present invention, there is provided a social network registration method, comprising: providing profiles of predetermined classes of users defined in relation to a content profile, wherein each said predetermined class
has characteristic functions defined in relation to one or more content generators; and providing an interface configured to allow remote users to populate said profiles.

According to an aspect of the present invention, there is provided a computer system forming at least part of a social network, comprising: a registration interface; a plurality of templates defining content generator profiles; a plurality of sets of user class profiles, each set of user class profiles being associated with a content generator profile and comprising a plurality of classes of users at least some of which define functions associated with proliferation of content; and a control module operable to cause a user to move through the process of populating one or more of said profiles.

According to an aspect of the present invention, there is provided a method of rewarding social network users' efforts in the proliferation of content, the method comprising: allocating a plurality of user profiles to a content generator profile; establishing one or more relationship between a user profile and content generator, wherein said relationship defines at least a proliferation function associated with content and a reward flowing to user in consideration for proliferation efforts in relation to the content; and facilitating proliferation activities by users according to their user profiles.

According to an aspect of the present invention, there is provided a computer system comprising: a database capable of ranking individual content items based on popularity with a general population of content consumers, wherein links relate individual users to the or each content item for which they have undertaken proliferation efforts.

According to an aspect of the present invention, there is provided a method of measuring individual contributions to the popularity of content generated by content generators, comprising: defining content generator profiles; defining a suite of user class profiles associated with each content generator profile, wherein one or more of said user class: defines a proliferation function for content generated by said content
generator; monitors one or more of (i) the popularity of content items and (ii) proliferation event activity of one or more users according to a user profile; and rewards said user based on said audit function.

According to an aspect of the present invention, there is provided a method for proliferating content throughout online communities, wherein a member of a user class is authenticated as being logically representative of a particular content generator.

According to an aspect of the present invention, there is provided a method for proliferating content throughout online communities, wherein a user can elect to perform certain predetermined retail functions on behalf of a content generator with which they are logically associated.

According to an aspect of the present invention, there is provided a method for proliferating content throughout online communities, wherein a member of a user class performs a retail function on behalf of a content generator with which they are logically associated.

According to an aspect of the present invention, there is provided a method and apparatus for ranking the content generated by content generators and proliferating content associated with particular content generators to drive improved rankings.

Additional advantages and novel features of the invention will be set forth in part in the description which follows, and in part will become apparent to those skilled in the art upon examination of the following and accompanying drawings or may be learned by practice of the invention.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS
For a better understanding of the invention and as to how the same may be carried into effect, reference will now be made, by way of example only, to the accompanying drawings, in which:

Figure 1 illustrates a process according to which a user signs up to a social network;
Figure 2 illustrates a process according to which a band or recording artist signs up to a social network;
Figure 3 illustrates the structure and typical interactions of a known social network;
Figure 4 illustrates an embodiment of the invention, showing a suite of pre-defined user classes and typical roles within those user classes which relate to a specific function within a band;
Figure 5 illustrates an embodiment of a control module, which is configured to allocate users into specific roles within said pre-defined user classes;
Figure 5A illustrates the association made between one or more user class profiles belonging to user and a content generator profile;
Figure 6 illustrates a user class join request and an exemplary maximum user class occupancy check;
Figure 7A illustrates a typical audit function carried out by a control module;
Figure 7B illustrates typical actions taken by the control module, given an audit report;
Figure 8 illustrates the ranking process carried out by the ranking function;
Figure 9 illustrates the commission process carried out by the commission function; and
Figure 10 illustrates how the various applications and functions may be centrally controlled and monitored by a single control module.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Those skilled in the art will appreciate that while this disclosure describes what is considered to be the best mode and, where appropriate, other modes of performing the invention, the invention should not be limited to the specific configurations and methods disclosed in this description of the preferred embodiment.
The term "content generator profile" is used herein to refer to a data structure identifying a content generator and defining key attributes of the content generator, including, for example, one or more items of content.

The term "user class profile" is used herein to refer to a data-structure identifying-a class of user associated with a particular content generator profile and defining certain functions and/or attributes to achieve proliferation of content from the content generator to other user profiles.

The term "user profile" is used herein to refer to the data profiles of ordinary social network users. Additionally, it will be apparent to the skilled person that both a content generator profile and user class profile are, in practice, specialised types of user profile.

Figure 1 shows how a new user typically integrates into an existing social network (100). A user (102) is able to visit the registration page of the social network website and enter registration details to create a user account (104). The user is then given a unique profile (or webspace) and URL (106). The profile may be personalised with an assortment of content. This content may include (108) to (116): uploaded media; a blog; a comments section; a bands section, where the user affiliates themselves with certain bands; and a friends section, where the user affiliates themselves with other users within the network. The process is carried out a number of times by different users to create a centrally controlled but randomly populated network, which may contain any number of randomly associated sub-networks.

Figure 2 shows how a band or recording artist (also referred to as 'content generators') may integrate into an existing social network (200). A band (202) may register in much the same manner as a user (102), as described in the preceding paragraph and as reiterated in steps (204) and (206). The registration of a band or recording artist, however, usually results in the display of different content on the profile page. For example, the profile page may contain media, blogs and comments in the same form as the user pages (208, 210), but may additionally contain user-generated content (212) which the band has uploaded (e.g. their own songs or videos), a list of tour dates (214), information on band members (216) and a list
representing the various affiliations created between the band and individual fans (or 'groupies') (218), or affiliations with other bands (220).

Figure 3 shows the typical structure of an existing social network (302). Pre-registered users and bands may interact by any number of applications allowing them to, for example: post discussion topics in forums; search within the network for other users by name, email address or common-interest pointers; exchange calendar information such as birthdays or appointments; send personal messages; write blogs; exchange media, etc. (304) to (318).

Figure 4 shows an embodiment of the invention. A user (402) visits a registration page (404) and a computer system hosting aspects of the social network provides profiles defined in terms of a suite of pre-defined sets of user classes, (406) to (412), each class having a pre-determined set of attributes, specific to the user class. Upon registration (404) in a given user class, a user is allocated with a unique identification (ID) number. A database is provided which stores each user ID along with the pre-defined user classes for a particular artist or band, as exemplified in table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ARTIST ID#</th>
<th>Class 1</th>
<th>Class 2</th>
<th>Class 3</th>
<th>Class 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>000000001</td>
<td>User 1</td>
<td>User 2</td>
<td>User 3</td>
<td>User 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>000000002</td>
<td>User 5</td>
<td>User 6</td>
<td>User 7</td>
<td>User 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>000000003</td>
<td>User 11</td>
<td>User 12</td>
<td>User 13</td>
<td>User 14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Example data table

In a preferred embodiment of the invention, the user classes may be limited to two sets of user classes: 'workers' and 'groupies'. This limitation is only exemplary, however, and it may be preferable to have any number and type of user classes associated with each content generator.

Typically, members of the 'workers' class may take on individually determined functions which include, but are not limited to: a 'signer', 'promoter' and 'plugger', each having one or more predetermined attributes, effective to define and/or measure a specific role in association with a band.
The 'signer' function comprises one or more individual users responsible for scouting and developing new creative talent. In the record industry, the signer acts as the link between the recording artists and the record label, generally to help with the artistic and commercial development of the artists. The signer may be required to handle contractual negotiations with a record label, find songwriters, additional band members or record producers for the act, and schedule recording sessions. Part of their duties may also include organising online gigs. The signer makes a commitment to contribute to the future success of the band and accordingly shares in profits they make.

The 'promoter' function comprises one or more individual users responsible for presenting the record across the social network in an attractive way, so that users may be encouraged to download or stream the record, thus increasing its popularity over time. This may include advertising the song directly on forums, but also may include a more general marketing strategy within the internal social network such as adding content to the profile page or sending personal messages to other users in order to create interest in the band. The promoter makes a commitment to contribute to the future success of the band and accordingly shares in profits they make.

The 'plugger' function comprises one or more individual users responsible for favourably mentioning the artist or song within the social network, e.g. on forums, whiteboards or placing comments upon the pages of their friends. The overall objective is the promotion of and generation of interest in the band or recording artist. The plugger makes a commitment to contribute to the future success of the band and accordingly shares in profits they make.

The 'groupie' class comprises one or more individuals who are ardent fans of a particular act. Their role may include posting favourable comments about the band on friend's profiles. While they may not share in any financial profits of the artist, they may receive the adulation of being associated with the band and by being listed on the band's front profile page, and may receive access to exclusive media content, for
example. Groupies may also earn points based on the success of their band or recording artist, with said points being exchangeable for content downloads or tangible goods.

Figure 4 shows the basic functionality of the registration application (400). The application is managed by a control module (414), which primarily performs management tasks relating to the user classes (406) to (412). For example, the control module may engage an application which controls the allocation of users to a specific class based on, for example, whether they have previously registered an interest in the artist (or content generator) or how they have been rated as workers within a certain class based on previous experience within the network. Once the application allocates a certain user to a certain user class, or more specifically a user profile into a certain user class, the control module performs a look-up of the database (416) which stores information relating to each user and identifies a particular user as an authentic representative within each class. The control module may then write the user into the database (418). In other words, the control module is operable to affiliate the one or more user class profiles with a content generator profile (420). As is illustrated in Table 1, each user class may have a pre-defined occupancy, which stipulates the maximum number of users which may belong to that class at any one time. Once the class occupancy has been filled, the control module may refuse any further registration.

Once the user has been approved by the band or recording artist and written into the database, the user may be allocated a graphical indicator (or 'avatar'), which is displayed on the user's profile page. Such graphical indicators serve to represent users and their functions and may represent different parts of their persona or status within the social network.

In a preferred embodiment of the invention, user identity may also be authenticated and the graphical indicator then acts to assure other users of the social network that the graphically indicated users are officially approved members of the relevant user class, and therefore selected representatives of the band or recording artist.
Typically, a user with a particular interest in a band or recording artist will visit the class registration page (404), which may be directly associated with a band/artist profile page (206), a user profile page (106) or a band/artist search application based on known methods. This page could contain useful content, such as question and answer forums, song-writing tutorials, instrument tuition guides on marketing and promotion, how to write press releases, etc. Once a user selects which class they wish to join, a control module of the computer system hosting the network performs a join request function as illustrated in figure 5.

Figure 5 shows the basic functionality of the user join application (500). Once a user (502) sends a class join request (504), a control module of the computer system (506) performs a database look-up (508) to determine the user class occupancy. If all the user classes are fully occupied (510), the control module may generate a join failure notice and send it to the user (512). Alternatively, if the class is not fully occupied (516), the control module may generate a join acceptance notice and send it to the user, and the control module may then write the new user into the relevant user class (522).

Figure 5A illustrates the association made between one or more user class profiles 550 belonging to user and a content generator profile 560, for example belonging to a band. Once the control module writes a user into a user class at 522, the user profile may be considered a user class profile affiliated with a certain content generator profile.

In addition, the control module may be configured to allocate each band/artist and workers with a private ‘meeting room’ where they can, for example, discuss ideas and worker functions or plan strategies for future success. The meeting room may take the form of a password-protected internet forum, private live chat forum or any other suitable means over which interested parties may communicate in confidence, or otherwise.
In an alternative embodiment, the control module (506) may further control a queuing system. In this case, the database as shown in table 1 would contain additional fields which may be filled by users queued for a certain role within a user class. In the event that a user registers for one of the user classes but the user class has full occupancy (514), the user join request may be stored in the corresponding queue fields of the database (520). The user's unique ID will then be registered in the queue field for the corresponding band or artist. The control module (504) monitors the user classes corresponding to each unique user ID and, in the event that any user resigns their position within a user class or fails an audit and/or performance measure, the module can allocate the position to a user occupying the queue fields of the database. The control module may be configured to queue users based on a 'first-come-first served' basis or on other criteria, e.g. individual contributions to the popularity of content.

By way of illustration, each band could be limited to having up to 5 workers, with each worker limited to representing up to 5 bands or artists at a given time, and up to 16 groupies. Of course, these numbers are only exemplary and the control module may be configured to perform the allocation and validation based on any pre-defined criteria.

By analogy to figure 5, the control module may also be configured to control the process if a user wishes to leave a user class and no longer perform the specific function in relation to the band. The user will typically send a leave class request, which will be picked up by the control module. The module then performs a database lookup to find the relevant data table and removes the user's unique ID entry from the relevant user class in the database. The control module may then lookup the next user queued for the role from the queue fields of the database and allocate a new user to the class.

Figure 6 shows a control module which may be configured to validate the maximum number of bands or artists a user is representing at a given time. A registered user (602) sends a join request (604) in relation to a particular user class associated with
a band or artist. The control module (606) performs a database look-up using the unique user ID number (608) corresponding to the registered user (602).

If the control module returns a look-up result indicating that the number of user ID occurrences in the database exceeds a pre-defined maximum (610), the user join request is rejected (612) and the user may be queued in a database queue field (620) until the number of user ID occurrences in the database drops below the pre-defined maximum, e.g. when the user leaves a user class associated with a different band or artist.

If, on the other hand, the control module returns a look-up result indicating that the number of user ID occurrences in the database does not exceed a pre-defined maximum (614), the control module checks if the relevant user class has maximum occupancy (616). If the relevant user class does have maximum occupancy (618), the user may be queued (620) in the queue field of the database. If the relevant user class does not have maximum occupancy (622), the control module writes the user ID into the user class of the database (624).

Figure 7A shows a control module which may be configured to control an application which acts to perform audit and/or performance measurement functions relating to the user classes (700). This may include assessing the user based on previous or current chart success of artists or songs they have influenced by their function in relation to that band, for example, the number of times they have mentioned the band in a forum or the number of comments they have placed on a user's profile relating to a band.

The audit function is typically engaged and controlled by the control module (702) once a user has been allocated into a certain class (704) after a successful join request. The audit function comprises a database look-up (706) and a network search (708), e.g. for the number of instances a user has mentioned a band across the network. Alternatively, an application or device monitoring the user's browser can automatically detect and count each time the user has mentioned a band or artist.
The control module can measure the user's performance in relation to the class and generate an audit and/or performance report (710). The audit report may be positive, neutral or negative. The report is then sent (712) to the control module (702).

Figure 7B shows the various processes carried out by the control module once the audit or performance report has been sent back to the control module (712). The control module can report to the band or artist (714) or its management (716) and, if desired, remove the user from the class (718) and allocate a new user (720), or take no action (722).

It will be clear from the disclosure that there may be any number of possible user classes for any number of media platforms. For example, within the music platform, there may be additional roles for a 'virtual' fan club manager. An alternative application may relate to or include any one of film, user-generated video, books or any other broadcast media. For example, within the film platform, the user classes may include a director, producer, marketer, promoter etc. It may also be preferable to have each member act as a retailer, selling whatever media they like through their own page, and gaining commission based on sales.

Figure 8 shows an embodiment of a download mechanism, whereby new artists can sell their music directly to the end-consumer. A user (802) may visit a webpage where song download information is stored (804). The user may then select the desired song for download (806) and the song is sent to the user's computer or other browsing means. Each song carries a unique identification number which is associated with a certain unique artist ID number. The unique ID numbers are stored by a control module (808) in a database (810), and a ranking function (812) keeps a running total of the number of instances the unique ID number is registered with the server and thus the number of downloads of each individual song (814). The ranking function ranks the song or artist based upon a suitable mechanism, such as the running total of downloads or the average number of downloads per unit time. The function is able to produce a table or chart (816), which ranks the individual songs or artists registered in the database in order of popularity. This table can be displayed
on the website and be dynamically updated as required. An example of such a table is illustrated below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ARTIST ID#</th>
<th>SONG ID#</th>
<th># DOWNLOADS</th>
<th>#STREAMS</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>000001</td>
<td>000100</td>
<td>2500</td>
<td>10000</td>
<td>12500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>000002</td>
<td>000200</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>8000</td>
<td>8800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>000003</td>
<td>000300</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>5000</td>
<td>5200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By analogy to the example in figure 8, which uses downloads as a ranking tool, it may be preferred to rank the songs or artists in terms of the number of times a certain song has been streamed by a user, or a combination of both.

In addition to the streaming or download chart (816), it is another aspect of the present invention that the ranking function may produce a 'team chart' and 'groupie chart'. It is yet another aspect of the invention to have a 'worker chart', which ranks individual members of the worker class. These three charts are monitored by the control module and are generated according to a ranking function based on, for example: how successful the respective bands or artists are, measured for example in terms of their number of download or streaming events; the amount of time the user has spent proliferating content of said bands or artists; and the number of individual occurrences on which the user has mentioned said band or artist on some level of the social network.

It is an aspect of the embodiments of the present invention, that one or more of the said user classes can influence ranking in the aforementioned charts and tables. Indeed, previous rankings achieved for associated acts and/or content may be a measure of performance included in the audit function, as described in figure 7A.

In one embodiment of the present invention, once the running total reaches a pre-defined level of rank, for example, but not limited to, any one of top 10, 20... etc., a flag is created which marks the content or act as having reached a certain rank and
thus having achieved a certain level of popularity or success. All songs downloaded thereafter may cause the control module to engage a commission function (818).

Figure 9 shows the commission function (900). The commission function, which may be activated when a song or act has reached a certain pre-determined rank or irrespective of rank from the first moment content is downloaded, has access to a data register storing pre-defined commission percentages based on specific roles within pre-defined user classes (904). The percentages represent the amount of commission each user receives for each downloaded song. The control module (906) performs a database look-up (908) to determine which users are registered in the user classes and checks the revenue generated from the download (910). Using the pre-defined commission percentages, the control module apportions out commission (912) to entitled recipients (916, 918, 920) by a variety of payment methods (914), which may include any one of the following payment methods: debit card, credit card, SMS payment or any other. Entitled recipients may include the band or artist, the management, the social network or any other.

Alternatively, the control module may be used to apportion commission generated if a band is eventually signed by a major or independent record label (922). Using the same or separately defined percentages, the commission function apportions out an amount of an independently negotiated signing fee to e.g. the band, the network and any of the user class members who contributed to the band’s success.

In addition to the method of rewarding social network users’ efforts in the proliferation of content, according to another aspect of the invention, rewards may be propagated to bands or recording artists in the form of enlarged user classes. By way of example, as workers proliferate more content, a band may no longer be limited to having up to 5 workers, and may be allowed to have any number of predetermined workers occupying the user class.

In a preferred embodiment of the present invention, an occupant of a user class can act as a distributed retailer for the content they are responsible for proliferating as a
member of their user class. For example, a user who is a worker for 5 bands can sell downloadable content of those 5 bands through their user profile.

In certain embodiments, it may be mandatory for a member of certain (or all) user classes to sell the content of band(s) or artist(s) with which they are associated.

In addition, or in the alternative, any one of a general population of users of a social networking site, or other online community, may elect to activate some or all of the capabilities of the disclosed system. For example, such a mechanism may be used to push membership of the disclosed system to existing users of an online community, such that they may individually populate profiles as bands, or user classes, according to the description set out herein before.

Optionally, users may deactivate the system by similar means.

Typically, the aforementioned distributed retailing takes place by utilising some suitable transaction mechanism. For example, each download may be charged at a predefined cost and be available to purchase via SMS, Credit Card, Paypal or any other means. The revenue generated from such distributed retailing is apportioned out according to the commission module, as illustrated in figure 9.

The control module may also provide the means for each band or recording artist to remove any user from one of the user classes in the event that the user is generating an unsatisfactory amount of revenue through the aforementioned distributed retailing mechanisms. This may include the right to remove any user from a user class who is generating, for example, but not limited to, 50% less business through their page than the average of the revenue generated by the other members of the user class.

Similarly, the control module may also provide the means for the band or artist to remove all of the users in the user classes, in the event that the band or artist has, for example, not featured in the top 500 downloads for 3 months as a result of the proliferation efforts by the users occupying the user classes. Of course, this measure
is not intended to be limiting and any suitable measure of success may be employed by the band or recording artist.

Figure 10 shows how the various functions illustrated in any preceding figure may be connected and controlled by a common control module (1002), which performs tasks relating to user registration (400), user class join requests (500), class occupancy checks (600), audit and/or performance functions (700, 701), ranking functions (800) and commission functions (900).

Optionally, each user is capable of hosting streamed media events on their user profile. Such media events may include live gigs, showcases or other online events presented by the bands or recording artists, which are accessible by any other users of the social network.

Applications may also be provided to allow users to create their own derivative works based on content originating from a band or recording artist, e.g. in the form of an online mixing studio, tracker or other music production means.

The social network may form strategic collaborations with existing key media channels, e.g. radio, magazines or television networks etc., in order to provide online versions of such channels, within the structure of the social network, with such channels forming additional means for users occupying user classes to proliferate content.

For example, a collaboration could be made with an existing terrestrial radio station such as BBC Radio 1, creating an online, social network version of the radio station which is then 'webcast' by a known method, i.e. by distributed internet streaming using a lossy audio codec such as MP3. Through a mixture of typical Radio 1 content and content exclusive to the social network, the social network version of Radio 1 would act as an online radio station for users to use whilst browsing the various levels of the social network. The music and live sessions streamed to users by the station would be a mixture of the type of established content usually broadcast
on the terrestrial station and content generated by bands or artists within the social network. The station could then be used by one of the users occupying the user classes (as described in page 11 of this disclosure) to proliferate content, e.g. by persuading the DJ or producer of the webcast to play their respective band's content.

Another collaboration could be with a music magazine such as *The NME*. In this instance, the collaboration would result in an online, social network version of the magazine, e.g. in the form of an editorial website. The editorial site would feature content such as interviews and reports relating to existing artists, as well as content relating to bands or artists within the social network. The site could then be used by users to proliferate content.

Yet another such collaboration could be with music channel *MTV*, creating an online, social network version of the channel for users to access via internet browsing means. The collaboration would result in an amalgamation of MTV programming and visual content generated by users of the social network. For example, a band or recording artist could create a music video, which could then be uploaded to a server controlling the online channel, and the server then stream, or offer for download, the video to any viewer of the channel. The channel could also be used by users to proliferate content.

Those skilled in the art will recognise that the invention has a broad range of applications in many different types of broadcast media, and that the embodiments may take a wide range of modifications without departing from the inventive concept as defined in the appended claims. For example, the invention has applications in all forms of media management, such as film, literature, arts and other creative works.
CLAIMS

1. A content proliferation computer system comprising:
   - a plurality of content generator profiles, each content generator profile having
     associated with it at least one user class profile, each user class profile characterised
     by certain predefined attributes relating to the content generator profile; and
   - a communications interface capable of supporting the population of said
     profiles by remote users.

2. The computer system of claim 1 comprising one or more user profiles, at least
   some of which are defined according to a user class profile.

3. The computer system of claims 1 or 2 wherein a plurality of user classes is
   associated with each content generator profile.

4. The computer system of any of claims 1 to 3 wherein one or more sets of rules
   defines functions performed by different user classes in relation to the content
   generator profile.

5. The computer system of claim 4 comprising a further set of rules defining
   relationships between different classes and/or maximum occupancy of each class of
   user.
6. The computer system of any of claims 1 to 5 wherein the computer system comprises a plurality of content generator profiles, each with an associated plurality of user classes.

7. The computer system of any of claims 1 to 6 wherein one or more of said user classes performs a function relating to the proliferation of content connected with the content generator profile with which it is associated.

8. The computer system of any of claims 4 to 7 wherein the functions defined in the rules applying to different user classes are distinct but complementary to the proliferation of content to other users.

9. The computer system of any of claims 1 to 8 wherein the computer system further comprises a control module arranged to enable registration of content generator profiles.

10. The computer system of claim 9 wherein the control module also enables registration of users into the, or each, predefined user class associated with a content generator profile.

11. The computer system of claim 10 wherein the control module is configured to provide queuing of registration of users into the, or each, predefined user class associated with a content generator profile based on a predetermined maximum user class occupancy.
12. The computer system according to any of claims 1 to 11 wherein said content generator profiles have content selected from any one or more of: music, film, broadcast media, literature or arts.

13. The computer system according to any of claims 1 to 12 wherein said content generator profile is associated with a recording artist or band.

14. A method of operating a content proliferation computer system, the method comprising:

   defining a plurality of content generator profiles, each content generator profile having associated with it at least one user class profile, each user class profile characterised by certain predefined attributes relating to the content generator profile; and

   allowing the population of said profiles by remote users via a communications interface.

15. The method of claim 14 comprising defining one or more user profiles, at least some of which are defined according to a user class profile.

16. The method of claims 14 or 15 wherein a plurality of user classes is associated with each content generator profile.

17. The method of claims 14 to 16 comprising defining one or more sets of rules defines functions performed by different user classes in relation to the content generator profile.
18. The method of claim 17 comprising defining a further set of rules defining relationships between different classes and/or maximum occupancy of each class of user.

19. The method of claims 14 to 18 comprising defining a plurality of content generator profiles, each with an associated plurality of user classes.

20. The method of claims 14 to 19 wherein one or more of said user classes performs a function relating to the proliferation of content connected with the content generator profile with which it is associated.

21. The method of claims 17 to 20 wherein the functions defined in the rules applying to different user classes are distinct but complementary to the proliferation of content to other users.

22. The method of claims 14 to 21 further comprising operating a control module arranged to support registration of content generator profiles.

23. The method of claim 22 wherein the control module also enables registration of users into the, or each, predefined user class associated with a content generator profile.

24. The method of claim 23 wherein the control module is configured to provide queuing of registration of users into the, or each, predefined user class associated
with a content generator profile based on a predetermined maximum user class occupancy.

25. The method of according to any of claims 14 to 24 wherein said content generator profiles have content selected from any one or more of: music, film, broadcast media, literature or arts.

26. The method according to any of claims 14 to 25 wherein said content generator profile is associated with a recording artist or band.

27. A content proliferation computer system configurable remotely by a plurality of users, comprising:

   a content generator profile and a plurality of user class profiles, each user class profile being logically associated with said content generator profile and being defined in terms of different predefined attributes relating to said content generator profile; and

   an interface for users to configure said profiles.

28. The computer system of claim 27 wherein said predefined attributes include predefined functions to be performed by a user in said class, on behalf of said content generator profile.

29. The computer system according to claim 28 wherein said predefined functions include one or more of: scouting and/or developing content generators, contractual
negotiations, scheduling events, advertisement, promotion, commentary, critical review of content, recommendations.

30. The computer system according to any of claims 27 to 29 wherein said predefined attributes include predefined relationships with said content generator profile, including entitlement to benefits and/or rewards flowing from proliferation of content from the content generator profile.

31. The computer system according to claim 30 wherein said content is music and/or video media.

32. The computer system according to any of claims 27 to 31 wherein the computer system is connected to or part of a social networking computer system and comprises a plurality of profile sets, each profile set including at least one content generator profile and a plurality of user profiles according to different classes.

33. The computer system according to any of claims 27 to 32 wherein said content generators generate content selected from any one or more of: music, film, broadcast media, literature or arts.

34. The computer system according to any of claims 27 to 33 wherein said content generator is a recording artist or band.
35. The computer system according to any of claims 27 to 34 wherein the computer system further comprises means for enabling user class profiles to host and distribute downloadable media.

36. A method for monitoring proliferation effectiveness of one or more user classes associated with a content generator, the method comprising:

   measuring the popularity of content attributed to a content generator and/or determining from an audit function proliferation events performed by individual users from among said user classes.

37. The method of claim 36 wherein said determination occurs when said popularity measurement indicates a certain predetermined threshold has been reached.

38. The method of claim 37 wherein popularity of content is determined by measuring one or more of download events, streaming events, or a combination of both.

39. A computer system comprising:

   a database of content and/or content generator profiles;

   an analysis module for measuring popularity of content among content consumers,

   and/or a monitoring module for monitoring proliferation events performed by individual user class profiles affiliated with said content.
40. The computer system of claim 39 wherein the analysis module includes a device for monitoring download events or streaming events.

41. The computer system according to claims 39 or 40 wherein said content is selected from any one or more of: music, film, broadcast media, literature or arts.

42. The computer system according to any of claims 39 to 41 wherein said content generator is a recording artist or band.

43. A social network registration method, comprising:

   providing profiles of predetermined classes of users defined in relation to a content profile, wherein each said predetermined class has characteristic functions defined in relation to one or more content generators; and

   providing an interface configured to allow remote users to populate said profiles.

44. The social network registration method of claim 43 wherein said content profile comprises a profile relating to one or more of the content generator and a content item for distribution to content consumers.

45. The social network registration method of claims 43 or 44 wherein each said predetermined class has characteristic relational connections with at least one other class and/or the content generator.
46. The social network registration method of claims 43 to 45 wherein said predefined functions include one or more of: scouting and/or developing content generators, contractual negotiations, scheduling events, advertisement, promotion.

5 47. A computer system forming at least part of a social network, comprising:

   a registration interface;

   a plurality of templates defining content generator profiles;

   a plurality of sets of user class profiles, each set of user class profiles being associated with a content generator profile and comprising a plurality of classes of users at least some of which define functions associated with proliferation of content; and

   a control module operable to cause a user to move through the process of populating one or more of said profiles.

10 48. The computer system of claim 47 wherein one or more of said user class templates also limit the number of users in a class.

49. A method of rewarding social network users' efforts in the proliferation of content, the method comprising:

20   allocating a plurality of user profiles to a content generator profile;

   establishing one or more relationship between a user profile and content generator, wherein said relationship defines at least a proliferation function associated with content and a reward flowing to a relevant user in consideration for proliferation efforts in relation to the content; and

25   facilitating proliferation activities by users according to their user profiles.
50. The method of claim 49 wherein the rewards include commission payments and/or proportion of income flowing to the content generator.

51. The method of claims 49 or 50 wherein the computer system records division of rewards between different users and/or different user classes.

52. The method of any of claims 49 to 51 wherein the computer system monitors proliferation events undertaken through user profiles and rewards individual users according the nature and/or extent of the proliferation efforts.

53. The method of any of claims 49 to 52 wherein payment is triggered by the popularity measurement indicating content from the content generator has reached a particular level of popularity.

54. The method of claim 53 wherein the level of popularity is defined in terms of a number of download events and/or streaming events.

55. The method of any of claims 49 to 54 wherein payment is triggered by a content generator reaching a predetermined type of commercial agreement with a content distributor and/or advertiser.

56. A computer system comprising:
a database capable of ranking individual content items based on popularity with a general population of content consumers, wherein links relate individual users to the or each content item for which they have undertaken proliferation efforts.

57. A method of measuring individual contributions to the popularity of content generated by content generators, comprising:

- defining content generator profiles;
- defining a suite of user class profiles associated with each content generator profile, wherein one or more of said user class profiles:
  - defines a proliferation function for content generated by said content generator;
  - monitors one or more of (i) the popularity of content items and (ii) proliferation event activity of one or more users according to a user profile; and
  - rewards said user based on results of said monitoring.

58. The method of claim 57 wherein said monitoring is performed via an audit function of a database.

59. The method of claims 57 or 58 wherein it is possible to adjust rewards between users and/or user classes supporting a given content generator based on the monitoring function.

60. A method for proliferating content throughout online communities, wherein a member of a user class is authenticated as being logically representative of a particular content generator.
61. A method for proliferating content throughout online communities, wherein a user can elect to perform certain predetermined retail functions on behalf of a content generator with which they are logically associated.

62. The method of claim 61 wherein said retail function is selling downloadable content items.

63. A method for proliferating content throughout online communities, wherein a member of a user class performs a retail function on behalf of a content generator with which they are logically associated.

64. The method of claim 63 wherein said retail function is selling downloadable content items.

65. The method of claim 64 wherein it is mandatory for a member of a user class to sell downloadable material from one or more of the content generators with which the user class is logically associated.

66. A method for ranking the content generated by content generators and proliferating content associated with particular content generators to drive improved rankings.
67. An apparatus for ranking the content generated by content generators and proliferating content associated with particular content generators to drive improved rankings.

68. A computer-readable medium encoded with a data structure configured to perform any of the methods of claims 14-26, 36-38, 49-55, 57-59, 60, 61-62, 63-65 and/or 66.
Figure 1

1. User
2. Visit website & enter registration data
3. URL & user profile created
4. Add bands
5. Add media
6. Blog
7. Comments
8. Add friends

Figure 2

1. Band/artist
2. Visit website & enter registration data
3. URL & band profile created
4. Tour dates
5. Band info
6. Add content
7. Blog
8. Comments
9. Add bands
10. Add groups
Figure 7A

1. CONTROL MODULE
2. AUDIT/PERFORMANCE FUNCTION ENGAGED ONCE USER ALLOCATED INTO A USER CLASS
3. PERFORMS DATABASE LOOK-UP
4. SEARCHES NETWORK USING PRE-DEFINED AUDIT/PERFORMANCE CRITERIA
5. CREATES AUDIT REPORT

Figure 7B

1. REPORT SENT
2. ALLOCATE NEW USER
3. REPORT TO BAND/ARTIST
4. REPORT TO MANAGEMENT
5. TAKE NO ACTION
6. REMOVE USER FROM CLASS
7. 701
8. 712
9. 722
10. 718
11. 714
12. 716
Figure 8

800

USER

802

VISITS DOWNLOAD WEBSITE

804

BROWSES/ SEARCHES FOR SONG TO DOWNLOAD

806

CONTROL MODULE

808

UNIQUE ID RECORDED IN DATABASE

810

RANKING FUNCTION

812

MONITORS RUNNING TOTAL

814

CREATES A CHART

816

CAN ACTIVATE COMMISSION FUNCTION AT PRE-DETERMINED RANK

818
### A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

**INV.** G06Q30/00

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

### B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

G06Q

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practical, search terms used)

EPO-Internal, WPI Data

### C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

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Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C.

* Special categories of cited documents:
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  * "E" earlier document but published on or after the international filing date
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Date of the actual completion of the international search: 5 August 2008

Date of mailing of the international search report: 12/08/2008

Authorized officer: Dedek, Frederic
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