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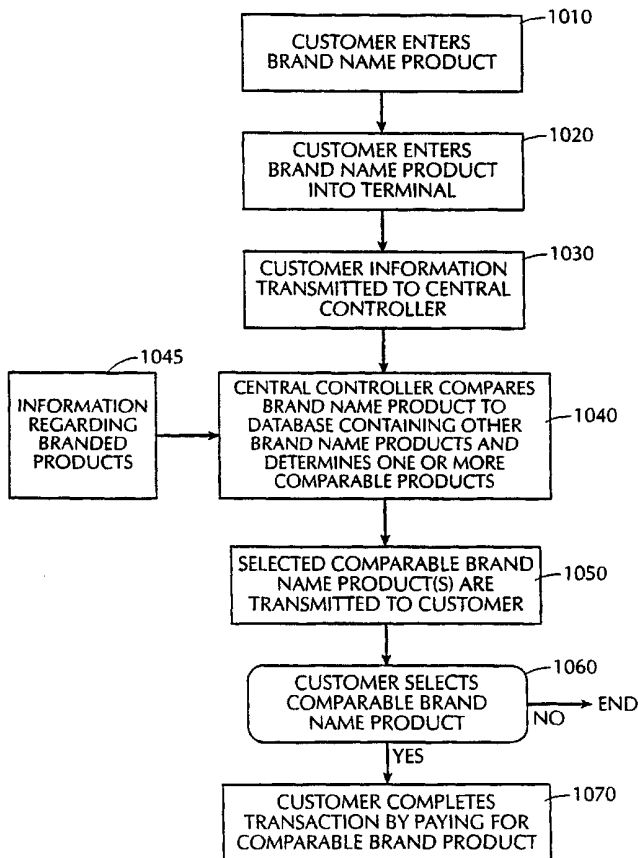
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(54) Title: SYSTEM FOR PROVIDING A COMPARABLE BRANDED PRODUCT BASED ON A CURRENT BRANDED PRODUCT



(57) Abstract: A system, method, and apparatus for inputting an end-user's current brand name (1010), and, in return, providing at least one comparable branded product to the end-user (1050). This method can be applied where the branded products are products for which comparison shopping is not usually feasible. In one embodiment, the system, method, and apparatus are utilized in the area of medical devices, including such markets as patients with intestinal stomas, incontinence, wound care needs, and diabetes.



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1     **SYSTEM FOR PROVIDING A COMPARABLE BRANDED PRODUCT BASED**  
2                                   **ON A CURRENT BRANDED PRODUCT**

3  
4     **FIELD OF THE INVENTION:**

5             The present invention relates to a system for providing a comparison of comparable  
6 branded products. More particularly, the invention relates to a method and apparatus for  
7 providing at least one comparable branded product to an end-user, wherein the category of  
8 products are non-comparison shopped products.

9  
10    **BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION:**

11            There are numerous categories of products that are sold by brand name. Typically, for  
12 certain categories of products, each manufacturer markets its branded products as separate  
13 from other manufacturers. Moreover, for these same type of products, a distributor that offers  
14 for sale the same or similar product category by different manufacturers will typically have  
15 its catalogue organized by manufacturer and not by product category. In this way, a consumer  
16 is unable to compare different brand names from different manufacturers in order to purchase  
17 alternative products. Examples of such markets include patients with intestinal stomas,  
18 incontinence, wound care needs, diabetes; and for patients requiring home respiratory therapy,  
19 respiratory access and tracheotomy care, home intravenous therapy, home occupational,  
20 physical and/or rehabilitation therapy, podiatric products, chiropractic and/or orthopedic  
21 equipment, braces and supports. Other examples of such markets include the category of  
22 perfumes.

23            In one embodiment, the present invention is applied to products used in conjunction  
24 with a stoma (e.g. an opening through the body wall). In urostomy, colostomy, ileostomy, and  
25 other similar operations, part or all of a patient's bladder, intestine, or other organ is removed,  
26 and is replaced with a conduit for channeling body fluids or waste out of the patient's body  
27 via a stoma or tube. In the case of a colostomy, ileostomy or urostomy, body waste is  
28 collected by an external apparatus, usually attached to the patient's skin around the stoma or  
29 tube. For example, a conventional ostomy appliance is a relatively flat plastic bag having an  
30 aperture to receive the stoma, the bag usually being formed with a flange for fitting around the  
31 stoma and for being sealed to the skin of the abdomen with an adhesive layer.

32            A primary problem faced by ostomates is that of undesired leakage around the  
33 containment appliance attached to the stoma location. Typically, a pouch for containing and  
34 holding the bodily drainages (i.e., human excrement, such as fecal matter or urine) is  
35 adhesively attached to the skin surrounding the stoma. Any type of relative movement  
36 between the surrounding skin area and the adhesive material will create a channel or a track  
37 through which bodily drainages will leak. Such leakages may cause detrimental damage to

1 the surrounding skin and are also a source of humiliation and embarrassment for the ostomate,  
2 not to mention the other problems associated with smell and damage to clothing.

3         Because of these conditions, there exist numerous products that are used with or in  
4 conjunction with a stoma including pouches, ostomy systems, sealants and skin barriers. For  
5 example, Hollister offers for sale a line of branded drainable pouches named "First Choice"  
6 while Coloplast offers for sale its own line of branded drainable pouches named "Assura".  
7 However, prior to the present invention, an end-user of one of these branded products would  
8 not and could not directly compare these branded products. Accordingly, as an example, an  
9 end-user who was presently buying a specific type of "Assura" drainable pouch would not be  
10 able to comparison shop and thus, compare to a specific type of a "First Choice" product.  
11 Moreover, in many cases, end-users were unaware that comparable branded products even  
12 existed and thus, the end-user may have had no expectation that he/she could comparison  
13 shop.

14         In addition, manufacturers of a specific branded product have been motivated in the  
15 past to assure that its branded product can not be comparison shopped with another  
16 manufacturer's branded product. Manufacturers employ numerous methods to achieve this  
17 result including, for example: (a) establishing a branded name (i.e. a label for the specific  
18 product); (b) establishing an internal proprietary coding system; (c) publishing catalogues and  
19 other sales information that avoids any detailed analysis of the product; and (d) providing  
20 insufficient details of their product so that distributors are required to publish catalogues that  
21 are compiled according to each manufacturer and not according to product category. All of  
22 these techniques have one main purpose - - to prevent the manufacturer's own branded  
23 product from being compared to other potentially competitive products. In this way, an end-  
24 user who has previously bought certain branded product from one manufacturer, will not be  
25 likely to switch to another manufacturer's branded product. Thus, the end-user will continue  
26 to purchase from the same manufacturer.

27         In contrast, there exist product categories that have a history of comparison shopping.  
28 For example, one category that has produced a multitude of products and has become a highly  
29 competitive comparison shopping environment is consumer appliances and electronics. Each  
30 type of product such as a television set is typically available from several different  
31 manufacturers, and each manufacturer typically produces several models of the same type of  
32 product. For example, an electronic distributor will typically display 20 inch television sets  
33 from different manufacturers and several models from the same manufacturer in a side-by-side  
34 comparison. As such, for these product categories, there exists an expectation on behalf of  
35 the end-user that there are comparable branded products.

36         Despite these known categories of products involving comparison shopping, there still  
37 is needed a system that automatically compares branded products (that were previously only

1 identified according to their own brand manufacturer and not comparison shopped) for the  
2 categories of non-comparison shopped products and provides an accurate and precise  
3 comparison, responsive to changing industry products, that also provides point of sale  
4 assistance to consumers with branded products and price comparisons among manufacturers  
5 products.

6

7

8 **SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION:**

9 For purpose of the present invention, the term “comparable” product means a product,  
10 or combination of products, that is interchangeable with the original branded product and that  
11 does not result in any additional detrimental effects when compared to the original product.  
12 The term “branded” name or “branded” product means the manufacturers specific  
13 identification of its own product. For example, a “branded” product may include a trademark,  
14 a manufacturer’s proprietary identification or other means used by a manufacture to identify  
15 its product and thus, to make the product distinct from other products.

16 Moreover, for purposes of this present invention, the term “non-comparison shopped  
17 product” means a type of product that, without technical assistance, an end-user of the product  
18 is not capable of determining at least one comparable product. The term “end-user” means  
19 the person who is using the product. For example, for a pouch to be used with an intestinal  
20 stoma, the end-user is the patient. The term “technical assistance” means a person having  
21 information concerning the specific branded product that is known only to those of ordinary  
22 skill in the art of the particular product category. The following are examples of “non-  
23 comparison shopped products”(but, are not limited to the following examples): (a) for patients  
24 with intestinal stomas, pouches, ostomy systems, sealants, and skin barriers; (b) for patients  
25 with incontinence, urinary catheters; (c) for patients with wound care needs (e.g. care of  
26 chronic wounds such as venous stasis ulcers and decubitus ulcer), skin barrier dressings and  
27 hydrogel dressings; and (d) for patients requiring respiratory access and tracheostomy care,  
28 tracheostomy tubes. In a specific example, numerous non-comparison shopped products are  
29 offered for sale in the catalogue, “The Complete Home Care and Ostomy Suppliers Catalog,”  
30 distributed by Edgepark Surgical Inc. In that catalogue, ostomy products are generally  
31 categorized according to manufacturer (e.g. ConvaTec, Hollister, Smith & Nephew, Inc.,  
32 Coloplast, Nu-Hope, Cymed/Bard) and not according to product category (e.g. pouches,  
33 ostomy systems, sealants, skin barriers).

34 The present invention provides an automated system and apparatus that provides an  
35 end-user with the capability to compare and display comparable branded products for a  
36 plurality of products and also provides an end-user at the point of sale with comparisons of  
37 comparable branded products among the same manufacturer and other manufacturers.

1 Specifically, the present invention relates to an automated system for providing at least one  
2 comparable branded product to an end-user, wherein the end-user's current branded product  
3 is a non-comparison shopped product, wherein the method comprises:

- 4 (a) entering means for entering the product data of the product including branded  
5 name and for generating an output corresponding to the product data;  
6 (b) generating means for receiving said output from said entering means, for  
7 accessing a set of data relating to other branded products, and for generating a function based  
8 on said output and said set of data, wherein said function has a branded product comparator;  
9 (c) computing means for receiving said function from said generating means and  
10 for computing a comparable branded product based upon said received function; and  
11 (d) transferring means for providing at least one comparable branded product to  
12 said user.

13 In one embodiment, the hardware for the system comprises a storage device for storing  
14 survey, branded products and transaction information in a data structure format, a memory  
15 medium, a central processing unit and a communication port. In one embodiment, the  
16 database is a relational database. The tables of the database may be in the format of rows and  
17 columns.

18 The system also contains a stored program-controlled application for comparing  
19 branded products and/or accompanying survey responsive to market fluctuations and changes.  
20 Thus, in one embodiment, as the data records in the tables are updated, a software program  
21 is utilized that automatically reconfigures the comparative branded products in accordance  
22 with an established comparator.

23 Accordingly, in another embodiment, the system of the present invention is a  
24 computerized comparator of branded products. Specifically, in yet another embodiment, the  
25 branded product comparator function of the system is responsive to branded products of the  
26 same and different manufacturers. The database of the system may include one or more  
27 identification markers for each item offered, including a product identification number, e.g.  
28 a stock keeping unit ("SKU"), and the manufacturer. The comparator software may define,  
29 among other elements, the type, category, measurements (including diameter(s) of device,  
30 size) and material composition.

31 In overall operation in one embodiment, the system receives a specific branded product  
32 from a specific manufacturer, compares this specific branded product with the database's  
33 comparable branded products, and automatically selects one or more comparable branded  
34 products or combination of comparable products. Manufacturer's branded products are input  
35 on a regular basis (e.g. daily, hourly, or other frequencies are possible) as necessary.

1 As a database system, the product invention may generate a variety of forms and  
2 reports. As an output device, the comparable branded product or products may be displayed  
3 in any method suitable to the end-user.

4

5 **BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS:**

6 The accompanying drawings are included to provide a further understanding of the  
7 present invention. These drawings are incorporated in and constitute a part of this  
8 specification, illustrate one or more embodiments of the present invention, and together with  
9 the description, serve to explain the principles of the present invention.

10 FIG. 1 illustrates a block diagram of the central controller in accordance with one  
11 embodiment of the present invention;

12 FIG. 2 is a schematic diagram of hardware in accordance with one embodiment of the  
13 present invention;

14 FIG. 3 is a schematic diagram representing the operation of the RAM in accordance  
15 with one embodiment of the present invention;

16 FIGS. 4 and 5 illustrate flow diagrams of various embodiments of methods of the  
17 present invention.

18 FIG. 6 illustrates a block diagram of the brand name database of one embodiment of  
19 the present invention.

20 FIG. 7 illustrates an example of the brand name comparator of one embodiment of the  
21 present invention.

22 Among those benefits and improvements that have been disclosed, other objects and  
23 advantages of this invention will become apparent from the following description taken in  
24 conjunction with the accompanying drawings. The drawings constitute a part of this  
25 specification and include exemplary embodiments of the present invention and illustrate  
26 various objects and features thereof.

27

28 **DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION:**

29 As required, detailed embodiments of the present invention are disclosed herein;  
30 however, it is to be understood that the disclosed embodiments are merely exemplary of the  
31 invention that may be embodied in various forms. The figures are not necessary to scale,  
32 some features may be exaggerated to show details of particular components. Therefore,  
33 specific structural and functional details disclosed herein are not to be interpreted as limiting,  
34 but merely as a basis for the claims and as a representative basis for teaching one skilled in  
35 the art to variously employ the present invention.

36 FIG. 1 illustrates one embodiment of the central controller 20 of the present invention.  
37 The central controller includes a CPU 21 which performs the processing functions of the

1 controller. It also includes a read only memory 22 (ROM) and a random access memory 23  
2 (RAM). The ROM 22 is used to store at least some of the program instructions that are to be  
3 executed by the CPU 21, such as portions of the operating system and the RAM 23 is used for  
4 temporary storage of data. A clock circuit 24 provides a clock signal which is required by the  
5 CPU. The use of a CPU in conjunction with ROM, RAM and a clock circuit is well known  
6 in the art of CPU based electronic circuit design.

7 The central controller 20 also includes a communication port 25 which enables the  
8 CPU 21 to communicate with devices external to the central controller. In one embodiment,  
9 a modem 26 is used to communicate with devices outside the central controller 20. However,  
10 other methods of communication with external devices may be used including hard-wired  
11 connections, wire-less connections and optical communications.

12 The CPU 21 can also store information to, and read information from, the data storage  
13 device 27. This data storage device includes, in one embodiment, a survey database 27a and  
14 a branded product database 27b. The data storage device 27 may also include a transaction  
15 processor instructions 27c which can be read by and executed by the CPU 21 and thus, enables  
16 the CPU 21 to process transactions. In another embodiment, the survey database and branded  
17 product database may be incorporated into a single database.

18 FIG. 2 illustrates one embodiment of the present invention depicting the hardware  
19 component. The hardware 100 includes a CPU 102, a RAM 104, a ROM 116, storage device  
20 110 such as a hard disk including a database 114 stored therein and user input/output devices  
21 108 such as terminals. A computer 116 includes RAM 104, ROM 116 and CPU 102.  
22 Optionally, a printer 112 is attached to the computer.

23 FIG. 3 shows schematically the organization of RAM 104 which includes an operating  
24 system 200, a teleprocessing (TP) multi-user monitor 202, a brand comparator program 204,  
25 a database management system 206 that manages the transfer of data between multiple local  
26 and remote terminals. Reference 208 and 210 refer to communicating access connections to  
27 terminals 108 and storage devices 110, e.g. hard disks. Database management system 206  
28 includes a database manager 212 and an interactive query/update language component 214  
29 wherein a user can query and update data records in the database 114.

30 In yet another embodiment, as is known in the art, a relational database is employed.  
31 A relational database is a database in which sets of related data are treated logically as if they  
32 were contained in two-dimensional tables in which each data record of the set appears as a row  
33 and attributes or fields of the items are arranged as columns. Since the database is relational,  
34 each of its tables will have a column that is the same as a column of at least one other table.  
35 Each specific model of a branded product in the system user's inventory, regardless of  
36 database organization, is characterized in the database, by certain parameters (attributes or  
37 fields). Each specific model of the branded product may be assigned a unique product

1 identification number which is used to identify it from other items in the database. Each  
2 product may also have one or more parameters which are used, for example, to group the  
3 product into one or more product groups or describe features of the product. In one  
4 embodiment of the present invention, the parameters for each product in the system user's  
5 inventory suitably includes, without limitation, a unique SKU, a product description, a  
6 manufacturer's name and number, and a branded name.

7 FIG. 4 illustrates a flow diagram representing one embodiment where a customer (i.e.  
8 end-user) is presently purchasing a specific branded product and, the present invention  
9 provides the end-user with one or more comparable branded products. Customer enters brand  
10 name product (e.g. the product customer is presently purchasing) (step 1010). Customer  
11 enters brand name product into terminal (step 1020). The customer information is transmitted  
12 to the central controller (step 1030). Information concerning each branded product is inputted  
13 into the central controller on a periodic basis (e.g. hourly, daily, weekly or monthly) and  
14 updated as necessary (step 1045). In one embodiment, each input branded product is analyzed  
15 by computer means and/or by an individual who is specifically trained to analyze and describe  
16 the branded products in specific product categories. For example, in one embodiment, in the  
17 area of stoma products, an individual, who is trained in this area (e.g. an enterostomal  
18 therapist), inspects the branded product and inputs the product characteristics and  
19 specifications of the branded product. In another embodiment, a computer program is written  
20 to "search" the internet for branded products in a specific category and for any characteristics  
21 of the branded products. The central controller then compares the current end-user's brand  
22 name product to the database containing other brand name products (including specific  
23 product characteristics) and determines one or more comparable products (step 1040). At  
24 least one selected comparable brand name product is transmitted to the customer (step 1050).  
25 In addition, the customer can then select the comparable brand name product (step 1060).  
26 Finally, the customer completes the transaction by paying for comparable brand product (step  
27 1070).

28 In another embodiment, a problem based survey may be used in conjunction with the  
29 analysis of the end-user's current branded product. For example, in one embodiment of stoma  
30 products, the following survey may be employed:

- 31 ● What type of operation: Ileostomy, Colostomy or Urostomy?
  - 32 ○ Narrows down to the correct type of appliances
- 33 ● Is the stoma flat or retracted?
  - 34 ○ Leads to convex faceplates
- 35 ● Is there a hernia, or bulge by the stoma?
  - 36 ○ Leads to binder, such as Nu-Hope Cool Comfort Support Belt
- 37 ● Is the stoma too high, or on top of a large bulge on the belly?
  - 38 ○ Adjust wafer size down
- 39 ● Is the stoma too low, or under a bulge on the belly?
  - 40 ○ Adjust wafer size up



- 1 ● Is there any skin surface irregularity around the stoma (e.g. bony prominence, scar or  
 2 belly button)  
 3 ○ Special contour appliances like Hollister Contour I or sealants like Eakin Cohesive  
 4 Seals under any stoma appliance  
 5 ● Do you have difficulty concealing the appliance under your clothes?  
 6 ○ Low-profile appliances  
 7 ● Does the stoma prolapse or protrude excessively?  
 8 ○ No low-profile appliances  
 9 ● Are you prone to skin rash?  
 10 ○ Powders, creams, moisture barriers  
 11 ○ Some prescription items here (e.g. Lotrimin cream for candida rash)

12 FIG. 5 illustrates a flow diagram representing another embodiment where a survey is  
 13 used in conjunction with a branded product analysis. In this embodiment, the customer (i.e.  
 14 end-user) completes the survey (step 1110). Customer enters the survey into terminal (step  
 15 1120). The customer information is transmitted to the central controller (step 1130).  
 16 Information concerning each branded product and responses to survey data corresponding to  
 17 branded products is inputted into the central controller on a periodic basis and updated as  
 18 necessary including branded products that meet the criteria of various questions of the survey  
 19 (step 1145). The central controller then compares the survey data to the database and  
 20 determines one or more product(s) that meet the acceptable criteria of the survey (step 1140).  
 21 One or more selected comparable branded product(s) are transmitted to the customer (step  
 22 1150). In addition, the customer can then select one or more of the comparable brand name  
 23 products (step 1160). And, the customer completes the transaction by paying for comparable  
 24 brand product (step 1170).

25 In another embodiment, FIG. 4 and FIG. 5 may be combined so that the customer  
 26 enters both the problem based survey data and the end-user's current branded product that  
 27 he/she is currently using.

28 FIG. 6 is one embodiment of the brand name database. The database system generally  
 29 comprises a statistical module that uses: (a) industry and statistical experience of a specific  
 30 branded product; (b) public database that relates to the specific product (e.g. manufacturers  
 31 catalogues, internet sites); and (c) experience obtained by inspecting specific branded product.  
 32 The statistical module creates a library database of branded products. The brand name  
 33 database combines specific information relating to the end-user with the library database to  
 34 generate one or more comparable branded products.

35 FIG. 7 is an example of one embodiment of the present invention in the area of stoma  
 36 devices. The left-most column labeled "manufacturer" is the input information of the  
 37 manufacturer by the end-user (if known). The next column is input information by the end-  
 38 user of his/her current branded product. The next column is the size of the end-user's branded  
 39 product. This information may be entered by the end-user. In one embodiment, the end-user  
 40 also inputs the SKU and count. In another embodiment, the central controller generates the

1 SKU and count along with the price. The central controller then compares the inputted  
2 information to the database and computes a “generic” description. The two right side columns  
3 are the comparable branded product information transmitted to the end-user. As shown in  
4 FIG. 7 in one example, the present invention generates a comparable branded product that is  
5 sold by a manufacturer as two separate items (see e.g. “Nu-Hope Flexible Barrier, Fecal, 4”  
6 x 4” ” and “Nu-Hope Round Barrier Discs”).

7 In another embodiment, in addition to transmitting at least one comparable branded  
8 name product to the end-user, the present invention automatically implements price responses  
9 based on the computation of comparable branded products. For example, in yet another  
10 embodiment, as illustrated in FIG. 7, comparable branded products are computed with their  
11 corresponding initial prices. After computing these comparable branded products, the system  
12 may implement an additional program that compares the price of the end-user’s current  
13 branded product with the comparable branded products. The system then adjusts the prices,  
14 either increasing or decreasing the prices of the comparable branded products based on a set  
15 margin established by the distributor of the system.

16 In yet another embodiment of the price response program, the controller may have an  
17 additional program that automatically implements price responses based on a comparison of  
18 advertised prices of other competitors (e.g. distributors). The displayed price may then be  
19 adjusted to reflect a lower price than the competitors’ prices. The program may also contain  
20 a “minimum” price for a particular product so that the displayed price is not less than this  
21 “minimum” price.

22 In a further embodiment, the present invention may be used for providing at least one  
23 comparable branded women’s or men’s perfume to an end-user. For example, a woman  
24 would input her current brand name. The brand name database perfume product would  
25 contain detailed information concerning the precise chemical make-up of that and other brand  
26 name women’s perfumes. In one embodiment, to produce the brand name product database,  
27 a sample of each specific branded perfume would be analyzed by gas chromatographes,  
28 infrared spectrometer, thermal chromatograph and/or mass spectrometer, or any combination  
29 of these devices. An electronic “fingerprint” (e.g. identification) would be produced for each  
30 sample. In another example, a device called a “Cyrano 2000” instrument may also be used to  
31 identify the electronic “fingerprint” of each sample. See e.g., “A Nose For Business,” MIT’s  
32 Technology Review (July/August 1999), pp. 62-7. The central controller would compare the  
33 current brand name product to the database and determine one or more women’s brand  
34 name(s) that correspond(s) to the electronic “fingerprint” of the current brand name. The  
35 central controller would be programmed to allow for established deviations when comparing  
36 the “fingerprint” of the current brand name to “fingerprints” in the database. One or more  
37 comparable brand name perfumes would be transmitted to the end-user. In yet another

1 embodiment, the central controller would select two or more specific branded name perfumes  
2 to be combined by the end-user in order to produce a comparable smell of the current brand  
3 name perfume.

4 In combination with the above embodiments concerning the perfume applications, a  
5 survey may be implemented. The survey may include such items as the “likes and dislikes”  
6 of various odors such as various food and flower odors. In this way, the present invention  
7 would select the desired brand name perfumes that correlate to the “fingerprint” and the  
8 survey.

9 A system and method for providing a comparable branded product based on a current  
10 branded product for non-comparison shopped products have been described herein. As  
11 previously stated, detailed embodiments of the present invention are disclosed herein;  
12 however, it is to be understood that the disclosed embodiments are merely exemplary of the  
13 invention that may be embodied in various forms. It will be appreciated that many  
14 modifications and other variations that will be appreciated by those skilled in the art are within  
15 the intended scope of this invention as claimed below without departure from the teachings,  
16 spirit and intended scope of the invention.

**1 CLAIMS****2 What Is Claimed Is:**

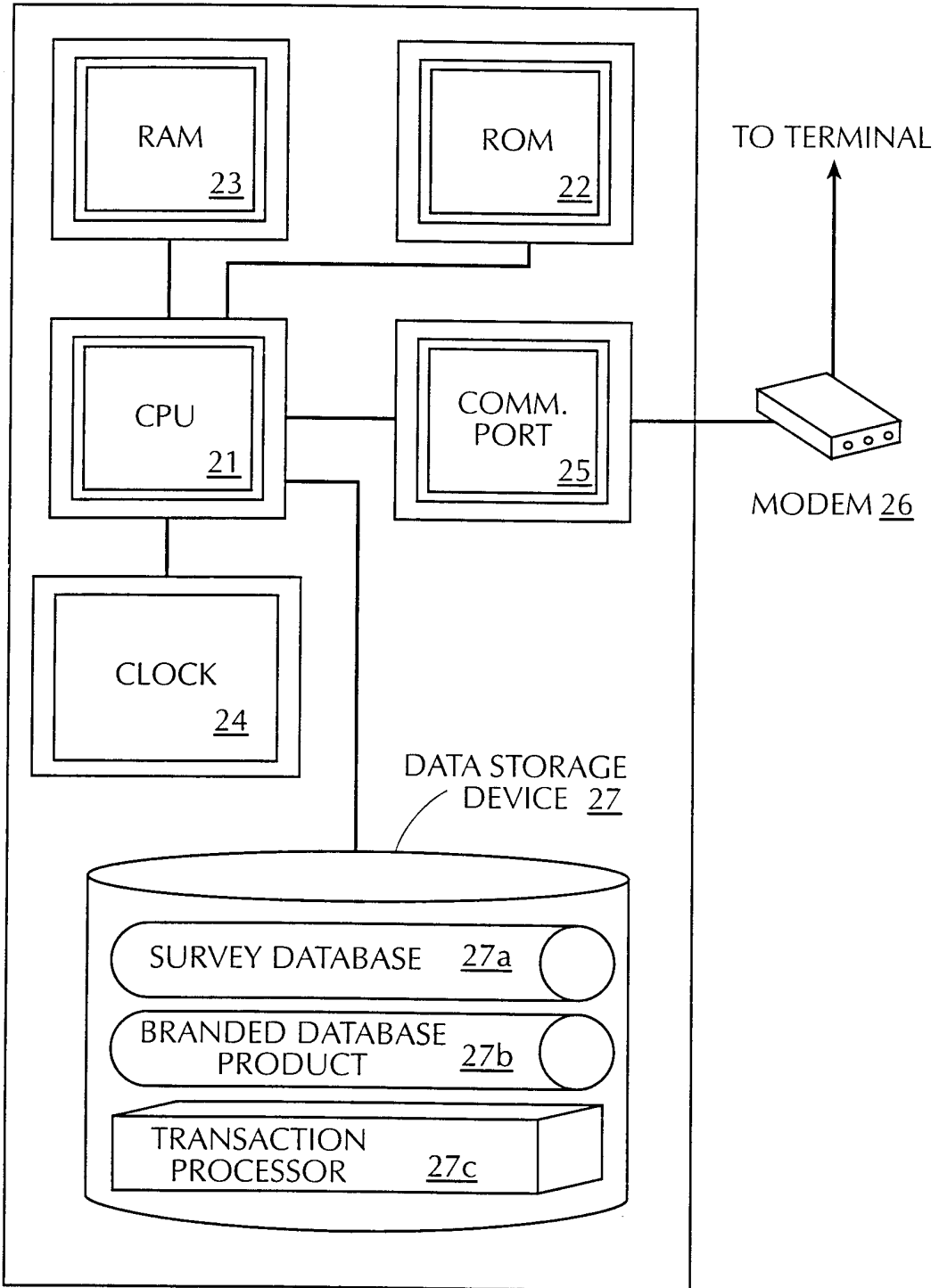
- 3 1. A computer implemented method of providing at least one comparable branded  
4 product to an end-user, wherein the end-user's current branded product is a non-  
5 comparison shopped product, wherein the method comprises:
- 6 (a) entering product data of the product including branded name into an entering  
7 device, wherein the entering step comprises generating an output corresponding to the product  
8 data;
- 9 (b) accessing a set of data relating to other branded products having comparable  
10 attributes from the product data from the output and the set of data;
- 11 (c) computing at least one comparable branded product to be provided to the user  
12 based upon the generated function and the comparable product; and
- 13 (d) providing at least one comparable branded product to the end-user.
- 14 2. An automated system for providing at least one comparable branded product to an  
15 end-user, wherein the end-user's current branded product is a non-comparison shopped  
16 product, wherein the method comprises:
- 17 (a) entering means for entering the product data of the product including branded  
18 name and for generating an output corresponding to the product data;
- 19 (b) generating means for receiving said output from said entering means, for  
20 accessing a set of data relating to other branded products, and for generating a function based  
21 on said output and said set of data, wherein said function has a branded product comparator;
- 22 (c) computing means for receiving said function from said generating means and  
23 for computing a comparable branded product based upon said received function; and
- 24 (d) transferring means for providing at least one comparable branded product to  
25 said user.
- 26 3. A data processing apparatus for determining at least one comparable branded product  
27 to an end-user, wherein the end-user's current branded product is a non-comparison  
28 shopped product, wherein the method comprises:
- 29 a central controller including a CPU and a memory operatively connected to said CPU;  
30 at least one terminal, adapted for communicating with said central controller, for  
31 transmitting to said central controller brand product information including branded name;  
32 said memory in said central controller containing a program, adapted to be executed  
33 by said CPU, for determining at least one comparable product based on the brand name of a  
34 product; and
- 35 wherein said central controller receives said brand name from said terminal and  
36 computes the comparable branded product based upon the brand name criteria.

- 1 4. An automated method of providing at least one comparable branded product, wherein  
2 the end-user's current branded product is a non-comparison shopped product, using  
3 a central controller including a CPU and a memory operatively connected to said CPU  
4 and containing a program adapted to be executed by said CPU for determining at least  
5 one comparable branded product based upon a brand name criteria, and a terminal  
6 adapted for communicating with said CPU, the method comprising the steps of:  
7 inputting brand name product criteria to the controller via the terminal;  
8 inputting survey data criteria to the controller via the terminal;  
9 computing at least one comparable branded product that gives a user the right to  
10 purchase the comparable branded product by having the CPU execute a program based on the  
11 branded name product and survey data input; and  
12 outputting the comparable branded product to the terminal.
- 13 5. The method of claims 1, 2, or 4, wherein the computed comparable branded product  
14 is composed of a combination of at least two different branded products.
- 15 6. The apparatus of claim 3, wherein the computed comparable branded product is  
16 composed of a combination of at least two different branded products.
- 17 7. The method of claim 1, wherein the non-comparison shopped products are a category  
18 of products for patients with intestinal stomas.
- 19 8. The method of claim 7, wherein the category of products is a group consisting of  
20 pouches, ostomy systems, sealants and skin barriers.
- 21 9. The method of claim 1, wherein the non-comparison shopped products are a category  
22 of products for patients with incontinence.
- 23 10. The method of claim 9, wherein the products are urinary catheters.
- 24 11. The method of claim 1, wherein the non-comparison shopped products are a category  
25 of products for patients with wound care needs.
- 26 12. The method of claim 11, wherein the products are skin barrier dressings and hydrogel  
27 dressings.
- 28 13. The method of claim 1, wherein the non-comparison shopped products are a category  
29 of products for patients requiring respiratory access and tracheostomy care.
- 30 14. The method of claim 13, wherein the products are tracheostomy tubes.
- 31 15. The method of claim 2, wherein the non-comparison shopped products are a category  
32 of products for patients with intestinal stomas.
- 33 16. The method of claim 15, wherein the category of products is a group consisting of  
34 pouches, ostomy systems sealants and skin barriers.
- 35 17. The method of claim 2, wherein the non-comparison shopped products are a category  
36 of products for patients with incontinence.
- 37 18. The method of claim 17, wherein the products are urinary catheters.

- 1 19. The method of claim 2, wherein the non-comparison shopped products are a category  
2 of products for patients with wound care needs.
- 3 20. The method of claim 19, wherein the products are skin barrier dressings and hydrogel  
4 dressings.
- 5 21. The method of claim 2, wherein the non-comparison shopped products are a category  
6 of products for patients requiring respiratory access and tracheostomy care.
- 7 22. The method of claim 21, wherein the products are tracheostomy tubes.
- 8 23. The method of claim 4, wherein the non-comparison shopped products are a category  
9 of products for patients with intestinal stomas.
- 10 24. The method of claim 23, wherein the category of products is a group consisting of  
11 pouches, ostomy systems, sealants and skin barriers.
- 12 25. The method of claim 4, wherein the non-comparison shopped products are a category  
13 of products for patients with incontinence.
- 14 26. The method of claim 25, wherein the products are urinary catheters.
- 15 27. The method of claim 4, wherein the non-comparison shopped products are a category  
16 of products for patients with wound care needs.
- 17 28. The method of claim 27, wherein the products are skin barrier dressings and hydrogel  
18 dressings.
- 19 29. The method of claim 4, wherein the non-comparison shopped products are a category  
20 of products for patients requiring respiratory access and tracheostomy care.
- 21 30. The method of claim 29, wherein the products are tracheostomy tubes.
- 22 31. The method of claims 1, 2 or 4, wherein the non-comparison shopped products are a  
23 category of perfumes.
- 24 32. The methods of claims 1, 2 and 4, further comprising:  
25 a payment receiving component configured to receive payment for the comparable  
26 branded product.
- 27 33. A computer implemented method of providing at least one comparable branded  
28 product to an end-user, wherein the end-user's current branded product is a non-  
29 comparison shopped product, wherein the method comprises:
- 30 (a) entering product data of the product including branded name into an entering  
31 device, wherein the entering step comprises generating an output corresponding to the product  
32 data;
- 33 (b) accessing a set of data relating to other branded products having comparable  
34 attributes and competitor's prices of comparable products, from the product data from the  
35 output and the set of data;
- 36 (c) computing at least one comparable branded product to be provided to the user  
37 based upon the generated function and the comparable product;

- 1           (d)     computing the price of the comparable branded product by comparing a set  
2 price of the comparable product with a competitor's price for the comparable branded product  
3 and re-pricing the comparable branded product; and
- 4           (e)     providing at least one comparable branded product and price to the end-user.
- 5 34.     The method of claim 33, wherein the re-priced comparable product is set at a price  
6           below the competitor's price.

FIG. 1





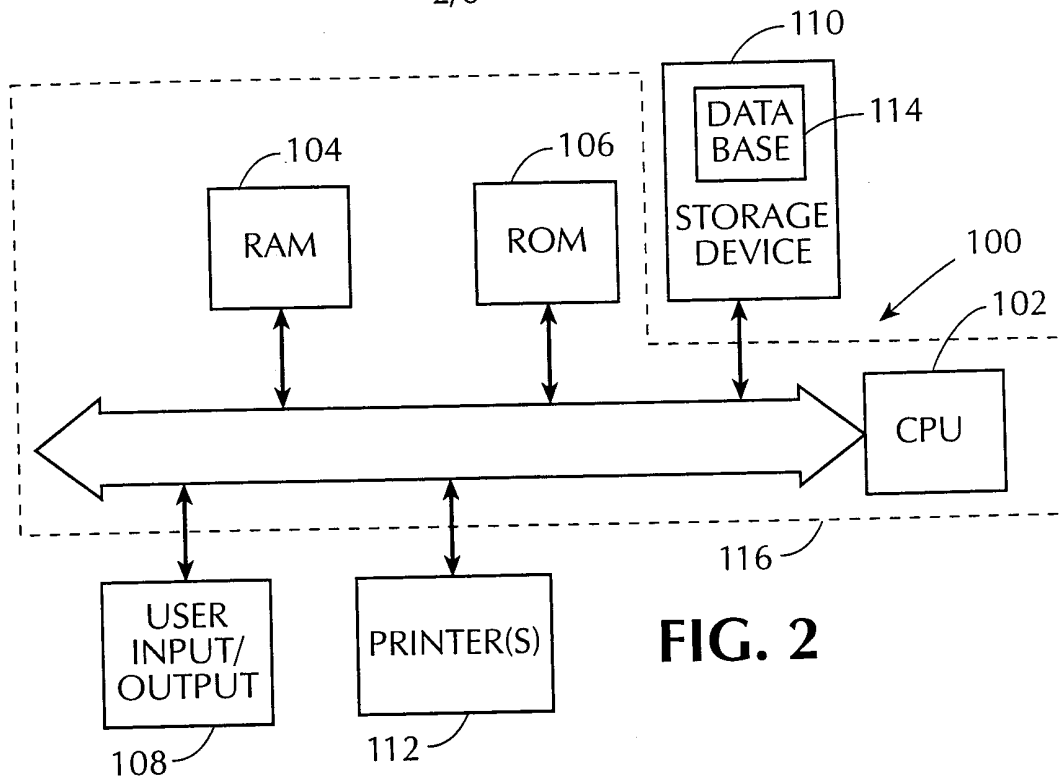


FIG. 2

FIG. 3

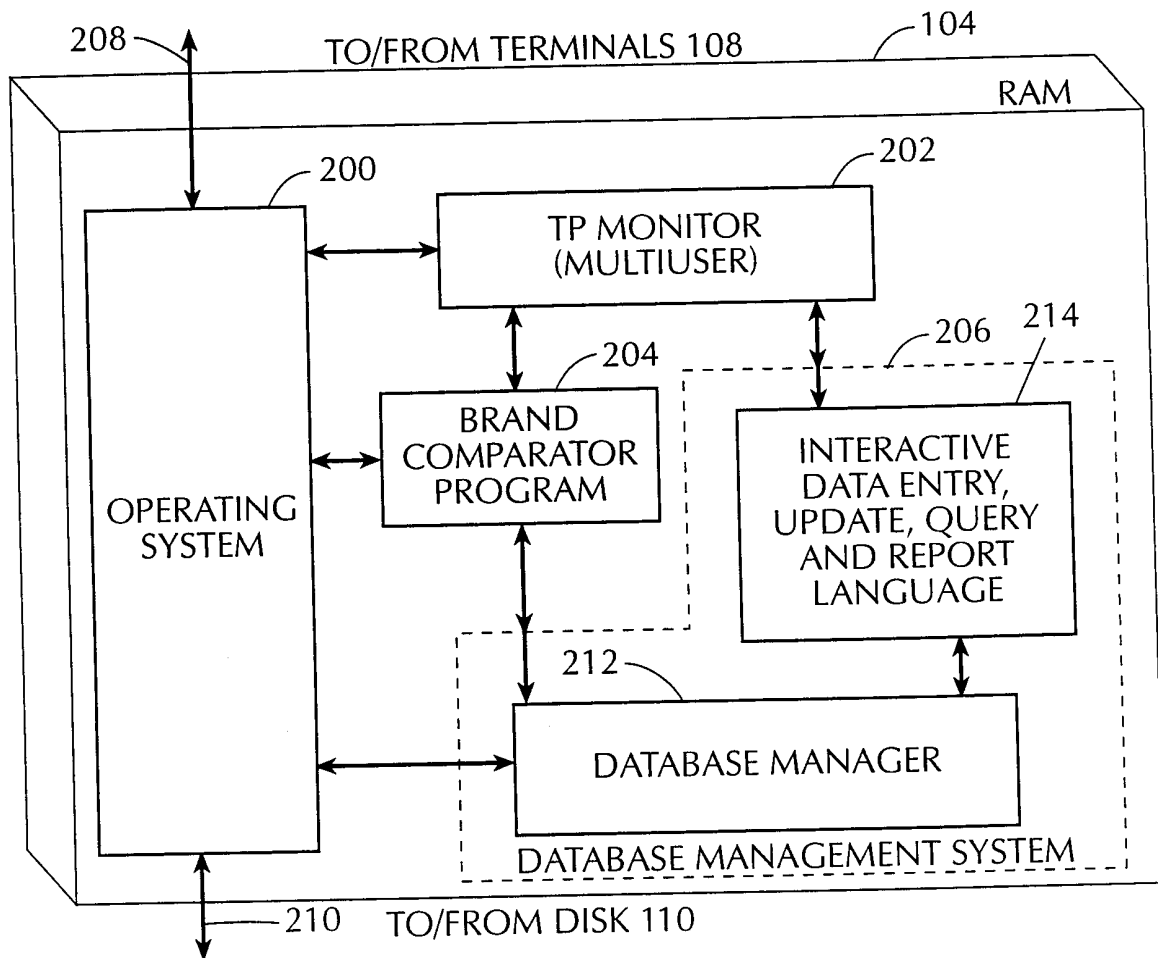


FIG. 4

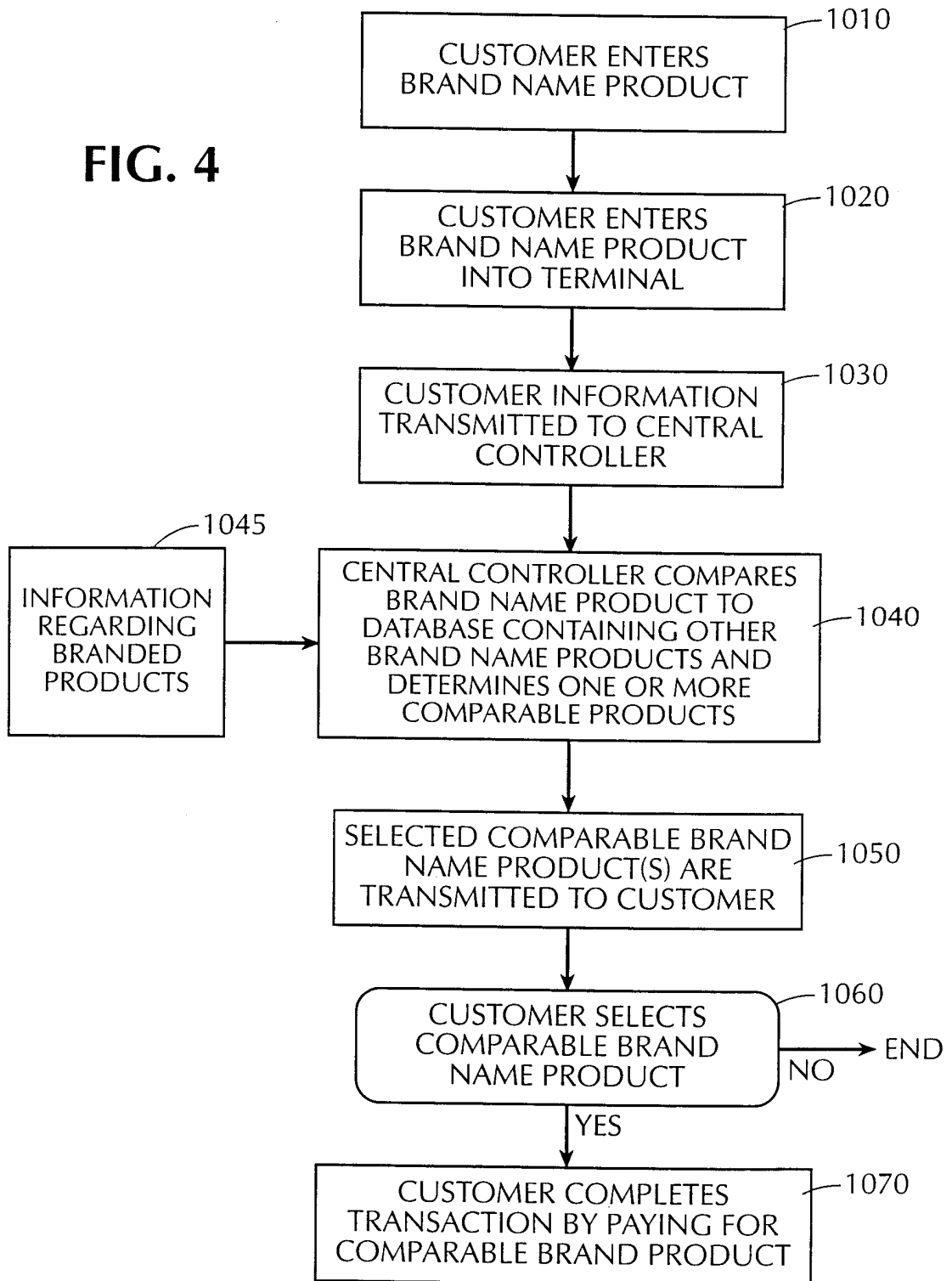
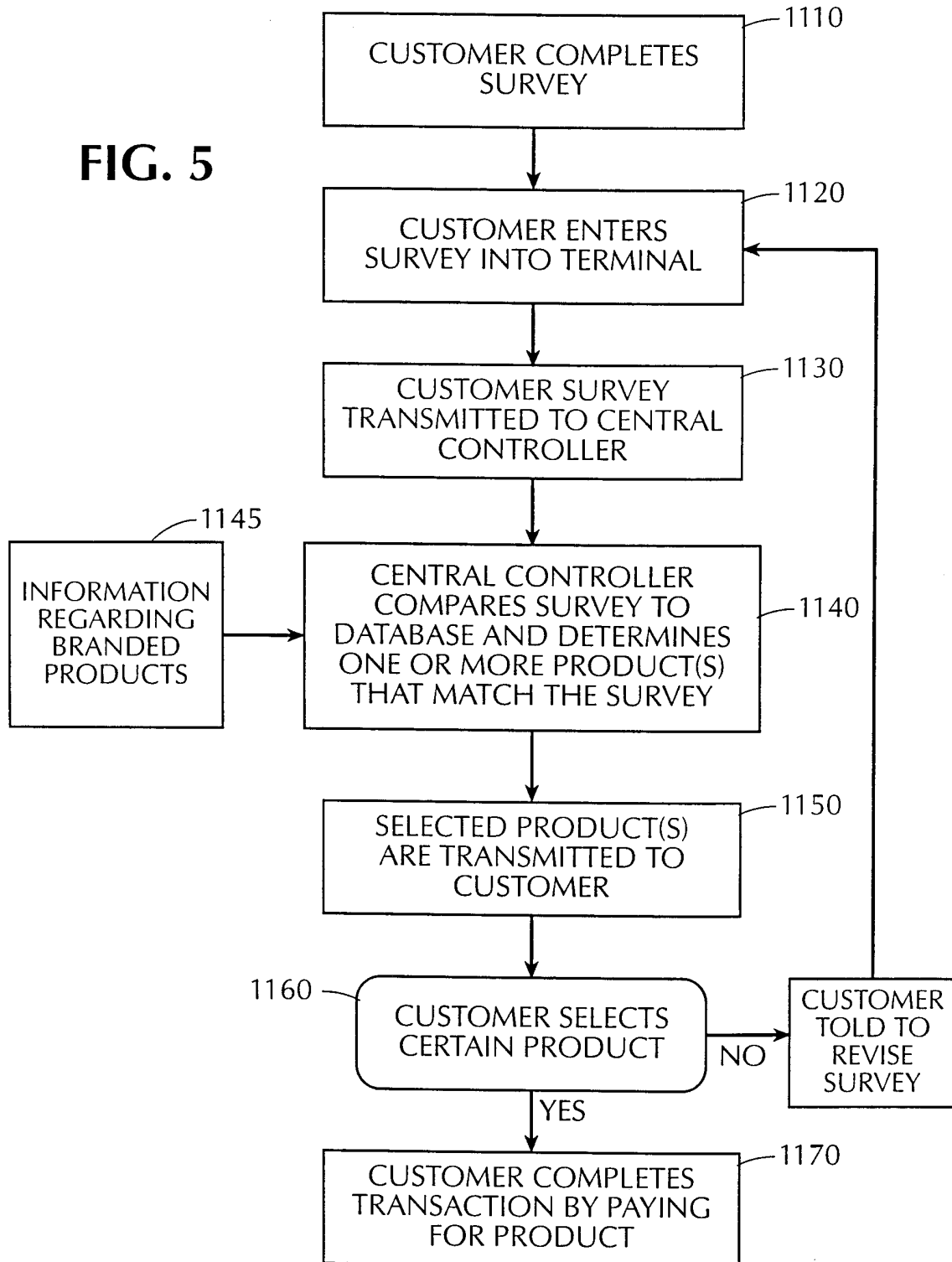
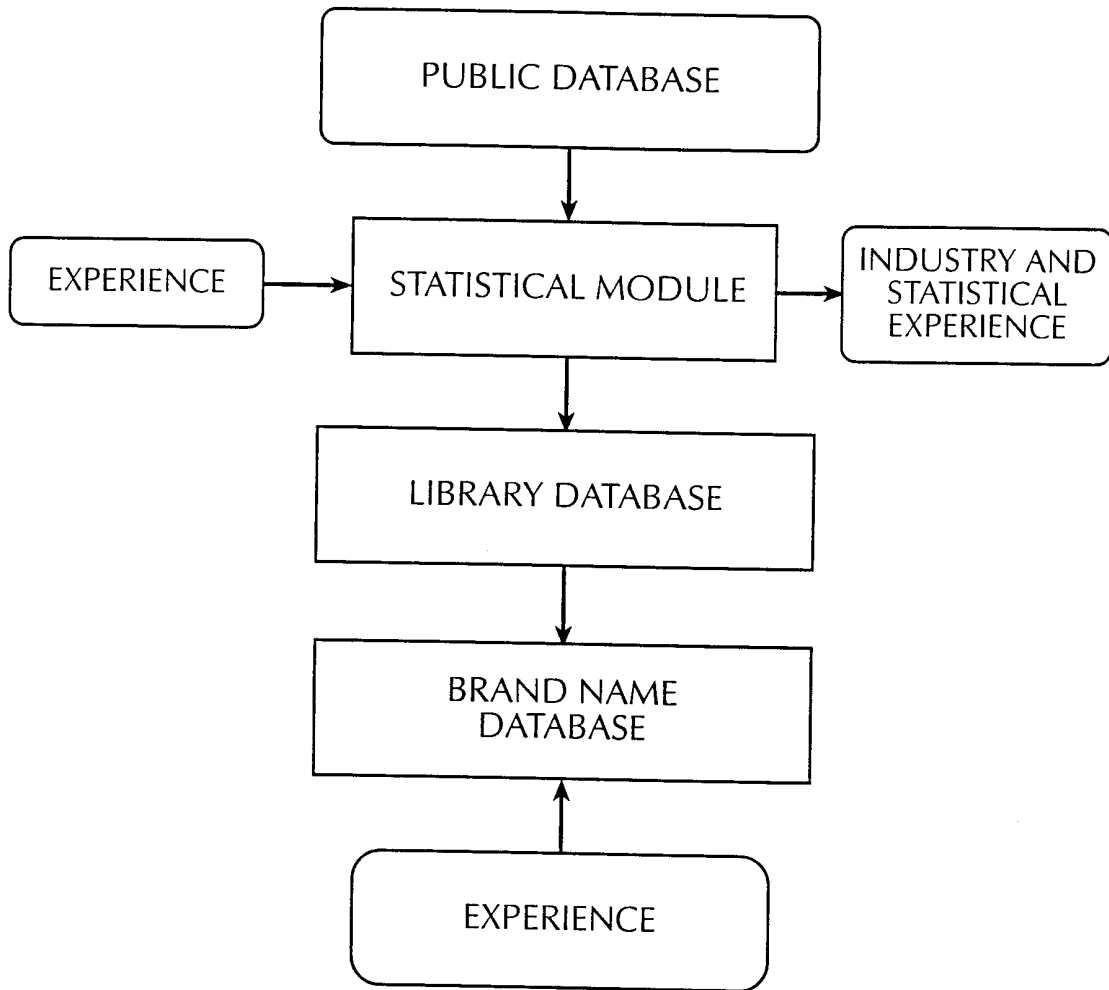


FIG. 5



**FIG. 6**



**FIG. 7**

<u>MANUFACTURER</u>	<u>ITEM NAME</u>	<u>SIZE</u>	<u>STOCK#</u>	<u>COUNT</u>	<u>PRICE</u>	<u>GENERIC DESCRIPTION</u>	<u>MANUFACTURER</u>	<u>ITEM NAME</u>	<u>SIZE</u>	<u>STOCK#</u>	<u>COUNT</u>	<u>PRICE</u>
ASSURA	CONVEX SKIN BARRIER FLANGE W/ BELT LOOPS, PRE-CUT GUARDIAN F-2-PIECE WITH FIRST CHOICE CONVEX SYNTHETIC	1 5/8" (BLUE)	12708	5PK	\$ 42.00		COLOPLAST	ASSURA CONVEX SKIN BARRIER FLANGE W/ BELT LOOPS, PRE-CUT GUARDIAN F-2-PIECE WITH FIRST CHOICE CONVEX SYNTHETIC	1 5/8" (BLUE)	12708	5PK	\$ 42.00
HOLLISTER	SKIN BARRIER	1 5/8" OPENING(A)	4439	5PK	\$ 39.48		HOLLISTER	SKIN BARRIER	1 5/8" OPENING(A)	4439	5PK	\$ 39.48
CONVATEC	DURAHESIVE 4"x4" WAFER WITH CONVEXIT	1 5/8" OPENING, 2 1/4" FLANGE	1784-74	5PK	\$ 53.27	CONVEX FACEPLATES FOR 2-PIECE STOMA APPLIANCES	CONVATEC	DURAHESIVE 4"x4" WAFER WITH CONVEXIT	1 5/8" OPENING, 2 1/4" FLANGE	1784-74	5PK	\$ 53.27
NU-HOPE PLUS	FLEXIBLE BARRIER, FECAL, 4"x4" ROUND BARRIER DISCS	1 5/8" OPENING	4040	5PK	\$ 18.27		NU-HOPE PLUS	FLEXIBLE BARRIER, FECAL, 4"x4" ROUND BARRIER DISCS	1 5/8" OPENING	4040	5PK	\$ 18.27
CONVATEC	SUR-FIT NATURA CLOSED-END POUCH WITH FILTER, OPAQUE CLOSED POUCH, WITH FILTER, SOFT BACKING, CUSTOM CUT	1 1/2"	4083	5PK	\$ 17.55		CONVATEC	SUR-FIT NATURA CLOSED-END POUCH WITH FILTER, OPAQUE CLOSED POUCH, WITH FILTER, SOFT BACKING, CUSTOM CUT	1 1/2"	4083	5PK	\$ 17.55
COLOPLAST	CONTOUR 1 CLOSED POUCH WITH CURAGAURD, OPAQUE	1 1/2" x 2 1/4"	5700	30PK	\$ 96.71		COLOPLAST	CONTOUR 1 CLOSED POUCH WITH CURAGAURD, OPAQUE	1 1/2" x 2 1/4"	5700	30PK	\$ 96.71
HOLLISTER	CONTOUR 1 CLOSED POUCH WITH PRESIZED TAPERED SKIN BARRIER, OPAQUE, ODOR-BARRIER FILM, DEODORIZING FILTER AND COMFORTWEAR PANEL	1 9/16" (40MM)	1714	30PK	\$ 94.95	1-PIECE, CLOSED END POUCH WITH DEODORIZING FILTER, OPAQUE	HOLLISTER	CONTOUR 1 CLOSED POUCH WITH PRESIZED TAPERED SKIN BARRIER, OPAQUE, ODOR-BARRIER FILM, DEODORIZING FILTER AND COMFORTWEAR PANEL	1 9/16" (40MM)	1714	30PK	\$ 94.95
SMITH & NEPHEW	BONGORT LIFESTYLE OSTOMY POUCH, NON-ABSORBANT COVER AND ADHESIVE WITH FILTER, OPAQUE	1 1/2"	183012	10PK	\$ 35.16		SMITH & NEPHEW	BONGORT LIFESTYLE OSTOMY POUCH, NON-ABSORBANT COVER AND ADHESIVE WITH FILTER, OPAQUE	1 1/2"	183012	10PK	\$ 35.16
DANSAC	CONTOUR CLOSED POUCH, OPAQUE	1 1/2"	225-25	30PK	\$ 97.74		DANSAC	CONTOUR CLOSED POUCH, OPAQUE	1 1/2"	225-25	30PK	\$ 97.74
COLOPLAST	SKIN BARRIER PASTE		2650	1 TUBE	\$ 9.65		COLOPLAST	SKIN BARRIER PASTE		2650	1 TUBE	\$ 9.65
CONVATEC	DUODERM HYDROACTIVE PASTE		187930	1 TUBE	\$ 11.45		CONVATEC	DUODERM HYDROACTIVE PASTE		187930	1 TUBE	\$ 11.45
CONVATEC	STOMAHESIVE PASTE		189310	1 TUBE	\$ 10.40		CONVATEC	STOMAHESIVE PASTE		189310	1 TUBE	\$ 10.40
CYMED	MICROHESIVE STOMA PASTE		CK0138	1 TUBE	\$ 9.85	STOMA PASTE	CYMED	MICROHESIVE STOMA PASTE		CK0138	1 TUBE	\$ 9.85
DANSAC	SOFT PASTE		77550	1 TUBE	\$ 10.30		DANSAC	SOFT PASTE		77550	1 TUBE	\$ 10.30
HOLLISTER	HOLLIHESIVE PASTE		7920	1 TUBE	\$ 5.35		HOLLISTER	HOLLIHESIVE PASTE		7920	1 TUBE	\$ 5.35
HOLLISTER	KARAYA PASTE		7919	1 TUBE	\$ 6.25		HOLLISTER	KARAYA PASTE		7919	1 TUBE	\$ 6.25
HOLLISTER	PREMIUM PASTE		7930	1 TUBE	\$ 11.10		HOLLISTER	PREMIUM PASTE		7930	1 TUBE	\$ 11.10

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## INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.  
PCT/US00/24730

## A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

IPC(7) :G06F 17/60

US CL :705/26, 27

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

## B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

U.S. : 705/26, 27

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

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

Please See Extra Sheet.

## C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
Y	US 4,992,940 A (DWORKIN) 12 February 1991, col. 2, lines 6-40, col. 3, lines 62-64, Figure 1, Figure 7.	1-34
Y	US 5,878,401 A (JOSEPH) 02 March 1999, col. 1, line 61, through col. 2, line 3, Tables I and II.	1-34
Y	US 5,840,091 A (STRONG) 24 November 1998, Abstract.	13-14, 21-22, 29-30
Y	US 4,567,359 A (LOCKWOOD) 28 January 1986, col. 1, line 67, through col. 2, line 5.	32
Y	US 5,873,069 A (REUHL et al.) 16 February 1999, col. 3, lines 41-57.	33-34
Y	US 5,554,588 A (BEHAN et al.) 10 September 1996, Abstract.	31

 Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C.
  See patent family annex.

* Special categories of cited documents:	*T* later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention
*A* document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance	*X* document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone
*E* earlier document published on or after the international filing date	*Y* document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art
*L* document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)	*A* document member of the same patent family
*O* document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means	
*P* document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed	

Date of the actual completion of the international search 03 NOVEMBER 2000	Date of mailing of the international search report 20 DEC 2000
Name and mailing address of the ISA/US Commissioner of Patents and Trademarks Box PCT Washington, D.C. 20231 Facsimile No. (703) 305-3230	Authorized officer VINCENT MILL <i>James R. Matthews</i> Telephone No. (703) 308-1065

## INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.  
PCT/US00/24730

C (Continuation). DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT		
Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
Y	Ostomy Wound Management, The 1998 O/MM Buyers Guide, Volume 44, Number 7, July 1998, pages 12 and 14-21.	7-12, 15-20, 23-28
Y	US 5,774,891 A (BOYER) 07 July 1998, Figures 1-3, col. 1, lines 53-59.	5-6

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.  
PCT/US00/24730

**B. FIELDS SEARCHED**

Electronic data bases consulted (Name of data base and where practicable terms used):

WEST: US Patents, European Patent Abstracts, Japanese Patent Abstracts, Derwent World Patent Abstracts, IBM Technical Disclosure Bulletins. Search terms: compar\$, shop\$, purchas\$, buy\$, product, service, tracheotomy, tracheostomy, tube, perfume, category.

DIALOG: Files 9, 13, 15, 16, 18, 20, 26, 47, 88, 120, 132, 141, 148, 160, 211, 230, 258, 267, 268, 275, 344, 347, 348, 349, 351, 433, 483, 484, 494, 545, 553, 570, 608, 609, 610, 613, 616, 623, 624, 810, 813. Search terms: shop, shops, shopping, purchase, purchasing, purchases, buy, buys, buying, marketing, mail order, catalog?, search?, similar?, like?, comparb?, type, equivalent?, equal, same, match?, goods, product??, brand????, item??, equipment, device??, service??, attribute??, characteristic??, feature, size??, model??, compar?, find?, locat?, brows?, window, computer?, software?, internet?, automat?, electronic?, web?, network?, cyberspace?, online, on line, cpu, www, portal, isp, specification??, data, fact, sheet??, etc.