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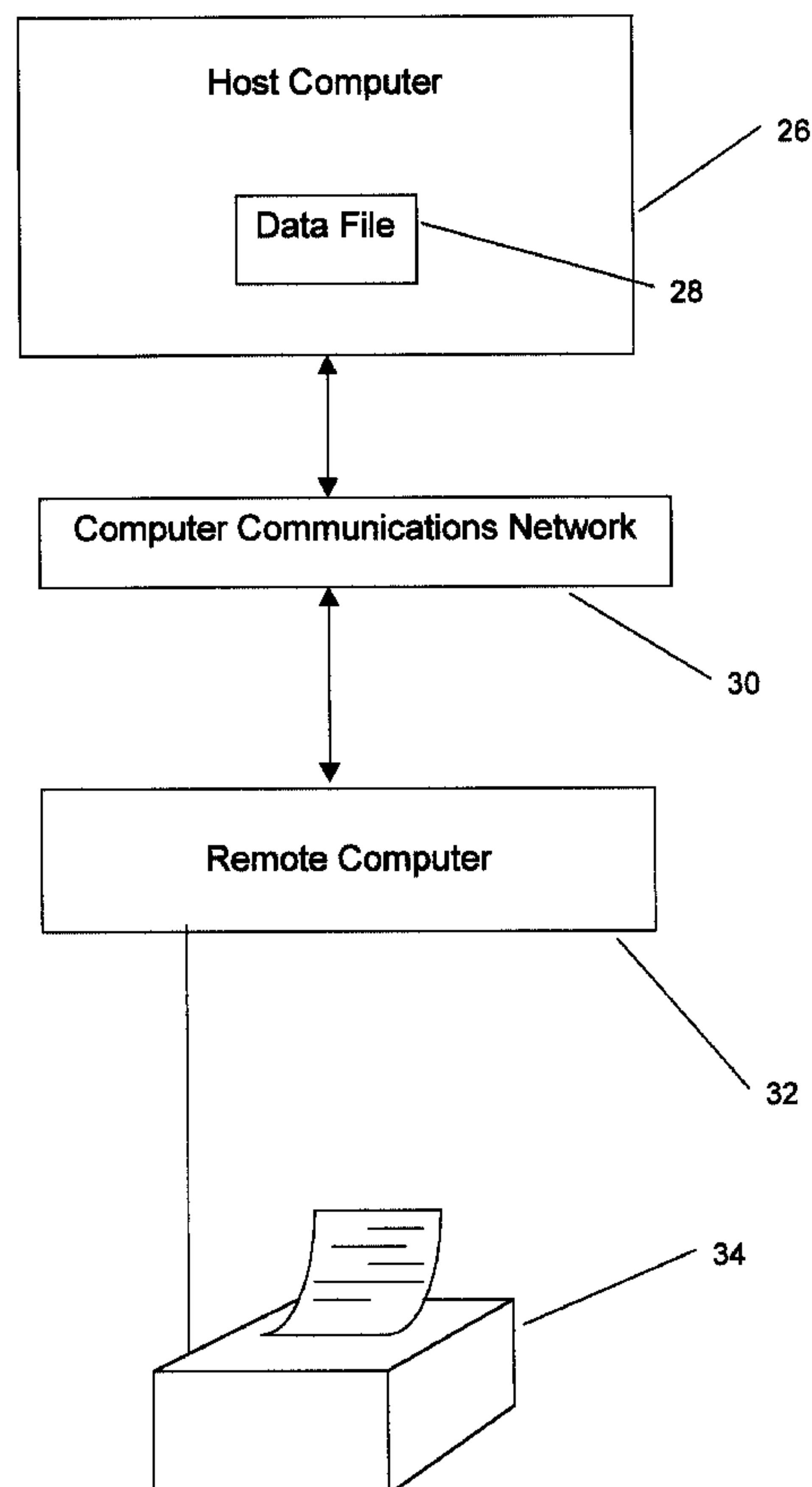
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(54) Titre : SYSTEME ET METHODE DE REPERAGE D'ARTICLES PERDUS AU MOYEN D'UN RESEAU
INFORMATIQUE MONDIAL OFFRANT DES SERVICES DE PREVENTION DU VOL ET DE PUBLICITE

(54) Title: SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR TRACKING LOST ARTICLES BY MEANS OF A GLOBAL COMPUTER
NETWORK, PROVIDING A THEFT DETERRENT AND ADVERTISING



Document describing:

System and method for tracking lost articles by means of a global computer network, providing a theft deterrent and advertising

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FIELD OF THE INVENTION

10 This invention relates to a method and system for identifying personal possessions and the ownership thereof using a computer network such as the internet as well as providing a theft deterrent and a vehicle for advertising products and services.

15 **Background-Field of Invention:**

The theft or loss of personal possessions, or items, that are unmarked can create difficulties for both the original owners of the items and those who find or recover such items.

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In many cases lost or stolen articles, or items, are recovered by police or other public authorities but cannot be returned to the owners of the articles because ownership of the articles cannot be determined. In other words, the personal possessions cannot be accurately identified. The inability to track down the
25 owners of recovered articles results in warehousing and other administrative costs which must be borne by the police or the public authority involved. The owner of the item will often remain unaware that the item has been found and is available to be recovered.

30 Known in the art are various systems where ID-labels or tags are sold to consumers to attach to their valuables. The ID-labels are printed with the

contact information of a central registry such as a telephone number as well as a unique code which the central registry files along with contact information of the owner. If an item is lost, the finder of such an item can contact the central registry and give the central registry the information on the ID-label as well as
5 the contact information of the finder. The central registry then looks up the information it has filed on the unique code and owner information and gives the contact information of the finder to the owner so that the valuable can be recovered.

10 Their systems suffers from a number of disadvantages:

- 15 a) The ID-labels are quite costly since they must be produced with unique codes for each label or user, and are physically sent to consumers using, for example, the postal system which also adds to the expense and is time consuming.
- 20 b) Their system requires each individual owner to pre-register their code with a central registry. Anonymity and privacy is therefore sacrificed by creating a database of the owner's names, addresses, codes and property.
- 25 c) Their system is expensive to produce and maintain. Vast databases must be constructed and vast amounts of data must be manually entered and updated such as when the owner of the property changes or when the owner's address changes.
- d) Do not provide a theft deterrent since the labels are easily removed from property.

Objects and Advantages

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Accordingly, several objects and advantages of the present invention are to

provide an effective method of identifying personal property for consumers that:

- 5 a) Is inexpensive since ID-labels can be distributed to consumers at little or no cost electronically over a computer network such as the internet and do not need to be physically sent to the consumer, thereby also saving time.
- 10 b) Provides anonymity and privacy to owners who's property is not lost or stolen since no database pre-registration is required, as is done with prior art systems. The owner can however register with the central registry if property is lost or stolen and help in their recovery is desired.
- 15 c) Is inexpensive to maintain since pre-registration of consumers and their ID-codes are not required. Therefore vast databases of information do not have to be maintained and constantly updated when owner addresses or ownership changes, since owners do not need to register with a central registry unless they require aid in recovering a lost or stolen article,
- d) To provide a viable theft deterrent to prevent property from being stolen.
- 20 A further object and advantage of the present invention is:
- To provide for a new vehicle for advertising products and services.

Brief Description

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Fig. 1, in a schematic representation, shows the configuration of the system of the preferred embodiment.

Fig. 2 illustrates a sheet on which ID-labels are printed.

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Fig. 3 illustrates an ID-label which has been affixed to the surface of an article.

Fig. 4 illustrates an inventory form.

Fig. 5 illustrates an ID-label which includes a stencil pattern for engraving the
5 surface of a valuable.

Fig. 6 illustrates ID-labels which can be affixed to vehicles.

Fig. 7 illustrates an ID-label which can be affixed to a door or window of a
10 building.

Fig. 8 illustrates a method of attaching an ID-label.

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Reference Numerals in Drawings

10 ID-label

12 ID-code

20

14 Advertising

16 Marking

25 **18 Adhesive Tape**

20 Article Surface

22 Sheet Material

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24 Inventory Form

26 Host Computer

28 Data File

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30 Computer Network

32 Remote Computer

10 **34 Printer**

36 Stencil Pattern

38 String

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Description Figures 1 to 8

In the preferred embodiment (Figure 1) a data file **28** stored on a host computer **26** such as a web server is downloaded to a consumer's remote computer **32** through a computer network **30** such as the internet.

In the preferred embodiment of the present invention, data file **28** contains the following digitized material:

- 25 1) A plurality of ID-labels **10** (Figures 2, 3 & 5,6,7) which can be printed out on sheet material **22** (Figure 2) such as paper by consumers using a printer **34**. Figure 3 shows an ID-label **10** which has been printed on sheet material **22** and has been affixed to an article surface **20** using a piece of transparent adhesive tape **18**. An important feature of the present invention is that
- 30 physical ID-labels **10** or ID-tags are not produced and delivered to consumers, but rather ID-labels **10** are distributed to consumers in digital

form, preferably through a computer network such as the internet.

2) An inventory form **24** (Figure 4) on which the consumer can note details of valuables which have been labeled. Figure 4 shows an example of inventory
5 form **24** which has been printed on paper.

3) Instructions for printing and applying ID-labels **10** to belongings.

Methods by which consumers may receive data file **28** over the internet include:

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- 1) Consumers visit a web site or internet page using remote computer **32** and download data file **28**.
 - 2) Consumers visit an internet site using remote computer **32** and order data file **28** to be sent to them electronically using email.
 - 15 3) Email marketing may be used to send data file **28** or the internet address from where it can be downloaded to a plurality of consumers.
 - 4) Emails containing data file **28** or a web address from where such can be downloaded may be forwarded from one consumer to another.
- 20 Preferable file formats, for data file **28**, include formats which can be used on a plurality of computer operating systems. This is preferable, for example, if email marketing is used to distribute data file **28**. Preferable formats include the PDF or Portable Document Format from Adobe Acrobat. Adobe Acrobat's PDF format has been found to be advantageous for consumers, since the program
25 for reading this format is offered at no charge by the maker. Email containing data file **28** in PDF format can, for example, be sent to numerous consumers using email, as is known in the art.

While the PDF file format is preferable, data file **28** may be offered to
30 consumers in other file formats as well. Data file **28** in different file formats and versions may be posted for downloading at an internet site so that consumers

may download the selected file or files. The selection can, for example, include:

- 5 - files for use with specific computer software and versions, such as Microsoft Word, Word Perfect, StarOffice, Adobe Acrobat, Microsoft Excel, Microsoft Access, etc. Since most consumers have text editing programs installed on their computers, consumers can, for example, be offered a plurality of downloadable files that have been formatted for processing with specific text editing or reading software and versions.
- 10 - files for use with software programs running on different computer operating systems such as Microsoft Windows, Apple, Unix, Linux etc.
- 15 - files formats which can be used with a plurality of software programs such as, for example RTF (Rich Text Format) and graphic formats including: TIFF, GIF and JPEG.
- 20 - files in a preferred language such as English, French etc.
- 25 - files formatted for printing on a specific paper size, such as, for example, A4 stock.
- 30 - files including ID-labels 10 formatted for printing on a specific paper size with pre-cut adhesive labels in a specific size, such as for example, Avery Standard labels.
- 35 - files with special versions, for example, for companies who have many items to label or private consumers who have fewer items to label.

It is preferable that data file 28 include a plurality of ID-labels 10 in different sizes, shapes and types for attaching to various valuables. Smaller ID-labels 10 for affixing to, for example, keys and larger ID-labels 10 for applying to, for

example, laptop computers and bicycles. Figure 2 shows a plurality of ID-labels 10 which have been printed out on sheet material 22. Figures 3, 5, 6 and 7 show examples of ID-labels which may be included in data file 28.

- 5 Figure 3 shows information which can be printed on ID-label 10. In the preferred embodiment of the present invention ID-label 10 is printed with contact information of a central registry or lost and found center. This contact information includes preferably an internet address of the central registry. The contact information of a central registry is more preferable than the address of
10 an owner. For example, if the address of an owner is attached to a key ring it would put the owner at risk since the finder could use the keys in a dishonest way. ID-label 10 is preferably also printed with notification that a reward is offered for the return, to the owner, of the found valuable. It has been found that a finder is more likely to return a found item if a financial reward is offered. A
15 consumer can, if desired, also write on ID-label 10 the amount which would be rewarded if the found item is returned to the owner.

In the preferred embodiment ID-label 10 is also printed with an ID-code 12 (Figure 3) which helps to identify the owner should the belonging be lost. An
20 important feature of the present invention is that ID-code 12 is not included in data file 28 but added by the consumer. Distributing generic ID-labels 10 to consumers without ID-code 12 has the following advantages:

- Is more simple and inexpensive to distribute since the same file with generic
25 ID-labels 10 without ID-codes 12 can be distributed electronically to a plurality of consumers, unlike files which have been uniquely formatted for each consumer with unique ID-codes 12.
- Gives consumers more anonymity and privacy since the central registry has
30 no way of knowing which ID-code 12 a consumer adds to ID-label 10. This is in contrast to prior art lost and found systems where all codes are filed along

with information about owners and their valuables in a central registry. The anonymity provided for by the present invention is particularly advantageous since computer networks are subject to security breaches. In the preferred embodiment, the central registry will not file all consumer contact information and ID-codes **12** as is done with prior art lost and found systems. In the preferred embodiment it is only in the case that a consumer has a missing valuable and reports this to the central registry, that the registry files the contact information of the owner and information about the lost article including ID-code **12**.

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ID-code **12** can be alphanumeric being made up of numbers and/or letters and may also include symbols. ID-code **12** is preferably added, by the consumer, to ID-label **10** electronically or digitally, before printing, in the following way:

- 15 - opening data file **28** with a software program such as, for example, Adobe Acrobat Reader or Microsoft Word and entering ID-code-**12** so that when printed out, ID-labels **10** are printed with the desired ID-code **12**.

Methods by which ID-code **12** can be added, by consumers, to ID-label **10**, after printing, include the following:

- 20 - Printing out the ID-label **10** and then adding ID-code **12** manually using a writing instrument such as a pen.
- 25 The likelihood of two consumers marking the same type of valuable, such as for example, a camera, with the same ID-code **12** and losing it at the same time is extremely unlikely. However to reduce the incidence or likelihood of a plurality of consumers using the same ID-code **12**, the central registry may, for example, encourage consumers to use a 7 digit numeric ID-code **12**.

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In the preferred embodiment of the present invention, consumers use the same

ID-code **12** for all ID-labels **10** included in data file **28**, however for certain consumers such as, for example, companies it may be desirable to have different ID-codes **12** printed on each ID-label **10**.

5 In the preferred embodiment, data file **28** also contains inventory form **24** (Figure 4) on which the owner can note one or more of the following:

- 1) Detailed information about the labeled valuables, including for example, a serial number, model number, amount paid etc.
- 10 2) ID-code **12** that the consumer added to ID-label **10** which is attached to the valuable.

In the preferred embodiment of the present invention, the consumer prints out the entire data file **28** including inventory form **24** and fills in the information
15 manually with, for example, a pen. The information may however also be entered digitally using a computer program and stored in data file **28**. Storing this information in an electronic format is advantageous since it can be updated easily. The consumer may, for example, store inventory form **24** electronically on a computer network such as the internet so that it is easily accessible to the
20 consumer should it be needed. For example if the consumer was on a trip and a valuable was missing, data on inventory form **24** can be retrieved over the internet. This data would be important in order to register the valuable as missing with the central registry.

25 In the preferred embodiment of the present invention data file **28** preferably also contains the following instructions:

- how to print out and apply ID-labels **10** to valuables.
- how to use the lost and found system should a valuable be missing.

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Data File **28** may also have certain user interface functions built in which would

make it easier for users. These functions depend on the file format and software capabilities of the software programs and versions used for processing and printing data file 28. As mentioned, different versions of data file 28 may be offered to consumers, for downloading over the internet. These user interface
5 functions may, for example, include the following:

a) In the preferred embodiment of the present invention, data file 28 has a form entry field where the consumer enters ID-code 12. When the user prints out data file 28, a plurality of ID-labels 10 are printed, each with the ID-code 12
10 that was entered in the form field. Text processing programs including Microsoft Word 97 and Adobe Acrobat 4 have form features which allow an entry field to be created within a document and reference fields placed in the document within ID-labels 10 so that when printed, a plurality of ID-labels 10 are printed with the value entered in the entry field.

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b) If consumers desire to print out ID-labels 10 with different ID-codes 12, data file 28 may have a form entry field where the consumer enters a number. When the user prints out data file 28, a plurality of ID-labels 10 are printed with different ID-codes 12 based on the value that was entered in the entry
20 field. For example if "1000000" was entered by the consumer in the form entry field, a plurality of ID-labels 10 may be printed with ID-codes 12 in sequential order: 1000000, 1000001, 1000002, 1000003, etc. In another variation, separate entry form fields can be placed in inventory form 24 or within ID-labels 10 so that when opened with a software program, selected
25 ID-codes 12 may be entered in the fields and when printed out, ID-labels 10 are printed with the selected ID-codes 12. Some software programs allow this to be incorporated into their file formats by using form and field functions. These include, for example, Microsoft Word and Adobe Acrobat.

30 c) Function buttons for performing operations such as printing and navigation.

d) Bookmarks and hyperlinks for navigating within the document.

While document format data files **28** are preferred, other file formats may also be offered to consumers. For example, data file **28** may be a data-base type file
5 or part of an executable software application as shown in the following examples:

- a file which can be processed with a program which the user has installed on remote computer **32**. For example a Microsoft "MDB" file may be offered
10 to consumers who have Microsoft Access installed on their computer.
- a stand alone executable application including an "exe" file which consumers can install on their computers. Such a software application can be made using, for example, the Microsoft Access Developer Kit.

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Data-base format files and applications generally can have more powerful user interface features built in than, for example, document type formats. A data-base type file or application can, for example, include:

- 20 - a table where detailed information about the labeled valuables is entered using easy to use entry forms.
- automatically produce ID-codes **12**. For example, the consumer can enter a number in a field and each ID-label **10** can be printed with this number as
25 ID-code **12** or a different code can be automatically generated for each ID-label **10** based on the number entered. For example, for each new article entered, the ID-code **12** could be increased by 1. Of course other mathematical formulas may also be used.
- 30 - include easy to use buttons for opening entry forms and for printing ID-labels **10**.

- include various print options for printing different ID-labels **10** .
- include detailed instructions on using the lost and found system.

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Similar functions may also be built into other file formats that can be used with text programs such as, for example, Microsoft Word or spread sheet programs such as, for example, Microsoft Excel.

10 Interactive web or internet sites may also incorporate similar functions, for example, allowing consumers to enter ID-code **12** and print ID-labels **10** on a printer while logged onto an interactive web site, or download a data file **28** formatted with the ID-codes **12** that were entered by the consumer at the web site.

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It is preferred that data file **28** is protected by a password so that consumers may not modify the file in any way other than adding data in the allowed fields. For example programs such as Adobe Acrobat and Microsoft Word allow for the creation of form documents with form fields, which can be protected from being

20 modified with passwords.

While in the preferred embodiment consumers receive data file **28** containing ID-labels **10** via downloading from a computer network such as the internet, consumers may also be given data file **28** on data medium such as diskettes,

25 CD's and the like. For example, magazines often include CD's and could include data file **28**.

An important feature of the present invention is it's value as an advertising vehicle for products and services. Data File **28** can contain advertising **14**

30 throughout the document including on the digitized ID-labels **10** as shown in Figure 3 and also on inventory form **24** and instructions. Advertising **14** may be

in the form of graphical and textual information, including for example, the graphic logo of the sponsoring company. Depending on the file format of data file 28, multimedia advertising may also be incorporated which includes sound and video. Advertising 14 may also be incorporated into the internet site of the
5 central registry and/or where consumers download data file 28.

Figure 3 shows ID-label 10 printed with advertising 14 from a sponsor company. Such advertising can be very valuable since ID-labels 10 are often attached to portable valuables which consumers handle often, such as portable computers
10 and key chains. The presence of advertising 14 can also give more credibility to the lost and found system and convince the finder that a reward will indeed be paid when returning the valuable to the owner.

Advertising 14 can be sold to advertisers thereby generating revenue for the
15 central registry or given free of charge in exchange for distributing data file 28 to consumers. For example, an advertiser can be provided with data file 28 formatted with advertising 14 on ID-labels 10 and throughout the document. The advertiser can then, for example, send data file 28 to its customers via email and/or invite its customers to download data file 28 from a web site.

20 The central registry may allow an advertiser to distribute data file 28 for an agreed time period or number of downloads from an internet site. Data file 28 may contain a notice that the document is only valid until a certain expiry date. Data file 28 may also be encoded with protection that would, for example, not
25 allow it to be printed out or opened after the expiry date.

Advertising 14 on data file 28 can depend on from where the consumer downloads the file. For example, specific advertising 14 can be directed to consumers in certain geographic locations. For example a consumer from
30 Canada may be instructed to download data file 28 from a certain internet page, where data file 28 contains advertising 14 from a Canadian company. A

consumer from France may be instructed to download data file 28 from another web page where data file 28 contains advertising from a company in France.

Such targeted advertising 14 may also depend on other consumer criteria such as age, sex, income etc. For example, if consumers fill in an online form to have data file 28 sent to them via email, such files may contain specific advertising 24 targeted for a particular consumer or group.

More information regarding the advertising value and methods of the present invention will become evident through a consideration of the following examples.

Example 1

15 An advertiser who is a magazine publisher, publishes a special offer in their magazine. Their readers are notified that they can visit the publisher's internet site and download a free lost and found system in the form of data file 28. When readers open the internet address with their internet browser they download data file 28 in the desired format. The digitized ID-labels 10 as well as other
20 information in data file 28 contain advertising 14 for the magazine publisher whereby the advertiser is named as a sponsor for the free lost and found system. It is to be noted that, if the magazine issue included a CD, data file 28 may be included on the CD.

25 Example 2

The ABC Insurance company informs it's customers that they can download a free lost and found system at an internet site. At the internet web page, data file 28 is available for downloading in a plurality of formats and contains ID-labels
30 10 that contain the following message: "Sponsor: ABC Insurance". ABC Insurance also informs it's customers that they will pay the reward that users

post for finding a missing valuable as long as the user is insured with ABC Insurance and the reward does not exceed \$50.00.

Example 3

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The World Travel Company gives their customers a diskette storing data file 28 in a variety of data formats containing their advertising 14. These include, PDF and Microsoft Word formats. It also informs customers that they can download data file 28 from their web site.

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In order to help keep track of data files 28, with different versions, formats and advertisers, it is preferable that the central registry give each data file 28 a serial number. It is also preferable that ID-code 12 be preformatted with a prefix which relates to the serial number. For example if ID-label 10 was preformatted with the alphabetic prefix "RT" and a consumer entered a 7 digit numeric code, ID-code 12 may for example be: RT1234567. Preformatting ID-code 12 with prefixes further reduces the incidence of consumers using duplicate ID-codes 12.

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20 While in the preferred embodiment of the present invention the consumer generates ID-code 12, the central registry can also give consumers the option of receiving an ID-code 12 which is generated by the central registry. Consumers can, for example, receive ID-codes 12 generated by the central registry in the following ways:

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- after receiving or downloading data-file 28 containing ID-labels 10, consumers may visit the internet site of the central registry and be issued an ID-code 12 which the consumer can enter on ID-labels 10.
- A consumer may receive ID-code 12 via email from the central registry by entering an email address at the internet site of the central registry.
- A consumer may visit an internet site and interactively, while connected to

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- A consumer may visit the internet site of the central registry and download data file **28** which contains in digital form ID-labels **10** which are formatted with ID-codes **12** generated by the central registry. Consumers may also order that such a formatted data file **28** be emailed to them by, for example, visiting the internet site of the central registry and leaving their email address.

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In the preferred embodiment of the present invention data file **28** contains a plurality of ID-labels **10** including various types and sizes, examples of which are shown in Figures 3, 5, 6, & 7.

- 5 After being cut out from paper sheet material **22** using, for example, a pair of scissors, printed ID-labels **10** can be affixed or attached to most articles using the following methods:

Method 1

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Method 1 is the preferred method for most articles. ID-label **10** is affixed to article surface **20** using a piece of transparent adhesive tape **18** as shown in figure 3, so that the printed information on ID-label **10** is visible through adhesive tape **18**. Adhesive tape **18** is preferably larger than ID-label **10** so that
15 it overlaps ID-label **10** on all sides. For example, a piece of standard 19 mm wide adhesive tape **18** may be used to affix 15 mm wide ID-labels **10** to articles. Tape **18** also makes ID-label **10** more durable. Since most consumers possess transparent adhesive tape with a standard width of about 19 mm it is preferable to include ID-labels **10** in data file **28** which are formatted to have a width which
20 is less than 19 mm when printed out. For wider ID-labels **10**, transparent adhesive tape **18** in wider sizes are readily available, such as for example 48 mm packaging tape. Most stationary or office supply stores stock suitable adhesive tape **18** rolls in a plurality of widths. It is preferable that ID-label **10** is affixed to a surface of the valuable which is easily visible. Small sized ID-label
25 **10** can be affixed using adhesive tape **18** to, for example, the collar tag of pets or leg band on birds. They can also be affixed directly onto keys, watch backs and clasps, credit cards etc. Larger ID-labels **10** may, for example, be affixed to computers and bicycles in the same way. When affixing ID-label **10** to windows such as on vehicles and buildings, it is preferable to affix the label to the interior
30 side of the window, with adhesive tape **18** so that the printed information is visible through the window from the outside.

Method 2

Items such as wallets and purses can have ID-labels **10** inserted into folds with
5 no adhesive tape **18**. It has been found that a preferred size for such labels is
the size of a credit card or about 54 mm by 86 mm, since wallets and purses
often have special folds for this size. It is preferable that data file **28** include ID-
labels **10** that are formatted so that when they are printed out, produce ID-labels
10 of credit card size. ID-labels **10** with no adhesive tape **18** may also be
10 inserted into ID-tags such as luggage tags and key ring tags. ID-labels **10** may
be laminated by affixing adhesive tape **18** to each side. The pieces of adhesive
tape **18** should overlap ID-label **10** on all sides. Such laminated ID-labels **10** are
more durable and resistant to moisture.

15 Method 3

Figure 8 illustrates another method of attaching ID-label **10** to articles. Tape **18**
is used to laminate ID-label **10** on both sides with a piece of string **38** inserted at
the fold. ID-label **10** can then be attached to suitcase handles, key rings etc, by
20 tying string **38**.

While it is preferable that ID-labels **10** are printed out on sheet material **22**
which is ordinary paper, since this is widely available to consumers, ID-labels
10 can also be printed out on other materials which are also readily available at
25 office supply stores. These include:

- specially coated paper and plastic sheets which are available in a wide
variety of colors, including transparent, for most printers. These sheets are
often more resistant to wear and tear than ordinary paper and will not yellow
30 with age.
- plastic or paper sheet material which has a pressure sensitive adhesive

coating on the back side.

- sheets with precut labels, such as for example, AVERY standard sizes with adhesive backing which are available in a wide variety of materials, shapes, colors and sizes in many office supply stores. Versions of data file 28 with ID-labels 10 pre-formatted for printing on various label sizes may be offered to consumers.

The consumer can also print out ID-labels 10 on sheets of paper or plastic with no adhesive coating and then apply an adhesive to the back of the label and then affix the label to article surface 22. Even if ID-label 10 is affixed to article surface 20 with adhesive, it is preferable that it is covered with adhesive tape 18 in order to make ID-label 10 more durable.

In order to act as a theft deterrent, article surface 22 may be substantially indelibly marked, in one or more places, with marking 16 (Figure 3) which preferably includes the contact information of the central registry and is preferably the internet address of the central registry. It is known that often thieves do not steal indelibly marked articles, since it reduces the resale value of stolen goods and makes them harder to sell. Marking 16 also makes it possible for lost articles to be recovered by the owner even if ID-label 10 is removed from the valuable. In order to produce marking 16 the consumer may use, for example, a permanent ink marking pen, hard metal tipped scribe or electric hand engraver. Other methods that may be used include:

- acid engraving of glass surfaces or metal surfaces using perforated stencils.
 - sand blasting through a perforated stencil
 - stamping tools which impress a mark into surfaces with heat and/or pressure.
 - permanent ink containing solvents in which article surface 20 is solvent.
- These inks may be applied using, for example, a perforated stencil or transfer/decal type systems as are known in the art.

- marking with a pen containing invisible ink which fluoresces when exposed to UV light.

If article surface **20** is marked, it is preferable that this is noted on ID-label **10** with a message such as for example: "Warning Marked Article", as shown in figure 3. Such a warning message on ID-label **10** serves to help deter theft. Figures 5, 6 and 7 show further examples of ID-labels **10** which include a warning message that the valuable has been marked with marking **16**. Data file **28** may include ID-labels **10** which are formatted with such warning messages, as well as others which do not include this message, should the consumer not wish to mark the valuable indelibly with marking **16**.

Figure 5 shows an example of ID-label **10** which has been printed with a stencil pattern **36** to facilitate consumers marking article surface **20** with marking **16**. After applying ID-label **10** to article surface **20** using, for example, the aforementioned method 1, the owner can use a sharp pointed tool such as, for example, a pin or scribe to perforate stencil pattern **36** at the points thereby engraving article surface **20** with marking **16**. This has been found to work well on plastic and painted surfaces, producing a discrete, ascetically acceptable mark. This has been found to work well on valuables such as, for example, cameras and portable computers.

Figure 6 shows two examples of ID-label **10** which can be used on vehicles such as cars, motorcycles and all terrain vehicles (ATV's). An electric hand engraver or scribe can be used to engrave a plurality of plastic and metal parts of the vehicle such as, for example, motor parts, wheel rims, etc. with marking **16**. On vehicles such as cars, two ID-labels **10** may be affixed to the inside of the two front side windows using adhesive tape **18**, so that ID-label **10** and it's warning message, can be read from outside of the vehicle. On motorcycles and recreational vehicles one or two ID-labels **10** may be affixed to a visible part of the vehicle such as the front or the sides.

Figure 7 shows an example of ID-label 10 that may be used to protect buildings such as houses which have valuables which have been marked with marking 16. This ID-label 10 may, for example, be affixed to doors and windows so that
5 they can be read from the outside of the building. Special versions of this ID-label 10 for business premises may also be included in data file 28.

Should a valuable be missing, the owner can contact the central registry and report the missing valuable. In the preferred embodiment, the owner contacts
10 the internet web page of the central registry and fills out an online form giving as much as possible of the following information to the central registry:

- Contact information of the owner including email address.
- Location and time that the valuable went missing.
- 15 - Detailed information about the valuable including, manufacturer, serial number, model number etc.
- ID-code 12 on ID-label 10.

The consumer can refer to inventory form 24 to obtain some of this information.
20

In the preferred embodiment, the owner also posts a reward for the return of the valuable. In the preferred embodiment, if the valuable is found, a portion of the reward goes to the finder and a portion to the central registry. For example, 50% of the reward may go to the finder and 50% to the central registry.

25

The reward posted by the owner, can reflect the value that the owner places on the valuable and not only it's replacement value. For example, the valuable may have great sentimental value as in the case of a family heirloom or pet, or perhaps an electronic device such as a pocket computer contains important
30 data. In many cases, an owner can determine a reward as a percentage of the value of the article. For example 10%. The central registry can also fix a

minimum reward requirement in order to cover its basic administration costs and also to insure that a finder receives a respectable reward. The minimal reward requirement set by the central registry may be a fixed amount or may be based on a percentage of the value or replacement cost of the lost belonging. In
5 some cases the owner will be reimbursed the entire or part of the reward by the owner's insurance company.

Should someone find the missing valuable and see the contact information of the central registry on marking **16** or ID-label **10** the finder can contact the
10 central registry. Even if ID-label **10**, is no longer on the valuable, the central registry can still be contacted if the valuable was marked with marking **16**, which in the preferred embodiment is the internet address of the central registry. In the preferred embodiment, the finder contacts the internet web page of the central registry and fills out an online form giving as much as possible of the
15 following information to the central registry:

- Contact information of the finder including an email address.
- Location and time that the valuable was found.
- Detailed information about the valuable including, manufacturer, serial
20 number, model number etc.
- ID-code **12** on ID-label **10**.

The central registry regularly checks it's list of missing articles and list of found articles for matches. For a match to be detected, it is preferable that a plurality
25 of matching points be detected, between the lost report and found report filed in the data base of the central registry. The more matching points, the stronger the match. For example:

- type of article (camera, bicycle etc) and ID-code **12** on ID-label **10** etc.

If a match is detected between an article reported as missing and an article reported as found, the central registry contacts the owner and gives the owner the finder information so that the missing article can be recovered by the owner. Under no circumstances, in the preferred embodiment of the present invention,
5 would the central registry give the finder the owner contact information.

Before giving the owner the finder information, the central registry may require further information from the owner in order to be sure:

- 10 - That the person purporting to be the owner is the rightful owner.
- That a found article is indeed the missing article, particularly if the match between the missing report and found report is weak.

This information may include:

- 15 - Proof of purchase, such as a sales receipt or more details about the lost article or where and when it went missing etc.

Preferably before the finder information is provided to the owner by the central
20 registry, the central registry will collect a fee from the owner which in the preferred embodiment is a portion of the finder reward posted by the owner.

It is preferable that the central registry collects the fee from the owner using electronic means such as a credit card or debit card, since this greatly speeds
25 up the recovery process and makes the system more efficient.

Depending on the electronic payment means available, the central registry may collect the entire reward posted by the owner using an electronic payment system and credit electronically the account of the finder after the valuable has
30 been recovered by the owner. However in most cases, the central registry will

collect only it's fee or portion of the reward, and the finder will collect the finder's portion of the reward when the owner recovers the missing article.

If the retrieved valuable is damaged or in an unacceptable condition, part or all
5 of the fee collected by the central registry will be refunded to the owner.

Further information about the present invention will become apparent by considering the following example:

10 Example

A consumer reads in a local newspaper of an internet site where a lost and found system can be downloaded for free. The consumer visits the advertised internet page and chooses from a number of data formats and versions, data
15 file **28** in the Adobe PDF format in the English language. After downloading, the consumer opens data file **28** using the Adobe Acrobat Reader and enters 1234567 as the ID-code **12** in the form entry field. The consumer then prints out the entire data file **28** including ID-labels **10**, inventory form **24**, and instructions on normal paper. All ID-labels **10** have been printed with ID-code **12** as the
20 number: 1234567, which was entered in the entry field. ID-code **12** is also printed on inventory form **24**. After cutting out ID-labels **10**, the consumer attaches selected ID-labels **10** to various belongings using standard 19 mm wide adhesive tape, following the instructions that were included in data file **28**. The owner also fills in the paper printout of inventory form **24** which was
25 included in data file **28**. Using a pen the consumer notes the model and serial number of a Minolta camera that was labeled as follows: Dynax 505 si, Serial Number 95807070. While the consumer is on vacation in London, England, the Minolta camera goes missing and the owner visits a location which offers internet access such as an internet cafe. The owner opens the internet site of
30 the central registry using an internet browser and fills in an online form posting a reward of \$80.00 and giving details of the camera including the serial number,

ID-code 12 and where it was lost as well as the owner's email address. This information is filed by the central registry. Later, a finder finds the camera and notices ID-label 10 promising a reward and contacts the central registry at its internet site, filling in an online form including the serial number of the camera, where it was found, and ID-code 12 which is the number 1234567 as well as contact information including an email address. The central registry detects a strong match between the camera that was reported as found and the camera reported as missing. The central registry notifies the owner via email that after payment of \$40.00 or 50% of the reward that the owner posted, it will immediately email the finder information to the owner. The owner pays \$40.00 to the central registry online using a credit card. Upon receiving payment, the central registry emails the complete finder information to the owner. The central registry also notifies the finder via email that the finder information has been sent to the owner and that the owner will be contacting the finder shortly and will pay the finder the remainder of the reward or \$40.00 when recovering the valuable. The owner contacts the finder and arranges to pick up the camera and on finding the camera in good condition pays the finder a \$40.00 reward in cash. The insurance company of the owner refunds the owner the \$80.00 which was posted as reward.

20

It is to be noted that in the case of a missing article, many or even all of the aforementioned interactions between the owner, central registry and finder can be automated or interactively integrated into a computer network, web or internet site. This is particularly the case when there is a strong match detected by the central registry between the found report and the missing report, based on a plurality of matching data points such as ID-code 12, serial number etc. More human intervention however is preferable when ID-label 10 is missing and there is only marking 16 on a found valuable with no serial numbers and matches between lost and found articles must be based on for example, descriptions of the article, where and when it was lost etc.

30

In case of change of ownership of an article, ID-label **10** should be removed from the article.

While in the preferred embodiment consumers add ID-code **12** to all ID-labels **10**, it is to be noted that, in most cases, this system will still function, particularly if the article has identifying features, even if for example:

- there is no ID-code **12** on ID-label **10**.
- ID-label **10** is removed from the valuable and marking **16** consisting of the internet address of the central registry is present.

A finder only has to contact the lost and found center or central registry using the internet address on ID-label **10** or marking **16** and provide identifying features of the article, where it was found etc. However the presence of ID-code **12** on ID-label **10** does make the system work more efficiently and is especially important for articles with few distinguishing features such as keys. Corresponding ID-codes **12** on an article reported as found and an article reported as lost provides additional proof that a recovered valuable belongs to the person who reported it missing.

20

While in the preferred embodiment of the present invention the central registry receives a portion of the reward offered by the owner of the missing article if it is recovered, other financial arrangements may also be used. For example:

- The central registry may charge a fixed fee for aiding in the recovery of an article.
- The central registry may charge consumers a subscription for using the system.

25

While in the preferred embodiment of the present invention marking **16** consists solely of the internet address of the central registry it may also include ID-code **12**.

- 5 While in the preferred embodiment of the present invention data file **28**, contains ID-labels **10** inventory form **24** and instructions, data file **28** may only contain ID-labels **10**.

While in the preferred embodiment of the present invention the consumer
10 downloads only one file containing ID-labels **10**, inventory form **24** and instructions, these may be divided into a plurality of downloadable files.

Summery, Ramification, and Scope

- 15 Accordingly, the reader will see that the method of use of this invention can be of great value in identifying both personal and corporate possessions as well as for discouraging theft and for verifying ownership. The advantages of the present invention is that valuable, high quality, identification can be offered to the consumer at substantially reduced cost since:

20

- ID-labels or tags do not need to be produced and physically sent to consumers but are downloaded in digital form from a computer network.

25

- the cost of the system is partly funded through advertising by sponsoring companies.

30

- there is no pre-registration of consumers and their valuables.
- In the preferred embodiment of the present invention only consumers who actually recover their missing valuables using the system, will incur the cost of the reward that they posted for the return of the valuable.

Although the description above contains many specificity's, these should not be construed as limiting the scope of the invention but as merely providing illustrations of some of the presently preferred embodiments of this invention.

Figure 1

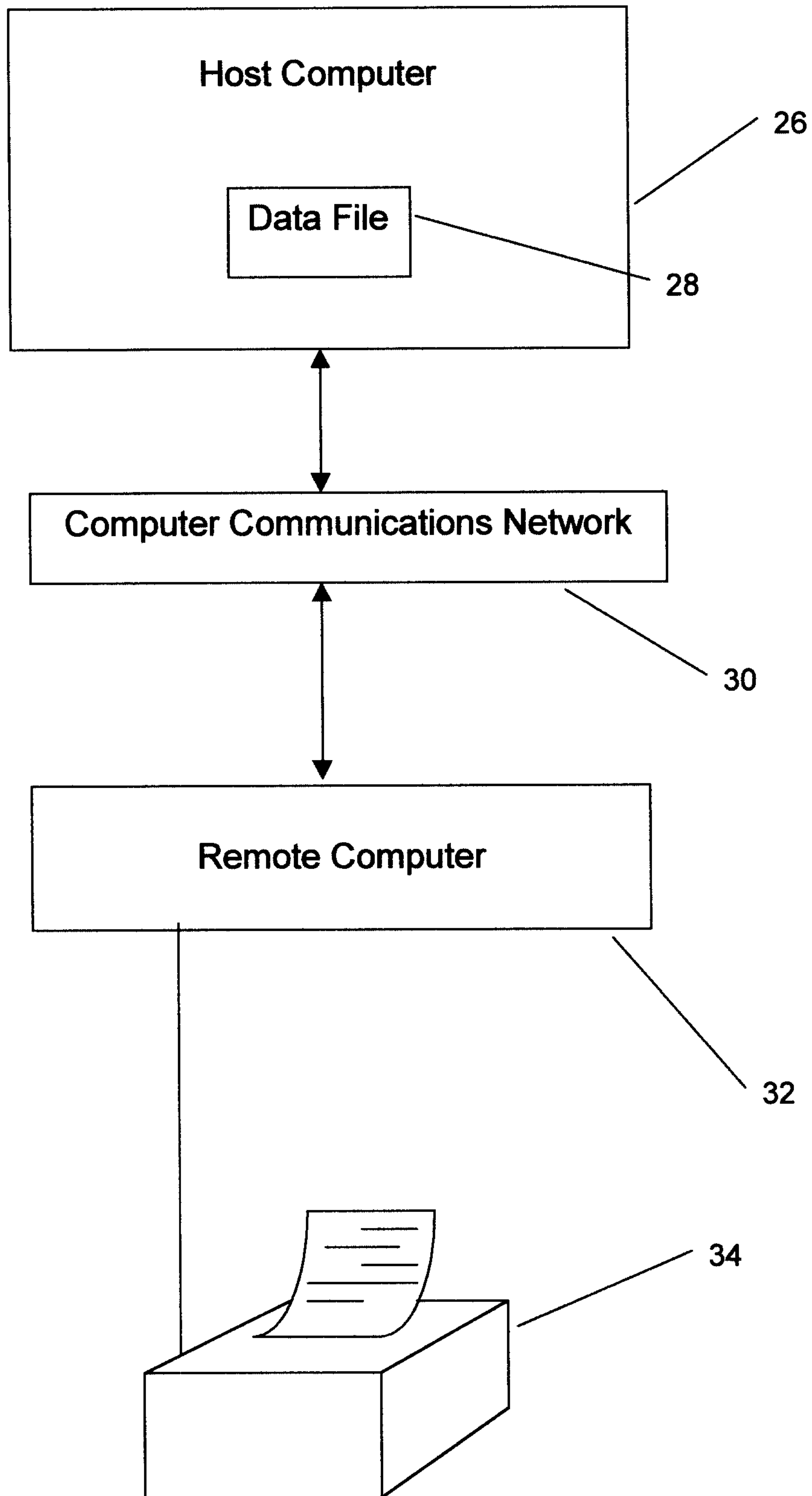


Figure 2

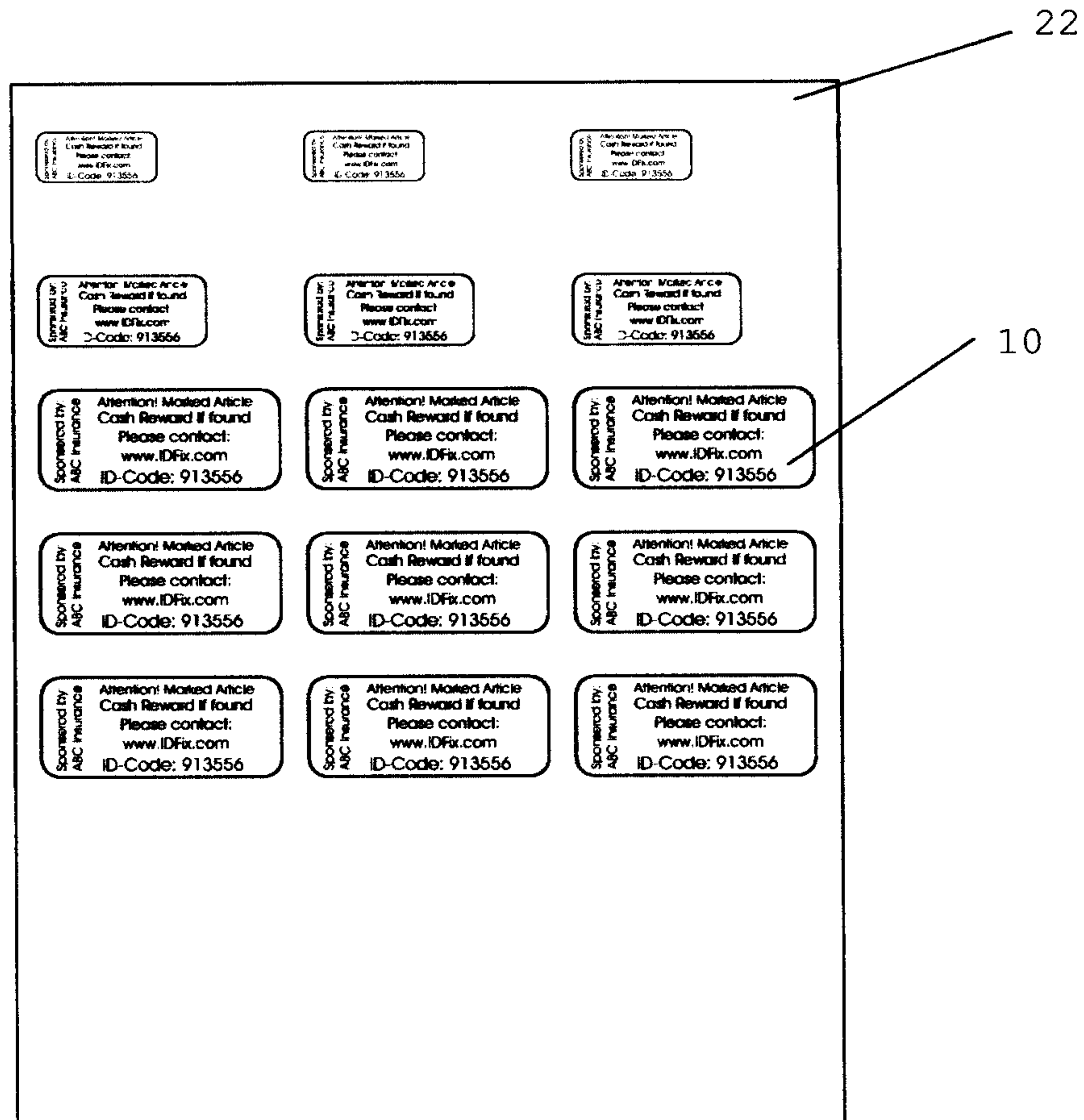


Figure 3

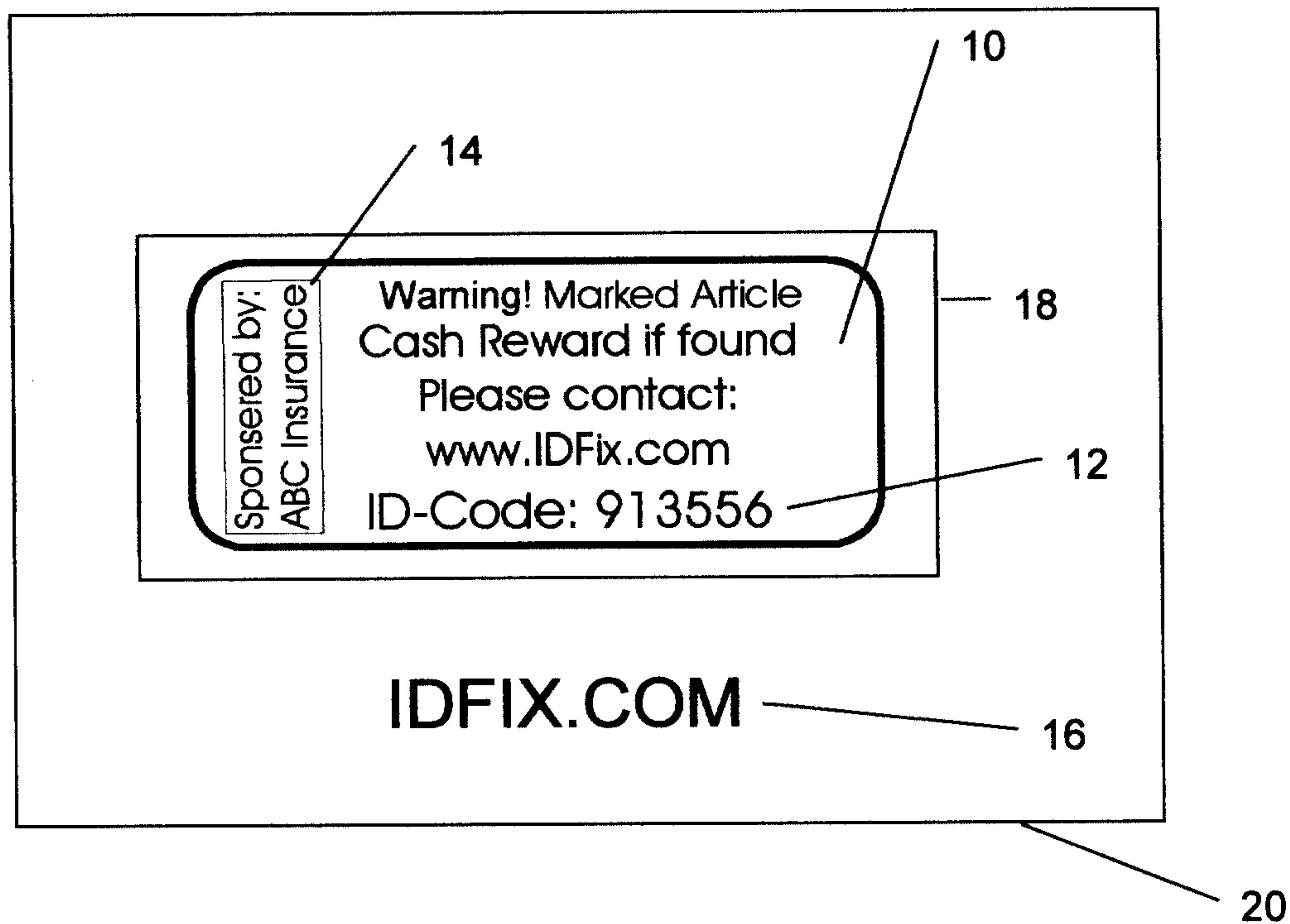


Figure 4

[illegible]

Figure 5

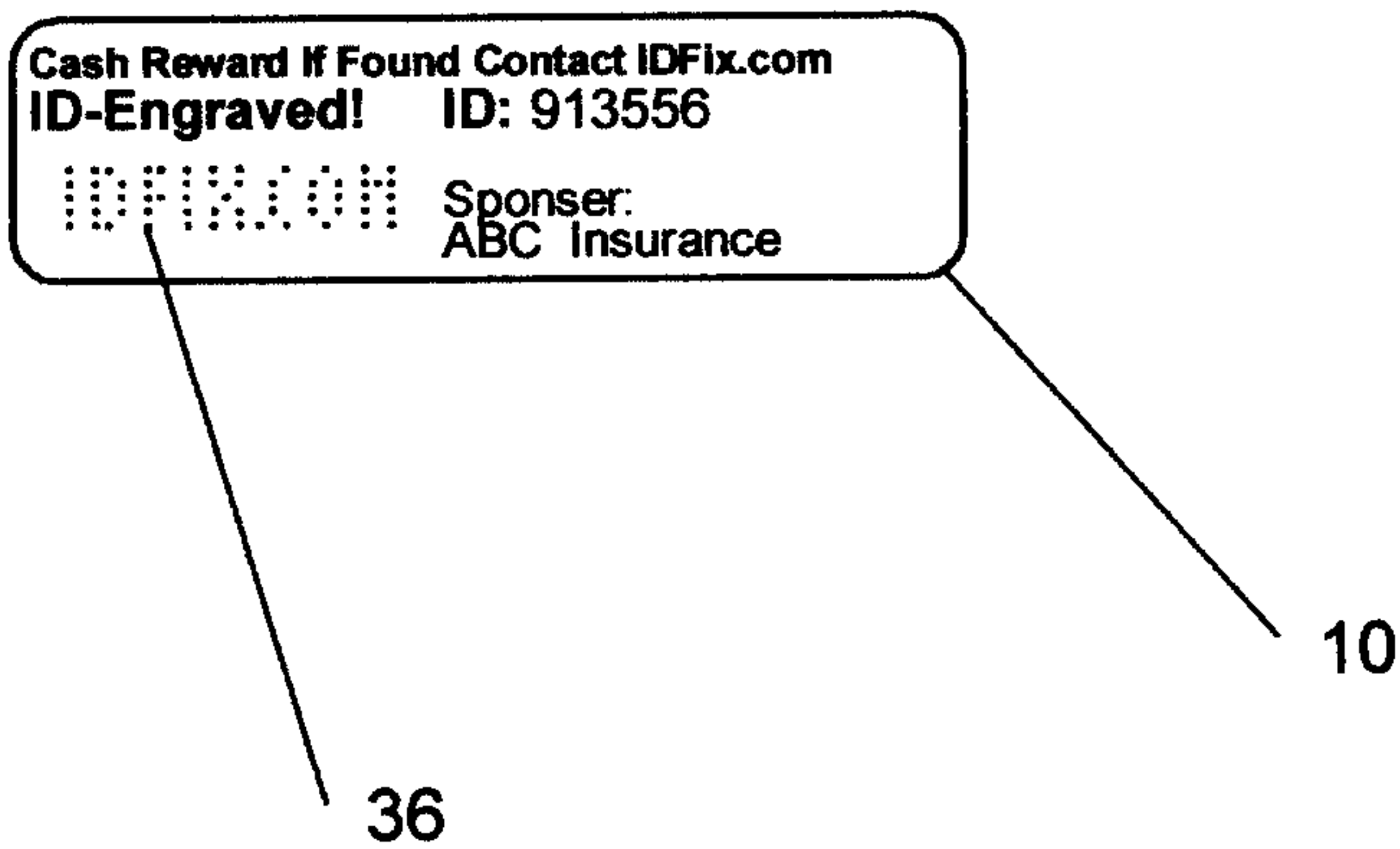


Figure 6

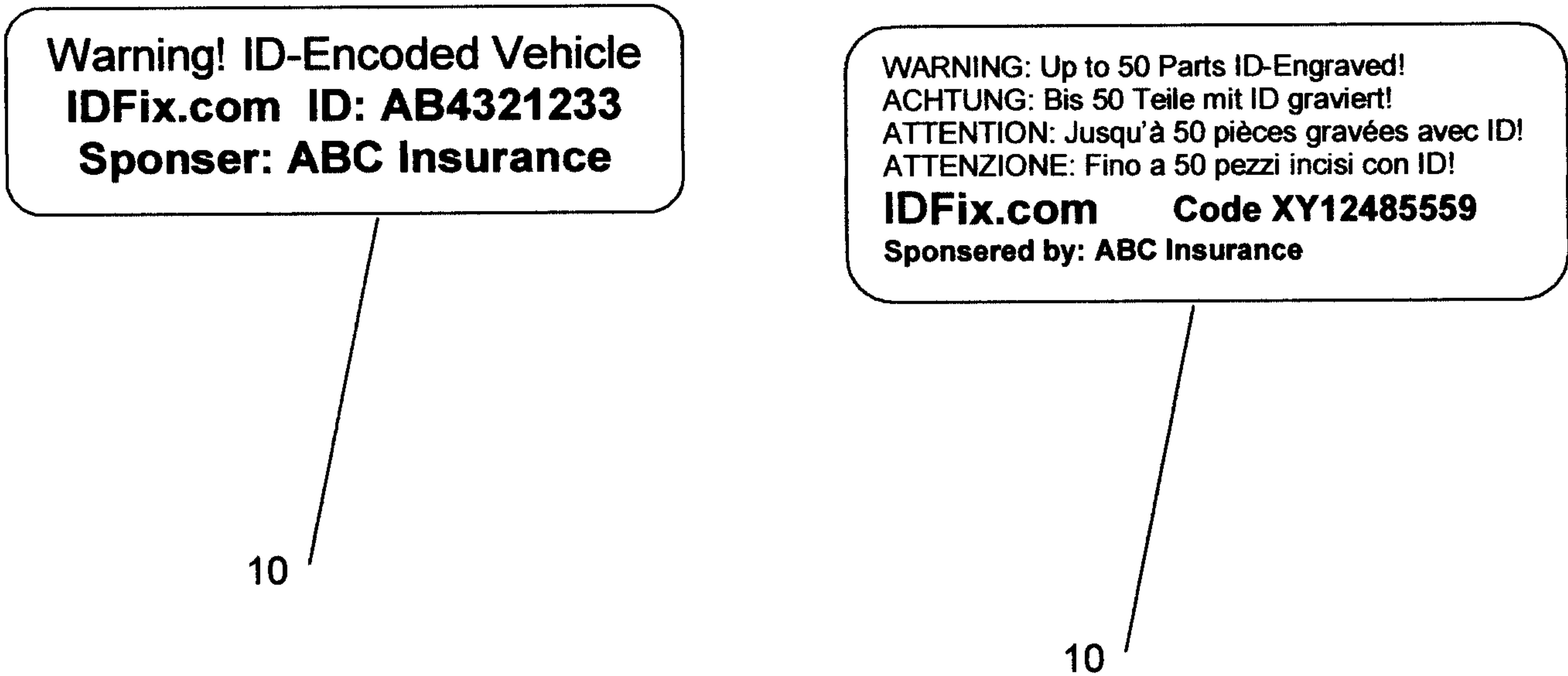
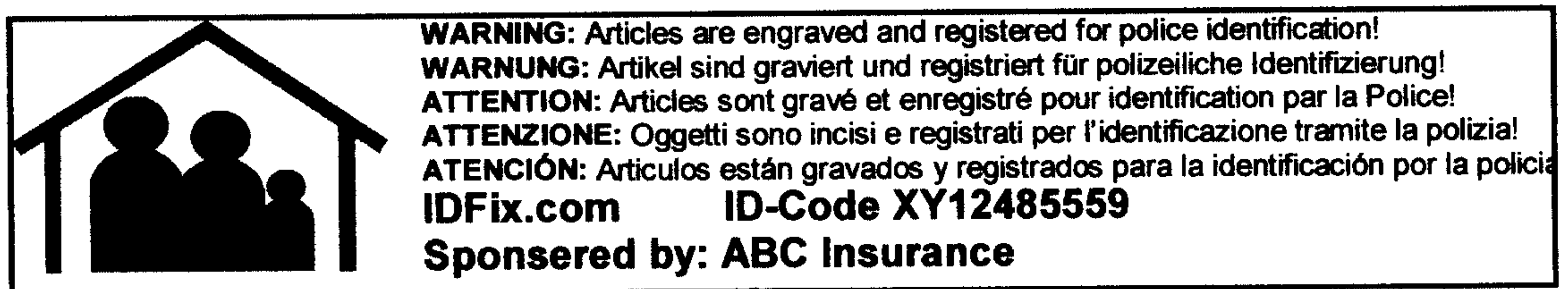


Figure 7



10

Figure 8

