Abstract: A method and system for online advertising which is rapid and user friendly, capable of having advertisements easily placed, modified and updated by a seller, allows a seller to readily track their advertisements and obtain relevant statistics, providing direct transaction and inter-activity capabilities and capable of providing other necessary online services in the one complete package.
— the filing date of the international application is within two months from the date of expiration of the priority period
— with information concerning one or more priority claims
considered void
For two-letter codes and other abbreviations, refer to the "Guidance Notes on Codes and Abbreviations" appearing at the beginning of each regular issue of the PCT Gazette.
METHOD AND SYSTEM OF ONLINE CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING

Technical Field of the Invention

The invention relates to the area of online advertising and in particular, to a method and system of online advertising for classified, directory and media advertising to a plurality of specialized market sectors.

Background to the Invention

With the expansion of internet usage over the past few years, online advertising has become a popular tool employed by many businesses for the marketing and advertisement of their business and/or products.

In terms of classified advertising, the market has generally been dominated in several categories by traditional newspaper or other print empires. However, the disadvantage of classified advertising in print media is that it is largely focused on only the traditional staple industries such as automotive, employment and property. Standard print media also tends to focus on the advertisement of mainstream big ticket items, leaving a lot of market categories and sectors untouched.

Online advertising is targeted at generating consumer awareness of a brand and stimulating consumer interest of preference for a certain product or service, and providing a means which enables the consumer to readily contact the advertiser for further information or to purchase a product. Online advertising has created new avenues through which an advertiser can communicate directly with a target audience, and provides the opportunity for the convergence of branding, dissemination of information and sales transactions to all occur in the one place.

Accordingly, it is an object of the invention to provide a method and system for online advertising which is rapid and user friendly, capable of having advertisements easily placed, modified and updated by a seller, allows a seller to readily track their advertisements and obtain relevant statistics, providing direct transaction and inter-activity capabilities and capable of providing other necessary online services in the one complete package.
Summary of the Invention

In a first aspect, the present invention provides a system for online classified advertising including:

- a server having at least one database accessible by at least one subscribing buyer and/or at least one subscribing seller in order to buy and/or sell at least one product and/or service;
- an online interface in the form of a website which provides a means for said buyer(s) and/or seller(s) to interact with the server and/or each other;
- at least one classified advertisement for at least one product and/or service;
- a search means for enabling said buyer(s) to search and/or purchase said product and/or service; and
- a payment means for enabling said buyer(s) and/or seller(s) to directly purchase a product and/or service and/or pay for advertising.

The classified advertisement(s) are preferably divided into a classified subgroup or category related to different industry and/or marketplace sectors dependent on the nature of the product and/or service being offered for sale.

The advertisement is preferably purchased by a seller from at least one package wherein each package is designed to offer different levels of visibility, priority, features and/or options for the advertisement.

The system preferably has provided a control panel which is adapted to enable a user to track their advertisement(s) and/or view real time statistics relating to said advertisements.

A photo management tool is preferably provided which is adapted to assist in the upload of picture and/or modification of picture content for an advertisement.

The system of the invention further comprises at least one complimentary service which is adapted to assist a seller in advertising/selling a product and/or complement their business.
In a second aspect, the present invention provides a method for online classified advertising wherein the method includes the following steps of:
- providing a server over a distributed communication network, said server having at least one database accessible by at least one subscribing buyer and/or at least one subscribing seller in order to buy and/or sell at least one product and/or service;
- said seller(s) directly uploading at least one classified advertisement for at least one product and/or service;
- said buyer(s) searching for available products and/or services by entering at least one search criteria to receive search results detailing available product(s) and/or service(s) meeting said search criteria via a search means;
- said buyer(s) selecting at least one product and/or service and directly purchasing selected product and/or service.

A seller is preferably able to incorporate information contained within the system onto a separate website.

In order that the invention may be more readily understood we will describe by way of non-limiting example one specific embodiment thereof with reference to the accompanying drawings.

Brief Description of the Drawings

Figure 1 shows the home page of the website according to a preferred embodiment of the invention demonstrating how the advertisements are divided into industry categories or sectors of the marketplace.

Figure 2 shows a preliminary page according to a preferred embodiment of the invention which a user may be directed to upon selection of a particular classified subgroup in order to be able to search or use that group.

Figure 3 shows a search results screen according to a preferred embodiment of the invention.

Figure 4 shows an advertisement for a product according to a preferred embodiment of the invention.
Figure 5 shows an integrated photo manager software feature according to a preferred embodiment of the invention which is adapted to assist a user in the upload and creation of an advertisement.

Figure 6 shows an administration web page according to a preferred embodiment of the invention which allows a seller to track their advertisements, manage buyer enquiries, view statistical information and access other individual features.

Figure 7 shows an example of the type of statistical information that is viewable by a seller according to a preferred embodiment of the invention.

Figure 8 shows an outline representation of the interaction between at least one buyer, seller and service provider according to a preferred embodiment of the invention.

Description of a Preferred Embodiment of the Invention

In this embodiment, the invention provides a system for online advertising which is rapid and user friendly, capable of having advertisements easily placed, modified and updated by a seller, allows a seller to readily track their advertisements and obtain relevant statistics, providing direct transaction and inter-activity capabilities and capable of providing other necessary online services in the one complete package.

The system preferably has provided a service provider 1 which is adapted to provide and means for, and control and manage, the purchase and sale of classified advertising and the interaction of at least one buyer 2 and at least one seller/dealer 3 via an online interactive interface 4. The online interactive interface 4 provides a means for enabling the buying and selling of classified advertising and preferably functions as a portal allowing direct interaction between a buyer 2 and seller/dealer 3. The online interactive interface 4 is preferably in the form of a website 4 provided over an distributed communications network such as the internet or the like, and is accessible via any locally connected or remote computer, mobile, PDA or other suitable device capable of being connected to the internet and/or network using a direct or wireless connection means.
The system preferably has provided a server having at least one database which is adapted to store buyer, seller, accounting, advertisement, and any other suitable information related to the system. The website 4 preferably includes a plurality of web pages 5 which are interconnected or interlinked and can be accessed via links provided on the home page and/or other pages within the website. The website 4 contains at least one categorized classified sub-group 6 that is relevant to a particular industry or sector of the marketplace. Within each classified subgroup 6 is preferably at least one web page containing advertisements 7 for products and/or services related to that particular category/industry/sector. Unlike previous forms of classified advertising, the present invention includes providing for specialized industries or sectors which usually remain inadequately represented. Each classified subgroup 6 relates to a different industry or sector, and/or specialised areas within those industries or sectors, of the marketplace and is thus, specifically tailored to suit different advertiser and consumer needs depending on the category such as automotive, property or the like. The classified subgroups 6 may include, but not be limited to, the following categories: cars, boats, trucks, motorbikes, farms, clearance stock, places to stay, property, baby, pet, hobby, aviation, machinery, caravan, horse, renovation, computer, camera, hi-fi, sport, general, jobs, personat, music, wedding, business, collectables etc.

Each classified subgroup 6 may have provided at least one advertisement 7 for at least one product and/or service 13 related to the particular industry or sector or subsection thereof to which the classified subgroup 6 relates. Each advertisement 7 is adapted to provide information such as: advertisement number, advertisement type, category, brand, product details, location, price, seller or dealer information. Each advertisement 7 is preferably provided with a short classified description which is automatically displayed in response to a search or request, and a detailed description which is displayed upon request for further information. The website 4 and advertisements 7 placed thereon are provided with embedded transaction and inter-activity capabilities which allows direct transactions and instantaneous interaction with the respective buyers 2 and sellers 3. Thus, a consumer is able to not only able to search and view advertisements, but is able to purchase the product and/or service they are interested in.

The system is preferably provided with at least one banner advertisement 11 which is to enhance a buyer’s 2 experience and provide an additional opportunity for a seller/dealer 3 to increase their revenue by attracting interest of potential buyers 2.
The banner advertisement 11 will contain targeted content relevant to the classified subgroup 6 under which the web page 5 on which it is displayed, falls within the website 4. The banner advertisement 11 is designed to direct a buyer/user to the seller/dealer's 3 website via a linked URL upon clicking the banner advertisement 11. The banner advertisement 11 preferably has integrated rich media technology which enables media such as video, audio, animation and photos or the like be incorporated into a multimedia advertisement.

The system has provided at least one search-and-find means 8 in the form of a search engine having specialised search functions which have been developed to enable a potential customer to navigate around the website 4 and search for the appropriate products and/or services 9 they may require. The search engine 8 can utilise boolean operators or natural language or a selection of search criteria to produce search results 14. The search engine 8 has provided at least one search criteria 9 which may be utilized to limit or expand a search. The search criteria preferably includes keywords contained within the advertisement to produce results which are pertinent to those keywords. The search engine(s) 8 can be tailored for each classified subgroup 6 to provide options and/or keywords pertinent to that industry or market sector.

The system has provided a payment means (not shown) to enable a buyer to purchase a product and/or service, and/or enable a seller to provide payment for use of the system. The payment means is preferably in the form of an e-commerce platform with high level security which is adapted to enable all transactions to be accepted and processed internally via an online environment in a secure manner. It is envisaged that payments may be accepted and processed directly through the provider, the seller or via an approved third party.

The system preferably has provided statistical and analysis software which is adapted to provide a seller with real-time statistics of their classified, directory and display advertisements. The statistical information 15 preferably includes, but is not limited to, number of times ad heading is shown, ad is clicked, ad is viewed, ad listing is used to click through to website, contact form in used, ad listing is printed, ad listing is sent to friend etc.
The system of the invention is adapted to provide classified advertising which is tailored to suit the needs of an individual by providing various levels of paid and unpaid classified advertising such as directory listing and display listing advertising. The directory listing is comprised of the various levels of advertising depending on the level of visibility, priority, features and options available to the advertisement. When a user is conducting a search of the directory listing, the search and list can be further refined by limiting or expanding the search through the use of particular search criteria including geographical selection criteria such as state, postcode or the like.

The display listing will preferably be provided as an additional option when an advertiser opts for a prescribed pre-packaged advertising option and in particular, a high-end priced package. The display listing options may include directing a user to the advertiser's website by opening a new browser window, displaying a full directory listing for the advertiser, directing a user to the range of products and/or services provided by the advertiser within the classifieds website or directing the user to a promotional online brochure which is prepared from the information provided by the advertiser. Display advertising can include half page, billboard, sign and placard sized advertisements. The display listings are the first results shown when a user searches for a certain category. For example, if a user is looking for 'cars', the first results screen would contain the display listings which can be limited or expanded with the provision of geographical search capabilities, followed by the directory listings in order of priority and visibility which is selected by the package purchased. The search may also be limited or expanded to list all the advertisements in a certain category or all the advertisements for a given advertiser. The advertisements may be static, animated, expanding, flash, which media, video supported and/or involve any other new arising technology or feature.

The system of the invention may also have provided an editing function which deletes any options or fields that are left blank by the advertiser at the time of placing the advertisement, enabling the advertisement to have a neat presentation once it is finalized and uploaded online. It is also envisaged that the system will have provided a number of 'self-labeling' fields which enable a seller to create their own label which would otherwise be set by the website. This provides the seller with further customization facilities for the advertisement and enables them to place their own specialty question or field to be filled in by the buyer.
The system of the invention preferably provides at least one complimentary service (not shown) which is adapted to assist a seller/dealer 3 in being able to advertise and/or sell their products and/or services and compliment their business. The complimentary service(s) may include, but not be limited to, website development, email accounts, web hosting, domain management, spam & virus filtering, web marketing, POS integration, stock/inventory control, accounting tools etc. The complimentary service(s) will be offered at discounted rates to subscribing sellers 3. The seller’s 3 online catalogue of products and/or services will also be able to be dynamically ‘imported’ into their own website with full e-commerce facilities. The system of the invention preferably has provided promotional code access integrated into all areas of the website 4 such that sellers 3 may be offered free advertisements or the like.

The invention may also have provided advertising in the form of sponsorships wherein the seller 3 is able to purchase continued exposure on a specific link or content page or email wherein information about the seller’s 3 products and/or services may be forwarded to a user in response an online form which enables the user to request to receive further information and/or offers in relation to a specific subject or category. An additional feature may provide alerts and notifications which instantly notify the user if more advertisements 7 have been placed in the category 6 for which they expressed interest. This feature can also apply when a user has selected an item to purchase, they can then be notified of a new similar product that may be of interest to them. It is envisaged that the notification may be via email, fax, voice message, SMS or any other suitable current or future technology. A notification means may also be provided which allows a person to email an advertisement 7 of interest to a friend or the like via email, sms or another suitable means.

In this embodiment, the invention provides a method for online advertising which is rapid and user friendly, capable of having advertisements easily placed, modified and updated by an advertiser, allows an advertiser to readily track their advertisements and obtain relevant statistics, providing direct transaction and inter-activity capabilities and capable of providing other necessary online services in the one complete package.

The method of the invention involves a seller 3 being able to advertise and sell their products and/or services via online classified advertising. The seller 3 registers their details to become a member and gain access to the system of the invention. This can
be done via the online interface 4 accessible through a seller's 3 computer via the internet. In order to register for an account the seller 3 can provide information including, but not limited to, contact details, accepted payment methods, website address (optional), instant message details (optional), acknowledgement of terms and conditions and security check information which may preferably involved entering an alphanumeric term which appears on the seller's screen 3. Once a seller 3 registers their details to establish an account, they will preferably be provided with a password, user id and/or advertisement authentication details which they can utilise to log onto the system and have access to the services and facilities available. It will also provide them with access to a private control panel 12 on the website 4 containing at least one management page such as administration, profile, advertisement, statistics and email inbox pages. Thus, once the a seller 3 has logged in, they can perform administrative functions such as changing their password or updating their account and system preferences, functions and features, search statistical information and current adverts, managing email enquiries, managing billing and payments and/or begin uploading an advertisement 7. The seller 3 is preferably required to pay a prescribed fee which can be paid periodically or per advertisement in return for unlimited listing or exposure of their product/service within a selected category 6. Once the payment has been received successfully the seller 3 can then upload one or more advertisements onto the system.

In order to place an advertisement 7, the seller 3 preferably selects at least one pre-packaged advertisement option from a range of pre-packaged advertisement options which are categorized into levels of paid classified advertising options. The levels are dependent on the visibility, priority and features and/or options which the advertisement make available to the seller 3. The pre-packaged advertisement options provide the advertiser with a single upfront fee based listing system in addition to a further ongoing fee for the duration of the lifetime of the advertisement on the website. It is envisaged that there will also be provided various 'upgrade' options which are capable of adding further value to the advertisement.

The seller 3 may preferably either provide their own stylized advertisement and provide payment based on the visibility, priority and position for their advertisement in respect of the website or utilise software provided by the system which has the various graphic templates and stylization features which enable the seller to develop their own advertisement to be placed onto the website 4.
Once the seller 3 has selected a pre-packaged advertisement option, including selection of a particular stylized template for the advertisement, details of the advertisement can be provided, and the transaction can be completed to place the advertisement online instantaneously. A seller 3 enters information including, but not limited to, advertisement type, designation, category, headline, caption, product details, currency, price, GST, delivery details, shipping details, description, options. The information entered is designed to be different and relevant to each category/classified subgroup into which the ad is to be placed. The advertiser can then place, modify and/or delete the details, listings or advertisements online at any given time. Whilst the seller 3 is creating and placing their advertisement it is possible to save each step so that the seller 3 has the opportunity to finalize the advertisement and/or provide payment at a later time. It is envisaged however, that the system will be programmable to hold or delete the saved advertisement after a predetermined period has expired.

It is envisaged that the contact information will be filled in dynamically such that the information is automatically incorporated into each advertisement associated with those contact details, ensuring that the contact information provided on the advertisement is constantly updated.

The system preferably has a photo management tool, which enables a seller 3 to create one or more advertisements 7 by uploading picture content and re-sizing and rotating images, re-ordering, adding captions, photographer credits or watermarks to protect the photographs, creating direct URL links, creating slideshows and/or completing any other required function. The advertisement/slideshows can then be modified or deleted at time during or after the placement of the advertisement 7.

A private control panel 12 enables the advertiser to search through some or all their listings by entering their username or searching for a particular advertisement number. For each advertisement 7, the seller 3 can then view real time statistics which may inform them of the number of times the advertisement has been viewed, the amount of replies that have been received and provide other relevant information in relation to a given advertisement.

Once the seller 3 has created their advertisement 7 and/or list of products or services, the advertiser can then 'import' and incorporate this information into their own website to be utilized as an online catalogue for their own business. There may
also be provided a means for incorporating optional e-commerce facilities to enable consumers to purchase any products and/or services from their website as well as through the system of the invention. The advertisement 7 can be specifically tailored to blend in with the original design of the seller’s website utilizing custom colours and display layouts, with the advertiser being able to decide what features are included or deleted as required. Thus, the present invention eradicates the need for having a multitude of different companies to implement the various steps and processes of the advertising and marketing campaign such as e-commerce facilities, payment gateways, website building, and domain name management or the like.

The seller 3 will also be able to liaise with a potential buyer 2 by receiving queries from potential buyers 2 and being able to respond to them via enquiry and feedback facilities provided by the system of the invention.

The method of the invention involves a buyer 2 registering the details to become a member and gain full access to the online distressed advertising system and services provided. This can be done via the online portal/interface accessible through a buyer’s 2 computer via the internet. Once a buyer 2 has provided their contact details and other necessary information, they are issued with a unique username and password which they can utilise to log onto the system or server 1 and have access to the services and facilities available. It is envisaged that membership may be divided into buyer’s or seller’s membership areas such that members may only have access to the appropriate sections of the website. It will also provide them with access to their own personal member’s section on the website which may have details of past purchases, sales, invoices, receipts and other relevant information. Thus, once a buyer 2 has logged in, they can perform administrative functions such as changing their password or updating their account, browse the media advertisement database 5 and/or purchase media products and/or services by beginning a new search and/or purchase or resuming a saved search and/or purchase.

A buyer 2 is able to search the online advertising system via a search and find functionality which enables each individual advertisement to be linked to relevant information that is listed under headings which relate to the same category. The search and list of results can then be further refined by limiting or expanding the search through the use of geographical selection criteria such as state, postcode or the like. The user may then use an associated email facility to forward a relevant
advertisement or link to a friend who might be interested in the information, save the results for future review so that when they return to the site it is not necessary to complete the entire search again, contact the seller or purchase the product or service via the secure payment facility. It is also envisaged that international users will be able to determine the cost of the product or service in their own currency through use of an associated currency converter. Thus, the consumer is provided with a fast and efficient means for finding and comparing products in the one location, with the advantage of being able to limit their search locally, or expand their search to a national level. The buyer is also able to send a broadcast enquiry to sellers in order to obtain quotes, brochures or information pertaining to a particular product and/or service. The broadcast enquiry is preferably sent to sellers randomly in order to provide buyers and sellers with a fair and equitable result.

While we have described herein one particular embodiment of the method and system of online advertising it is further envisaged that other embodiments of the invention could exhibit any number and combination of any one of the features previously described. However, it is to be understood that any variations and modifications can be made without departing from the spirit and scope thereof.
The claims defining the invention are as follows:

1. A system for online classified advertising including:
   a server having at least one database accessible by at least one subscribing buyer and/or at least one subscribing seller in order to buy and/or sell at least one product and/or service;
   an online interface in the form of a website which provides a means for said buyer(s) and/or seller(s) to interact with the server and/or each other;
   at least one classified advertisement for at least one product and/or service;
   a search means for enabling said buyer(s) to search and/or purchase said product and/or service; and
   a payment means for enabling said buyer(s) and/or seller(s) to directly purchase a product and/or service and/or pay for advertising.

2. A system for online classified advertising as claimed in claim 1 wherein the classified advertisement(s) is divided into a classified subgroup or category related to different industry and/or marketplace sectors dependent on the nature of the product and/or service being offered for sale.

3. A system for online classified advertising as claimed in claim 1 or claim 2 wherein the advertisement is purchased from at least one package by a seller.

4. A system for online classified advertising as claimed in claim 3 where each package offers different levels of visibility, priority, features and/or options for the advertisement.

5. A system for online classified advertising as claimed in any one of the above claims which further comprises a control panel which is adapted to enable a user to track their advertisement(s) and/or view real time statistics relating to said advertisement(s).

6. A system for online classified advertising as claimed in any one of the preceding claims which further comprises a photo management tool which is adapted to assist in the upload of picture and/or modification of picture content for an advertisement.
7. A system for online classified advertising as claimed in any preceding claim which further comprises at least one complimentary service which is adapted to assist a seller in advertising/selling a product and/or complement their business.

8. A method for online classified advertising wherein the method includes the following steps of:
   - providing a server over a distributed communication network, said server having at least one database accessible by at least one subscribing buyer and/or at least one subscribing seller in order to buy and/or sell at least one product and/or service;
   - said seller(s) directly uploading at least one classified advertisement for at least one product and/or service;
   - said buyer(s) searching for available products and/or services by entering at least one search criteria to receive search results detailing available product(s) and/or service(s) meeting said search criteria via a search means;
   - said buyer(s) selecting at least one product and/or service and directly purchasing selected product and/or service.

9. A method for online classified advertising as claimed in claim 8 wherein the seller is able to track their advertisement(s) and obtain statistics regarding their advertisement(s).

10. A method for online classified advertising as claimed in claim 8 or claim 9 which enables a seller to incorporate information contained within the system onto a separate website.

11. A method and system of for online classified advertising as substantially described herein with reference to the above example.
Figure 1
Figure 2
Figure 4
Figure 5
Figure 6
Figure 7
Figure 8
INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No
PCT/AU2006/000609

A CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

Int C1

G06Q 30/00 (2006 Q1)

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B FIELDS SEARCHED

Documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

Minimum documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic database consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable search terms used)

Espace, USPTO with keywords

Shopping cart, advertising, classified, category, directoriesell, buy, payment, retail, saleebusiness, ecommerce, Web, internet, G06F

C DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

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<td>WO 2003/038560 A2 (Amazon com, Inc) 8 May 2003 See whole document</td>
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* Special categories of cited documents

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Date of the actual completion of the international search
20 July 2006

Date of mailing of the international search report
27 JUL 2006

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This Annex lists the known "A" publication level patent family members relating to the patent documents cited in the above-mentioned international search report. The Australian Patent Office is in no way liable for these particulars which are merely given for the purpose of information.

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Due to data integration issues this family listing may not include 10 digit Australian applications filed since May 2001.

END OF ANNEX