



US 20120317026A1

(19) **United States**

(12) **Patent Application Publication**  
**Wolfston**

(10) **Pub. No.: US 2012/0317026 A1**

(43) **Pub. Date: Dec. 13, 2012**

(54) **METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR INCREASING CHARITABLE DONATIONS BY PROVIDING INSTANTANEOUS DONOR RECOGNITION**

(60) Provisional application No. 60/083,401, filed on Apr. 29, 1998.

**Publication Classification**

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(51) **Int. Cl.**  
**G06Q 40/02** (2012.01)

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(52) **U.S. Cl.** ..... **705/42**

(21) Appl. No.: **13/593,186**

(57) **ABSTRACT**

(22) Filed: **Aug. 23, 2012**

Charitable donations are increased by automatically providing immediate on-line recognition of on-line donors. A list of donors is maintained on a Web page acknowledging the on-line contributions. Donor names on the list can be links to additional information about the donation or the donor. Information about donor and donation is entered by the donor, who can specify what information is to be published on the Web and what information is to remain unpublished. The donor list can be arranged in order of donation size, and donors can compete for position on the list. The donor information can indicate membership in a group, and donations can also be totaled by group to encourage donation competition between groups.

**Related U.S. Application Data**

(63) Continuation of application No. 13/248,258, filed on Sep. 29, 2011, now Pat. No. 8,280,811, which is a continuation of application No. 12/015,206, filed on Jan. 16, 2008, now Pat. No. 8,032,463, which is a continuation of application No. 09/300,881, filed on Apr. 28, 1999, now Pat. No. 7,321,876.

Enter your donation to the Generic University @lumni Fund:

Name:

John Q. Public

Amount:

\$100

Allocate  
Donation:

Orchestra  
Football  
Endowment  
Scholarship

Dedicate  
Donation:

In loving memory of Sarah

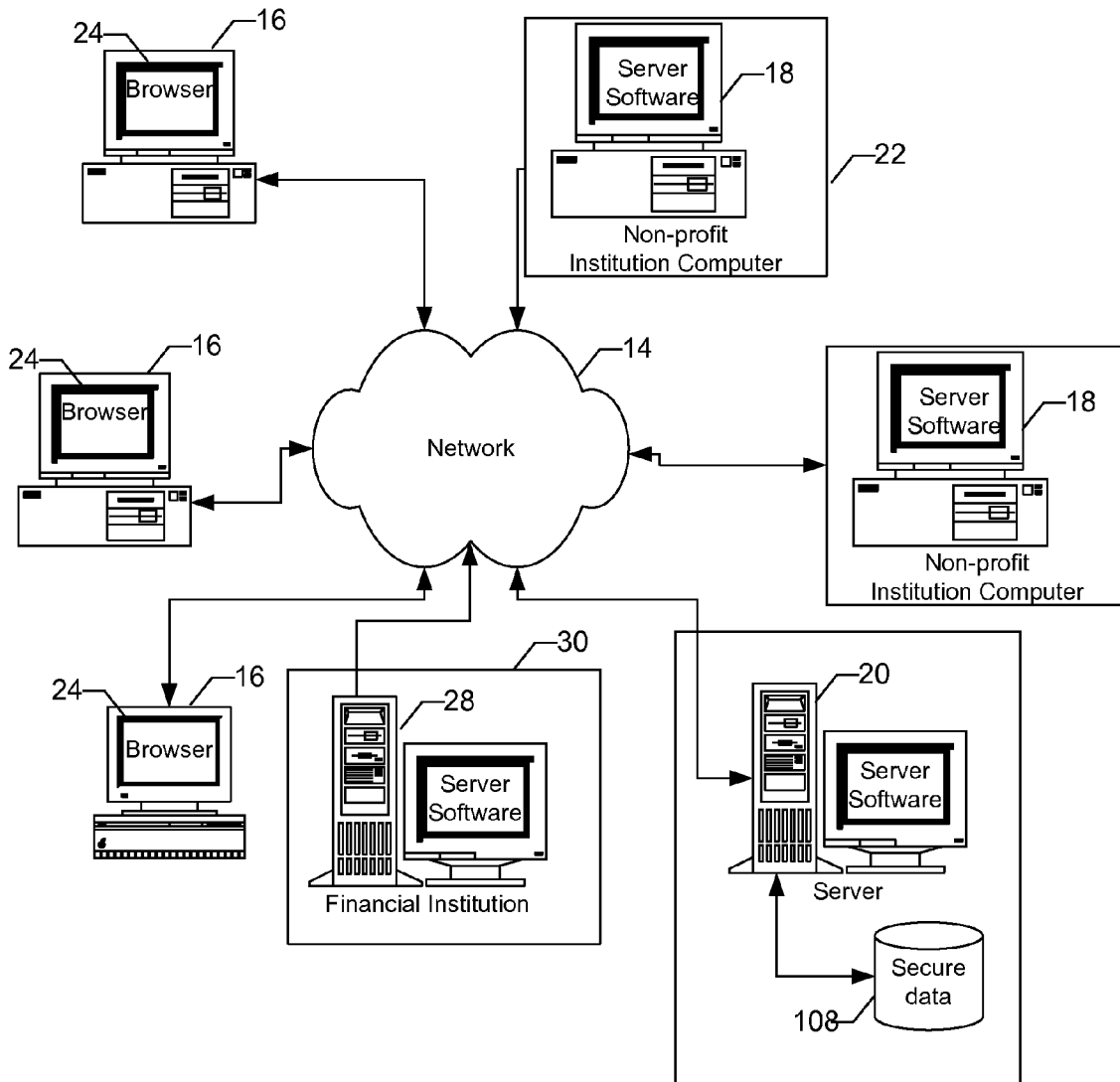


Fig. 1

# Generic University Home Page

Hometown, State

38  
↓

## Admission Online

44/ [Catalogs & Schedules](#) | [Hot Topics](#) | [Maps](#) | [Phone Book](#) | [Web Style and Help](#) | [Keyword Search](#)

## Visitor Center

44/ [About HSU](#) | [Prospective Students](#) | [Unique Resources](#)

## Campus Update

44/ [People](#) | [Athletics & Events](#) | [News & Publications](#)

## Student Site (Text Version)

44/ [Academics & Registration](#) | [Financial Aid, Jobs, Housing & Health](#) | [Life & Activities](#)

## Main Campus

44/ [Alumni & Friends](#) | [Colleges & Departments](#) | [Libraries, Media & Computing](#) | [Administration & Support Services](#)

## Frontiers in Education

44/ [Courses on the Web](#) | [Extension Service](#) | [International](#) | [HSU Statewide](#) | [Research](#)

## Donations

46/

Mailing Address: Generic State University, Hometown, State 22222 USA

Campus Phone Number: 222/222-2222

Fig. 2

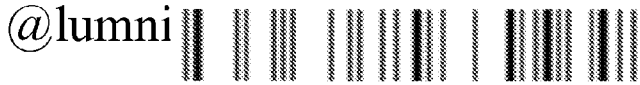
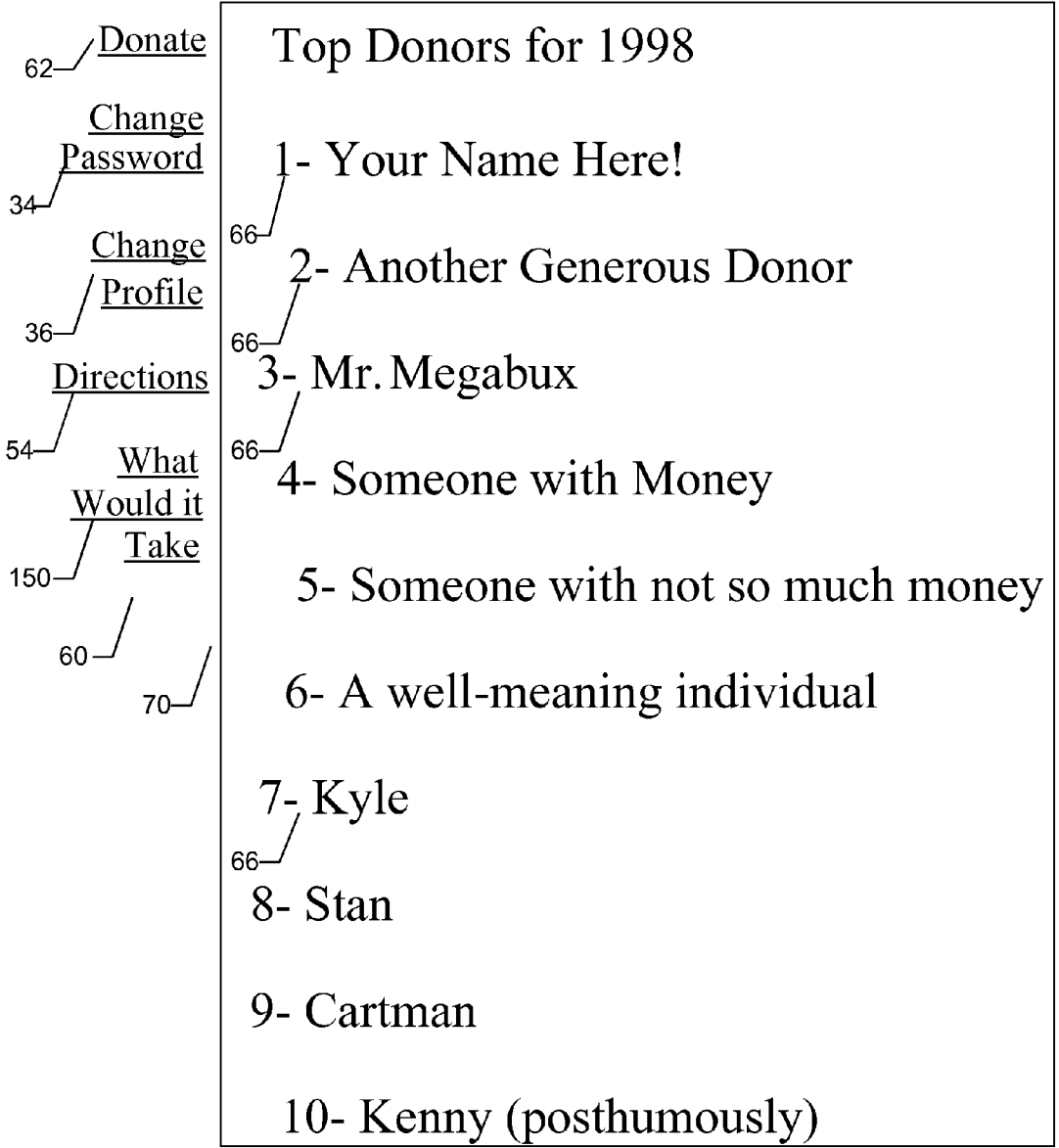


Fig. 3



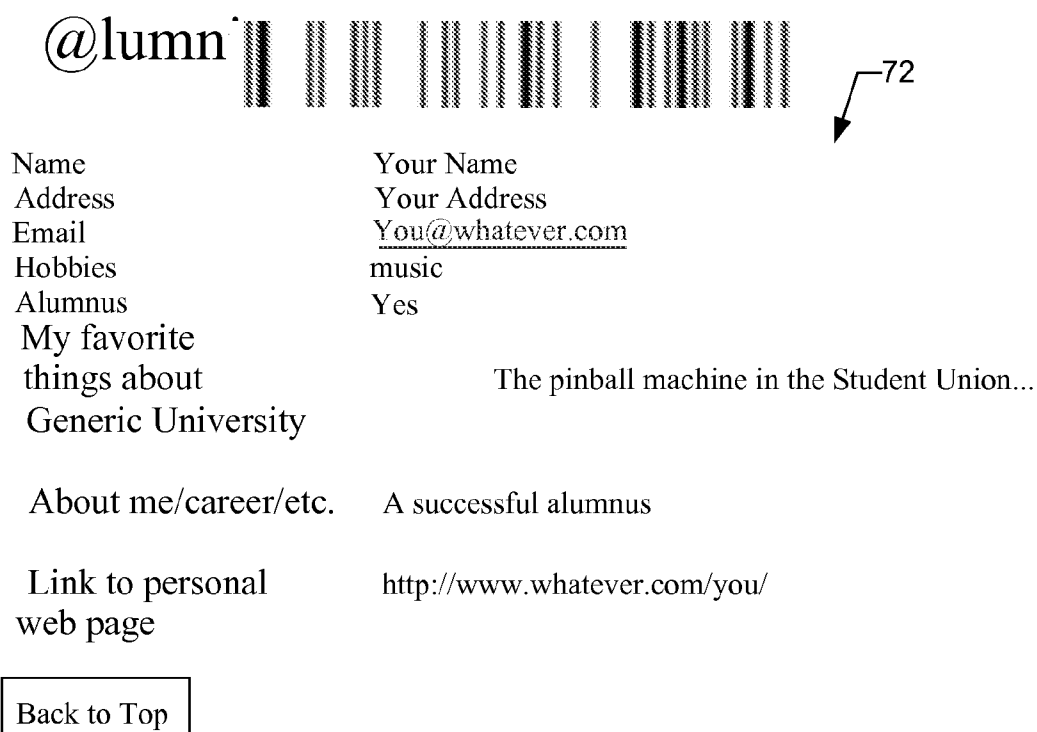


Fig. 4

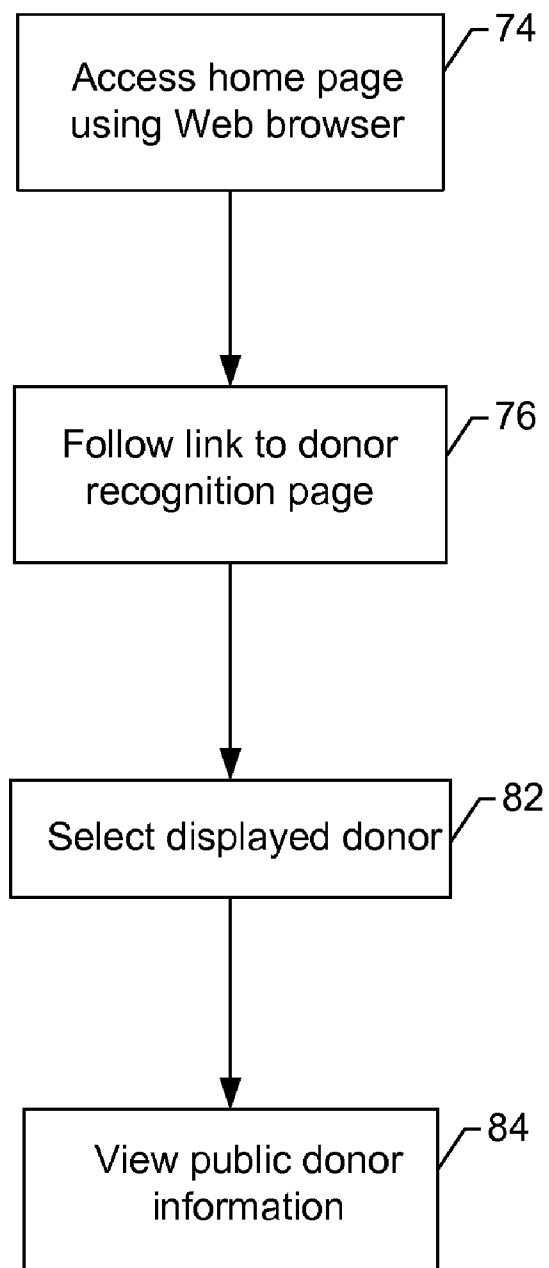
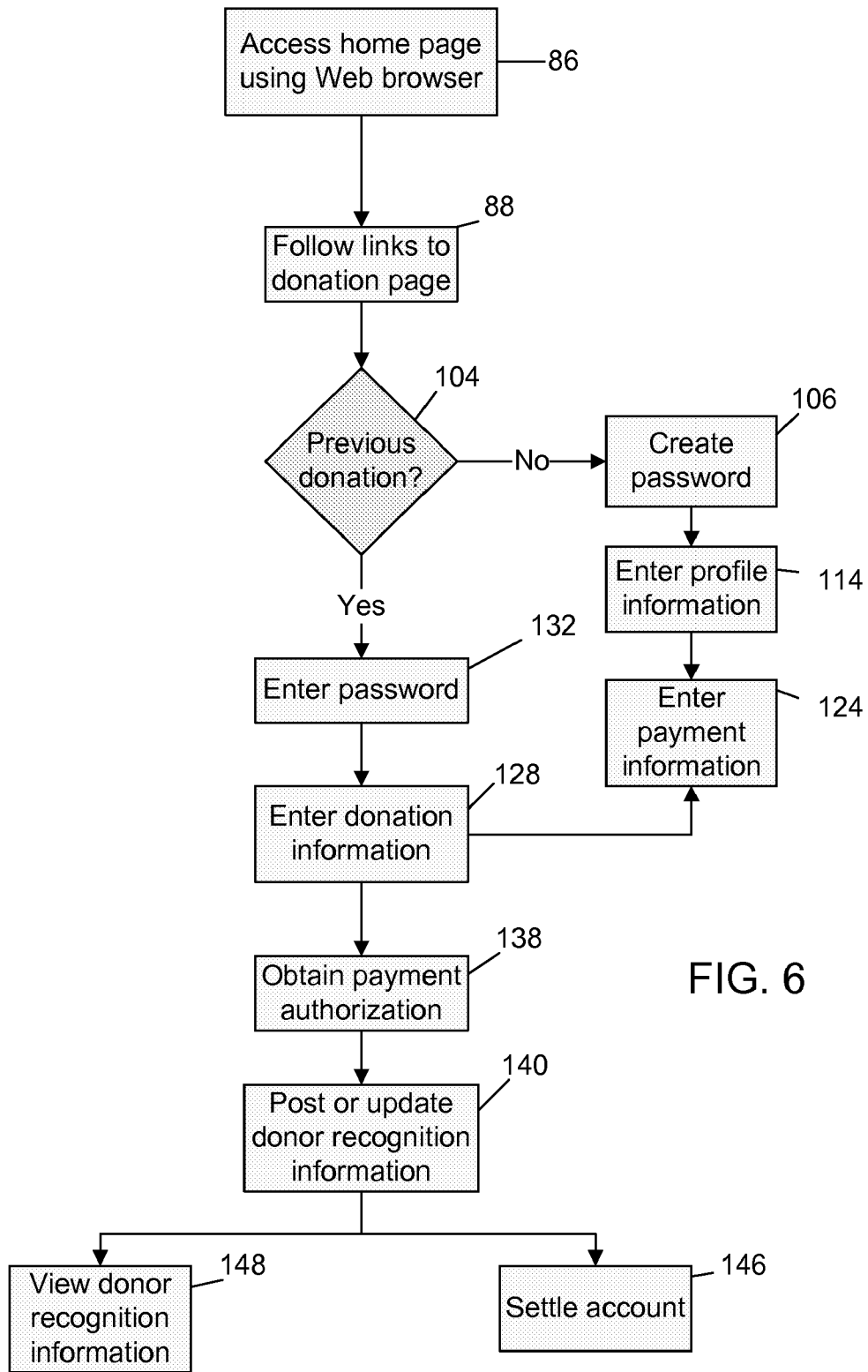
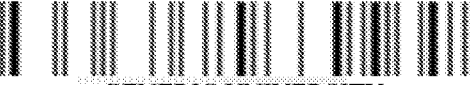


FIG. 5



**@lumn**  **GENERIC UNIVERSITY** 116

Name   Hide

Address   Hide

Email   Hide

Hobbies   Hide

Alumnus  Yes  No  Hide

My favorite things about Generic University   Hide

About me/career/etc.   Hide

Link to personal web page   Hide

Fig. 7





## NOTE:

Once you have chosen a payment method below and completed the payment transaction you will not be able to resubmit this donation or change any of the data on it

Please be sure all the information on your donation is correct and in the form you want it. If you want to review or change your donation now use the "Back" button on your browser.

In order to transmit your donation to the (your college) Alumni Fund, you need to verify the charge and select a payment method from the choices below:

---

Donor: John Q. Public

Choose a payment method:

Debit Card

Visa/MasterCard via Secure Server

---

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[Email Feedback](#)

Fig. 8

@lumni

GENERIC UNIVERSITY

Enter your donation to the Generic University @lumni Fund:

Name:

John Q. Public

Amount:

\$100

Allocate  
Donation:

Orchestra

Football  
Endowment  
Scholarship

Dedicate  
Donation:

In loving memory of Sarah

Fig. 9

**METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR INCREASING CHARITABLE DONATIONS BY PROVIDING INSTANTANEOUS DONOR RECOGNITION**

[0001] This application is a Continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 13/248,258, filed Sep. 29, 2011, which is a Continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 12/015,206, filed Jan. 16, 2008, now U.S. Pat. No. 8,032,463, which is a Continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 09/300,881, filed Apr. 28, 1999, now U.S. Pat. No. 7,321,876, which claims priority from U.S. Provisional Patent application No. 60/083,401, filed Apr. 29, 1998, all of which are hereby incorporated by reference.

**TECHNICAL FIELD OF THE INVENTION**

[0002] This invention relates to increasing charitable donations by enhancing recognition of donors, and in particular, to increasing donations made electronically over a computer network.

**BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION**

[0003] As government support for non-profit institutions decreases, institutions are looking more to individuals and corporations for financial support. More than two thirds of all U.S. households make charitable donations. Americans gave an estimated \$120 billion in voluntary contributions in 1996. Of this amount, about \$70 billion was donated for religious purposes, \$18 billion for education, and \$26 billion for health and human services.

[0004] Non-profit organizations have limited resources with which to develop contributions, and it is cost effective for them to spend those resources developing large donors. Although recognition of donors is known to be an important factor in encouraging repeat donations, small donors are often not given the attention and recognition that is necessary to encourage repeat donations. Because lower income donors tend to contribute a larger proportion of their income to charities than do higher income individuals, small donors can be a significant source of income for nonprofit organizations.

[0005] Even large donors often do not obtain the recognition they seek from nonprofit institutions to which they contribute. To many donors, public recognition of their donation is important. Corporate donors, in particular, may want the public to know of their gifts to the community. Also, donors that donate in honor or memory of a person or an event want their donation to be promptly and publicly recognized.

[0006] Donor recognition should be immediate and public and should correctly reflect how the donors wish to be acknowledged. Many organizations recognize donors quarterly or once a year in newsletter publications. Thus, donors may have to wait months to receive formal, public recognition of their donation. This may discourage repeat giving.

[0007] Because of the infrequent publication of donor recognition lists and the limited accessibility of the public to organizational newsletters, potential donors do not receive the kind of recognition that encourages original and repeat donations. Moreover, with the delay between the gift and the

publication, a busy organization can make mistakes in acknowledging the donation as the donor requested.

**SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION**

[0008] Accordingly, it is an object of the invention to provide a method and apparatus for increasing charitable donations.

[0009] It is a further object of the present invention to provide such a method and apparatus that includes improving recognition of donors.

[0010] It is yet another object of the present invention to provide such a method and apparatus that provides instantaneous on-line recognition of donors.

[0011] It is still another object of the invention to provide a method and apparatus for non-profit organizations to develop small donors and to do so more cost effectively.

[0012] It is yet another object of the invention to provide such a method and apparatus that allows each donor to write his own acknowledgment.

[0013] It is still another object of this invention to provide such a method and apparatus that allows for centralized processing of electronic donations.

[0014] It is still a further object of the invention to increase donations through donor competition by using immediate feedback to competing donors.

[0015] The present invention provides a way for instantaneous public recognition of a donor. The invention provides a method for a donor to contribute through a computer network, preferably by supplying information to allow an electronic charge or transfer from the donors account. The names of the donors to the organization are displayed on a suitably organized and illustrated donor recognition electronic page, which is accessible to the public over the computer network. Donor names are preferably linked to individual donor pages that include additional information about the donor and the donation.

[0016] When making a donation, a donor is presented on his computer monitor a screen that allows him to enter information about himself and his donation. The donor can preferably designate which parts of the entered information is to be publicly accessible. The entered information becomes part of a donor database that can be used by the non-profit organization for further donation development.

[0017] When the donation is complete, the designated information about the donor and donation becomes publicly accessible through the computer network, thereby providing immediate recognition. Because the donor himself writes the acknowledgment for the donation; there is no opportunity for misunderstanding between the donor and the organization. Moreover, because the donation processing and donor recognition are performed automatically, even the smallest donors receive instant recognition. Donations can be processed by the non-profit organization itself or by a third party servicer having expertise in electronic commerce. The immediate publication of donations facilitates competition among donors, encouraging each donor to contribute more than the others, thereby increasing the overall amount of contributions.

[0018] The subject matter of the present invention is particularly pointed out and distinctly claimed in the concluding portion of this specification. However, both the organization and method of operation, together with further advantages and objects thereof, may best be understood by reference to

the following description taken in connection with accompanying drawings wherein like reference characters refer to like elements.

#### BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0019] FIG. 1 shows a computer network over which a preferred embodiment of the invention is implemented.

[0020] FIG. 2 shows a home page of a typical non-profit organization.

[0021] FIG. 3 shows a typical donor recognition page.

[0022] FIG. 4 shows a typical donor profile page, accessed through the donor recognition page of FIG. 3.

[0023] FIG. 5 is a flowchart showing the steps for viewing donor recognition information in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the invention.

[0024] FIG. 6 is a flowchart showing the steps for making a donation in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the invention.

[0025] FIG. 7 shows a donor profile entry form, used by the donor to enter the information for display in the donor profile page of FIG. 3.

[0026] FIG. 8 shows a screen for selecting a method of payment.

[0027] FIG. 9 shows a screen for entering a donation.

#### DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

[0028] FIG. 1 shows a computer network 14 that connects personal computers 16, institutional servers 18, and a third party donation server 20. Institutional servers 18 are operated by non-profit organizations, such as a university 22, and personal computers 16 are operated by individuals, such as donors and others having an interest in the non-profit organizations.

[0029] Computer network 14 is preferably the World Wide Web (the Web) portion of the Internet. Institutional servers 18 and third party donation server 20 may comprise, for example, Sun Solaris Supersparc Servers executing server software, such as that available from Apache Digital Corporation, Durango, Colorado. Personal computers 16 may include, for example, computers such as Apple Macintoshes or Pentium-based computers using window-based operating systems. Personal computers 16 are executing commercially available Web browser software 24, such as Netscape Navigator or Microsoft Internet Explorer.

[0030] Third party donation server 20 is also connected, either directly or through computer network 14, to one or more payment funding servers 28 operated by financial institution 30, such as VISA.net. If no third party donation server is present, institutional servers 18 are connected to payment funding server 28. Server 20 includes secure areas for sending receiving and storing sensitive personal and financial information.

[0031] Non-profit organizations often host a Web site on their institutional server 18 to provide information to interested parties. Information on a Web site is typically formatted in a hypertext mark-up language (HTML) and can include: text, programs, graphics, video, and audio portions. Although the preferred embodiment of the invention is implemented using an Internet Web site, the invention is not limited to any particular type of computer or computer network.

[0032] FIG. 2 shows a typical university home page 38 maintained on institutional server 18. Home page 38 includes

links 44 to many areas of interest to supporters of, and others having some interest in, the organization. For example, home page 38 includes links to background information about the university, information for prospective students, news about research and athletic program, maps of the campus, directories of students and faculty, course information, and alumni information.

[0033] In accordance with the invention, home page 38 also includes a donor recognition page link 46. Upon following donor recognition page link 46, the donor is presented with a donor recognition page 60 (FIG. 3). Donor recognition page link 46 can be displayed as, for example, the word "Donations," "Contributions," "Support the School," or other such word or symbol. Donor recognition page 60 provides on-line recognition of donors and a donate link 62 that leads to a page for beginning the process of making a donation. Donor recognition page 60 also includes a link 64 to a page containing directions explaining how to use the donation system.

[0034] As the term "page" is used herein, a page can be composed of a single screen or multiple screens for displaying and entering of information, and the content of subsequent screens may depend on the entries made on previous screens or pages.

[0035] Although donor recognition page 60 shows donor names 66 displayed as a simple donor list 70 arranged in order of donation size, donor names 66 could be portrayed using suitable imagery, such as by having donor names 66 engraved on cornerstones. Donation amounts and messages, such as donation dedications, can also be displayed with the donor names 66. Donors wishing to remain anonymous may use a pseudonym or a statement in place of their name. Links to donor recognition page 60 may be included, not only on home page 38, but throughout the institution's web site. For example, donor recognition page 60 could be accessible from links on the alumni page and from pages related to specific programs for which donations are solicited.

[0036] Donor names 66 function as links to donor profile pages, such as a donor profile page 72 shown in FIG. 4. Donor profile page 72 shows information entered by and about the donor. Information about the amount and purpose of a donation can be included with donor names 66 on donor recognition page 60, on donor profile page 72, or on both. Different donor profile pages could be provided for individuals and business.

[0037] FIG. 5 is a flow chart of the steps used to view donor information. Step 74 shows that a user accesses university home page 38 using Web browser 24 on a personal computer 16. From home page 38, the user selects donor recognition page link 46 to view donor list 70 in step 76. By selecting a name 66 in step 82, the user is presented with a corresponding donor profile page 72 in step 84.

[0038] FIG. 6 is a flow chart showing the steps for making a donation in accordance with the present invention. Step 86 shows that a donor accesses home page 38 using Web browser 24 on a computer 16. Step 88 shows that the donor selects appropriate links to reach a donation screen shown in FIG. 9. For example, the donor may select donor recognition page link 46 from home page 38 and then select a donate link 62 from donor recognition page 60. Upon selecting the donate link 62, the donor is connected to a secure area of server 20 to protect the confidentiality of personal and financial information that will be transmitted.

[0039] Step 104 shows that server 20 presents the donor with a form-type screen that asks the user if he has made a

previous donation. All such form-type screens are typically created in HTML using the <form> tag, and the information entered onto the forms is typically processed using programs written in C, C++ or Perl and using the common gateway interface (CGI) protocol.

**[0040]** If the donor has not previously donated, server **20** presents the donor in step **106** with a screen for creating an account by entering user identification and a password. The user identifier is checked for uniqueness before being accepted by server **20**, and the password is saved in an encrypted database **108** (FIG. 1). Although it is preferable to create donor accounts to facilitate repeat giving, the invention can be implemented without donor accounts, although the donor would be required to enter personal and payment information with each donation.

**[0041]** After the user account is established, server **20** presents the donor in step **114** with a donor profile entry form **116** (FIG. 7) that requests information to create a donor profile. Profile form **116** includes fields **118** for entering information to identify the donor, as well as any other information that the non-profit organization believes would be useful for donation development. For example, if the non-profit organization is an institute of higher education, the screen may request information such as whether the donor is an alumnus of the institution, the donor's year of graduation, degree, etc. Different profile forms could be presented, depending on whether the donor was an individual or a business. Profile form **116** could also allow the donor to select clip-art drawings to decorate his profile page **72**.

**[0042]** In a preferred embodiment, the donor would have the option of indicating which fields **118** are to be published on his donor profile page **72** for viewing by anyone visiting the institution's site and which fields **118** are to be accessible only to the staff of the non-profit organization. The donor can indicate which information is not to be published, for example, by checking a hide box **120** next to the fields **118** he chooses not to publish. A donor thus has complete control over what information, if any, will be published on the Web page. A donor can also chose to leave incomplete portions of donor profile entry form **116**. The only mandatory information is that which is required to process the payment.

**[0043]** After receiving the personal information, step **124** shows that payment information is requested from the donor. The methods of payment available are preferably electronic and can include credit cards, debt cards, billing a telephone number account, or payroll deduction. FIG. 8 shows a screen **126** for selecting a method of payment. The invention is not limited to any particular method of transferring funds. An option for mailing a payment may also be included, although a mailed donation is preferably not recognized until the funds are collected.

**[0044]** After a payment method is selected, an appropriate screen is displayed to the donor to collect the information necessary to process that type of payment. For example, if credit card payment is chosen, a subsequent screen would have the user enter the credit card type, credit card number, expiration date, and cardholder's name. If debit card payment is selected, the subsequent screen would request the account number and personal identification number. The part of the server used to handle sensitive information, such as credit card and bank account numbers, is secure, and information transmitted to or from the secure server is encrypted and/or authenticated by known methods so that it cannot be inter-

cepted or forged by others on the Internet. The donor is now ready to enter his donation in step **128**.

**[0045]** If the donor had indicated in step **104** that he has previously donated, he would have been presented in step **132** with a screen requesting him to enter his password. Upon successful comparison of the entered password with the password stored in the database, the donor would proceed immediately to step **128** to enter his donation using a donation screen **92** shown in FIG. 8. The personal and charge information will be drawn from the secure area of the server upon entry of the account name and password. Repeat donations are thus encouraged by simplifying the process. For added security, additional information can be requested from the donor using a password, particularly in the event of a large donation exceeding a predetermined threshold amount. A donor can change his password at any time by following a change password link **134** from donor recognition page **60**. Although the donor is not required to reenter his profile and payment information, he has the option to change the information if he chooses by following a change profile link **136** from donor recognition page **60**. On donation screen **92**, a donor is given an option to allocate his donation to a specified program. A default allocation can be used. If donor recognition page **60** was accessed through a link indicating an allocated payment, such as "Donate to the Humanities Program," the default allocation is to that program, although the donor has the opportunity to change the allocation.

**[0046]** Donation screen **92** also provides one or more fields for entry of an optional dedication message from the donor. For example, a donor's message might read "Miller's Used Cars supports the HSU Beavers—William Miller, Class of '63" and could also include a link to the home page of Miller's Used Cars. Other examples of messages include "In loving memory of William Miller, Class of '42" or "Congratulations to the Class of 2000." Appropriate clip art could also be selected by the donor to use with his message. The publicly displayed text fields can be screened by the institution to eliminate inappropriate content, either automatically or manually.

**[0047]** When the donor completes donation screen **92** and posts the form, payment information is sent over the computer network in step **138** to the appropriate funding institution to authorize the payment. For example, a payment made rising a VISA card would be verified and credited over the VISA.net system. If the authorization system fails to authorize the funds, the donor is informed and requested to correct the entered information or, if there is no data entry error, to select another payment option. Methods for electronic commerce are known in the art and are described, for example, in U.S. Pat. No. 5,710,887 to Chelliah et al for "Computer System and Method for Electronic Commerce" and U.S. Pat No. 5,715,314 to Payne et al. for "Network Sales System."

**[0048]** Once payment is authorized, step **144** shows that the donor information is published on donor recognition page **60**, and the link to profile page **72** is activated. After the donor information has been published, the account is settled in step **146** and the donor can view the posted information in step view **148**.

**[0049]** Donor recognition page **60** can be expanded to an elaborate set of donor recognition pages. Donor recognition pages can be customized using, for example, symbols or mascots associated with the institution. The donor recognition page could appear, for example, as a plaque, with donors divided into groups based upon the amount of the donation or

other criterion. For example, individuals that donated \$10,000 or more may be at the top, followed by \$5,000 donors, \$1,000 donors, etc. The amount of space provided to each donor on his profile page or information available, such as the number of lines of text, could be made dependent on the size of the donation. The amount of each donation could be published or not, in accordance with the desire of the donor.

**[0050]** All information relating to donations made through the donor recognition page is maintained in a donor information database. The on-line donation information can be sorted and summed on different fields. For example, when an individual gives a repeat donation, the donor recognition page could display the donor's total contributions for the year.

**[0051]** Besides encouraging donors by providing immediate public recognition, the present invention can also be used to encourage donations by promoting competition between donors. For example, donor recognition page **60** includes a "what-would-it-take" button **150** that upon activation shows a potential donor what donation level would be required to achieve a specified position in donor list **70**. To use "what-would-it-take" button **150**, a potential donor selects a position number on donor list **70**, such as by highlighting the position, and double clicks button **150**. Server **20** then determines and displays the donation level required for the potential donor to move into that position on list **70**. The determination may entail, for example, adding a fixed amount to the donation of the current holder of the position. If the potential donor has logged into server **20**, it could use stored information about the potential donor's previous donations to determine the incremental donation required to reach the required donation level.

**[0052]** Non-profit institutions can also use the present invention to create donation competitions between groups, such as different graduating classes or different schools in a university. The information collected from donors can identify each donor as a member of a group, such as a graduating class, and then individual donations can be totaled for each graduating class. Because donations are processed immediately and automatically, donation totals can be continually updated and displayed by graduating class, thereby encouraging members of each class to donate more and win the competition. As the donation total for a class increases, it is immediately visible to members of other classes, who are thereby spurred to increase their donations. The overall contribution from such a real-time, on-line campaign could be significantly greater than the contributions realized from prior art donation campaigns.

**[0053]** Even without a formal competition, the donations can be totaled on different fields and the totals publicly displayed on the web site to spur donations from groups or as a statistical basis to plan donation development. The database also provides a ready-made mailing list, allowing the organization to easily keep in contact with donors.

**[0054]** Although the invention can be implemented entirely by an individual non-profit organization servicing its on donations, a third party donation servicer could process donations for more than one non-profit organization. The third party donation servicer can supply expertise in on-line commerce that the individual non-profit organization may lack. By handling a large volume of charges or funds transfers, the third party donation servicer can reduce bank service charges. Using a third party donation servicer to verify and collect funds, the non-profit organization would not be required to

obtain and be responsible for the security of sensitive information such as credit card and bank account information.

We claim as follows:

- 1.** A method of providing recognition for donors donating to non-profit organizations, the method comprising:
  - transmitting to a donor over a computer network a form for the donor to use to enter a donation to the non-profit organization;
  - entering onto the form an amount of the donation and payment information;
  - transmitting the form over the computer network to the donation servicer;
  - electronically transferring funds from the donor to the non-profit organization; and
  - automatically adding the donor to a donor list published on the computer network.
- 2.** The method of claim **1** further comprising:
  - entering additional information about the donor; and
  - presenting to a person viewing the donor list through the computer network the additional information about the donor in response to selecting a donor from the list.
- 3.** The method of claim **1** in which entering onto the form an amount of the donation and payment information includes entering personal information and indicating what parts of the personal information will be publicly accessible over the computer network.
- 4.** The method of claim **1** in which entering payment information includes entering a credit card number or a bank account number.
- 5.** The method of claim **1** in which the donor list is arranged by size of donation and further comprising displaying the size of donation required to obtain a position on the list.
- 6.** A method of increasing charitable donations to an organization, the method comprising:
  - providing a network server for communicating with individuals over a computer network;
  - automatically accepting donations over the computer network; and
  - automatically publishing on the computer network information about the donation, thereby providing immediate recognition to the donor.
- 7.** The method of claim **6** in which automatically publishing information about the donation includes automatically publishing information about the donor.
- 8.** The method of claim **7** in which automatically accepting donations over the computer network includes the donor entering information about the donor
- 9.** The method of claim **8** in which the donor entering information about the donor includes indicating which parts of the information is to be published.
- 10.** The method of claim **6** in which automatically accepting donations over the computer network includes automatically processing an electronic funds transfer from the donor to the organization.
- 11.** The method of claim **6** in which automatically publishing information about the donation includes providing a link to an electronic page including information about the donor.
- 12.** The method of claim **6** in which automatically publishing on the computer network information about the donation includes publishing a donation list including the donation.
- 13.** The method of claim **12** in which the donation list is arranged in order of donation level and further comprising displaying the level of donation required to achieve a specified position on the list.

**14.** The method of claim **6** further comprising:  
totaling donations categories based upon information provided by the donors; and  
publishing donation totals by category on the computer network.

**15.** The method of claim **14** in which the categories represent competing groups of donors, the method further comprising using the totals published on the computer network to encourage the competing groups of donors to increase donations.

**16.** The method of claim **6** in which automatically publishing on the computer network includes publishing the information on an Internet Web page.

**17.** An apparatus for increasing charitable donations to an organization, the apparatus comprising:

a network server for communicating with individuals over a computer network;

a program executing on the network server to automatically accept donations over the computer network; and  
a program executing on the network server to automatically publish on the computer network information about the donation, thereby providing immediate recognition to the donor.

**18.** The apparatus of claim **17** in which the network server communicates over the Internet.

**19.** The apparatus of claim **17** in which the program executing on the network server and automatically publishing information about the donation publishes the information on a World Wide Web page on the Internet.

**20.** The apparatus of claim **17** in which the program executing on the network server and automatically publishing information about the donations publishes an ordered list of donations.

\* \* \* \* \*