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(54) **METHODS AND SYSTEMS FOR VENDOR ASSURANCE**

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

(21) Appl. No.: **13/608,194**

Methods and systems for managing financial transactions. Specifically, the invention includes methods and systems for creating order profiles used to select vendors for carrying out third-party sub-transactions needed to complete financial transactions. A product related to the completion of the financial transaction is selected, a vendor ordering profile is selected, a product vendor that most closely matches the characteristics designated in the ordering profile is selected, and the selected product is ordered from the selected product vendor.

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Related U.S. Application Data

(63) Continuation of application No. 12/335,196, filed on Dec. 15, 2008, now Pat. No. 8,266,013, which is a continuation-in-part of application No. 10/937,879, filed on Sep. 10, 2004, now Pat. No. 7,707,055.

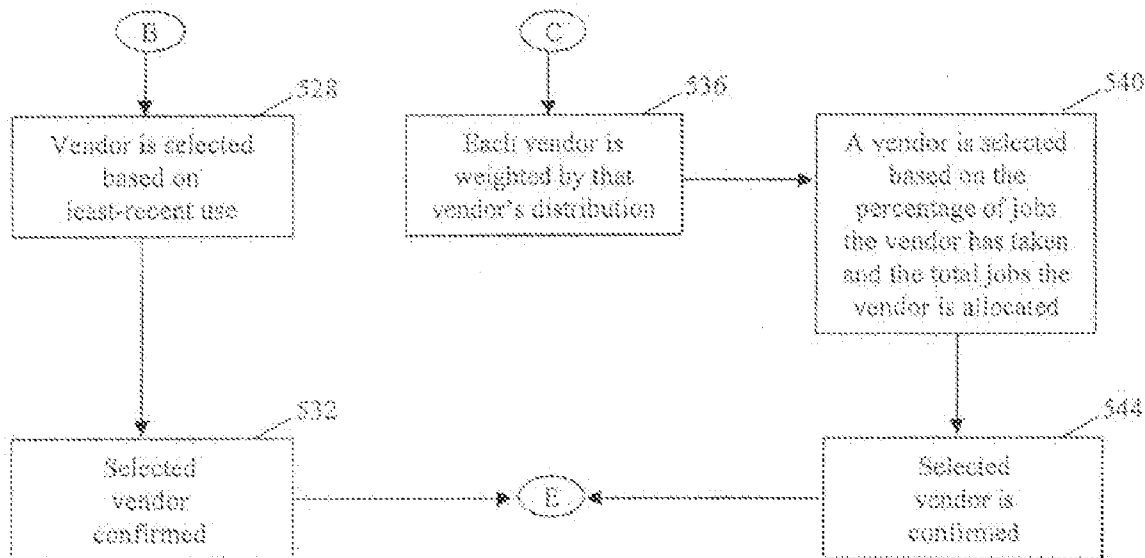


Fig. 1

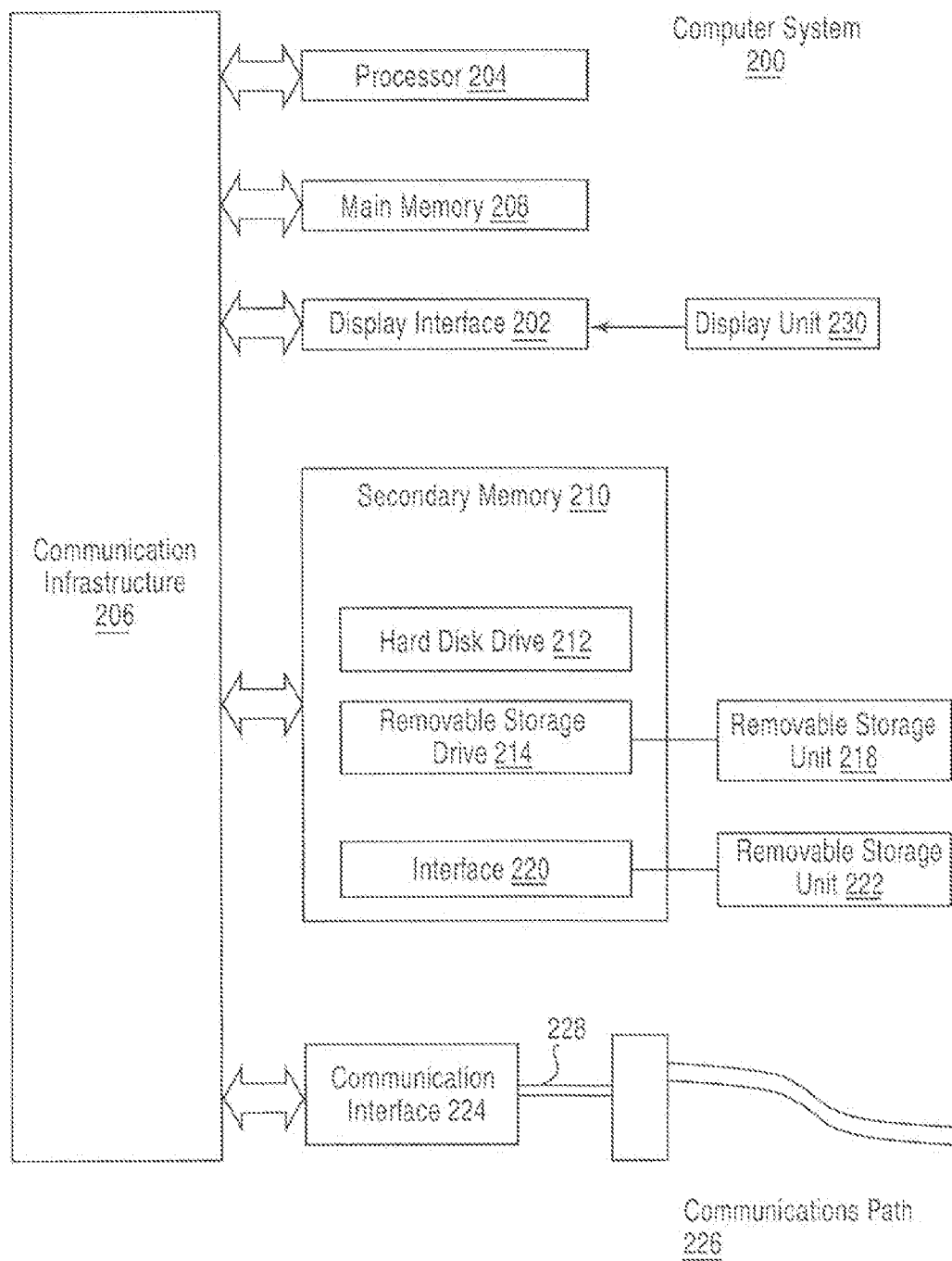


Fig.2

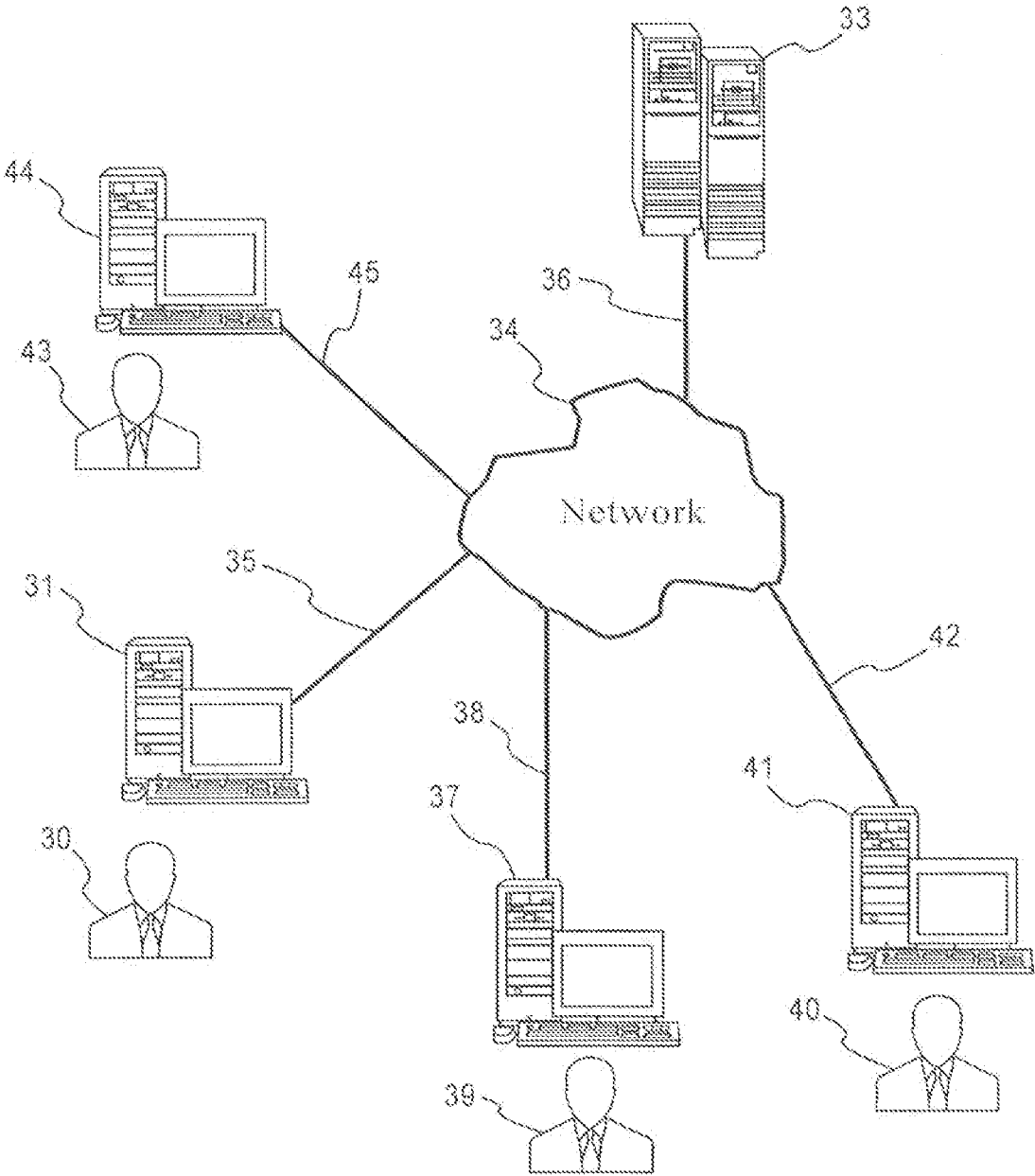


FIG. 3

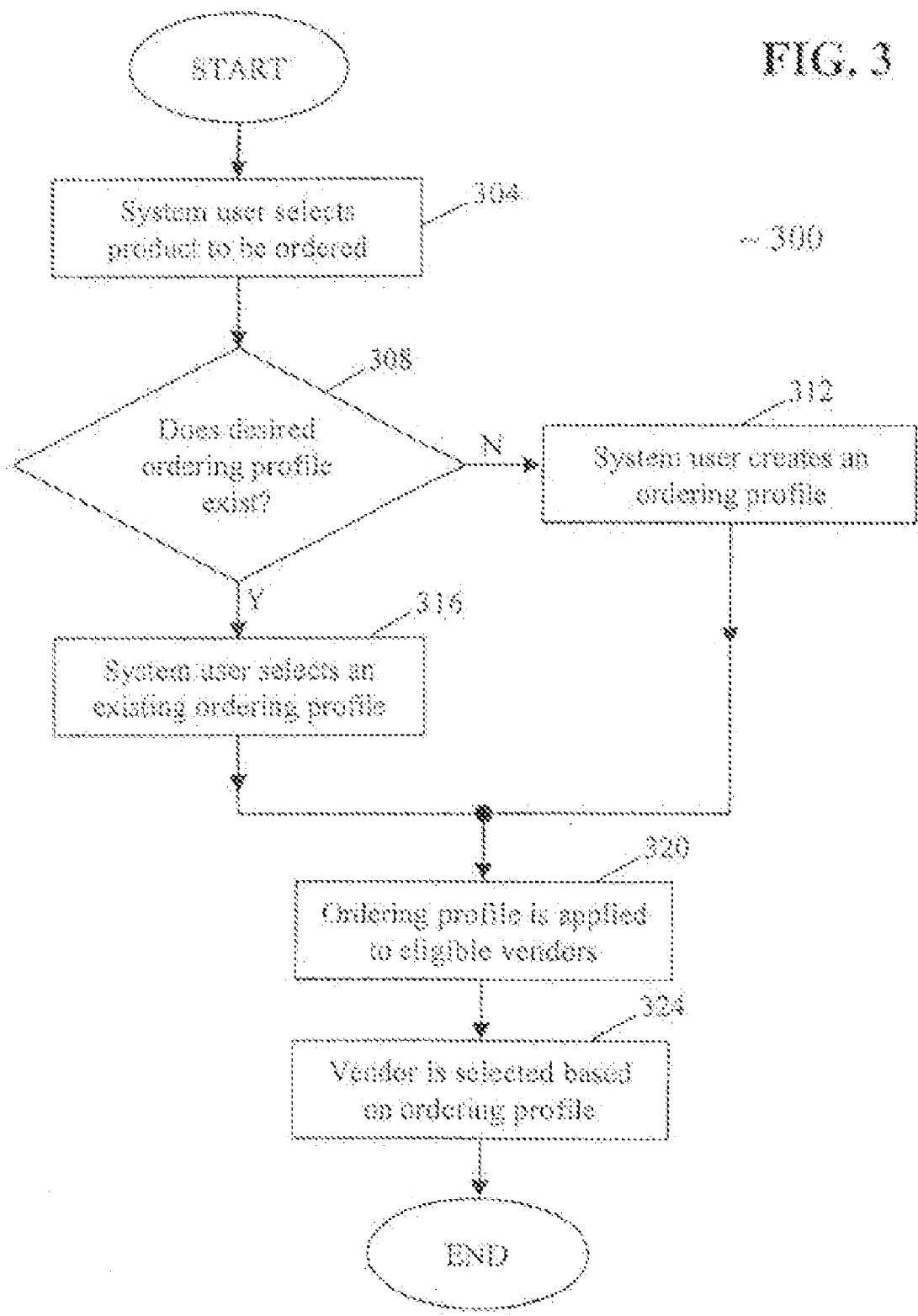


FIG. 4A

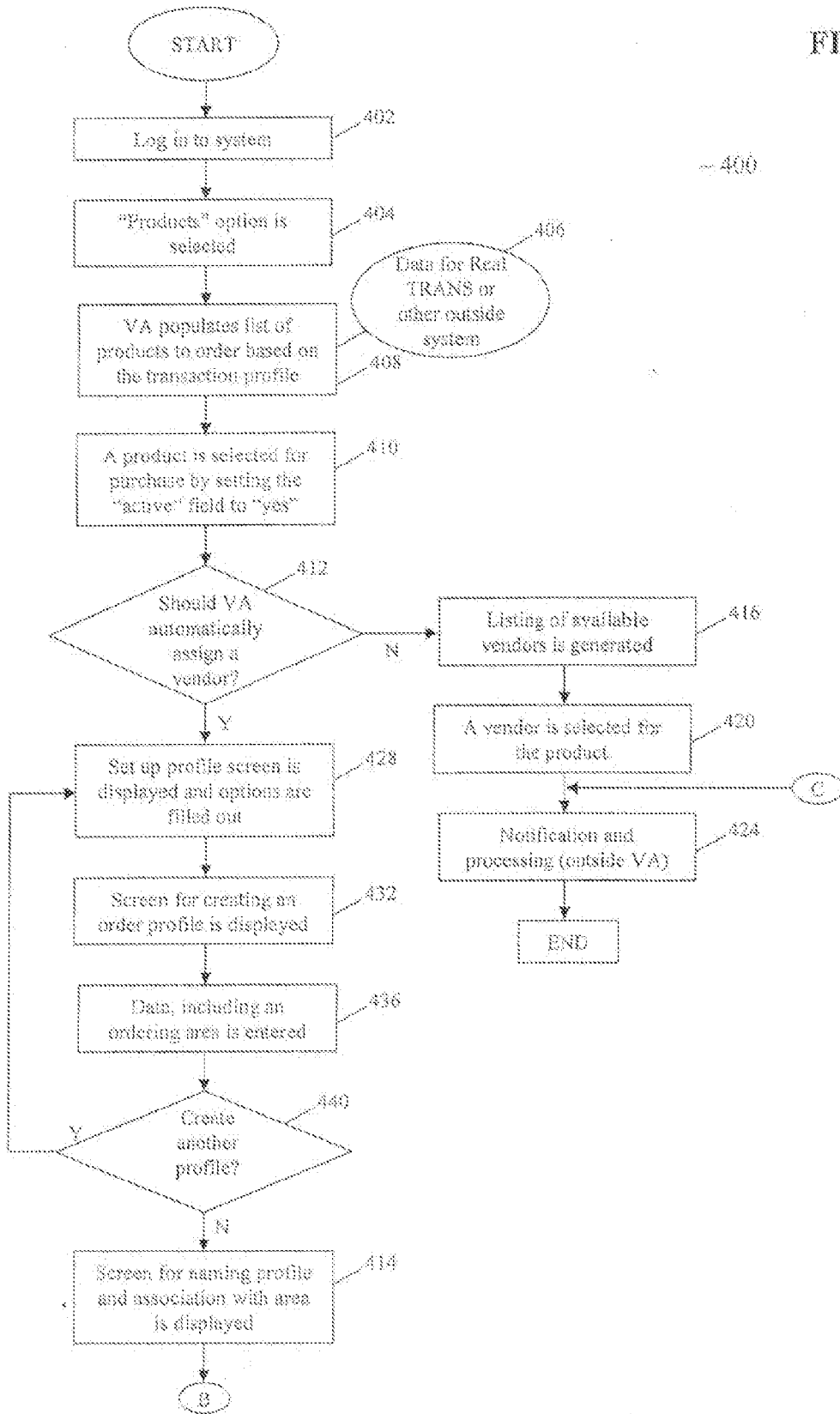


FIG. 4B

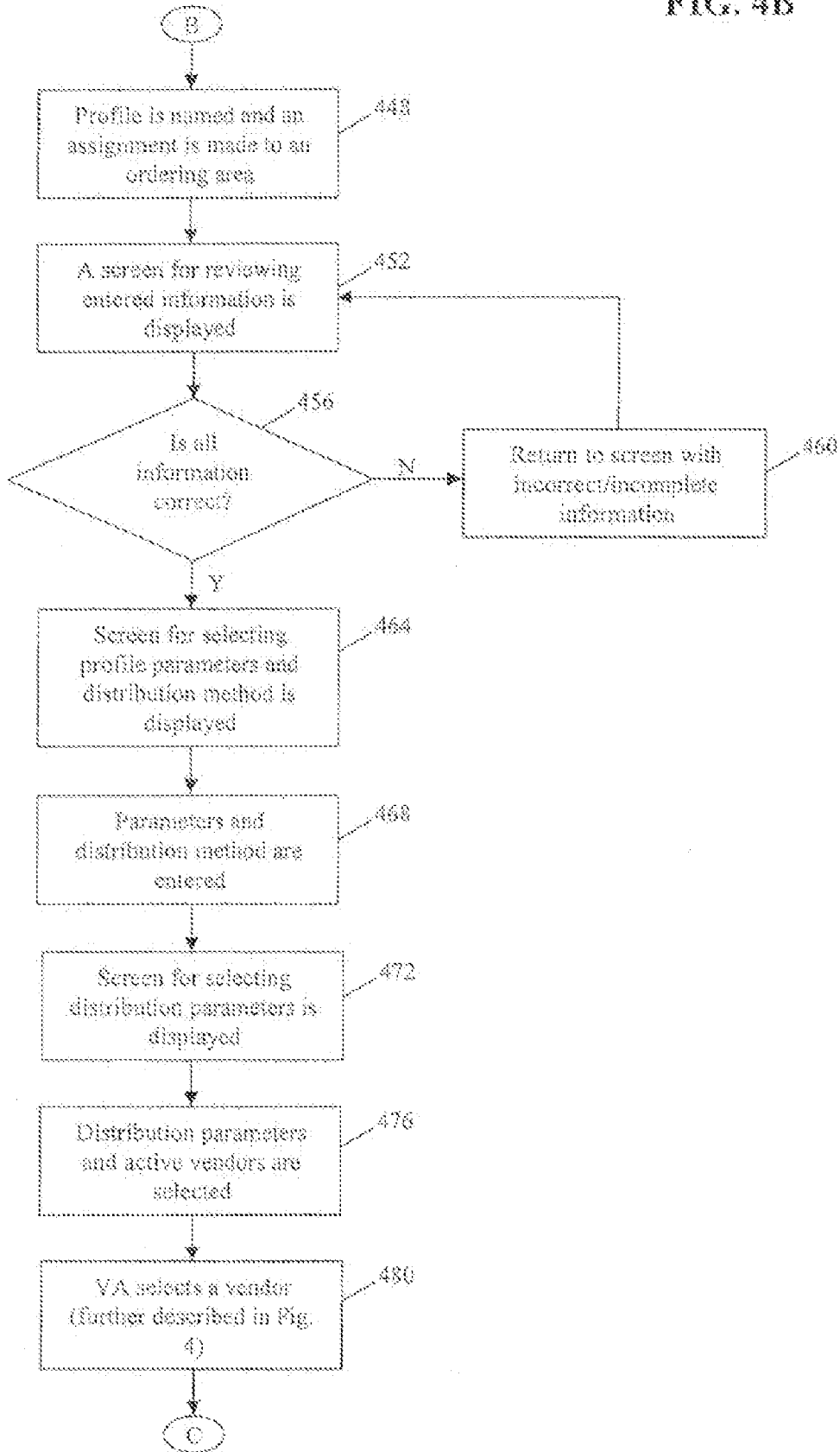


FIG. 5A

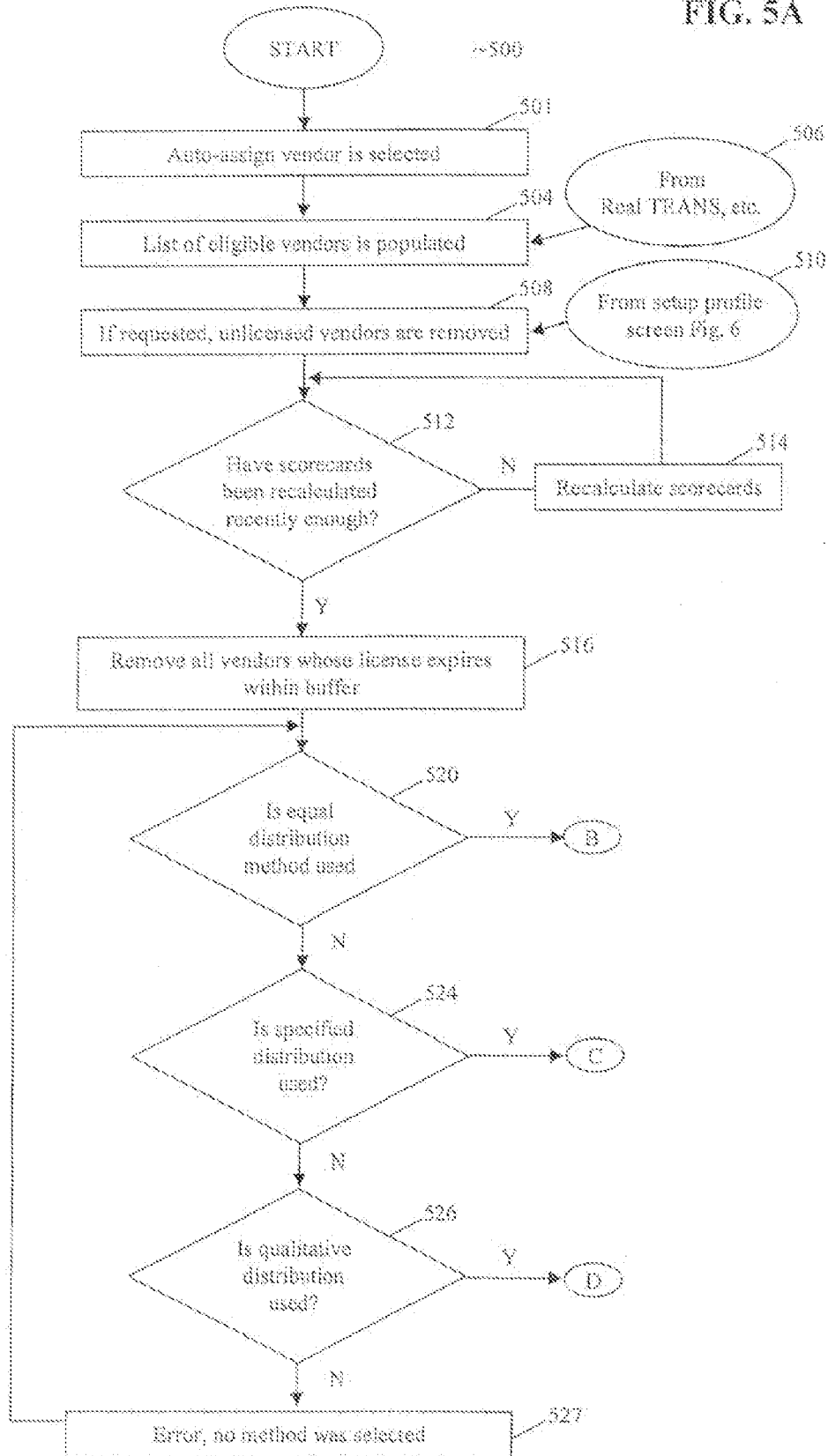


FIG. 5B

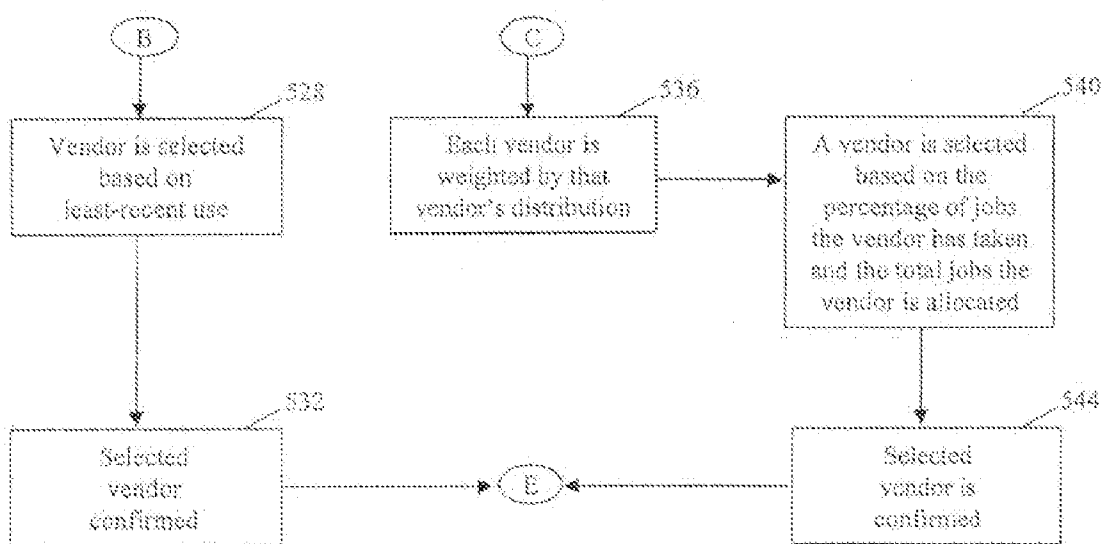
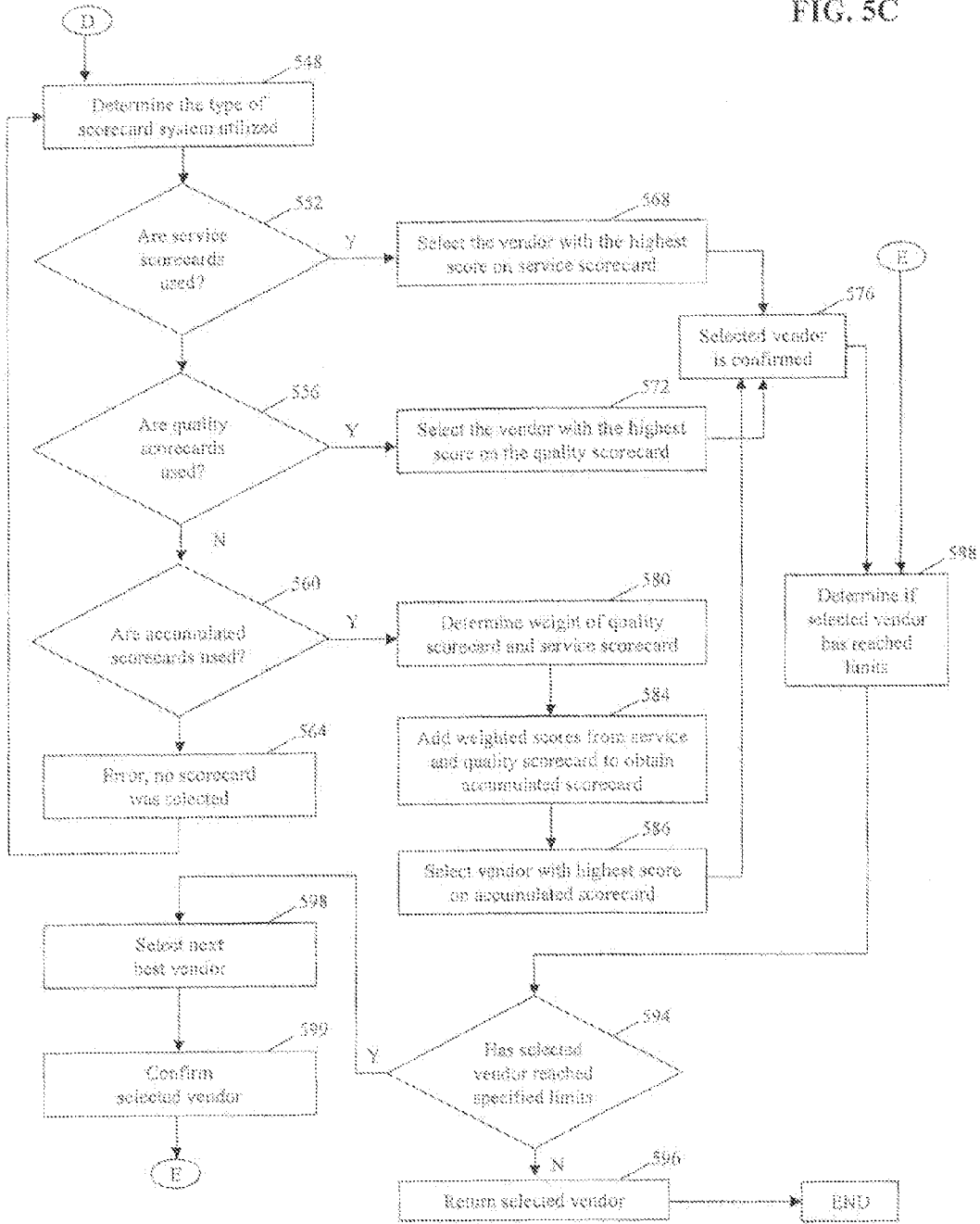


FIG. 5C



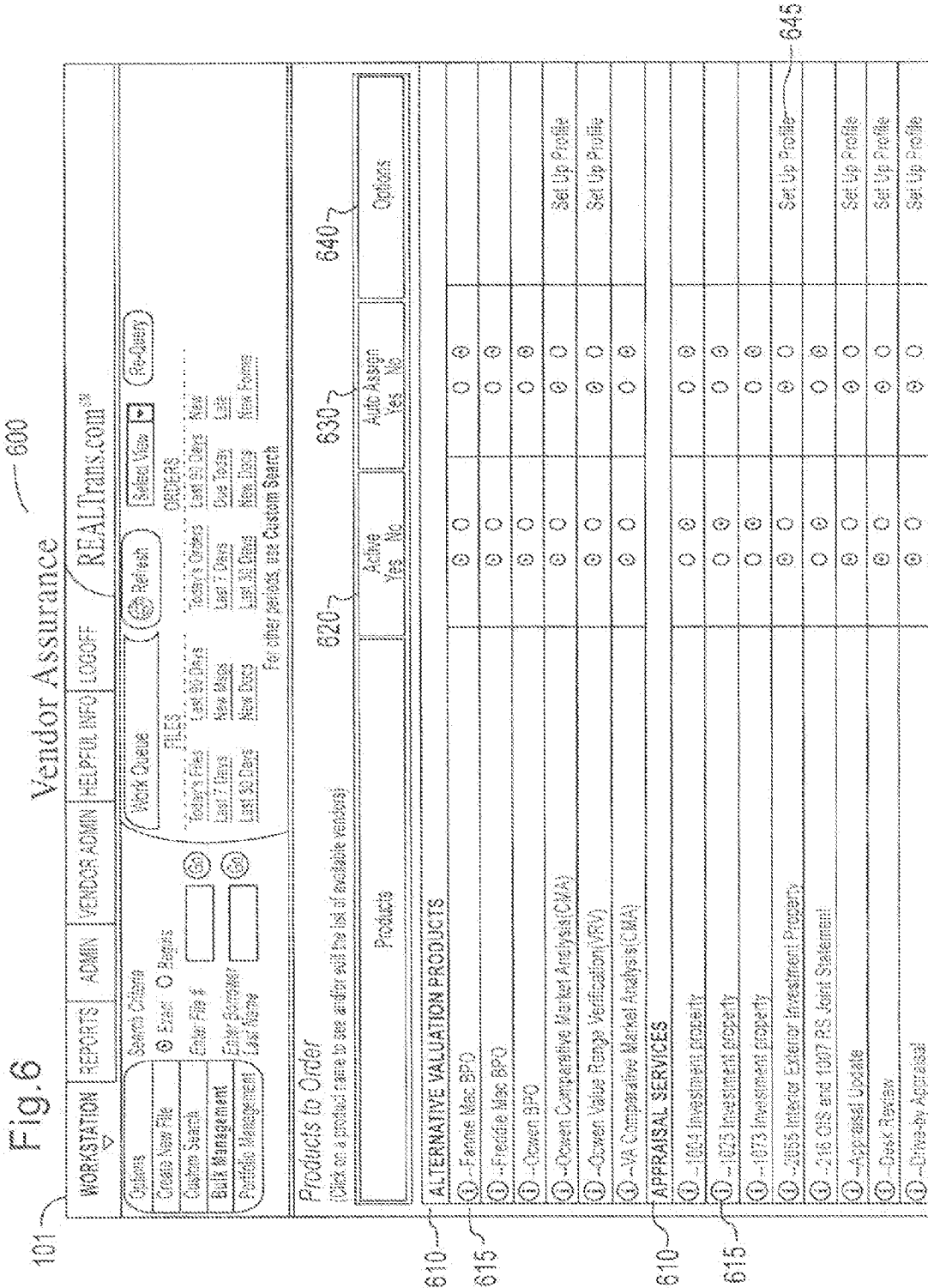


Fig. 7

700

101

Vendor Assurance REALTRACS.COMSM

WORKSTATION | REPORTS | ADMIN | VENDOR ADMIN | HELPFUL INFO | LOGOFF

Options: Create New File, Custom Search, Bank Management, Portfolio Management

Search Criteria: Exact Begins

Enter File #:

Enter Borrower:

Last Items:

Work Queue: Refresh

FILES: Today's Files, Last 30 Days, Last 7 Days, Last 90 Days, New Misses, New Items, New Items

ORDERS: Today's Orders, Last 30 Days, Due Today, Last 7 Days, Last 90 Days, New Items, New Forms

For other periods, use Custom Search

Set Up Profile

Criteria	Select
Eligibility Options	
Use Licensed Vendors	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input checked="" type="radio"/> No
Licensed Expiration Buffer (Days)	<input type="text" value="7"/> <input type="radio"/> Yes <input checked="" type="radio"/> No 712
Product Options	
Score Cards Calculation Period (Days)	<input type="text" value="5"/> <input type="radio"/> Yes <input checked="" type="radio"/> No 722
Allow Override of Auto Assignment	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input checked="" type="radio"/> No
Set Auto Reprocessing Indicator	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input checked="" type="radio"/> No
* Effective Date	<input type="text" value="8/19/2005"/> <input type="radio"/> Yes <input checked="" type="radio"/> No 724

Next Cancel

760

710

720

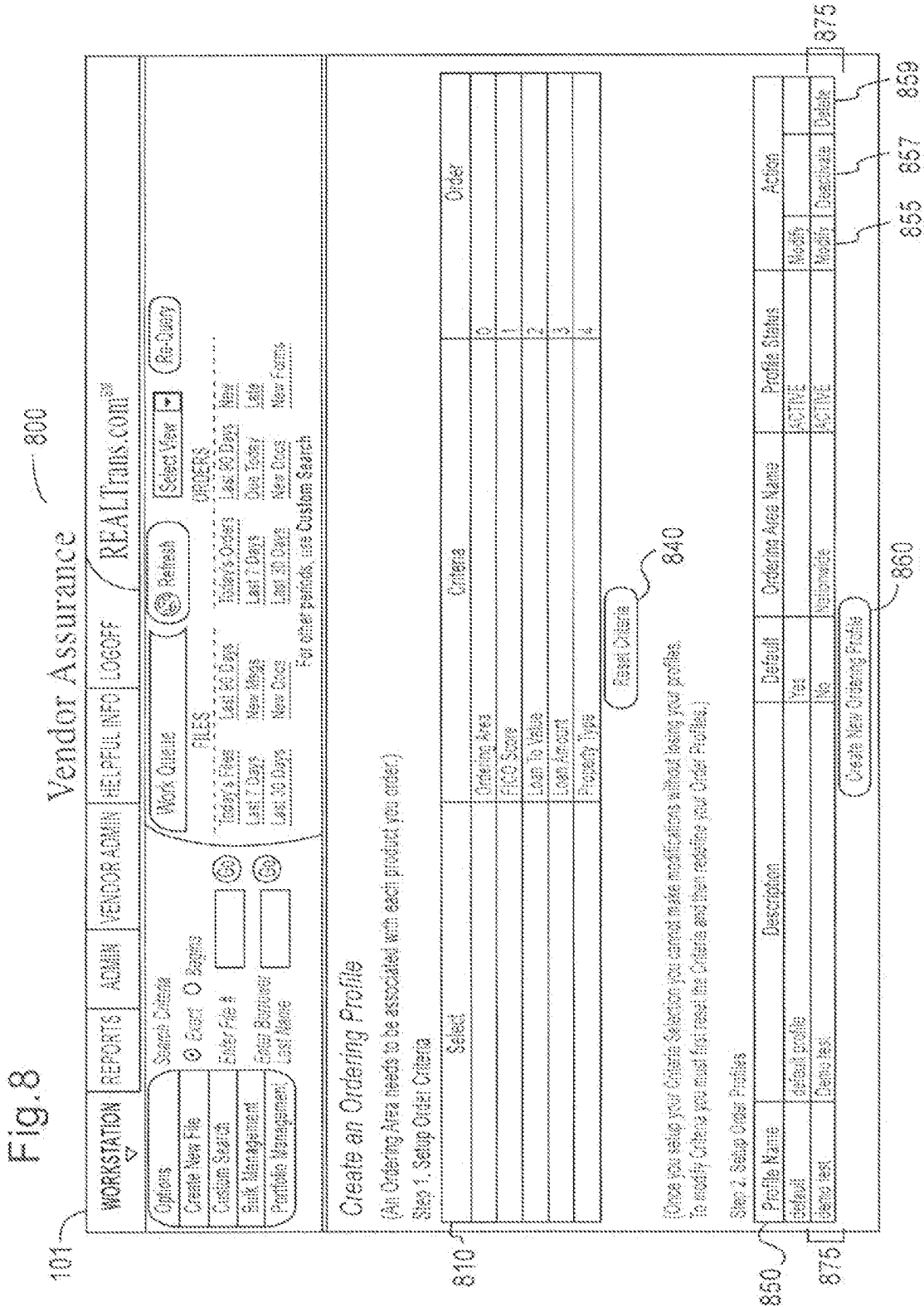


Fig. 8

101

800

810

840

850

875

875

860

855

857

859

Fig. 9

900

Vendor Assurance

101

WORKSTATION | REPORTS | ADMIN | VENDOR ADMIN | HELPFUL INFO | LOGOFF | REALTrains.comSM

Options: Search Criteria: Exact Begins

Create New File:

Custom Search: Enter File #

Bulk Management: Enter (forward) Last Name

Portfolio Management:

Work Queue:

FILES: Today's Files Last 30 Days New Missions New Docs New Files

ORDERS: Today's Orders Last 30 Days New Due Today Late New Docs New Files

For other periods, use Custom Search

Order Profile

905

Profile Information

*Order Profile Name: 910

Order Profile Description: 915

*Ordering Area: 920

950

Fig. 10

Vendor Assurance

WORKSTATION
REPORTS
ADMIN
VENDOR ADMIN
HELPFUL INFO
LOGOFF

REALTRANS.COMSM

Options

Create New File

Custom Search

Book Management

Portfolio Management

Search Criteria

Exact Begins

Enter File #

Enter Borrower

Last Name

Mark Queue

Refresh

Re-Query

FILES

Today's Files	Last 90 Days	Today's Orders	Last 60 Days	New
Last 1 Day	New Alerts	Last 1 Day	Due Today	Logs
Last 30 Days	New Docs	Last 30 Days	New Docs	New Forms

For other periods, use Custom Search

Order Profile Definition

Profile Information

Name	Home Test
Description	Demo Test
Product	Complete
Ordering Area	Nationwide

Criteria	Value	Options
Ordering Area	Nationwide	Add Parameter
FICO Score	700.00 - 750.00	Add Parameter
Loan To Value	50.0000% - 80.0000%	Add Parameter
Loan Amount	\$350,000.00 - \$450,000.00	Add Parameter
Property Type	Single Family	Add Parameter
Distribution	10000000	Add Parameter

Back

101

1010

1030

1050

Fig. 11

1100

101

Vendor Assurance

WORKSTATION
REPORTS
ADMIN
VENDOR ADMIN
HELPFUL INFO
LOGOFF

REALTRAIS.COM[®]

Options

Create New File Exact Begins

Custom Search

Bulk Management

Portfolio Management

Work Queue

Today's Files

Last 7 Days

Last 30 Days

FILES

Today's Orders

Last 7 Days

Last 30 Days

Profile Parameters And Distribution

New Profile Parameters

Ordering Area

FICO Score to

Loan To Value to

Loan Amount to

Property Type

Distribution Method

(Choose a Distribution Method)

Equal Distribution
(orders are distributed equally amongst available vendors)

Check Item to distribute orders to all approved vendors.
Uncheck to specify vendors for order distribution.

Specified Distribution
(orders are distributed to specific vendors utilizing a defined distribution)

Qualitative Distribution
(orders are distributed equally based upon each vendor's qualitative performance)

1110

1120

Fig. 12

1200

101

Vendor Assurance
REALTRACS.comSM

WORKSTATION
REPORTS
ADMIN
VENDOR ADMIN
HELPFUL INFO
LOGOFF

Options

Search Criteria

Exact Begins

Enter File #

Enter Keyword

Portfolio Management

Work Queue

FILES

Today's Files Last 30 Days Today's Orders Last 30 Days New

Last 7 Days New Mgmt Over Today LATE

Last 30 Days Next Days Next Days New Forms

Refresh

Selected View (Re-Query)

Distribution Parameters

(Establish Distribution Limits)

Yes No Subject to Vendor License Requirements

Yes No Subject to Vendor Capacity Limits

Yes No Subject to Vendor Threshold Limits

Yes No Subject to Daily Capacity Limits

Yes No Subject to Late Order Ratio Limits

Activate Vendors	Company	City	State	View Office Info
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	First American Appraisal	Poway	CA	View
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	First American Appraisal Services-David Feldman	Poway	CA	View
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Victoria Vendor Services-Rocky Hill Branch	Rocky Hill	CT	View
<input type="checkbox"/>	Vendor Test Company 2 -Vendor Test Office 2	NYC	NY	View
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	VanMan Test1 - VanMan Test1	WPB	FL	View
<input type="checkbox"/>	Vendor Company Test 1 - Vendor Office Test 1	NYC	NY	View
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Vendor Test Company 03 - Vendor Test Office 03	NYC	NY	View

Save Cancel

1210

1220

METHODS AND SYSTEMS FOR VENDOR ASSURANCE

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

CLAIM OF PRIORITY

[0001] This application claims priority to U.S. application Ser. No. 12/335,196, filed Dec. 15, 2008, which claims priority to U.S. Provisional Application No. 60/996,975, entitled "METHODS AND SYSTEMS FOR VENDOR ASSURANCE" filed Dec. 13, 2007, and which is also a continuation-in-part of U.S. application Ser. No. 10/937,879, entitled "METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR VENDOR MANAGEMENT" filed Sep. 10, 2004, now U.S. Pat. No. 7,707,055, issued Apr. 27, 2010, which claims priority to U.S. Provisional Application No. 60/502,273 filed Sep. 12, 2003. The entire disclosures of all of the foregoing applications are incorporated by reference herein.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0002] 1. Field of the Invention

[0003] The present invention relates to a method and system for managing financial transactions that require goods and/or services from multiple vendors, and, in particular, to methods and systems for selecting vendors to carry out sub-transactions associated with a financial transaction.

[0004] 2. Background of the Technology

[0005] There exist in related arts paper-based methods and systems for completing financial transactions, such as mortgages, but these systems are inefficient and are bound by the limitations of traditional paper-based systems. Computer-implemented systems to manage financial transactions are also known, but these systems do not possess functionality to manage each step in the lifespan of an entire financial transaction. Moreover, related art computer-implemented systems do not provide functionality to initiate or track sub-transactions that are necessary for the completion of a financial transaction. Further, related art computer-implemented systems do not provide functionality to a system user (also alternatively or interchangeably referred to as an employee, agent, affiliate of a financial institution, or user) for efficiently selecting third party vendors for carrying out sub-transactions associated with a financial transaction (also alternatively or interchangeably referred to herein as "vendors") for carrying out sub-transactions associated with a financial transaction.

[0006] There exist in related arts paper-based methods and systems for selecting vendors to execute sub-transactions to be performed in the execution of a financial transaction. However, these systems offer only a marginal increase in efficiency, due to the overhead requirements for executing these systems. There are known in related arts systems and methods for vendor selection, but these systems and methods generate excess transactional costs in the management of vendor selection. Known methods and systems do not easily allow a system user to use a precise methodology for selecting a particular vendor.

[0007] Computer-implemented systems for vendor selection are also known in related arts, but these systems do not contain the necessary functionality to select a vendor based on specific user criteria. These computer-implemented systems are not easy to customize, and often apply the same methodology for vendor selection without regard to the type of product being ordered, or the preferences of the system user who places the order.

[0008] The present invention relates to a method and system for electronically facilitating a business transaction between a financial institution and a system user, wherein the business transaction optionally includes one or more sub-transactions among a vendor and a customer, a vendor and a financial institution, or between a customer and a financial institution.

[0009] In an aspect of the present invention, the method and system may begin when a system user selects a sub-transaction to be executed. The system user may choose an ordering profile to be associated with that product. If no ordering profile meets the needs of that particular system user, then the system user may create an ordering profile. Once an ordering profile is selected, the system applies the ordering profile to a list of eligible vendors, based on the system user's preferences. The system or the system user then selects a vendor whose characteristics most closely match the system user's requested characteristics from the order profile.

[0010] The present invention utilizes three distribution models for selecting vendors. The first is an equal distribution model, wherein vendors may be selected based solely on a round-robin method, which selects all available vendors once before selecting a vendor for a second product order. The second model is a specific distribution model, which allows the system user to assign a specific amount of the orders to each vendor. The third model is a qualitative distribution model, where a vendor is selected based on user-defined performance criteria.

[0011] For the purposes of this application, "financial institutions" include banks, investment companies, real estate lenders, investment and holding companies, and/or other commercial entities engaged in the business of financing loans or mortgages. "System users" include anyone using the present invention to select a vendor for ordering a product, regardless of the role of each user in the transaction. "Product" in this context can be a good or service, generally needed to complete a financial transaction.

[0012] Additional advantages and novel features of the invention will be set forth in part in the description that follows, and in part will become more apparent to those skilled in the art upon examination of the following or upon learning by practice of the invention.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE FIGURES

[0013] FIG. 1 illustrates various features of an example computer system for use in accordance with an aspect of the present invention;

[0014] FIG. 2 illustrates an exemplary system diagram of various hardware components and other features, in accordance with an aspect of the present invention;

[0015] FIG. 3 illustrates a high-level example representative flow diagram of functions performed in accordance with an aspect of the present invention;

[0016] FIGS. 4A-4B illustrate a more detailed example representative flow diagram of functions performed in accordance with an aspect of the present invention;

[0017] FIGS. 5A-5C illustrate an example representative flow diagram of vendor selection performed in accordance with an aspect of the present invention; and

[0018] FIGS. 6-12 illustrate sample Graphical User Interface ("GUI") screens presented to a system user in conjunction with an aspect of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0019] The present invention provides a system and method for executing financial transactions, such as a mortgage transaction. In one aspect of the present invention, executing a financial transaction may include ordering one or more sub-transactions (also referred to interchangeably herein as “products”). Sub-transactions include, for example, actions that may be required or desired to complete the financial transaction. Numerous third party vendors may compete for the right to complete these sub-transactions. Parties to the transaction (also referred to interchangeably herein as “system users”) may prefer to use multiple vendors, thereby ensuring the vendor most capable of delivering the product receives the order.

[0020] In one aspect of the present invention, the system user may not manually select a vendor from which to order a product. Rather, the system user develops an ordering profile for each product ordered. The ordering profile may include vendor licensing information, the active area of the vendor, among other vendor characteristics. After the system user chooses an ordering profile, the ordering profile may be applied to a list of eligible vendors, and the vendor that most closely matches the ordering profile is selected. The new vendor selection method reduces customer costs, in part due to the reduction in manual processes by the system user, and also reduces erroneous product ordering (e.g., ordering the wrong set of products for a specified financial transaction).

[0021] The present invention may be implemented using hardware, software or a combination thereof and may be implemented in one or more computer systems or other processing systems. In one aspect, the invention is directed toward one or more computer systems capable of carrying out the functionality described herein. An example of such a computer system 200 is shown in FIG. 1.

[0022] Computer system 200 includes one or more processors, such as processor 204. The processor 204 is connected to a communication infrastructure 206 (e.g., a communications bus, cross-over bar, or network). Various software aspects are described in terms of this exemplary computer system. After reading this description, it will become apparent to a person skilled in the relevant art(s) how to implement the invention using other computer systems and/or architectures.

[0023] Computer system 200 can include a display interface 202 that forwards graphics, text, and other data from the communication infrastructure 206 (or from a frame buffer not shown) for display on the display unit 230. Computer system 200 also includes a main memory 208, preferably random access memory (RAM), and may also include a secondary memory 210. The secondary memory 210 may include, for example, a hard disk drive 212 and/or a removable storage drive 214, representing a floppy disk drive, a magnetic tape drive, an optical disk drive, etc. The removable storage drive 214 reads from and/or writes to a removable storage unit 218 in a well known manner. Removable storage unit 218, represents a floppy disk, magnetic tape, optical disk, etc., which is read by and written to removable storage drive 214. As will be appreciated, the removable storage unit 218 includes a computer usable storage medium having stored therein computer software and/or data.

[0024] In alternative aspects, secondary memory 210 may include other similar devices for allowing computer programs or other instructions to be loaded into computer system 200. Such devices may include, for example, a removable storage unit 222 and an interface 220. Examples of such may include

a program cartridge and cartridge interface (such as that found in video game devices), a removable memory chip (such as an erasable programmable read only memory (EPROM), or programmable read only memory (PROM)) and associated socket, and other removable storage units 222 and interfaces 220, which allow software and data to be transferred from the removable storage unit 222 to computer system 200.

[0025] Computer system 200 may also include a communications interface 224. Communications interface 224 allows software and data to be transferred between computer system 200 and external devices. Examples of communications interface 224 may include a modem, a network interface (such as an Ethernet card), a communications port, a Personal Computer Memory Card International Association (PCMCIA) slot and card, etc. Software and data transferred via communications interface 224 are in the form of signals 228, which may be electronic, electromagnetic, optical or other signals capable of being received by communications interface 224. These signals 228 are provided to communications interface 224 via a communications path (e.g., channel) 226. This path 226 carries signals 228 and may be implemented using wire or cable, fiber optics, a telephone line, a cellular link, a radio frequency (RF) link and/or other communications channels. In this document, the terms “computer program medium” and “computer usable medium” are used to refer generally to media such as a removable storage drive 214, a hard disk installed in hard disk drive 212, and signals 228. These computer program products provide software to the computer system 200. The invention is directed to such computer program products.

[0026] Computer programs (also referred to as computer control logic) are stored in main memory 208 and/or secondary memory 210. Computer programs may also be received via communications interface 224. Such computer programs, when executed, enable the computer system 200 to perform the features of the present invention, as discussed herein. In particular, the computer programs, when executed, enable the processor 204 to perform the features of the present invention. Accordingly, such computer programs represent controllers of the computer system 200.

[0027] In an aspect where the invention is implemented using software, the software may be stored in a computer program product and loaded into computer system 200 using removable storage drive 214, hard drive 212, or communications interface 224. The control logic (software), when executed by the processor 204, causes the processor 204 to perform the functions of the invention as described herein. In another aspect, the invention is implemented primarily in hardware using, for example, hardware components, such as application specific integrated circuits (ASICs). Implementation of the hardware state machine so as to perform the functions described herein will be apparent to persons skilled in the relevant art(s).

[0028] In yet another aspect, the invention is implemented using a combination of both hardware and software.

[0029] FIG. 2 presents an exemplary system diagram of various hardware components and other features in accordance with an aspect of the present invention. As shown in FIG. 2, in an aspect of the present invention, data and other information and services for use in the system are, for example, input by a user 30 via a terminal 31. The terminal 31 is coupled to a server 33 via a network 34, such as the Internet, via couplings 35, 36. In one aspect, a vendor 39 also inputs

information/data via a terminal **37** coupled **38** to the network **34**. Furthermore, in one aspect, a member of an outsourced workforce **40** inputs information/data via a terminal **41** coupled **42** to the network **34**, and in another aspect, a member of a financial institution workforce **43** inputs information/data via a terminal **44** coupled **45** to the network **34**.

[0030] Each of the terminals **31**, **37**, **41**, **44** includes, for example, a personal computer (PC), minicomputer, mainframe computer, microcomputer, telephone device, personal digital assistant (PDA), or other device having a processor and input capability. The server **33** includes a PC, minicomputer, mainframe computer, microcomputer, or other device having a processor and a repository of data or access to a repository of data.

[0031] In operation, for example, in an aspect of the present invention, via the network **34**, vendor data, transactional data, sub-transactional data, order data and/or other information is communicated with the server **33**. The server **33** receives and resolves the transaction, including triggering and resolving sub-transactions, stores data regarding the transaction, vendor, and sub-transaction, and documents the transaction (e.g., electronically).

[0032] In one aspect, the present invention uses active server page (ASP) technology to deliver information and services to a user. This technology may include one or more ASPs stored on the server **33**. This approach reduces maintenance and hardware expenses, results in limited implementation/integration costs, limited support expense, and low total cost of ownership.

[0033] In one aspect of the present invention, information relating to a transaction, such as a loan, is stored electronically. This information is referred to interchangeably herein as a virtual loan file. Among other things, the virtual loan file enables data mining, reduces post closing quality reviews, facilitates secondary market due diligence, streamlines loan servicing functions, reduces data archive costs, reduces processing costs, automates routine and decision based processes, and reduces data entry errors.

[0034] FIG. 3 illustrates a high-level exemplary flow diagram **300** according to an aspect of the present invention. The system user may select a product to be ordered **304**. After product selection, a determination may occur as to whether the desired ordering profile exists **308**. The desired ordering profile may include vendor licensing information, the active area of the vendor, among other vendor characteristics. If the desired profile exists, the desired ordering profile is selected **316**. If the desired profile does not exist, the system user may be prompted to create an ordering profile **312**. Once an ordering profile has been created and selected, then the ordering profile may be applied to eligible vendors **320**. The vendors may be outputted on an output device, such as a printer, display or audio device, for example. The vendor that most closely aligns with the desired characteristics indicated in the ordering profile may be identified **324**. The flow diagram of FIG. 3 will be described in more detail with reference to flow diagram FIGS. 4A-4B and 5A-5C, and GUI screen FIGS. 6-12.

[0035] FIGS. 4A-4B show a flow chart **400** of a vendor assurance method for one aspect of the present invention. The method of FIGS. 4A-4B provides seamless integration with preliminary loan services. The process starts when a system user logs into the Vendor Assurance system **402**. When the option corresponding to "products" is selected **404**, the present invention may populate a list of products to order

based on the transaction profile **408**. Depending on the implementation of the system, this information may be provided from an outside system **406**, such as the method and system of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 09/512,845 filed Feb. 25, 2000, entitled "Method for Workflow Processing Through Computer Network," the entirety of which is hereby incorporated herein by reference. If no transaction profile is provided, then a list of products to order may be populated **408** by retrieving a predetermined default list of products to order.

[0036] After the list is populated, a product may be selected for purchase by setting the "active" field to "YES" **410**. If the system user desires to manually select a vendor **412**, then a listing of available vendors may be generated **416**. From this list, the system user may select a vendor to deliver the product **420**. An outside source for notification and processing of the order **424** may be contacted or order processing may be otherwise initiated.

[0037] If, instead, the system user wants the present invention to assign a vendor, then in the "Auto Assign" field, the system user selects "YES." This causes the option "Set Up Profile" to be displayed **428**. Selection of this option may result in prompting for creation of an ordering profile **432**. Various options for ordering may be then selected **436**. For example, the system user may specify to use only licensed vendors, and specify a minimum number of days before that vendor's license expires, among other options for ordering. In an aspect of the present invention, the system user may select a period of days over which to assess the score cards used to evaluate vendors. In another aspect of the present invention, the system user may also decide to override the auto assignment feature. For example, the system user may select a vendor for ordering the product without using an order profile.

[0038] In one aspect, when creating an order profile **432**, the system user specifies criteria for evaluating vendors. For example, criteria may include order area, Fair, Isaac and Company (FICO) credit score, loan-to-value ratio, loan amount, and property type, among other criteria. The system user may also provide each criterion with an "order" value, which ranks in descending order of importance, for example, how heavily each criterion should be weighted. In one aspect of the present invention, the ordering area may be set as the default value for the most heavily-weighted criterion. Ordering areas may include, for example, cities, states, or anywhere in the country, among other order areas.

[0039] After the system user enters an order profile **436**, the system user has the option of creating another profile **440**. If the system user wishes to create another profile, the current profile may be saved for use by the system user. If the system user does not wish to create another profile, a screen for naming the profile and associating the profile with an ordering area may be displayed **444**. The system user may name the profile, in order that the profile may be more easily retrieved. In addition, naming the profile may allow the system user to set an active ordering area for the profile **448**. Optionally, the system user can enter an order profile description to provide information about the ordering profile in a convenient location.

[0040] A prompt may be provided for reviewing the entered information **452** allowing the system user to view the order profile information. If any of the criteria the user previously inputted may be incorrect **456**, then the user may make changes by selecting the "edit" box associated with the incor-

rect criteria, or, for example, use the “back” button to return to the screen where the incorrect information was entered **460**.

[0041] Then, a GUI screen appears, or other prompt may be provided, for selecting new profile parameters and a distribution method **464**. Here, vendor limit parameters may be selected, and a distribution method may be associated with profile **468**. The distribution method options available to the system user may include, for example, equal distribution, specified distribution, and qualitative distribution, among other distributions.

[0042] In an equal distribution system, vendors may be selected in a round-robin fashion. Once a vendor has been selected to furnish a product, the selected vendor may not be selected to furnish another product until all other vendors have had the opportunity to be selected. In a specified distribution system, orders may be distributed to specific vendors utilizing a defined distribution specified by a system user. For example, a system user may wish to utilize Vendor A 30% of the time, Vendor B 10% of the time, and Vendor C 60% of the time. Thus, in a specified distribution system, a vendor may be selected with a frequency based on these percentages. In a qualitative distribution system, orders may be distributed based on a vendor’s qualitative performance. In a process that will be described more fully below, system users have the option of assigning each vendor a grade, based on quality and timeliness, among other considerations, in proportions selected by the system user. When this method is selected, the present invention may choose the most qualified vendor available based on the scoring criteria specified by the system user. If the most qualified vendor is not available, the present invention may select the second most qualified vendor, and so on, until the order is fulfilled.

[0043] A new GUI screen appears, or another prompt may be made, for allowing a system user to view and/or specify distribution parameters **472** and select vendors **476**. Some examples of limits for distribution parameters may include vendor license requirements, vendor capacity limits, vendor threshold limits, daily capacity limits, and late order ratio limits, among other limits. The screen may also include a list of currently active vendors, so that if a system user wishes to temporarily remove a vendor from the list, the system user can uncheck the box next to that vendor’s name, for example, and that vendor may not be considered when a vendor is selected.

[0044] Once the above-mentioned steps are completed, a vendor may be selected **480** (the process of which is further illustrated in FIG. **5** and the associated description). Once the vendor is selected, the present invention may interface with an outside system to notify and process the order with the vendor selected **424**.

[0045] FIGS. **5A-5C** show an exemplary flow diagram **500** illustrating the selection of a vendor according to an aspect of the present invention. At step **501**, the “Auto Assign” field is set to “YES,” or automatic assign of a vendor is otherwise enabled, and a list of eligible vendors may be populated **504**. The list of eligible vendors may be drawn from various sources, such as, from an outside source **506**, (e.g., the system described in U.S. patent application Ser. No. 09/512,845 referenced above), or from a list of vendors from which the system user has previously ordered products, among other sources. If the system user has requested that unlicensed vendors be removed, then the unlicensed vendors may be removed **508** from the list of vendors. This selection may also be made manually by the system user **510**. Checks may be

performed whether the scorecards for vendors, which may be used in determining licensing, have been recalculated recently enough **512**, based on the number of days the system user specifies for the scorecard calculation period, for example. If the scorecards have not been recalculated as recently as the system user has specified for them to be calculated, then the present invention recalculates the scorecards **514**.

[0046] The present invention may remove all of the vendors whose licenses expire within a predefined period (also interchangeably referred to herein as a “buffer”) **516**, calculated using a user-defined number of days, among other predefined periods. For example, if the user defined buffer is 7 days, and the date of vendor selection is April 11, all vendors whose licenses expire before April 18 may be removed from the list of vendors.

[0047] The system may determine which of the distribution systems (e.g., the three systems outlined above) to utilize for selecting the vendor. If the equal distribution method is used **520**, for example, then a vendor is selected based on the least recent use **528** and once the vendor is confirmed **532**. If the specified distribution method **524** is used, for example, then the present invention weights each vendor, based on that vendor’s specified distribution **536**. After the weighing of each vendor, the present invention may select a vendor based on the percentage of jobs the vendor has taken, and the total percent of the jobs the vendor is allocated under the specific distribution **540**. The selected vendor is then confirmed **544**. If a qualitative distribution method **527** is used, for example, then the present invention determines the type of scorecard system utilized **548**.

[0048] In an aspect of the present invention, vendors may be ranked using one of three types of “scorecards.” Each scorecard in this aspect works by assigning a vendor a point total, on a scale from 0 to 100, for example. A higher score may indicate a higher ranked, and thus more preferred, vendor. When the system user selects a profile which has been configured to utilize a qualitative distribution method, vendors may be prioritized by their scorecard score. The system user may select which scorecard to use when prioritizing the vendors. The system user may also select the frequency with which the scorecards may be updated and recorded. The scorecards may be collected by hand and manually entered into the system, or they may be updated based on the time of service completion and user satisfaction, among other entry methods.

[0049] The first type of scorecard utilized by the system in this aspect is a service scorecard. For each product, the service scorecard retrieves a user customizable turnaround time. Each time a vendor delivers the product or completes the service within the optimal turnaround time, the system may award that vendor the maximum point value, 100 points, for example. For each day that the vendor is late, the system may deduct a predetermined number of points from the overall score.

[0050] The second type of scorecard utilized in this aspect is a quality scorecard. The quality scorecard may be based on multiple user-customizable factors. The system user may select the criteria used for assigning a score to the vendor’s work, and may also customize the point value of each individual criterion, among other factors. For example, if the product to be ordered is an appraisal, the system user may set up appraisal-specific criteria. Such criteria may include, for example, the distance from the vendor to the subject property,

whether the vendor signed the appraisal, whether the cost of the appraisal was within a given range, and whether the appraised value was within the projections of the computed data, among other criteria.

[0051] The third type of scorecard utilized by the system in this aspect is an accumulated scorecard. The accumulated scorecard may be a weighted average of the service scorecard and the quality scorecard. The user may define the weight to apply to each scorecard. For example, the system user may wish to assign a 60% weight to the service scorecard and a 40% weight to the quality scorecard. The accumulated scorecard value is the resulting weighted value of the service and quality scorecards.

[0052] In the exemplary aspect shown in FIGS. 5A-5C, if service scorecards are used 552, the present invention may select the vendor with the highest service scorecard score 568, and the selected vendor is confirmed 576. If quality scorecards are used 556, the vendor with the highest quality scorecard may be selected 572, and the selected vendor is again confirmed 576. If accumulated scorecards are used 560, a determination may occur to determine the weight of the quality scorecard and the service scorecard 580. The weighted scores from the service scorecard and the quality scorecard may be added together to obtain an accumulated scorecard 584. The vendor with the highest score on the accumulated scorecard may be selected 586, and the selected vendor is confirmed 576.

[0053] Once a vendor has been selected and confirmed, the system determines if the selected vendor has reached any of the user-defined limits 588. These limits may include, but are not limited to, vendor capacity limits, vendor threshold limits, daily capacity limits, and late order ratio limits, among other limits. If the selected vendor has reached any of the specified limits 594, then the next best vendor may be selected 598 and confirmed 599. If the selected vendor has not reached any specified limits 594, then the system returns the name of the selected vendor 596.

[0054] The method described in conjunction with the flow diagrams of FIGS. 3, 4, and 5, will now be described in more detail with reference to FIGS. 6-12 and the associated descriptions thereof.

[0055] FIGS. 6-12 illustrate various exemplary GUI screen shots according to an aspect of the present invention. FIG. 6 shows a screen shot including a first portion 101 detailing global options and menus, which, in one aspect of the present invention, is common to all GUI screens which may include standard system functions displayed to a system user. FIG. 6 also displays a table 610, which lists types of products to order, along with the specific product names 615. The list of products displayed can be based on the system defaults or the system user's preferences for the financial transaction, for example. Corresponding to each product entry may be three columns, "Active" 620, "Auto Assign" 630, and "Options" 640. In order to select a product, the system user may set "Active" to "YES" and "Auto Assign" to "YES." This allows the "Set Up Profile" flag 645 to appear in the "Options" column 640, indicating that this feature may be incorporated into the evaluation process.

[0056] Once a system user selects to proceed, the "Set Up Profile" screen 700 appears, as shown in FIG. 7. The Set Up Profile screen 700 includes two tables, an Eligibility Options table 710 and a Product Options table 720. In the Eligibility Options table, the system user selects the "Yes" or "No" button depending on whether the system user wants to use

only licensed vendors. In the field labeled "License Expiration Buffer (Days)" 712, the system user may input the number of days of buffer required for a vendor before a license expires, as described in more detail above. In the Product Options table 720, the system user may input the Score Cards Calculation Period 722 in days. This number represents the time period over which each vendor's scorecard may be calculated. For example, if "5" is entered into the Score Cards Calculation Period field 722, then each vendor's scorecard may be calculated based on the previous five days. The system user may also set options to allow the overriding of an auto assignment, and whether to set the auto reprocessing indicator. The system user may also select an effective date, that is, the date from which the License Expiration Buffer 712 and the Score Card Calculation Period 722 may be calculated. This date is entered into the Effective Date field 724. When the system user has finished inputting information into this screen 700, the system user selects the "Next" button 760. Otherwise, the system user may cancel this input.

[0057] Once the system user selects the "Next" button 760 shown in FIG. 7, the system user is taken to the "Create an Ordering Profile" screen 800 shown in FIG. 8. FIG. 8 includes a screen portion 810 for setting up the order criteria. On this screen portion 810, the user's selected criteria may be displayed based on the system user's preferences. The criteria may be modified by selecting the "Reset Criteria" flag 840, and re-creating the order profiles in accordance with the description of FIGS. 6 and 7. FIG. 8 also includes a third portion 850 showing the order profiles that have been created. The order profiles may be modified by changing the "Modify" action flag 855, deactivated by changing the "Deactivate" action flag 857, or deleted by changing the "Delete" action flag 859. If the system user wishes to create a new ordering profile, then the Create New Ordering Profile button 860 is selected. For example, if the user wishes to modify the "Demo Test" profile 875 shown in FIG. 8, the system user changes the "Modify" action flag 855 in the row corresponding to the "Demo Test" profile 875. A screen for editing the profile information is then displayed.

[0058] FIG. 9 shows a screen shot of the "Order Profile" editing screen 900 according to one aspect of the present invention. FIG. 9 includes a screen portion 905 detailing the Profile Information for a specific order profile. If the system user reaches this screen by modifying an existing profile, for example, the profile information currently associated with that profile is loaded into the input fields, as shown in FIG. 9. If the system user reaches this screen by creating a new profile, then the fields shown in FIG. 9 may be initially blank.

[0059] Within the screen portion 905 of the GUI screenshot of FIG. 9, the system user may modify the Order Profile Name 910, and the Ordering Area 920. In one aspect of the present invention, the Ordering Area value 920 defaults to "Nation-Wide," indicating that the Order Profile may be used regardless of the location within a country in which the transaction takes place. A value for Ordering Area 920 is used by the system as a way of classifying the profiles. Optionally, the system user may type a description for the profile in the "Order Profile Description" field 915. This description may be used for convenience or reference and does not affect the functionality of the present invention. When the system user has inputted the required information, the system user then selects the "Next" button 950 to move on to the Order Profile Definition screen 1000 shown in FIG. 10.

[0060] FIG. 10 shows a screen shot 1000 of the “Order Profile” editing screen in one aspect of the present invention. FIG. 10 includes a screen portion 1010 displaying profile information, and another screen portion 1030 that allows modification of the criteria for the specified order profile. Screen portion 1010 may include a listing of the profile name, the profile description, the product associated with the profile, and the Ordering Area associated with the profile, among other profile information. Screen portion 1030 may illustrate the criteria used to evaluate vendors in order of priority. In one aspect of the present invention, the “Ordering Area” field of screen portion 1030 may be listed first in a different color without the “Edit” or “Delete” options because the Ordering Area field is required by the system so as to select vendors only in the appropriate area.

[0061] In another aspect of the present invention, the other criteria displayed in screen portion 1030 may be modified and/or deleted depending on the system user’s preferences. The system user may add or modify parameters by changing the “Add Parameter,” “Edit” or “Delete” flags corresponding to each criterion, for example. When the system user is satisfied with the criteria and the parameters, the user selects the “Back” button 1050 to continue the selection process.

[0062] If the system user selects “Create New Ordering Profile” 860 from the screen shot of FIG. 8, then after the system user completes the “Order Profile,” such as in the screen 900 shown in FIG. 9, the system displays a “Profile Parameters and Distribution” screen 1100, as shown in FIG. 11. FIG. 11 shows the top part of an exemplary screen 1100, which may include a screen portion 1110 for new profile parameters, and another screen portion 1120 for distribution methods selection. When creating a new profile, the system user inputs parameters for the predefined criteria screen portion 1110, such as FICO Score, Loan-to-Value, Loan Amount, and Property Type, among other predefined criteria. It is noted that the user cannot change the Ordering Area on this screen in this aspect, because the Ordering Area is defined when naming the Order Profile, on the screen shown in FIG. 9.

[0063] After the system user inputs the profile parameters, the system user may select one of the distribution methods displayed in screen portion 1120. Here, the system user may select among Equal Distribution, Specified Distribution, and Qualitative Distribution, as further discussed above. In addition, the system user may select distribution parameters, and active vendors, as shown in the bottom part of an exemplary screen 1200, displayed here as FIG. 12. FIG. 12 is a screenshot showing the continuation of the screen shown in FIG. 11. FIG. 12 may include a screen portion 1210 listing distribution parameters, and a screen portion 1220 listing active vendors. In screen portion 1210, the system user may select limits to which vendors may be subjected, such as capacity limits, threshold limits, and daily capacity limits, among other limits. In doing so, a system user may restrict the number of orders that may be assigned to each vendor based on such factors.

[0064] In screen portion 1220, the system retrieves a list of vendors eligible to deliver products ordered with this profile. The system user may manually remove or add vendors to be considered eligible when using this profile. In an aspect of the present invention, the default option includes all vendors as activated, unless the system user deactivates them. When the

system user has finished entering information, the system user selects the “Save” option 1250, and the Order Profile is saved within the system.

[0065] The set up order profile detailed in FIGS. 6-12 may be a used in the selection of a vendor or vendors to perform an order.

[0066] While the present invention has been described in connection with preferred aspects, it will be understood by those skilled in the art that variations and modifications of the preferred aspects described above may be made without departing from the scope of the invention. Other aspects will be apparent to those skilled in the art from a consideration of the specification or from a practice of the invention disclosed herein. It is intended that the specification and the described examples are considered exemplary only, with the true scope of the invention indicated by the following claims.

1. A method for selecting a vendor for at least one transaction using at least one processor, the method comprising:

receiving, via the at least one processor, a selection of a product related to the transaction; and
automatically selecting, via the at least one processor, at least one vendor from a plurality of vendors using a distribution selection method.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein the distribution selection method comprises one or more of an equal distribution selection method, a specific distribution selection method, or a qualitative distribution selection method.

3. The method of claim 2, wherein the distribution selection method comprises the equal distribution selection method, the equal distribution selection method comprising:

automatically selecting, via the at least one processor, a subset of vendors from the plurality of vendors; and
automatically ordering, via the at least one processor, the product from each of the vendors in the subset of vendors before reordering the product from any one vendor in the subset of vendors.

4. The method of claim 2, wherein the distribution selection method comprises the specific distribution selection method, the specific distribution selection method comprising:

automatically selecting, via the at least one processor, a subset of vendors from the plurality of vendors; and
automatically ordering, via the at least one processor, a specific amount of the product from each one of the vendors in the subset of vendors.

5. The method of claim 2, wherein the distribution selection method comprises the qualitative distribution selection method, the qualitative distribution selection method comprising:

receiving, via the at least one processor, a selection of an ordering profile stored in a storage medium coupled to the at least one processor, the ordering profile having desired characteristics;

applying, via the at least one processor, the ordering profile to the plurality of product vendors by comparing the selected ordering profile desired characteristics to characteristics associated with each vendor contained in the plurality of product vendors; and

obtaining, via the at least one processor, the selection of the at least one product vendor from the plurality of product vendors by selecting a vendor that has characteristics that best match the selected ordering profile desired characteristics.

6. The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of automatically ordering, via the at least one processor, the product from the selected at least one vendor.

7. The method of claim 5, wherein the selected ordering profile comprises one of a pre-existing ordering profile and a new ordering profile.

8. The method of claim 5, wherein the selected ordering profile desired characteristics comprises at least one of:

- an ordering area;
- a vendor ranking based on preset criteria;
- a distribution method; or
- distribution parameters.

9. The method of claim 8, further comprising selecting, via the at least one processor, the next vendor that has associated characteristics that most closely match the selected ordering profile desired characteristics when the selected vendor has reached a predetermined vendor ranking with a designated limit.

10. A system for selecting a vendor for at least one transaction for a product or service, the system comprising:

- at least one processor;
- a user interface in communication with the at least one processor; and
- a storage medium in communication with the at least one processor;

wherein the at least one processor is configured to:

- receive a selection of at least one product or service from a list of products and services stored in the storage medium,
- receive a selection of an ordering profile having desired characteristics associated with the at least one selected product or service;
- compare the selected ordering profile desired characteristics to characteristics associated with each vendor from a plurality of vendor information stored in the storage medium; and

one of

- display a list of vendors that result from the comparison of the selected ordering profile desired characteristics to characteristics associated with each vendor so that the user can select a qualified vendor, or
- automatically select a vendor based on the results of the comparison of the selected vendor ordering profile desired characteristics to the characteristics associated with each vendor.

11. The system of claim 10, wherein one of the ordering profile desired characteristics is based on a performance ranking score.

12. The system of claim 11, wherein the performance ranking score is based on one of a delivery time, the capacity to deliver the product or service in a specified amount of time, and the cost of the product or service.

13. The system of claim 10, wherein the characteristics associated with each vendor further comprises at least one of: vendor location;

vendor capacity to deliver the services in a specified time period;
vendor Fair Isaac and Company credit score;
vendor licensing; or
vendor ranking based on preset criteria.

14. The system of claim 10, wherein the at least one processor is further configured to select another vendor if the selected vendor has reached a predetermined number of orders designated as a limit.

15. The system of claim 10, wherein the at least one processor is embedded in a handheld device.

16. A system for selecting a vendor for at least one transaction for a product or service, the system comprising:

- at least one processor;
- a user interface in communication with the at least one processor; and
- a storage medium in communication with the at least one processor;

wherein the at least one processor is configured to:
receive a selection of a product or service related to the transaction; and

automatically select, via the at least one processor, at least one vendor from a plurality of vendors using one of an equal distribution selection method, a specific distribution selection method and a qualitative distribution selection method.

17. The system of claim 16, wherein the equal distribution selection method further comprises automatically selecting a subset of vendors from the plurality of vendors and automatically ordering the product or service from each of the vendors in the subset of vendors before reordering the product or service from any one vendor in the subset of vendors.

18. The system of claim 16, wherein the specific distribution selection method further comprises automatically selecting a subset of vendors from the plurality of vendors and automatically ordering a specific amount of the needed product or service from each one of the vendors in the subset of vendors.

19. The system of claim 16, wherein the processor is further configured for using the qualitative distribution selection method to:

- receive a selection of an ordering profile stored in the storage medium, the ordering profile having desired characteristics;
- apply the ordering profile to the plurality of product vendors by comparing the selected ordering profile desired characteristics to characteristics associated with each vendor contained in the plurality of product vendors; and
- select the at least one product vendor from the plurality of product vendors by selecting the at least one vendor that has characteristics that best match the selected ordering profile desired characteristics.

20. The system of claim 19, wherein the at least one processor is further configured to automatically order the product from the selected at least one vendor.

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