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(54) SYSTEMS AND METHODS FOR MANIPULATION OF INEXACT SEMI-STRUCTURED DATA

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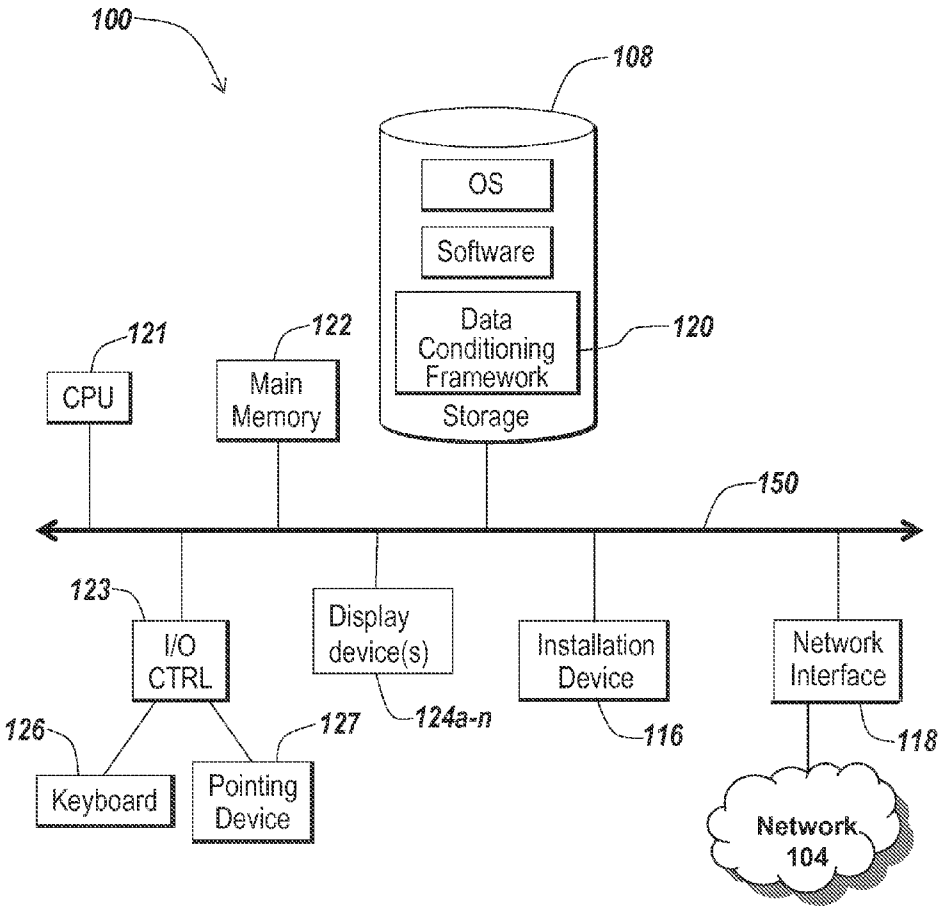
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

The data constraint framework solution of the present invention addresses data quality issues by standardizing, verifying, matching, consolidating and merging data records using powerful inexact matching logic and search reduction technologies. The data conditioning framework uses these technologies to more efficiently condition data to improve the quality of data and/or resolve quality data issues such as incomplete, inaccurate and duplicate data records. For example, the data conditioning framework is used to "cleanse" incorrect, incomplete and duplicate data from a data source, such as an information system. The data conditioning framework uses the following approximate searching and matching techniques to improve the efficiency of the approximate matching, reduce the search space for approximate matching, and improve the speed of executing approximate searches and matches: 1) inexact trimmed matching, 2) adaptive search ordering, 3) cascading search space reduction, 4) tiered and metric indexing, and 5) domain knowledge matching.



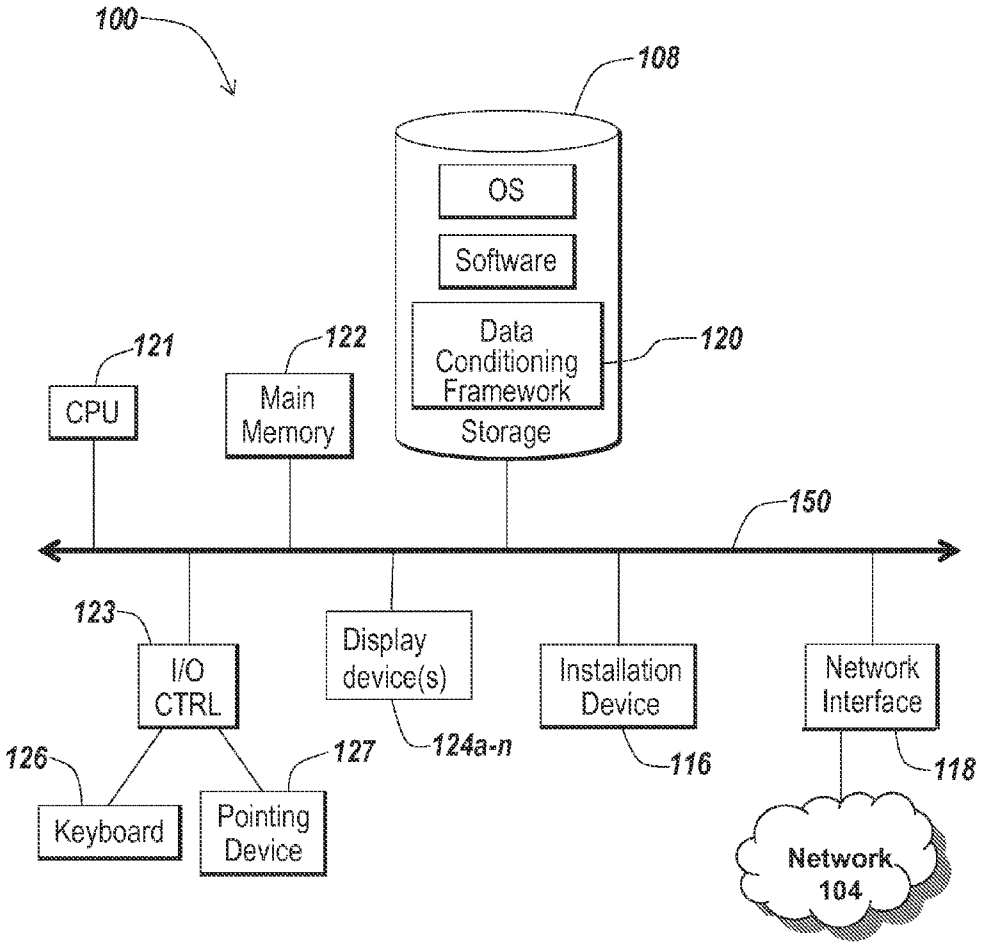

100
108
OS
Software
Data Conditioning Framework
120
Storage
121
CPU
122
Main Memory
150
123
I/O CTRL
Display device(s)
124a-n
Installation Device
116
Network Interface
118
126
Keyboard
127
Pointing Device
Network 104

Fig. 1A

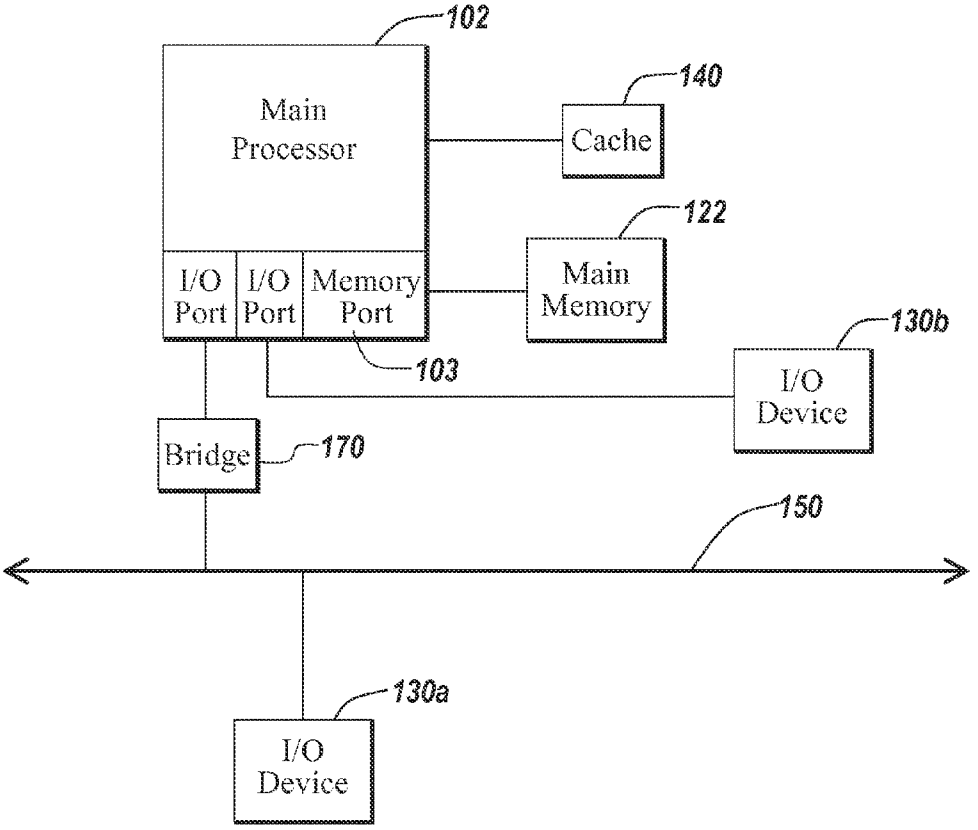

102
Main Processor
140
Cache
122
Main Memory
I/O Port
I/O Port
Memory Port
103
130b
I/O Device
Bridge
170
150
130a
I/O Device

Fig. 1B

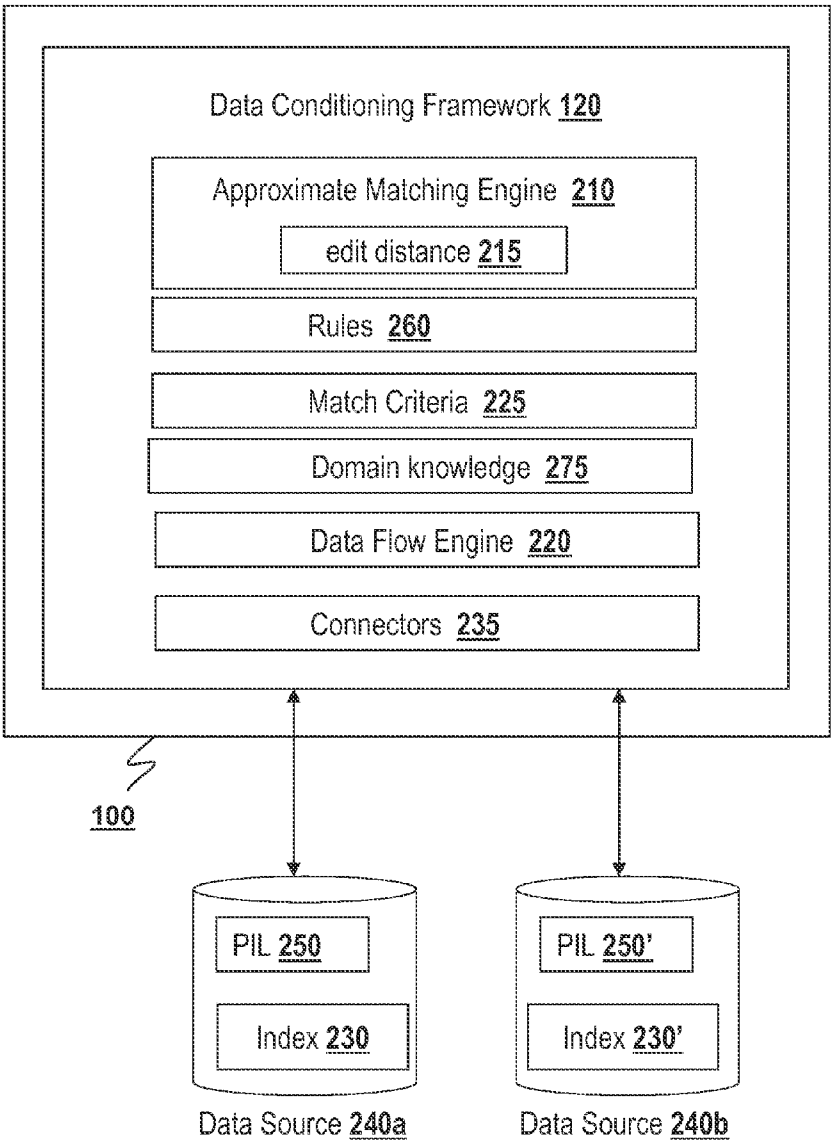

Data Conditioning Framework 120
Approximate Matching Engine 210
edit distance 215
Rules 260
Match Criteria 225
Domain knowledge 275
Data Flow Engine 220
Connectors 235
100
PIL 250
Index 230
Data Source 240a
PIL 250'
Index 230'
Data Source 240b

Fig. 2A

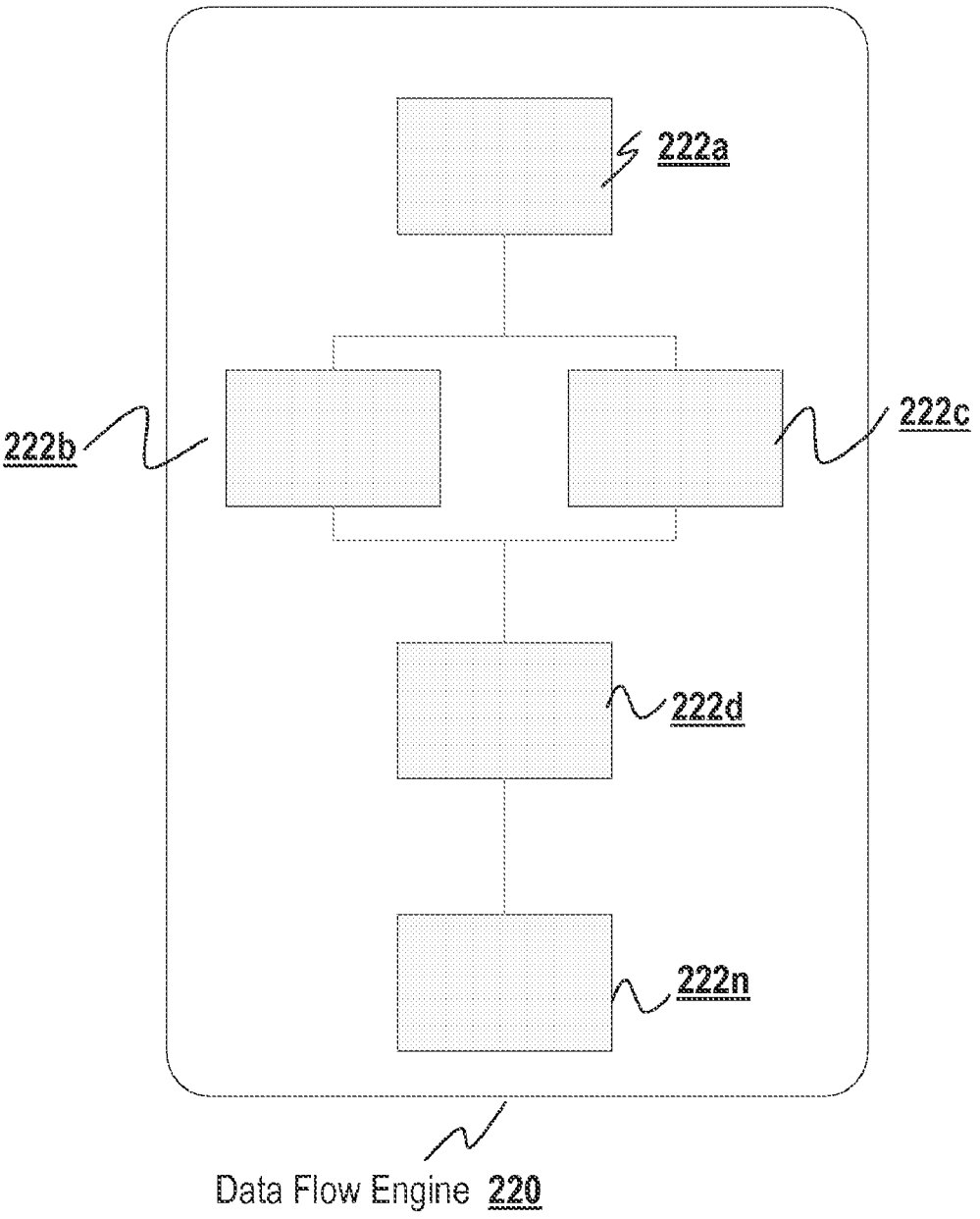


Fig. 2B

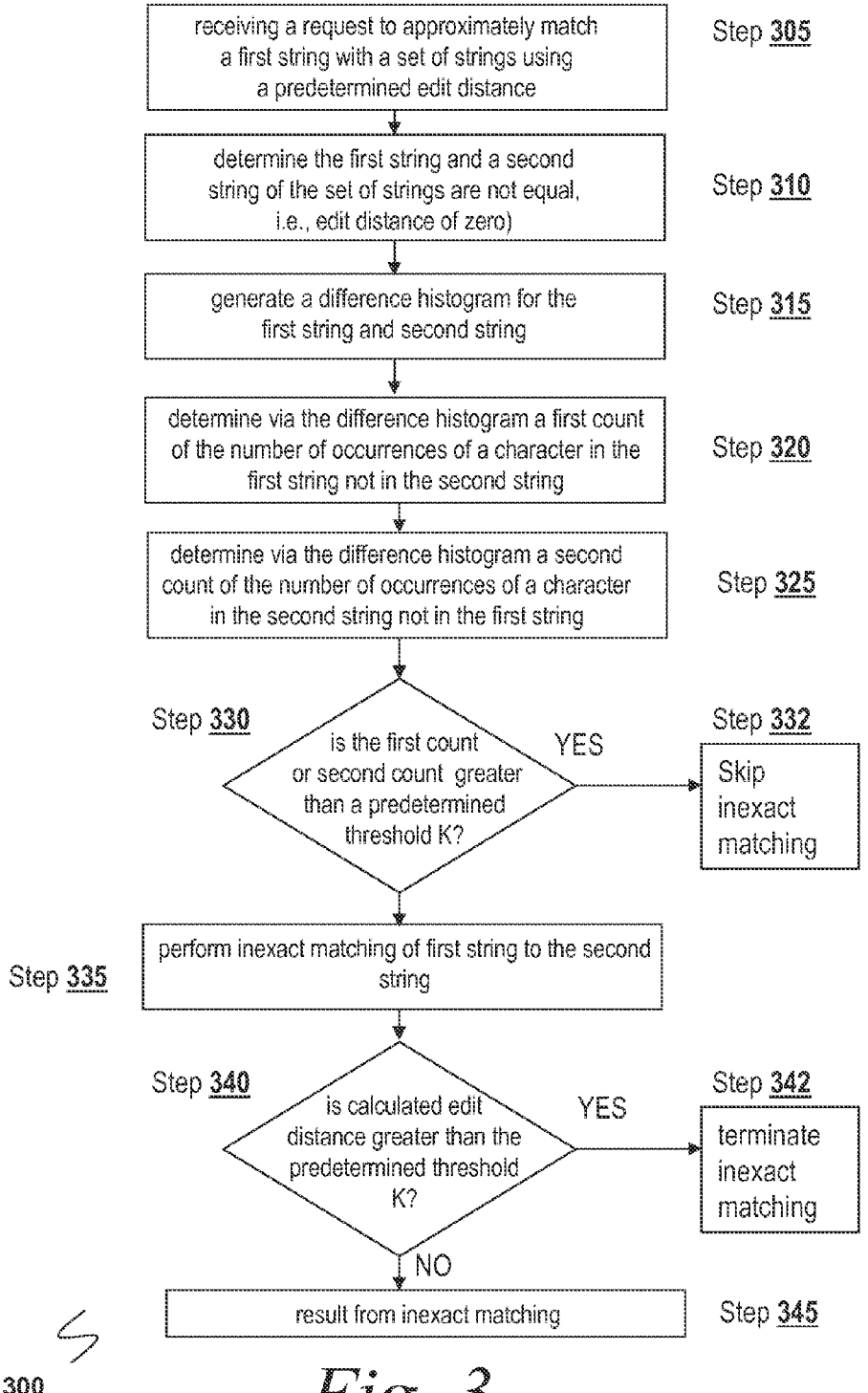
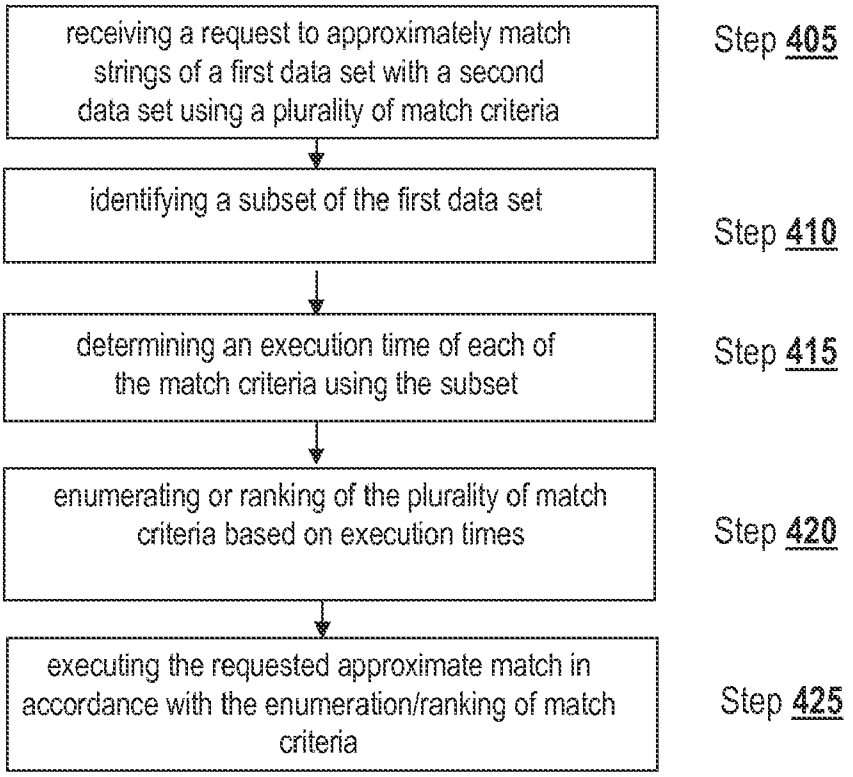

receiving a request to approximately match a first string with a set of strings using a predetermined edit distance
Step 305
determine the first string and a second string of the set of strings are not equal, i.e., edit distance of zero)
Step 310
generate a difference histogram for the first string and second string
Step 315
determine via the difference histogram a first count of the number of occurrences of a character in the first string not in the second string
Step 320
determine via the difference histogram a second count of the number of occurrences of a character in the second string not in the first string
Step 325
Step 330
is the first count or second count greater than a predetermined threshold K?
YES
Step 332
Skip inexact matching
perform inexact matching of first string to the second string
Step 335
Step 340
is calculated edit distance greater than the predetermined threshold K?
YES
Step 342
terminate inexact matching
NO
result from inexact matching
Step 345
300

Fig. 3


receiving a request to approximately match strings of a first data set with a second data set using a plurality of match criteria
Step 405
identifying a subset of the first data set
Step 410
determining an execution time of each of the match criteria using the subset
Step 415
enumerating or ranking of the plurality of match criteria based on execution times
Step 420
executing the requested approximate match in accordance with the enumeration/ranking of match criteria
Step 425

400

Fig. 4

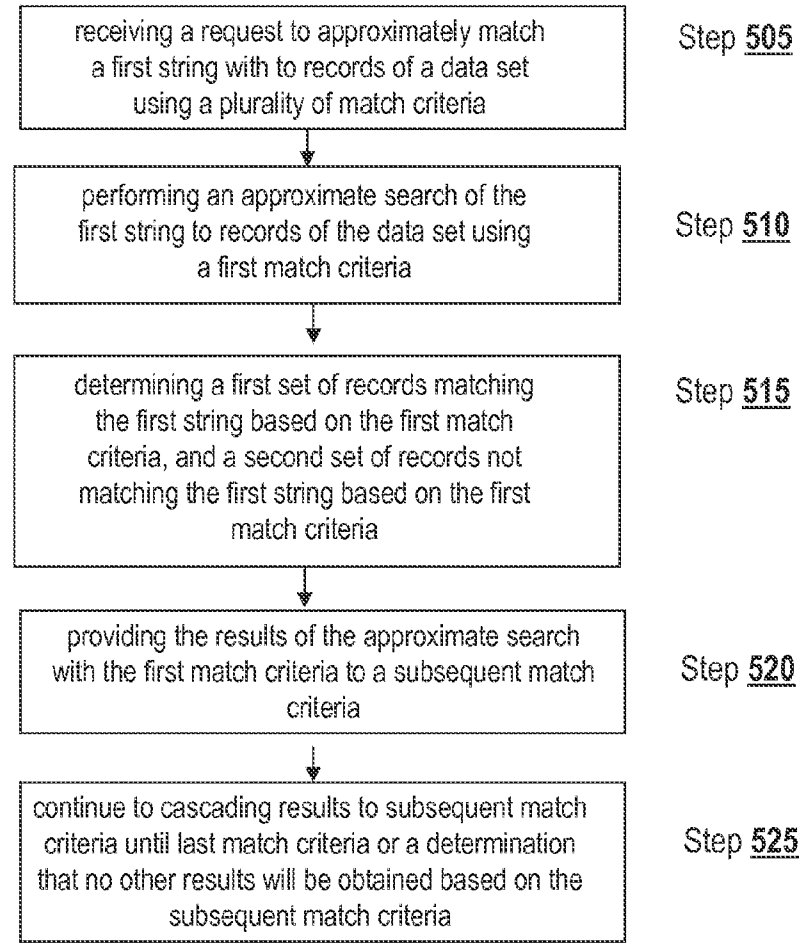

receiving a request to approximately match a first string with to records of a data set using a plurality of match criteria
Step 505
performing an approximate search of the first string to records of the data set using a first match criteria
Step 510
determining a first set of records matching the first string based on the first match criteria, and a second set of records not matching the first string based on the first match criteria
Step 515
providing the results of the approximate search with the first match criteria to a subsequent match criteria
Step 520
continue to cascading results to subsequent match criteria until last match criteria or a determination that no other results will be obtained based on the subsequent match criteria
Step 525
500

Fig. 5

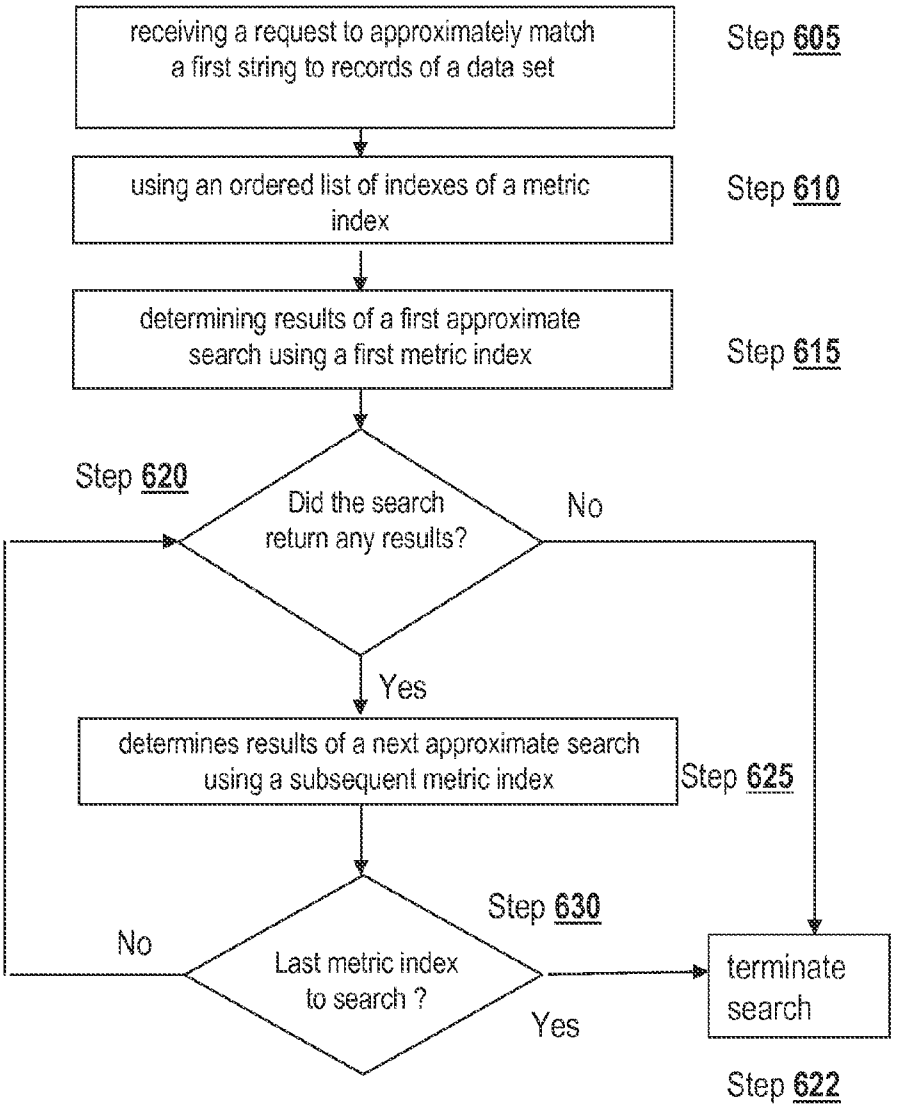

receiving a request to approximately match a first string to records of a data set
Step 605
using an ordered list of indexes of a metric index
Step 610
determining results of a first approximate search using a first metric index
Step 615
Step 620
Did the search return any results?
No
Yes
determines results of a next approximate search using a subsequent metric index
Step 625
Step 630
No
Last metric index to search ?
Yes
terminate search
Step 622
600

Fig. 6

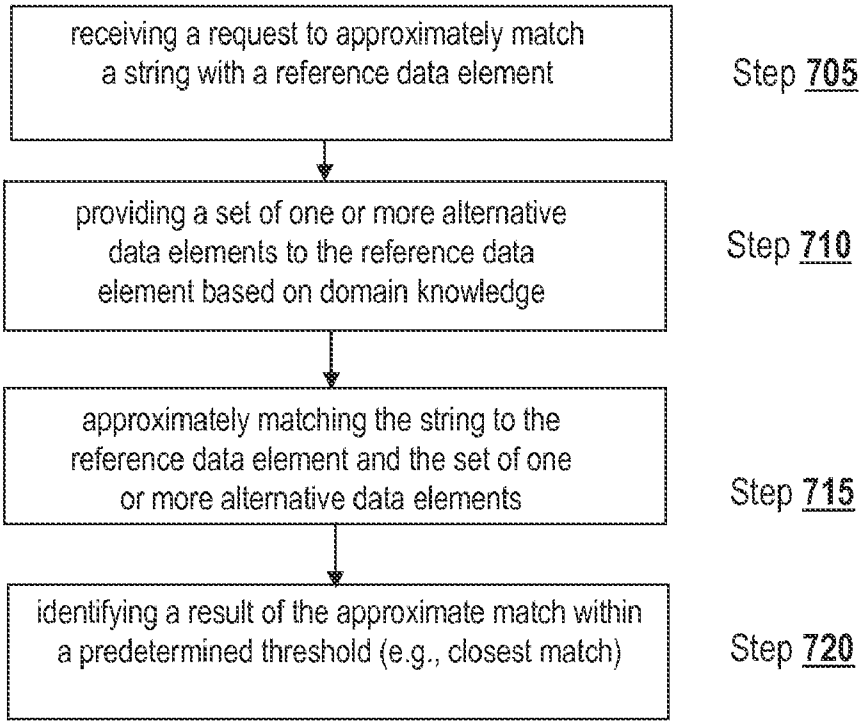

receiving a request to approximately match a string with a reference data element
Step 705
providing a set of one or more alternative data elements to the reference data element based on domain knowledge
Step 710
approximately matching the string to the reference data element and the set of one or more alternative data elements
Step 715
identifying a result of the approximate match within a predetermined threshold (e.g., closest match)
Step 720
700

Fig. 7

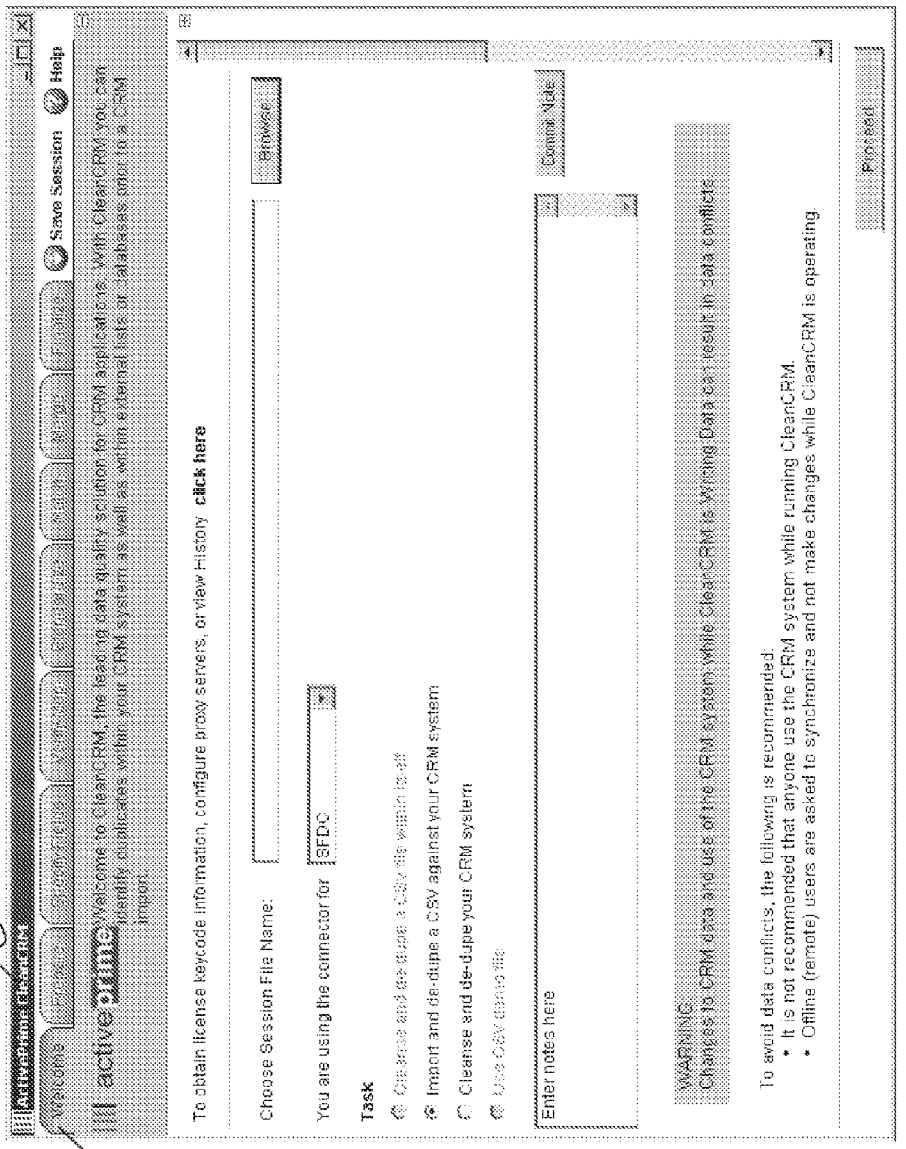

800
805
Welcome
Save Session
Help
To obtain license keycode information, configure proxy servers, or view History click here
Choose Session File Name:
Browse...
You are using the connector for SFDC
Task
Import and de-dupe a CSV against your CRM system
Cleanse and de-dupe your CRM system
Enter notes here
Commit Note
WARNING:
Changes to CRM data and use of the CRM system while CleanCRM is Wiring Data can result in data conflicts
To avoid data conflicts, the following is recommended:
It is not recommended that anyone use the CRM system while running CleanCRM.
Offline (remote) users are asked to synchronize and not make changes while CleanCRM is operating
Proceed

Fig. 8A

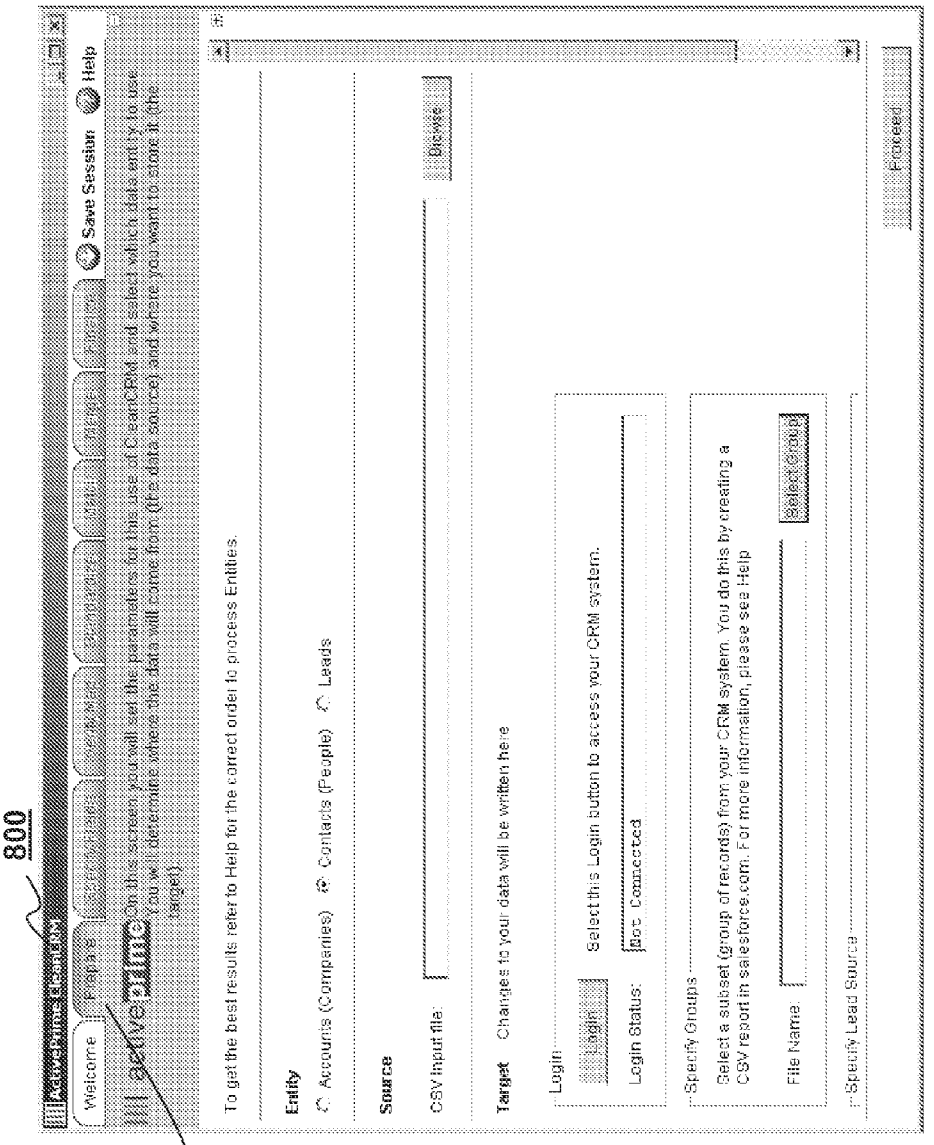

800
810
Welcome
Prepare
Save Session
Help
To get the best results refer to Help for the correct order to process Entities.
Entity
Accounts (Companies)
Contacts (People)
Leads
Source
CSV input file:
Browse...
Target
Changes to your data will be written here
Login
Login
Select this Login button to access your CRM system.
Login Status:
Not Connected
Specify Groups
Select a subset (group of records) from your CRM system. You do this by creating a CSV report in salesforce.com. For more information, please see Help
File Name:
Select Group
Specify Lead Source
Proceed

Fig. 8B

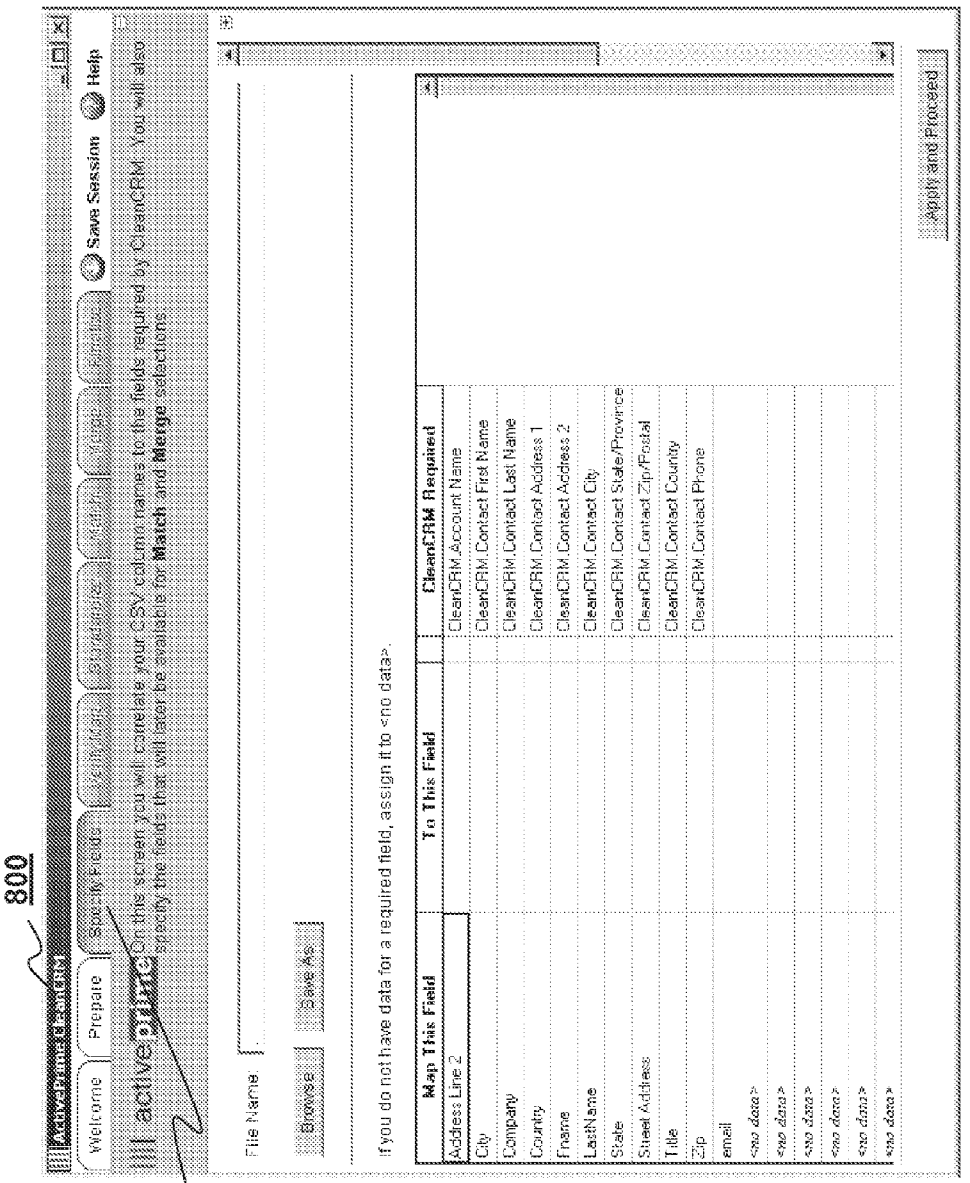

800
815
Welcome
Prepare
Specify Fields
Verify Data
Standardize
Match
Merge
Finalize
Save Session
Help
activeprime
On this screen, you will correlate your CSV column names to the fields required by CleanCRM. You will also specify the fields that will later be available for Match and Merge selections.
File Name
Browse...
Save As...
If you do not have data for a required field, assign it to <no data>.
Map This Field
To This Field
CleanCRM Required
Address Line 2
City
Company
Country
Fname
LastName
State
Street Address
Title
Zip
email
<no data>
<no data>
<no data>
<no data>
<no data>
<no data>
CleanCRM.Account Name
CleanCRM.Contact First Name
CleanCRM.Contact Last Name
CleanCRM.Contact Address 1
CleanCRM.Contact Address 2
CleanCRM.Contact City
CleanCRM.Contact State/Province
CleanCRM.Contact Zip/Postal
CleanCRM.Contact Country
CleanCRM.Contact Phone
Apply and Proceed

Fig. 8C

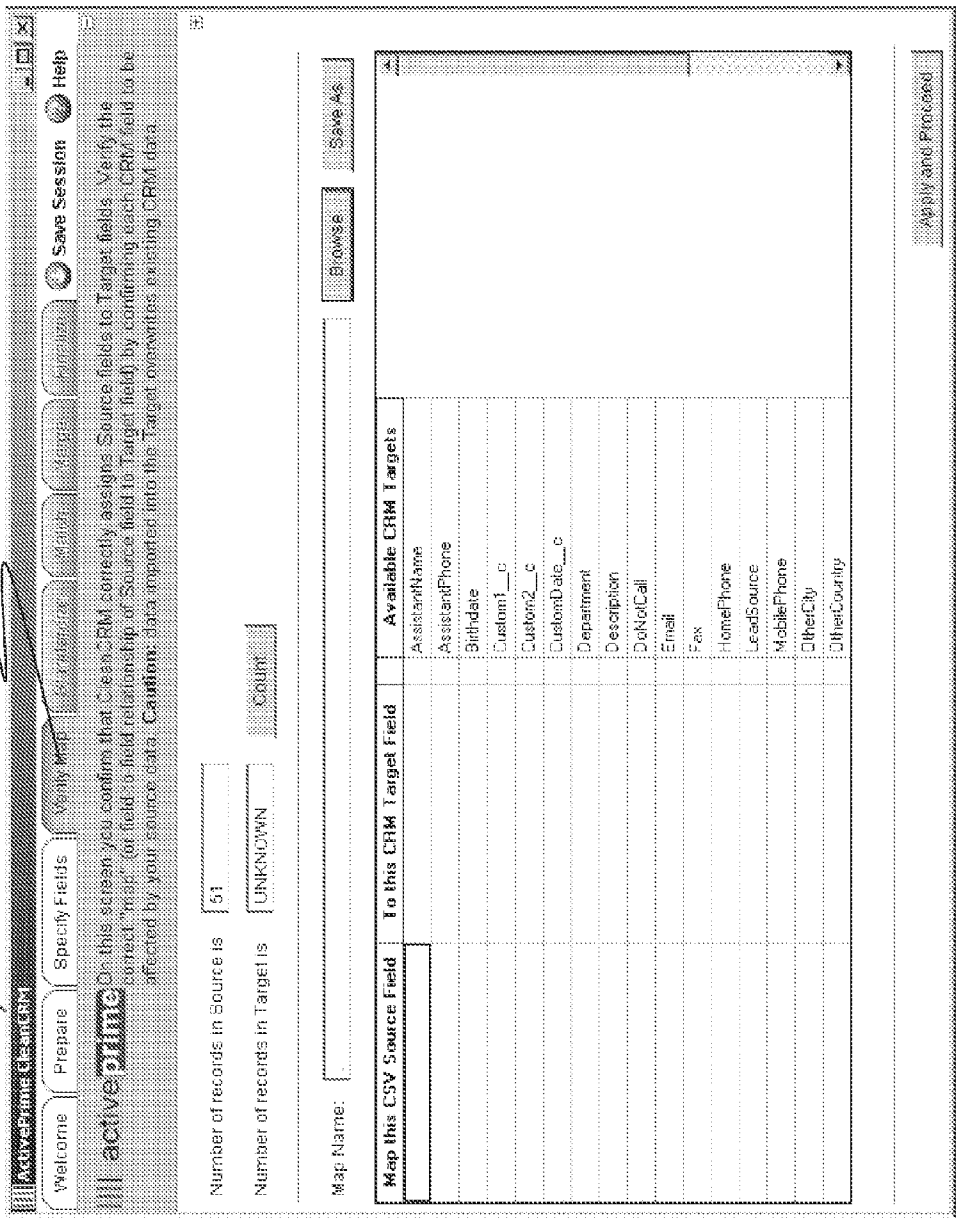

800
820
Welcome
Prepare
Specify Fields
Verify Map
Preferences
Options
Progress
Finished
Save Session
Help
activeWizard
On this screen you confirm that CleanCRM correctly assigns Source fields to Target fields. Verify the correct "map" (or field to field relationship) of Source field to Target field by confirming each CRM field to be affected by your source data. Caution: data imported into the Target overwrites existing CRM data.
Number of records in Source is
51
Number of records in Target is
UNKNOWN
Count
Map Name:
Browse
Save As
Map this CSV Source Field
To this CRM Target Field
Available CRM Targets
AssistantName
AssistantPhone
Birthdate
Custom1__c
Custom2__c
CustomDate__c
Department
Description
DoNotCall
Email
Fax
HomePhone
LeadSource
MobilePhone
OtherCity
OtherCountry
Apply and Proceed

Fig. 8D

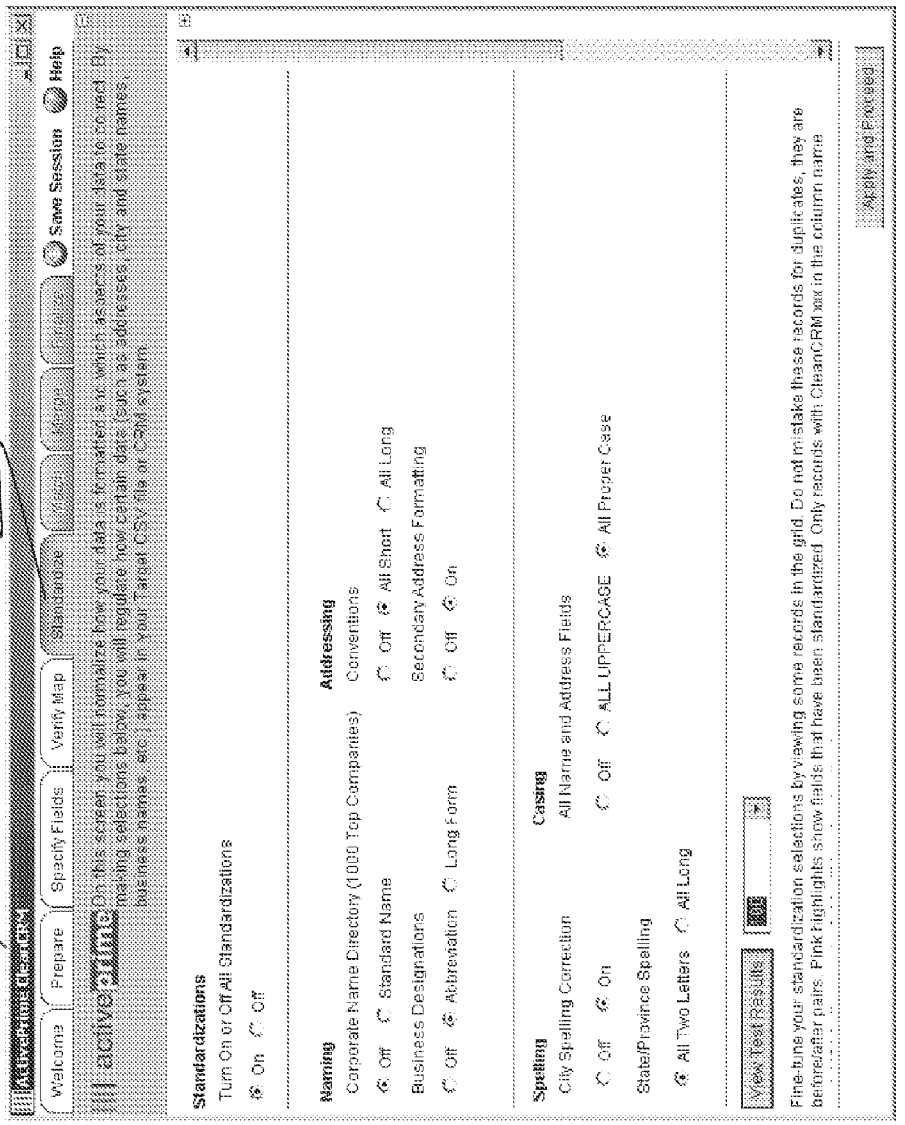

800
825
Welcome
Prepare
Specify Fields
Verify Map
Standardize
Match
Merge
Finalize
Save Session
Help
activeprime
Standardizations
Turn On or Off All Standardizations
On
Off
Naming
Corporate Name Directory (1000 Top Companies)
Off
Standard Name
Business Designations
Off
Abbreviation
Long Form
Addressing
Conventions
Off
All Short
All Long
Secondary Address Formatting
Off
On
Spelling
City Spelling Correction
Off
On
State/Province Spelling
All Two Letters
All Long
Casing
All Name and Address Fields
Off
ALL UPPERCASE
All Proper Case
View Test Results
Accept and Proceed

Fig. 8E

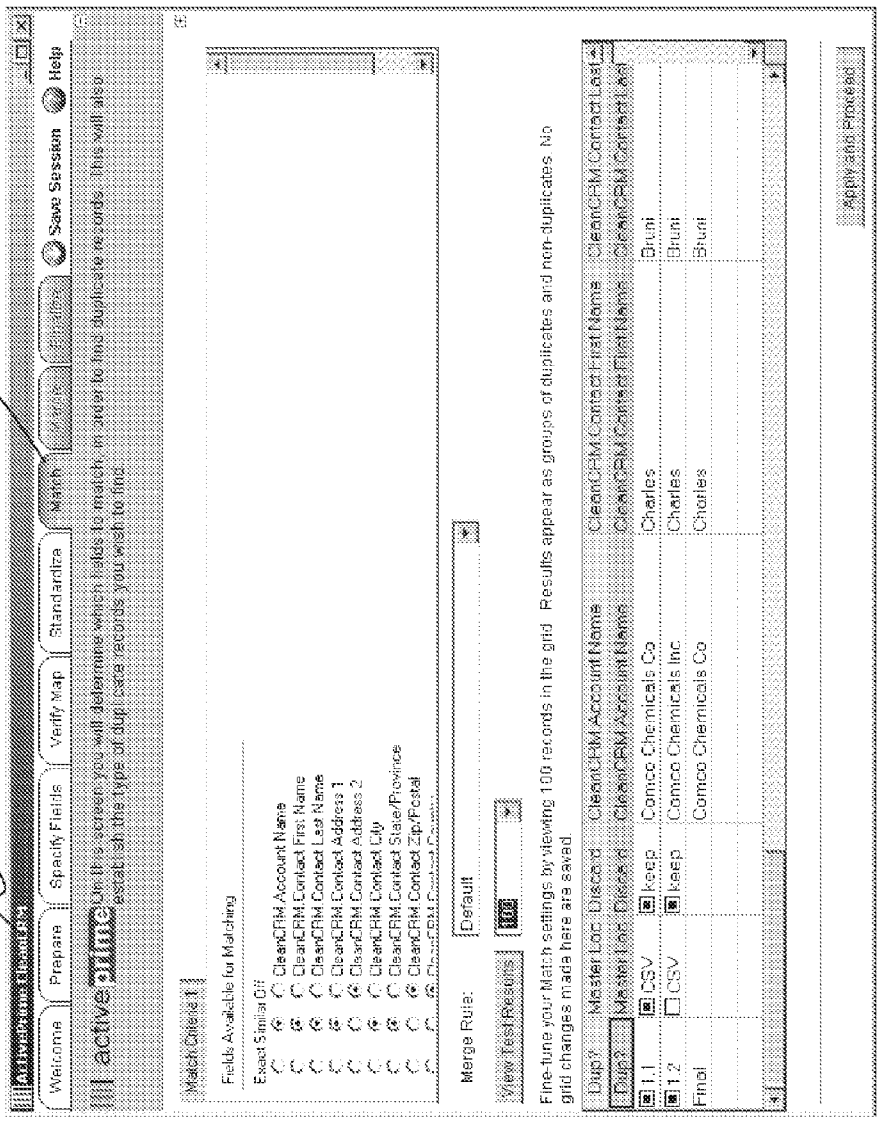

800
830
Welcome
Prepare
Specify Fields
Verify Map
Standardize
Match
Enrich
Save Session
Help
activeame
Match Criteria
Fields Available for Matching
Exact Similar Dif
CleanCRM Account Name
CleanCRM Contact First Name
CleanCRM Contact Last Name
CleanCRM Contact Address 1
CleanCRM Contact Address 2
CleanCRM Contact City
CleanCRM Contact State/Province
CleanCRM Contact Zip/Postal
Merge Rule:
Default
View Test Results
Fine-tune your Match settings by viewing 100 records in the grid. Results appear as groups of duplicates and non-duplicates. No grid changes made here are saved.
Dup?
Master Loc
Discard
CleanCRM Account Name
CleanCRM Contact First Name
CleanCRM Contact Last
Dup?
Master for Discard
CleanCRM Account Name
CleanCRM Contact First Name
CleanCRM Contact Last
1.1
CSV
Keep
Comco Chemicals Co
Charles
Bruni
1.2
CSV
keep
Comco Chemicals Inc
Charles
Bruni
Final
Comco Chemicals Co
Charles
Bruni
Apply and Proceed

Fig. 8F

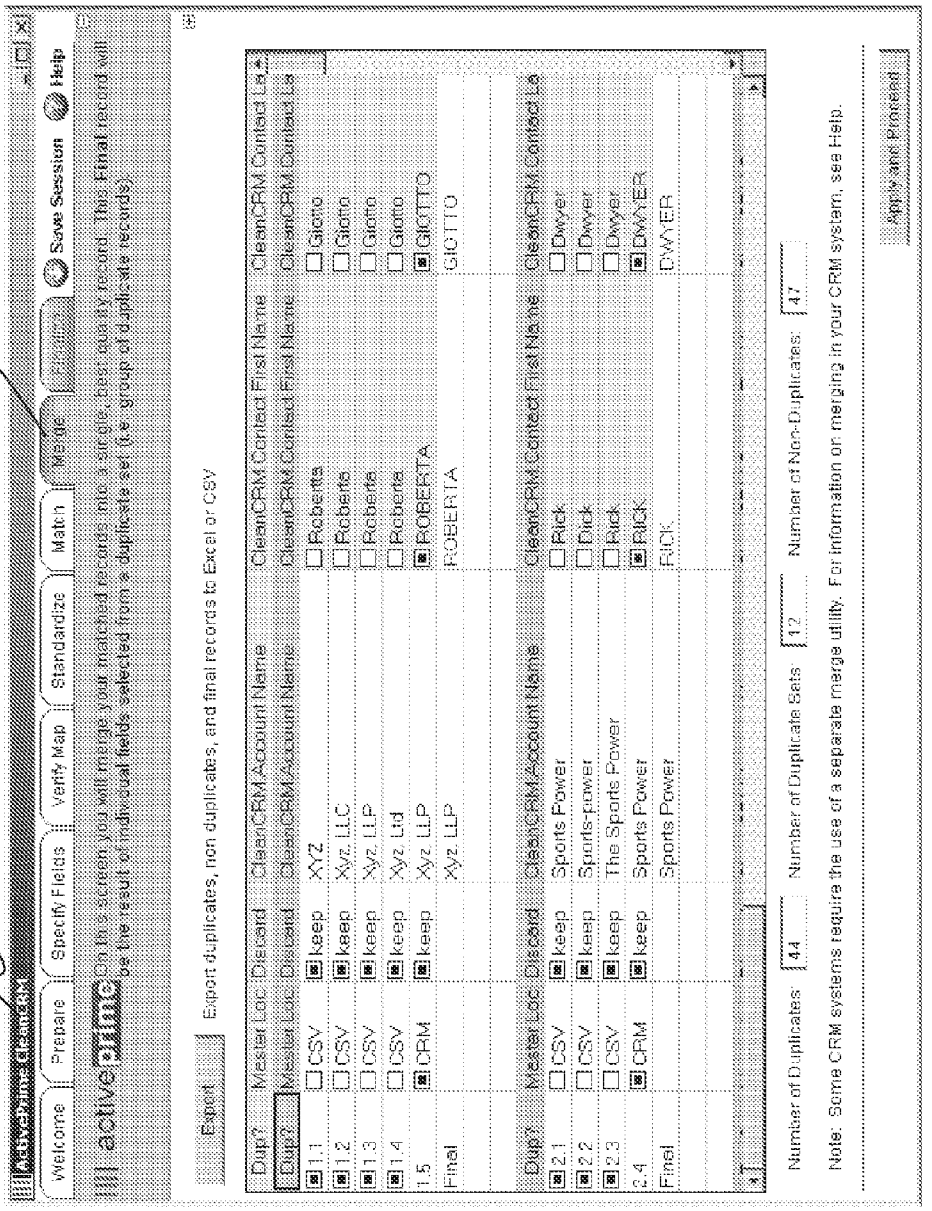

800
835
ActiveMerge Framework
Welcome
Prepare
Specify Fields
Verify Map
Standardize
Match
Merge
Finish
Save Session
Help
activemerge
On this screen you will merge your matched records into a single, best quality record. The Final record will be the result of individual fields selected from a duplicate set (i.e. group of duplicate records).
Export
Export duplicates, non duplicates, and final records to Excel or CSV
Dup? Master Loc Discard CleanCRM Account Name CleanCRM Contact First Name CleanCRM Contact La
Dup? Master Loc Discard CleanCRM Account Name CleanCRM Contact First Name CleanCRM Contact La
1.1 CSV keep XYZ Roberta Giotto
1.2 CSV keep Xyz, LLC Roberta Giotto
1.3 CSV keep Xyz, LLP Roberta Giotto
1.4 CSV keep Xyz Ltd Roberta Giotto
1.5 CRM keep Xyz, LLP ROBERTA GIOTTO
Final Xyz, LLP ROBERTA GIOTTO
Dup? Master Loc Discard CleanCRM Account Name CleanCRM Contact First Name CleanCRM Contact La
2.1 CSV keep Sports Power Rick Dwyer
2.2 CSV keep Sports-power Rick Dwyer
2.3 CSV keep The Sports Power Rick Dwyer
2.4 CRM keep Sports Power RICK DWYER
Final Sports Power Rick DWYER
Number of Duplicates 44 Number of Duplicate Sets 12 Number of Non-Duplicates 47
Note: Some CRM systems require the use of a separate merge utility. For information on merging in your CRM system, see Help.
Apply and Proceed

Fig. 8G

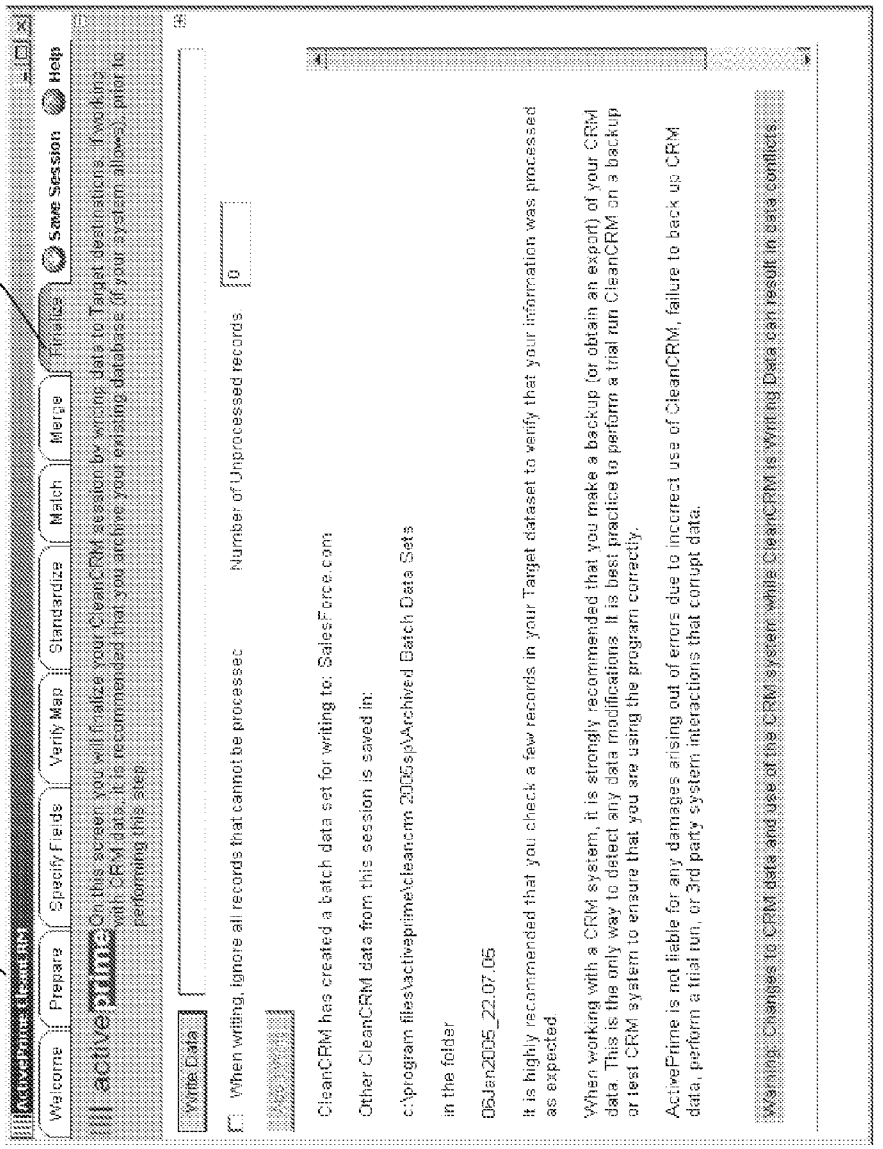

800
840
ActivePrime Integration
Welcome
Prepare
Specify Fields
Verify Map
Standardize
Match
Merge
Finalize
Save Session
Help
activePrime
On this screen you will finalize your CleanCRM session by writing data to Target destinations. Working with CRM data, it is recommended that you archive your existing database (if your system allows) prior to performing this step.
Write Data
When writing, ignore all records that cannot be processed
Number of Unprocessed records
0
CleanCRM has created a batch data set for writing to: SalesForce.com
Other CleanCRM data from this session is saved in:
c:\program files\activeprime\cleancrm 2005sp\Archived Batch Data Sets
in the folder
06Jan2005_22.07.05
It is highly recommended that you check a few records in your Target dataset to verify that your information was processed as expected
When working with a CRM system, it is strongly recommended that you make a backup (or obtain an export) of your CRM data. This is the only way to detect any data modifications. It is best practice to perform a trial run CleanCRM on a backup or test CRM system to ensure that you are using the program correctly.
ActivePrime is not liable for any damages arising out of errors due to incorrect use of CleanCRM, failure to back up CRM data, perform a trial run, or 3rd party system interactions that corrupt data.
Warning: Changes to CRM data and use of the CRM system while CleanCRM is writing Data can result in data conflicts.

Fig. 8H

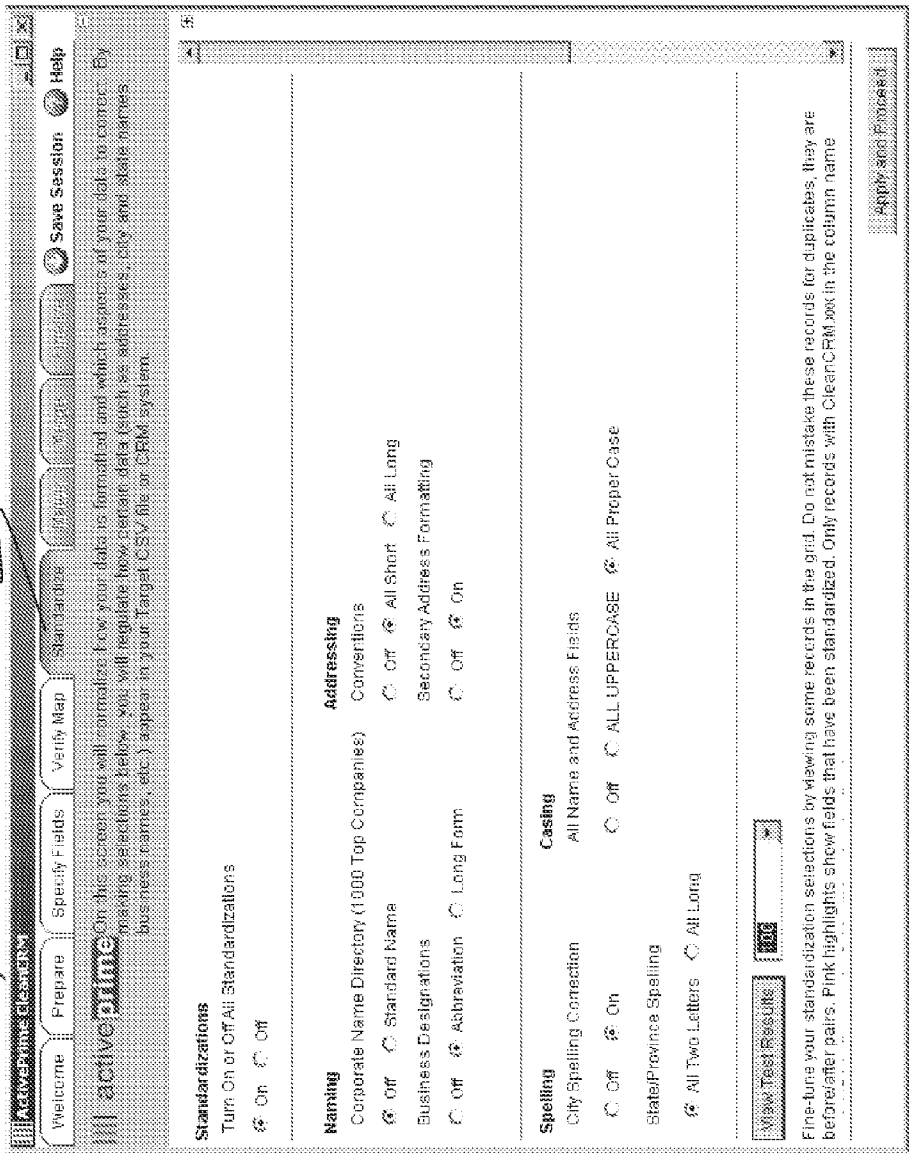

800
825
Welcome
Prepare
Specify Fields
Verify Map
Standardize
Save Session
Help
Standardizations
Turn On or Off All Standardizations
On
Off
Naming
Corporate Name Directory (1000 Top Companies)
Off
Standard Name
Business Designations
Off
Abbreviation
Long Form
Addressing
Conventions
Off
All Short
All Long
Secondary Address Formatting
Off
On
Spelling
City Spelling Correction
Off
On
State/Province Spelling
All Two Letters
All Long
Casing
All Name and Address Fields
Off
ALL UPPERCASE
All Proper Case
View Test Results
Fine-tune your standardization selections by viewing some records in the grid. Do not mistake these records for duplicates, they are before/after pairs. Pink highlights show fields that have been standardized. Only records with CleanCRM.xxx in the column name
Apply and Proceed

Fig. 9A

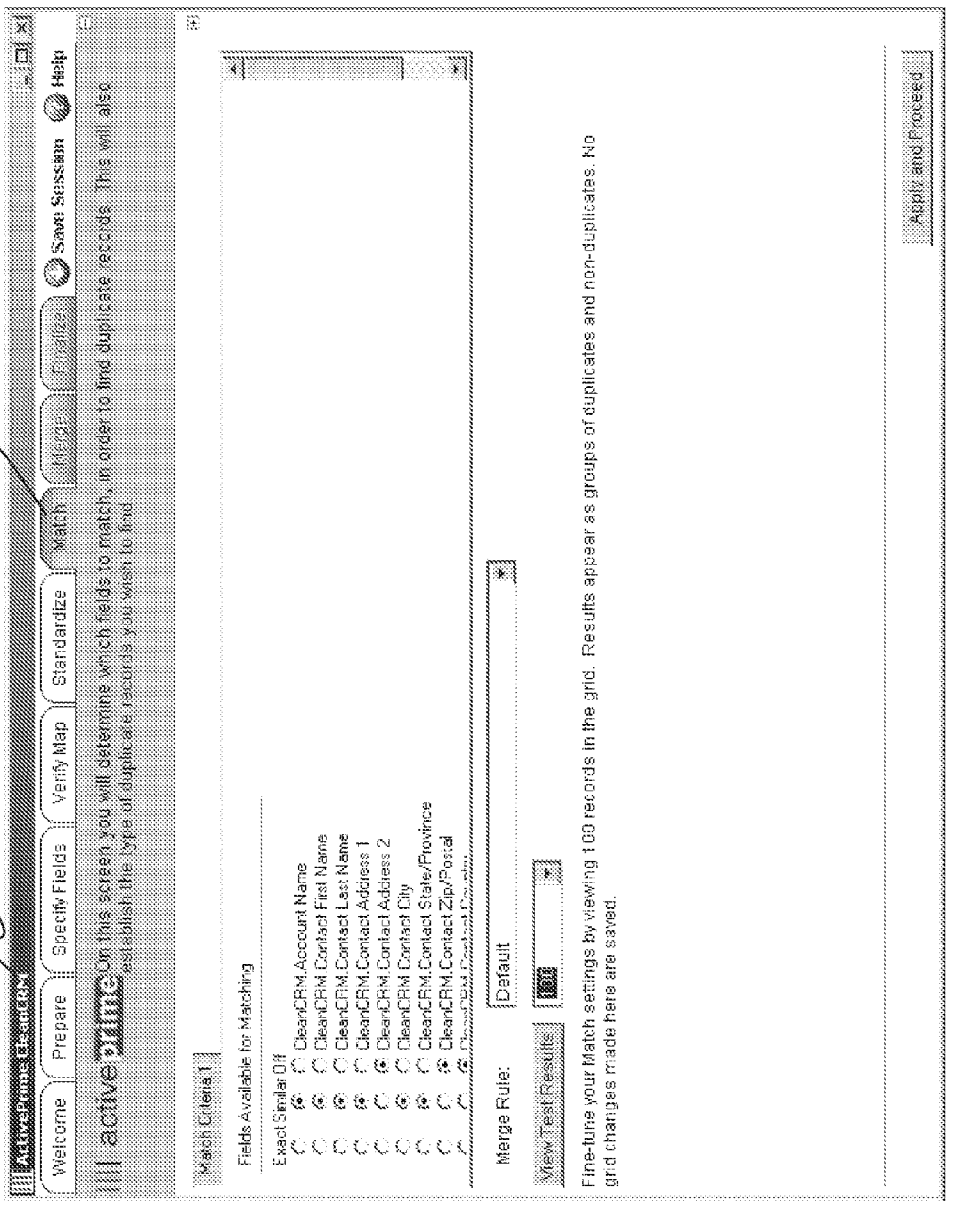

800
830
Welcome
Prepare
Specify Fields
Verify Map
Standardize
Match
Merge
Finalize
Save Session
Help
activeprime
Match Criteria 1
Fields Available for Matching
Exact
Similar
Off
CleanCRM.Account Name
CleanCRM.Contact First Name
CleanCRM.Contact Last Name
CleanCRM.Contact Address 1
CleanCRM.Contact Address 2
CleanCRM.Contact City
CleanCRM.Contact State/Province
CleanCRM.Contact Zip/Postal
Merge Rule:
Default
View Test Results
Apply and Proceed

Fig. 9B

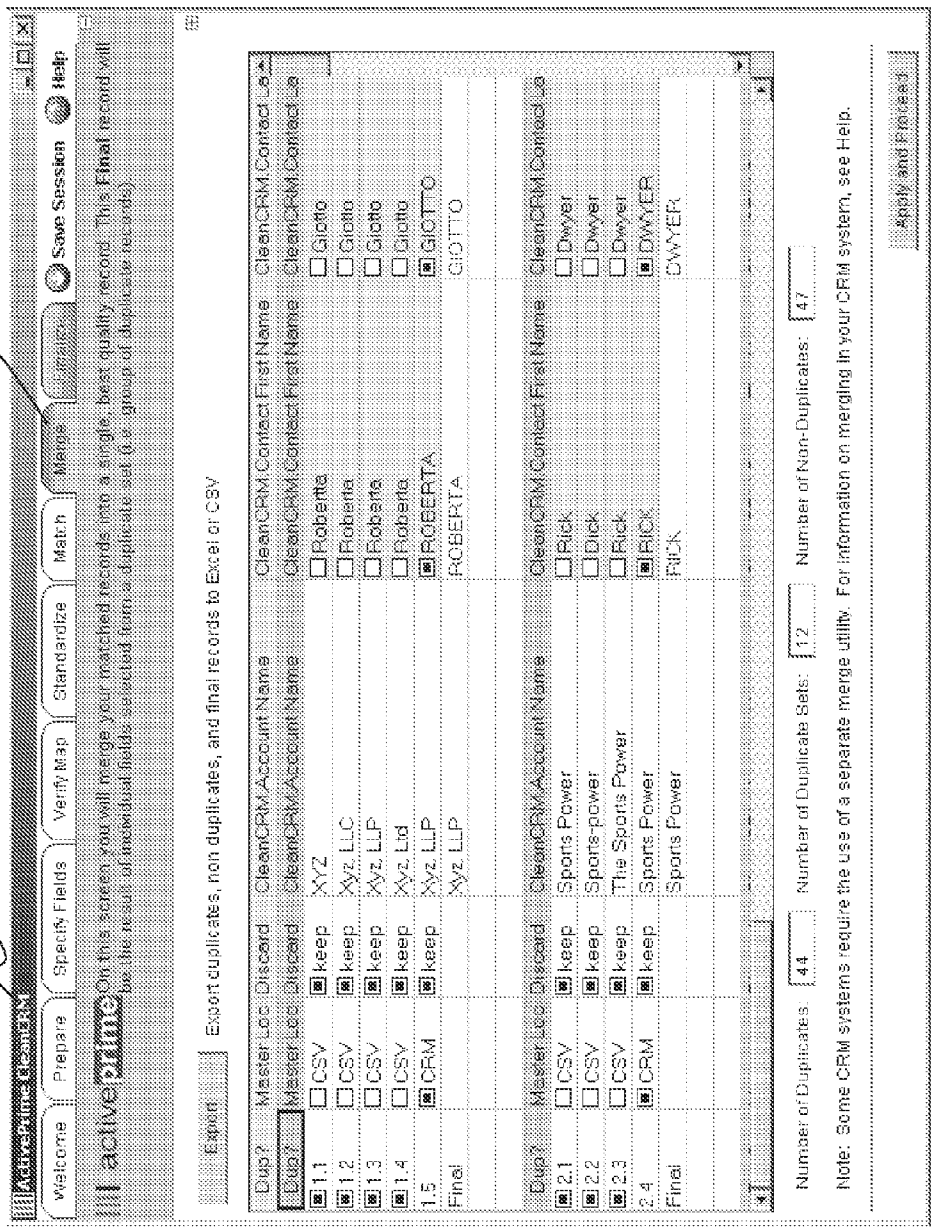

800
835
Welcome
Prepare
Specify Fields
Verify Map
Standardize
Match
Merge
Export
Save Session
Help
activeprime
Export duplicates, non duplicates, and final records to Excel or CSV
Dup?
Master Loc
Discard
CleanCRM Account Name
CleanCRM Contact First Name
CleanCRM Contact La
Number of Duplicates
Number of Duplicate Sets:
Number of Non-Duplicates:
Apply and Proceed

Fig. 9C

SYSTEMS AND METHODS FOR MANIPULATION OF INEXACT SEMI-STRUCTURED DATA

RELATED APPLICATION

[0001] This application claims priority to and is a continuation of U.S. Non-provisional application Ser. No. 11/908,885 entitled "Systems and Methods for Manipulation of Inexact Semi-Structured Data" and filed on Mar. 17, 2006 which is incorporated herein by reference in its entirety for all purposes.

TECHNICAL FIELD

[0002] The present invention generally relates to searching and matching inexact data. More particularly, the present invention relates to techniques for more efficiently performing approximately searching and matching of data records.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

[0003] Companies store and manage data in a wide variety of data sources, such as information systems and databases. For example, a company may store and manage customer related data in a customer relationship management (CRM) system used by multiple employees, such as sales representatives. Many data quality issues arise in such information systems and databases from human data entry errors or lack of diligence in entering or managing the data. In one case, a sales representative may enter incomplete information regarding contact information for a customer. For example, the sales representative may not include the zip code in the customer's address. In another case, another sales representative may create duplicate data by creating a second record for the same customer entered by the first sales representative. For example, the sales representative may enter a nickname or different name for the company in the CRM system so that the company appears to be different than the customer record entered by another sales representative. In other cases, a sales representative may incorrectly spell a company name, a person's name or other portions of the contact information. In yet another case, a sales representative may enter the wrong address or wrong telephone number for a customer. As a result of the various ways people enter data, data sources may have a multitude of inaccurate, incomplete or duplicate data to manage and correct.

[0004] Data quality issues, such as inaccurate, incomplete, and duplicate data can be costly in time, expense, and resources. For example, a sales representative may spend hours searching through duplicate records to find the current notes and account information of a customer. As such, data quality may result in loss productivity of employees. In another example, marketing may not be able to accurately target customers and prospects because of outdated and incorrect contact information. For example, a marketing campaign may have a high number of email or mail returns from incorrect address information, a high number of duplicate mailing, or marketing information sent to an incorrect person. Thus, data quality issues may result in extra expense and missed sales, customer relationship and goodwill opportunities. In some cases, information technology (IT) personnel may be pulled away from important business matters to address the data quality issues in an information system. For example, an IT resource may be used to fix or merge duplicate records, and may work on such issues one at a time as they are reported. As a result, data quality issues may result in less efficient use of company resources and time.

[0005] Additionally, companies rely on corporate data to make many business decisions. Various company reports may be created from one or more data sources having quality issues. For example, a company may generate a report that aggregates errors and duplicates while rolling up the data into a report view. In some cases, the company must spend time, expense and resources to verify and correct the quality data issues to have an accurate report. In other cases, the company report may have quality data issues that are unknown or net yet detected. As such, the company may make business decisions on less than accurate information. The consumption of cost, time and resources related to data qualities issues are further compounded by the multiple data sources and information systems companies use, maintain and rely on for business decisions. For example, companies may have quality data issues in their accounting systems, manufacturing systems, product data and lifecycle management systems, supply chain management systems, and enterprise resource planning systems.

[0006] Therefore, systems and methods are desired to more efficiently address and improve the quality of data in data sources, such as information systems and databases.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0007] The data conditioning framework solution of the present invention addresses data quality issues by standardizing, verifying, matching, consolidating and merging data records using powerful inexact matching logic and search reduction technologies. The data conditioning framework uses these technologies to more efficiently condition data to improve the quality of data and/or resolve quality data issues such as incomplete, inaccurate and duplicate data records. For example, the data conditioning framework may be used to "cleanse" incorrect, incomplete and duplicate data from a data source, such as an information system. The data conditioning framework provides the following approximate searching and matching techniques to improve the efficiency of the approximate matching, reduce the search space for approximate matching, and improve the speed of executing approximate searches and matches: 1) inexact trimmed matching, 2) adaptive search ordering, 3) cascading search space reduction, 4) tiered and metric indexing, and 5) domain knowledge matching.

[0008] In one aspect, the present invention is related to a method for reducing a set of strings to approximately match to a first string by determining an edit distance between the first string and the set of strings is within a predetermined threshold. The method includes the steps of receiving a request to approximately match a first string with a set of strings using a predetermined edit distance, and generating a difference histogram based on a distribution of a difference in a number of occurrences of each character in the first string and a second string of the set of strings. The method determines via the difference histogram a first count of the number of occurrences of each character of the first string not in the second string is greater than a predetermined threshold, and identifies the second string as having an edit distance greater than the predetermined edit distance in response to the determination.

[0009] In one embodiment, the method includes skipping an approximate match of the first string to the second string in response to the determination. In another embodiment, the

method includes determining via the different histogram a second count of the number of occurrences of each character of the second string not in the first string is greater than the predetermined threshold, and identifying the second string as having an edit distance greater than the predetermined edit distance in response to the determination. In some embodiments, the method determines the first count and the second count are less than the predetermined threshold and performs an approximate match of the first string to the second string using the predetermined edit distance. In one embodiment, the method includes terminating execution of an approximate match of the first string with a string of the set of strings upon an edit distance of the approximate match reaching the predetermined threshold. In some embodiments, the method determines the first string and the second string are the same and identifies the second string as having an edit distance of zero. In yet another embodiment, the method includes setting one of the predetermined edit distance or the predetermined threshold based on a percentage of number of characters of the first string.

[0010] In other embodiments, the first string or the second string may identify a person, an institute or a location. In some embodiments, the first string or the second string represents data of one of the following systems: 1) accounting, 2) manufacturing, 3) customer relationship management, 4) enterprise resource planning, 5) product data management, 6) product lifecycle management, 7) supply chain management, 8) bioinformatics system and 9) lab information management system. In one embodiment, the characters of the first string or the second string includes a letter, a digit, or a symbol.

[0011] In another aspect, the present invention is related to a method for ordering a plurality of match criteria for approximately matching a first data set to a second data set based on execution times of the match criteria. The method includes the steps of receiving a request to approximately match strings of a first data set to strings of a second data set using a plurality of match criteria, and identifying a subset of the first data set. The method determines an execution time of an approximate search of the subset of the first data set to the second data set for each of the plurality of match criteria, and ranks the plurality of match criteria in an order based on the determination.

[0012] In one embodiment, the method includes ranking the plurality of match criteria in the order from a faster execution time to a slower execution time. In another embodiment, the method includes performing an approximate match of the first data set to the second data set in accordance with the ranked plurality of match criteria. In some embodiments, the plurality of match criteria includes a field and corresponding predetermined threshold for approximately matching a string with the field. In other embodiments, the plurality of match criteria includes a first field and a first corresponding predetermined threshold logically conjucted with a second field and a second corresponding predetermined threshold. In yet another embodiment, the plurality of match criteria includes a multiple match criteria. In one embodiment, the multiple match criteria has a first match criteria logically disjuncted with a second match criteria.

[0013] In other embodiments of this method, strings of the first data set or second data set may identify a person, an institute or a location. In some embodiments, strings of the first data set or second data set represent data of one of the following systems: 1) accounting, 2) manufacturing, 3) customer relationship management, 4) enterprise resource planning, 5) product data management, 6) product lifecycle management, 7) supply chain management, 8) bioinformatics system and 9) lab information management system.

[0014] In some aspects, the present invention is related to a method for reducing a number of records to search for approximately matching a string to a data set of records using a plurality of match criteria by cascading a search result from a first match criteria to a subsequent match criteria. The method includes receiving a request to perform an approximate match of a first string to records of a data set using a plurality of match criteria. The method determines a first set of one or more records of the data set approximately matching the first string based on a first match criteria of the plurality of match criteria, or a second set of one or more records of the data set not approximately matching the first string based on the first match criteria. The method also includes providing the first set or the second set of records to an approximate match search using a subsequent match criteria of the plurality of match criteria.

[0015] In one embodiment, the method determines a third set of records approximately matching the first string based on an approximate match of the first string to one of the first set or the second set of records using the subsequent match criteria. In some embodiments, the first match criteria or the subsequent match criteria includes a field and corresponding predetermined threshold for approximately matching a string with the field. In other embodiments, the method includes ranking the plurality of match criteria in an order from a faster execution time to a slower execution time. In one embodiment, the method performs an approximate match of the string to the data set in accordance with the ranked plurality of match criteria. In some embodiments, the plurality of match criteria include a field and corresponding predetermined threshold for approximately matching a string with the field. In another embodiment, one of the plurality of match criteria includes a first field and a first corresponding predetermined threshold logically conjucted with a second field and a second corresponding predetermined threshold. In another embodiment, one of the match criteria is a multiple match criteria. In some embodiments, the multiple match criteria has a first match criteria logically disjuncted with a second match criteria.

[0016] In other embodiments of this method, strings of the first data set or second set of records may identify a person, an institute or a location. In some embodiments, strings of the first or second set of records represent data of one of the following systems: 1) accounting, 2) manufacturing, 3) customer relationship management, 4) enterprise resource planning, 5) product data management, 6) product lifecycle management, 7) supply chain management, 8) bioinformatics system and 9) lab information management system.

[0017] In another aspect, the present invention is related to a method for reducing a number of records to search for approximately matching a string to records of a data set using a plurality of metric indexes. The method includes receiving a request to perform an approximate match of a string to records of a data set, and identifying an ordered list of a plurality of metric indexes. Each of the metric indexes includes an index to a record of the data set based on a metric. The method also includes determining a first approximate search of the string in the records of the data set using a first metric index of the plurality of metric indexes returns a matching result; and executing a second approximate search

of the string in the records of the data set using a second metric index of the plurality of metric indexes in response to the determination.

[0018] In one embodiment, the method may include not executing, or otherwise skipping, the second approximate search if the first approximate search returns no matching results. In some embodiments, the first metric index or the second metric index comprises a sized based index. In another embodiment, a key of the sized based index comprises a string length and a value associated with the key includes a record of the data set having the string length. In other embodiments, the first metric index or the second metric index includes a first character index or a last character index. In one embodiment, a key of the first character index includes a character, and a value associated with the key comprises a record of the data set starting with the character. In another embodiment, a key of the last character index includes a character, and a value associated with the key comprises a record of the data set ending with the character. In some embodiments, the method also includes ordering the list of the plurality of metric indexes based on a time of execution of approximately searching a subset of strings of a first data set with the records of the data set.

[0019] In yet another aspect, the present invention is related to a method for improving an approximate match of a string with a reference data element by approximately matching the string with one or more data elements identifying alternative representations of the reference data element. The method includes receiving a request to perform approximate matching of a string with a reference data element, and determining an approximate match of the string to the reference data element and one or more alternative data elements. The one or more alternative data elements include alternative representations of a value of the reference data element. The method also identifies as a result one of the reference data element or the alternative data elements having the approximate match within a predetermined threshold.

[0020] In one embodiment, the method includes identifying the result having the closest match within the predetermined threshold. In some embodiments, the method includes identifying the reference data element as the result having the approximate match within the predetermined threshold. In other embodiments of this method, one of the string, the reference data element, or the one or more alternative data elements may identify a person, an institute or a location. In some embodiments, one of the string, the reference data element, or the one or more alternative data elements represent data of one of the following systems: 1) accounting, 2) manufacturing, 3) customer relationship management, 4) enterprise resource planning, 5) product data management, 6) product lifecycle management, 7) supply chain management, 8) bioinformatics system and 9) lab information management system.

[0021] In some embodiments, the reference data element includes an abbreviation of a state, and the one or more alternative data elements include alternative representations of identifying the state. In one embodiment, the reference data element includes an abbreviation of a country, and the one or more alternative data elements comprise alternative representations of identifying the country. In another embodiment, the reference data element includes a zip code, and the one or more alternative data elements include a city associated with the zip code. In other embodiments, the reference data element includes a portion of an address, and the one or more alternative data elements include alternative representations of the portion of the address. In some embodiment, the reference data element includes a type of business, and the one or more alternative data elements include alternative representations of the type of business. In yet another embodiment, the reference data element includes a portion of a city name, and the one or more alternative data elements include alternative representations of the portion of the city name. In one embodiment, the reference data element includes a name of a company, and the one or more alternative data elements include alternative representations of the name of the company. In another embodiment, the reference data element includes a secondary address unit designator, and the one or more alternative data elements include alternative representations of the secondary address unit designator.

[0022] The details of various embodiments of the present invention are set forth in the accompanying drawings and the description below.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0023] The foregoing and other objects, aspects, features, and advantages of the invention will become more apparent and may be better understood by referring to the following description taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, in which:

[0024] FIGS. **1**A and **1**B are block diagrams of embodiments of a computing device for practicing an embodiment of the present invention;

[0025] FIG. **2**A is a block diagram of a data conditioning framework for practicing an embodiment of the present invention;

[0026] FIG. **2**B is a block diagram of a data flow engine for practicing an embodiment of the data conditioning framework;

[0027] FIG. **3** is a flow diagram of steps performed in practicing a technique for trimmed inexact matching in one embodiment of the data conditioning framework;

[0028] FIG. **4** is a flow diagram of steps performed in practicing a technique of adaptive search ordering of match criteria in another embodiment of the data conditioning framework;

[0029] FIG. **5** is a flow diagram of steps performed in practicing a technique of cascaded search space reduction in one embodiment of the data conditioning framework;

[0030] FIG. **6** is a flow diagram of steps performed in practicing a technique of tiered metric indexing in another embodiment of the data conditioning framework;

[0031] FIG. **7** is a flow diagram of steps performed in practicing a technique of domain knowledge based approximate matching in one embodiment of the data conditioning framework;

[0032] FIGS. **8**A-**8**H are diagrammatic views of eight screens of a graphical user interface wizard in one embodiment of using the data conditioning framework;

[0033] FIG. **9**A is a diagrammatic view of a standardization user interface for practicing another embodiment of the data conditioning framework;

[0034] FIG. **9**B is a diagrammatic view of a match criteria selection user interface for practicing another embodiment of the data conditioning framework; and

[0035] FIG. **9**C is a diagrammatic view of a merge operation user interface for practicing another embodiment of the data conditioning framework.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0036] Certain illustrative embodiments of the present invention are described below. It is, however, expressly noted that the present invention is not limited to these embodiments, but rather the intention is that additions and modifications to what is expressly described herein also are included within the scope of the invention. Moreover, it is to be understood that the features of the various embodiments described herein are not mutually exclusive and can exist in various combinations and permutations, even if such combinations or permutations are not expressly made herein, without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention.

[0037] The illustrative embodiments of the systems and methods of the data conditioning framework described herein provide for efficiently performing approximate matching or searching of a first set of one or more data records with a second set of one or more data records, such as approximately matching a first string with a second string. The data conditioning framework provides the following approximate searching and matching techniques: 1) inexact trimmed matching, 2) adaptive search ordering, 3) cascading search space reduction, 4) tiered and metric indexing, and 5) domain knowledge matching. These various techniques improve the efficiency of the approximate matching, reduce the search space for approximate matching, and improve the speed of executing approximate searches and matches and returning search and match results. The data conditioning framework uses these techniques to more efficiently condition data to improve the quality of data and/or resolve quality issues with data. For example, the data conditioning framework in one example application is used to cleanse incorrect, incomplete and duplicate data from a data source, such as an information system.

[0038] FIGS. **1**A and **1**B depict block diagrams of a computing device **100** useful for practicing an embodiment of the data conditioning framework. Referring to FIGS. **1**A and **1**B, the computing device **100** includes a central processing unit **102**, and a main memory unit **122**. As shown in FIG. **1**A, a typical computing device **100** may include a visual display device **124**, a keyboard **126** and/or a pointing device **127**, such as a mouse. In some embodiments, the visual display device **124** and any related hardware and/or software supports and is capable of displaying high-definition video as described in detail further herein. Each computing device **100** may also include additional optional elements, such as one or more input/output devices **130***a*-**130***b* (generally referred to using reference numeral **130**), and a cache memory **140** in communication with the central processing unit **102**.

[0039] The central processing unit **102** is any logic circuitry that responds to and processes instructions fetched from the main memory unit **122**. In many embodiments, the central processing unit is provided by a microprocessor unit, such as: those manufactured by Intel Corporation of Mountain View, Calif.; those manufactured by Motorola Corporation of Schaumburg, Ill.; those manufactured by Transmeta Corporation of Santa Clara, Calif.;, those manufactured by International Business Machines of White Plains, N.Y.; or those manufactured by Advanced Micro Devices of Sunnyvale, Calif. In some embodiments, the CPU **102** may comprise a single core, dual core, or multi-core processor. The computing device **100** may be based on any of these processors, or any other processor capable of operating as described herein.

[0040] Main memory unit **122** may be one or more memory chips capable of storing data and allowing any storage location to be directly accessed by the microprocessor **102**, such as Static random access memory (SRAM), Burst SRAM or SynchBurst SRAM (BSRAM), Dynamic random access memory (DRAM), Fast Page Mode DRAM (FPM DRAM), Enhanced DRAM (EDRAM), Extended Data Output RAM (EDO RAM), Extended Data Output DRAM (EDO DRAM), Burst Extended Data Output DRAM (BEDO DRAM), Enhanced DRAM (EDRAM), synchronous DRAM (SDRAM), JEDEC SRAM, PC **100** SDRAM, Double Data Rate SDRAM (DDR SDRAM), Enhanced SDRAM (ESDRAM), SyncLink DRAM (SLDRAM), Direct Rambus DRAM (DRDRAM), or Ferroelectric RAM (FRAM). The main memory **122** may be based on any of the above described memory chips, or any other available memory chips capable of operating as described herein. In the embodiment shown in FIG. **1**A, the processor **102** communicates with main memory **122** via a system bus **150** (described in more detail below). FIG. **1**A depicts an embodiment of a computing device **100** in which the processor communicates directly with main memory **122** via a memory port **103**. For example, in FIG. **1**B the main memory **122** may be DRDRAM.

[0041] FIG. **1**B depicts an embodiment in which the main processor **102** communicates directly with cache memory **140** via a secondary bus, sometimes referred to as a backside bus. In other embodiments, the main processor **102** communicates with cache memory **140** using the system bus **150**. Cache memory **140** typically has a faster response time than main memory **122** and is typically provided by SRAM, BSRAM, or EDRAM.

[0042] In the embodiment shown in FIG. **1**A, the processor **102** communicates with various I/O devices **130** via a local system bus **150**. Various busses may be used to connect the central processing unit **102** to any of the I/O devices **130**, including a VESA VL bus, an ISA bus, an EISA bus, a MicroChannel Architecture (MCA) bus, a PCI bus, a PCI-X bus, a PCI-Express bus, or a NuBus. For embodiments in which the I/O device is a video display **124**, the processor **102** may use an Advanced Graphics Port (AGP) to communicate with the display **124**. FIG. **1**B depicts an embodiment of a computer **100** in which the main processor **102** communicates directly with I/O device **130***b* via HyperTransport, Rapid I/O, or InfiniBand. FIG. **1**B also depicts an embodiment in which local buses and direct communication are mixed: the processor **102** communicates with I/O device **130***a* using a local interconnected bus while communicating with I/O device **130***b* directly.

[0043] The computing device **100** may support any suitable installation device **116**, such as a floppy disk drive for receiving floppy disks such as 3.5-inch, 5.25-inch disks or ZIP disks, a CD-ROM drive, a CD-R/RW drive, a DVD-ROM drive, tape drives of various formats, USB device, hard-drive or any other device suitable for installing software, programs, data or files, such as any software **120**, or portion thereof, related to the data conditioning framework described herein.

[0044] The computing device **100** may also include a storage device **128** of any type and form for storing an operating system and other related software, and for storing application software programs such as any program related to the data conditioning framework **120**. In one embodiment, the storage

device **128** includes one or more hard disk drives or redundant arrays of independent disks. In other embodiments, the storage device **128** comprises any type and form of portable storage medium or device, such as a compact flash card, a micro hard drive or pocket drive, embedded flash storage, or USB storage drive. Portable storage devices may be generally referred to by a variety of names, including but not limited to, finger drive, flash disk, flash drive, flash memory drive, jump drive, jump stick, keychain drive, keydrive, memory key, mobile drive, pen drive, thumb drive, thumb key, vault drive, USB drive, or USB stick. Optionally, any of the installation devices or mediums **116** could also provide a storage medium or device **128**. For example, a CD-R, CD-RW, or DVD-R, DVD-RW may store the portable user environment **120**.

[0045] As depicted in FIG. **1**A, the computing device **100** may include a network interface **118** to interface to a network **104** through a variety of connections including, but not limited to, standard telephone lines, LAN or WAN links (e.g., TCP/IP, IPX, SPX, NetBIOS, Ethernet, ARCNET, SONET, SDH, Fiber Distributed Data Interface (FDDI), RS232, IEEE 802.11, IEEE 802.11a, IEEE 802.11b, IEEE 802.11g, T1, T3, 56kb, X.25 and direct asynchronous connections), broadband connections (e.g., ISDN, Frame Relay, ATM), wireless or WiFi connections, or some combination of any or all of the above. The network interface **118** may comprise a built-in network adapter, network interface card, PCMCIA network card, card bus network adapter, wireless network adapter, USB network adapter, modem or any other device suitable for interfacing the computing device **100** to any type of network capable of communication and performing the operations described herein.

[0046] The network **104** can be any type and form of network. The network **104** can be a local-area network (LAN), such as a company Intranet, a metropolitan area network (MAN), or a wide area network (WAN), such as the Internet or the World Wide Web. The topology of the network **104** may be a bus, star, or ring network topology. The network **104** and network topology may be of any such network or network topology capable of supporting the operations of the present invention described herein.

[0047] A wide variety of I/O devices **130***a*-**130***n* may be present in the computing device **100**. Input devices include keyboards, mice, trackpads, trackballs, microphones, and drawing tablets. Output devices include video displays, speakers, inkjet printers, laser printers, and dye-sublimation printers. The I/O devices may be controlled by an I/O controller **123** as shown in FIG. **1**A. The I/O controller may control one or more I/O devices such as a keyboard **126** and a pointing device **127**, e.g., a mouse or optical pen.

[0048] Furthermore, an I/O device **130** may also provide storage **128** and/or an installation medium **116** for the computing device **100**. For example, an I/O device **130** may provide a connection to receive any type and form of portable storage device **128**. In still other embodiments, the computing device **100** may provide USB connections to receive handheld USB storage devices such as the USB Flash Drive line of devices manufactured by Twintech Industry, Inc. of Los Alamitos, Calif. In one embodiment, the computing device **100** may provide a USB connection to receive a media storage device, such as an iPod device manufactured by Apple Computer of Cupertino, Calif.

[0049] In other embodiments, an I/O device **130** may be a bridge **170** between the system bus **150** and an external communication bus, such as a USB bus, an Apple Desktop Bus, an RS-232 serial connection, a SCSI bus, a FireWire bus, a FireWire **800** bus, an Ethernet bus, an AppleTalk bus, a Gigabit Ethernet bus, an Asynchronous Transfer Mode bus, a HIPPI bus, a Super HIPPI bus, a SerialPlus bus, a SCI/LAMP bus, a FibreChannel bus, or a Serial Attached small computer system interface bus.

[0050] A computing device **100** of the sort depicted in FIGS. **1**A and **1**B typically operate under the control of operating systems, which control scheduling of tasks and access to system resources. The computing device **100** can be running any operating system such as any of the versions of the Microsoft® Windows operating systems, the different releases of the Unix and Linux operating systems, any version of the Mac OS® for Macintosh computers, any embedded operating system, any network operating system, any real-time operating system, any open source operating system, any proprietary operating system, any operating systems for mobile computing devices or network devices, or any other operating system capable of running on the computing device and performing the operations described herein. Typical operating systems include: WINDOWS 3.x, WINDOWS 95, WINDOWS 98, WINDOWS 2000, WINDOWS NT 3.51, WINDOWS NT 4.0, WINDOWS CE, and WINDOWS XP, all of which are manufactured by Microsoft Corporation of Redmond, Wash.; MacOS, manufactured by Apple Computer of Cupertino, Calif.; OS/2, manufactured by International Business Machines of Armonk, N.Y.; and Linux, a freely-available operating system distributed by Caldera Corp. of Salt Lake City, Utah, or any type and/or form of a Unix operating system, among others.

[0051] In other embodiments, the computing device **100** may have different processors, operating systems, and input devices consistent with the device and in accordance with embodiments further described herein. The computing device **100** can be any workstation, desktop computer, laptop or notebook computer, server, handheld computer, mobile telephone or other portable telecommunication device, media playing device, a gaming system, or any other type and/or form of computing, telecommunications or media device that is capable of communication and that has sufficient processor power and memory capacity to perform the operations described herein. For example, the computing device **100** may comprise a device of the iPod family of devices manufactured by Apple Computer of Cupertino, Calif., a Playstation 2, Playstation 3, or Personal Playstation® Portable (PSP) device manufactured by the Sony Corporation of Tokyo, Japan, a Nintendo DS™ or Nintendo Revolution™ device manufactured by Nintendo Co., Ltd., of Kyoto, Japan, or a Xbox™ or Xbox 360™ device manufactured by the Microsoft Corporation of Redmond, Wash.

[0052] FIG. **2**A illustrates an embodiment of the data conditioning framework **120** for practicing the approximate matching and searching techniques. In brief overview, the data conditioning framework **120**, sometimes referred to as the DCF or also as a data constraint framework, resides, executes, or is otherwise provided on computing device **100**. The data conditioning framework **120** includes an approximate matching engine **210** and a data flow engine **220**. In one embodiment, the approximate matching engine **210** uses an edit distance **214** in performing an approximate match, such as between two strings. The approximate matching engine **210** may also use one or more match criteria **225** to perform an approximate match or search. The data conditioning framework **120** also may include one or more connectors **235**

for interfacing, connecting or communicating with one or more data sources **240***a*-**240***b*. The data sources **240***a*-**240***b* may include a first set of one or more strings to be approximately matched with a second a set of one or more strings. For example, in one embodiment, the data sources **240***a*-**240***b* may include data or information identifying a person, an institute or location, generally referred to herein as PIL **250**, **250'**. The data sources **240***a*-**240***b* may also be associated with one or more indexes **230**, **230'**, such as a metric based index.

[0053] In further detail, the approximate matching engine **210** includes any logic, function or operations to compare and/or match a first record with one or more second records, such as a first string with one or more second strings. The approximate matching engine **210** may comprise software, hardware, or any combination of software and hardware. In one embodiment, the approximate matching engine **210** performs exact matching such as comparing a first string to a second string to determine if the strings are the same. In another embodiment, the approximate matching engine **210** performs approximate matching of a first string to a second string. Approximate matching may also be referred to as inexact matching. In some embodiments, approximate or inexact matching includes comparing a first string to a second string to determine if one or more differences between the first string and the second string are with a predetermined or desired threshold. If the determined differences are less than or equal to the predetermined threshold, the strings may be considered to be approximately matched. For example, a first string of "America" may be approximately matched to a second string of "American" as the strings are different by one character.

[0054] In one embodiment, the approximate matching engine **210** performs an approximate match by determining the number of corrections or changes needed to be made to the first string in order for the first string to exactly match or be transformed into the second string, or vice-versa, e.g., second string to the first string. In some embodiments, the number of corrections or changes comprises a number of inserts, a number of substitutions or replacements, a number of deletions and/or a number of edits to transform a first string into a second string, or vice-versa. In one embodiment, the number of corrections or changes is referred to as the edit distance **215**. In some embodiments, the edit distance **215** is the Levenshtein distance or edit distance as used in the Levenshtein algorithms and calculations known to those skilled in the art for determining if a first string approximately or inexactly matches another string. The edit distance **215** may be represented or identified by any type and form of data and/or information. In some embodiments, a number or quantity identifies the edit distance **215**.

[0055] The approximate matching engine **210** may be designed and constructed to use or perform any type and form of approximate or inexact matching algorithm. In one embodiment, the approximate matching engine **210** uses an adaptation or implementation of the Levenshtein inexact matching algorithm. In another embodiment, a Damerau-Levenshtein distance is uses as an extension of the Levenshtein distance that counts transposition as a single edit operation. In other embodiments, a Hamming distance is also used in the case of strings of the same length. For two strings s and t, the Hamming distance, H(s, t) is the number of places in which the two string differ, i.e., have different characters. In yet another embodiment, the approximate matching engine **210** uses dynamic programming techniques to perform inexact string matching.

[0056] In other embodiments, the approximate matching engine **210** uses any type and form of fuzzy logic to inexactly match strings. For example, the approximate matching engine **210** may use a bitap algorithm, also known as the shift-or, shift-and or Baeza-Yates-Gonnet algorithm, as a fuzzy string searching algorithm. In this embodiment, the bitap algorithm tells whether a given text contains a substring which is "approximately equal" or approximately matches a given pattern. In one embodiment, the approximate equality is defined in terms of Levenshtein or edit distance. For example, if the substring and pattern are within a given distance of each other, then the algorithm considers them equal. In one embodiment, the bitap algorithm begins by precomputing a set of bitmasks containing one bit for each element of the pattern. Then the bitap algorithm performs of the work with bitwise operations, which may further improve performance of the approximate matching engine **210**.

[0057] In another embodiment, the approximate matching engine **210** uses any type and form of pattern matching to inexact matching. In one embodiment, the approximate matching engine **210** uses any decision trees or graph node techniques for performing an approximate match. In yet another embodiment, the approximate matching engine **210** may use any custom or proprietary algorithm or logic. In some embodiments, the approximate matching engine **210** may be designed and constructed to perform a plurality of approximate matching algorithms, alone or in combination. Any of these embodiments may also include implementation of boundaries and/or conditions to improve the performance or efficiency of the inexact matching algorithm.

[0058] Although the approximate or inexact matching may be generally described in terms of strings, a string may include one or more characters, symbols, letters, numbers or digits, or any combination thereof. For example, a record of a telephone number, social security number, or a person's age may include all numbers but may be approximately matched in accordance with the operations described herein. Additionally, the data conditioning framework **120** or application implementing the data conditioning framework **120** may implement or use any type of data structures, string-based, non-string based (e.g., integer), or otherwise, in a programming or scripting language to represent any fields, records, values or strings to be approximately matched.

[0059] Additionally, the data conditioning framework **120** may be discussed in terms of performing an approximate or inexact search. In some embodiments, an approximate search comprises performing a search of a set of data records, such as data source **240***b*, for one or more strings that approximately match a first string, such as a string from data source **240***a*. In one embodiment, the approximate search is executing an approximate match of a first string to each of a set of strings to determine if the first string approximately matches any of the set of strings. In some cases, the approximate search may result in no approximate matches between the first string and any of the set of strings.

[0060] The data conditioning framework **120** and/or approximate matching engine **210** may use one or more match criteria **225**. In one embodiment, a match criteria **225** identifies a criteria, condition or other factor for approximately or inexactly matching one record with another record. In some embodiments, the match criteria **225** identifies a

portion of a record, such as field or set of fields for which an approximate match is to be performed. For example, the match criteria **225** may identify a first name, last name, phone number or address field of a contact record. In another example, the match criteria **225** may identify the names of table columns or database fields for which to use in approximate matching. In other embodiments, the match criteria **225** identifies a portion of a string or one or more strings for which to perform approximate matching. The match criteria **225** may identify the predetermined or desired threshold by which one string is determined to not approximately match another string. For example, in one embodiment, the match criteria **225** identifies an edit distance threshold by which the fields, or portions of the record are not considered an approximate match if the edit distance calculation is greater than the desired or predetermined threshold. In some embodiments, the predetermined threshold of the match criteria **225** may identify a percentage. For example, the percentage may indicate the number of characters of the string by which the two strings may be different and be considered an approximate match.

[0061] The match criteria **225** may be identified via any type and form of language, syntax, or constructs readable, interpretable or understandable by the approximate matching engine **210**. In some embodiments, the match criteria **225** may include any logical operators, or representation thereof, such as the logical AND or logical OR operators. In other embodiments, the match criteria **225** includes any operators to perform string manipulation, such as the concatenation or truncation of strings. The match criteria **225** may be also be formed via any textual or graphical mechanism. In one embodiment, a text editor may be used to create the match criteria **225**. In another embodiment, a graphical user interface may be designed and constructed to enable a user to select, create, configure or modify one or more match criteria **225**. In some embodiments, the match criteria **225** may be stored in one or more files, data sources **240**, an application, program or other electronic forms. In other embodiments, the approximate matching engine **210** includes a match criteria rules engine for creating, providing, managing and using one or more match criteria **225**.

[0062] In some embodiments and by way of example, a match criteria **225** includes a field and/or a threshold for matching one record with another record. For example, a match criteria **225**, sometimes referred to as MC, includes a list of one or more fields and thresholds used for matching where each field is logically conjucted or ANDed, by which it may be referred. For instance, the match criteria **225** of [("First Name", 10),("Last Name", 10), ("Phone", 20)] defines an approximate match when two records have a similar "Last Name" AND "First Name" AND "Phone". In the example match criteria **225**, the thresholds for each field are 10, 10, and 20 respectively. The "First Names" and "Last Names" of the compared records can have a 10% difference between them and still be similar, or approximately matched. Likewise, the "Phone" fields of the compared records can have a 20% difference and be considered an approximate matched. In one embodiment, the thresholds define the threshold edit distance. In the case of the "Phone" field, any edit distance greater than 20% of the number of characters of either the first phone field or the second phone field indicates that the values are not similar. The match criteria **225** may include any number of fields, such as any positive number. In some embodiments, the data conditioning framework **120** and/or approximate matching engine **210** may identify a minimum and/or maximum number of fields per match criteria, or in combination among a plurality of match criteria **225**. Thresholds of the match criteria can be any range of numbers, such as a positive number or range of positive numbers. In one embodiment, a threshold can be any number between 0 and 100. In some embodiments, the data conditioning framework **120** and/or approximate matching engine **210** may identify a minimum and/or maximum number of thresholds per match criteria, or in combination among a plurality of match criteria **225**.

[0063] In yet another embodiment, the match criteria **225** may include a plurality of match criteria **225** grouped together or used in combination, such as via logically operators, to form a match criteria referred to as a multiple match criteria **225**. In one embodiment, a multiple match criteria **225** includes a list of match criteria that are logically disjuncted or logically OR'd. For instance, in the multiple match criteria example of [[("First Name", 20)],[("Last Name", 20)]], the use of brackets identify two match criteria, each with one field and one threshold. The first match criteria of the multiple match criteria **225** identifies a criteria of the "First Name" values of the compared records have a 20% difference or less. The second match criteria of the multiple match criteria **225** identifies a criteria of the "last Name" values of the compared records have a 20% difference or less. As a result, the example multiple match criteria **225** specifies if the "First Name" values of the compared records have a 20% difference or less OR the "Last Name" values have a 20% difference or less, then the records approximately match.

[0064] Although, in the examples above, a comma within one set of brackets and between a field and threshold identifies a logical AND operation while the comma between sets of brackets is used to identify a logical OR operation, any type and form of one or more characters or symbols may be used to identify or specify a logical operator of a match criteria **225**. Furthermore, although the match criteria **225** is generally described as logically AND'd and the multiple match criteria **225** as logically OR'd, the match criteria **225** may specify any combination of one or more types of logical operations for a single match criteria and/or multiple match criteria. The data conditioning framework **120** and/or approximate matching engine **210** may use a wide range of combinations of match criteria and multiple match criteria. Additionally, the match criteria **225** may be arranged or organized in any hierarchical manner.

[0065] The data conditioning framework **120**, approximate matching engine **210**, and/or data flow engine **220** may interface, communicate, or connect to one or more data sources **240***a*-**240***b*. The data sources **240***a*-**240***b*, generally referred to as data source **240**, may comprise any type and form of data. In one embodiment, the data source **240** comprises a file, such as a CSV or comma-separated-value formatted file. In another embodiment, the data source **240** comprises a file having fields or values delimited in any manner by using fixed length field or any predetermined field or value delimiters. The file may have a structure, format, and/or content readable and understandable by the data conditioning framework **120**, or any portion thereof. In another embodiment, the data source **240** comprises a database, such as any type and form of relational database, non-relational database, object database, or object-oriented database. In one embodiment, the data source **240** provides an Open Database Connectivity (ODBC) interface for accessing the database. In another

embodiment, the data source **240** comprises a server farm of databases. In some embodiments, the data source **240** comprises a database cluster.

[0066] In other embodiments, the data source **240** comprises an application, program, software, service, process or task providing access to data. The data source **240** may provide any type and form of application programming interface (API), such as an XML, object, or web-service based interface for accessing or providing data. For example, the data source **240** may comprise an enterprise resource planning (ERP) or a customer relationship management (CRM) system. In one embodiment, the data source **240** comprises a customer relationship management system such as salesforce.com manufactured by Salesforce.com Inc. of San Francisco, Calif. In some embodiments, the data source **240** comprises any of the ERP and CRM products manufactured by Oracle of Redwood Shores, Calif. In another example, the data source **240** comprises a network accessible web service interface providing access to data, such as via an ecommerce or web-site. In yet another embodiment, the data source **240** comprises any of SaleLogix products manufactured by Sage Software Inc. of Scottsdale, Ariz. In another example, the data source **240** comprises an email or contact management system, such as Microsoft Outlook manufactured by Microsoft Corporation of Redmond, Wash.

[0067] In one embodiment, the data source **240** may comprise data or information representing a person, an institute, or a location, referred to herein as PIL **250**. Data representing a person may include data identifying a person, such as one or more of the following: 1) a first name or initial, 2) a middle name or initial, 3) a last name, 4) a name suffix, 5) name prefix and 6) social security number. A name suffix may include any type and form of designator for a) social title or status, such as Jr., Sr. II, III, etc., b) academic, such as B.S., B.A., M.A, M.S., M.B.A., Ph. D., D. Phil, etc., c) honorary, such as a monarch or head of state identifier or d) professional title, such as Esq., MD, CPA, CFA, etc. The name suffix may include any one or more post-nominal letters to indicate that that individual holds a position, office, or honor. The person related data **250** may include any combination of a plurality of name suffixes or post nominal letters, which may be in any descending or ascending order. A name prefix may indicate the marital or social status of the person, such as Mr., Mrs. Ms, Mister, Madam, Honorable, King, Queen or Lord.

[0068] Data representing an institute may include data identifying a name of a company, entity, organization, corporation, partnership, foundation, group, society or any other type and form of establishment. The data may include any legal name, trade name, nickname, alias or any other alternative name for the institute. The data may also include a designator identifying the type of legal entity, such as any of the following: 1) Incorporated or Inc., 2) Corporation or Corp., 3) Limited Liability Company or LLC, 4) Limited Liability Partnership or LLP, 5) General Partnership, 6) sole proprietorship or 7) limited company or LTD. The data may also include any Standard Institute Classification (SIC) codes or any other classification codes that identify the type, category or area of business of the institute.

[0069] Data representing a location may include data identifying a position or point in physical or geographical space, such as on the earth's surface, of a person, place or thing. The location may be expressed as an absolute location or a as location relative to the position of another person, place or thing. In some embodiments, the location may be defined by coordinates or some other referencing system, such as a street address or space indexing system. In one embodiment, the location may be expressed as an address, such as a street address using any type and form of naming convention. The location may include a 1) building name, number or designator, 2) secondary unit designator 3) a street number, 4) a street name, 5) a city or town name, 6) state, 7) country, and 8) zip or postal codes. The address may include any address conventions, such as annex or alley, or any alternative designations. The secondary unit designator may identify a basement, floor, apartment, suite number or office number.

[0070] Although generally the data of the data source is generally described above in terms of people, institutes and locations, the data source and types of data used by the data conditioning framework in applying any of the techniques described herein may comprise any type of data from any type of system. In some embodiments, the data source **240** comprises any type of accounting or financial system, or data produced therefrom. For example, in one embodiment, the data source **240** comprise any version of the SAGE MAS90 accounting system manufactured by Sage Group Plc of North Park, Newcastle Upon Tyne, or data product therefrom. In another embodiment, the data source **240** comprise any version of NetSuite product manufactured by NetSuite of San Mateo, Calif., or data produced therefrom. In other embodiments, the data source **240** comprise any version of the Microsoft Dynamics-GP product manufactured the Microsoft Corporation of Redmond, Wash., or data produced therefrom.

[0071] In one embodiment, the data source **240** comprises a product data management (PDM), product information management (PIM) or a product life cycle management (PLM) system and/or data related thereto. For example, the data source **240** may comprise data identifying or describing Bill-Of-Material (BOM) information, engineering change management information, product design information, Computer Aided Design (CAD), and/or Computer Aided Manufacturing (CAM) information of one or more products. In one embodiment, the data source **240** may comprise any version of the TeamCenter product manufactured by UGS Corporation of Plano, Tex., or data produced therefrom. In another embodiment, the data source **240** may comprise any version of the mySAP PLM product manufactured by SAP AG of Waldorf, Germany, or data produced therefrom. In yet another embodiment, the data source **240** may comprise any version of the Windchill product suite manufactured by Parametric Technology Corporation (PTC) of Needham, Massachusetts, or data produced therefrom. In some embodiments, the data source **240** may comprise any version of the Matrix products manufactured by MatrixOne of Westford, Mass., or data produced therefrom.

[0072] In another example, the data source **240** may comprise a supply chain information or management (SCM) system and/or data related thereto. For example, the data source **240** may comprise data identifying, describing or representing supplier information, and pricing, delivery and payment process information for supplies and any metric for monitoring and managing the supplier relationship. The data source **240** may comprise data identifying the goods and services used to create a product and which suppliers provide the goods and services. The data source **240** may comprise data identifying or described the receiving and verification of shipments, authorizing supplier payments, and the transfer of shipments between facilities. The data source **240** may also

identify the scheduling of activities, such as manufacturing activities, for production, testing, packaging and preparation for delivery of goods and services. In some embodiments, the data source **240** may also provide data identifying, describing or representing a measurement of quality levels, production output and worker productivity related to the products, goods, and services. In another embodiment, the data source **240** may provide data identifying, describing or representing the coordination of receipt of orders from customers, development of a network of warehouses, the picking of carriers to get products to customers and the set up of an invoicing system to receive payments. In other embodiments, the data source **240** identifying, describing or representing returns in the supply chain, such as creating a network for receiving defective and excess products back from customers and supporting customers who have problems with delivered products. In one embodiment, the data source **240** may comprise any of the i2 products manufactured by i2 Technologies of Dallas, Tex., or data produced therefrom. In another embodiment, the data source **240** may comprise any of the mySCM products manufactured by SAP or data produced therefrom. In some embodiments, the data source **240** may comprise any of the Mapics products manufactured by Infor Global Solutions of Alpharetta, Georgia or data produced therefrom.

[0073] In yet another example, the data source **240** may comprise a life sciences, medical, clinical, pharmaceutical, hospital, healthcare, or lab related information system and/or data related thereto. In one embodiment, the data source **240** comprises a bioinformatics systems or data produced therefrom. In another embodiment, the data source **240** comprises a Lab Information Management System (LIMS), or data produced therefrom, such as the LabSoft LIMS products manufactured by Computing Solutions, Inc. of Evansville, Ind., any of LABSVantage products manufactured by LabsVantage Solutions of Bridgewater, N.J., any of the LABware LIMS Solutions manufactured by LabWare, Inc. of Wilmington, Del., or any of the LIMS and Lab related software manufactured by the Thermo Electron Corporation of Waltham, Mass. In some embodiments, the data source **240** and data comprises any type of spectrometry information system, clinical science diagnostic system, or any system related to the research, design, testing, manufacturing, packaging and delivery of pharmaceutical, medical devices, or any life sciences related good or service.

[0074] In some embodiments, the data conditioning framework **120** includes domain knowledge information **275** related to any of the data of the data source **240**. In some embodiments, the domain knowledge information **275** comprises data identifying, describing, or representing one or more alternative or different ways to represent any data, field, value of any data element, field, and record of a data source **240**. In one embodiment, the domain knowledge **275** comprises a lookup table. In another embodiment, the domain knowledge comprises a database. In other embodiments, a data source **240** comprises the domain knowledge **275**. Further detail and the use of domain knowledge **275** will be described below in conjunction with FIG. **7**.

[0075] The data source **240** may include or be associated with one or more indexes **230**, **230'** of any type and form. In some embodiments, the index **230** may be included with, in or as part of the data source **240**. For example, one or more indexes **230** may be stored in the data source **240**. In other embodiments, the indexes **230** may be stored in the data conditioning framework **120**, such as in the approximate matching engine **210**, data flow engine **220** or the rules **260** or match criteria **225**. In yet another embodiment, the data conditioning framework **120** may obtain an index **230** for a data source **240** by any device, storage or location accessible via network **104**. In one embodiment, an index **230** is a feature of a database that allows quicker access to a row in a table. The index may be created using one or more columns of the table, and acts a value to lookup a record in the table. In some embodiments, an index is any data structure or data element that improves the performance of lookup of a data source, such as file, database, array, object, or application. In one embodiment, the index **230** comprises a key to index to, point to or lookup a record, field or value in the data source **240**. The data conditioning framework **120** may include one or more metric-based indexes or metric indexes, sometime referred to as a mIndex. In one embodiment, a metric index **230** comprises a standard or unit of measurement type of index to access the data source. In some embodiments, a metric index **230** identifies an aspect, function, characteristic or portion to be measured related to the data of the data source **240**, such as the size, type, and characteristics of any strings, or portions thereof, stored in the data source **240**.

[0076] In one embodiment, the metric index **230** includes a sized-based index or size metric index, referred to as an sIndex. The sIndex is based on the size of a record, field or value of the data source **240**, such as the size of a string. In one embodiment, the sIndex is created, generated or formed by storing as the key of the index the size of the strings stored in that keys value. In some embodiments, a string can be identified in the sIndex by determining the number of characters or length of the string, i.e., size, and searching those entries of the sIndex with the length. In another embodiment, the metric index **230** includes a starting or ending character metric index, referred to as an seIndex. The seIndex is created, generated or formed by storing two indexes per seIndex, called se1Index and se2Index. In one embodiment, the se1Index stores the first character as the key of the index. In other embodiments, the se1Index stores a set of leading or first characters as the index key. Strings in the data source **240** that start with the key are stored in the values at that key. The se2Index is similar to the se1Index but indexes (key) the values according to the last character or set of characters of the string of the data source **240**. When searching for a string in the seIndex, the string would be searched for existence in both the se1Index and se2Index.

[0077] Still referring to FIG. **2**A, the data conditioning framework **120** includes one or more connectors **235** designed and constructed to work with any type and form of data source **240***a*-**240***b* or with any information system that represents or provides data. In one embodiment, the data source **240***a*-**240***b* or the information system comprises information regarding people, institute or locations (PIL) **250**. In some embodiments, a connector **235** is a mechanism by which the data conditioning framework **120** communicates with PIL based data sources **230**, such as information systems. In one embodiment, connectors **235** are installed separately from the application using the data conditioning framework **120** and the ability to use a connector **235** is unlocked by a key code. In some embodiments, a connector **235** provide three categories of functionality: 1) user interface related functionality for allowing a user to interact with the PIL data source **240**, 2) introspection capabilities which allow the application using the data conditioning framework **120** to introspect the PIL based data source **240** for internal infor-

mation, and 3) data capabilities which allow the application using the data conditioning framework **120** to exchange data with the PIL based data source **240**.

[0078] In one embodiment, the user interface functionality of the connector **235** includes: 1) user selection of source and target data sources **230**, 2) user login, 3) query, display, and user selection of groups, 4) query and display of number of records in the group, 5) query, display, and user selection of lead sources, and 6) checking data source constraints. In some embodiments, the introspection functionality includes: 1) obtain the name of the type of data source **240**, such as the name of the PIL based system, 2) obtain list of underlying person, institute, and location tables or data sources, 3) obtain list of one-to-one, many-to-one and one-to-many tables with respect to the data source **240**, and 4) obtain format information for data sources. In another embodiment, the data exchange functionality includes: 1) connect and disconnect to the data source **240** and read, insert, update, delete, and/or merge data.

[0079] The data conditioning framework **120** may include one or more rules **260** comprising any type and form of syntax, language, structure and content for specifying logic, conditions, constraints, decisions, declaration or instructions to control, direct, manage or influence the behavior of the data conditioning framework **120**. In one embodiment, the data conditioning framework **120** provides the user an option for selecting a type of merge rule to apply to duplicates and provides an extension for allowing new merge rules to be created and used in an application. For example, a user may select via a user interface screen of the application one of the following behaviors for merging data to create or form a master record:

Name	Description	When is it available
Default	This is the current behavior	All
Last Created	Master is record with least recent create date	CRM-CRM
First Created	Master is record with most recent create date	CRM-CRM
Last Modified	Master is record with least recent modify date	CRM-CRM
First Modified	Master is record with most recent create date	CRM-CRM
CRM	Master is the record that is the CRM entry	CSV-CRM
CSV	Master is the CRM entry, but the data is filled in (copied) from the first CSV entry	CSV-CRM, CSV-CSV

Rules **260** may be configured via a user interface, such as command line or graphical user interface. Rules **260** may also be created, added or provided programmatically via one or instructions and/or an application programming interface (API). By way of example, merge rules **260** may have the following properties: 1) a unique name, which is used in the graphical user interface to select merge rules **260**, 2) a location in a rule selector, 3) description of the rule, 4) availability of the rule, and 5) code or instructions for specifying the behavior of the rule. In one embodiment, the location is an integer starting from 0 that identifies the Merge Rule's location in the selector. In some cases, an integer value of 0 identifies the top or first entry. In some embodiments, the merge rules **260** are in the order specified in a grid of the graphical user interface. If a custom merge rule location is a negative number, then this behaves like lists in Python: −1 means the last element in the selector, −2 the second to the last, etc. In some cases, a description is a short text description of the rule. In one embodiment, this description may be displayed when the user moves the mouse over a particular selector. In some embodiments, the availability specifies when a rule can be used. The value is a text string with a value of "All", "CRM-CRM", "CSV-CRM", or "CSV-CSV". "CRM-CRM" indicates the rule is available for CRM to CRM merging, CSV-CRM for CSV format to CRM merging, and CSV-CSV for CSV format to CSV format merging. "All" availability indicates the rule is available for all merge cases. The rule may be specified by any programming language, scripting language, or other instructions. In one embodiment, the rule comprises Python source code that specifies, describes or directs how a rule behaves.

[0080] In some embodiments, the rules **260** may be pre-configured and stored in a file. For example, pre-configured rules may be provided in a MergeRules.pye file and stored in a known directory, such as the Config\MergeRules subdirectory of an application install directory. In some embodiments, a rule loader will look for .pye files for the pre-configured merge rules. If the .pye file does not exist that rule will not be loaded by the data conditioning framework **120**. Custom merge rules may be stored in .py, .pyc, or .pye file in the Config\MergeRules. In some cases, more than one rule can be specified per file. Each rule in a .py file is a class that defines the rule and this class inherits from a MergeRule base class. In one embodiment, the MergeRule base class exists in the ccrmExtensions.py file.

[0081] In some embodiments, rules **260** specify how duplicate data records from data sources **240** are to be merged. In one embodiment, python dictionaries provide access to appropriate functions and variables in classes for use by the rules **260**. This availability effectively specifies what type of rules can be written, or at least what type of information is available to rules. In many embodiments, functions and variables are provided via classes for the following information: 1) manual edits, 2) standardization changes (values before and after standardization), 3) CRM information including CRM user name, CRM DB name, CRM date and time format, 4) connector name, 5) entity type (Account, Contact, Lead), 6) Mode (CSV-CSV, CSV-CRM, CRM-CRM), 7) Required fields, 8) Duplicate List, 9) each record in a Duplicate, 10) the final record for each Duplicate, 11) Conflicting fields for each Duplicate, 12) Current selected conflicting field, 13) Duplicate master record number, and 14) Non-duplicate records. Also, in one embodiment, the data conditioning framework **120** provides the ability for allowing manual selections to over ride merge rules **260** so that manual selections of values will not be lost when a merge rule is applied.

[0082] In another embodiment, the data conditioning framework **120** provides the ability to specify when to run the selected rule. For example, a rule **260** may trigger by any application or data constrain framework **120** event, such as via any of the following CleanCRM application events:

[0083] onInit: When DV receives the data grid the rule **260** is run on the entire DuplicateList

[0084] changeDuplicate: When user changes the status of a "Dup?" button, the rule **260** is run on the "current" duplicate.

[0085] changeMasterLocation: When user changes the status of a "Master Loc" button, the rule **260** is run on the "current" duplicate.

[0086] changeDiscard: When user changes the status of a "Discard" button, the rule **260** is run on the "current" duplicate.

[0087] changeConflictField: When user changes the status of a conflict field button, the rule **260** is run on the "current" duplicate.

[0088] editFinalField: When user changes the text of a final field, the rule **260** is run on the "current" duplicate.

In one embodiment, the data conditioning framework **120** provides the ability to allow manual edits to over ride rules. If a user manually changes a duplicate value or button, and manual override is selected, such as via a button on a graphical user interface of the CleanCRM application, then when the rule is run on the duplicate, the manual changes are not changed by the logic of the rule **260**. In another embodiment, manual override may be the default behavior.

[0089] Although the rules **260** are generally described in view of Python and/or an application such as CleanCRM, the rules may be implemented or configured with any programming, scripting, textual or configuration language, and may use any events provided by the data conditioning framework or the application using the data conditioning framework **120**.

[0090] In yet another embodiment, the rules **260** may include standardize rules as another plug point or extension to the data conditioning framework **120**. Standardize rules **260** provide the ability to call code before, after, or before and after the standardizations are applied to data records, such as via the Standardize Screen of the CleanCRM application described in detail below. In another embodiment, rules **260** are loaded into the application or data conditioning framework **120** memory upon initialization. In yet another embodiment, the rules **260** may specify or identify match criteria **225**. In one embodiment, the rules may specify or identify an index **230**, such as a metric index. In still another embodiment, the rules **260** may specify or identify one or more approximate matching or searching techniques as will be discussed in conjunction with FIGS. **3-7**.

[0091] The data conditioning framework **120** includes a data flow engine **220** for processing one or more data records, such as any data from data sources **240***a*-**240***b*. The data flow engine **220** may include software, hardware, or any combination of software and hardware. In one embodiment, the data flow engine **220** processes textual data, such as strings. In some embodiments, the data flow engine **220** processes data via a grid or table, referred to as a data grid, such as a table of textual data. In some cases, the data flow engine **220** receives, uses, or otherwise processes data grids. Referring now to FIG. **2**B, an embodiment of the data flow engine **220** is depicted. In brief overview, the data flow engine **220** comprises a data flow graph with one or more nodes **222***a*-**222***n*. Each of the nodes **222***a*-**222***n* are implemented, represented, or otherwise provided by one or more modules **222***a*-**222***n*, which perform computations on data in the data grid, such as parameterized computations. The modules **222***a*-**222***n* are connected, interfaced or in communication such as to form a flow of data and processing of an input data grid. The data flow engine **220** may process an input data grid to provide an output data grid, one or more processes data records from the input data grid, or merging and management of the input data grid into any predetermined or desired form.

[0092] The diagrammatical view of the data flow engine **220** in FIG. **2**B visually depicts an example data flow. In this example, the data flow is titled 'TestDataflow 'and the modules **222***a*-**22***n* are titled ReadCSV, AddColumn, NullColumn, MergeData, and PrintCSV respectively. By further way of example, the ReadCSV module **222***a* may read, receive or otherwise obtain a data grid for processing. In one embodiment, the ReadCSV module **222**A reads in a CSV formatted file or data source **240***a-b*. The comma-separated values (CSV) file format is a tabular data format that has fields or values separated by the comma character. If a field's value contains a double quote character it is escaped with a pair of double quote characters. The ReadCSV module **222***a* may be interfaced, connected to or communication with the AddColumn module **222***b* and NullColumn **222***c* modules. Output from the ReadCSV module **222***a* may be communicated, received by or otherwise provided to these modules **222***b*-**222***c*. The AddColumn module **222***b* may add one or more columns to the data grid, such as a new column to a table with one or more rows of data. The NullColumn module **222***c* may remove a column, or one or more portions of data in a column, and in some embodiments, set certain values in records of the column to a null value. In other embodiments, the NullColumn module **222***c* may set the values of records in one or more columns to a predetermined value. The predetermined value may identify a record is no longer valid, should be discarded, or in another embodiment, should be merged by the MergeData **222***d* module.

[0093] Output from the ReadCSV module **222***a*, AddColumn module **222***b* and NullColumn **222***c* module may be provided to or obtained by the MergeData **222***d* module. The MergeData **222***d* module may merge one or more data records of the data grid processed or provided as output. In some embodiments, the MergeData **222***d* module may perform any of the logic, functionality and operations of the approximate matching engine **210**. In one embodiment, the MergeData **222***d* module may merge duplicate records identified via approximate matching into a single data record. In some embodiments, the data flow and the MergeData **222***d* module merge data records between multiple data grids, such as duplicate records from a first data source **240***a* found in a second data source **240***b*. The MergeData **222***d* module may provide as output to the PrintCSV **222***n* module one or more merged data grids. The PrintCSV **222***n* module may print or write the output to an output device or file, such as writing the merge data records to a data source **240***b*. In one embodiment, the PrintCSV **222***n* module prints the merged data records to a CSV file format.

[0094] The modules and data flows of the data flow engine **220** may be programmed or implemented via any type and form of programming or scripting language. In one embodiment, the data flow engine **220** is coded and implemented using Python, an open source, object oriented, scripted programming language. The output of a module **222***a*-**222***n* can be interfaced, connected or in communication with any other module **222***a*-222n. In some embodiments, each module **222***a*-**222***n* specifies or describes how many inputs the module takes. Modules **222***a*-**222***n* may be programmed or implemented to take any number of inputs, including none, like the ReadCSV module illustrated in the data flow of FIG. **2**B. Additionally, the modules **222***a*-**222***n* may be parameterized such as to receive input or provide output via one or more parameters. For example, a file to read is a parameter of the ReadCSV **222***a* module. The parameters of the modules **222***a*-**222***n* may be include any type and form of data representations, including any type of data declarations, such as strings, integers, arrays, data structures and objects.

[0095] Although FIG. **2**B illustrates an example data flow, the data flow engine **220** may comprise any one or more data flows comprising any desired data flow with any one or more modules **222***a*-**222***n* connected in a desired manner. Although the example data flow uses ReadCSV, AddColumn, NullColumn, MergeData, and PrintCSV modules, the data flow may be designed and arranged with any set of modules designed and constructed to perform any of the functions, operations and techniques described herein. For example, a module may be designed and constructed to perform any of the techniques of the data conditioning framework **120** or approximate matching engine **210** described herein, such as those technique discussed in conjunction with FIGS. **3**-**7**. In another example, a module **222** may be designed and constructed to perform any of the functions and operations described in connection with the connectors **235**, rules **260**, and/or match criteria **225**. In yet another example, a module **222** may be used to perform any of the functions and operations described in the example CleamCRM application discussed in FIGS. **8**A-**8**H below.

[0096] The data flow engine **220** may comprise any type and form of interface, such as a command line, graphical or application programming interface to instantiate, start, pause, and/or stop. The data flow engine **220** can load and unload one or more data flows. In one embodiment, the data flows and modules **222***a*-**222***n* are stored on a location in storage. In some embodiments, the data flow engine **220** provides information on which data flow is being processed and the stage of processing of the currently processing module. In other embodiments, the data flow engine **220** provides information related to any errors. In one embodiment, the data flow engine **220** is not tied to or implemented for any specific environment or graphical user interface functionality. In another embodiment, the data flow engine **220** can be embedded in an application, such as the CleanCRM application, which will be described in further detail below in conjunction with FIGS. **8**A-**8**H. The data conditioning framework **120** or an application using the data conditioning framework **120** can run multiple data flow engines **120**.

[0097] The data conditioning framework **120** and/or approximate matching engine **210** provides the following techniques to improve the efficiency and performance of approximate searching and matching of data records: 1) inexact trimmed matching, 2) adaptive search ordering, 3) cascading search space reduction, 4) tiered metric indexing, and 5) domain knowledge matching. These techniques will be described in conjunction with FIGS. **3**-**7**. FIG. **3** illustrates an embodiment of the inexact trimmed matching technique for performing approximate matching between strings. FIG. **4** illustrates an embodiment of the adaptive search ordering technique for ordering a plurality of match criteria, and FIG. **5** illustrates an embodiment of the cascading search result technique for sharing results between a plurality of match criteria. FIG. **6** illustrates an embodiment of a metric based index technique for approximate searching, and FIG. **7** illustrates an embodiment of another technique for applying domain knowledge to approximate matching.

[0098] Referring now to FIG. **3**, a method **300** of an embodiment of performing a trimmed inexact matching technique is depicted. The inexact matching technique determines if the edit distance between two strings is within a given or predetermined value, K, where K>0. In brief overview, at step **305**, the data conditioning framework **120** receives a request to approximately match a first string with a set of strings using a predetermined edit distance. At step **320**, the data conditioning framework **120** determines if the first string and a second string of the set of strings are not equal, e.g., have an edit distance >0. If the strings are equal, the data conditioning framework **120** may return a match without performing any of the other steps of method **300**. At step **315**, the data conditioning framework **120** generates a difference histogram for the first string and the second string. At step **320**, the data conditioning framework **120** determines via the difference histogram a first count of the number of occurrences of a character in the first string not in the second string. At step **325**, the data conditioning framework **120** determines via the difference histogram a second count of the number of occurrences of a character in the second string not in the first string. At step **330**, the data conditioning framework **120** determines if the first count or second count is greater than a predetermined threshold K. If the first count or second count is greater than predetermined threshold K, then method **300** skips inexact matching of the strings at step 332. If the first count or second count is less than or equal to the predetermined threshold K, then at step **335**, the method performs inexact matching of the first string to the second string. While performing the inexact matching, if at step **340**, the data conditioning framework **120** determines the calculated edit distance is greater than the predetermined threshold K, and then at step **342**, the inexact matching is terminated. Otherwise, at step **345**, the data conditioning framework **120** provides a result of performing inexact matching between the first string and the second string.

[0099] In further detail, at step **305**, the data conditioning framework **120** receives a request to approximately match, e.g., an approximate match request, by any suitable means and/or mechanisms. In one embodiment, the data conditioning framework **120** receives an approximate match request from a command line or graphical user interface. In another embodiment, the data conditioning framework **120** receives an approximate match request from an application programming interface (API). In some embodiments, the data conditioning framework **120** receives an approximate match request via a message, network communication or inter-process communication interface. In one embodiment, the data conditioning framework **120** receives an approximate match request via a web-based request, XML message, or a web-service interface.

[0100] In some embodiments, the data conditioning framework **120** receives a request to approximately match one or more records from a first data source **240***a* to one or more records of a second data source **240***n*. In one embodiment, the approximate match request may identify the strings to be approximately matched. In another embodiment, the approximate match request may identify the data sources **240***a*-**240***b*, or portions thereof, such as tables, etc., to be approximately matched. In yet another embodiment, the approximate match request identifies the predetermined threshold K in the request or as part of the request. In other embodiments, the predetermined threshold K is configured in the data condi-

tioning framework **120** or is read from a configuration file by the data conditioning framework **120**. In some embodiments, the predetermined threshold K is selected, identified or provided by a user via a graphical user interface of the data conditioning framework **120** or an application using the data conditioning framework **120**.

[0101] At step **310**, the data conditioning framework **120** determines the first string and one of the strings, such as a second string, of the set of strings are the same. In some embodiments, the data conditioning framework **120** uses any type and form of string comparison functions of the underlying programming or scripting language to determine if the first string and the second string are the same. In other embodiments, the data conditioning framework **120** may perform any set of executable instructions to perform a string or character comparison to determine if the strings are the same. If the strings are the same, then they exactly match and the edit distance is zero. In some embodiments, if the strings are determined to be the same, the data conditioning framework **120** does not perform approximate matching of the strings, such as by skipping approximate matching at step **332**.

[0102] At step **315**, the data conditioning framework **120** generates, creates, forms or otherwise provides a difference histogram of the characters in the first string and the second string. By using a difference histogram, the data conditioning framework **120** can perform filtering to determine if the edit distance between two strings, such as the first string and the second string, is greater than the predetermined threshold K. In one embodiment, if the difference histogram has a value that is greater than predetermined threshold K, then the strings are not considered approximately similar within the threshold, and the data conditioning framework **120** can skip performing, or otherwise not perform the approximate matching of the first string to the second string.

[0103] In some embodiments, a histogram depicts graphically, textually, or otherwise, a number of occurrences of each value in a data set. In one embodiment, the histogram depicts graphically, textually, or otherwise a frequency of distribution of values in the data set. In view of the inexact matching technique of method **300**, a difference histogram represents graphically, textually, or otherwise, a difference in the number of occurrences of each character in the first string and the second string. In some embodiments, the difference histogram represents graphically, textually, or otherwise, a difference in the frequency distribution of each character in the first string and the second string. The data conditioning framework **120** may provide the difference histogram via one or more data structures, arrays, objects and application programming interfaces. In some embodiments, the data conditioning framework **120** comprises a set of executable instructions in any programming or scripting language to create the different histogram. In one embodiment, the data conditioning framework **120** provides the difference histogram via any type and form of statistical application, program, library, or tool.

[0104] By way of an example, generating a difference histogram H will be described. The difference histogram may be represented by the data structure or array H. For purposes the example, N will be assumed to be the number of characters in the alphabet B, which represents expected strings. In some embodiments, alphabet B may be the characters used in the set of strings. In other embodiments, alphabet B may be the characters used in the first string and the second string. In still another embodiment, alphabet B may be the characters used in a first data source **240***a*, and/or a second data source **240***b*. Each value of the alphabet may be identified by the letter A, which is represented as an integer value from 0 to N-1. The difference histogram H is created as an array H with H[N] cells or elements. S**1** will represent the first string and S**2** the second string. The different histogram H is populated or assigned values as follows:

For *i* in len(*S*1), *H*[*S*1[*i*]]+=1; and

For *i* in len(*S*2), *H*[*S*2[*i*]]−=1.

For each character in the first string, the corresponding cell of the H array is incremented by a positive value, e.g.,. 1. For each character in the second string, the corresponding cell of the H array is decrement by a negative value, e.g., −1. Upon population of the H array, the difference histogram specifies or describes a difference in frequency distribution or occurrence of characters between the first string and the second string.

[0105] At steps **320** and **325**, a first count and a second count are determined via the difference histogram. In one embodiment, the first count identifies the number of occurrences of a character in the second string not in the first string, and the second count identifies the number of occurrences of a character in the first string not in the second string. By way of example, determination or computing of the first and second count via counters will be described. Two counters Cp and Cn are initialized to an initial value, such as zero. For every character A in alphabet B, if H[A]>0 then increment Cp by H[A]. Otherwise, if H[A]<0 then decrement Cn by H[A]. Based on the values of the counters Cp and Cn in comparison to the predetermined threshold K, the data conditioning framework **120** can skip performing inexact matching of the strings.

[0106] At step **330**, in one embodiment, if the first count, Cp, is greater than the predetermined threshold K, the data conditioning framework **120** may terminate the method **300** at step **322** by skipping or not performing inexact matching of the strings. With the first count greater than the predetermined threshold K, the difference or edit distance between the first string and the second strings is guaranteed to be greater than K . Likewise, if the second count is now less than the negative of the predetermined threshold, −K, the difference or edit distance between the first string and the second strings is guaranteed to be greater than K. As such, the data conditioning framework **120**, at step **330**, can determine to skip performing inexact matching at step 332. In some embodiments, to improve performance, method **300** may also keep track of which letters A in alphabet B exist in the first string and the second string. In one embodiment, the data conditioning framework **120** will use or access the elements or cells of the different histogram H[A] if A is a character in the first string or the second string.

[0107] At step **335**, if the first count or second count does not identify an edit distance between the first string and the second string greater than the predetermined threshold K, the data conditioning framework **120** performs inexact matching between the strings. In one embodiment, the approximate matching engine **210** performs inexact matching between the first string and the second string. In some embodiments, the approximate matching engine **210** uses an adaptation or implementation of the Levenshtein edit or distance calculation. In another embodiment, the approximate matching engine **210** calculates the edit distance between the strings with an optimization using the predetermined threshold K. In

some embodiments, while performing the approximate matching, if at step **340**, the approximate matching engine **210** determines the edit distance reaches or exceeds the predetermined threshold K, the approximate matching engine **210** may terminate the inexact matching at step **342**. Otherwise, at step **345**, the approximate matching engine **210** returns or provides a result of the approximate matching of the strings. In one embodiment, the approximate matching engine **210** indicates that the strings either approximately match or do not approximately match. In another embodiment, the approximate matching engine **210** identifies a difference or how much the strings do not approximately match by providing a calculated edit distance or a % difference value.

[0108] Using the fast filtering of the difference histogram, the data conditioning framework **120** and/or approximate matching engine **210** perform approximate match computation or processing on the strings that are filtered to have an edit distance less than or equal to the predetermined threshold K. The predetermined threshold K may be set or configured to any desired value or sensitivity. In some embodiments, the predetermined threshold may be equal to the predetermined edit distance between strings that will be considered an approximate match. In other embodiments, the predetermined threshold may be set to a value smaller than the predetermined or desired edit distance to be considered a match. For example, the predetermined threshold may be set to a percentage of the desired edit distance or the length of characters of the first string or second string. In yet another embodiment, the predetermined threshold may be set to a value greater than the desired edit distance, and below a higher threshold or maximum edit distance between the strings.

[0109] Referring now to FIG. **4**, a method **400** of an embodiment of the adaptive search ordering technique of the data conditioning framework **120** for ordering a plurality of match criteria is illustrated. In this embodiment, the data conditioning framework **120** performs an approximate search using a subset of the data to be matched and the match criteria **225** identified for the approximate search. The match criteria **225** are then ordered or ranked based on the time to perform the approximate search using the subset of data. In one embodiment, the match criteria **225** are ordered from the fastest executing match criteria **225**, e.g., first match criteria, to the slowest match criteria, e.g., the last match criteria.

[0110] In brief overview of method **400**, at step **405**, the data conditioning framework **120** receives a request to approximately match strings of a first data set with a second data set using a plurality of match criteria **225**. At step **410**, the data conditioning framework **120** identifies a subset of the first data set. At step **415**, the data conditioning framework **120** determines an execution time for each of the match criteria **225** using the subset of the first data set. At step **420**, the data conditioning framework **120** enumerates, ranks or orders the plurality of the match criteria **225** based on their respective execution times. At step **425**, the data conditioning framework **120** executes the requested approximate match in accordance with the order or ranking of the match criteria **225**.

[0111] In further detail, at step **405**, the data conditioning framework **120** receives a request to approximately match, e.g., an approximate match request, by any suitable means and/or mechanisms. For example, the data conditioning framework **120** may receive a request as described above in connection with step **305** of method **300**. In other embodiments, the data conditioning framework **120** receives a request to approximately search for any of the strings in the first data set **240***a* for one or more approximate matches with strings in a second data set **240***b*. In another embodiment, the data conditioning framework **120** receives a request to order or rank match criteria based on first and second data sets **240***a*-**240***b*. The first and second data sets **240***a*-**240***b* may be a sample or example of type of data to be processed using the match criteria **225**.

[0112] At step **410**, the data conditioning framework **120** identifies a subset or portion of the first data set **240***a*. In one embodiment, the subset of the first data set **240***a* is used to determine execution times of performing an approximate match with the match criteria **225** against a second data set **240***b*. In some embodiments, a subset of the first data set **240***a* is used to prevent from executing a substantial or entire portion of the approximate search to determine the execution times of the match criteria **225**. In another embodiment, the data conditioning framework **120** also identifies a subset or portion of the second data set **240***b*. As such, in one embodiment, the data conditioning framework **120** may determine execution times of match criteria **225** using a subset of the first data set **240***a* and a subset of the second data set **240***b*.

[0113] The data conditioning framework **120** may identify a subset of the first data set **240***a* and/or second data set **240***b* by any suitable means and/or mechanisms. In one embodiment, the data conditioning framework **120** identifies the first set of records in sequence of the data set **240**. For example, the data conditioning framework **120** may identify the first 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 50, 75, or 100 rows or records of the data set **240**. In another embodiment, data conditioning framework **120** identifies every other record, or every third record, or every fourth record, etc. of the data set **240**. In yet another embodiment, the data conditioning framework **120** may identify some last rows or records of the data set **240**, such as the last 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 50, 75, or 100 rows or records. In some embodiments, the data conditioning framework **120** may identify a subsequent set of rows or records from near the middle of the data set **240**. In other embodiments, the data conditioning framework **120** may identify a first portion, a middle portion, and/or an ending portion of rows or records of the data set **240**, subsequent, in a certain frequency or pattern, or otherwise. In one embodiment, the data conditioning framework **120** may identify rows or records of the data set **240** by size. In another embodiment, the data conditioning framework **120** may identify rows or records of the data set **240** by type or category. In some embodiments, the data conditioning framework **120** uses one or more rules **260** to identify a subset of the data set **240**. In other embodiments, the data conditioning framework **120** uses domain knowledge to identify a subset of the data set **240**. For example, in one embodiment, a user may identify a subset of the data set **240***a*-**240***b*

[0114] At step **415**, the data conditioning framework **120** determines an execution time for the match criteria **225** using the identified subset of data from step **410**. In one embodiment, the data conditioning framework **120** determines an execution time for each of the match criteria **225** by performing an approximate match of strings in the identified subset of data of the first data set **240***a* with the records of the second data set **240***b* using the match criteria **225**. For example, in one case, the data conditioning framework **120** runs an approximate search of a first string of the identified subset of

data in the records of the second data set **240***b* using a first match criteria **225**. In one embodiment, the data conditioning framework **120** performs one approximate search for each match criteria **225** based on one string from the identified subset of data. In other embodiments, the data conditioning framework **120** performs a plurality of approximate searches for each match criteria **255** based on one string from the identified subset of data. In yet another embodiment, the data conditioning framework **120** performs a plurality of approximate searches for each match criteria **225** based on a plurality of strings from the identified subset of data.

[0115] In some embodiments, the data conditioning framework **120** records execution information for each match criteria **225** to memory or storage, and associates this information with the match criteria **225**. In one embodiment, the execution information may include start time(s), end time(s) and/or total execution time(s). For example, in another embodiment, the data conditioning framework **120** uses a data structure or array to track the execution times of each of the match criteria **225**. In other embodiments, the data conditioning framework **120** records the execution information or execution time as an average or a median of execution times for a match criteria over a plurality of approximate searches using the match criteria. In some embodiments, the execution time comprises the execution time of one approximate search using the match criteria **225**, either with a single string or a plurality of strings. In another embodiment, the execution time may include the highest or best execution time for the match criteria **225**. In yet other embodiments, the execution time may include the lowest execution time of the match criteria **225**. In further embodiments, one or more execution times between the highest and lowest execution times may be used.

[0116] In one embodiment, the data conditioning framework **120** may use a lookup table, database or other structured stored information mechanism to determine execution times of a match criteria **225**. For example, the data conditioning framework **120** may use a name or id of the match criteria **225** to lookup a corresponding execution time for the match criteria in a table. In some embodiments, the lookup table may comprise an average or other statistical based execution time for a match criteria **225**. For example, an average or median execution time for the match criteria **225** may be used based on a history of execution times of the match criteria **225** in previous approximate searches. In some cases, the data conditioning framework **120** may use the highest or lowest execution time from the history of execution times for the match criteria.

[0117] In the case of multiple match criteria, in one embodiment, the data conditioning framework **120** may determine the execution times for the multiple match criteria by executing the multiple match criteria and recording the execution information. In another embodiment, the data conditioning framework **120** may determine the execution times for a multiple match criteria by determining the execution information for each of the component match criteria. For example, a multiple match criteria may include a first match criteria and a second match criteria. The data conditioning framework **120** may determine a first execution time for the first match criteria, and a second execution time for the second match criteria. The first and second execution times may be added or averaged to determine an execution time for the multiple match criteria. In one embodiment, the data conditioning framework **120** stores the first and second execution times of the first and second match criteria to be used by other multiple match criteria which may also have the first and/or second match criteria.

[0118] At step **420**, the data conditioning framework **120** enumerates, orders, or otherwise ranks the match criteria **225** based on determined execution times from step **415**. In one embodiment, the data conditioning framework **120** orders or ranks the match criteria **225** from highest execution time to lowest execution time. In another embodiment, the data conditioning framework **120** orders or ranks the match criteria **225** from lowest execution time to highest execution time. In some embodiments, the data conditioning framework **120** orders the match criteria **225** in memory or storage. For example, the data conditioning framework **120** may rearrange a list of match criteria into an order based on the execution times. In other embodiments, the data conditioning framework **120** orders or ranks the match criteria **225** by assigning a ranking or order identifier to the match criteria. For example, in some cases, the data conditioning framework **120** may assign a ranking number to a value of the data structure or object representing the match criteria **225**. In another case, the data conditioning framework **120** may store in, or in association with, the match criteria **225** a ranking or order identifier, e.g. a ranking number, such as via a field or column of a table in a database. In yet another embodiment, the data conditioning framework **120** may generate an enumerated list of match criteria **225** based on the order or ranking in accordance with the execution times. In some cases, this enumerated list of match criteria **225** may be stored in memory or storage.

[0119] At step **425**, the data conditioning framework **120** and/or approximate matching engine **210** performs the approximate match in accordance with the ranking or order of the match criteria **225**. In one embodiment, in response to the request of step **405**, the data conditioning framework **120** performs an approximate search between the first data set **240***a* and the second data set **240***b* using each of the match criteria **225** in the order specified in accordance with step **420**. As such, in some embodiments, the data conditioning framework **120** may perform the faster match criteria searches first followed by the slower match criteria searches. In other embodiments, the data conditioning framework **120** may perform the slower match criteria searches first followed by faster match criteria searches. In yet other embodiments, the data conditioning framework **120** may distribute the slower match criteria searches to a second instance of the data conditioning framework **120'**, or portion thereof, or in another case, a second computing device **100'** for executing the match criteria search. In one case, the data conditioning framework **120** may initiate a second process, service or thread to handle the slower match criteria. For example, in one embodiment, a first instance of the data conditioning framework **120** may execute the faster match criteria from a top of the ranking or the order, and a second instance of the data conditioning framework **120** may execute the slower match criteria from the bottom of the ranking

[0120] In some embodiments, the data conditioning framework **120** does not perform steps **410**, **415** and **420** in response to request **405**. For example, the data conditioning framework **120** may have already ordered the same match criteria **225** from a previous request. As such, in one embodiment, at step **405**, the data conditioning framework **120** determines the match criteria **224** have been ordered or ranked for the approximate search and then performs step **425** using the

previously ordered list of match criteria **225**. In yet another embodiment, the data conditioning framework **120** may receive a first request to order or rank match criteria **225** based on data sets **240***a*-**240***b* without performing the approximate search. Then, the data conditioning framework **120** may receive a second request to perform an approximate search on the data sets **240***a*-**240***b* using the ordering of match criteria from the first request. For example, the first request may be used to train the data conditioning framework **120** with some sample data sets to order the match criteria **225**. In response to the second request, the data conditioning framework **120** may perform an approximate search on a second data set based on the training

[0121] Referring now to FIG. **5**, a method **500** of an embodiment of the cascaded search space reduction technique of the data conditioning framework **120** is illustrated. In this embodiment, the data conditioning framework **120** cascades the results of a first match criteria to a subsequent match criteria. In one case, since the results of each portion of a match criteria **225** is to be logically ANDed with the next portion of the match criteria **225**, then the records that do match the first portion need be matched using the second portion of the match criteria. Hence, the number of records searched in the second portion of the match criteria is less than or equal to the number of records searched in the first portion of match criteria. In another case of multiple match criteria, since the results of each match criteria of a multiple match criteria **225** is to be logically ORed with the next match criteria, then only the records that do not match the first match criteria needs to be matched using the next match criteria. In some embodiments, this technique has the effect of rapidly reducing the number of searches that each following match criteria has to perform. In some embodiments, if the match criteria are ordered from faster to slower, for example, in accordance with method **400**, the slower match criteria **225** will be searching on a reduced subset of the data, with the subset of data shrinking from match criteria to match criteria.

[0122] In brief overview of method **500**, at step **505**, the data conditioning framework **120** receives a request to approximately match a first string with records of a data set using a plurality of match criteria. At step **510**, the data conditioning framework **120** performs an approximate match of the first string to records of the data set using a first match criteria. At step **515**, the data conditioning framework **120** determines a first set of records matching the first string based on the first match criteria **225**, or portion thereof, and a second set of records not matching the first string based on the first match criteria **225**, or portion thereof. At step **520**, the data conditioning framework **120** provides the results of the approximate search with the first match criteria, to a second portion of the match criteria or to a subsequent match criteria **225**. At step **525**, the data conditioning framework **120** continues to cascade results to subsequent match criteria, and portions thereof, until a determination that no other results will be obtained based on the remaining match criteria or completion or termination of the approximate search.

[0123] In further detail, at step **505**, the data conditioning framework **120** receives a request to approximately match, e.g., an approximate match request, by any suitable means and/or mechanisms. For example, the data conditioning framework **120** may receive a request as described above in connection with step **305** of method **300**, or as in step **405** of method **400**. In one embodiment, the data conditioning framework **120** receives a request to perform an approximate search of records or strings of the first data source **240***a* in the second data source **240***b* using a plurality of match criteria **225**. In one embodiment, the plurality of match criteria **225** may comprises single match criteria having logically ANDed fields and thresholds. In another embodiment, the plurality of match criteria **225** may include one or more multiple match criteria having logically ORed match criteria **225**.

[0124] At step **510**, the data conditioning framework **120** and/or approximate matching engine **210** performs an approximate search of a first string of a first data source **240***a* to one or more records of a second data source **240***b* using a first match criteria **225**. In one embodiment, the data conditioning framework **120** performs an approximate search using a first portion of the first match criteria **225** such as a first field and a first threshold, and/or a second portion of the first match criteria **225**, such as a second field and a second threshold. In another embodiment, the data conditioning framework **120** performs an approximate search using a first match criteria and/or a second match criteria of a multiple match criteria **225**.

[0125] At step **515**, the data conditioning framework **120** and/or approximate matching engine **210** determines results of the approximate search performed at step **510**. In one embodiment, the data conditioning framework **120** determines a first set or portion of the second data source **240***b*, e.g., records, not matching one or more records or strings of the first data source **240***a*. In another embodiment, the data conditioning framework **120** determines a first or portion of the second data source **240***b* matching one or more records or strings of the first data source **240***a*. In some embodiments, the data conditioning framework **120** determines a result of a first portion of a match criteria **225**, such as those records of the second data source **240***b* matching or not matching a first field and first threshold. In other embodiments, the data conditioning framework **120** determines a result of a first match criteria of a multiple match criteria **225**, such as those records of the second data source **240***b* matching or not matching the first match criteria.

[0126] At step **520**, based on the results of the approximate search of each match criteria **225**, the data conditioning framework **120** and/or approximate matching engine **210** may provide or not provide the results to a subsequent portion of a match criteria or multiple match criteria. In some embodiments, the data conditioning framework **120** cascades or passes the results to a subsequent portion of the match criteria or multiple match criteria. In one embodiment, the data conditioning framework **120** provides the records of the second data source **240***b* matching the first portion of the match criteria, e.g., first field and first threshold, to the second portion of the match criteria, e.g., second field and second threshold. As such, in this embodiment, the approximate matching engine **210** performs an approximate search on the records of the second data source **240***b* matching the first portion of the match criteria **225**, and does not further process the records of the second data source **240***b* not matching the first portion of the match criteria **225**. In another embodiment, the data conditioning framework **120** provides the records of the second data source **240***b* not matching the first match criteria of a multiple match criteria **225** to a second match criteria of the multiple match criteria **225**. In this embodiment, the approximate matching engine **210** performs an approximate search of the records of the second data source **240***b* not matching the first match criteria, and does not fur-

ther process the records of the second data source **240***b* matching the first match criteria.

[0127] Any subsequent portion of a match criteria, multiple or otherwise, may receive a reduced portion of the records of the second data source **240***b* to search or perform approximate matching. At step **525**, the data conditioning framework **120** and/or approximate matching engine **210** continues to perform steps **510**, **515**, and **520** for subsequent match criteria of the plurality of match criteria **225** being used for the approximate search. For each approximate search on a portion of match criteria, the results of records either matched or not matched are cascaded, propagated, passed, or otherwise provided to a next or subsequent match criteria, or portion thereof. In some embodiments, the cascading of results continues until an approximate search of the last match criteria is performed or otherwise the approximate search requested at step **505** is completed or terminated. In other embodiments, the cascading of results continues until the set of records to search in accordance with remaining match criteria have been reduced to a zero, empty or null set. For example, the data conditioning framework **120** may determine to not perform any remaining match criteria as there are no results to cascade to those match criteria. In another example, the data conditioning framework **120** may determine that performing an approximate search using any remaining match criteria with the reduced data set will return no results.

[0128] In some embodiments, the steps of method **500** are performed with an ordered or ranked list of match criteria **225**. In one embodiment, the match criteria **225** are ordered in accordance with the techniques of method **400** discussed above. For example, the plurality of match criteria **225** may be ordered by execution times from fastest to slowest. As such, in this example, the slower match criteria will receive a reduced set of data to process from the cascaded results. The faster match criteria will be used for the larger portions of the data set while the slower match criteria will be used for the smaller portions of the data set. Thus, in some embodiments, using the ranked list of match criteria with propagation of results further increases the efficiency and performance of the approximate search.

[0129] Referring now to FIG. **6**, a method **600** of an embodiment of the tiered and metric indexing techniques of the data conditioning framework **120** is illustrated. In this embodiment, the data conditioning framework **120** uses one or more metric indexes **230** to perform approximate search. The metric index may include a size-based metric, such as string lengths, or a first and last character metric index, such as the first and last characters of strings in a data source **240**. The data conditioning framework **120** may also tier the metric indexes or have the metric indexes in an order to be searched. As such, in one embodiment, if a first metric index of a plurality of ordered metric indexes **230** does not return a result, then a subsequent or second metric index will not be searched and the approximate searching terminates. The data conditioning framework **120** may deploy metric indexes, tiered, ordered or otherwise to improve the efficient and performance of approximate searching.

[0130] In brief overview of method **600**, at step **605**, the data conditioning framework **120** receives a request to approximately match a first string to records of a data set **240**. At step **610**, the data conditioning framework **120** identifies an ordered list of metric indexes to use for the approximate search. At step **615**, the data conditioning framework **120** determines results of an approximate search using a first metric index. At step **620**, the data conditioning framework **120** determines if the search produced any matching results. If no matches resulted from the search, the data conditioning framework **120** terminates the search at step **622**. Otherwise, at step **625**, the data conditioning framework **120** determines the results of a next approximate search using a subsequent metric index of the ordered list of metric indexes. At step **630**, if the next metric index is the last metric index, the data conditioning framework **120** obtains the results and completes the search at step **622**. Otherwise, the data conditioning framework **120** continues at step **620** to determine results from subsequent metric index searches until the last metric index or termination or completion of the approximate search.

[0131] In further detail, at step **605**, the data conditioning framework **120** receives a request to approximately match, e.g., an approximate match request, by any suitable means and/or mechanisms. For example, the data conditioning framework **120** may receive a request as described above in connection with step **305** of method **300**, step **405** of method **400**, or as in step **505** of method **500**. In one embodiment, the data conditioning framework **120** receives a request to perform an approximate search of records or strings of the first data source **240***a* in the second data source **240***b*. In some embodiments, the request may include using one or more match criteria **225**. In other embodiments, the request may identify one or more metric indexes **230**, **230'** to use for the approximate search.

[0132] At step **610**, the data conditioning framework **120** identifies or uses a metric index **230** for an approximate search. In one embodiment, the metric index **230** to use may be identified via one or more rules **260**. In some embodiments, the metric index **230** may be identified via the data source **240**. For example, the data source **240** may include one or more metric indexes **230**, **230'** as illustrated in FIG. **2**A. In yet another embodiment, the data conditioning framework **120** may generated any one or more of the metric indexes **230**, **230'** based on an identified data source **240**. In another embodiment, the metric index **230** may be ordered in a tiered manner. For example, a metric index based on a size may be tiered either from larger to smaller indexes, or smaller to larger indexes. In the example case of a sized-based metric index **230**, the first metric index may be for a string length of 1, the next and second index may be for a string length of 2, etc. In the example case of a first and last character based index, the first and last character indexes may be ordered alphabetically. In yet another embodiment, the indexes **230**, either sized-based or character-based, may be ordered by the number of strings or records of the data source **240** matching each index.

[0133] At step **615**, the data conditioning framework **120** and/or approximate matching engine **210** performs an approximate search using the metric index **230** and determines a result from the search. In one embodiment, the approximate search or match may return a result of one or more matching records. For example, a search of a string of a 5 character length from a first data source **240***a* may be approximately matched to one or more strings of 5 character lengths from a second data source **240***b* using a sized-based metric index. In another example, a search of a string beginning with letter A and ending with letter E from a first data source **240***a* may be approximately matched to one or more

strings starting with A and ending in E from the second data source **240***b* using the first and last character based metric index.

[0134] In yet another embodiment, the data conditioning framework **120** searches those sized-based metric indexes **230** within a range of lengths of a string of the first data source **240***a*. For example, a string may be searched via the sized-based metric indexes **230** having a 20% size difference to the length of the string. To identify if string S is in the sIndex with allowing up to 20% difference in the strings characters, then compute the number characters that can be subtracted or added to S and still be within 20%. This gives a range of lengths referred to as RL. The data conditioning framework **120** searches those metric index entries where the key is in RL. For example, if the string to be searched for is 10 characters in length, the sized-based metric indexes corresponding to the range of lengths between 8 and 12 characters may be used for the approximate search.

[0135] In another embodiment, the approximate search or match may not return a matching result. Further to example of the sized-based metric index, the second data source **240***b* may not have any strings approximately matching the 5 character length string of the first data source **240***a*. In the example of the first and last character based index, the second data source **240***b* may not have any strings or strings that approximately match the string from the first data source **240***a* beginning with A and ending with E. In yet another embodiment, the approximate search may result in a string not matching because the match is below the threshold of a match criteria **225**. For example, the approximate search may search those strings of 5 characters in length based on the sized-based metric index but none of those strings satisfy the predetermined threshold condition of the match criteria **225**.

[0136] At step **620**, the data conditioning framework **120** determines if the approximate search using the metric index, with or without match criteria **225**, returns any results. In the case of a sized-based metric index, if no results are returned then the approximate search terminates at step **622**. For example, if the first string of the first data source **240***a* is 5 characters in length and the metric index of 5 character length strings of the second data source **240***b* returns no matches, then the data conditioning framework **120** determines not to search any string lengths of greater than 5 characters in length from the second data source **240***b*. In the example case of a first and last character based index, the data conditioning framework **120** determines if a string exists in both the first character index and the last character index; otherwise no matching results are returned.

[0137] If the data conditioning framework **120** determines the metric index based search returned results, the data conditioning framework **120** and/or approximate match engine **210** performs another approximate search using a next index of the metric-based index **230**. For example, in one embodiment, if the sized-based metric index of character length **8** returns a result, the sized-based metric index of character length **9** may be searched next. Then, at step **630**, the data conditioning framework **120** continues obtaining results from subsequent metric-indexes until determining the last metric index has been searched and completes the search at step **622**, or otherwise a search returns no results and terminates the search at step **622**.

[0138] Although method **600** is generally discussed as using a sized-based metric index or a first and last character based metric index, the data conditioning framework **120** may use both types of metric indexes in conjunction with each other. For example, a first string of character length **5** and beginning with A and ending in E may be searched via both types of metric indexes of a second data source **240***b*. In this example, in order to return a result, the string must be found in the sized-based index corresponding to 5 characters length and the character-based indexes corresponding to a first character of A and a last character of E. Furthermore, as previously mentioned, one or more types of metric indexes may be used in conjunction with any match criteria in performing an approximate search. For example, in one embodiment, not only does an approximately matched string need to be found in the appropriate metric index but the approximately matched string may also need to be approximately matched in accordance with one or more match criteria **225**.

[0139] Referring now to FIG. **7**, a method **700** of an embodiment of inexact domain knowledge based searching techniques of the data conditioning framework **120** is illustrated. In this embodiment, the data conditioning framework **120** deploys inexact domain knowledge to improve the ability to match domain knowledge with a data element. In one embodiment, domain knowledge matching comprises the operations of providing a domain knowledge lookup table for a data element and then performing inexact matching on the lookup table entries to determine an approximate match. For example, the following domain knowledge lookup table **275** comprises three states of the United States:

[0140] AL, Alabama, bama

[0141] AR, Arkansas

[0142] MA, Massachusetts, mass

In this example, the two letter state designator of AL, AK, and MA are the reference values or data elements, and the other values are different or alternative ways to represent the data elements, e.g., alternative data elements, AL, AK, and MA, respectively. The domain knowledge inexact matching technique performs approximate matching of any reference data element by also performing approximate matching on the alternative ways in which the data element can be represented. Using this technique, in one embodiment, the data conditioning framework **120** selects as a result of an approximate match one of the reference data element or alternative data elements having the best or closest approximate match to the searched string, given that it is within the desired match threshold, e.g. match criteria.

[0143] In brief overview of method **700**, at step **705**, the data conditioning framework **120** receives a request to approximately match a string with a data element, referred to as the reference data element. At step **710**, the data conditioning framework **120** provides or identifies a set of one or more alternative data elements to the reference data element, such as a domain knowledge based lookup table **275**. At step **715**, the data conditioning framework **120** approximately matches the string to the reference data element and the set of one or more alternative data elements. At step **720**, the data conditioning framework **120** identifies one of the reference data element and the alternative data elements as a result for the approximate match within a predetermined threshold. For example, at step **720**, the data conditioning framework **120** may provide as result one of the reference data element or the alternative data elements providing the closest or best approximate match.

[0144] In further detail, at step **705**, the data conditioning framework **120** receives a request to approximately match a first string with one or more data records by any suitable

means and/or mechanisms. For example, the data conditioning framework **120** may receive a request as described above in connection with step **305** of method **300**, step **405** of method **400**, step **505** of method **500**, or as in step **605** of method **600**. In one embodiment, the data conditioning framework **120** receives a request to perform an approximate search of a record or string of the first data source **240***a* in the second data source **240***b*. In some embodiments, the request may include using one or more match criteria **225**. In other embodiments, the request may identify one or more metric indexes **230**, **230'** to use for the approximate search. For example, in one embodiment, the data conditioning framework **120** receives a request to approximately match a string with a data element of one or more records of a data source **240**.

[0145] At step **710**, the data conditioning framework **120** obtains, provides or otherwise identifies a set of one or more alternative data elements for the data element of the record or data source 24 to be searched or matched. In one embodiment, the data conditioning framework **120** has one or more lookup tables **275** having one or more alternative data elements related to or associated with the reference data element. In one embodiment, the reference data element is used as an index to the lookup table. In another embodiment, the lookup table **275** may comprise a hash table and a hash value of the reference data element is used as an index. In some embodiments, the alternative data elements **275** are provided, stored or located in a data source **240**. In other embodiments, the data conditioning framework **120** provides the alternative data elements via a file. In yet another embodiment, the data conditioning framework **120** provides the alternative data elements **275** via a database, such as in one or more tables. In one embodiment, the data conditioning framework **120** obtains the alternative data elements **275** via a query or application programming interface call (API) to a database, another application or information system, such as knowledge base, contact information system, email system, ERP or CRM system.

[0146] In one embodiment, the data conditioning framework **120** may deploy domain knowledge of the reference data element to provide alternative data elements. By way of example and in view of the CleanCRM application to be described below, the domain knowledge **275** for the alternative data elements may be related to any type and form of person, institute and location data **250**. In some embodiments, one or more of the following eight domain knowledge lookup information of alternative data elements may be used in practicing an embodiment of this technique: 1) Country, 2) Zip code, 3) Nicknames, 4) Address Conventions, 5) Business Designations, 6) City words, 7) Top 1000 companies, and 8) Secondary unit designators. In the example case of country and region domain knowledge, the data conditioning framework **120** provides alternative data elements referring to, identifying or otherwise representing a country or regions in the country. For example, the following table **275** identifies alternative data elements for the reference data element USA and respective regions, e.g., states of the USA:

[0147] USA, US, United States of America, America

[0148] USA, AL, Alabama, bama

[0149] USA, AK, Alaska

[0150] etc . . .

[0151] In one embodiment, the data conditioning framework **120** provides alternative data elements **120** referring to, identifying or representing the relationship between USA state, cities, and zip codes. The following tables identifies some example alternatives:

[0152] 01021, Chicopee, Mass.

[0153] 01022, Chicopee, Mass.

[0154] 01026, Cummington, Mass.

[0155] 01027, Easthampton, Mass.

[0156] etc . . .

[0157] In another embodiment, the data conditioning framework **120** provides nicknames referring to, identifying or representing the relationship between different ways to represent first names as in the following table **275**:

[0158] Abigail, Abigail, Abby, Abbie

[0159] Abraham, Abraham, Abe

[0160] etc . . .

In some embodiments, address conventions domain knowledge is used in referring to, identifying or representing the relationship between different ways to represent different address conventions, such as North American address conventions. For example, the following table **275** identifies alternatives for alley and annex reference data elements, which may be found in an address record of a data source **240**:

[0161] Alley, Alley, Aly, Alley

[0162] Annex, Annex, Anx, Annex

[0163] etc . . .

[0164] In yet one embodiment, the data conditioning framework **120** provides alternative business designations referring to, identifying or representing the relationship between different ways to represent different business designations as in the following example table **275**:

[0165] LLP, Limited Liability Partnership

[0166] Corp, Corporation

[0167] LLC, Limited Liability Company

[0168] Inc., Incorporated

[0169] Ltd., Limited

[0170] etc . . .

In other embodiments, the data conditioning framework **120** provides alternative ways to refer to, identify or to represent words in city names. For example, the following table **275** identifies alternatives for the words of Beach and Bluff that may be found in a record having a city name:

[0171] Beach, Bch

[0172] Bluff, Blf

[0173] etc . . .

In some embodiments, the data conditioning framework **120** may provide alternative data elements to identify, or refer to the different ways to represent the common names of the top 1000 companies. For example, the following table **275** identifies alternative names for 3Com and Abbott:

[0174] 3Com, 3Com, ThreeCom

[0175] Abbott Laboratories, Abbott Laboratories, Abbott Labs, Abbott

[0176] etc . . .

In another embodiment, the data conditioning framework **120** provides alternative data elements to identify, or refer to the different ways to represent secondary address unit designators. For example, the following table identifies alternative secondary address unit designators for Apartment and Basement:

[0177] Apartment, Apartment, Apt, Apart, Aprtmnt

[0178] Basement, Basement, Bsmt

[0179] etc . . .

[0180] Although the domain knowledge and alternative data elements are generally described above with examples of

PIL information and corresponding example tables, the technique depicted in FIG. **7** and the data conditioning framework **120** may use a vast array of different alternative data representations and different lookup or table information for other types of PIL information and non-PIL information. For example, the data conditioning framework **120** may provide alternative data elements to identify or represent first, nicknames, and/or last names by country. In another example, the data conditioning framework **120** may provide alternative data elements to identify or represent companies or business in a state, county, country or other area by size, type, industry or otherwise. In one example, the data conditioning framework **120** may provide alternative data elements to identify or represent data elements, values, fields or records of a ERP, PDM, PLM, SCM or LIMS information system.

[0181] Still referring to FIG. **7**, and in further detail, at step **715**, the data conditioning framework **120** and/or approximate matching engine **210** performs an approximate search or match for the first string requested in step **705** with the reference data element and any of the alternative data elements. In some embodiments, the data conditioning framework **120** deploys any of the matching and/or searching techniques described in conjunction with methods **300**, **400**, **500** and/or **600**. In one embodiment, the data conditioning framework **120** uses one or more match criteria **225** during the approximate matching. In another embodiment, the data conditioning framework **120** uses one or more metric indexes **230** during the approximate matching.

[0182] In some embodiments, the data conditioning framework **120** performs an approximate match of the first string to the reference data element and each of the alternative data elements. In other embodiments, the data conditioning framework **120** performs an approximate match of the first string to the reference data element, and if the reference data element exactly matches or approximately matches within a predetermined threshold, the data conditioning framework **120** skips the alternative data elements. In another embodiment, the data conditioning framework **120** performs an approximate match of the first string to the alternative data elements until finding an approximate match within the predetermined threshold. In yet another embodiment, the data conditioning framework **120** performs an approximate match of the first string to the alternative data elements and identifies all of the alternative data elements approximately matching the first string within a predetermined threshold. In some embodiments, one or more of the reference data element and alternative data elements may approximately match the first string within a predetermined threshold.

[0183] At step **720**, the data conditioning framework **120** provides a result of the approximate match between the first string and the reference data element and/or alternative data elements within a predetermined threshold. In one embodiment, the data conditioning framework **120** provides the approximate match of the reference and alternative data elements having the closest or best approximate match with the first string. For example, a reference data element and one of the alternative data elements may both approximately match the first string within the predetermined threshold but the alternative data element more closely matches the first string. As such, in this example, the data conditioning framework **120** may provide the alternative data element as the result. In other cases, although the alternative data elements are searched for an approximate match, the reference data element may provide the closer approximate match to the first string and identified as the resulting match. In other embodiments, the data conditioning framework **120** may provide a plurality of results approximately matching the first string, such as the reference data element and one of the alternative data elements, or a plurality of the alternative data elements. For example, a user of an application or the data conditioning framework **120** may selected the desired approximately matching data element from the plurality of the results. In some embodiments, the data conditioning framework **120** may reduce the plurality of results by approximately matching to one or more match criteria **225**, or using one or more metric indexes **230**.

[0184] Although the domain knowledge technique of method **700** is generally described with domain knowledge information related to people, institute and locations, the domain knowledge information may comprise data relevant to any type of system, such as a PDM, PLM, SCM, ERP, LIMS or other information system. As such, in some embodiments, the technique of method **700** may be applied according to the data, information, terms, terminology, and language related to the domain of the information system. In one embodiment, the domain knowledge technique described herein may be applied to any of the following domains of information: 1) accounting or financial system, 2) manufacturing, 3) product data management, 4) product life cycle management, 5) enterprise resource planning, 6) supply chain, 7) lab information systems, 8) bioinformatics systems and 9) life sciences information systems.

[0185] Furthermore, any of the techniques of methods **300**, **400**, **500**, **600** and **700** described in conjunction with FIGS. **3**, **4**, **5**, **6**, and **7** respectively may be used alone or in any combination with each other. In one embodiment, the inexact trimmed matching technique of method **300** may be performed with the adaptive search ordering technique of method **400**, the cascading search space reduction technique of method **500**, the metric indexing technique of **600**, and/or the domain knowledge matching technique of method **700**. In another embodiment, the adaptive search ordering technique of method 400 may be performed with the cascading search space reduction technique of method **500**, the metric indexing technique of **600**, and/or the domain knowledge matching technique of method **700**. In a further embodiment, the cascading search space reduction technique of method **500** may be performed with the metric indexing technique of **600**, and/or the domain knowledge matching technique of method **700**. In yet another embodiment, the metric indexing technique of **600** may be performed with the domain knowledge matching technique of method 700.

[0186] In view of the structure, functions and operations of the data conditioning framework **120** and approximate matching and searching techniques, any type and form of application may use, incorporate, integrate or embed the data conditioning framework **120**. For example, the data conditioning framework **120** may be used to "cleanse" data of a data source **240**, such as a CRM system. Cleansing data may include removing duplicates, fixing typos or misspellings, changing names to formal names or to standard naming conventions, correcting case types, correcting incorrect information, such as addresses and contact information, and filling in missing information. Referring now to FIGS. **8**A-**8**H, an example of an application using the data conditioning framework **120**, referred to as CleanCRM **800** is illustrated. In one embodiment, the CleanCRM application **800** plugs into a CRM system to standardize data and merge duplicate infor-

mation. The application **800** uses the techniques described herein to find matches in nicknames, abbreviations or misspellings. Furthermore, the application **800** applies standardization rules **260** automatically to cleanse addresses, fill in missing zip codes, and correct abbreviations and casing. All fields, including custom fields, in the CRM tables may be cleansed. Through a simple wizard interface, the CleanCRM application **800** de-duplicates, informally referred to as de-duping, and standardizes both external lists prior to a CRM import, and the existing CRM system.

[0187] In one embodiment, CleanCRM **800** is a work flow or wizard type application with eight screens as depicted in FIGS. **8**A-**8**H. The user traverses from one screen to the next screen by filling in the information on each screen before proceeding in a linear fashion to the next screen. In some embodiments, the CleanCRM application **800** performs user constraint checking For example, before transitioning to the next screen, the user must perform certain actions, with each screen's required actions being dependent upon the screen and sometimes dependent upon the mode of operation. Each of the screens of the application **800** will be described with a list of constraints per screen that may be applied.

[0188] Referring now to FIG. **8**A, the application **800** provides a Welcome Screen **805** which in one embodiment, has no user constraints. At the top of the screen, the license, proxy and history configuration information is identified via the text and uniform resource locator (URL) or hyperlink: "To obtain license keycode information, configure proxy servers, or view History click here." A user may click on the link to bring up a box with the license, proxy and history information. The history information displays information about usage of CleanCRM. A refresh button may be selected to show updated Archived Batch Data Set information in a grid or tabular format. Each row of the grid corresponds to a particular Archived Batch Data Set and contains information on the entity processed, the connector used, the mode in which a user ran a CleanCRM session, the size of the log file, the number of unprocessed records, the version of CleanCRM **800** used, and any notes the user committed during the session. The user can view the data files comprising each archived batch data set, by clicking on the desired Archived Batch Data Set. The license information displays the permissions the user may have with CleanCRM **800**. The proxy information allows the user to configure a proxy server for use with or by the application **800**. For example, a Network tab may display the proxy settings, which may be customized or changed. The Welcome Screen **805** also identifies the connectors **235** being used. In the license information and configuration, a connectors tab allows a user to install connectors **235** to run with CleanCRM **800**.

[0189] The Welcome Screen **805** also provides a task selection mechanism for the user to select the type of task for using the application **800** to cleanse data. The user may have the following task options: 1) Cleanse and de-duplicate (e.g. remove duplicates) a CSV file **240** within itself, 2) Import and de-de-duplicate a CSV **240***a* against a CRM system **240***b*, 3) Cleanse and de-duplicate a CRM system **340**, or 4) use a CSV demo file **240**. For the Cleanse and de-duplicate a CSV file within itself task, or CSV-CSV mode, the application **800** cleanses data from a single CSV file **240** (no CRM system is involved). In one embodiment, the Source data file is the CSV file **240***a* which needs to be cleaned, and the Target data file **240***b*, which is also in CSV format, comprises the cleansed data. In some embodiments, the CleanCRM application **800** leaves the data in the original source file unchanged. In one embodiment, all cleansing changes are written to the Target file **240***b*. Thus, with this option, the user retains the original data file (the source file) as well as obtaining a cleansed data file (the target file). For the Import and de-duplicate a CSV against your CRM system task, or CSV-CRM mode, the data from a separate CSV file **240***a* is cleansed and merged into an existing CRM database **240***b*. The Source file **240***a* is the CSV file to be cleansed and integrated into the CRM system. The Target file **240***b* comprises a selected group (subset) of records from the CRM system that the CSV file is to be imported and de-duplicated against. In one embodiment, the data in the CSV file is compared to the data in the subset of the CRM system. This comparison is made in order to identify duplicates and inconsistencies that may exist. Once CleanCRM cleanses the CSV source file, in one embodiment, the application **800** then integrates and merges the content into the target CRM system.

[0190] For the Cleanse and de-duplicate your CRM system task, or CRM-CRM mode, the CleanCRM application **800** cleanses a selected portion of a CRM database **240**. In this embodiment, the user selects a subset of data records from the CRM system **240** to be cleansed by CleanCRM **800**. In this option, the selected subset of the CRM system now has cleansed data, and the original CRM data is not retained. For the Use CSV demo file task, or CSV-CSV mode, the application provides this mode for first time users of CleanCRM **800**. The demo file **240** includes dummy data, which may be used for demo and practice purposes.

[0191] The Welcome Screen **805** enables a user to use a previously saved session, by entering the session in the Choose Session File Name location. Sessions may be stored in a file having the extension '.ses'. The user may also click the browse button to navigate to a session file. With the saved session, connector, task, and entity under which the session was saved will be applied. In the notes section of the Welcome Screen, the user may a comment or note about the run of the CleanCRM session the user wishes to save. The user can type into the box any desired text. When done, the user selects or clicks the Commit Note button to save the note. In one embodiment, the note will be saved as a text file in the Archived Batch Data Sets folder with the first 20 characters of your note as the title.

[0192] Referring now to FIG. **8**B, an example prepare screen **810** of the application **800** is depicted. In some embodiments, the user constraints may include that the data source and targets must be specified and they must be valid sources and targets. In other embodiments, if connecting to a CRM system that requires a user login and password, then one constraint may be that the user must have successfully logged in. In this screen **810**, the user will set the parameters for use of the application and select which data entity to use. The user will select a source data source **240***a* and target data source **240***b*. If cleansing data within the CRM system only (no CSV file), the user processes Accounts first and then Contacts. When Importing and de-duping a CSV file into the CRM system, the user may need to run CleanCRM multiple times. In some embodiment, if both Account and Contact information is in the CSV file, the user may need to process the Contacts data first in CleanCRM **800**, then Accounts. In other embodiments, CleanCRM **800** will insert the CSV Contacts into existing Accounts in the CRM as long as another Contact belonging to that Account is included in the groups report of the CRM. After the Contact data has been imported,

in some cases, the user must run CleanCRM again to import the Account data in the CSV file. In one embodiment, after Account and Contact data has been imported, the user may also need to run CleanCRM **800** to Cleanse and de-duplicate the CRM system in case duplicate Accounts are created. In some embodiments, this may only be necessary when importing Contacts, and the CRM groups report did not have Contacts belonging to matching Accounts in the CSV file.

[0193] In the source section of the Prepare Screen **810**, the user selects a source file of data **240***a* to be processed by CleanCRM **800**. When Cleansing and de-duping a CSV file within itself or Importing and de-duping a CSV file against a CRM system, the source **240***a* will be a CSV file. When Cleansing and de-duping a CRM system, the source may be a subset of records in the CRM system **240***a*. The user has the option of Basic Grouping or Advanced Grouping for the CRM source selection. Basic Grouping will use records in the CRM system **240***a* that have Account Names starting with the letters indicated in the selection. Advanced Grouping uses a group of CRM records that the user has assembled for a run of CleanCRM **800**.

[0194] In the target section of the Prepare Screen **810**, the user selects a target **240***b* where CleanCRM will write the cleansed data. When Cleansing and de-duping a CSV file within itself, the Target **240***b* will be a CSV file that CleanCRM **800** will create upon writing the data. When Importing and de-duping a CSV file into a CRM system, the target **240***b* will include a subset of records from the CRM system **240***a*. The user may have the option of Basic Grouping or Advanced Grouping for the Target selection. As described above, the Basic Grouping will use records in the CRM system that have Account Names starting with the letters indicated in the user selection, and Advanced Grouping uses a group of CRM records that the user has assembled for a run of CleanCRM **800**. In one embodiment, the user does not need to select a Target when Cleansing and de-duping the CRM system.

[0195] Referring now to FIG. **8**A, an example Specify Fields screen **815** of the application **800** is depicted. In one embodiment, the user constraint for this screen **815** is that all required CleanCRM fields must have source fields mapped into them. In some embodiments, the user constraint may include the mapping of a subset of CleanCRM fields to the source fields are required. On the Specify Fields screen **815**, the user maps column/field headings from the Source CSV file **240***a* to corresponding CleanCRM field headings **240***b*. In one embodiment, these fields are used in the Matching and Merging steps of the CleanCRM application **800**. In another embodiment, the user does not have to Specify Fields when cleansing the CRM system **240**. In some embodiments, in order to choose data in conflicting fields on the Merge screen **835**, those fields have to be specified in this screen **815**. If the user does not Specify fields, the user may choose fields from a Master Record.

[0196] Further to the Specify Fields screen **815**, when Cleansing and de-duping a CSV file or Importing and de-duping a CSV file against a CRM system, the user may also specify additional fields in order to carry the data through CleanCRM **800**. These fields do not necessarily need to be used for Matching or merging purposes. For example, a user may want to carry through data regarding the Contacts' birth dates from the CSV file **240***a*. The user can simply check off this field under the Specify Additional Fields section of the screen **815**, and the birth dates will be carried through to the Target **240***a*. In some embodiments, if the CSV file **240***a* does not have column headers, CleanCRM **800** will assign each column a number to appear onscreen. If the user is unable to work with your data in this form, the user may exit CleanCRM **800**, insert column headers into the CSV file **240***a*, and restart CleanCRM **800**.

The way in which fields are mapped to the CRM system may be specific to each system.

[0197] Referring now to FIG. **8**D, an example Verify Map Screen **820** of the application **800** is depicted. In one embodiment, the user constraint for this screen **810** may be that any additional fields that where mapped in from the Verify Fields Screen must all be mapped to target fields. In some embodiments, the Verify Map Screen **820** is used when importing a CSV file **240***a* into a CRM system **240***b*. In other cases, the user may skip the process of this screen **8210** and immediately click Apply and Proceed button to move to the next screen. The Verify Map screen **820** is used to map data to fields in addition to the CleanCRM Required fields on the Specify Fields screen **815**. The fields that will be mapped on this screen **820** are determined by the additional fields the user checked off on the bottom portion of the Specify Fields screen **815**. For example, the user may wish to map data in fields that do not match any of the standard fields. In some embodiments, the CRM administrator can create custom fields in the CRM system **240** for these data fields prior to the import process. At the top of the screen, there are numbers that indicate the number of records in the Source **240***a* and Target file **240***b* database, which will be cleansed by CleanCRM **800**. These numbers can assist the user in estimating the time it will take for CleanCRM to run the cleansing session.

[0198] Referring now to FIG. **8**E, an example Standardize Screen **825** of the application **800** is depicted. In one embodiment, the user constraint for this screen **825** includes displaying a dialog warning to the user if the user did not "View Test Results" for the standardization settings on this screen. In some embodiments, The user may want to verify how the standardization settings change the data. In another embodiments, this dialog box is just a reminder and does not appear if the user has indeed selected "View Test Results". Also, in some embodiments, if all standardizations are turned off, then the dialog does not appear because no changes will be applied to the data. Standardizations or standardize rules **260** will format the appearance of the processed data records. In one embodiment, the rules **260** are only applied to the CleanCRM **800** Required data fields.

[0199] In the Standardize Screen **825**, the section of Turning Standardizations On identifies the following in this CleanCRM **800** example:

[0200] States will appear either in all long form or all short form, depending upon user selection.

[0201] If no zip code is specified in a particular record of the CSV or CRM database, CleanCRM will fill in the appropriate zip code that corresponds to the specified city name. However, if the city has more than one zip code associated with it (e.g. New York, Chicago), CleanCRM will leave the zip code field blank.

[0202] If a zip code is specified but there is no city name or state, CleanCRM will fill in the appropriate city name and state that correspond with the specified zip code.

[0203] Punctuation will be removed from the Corporate Name Directory companies, Business Designations, Addressing Conventions, Secondary Address Formatting, and two-letter State Abbreviations.

[0204] Other selected standardizations will be applied.

If the Standardizations are turned off, then the above-described features may not be applied during the cleansing process of CleanCRM **800**. In some embodiments, when cleansing and de-duping a CSV file or a CRM system, standardizations **260** are applied to all records that CleanCRM **800** is processing. In other embodiments, when Importing and de-duping a CSV file against a CRM system, standardizations **260** are applied to the records in the CSV file. In one embodiment and in order to get Standardizations to be applied to the CRM records, the user must run CleanCRM **800** again with the task to Cleanse and de-duplicate your CRM system.

[0205] In some embodiments, the naming standardizations **260** are applied to businesses in the Account/Company Name fields in the records as depicted by the Naming section of the Standardize screen **825**. The Corporate Name Directory **275** is an example of a directory of alternative representation of names of the Fortune 1000 companies. In one embodiment, if Standard Name is selected, CleanCRM **800** will access this database **275**, and ensure the standard spelling and business designations for the Accounts/Companies that are a part of the Fortune 1000 directory. Business Designations selection of the Naming section of this screen **825** determines the format of the Account/Company designations (Incorporated, Corporation, University, etc.). In one embodiment, selecting Abbreviation will rewrite all designations in abbreviated form (Inc, Corp, Univ, etc.). In another embodiment, selecting Long Form will rewrite all designations to their full, unabbreviated form. Selecting Off will disable the particular Naming standardization **260** and leave the Account/Company Name data in the original format before being processed by CleanCRM **800**.

[0206] In the Addressing section of the Standardize screen **825**, standardizations **260** may be applied to the address fields of the records. In one embodiment, the Conventions selection will determine the format of the conventions of the addresses. In some embodiments, the option All Short sets all conventions in an abbreviated form (St, Ave, Blvd, etc.). In other embodiments, the option All Long sets all conventions to their full, unabbreviated form (Street, Avenue, Boulevard, etc.). In another embodiment, the Secondary Address Formatting selection will format the separation of common secondary address, e.g., Address 2, data from the primary address field, e.g., Address1 field. In some embodiments, selecting On enables CleanCRM **800** to recognize and separate the Address2 data (PO Box 123, Unit 100, Suite 23, etc.) from the Address1 data (123 Main St, 456 James Blvd) into their appropriate fields. In other embodiments, selecting Off will disable the Addressing standardizations **260** and leave the Address1 and Address2 data in the original format before being processed by CleanCRM **800**.

[0207] In the Spelling section of the Standardize Screen **825**, the standardizations **260** may be applied to the City and State/Province fields of the data. In one embodiment, the City Spelling Correction applies an automatic spell-check for many common cities and towns. In some embodiments, selecting Off will disable the spell-check and leave the city names unchanged. In other embodiments, the State/Province Spelling determines the format of the states and provinces in the data. In another embodiments, selecting All Two Letters will set all state/province names to a common two-letter abbreviation (MA, CA, TX, etc.). In yet another embodiment, selecting All Long will set all state/province names to a full, unabbreviated form (Massachusetts, California, Texas, etc.).

[0208] In the Casing section of the Standardize screen **825**, standardizations **260** regarding casing may be applied to Name and Address fields. In one embodiment, the Casing option determines the written format of the data. In some embodiments, selecting ALL UPPERCASE will set the text of every record in uppercase letters, for example: ABC CORP, JOHN SMITH, 123 SMITH AVE, WONDERLAND, etc. In other embodiments, selecting Proper Case capitalizes the first letter of each word and sets the remaining letters in lowercase, for example: Example: Abc Corp, John Smith, 123 Smith Ave, Wonderland, etc. In yet another embodiment, selecting Off will leave the data in the original casing format before being processed by CleanCRM **800**.

[0209] Referring now to FIG. **8**F, an example Match Screen **830** of the application **800** is depicted. The Match Screen **830** is used to determine which fields to match in order to find duplicate records. In some embodiments, this screen **830** is also used to establish the type of duplicate records the user desires to find. In one embodiment, the user constraint for this screen **830** includes displaying a warning dialog if the user did not selected "View Test Results" for the match settings on this screen **830**. In some cases, the user will want to verify how the match settings calculate (find) duplicates. In one embodiment, this dialog box serves as a reminder to the user and does not appear if the user has selected "View Test Results".

[0210] In the Match Criteria **225** section of the Match Screen **830**, the user can select which fields to use for matching by either an exact match or an approximate match, e.g., similar match. In one embodiment, if the user selects to search for similar records, CleanCRM **800** will apply matching algorithms and/or domain knowledge to determine records that are similar. In some embodiments, the application **800** will use any of the techniques of method **300**, **400**, **500**, **600** and **700** described herein, alone or in combination to determine similar records. For example, CleanCRM **800** may identify similar records such as misspellings (Commcast and Comcast), phonetic matches (Klaus and Claus), nicknames (Dick and Richard, or Becky and Rebecca), company abbreviations (ABC and American Business Company), and numerical variances (7th Street and Seventh Street). In some embodiments, CleanCRM **800** will ignore punctuation and extra spaces when matching business designations (such as Inc or Co) and will overlook words not part of the official company name (such as The Toy Company and Toy Company). In other embodiments, when searching for exact duplicates, the application **800** will locate identical or exact matching records as duplicates. For example, the application **800** would match Toy Company as an exact match with Toy Company, but would not identify The Toy Co as a potential match to Toy Company. In another embodiment, CleanCRM **800** considers blank data fields in two different records to be matches. In other embodiments, a blank data field may not be considered a match with another field containing data.

[0211] In the Merge Rule section of the Match Screen **830**, the Merge Rule **260** functionality sets which data from which record in a duplicate set CleanCRM **800** will automatically use when filling in Final Record values. Also, depending upon the task the user is running, the Merge Rule **260** may determine which record in the duplicate set is automatically selected as the Master Record. Each task to run in CleanCRM **800** may have different Merge Rules **260** available with various behaviors.

[0212] Referring now to FIG. **8**G, an example Merge Screen **835** of the application **800** is depicted. In one embodiment, the Merge Screen **835** has no user constraints. In another embodiment, the Merge Screen **835** comprises a custom user constraint. In other embodiments, the Merge Screen **835** is used to merge matched records in to a single or final record. In some embodiments, the final record is a result of individual fields selected from a duplicate set, i.e., group of duplicate records. On the Merge screen **835**, CleanCRM **800** displays the data records it is working with in Duplicate Sets. In one embodiment, CleanCRM **800** writes the Final Record to the target **240***b*. In another embodiment, the user uses the records in the duplicate set to customize the Final Record. In some embodiments, don-duplicates, or records that did not get matched up as duplicates, are displayed in the Non-Dups table below the duplicate sets. In other embodiments, the columns of data fields that are displayed in the Merge grid are those that are checked off at the bottom of the Specify Fields screen. The user may rearrange the order of the data columns by clicking on the column header at the top of the grid and dragging it either to the left or right. In some embodiments, any changes in column order will be saved to a Save Session. In another embodiment, all fields with a predetermined color, such a red, are referred to and identifies as Final Record fields, which are editable. The user may edit these fields by clicking in the desired field and typing over the existing data. Fields highlighted in another predetermined color, such as a second color or pink, may identify un-identical or conflicting data within a duplicate set that are being consolidated into the Final Record. The user may click on the radio button of the desired field to set its data value as the Final Record. In some embodiments, the Final Records will comprise data from the checked off field in any group of un-identical or conflicting data records. Fields highlighted in a third color, such as yellow may identify where data to which Standardizations **260** have been applied. In one embodiment, the user may middle-click (with the middle button or scroll-wheel of a mouse) to see these changes in a before-and-after view. In another embodiments, conflicting fields that have had standardizations **260** applied may only appear highlighted in the third color, such as yellow. Additionally, in some embodiments, indicated at the bottom of the screen **835** are the number of duplicates, duplicate sets, and non-duplicates found by CleanCRM **800**.

[0213] Referring now to FIG. **8**H, an example Finalize Screen **840** of the application **800** is depicted. In one embodiment, the Finalize Screen **840** has no user constraints. In other embodiments, the user is notified via a dialog box if results were not written out to the target **240***b*. In the Finalize Screen **840**, the user finalizes the CleanCRM session by writing data to a target destinations **240***b*. In some embodiments, in the Write Data section of this screen **840**, the user clicks on the Write Data button to write the cleansed data to the Target **240***b*. In one embodiment, CleanCRM **800** will either create new records or update already-existing records in the Target **240**, depending upon the task that is running and the status of the duplicate sets. In other embodiments, CleanCRM **800** may encounter a record that fails to be written to the Target **240***b*. In one embodiment, the user may check off the ignore option below the Write Data button to ignore these records and not be notified by a popup. Otherwise, in another embodiment, any time CleanCRM **800** encounters a record that fails to be written, a notification message will pop up, asking the user how to handle the write failure. In some cases, records that fail to be written, along with a reason for failure, are stored in a file, such as a file called UnprocessedWrite.csv in the Archived Batch Data Sets.

[0214] In some embodiments, when cleansing and de-duping a CSV file, the application **800** creates a new Target CSV file **240***b* that has been indicated on the Prepare Screen **810**. In one embodiment, the Source file **240***a* remains unmodified. For Each Duplicate Set, the application **800**, in another embodiment, writes the master record to the Target CSV file **240***b* according to its Final Record settings on the Merge Screen **835**. In other embodiments, the application **800** writes any records unchecked from a duplicate to the Target CSV file **240***b* as separate records. For Non-Duplicate Records, the application **800** Each non-duplicate record is inserted into the Target CSV file **240***b* according to its Final Record settings on the Merge Screen **835**.

[0215] In some embodiments, when importing and de-duping a CSV file against a CRM system, the application **800** updates records in the CRM system **240***b*. In one embodiment, the application **800** either writes new records to the CRM system **240***b* or updates existing records. In another embodiment, for each duplicate set, the application **800** inserts each final record that does not exist in the CRM system **240***b* according to its Final Record settings. In one case, records that exist in the CRM system **240***b* are written according to their Final Record settings in each duplicate set. In another case, duplicate CRM records are deleted. In other embodiments, for non-duplicate records, the application **800** inserts each non-duplicate record from the CSV file **240***a* into the CRM system **240***b*. In one case, pre-existing CRM system data is not deleted. The user may run CleanCRM **800** with the task Cleanse and de-duplicate your CRM system to remove these records. In another embodiment, then Contacts are inserted into the CRM system **240***b*, a new parent Account is also inserted into the CRM system. In one embodiment, the Account will be the Account Name that is specified for the Contact, and the new account will be associated with the inserted Contact.

[0216] In some embodiments, when cleansing and de-duping a CRM System **240***b*, for each duplicate set, the application retains the Master Record of the duplicate set if the application does the merging into the CRM **240***b*. In one embodiment, the application **800** updates the Master Record according to the Final Record settings. In other embodiments, the application **800** removes all other records in the duplicate set from the CRM system **240***b* unless removed from the duplicate set. In another embodiment, if the application 800 does not do the merging in the CRM **240***b*, only the Master Record is updated according to the Final Record settings. The remaining records in the duplicate set may remain unchanged. For non-duplicate records, the application **800** updates the records in the CRM system **240***b* according to their Final Record settings on the Merge Screen **235**.

[0217] Referring now to FIG. **9**A, another embodiment of the user interface of the Standardize Screen **825** for specifying standardized rules **260** is illustrated. In some embodiments, standardizations **260** are applied using a combination of domain knowledge as described in connection with FIG. **7** and inexact matching and inexact searching as described in connection with FIGS. **3-6**. A subset of the records can be viewed on this screen by selecting the number of records to process and view and then selecting the "View Test Results" button. When the user is satisfied with the standardization

settings, the Apply and Proceed button is selected to standardize all records and then display the next screen.

[0218] Referring now to FIG. **9**B, another embodiment of the user interface of the Match Screen **830** is depicted. In one embodiment, the user selects the match criteria **225** on this screen **830**. In some embodiments, additional match criteria can be selected by clicking on the "Match Criteria" tab and selecting "add match criteria". Match criteria **225** can be removed by selecting "remove match criteria". In one embodiment, each match criteria **225** comprises a set of available fields to match on. In some embodiments, the user may select either "Exact", "Similar", or "Off" for each field. In another embodiment, a similar match on a field is defined as any two strings that are within a predefined threshold, such as a percentage or number of characters, of one another. In some embodiments, a predetermined threshold may be 20%. For example, the predetermined threshold of 20% indicates two strings can not have more than 20% difference. If the strings are S**1** and S**2**, then if S**1** is 10 characters long and S**2** is 20 characters long, the shortest string is used to identify how many edits is 20%. In this case, 20% of 10 is 2 character edits. If S**1** and S**2** required 3 edits to make them the same, then they are not similar. If they require 2 or less edits, then they are similar. In other embodiments, the predetermined threshold may comprise 1%, 2%, 3%, 4%, 5%, 10%, 15%, 20%, 25%, 30%, 35%, 40%, 45%, or 50%. In another embodiment, the predetermined threshold may comprise any increment or interval in the range of 0% to 100%. In some embodiments, the predetermined threshold may be based on the first string, S**1**. In other embodiments, the predetermined threshold may be based on the first string, S**2**.

[0219] In the Match Screen **830**, the user selects a number of records to process and the "View Test Results" button to perform matching on that subset of data. When the user is satisfied with the match criteria **225** settings, the user selects "Apply and Proceed" and all records are matched and the next screen is displayed. The "Merge Rule" selector illustrated in FIG. **9**B allows the user to specify what type of merging behavior to apply when matches are found and then merged.

[0220] Referring now to FIG. **9**C, another embodiment of the user interface of the Merge Screen **835** is depicted. In one embodiment, the Merge Screen **835** provides a user interface for managing identified duplicates. In some embodiments, one or more of the following user actions are supported: 1) view all duplicates, 2) view those records that compose each duplicate, 3) view final duplicate records after merging the duplicate records into one final record, 4) view the non-duplicate records, 5) per duplicate, select which record is the master 6) have all other records in that duplicate "folded" into the master by selecting the record's toggle button in the "Master Loc" column, 7) Per duplicate, edit fields in the master record, 8) Per duplicate, observe which fields have conflicting values, 9) Per duplicate, observe which fields have been standardized, 10) Select any conflicting field's value to be folded into the final record 11) remove a record from a duplicate by selecting it's toggle button in the "Dup?" column, 12) remove a record from further processing by selecting it's toggle button in the "Discard" column, 13) view the total number of duplicate records, duplicates, and non-duplicates, and 14) export the duplicates grid out to either Excel or CSV format.

[0221] In some embodiments, the CleanCRM application **800** stores various settings to a storage location and such setting can be loaded for another instance or run of the application. The following type of setting may exist: 1) session settings, 2) map settings and 3) user settings. In one embodiment, a session setting comprises storage of configuration for the work flow. The state of one or more user interfaces may be saved in session settings. For instance, what type of standardization **260** to perform, and what match criteria **225** to use, etc. The user can save/load session settings. In another embodiment, map setting comprises two types of maps: one for the Specify Map Screen and one for the Verify Map Screen. In one embodiment, the user can save/load maps. In other embodiments, the use settings comprise certain configurations in the application that are stored, automatically, or otherwise, for the user. In one embodiment, the use settings included storage of the state of the Banner and Instruction windows, which may have a maximized and minimized state.

[0222] Although the example CleanCRM application **800** using the data conditioning framework **120** is generally described in connection with cleansing a CRM system or CSV data, the data conditioning framework **120** and/or application **800** may be used to cleanse any type of data source or information system using any of the techniques described herein. For example, an application **800**, having similar operations, structure and/or functionality of the illustrated CleanCRM, may be used to cleanse data related to any of the following types and forms of information systems, data sources, or data related thereto: 1) accounting or financial system, 2) manufacturing, 3) product data management, 4) product life cycle management, 5) enterprise resource planning, 6) supply chain, 7) lab information systems, 8) bioinformatics systems and 9) life sciences information systems.

[0223] Many alterations and modifications may be made by those having ordinary skill in the art without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention. Therefore, it must be expressly understood that the illustrated embodiments have been shown only for the purposes of example and should not be taken as limiting the invention, which is defined by the following claims. These claims are to be read as including what they set forth literally and also those equivalent elements which are insubstantially different, even though not identical in other respects to what is shown and described in the above illustrations.

What is claimed:

1. A method for improving an approximate match of a string with a reference data element by approximately matching the string with one or more data elements identifying alternative representations of the reference data element, the method comprising:

(a) receiving, by a device, a request to perform approximate matching of a string with a reference data element;

(b) determining, by an approximate matching engine executing on the device, an approximate match of the string to the reference data element and one or more alternative data elements, the one or more alternative data elements comprising alternative representations of a value of the reference data element; and

(c) identifying, by the device, as a result one of the alternative data elements having the approximate match within a predetermined threshold.

2. The method of claim **1**, wherein one of the string, the reference data element, or the one or more alternative data elements identifies one of a person, an institute or a location.

3. The method of claim **1**, wherein the string, the reference data element, or the one or more alternative data elements represent data of one of the following systems: accounting, manufacturing, customer relationship management, enter-

prise resource planning, product data management, product lifecycle management, supply chain management, bioinformatics system or lab information management system.

4. The method of claim **1**, further comprising identifying, by the device, the result having the closest match within the predetermined threshold.

5. The method of claim **1**, wherein step(c) comprises identifying, by the device the reference data element as the result having the approximate match within the predetermined threshold.

6. The method of claim **1**, wherein the reference data element comprises an abbreviation of a state, and the one or more alternative data elements comprise alternative representations of identifying the state.

7. The method of claim **1**, wherein the reference data element comprises an abbreviation of a country, and the one or more alternative data elements comprise alternative representations of identifying the country.

8. The method of claim **1**, wherein the reference data element comprises a zip code, and the one or more alternative data elements comprise a city associated with the zip code.

9. The method of claim **1**, wherein the reference data element comprises a portion of an address, and the one or more alternative data elements comprise alternative representations of the portion of the address.

10. The method of claim **1**, wherein the reference data element comprises a type of business, and the one or more alternative data elements comprise alternative representations of the type of business.

11. The method of claim **1**, wherein the reference data element comprises a portion of a city name, and the one or more alternative data elements comprise alternative representations of the portion of the city name.

12. The method of claim **1**, wherein the reference data element comprises a name of a company, and the one or more alternative data elements comprise alternative representations of the name of the company.

13. The method of claim **1**, wherein the reference data element comprises a secondary address unit designator, and the one or more alternative data elements comprise alternative representations of the secondary address unit designator.

14. A system for improving an approximate match of a string with a reference data element by approximately matching the string with one or more data elements identifying alternative representations of the reference data element, the system comprising:

a device receiving a request to perform approximate matching of a string with a reference data element;

an approximate matching engine executing on the device determining an approximate match of the string to the reference data element and one or more alternative data elements, the one or more alternative data elements comprising alternative representations of a value of the reference data element; and

wherein the device identifies as a result one of the alternative data elements having the approximate match within a predetermined threshold.

15. The system of claim **14**, wherein one of the string, the reference data element, or the one or more alternative data elements identifies one of a person, an institute or a location.

16. The system of claim **14**, wherein the string, the reference data element, or the one or more alternative data elements represent data of one of the following systems: accounting, manufacturing, customer relationship management, enterprise resource planning, product data management, product lifecycle management, supply chain management, bioinformatics system or lab information management system.

17. The system of claim **14**, further comprising identifying, by the device, the result having the closest match within the predetermined threshold.

18. The system of claim **14**, wherein the reference data element comprises an abbreviation of a country, and the one or more alternative data elements comprise alternative representations of identifying the country.

19. The system of claim **14**, wherein the reference data element comprises a zip code, and the one or more alternative data elements comprise a city associated with the zip code.

20. The system of claim **14**, wherein the reference data element comprises a portion of an address, and the one or more alternative data elements comprise alternative representations of the portion of the address.

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