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MARKET DATA AND EVALUATING THE
MARKET VALUE OF ITEMS**(71) Applicant: **BuyMetrics, Inc.**, Atlanta, GA (US)(72) Inventor: **Valerie Hansen**, Racine, WI (US)(21) Appl. No.: **15/237,518**(22) Filed: **Aug. 15, 2016****Publication Classification**

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G06F 17/30 (2006.01)

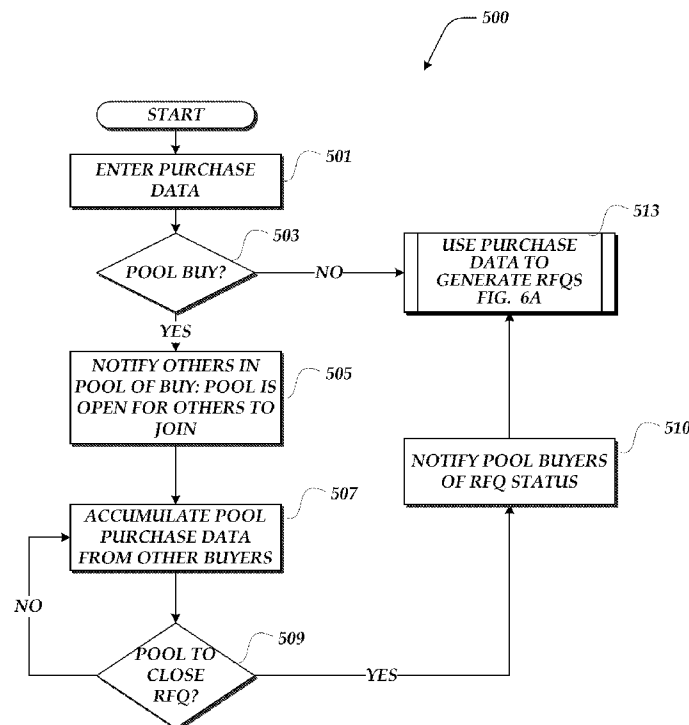
(52) **U.S. Cl.**
CPC **G06Q 20/10** (2013.01); **G06F 17/30528**
(2013.01); **G06F 17/30864** (2013.01); **G06F**
17/3053 (2013.01); **G06F 17/30554** (2013.01);
G06F 7/08 (2013.01); **G06Q 30/0206**
(2013.01)

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(63) Continuation of application No. 14/740,630, filed on Jun. 16, 2015, now Pat. No. 9,418,371, which is a continuation of application No. 14/262,682, filed on Apr. 25, 2014, now Pat. No. 9,092,825, which is a continuation of application No. 13/869,942, filed on Apr. 24, 2013, now Pat. No. 8,762,258, which is a continuation of application No. 13/597,200, filed on Aug. 28, 2012, now Pat. No. 8,442,888, which is a continuation of application No. 13/475,900, filed on May 18, 2012, now Pat. No. 8,321,317, which is a continuation of application No. 13/118,351, filed on May 27, 2011, now Pat. No. 8,224,729, which is a continuation of application No. 12/952,083, filed on Nov. 22, 2010, now Pat. No. 7,966,240, which is a continuation of application No. 11/394,540, filed on Mar. 31, 2006, now Pat. No. 7,840,462, which is a continuation of application No. 09/607,502, filed on Jun. 28, 2000, now Pat. No. 7,043,457.

(57) **ABSTRACT**

A system includes a remotely-located server implementing a metric server adapter, a metrics application, and a communication application. The metric server adapter includes governing logic that manages at least one evaluation service and a plurality of predefined instructions for managing metric data. The metrics application is a production application that operates in coordination with the metric server adapter. Receipt or retrieval of at least one price data set triggers the metrics application to obtain metric data that includes market reference price data, evaluate attributes of each responsive item in the metric data to dynamically discover a difference in the attribute data, and dynamically define transaction-specific instructions for adapting the metric data for a respective item in the price data set. One or more adjustment values transform the market reference price data, and one or more evaluation metrics are communicated to the buyer-agent computing device.



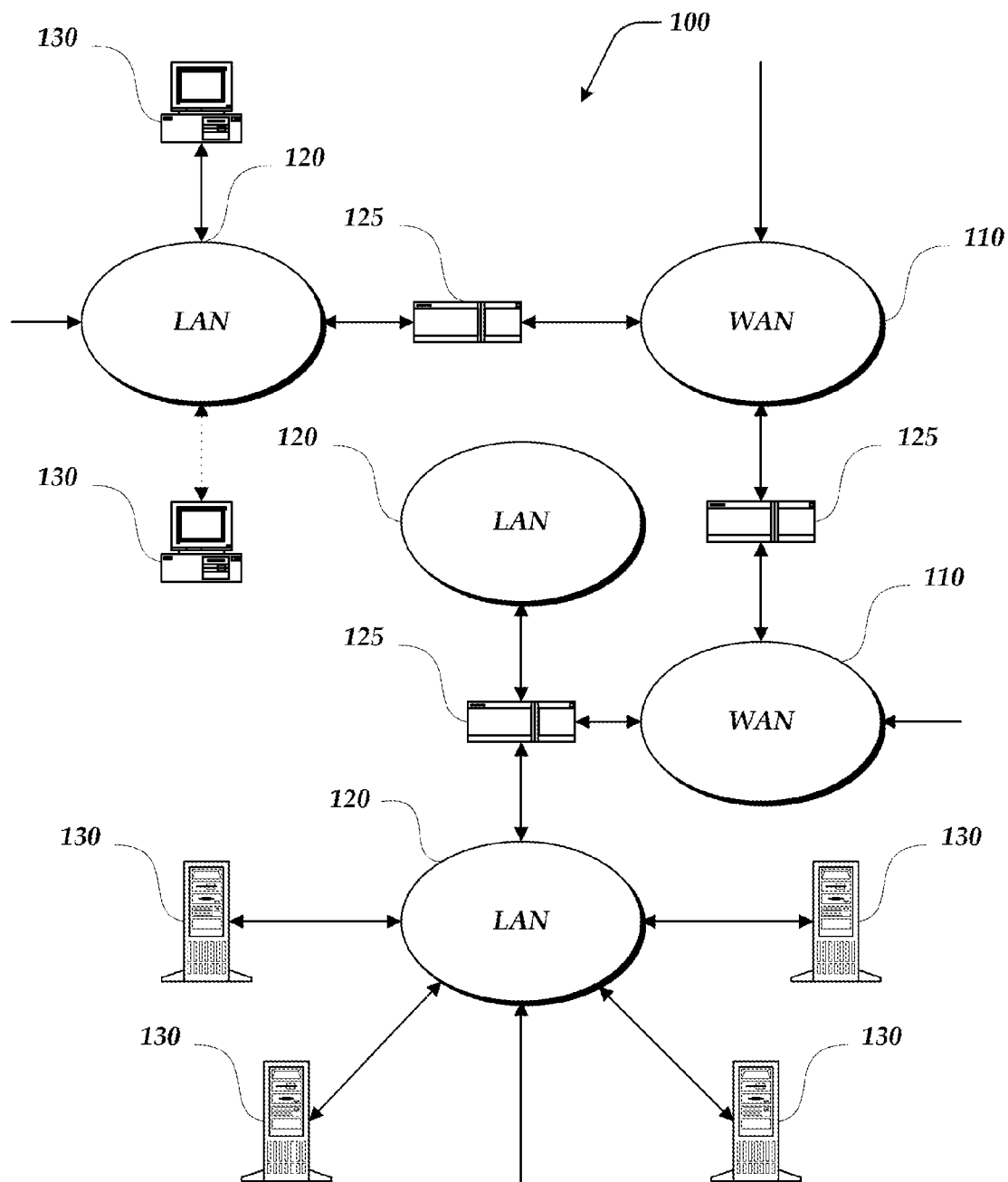


Fig.1.
(PRIOR ART)

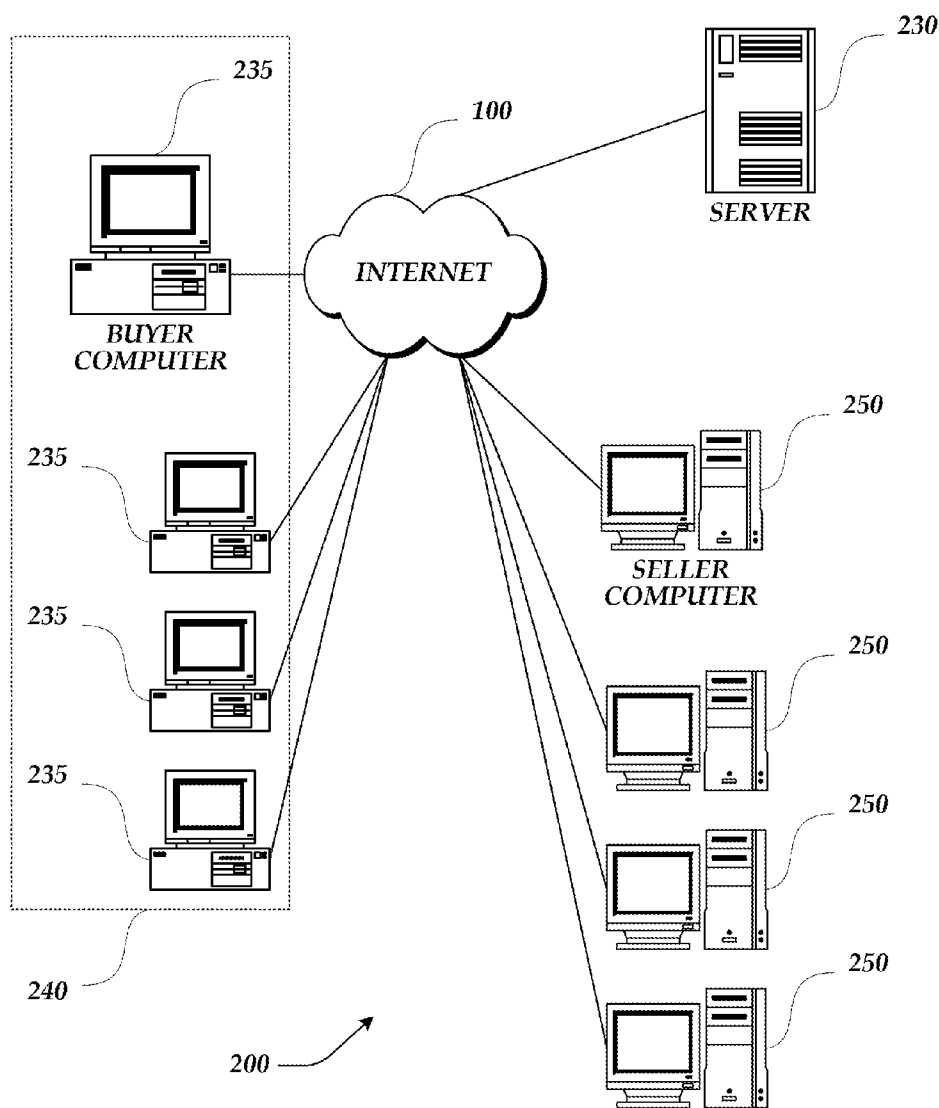
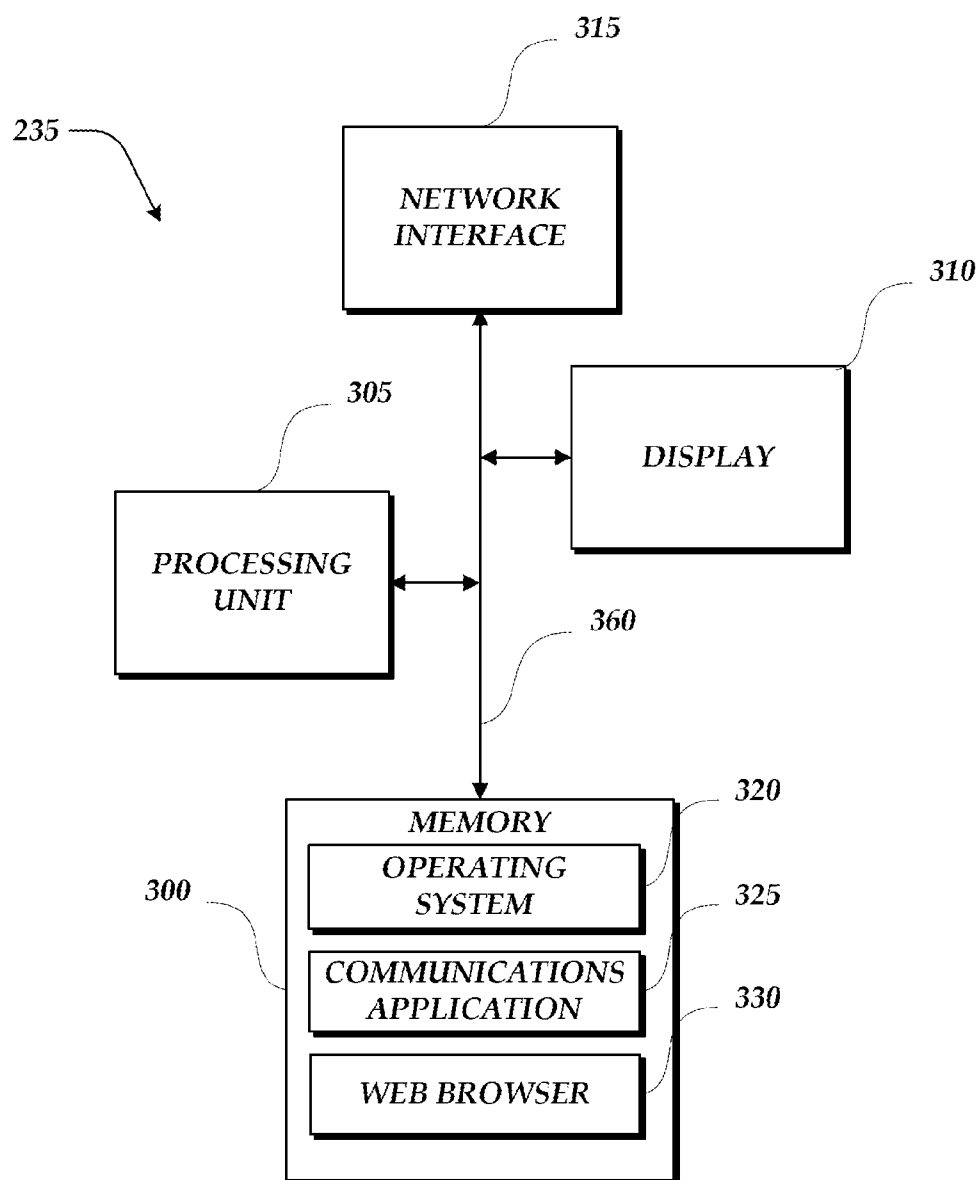


Fig.2.

*Fig.3.*

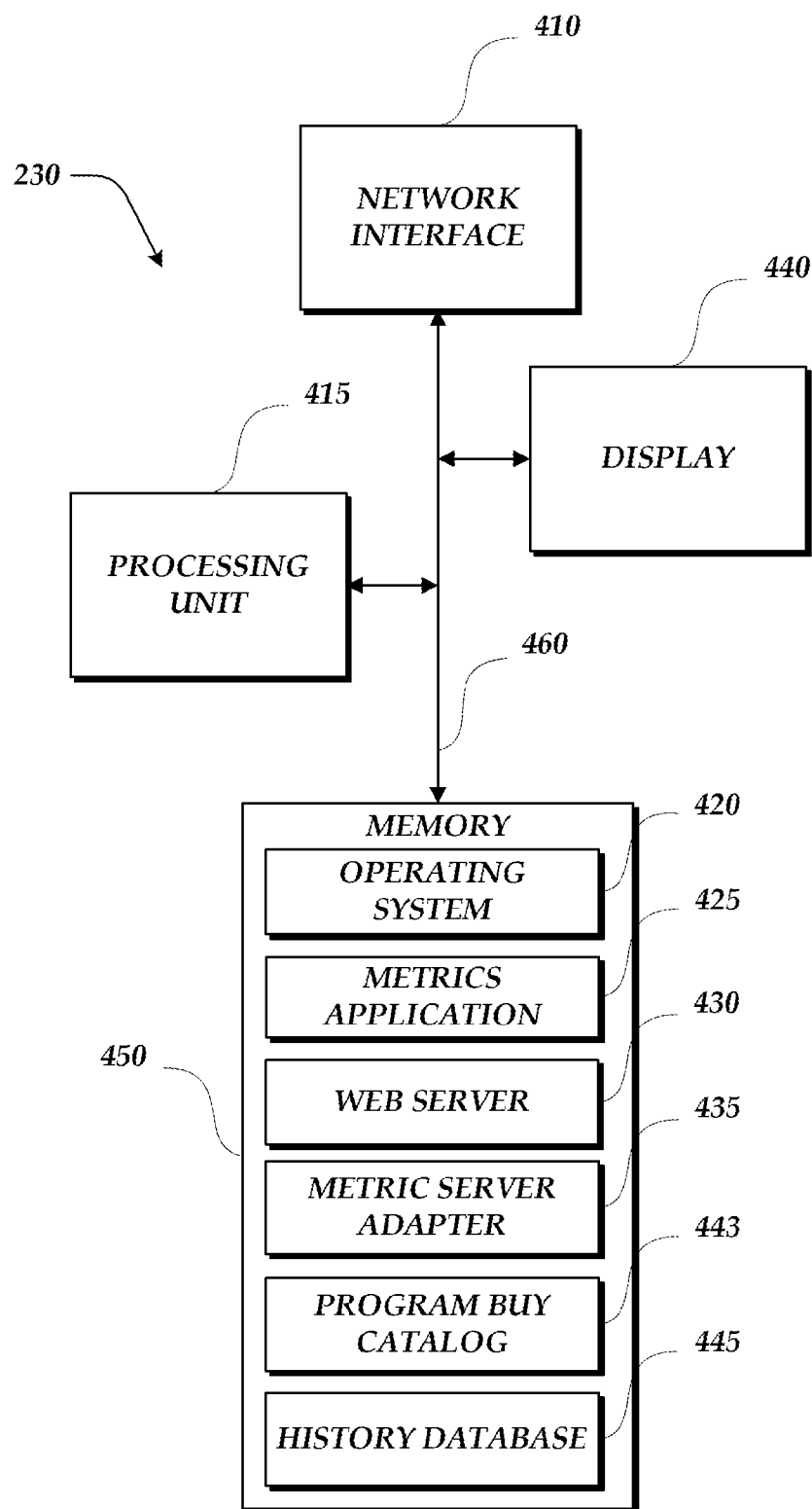
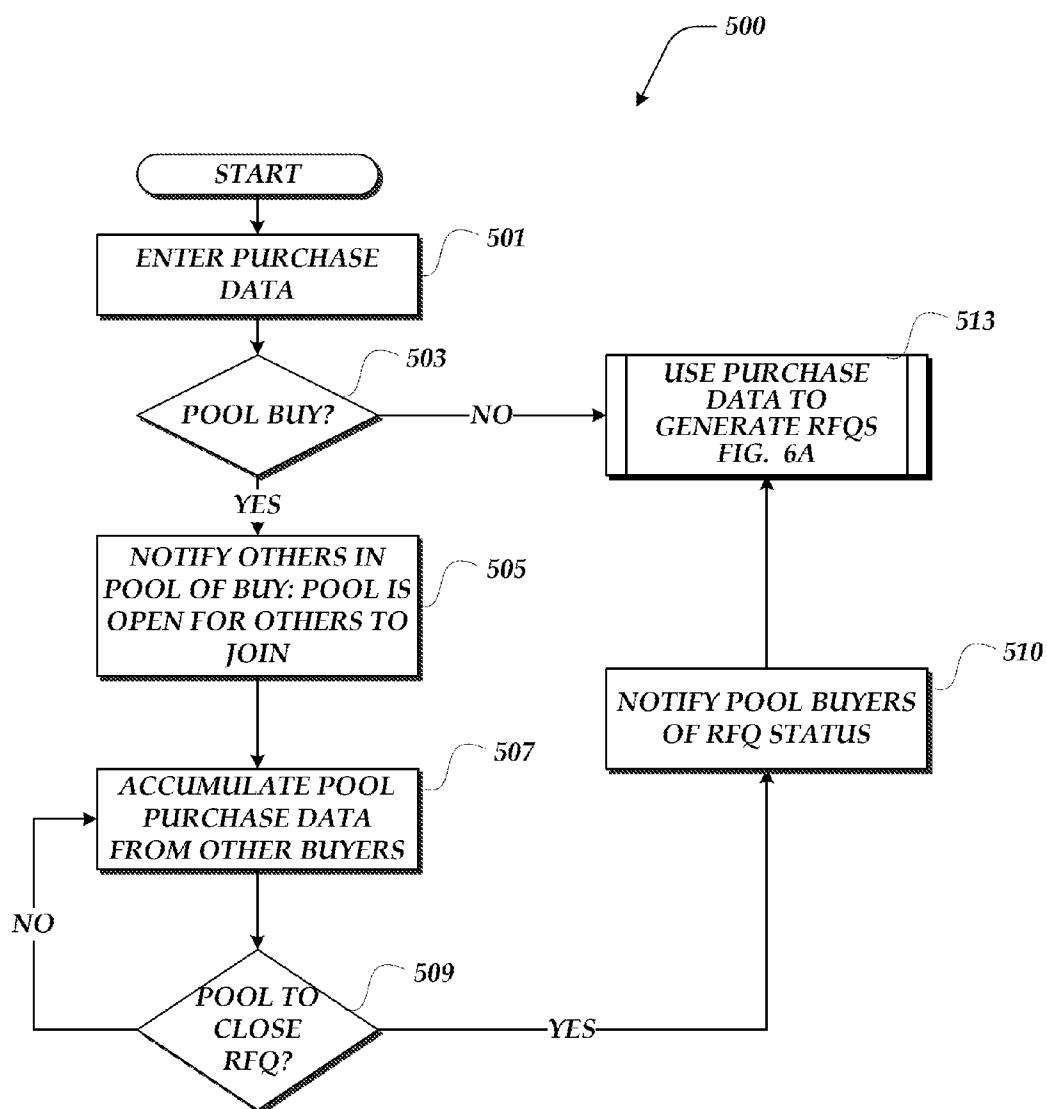


Fig.4.

*Fig.5.*

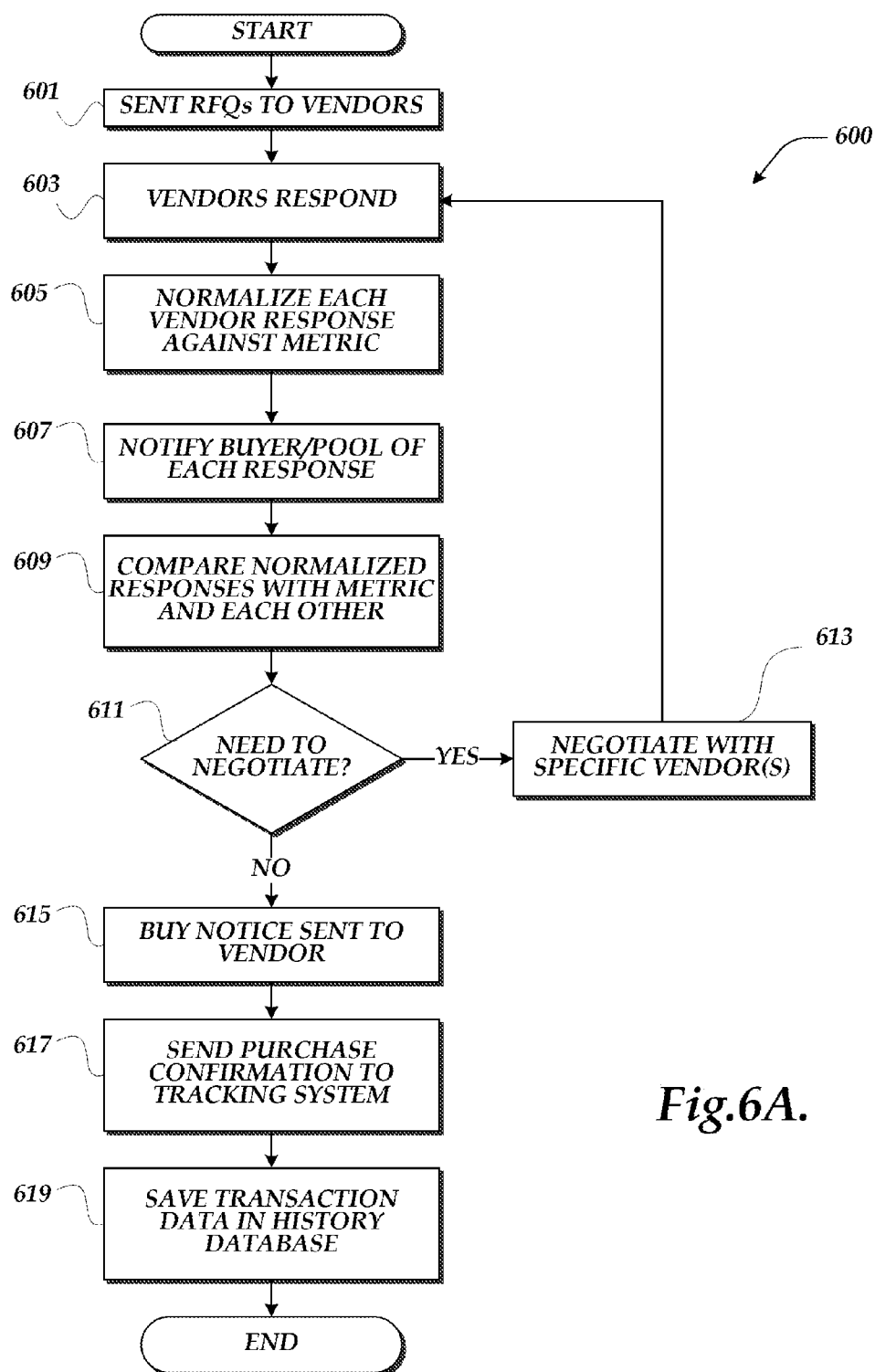
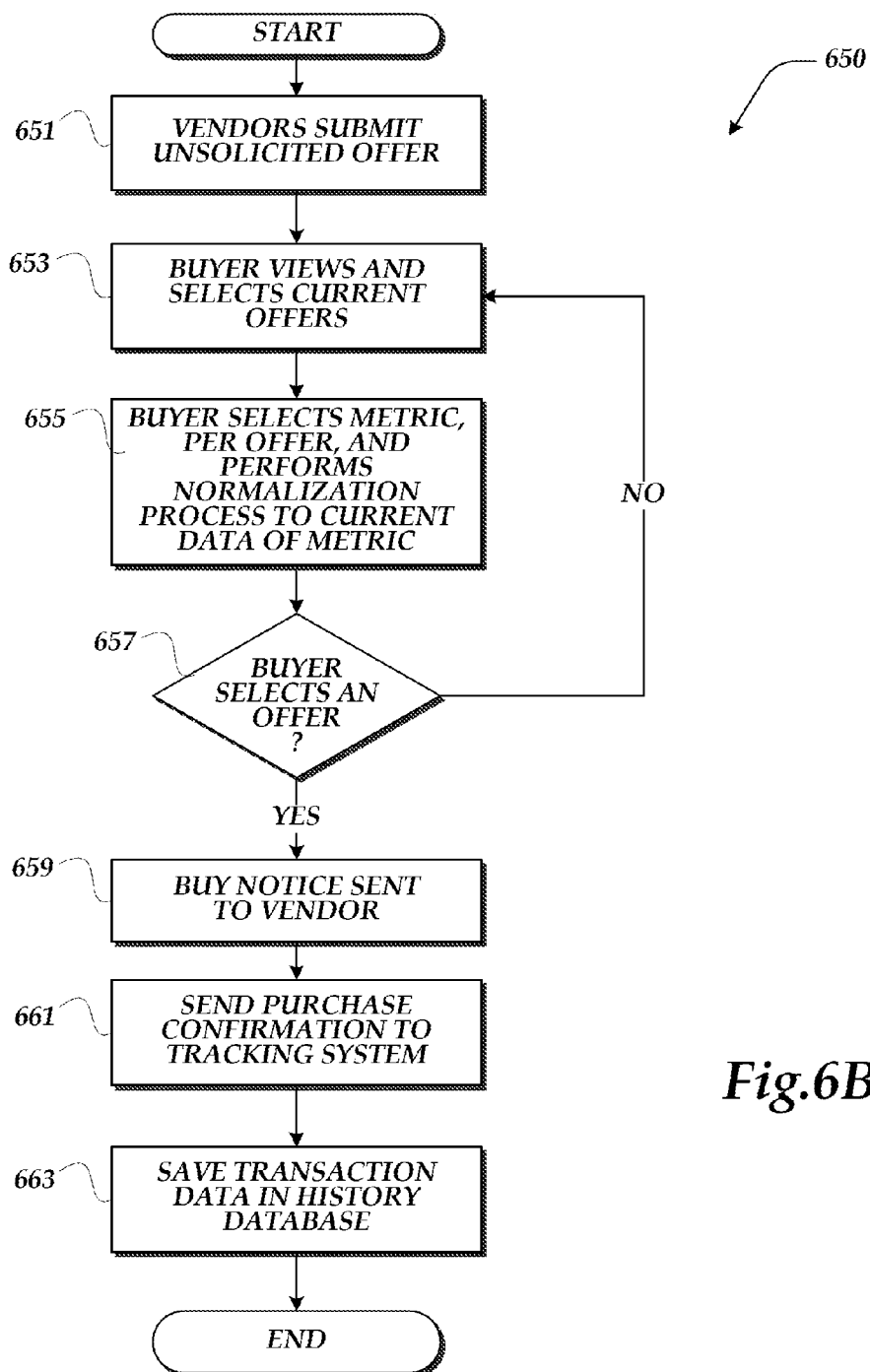
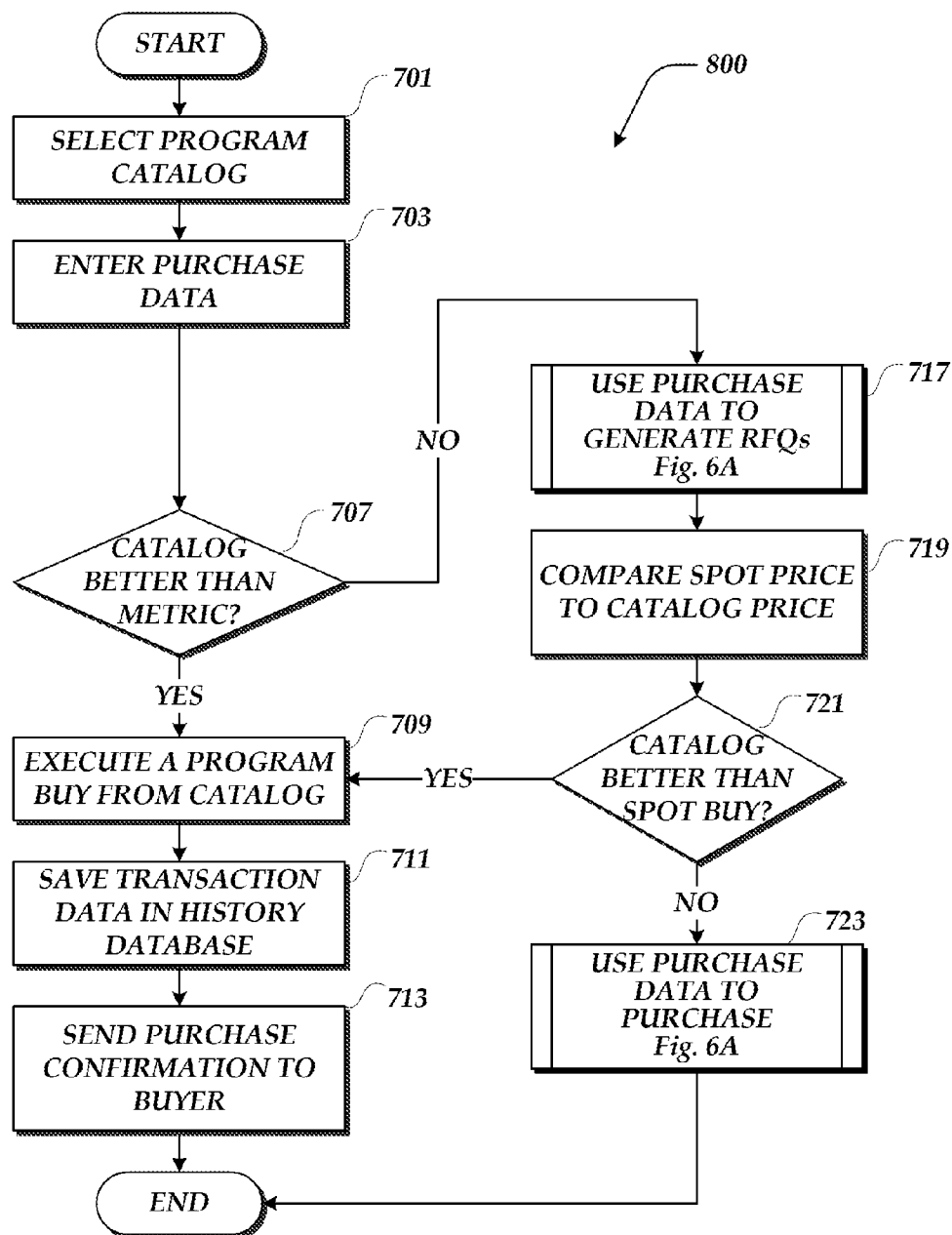


Fig.6A.

*Fig.6B.*

*Fig.7.*

http://www.probuild.com/buymetrics/RFQSoftwood.asp

FILE EDIT VIEW FAVORITES TOOLS HELP

BACK FORWARD STOP REFRESH HOME SEARCH FAVORITES HISTORY MAIL SIZE PRINT

LINKS >> ADDRESS http://www.probuild.com/buymetrics/RFQSoftwood.asp GO

Spot-Buy Vendors

Scott Melt ABC Lumber
Jeff Heyda GP
Quality Lumber
Fast Broker
Lumber Supplier

RFQ Posting Date: 6/19/2000
RFQ Label:

807

809

806

803

805B

805D

807

808

804

810

812

814

Software RFQ

CALCULATED VALUES

Metric\$/M: 342.075
TotalIBF: 57624
TotalILF: 294
TotalWeight: 115248

Delivered on or Before: For Delivery week of (FORWARD PRICE): 10/01/00

City: Delivery (TL, Car,) Lumber Type 8 10 12 14 16 18 20 Delivery Location
1 Car50 2 x 4 SPF S & B 4 6 3 5 6 Chicago, IL

Other Tally: Metric 2 x 4 WSPF S&B Unit Size: 294
805A 805C 805E

Notes: Forward price: Do not ship before 10/1/00. Do not invoice until shipment.
Add Additional Tally (Save) None Post to Vendors
Post Buyer Pool

Fig.8A.

http://www.probuild.com/buymetrics/RFQSoftwood/Compare.asp?Order=T&RFQID=58

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BACK FORWARD STOP REFRESH HOME SEARCH FAVORITES HISTORY MAIL SIZE PRINT

LINKS ADDRESS http://www.probuild.com/buymetrics/RFQSoftwood/Compare.asp?Order=T&RFQID=58 GO

Requested Tally(s):

Delivered on or Before: 7/1/00 For Delivery week of (FORWARD PRICE):

Qty	Delivery	Lumber Type	8	10	12	14	16	18	20	Delivery Location	Price	Price Units
1	Car50	2 x 4 SPF S & B	4	3	3	2	6			Kingston, Pennsylvania		
or												

Tally Response Information:

Comparison	PCS/Unit	294	Price/M	360	Freight	Quote \$ / Metric \$	1,080,174	Metric \$ / M:	333,2798	View Calculation	Buy!	
Delivered on or Before: 7/1/00												
Qty	Delivery	Lumber Type	8	10	12	14	16	18	20	Delivery Location <td>Price<td>Price Units</td></td>	Price <td>Price Units</td>	Price Units
1	Car50	2 x 4 SPF S & B	4	3	4	2	6			Kingston, Pennsylvania	360	m
or										net 10		

807 804 806 803

820 808 813 820/4

816 815 813/4

805A 805B-805C 805D 805E

Delivered on or Before: 7/1/00 For Delivery week of (FORWARD PRICE):

Comparison	PCS/Unit	294	Price/M	360	Freight	Quote \$ / Metric \$,927,0521	Metric \$ / M:	345,1802	View Calculation	Buy!	
Delivered on or Before: 7/1/00												
Qty	Delivery	Lumber Type	8	10	12	14	16	18	20	Delivery Location <td>Price<td>Price Units</td></td>	Price <td>Price Units</td>	Price Units
1	Car50	2 x 4 SPF S & B	4	3	4	2	6			Kingston, Pennsylvania	320	m
or										net 10		

*New response old RFQ

Fig.8B.

<http://www.probuild.com/buymetrics/RFAQSoftware/Compare.asp?Order=T&RFQID=82>
FILE EDIT VIEW FAVORITES TOOLS HELP

LINKS >> **ADDRESS** <http://www.probuild.com/buymetrics/RFAQSoftware/Compare.asp?Order=T&RFQID=82> **GO**

Softwoods RFQ Summary

Requested Tally(s):

Delivered on or Before: 8/01/00		For Delivery week of (FORWARD PRICE):										
Qty	Delivery	Lumber Type	8	10	12	14	16	18	20	Delivery Location	Price	Price Units
1	Car50	2 x 4 ESPF 2&B	4	4	6	2	6	Chicago, Illinois				
or												

Tally Response Information:

Lumber Supplier

Comparison:	PCS Unit: 294	Price: M: 320	Freight:	Quote: S	Metric: \$0.9700093	Metric: \$	M: 333.2790	View Calculation Detail	Buy
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Delivered on or Before: 8/1/00

For Delivery week of (FORWARD PRICE):												
Qty	Delivery	Lumber Type	8	10	12	14	16	18	20	Delivery Location	Price	Price Units
1	Car50	2 x 4 ESPF 2&B	4	4	6	3	5	Chicago, Illinois		320	m	
net 10												

Lumber Supplier

Comparison:	PCS Unit: 294	Price: M: 322	Freight:	Quote: S	Metric: \$0.9700093	Metric: \$	M: 331.791	View Calculation Detail	Buy
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Delivered on or Before: 8/1/00

For Delivery week of (FORWARD PRICE):												
Qty	Delivery	Lumber Type	8	10	12	14	16	18	20	Delivery Location	Price	Price Units
1	Car50	2 x 4 ESPF 2&B	4	4	6	2	6	Chicago, Illinois		322	m	
net 10												

Fig. 8C.

Fig. 8D.

http://www.probuild.com/buymetrics/SoftwoodTally.asp?MetricID=194\$Action=FromSummary

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LINKS ADDRESS http://www.probuild.com/buymetrics/SoftwoodTally.asp?MetricID=194\$Action=FromSummary GO

New Softwood RFQ
New Panel RFQ
New Program and Buy RFQ
List Open Softwoods RFQs
List Submitted Softwoods RFQs
List Open Panels RFQs
List Submitted Panels RFQs
List Unsolicited Offers
List Closed Softwoods RFQs
List Closed Panels RFQs
Tally Calculator Manager

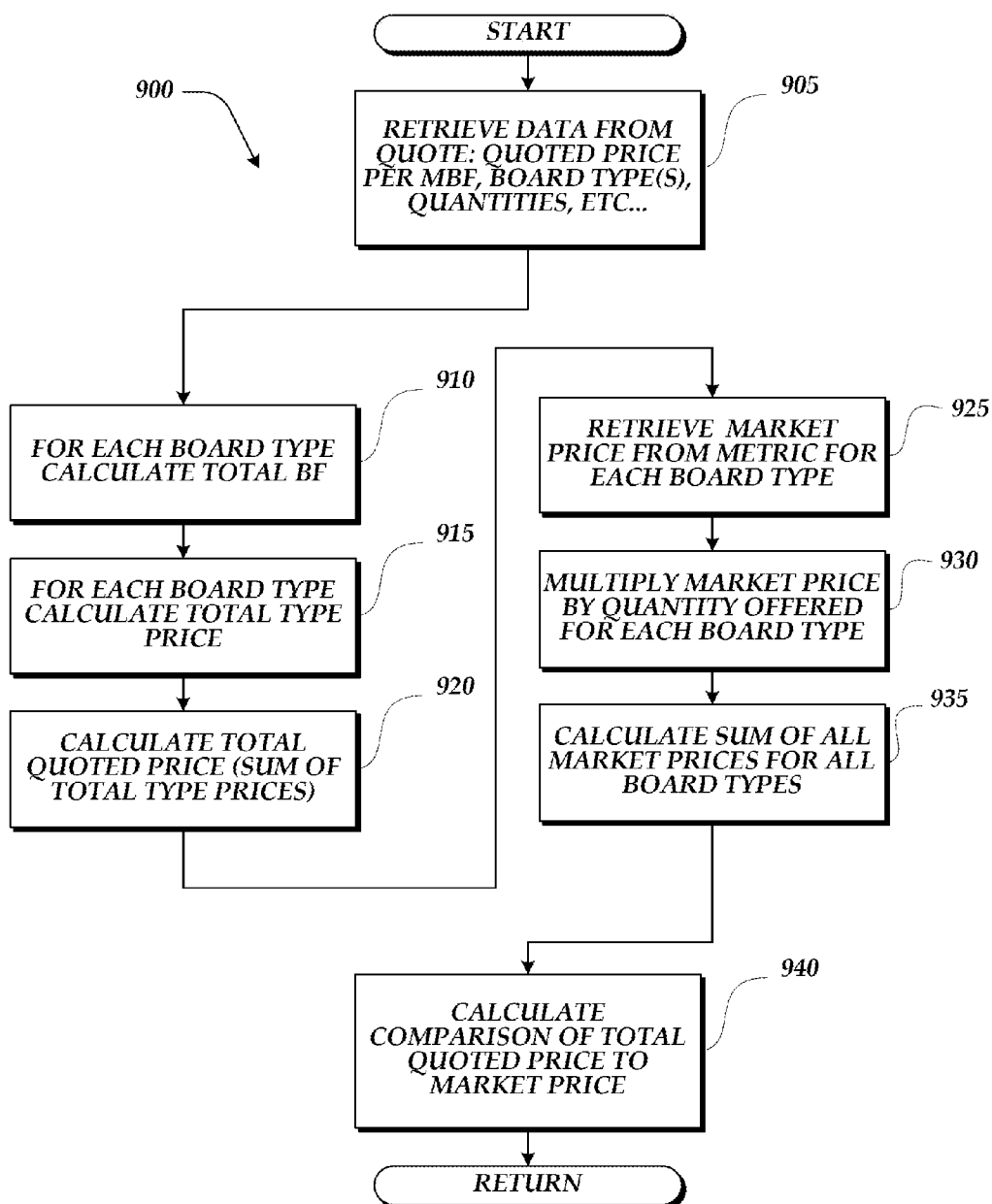
Lumber Type:
2 x 4 WSPF 2&B
2 x 6 WSPF 2&B
2 x 4 ESPF 2&B Boston
2 x 8 WSPF 2&B
2 x 10 WSPF 2&B

Calculate

PCS Per Unit: Price/M Lumber Dimension: Freight: Metric \$/M: Quote \$/Metric \$

294 322 2 x 4 331.791 0.970490

Length	Qty	PCS	Piece	BF Total	Invoice Cost	Price	Spec Cost	Adj Cost	Metric \$/M	Adj Piece Cost	Total:
8	4	1176	5.3333	6272	2019.584	220	1881.6	1826.075	291.147	1.553	1826.328
10	4	1176	6.6667	7840	2524.48	225	2391.2	2320.636	295.999	1.973	2320.248
12	6	1764	8	14112	4544.064	220	4233.6	4108.668	291.147	2.329	4108.356
14	2	588	9.3333	5488	1767.136	260	1865.92	1810.857	329.967	3.08	1811.04
16	6	1764	10.6667	18816	6058.752	295	7056	6847.78	363.934	3.882	6847.848
18		0	12			285					
20		0	13.3333			285					
TOTALS	22	6468		52528	16914.016		17428.32	16914.016			16913.82

*Fig.9.*

AUTOMATED SYSTEM FOR ADAPTING MARKET DATA AND EVALUATING THE MARKET VALUE OF ITEMS

BACKGROUND

[0001] Technical Field

[0002] This present disclosure generally relates to electronic commerce software applications and, more particularly, to evaluating prices and transactions for purchasing.

[0003] Description of the Related Art

[0004] Commodity items such as lumber, agricultural products, metals, and livestock/meat are usually traded in the open market between a number of buyers and sellers. The sales transactions of most commodity items involve a number of parameters. For instance, in the trade of commodity lumber, a buyer usually orders materials by specifying parameters such as lumber species, grade, size (i.e., 2×4, 2×10, etc.), and length, as well as the “tally” or mix of units of various lengths within the shipment, method of transportation (i.e., rail or truck), shipping terms (i.e., FOB or delivered), and desired date of receipt, with each parameter influencing the value of the commodity purchase. Given the multiple possible combinations of factors, a commodity buyer often finds it difficult to objectively compare similar but unequal offerings among competing vendors.

[0005] For example, in a case where a lumber buyer desires to order a railcar load of spruce (SPF) 2×4’s of #2 & Better grade, the buyer would query vendors offering matching species and grade carloads seeking the best match for the buyer’s need or tally preference at the lowest market price. Lumber carloads are quoted at a price per thousand board feet for all material on the railcar. When the quoted parameters are not identical, it is very difficult for buyers to determine the comparative value of unequal offerings.

[0006] Typically, a lumber buyer will find multiple vendors each having different offerings available. For example, a railcar of SPF 2×4’s may be quoted at a rate of \$300/MBF (thousand board feet) by multiple vendors. Even though the MBF price is equal, one vendor’s carload may represent significantly greater marketplace value because it contains the more desirable lengths of 2×4’s, such as market-preferred 16-foot 2×4’s. When the offering price varies in addition to the mix of lengths, it becomes increasingly difficult to compare quotes from various vendors. Further, because construction projects often require long lead times, the lumber product may need to be priced now, but not delivered until a time in the future. Alternately, another species of lumber (i.e., southern pine) may represent an acceptable substitute.

[0007] Therefore, from the foregoing, there is a need for a method and system that allows buyers to evaluate the price of commodity offerings possessing varying shipping parameters.

BRIEF SUMMARY

[0008] Described herein is a system that operates in a networked environment. In at least one aspect, the system comprises a remotely-located server that includes a network interface, a non-transitory computer-readable medium having computer-executable instructions stored thereon, and a processor in communication with the network interface and the computer-readable medium. The processor is configured to execute the computer-executable instructions stored in the

computer-readable medium. When executed, the computer-executable instructions implement a plurality of applications including a metric server adapter, a metrics application, and at least one communication application.

[0009] The metric server adapter is a governing logic application programmed to manage at least one evaluation service and a plurality of predefined instructions for managing metric data, including industry-specific instructions or a buyer-agent’s customized instructions, to dynamically define transaction-specific instructions for adapting metric data.

[0010] The metrics application is a production application programmed to manage one or more purchase and/or analysis processes and to invoke and execute the at least one evaluation service in coordination with the governing logic application. The metrics application is further programmed to manage one or more user interfaces that, in operation, facilitate interactions with the remotely-located server.

[0011] The at least one communication application is programmed to manage one or more protocols that facilitate communications between one or more computing devices and the remotely-located server via the network interface. In operation, a triggering request received from a buyer-agent computing device initiating the at least one evaluation service causes the at least one communication application to identify an applicable protocol for communicating with the buyer-agent computing device and triggers the metrics application to receive one or more product specification data sets from the buyer-agent computing device. Each product specification data set identifies at least one item that is defined by a plurality of attributes having attribute data that includes two or more parameter values, or a plurality of items having a plurality of attributes that differ in accordance with at least one parameter value.

[0012] Using one or more purchase processes, the metrics application receives or retrieves a plurality of price data sets responsive to at least one item identified in the one or more product specification data sets. Each received or retrieved price data set represents an offer to sell and includes price data for at least one item possessing a plurality of attributes having attribute data that includes at least one parameter value.

[0013] Receipt or retrieval of at least one price data set triggers the metrics application to invoke the at least one evaluation service which causes the metrics application, for each price data set, to obtain metric data from at least one data source accessible to the remotely-located server. The obtained metric data represents market reference data for at least one responsive item having attributes corresponding to attributes of a respective item as identified in the price data set and includes market reference price data of a current time or current period of time. Each responsive item in the metric data possesses a plurality of attributes having attribute data that includes at least one parameter value, and wherein at least one responsive item in the obtained metric data differs by at least one parameter value from the respective item as identified in the price data set.

[0014] The metrics application is further caused to evaluate the plurality of attributes of each responsive item in the metric data relative to the plurality of attributes for the respective item as identified in the price data set to dynamically discover a difference in the attribute data. The difference in the attribute data is disclosed to the metric server adapter and enables the metric server adapter to contextually

determine which of the predefined instructions for managing metric data are applicable to the responsive item in the metric data. The metric server adapter uses the attributes and one or more parameter values as identified for the respective item in the price data set with the predefined instructions determined to be applicable to the responsive item in the metric data to dynamically define transaction-specific instructions for adapting the metric data for the respective item.

[0015] The metrics application normalizes the metric data by executing, in coordination with the metric server adapter, the transaction-specific instructions for adapting the metric data for the respective item. Execution of at least one transaction-specific instruction causes one or more adjustment values to be generated and applied to the market reference price data for at least one responsive item that differs by at least one parameter value from the respective item as identified in the price data set, transforming the market reference price data for the at least one responsive item and automatically producing one or more transaction-specific market reference price data values for the respective item as identified in the price data set.

[0016] The metrics application generates one or more evaluation metrics that pertain to the at least one evaluation service for the respective item as identified in the price data set. Each evaluation metric is based, at least in part, on the one or more transaction-specific market reference price data values produced for the respective item as identified in the price data set. The metrics application sorts and/or ranks the plurality of price data sets using one or more of the evaluation metrics generated for the at least one item as identified in each price data set.

[0017] The metrics application is further programmed to communicate, in cooperation with the at least one communication application, at least a subset of the sorted and/or ranked price data sets and the one or more evaluation metrics generated for the at least one item as identified in each communicated price data set to at least the buyer-agent computing device from which the one or more product specification data sets were received.

[0018] In another aspect of the present disclosure, a triggering request received from a user-agent computing device initiating the at least one evaluation service causes the at least one communication application to identify an applicable protocol for communicating with the user-agent computing device and triggers the metrics application to receive at least one product specification data set from the user-agent computing device. Each product specification data set identifies at least one item that is defined by a plurality of attributes having attribute data that includes two or more parameter values, or a plurality of items having a plurality of attributes that differ in accordance with at least one parameter value. Using one or more purchase processes, the metrics application receives or retrieves at least one price data set responsive to at least one item identified in the at least one product specification data set. The at least one price data set represents an offer to sell and includes price data for at least one item possessing a plurality of attributes having attribute data that includes at least one parameter value.

[0019] Receipt of at least one product specification data set and receipt or retrieval at least one price data set responsive to at least one item identified in the at least one product specification data set triggers the metrics application to invoke the at least one evaluation service which causes the

metrics application, for each received product specification data set and for each received or retrieved price data set, to obtain metric data from at least one data source accessible to the remotely-located server. The obtained metric data represents market reference data for at least one responsive item having attributes that correspond to attributes of a respective item as identified in the product specification data set or the price data set and includes market reference price data of a current time or current period of time. Each responsive item in the metric data possesses a plurality of attributes having attribute data that includes at least one parameter value, and at least one responsive item in the obtained metric data differs by at least one parameter value from the respective item as identified in the product specification data set or the price data set.

[0020] The metrics application is further causes to evaluate the plurality of attributes of each responsive item in the metric data relative to the plurality of attributes for the respective item as identified in the product specification data set or the price data set to dynamically discover a difference in the attribute data. The difference in the attribute data is disclosed to the metric server adapter and enables the metric server adapter to contextually determine which of the predefined instructions for managing metric data are applicable to the responsive item in the metric data. The metric server adapter uses the attributes and one or more parameter values as identified for the respective item in the product specification data set or the price data set with the predefined instructions determined to be applicable to the responsive item in the metric data to dynamically define transaction-specific instructions for adapting the metric data for the respective item.

[0021] The metrics application normalizes the metric data by executing, in coordination with the metric server adapter, the transaction-specific instructions for adapting the metric data for the respective item in the product specification data set or the price data set. Execution of at least one transaction-specific instruction causes one or more adjustment values to be generated and applied to the market reference price data for at least one responsive item that differs by at least one parameter value from the respective item as identified in the product specification data set or the price data set, transforming the market reference price data for the at least one responsive item and automatically producing one or more transaction-specific market reference price data values for the respective item as identified in the product specification data set or the price data set.

[0022] The metrics application generates one or more evaluation metrics that pertain to the at least one evaluation service for the respective item as identified in the product specification data set and as identified in the received or retrieved price data set. Each evaluation metric is based, at least in part, on the one or more transaction-specific market reference data values produced for the respective item.

[0023] The metrics application is further programmed to communicate, in cooperation with the at least one communication application, the one or more evaluation metrics generated for the at least one item as identified in each product specification data set and each price data set, via the network interface, to at least the user-agent computing device from which the one or more product specification data sets were received.

[0024] In yet another aspect of the present disclosure, a triggering request received from a buyer-agent computing

device initiating the at least one evaluation service causes the at least one communication application to identify an applicable protocol for communicating with the buyer-agent computing device and triggers the metrics application to receive one or more product specification data sets from a buyer-agent computing device. Each product specification data set identifies at least one item that is defined by a plurality of attributes having attribute data that includes two or more parameter values, or a plurality of items having a plurality of attributes that differ in accordance with at least one parameter value.

[0025] Using a first purchase process, the metrics application receives or retrieves at least one price data set responsive to at least one item identified in the one or more product specification data sets. Each price data set comprises an offer to sell that includes price data for at least one item possessing a plurality of attributes having attribute data that includes at least one parameter value.

[0026] Receipt or retrieval of at least one price data set triggers the metrics application to invoke the at least one evaluation service which causes the metrics application, for each price data set, to obtain metric data from at least one data source accessible to the remotely-located server. The obtained metric data represents market reference data for at least one responsive item having attributes corresponding to attributes of a respective item as identified in the price data set and includes market reference price data of a current time or current period of time. Each responsive item in the metric data possesses a plurality of attributes having attribute data that includes at least one parameter value, and wherein at least one responsive item in the obtained metric data differs by at least one parameter value from the respective item as identified in the price data set.

[0027] The metrics application is further caused to evaluate the plurality of attributes of each responsive item in the metric data relative to the plurality of attributes for the respective item as identified in the price data set to dynamically discover a difference in the attribute data. The difference in the attribute data is disclosed to the metric server adapter and enables the metric server adapter to contextually determine which of the predefined instructions for managing metric data are applicable to the responsive item in the metric data. The metric server adapter uses the attributes and one or more parameter values as identified for the respective item in the price data set with the predefined instructions determined to be applicable to the responsive item in the metric data to dynamically define transaction-specific instructions for adapting the metric data for the respective item.

[0028] The metrics application normalizes the metric data by executing, in coordination with the metric server adapter, the transaction-specific instructions for adapting the metric data for the respective item. Execution of at least one transaction-specific instruction causes one or more adjustment values to be generated and applied to the market reference price data for at least one responsive item that differs by at least one parameter value from the respective item identified in the price data set, transforming the market reference price data for the at least one responsive item and automatically producing one or more transaction-specific market reference price data values for the respective item as identified in the price data set.

[0029] The metrics application generates one or more evaluation metrics that pertain to the at least one evaluation

service for the respective item as identified in the price data set received or retrieved via the first purchase process. Each evaluation metric is based, at least in part, on the one or more transaction-specific market reference data values produced for the respective item as identified in the price data set. At least one evaluation metric comprises a ratio or index value, wherein price data for the respective item in the price data set is divided by one or a combination of transaction-specific market reference price data values produced for the respective item, to generate a relative value metric.

[0030] If no price data set received or retrieved via the first purchase process has a relative value metric of less than one, the metrics application is programmed to retrieve or receive at least one price data set having an item that is responsive to at least one item identified in the one or more product specification data sets using a second, different purchase process. The metrics application is further programmed to produce, in coordination with the metric server adapter, one or more transaction-specific market reference price data values for the respective item as identified in each price data set received or retrieved via the second purchase process and to generate the one or more evaluation metrics, including a relative value metric, for the at least one item as identified in each price data set received or retrieved via the second purchase process.

[0031] The metrics application compares the price data sets received or retrieved via each purchase process, wherein the relative value metric generated for the respective item as identified in each price data set provides an objective measure to compare the first and second purchase processes. The metrics application is further programmed to communicate, in cooperation with the at least one communication application, a result of the comparison, via the network interface, to at least the buyer-agent computing device from which the one or more product specification data sets were received.

[0032] In still another aspect of the present disclosure, a triggering request received from a buyer-agent computing device initiating the at least one evaluation service causes the at least one communication application to identify an applicable protocol for communicating with the buyer-agent computing device and triggers the metrics application to receive at least one evaluation scenario from the buyer-agent computing device for analysis. The at least one scenario identifies two or more different purchase processes, at least one product specification data set, and at least one particular period of time. Each product specification data set identifies at least one item that is defined by a plurality of attributes having attribute data that includes two or more parameter values, or identifies a plurality of items having a plurality of attributes that differ in accordance with at least one parameter value.

[0033] Receipt of at least one evaluation scenario triggers the metrics application to invoke the at least one evaluation service which causes the metrics application, for each purchase process identified in the at least one evaluation scenario, to retrieve the buyer-agent's historical purchase data associated with the purchase process from one or more memories accessible to the remotely-located server. The retrieved purchase data includes one or more price data sets responsive to at least one item identified in the at least one product specification data set over the at least one period of time identified in the evaluation scenario. Each retrieved price data set includes price data for at least one item

possessing a plurality of attributes having attribute data that includes at least one parameter value.

[0034] The metrics application is further caused to obtain metric data from at least one data source accessible to the remotely-located server. The obtained metric data represents market reference data for at least one responsive item having attributes corresponding to attributes of a respective item as identified in the price data set and includes market reference price data of the at least one period of time identified in the evaluation scenario. Each responsive item in the metric data possesses a plurality of attributes having attribute data that includes at least one parameter value. At least one responsive item in the obtained metric data differs by at least one parameter value from the respective item as identified in the price data set.

[0035] The metrics application evaluates the plurality of attributes of each responsive item in the metric data relative to the plurality of attributes for the respective item as identified in the price data set to dynamically discover a difference in the attribute data. The difference in the attribute data is disclosed to the metric server adapter and enables the metric server adapter to contextually determine which of the predefined instructions for managing metric data are applicable to the responsive item in the metric data. The metric server adapter uses the attributes and one or more parameter values as identified for the respective item the price data set with the predefined instructions determined to be applicable to the responsive item in the metric data to dynamically define transaction-specific instructions for adapting the metric data for the respective item.

[0036] The metrics application normalizes the metric data by executing, in coordination with the metric server adapter, the transaction-specific instructions for adapting metric data for the respective item. Execution of at least one transaction-specific instruction causes one or more adjustment values to be generated and applied to the market reference price data for at least one responsive item that differs by at least one parameter value from the respective item as identified in the price data set, transforming the market reference price data for the at least one responsive item and automatically producing one or more transaction-specific market reference price data values for the respective item as identified in the price data set.

[0037] For each of the two or more purchase processes identified in the evaluation scenario, the metrics application generates one or more evaluation metrics that pertain to the at least one evaluation service for the at least one item identified in the at least one product specification data set over the at least one period of time identified in the evaluation scenario. Each evaluation metric is based, at least in part, on the transaction-specific market reference price data values produced for the respective item as identified in the price data sets associated with each purchase process.

[0038] The metrics application compares the two or more identified purchase processes using one or more of the evaluation metrics generated for each purchase process. The metrics application is further programmed to communicate, in coordination with the at least one communication application, a result of the comparison, via the network interface, to at least the buyer-agent controlled computing device from which the at least one evaluation scenario was received.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SEVERAL VIEWS OF THE DRAWINGS

[0039] The foregoing aspects and many of the attendant advantages of the present disclosure will become more readily appreciated as the same become better understood by reference to the following detailed description, when taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, wherein:

[0040] FIG. 1 is a block diagram of a prior art representative portion of the Internet;

[0041] FIG. 2 is a pictorial diagram of a system of devices connected to the Internet, which depict the travel route of data;

[0042] FIG. 3 is a block diagram of the several components of the buyer's computer shown in FIG. 2 that is used to request information on a particular route;

[0043] FIG. 4 is a block diagram of the several components of an information server shown in FIG. 2 that is used to supply information on a particular route;

[0044] FIG. 5 is a flow diagram illustrating the logic of a routine used by the information server to receive and process the buyer's actions;

[0045] FIGS. 6A-6B are flow diagrams illustrating another embodiment of the logic used by the information server to receive and process the quotes and quote requests of both buyers and vendors;

[0046] FIG. 7 is a flow diagram illustrating another embodiment of the logic used by the information server to execute the process of a catalog purchase;

[0047] FIGS. 8A-8D are images of windows produced by a Web browser application installed on a client computer accessing a server illustrating one embodiment of the present disclosure; and

[0048] FIG. 9 is a flow diagram illustrating one embodiment of the normalization process described herein.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0049] The term "Internet" refers to the collection of networks and routers that use the Internet Protocol (IP) to communicate with one another. A representative section of the Internet **100** as known in the prior art is shown in FIG. 1 in which a plurality of local area networks (LANs) **120** and a wide area network (WAN) **110** are interconnected by routers **125**. The routers **125** are generally special-purpose computers used to interface one LAN or WAN to another. Communication links within the LANs may be twisted wire pair, or coaxial cable, while communication links between networks may utilize 56 Kbps analog telephone lines, or 1 Mbps digital T-1 lines, and/or 45 Mbps T-3 lines. Further, computers and other related electronic devices can be remotely connected to either the LANs **120** or the WAN **110** via a modem and temporary telephone link. Such computers and electronic devices **130** are shown in FIG. 1 as connected to one of the LANs **120** via dotted lines. It will be appreciated that the Internet comprises a vast number of such interconnected networks, computers, and routers and that only a small representative section of the Internet **100** is shown in FIG. 1.

[0050] The World Wide Web (WWW), on the other hand, is a vast collection of interconnected, electronically stored information located on servers connected throughout the Internet **100**. Many companies are now providing services and access to their content over the Internet **100** using the WWW. In accordance with the present disclosure, and as

shown in FIG. 2, there may be a plurality of buyers operating a plurality of client computing devices 235. FIG. 2 generally shows a system 200 of computers and devices to which an information server 230 is connected and to which the buyers' computers 235 are also connected. Also connected to the Internet 100 is a plurality of computing devices 250 associated with a plurality of sellers. The system 200 also includes a communications program, referred to as CEA, which is used on the sellers' computing devices 250 to create a communication means between the sellers' backend office software and the server applications.

[0051] The buyers of a market commodity may, through their computers 235, request information about a plurality of items or order over the Internet 100 via a Web browser installed on the buyers' computers. Responsive to such requests, the information server 230, also referred to as a server 230, may combine the first buyer's information with information from other buyers on other computing devices 235. The server 230 then transmits the combined buyer data to the respective computing devices 250 associated with the plurality of sellers. Details of this process are described in more detail below in association with FIGS. 5-7.

[0052] Those of ordinary skill in the art will appreciate that in other embodiments of the present disclosure, the capabilities of the server 230 and/or the client computing devices 235 and 250 may all be embodied in the other configurations. Consequently, it would be appreciated that in these embodiments, the server 230 could be located on any computing device associated with the buyers' or sellers' computing devices. Additionally, those of ordinary skill in the art will recognize that while only four buyer computing devices 235, four seller computing devices 250, and one server 230 are depicted in FIG. 2, numerous configurations involving a vast number of buyer and seller computing devices and a plurality of servers 230, equipped with the hardware and software components described below, may be connected to the Internet 100.

[0053] FIG. 3 depicts several of the key components of the buyer's client computing device 235. As known in the art, client computing devices 235 are also referred to as "clients" or "devices," and client computing devices 235 also include other devices such as palm computing devices, cellular telephones, or other like forms of electronics. A client computing device can also be the same computing device as the server 230. An "agent" can be a person, server, or a client computing device 235 having software configured to assist the buyer in making purchasing decisions based on one or more buyer-determined parameters. Those of ordinary skill in the art will appreciate that the buyer's computer 235 in actual practice will include many more components than those shown in FIG. 3. However, it is not necessary that all of these generally conventional components be shown in order to disclose an illustrative embodiment for practicing the present invention. As shown in FIG. 3, the buyer's computer includes a network interface 315 for connecting to the Internet 100. Those of ordinary skill in the art will appreciate that the network interface 315 includes the necessary circuitry for such a connection and is also constructed for use with TCP/IP protocol.

[0054] The buyer's computer 235 also includes a processing unit 305, a display 310, and a memory 300, all interconnected along with the network interface 315 via a bus 360. The memory 300 generally comprises a random access memory (RAM), a read-only memory (ROM), and a per-

manent mass storage device, such as a disk drive. The memory 300 stores the program code necessary for requesting and/or depicting a desired route over the Internet 100 in accordance with the present disclosure. More specifically, the memory 300 stores a Web browser 330, such as Netscape's NAVIGATOR® or Microsoft's INTERNET EXPLORER® browsers, used in accordance with the present disclosure for depicting a desired route over the Internet 100. In addition, memory 300 also stores an operating system 320 and a communications application 325. It will be appreciated that these software components may be stored on a computer-readable medium and loaded into memory 300 of the buyers' computer 235 using a drive mechanism associated with the computer-readable medium, such as a floppy, tape, or CD-ROM drive.

[0055] As will be described in more detail below, the user interface which allows products to be ordered by the buyers are supplied by a remote server, i.e., the information server 230 located elsewhere on the Internet, as illustrated in FIG. 2. FIG. 4 depicts several of the key components of the information server 230. Those of ordinary skill in the art will appreciate that the information server 230 includes many more components than shown in FIG. 4. However, it is not necessary that all of these generally conventional components be shown in order to disclose an illustrative embodiment for practicing the present invention. As shown in FIG. 4, the information server 230 is connected to the Internet 100 via a network interface 410. Those of ordinary skill in the art will appreciate that the network interface 410 includes the necessary circuitry for connecting the information server 230 to the Internet 100, and is constructed for use with TCP/IP protocol.

[0056] The information server 230 also includes a processing unit 415, a display 440, and a mass memory 450, all interconnected along with the network interface 410 via a bus 460. The mass memory 450 generally comprises a random access memory (RAM), read-only memory (ROM), and a permanent mass storage device, such as a hard disk drive, tape drive, optical drive, floppy disk drive, or combination thereof. The mass memory 450 stores the program code and data necessary for incident and route analysis as well as supplying the results of that analysis to consumers in accordance with the present disclosure. More specifically, the mass memory 450 stores a metrics application 425 formed in accordance with the present disclosure for managing the purchase forums of commodities products, and a metric server adapter 435 for managing metric data. In addition, mass memory 450 stores a database 445 of buyer information continuously logged by the information server 230 for statistical market analysis. It will be appreciated by those of ordinary skill in the art that the database 445 of product and buyer information may also be stored on other servers or storage devices connected to either the information server 230 or the Internet 100. Finally, mass memory 450 stores Web server software 430 for handling requests for stored information received via the Internet 100 and the WWW, and an operating system 420. It will be appreciated that the aforementioned software components may be stored on a computer-readable medium and loaded into mass memory 450 of the information server 230 using a drive mechanism associated with the computer-readable medium, such as floppy, tape, or CD-ROM drive. In addition, the data stored in the mass memory 450 and other memory can be "exposed" to other computers or persons for purposes of

communicating data. Thus, “exposing” data from a computing device could mean transmitting data to another device or person, transferring XML data packets, transferring data within the same computer, or other like forms of data communications.

[0057] In accordance with one embodiment of the present disclosure, FIG. 5 is a flow chart illustrating the logic implemented for the creation of a Request for Quote (RFQ) by a singular buyer or a pool of buyers. In process of FIG. 5, also referred to as the pooling process 500, a buyer or a pool of buyers generate an RFQ which is displayed or transmitted to a plurality of sellers. Responsive to receiving the RFQ, the sellers then send quotes to the buyers.

[0058] In summary, the creation of the RFQ consists of at least one buyer initially entering general user identification information to initiate the process. The buyer would then define a Line Item on a Web page displaying an RFQ form. The Line Item is defined per industry specification and units of product are grouped as a “tally” per industry practice. The pooling process 500 allows buyers to combine RFQ Line Items with other buyers with like needs. In one embodiment, the pool buy feature is created by a graphical user interface where the RFQ Line Items from a plurality of buyers are displayed on a Web page to one of the pool buyers, referred to as the pool administrator. The server 230 also provides a Web-based feature allowing the pool administrator to selectively add each RFQ Line Item to one combined RFQ. The combined RFQ is then sent to at least one vendor or seller. This feature provides a forum for pooling the orders of many buyers, which allows individual entities or divisions of larger companies to advantageously bid for larger orders, thus providing them with more bidding power and the possibility of gaining a lower price.

[0059] The pooling process 500 begins in step 501 where a buyer initiates the process by providing buyer purchase data. In step 501, the buyer accesses a Web page transmitted from the server 230 configured to receive the buyer purchase data, also referred to as the product specification data set or the Line Item data. One exemplary Web page for the logic of step 501 is depicted in FIG. 8A. As shown in FIG. 8A, the buyer enters the Line Item data specifications in the fields of the Web page. The Line Item data consists of lumber species and grade 803, number of pieces per unit 804, quantities of the various units comprising the preferred assortment in the tally 805A-E, delivery method 806, delivery date 807, delivery location 808, and the overall quantity 809. In one embodiment, the buyer must define the delivery date as either contemporaneous “on-or-before” delivery date or specify a delivery date in the future for a “Forward Price” RFQ. In addition, the buyer selects a metric or multiple metrics in a field 810 per RFQ Line Item (tally). As described in more detail below, the metric provides pricing data that is used as a reference point for the buyer to compare the various quotes returned from the sellers. The buyer RFQ Line Item data is then stored in the memory of the server 230.

[0060] Returning to FIG. 5, at a next step 503, the server 230 determines if the buyer is going to participate in a pool buy. In the process of decision block 503, the server 230 provides an option in a Web page that allows the buyer to post their Line Item data to a vendor or post their Line Item data to a buyer pool. The window illustrated in FIG. 8A is one exemplary Web page illustrating these options for a

buyer. As shown in FIG. 8A, the links “Post Buyer Pool” 812 and “Post to Vendors” 814 are provided on the RFQ Web page.

[0061] At step 503, if the buyer does not elect to participate in a pool buy, the process continues to step 513 where the server 230 generates a request for a quote (RFQ) from the buyer’s Line Item data. A detailed description of how the server 230 generates a request for a quote (RFQ) is summarized below and referred to as the purchase order process 600A depicted in FIG. 6A.

[0062] Alternatively, at decision block 503, if the buyer elects to participate in a pool buy, the process continues to step 505 where the system notifies other buyers logged into the server 230 that an RFQ is available in a pool, allowing other buyers to add additional Line Items (tallies) to the RFQ. In this part of the process, the Line Items from each buyer are received by and stored in the server memory. The Line Items provided by each buyer in the pool are received by the server 230 using the same process as described above with reference to block 501 and the Web page of FIG. 8A. All of the Line Items stored on the server 230 are then displayed to a pool administrator via a Web page or an e-mail message. In one embodiment, the pool administrator is one of the buyers in a pool where the pool administrator has the capability to select all of the Line Item data to generate a combined RFQ. The server 230 provides the pool administrator with this capability by the use of any Web-based communicative device, such as e-mail or HTML forms. As part of the process, as shown in steps 507 and 509, the pool may be left open for a predetermined period of time to allow additional buyers to add purchase data to the current RFQ.

[0063] At decision block 509, the server 230 determines if the pool administrator has closed the pool. The logic of this step 509 is executed when the server 230 receives the combined RFQ data from the pool administrator. The pool administrator can send the combined RFQ data to the server 230 via an HTML form or by other electronic messaging means such as e-mail or URL strings. Once the server 230 has determined that the pool is closed, the process continues to block 510 where the Line Items from each buyer (the combined RFQ) are sent to all of the buyers in the pool. The process then continues to step 513 where the server 230 sends the combined RFQ to the vendors or sellers.

[0064] Referring now to FIG. 6A, one embodiment of the purchase-negotiation process 600 is disclosed. The purchase-negotiation process 600 is also referred to as a solicited offer process or the market purchase process. In summary, the purchase-negotiation process 600 allows at least one buyer to submit an RFQ and then view quotes from a plurality of vendors and purchase items from selected vendor(s). The logic of FIG. 6A provides buyers with a forum that automatically manages, collects, and normalizes the price of desired commodity items. The purchase-negotiation process 600 calculates a normalized price data set that is based on a predefined metric(s). The calculation of the normalized price data set in combination with the format of the Web pages described herein create an integrated forum where quotes for a plurality of inherently dissimilar products can be easily obtained and compared.

[0065] The purchase-negotiation process 600 begins at step 601 where the RFQ, as generated by one buyer or a pool of buyers in the process depicted in FIG. 5, is sent to a plurality of computing devices 250 associated with a plu-

rality of sellers or vendors. The vendors receive the RFQ via a Web page transmitted by the server **230**. In one embodiment, the vendors receive an e-mail message having a hypertext link to the RFQ Web page to provide notice to the vendor. Responsive to the information in the buyers' RFQ, the process then continues to step **603** where at least one vendor sends their quote information to the server **230**.

[**0066**] In the process of step **603**, the vendors respond to the RFQ by sending their price quote to the server **230** for display via a Web page to the buyer or buyer pool. Generally described, the vendors send an HTML form or an e-mail message with a price and description of the order. The description of the order in the quote message contains the same order information as the RFQ.

[**0067**] FIG. **8B** illustrates one exemplary Web page of a vendor quote that is displayed to the buyer. As shown in FIG. **8B**, the vendor quote includes the vendor's price **813**, the lumber species and grade **803**, number of pieces per unit **804**, quantities of the various units comprising the preferred assortment in the tally **805A-E**, delivery method **806**, delivery date **807**, and delivery location **808**. In the quote response message, the vendor has the capability to modify any of the information that was submitted in the RFQ. For example, the vendor may edit the quantity values for the various units comprising the preferred assortment in the tally **805A-E**. This allows the vendor to adjust the buyer's request according to the vendor's inventory, best means of transportation, etc. All of the vendor's quote information is referred to as price data set or the RFQ Line Item (tally) quote.

[**0068**] Returning to FIG. **6A**, the process continues to step **605**, where the server **230** normalizes the price of each RFQ Line Item (tally) quote from each vendor. The normalization of the vendor's price is a computation that evaluates the vendor's price utilizing data from a metric. The normalization process is carried out because each vendor may respond to the Line Items of an RFQ by quoting products that are different from a buyer's RFQ and/or have a different tally configuration. The normalization of the pricing allows the buyers to objectively compare the relative value of the different products offered by the plurality of vendors. For example, one vendor may produce a quote for an RFQ of one unit of 2×4×10, two units of 2×4×12, and three units of 2×4×16. At the same time, another vendor may submit a quote for three units of 2×4×10, one unit of 2×4×12, and two units of 2×4×16. Even though there is some difference between these two offerings, the price normalization process provides a means for the buyer to effectively compare and evaluate the different quotes even though there are variations in the products. The price normalization process **900** is described in more detail below in conjunction with the flow diagram of FIG. **9**.

[**0069**] Returning again to FIG. **6A**, at step **607** the vendor's quote information is communicated to the buyer's computer for display. As shown in FIG. **8B** and described in detail above, the vendor's quote is displayed via a Web page that communicates the vendor's quote price **813** and other purchase information. In addition, the vendor's quote page contains a metric price **815** and a quote price versus metric price ratio **816**. The metric price **815** and the quote price versus metric price ratio **816** are also referred to as a normalized price data value. A ratio higher than one (1)

indicates a quote price that is above the metric price, and a lower ratio indicates a quote price that is below the metric price.

[**0070**] Next, at step **609**, the buyer or the administrator of the buyer pool compares the various products and prices quoted by the vendors along with the normalized price for each Line Item on the RFQ. In this part of the process, the buyer may decide to purchase one of the products from a particular vendor and sends a notification to the selected vendor indicating the same. The buyer notifies the selected vendor by the use of an electronic means via the server **230**, such as an HTML form, a chat window, e-mail, etc. For example, the quote Web page depicted in FIG. **8B** shows two different quotes with two different tallies, the first quote price **813** of \$360, and the second quote price **813A** of \$320. If the buyer determines that they prefer to purchase the materials listed in the first quote, the buyer selects the "Buy!" hyperlink **820** or **820A** associated with the desired tally.

[**0071**] If the buyer is not satisfied with any of the listed vendor quotes, the server **230** allows the buyer to further negotiate with one or more of the vendors to obtain a new quote. This step is shown in decision block **611**, where the buyer makes the determination to either accept a quoted price or proceed to step **613** where they negotiate with the vendor to obtain another quote or present a counter-offer. Here, the server **230** provides a graphical user interface configured to allow the buyer and one vendor to electronically communicate, using, e.g., a chat window, streaming voice communications, or other standard methods of communication. There are many forms of electronic communications known in the art that can be used to allow the buyer and vendors to communicate.

[**0072**] The buyer and seller negotiate various quotes and iterate through several steps **603-613** directed by the server **230**, where each quote is normalized, compared, and further negotiated until a quote is accepted by the buyer or negotiations cease. While the buyer and seller negotiate the various quotes, the server **230** stores each quote until the two parties agree on a price. At any step during the negotiation process, the system always presents the buyer with an option to terminate the negotiation if dissatisfied with the quote(s).

[**0073**] At decision block **611**, when a buyer agrees on a quoted price, the process then continues to step **615** where the buyer sends a notification message to the vendor indicating they have accepted a quote. As described above with reference to steps **603-613**, the buyer notification message of step **615** may be in the form of a message on a chat window, e-mail, by an HTML form, or the like. However, the buyer notification must be transmitted in a format that allows the system to record the transaction. The buyer notification may include all of the information regarding the specifications by RFQ Line Item, such as, but not limited to, the buy price, date, and method of shipment, and payment terms.

[**0074**] The purchase-negotiation process **600** is then finalized when the system, as shown in step **617**, sends a confirmation message to a tracking system. The confirmation message includes all of the information related to the agreed sales transaction.

[**0075**] Optionally, the process includes step **619**, where the server **230** stores all of the information related to RFQ, offers, and the final sales transaction in a historical database. This would allow the server **230** to use all of the transaction information in an analysis process for providing an

improved method of obtaining a lower market price in future transactions and in identifying optimum purchasing strategy. The analysis process is described in further detail below. Although the illustrated embodiment is configured to store the data related to the sales transactions, the system can also be configured to store all of the iterative quote information exchanged between the buyer and vendor.

[0076] Referring now to FIG. 6B, an embodiment of the unsolicited offer process 650 is disclosed. In summary, the unsolicited offer process 650, also referred to as the unsolicited market purchase process, allows at least one buyer to view unsolicited offers from a plurality of vendors and purchase items from a plurality of vendors from the offers. The logic of FIG. 6B provides buyers with a forum that automatically manages, collects, and normalizes price quotes based on metric data. By the price normalization method of FIG. 6B, the server 230 creates an integrated forum where offers from a plurality of inherently dissimilar products can be obtained and normalized for determination of purchase.

[0077] The unsolicited offer process 650 begins at step 651 where the plurality of vendors is able to submit offers to the server 230. This part of the process is executed in a manner similar to step 603 of FIG. 6A, where the vendor submits a quote to the server 230. However, in the Web page of step 651, the server 230 generates a Web page containing several tallies from many different vendors. In addition, at step 651, the server 230 stores all of the unsolicited offer data provided by the vendors.

[0078] Next, at step 653, a buyer views the offers stored on the server 230. This part of the process is carried out in a manner similar to the process of step 603 or 607 where the server 230 displays a plurality of offers similar to the tallies depicted in FIG. 8A.

[0079] Next, at step 655, the buyer selects a metric for the calculation of the normalized price associated with the selected offer. As described in more detail below, metric data may come from publicly available information, i.e., price of futures contracts traded on the Chicago Mercantile Exchange, subscription services such as Crowes™ or Random Lengths™ accessed via the metric server adapter 435 (shown in FIG. 4), or internally generated metrics derived from the data stored in the server 230. The normalization calculation, otherwise referred to as the normalization process, occurs each time the buyer views a different offer, and the normalization calculation uses the most current metric data for each calculation. The normalization process is carried out because each vendor will most likely offer products that may vary from products of other vendors and have a different tally configuration from those supplied by other vendors. The normalization of the pricing allows the buyers to compare the relative value of the different products offered by the number of vendors. The metric price for each selected offer is displayed in a similar manner as the metric price 815 and 816 shown in the Web page of FIG. 8B.

[0080] Next, at decision block 657, the buyer selects at least one offer for purchase. This is similar to the process of FIG. 6A in that the buyer selects the “Buy!” hyperlink 820 associated with the desired tally to purchase an order. The process then continues to steps 659-663, where, at step 659, the process transmits a buy notice to the vendor, then, at step 661, sends a purchase confirmation to the tracking system, and then, at step 663, saves the transaction data in the server database. The steps 659-663 are carried out in the same

manner as the steps 615-619 of FIG. 6A. In the above-described process, the buyer notification may include all of the information regarding the specifications by RFQ Line Item, and data such as, but not limited to, the buy price, date, and method of shipment, and the payment terms.

[0081] Referring now to FIG. 7, a flow diagram illustrating yet another embodiment of the present disclosure is shown. FIG. 7 illustrates the catalog purchase process 700. This embodiment allows buyers to search for a catalog price of desired commerce items, enter their purchase data based on the pre-negotiated catalog prices, and to compare those catalog prices with a selected metric price and the current market price, wherein the current market price is determined by the purchase-negotiation process 600.

[0082] The process starts at step 701 where the buyer selects a program buy catalog 443. The program buy catalog 443 provides buyers with the published or pre-negotiated price of the desired products. Next, at step 703, based on the catalog information, the buyer then enters their purchase data. Similar to step 501 of FIG. 5 and the tally shown in FIG. 8A, the buyer sends purchase data to the server 230, such as the desired quantity of each item and the lumber species, grade, etc.

[0083] The process then proceeds to decision block 707 where the buyer makes a determination of whether to purchase the items using the catalog price or purchase the desired product in the open market. Here, the server 230 allows the user to make this determination by displaying the metric price of each catalog price. This format is similar to the metric price 815 and 816 displayed in FIG. 8B.

[0084] At decision block 707, if the buyer determines that the catalog price is better than a selected metric price, the process then proceeds to steps 709, 711, and 713, where a program buy from the catalog is executed, and the buyer's purchase information is stored on the server 230 and sent to the vendor's system to confirm the sale. These steps 711-713 are carried out in the same manner as the confirmation and save steps 617 and 619 as shown in FIG. 6A.

[0085] At decision block 707, if the buyer determines that the metric price is better than the catalog price, the process continues to step 717 where the buyer's purchase data is entered into an RFQ. At this step, the process carries out the first five steps 601-609 of the method of FIG. 6A to provide buyers with the price data from the open market, as well as provide the normalized prices for each open market quote. At step 719, the server 230 then displays a Web page that allows the user to select from a purchase option of a catalog or spot (market) purchase. At decision block 721, based on the displayed information, the buyer will then have an opportunity to make a determination of whether they will proceed with a catalog purchase or an open market purchase.

[0086] At decision block 721, if the buyer proceeds with the catalog purchase, the process continues to step 709 where the catalog purchase is executed. Steps 709-713 used to carry out the catalog purchase are the same as if the buyer had selected the catalog purchase in step 707. However, if at decision block 721 the buyer selects the option to proceed with the market purchase, the process continues to step 723 where the RFQ generated in step 717 is sent to the vendor. Here, the process carries out the steps of FIG. 6 to complete the open market purchase. More specifically, the process continues to step 609 where the buyer compares the normalized prices from each vendor. Once a vendor is selected, the negotiation process of steps 603-613 is carried out until

the buyer decides to execute the purchase. Next, the transaction steps **615-619** are carried out to confirm the purchase, notify the tracking system, and save the transactional data on the historical database.

[0087] Optionally, the process can include a step where the server **230** stores all of the information related to program buy and metric comparisons and the final sales transaction in a historical database. This would allow the server **230** to use all of the transaction information in an analysis process for providing an improved method of obtaining the value of the program. Although the illustrated embodiment is configured to store the data related to the sales transactions, the system can also be configured to store all of the iterative quote information exchanged between the buyer and vendor.

[0088] The analysis process allows the server **230** to utilize the sales history records stored in steps **619** and **711** to generate price reports for communication to various third parties as well as provide a means of calculating current market prices for products sold in the above-described methods. The sales history records are also used as the source for a metric, such as those used in the process of FIGS. **6A**, **6B**, and **7**. As shown in steps **619**, **663**, and **711**, the server **230** continually updates the historical database for each sales transaction. The analysis reporting process allows a buyer or manager of buyers to conduct analysis on the historical information. This analysis would include multi-value cross compilation for purposes of determining purchasing strategies, buyer effectiveness, program performance, vendor performance, and measuring effectiveness of forward pricing as a risk management strategy.

[0089] Referring now to FIG. **9**, a flow diagram illustrating the logic of the normalization process **900** is shown. The logic of the normalization process **900** resides on the server **230** and processes the quotes received from commodity sellers. The logic begins at step **905** where quote data is obtained from the seller in response to the buyer's RFQ as described above.

[0090] Next, at step **910**, routine **900** iteratively calculates the board footage (BF) of each type of lumber. Once all the totals are calculated for each type, routine **900** continues to step **915** where the server **230** calculates the total type price.

[0091] At step **915**, routine **900** iteratively calculates the total type price for the amount of each type of lumber specified in the quote. This is accomplished by taking the total board footage (BF) calculated in block **910** and multiplying the total BF by the price per MBF specified in the quote. Once all the prices are calculated for each type, routine **900** continues to step **920** where the server **230** calculates the total quoted price. At step **920**, the routine **900** calculates the total price for the quote by summing all of the total type prices calculated at step **915**.

[0092] At step **925**, routine **900** iteratively retrieves the most current price for each type of lumber specified in the quote from a predefined metric source(s). Metric data may come from publicly available information, i.e., price of futures contracts traded on the Chicago Mercantile Exchange, subscription service publications such as Crowes™ or Random Lengths™ accessed via the metric server adapter **435** (shown in FIG. **4**), or internally generated metrics derived from the server database. Once all the prices are retrieved for each type, at step **930**, the routine **900** then iteratively calculates the market price for the quantity of each type of lumber in the quote. Once the totals for all types are calculated, routine **900** continues to step **935** where the

routine **900** calculates the total market price for the quote by summing all the most current prices calculated in step **930**. Although this example illustrates that steps **910-920** are executed before steps **925-935**, these two groups of steps can be executed in any order, or in parallel, so long as they are both executed before a comparison step **940**.

[0093] At step **940**, routine **900** compares the total quoted to the metric price to arrive at a comparative value. In one exemplary embodiment of the current invention, the comparative value is a "percent of metric" value. A value higher than one hundred (100) percent indicates a price that is above the metric rate, and a lower percent indicates a price that is below the metric rate.

[0094] The operation of routine **900** can be further illustrated through an example utilizing specific exemplary data. In the example, a buyer sends out a request for a quote (RFQ) requesting a lot of 2"x4 S&B lumber consisting of five units of 2"x4"x8', two units of 2"x4"x14', and five units of 2"x4"x16'. The buyer then receives quotes from three sellers. Seller A responds with a tally of six units of 2"x4"x8', four units of 2"x4"x14', and three units of 2"x4"x16' for \$287 per thousand board feet. Seller B responds with a lot of five units of 2"x4"x8', one unit of 2"x4"x14', and six units of 2"x4"x16' for \$283 per thousand board feet. Seller C responds with a lot of one unit of 2"x4"x8', five units of 2"x4"x14', and five units of 2"x4"x16' for \$282 per thousand board feet. Suppose also that the typical unit size is 294 pieces/unit, and the metric or reported market price for 2"x4"x8's is \$287.50, for 2"x4"x14's is \$278.50, and for 2"x4"x16' is \$288.

[0095] Viewing the MBF prices for the respective quotes is not particularly informative, given that certain lengths of lumber are more desirable and priced accordingly in the marketplace. By processing the quote from Seller A using routine **900**, we arrive at a total MBF of 29.792, giving a total quoted price of \$8,550.30. The selected metric price for the same types and quantities of lumber would be \$8,471.12; therefore, the quoted price would have a percent of market value of 100.93%. Processing the quote from Seller B using routine **900**, we arrive at a total MBF of 29.400, giving a total quoted price of \$8,320.20. The selected metric price for the same types and quantities of lumber, however, would be \$8,437.21; therefore, the quoted price would have a percent of market value of 98.61%. Finally, processing the quote from Seller C using routine **900**, we arrive at a total MBF of 30.968, giving a total quoted price of \$8,732.98. The selected metric price for the same types and quantities of lumber, however, would be \$8,767.66; therefore, the quoted price would have a percent of market value of 99.38%. By looking at the percent of selected metric value, it is apparent that the price from Seller B is a better value. As shown in the methods of FIGS. **5-7**, this price normalization process allows users to compare inherently different offers having different quality and quantity values.

[0096] In yet another example of an application of the normalization process, additional exemplary data is used to demonstrate the analysis of a transaction having one RFQ from a buyer and two different quotes from a seller, normalized to comparable product of another species. In this example, the buyer produces an RFQ listing the following items: one carload of Eastern SPF (ESPF) lumber having four units of 2"x4"x8', four units of 2"x4"x10', six units of 2"x4"x12', two units of 2"x4"x14', and six units of 2"x4"x16'. The vendor then responds with two different quotes with

two different unit tallies and two different prices. The first response lists a quote price of \$320 per thousand board feet, and a slight modification of the tally provides four units of 2"×4"×8', four units of 2"×4"×10', six units of 2"×4"×12', three units of 2"×4"×14', and five units of 2"×4"×16'. The second response quotes per the requested tally at a price of \$322 per thousand board feet. Both quotes list the delivery location as "Chicago."

[0097] To display the quotes, the server 230 produces a Web page similar to that displayed in FIG. 8C, where the vendor's modified tally is displayed in highlighted text. The buyer can then view summary metric comparison or select the hypertext link "View Calculation Detail," which then invokes the server 230 to produce a Web page as shown in FIG. 8D. Referring now to the Web page illustrated in FIG. 8D, the data produced by server 230 compares the response to a selected metric of a different species, Western SPF (WSPF), for items of the same size, grade, and tally. The market price for the same 2×4 tally of ESPF and WSPF are thus simultaneously compared. In an example, Eastern quoted at \$322 per thousand board feet, Western metric (Random Lengths™ Jun. 26, 2000 print price plus freight of \$80 as defined in Metric Manager) for the same tally being \$331.791. This metric comparison is also represented as Quote/Metric Value or Eastern price representing 0.970490, or 97% of comparable Western product.

[0098] In review of the normalization process, the buyer must select a metric source for price information for a defined item given a set of attributes, i.e., grade, species, and size. The metric may then be mapped to the RFQ item for comparison and does not have to be the equivalent of the item. For instance, as explained in the above-described example, it may be desirable to map the market relationship of one commodity item to another. The most current pricing data for the metric is electronically moved from the selected source to the server 230. As mentioned above, metric data may come from publicly available information, (i.e., price of futures contracts traded on the Chicago Mercantile Exchange), or subscription services, (i.e., Crowes™ or Random Lengths™ publications), or be an internal metric generated by the server 230. This metric data is used in the normalization process for all calculations, as described with reference to the above-described methods.

[0099] While various embodiments of the invention have been illustrated and described, it will be appreciated that within the scope of the appended claims, various changes can be made therein without departing from the spirit of the invention. For example, in an agricultural commodity, an order for Wheat U.S. #2 HRW could be compared to a selected metric of Wheat U.S. #2 Soft White, similar to how different species are analyzed in the above-described example.

[0100] The above system and method can be used to purchase other commodity items, such as in the trade of livestock. In such a variation, order information such as a lumber tally would be substituted for a meat type, grade, and cut. Other examples of commodity items include agricultural products, metals, or any other items of commerce having several order parameters.

1. In a networked environment, a system comprising:
 - a remotely-located server comprising:
 - a network interface;
 - a non-transitory computer-readable medium having computer-executable instructions stored thereon,

wherein the computer-executable instructions, when executed, implement a plurality of components including:

- a metric server adapter;
- a metrics application; and
- at least one communication application; and

a processor in communication with the network interface and the computer-readable medium, wherein the processor is configured to execute the computer-executable instructions stored in the computer-readable medium;

wherein:

the metric server adapter includes governing logic programmed to manage at least one evaluation service and a plurality of predefined instructions for managing metric data, including industry-specific instructions or a buyer-agent's customized instructions, and to dynamically define transaction-specific instructions for adapting metric data;

the metrics application is a production application programmed to manage one or more purchase and/or analysis processes and to invoke and execute the at least one evaluation service in coordination with the metric server adapter, and to manage one or more user interfaces that, in operation, facilitate interactions with the remotely-located server;

the at least one communication application is programmed to manage one or more protocols that facilitate communications between one or more computing devices and the remotely-located server via the network interface;

in operation, in response to receipt of a triggering request from a buyer-agent computing device, the at least one communication application identifies an applicable protocol for communicating with the buyer-agent computing device and the metrics application receives from the buyer-agent computing device one or more product specification data sets, wherein each product specification data set identifies at least one item that is defined by a plurality of attributes having attribute data that includes two or more parameter values, or a plurality of items having a plurality of attributes that differ by at least one parameter value; and

using one or more purchase processes, the metrics application receives or retrieves a plurality of price data sets responsive to at least one item identified in the one or more product specification data sets, each received or retrieved price data set representing an offer to sell that includes price data for at least one item possessing a plurality of attributes having attribute data that includes at least one parameter value;

wherein receipt or retrieval of at least one price data set triggers the metrics application to invoke the at least one evaluation service which causes the metrics application, for each price data set, to:

obtain metric data from at least one data source accessible to the remotely-located server, wherein the obtained metric data represents market reference data for at least one responsive item having attributes corresponding to attributes of a respective item as identified in the price data set and includes market reference price data of a current time or current period of time, wherein each responsive item in the

metric data possesses a plurality of attributes having attribute data that includes at least one parameter value;

evaluate the plurality of attributes of each responsive item in the metric data relative to the plurality of attributes for the respective item as identified in the price data set to dynamically discover a difference in the attribute data, wherein a discovered difference is disclosed to the metric server adapter which enables the metric server adapter to contextually define transaction-specific instructions for adapting the metric data for the respective item;

normalize the metric data by executing the transaction-specific instructions for adapting the metric data for the respective item, wherein execution of at least one transaction-specific instruction causes one or more adjustment values to be generated and applied to the market reference price data for at least one responsive item that differs by at least one parameter value from the respective item, transforming the market reference price data for the at least one responsive item and automatically producing one or more transaction-specific market reference price data values for the respective item; and

generate one or more evaluation metrics that pertain to the at least one evaluation service for the respective item as identified in each price data set, wherein each evaluation metric is based, at least in part, on one or a combination of the transaction-specific market reference price data values produced for the respective item as identified in the price data set; and

sort and/or rank the plurality of price data sets using one or more of the evaluation metrics generated for the respective item as identified in each price data set;

wherein the metrics application is further programmed to communicate, in cooperation with the at least one communication application, at least a subset of the sorted and/or ranked price data sets and the one or more evaluation metrics generated for the at least one item in each communicated price data set to at least the buyer-agent computing device.

2. The system of claim 1, wherein the coordinated operation of the metrics application and the metric server adapter provides a common platform that, in operation, enables the metric server adapter to consistently define transaction-specific instructions for adapting metric data without regard to the one or more purchase processes being managed by the metrics application.

3. The system of claim 1, wherein the metrics application is separate from the metric server adapter, and wherein coordinated operation of the metrics application with the metric server adapter enables the metrics application to algorithmically process the attribute data to dynamically identify at least one relationship comprising a difference in the attribute data, wherein the at least one relationship may include a new or previously unknown relationship.

4. The system of claim 1, wherein the coordinated operation of the metrics application and the metric server adapter enables the metric server adapter to autonomously manage the at least one evaluation service and the plurality of predefined instructions for managing metric data to define transaction-specific instructions for adapting metric data, and wherein execution of the transaction-specific instructions by the metrics application provides an evaluation

service that is customized for the buyer-agent or the industry without custom-coding the computer-executable instructions that comprise the metrics application.

5. The system of claim 1, wherein execution of a predefined buy link preassociated with at least one item in at least one price data set communicated to the buyer-agent computing device further causes the metrics application, in cooperation with the at least one communication application, to automatically transmit a purchase notice or purchase order to a seller-agent computing device associated with the at least one price data set.

6. The system of claim 1, wherein at least one of the one or more evaluation metrics generated for the at least one item in each price data set is a relative value metric, wherein price data associated with the at least one item in the price data set is divided by one or a combination of the transaction-specific market reference price data values produced for the respective item in the price data set, to generate a ratio or index value.

7. The system of claim 6, wherein a price data set with a lowest relative value metric for the at least one item represents an optimal market value among the plurality of price data sets.

8. The system of claim 6, wherein at least one received or retrieved price data set identifies at least one item that is not a perfect substitute for an item as identified in another received or retrieved price data set in that the at least one item is an alternate item or an item that differs by one or more parameter values from the item as identified in the other received or retrieved price data set, wherein the at least one relative value metric generated for the at least one item as identified in each of the plurality of price data sets provides an objective measure with which to sort and/or rank the plurality of price data sets, including the at least one price data set that identifies an alternate item or an item that differs by one or more parameter values.

9. The system of claim 1, wherein the one or more parameter values represent attributes or conditions that are variable for a specific item or transaction.

10. The system of claim 9, wherein the one or more parameter values include at least one of a grade, a rating measure, a species, an item type, a brand, a quantity, a size, a unit of measure, a tally, a shipping or delivery location, a method of delivery, a delivery date, a time of service, a warranty, a payment term, or a transaction type.

11. The system of claim 10, wherein delivery comprises a financial delivery.

12. The system of claim 10, wherein the delivery date or time of service specifies one or more fulfillment dates in the future, and comprises a forward price transaction type.

13. The system of claim 10, wherein delivery comprises an exchange of at least one item for at least one other item, wherein the at least one other item differs by at least one parameter value from the at least one item.

14. The system of claim 1, wherein a current time or current period of time includes a continuously sliding interval of time that represents a most current period of time.

15. The system of claim 1, wherein invocation of the at least one evaluation service and/or execution of at least one predefined instruction that pertains to the at least one evaluation service causes the metrics application to generate at least one evaluation metric that encompasses a series of times, periods of time, and/or delivery dates, wherein the

series of times, periods of time, and/or delivery dates can include one or more times in the future.

16. The system of claim 1, wherein invocation of the at least one evaluation service and/or execution of at least one predefined instruction that pertains to the at least one evaluation service causes the metrics application to manage, in cooperation with the at least one communication application, one or more user interfaces that, in operation, expose the at least one product specification data sets to additional buyer-agent computing devices, wherein the one or more user interfaces enable the additional buyer-agents to identify one or more items to be added to the product specification data set, wherein the collaboratively-generated product specification data set identifies a plurality of items, possessing a plurality of attributes having attribute data that differs by at least one parameter value.

17. The system of claim 1, wherein invocation of the at least one evaluation service and/or execution of at least one predefined instruction that pertains to the at least one evaluation service causes the metrics application to manage, in cooperation with the at least one communication application, one or more user interfaces that, in operation, expose at least one item as identified in the one or more product specification data sets to one or more trading venues, and to receive, from at least one seller-agent computing device, via the network interface, one or more price data sets responsive to the at least one item as identified in the product specification data set.

18. The system of claim 1, wherein the metrics application is further programmed to manage, in cooperation with the at least one communication application, one or more user interfaces that, in operation, communicate a request for quotation (RFQ) for at least one item identified in the one or more product specification data sets to at least one seller-agent computing device on behalf of the buyer-agent, and to receive, from the at least one seller-agent computing device, via the network interface, one or more price data sets responsive to the at least one item as identified in the RFQ.

19. The system of claim 1, wherein invocation of the at least one evaluation service and/or execution of at least one predefined instruction that pertains to the at least one evaluation service causes the metrics application to manage, in cooperation with the at least one communication application, one or more user interfaces that, in operation, query one or more databases or data sources accessible to the remotely-located server or to monitor one or more data streams for at least one price data set that is responsive to at least one item identified in the one or more product specification data sets.

20. The system of claim 1, wherein invocation of the at least one evaluation service and/or execution of at least one predefined instruction that pertains to the at least one evaluation service causes the metrics application to manage, in cooperation with the at least one communication application, one or more user interfaces that, in operation, enable the metrics application to filter price data sets exposed to the remotely-located server without prompting by the remotely-located server and to receive at least one exposed price data set that is responsive to at least one item identified in the one or more product specification data sets.

21. The system of claim 1, wherein the metrics application is further programmed to manage, in cooperation with the at least one communication application, one or more user interfaces that, in operation, enable the remotely-located

server to receive, from at least one seller-agent, an unsolicited offer to sell at least one item to the buyer-agent.

22. The system of claim 1, wherein invocation of the at least one evaluation service and/or execution of at least one predefined instruction that pertains to the at least one evaluation service causes the metrics application to retrieve at least one price data set from one or more catalogs, price lists, or one or more programs pre-negotiated with a seller-agent.

23. The system of claim 1, wherein the metrics application is further programmed to manage one or more user interfaces that, in operation, control at least one preprogrammed application, utility, or function that is running on the remotely-located server, the buyer-agent computing device, or another computing device in communication with the remotely-located server, and to execute movement of data in an integrated data exchange between the remotely-located server and the at least one preprogrammed application, utility, or function.

24. The system of claim 1, wherein the metrics application is further programmed to manage one or more user interfaces that, in operation, enable a buyer-agent to predefine an item by a plurality of attributes including one or more parameter values and to preassociate the item with one or more evaluation services.

25. The system of claim 24, wherein execution of at least one predefined instruction that pertains to the buyer-agent and the at least one evaluation service causes the metrics application to use the one or more purchase processes continuously or at a predefined time to receive or retrieve one or more price data sets responsive to at least one item predefined by the buyer-agent and to automatically generate, in coordination with the metric server adapter, one or more evaluation metrics for the at least one predefined item, wherein the metrics application is further caused to manage one or more user interfaces that, in operation, communicate at least a subset of the price data sets and the evaluation metrics generated for the at least one predefined item, continuously or at the predefined time, via the network interface, to the buyer-agent computing-device of the buyer-agent that predefined the at least one item.

26. The system of claim 1, wherein invocation of the at least one evaluation service and/or execution of one or more predefined instructions that pertain to the buyer-agent and the at least one evaluation service further causes the metrics application to limit the number of price data sets communicated to the buyer-agent computing device to a predefined number or a predefined portion of the sorted or ranked price data sets.

27. The system of claim 1, wherein at least one item identified in at least one product specification data set or in a received or retrieved price data set is a bundled or combined item that represents a plurality of items in a packaged product or transaction, a tally, or an assembly of component parts, wherein each item or component part possesses a plurality of attributes having attribute data that differs by at least one parameter value.

28. The system of claim 27, wherein invocation of the at least one evaluation service and/or execution of at least one predefined instruction that pertains to the at least one evaluation service causes the metrics application to subdivide the plurality of items or component parts of the bundled or combined item into a plurality of segments, wherein the metrics application selectively uses a different purchase

process to receive or retrieve one or more price data sets for at least one segment of the bundled or combined item.

29. The system of claim **1**, wherein invocation of the at least one evaluation service and/or execution of at least one predefined instruction that pertains to the at least one evaluation service causes the metric server adapter to define at least one transaction-specific instruction that causes the metrics application to produce at least one composite market reference price data value for the respective item, wherein two or more transaction specific market reference price data values produced for the respective item are combined using at least one function or algorithm preassociated with the at least one evaluation service to produce the at least one composite market reference price data value.

30. The system of claim **1**, wherein the metric server adapter is programmed to coordinate a conditional execution of transaction-specific instructions for adapting metric data by the metrics application, including:

- one or more formulas operationally combining data values and using variables relating to a plurality of items, attributes, parameters, events, or metric data sources; or
- a combination of instructions, including validation rules and/or statistical criteria, relating to a plurality of items, attributes, parameters, vendors, events, metric data sources or obtained metric data, the conditional execution of which is priority weighted, sequential, recursive, or subject to another method of control defined by the metric server adapter; or

- a combined evaluation service that includes a plurality of transaction-specific instructions for adapting metric data, wherein at least one transaction-specific instruction is further combined with at least one other transaction-specific instruction that specifies employing a process step, action, function, utility, or subroutine, or wherein at least one evaluation service is combined with at least one other evaluation service, wherein the conditional execution of the transaction-specific instructions of the combined evaluation service is priority weighted, sequential, recursive, or subject to another method of control defined by the metric server adapter.

31. The system of claim **1**, wherein the transformation of the market reference price data occurs independent of unit-of-measure conversion of data in the metric data for responsive items that are defined by a unit-of-measure.

32. The system of claim **1**, wherein the buyer-agent computing device from which the one or more product specification data sets are received is a mobile computing device, and wherein at least one predefined instruction that pertains to the buyer-agent and the at least one evaluation service causes the metric server adapter to define at least one transaction-specific instruction that causes the metrics application to limit the number of price data sets communicated to the mobile computing device for visual display in a constrained display space to a predefined number or a predefined portion of the sorted and/or ranked price data sets.

33. The system of claim **1**, wherein invocation of the at least one evaluation service and/or execution of at least one predefined instruction that pertains to the at least one evaluation service causes the metrics application to compare a plurality of seller-agents using at least one evaluation metric generated for the respective item as identified in one or more of the price data sets associated with each seller-agent.

34. The system of claim **1**, wherein the metrics application is further programmed to manage at least one user interface that, in operation, configures the remotely-located server to facilitate data communication in XML format, enabling the metrics application to dynamically change, dynamically route, and/or pre-configure data for movement of the data in an integrated data exchange.

35. The system of claim **1**, wherein the price data for at least one item identified in a received or retrieved price data set is specified as a formula, wherein the price of the at least one item is to be determined at one or more specified times in the future using, at least in part, one or more evaluation metrics generated by the remotely-located server or one or more market-reference prices reported by a specified data source, wherein, at the one or more specified times, the metrics application automatically obtains the one or more reported market-reference prices or generates the one or more evaluation metrics for the at least one item, wherein the metrics application automatically derives the price data for the at least one item in accordance with the specified formula, and wherein the metrics application is further programmed to communicate the price data derived for the at least one item as identified in the received or retrieved data set, via the network interface, to at least the buyer-agent computing device from which the one or more product specification data sets were received.

36. The system of claim **1**, wherein the metrics application is further programmed to manage one or more user interfaces that, in operation, enable the remotely-located server to prompt the buyer-agent computing device to identify or select at least one data element or function to be added to or removed from a currently in-progress evaluation service, to identify or select at least one different parameter value for the at least one item identified in the product specification data set, or to provide additional information required by a currently in-progress evaluation service.

37. The system of claim **36**, wherein identification or selection of at least one different parameter value for the at least one item identified in the product specification data set causes the metrics application to automatically generate one or more evaluation metrics for the respective item using the at least one different parameter value.

38. The system of claim **1**, wherein invocation of the at least one evaluation service and/or execution of at least one predefined instruction that pertains to the at least one evaluation service causes the metric server adapter to define at least one transaction-specific instruction that, when executed, causes the metrics application to obtain metric data for an alternate item, wherein the alternate item is a substitute item and/or differs by at least one parameter value from the at least one item as identified in a received or retrieved price data set, and further causes the metrics application, in coordination with the metric server adapter, to produce the one or more transaction-specific market reference price data values for the at least one item identified in the price data set using, at least in part, metric data obtained for the alternate item.

39. The system of claim **1**, wherein invocation of the at least one evaluation service and/or execution of at least one predefined instruction that pertains to the at least one evaluation service causes the metrics application to automatically query one or more databases or data sources accessible to the remotely-located server or to monitor one or more data streams to obtain market reference data for one or more

responsive items having attributes corresponding to the attributes of at least one item identified in a received or retrieved price data set.

40. The system of claim 1, wherein invocation of the at least one evaluation service and/or execution of at least one predefined instruction that pertains to the at least one evaluation service causes the metric server adapter to define at least one transaction-specific instruction that causes the metrics application to limit the metric data to market-reference data associated with at least one predefined seller-agent or metric data source, or to filter, for inclusion or exclusion, the one or more responsive items in the metric data using one or more predefined control values, criteria, or parameters, and to use only a limited or filtered segment of the metric data to produce the one or more transaction-specific market reference price data values for the at least one item identified in the price data set.

41. The system of claim 1, wherein invocation of the at least one evaluation service and/or execution of at least one predefined instruction that pertains to the at least one evaluation service causes the metrics application to obtain only metric data resulting from a computer-based interaction and/or to use only electronically-created metric data to produce the one or more transaction-specific market reference price data values for the at least one item identified in the price data set, wherein the electronically-created metric data does not include human-reported transaction data or transaction data that was manually transcribed into a digital format, wherein the electronically-created metric data includes data comprising a timestamp that identifies a particular time or period of time.

42. The system of claim 1, wherein invocation of the at least one evaluation service and/or execution of at least one predefined instruction that pertains to the at least one evaluation service causes the metrics application to evaluate each responsive item in the metric data for satisfaction of one or more predefined validation rules and/or statistical criteria and to only produce the one or more transaction-specific market reference price data values for the at least one item identified in the product specification data set using metric data that satisfies the predefined validation rules and/or statistical criteria.

43. The system of claim 1, wherein the at least one communication application automatically identifies the buyer-agent computing device initiating the at least evaluation service, wherein upon identification of the buyer-agent computing device initiating the at least one evaluation service, the metrics application is caused to manage one or more user interfaces customized for the buyer-agent, wherein the one or more customized user interfaces include one or more preconfigured dropdown menus preloaded with one or more items and/or one or more parameter values predefined by the buyer-agent.

44. The system of claim 1, wherein invocation of the at least one evaluation service and/or execution of at least one predefined instruction that pertains to the at least one evaluation service causes the metrics application to manage one or more user interfaces that incorporate predefined industry-specific terminology, industry-specific standards, and/or industry-specific practices.

45. The system of claim 1, wherein invocation of the at least one evaluation service and/or execution of at least one predefined instruction that pertains to the at least one evaluation service causes the metrics application to, continuously

or over a predetermined period of time, obtain more current metric data for at least one item as identified in a received or retrieved price data set, wherein the more current metric data represents market reference data for one or more items having attributes that are responsive to attributes of the at least one item as identified in the price data set and includes more-current market reference price data for the at least one item or excludes previously-obtained metric data that is no longer responsive to the at least one item or no longer represents market reference price data associated with the at least one item at the current time or period of time, and further causes the metrics application, in coordination with the metric server adapter, to produce one or more more-current transaction-specific market reference price data values for the at least one item and to generate one or more more-current evaluation metrics for the at least one item as identified in the price data set, and wherein the metrics application is further programmed to communicate at least one of the one or more more-current evaluation metrics generated for the at least one item identified in at least one price data set, via the network interface, to at least to the buyer-agent computing device from which the one or more product specification data sets were previously received.

46. In a networked environment, a system comprising:

a remotely-located server comprising:

a network interface;

a non-transitory computer-readable medium having computer-executable instructions stored thereon, wherein the computer-executable instructions, when executed, implement a plurality of components including:

a metric server adapter;

a metrics application; and

at least one communication application; and

a processor in communication with the network interface and the computer-readable medium, wherein the processor is configured to execute the computer-executable instructions stored in the computer-readable medium;

wherein:

the metric server adapter includes governing logic programmed to manage at least one evaluation service and a plurality of predefined instructions for managing metric data, and to dynamically define transaction-specific instructions for adapting metric data;

the metrics application is a production application programmed to manage one or more purchase and/or analysis processes and to invoke and execute the at least one evaluation service in coordination with the metric server adapter, and to manage one or more user interfaces that, in operation, facilitate interactions with the remotely located server;

the at least one communication application is programmed to manage one or more protocols that facilitate communications between one or more computing devices and the remotely-located server via the network interface; and

in operation, in response to receipt of a triggering request from a user-agent computing device, the at least one communication application identifies an applicable protocol for communicating with the user-agent computing device and the metrics application receives from the user-agent computing

device at least one product specification data set, wherein each product specification data set identifies at least one item that is defined by a plurality of attributes having attribute data that includes two or more parameter values, or a plurality of items having a plurality of attributes that differ by at least one parameter value; and

using one or more purchase processes, the metrics application receives or retrieves at least one price data set that is responsive to at least one item identified in the at least one product specification data set, wherein the at least one price data set represents an offer to sell that includes price data for at least one item possessing a plurality of attributes having attribute data that includes at least one parameter value;

wherein receipt of at least one product specification data set and receipt or retrieval at least one responsive price data set triggers the metrics application to invoke the at least one evaluation service which causes the metrics application, for each received product specification data set and for each received or retrieved price data set, to:

obtain metric data from at least one data source accessible to the remotely-located server, wherein the obtained metric data represents market reference data for at least one responsive item having attributes that correspond to attributes of a respective item as identified in the product specification data set or the price data set and includes market reference price data of a current time or current period of time, wherein each responsive item in the metric data possesses a plurality of attributes having attribute data that includes at least one parameter value;

evaluate the plurality of attributes of each responsive item in the metric data relative to the plurality of attributes for the respective item as identified in the product specification data set or the price data set to dynamically discover a difference in the attribute data, wherein a discovered difference is disclosed to the metric server adapter which enables the metric server adapter to contextually define transaction-specific instructions for adapting the metric data for the respective item;

normalize the metric data by executing the transaction-specific instructions for adapting the metric data for the respective item, wherein execution of at least one transaction-specific instruction causes one or more adjustment values to be generated and applied to the market reference price data for at least one responsive item that differs by at least one parameter value from the respective item, transforming the market reference price data for the at least one responsive item and automatically producing one or more transaction-specific market reference price data values for the respective item; and

generate one or more evaluation metrics that pertain to the at least one evaluation service for the respective item as identified in the product specification data set or the price data set, wherein each evaluation metric is based, at least in part, on one

or a combination of the transaction-specific market reference data values produced for the respective item;

wherein the metrics application is further programmed to communicate, in cooperation with the at least one communication application, the one or more evaluation metrics generated for the at least one item as identified in the at least one product specification data set and the at least one price data set to at least the user-agent computing device.

47. The system of claim 46, wherein the metrics application is separate from the metric server adapter, and wherein coordinated operation of the metrics application with the metric server adapter enables the metrics application to algorithmically process the attribute data to dynamically identify at least one relationship comprising a difference within the attribute data, wherein the at least one relationship may include a new or previously unknown relationship.

48. The system of claim 46, wherein the plurality of predefined instructions for managing metric data includes one or more industry-specific instructions or one or more instructions predefined by a user-agent, and wherein the plurality of predefined instructions for managing metric data are stored in a memory accessible to the remotely-located server.

49. The system of claim 46, wherein the one or more parameter values represent attributes or conditions that are variable for a specific item or transaction.

50. The system of claim 49, wherein the one or more parameter values include at least one of a grade, a rating measure, a species, an item type, a brand, a quantity, a size, a unit of measure, a tally, a location, a method of delivery, a delivery date, a time of service, a warranty, a payment term, or a transaction type.

51. The system of claim 50, wherein delivery comprises a financial delivery.

52. The system of claim 50, wherein the delivery date or time of service specifies one or more fulfillment dates in the future, and comprises a forward price transaction type.

53. The system of claim 50, wherein delivery comprises an exchange of at least one item for at least one other item, wherein the at least one other item differs by at least one parameter value from the at least one item.

54. The system of claim 46, wherein invocation of the at least one evaluation service and/or execution of at least one transaction specific instruction that pertains to the at least one evaluation service causes the metrics application to compare at least one evaluation metric generated for the respective item as identified in at least one product specification data set with price data associated with the respective item as identified in at least one received or retrieved price data set.

55. The system of claim 54, wherein invocation of the at least one evaluation service and/or execution of at least one predefined instruction that pertains to the at least one evaluation service further causes the metrics application to use the comparison to identify one or more seller-agents associated with price data sets that include at least one item with price data that is below one or more of the evaluation metrics generated for the at least one item identified in the product specification data set or the corresponding price data set.

56. The system of claim 46, wherein invocation of the at least one evaluation service and/or execution of at least one

transaction specific instruction that pertains to the at least one evaluation service causes the metrics application to compare price data associated with the respective item in a price data set with one or more of the evaluation metrics generated for the respective item as identified in the price data set.

57. The system of claim 46, wherein invocation of the at least one evaluation service and/or execution of at least one transaction specific instruction that pertains to the at least one evaluation service causes the metrics application to compare one or more of the evaluation metrics generated for the respective item as identified in the product specification data set to one or more of the evaluation metrics generated for the respective item as identified in at least one received or retrieved price data set.

58. The system of claim 46, wherein invocation of the at least one evaluation service and/or execution of at least one predefined instruction that pertains to the at least one evaluation service causes the metrics application to produce a composite market reference price data value for the respective item, wherein two or more transaction specific market reference price data values produced for the respective item as identified in the product specification data set or the price data set are combined using a function or algorithm pre-associated with the at least one evaluation service.

59. The system of claim 46, wherein invocation of the at least one evaluation service and/or execution of at least one transaction specific instruction that pertains to the at least one evaluation service causes the metrics application to generate at least one relative value metric, wherein price data associated with the respective item in a product specification data set or a price data set is divided by one or a combination of the transaction-specific market reference price data values produced for the respective item, to generate a ratio or index value.

60. The system of claim 46, wherein invocation of the at least one evaluation service and/or execution of at least one predefined instruction that pertains to the at least one evaluation service causes the metrics application to compare two or more purchase processes using one or more of the evaluation metrics generated for the respective item as identified in one or more of the price data sets received or retrieved via each purchase process.

61. The system of claim 46, wherein invocation of the at least one evaluation service and/or execution of at least one predefined instruction that pertains to the at least one evaluation service causes the metric server adapter to define at least one transaction-specific instruction that, when executed by the metrics application, causes data expressed in units of measure to be consistently converted into standardized or common units of measure, or units of measure as specified for the at least one item identified in the product specification data set, and further causes the metrics application to only produce the one or more transaction-specific market reference price data values for the at least one item as identified in the product specification data set or the price data set using data possessing consistent units of measure.

62. The system of claim 46, wherein execution of a predefined buy link preassociated with at least one price data set communicated to the user-agent computing device causes the metrics application, in cooperation with the at least one communication application, to automatically trans-

mit a purchase notice or purchase order to a seller-agent computing device associated with the at least one price data set.

63. The system of claim 46, wherein invocation of the at least one evaluation service and/or execution of at least one predefined instruction that pertains to the at least one evaluation service causes the metrics application to automatically update one or more of the evaluation metrics generated for the at least one item in the price data set and/or the product specification data set, continuously, at a predefined time or interval of time, upon the occurrence of a predefined event, or upon user-agent instruction.

64. In a networked environment, a system comprising:
a remotely-located server comprising:

- a network interface;
- a non-transitory computer-readable medium having computer-executable instructions stored thereon, wherein the computer-executable instructions, when executed, implement a plurality of components including:
 - a metric server adapter;
 - a metrics application; and
 - at least one communication application; and
- a processor in communication with the network interface and the computer-readable medium, wherein the processor is configured to execute the computer-executable instructions stored in the computer-readable medium;

wherein:

- the metric server adapter includes governing logic programmed to manage at least one evaluation service and a plurality of predefined instructions for managing metric data, and to dynamically define transaction-specific instructions for adapting metric data;
- the metrics application is a production application programmed to manage one or more purchase and/or analysis processes and to invoke and execute the at least one evaluation service in coordination with the metric server adapter, and to manage one or more user interfaces that, in operation, facilitate interactions with the remotely located server;
- the at least one communication application is programmed to manage one or more protocols that facilitate communications between one or more computing devices and the remotely-located server via the network interface; and
- in operation, in response to receipt of a triggering request from a buyer-agent computing device, the at least one communication application identifies an applicable protocol for communicating with the buyer-agent computing device and the metrics application receives from the buyer-agent computing device one or more product specification data sets, wherein each product specification data set identifies at least one item that is defined by a plurality of attributes having attribute data that includes two or more parameter values, or a plurality of items having a plurality of attributes that differ by at least one parameter value; and

using a first purchase process, the metrics application receives or retrieves at least one price data set responsive to at least one item identified in the one or more product specification data sets, wherein each

price data set comprises an offer to sell that includes price data for at least one item possessing a plurality of attributes having attribute data that includes at least one parameter value;

wherein receipt or retrieval of at least one price data set triggers the metrics application to invoke the at least one evaluation service which causes the metrics application, for each price data set, to:

obtain metric data from at least one data source accessible to the remotely-located server, wherein the obtained metric data represents market reference data for at least one responsive item having attributes corresponding to attributes of a respective item as identified in the price data set and includes market reference price data of a current time or current period of time, wherein each responsive item in the metric data possesses a plurality of attributes having attribute data that includes at least one parameter value;

evaluate the plurality of attributes of each responsive item in the metric data relative to the plurality of attributes for the respective item as identified in the price data set to dynamically discover a difference in the attribute data, wherein a discovered difference is disclosed to the metric server adapter which enables the metric server adapter to contextually define transaction-specific instructions for adapting the metric data for the respective item;

normalize the metric data by executing the transaction-specific instructions for adapting the metric data for the respective item, wherein execution of at least one transaction-specific instruction causes one or more adjustment values to be generated and applied to the market reference price data for at least one responsive item that differs by at least one parameter value from the respective item, transforming the market reference price data for the at least one responsive item and automatically producing one or more transaction-specific market reference price data values for the respective item; and

generate one or more evaluation metrics that pertain to the at least one evaluation service for the respective item as identified in each price data set received or retrieved via the first purchase process, wherein each evaluation metric is based, at least in part, on one or a combination of the transaction-specific market reference data values produced for the respective item as identified in the price data set, wherein at least one evaluation metric comprises a ratio or index value in which price data for the respective item is divided by one or a combination of the transaction-specific market reference price data values produced for the respective item, to generate a relative value metric;

wherein if no price data set has a relative value metric of less than one, the metrics application is programmed to retrieve or receive at least one price data set having a respective item responsive to the same at least one item using a second, different purchase process, and to produce, in coordination with the metric server adapter, one or more transaction-specific market reference price

data values and generate one or more evaluation metrics, including a relative value metric, for the respective item as identified in each price data set received or retrieved via the second purchase process; and

compare the price data sets received or retrieved via the first and second purchase processes using at least the relative value metric generated for the respective item as identified in each price data set;

wherein the metrics application is further programmed to communicate, in cooperation with the at least one communication application, a result of the comparison to at least the buyer-agent computing device.

65. The system of claim **64**, wherein the coordinated operation of the metrics application and the metric server adapter provides a common platform that, in operation, enables the metric server adapter to consistently define transaction-specific instructions for adapting metric data without regard to the purchase process used by the metrics application.

66. The system of claim **64**, wherein the metrics application is separate from the metric server adapter, and wherein coordinated operation of the metrics application with the metric server adapter enables the metrics application to algorithmically process the attribute data to dynamically identify at least one relationship comprising a difference within the attribute data, wherein the at least one relationship may include a new or previously unknown relationship.

67. The system of claim **64**, wherein the plurality of predefined instructions for managing metric data include one or more industry-specific instructions or one or more instructions predefined by a buyer-agent, and wherein the plurality of predefined instructions for managing metric data are stored in a memory accessible to the remotely-located server.

68. The system of claim **67**, wherein the coordinated operation of the metrics application and the metric server adapter enables the metric server adapter to autonomously manage the at least one evaluation service and the plurality of predefined instructions for managing metric data, to define transaction-specific instructions for adapting metric data, and wherein execution of the transaction-specific instructions by the metrics application provides an evaluation service that is customized for the buyer-agent or the industry without custom-coding the computer-executable instructions that comprise the metrics application.

69. The system of claim **64**, wherein the one or more parameter values represent attributes or conditions that are variable for a specific item or transaction.

70. The system of claim **64**, wherein the comparison provides an objective measure that enables a buyer-agent to identify an optimal purchase process with which to procure the at least one item identified in the one or more product specification data sets.

71. The system of claim **64**, wherein a price data set with a lowest relative value metric represents an optimal market value for the at least one item among the plurality of price data sets.

72. The system of claim **64**, wherein at least one received or retrieved price data set identifies at least one item that is not a perfect substitute for an item as identified in another received or retrieved price data set in that the at least one item is an alternate item or an item that differs by one or

more parameter values from the item as identified in the other received or retrieved price data set, and wherein the at least one relative value metric generated for the at least one item as identified in each of the plurality of price data sets provides an objective measure with which to compare the item or items across the plurality of received or retrieved price data sets, including the at least one price data set that identifies an alternate item or an item that differs by one or more parameter values.

73. The system of claim **64**, wherein the metrics application is further programmed to manage, in cooperation with the at least one communication application, one or more user interfaces that, in operation, communicate the result of the comparison for visual display on at least the buyer-agent computing device, wherein the one or more user interfaces facilitate interactions that enable the buyer-agent to expose underlying data in one or more layers of detail, to display additional data in one or more simultaneously displayed pop-up windows, to display linked information, or to display the same data in a different form or representing one or more different purchase processes or from one or more different sources of metric data or as determined at a different period of time.

74. The system of claim **64**, wherein execution of a predefined buy link preassociated with at least one price data set in the comparison communicated to the buyer-agent computing device causes the metrics application, in cooperation with the at least one communication application, to automatically transmit a purchase notice or purchase order to a seller-agent computing device associated with the at least one price data set.

75. The system of claim **64**, wherein invocation of the at least one evaluation service and/or execution of at least one predefined instruction that pertains to the at least one evaluation service causes the metrics application to manage, in cooperation with the at least one communication application, one or more user interfaces that, in operation, expose at least one item identified in the one or more product specification data sets to one or more trading venues, and to receive, from at least one seller-agent computing device, via the network interface, one or more price data sets responsive to at least one item identified in the one or more product specification data sets.

76. The system of claim **64**, wherein the metrics application is further programmed to manage, in cooperation with the at least one communication application, one or more user interfaces that, in operation, communicate a request for quotation (RFQ) for at least one item identified in the one or more product specification data sets to at least one seller-agent computing device on behalf of the buyer-agent, and to receive, from the at least one seller-agent computing device, via the network interface, one or more price data sets responsive to at least one item as identified in the RFQ.

77. The system of claim **64**, wherein at least one purchase process causes the metrics application to query one or more databases or data sources accessible to the service provider server or to monitor one or more data streams for at least one exposed price data set that is responsive to at least one item identified in the one or more product specification data sets.

78. The system of claim **64**, wherein the metrics application is further programmed to manage, in cooperation with the at least one communication application, one or more user interfaces that, in operation, enable the remotely-located

server to receive, from at least one seller-agent, an unsolicited offer to sell at least one item to the buyer-agent.

79. The system of claim **64**, wherein invocation of the at least one evaluation service and/or execution of at least one predefined instruction that pertains to the at least one evaluation service causes the metrics application to retrieve at least one price data set from one or more catalogs, price lists, or one or more programs pre-negotiated with a seller-agent.

80. The system of claim **64**, wherein invocation of the at least one evaluation service and/or execution of at least one predefined instruction that pertains to the at least one evaluation service causes the metrics application to compare a catalog purchase process to a market purchase process, wherein at least one relative value metric generated for the respective item as identified in each price data set retrieved via the catalog process is compared to at least one relative value metric generated for the respective item as identified in each price data set received via the market purchase process.

81. The system of claim **64**, wherein at least one price data set identifies a bundle of items defined by a plurality of attributes having attribute data that differs by at least one parameter value or wherein at least one item identified in at least one received or retrieved price data set is a combined item that represents a packaged product or transaction, a tally, or an assembly of one or more component parts, wherein each component part is defined by a plurality of attributes having attribute data that differs by at least one parameter value, wherein at least one predefined instruction that pertains to the at least one evaluation service causes the metrics application to subdivide the plurality of items or component parts of the bundle or combined item into a plurality of segments, wherein the metrics application selectively uses a different purchase process to receive or retrieve one or more price data sets for at least one segment of the bundle or combined item.

82. The system of claim **64**, wherein invocation of the at least one evaluation service and/or execution of at least one predefined instruction that pertains to the at least one evaluation service causes the metric server adapter to define at least one transaction-specific instruction that causes the metrics application to limit the metric data to market-reference data associated with at least one predefined seller-agent or metric data source or to filter, for inclusion or exclusion, the one or more responsive items in the metric data using one or more predefined control values, criteria, or parameters, and to use only a limited or filtered segment of the metric data to produce the one or more transaction-specific market reference price data values for the at least one item identified in the price data set.

83. In a networked environment, a system comprising:
a remotely-located server comprising:

- a network interface;
- a non-transitory computer-readable medium having computer-executable instructions stored thereon, wherein the computer-executable instructions, when executed, implement a plurality of components including:
 - a metric server adapter;
 - a metrics application; and
 - at least one communication application; and
- a processor in communication with the network interface and the computer-readable medium, wherein the

processor is configured to execute the computer-executable instructions stored in the computer-readable medium;

wherein:

the metric server adapter includes governing logic programmed to manage at least one evaluation service and a plurality of predefined instructions for managing metric data, including industry-specific instructions or a buyer-agent's customized instructions, and to dynamically define transaction-specific instructions for adapting metric data;

the metrics application is a production application programmed to manage one or more purchase and/or analysis processes and to invoke and execute the at least one evaluation service in coordination with the metric server adapter, and to manage one or more user interfaces that, in operation, facilitate interactions with the remotely located server;

the at least one communication application is programmed to manage one or more protocols that facilitate communications between one or more computing devices and the remotely-located server via the network interface; and

in operation, in response to receipt of a triggering request from a buyer-agent computing device, the at least one communication application identifies an applicable protocol for communicating with the buyer-agent computing device and the metrics application receives from the buyer-agent computing device at least one evaluation scenario for analysis, the at least one evaluation scenario identifying two or more different purchase processes, at least one product specification data set, and at least one particular time or period of time, wherein each product specification data set identifies at least one item that is defined by a plurality of attributes having attribute data that includes two or more parameter values, or a plurality of items having a plurality of attributes that differ by at least one parameter value;

wherein receipt of at least one evaluation scenario triggers the metrics application to invoke the at least one evaluation service which causes the metrics application, for each purchase process identified in the at least one evaluation scenario, to:

retrieve the buyer-agent's historical purchase data associated with the purchase process for the at least one particular time or period of time, wherein the retrieved purchase data includes one or more price data sets responsive to at least one item identified in the at least one product specification data set, each price data set including price data for at least one item, and each item possessing a plurality of attributes having attribute data that includes at least one parameter value;

for each price data set, obtain metric data from at least one data source accessible to the remotely-located server, wherein the obtained metric data represents market reference data for at least one responsive item having attributes corresponding to attributes of a respective item as identified in the price data set and includes market reference price data for the at least one particular time or period of time, wherein each responsive item in the metric data possesses a plu-

rality of attributes having attribute data that includes at least one parameter value;

evaluate the plurality of attributes of each responsive item in the metric data relative to the plurality of attributes for the respective item as identified in the price data set to dynamically discover a difference in the attribute data, wherein a discovered difference is disclosed to the metric server adapter which enables the metric server adapter to contextually define transaction-specific instructions for adapting the metric data for the respective item;

normalize the metric data by executing the transaction-specific instructions for adapting metric data for the respective item, wherein execution of at least one transaction-specific instruction causes one or more adjustment values to be generated and applied to the market reference price data for at least one responsive item that differs by at least one parameter value from the respective item, transforming the market reference price data for the at least one responsive item and automatically producing one or more transaction-specific market reference price data values for the respective item;

generate one or more evaluation metrics that pertain to the at least one evaluation service for at least one item identified in the at least one product specification data set for the at least one particular time or period of time, wherein each evaluation metric is based, at least in part, on one or a combination of the transaction-specific market reference price data values produced for the respective item as identified in the price data sets associated with each purchase process; and

compare the two or more purchase processes identified in the at least one evaluation scenario using one or more of the evaluation metrics generated for the respective item as identified in the price data sets associated with each purchase process;

wherein the metrics application is further programmed to communicate, in coordination with the at least one communication application, a result of the comparison to at least the buyer-agent controlled computing device.

84. The system of claim **83**, wherein the coordinated operation of the metrics application and the metric server adapter provides a common platform that, in operation, enables the metric server adapter to consistently define transaction-specific instructions for adapting metric data without regard to the one or more purchase processes being analyzed by the metrics application.

85. The system of claim **83**, wherein invocation of the at least one evaluation service and/or execution of at least one predefined instruction that pertains to the at least one evaluation service causes the metrics application to generate a relative value metric for each of the two or more purchase processes identified in the evaluation scenario, wherein price data associated with the respective item as identified in each of the price data set associated with a particular purchase process is combined to determine an average price paid by the buyer-agent for the at least one item over the identified at least one period of time using the particular purchase process and further to combine the corresponding transaction-specific market reference price data values produced for the respective item as identified in each retrieved price data set to determine an average market-reference price data

value for the at least one item over the same period of time, wherein the average price paid by the buyer-agent is divided by the average market-reference price data value produced for the at least one item in the price data sets to generate the relative value metric, comprising a ratio or index value, for each of the two or more identified purchase processes.

86. The system of claim **83**, wherein a purchase process with a lowest relative value metric represents an optimal purchase process with which to procure the at least one item identified in the at least one product specification data set over the at least one period of time identified in the evaluation scenario.

87. The system of claim **86**, wherein the metrics application is programmed to manage, in cooperation with the at least one communications application, at least one interface that enables the buyer-agent to predefine at least one instruction that preassociates the optimal purchase process with the at least one item, wherein upon receiving a product specification data set from a computing device under the control of the buyer-agent that identifies the at least one item, the metrics application is caused to automatically use the pre-associated purchase process to receive or retrieve at least one price data set responsive to the at least one item as identified in the product specification data set.

88. The system of claim **83**, wherein the metrics application is separate from the metric server adapter, and wherein coordinated operation of the metrics application with the metric server adapter enables the metrics application to algorithmically process the attribute data to dynamically identify at least one relationship comprising a difference within the attribute data, wherein the at least one relationship may include a new or previously unknown relationship.

89. The system of claim **83**, wherein the coordinated operation of the metrics application and the metric server adapter enables the metric server adapter to autonomously manage the at least one evaluation service and the plurality of predefined instructions for managing metric data to define transaction-specific instructions for adapting metric data, and wherein execution of the transaction-specific instructions by the metrics application provides an evaluation service that is customized for the buyer-agent or the industry without custom-coding the computer-executable instructions that comprise the metrics application.

90. The system of claim **83**, wherein the metrics application is further programmed to manage, in coordination with the at least one communication application, one or more user interfaces that, in operation, communicate, via the network interface, a result of the comparison for display on at least the buyer-agent computing device which identified the at least one evaluation scenario, wherein the one or more user interfaces facilitate interactions that enable the buyer-agent to expose underlying data in one or more layers of detail, to display additional data in one or more simultaneously displayed pop-up windows, to display linked information, or to display the same data in a different form or representing one or more different purchase processes or from one or more different sources of metric data or as determined at a different period of time.

91. The system of claim **83**, wherein invocation of the at least one evaluation service and/or execution of at least one predefined instruction that pertains to the at least one evaluation service causes the metrics application to obtain metric data for an alternate item, wherein the alternate item is a

substitute item and/or differs by at least one parameter value from the at least one item as identified in the at least one product specification data set, and further causes the metrics application, in coordination with the metric server adapter, to produce the one or more transaction-specific market reference price data values using, at least in part, metric data obtained for the alternate item.

92. The system of claim **83**, wherein a plurality of evaluation scenarios are received from the buyer-agent computing device for analysis, wherein at least one evaluation scenario specifies the use of an alternate item, alternate parameter, alternate time or period of time, alternate metric data source, or combination thereof.

93. The system of claim **83**, wherein invocation of the at least one evaluation service and/or execution of at least one predefined instruction that pertains to the at least one evaluation service causes the metrics application to generate at least one evaluation metric that comprises a range of values for each purchase process, wherein each value in the range of values is based, at least in part, on one or a combination of transaction-specific market reference price data values produced for the respective item as identified in the at least one price data set retrieved from the historical purchase data for each of the two or more different purchase processes identified in the at least one evaluation scenario.

94. The system of claim **83**, wherein the one or more parameter values represent attributes or conditions that are variable for a specific item or transaction.

95. The system of claim **83**, wherein invocation of the at least one evaluation service and/or execution of at least one predefined instructions that pertains to the at least one evaluation service causes the metric server adapter to define at least one transaction-specific instruction that causes the metrics application to filter the buyer-agent's historic purchase data using one or more predefined control values, criteria, or parameters, and to only retrieve price data sets that satisfy the specified control values, criteria, or parameters.

96. The system of claim **83**, wherein at least one evaluation scenario identified by the buyer-agent causes the metrics application to filter the buyer-agent's historic purchase data and to only retrieve price data sets associated with a particular seller-agent, type of seller-agent, a particular transaction type, or purchase data resulting from an executed purchase or contract.

97. The system of claim **83**, wherein invocation of the at least one evaluation service and/or execution of at least one predefined instruction that pertains to the at least one evaluation service causes the metrics application to automatically query one or more databases or data sources accessible to the remotely-located server or to monitor one or more data streams to obtain metric data for one or more items responsive to the attributes of at least one item identified in at least one retrieved price data set.

98. The system of claim **83**, wherein invocation of the at least one evaluation service and/or execution of at least one predefined instruction that pertains to the at least one evaluation service causes the metrics application to evaluate each responsive item in the metric data for satisfaction of one or more predefined validation rules and/or statistical criteria and to only produce the one or more transaction-specific market reference price data values for the respective item using metric data that satisfies the predefined validation rules and/or statistical criteria.

99. The system of claim **83**, wherein invocation of the at least one evaluation service and/or execution of at least one predefined instruction that pertains to the at least one evaluation service causes the metric server adapter to define at least one transaction-specific instruction that causes the metrics application to limit the metric data to market-reference data associated with at least one predefined seller-agent or metric data source, or to filter, for inclusion or exclusion, the one or more responsive items in the metric data using one or more predefined control values, criteria, or parameters, and to use only a limited or filtered segment of the metric data to produce the one or more transaction-specific market reference price data values for the respective item.

100. The system of claim **83**, wherein invocation of the at least one evaluation service and/or execution of at least one predefined instruction that pertains to the at least one evaluation service causes the metrics application to limit the obtained metric data to market-reference price data representing the same time or period of time as that of the price data set.

101. The system of claim **83**, wherein the transformation of the market reference price data occurs independent of unit-of-measure conversion of data in the metric data for responsive items that are defined by a unit-of-measure.

102. The system of claim **3**, wherein the metric server adapter uses the at least one relationship comprising a difference to ascertain which of the predefined instructions for adapting metric data are applicable to the responsive item, wherein the metric server adapter uses the attributes and one or more parameter values of the respective item, in combination with the predefined instructions for adapting metric data ascertained to be applicable to the responsive item, to contextually define transaction-specific instructions for adapting the metric data for the respective item.

103. The system of claim **1**, wherein the governing logic comprises a module or application or a separate application layer, wherein the governing logic cohesively manages a plurality of predefined instructions that pertain to the at least one evaluation service, wherein the predefined instructions identify rules or variables or criteria that were predefined and preassociated with the at least one evaluation service, and wherein the predefined instructions serve to identify or modify features or elements that pertain to the at least one evaluation service or to limit at least one functionality of the at least one evaluation service or a feature or element identified therein.

104. The system of claim **47**, wherein the metric server adapter uses the at least one relationship comprising a difference to ascertain which of the predefined instructions for adapting metric data are applicable to the responsive item, wherein the metric server adapter uses the attributes and one or more parameter values of the respective item, in combination with the predefined instructions for adapting metric data ascertained to be applicable to the responsive item, to contextually define transaction-specific instructions for adapting the metric data for the respective item.

105. The system of claim **46**, wherein the governing logic comprises a module or application or a separate application layer, wherein the governing logic cohesively manages a plurality of predefined instructions that pertain to the at least one evaluation service, wherein the predefined instructions identify rules or variables or criteria that were predefined and preassociated with the at least one evaluation service, and wherein the predefined instructions serve to identify or modify features or elements that pertain to the at least one evaluation service or to limit at least one functionality of the at least one evaluation service or a feature or element identified therein.

106. The system of claim **66**, wherein the metric server adapter uses the at least one relationship comprising a difference to ascertain which of the predefined instructions for adapting metric data are applicable to the responsive item, wherein the metric server adapter uses the attributes and one or more parameter values of the respective item, in combination with the predefined instructions for adapting metric data ascertained to be applicable to the responsive item, to contextually define transaction-specific instructions for adapting the metric data for the respective item.

107. The system of claim **64**, wherein the governing logic comprises a module or application or a separate application layer, wherein the governing logic cohesively manages a plurality of predefined instructions that pertain to the at least one evaluation service, wherein the predefined instructions identify rules or variables or criteria that were predefined and preassociated with the at least one evaluation service, and wherein the predefined instructions serve to identify or modify features or elements that pertain to the at least one evaluation service or to limit at least one functionality of the at least one evaluation service or a feature or element identified therein.

108. The system of claim **88**, wherein the metric server adapter uses the at least one relationship comprising a difference to ascertain which of the predefined instructions for adapting metric data are applicable to the responsive item, wherein the metric server adapter uses the attributes and one or more parameter values of the respective item, in combination with the predefined instructions for adapting metric data ascertained to be applicable to the responsive item, to contextually define transaction-specific instructions for adapting the metric data for the respective item.

109. The system of claim **83**, wherein the governing logic comprises a module or application or a separate application layer, wherein the governing logic cohesively manages a plurality of predefined instructions that pertain to the at least one evaluation service, wherein the predefined instructions identify rules or variables or criteria that were predefined and preassociated with the at least one evaluation service, and wherein the predefined instructions serve to identify or modify features or elements that pertain to the at least one evaluation service or to limit at least one functionality of the at least one evaluation service or a feature or element identified therein.

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