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(54) Title: CREDIT BASED ADVERTISING THROUGH EMAIL

(57) Abstract:

For two-letter codes and other abbreviations, refer to the "Guidance Notes on Codes and Abbreviations" appearing at the beginning of each regular issue of the PCT Gazette.
Credit Based Advertising Through Email

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

The present invention relates to the field of electronic advertising. More specifically, the present invention relates to advertising through email.

2. Background Information

With advances in integrated circuit, microprocessor, networking and communication technologies, increasing number of devices, in particular, digital computing devices, are being interconnected together. The increased interconnectivity of computing devices have led to wide spread adoption of various network dependent applications, such as email and the world wide web.

Internet based advertising through web pages, such as banner ads, is known in the art. See e.g. U.S. Patent 5,948,061. However, this form of advertising suffers from the disadvantage that the frequency of play of an advertisement is dependent on the volume as well as the type of traffic accessing a particular content web site or particular web pages.

Using email as a direct mailing advertising campaign is also known in the art. However, Internet users are generally annoyed with unsolicited emails. Various filters are often deployed to filter out “spam” mail. Even if one of these direct campaign emails survived the filtering, out of concern for virus and other reasons, a user may simply delete it, without opening the email. As a result, the advertisement would not get presented anyway. Moreover, increasingly, Internet users are concerned with privacy issues, in particular, with the sales of email addresses. Thus, out of concern of offending their user bases, increasingly, entities with user email addresses (such as e-commerce sites) are no longer selling or sharing email addresses in their possession.

Thus, an improved approach to Internet advertising is desired.
SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

An advertisement server and an enhanced email program (or a re-mailer) are provided to facilitate insertion of either a link to an advertisement of an advertiser or the advertisement itself in a email being prepared by a sender. Upon receipt by the recipient, after transmission by the sender, the advertisement server and the recipient’s email program also facilitate display of the email including the advertisement for viewing by the recipient. The sender is credited for the publication of the advertisement, based either on the insertion and transmission of the advertisement enabled/included email, or on the viewing of the advertisement by the recipient. The advertisement link/advertisement may be inserted automatically or manually (if facilitated by the sender’s enhanced email program). Automatic insertion may be based on attributes of one or more recipients. Manual insertion may include selection of an advertisement category and selection of the advertiser, in addition to selection of the advertisement. If employed, the re-mailer may be disposed completely or partially on the sender’s device. In the partially disposed case, the re-mailer is implemented with a client-server architecture, with the client pirece being disposed on the sender’s device.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF DRAWINGS

The present invention will be described by way of exemplary embodiments, but not limitations, illustrated in the accompanying drawings in which like references denote similar elements, and in which:

Figure 1 illustrates a network view of the present invention, including an email sender, an email recipient, an advertisement publisher and an advertiser, in accordance with one embodiment;

Figure 2 illustrates a method view of the same invention, in accordance with two embodiments;

Figures 3a-3e illustrate an user interface suitable for use to practice the present invention at the email sender end, in accordance with one embodiment;
Figures 4-5 illustrate various data organization suitable for use to practice the present invention at the email sender (and advertisement publisher server), in accordance with one embodiment;

Figures 6-7 illustrate the operational flow of the relevant aspects of an enhanced email program practicing the present invention at the email sender end, in accordance with two embodiments;

Figure 8 further illustrates the user interface of Fig. 3, more specifically, for use at a recipient end, in accordance with one embodiment;

Figure 9 illustrates the operational flow of the relevant aspects of the enhanced email program practicing the present invention at the recipient end, in accordance with one embodiment;

Figures 10a-10c illustrate the operational flow of the relevant aspects of the advertisement publisher server of Fig. 1, in accordance with one embodiment; and

Figures 11a-11c illustrate various data organizations suitable for use for practicing the present invention at the advertisement publisher end, in accordance with one embodiment;

Figure 12 illustrates an example computer system suitable for use as a sender/recipient computer or an advertisement publisher/advertiser server, in accordance with one embodiment; and

Figures 13a-13b illustrate two variations of a re-mailer alternate embodiment of Figure 1.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

In the following description, various aspects of the present invention will be described. However, it will be apparent to those skilled in the art that the present invention may be practiced with only some or all aspects of the present invention. For purposes of explanation, specific numbers, materials and configurations are set forth in order to provide a thorough understanding of the present invention. However, it will also be apparent to one skilled in the art that the present invention may be practiced without the specific details. In other
instances, well known features are omitted or simplified in order not to obscure the present invention.

Parts of the description will be presented in terms of operations performed by a processor based device, using terms such as data, tables, requesting, determining, retrieving, displaying, and the like, consistent with the manner commonly employed by those skilled in the art to convey the substance of their work to others skilled in the art. As well understood by those skilled in the art, the quantities take the form of electrical, magnetic, or optical signals capable of being stored, transferred, combined, and otherwise manipulated through mechanical and electrical components of the processor based device; and the term processor include microprocessors, micro-controllers, digital signal processors, and the like, that are standalone, adjunct or embedded.

Various operations will be described as multiple discrete steps in turn, in a manner that is most helpful in understanding the present invention, however, the order of description should not be construed as to imply that these operations are necessarily order dependent. In particular, these operations need not be performed in the order of presentation. Further, the description repeatedly uses the phrase “in one embodiment”, which ordinarily does not refer to the same embodiment, although it may.

**Overview**

Referring now first to Figures 1-2, wherein two block diagrams illustrating a network view and a method view of the present invention, in accordance with one embodiment, are shown. As illustrated in Fig 1, the computing equipment of email sender 106, email recipient 108, advertisement publisher 102, advertisers 104, and email servers 111 and 113 are interconnected with each other through networking fabric 110. The computing equipment of email sender 106 and email recipient 108 are correspondingly provided with enhanced email programs 107 and 109 incorporated with the teachings of the present invention, whereas the computing equipment of advertisement publisher 102 is incorporated with complementary teachings. Together, these elements facilitate practice of the credit based advertising through email of the present invention.
As illustrated in Fig. 2, under the present invention, email sender 106 using enhanced email program 107 (assisted by advertisement server 102) prepares either an advertisement enabled or advertisement included email, block 202. The enabling/inclusion may be accomplished via either a manual insertion mode or an automatic insertion mode. Thereafter, email sender 106 sends the advertisement enabled/included email to one or more recipients 108 by way of email servers 111 and 113, block 204. Each recipient 108 in turn using enhanced email program 109 (if necessary, assisted by advertisement server 102 and advertiser servers 104) opens and views the received email including the advertisement, block 206.

In one embodiment, advertisement publisher 102 is also notified of the transmission of the advertisement enabled/included email at block 204. In this embodiment, advertisement publisher 102 logs the inclusion and sending of the advertisement, block 205. In another embodiment, advertisement publisher 102 is notified of the viewing of the advertisement by recipient 108 at block 206. In this embodiment, advertisement publisher 102 logs the viewing of the advertisement by email recipient 108, block 208.

In either embodiment, at blocks 210 and 212, advertisement publisher 102 invoices advertisers for publication of the advertisements, and email sender 106 is credited for publishing/viewing of the advertisements. In the first earlier described embodiment, email sender 106 may be credited simply for enabling/including the advertisement and publishing it (without regard to whether the advertisement is actually viewed by recipient/recipients 108). On the other hand, in the second earlier described embodiment, email sender 106 may be credited for viewing of the advertisement by recipient/recipients 108. The present invention anticipates that credit may be given in monetary as well as non-monetary compensation, e.g. air miles of an airline’s frequent flyer plan or points earned of a hotel’s frequent visit plan. In the case of the monetary compensation, the “credit” may be given to email sender 106 by advertisement publisher 102 or by advertisers 104.

These and other aspects of the present invention will all be described in further detail below.
Returning briefly to Fig. 1, the equipment employed by email sender 106 and recipient 108 may be any one of a broad range of email hosting capable equipment known in the art. Examples of such equipment include but are not limited to computers of various form factors, desktop, laptop, palm sized, as well as personal digital assistants (PDA) and wireless cell phones known in the art. Similarly, the equipment employed by advertisement publisher 102 and advertisers 104 may be any one of a broad range of advertisement hosting capable equipment known in the art. Examples of such equipment include but not limited to server computers of various performance levels from entry level server to supercomputers.

Email Sender

Figures 3a-3d illustrate an example end user interface suitable for use to practice the email sender aspect of the present invention, in accordance with a manual insertion embodiment. As illustrated in Fig. 3a, similar to other email sender end user interfaces, example end user interface 300 includes menu 302 of "drop down" commands, i.e. "File", "Edit" and so forth menu 304 of action icons, a number of command buttons 306-314, date/time, from, to and copy addressee fields 316-324. However, unlike prior art email sender end user interfaces, command buttons 306-314 includes a novel "insert Ad" command button 312.

As illustrated in Fig. 3b, in response to user selection of "insert ad" button 312, end user interface 300 further presents an "insert ad pop-up" window 330 presenting a number of advertisement categories 332 for selection by the user. As illustrated in Fig. 3c, in response to user selection of one of the present categories 332, end user interface 300 further presents a number of advertisers 334 of the selected advertisement category 332 for selection by the user. As illustrated in Fig. 3c, in response to user selection of one of the advertisers 334 for the selected category 332, end user interface 300 further a number of advertisements 336 of the selected advertiser 334 for selection by the user. Finally, as illustrated in Fig. 3d, in response user selection of one of the advertisements 336, the selected advertisement is "inserted" into the email. In one embodiment, it is the selected advertisement itself that is actually
inserted into the email. In another embodiment, a link to an advertisement publisher 102 or an advertiser 104 where the selected advertisement may be retrieved is inserted instead. For the embodiment, the email may be considered as advertisement “enabled”.

Thus, it can be seen from the above description, under the manual insertion mode of operation, a user has full control in selecting the kind of advertisements that are “included” in the email. The selection process may be repeated as many times as the user desire. In one embodiment, the selected “advertisements” 338a-338e are automatically arranged along the perimeters of the email as shown.

In alternate embodiments, “advertisements” 338a-338e may be inserted automatically instead. In one embodiment, “advertisements” 338a-338e are automatically inserted based on attributes of one or more of the addressees. Attributes may include interest, demographic as well as other types of data. Examples of interest designations include but are not limited to sports (football, baseball, basketball, hockey, soccer, golf, fishing, skiing, sailing, biking, and so forth), art (painting, music, sculpting, theatre, cinema, and so forth), scientific subjects (astronomy, biology, chemistry, physics and so forth), and so forth. Of course, any of these example interest designations may be expressed at a higher or lower level of specificity, e.g. music may be further delineated as classical music, rock and roll, rhythm and blue, rap, and so forth. Demographic data may include but are not limited to race, sex, age, neighborhood and so forth.

In one embodiment, “advertisements” 338a-338e are automatically inserted based on attributes of the primary addressee, e.g. the first addressee named. In an alternate embodiment, “advertisements” 338a-338e are automatically inserted based on attributes of all specified addressees. In one embodiment, derivative attributes based on the attributes of the specified addresses are generated, and used for advertisement selection instead. Examples of derivative attributes may include modifying a gender attribute to neutral when both male and female addressee are present, or substituting a geographic attribute with a wider state or regional designation when addressees from more than one community are present.
In one embodiment, these attributes are advantageously stored in an enhanced address book accessible to email sender 106. In one embodiment, the enhanced address book is the private address book of email sender 106. In another embodiment, the enhanced address book is a "public" address book.

In one embodiment, the multiple attributes based selected advertisements may also be automatically inserted in a fee related order. That is, selected advertisements of advertisers paying a higher fee schedule are inserted first before selected advertisements of advertisers paying a lower fee schedule.

Figure 4 illustrates one such address book. As illustrated, in addition to conventional table columns for storing addressee names (column 404), their email and physical addresses (columns 406-408), and so forth, address table 402 is advantageously provided with a number of columns 410 for storing the aforementioned interest and demographic data.

Figure 5 illustrates a number of sample tables suitable for storing the earlier described category, advertiser, and advertisement information, for practicing the present invention, in accordance with one embodiment. Example category table 502 includes column 504 for storing categories identifications, and column 506 for storing descriptions of the various advertisement categories, whereas example advertiser table 512 includes columns 514 and 516 for storing advertiser identifications and their names, and column 517 for storing category identifications of the advertisers. Additionally, for the illustrated embodiment, advertiser table 512 also includes columns 518 for storing at least various financial data associated with crediting email senders, such as the amount invoiced for the current reporting period, cumulative balance owed, and so forth. Example advertisement table 522 includes column 524 for storing advertisement identification, and columns 525 and 526 for storing advertiser identifications of the advertisements, and links to the locations where the advertisements may be retrieved. Additionally, for the illustrated embodiment, advertisement table 512 also includes columns 528 for storing at least various statistical data associated with the publishing of the
advertisements. Examples of these statistical data include inclusion and viewing statistics.

**Figure 6** illustrates the operation flow of the relevant aspects of the email program executing on the equipment of email sender 106, in accordance with one embodiment. As illustrated, at block 602, the email program awaits for the selection of the "insert ad" command button. At block 604, as alluded to earlier, in response to the selection of the "insert ad" command button, the email program displays a number of advertisement categories, e.g. in a pop-up window, and facilitates selection of an advertisement category, e.g. scrolling the advertisement categories up and down in response to a user's selection of an up or down arrow icon associated with the pop-up window. At block 606, also as alluded to earlier, in response to the selection of an advertisement category, the email program displays a number of advertisers of the selected advertisement category, and facilitates selection of an advertiser. At block 608, in response to the selection of an advertiser, the email program displays a number of advertisements of the selected advertiser, and facilitates selection of an advertisement of the selected advertiser. At block 610, the email program includes the selected "advertisement" in the email. As described earlier, in one embodiment, the actual advertisement itself is inserted. In another embodiment, only a link to a location where the advertisement may be retrieved is inserted. The email is said to be advertisement enabled. Therefore, the process returns the block 610, awaits another selection of the "insert ad" command button by the email sender 106.

**Figure 7** illustrates the operational flow of the relevant aspects of the enhanced email program executing on the equipment of the email sender 106, in accordance with another embodiment (an "automatic insertion" embodiment). As illustrated, in response to the selection of the "send" command button by the email sender 106, the email program determines if the "auto insert" option of the email program is enabled, block 702. [The basic provision and enabling/disabling of the "auto insert" option, except for the responsive action, may be implemented as any one of a number of conventional email program options.] If the "auto insert" option is determined to be not enabled, no further actions are taken. The email is sent as in the
prior art, block 712. However, if the “auto insert” option is determined to be enabled, the email program retrieves the attributes of the recipients specified, block 704. As described earlier, depending on the embodiment, the email program may retrieve the attributes from a local private address book or from a remote public address book. The email program may also retrieve attributes of the “primary” recipient, or all recipient, or somewhere in between (e.g. only the “To” addressees, and not the “cc” or “bcc” addressees). As illustrated, if the email program supports automatic selection of advertisements based on attributes of multiple addressees, the email program further generates a number of derivative attributes as described earlier, based on a number of derivation policies, block 706. [In alternate embodiments, in lieu of generating derivative attributes, and inserting the advertisements/advertisement links based on the derivative attributes, the present invention may be practiced having the email replicated, one for each recipient, and having the advertisements/advertisement links inserted based on the corresponding recipient’s attributes instead. ]

In any event, at block 708, the email program selects one or more advertisements to be included based on the attributes/derivative attributes of the recipient/recipient. The number of advertisements selected may be predetermined, or dependent on the length of the email, or a number of other factors. At 710, the email program includes the selected advertisements themselves, or the links to the locations where the advertisements may be retrieved. In some embodiments, the inclusion may also include including information associated with facilitating crediting the sender, such as the sender’s identification (if identification other than the email address of the sender is used). Finally, at block 712, the advertisement enabled included email is sent as any of the prior art emails (void of advertisements).

Accordingly, advertisement enabled included emails may be sent by email senders 108 under the present invention.

Email Recipient

Figure 8 illustrates an example end user interface suitable for use to practice the email recipient aspect of the present invention, in accordance one
embodiment. For ease of understanding, end user interface 800 is basically
the same end user interface of Fig. 3a-3d, except viewed from an email
recipient's perspective, in particular, when one of the included advertisement is
selected. In alternate embodiments, completely different end user interface
may be employed instead, as long as the teachings of the present invention
are incorporated. As illustrated, in response to the "selection" of an included
advertisement (or advertisement link), pop-up window 840 is presented, and
the selected advertisement is (retrieved and) rendered in pop-up window 840.
The present invention contemplates that "selection" may be made
automatically for the recipient of the email, and/or manually by the recipient of
the email.

Figure 9 illustrates the operation flow of the relevant aspects of the
enhanced email program executing on the equipment of email recipient 108, in
accordance with one embodiment. As illustrated, upon detecting opening of an
email, at block 902, the email program determines if the "auto display" option is
enabled. Provision and facilitating enabling/disabling of an "auto display"
option may likewise be provided as other convention email options. If it is
determined that the "auto display" option is not enabled, the process continues
at block 906, i.e. reading of the email is facilitated as in the prior block.
However, if it is determined that the "auto display" option is enabled, the
process continues at block 904 instead. The email program automatically
selects an advertisement, (retrieves the advertisement), and renders the
advertisement. If multiple advertisements are included, the email program may
successively select and render the advertisements in a revolving manner.
Selection may be made randomly or in a predetermined order, e.g. by the order
the advertisements are included in the email. If retrieval is performed (when
only a link is included), retrieval may be a multi-step process, e.g. retrieving
first from an advertisement publisher a link to an advertiser, and then retrieving
the advertisement from the advertiser. Upon rendering the advertisements or
concurrent with rendering the advertisement, at block 906, the email program
facilitates reading of the email as in the prior art, e.g. responding to scrolling
up, or scrolling down requests, facilitating "reply" and/or "forward" operations,
and so forth.
While facilitating reading of the email as in the prior art, the email program returns to block 904 if email recipient 108 manually selects an advertisement. As described earlier, at block 904, the email program (retrieves) and renders the selected advertisement. The process continues until eventually email recipient 108 "closes" the email, by taking any one of a number of "closing" actions, e.g. "closing" the email upon end of reading, sending a reply/forward, and so forth.

**Advertisement Publisher**

**Figures 10a-10c** illustrate the operation flow of the relevant aspects of the advertisement publishing programs executing on the equipment of advertisement publisher 102, in accordance with one embodiment. As illustrated in Fig. 10a, upon receipt of an advertisement inclusion request, the publishing programs return either a link to an advertisement or the advertisement itself for inclusion, block 1002. For the illustrated embodiment, the publishing programs also log the advertisement inclusion request, and update the applicable databases, block 1004.

**Fig. 10b** illustrates the publishing programs' response to an advertisement display request. At block 1012, the publishing programs return the request advertisement(s), which as alluded to earlier, may be links to the advertisers where the advertisements are ultimately located. At block 1014, the publishing programs log the advertisement display request, and update the applicable databases.

**Fig. 10c** illustrates the publishing programs' invoice and credit operations. At block 1022, upon detecting it is time to invoice and/or credit, the publishing programs access the databases, retrieve and process the recorded information, and invoice the advertisers accordingly, which as described earlier, may be based on inclusion and/or actual rendering. For the illustrated embodiment, the publishing programs also credit the subscriber participants, i.e. the senders accordingly. As described earlier, the credit may be monetary, e.g. a percentage of the amount invoiced the advertisers, or non-monetary, based on certain benefit accumulation programs. Recall also from earlier description, in alternate embodiments, credit may be given to email sender 106.
by the advertisers directly. Naturally, in alternate embodiments, credit may be given by both the advertisement publishers and the advertisers.

**Figures 11a-11c** illustrate three sample data structures suitable for use to practice the advertisement publisher aspect of the present invention. As illustrated in **Fig. 11a**, subscriber table **1102** may be employed to record the relevant information about the participant senders **106**, to enable them to be credited. Example subscriber table **1102** includes a subscriber identification column **1104** for storing an identifier for each of the participant senders **106**. Subscriber table **1102** also includes a number of columns **1106** for storing basic information about the participant senders **106** such as name, email address, physical mailing address and so forth. Further, subscriber table **1102** includes in particular, column **1108** for storing the amount of credit due each of the participant senders **106** (subscribers).

**Fig. 11b** illustrates an example advertisement inclusion log **1122** suitable for recording advertisement inclusion events. Example advertisement inclusion log **1122** includes fields **1124** for recording the date and time of the inclusion events and field **1126** for recording identifiers of the advertisement included. Further, advertisement inclusion log **1122** includes field **1128** for recording identifiers of the inclusion requestors, i.e. email senders **106** (subscribers).

Similarly, **Fig. 11c** illustrates an example advertisement display log **1132** suitable for recording advertisement display events. Example advertisement display log **1132** includes fields **1123** for recording the date and time of the display events and field **1136** for recording identifiers of the advertisement displayed. Further, advertisement display log **1122** includes field **1138** for recording identifiers of the email senders **106** (subscribers).

**Example Computer System**

**Figure 12** illustrates an example computer system suitable for use as either a sender/recipient computer **106/108** or a advertisement publisher/advertiser server **102/104** of **Fig. 1**, in accordance with one embodiment. As shown, computer system **1200** includes one or more processors **1202** (typically depending on whether it is used as server **102/104**
or one of computers 106-108) and system memory 1204. Additionally, computer system 1200 includes mass storage devices 1206 (such as diskette, hard drive, CD-ROM and so forth), input/output devices 1208 (such as keyboard, cursor control and so forth) and communication interfaces 1210 (such as network interface cards, modems and so forth). The elements are coupled to each other via system bus 1212, which represents one or more buses. In the case of multiple buses, they are bridged by one or more bus bridges (not shown). Each of these elements perform its conventional functions known in the art. In particular, system memory 1204 and mass storage 1206 are employed to store a working copy and a permanent copy of the programming instructions implementing the teachings of the present invention. The permanent copy of the programming instructions may be loaded into mass storage 1206 in the factory, or in the field, as described earlier, through a distribution medium (not shown) or through communication interface 1210 (from a distribution server (not shown). The constitution of these elements 1202-1212 are known, and accordingly will not be further described.

Alternate Re-mailer Embodiment

Figures 13a-13b illustrate two variations of a re-mailer alternate embodiment of Fig. 1. As illustrated by Fig. 13a, in lieu of enhancing email program 107 with the teachings of the present invention, to advantageously operate as earlier described to practice the present invention, a re-mailer program 121 is provided to the equipment of email sender 106 to practice the present invention instead. Re-mailer program 121 operates to intercept emails being sent by email sender 106 (to email server 111). Upon intercepting a email, re-mailer program 121 facilitates automatic insertion of advertisements or links to advertisements into the email (with the assistance of advertisement publisher 102), as earlier described for enhanced email program 107. That is, re-mailer program 121 facilitates automatic insertion of advertisements/advertisement links into the email based on the attributes of the recipient. If the email is addressed to multiple recipients, re-mailer 121 may generate derivative attributes, and insert the advertisements/advertisement
links accordingly, or replicate the email, one for each recipient, and insert the
advertisements/Advertisements correspondingly. Upon facilitating the
automatic insertion, re-mailer 121 then forwards the advertisement
included/advertisement enabled email to recipient/Recipients 108 by way of
e-mail servers 111 and 113. Thereafter, the process continues as earlier
described, resulting in email sender 106 being credited for the publication of
the "included" advertisements.

Fig. 13b illustrates another variation of the re-mailer alternate
embodiment of Fig. 13a. Instead of providing a re-mailer program 121 to email
sender 106, a client piece of re-mailer program 121a is provided to email
sender 106, and the complementary server part of re-mailer program 121b is
remotely disposed instead. Together, the client and server pieces of re-mailer
program 121a and 121b perform the same functions earlier described for re-
mailer program 121, that is, the same automatic advertisement insertion
functions earlier described for enhanced email program 107. The client piece
of re-mailer program 121a is further advantageously provided with the logic to
determine whether the equipment of email sender 106 is connected on-line.
The client piece of re-mailer program 121a awaits until the equipment of email
sender 106 is connected online, before communicating with its complementary
server portion of re-mailer program 121b to facilitate the earlier described
insertion of advertisements/advertisement links.

Accordingly, under these re-mailer program alternate embodiments, the
present invention may be practiced without having to enhance any email
program.

Conclusion and Epilogue

Thus, it can be seen from the above descriptions, a novel method and
apparatus for credit based advertising through email has been described. The
novel method/apparatus advantageously induce advertisement to be published
through emails that have a higher likelihood of being viewed.

While the present invention has been described in terms of the above
illustrated embodiments, those skilled in the art will recognize that the invention
is not limited to the embodiments described. The present invention can be
practiced with modification and alteration within the spirit and scope of the appended claims. For example, to encourage viewing of the published advertisements, the non-auto display embodiments may be further extended by crediting the email recipients for selecting and viewing the published advertisements. The above described data structures and processes may be extended to enable the recipient identifications and their viewing actions to be tracked and rewarded accordingly. The description is thus to be regarded as illustrative instead of restrictive on the present invention.
CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A method comprising:
   inserting a selected one of (a) a link to an advertisement of an advertiser and (b) the advertisement itself, in a email being prepared by a sender;
   sending the advertisement enabled/included email to a recipient;
   displaying the email including the advertisement for viewing by the recipient; and
   crediting said sender based on a selected one of said inserting and said viewing of the advertisement by said recipient.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein said inserting is made in a selected one of (a) a manual manner, in response to actions taken by said sender, and (b) an automatic manner, based at least in part on attributes associated with said recipient.

3. The method of claim 1, wherein it is a link to the advertisement that is inserted in said email, and the method further comprises retrieving said advertisement from an advertisement server for said display, using said inserted link.

4. The method of claim 1, wherein said retrieving is made in a selected one of (a) an automatic manner and (b) a responsive manner, in response to a request of said recipient.

5. The method of claim 1, wherein said crediting comprises a selected one of (a) the advertisement server invoicing said advertiser for said inserting/viewing, and crediting said sender for a percent of an amount invoiced, and (b) the advertisement server reporting to said advertiser about said inserting/viewing, and said advertiser crediting said sender accordingly.
6. In a client device, a method comprising:
facilitating insertion of a selected one of (a) a link to an advertisement of
an advertiser and (b) the advertisement itself, in an email being prepared by a
sender; and
facilitating sending of the advertisement enabled/included email to a
recipient for viewing;
wherein the sender will be credited for a selected one of (a) said
insertion facilitated and (b) said viewing by said recipient.

7. The method of claim 6, wherein said insertion facilitation comprises
facilitating automatic insertion of said link of the advertisement/the
advertisement itself based at least in part on attributes of said recipient.

8. The method of claim 7, where said automatic insertion facilitation
comprises facilitating automatic retrieval of said attributes of said recipient from
an address book.

9. The method of claim 8, where said automatic insertion facilitation further
comprises facilitating sending said retrieved attributes to an advertisement
server.

10. The method of claim 8, wherein said automatic insertion facilitation further
comprises facilitating further basing said automatic insertion on
attributes of at least one other recipient.

11. The method of claim 10, wherein said facilitation of further basing said
automatic insertion on attributes of at least one other recipient comprises
generating derivative attributes based on said attributes of said recipients.

12. The method of claim 6, wherein said insertion facilitation is made in
response to a request of said sender.
13. The method of claim 12, wherein said insertion facilitation comprises facilitating selection of the advertisement from a plurality of advertisements of the advertiser.

14. The method of claim 13, wherein said insertion facilitation further comprises facilitating at least a selected one of (a) selection of an advertisement category from a plurality of advertisement categories, and (b) selection of the advertiser from a plurality of advertisers.

15. The method of claim 6, wherein said insertion facilitation comprises facilitating retrieving said link of the advertisement/the advertisement itself from a selected one of (a) an advertisement server and (b) a local cache of advertisement links/advertisements pre-downloaded from the advertisement server.

16. An apparatus comprising:
   a storage medium having stored therein a plurality of programming instructions designed to facilitate insertion of a selected one of a link to an advertisement of an advertiser and the advertisement itself in an email being prepared by a sender, and to facilitate sending of the advertisement enabled/included email to a recipient for viewing, wherein the sender will be credited for a selected one of said insertion facilitated and said viewing by said recipient; and
   a processor coupled to the storage medium to execute the programming instructions.

17. The apparatus of claim 16, wherein said programming instructions are designed to facilitate basing said automatic insertion of said link of the advertisement/the advertisement itself, at least in part on attributes of said recipient.
18. The apparatus of claim 17, where said programming instructions are designed to facilitate automatic retrieval of said attributes of said recipient from an address book.

19. The apparatus of claim 18, where said programming instructions are designed to further facilitate sending said retrieved attributes to an advertisement server.

20. The apparatus of claim 18, wherein said programming instructions are designed to facilitate further basing said automatic insertion on attributes of at least one other recipient.

21. The apparatus of claim 20, wherein said programming instructions are designed to generate derivative attributes based on attributes of said recipients.

22. The apparatus of claim 16, wherein said programming instructions are designed to facilitate said insertion in response to a request of said sender.

23. The apparatus of claim 22, wherein said programming instructions are designed to facilitate selection of the advertisement from a plurality of advertisements of the advertiser.

24. The apparatus of claim 23, wherein said programming instructions are designed to facilitate at least a selected one of (a) selection of an advertisement category from a plurality of advertisement categories, and (b) selection of the advertiser from a plurality of advertisers.

25. The apparatus of claim 16, wherein said programming instructions are further designed to facilitate retrieving said link of the advertisement/the advertisement itself from a selected one of (a) an advertisement server and (b) a local cache of advertisement links/advertisements pre-downloaded from the advertisement server.
26. In a client device, a method comprising:
   facilitating opening of an email received from a sender for viewing by a recipient; and
   facilitating displaying of an advertisement directly/indirectly included in said email for viewing by said recipient;
   wherein the sender is credited for a selected one of (a) directly/indirectly including said advertisement in said email, and (b) viewing of said directly/indirectly included advertisement by said recipient.

27. The method of claim 26, wherein said opening facilitation comprises determining whether an included advertisement is to be automatically displayed; and said displaying facilitation is performed automatically if it is determined that an included advertisement is to be displayed automatically, else said displaying facilitation is performed in response to a request of said recipient.

28. The method of claim 26, wherein said display facilitation comprises retrieving said advertisement from a selected one of (a) an advertisement publisher server, and (b) an advertiser's server.

29. An apparatus comprising:
   a storage medium having stored therein a plurality of programming instructions designed to facilitate opening of an email received from a sender for viewing by a recipient, and to facilitate displaying of an advertisement directly/indirectly included in said email for viewing by said recipient, wherein the sender is credited for (a) directly/indirectly including said advertisement, and (b) viewing of said directly/indirectly included advertisement by said recipient; and
   a processor coupled to the storage medium to execute the programming instructions.
30. The apparatus of claim 29, wherein said programming instructions are designed to determine whether an included advertisement is to be automatically displayed, and to perform said displaying facilitation automatically if it is determined that an included advertisement is to be displayed automatically, else perform said displaying facilitation in response to a request of said recipient.

31. The apparatus of claim 30, wherein said programming instructions are designed to retrieve said advertisement from a selected one of (a) an advertisement publisher server, and (b) an advertiser's server.

32. In a server, a method comprising:
   providing a selected one of (a) a link to an advertisement of an advertiser, and (b) the advertisement itself, to a sender for inclusion of the advertisement link/the advertisement itself in a email being prepared by the sender for transmission to a recipient; and
   facilitating crediting said sender for at least a selected one of (a) transmission of said advertisement included email, and (b) viewing of said advertisement by said recipient.

33. The method of claim 32, wherein the method further comprises providing a plurality of advertisements of the advertiser to the sender to facilitate selection of said advertisement.

34. The method of claim 33, wherein the method further comprises providing at least a selected one of (a) a plurality of advertisement categories, and (b) a plurality of advertisers, to the sender for said advertisement selection facilitation.

35. The method of claim 32, wherein said providing is based at least in part on attributes of said recipient.
36. The method of claim 35, wherein said providing is further based on attributes of one other recipient, and the method further comprises generating derivative attributes based on attributes of said recipients.

37. The method of claim 32, wherein it is a link of the advertisement that is provided in said providing operation, and the method further comprises providing the advertisement to said recipient.

38. The method of claim 32, wherein the method further comprises invoicing the advertiser.

39. The method of claim 38, wherein the method further comprises crediting the sender for a portion of an amount said advertiser was invoiced.

40. An apparatus comprising:
    a storage medium having stored therein a plurality of programming instructions designed to provide a selected one of (a) a link to an advertisement of an advertiser, and (b) the advertisement itself, to a sender for inclusion of the advertisement link/the advertisement itself in a email being prepared by the sender for transmission to a recipient, and to facilitate crediting said sender for at least a selected one of (a) transmission of said advertisement included email, and (b) viewing of said advertisement by said recipient; and
    a processor coupled to the storage medium to execute the programming instructions.

41. The apparatus of claim 40, wherein the programming instructions are designed to provide a plurality of advertisements of the advertiser to the sender to facilitate selection of said advertisement.

42. The apparatus of claim 41, wherein the programming instructions are designed to further provide at least a selected one of (a) a plurality of
advertisement categories, and (b) a plurality of advertisers, to the sender for said advertisement selection facilitation.

43. The apparatus of claim 40, wherein the programming instructions are designed to base said provide on at least in part on attributes of said recipient.

44. The apparatus of claim 43, wherein the programming instructions are designed to further base said provide on attributes of one other recipient, and the programming instructions are also designed to generate derivative attributes based on attributes of said recipients.

45. The apparatus of claim 40, wherein it is a link of the advertisement that is provided in said providing operation, and the programming instructions are further designed to provide the advertisement to said recipient.

46. The apparatus of claim 40, wherein the programming instructions are further designed to invoice the advertiser.

47. The apparatus of claim 46, wherein the programming instructions are further designed to credit the sender for a portion of an amount said advertiser was invoiced.

48. In a server, a method comprising:

   facilitating retrieval of a selected one of (a) a link to an advertisement of an advertiser and (b) the advertisement itself, on behalf of a email being sent by a sender on a remote client device to a recipient; and

   facilitating insertion of the retrieved one of the link to an advertisement of an advertiser and the advertisement itself, into said email being sent by said sender on said remote client device to said recipient;

   wherein upon sending said email, the sender will be credited for a selected one of (a) said insertion facilitated and (b) viewing of said advertisement by said recipient.
49. The method of claim 48, wherein said insertion facilitation comprises facilitating automatic insertion of said link of the advertisement/the advertisement itself based at least in part on attributes of said recipient.

50. The method of claim 48, where said automatic insertion facilitation comprises facilitating automatic retrieval of said attributes of said recipient from an address book.

51. The method of claim 50, where said automatic insertion facilitation further comprises facilitating sending said retrieved attributes to an advertisement server.

52. The method of claim 50, wherein said automatic insertion facilitation further comprises facilitating further basing said automatic insertion on attributes of at least one other recipient.

53. The method of claim 52, wherein said facilitation of further basing said automatic insertion on attributes of at least one other recipient comprises generating derivative attributes based on said attributes of said recipients.

54. An apparatus comprising:
   a storage medium having stored therein a plurality of programming instructions designed to enable said apparatus to facilitate retrieval of a selected one of (a) a link to an advertisement of an advertiser and (b) the advertisement itself, on behalf of a email being sent by a sender on a remote client device to a recipient, and to facilitate insertion of the retrieved one of the link to an advertisement of an advertiser and the advertisement itself, into said email being sent by said sender on said remote client device to said recipient, wherein upon sending said email, the sender will be credited for a selected one of (a) said insertion facilitated and (b) viewing of said advertisement by said recipient; and
   a processor coupled to the storage medium to execute the programming instructions.
55. The apparatus of claim 54, wherein said programming instructions enable the apparatus to facilitate automatic insertion of said link of the advertisement/the advertisement itself based at least in part on attributes of said recipient.

56. The apparatus of claim 54, where said programming instructions enable the apparatus to facilitate automatic retrieval of said attributes of said recipient from an address book.

57. The apparatus of claim 56, where said programming instructions further enable the apparatus to facilitate sending said retrieved attributes to an advertisement server.

58. The apparatus of claim 56, wherein said programming instructions enable the apparatus to facilitate said automatic insertion based further on attributes of at least one other recipient.

59. The apparatus of claim 58, wherein said programming instructions further enable the apparatus to generate derivative attributes based on said attributes of said recipients.
Figure 1
Email Sender prepares Email with Advertisement(s) 202

Email Sender sends Email with Ad(s) to Email Recipient(s) [Ad Publisher notified] 204

Each Email Recipient opens and reads Email with Ad(s) (Ad Publisher notified) 206

Ad Publisher logs viewing of Ad(s) by Email Recipient 208

Ad Publisher invoice Advertisers 210

Email Sender credited 212

Ad Publisher logs inclusion and sending of Ad(s) 205
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>XYZ Email Program</th>
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<tr>
<td>File  Edit  View  Action  Window  Help ~ 302</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☀️  ☐  ☐  ☐  ☐  ☐  ~ 304</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Address  Delivery Options  Sign  Insert Ad  Send</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Date/Time ~ 316
From: Sender ~ 318
To: Addressees ~ 320
c: Copy Addressees ~ 322
bcc: Blind Copy Addressees ~ 324
Subject:

300

Figure 3a
XYZ Email Program

File Edit View Action Window Help ~ 302

~ 304

Address Delivery Options Sign Insert Ad Send

306 308 310 312 314

Date/Time ~ 316
From: Sender ~ 318
To: Addressees ~ 320
cc: Copy Addressees ~ 322
bcc: Blind Copy Addressees ~ 324
Subject: ~ 326

Insert Ad Pop-Up ~ 330

Choose a category

Category A ~ 332
Category B ~ 332
Category C ~ 332
...

Figure 3b
### XYZ Email Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>File</th>
<th>Edit</th>
<th>View</th>
<th>Action</th>
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<td>🌐</td>
<td>🕳️</td>
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- **Date/Time**: ~316
- **From**: Sender ~318
- **To**: Addressees ~320
- **cc**: Copy Addressees ~322
- **bcc**: Blind Copy Addressees ~324
- **Subject**: ~326

### Insert Ad Pop-Up ~330

**Category X**

Choose an advertiser

- Advertiser A ~334
- Advertiser B ~334
- Advertiser C ~334
- ...

---

**Figure 3c**
XYZ Email Program

File  Edit  View  Action  Window  Help  ~ 302

~ 304

Address  Delivery Options  Sign  Insert Ad  Send

306  308  310  312  314

Date/Time  ~ 316
From:  Sender  ~ 318
To:  Addressees  ~ 320
cc:  Copy Addressees  ~ 322
bcc:  Blind Copy Addressees  ~ 324
Subject:  ~ 326

Insert Ad Pop-Up  ~ 330
Company Y
Choose an advertisement

Ad A  ~336
Ad B  ~336
Ad C  ~336
...

Figure 3d
XYZ Email Program

File Edit View Action Window Help ~ 302

~ 304

Address Delivery Options Sign Insert Ad Send

306 308 310 312 314

Date/Time ~ 316
From: Sender ~ 318
To: Addressees ~ 320
case: Copy Addressees ~ 322
bcc: Blind Copy Addressees ~ 324
Subject: ~ 326

Ad aa 338a
Ad bb 338b
Ad cc 338c
Ad ce 338e
Ad dd 338d

Figure 3e
Address Table ~ 402

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Addressee Name</th>
<th>Email Address</th>
<th>Other Conventional Address Table Data, Physical Mailing Address, etc.</th>
<th>Attributes – Interest, Demographic Data etc</th>
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<td>~410</td>
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**Figure 4**

Category Table ~ 502

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<th>Category Description</th>
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Advertiser Table ~ 512

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<tr>
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<th>Category ID</th>
<th>Financial Data</th>
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</table>

Advertisement Table ~ 522

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advertisement ID</th>
<th>Advertiser ID</th>
<th>Link to Ad</th>
<th>Inclusion and Viewing Statistical Data</th>
<th>Other Data</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>~ 524</td>
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<td>~528</td>
<td>~530</td>
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</tbody>
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**Figure 5**
No

Insert Ad? 602

Yes

Display advertisement category list and facilitate selection of an advertisement category 604

Display advertisers list and facilitate selection of an advertiser 606

Display advertisements list and facilitate selection of an advertisement 608

Done? 610

No

A

Yes

Include Links/Actual Ad of selected Ad(s) [and Sender data] with Email 612

Figure 6
Send

Auto Insert? 702
Yes

Retrieve Attributes of Recipient(s) 704

Select advertisements to be included based at least in part on (composite) attributes 708

Include Links/Actual Ad of selected Ad(s) [and Sender data] with Email 710

Send Email as in prior art 712

if multiple Recipients, form "composite" attributes or "break up" email 706

A

Figure 7
XYZ Email Program

File Edit View Action Window Help ~ 802

~ 804

Address Delivery Options Sign Insert Ad Send

806

Date/Time ~ 816
From: Sender ~ 818
To: Addressees ~ 820
c: Copy Addressees ~ 822
Subject: ~ 826

Ad aa 838a

Selected Ad

AD BODY

Ad ee 838e

Figure 8
Open

Auto Display? 902

Yes: Retrieve Ad from Publisher [and/or Advertiser] 904

Facilitate Email reading as in prior art 906

Ad Selected? 908

Yes: A

No:

Done? 910

Yes: End

No:

Figure 9
Ad Inclusion Request

Return Link to Ad or Ad itself
1002

Log AD inclusion request, and update Databases
1004

AD Display Request

Return requested Ad [link to Advertiser]
1012

Log AD request, and update Databases
1014

Figure 10a

Figure 10b

Time to Invoice/Credit

Invoice Advertisers
1022

Credit Senders
1024

Figure 10c
Subscriber Table ~ 1102

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subscriber ID ~ 1104</th>
<th>Basic Info – Name, Email Address, Physical Mailing Address, etc. ~1106</th>
<th>Credit Data ~1108</th>
<th>Other Data ~ 1110</th>
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**Figure 11a**

Ad Inclusion Log ~ 1122

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<th>Date and Time Data ~ 1124</th>
<th>Inclusion Ad ID ~1126</th>
<th>Inclusion Requestor ID ~ 1128</th>
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**Figure 11b**

Ad Display Log ~ 1132

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<th>Displayed Ad ID ~1136</th>
<th>Email Sender ID ~ 1138</th>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 11c**
Figure 12
Figure 13a
Figure 13b
DECLARATION OF NON-ESTABLISHMENT OF INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

(PCT Article 17(2)(a), Rules 13ter.1(c) and Rule 39)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Applicant's or agent's file reference</th>
<th>IMPORTANT DECLARATION</th>
<th>Date of mailing (day/month/year)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>51001. P002</td>
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<td>15/06/2001</td>
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<th>International application No.</th>
<th>International filing date (day/month/year)</th>
<th>(Earliest) Priority date (day/month/year)</th>
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<tr>
<th>International Patent Classification (IPC) or both national classification and IPC</th>
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<td>F08F17/60</td>
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</table>

Applicant

ZAIRMAIL, INC.

This International Searching Authority hereby declares, according to Article 17(2)(a), that no international search report will be established on the international application for the reasons indicated below:

1. [X] The subject matter of the international application relates to:
   a. ☐ scientific theories.
   b. ☐ mathematical theories
   c. ☐ plant varieties.
   d. ☐ animal varieties.
   e. ☐ essentially biological processes for the production of plants and animals, other than microbiological processes and the products of such processes.
   f. ☑ schemes, rules or methods of doing business.
   g. ☐ schemes, rules or methods of performing purely mental acts.
   h. ☐ schemes, rules or methods of playing games.
   i. ☐ methods for treatment of the human body by surgery or therapy.
   j. ☐ methods for treatment of the animal body by surgery or therapy.
   k. ☐ diagnostic methods practised on the human or animal body.
   l. ☐ mere presentations of information.
   m. ☐ computer programs for which this International Searching Authority is not equipped to search prior art.

2. ☐ The failure of the following parts of the international application to comply with prescribed requirements prevents a meaningful search from being carried out:
   ☐ the description
   ☐ the claims
   ☐ the drawings

3. ☐ The failure of the nucleotide and/or amino acid sequence listing to comply with the standard provided for in Annex C of the Administrative instructions prevents a meaningful search from being carried out:
   ☐ the written form has not been furnished or does not comply with the standard.
   ☐ the computer readable form has not been furnished or does not comply with the standard.

4. Further comments:

Name and mailing address of the International Searching Authority

European Patent Office, P.B. 5818 Patentlaan 2
NL-2280 HV Rijswijk
Tel. (+31-70) 340-2040, Tx. 31 651 epo nl,
Fax: (+31-70) 340-3016

Authorized officer

Mar’a Rodríguez Nóvoa

Form PCT/ISA/203 (July 1998)
The subject-matter claimed in claims 1-15, 26-28, 32-39 and 48-53 falls under the provisions of Article 17(2)(a)(i) and Rule 39.1(iii), PCT, such subject-matter relating to a method of doing business.

Claims 16-25, 29-31, 40-47 and 54-59 relate to a conventional apparatus for performing the business method of claims 1-15, 26-28, 32-39 and 48-53. Although these claims do not literally belong to the method category, they essentially claim protection for the same commercial effect as the method claims. The International Searching Authority considers that searching this subject-matter would serve no useful purpose. It is not at present apparent how the subject-matter of the present claims may be considered defensible in any subsequent examination phase in front of the EPO as International Preliminary Examining Authority with regard to the provisions of Article 33(1) PCT (novelty, inventive step); see also Guidelines B-VII, 1-6).

The applicant's attention is drawn to the fact that claims relating to inventions in respect of which no international search report has been established need not be the subject of an international preliminary examination (Rule 66.1(e) PCT). The applicant is advised that the EPO policy when acting as an International Preliminary Examining Authority is normally not to carry out a preliminary examination on matter which has not been searched. This is the case irrespective of whether or not the claims are amended following receipt of the search report or during any Chapter II procedure. If the application proceeds into the regional phase before the EPO, the applicant is reminded that a search may be carried out during examination before the EPO (see EPO Guideline C-VI, 8.5), should the problems which led to the Article 17(2) declaration be overcome.