

FIG.2

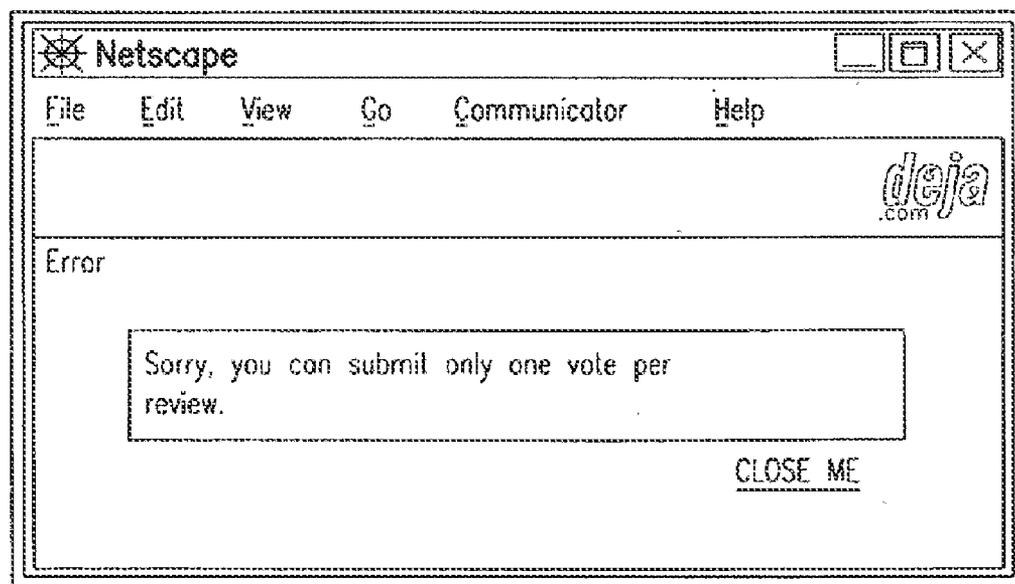


FIG.3

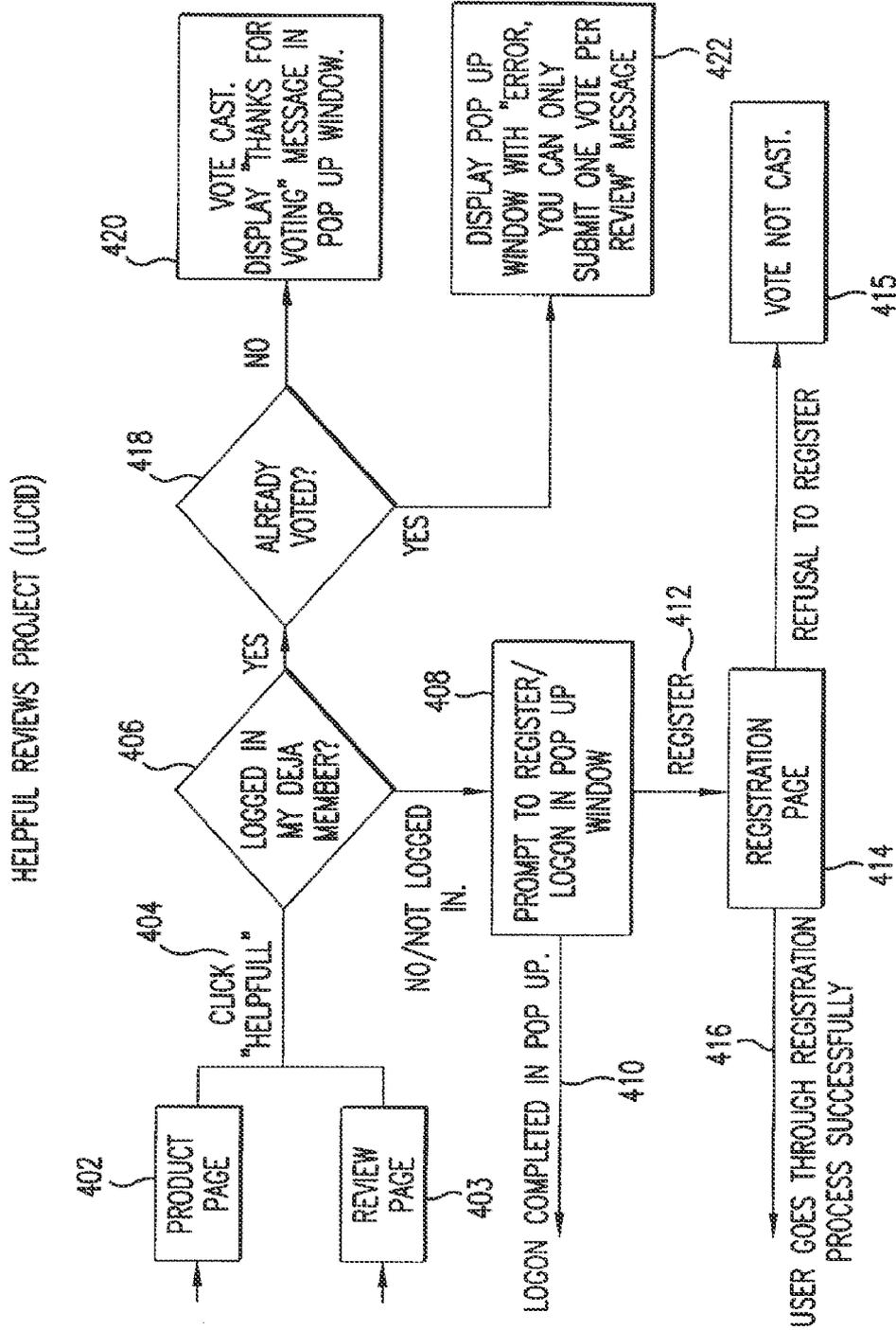


FIG.4

**USER EVALUATION OF CONTENT ON DISTRIBUTED COMMUNICATION NETWORK**

RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This application is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 09/731,019, filed Dec. 7, 2000, which claims the benefit under 35 U.S.C. 119(e) of the filing date of U.S. Provisional Application Ser. No. 60/170,362, filed Dec. 31, 1999, which are incorporated herein by reference in their entirety.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0002] 1. Field of the Invention

[0003] The present invention relates generally to interactive user tools on a distributed communication network, such as the Internet. More particularly, the present invention relates to a system and method for enabling users of content on a distributed communication network to collectively indicate the degree of helpfulness or usefulness of individual items of contents, such as for example reviews of commercially available products and/or services, usenet postings, news articles, etc., by interactively voting or indicating that particular items of content were helpful or otherwise valuable to the user. Subsequent users then are able to sort retrieved items of content by degree of helpfulness or usefulness according to the number of previous users who have indicated that the individual items of content were helpful or otherwise valuable.

[0004] 2. Background and Related Art

[0005] It is generally known in the art to survey consumers regarding the quality of particular products and/or services, and to publish or advertise the results of the survey. Recently, with the rapid technological advancement of the Internet, it has become possible for individual consumers to provide narrative reviews of products and/or services, in addition to standardized scaled ratings. Such reviews can be stored in a server database and retrieved and displayed to users (clients) in response to search queries using known search engines.

[0006] As the number of individual consumers participating in on-line product ratings and posting product reviews continues to grow, so does the amount of information available for subsequent users to evaluate.

[0007] In addition to consumer reviews or ratings of products and services, it is possible to retrieve a very large of amount of information from the Internet relating to any subject at all. For example, information can be retrieved in the form of usenet postings, professional reviews, news articles, on-line catalogs, video and audio clips, etc.

[0008] Consequently, there exists a need in the art to provide a methodology by which users may indicate the particular helpfulness or usefulness of certain individual items of content, whereby subsequent users will be able to sort available reviews by the degree of indicated helpfulness or usefulness, and thereby reduce the amount of information for the user to evaluate, based on the prior experience of other users.

OVERVIEW

[0009] The document relates generally to methods and systems that fulfill the existing need in the art as described above, by providing an interactive user tool on a distributed communication network, whereby a user of an on-line content database can provide an indication that a particular review has

been helpful or otherwise valuable to the user in assessing the quality of the content, e.g., in the case of a product review, in determining whether to purchase or use the reviewed product or service. A tally of such indications is stored in a database associated with the content, and is displayed to subsequent users who retrieve or otherwise view the content.

[0010] This section is intended to provide an overview of subject matter of the present patent application. It is not intended to provide an exclusive or exhaustive explanation of the invention. The detailed description is included to provide further information about the present patent application.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0011] The invention will be described in detail with reference to the following drawings in which:

[0012] FIG. 1 is a screen display which shows stored items of content, and the provision of an interactive element or icon that allows a user to designate a particular item of content as being helpful or otherwise valuable to the user, according to one embodiment of the present invention;

[0013] FIG. 2 is a screen display of a pop-up window confirming the recording of a user's indication that a particular item of content was found to be helpful;

[0014] FIG. 3 is a screen display of a pop-up window declining to record a user's indication that an item of content is helpful in the event that the user has already interactively indicated as such; and

[0015] FIG. 4 is a flow diagram showing a basic program flow for recording an individual user's indications that such user found a particular item of content to be helpful or otherwise valuable to the user, according to one embodiment of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

[0016] FIG. 1 is a screen display illustrating one particular example of the present invention. According to the example, a user of an on-line consumer products and services ratings and reviews site is interested in computer operating systems, and in particular the AmigaOS operating system. A product identification line 100 identifies the AmigaOS as the product whose ratings and reviews are presented on the display.

[0017] A number of scaled numerical ratings 102 based on different criteria are provided for the product, in both graphical and numerical form. In addition to the numerical scaled ratings, the available consumer reviews for the product are indicated in review label 104. In the example, 468 consumer reviews have been posted for the product and stored in the database. One of the stored reviews 106 is displayed at the bottom of the screen. To the right of the review, an indication 112 is provided of the number of users who have found the displayed review helpful. An interactive element or icon 110 is provided adjacent to the displayed review, which enables a user to indicate whether she finds the review helpful by clicking on the element 110 with a pointing device, as is well known in the art.

[0018] Once the user's indication with respect to the displayed review has been received and counted, a pop-up window can be displayed on the user's display screen, as shown for example in FIG. 2, which confirms the receipt of the user's indication by the database interface. If the user has already submitted an indication for the displayed review as being helpful or otherwise valuable, a pop-up window as shown in

FIG. 3 may be displayed to the user informing her that only one indication per user per review will be accepted.

[0019] FIG. 4 is a flow diagram illustrating an example of a process according to one preferred embodiment of the invention whereby a user may submit an indication for a product/service review as being helpful. The example provided hereinafter relates to review of products and/or services for purposes of explanation; however, it is emphasized that the present invention is not limited to product and/or service reviews, but as explained above can be used to filter or sort any individual item of content retrievable by a client from a database.

[0020] As shown in FIG. 4, the user may be at either a product page at step 402 (as shown in FIG. 1), or a review page at step 403, in which a “helpful” element or icon is displayed. In either case, the page contains a number of reviews of different products/services by the same individual reviewer (alternatively, the viewer may be at any page which displays items of content). At step 404, the user clicks on the “helpful” element, and at step 406 it is determined whether the user is logged onto the server as a registered user. If not, the user is prompted at step 408 to register with the server, or to logon to the server (if the user has previously registered). The prompting step may be carried out by displaying a pop-up window to the user.

[0021] At step 410, a previously registered user logs on to the server by entering her user name and password in appropriate fields, and the user is then returned to the product page or review page from which she clicked on the “helpful” element. An unregistered user will click a register element in the pop-up window at step 412, whereby the user will be directed to a register page 414. The unregistered user enters her personal information into the appropriate fields in the register page, and submits the information at step 416, whereby the user is successfully registered and logged in, and is brought back to the product or review page where the user again clicks the “helpful” element, which now tallies the indication.

[0022] In an alternative embodiment, once a user has been successfully logged in, the user can be brought directly to step 418 (described below) without being required to again click the “helpful” element.

[0023] Once the user is logged on to the server as a registered user, at step 418 previously stored user data is checked to determine whether that user has already submitted an indication for a particular review as being helpful. This step prevents users from submitting such indication more than once, and thus prevents the artificial inflation of the appearance of helpfulness of reviews. If it is determined that the user has already submitted an indication, at step 422 a pop-up window as shown in FIG. 3 is displayed, notifying the user of an error because the user has already submitted an indication. The user then can close the pop-up window. This process will repeat itself if the user continues to click the “helpful” element for a review for which the user has already submitted an indication.

[0024] If the user has not already submitted an indication for the review, at step 420 the user’s indication is received and counted, and a pop-up window as shown in FIG. 2 is displayed, confirming to the user that the indication has been tallied.

[0025] As shown in FIG. 1, reviews may be sorted by number of indications of helpfulness or by another criterion as a default. If the user desires to change the order by which the reviews are sorted, the user may click the drop-down menu

item 108 to choose alternative sorting criteria by which the reviews will be sequentially displayed. For example, the user may view reviews by submission date, highest rating, or lowest rating. When more than one person has submitted an indication for particular review, the text string 112 is replaced with “XX people have found this review helpful.” where XX is the number of indications by different users received for the review.

[0026] According to a further aspect of the invention, a reviewer’s “hall of fame” page may be provided, which lists the individual users who have received the most “helpful” indications for reviews they have written. In this way, subsequent users may view the reviewers with the highest number of helpful indications on the “hall of fame” page. This information then may be used by the user in a search, such as by searching for all reviews written by a particular reviewer, or by adding the reviewer’s name to a search string for a particular product.

[0027] The invention having been thus described, it will be apparent to those skilled in the art that the same may be varied in many ways without departing from the spirit and scope of the inventions. For example, while the invention has been described with respect to rating reviews or other content as to “helpfulness,” it is possible to rate the same on alternative characteristics such as writing style, wit or another subjective criterion, or on multiple subjective criteria. All such modifications are intended to be encompassed by the following claims.

What is claimed is:

1. A method comprising:

causing one or more reviews stored in the database to be displayed on a client display connected to the database over a network;

providing an interactive element associated with each of the displayed reviews on the client display, which when selected by a user, generates an indication that the user has found a displayed review helpful in assessing an object of the review;

receiving, at the database, an indication that the user has selected the interactive element; and

incrementing a count of a stored number of indications for the review when the received indication is a first indication received from the user in connection with the displayed review.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein incrementing a count of a stored number of indications for the review includes incrementing the count after determining that the user is a registered user.

3. The method of claim 1, including causing the count of the stored number of indications for the review to be displayed on the client display adjacent to the review.

4. The method of claim 1, including sending an error message to the user if the interactive element is selected more than once by the user for the review.

5. The method of claim 1, including:

sorting the reviews in ascending or descending order as a function of the count corresponding to each review; and causing the reviews to be displayed in the sorted order on the client display.

6. The method of claim 1, including updating the number of indications and resorting the reviews for a subsequent display.

7. The method of claim 1, further comprising:  
 compiling a list of reviewers including names of those reviewers whose reviews have received a highest number of indications; and  
 causing the list of reviewers to be displayed on the client display.

8. The method of claim 1, including  
 causing a field to be displayed on the client display when the user is unregistered, wherein the field is configured to receive registration information; and  
 causing the reviews from the database to be redisplayed on the client display upon receiving the registration information.

9. The method of claim 1, including not incrementing the count of the stored number of indications for the review based on the received indication not being the first indication.

10. A system comprising:  
 a server coupled to a database via a network, the server configured to:

cause one or more reviews stored in the database to be displayed on a remote client display connected to the network;

provide an interactive element associated with each of the displayed reviews on the client display, wherein the interactive element, when selected by a user, generates an indication that the user has found a displayed review helpful in assessing an object of the review;

receive, via the network, the indication that the user selected the interactive element; and

increment a count of a stored number of indications for the review when the received indication is a first indication received from the user in connection with the displayed review.

11. The system of claim 10, wherein the server is configured to cause an error message to be displayed on the client display when receiving, via the network, the indication that the user selected the interactive element more than once.

12. The system of claim 10, wherein the server is configured to:

sort the reviews in ascending or descending order as a function of the count corresponding to each review; and  
 display the reviews in the sorted order on the first computer.

13. The system of claim 10, wherein the server is configured to update the number of indications and re-sort the reviews for subsequent display.

14. The system of claim 10, wherein the server is configured to:

compile a list of reviewers that includes names of those reviewers whose reviews have received a highest number of indications; and

cause the list of reviewers to be displayed on the client display.

15. The system of claim 10, wherein the server is configured to cause the count of the stored number of indications for the review to be displayed on the client display adjacent to the review.

16. The system of claim 10, wherein the server is configured to increment the count when the user is registered with the server.

17. The system of claim 10, wherein the server is configured to:

cause a field to be displayed on the client display when the user is unregistered;

receive registration information entered into the field; and

cause the reviews from the database to be redisplayed on the client display upon receiving the registration information.

18. The system of claim 10, wherein the server is configured to increment the count of the stored number of indications for the review based on the received indication not being the first indication.

19. A non-transitory machine-readable medium including instructions which, when performed by the machine, cause the machine to perform acts comprising:

causing reviews stored in a database to be displayed on a client display connected to the database over a network; providing an interactive element associated with each of the displayed reviews to be displayed on the client display, which when selected by a user, indicates that the user has found a displayed review helpful in assessing an object of the review;

receiving, at the database, an indication that the user has selected the interactive element; and

incrementing a count of a stored number of indications for the review when the received indication is a first indication received from the user in connection with the displayed review.

20. The machine readable medium of claim 19 including instructions, which when performed by the machine, cause the count of the number of indications for the review to be displayed on the client display adjacent to the review.

21. The machine readable medium of claim 19 including instructions, which when performed by the machine, cause the reviews to be sorted in ascending or descending order as a function of the count corresponding to each review, and cause the reviews to be displayed in the sorted order on the client display.

22. The machine readable medium of claim 19 including instructions, which when performed by the machine, cause the number of indications to be updated and the reviews re-sorted for a subsequent display.

23. The machine readable medium of claim 19 including instructions, which when performed by the machine, cause an error message to be sent to the client display for display to the user when the interactive element is selected more than once by the user for the review.

24. The machine readable medium of claim 19 including instructions, which when performed by the machine, cause a list of reviewers to be compiled, wherein the list includes names of those reviewers whose reviews have received a highest number of indications, and cause the list of reviewers to be displayed on the client display.

25. The machine readable medium of claim 19 including instructions, which when performed by the machine, cause incrementing the count when the user is a registered user.

26. The machine readable medium of claim 19 including instructions, which when performed by the machine, cause a field to be displayed on the client display when the user is unregistered, wherein the field is configured to receive registration information, and cause the reviews from the database to be redisplayed on the client display upon receiving the registration information.

27. The machine readable medium of claim 19 including instructions, which when performed by the machine, cause the count of the stored number of indications for the review to not be incremented based on the received indication not being the first indication from the user in connection with the displayed review.