

(19) World Intellectual Property Organization
International Bureau



(43) International Publication Date
12 March 2009 (12.03.2009)

PCT

(10) International Publication Number
WO 2009/032720 A2

(51) International Patent Classification:

G06F 13/00 (2006.01) **G06F 19/00** (2006.01)
G06F 15/00 (2006.01)

(21) International Application Number:

PCT/US2008/074550

(22) International Filing Date: 28 August 2008 (28.08.2008)

(25) Filing Language: English

(26) Publication Language: English

(30) Priority Data:

60/966,818 30 August 2007 (30.08.2007) US
12/192,445 15 August 2008 (15.08.2008) US

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(81) Designated States (unless otherwise indicated, for every
kind of national protection available): AE, AG, AL, AM,
AO, AT, AU, AZ, BA, BB, BG, BH, BR, BW, BY, BZ, CA,
CH, CN, CO, CR, CU, CZ, DE, DK, DM, DO, DZ, EC, EE,
EG, ES, FI, GB, GD, GE, GH, GM, GT, HN, HR, HU, ID,
IL, IN, IS, JP, KE, KG, KM, KN, KP, KR, KZ, LA, LC, LK,
LR, LS, LT, LU, LY, MA, MD, ME, MG, MK, MN, MW,
MX, MY, MZ, NA, NG, NI, NO, NZ, OM, PG, PH, PL, PT,
RO, RS, RU, SC, SD, SE, SG, SK, SL, SM, ST, SV, SY, TJ,
TM, TN, TR, TT, TZ, UA, UG, US, UZ, VC, VN, ZA, ZM,
ZW.

(84) Designated States (unless otherwise indicated, for every
kind of regional protection available): ARIPO (BW, GH,
GM, KE, LS, MW, MZ, NA, SD, SL, SZ, TZ, UG, ZM,
ZW), Eurasian (AM, AZ, BY, KG, KZ, MD, RU, TJ, TM),
European (AT, BE, BG, CH, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI,
FR, GB, GR, HR, HU, IE, IS, IT, LT, LU, LV, MC, MT, NL,
NO, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, TR), OAPI (BF, BJ, CF, CG,
CI, CM, GA, GN, GQ, GW, ML, MR, NE, SN, TD, TG).

[Continued on next page]

(54) Title: SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR AN ELECTRONIC GIFT KEY

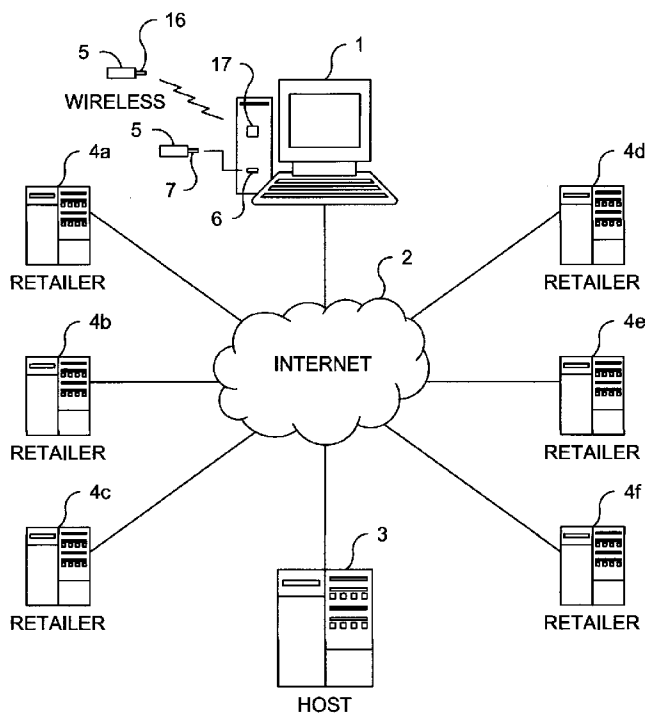


Fig. 1

(57) Abstract: A system and method for a physically-based gift key (5) enabling a purchaser to deliver a single, fully-integrated gift item to a recipient and including an electronic greeting card and store credits redeemable online is presented. The method includes the steps of activating a gift key (50), customizing an electronic greeting card (51) associated with the gift key (5) at a host site via physical or wireless linkage of a gift key (5) to a first local computer (1), accessing the greeting card (52) at the host site via linkage of the gift key (5) to a second local computer, and redeeming a store credit (53) associated with the gift key (5) at a retail website accessible from the host site. The system includes a gift key (5) and a host computer system (3) directly or indirectly controlling a host site. The gift key (5) has a housing (8a, 8b), an integrated circuit (10) within the housing (8a, 8b), and a connector (7) or wireless interface (16) extending from the housing (8a, 8b) so as to allow linkage of the gift key (5) with a local computer (1) remotely located with respect to the host system (3) and retailer systems (4a-4f). The local computer (1) automatically launches a website at the host or retailer levels when the gift key (5) is linked to the local computer (1).



Declaration under Rule 4.17:

— *of inventorship (Rule 4.17(iv))*

Published:

— *without international search report and to be republished
upon receipt of that report*

TITLE

System and Method for an Electronic Gift Key

DESCRIPTION**1. Technical Field**

The present invention generally relates to an electronic gift key enabling a purchaser to deliver a single, fully-integrated gift item to a recipient including an electronic greeting card and redeemable store credits. Specifically, the invention includes a system and method whereby an electronic gift key, comprising a decorative housing with integrated circuit and memory therein and an interface projecting therefrom, is linkable to a computer either physically or wirelessly, thereafter launching a website at a host site so as to allow a purchaser to customize a greeting card and also allow a recipient to access the customized greeting card at the host site and/or redeem store credits associated with the gift key at a retail and/or host website.

2. Background Art

Gift certificates and gift cards enjoy ever increasing popularity because of their convenience and ability to allow a recipient thereof to redeem store credits for the purchase of items desired by a recipient, rather than gifts chosen by a purchaser.

Gift certificates and cards are essentially the same, except that gift cards automate the checkout and accounting processes via a barcode or magnetic strip which is scanned or swiped at the time of purchase and use.

Gift cards may or may not have an assigned value prior to purchase. For example, some gift cards have no value until they are sold, at which time a cashier enters the amount which a buyer wishes to associate with the card. This information is rarely stored on the card, but rather stored in a database operated by a retailer which is cross referenced to the card via an identifier when a transaction is processed. Other gift cards, often referred to as stored-value cards, have a fixed value which is stored directly on the card and updated after each transaction. Stored-value cards eliminate the need for checkout and accounting processes at a remote site, thus simplifying network support requirements.

Counterfeiting is a major problem with gift cards typically mitigated via encryption methods and card design. Encryption methods are generally not robust given the relatively low monetary value assigned to gift cards. In terms of card design, a magnetic strip is often placed at a location along the card to prevent compatibility with many read/write devices.

1 Furthermore, gift certificates and gift cards require the purchaser to buy a non-
2 customized greeting card separate and apart from the certificate or card. This reduces
3 both perceived and actual convenience of gift certificates and cards.

4 Finally, gift certificates and cards require the purchaser or recipient to travel to
5 a physical location operated by a retailer for the purpose of redemption. As such,
6 many gift certificates and cards are never used. These lost transactions also include
7 lost interactions during which advertising and marketing activities are possible to
8 encourage impulse purchases beyond the value associated with the certificate or card.

9 As is readily apparent from the discussions above, the related arts do not
10 include a decorative gift item physically presentable to a recipient by a purchaser
11 whereby the gift item enables the purchaser to electronically customize online content
12 for the recipient and further enables the recipient to access the customized content and
13 redeem store credits at one or more online retail sites.

14 Therefore, what is required is a system and method which allow for the
15 purchase, transfer, and use of a single physically-based gift item, enabling access to
16 an electronic greeting card and redeemable store credits via the internet in a secure,
17 convenient, customizable, and controllable manner.

18 **3. Disclosure of the Invention**

19 An object of the present invention is to provide a system and method which
20 allow for the purchase, transfer, and use of a single physically-based gift item
21 enabling access to an electronic greeting card and redeemable store credits via the
22 internet in a secure, convenient, customizable, and controllable manner.

23 In accordance with embodiments of the invention, the method includes the
24 steps of activating a gift key, customizing an electronic greeting card associated with
25 the gift key at a host site via physical or wireless linkage of the gift key to a first local
26 computer, accessing the optional greeting card at the host site via linkage of the gift
27 key to a second local computer, and redeeming a store credit associated with the gift
28 key at a retail website accessible from the host site. In one embodiment, the gift key
29 could include a housing, an integrated circuit within the housing, and a connector or
30 wireless interface extending from the housing so as to allow linkage of the gift key
31 with a computer remotely located with respect to the host and retail sites. The
32 connector facilitates a physical connection between gift key and local computer. The
33 wireless interface facilitates wireless communication between gift key and local

1 computer. First and second local computers communicate with the host site via a
2 network, preferably the Internet.

3 In accordance with embodiments of the invention, the system includes a gift
4 key and a host computer system directly or indirectly controlling a host site. The gift
5 key has an identifier number and at least one web address readable therefrom and a
6 security program executable by an integrated circuit within the key. The gift key is
7 linkable to a local computer system via the connector or wireless interface thereon.
8 The host computer system interacts with a host site facilitating design of an electronic
9 greeting card associated with the gift card, display of the greeting card, and
10 redemption of store credits associated with the gift key via a computer system
11 controlling a retail website. Store credits are either pre-stored on the gift key or added
12 to the gift key when the key is purchased. The gift key communicates with the host
13 and retailer computer systems via a network. The gift key automatically launches a
14 website at the host or retailer levels when the gift key is linked to a local computer
15 system.

16 In accordance with preferred embodiments of the invention, the gift key could
17 include a three-dimensional device with a plastic outer housing stylized as a toy or
18 other decorative object and a USB connector extending or extendable therefrom. The
19 housing could be a licensed character, action figure, vehicle, or any object suitable for
20 presentation as a gift. The housing ensures the gift key has play value and appeal long
21 after the electronic greeting card is viewed and store credits are depleted. Electronics
22 within each gift key contain a serial or global unique identifier (GUID) number used
23 as a cross reference to uniquely identify the gift key for accessing product features,
24 greeting card, and store credits.

25 In accordance with preferred embodiments of the invention, the USB
26 connector enables the gift key to be physically connected to a personal computer or
27 the like via a connector residing on the computer, thereafter automatically launching a
28 web browser to a host and/or retailer website via Internet Explorer®, a registered
29 trademark of Microsoft Corporation, Safari®, a registered trademark of Apple, Inc., or
30 the like. The serial or GUID number is communicated from the gift key to the host or
31 retailer website via encryption protocols, one example being a 128bit encryption
32 format.

33 A purchaser connects or links the gift key to a computer prior to physically
34 transferring the key to a recipient. The gift key communicates a web address for the

1 host site to the web browser executable on the computer. After security protocols are
2 verified with the host site, a website is automatically launched so that the purchaser
3 might view the store credits accessible with the key and customize an electronic
4 greeting card which resides on the host website. The host website allows the
5 purchaser to choose a card type, non-limiting examples being a holiday, birthday, or
6 other special event, and to embed text, pictures, or videos into viewing areas on the
7 electronic greeting card creating a personalized message to the recipient. The
8 electronic greeting card and store credit information resides on the host site for later
9 access by a recipient.

10 After physical acceptance of the gift key by a recipient from a purchaser, the
11 recipient connects or links the gift key to a computer. The gift key communicates a
12 web address for the host site to the web browser executable on the computer. After
13 security protocols are executed and satisfied between the gift key and the host site, a
14 website is automatically launched so that the recipient might view the store credits
15 accessible with the key and the electronic greeting card prepared by the purchaser, as
16 well as access a retail website for online shopping and redemption of store credits.

17 In accordance with some embodiments of the invention, the recipient could
18 access theme related content corresponding to the appearance of the gift key at the
19 host website. For example, a gift key having a character-based theme might allow
20 access to games, movie trailers, facts and biographic data, and other media associated
21 with the character.

22 In accordance with other embodiments of the invention, the host website could
23 include online links to one or more retailers when store credits are not restricted to a
24 specific retailer. Links could be specific to the type of gift key so as to target and
25 guide a consumer's shopping experience and/or increase sales of a preferred retailer.
26 For example, a character based gift key could automatically forward a recipient to one
27 or more specific web pages at a retailer's online site.

28 Several advantages are offered by the described invention. The gift key
29 provides both electronic and physical functionalities which in combination enhance
30 the collectability, appeal, and play value of the gift item. Decorative aspects and
31 electronic functionality of the gift key provide for an overall package design which is
32 highly customizable for a specific recipient. Electronic functionality of the gift key
33 maximizes the flexibility afforded to the recipient in terms of use and redemption
34 options. Electronic functionality of the gift key facilitates access to theme specific

content by a recipient so as to target and guide purchasing behavior. Physical aspects of the gift key provide a fully integrated package design which avoids the cost and complexities of supplemental gift wrapping.

4. Brief Description of the Drawings

Additional aspects, features, and advantages of the invention will be understood and will become more readily apparent when the invention is considered in the light of the following description made in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, wherein:

FIG. 1 is a schematic diagram illustrating interaction between a gift key linkable to a local computer either physically or wirelessly, a host site, and one or more retailer sites via the internet in accordance with an embodiment of the invention;

FIG. 2 is an exploded view illustrating housing, circuit board, integrated circuit, and interface for an exemplary gift key in accordance with an embodiment of the invention;

FIG. 3a is a front side perspective view illustrating an exemplary decorative gift key configured as a keychain and having a movable USB plug fully retracted within a decorative housing in accordance with an embodiment of the invention;

FIG. 3b is a rear side perspective view illustrating an exemplary decorative gift key configured as a keychain and having a movable UBS plug fully extended from a decorative housing in accordance with an embodiment of the invention;

FIG. 4 is a flowchart illustrating transactional steps in accordance with an embodiment of the invention;

FIG. 5 is an exemplary webpage displayed by a host site used by a purchaser or a recipient to access online features via the gift key and website in accordance with an embodiment of the invention;

FIG. 6 is an exemplary webpage displayed by a host site used by a purchaser to customize a cover page of an electronic greeting card associated with a gift key in accordance with an embodiment of the invention;

FIG. 7 is an exemplary webpage displayed by a host site used by a purchaser to customize a text page of an electronic greeting card associated with a gift key in accordance with one embodiment of the invention;

FIG. 8 is an exemplary greeting card with link to a retailer, for purpose of redeeming store credits, displayed by a host site to the recipient of a gift key in accordance with an embodiment of the invention; and

FIG. 9 is a flowchart illustrating interactions between retailer, purchaser, recipient, host and network levels in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the invention.

5. Modes for Carrying out the Invention

This application is based upon and claims priority from U.S. Non-Provisional Application No. 12/192,445 filed August 15, 2008 and U.S. Provisional Application No. 60/966,818 filed August 30, 2007, both entitled *System and Method for an Electronic Gift Key*, each of the applications being hereby incorporated by reference in their entirety.

Reference will now be made in detail to several preferred embodiments of the invention that are illustrated in the accompanying drawings. Wherever possible, same or similar reference numerals are used in the drawings and the description to refer to the same or like parts or steps. The drawings are in simplified form and are not to precise scale. The words communicate, connect, couple, link, and similar terms with their inflectional morphemes do not necessarily denote direct and immediate connections, but also include connections through intermediary elements or devices.

Referring now to FIG. 1, embodiments of the invention include a gift key 5 having a physical interface 7 which is attachable or linkable to a port 6 residing on a local system 1 or a wireless interface 16 which communicates with a complimentary wireless interface 17 residing on a local system 1. The local system 1 could include a personal computer, laptop computer, or other similar device having a port and capable of communication via wire or wireless means with a network 2. The network 2 is a communication system which allows two or more computer systems to communicate, a preferred example being a collective electronic network of computers and computer networks which are inter-connected throughout the world, otherwise referred to as the Internet. Communication by and between the local system 1, network 2, host system 3, and retailer systems 4a-4f are via protocols and methods understood within the art.

The network 2 also facilitates communication with a host system 3 and at least one retailer system 4a-4f. Host system 3 and retailer systems 4a-4f could include computer hardware and software which display a website or the like over a network 2 and allow communication therewith by one or more local systems 1.

The host system 3 communicates with a gift key 5 via the local system 1 so as to allow a purchaser of the gift key 5 to customize a greeting card associated with the gift key 5 via a serial or global unique identifier (GUID) number stored on a read-only

1 memory (ROM) or similar device housed within the gift key 5. The host system 3 also
2 enables a recipient of a gift key 5 to view the greeting card via a local system 1. The
3 host system 3 further communicates with a gift key 5 so as to allow a recipient to
4 redeem store credits associated with the gift key 5 via a serial number, GUID number,
5 or other similar security identifier stored electronically within the gift key 5.

6 The retailer systems 4a-4f are accessible via the host system 3 and graphically
7 displayed on the local system 1. Each retailer system 4a-4f controls a website or the
8 like which displays goods and services for sale and allows for the purchase thereof.
9 Although six retailer systems 4a-4f are described in FIG. 1, the number of retailer
10 systems 4a-4f could be one or more systems operated by one or more retailers or the
11 like.

12 Referring now to FIG. 2, an exemplary gift key 5 is shown including a two-
13 piece housing 8a, 8b disposed about and protecting a circuit board 9, an integrated
14 circuit 10, a wire assembly 11, and a physical interface 7 and/or a wireless interface
15 16. The housing 8a, 8b could be composed of a plastic composition and include a
16 decorative design which is printed, molded thereon, or attached thereto. For example,
17 the housing 8a, 8b could be shaped as a cartoon character as shown in FIGS. 2, 3a, 3b
18 or have the appearance of any object suitable as a gift. Also, the housing 8a, 8b, may
19 include two or more elements which are movable so as to change the overall shape
20 and appearance of the gift key 5. The housing 8a, 8b is intended to support and protect
21 at least the elements mentioned herein.

22 A variety of circuitry designs and connectors could reside within the gift key
23 5. For example, a circuit board 9 could be fastened or adhered to the housing 8a or 8b
24 and thereafter attached to the integrated circuit 10. A physical interface 7, one
25 example being a USB connector, or a wireless interface 16 could be attached to the
26 housing 8a, 8b via a fastener or adhesive and, thereafter, electrically connected to the
27 integrated circuit 10 via a wire assembly 11. Housing 8a, 8b elements are joined and
28 fixed via a fastener or an adhesive to form a protective covering about the electronic
29 components described herein.

30 In preferred embodiments, components comprising the gift key 5 are powered
31 by the local system 1 via the physical interface 7. In wireless embodiments, a power
32 supply, one example being a battery, is provided within the housing 8a, 8b and
33 electrically coupled to components therein.

1 The wireless interfaces 16, 17 could include devices which facilitate the
2 functionality of a physical connector without direct contact between the interface
3 elements. For example, wireless interfaces 16, 17 may include optical devices,
4 examples including but not limited to IrDA elements, or RF devices, examples
5 including but not limited to Bluetooth, WiFi, passive RFID tag, and the like, which
6 enable unidirectional or bi-directional communication between a gift key 5 and a local
7 system 1.

8 In some embodiments of the invention, the gift key 5 could further include a
9 light 18 which extends from the housing 8a, 8b through a like shaped opening formed
10 by complimentary openings 59a, 59b. The light 18 could be electrically connected to
11 components on the circuit board 9 so as to display the operational and/or power states
12 of the integrated circuit 10. For example, the light 18 could be a light emitting diode,
13 whereby the ON state of the gift key 5 is indicated when the light 18 is green,
14 communication states between local system 1 and host system 3 or retailer systems
15 4a-4f is indicated when the light 18 is yellow, and/or a functional or power fault state
16 is indicated when the light 18 is red. Other visual display queues are possible.

17 The gift key 5 could also include appendages 54a, 54b which replica the arms,
18 legs, and/or head of a character. Each appendage 54a, 54b could include a nub 55 and
19 a channel 56, the latter secured between the paired arrangement of openings 57a, 57b,
20 which compliment the shape of each channel 56 so as to fix the appendages 54a, 54b
21 to the housing 8a, 8b or allow the appendages 54a, 54b to move or rotate with respect
22 to the housing 8a, 8b.

23 In some embodiments, the physical interface 7 or wireless interface 16 could
24 extend from the gift key 5 in a fixed arrangement through a like shaped opening
25 formed by the paired arrangement of openings 58a, 58b. An optional cover 19,
26 composed of a plastic cup-shaped element, could be used to cover the physical
27 interface 7 or wireless interface 16 in a secured but removable fashion so as to prevent
28 contaminants from damaging the interface.

29 In yet other embodiments, the gift key 5 could include elements which allow it
30 to function as a key chain or facilitate attachment to a school bag, handbag, or other
31 object. For example, the gift key 5 could have a loop 60 molded or attached to the
32 housing 8a, 8b. One end of a chain 13 could be secured to the loop 60 and the other
33 end secured to a hook 12.

1 Preferred embodiments of the gift key 5 could include an integrated circuit 10
2 with both internal masked ROM and flash EEPROM with built in USB controller. In
3 one example, the integrated circuit 10 could be a universal serial bus microcontroller,
4 model number EM78M612, sold by ELAN Microelectronics Corporation. The
5 masked ROM could include twelve kilobytes of memory to store an operating system
6 program. The operating system program could include a self-executable program
7 which is automatically launched via an internet browser on a local system 1 when
8 linked to a gift key 5. The program is intended to direct the local system 1 to a
9 website controlled by a host system 3, as described herein. The operating system
10 program could also include a security handshake algorithm which transfers an
11 identifier or serial number unique to each gift key 5 so as to establish communication
12 between a website at the host system 3 and a local system 1. Security protocols could
13 prevent hackers from altering or otherwise bypassing the serial number electronically
14 stored on the gift key 5, operating program, and/or website link. The masked ROM
15 could also include a number of website addresses allowing one web address to be
16 selected based upon the serial number stored on the EEPROM.

17 In some embodiments, the EEPROM could include four bytes to store a thirty-
18 six digit individualized serial number. The serial number could be embedded with
19 two digits which identify the web address of the retailer system 4a-4f stored on the
20 masked ROM. This data could be stored on the internal memory of the EEPROM. In
21 other embodiments, the EEPROM could be a separate device from the integrated
22 circuit.

23 In preferred embodiments, the gift key 5 could include a micro-controller unit
24 with internal EEPROM capable of storing a thirty digit GUID number, one example
25 being model number SPCP18E2A sold by Sunplus Innovation Technology, Inc., a
26 ROM element capable of storing an operating system and web link addresses, and a
27 USB 1.1 or higher connector compatible with personal and Apple computers and
28 capable of communicating power to the micro-controller unit and other elements
29 along the circuit board 9.

30 Executable programs on the integrated circuit 10 facilitate communication
31 between a gift key 5 and host system 3. Communication between gift key 5 and host
32 system 3 is authorized after a security handshake algorithm is properly executed,
33 thereby allowing an interface between a website and a remotely located local system
34 1. The handshake program is automatically launched and executed after a physical

1 interface 7 on the gift key 5 is properly linked to a complimentary port 6 on a local
2 system 1 or wireless interfaces 16, 17 are successfully linked. After the security
3 handshake program is verified, the individualized serial number is transferred from
4 the EEPROM memory to the host system 3.

5 Each EEPROM is programmed with at least one web address and a GUID
6 number or the like, preferably thirty digits long; however, the number of digits is
7 design and use dependent and may be longer or shorter. In some embodiments, the
8 GUID number may not be the actual account number stored in the retailer's system so
9 as to further enhance security. Non-correlated GUID numbers prevent the theft of
10 account numbers because the latter is never passed from the gift key 5 to the host
11 system 3 and/or retailer systems 4a-4f. Theft of a GUID number alone is not sufficient
12 to access and redeem store credits at the host and retail levels.

13 Each integrated circuit 10 has an internal EEPROM that is unreadable by a
14 hacker or the like. Since each EEPROM is internal to the integrated circuit 10 and not
15 a separate component removable from the circuit board 9, the ROM operating system
16 protects data in the EEPROM from being retrieved because an external lookup table is
17 required to correctly map and retrieve the GUID number data.

18 When a gift key 5 is plugged into or otherwise linked to a local system 1 by a
19 purchaser or recipient, the gift key 5 automatically launches the web browser
20 executable on the local system 1 and addresses an invisible form webpage residing on
21 the host system 3 based on a web address stored on the gift key 5. The invisible
22 webpage could have a thirty digit GUID number embedded and encrypted therein via
23 a 128bit header trigger template (HTTS). Every gift key 5 calls the same web link
24 address, one example being www.3dgiftcard.com/register, and communicates its
25 device specific GUID number to the site for identification and authentication
26 purposes. In alternate embodiments, the actual account number could be stored on the
27 EEPROM and passed to the host system 3 via the invisible webpage. This latter
28 approach simplifies database and bar coding requirements at the host and retail levels.

29 After receipt of the GUID number, the host system 3 decrypts the GUID
30 number and correlates the GUID number to the account number and personal
31 identification number (PIN) stored within a database or the like on the host system 3.
32 Next, the host system 3 directs the web browser residing on the local system 1 to the
33 correct webpage based on the card style and user. For example, the web browser
34 could be directed to pages facilitating the customization of an electronic greeting card

1 when the user is a purchaser and to pages which facilitate viewing of the greeting card
2 and redemption of store credits when the user is a recipient. In preferred
3 embodiments, the system and method described herein assumes first use of the gift
4 key 5 is by a purchaser and subsequent uses are by a recipient.

5 Digits within the GUID number are parsed to identify the style and number
6 assigned to the gift key 5. For example, the first six digits in a thirty digit GUID
7 number could correspond to the key style number and the last twenty-four digits to the
8 key identifier number.

9 The key style number could correspond to the decorative theme appearing on
10 the housing 8a, 8b of the gift key 5, the retailer at which store credits are redeemable,
11 or another classification system which logically links webpage content and design to
12 the gift key 5 and/or its intended use. It is likewise possible for the key style to also
13 identify the forwarding links to retailers which might appear on the host system 3 and
14 retailer systems 4a-4f.

15 The key identifier number is a number assigned to each gift key 5 for
16 identification purposes. The host system 3 processes the key identifier number to
17 identify the account number for access to store credit data and PIN or security code
18 for a specific retailer, as well as any customized electronic greeting card prepared
19 specifically by a purchaser for a recipient. Accordingly, the key identifier number
20 facilitates the automatic launch of the key specific greeting card when the gift key 5 is
21 linked to a local system 1.

22 In preferred embodiments, the key identifier number should have sufficient
23 digits to allow it to be processed as a credit card for non-restricted retailer
24 applications. Presently, most credit cards require twenty-three digits to properly
25 identify the account number (sixteen digits), expiration date (four digits), and PIN
26 (three digits) for transaction purposes.

27 In some embodiments, it might be advantageous to print the GUID number
28 onto the housing 8a, 8b of the gift key 5 in a first bar code format. This bar code
29 could be used to record the purchase of the gift key 5 by a purchaser at the retail level.
30 This information could be communicated to the host system 3 so that subsequent use
31 of the gift key 5 is permitted at the host and retail levels.

32 In yet other applications, a second bar code could be applied to the gift key 5
33 adjacent to the first bar code. This second identifier could be applied by an industry
34 certified factory, separate and apart from the source of the first bar code, and used to

1 identify the account number and optional PIN associated with the gift key 5. Two
2 separately printed bar codes minimize potential security breaches otherwise possible
3 when the same factory applies both bar codes. Correlation between account
4 number/PIN and GUID number could be performed by scanning both numbers at the
5 point-of-sale by a retailer to a purchaser or at a factory authorized to scan and
6 correlate identifiers, which is thereafter communicated to the host system 3.

7 In other embodiments, a single bar code could be printed onto the gift key 5 so
8 as to identify the account number and PIN only. The account number would be stored
9 on the EEPROM within the gift key 5. This approach simplifies the bar code labeling
10 process as only one bar code matching the device's EEPROM would be required.

11 Alternately, a single bar code with account number and PIN could be printed
12 onto the gift key 5 and the GUID number stored in the device's EEPROM. When the
13 user connects to the host system 3, the GUID number is passed to the invisible
14 webpage and the user is required to manually enter the account number and PIN
15 displayed on the housing 8a, 8b of the gift key 5 via a security login page displayed
16 by the host system 3 or retailer systems 4a-4f. The login process could compare the
17 GUID number and account numbers stored by the host system 3 to properly verify
18 access to the host site.

19 Referring now to FIGS. 3a and 3b, the gift key 5 could include an interface 15
20 extendable from and retractable into the housing 8a, 8b so as to protect the interface
21 15 and enhance the overall appearance of the gift key 5. The interface 15 could be a
22 physical connector or wireless device, as described herein. The interface 15 would be
23 disposed in a sliding fashion along cavity within the interior of the housing 8a, 8b.
24 The interface 15 could be attached to a button 14 likewise slidable along a slot 83, as
25 represented in FIG. 3b. A user would extend the interface 15 in part or whole by
26 sliding the button 14 in one direction along the slot 83 and retract the interface 15 in
27 part or whole into the housing 8a, 8b by sliding the button 14 in the opposite direction
28 along the same slot 83. The button 14 could lock into one or more positions along the
29 slot 83 to secure the interface 15 with respect to the housing 8a, 8b.

30 Referring now to FIG. 4, one exemplary embodiment of the method is
31 described including the steps of activating a gift key 5, customizing a gift key 5 at a
32 host website 51, accessing a greeting card at a host website 52, and redeeming a store
33 credit at a retail website 53. The customizing and accessing steps are optional.

1 The activation step 50 is performed when the gift key 5 is purchased at the
2 point-of-sale by a purchaser from a retailer, online or telephonically. The activation
3 step 50 could include a variety of sub-steps, non-limiting examples including: (1)
4 purchaser buys a gift key 5 from retailer; (2) gift key 5 is swiped to read magnetic
5 strip or scanned to read a bar code on gift key 5 or packaging therefore, or linked, via
6 the physical interface 7 or wireless connector 16, to a device, one example being a
7 register, during checkout to read an identifier, examples being a serial, GUID or
8 account number, specific to the gift key 5; (3) serial, GUID, or account number from
9 the gift key 5 is cross referenced to database information at the point-of-sale or
10 elsewhere to validate gift key 5, store credit amount, retailer for store credit, and other
11 pertinent transactional information; and (4) gift key 5 is authorized for use at a host
12 system 3. When the purchase is made remotely, the activation step is performed
13 before shipment to the purchaser.

14 The customization step 51 is performed by the purchaser before the gift key 5
15 is delivered to a recipient. The customization step 51 could include a variety of sub-
16 steps, non-limiting examples including: (1) purchaser links the gift key 5 via physical
17 or wireless means to a local system 1; (2) gift key 5 automatically launches an internet
18 browser to a web address retrieved from the gift card 5 for the website at the host
19 system 3; (3) gift key 5 executes a security handshake program to enable interface
20 with host website; (4) host website retrieves an identifier, examples being a serial,
21 GUID, or account number, from the gift key 5 so as to properly identify the gift key 5;
22 (5) identifier is cross referenced with database information to verify store credit
23 amount and/or name of retailer; (6) purchaser could activate gift key 5 via host
24 website when gift key 5 is not authorized in sub-step (5); (7) purchaser designs
25 electronic greeting card for recipient which could include uploading image, video,
26 and/or audio files embedded within the greeting card; and (8) purchaser presents gift
27 key 5 to a recipient.

28 The access step 52 is performed by the recipient using a local system 1 which
29 could be the same or different device used by the purchaser, as described herein. The
30 access step 52 could include a variety of sub-steps, non-limiting examples including:
31 (1) recipient links the gift key 5 via physical or wireless means to a local system 1; (2)
32 gift key 5 automatically launches an Internet browser to a web address retrieved from
33 the gift key 5 for the host website displayed by the host system 3; (3) gift key 5
34 executes a security program to verify identity and enable communication with the

1 host; (4) host website retrieves an identifier, examples being a serial, GUID, or
2 account number, from the gift key 5 so as to properly identify the gift key 5; (5)
3 identifier is cross referenced with database information to verify store credit amount
4 and/or name of retailer; (6) recipient views optional greeting card, displayed by host
5 website, associated with gift key 5 via the identifier; and (7) host website could
6 display advertisements specific to the identified retailer.

7 The redemption step 53 is performed by the recipient using a local system 1
8 which may or may not be the device used by the purchaser, as described herein. The
9 redemption step 53 could include a variety of sub-steps, non-limiting examples
10 including: (1) recipient links gift key 5 via physical or wireless means to a local
11 computer 1 to automatically launch host or retailer website; (2) recipient launches
12 retail website displayed by a retailer system 4a-4f corresponding to information
13 retrieved from a gift key 5 by the host system 3; (3) recipient views and purchases
14 goods and services from retailer via its retail website; (4) host website may display
15 advertisements specific to identified retailer or content and theme specific media; and
16 (5) recipient exits retail and/or host websites. Direct launch of a retailer website could
17 require the execution of security protocols described herein to be performed at the
18 retailer level.

19 The host website includes web pages enabling a purchaser to customize a
20 greeting card and a recipient to view a customized greeting card and access one or
21 more retailers. Web pages could include a variety of layouts and features. Webpages
22 are written in one or more program languages understood in the art. Webpages are
23 communicated to a local system 1 via the host system 3 over a network 2. In some
24 embodiments, the design and content offering could depend on the design or theme of
25 the gift key 5, as described herein.

26 FIGS. 5-8 describe several exemplary web pages used by a purchaser and
27 recipient to access online features associated with the gift key 5. Other designs,
28 layouts, and options are possible, including access to theme specific games, media,
29 and online information and resources. Web pages described in FIGS. 5-8 provide for
30 one possible embodiment of the content accessible with a gift key 5. Web pages are
31 not meant to be exhaustive of the appearance and functionality of the described
32 invention, but rather are merely illustrative to assist in describing aspects of the online
33 content and its function in the manner described herein.

1 Referring now to FIG. 5, an exemplary landing webpage 84 is shown
2 including a variety of frames, fields, and buttons. The landing webpage 84 is an
3 optional page displayed on a local system 1 via a host system 3 after linkage of a gift
4 key 5 to a local system 1 and a security algorithm is properly completed. In some
5 embodiments, the landing webpage 84 could be a single page with features pertinent
6 to a purchaser and recipient. In other embodiments, the landing webpage 84 could be
7 two pages separately showing features pertinent to a purchaser and a recipient. In
8 preferred embodiments, the landing webpage 84 includes designs and features which
9 are theme specific and/or correspond to the decorative appearance of the gift key 5.
10 For example, a gift key 5 having the appearance of an action figure could access a
11 landing page 84 with an advertisement frame 85 which displays goods and/or services
12 corresponding to the action figure. The advertisement frame 85 could display a video,
13 play an audio message, or communicate interactively with the viewer via known
14 formats and protocols. In some embodiments, the advertisement frame 85 could
15 include two or more separate frames which appear at various locations along the
16 landing webpage 84. In other embodiments, the advertisement frame 85 could appear
17 as the background in a webpage or in the foreground as a pop-up screen. In yet other
18 embodiments, one or more additional advertisement frames 85 could appear on the
19 web pages shown in FIGS. 6-8. An EXIT button 90 is provided to close the link
20 between local system 1 and host system 3 and all advertisement frames 85, so as to
21 redirect the web browser on the local system 1 to its default page.

22 The gift value field 45 and retailer field 46 display information specific to the
23 gift key 5 relevant to store credits data stored at the host system 3. The retailer field
24 46 could include one or more names. When the gift key 5 is redeemable at any
25 retailer, the retailer field 46 could include one or more suggested retailers to focus and
26 direct purchases by the recipient.

27 The CREATE CARD button 86 accesses the web pages shown in FIGS. 6 and
28 7, as described herein. The CREATE CARD button 86 could be disabled after it is
29 first selected by a purchaser to prevent subsequent access by a recipient or reuse by a
30 subsequent party. In some embodiments, the remaining buttons could be disabled to
31 prevent access to these features by a purchaser, but otherwise selectable after
32 subsequent connections.

33 The VIEW CARD button 87 accesses and displays the webpage shown in
34 FIG. 8, as described herein. The VIEW CARD button 87 could be accessible by either

1 a purchaser to preview a greeting card or a recipient to view a greeting card prepared
2 by a purchaser.

3 One or more ONLINE SHOPPING buttons 88 access web pages at the host
4 system 3 or provide a hyperlink to web pages viewable from a retailer system 4a-4f so
5 as to facilitate online shopping by a recipient. The recipient then browses the web
6 pages selecting items for purchase which are paid for with store credits associated
7 with the gift key 5. When shopping is performed at the retailer level, the host system 3
8 could transmit the value of store credits available, account number and PIN, and other
9 information transactional information to the retailer system 4a-4f to facilitate
10 completion of a purchase transaction via processes employed by the retailer, after
11 which the retailer communicates the total value of store credits used or remaining to
12 the host system 3 so that the host system 3 is able to properly updates its database
13 information for the gift key 5.

14 One or more ONLINE CONTENT buttons 89 access online content from the
15 host system 3, retailer system 4a-4f, or other third party website, which correspond to
16 the decorative design or theme of the gift key 5. In several examples, the ONLINE
17 CONTENT button 89 could display a movie trailer in a popup screen, allow the
18 recipient to access an online game, or allow the recipient to view information. Online
19 content could be provided by the host system 3, a retailer system 4a-4f, or by a third
20 party. The ONLINE CONTENT button 89 could include a "straight link" to a specific
21 web address readable by a recipient or an "encrypted web link" whereby the web
22 address is scripted so as to prevent a recipient from directly accessing the content
23 without the gift key 5.

24 The recipient could customize an electronic greeting card linked to the gift key
25 5 via the serial or GUID number. This identifier is cross referenced at the host system
26 3 to identify the file or database location to display a greeting card whenever a
27 purchaser creates or a recipient retrieves a card.

28 In some embodiments, the electronic greeting card is a Flash-based webpage.
29 The greeting card is created and customized to include text, graphics, images, video,
30 and/or audio. Text message boxes may include user drafted text fields positioned
31 anywhere within the active area of a webpage and adjustable with respect to the
32 style, color and size of fonts. Graphics and images in a variety of formats, examples
33 including but not limited to JPEG and BMP, may be uploaded from a local system 1
34 to a host system 3, resized, and positioned anywhere within the active area of a

1 webpage. Exemplary images could include clip art, backgrounds, and border. Video
2 files in a variety of format, examples including but not limited to MPEG and AVI,
3 may also be uploaded into the active area of a webpage and resized. Audio files in a
4 variety of formats, one example being MP3, may also be updated into the active area
5 of a webpage and queued to play when selected. Audio files may be created by the
6 purchaser via known methods. In preferred embodiments, an electronic greeting card
7 is created and customized by a purchaser using text, image, video, and/or audio
8 templates.

9 Referring now to FIG. 6, a card creator webpage 20 is shown for the cover
10 page displayed when the gift key 5 is first attached to a local system 1 or accessed via
11 a landing webpage 84. A preview window 23 displays the cover page in real time as
12 the purchaser selects designs and uploads files for display on the card. In this
13 embodiment, the webpage 20 includes several CARD TYPES buttons 21 below the
14 Select Card Type identifier which correspond to holidays, events, and celebrations for
15 which a gift is appropriate. The purchaser selects the appropriate card type by placing
16 a cursor over the button corresponding to the appropriate event and clicking a button
17 on a mouse communicating with the local system 1. Selection of the card type causes
18 the DESIGN buttons 22 below the Select Design identifier to be updated to display a
19 design associated with each button in miniature. The purchaser selects a design by
20 placing the cursor over a DESIGN button 22 and clicking a button on the mouse, after
21 which the design is displayed within the preview window 23.

22 Some designs may include an upload frame 28 to display a picture or video or
23 play an audio message for the recipient. A file is uploaded from the local system 1 to
24 the host system 3 by placing the page cursor over the UPLOAD FILE button 27 and
25 clicking a button on the mouse. A popup window is displayed to allow input of the
26 name and location of the file on the local system 1 which corresponds to the image,
27 video, or audio file. The file is transferred via protocols understood in the art from the
28 local system 1 to the host system 3. Thereafter, the upload frame 28 is updated to
29 show the picture or first image of the video or display a decorative image
30 corresponding to an audio file. The cover page design is saved to a file located on the
31 host system 3 by clicking the SAVE button 25. Alternatively, the purchaser may
32 select the EXIT button 26 to exit to the host website without saving the card design.

1 An ACTIVATION button 29 could be included in some embodiments to allow
2 the purchaser to activate the gift key 5. The ACTIVATION button 29 causes sub-
3 steps (3) and (4) to be performed from the activation step 50, as described herein.

4 A NEXT button 24 is provided to allow the purchaser to display the web page
5 in FIG. 7. Referring now to FIG. 7, a webpage 30 is shown for the text page which is
6 displayed when the gift key 5 is first attached to a local system 1. A preview window
7 35 displays the text page in real time as the purchaser selects an introduction, text, and
8 signature and uploads files for display on the card. The purchaser inputs the
9 introduction by selecting the INTRODUCTION button 31 and typing the desired text
10 in the corresponding field within the preview window 35. In this embodiment, the
11 webpage 30 includes TEXT buttons 32 below the Body identifier which correspond to
12 pre-prepared messages consistent with the card type. The purchaser selects the
13 appropriate text message by clicking a TEXT button 32, after which the selected text
14 message is displayed within the preview window 35. A CUSTOM TEXT button 33 is
15 also provided so as to allow the purchaser to compose a message for display in the
16 corresponding field within the preview window 35. The purchaser inputs a signature
17 by selecting the SIGNATURE button 34 and typing the desired text in the
18 corresponding field within the preview window 35.

19 Some designs could include a display frame 39 to display a picture or video or
20 play an audio message for the recipient. A file is uploaded from the local system 1 to
21 the host system 3 by placing the page cursor over the UPLOAD FILE button 27 and
22 clicking a button on a mouse. A popup window is displayed to allow input of the file
23 name and its location on the local system 1 which corresponds to the file containing
24 the image, video, or audio content. The file is transferred via protocols understood in
25 the art from the local system 1 to the host system 3. Thereafter, the display frame 39
26 is updated to show the picture or first image of the video or display a decorative
27 image corresponding to an audio file. The text page design is saved to a file or
28 database located on the host system 3 by clicking the SAVE button 37. Alternatively,
29 the purchaser may select the EXIT button 38 to exit to the host website without saving
30 the card design. A PREVIOUS PAGE button 36 is provided to allow the purchaser to
31 return to the webpage shown in FIG. 6.

32 Referring now to FIG. 8, a greeting card webpage 40 is shown which is when
33 the gift key 5 is first attached to a local system 1 or accessed via a landing webpage
34 84 by a recipient. The greeting card webpage 40 includes a cover page frame 41 and

1 text page frame 42 which display the pages customized by the purchaser, as
2 previously described in FIGS. 6 and 7. The text page frame 42 is shown including an
3 embedded video message which is accessed by placing the cursor within the field and
4 selecting the field via a mouse button.

5 A gift value field 45 and retailer field 46 are provided for informational
6 purposes. The gift value field 45 displays the present value of a store credit available
7 at the retailer named in the retailer field 46. A RETAILER button 43 is provided to
8 allow the recipient to launch the retail website associated with the gift key 5. An
9 EXIT button 44 is provided to allow the recipient to exit the host website and return
10 the web browser on the local system 1 to its default page.

11 In preferred embodiments, one or more ONLINE CONTENT buttons 89, as
12 described herein, access online content from the host system 3, retailer system 4a-4f,
13 or other third party website, which correspond to the decorative design or theme of
14 the gift key 5.

15 The redemption of store credits could be processed via third party companies
16 or the retailer directly via a secure connection between local system 1 with gift key 5
17 and host system 3 or retailer system 4a-4f. The methods and systems described herein
18 are compatible with both externally and internally processed transactions.

19 Third party processing could include the steps of: (1) assigning an account
20 number and PIN to each gift key 5 so as to avoid duplicate and conflicting identifiers;
21 (2) bar coding each gift key 5; (3) storing store credit information in a database
22 accessible by the third party via a reference system which allows for tracking and
23 accounting for each gift key 5; and (4) interfacing with the retailer's management
24 information system to retrieve transaction data and adjust the store credits available
25 on a gift key 5. During a transaction, the gift key 5 communicates its GUID number
26 to the host system 3 which is cross referenced by the host system 3. A portal is
27 established to communicate with a third party to verify the account number and PIN
28 for the gift key 5.

29 Internal or retailer processed transactions could include the steps of: (1)
30 assigning an account number and PIN to each gift key 5 so as to avoid duplicate and
31 conflicting identifiers; (2) bar coding each gift key 5 by a certified factory; (3) storing
32 store credit information in a database, managed by the retailer, via a reference system
33 which allows for tracking and accounting for each gift key 5; and (4) interfacing with
34 the retailer's database to retrieve transaction data and adjust the store credits available

1 on a gift card 5. During a transaction, the gift key 5 communicates its GUID number
2 to the host system 3 which is cross referenced by the host system 3. A portal is
3 established to communicate with a retailer to verify the account number and PIN for
4 the gift key 5.

5 Referring now to FIG. 9, a flowchart is provided for one possible embodiment
6 of system and method for a gift key 5 implemented transaction. The flowchart is not
7 meant to be exhaustive, but rather is merely illustrative to assist in describing aspects
8 of transaction in the manner described herein.

9 Steps 66-69 are performed at the retailer level 61 and include both traditional
10 in-store and electronically-based, on-line events. In step 66, the gift key is
11 merchandized to prospective purchasers at retail locations for purchase. In step 67, the
12 purchaser has selected the gift key 5 for purchase at a retail location, online, or
13 telephonically and pays for the device. When the purchase is made remotely, the
14 activation step is performed before shipment of the purchaser. The gift key 5 is
15 scanned to record one or more bar codes which appear on the device or packaging
16 therefore. The store credit assigned to the gift key 5 is assigned to an account number
17 for tracking purposes either external or internal to the retailer. In step 68, account
18 number and store credit are cross referenced for later retrieval. In step 69, the
19 purchaser takes possession and ownership of the gift key 5.

20 Steps 70 and 78 are performed at the purchaser level 62 and include physical
21 events by the purchaser and intermediate or electronically implemented events,
22 namely, steps 71-73, at the host level 63. In step 70, the purchaser either physically or
23 wirelessly connects the gift key 5 to a computer. The gift key 5 automatically
24 launches a webpage originating at the host level 63 and viewable at the purchaser
25 level 62. In step 71, the host computer executes a security program to verify
26 identifiers passed from the gift key 5 to the host. If identifiers fail verification, access
27 is denied. Otherwise, in step 72 the host computer will verify the store credit value
28 available with the gift key 5 at the host level 63 and/or the retailer level 61 and could
29 display FIG. 5. In step 73, the purchaser customizes and saves an electronic greeting
30 card at the host level 63 and viewable at the purchaser level 62 via the web pages
31 described in FIGS. 6 and 7. In step 78, the purchaser physically transfers possession
32 and ownership of the gift key 5 to a recipient.

33 Step 79 is performed at the recipient level 64 including a physical event by the
34 recipient and electronically implemented events, namely, steps 74-77, at the host level

1 63. In step 79, the recipient either physically or wirelessly connects the gift key 5 to a
2 computer. The gift key 5 automatically launches a webpage originating at a host level
3 63 and viewable at the recipient level 64. In step 74, the host computer executes a
4 security program to verify identifiers passed from the gift key 5 to the host. If
5 identifiers fail verification, access is denied. Otherwise, in step 75 the host computer
6 will verify the store credit value available with the gift key 5 at the host level 63
7 and/or the retailer level 61 and could display FIG. 5. In step 76, the recipient could
8 view the electronic greeting card stored at the host level 63 and viewable at the
9 recipient level 64 via the webpage described in FIG. 8. In step 77, the recipient selects
10 a retail site for online shopping and identifier information is transferred to the retailer
11 network 65.

12 Steps 80-82 are performed at the retailer network 65 and include
13 electronically-based, on-line events. In step 80, the recipient shops online by viewing
14 web pages at the retailer network 65 and viewable at the recipient level 64. In step 81,
15 the retailer network 65 verifies account and credit information via a cross reference to
16 a key specific database. If identifiers fail verification, then access is denied.
17 Otherwise, the user is permitted to view retailer's web pages. In step 82, the recipient
18 has chosen goods or services for purchase and executes an online process specific to
19 the retailer during which store credits are depleted from the gift key 5 and the
20 recipient takes ownership of the goods and/or services. Steps 79, 74-77, and 80-82 are
21 repeatable, if store credits remain on the gift key 5 after each transaction by the
22 recipient.

23 The description above indicates that a great degree of flexibility is offered in
24 terms of the present invention. Although systems and methods have been described in
25 considerable detail with reference to certain preferred versions thereof, other versions
26 are possible. Therefore, the spirit and scope of the appended claims should not be
27 limited to the description of the preferred versions contained herein.

28 **6. Industrial Applicability**

29 As is evident from the explanation above, the described invention provides a
30 fully-integrated gift item including a customizable electronic greeting card and store
31 credits which are redeemable online. Accordingly, the described invention is expected
32 to be sold by retailers and the like to shoppers who require the convenience of a store-
33 base credit and the flexibility of an electronically enabled gift item.

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A method for presenting a gift to a recipient comprising the steps of:

(a) activating a gift key, said gift key comprising a housing, an integrated circuit within said housing, and a physical interface or a wireless interface communicating with said integrated circuit; and

(b) customizing an electronic greeting card associated with said gift key at a host site from a first local computer, said first local computer communicating with said host site via a network, said gift key launching said host site when said gift key is linked to said first local computer, said gift key having a store credit associated therewith.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein said activating step includes:

(i) swiping, scanning, or linking said gift key so as to read an identification number from and unique to each said gift key;

(ii) matching said identification number to a database to authenticate the value of said store credit; and

(iii) authorizing subsequent use of said gift key.

3. The method of claim 1, wherein said customizing step includes:

(i) linking said gift key to said first local computer;

(ii) launching a first browser on said first local computer to a web address retrievable from said gift card;

(iii) executing a security algorithm to enable interface with said host site;

(iv) communicating an identification number from said gift key;

(v) matching said identification number to a database to verify the value of said store credit; and

(vi) preparing said electronic greeting card via webpages at said host site, said host site displays said store credit.

4. The method of claim 3, wherein said customizing step further includes:

(vii) activating said gift key for use via said host site.

5. The method of claim 3, wherein said customizing step further includes:

(vii) transferring said gift key to said recipient.

6. The method of claim 1, further comprising the steps of:

- 1 (c) accessing said greeting card at said host site via linkage of said gift key to a
2 second local computer, said second local computer communicating with said
3 host site via said network; and
4 (d) redeeming said store credit at a retail website via said second local
5 computer.
- 6 7. The method of claim 6, wherein said first local computer and said second local
7 computer are the same device.
- 8 8. The method of claim 6, wherein the accessing step includes:
9 (i) linking said gift key to said second local computer;
10 (ii) launching a second browser on said second local computer to a web
11 address retrievable from said gift card;
12 (iii) executing a security program to enable interface with said host
13 site;
14 (iv) communicating an identification number from said gift key;
15 (v) matching said identification number to a database to authenticate
16 the value of said store credit; and
17 (vi) viewing said greeting card and said store credit at said host site.
- 18 9. The method of claim 8, wherein said accessing step further includes:
19 (vii) displaying at least one advertisement at said host site.
- 20 10. The method of claim 8, wherein said accessing step further includes:
21 (vii) displaying theme related content based on said gift key.
- 22 11. The method of claim 10, wherein said theme related content is a game, a movie
23 trailer, factual information, or media.
- 24 12. The method of claim 6, wherein said redeeming step includes:
25 (i) launching a retailer website via said host site;
26 (ii) viewing goods and/or services at said retailer website;
27 (iii) purchasing goods and/or services at said retailer website; and
28 (iv) updating said store credit after said purchasing step.
- 29 13. The method of claim 12, further comprising the step of:
30 (v) passing an identification number unique to said gift key to said
31 retailer website for online transaction.
- 32 14. The method claim 13, wherein said redeeming step further includes:
33 (vi) exiting said retailer website; and
34 (vii) exiting said host site.

- 1 15. A system for presenting a gift to a recipient comprising:
- 2 (a) a gift key including a housing, an integrated circuit within said housing,
- 3 and a physical interface or a wireless interface electrically attached to said
- 4 integrated circuit so as to allow use of said gift key over a network, said gift
- 5 key having an identification number and at least one web address readable
- 6 from and a security algorithm executable by said integrated circuit, said gift
- 7 key linkable to a local computer via said physical interface or said wireless
- 8 interface; and
- 9 (b) a host computer controlling a host site, said host site enabling design of a
- 10 greeting card associated with said gift key, display of said greeting card, and
- 11 redemption of a store credit associated with said gift key via at least one
- 12 retailer computer controlling at least one retailer website, said gift key
- 13 communicating with said host computer and said at least one retailer computer
- 14 via said network, said gift key launching a website from said host computer
- 15 when said gift key is linked to said local computer.
- 16 16. The system of claim 15, wherein said physical interface contacts a port attached to
- 17 said local computer.
- 18 17. The system of claim 15, wherein said wireless interface communicates with said
- 19 local computer via wireless means.
- 20 18. The system of claim 17, wherein said wireless interface is enabled via Bluetooth,
- 21 Wifi, or IrDa.
- 22 19. The system of claim 15, wherein said connector is a USB plug and said integrated
- 23 circuit includes a read-only memory, a flash memory, and a USB controller.
- 24 20. The system of claim 15, wherein said housing includes a three-dimensional
- 25 decorative design.
- 26 21. The system of claim 15, further comprising:
- 27 (c) at least one appendage attached to said housing.
- 28 22. The system of claim 15, wherein said physical interface or said wireless interface
- 29 is extendable from and retractable into said housing.
- 30 23. The system of claim 15, wherein said recipient accesses said retailer website via
- 31 said host site.
- 32 24. The system of claim 15, wherein said network is an internet.
- 33 25. The system of claim 15, further comprising:

1 (c) at least one bar code disposed along said gift key, said at least one bar code
2 corresponding to said identification number.

3 26. A method for presenting a gift to a recipient comprising the steps of:

4 (a) activating a gift key for use, said gift key comprising a housing, an
5 integrated circuit within said housing, and a physical interface or a wireless
6 interface communicable with said integrated circuit, said gift key
7 automatically launching a host website at a host computer when said gift key
8 is linked to a first local computer; and

9 (b) redeeming a store credit associated with said gift key at a retail website via
10 linkage of said gift key to a second local computer, said gift key automatically
11 launching said host website or a second website at a retailer computer when
12 said gift is linked to said second local computer.

13 27. The method of claim 26, further comprising the step of:

14 (c) creating an electronic greeting card at said host website via said first local
15 computer, said greeting card stored by said host computer.

16 28. The method of claim 27, further comprising the step of:

17 (d) viewing an electronic greeting card at said host website via said first local
18 computer or said second computer.

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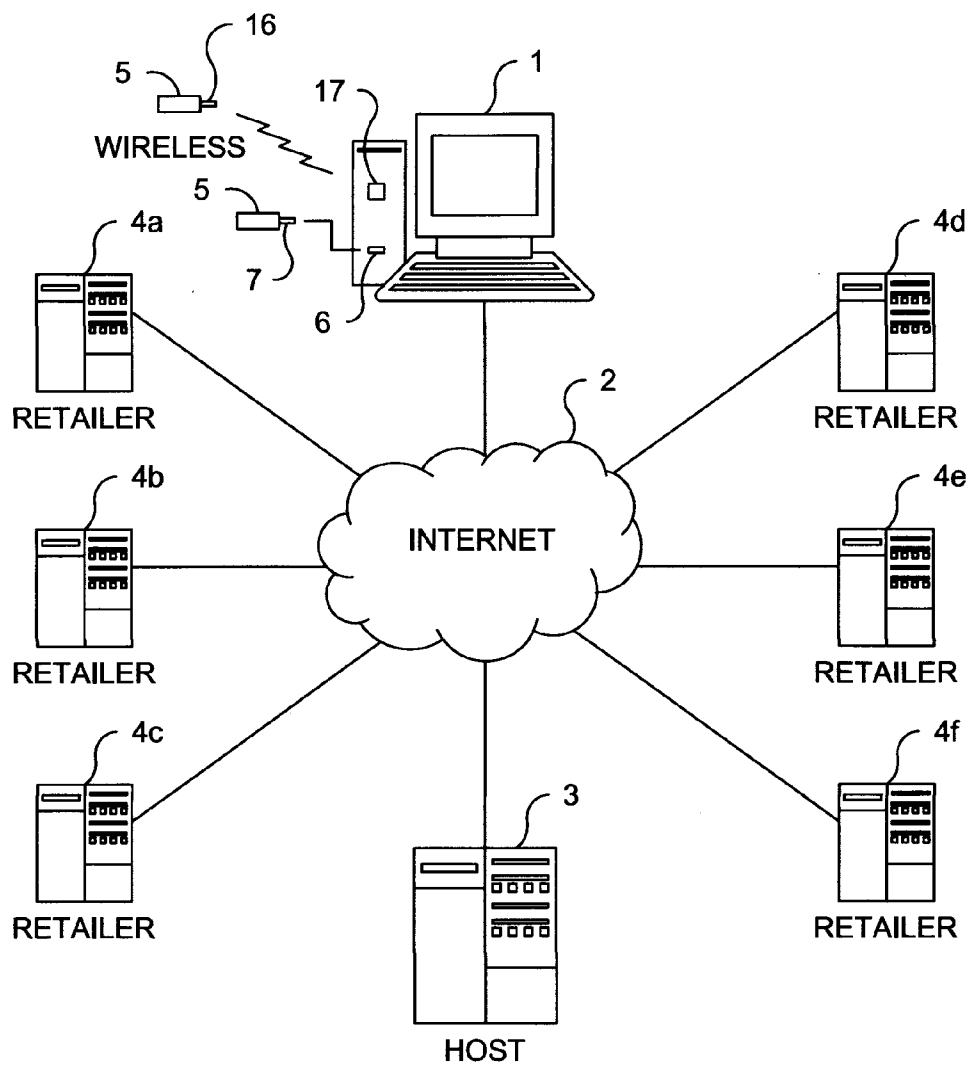
29

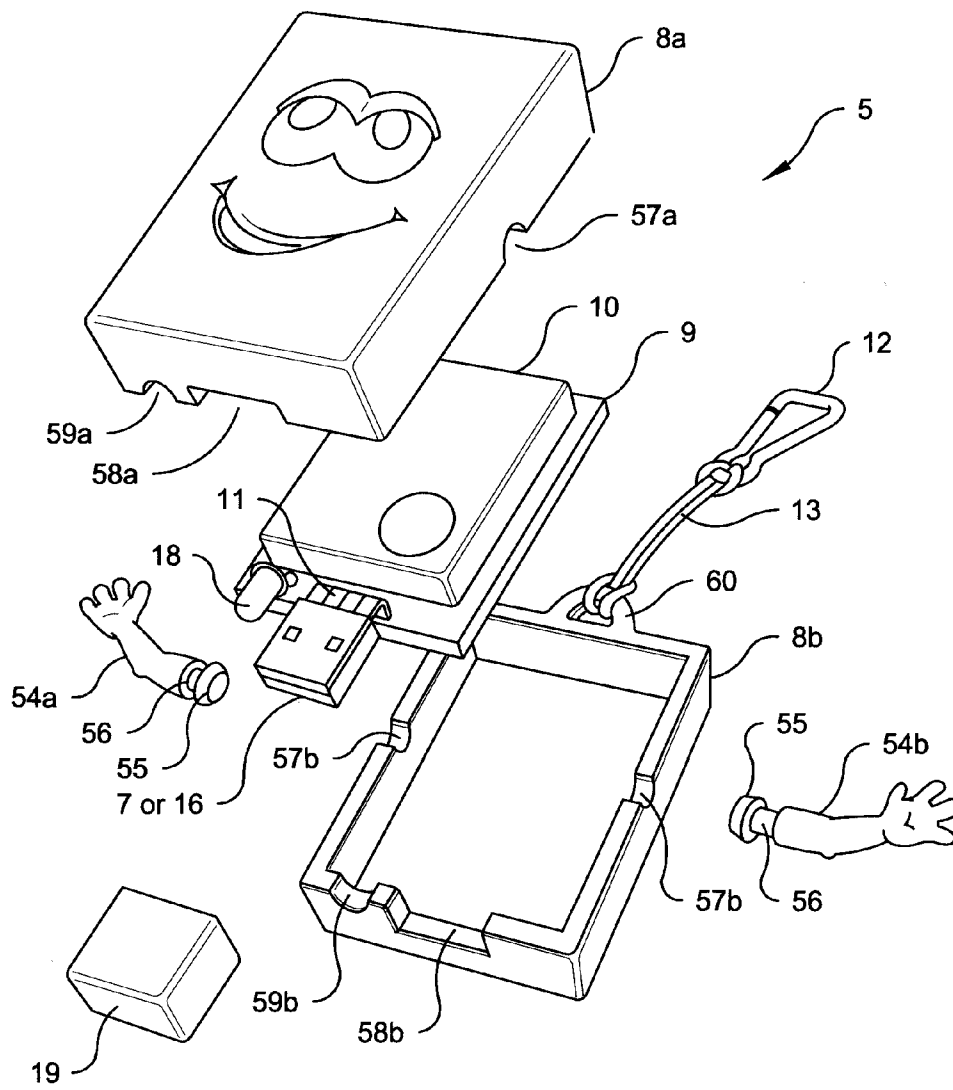
30

31

32

33

**Fig. 1**

**Fig. 2**

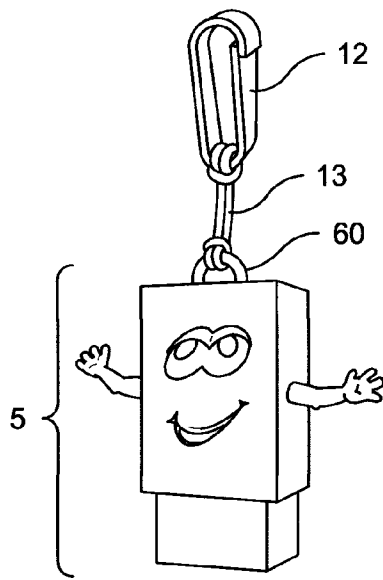


Fig. 3a

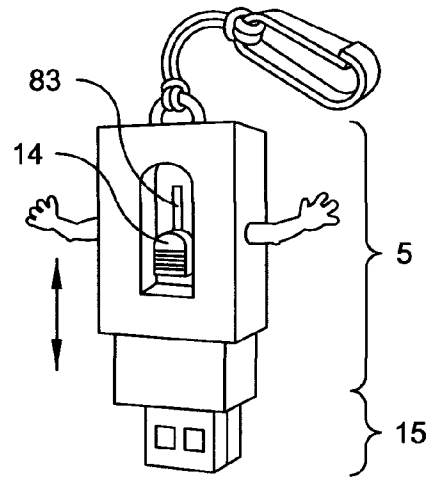
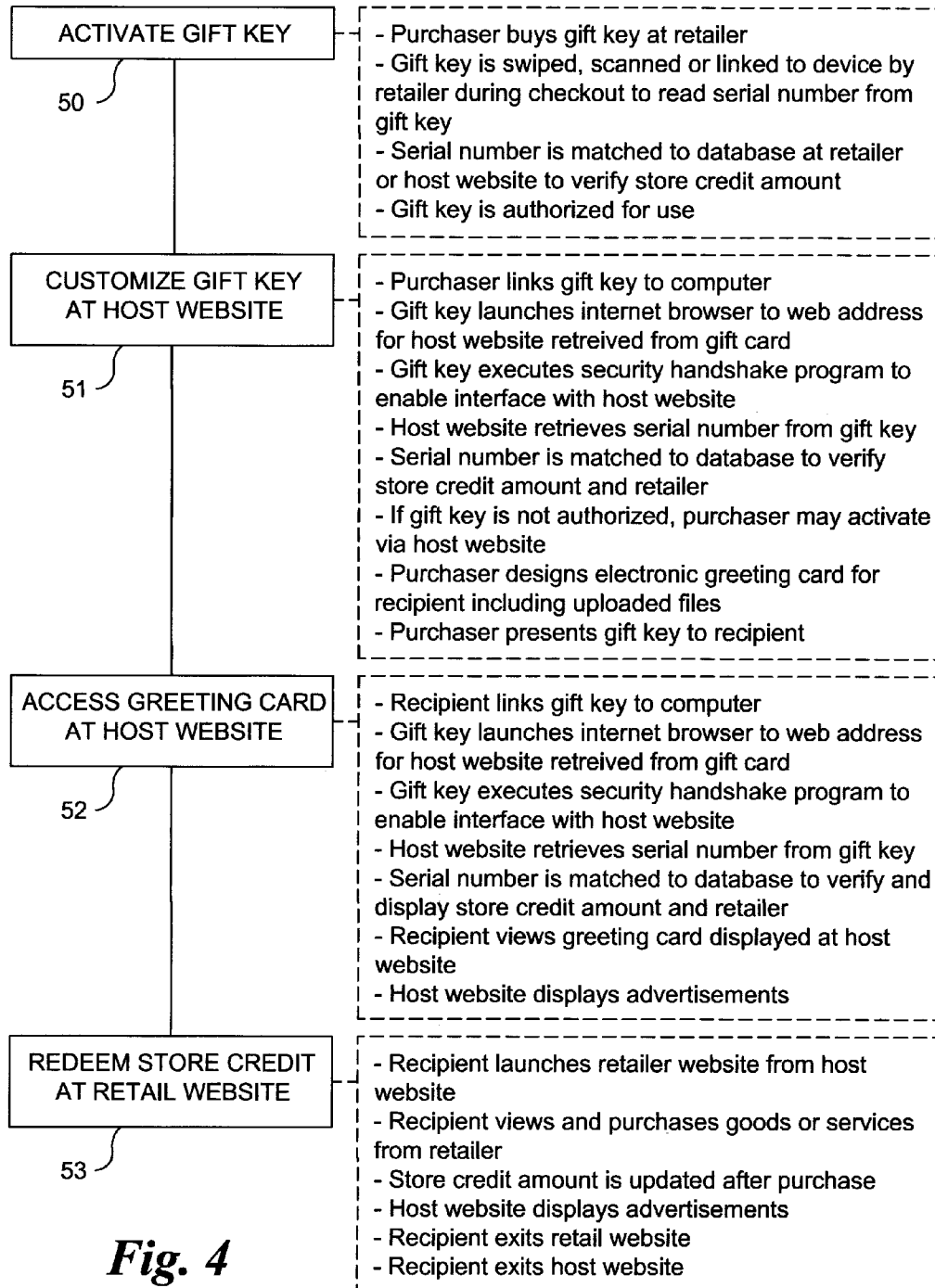
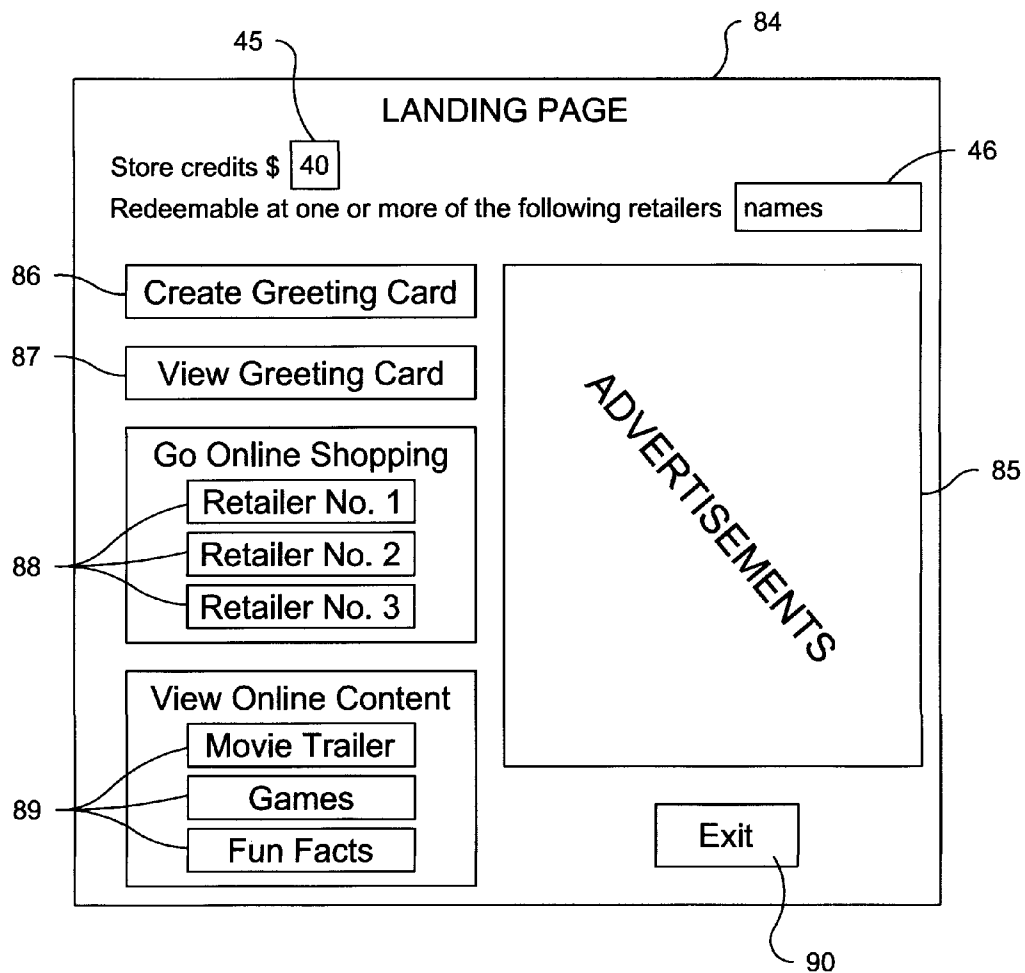
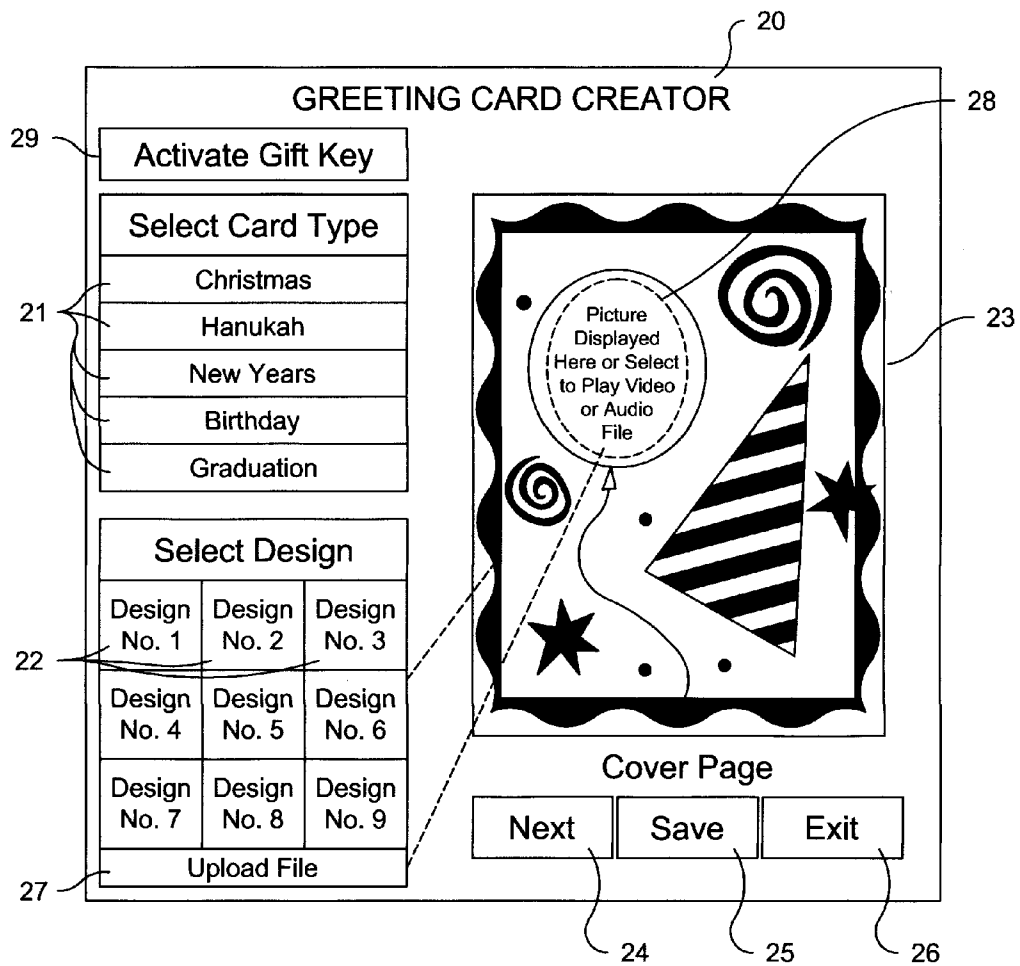


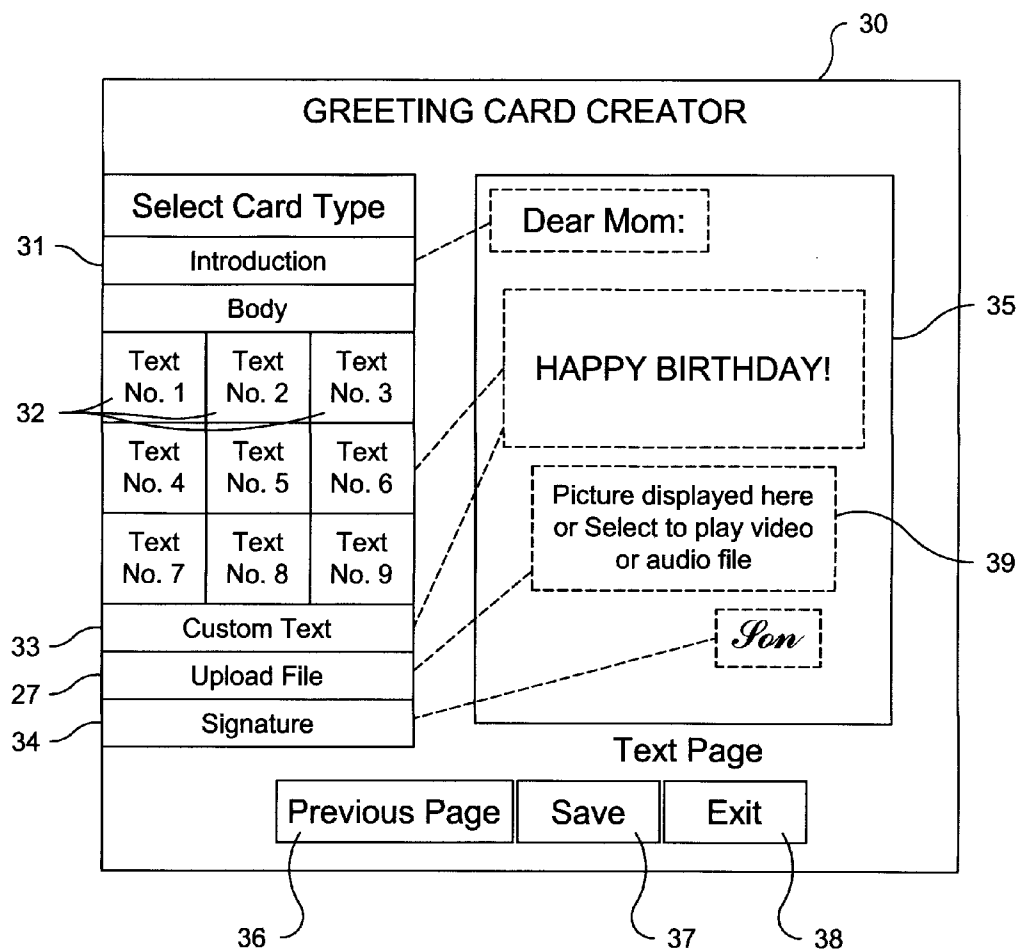
Fig. 3b

**Fig. 4**

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**Fig. 5**

**Fig. 6**

**Fig. 7**

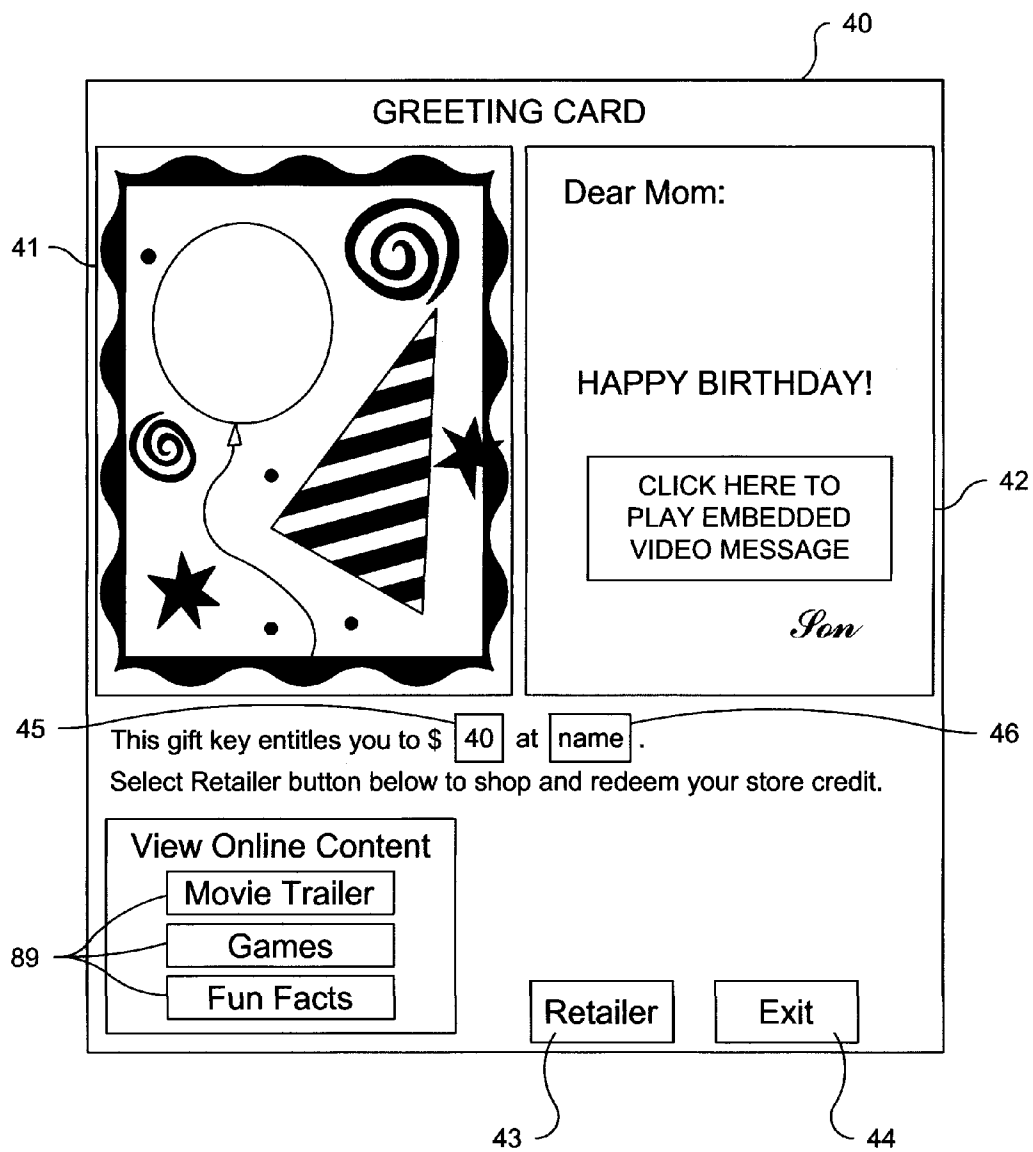
**Fig. 8**

Fig. 9