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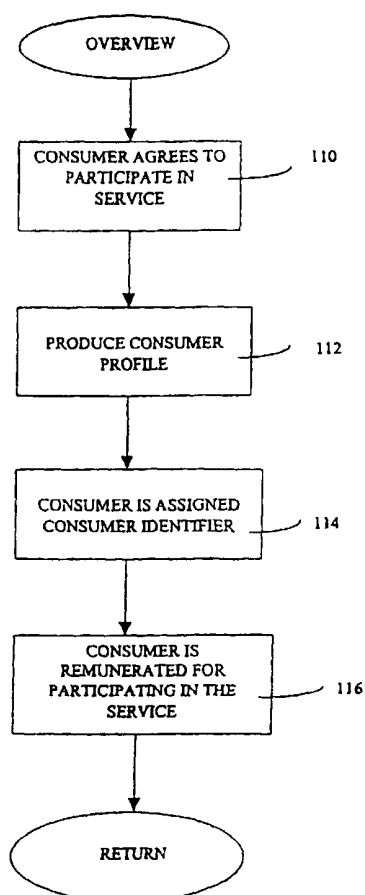
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(54) Title: SUBSCRIPTION-BASED MARKETING WITH REMUNERATION FOR CONSUMERS



(57) Abstract: Consumers may subscribe to a subscription-based marketing service that provides remuneration to the consumers based on use of the service. The consumers agree to receive telemarketing calls or other communications from marketers in return for the remuneration (116). The remuneration may take the form of cash, discounts, credits or non-cash compensation. The amount of remuneration may be fixed as so much per communication or may vary based upon the extent of interaction between the consumer and the marketer or the nature of the interaction between the consumer and marketer. Vendor organizations may be charged for participation in the service. The vendor organizations may have access to consumer profiles (112) to determine which consumers to contact.

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SUBSCRIPTION-BASED MARKETING  
WITH REMUNERATION FOR CONSUMERS

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## 1. Field of the Invention

The present invention relates generally to telecommunications and computer systems and more particularly to subscription-based marketing with remuneration for consumers.

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## 2. Discussion of the Related Art

Early telemarketing systems generally consisted of a telephone bank where operators would be given a list of numbers to "blind" call. As technology evolved, the telephone banks were replaced with dialer systems which permitted the operators to sequence through all phone numbers in an exchange, one by one. However, this was still "blind" calling and, while faster than the phone banks, was still a hit-or-miss type of marketing.

In an attempt to improve the random calling system, various enterprising groups began to sell telemarketers lists of their membership so as to provide a target audience to which the telemarketers' calls could be directed, thereby moving away from "blind" calling. Eventually, as telemarketing grew, the revenue the groups received from the selling of their lists grew. As a result, the groups began to gather additional demographic data about their members.

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Using this demographic data permitted the groups to sell the telemarketers custom lists tailored to a specific demographic group. These lists may now be generated to identify consumers based on an wide variety of criteria, such as age, sex, address, past purchasing activity, income level or the like. Telemarketers supplied with these custom lists can then sequentially call the identified consumers on the list hoping that the consumers are available and receptive to such calls.

Unfortunately, there remain drawbacks associated with conventional telemarketing systems. Consumers have become so inundated with telemarketing calls that the consumers either refuse to answer their phone or quickly terminate any telemarketing calls. Additionally, advances in telephone service technology permits the

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consumer to subscribe to a service which answers their call and ascertain if it is a telemarketing call. Such a service advises the caller to either hang up or press a number, if not a telemarketing call, before the consumer's telephone even rings. Additionally, the consumers listed on a consumer list may be poorly researched such that many of the  
5 identified consumers have no real interest in the telemarketing calls.

The method for subscription-based marketing with remuneration for consumers of  
10 the present invention overcomes the limitations of the prior art discussed above.

In accordance with a first aspect, the present invention is directed to a method of marketing directly to consumers. The method comprising the steps of initiating service for a consumer wherein the consumer participates in the service by receiving a  
15 communication from an organization utilizing the service, selecting a consumer that will communicate with the organization, and compensating the consumer for participating in the service based on the organization's usage of the service and the consumer's participation.

In accordance with another aspect, the present invention is directed to a method of marketing directly to consumers. The method comprising the steps of assigning an identifier to a consumer, the identifier being adapted to facilitate a direct communication between an organization and a consumer, enabling the communication between the organization and the consumer, authenticating the communication between the  
20 organization and the consumer, and compensating the consumer for the communication  
25 based on the organization's communication with the consumer.

In accordance with another aspect, the present invention is directed to a method of marketing directly to consumers. The method comprising the steps of providing a  
30 computing resource for consumers to access as part of a marketing service, when a selected one of the consumers seeks to access the computing resource, obtaining authorization information from the selected consumer, authenticating the authorization information to ensure that valid authorization information was obtained, and where valid authorization information was obtained, granting the selected consumer access to the

computing resource and compensating the selected consumer based on the consumer's use of the computing resource.

5           The present invention addresses the above-described limitations of conventional telemarketing systems by providing a subscription marketing service to which consumers subscribe. In a presently preferred embodiment of the invention, subscribed consumers agree to receive telemarketing calls or other communications from marketers in return for some form of remuneration, such as cash, discounts, non-cash compensation or the like.

10       The amount of remuneration may be fixed, for example, so much per call, or may vary based on the manner in which the consumer was contacted and/or the amount of time or interaction provided by the consumer. Conversely, the organizations that contact the consumers are assessed a corresponding charge for participating in the program. The charge may, likewise, be a flat fee or may be a variable fee depending on the number of

15       consumers contacted, the durations or interactions of the contacts with the consumers and/or the nature of the consumers that are contacted. The organizations may be given profile information regarding the consumers so as to identify solely those consumers that appear to be of interest to the particular organizations.

20           In one exemplary embodiment of the present invention, each subscribed consumer is given a 900-service number or similar type of caller pays number or identifier. Information regarding the consumer is gathered and put into a consumer profile. Organizations may then review the profile of the consumer and contact the consumer via the identifier provided for the consumer. The charges associated with calls to the

25       consumer are charged to the organization. The telecommunications provider that facilitates the call and the consumer split the proceeds paid by the organization.

          In accordance with another exemplary embodiment of the present invention, a subscription to a service is initiated for a consumer. The consumer agrees to receive

30       electronic communications from organizations as part of this service. Information is obtained from the consumer to create a consumer profile. The information may include, for example, the name of the consumer, the address of the consumer, a phone number or email address that may be used to contact the consumer, information regarding personal interests, information regarding purchase history, and information regarding income

35       level. Organizations are allowed to review the consumer profile to determine whether the

organization desires to electronically communicate with the consumer. The consumer is compensated for the subscription. Electronic communications may include phone calls, electronic mail messages, facsimile communications and pages. The electronic communications may be transmitted over a computer network, such as the Internet.

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In accordance with an additional aspect of the present invention, a phone number may be assigned to an individual consumer. The phone number is dedicated solely to receiving calls from marketers. At least one phone call to the phone number is received from a selected one of the marketers. The individual consumer answers the phone call and is remunerated for receiving the phone call. The phone number may be a 900-service phone number or an additional number, with a distinctive ring, on the consumer's existing line. The remuneration may depend upon the number of calls received by the individual consumer and/or the duration of the calls received by the individual consumer.

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The telemarketers may contact the consumer for a number of different reasons. For example, the telemarketers may seek to receive monetary contributions from the consumer, to sell products to the consumer, to sell services to the consumer, to gather data from the consumer or to furnish information, such as advertisements, to the consumer.

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In accordance with a further aspect of the present invention, a computing resource is provided for consumers to access as part of a marketing service for directly marketing to consumers. Authorization information is obtained from a selected consumer when the selected consumer seeks to access the computing resource. The authorization information is authenticated to ensure that it is valid. When valid authorization information is obtained, the selected consumer is granted access to the computing resource and compensated for accessing the resource. The resource may be, for example, a web site that is provided on the Internet or on an intranet.

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The foregoing and other features and advantages of the present invention will be apparent from the following, more particular description of preferred embodiments of the invention, as illustrated in the accompanying drawings. In the drawings, like reference

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numbers indicate identical or functionally similar elements. Additionally, the left most digit of a reference number indicates the drawing in which the reference number first appears.

FIGURE 1 is a flow chart illustrating the steps that are performed relative to a consumer when the consumer agrees to participate in a marketing method in accordance with an exemplary embodiment of the present invention.

FIGURE 2 illustrates a number of remuneration options that are available in the exemplary embodiment of the present invention.

FIGURE 3 is a flow chart illustrating steps that are performed to ensure that remuneration is provided only when warranted in accordance with an exemplary embodiment of the present invention.

FIGURE 4 depicts several varieties of remuneration standards that may be required to be met for a consumer to be remunerated in accordance with an exemplary embodiment of the present invention.

FIGURE 5 is a flow chart illustrating the steps that are performed relative to a vendor organization that participates in a marketing method in accordance with the exemplary embodiment of the present invention.

FIGURE 6 illustrates the interaction between a vendor organization and a consumer in a marketing method in accordance with an exemplary embodiment of the present invention.

FIGURE 7 illustrates a number of different types of organizations that may participate in marketing in accordance with an exemplary embodiment of the present invention.

FIGURE 8 illustrates a number of different purposes for marketing in accordance with an exemplary embodiment of the present invention.

FIGURE 9 illustrates a number of options regarding how costs are assessed to an organization in accordance with an exemplary embodiment of the present invention.

FIGURE 10 is a flow chart illustrating steps that are performed in allocating charges and the proceeds of a communication in accordance with an exemplary embodiment of the present invention.

FIGURE 11 is a flow chart illustrating the steps that are performed when the consumer is assigned a caller pays phone number for marketing calls in accordance with an exemplary embodiment of the present invention.

FIGURE 12 illustrates an alternate marketing method of the exemplary embodiment wherein electronic devices, such as computer systems, communicate with each other.

FIGURE 13 is a flow chart illustrating the steps that are performed relative to a consumer when the marketing method is performed via a web site in accordance with an exemplary embodiment of the present invention.

FIGURE 14 depicts an exemplary user interface for obtaining a user ID and password from a consumer in accordance with an exemplary embodiment of the present invention.

FIGURE 15 is a flow chart illustrating the steps that are performed to provide conditional access to a web site in accordance with an exemplary embodiment of the present invention.

FIGURE 16 is a flow chart illustrating the steps that are performed to provide conditional access to a web site in accordance with an alternate exemplary embodiment of the present invention.

FIGURE 17 is a flow chart illustrating the steps that are performed with electronic communications between a vendor organization and a consumer by a device other than a phone or computer system in accordance with an exemplary embodiment of the present invention.

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The exemplary embodiment of subscription-based marketing with remuneration for consumers in accordance with the present invention provides a number of unique marketing methods. In each of these marketing methods, a consumer is compensated for agreeing to pay attention to a marketing presentation. Different techniques may be employed to test consumer attentiveness. In one exemplary embodiment, a consumer agrees to subscribe to a service where the consumer listens to telemarketing presentations via telephone. The consumer may be assigned a unique phone number, such as a 900-service phone number, and is compensated for listening to the telemarketing presentations. The consumer may be compensated based on the number of presentations to which the consumer listens and/or the duration of the presentations. Consumers may also be expected to interact with presentations and their compensation may be modified based on their level of interaction and the quality of the interaction. The compensation



may take many forms, including monetary compensation as well as non-monetary compensation.

5 In an alternate exemplary embodiment, the marketing occurs via a web site provided by a vendor. The web site may provide information to the consumer and/or gather information from the consumer. The consumer is directed to the web site by directly providing the consumer with a universal resource locator (URL) for the web site or through the provision of hyperlinks at other on-line locations. The consumer visits the web site and navigates through the web site. The consumer may be remunerated in  
10 varying amounts for visiting the web site and/or for navigating or interacting with the web site.

In another alternate exemplary embodiment, the marketing takes place via electronic devices other than telephones or computer systems. For example,  
15 communications with a consumer may occur via pager, facsimile machine, interactive television, or other interactive digital devices.

In order to clarify the discussion below, it is helpful first to define a few terms.

20 A "vendor" is a party (such as an organization) that desires to contact consumers as part of the marketing program provided by the present invention. The vendor may, for example, desire to sell goods or services, solicit contributions, or obtain information from the consumers.

25 A "consumer" is a party that receives communications from the vendors or agents of the vendor as part of the marketing program. The consumer is remunerated for participating in the marketing program.

30 "Direct marketing" refers to marketing efforts in which a consumer is directly contacted. Direct marketing stands in contrast to other passive marketing strategies, such as television advertisements, billboards and magazine advertisements.

A "web site" is a location in a network that holds documents or files, such as HTML files or XML files, that are interpretable or downloadable by a web browser. All  
35 web sites have a given URL and reside on a server.

Figure 1 is a flow chart 100 illustrating the steps that are performed relative to a consumer when a consumer agrees to participate in a marketing method in accordance with an exemplary embodiment of the present invention. Initially, the consumer agrees to participate in the service (step 110 in Figure 1). The consumer may contact or be contacted by a representative of the vendor organization by telephone, by written communication or by any other means to obtain agreement from the consumer to participate in the service. The consumer may then be asked to provide personal information or the personal information may be extracted from existing databases. This personal information is used to produce or create a consumer profile (step 112 in Figure 1). The consumer profile encapsulates the consumer's personal information and may be stored, for example, as a record in a database on a computer system. Those skilled in the relevant art will appreciate that the consumer profile may include a number of different types of information regarding a consumer. For example, the consumer profile may include name, address, phone number, occupation, income level, personal interests, purchase histories, credit history and the like. Examples of consumer profiles will be discussed below. Vendors may store this information for future use by organizations that participate in the service.

The consumer is then assigned a customer identifier for use in the marketing program (step 114 in Figure 1). For example, where the marketing is to occur via telephone, the consumer identifier may be a telephone number, whereas when the marketing is to occur via computer, the consumer may be assigned a consumer ID and password.

The consumer participates in the service (e.g., marketing program) and is remunerated (step 116 in Figure 1) for his/her participation. As will be described in more detail below, different techniques may be used to judge consumer participation and a number of different forms of remuneration may be used.

Figure 2 sets forth a number of the remuneration options 200 that are available. The list is intended to be illustrative and not exhaustive. One option is to provide a non-cash award 210 to the consumer. For example, a consumer may be given small gifts, frequent flyer miles or points that may be applied to obtain merchandise as remuneration. Credit card companies typically utilize this option. Another remuneration option is to

provide the consumer with a discount 212. For example, the consumer may be provided with discounts for telephone services, discounts for purchases at selected stores or the like. The degree of discount may vary with the degree of participation by the consumer. The consumer may also be remunerated through cash awards 214. For example, the  
5 consumer may get a certain cash award for each marketing presentation presented to the consumer or a certain amount of cash for each month of participating in a service. Instead of receiving a cash award, the consumer may also receive a credit 216 that may be applied towards purchases of services or goods. Many other forms of remuneration  
218 may also be used in the marketing program.

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If the consumer is blindly given remuneration for participating in the service, the service may be subject to abuse. For example, a consumer might inattentively participate in an extreme number of presentations in order to maximize remuneration. Unfortunately, in such an instance, the vendor organization is not receiving proper value  
15 for its investment. Accordingly, a number of constraints may be imposed to ensure that remuneration is granted to the consumer only where appropriate.

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Figure 3 is a flow chart 300 illustrating the steps that are performed relative to authenticating communication and thereby establishing remuneration for a consumer participating in the service. A determination is made whether the remuneration standards were met (step 310 in Figure 3). Figure 4 provides a listing of several different varieties of remuneration standards 400 that may be required to be fulfilled in order for the consumer to be remunerated. For example, the consumer may be required to participate in a marketing presentation for at least a minimal amount of time. Thus, the time of  
interaction 410 is one of the remuneration standards that must be met in such an instance. The vendor that is presenting the marketing presentation may provide feedback to the marketing service as to the quality and nature of the interaction by the consumer. The vendor feedback 412 should be sufficiently positive in order for the consumer to be remunerated. At different points during the course of a marketing presentation, the  
vendor organization may solicit responses to identify whether the consumer is attentive or not. For example, consumers may be required to verbally answer questions or respond by providing dual tone multi-frequency (DTMF) input. A failure to respond or a failure to respond within an acceptable range of responses or within a minimum time period may constitute a failure to fulfill a responsiveness 414 remuneration standard. Consumers  
may be asked to interact a specified amount during the presentation or may be required to

navigate to a certain depth in a presentation in order to be remunerated. For instance, where the marketing presentation includes a sequence of web pages that the consumer must navigate, there may be a requirement that the consumer navigate all of the web pages before remuneration is granted, or the degree of remuneration provided to the consumer may vary with the degree of depth of navigation. Accordingly, depth of interaction/navigation 416 provides another remuneration standard. In addition, other 418 remuneration standards may be employed. For example, where the marketing presentation is provided by telephone, a live answer may be required before remuneration is provided.

In instances where the remuneration standards are met (step 310 in Figure 3), full remuneration may be provided (step 312 in Figure 3). Where the remuneration standards were not met, the consumer may be provided with no remuneration (step 314 in Figure 3). Alternately, the consumer may be provided with a lessened level of remuneration as indicated by step 316 in Figure 3 (which is shown in phantom form as an alternative).

Although the discussion has so far been focused on the consumer, it should be appreciated that vendor organizations may also play a role in the service provided by the exemplary embodiment of the present invention. Figure 5 is a flow chart 500 illustrating steps that are performed by a vendor organization in participating in the marketing methods of the exemplary embodiment of the present invention. Figure 5 will be described in conjunction with Figure 6. As mentioned above, a consumer profile may be gathered from each consumer that agrees to participate in the marketing service in accordance with the present invention. These consumer profiles may be stored as records that are available for review by vendor organizations. Thus, initially the vendor organization reviews the consumer profiles (step 510 in Figure 5). Figure 6 shows an example where an organization 600 reviews three consumer profiles 610A, 610B and 610C. In the example shown in Figure 6, the consumer profiles 610A, 610B and 610C each include a consumer name 612, a listing of personal interests 614, a "900" number 616 that may be used to contact the consumer and an indication of income level 618.

The vendor organization 600 selects consumer profiles that appear to be of interest (step 512 in Figure 5). It is up to the vendor organization 600 to decide what qualities or characteristics are of interest. In the example depicted in Figure 6, it is presumed that the vendor organization 600 selects profile 610B for a consumer named

“Joe.” It is also presumed that the vendor organization 600 is a vendor of stamps. Joe was selected by the vendor organization for contact because Joe’s personal interests include stamps. The selected consumer is contacted (step 514 in Figure 5). In the illustrative case of Figure 6, a phone call is then placed to the 900 number listed in the consumer profile 610B for the vendor organization to contact the selected consumer. The communication goes over a network 620 to the phone 624 for the selected consumer. The network 620 may be a conventional public switched telephone network (PSTN), a cellular phone network, a cable network, a computer network such as the Internet, or even a hybrid combination of different networks. If the selected consumer receives the communication and participates in the marketing presentation, the vendor organization 600 is charged for the contact (step 516 in Figure 5).

A number of different types of vendor organizations 600 may desire to participate in the service provided in the exemplary embodiment. Figure 7 shows an example of some of the different types of organizations 600 that may desire to participate. The vendor organization 600 may be a seller 710 of products, services or a combination thereof. The vendor organization 600 may be a charity 712 that solicits cash or non-monetary contributions via the marketing service. The vendor organization 600 may be an advertiser 714 that desires to provide advertising information to the consumer via the marketing service. Advertisers may include political causes or parties that desire to provide information to people regarding their positions. The vendor organization 600 may be a poller 716 that gathers survey information or other information from consumers and/or voters. More generally, the vendor organization 600 may be any other variety of organization 718 that desires a highly reliable method for contacting individuals.

The purpose of the communication by the vendor organization 600 may also vary. As shown in Figure 8, the purpose of the contact 800 may be to advertise 810. Moreover, the purpose of the contact 800 may be to solicit the sale of a product 812 or to solicit the sale of a service 814. The purpose of the contact 800 may to solicit contributions 816 from consumers or even to gather information 818 from consumers. The purpose of the contact 800 may be to provide information 820 to consumers. Lastly, the purpose of the contact 800 may fall into the category of “other” purposes 822 not itemized above and may include any lawful purpose under the sun.

The charges assessed to a vendor organization may be determined in a number of different fashions based on a number of different factors. Figure 9 lists some of the cost assessment options 900 that are available in the exemplary embodiment of the present invention. In one exemplary embodiment, a vendor organization is charged a flat fee 910 for participating in the service. For example, a vendor organization may be charged on a yearly or monthly basis for participating in the program. The magnitude of the fee may vary depending upon the number of communications the vendor organization desires to have. A vendor organization may also be charged on a per use basis 912. For example, a vendor organization may be charged per communication with the consumer and may be charged based upon the duration of the communication, the time at which the communication took place, or the level of interaction achieved with the consumer. For example, a vendor organization may be charged two dollars per phone call that does not exceed fifteen minutes and three dollars per phone call that exceeds fifteen minutes. Still further, an organization may be charged depending upon the quality of the communication 914. The quality of the communication may depend upon when the communication took place, whether the communication resulted in a sale, whether the consumer is a particularly desirable consumer, the type of communication and the like. Lastly, the costs may be assessed based on some "other" basis 916.

All of the proceeds obtained from a vendor organization for a consumer participating in a marketing service need not go solely to the consumer, rather apportioning of the proceeds may be performed. Figure 10 is a flow chart 1000 illustrating one approach to allocating costs and proceeds associated with a communication between a vendor organization and a consumer. Initially, the costs of the communication session are determined (step 1010 in Figure 10). These costs may entail not only the cost of the communication (e.g., phone charges) but also the costs associated with giving the vendor organization access to consumer profile data. The costs are then assessed as a charge to the vendor organization (step 1012 in Figure 10). For example, suppose that the session is a telephone call between a vendor organization and a consumer and further suppose that a 900-service phone number is used for the telephone call. The cost associated with the 900-service phone call is charged to the organization. A percentage of the proceeds may then be allocated to the service provider (step 1014 in Figure 10). In this case, the service provider is one or more telephone companies that provide the telephone infrastructure and back office support for the 900-service. Another percentage of the proceeds may then be given or credited to the consumer (step 1016 in

Figure 10). For example, an arrangement may be established wherein fifty percent of the proceeds are credited towards the consumer and fifty percent of the proceeds are credited to the service provider.

5       The above discussion has focused on the generalized case in which the communications between the vendor organization and the consumer may take many different forms, including the form of a telephone call, a computing session, or other variety of electronic communication session. Figure 11 is a flow chart 1100 illustrating the steps that are performed in an instance wherein the marketing service interacts with  
10   the consumers via telephone. In the instance depicted in Figure 11, each consumer is assigned a caller pays number, such as a 900-service number (step 1110 in Figure 11). This is the phone number that a vendor organization calls if the vendor organization desires to contact the consumer. Although the phone number may be associated with a dedicated phone line into the residence of the consumer, the number may instead be  
15   associated with an existing phone line into the consumer's residence. The phone number that is used for marketing may cause the phone of the consumer to ring differently than other phone calls. As such, the phone of the consumer rings normally for standard phone calls but rings a unique ring pattern when a designated marketing phone number is dialed. The means for altering the ring pattern are known to those skilled in the relevant art.

20       One or more vendor organizations then call the consumer on the specified number (step 1112 in Figure 11). Based upon the criteria discussed above, the vendor organizations are then charged for the phone calls (where appropriate) and the consumer is remunerated if appropriate (step 1114 in Figure 11). The charging and the  
25   remuneration may all be performed automatically by computer systems that execute billing and accounting software.

30       One reason for assigning a 900 number or a caller pays number to consumers is to take advantage of built-in accounting and billing functions already associated with such numbers. Normally, a 900-type number is used by information or entertainment services, like astrology hot lines, that charge consumers per minute rates for use of the server through the consumer's regular phone bill. It is an aspect of the present invention to use a 900-type number in reverse. Rather than have the consumer call the organization, the organization calls the consumer. The organization is then charged per minute for the  
35   consumer's participation and the consumers are remunerated through their regular phone

5 bills. The communications company offering such marketing services make money by charging the organization for use of the consumer phone numbers, as well as charging consumers for assignment of the number, for example, in the event the consumer fails to fully participate in the service. Also, since only consumers who want to receive marketing calls would sign up for this service, the marketing organizations can use computers to place the calls. In some countries, such as the United States, a computer cannot be utilized to initiate a call without the called party's prior approval. Since such approval may be obtained when the consumer first signs up for the service, computers may be utilized, thereby significantly reducing telemarketing costs.

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The electronic communication between the organization and the consumer need not be realized purely as a phone call, rather other types of electronic communications may be utilized. For example, the electronic communications may be facsimile communications, wireless pages, electronic mail communications, interactive television  
15 communications, or video mail communications. Moreover, multiple forms of communication may take place between a given organization and consumer such as shown in Figure 12. In Figure 12, the organization has a electronic device 1210, such as computer system, pager, set-top box or the like, that communicates with a network 1212 to communicate with a consumer. The consumer has a facsimile machine 1216 that is  
20 accessible via the network 1212, an electronic device 1214, and a pager 1218. The network 1212 may be a telephone network, a packet-switched network, such as the Internet, a computer network, a paging network, a hybrid combination of any or all these, or some other network infrastructure that is useful for facilitating communication between two parties. The electronic device 1214 may include a web browser 1220 for  
25 enabling the device to communicate with web sites. The electronic device 1214 may also include support for electronic mail (email) 1222 and support for video mail 1224. The electronic device 1214 may include a video display 1226 for displaying video information.

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The electronic device 1210 of the vendor organization may hold one or more HTML files 1228 for web pages that facilitate consumers interacting with the electronic device 1210 over the Internet or similar type of network. The electronic device 1210 also may include support for email 1230 and support for video mail 1232.



In one exemplary embodiment, the vendor organization communicates with the consumer not by telephone but over a computer network, such as the Internet or other type of computer network. In such an instance, the vendor organization and the consumer exchange information over the computer network. Figure 13 is a flow chart 1300 illustrating the steps that may be performed when the computer connection is via a packet routed network, such as the Internet. Initially, the consumer is provided a hyperlink or a URL for a packet routed network, such as the web site operated by or for the vendor organization (step 1310 in Figure 13). The web site may be associated with a given computing resource, such as a web server, FTP server or the like. The consumer accesses the web site via the web browser 1220, illustrated in Figure 12, (step 1312 in Figure 13). The entire web site, or just portions of it, may have conditional access enabled, such that the consumer must utilize an identifying name or number and an organization supplied password to obtain access. In general, the consumer must preferably provide valid authorization information to gain access to the web site.

In order to facilitate the conditional access, the method of the exemplary embodiment may provide a web page 1400 like that depicted in Figure 14. The web page 1400 is a form that includes two text boxes 1412 and 1414 for gathering a user ID and password, respectively, from a consumer. This web page 1400 may be passed to the web browser 1220, illustrated in Figure 12, of the electronic device 1216 of the consumer. The web page may originate from the HTML files 1228 stored on electronic device 1210. After the consumer has completed the text boxes 1412 and 1414 and submitted this information by activating the submit button 1416, the information is sent to the electronic device 1210. The electronic device 1210 process the information and verifies that a valid user ID and password have been presented (i.e. it "authenticates" the authorization information).

Figure 15 is a flow chart 1500 illustrating the steps that are performed to realize such conditional access. Initially, the user is prompted for a user ID and a password (step 1510 in Figure 15). As was described above, one approach is to provide a form that is completed by the consumer and submitted. A check is then made whether a valid user ID has been submitted (step 1512 in Figure 15). The electronic device 1210, illustrated in Figure 12, may comprise a database of valid user IDs and valid passwords for the associate's user IDs. This database may be accessed to determine whether the user has entered a valid user ID. Where the user has not entered a valid ID, access to the web site

is denied (step 1514 in Figure 15). If a valid user ID has been entered, a check is made to determine whether a valid password has been entered (step 1516 in Figure 15). If the consumer enters an invalid password, access to the web site is denied (step 1514 in Figure 15). In some instances, the user may be given a fixed number of tries to enter a valid user ID and valid password before being denied access. Where the consumer enters a valid user ID and valid password, access is granted to the web site (step 1518 in Figure 15).

In an alternate embodiment, conditional access may be achieved utilizing public-key cryptography. Figure 16 is a flow chart 1600 illustrating the steps that are performed to realize such conditional access. Initially, the server issues a random, plain text challenge (step 1610 in Figure 16). The user receives the challenge and encrypts it utilizing a private key from a cryptographic key pair (step 1612 in Figure 16). Essentially, the challenge is encrypted by combining the plain text challenge with the private key in accordance with a predetermined encryption algorithm. There are a number of well known encryption algorithms which may be utilized. The user then sends the encrypted challenge back to the server. The server then decrypts the encrypted challenge utilizing a public key from the cryptographic key pair (step 1614 in Figure 16). Essentially, the challenge is decrypted by correct application of the public key in accordance with a predetermined decryption algorithm. Accordingly, if the server is able to correctly decrypt the encrypted challenge back into the original plain text challenge (step 1616 in Figure 16), then access is granted (step 1618 in Figure 16) because only the holder of the correct private key could have encrypted the challenge so that it could only be correctly decrypted utilizing the corresponding public key. If the server is not able to correctly decrypt the encrypted challenge, access is denied (step 1620 in Figure 16).

Returning to Figure 13, once the consumer is granted access to the web site, the consumer then navigates the web site (step 1314 in Figure 13), which may include advertisements, solicitations to purchase goods or services or contributions, and which may contain political or other useful information. In addition, the web site may request information from the potential consumers so as to gather information from the consumer or simply make sure the consumer visits the entire site and "works" for his/her money.

The consumer may be remunerated for accessing the web site (step 1316 in Figure 13) in many different ways. Certain safety precautions may be utilized to ensure that

there is no fraudulent access to the web site. For example, the consumer may be required to view each of the web pages in a sequence in order to be remunerated. Moreover, the consumer may be required to spend at least a minimal amount of time with each of the web pages (based on interactions with a page rather than actual time) and may be  
5 required to fully scroll through each of the web pages, performing actions along the way. Furthermore, the consumers may be required to provide information before remuneration is provided or to gather information and use that gathered information to answer a questionnaire or other testing mechanism. These are all examples of authenticating a communication.

10

As mentioned above, electronic communications between the vendor organization and the consumer may take a form other than Internet communications or telephone communications. Figure 17 is a flow chart 1700 illustrating the steps that are performed when such other options are pursued. Initially the consumer is sent an electronic  
15 communication (step 1710 in Figure 17). For example, the consumer may be sent a facsimile message that is received by the facsimile machine 1214, illustrated in Figure 12, or by facsimile software on the computer system 1216. Furthermore, the consumer may be sent an email message or a video mail message. The consumer may be sent a page that is received by wireless pager 1218. The consumer reviews the communications  
20 and, in some instances, may interact by responding to the communications (step 1712 in Figure 17). For example, the consumer may reply by providing a facsimile message, an email message, a video mail message or a return page in some instances. The consumer is then remunerated appropriately (step 1714 in Figure 17).

25

Although shown and described is what are believed to be the most practical and preferred embodiments, it is apparent that departures from specific methods and designs described and shown will suggest themselves to those skilled in the art and may be used without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention. The present invention is not restricted to the particular constructions described and illustrated, but should be construed  
30 to cohere with all modification that may fall within the scope of the appended claims.

Claims

- 1           1.       A method of marketing directly to consumers, comprising the steps of:  
2                   initiating service for a consumer wherein the consumer participates in the  
3       service by receiving a communication from an organization utilizing the service;  
4                   selecting a consumer that will communicate with the organization; and  
5                   compensating the consumer for participating in the service based on the  
6       organization's usage of the service and the consumer's participation.  
7
- 1           2.       The method of claim 1, wherein the step of initiating the service includes  
2       the step of obtaining information from the consumer to create a profile.  
3
- 1           3.       The method of claim 2, wherein the step of selecting the consumer  
2       includes the step of reviewing the profile to determine if the profile matches pre-  
3       established criteria.  
4
- 1           4.       The method of claim 1, wherein the step of selecting the consumer  
2       includes the steps of:  
3                   obtaining information from the consumer to create a profile; and  
4                   reviewing the profile to determine if the consumer matches pre-established  
5       criteria.  
6
- 1           5.       The method of claim 1, wherein before the step of compensating the  
2       consumer, the method of marketing further comprises the step of authenticating a  
3       communication between the consumer and the organization.  
4
- 1           6.       The method of claim 5, wherein the step of authenticating the  
2       communication includes monitoring the communication between the consumer and the  
3       organization for acceptable responses from the consumer.  
4
- 1           7.       The method of claim 6, wherein an acceptable response is a verbal  
2       indicator generated by the consumer.  
3
- 1           8.       The method of claim 6, wherein an acceptable response is a DTMF signal  
2       generated by the consumer.

3  
1 9. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of compensating the consumer  
2 includes compensating the consumer at a flat rate as long as the consumer participates in  
3 the service.

4  
1 10. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of compensating the consumer  
2 includes compensating the consumer at a variable rate that varies with a degree of  
3 participation in the service by the consumer.

4  
1 11. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of compensating the consumer  
2 comprises providing the consumer with non-monetary compensation.

3  
1 12. The method of claim 1, wherein the consumer participates in the services  
2 by receiving a telephone call.

3  
1 13. The method of claim 1, wherein the consumer participates in the service  
2 by receiving an electronic mail message.

3  
1 14. The method of claim 1, wherein the consumer participates in the service  
2 by receiving a communication via a computer system.

3  
1 15. A method of marketing directly to consumers, comprising the steps of:  
2 assigning an identifier to a consumer, the identifier being adapted to  
3 facilitate a direct communication between an organization and a consumer;  
4 enabling the communication between the organization and the consumer;  
5 authenticating the communication between the organization and the  
6 consumer; and  
7 compensating the consumer for the communication based on the  
8 organization's communication with the consumer.

9  
1 16. The method of claim 15, wherein the identifier is a phone number.

2  
1 17. The method of claim 16, wherein the phone number is a caller pays phone  
2 number dedicated to facilitating the communication between the organization and the  
3 consumer.

4  
1 18. The method of claim 16, wherein the phone number is a callers pays  
2 phone number assigned to a phone line dedicated for communications between one or  
3 more organizations and the consumer.

4  
1 19. The method of claim 16, wherein the phone number is a caller pays phone  
2 number assigned to a phone line already assigned to the consumer and calls to the phone  
3 number are assigned a unique ring pattern.

4  
1 20. The method of claim 15, wherein the identifier facilitates the  
2 communication between the organization and the consumer over a packet-switched  
3 network.

4  
1 21. The method of claim 20, wherein the identifier is a user ID and a  
2 password, and wherein the enabling step includes the steps of:  
3 requiring the consumer to enter a user ID;  
4 testing the user ID; and  
5 requiring the consumer to enter the password if the user ID tests positive.

6  
1 22. The method of claim 20, wherein the authenticating step includes the step  
2 of monitoring the communication between the organization and the consumer for  
3 acceptable responses from the consumer.

4  
1 23. The method of claim 15, wherein the phone number is a caller pays  
2 number, wherein the enabling step includes the step of monitoring the communication  
3 between the organization and the consumer to establish a time for the communication,  
4 and wherein the compensating step includes the steps of:  
5 charging the organization a fee based on the time for the communication;  
6 and  
7 remunerating a portion of the fee to the consumer for the communication.

8  
1 24. The method of claim 15, wherein before the enabling step, the method of  
2 marketing further comprises the step of selecting the consumer that will communicate  
3 with the organization.

1           25.     The method of claim 15, wherein the selecting step includes the step of  
2 obtaining information from the consumer to create a profile.  
3

1           26.     The method of claim 25, wherein the selecting step further includes the  
2 step of reviewing the profile to determine if the profile matches pre-established criteria.  
3

1           27.     The method of claim 15, wherein the enabling step includes the steps of:  
2 obtaining information from the consumer to create a profile; and  
3 reviewing the profile to determine if the consumer matches pre-established  
4 criteria.  
5

1           28.     The method of claim 27, wherein the enabling step further comprises the  
2 step of permitting the organization to communicate with the consumer if the consumer's  
3 profile matches the pre-established criteria.  
4

1           29.     The method of claim 15, wherein the authenticating step includes  
2 monitoring the communication between the organization and the consumer for acceptable  
3 responses from the consumer.  
4

1           30.     The method of claim 29, wherein an acceptable response is a verbal  
2 indicator generated by the consumer.  
3

1           31.     The method of claim 29, wherein an acceptable response is a DTMF  
2 signal generated by the consumer.  
3

1           32.     A method of marketing directly to consumers, comprising the steps of:  
2 providing a computing resource for the consumers to access as part of a  
3 marketing service;

4                 when a selected one of the consumers seeks to access the computing  
5 resource, obtaining authorization information from the selected consumer;

6                 authenticating the authorization information to ensure that valid  
7 authorization information was obtained; and

8                 where valid authorization information was obtained, granting the selected  
9 consumer access to the computing resource and compensating the selected consumer  
10 based on the consumer's use of the computing resource.  
11

1           33.     The method of claim 32, wherein the step of providing the computing  
2 resource includes the step of providing a web site.

3  
1           34.     The method of claim 33, wherein the web site is provided on the Internet.

2  
1           35.     The method of claim 33, wherein the web site is provided on an intranet.

2  
1           36.     The method of claim 32, wherein the step of obtaining authorization  
2 information includes the step of obtaining an identifier that identifies the selected  
3 consumer.

4  
1           37.     The method of claim 36, wherein the step of obtaining authorization  
2 information includes the step of obtaining a password.

3  
1           38.     The method of claim 32, wherein the step of obtaining authorization  
2 information includes the step of obtaining a password.

3  
1           39.     The method of claim 32, further comprising the step of denying the  
2 selected consumer access to the computing resource where valid authorization  
3 information was not obtained.

4  
1           40.     The method of claim 32, wherein the computing resource is navigable by  
2 the selected consumer and wherein a magnitude of compensation provided to the selected  
3 consumer depends upon an extent of navigation of the computing resource by the  
4 selected consumer.

5  
1           41.     The method of claim 32, wherein the step of compensating the selected  
2 consumer further includes the step of requiring the selected consumer to provide  
3 feedback to the computing resource in order for the selected consumer to be  
4 compensated.

5  
1           42.     The method of claim 32, wherein the step of obtaining authorization  
2 information from the selected consumer comprises:  
3                 issuing a random plain text challenge to the consumer;  
4                 having the consumer encrypt the random plain text challenge with a  
5 private key from a cryptographic key pair; and



- 6                    decrypting the encrypted random plain text challenge with a public key
- 7    corresponding to the private key of the cryptographic key pair.

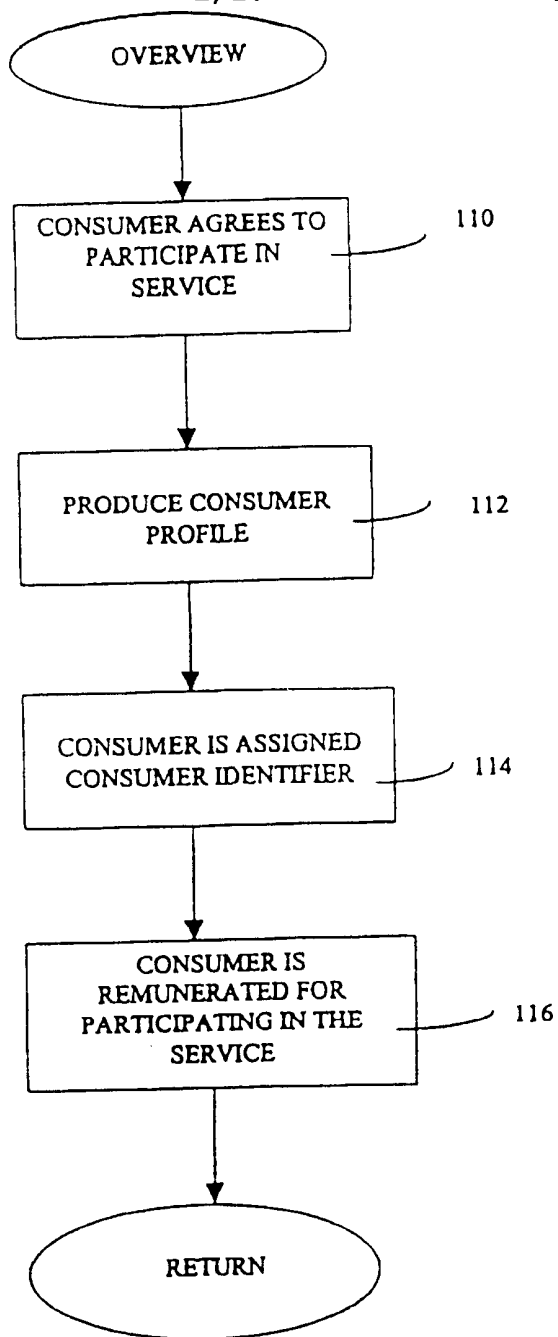


Figure 1

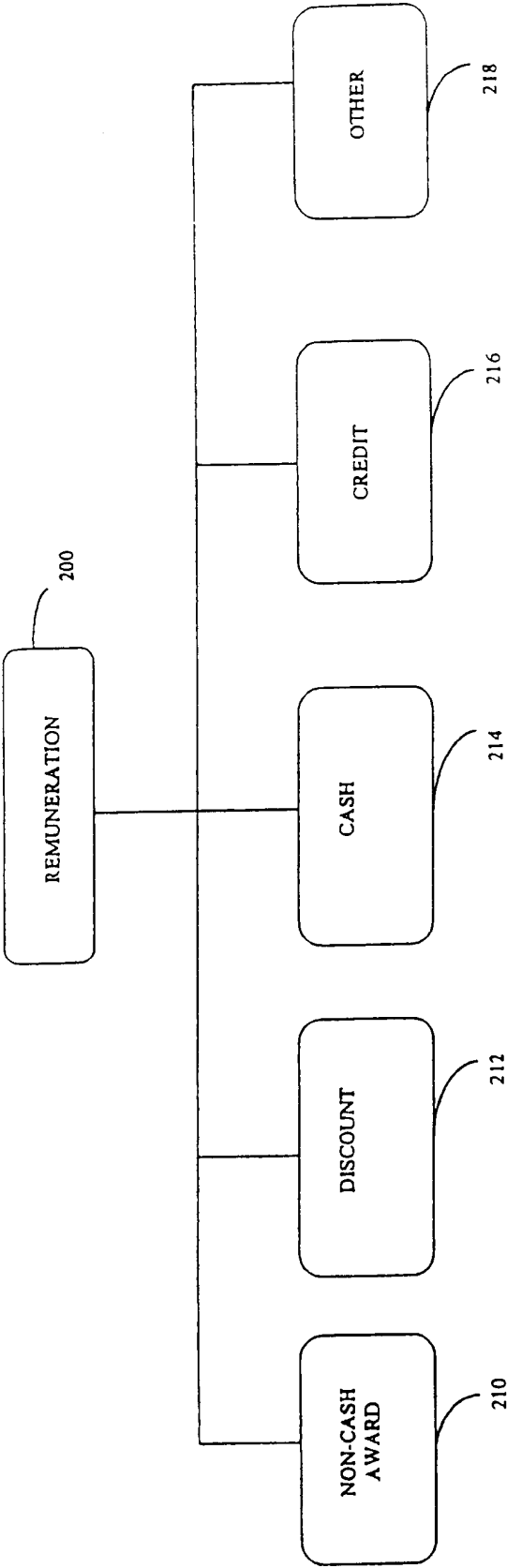


Figure 2

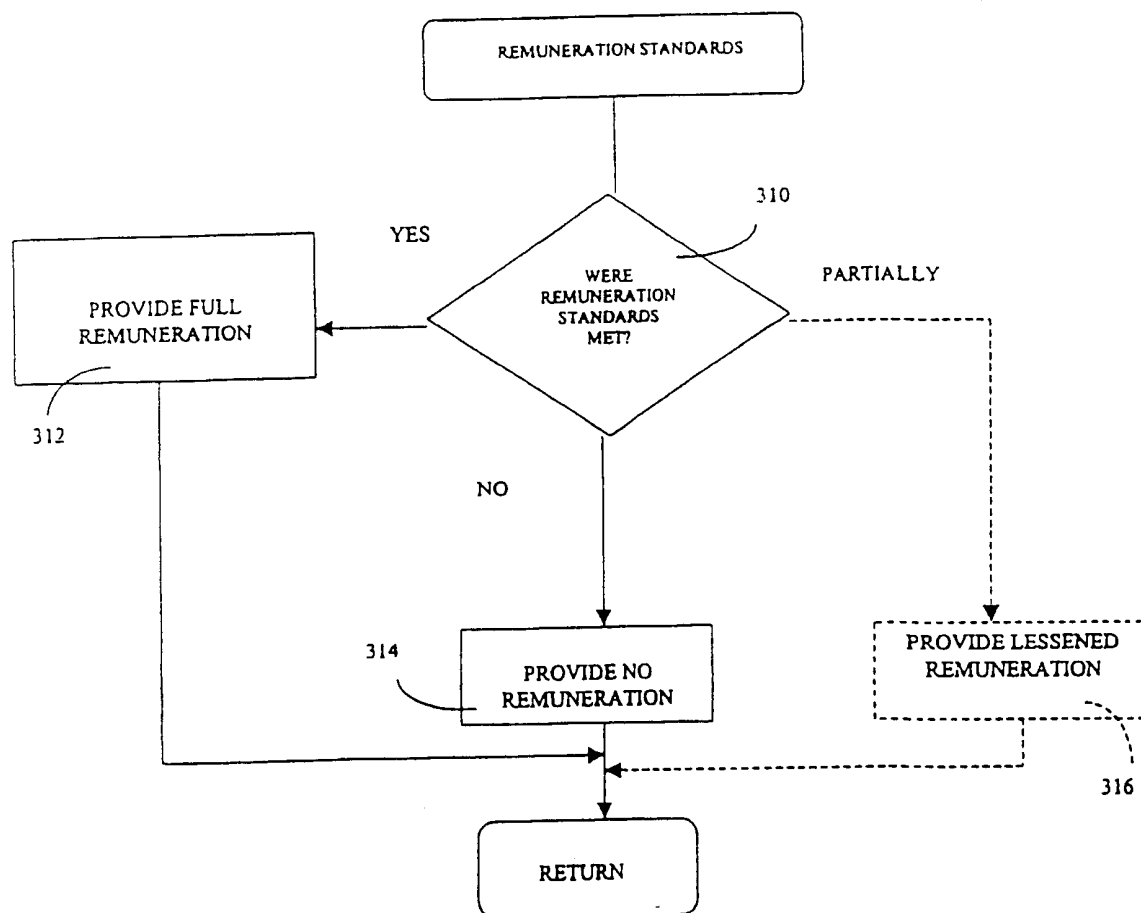


Figure 3

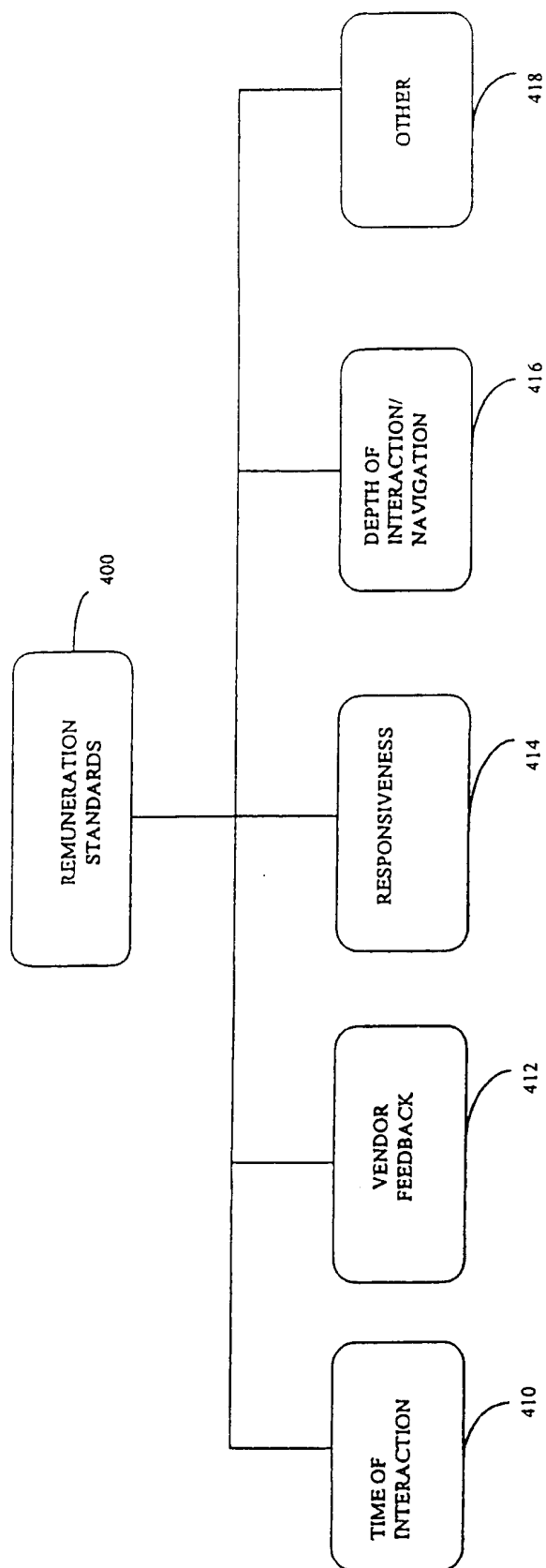


Figure 4

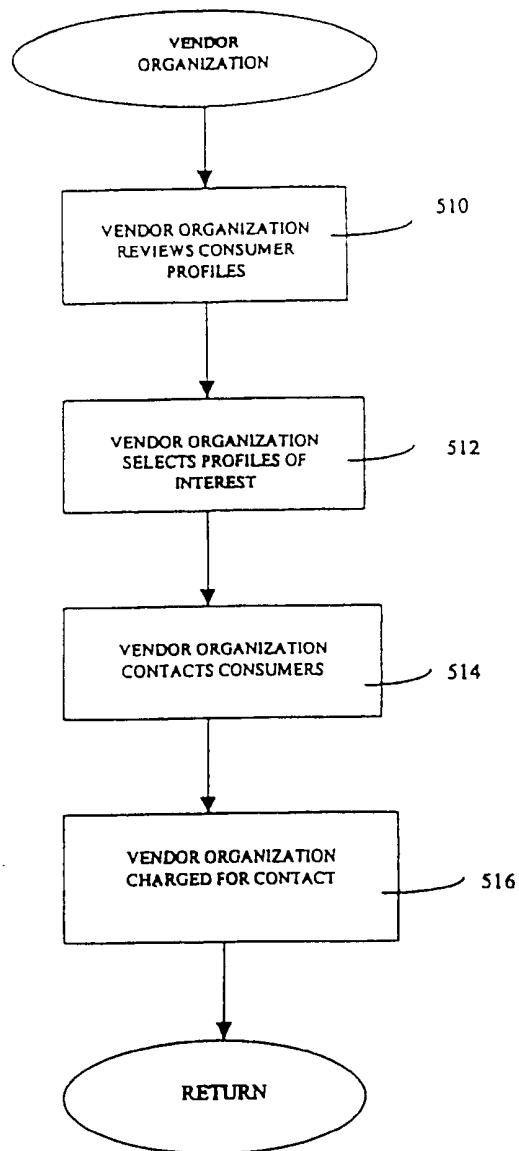


Figure 5

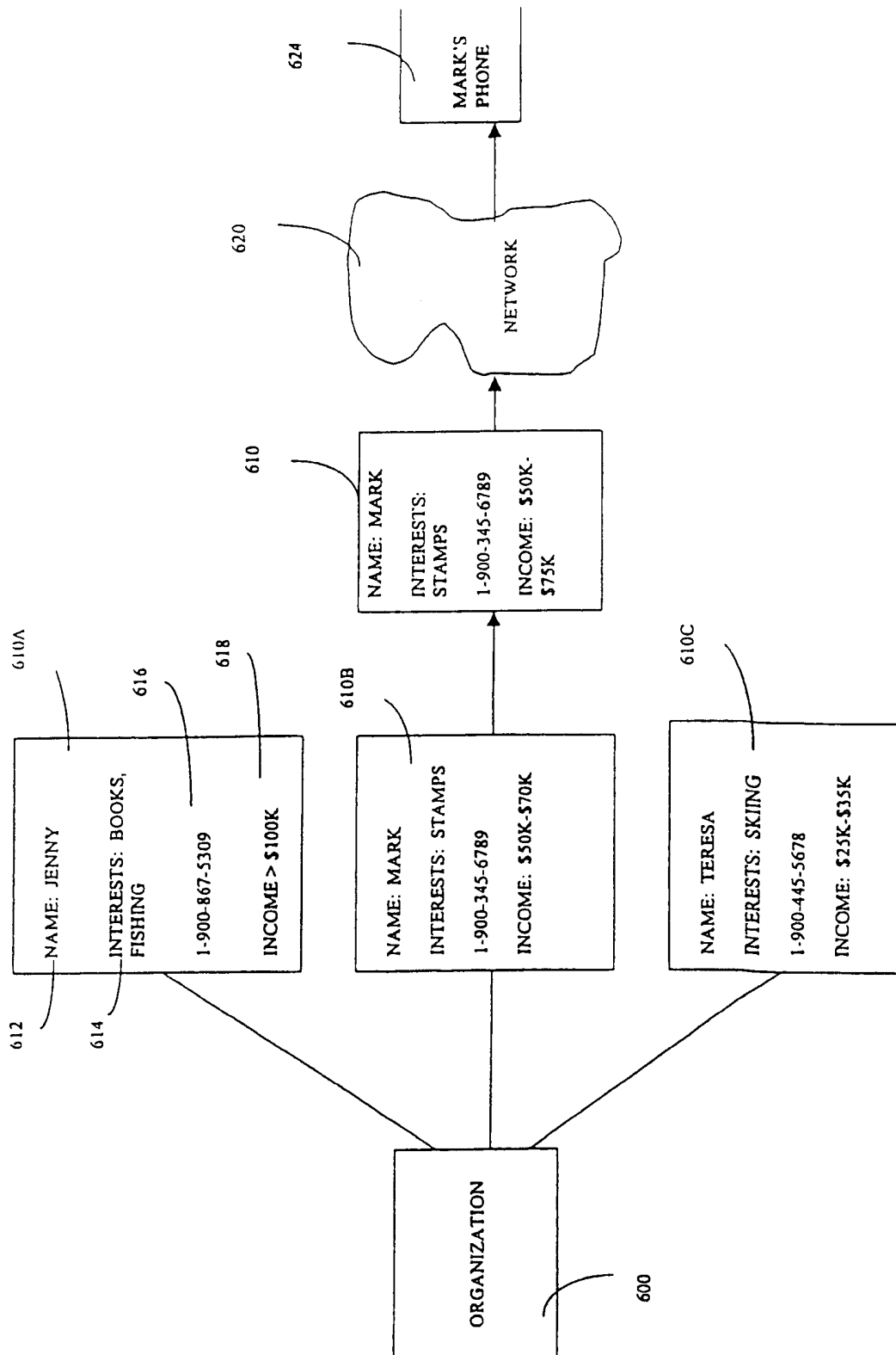


Figure 6

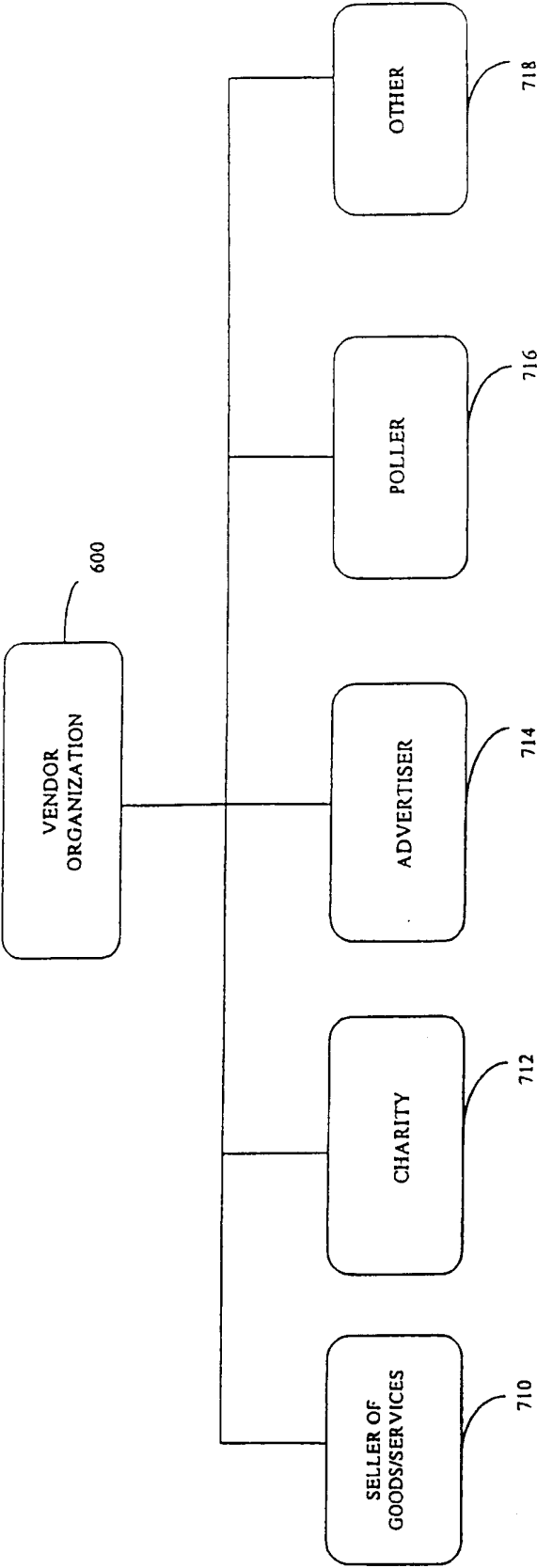


Figure 7



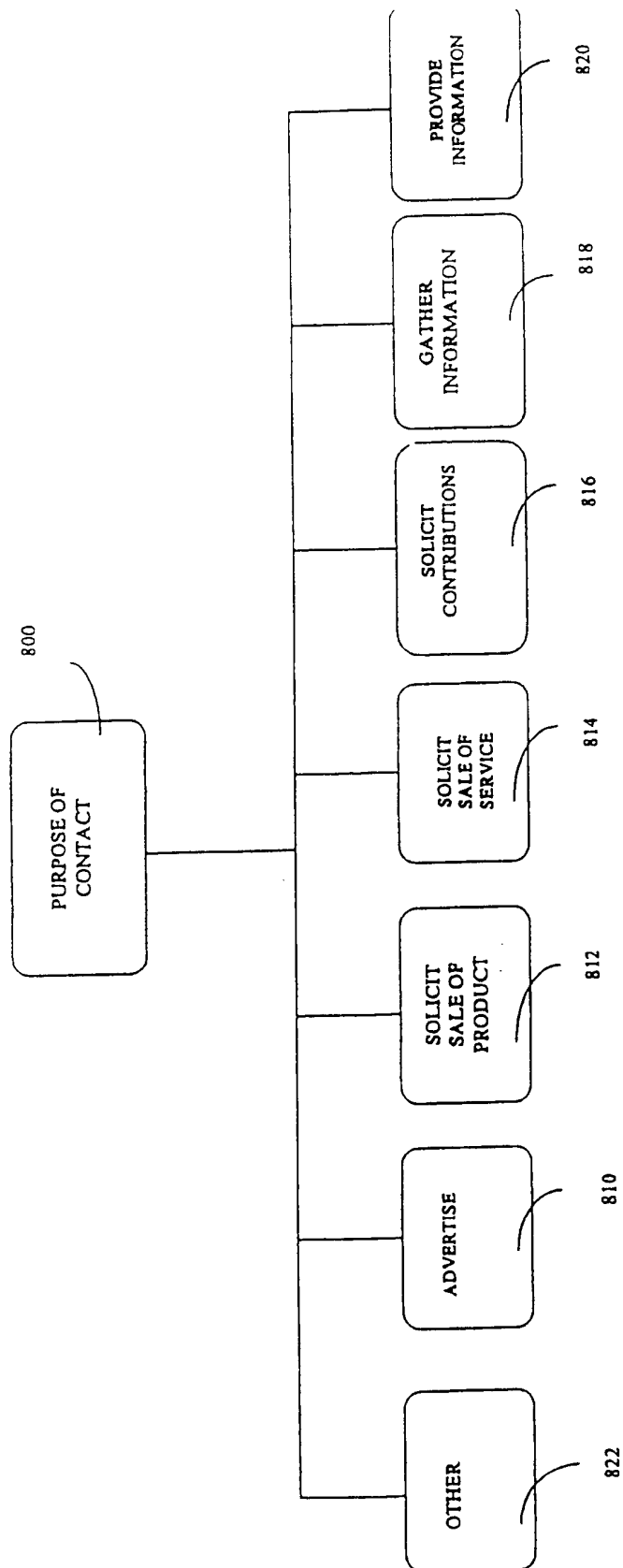


Figure 8

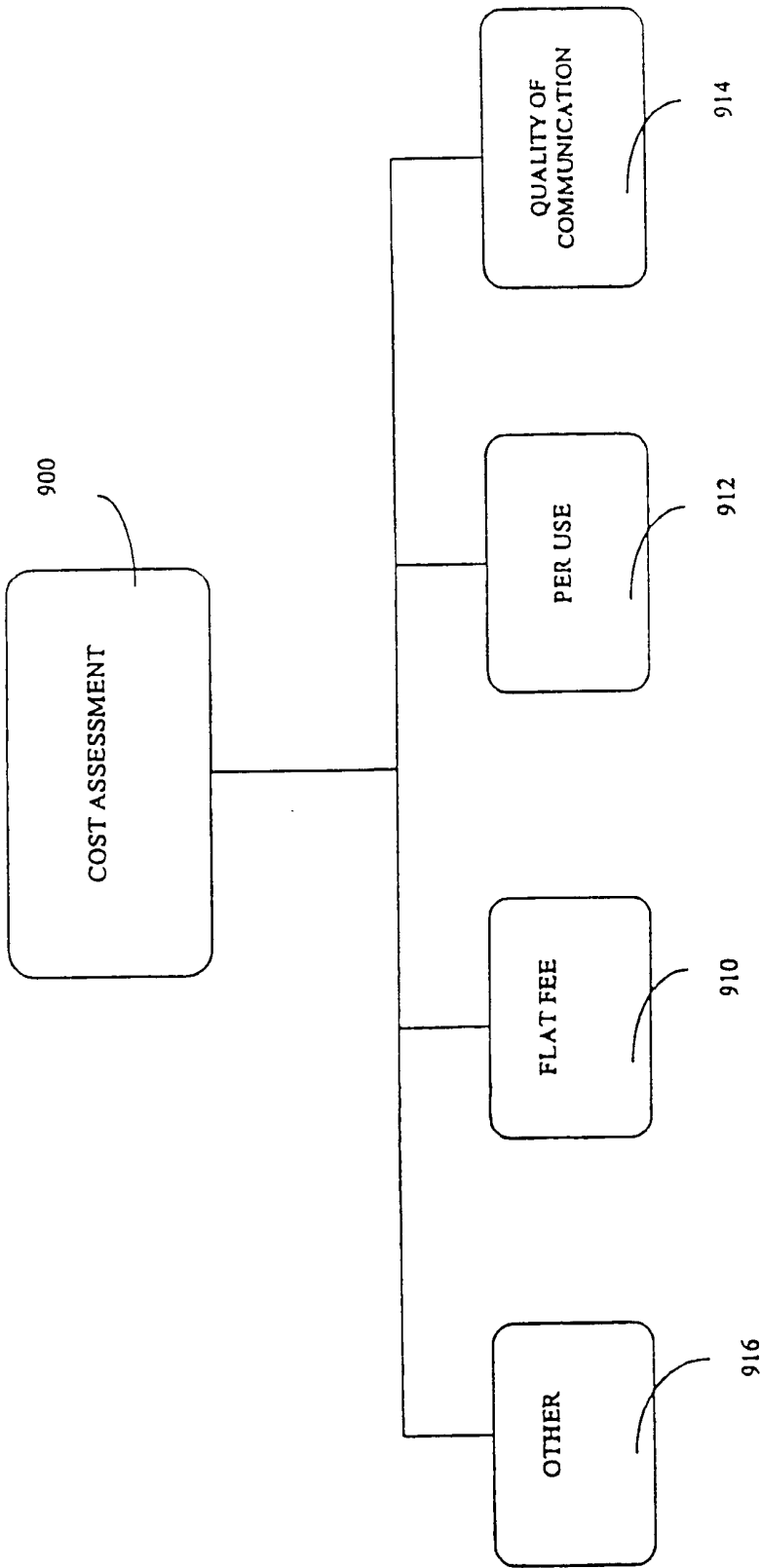


Figure 9

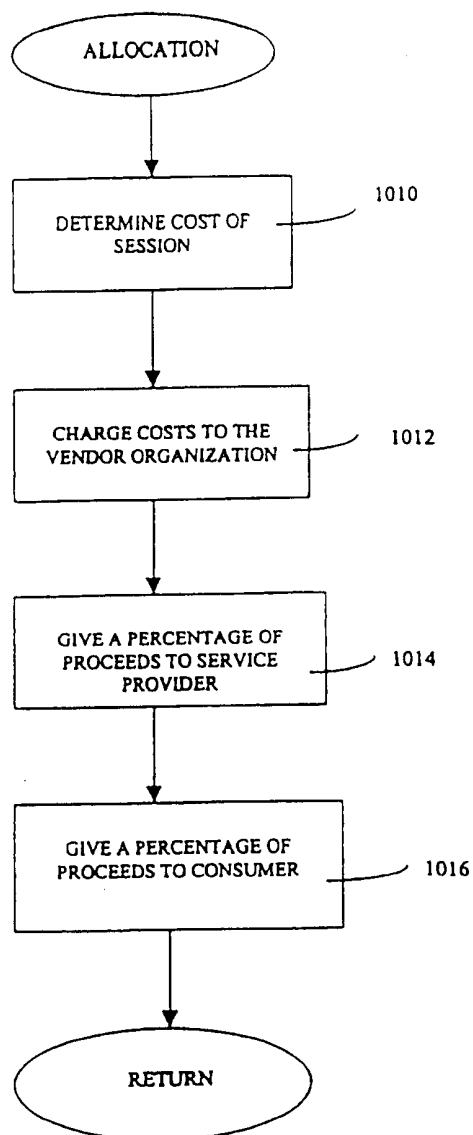


Figure 10

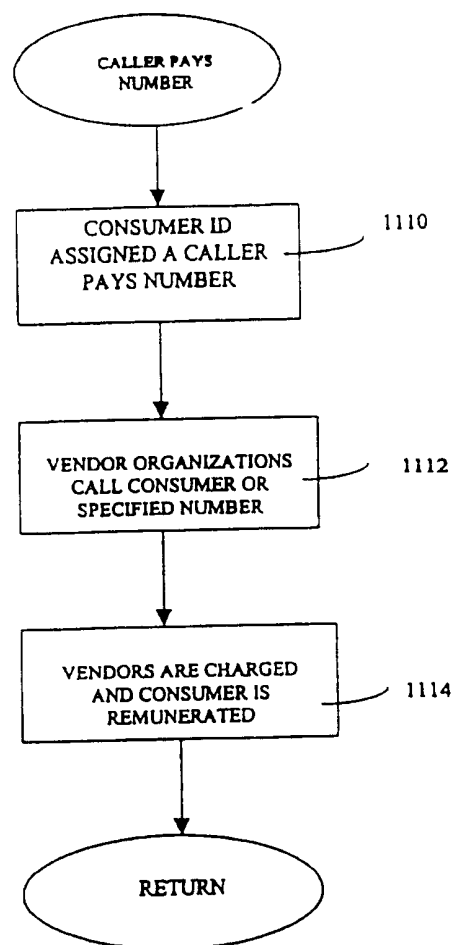


Figure 11

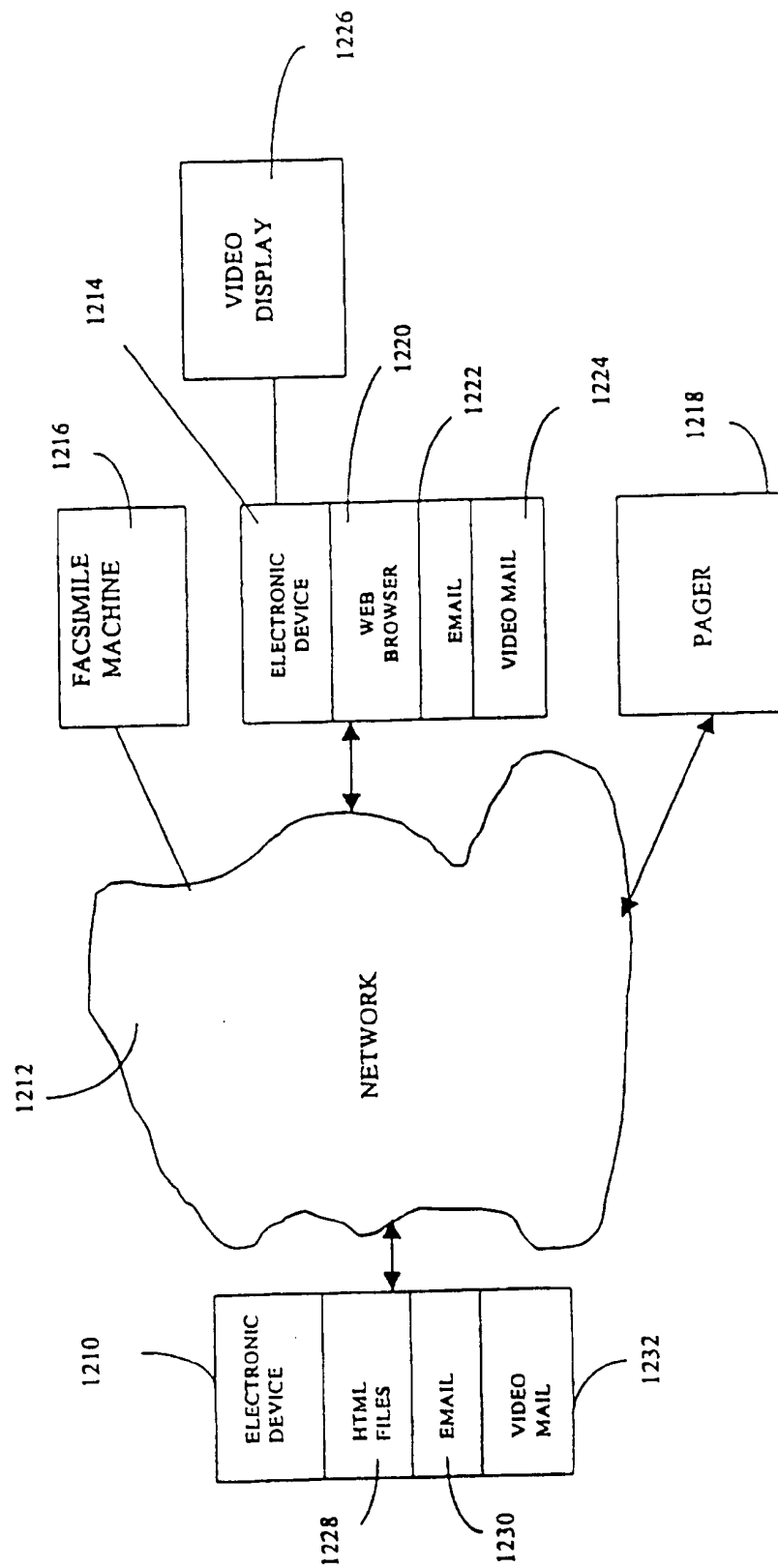


Figure 12

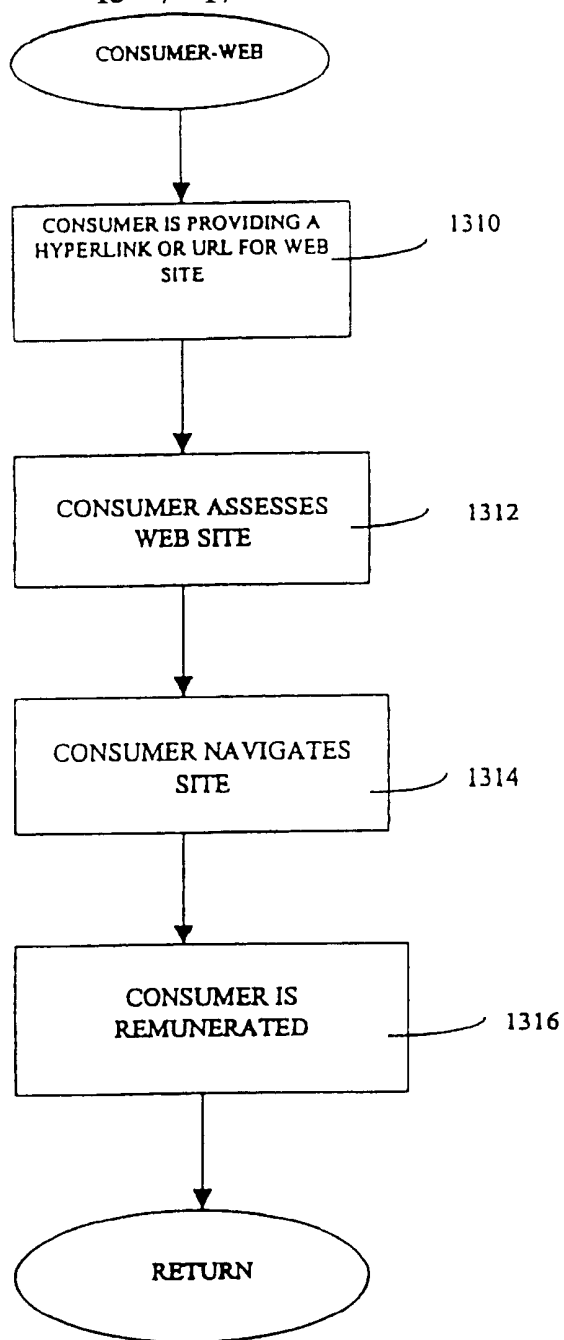


Figure 13

Figure 14 is a schematic diagram of a login form interface. The form is enclosed in a rectangular border. At the top, there is a header bar. Below the header, the text "PLEASE ENTER THE FOLLOWING" is centered. Underneath this, the text "USER ID" is centered, followed by a horizontal rectangular input field. Below the input field, the text "PASSWORD" is centered, followed by another horizontal rectangular input field. At the bottom right of the form, there is a rectangular button labeled "SUBMIT". Four reference numerals are used to identify parts of the form: 1400 points to the main form area, 1412 points to the "USER ID" input field, 1414 points to the "PASSWORD" input field, and 1416 points to the "SUBMIT" button.

1400

PLEASE ENTER THE FOLLOWING

USER ID

1412

PASSWORD

1414

SUBMIT

1416

Figure 14

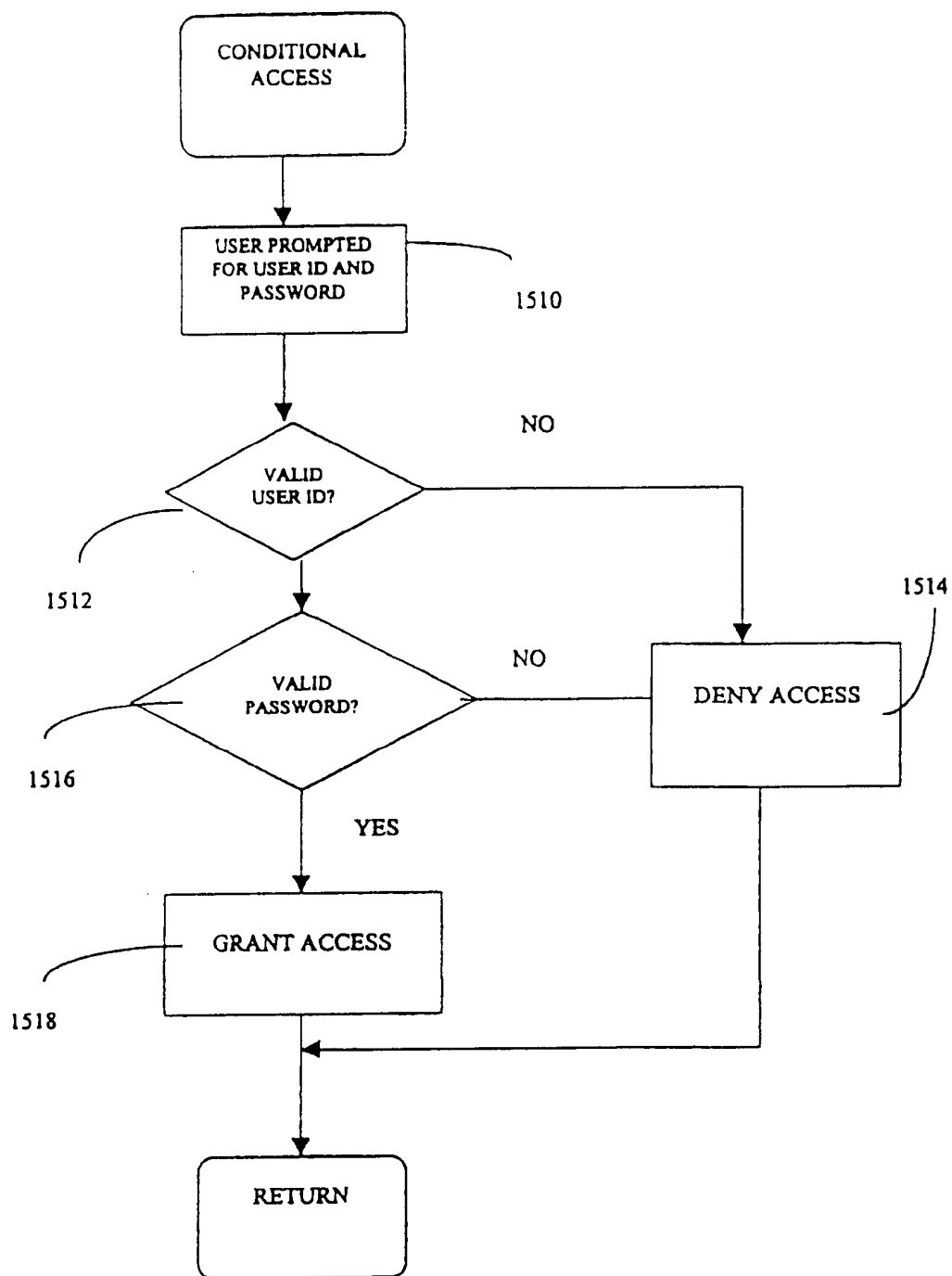


Figure 15



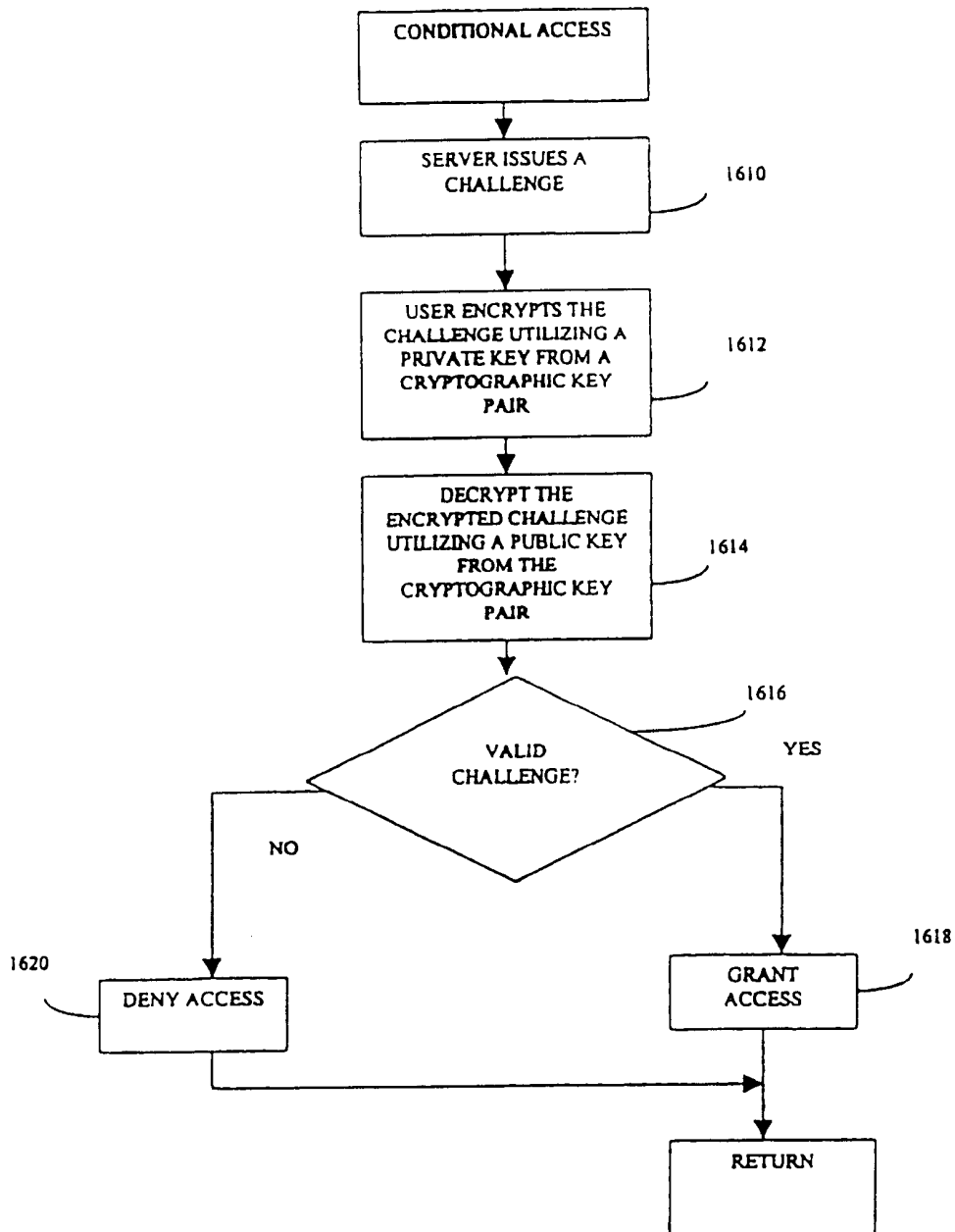


Figure 16

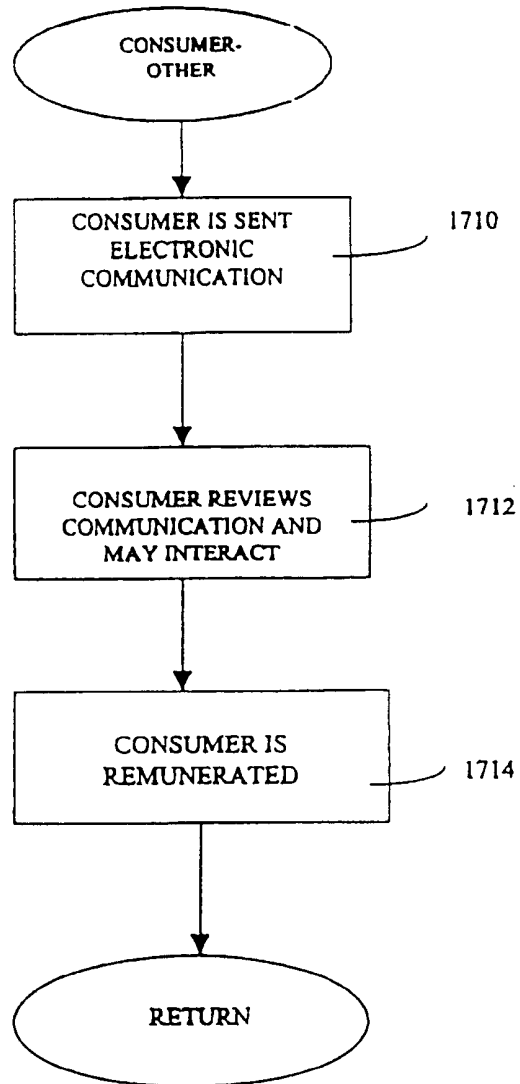


Figure 17

## INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.

PCT/US00/29691

**A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER**

IPC(7) : G06F17/60

US CL : 705/14

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)

U.S. : 705/14

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 practicable, search terms used)

**C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT**

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X	US 5,855,008 A (GOLDHABER et al), 29 December 1998, abstract, Fig 12 and accompanying discussion, entire document	1-42
X	US 5,974,398 A (HANSON et al), 26 October 1999, abstract, entire document	1-42
A	WO 96/31848 (BURDON et al), 10 October 1996, abstract, pages 29-39	1-42
A	US 4,941,172 A (WINEBAUM et al), 10 July 1990, abstract, entire document	7-8,18-19,30-31
A	US 5,963,625 A (KAWECKI et al), 05 OCTOBER 1999, abstract, entire document	17,18,19



Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C.



See patent family annex.

* Special categories of cited documents:	"T" later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention
"A" document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance	"X" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone
"E" earlier document published on or after the international filing date	"Y" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art
"L" document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)	"&" document member of the same patent family
"O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means	
"P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed	

Date of the actual completion of the international search

14 DECEMBER 2000

Date of mailing of the international search report

Peggy Hamed 25 JAN 2001

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