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(71) Applicant(s)
Canon Kabushiki Kaisha

(72) Inventor(s)
Hiroshi Matsui

(74) Agent/Attorney
SPRUSON and FERGUSON,GPO Box 3898,SYDNEY NSW 2001

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

NETWORK INFORMATION SEARCHING APPARATUS AND NETWORK INFORMATION SEARCHING METHOD

5

A collecting process of data which is managed by each server (103) on a network (102) is first started by information collection means (107). In the collecting process, data under a point serving as a root is collected while repeating processes such that data at the point serving as a certain root is collected on the basis of access setting
10 information, a link destination is extracted from the collected data, and data on the extracted link destination is further collected. Subsequently, the data which is necessary by the user is extracted by extraction means (109). The extracted data is outputted (110) to an output destination. Thus, the information which is required by the user can be searched from the information managed and held in a plurality of
15 information processing apparatuses (103) on the network (102) without forcing surplus labor and time to the user.

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COMPLETE SPECIFICATION

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ORIGINAL

Name and Address
of Applicant:

Canon Kabushiki Kaisha
30-2, Shimomaruko 3-chome
Ohta-ku
Tokyo
JAPAN

Actual Inventor(s):

Hiroshi Matsui

Address for Service:

Spruson & Ferguson, Patent Attorneys
Level 33 St Martins Tower, 31 Market Street
Sydney, New South Wales, 2000, Australia

Invention Title:

Network Information Searching Apparatus and Network
Information Searching Method

The following statement is a full description of this invention, including the best method of performing it known to me/us:-

NETWORK INFORMATION SEARCHING APPARATUS
AND NETWORK INFORMATION SEARCHING METHOD

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

5 Field of the Invention

The invention relates to a network information searching apparatus which is connected to a plurality of information processing apparatuses on a network through the network and is used to search information
10 required by the user from information managed and held in each of the information processing apparatuses and also relates to a method for such an apparatus.

Related Background Art

In case of searching desired information of the
15 user from information managed and held by a plurality of computers on a network, it is necessary to repetitively execute an operation to obtain the information and an operation to confirm the contents of the obtained information until necessary information or
20 information including the necessary information is obtained. That is, it is necessary to repetitively execute an operation for accessing from a computer of the user through the network to a server program operating on the computer connected to the network and
25 for obtaining information in accordance with a procedure corresponding to the server program after accessing, an operation for reading the contents of the

obtained information and confirming whether the necessary information is included in the information or not, and an operation for getting next information if the necessary information is not included in the
5 obtained information.

In case of searching necessary information from information of a page construction which is managed by a WWW (World Wide Web) system constructed by a WWW program operating on a computer connected to the
10 internet and is logically linked by a URL (Uniform Resource Locator), the necessary information is searched by repeating operations such that the contents of an arbitrary page in information of the page construction managed are read, if the necessary
15 information does not exist in the page, characters or a figure, namely, what is called an anchor concerned with a URL of a page which may include the necessary information at a page that is at present opened is clicked by a mouse, a corresponding next page is
20 displayed, and the contents of this page are read.

An example of the operations in case of searching necessary information from the information managed by the WWW system will now be described with reference to Fig. 14. Fig. 14 is a diagram for explaining the
25 operation example in case of searching the necessary information from the information managed by the conventional WWW system.

For example, as shown in Fig. 14, the contents of an arbitrary page 8101 in information of a page construction managed by a plurality of WWW servers 81, 82, ..., and 8n are read. If the necessary information does not exist in this page, characters or a figure, that is, an anchor 8101-1 here concerned with a URL which may include the necessary information at this page is clicked, so that a page 8102 is displayed. The user reads the contents of the page 8102. When he confirms that the information which is needed by the user does not exist in the page 8102 in a manner similar to the above operation, characters or a figure concerned with the URL of the page which may include the necessary information is clicked by the mouse, thereby displaying the next page.

However, in case of searching the necessary information from the information managed by the WWW system mentioned above, as characters or a figure concerned with the URL of the page which may include the necessary information at the page that is at present opened, which characters or figure should be selected often depends on intuition of the user. The user cannot know the relations among the pages. Therefore, it is necessary to repeat the operations many times and the user is forced to read unnecessary information other than the object for a period of time until the necessary information is searched. Much

surplus labor and surplus working time are required for the operation by the page including the necessary information is found.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

5 It is an object of the invention to provide a network information searching apparatus and a network information searching method which can search information specified by the user from information managed and held in a plurality of information processing apparatuses on a network without forcing surplus labor and time to the user.

According to a first aspect of the invention there is provided a network
10 information searching apparatus which is connectable through a network to a plurality of information processing apparatus on the network and to be used to search information corresponding to requirement information specified by the user from stored information stored in memory means in each of said information processing apparatuses, comprising:

information collection means for collecting the information stored in each of said
15 memory means through said network by preferentially collecting information which is concerned with the requirement information specified by said user at a predetermined probability;

information holding means for holding the stored information collected by said information collection means;



extracting means for extracting information corresponding to the requirement information specified by said user from the stored information held in said information holding means; and

5 output means for outputting said extracted information extracted by said extraction means.

According to a second aspect of the invention there is provided a network information searching method of a network information searching apparatus which is connected through a network to a plurality of information processing apparatus on the network and is used to search information corresponding to requirement information
10 specified by the user from stored information stored in memory means in each of said information processing apparatuses, comprising:

an information collecting step of collecting stored information stored in each of said memory means through said network by preferentially collecting information which is concerned with the requirement information specified by said user at a predetermined
15 probability;

an information holding step of holding the stored information into said information holding means;

an extracting step of extracting information corresponding to the requirement information specified by said user from the stored information held in said information
20 holding means; and

an output step of outputting said extracted information.



According to a further aspect of the invention there is provided a storage medium which is connectable through a network to a plurality of information processing apparatus on the network and in which a network information searching program to search information corresponding to requirement information specified by the user from stored information stored in memory means in each of said information processing apparatuses
5 has been stored,

wherein said network information searching program comprises:

an information collection module for collecting information stored in each of said memory means through said network by preferentially collecting information which
10 is concerned with the requirement information specified by said user at a predetermined probability;

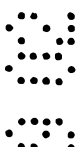
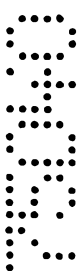
an information holding module for holding said stored information into information holding means;

an extracting module for extracting information corresponding to the
15 requirement information specified by said user from the stored information held in said information holding means; and

an output module for outputting said extracted information.

According to a further aspect of the invention there is provided a network information searching system constructed by a plurality of information processing apparatuses and a network information searching apparatus which are mutually connected
20 through a network,

wherein said network information searching apparatus comprises:



information collection means for collecting stored information stored in memory means in each of said information processing apparatuses through said network by preferentially collecting information which is concerned with requirement information
5 specified by said user at a predetermined probability;

information holding means for holding the stored information collection collected by said information collection means;

extracting means for extracting information corresponding to the requirement information specified by said user from the stored information held in said information
10 holding means; and

output means for outputting said extracted information extracted by said extraction.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

15 Fig. 1 is a block diagram showing a construction of an embodiment of a network information searching apparatus of the invention;

Fig. 2 is a diagram showing the contents of environment setting information which is used in the network information searching apparatus of Fig. 1;

Fig. 3 is a diagram showing the contents of access



setting information which is used in the network
information searching apparatus of Fig. 1;

Fig. 4 is a diagram showing the contents of
extraction condition setting information which is used
5 in the network information searching apparatus of Fig.
1;

Fig. 5 is a diagram showing the contents of
address information which is used in the network
information searching apparatus of Fig. 1;

10 Fig. 6 is a diagram showing the contents of image
characteristics information which is used in the
network information searching apparatus of Fig. 1;

Fig. 7 is a diagram for explaining an example of
the operation in an information search using the
15 network information searching apparatus of Fig. 1;

Fig. 8 is a diagram conceptually showing data
stored in storage means in the network information
searching apparatus of Fig. 1;

Fig. 9 is a diagram for explaining an example of a
20 directivity data collection from a WWW system in the
network information searching apparatus of Fig. 1;

Fig. 10 is a flowchart showing a processing
procedure in the network information searching
apparatus of Fig. 1;

25 Fig. 11 is a flowchart showing a processing
procedure for searching a server program which operates
on a server computer on a network in the network

information searching apparatus of Fig. 1;

Fig. 12 is a flowchart showing a processing procedure in case of collecting information having directivity in the network information searching apparatus of Fig. 1;

Fig. 13 is a flowchart showing a processing procedure for extracting image data having designated characteristics in the network information searching apparatus of Fig. 1; and

Fig. 14 is a diagram for explaining an operation example in case of searching necessary information from information managed by a conventional WWW system.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

An embodiment of the invention will now be described hereinbelow with reference to the drawings.

(a) First Embodiment:

Fig. 1 is a block diagram showing a construction of an embodiment of a network information searching apparatus of the invention.

As shown in Fig. 1, a plurality of server computers 103(m) ($m = 1, 2, \dots, n$) are connected to an internet network (hereinafter, referred to as a network) 102. An information management system to manage holding information by server programs such as WWW server programs 1 to n, file server programs 1 to n, and the like is constructed in each of the server

computers 103(m).

A network information searching apparatus 101 is used as an apparatus for searching information required by the user from the information held in each of the server computers 103(m). The apparatus 101 is connected to the network 102 through a public line 112 and a provider 111. The network information searching apparatus 101 comprises input means 104, storage means 105, timer start means 106, information collection means 107, memory means 108, extraction means 109, and output means 110.

The input means 104 inputs various information such as environment setting information, access setting information, extraction condition setting information, address information, extraction image information, and the like in accordance with the operation by the user. The inputted various information is stored into the storage means 105.

Fig. 2 is a diagram showing the contents of the environment setting information which is used in the network information searching apparatus of Fig. 1.

As shown in Fig. 2, in the environment setting information, there have been registered: a date, a day of the week, and time of "start"; a date, a day of the week, and time of "end"; a timer setting to set everyday, every week, or every month in case of periodically starting; a timeout of the connection; the

number of times of retry; a transfer amount upon downloading; and the number of sessions which are simultaneously accessed.

Fig. 3 is a diagram showing the contents of the access setting information which is used in the network information searching apparatus of Fig. 1.

As shown in Fig. 3, in the access setting information, there have been registered: an access setting No.; an address of the server which is used; a classification of the server; a URL serving as a root in case of accessing to the WWW server; a hierarchical layer showing a depth of downloading; a mail address of the user in case of accessing to a mail system; a directory serving as a root in case of accessing to a file server; a user ID; a password; a directivity collection to set whether the directivity collection is performed or not; and a hierarchical layer serving as a unit of discrimination about the directivity collection.

Fig. 4 is a diagram showing the contents of the extraction condition setting information which is used in the network information searching apparatus of Fig. 1.

As shown in Fig. 4, in the extraction condition setting information, there have been registered: an extraction condition setting No.; an access setting No. concerned with the access setting No. of the access

setting information; a search extraction to set whether
the extraction by the search is performed or not; a
synonym extraction to set whether the extraction by a
synonym is performed or not; an analogue extraction to
5 set whether the extraction by an analogue is performed
or not; a search object to designate a search object;
search conditions 1 to n to set a search keyword and
the like; a data type extraction to set whether the
extraction by a data type is performed or not; data
10 types 1 to n to designate a type of data to be
extracted; an image extraction to set whether the
extraction by characteristics of the image data is
performed or not; image conditions 1 to n to designate
characteristics of the image data to be extracted; an
15 output destination designation to set an output
destination; an address No. in case of outputting to a
mail or FAX; and extra condition data to set whether
the data which is not congruous with the extraction
conditions is left or not.

20 Fig. 5 is a diagram showing the contents of the
address information which is used in the network
information searching apparatus of Fig. 1. Fig. 6 is a
diagram showing the contents of the image
characteristics information.

25 As shown in Fig. 5, a mail or an FAX telephone
number of the address has been registered in the
address information. As shown in Fig. 6, an image

condition No. and image characteristics information have been registered in the image extraction information.

The information collection means 107 comprises means for accessing to the corresponding server computer (m) on the basis of the access setting information and collecting information held by each server computer (m) through the network 102. The information collected by the information collection means 107 is held in the memory means 108. The extraction means 109 extracts the information corresponding to the information required by the user on the basis of the extraction condition setting information set by the user from the information held in the memory means 108. The extracted information is outputted to the output destination designated by the output destination designation included in the extraction condition setting information by the output means 110. The timer start means 106 comprises means for starting the information collection means 107 on the basis of the information included in the environment setting information.

Subsequently, a series of operations in case of searching the information which is needed by the user will now be described by using the network information searching apparatus 101 with reference to Figs. 1 to 5 and 7. Fig. 7 is a diagram for explaining an example

of the operation in the information search using the network information searching apparatus of Fig. 1. The series of operations will now be described with respect to an example in the case where the apparatus is
5 connected to the network 102 at night when the network 102 is free, a series of WWW pages designated by the user is collected, the pages which are needed by the user are extracted from the collected pages, and the extracted pages are browsed in the daytime.

10 It is assumed that the information which is needed by the user, for example, the pages including the information regarding a printing device are a page 718 in a server 710 of A newspaper company and a page 7n4 in a server 7nn of N newspaper company and that a page
15 of an index having a logical link to each newspaper company is a page 702 under the management of the WWW server 701 of CC Co. Ltd.

In this case, first, the user sets various information through the input means 104. In the access
20 setting information, as shown in the access setting No. 1 in Fig. 3, a URL of the page 702 as a URL serving as a root is set to 3 as a hierarchical layer which traces the link. In case of storing the extracted information into a homepage and confirming, in the extraction
25 condition setting information, as shown in the extraction condition No. 1 in Fig. 4, 1 is set into the access setting No. and the storage device (storage

means 105 here) is set to the output destination,
respectively. Further, for example, in case of setting
so as to start the information collection means 1 at 3
a.m. when it is presumed that the network 102 and WWW
5 server 701 will be free, as shown in Fig. 2, the start
time in the environment information setting information
is set to 3 a.m..

When the time of 3 a.m. comes, the information
collection means 107 is started by the timer start
10 means 106. The information collection means 107 refers
to the access setting information held in the storage
means 105, connects to the provider 111 through the
public line 112, and connects to the network 102 via
the provider 111. After it was connected to the
15 network 102, first, the data at the page 702 under the
management of the WWW server 701 of CC Co., Ltd. is
collected. The information of the linked URL is
extracted from the collected data. The data at pages
711 to 7n1 on the linked destination side is collected
20 from the page 702 on the basis of the extracted link
information. The information of the linked URL is
extracted from those pages. By repeating the processes
for collecting the page data of further lower
hierarchical layers on the basis of the extracted link
25 information, the data as much as four hierarchical
layers is collected. After completion of the
collection of the data, the connection to the provider

111 through the public line 112 is disconnected. The data collected by the information collection means 107 is held in the memory means 108.

5 The data corresponding to the information which is needed by the user is extracted by the extraction means 109. In the extracting process, with reference to the extraction condition setting information, the data held in the memory means 108 is discriminated to see whether a keyword of "printing device", a synonym, or an
10 analogue is included in the whole text or not on a page unit basis. If there is a page including the keyword, synonym, or analogue, the data of this page is stored into the storage means 105.

15 After the data was stored, the user displays the data stored in the storage means 105 to display means (not shown) and confirms the contents of the data.

20 The data stored in the storage means 105 will now be described with reference to Fig. 8. Fig. 8 is a diagram conceptually showing the data stored in the storage means of the network information searching apparatus of Fig. 1.

25 As shown in Fig. 8, page data 9101, 9102, and 9103 extracted by the extracting process is stored in the storage means 105. The page data 9101 is the data of the page having index information of the extraction result. The page data 9102 is the data of the page corresponding to the page 718 shown in Fig. 7. The

page data 9103 is the data of the page corresponding to the page 7n4 shown in Fig. 7. Therefore, it is sufficient for the user to confirm the page data 9102 and 9103. It will be understood that the work can be remarkably reduced as compared with a work to confirm the pages of the lower hierarchical layers in which the page 702 in Fig. 7 is the top hierarchy.

A processing procedure in the network information searching apparatus 101 will now be described with reference to Fig. 10. Fig. 10 is a flowchart showing a processing procedure in the network information searching apparatus of Fig. 1.

First, the processing routine is started in step S1. The "start" of the processing routine denotes that the information collecting process by the information collection means 107 is started. As a starting method, there is a start by the timer start means 106 or a start by the operation of the input means 104.

In step S2, the collecting process of the network information by the information collection means 107 is subsequently executed. In the collecting process, the data under the point serving as a root is collected up to the set hierarchical layer while repeating processes for collecting the data at a point serving as a certain root on the basis of the access setting information, extracting the link destination from the collected data, and further collecting the data on the extracted

link destination. The "point serving as a root" here denotes a page shown by the URL in the WWW system, a directory of the file system in the file server system on the network, or a mail address in the mail system.

5 In step S3, the data which is needed by the user is extracted by the extraction means 109. The extraction condition which is used at the time of data extraction is held as extraction condition setting information in the storage means 105 as mentioned
10 above. As an extracting method of the data, there is an extraction of data including the image set by the user, an extraction of data of the type set by the user, an extraction of data including the data set by the user, an extraction by the keyword set by the user,
15 an extraction by the synonym of the keyword set by the user, or an extraction by the analogue of the keyword set by the user.

 The extraction of data of the type set by the user denotes that, for example, in case of the data of the
20 page under the management of the WWW system, only the data of the designated type is extracted from the page. As a type of data, there is text data, image data, audio data, or binary data.

 The extraction of data including the data set by
25 the user denotes that, for example, in case of the data of the page under the management of the WWW system, all of the data of the page including the data of the

designated type is extracted from the page, and that in case of the file, the file itself including the data of the designated type is extracted.

5 The extraction by the keyword, synonym of the keyword, or analogue of the keyword denotes that on the basis of the keyword and its synonym or analogue, the search is performed for the title of the data, file name, URL name, and the whole sentences of the text as targets, and the data including the keyword and its
10 synonym or analogue is extracted. Whether the extracted data is congruous with the search condition or not is determined by designating by the user after the data was extracted.

15 In step S4, the extracted data is outputted. In the data output, the extracted data is outputted to the output destination designated by the output destination designation included in the extraction condition setting information. As an output destination, it is possible to set the storage means 105, printing device,
20 display means, arbitrary FAX number, arbitrary mail address, or the like.

In step S5, the confirmation of the user for the outputted information is performed. The processing routine is finished.
25

(b) Second Embodiment

In step S2 mentioned above, the process has been

performed on the assumption of the case where the information such as server address, URL, or the like in which the point serving as a root exists has been set by the access setting information, namely, the case
5 where the user knows the information of the server address, URL, or the like as a prerequisite. However, processes in the case where the user does not know such information will now be described with reference to Fig. 11. Fig. 11 is a flowchart showing a procedure
10 for processes for searching a server program operating on the server computer on the network in the network information searching apparatus of Fig. 1.

First in step S21, a response request is issued to each of the server computers 103(m) on the network 102.
15 In step S22, a check is made to see if there is a response to the response request from each server computer 103(m). If there is a response, step S23 follows and a request is issued to the server on the server computer 103(m) which responded. In step S24, a
20 check is made to see if there is a response to the request from the corresponding server. If there is a response to the request from the corresponding server, the processing routine advances to a process to search the data which is needed by the user while using the
25 server as a root. If the target data does not exist in the hierarchical data constructed under the dominant of the root, the processing routine is returned to step

S21 and the process to search the next server is performed.

The order of the server computers 103(m) to generate the response request in step S21 is determined
5 by preferentially using the method selected by the user among the well-known method of preferentially using the typical address, a method of preferentially using the address near the address of the user, and a method of accessing at random.

10

(c) Third Embodiment:

In step S2, a processing procedure in case of collecting the information having directivity will now be described with reference to Fig. 12. Fig. 12 is a
15 flowchart showing the processing procedure in case of collecting the information having directivity in the network information searching apparatus of Fig. 1.

First in step S31, the data as much as the hierarchical layers set in the access setting
20 information is collected. In step S32, a grade congruous with the extraction condition is numerically evaluated.

In step S33, the hierarchical data of data located under the page having a high grade congruous with the
25 extraction condition is collected by only an amount of the directivity collection hierarchical layers set in the access setting information. In step S34, a check

is made to see if an end condition has been satisfied. If the end condition is not satisfied, the processing routine is returned to step S32. Processes from step S32 are repetitively executed by the end condition is
5 satisfied. When the end condition is satisfied, the processing routine is finished.

The collection of the information having the directivity will now be described with reference to Fig. 9 with respect to an example in the case of
10 collecting the data from the WWW system. Fig. 9 is a diagram for explaining an example of the directivity data collection from the WWW system in the network information searching apparatus of Fig. 1.

In Fig. 9, in the case where the hierarchical
15 layer to collect the data in a lump is labelled as "1" while using a page 10101 as a root, first, the data of pages 10102 to 10104 of the hierarchical layers under the page 10101 is collected, a grade congruous with the extraction condition is numerically evaluated, and it
20 is assumed that the page in which the congruous grade is the highest is the page 10103. In this instance, the data of pages 10106 to 10108 under the page 10103 is collected. Similar processes are repeated. When it is assumed that the pages in which the grade congruous
25 with the extraction condition is high are the page 10106 among the pages 10106 to 10108 and a page 10202 among pages 10202 to 10204, the pages included in the

range of a page 11111 to be collected are collected.

(d) Fourth Embodiment:

In step S3, the case of extracting the image data
5 having the designated characteristics will now be
described with reference to Fig. 13. Fig. 13 is a
flowchart showing a processing procedure for extracting
the image data having designated characteristics in the
network information searching apparatus of Fig. 1.

10 First in step S41, the image data is extracted
from the information collected in step S2 (shown in
Fig. 10). In step S42, characteristics of the
extracted image data are extracted. In step S43, by
comparing the extracted characteristics of the image
15 with the image extraction information (shown in Fig. 6)
set by the user, the image data having the
characteristics of the image data which is needed by
the user is extracted.

As characteristics of the image which is set by
20 the user, there are an outline and a color such as
human object, house, or the like solely having certain
characteristics in case of an outline, scenery
characteristics such as mountain, plain, sea, four
seasons, or the like in case of a scene, and the like.

25 As mentioned above, in the network information
searching apparatus 101, the data held by the server
system of each server computer 103(m) is collected

through the network 102. The data corresponding to the data required by the user is extracted from the collected data. The extracted data is outputted to the set output destination. Therefore, the data which is
5 needed by the user can be searched from the data managed and held by the server system of each of the server computers 103(m) on the network 102 without forcing surplus labor and time to the user.

10 Data can be automatically collected in a time zone when the network is free, the communication time can be reduced, and the communication costs can be reduced.

Further, since the extracted data is outputted to the designated output destination, for example, it is possible to easily set a mode to print and output the
15 pages which are seen everyday by a predetermined time in the morning, a mode to output them as a mail to himself, a mode to transmit them to an FAX apparatus of a predetermined address, or the like. The extracted information can be confirmed in a desired output form
20 of the user.

In the embodiment, although the example in which the network information searching apparatus 101 is constructed as a single apparatus has been shown, the network information searching apparatus 101 can be also
25 constructed by a personal computer. In this case, there is used a personal computer comprising at least: a keyboard or a mouse constructing the input means 104;

a display; an external memory device such as hard disk
or the like constructing the storage means 105 or
memory means 108; and an interface to connect to the
provider 111 through the public line. A network
5 information searching program including an information
collecting module constructing the information
collection means 107, an information holding module for
holding the collected data into the external memory
device, an extracting module constructing the
10 extraction means 109, and an output module constructing
the output means 110 is stored in the external memory
device. By reading out and executing the network
information searching program as necessary, the network
information searching apparatus is constructed. The
15 network information searching program is supplied by a
memory medium such as FD (floppy disk), CD-ROM, or the
like.

As described above, according to the first to
fourth embodiments, the information which is required
20 by the user can be searched from the information
managed and held by the information processing program
of a plurality of information processing apparatuses on
the network without forcing surplus labor and time to
the user.

25 The data can be automatically collected in a time
zone when the network is free, the communication time
can be reduced, and the communication costs can be

decreased.

It is also possible to easily connect to the information processing apparatus in which the connection is permitted from a plurality of information processing apparatuses on the network.

The information required by the user can be properly extracted.

It is possible to easily set the mode to print and output the pages which are seen everyday by a predetermined time, the mode to output them as a mail to himself, the mode to transmit them to the FAX apparatus of a predetermined address, or the like. The extracted information can be confirmed in a desired output form of the user can be confirmed.

The claims defining the invention are as follows:

1. A network information searching apparatus which is connectable through a network to a plurality of information processing apparatus on the network and
5 to be used to search information corresponding to requirement information specified by a user from stored information stored in memory means in each of said information processing apparatuses, comprising:

information collection means for collecting the information stored in each of said memory means through said network by preferentially collecting information which is
10 concerned with the requirement information specified by said user at a predetermined probability;

information holding means for holding the stored information collected by said information collection means;

extracting means for extracting information corresponding to the requirement
15 information specified by said user from the stored information held in said information holding means; and

output means for outputting said extracted information extracted by said extraction means.

20 2. An apparatus according to claim 1, further comprising timer start means for starting said information collection means at a start time set by said user.

3. An apparatus according to Claim 1, wherein said information collection means has detection means for detecting an address of the information processing
25 apparatus in which a connection is permitted for said user among said information processing apparatuses and an information management system having said address.

4. An apparatus according to Claim 1, wherein each of said memory means is controlled by an information management program.

30

5. An apparatus according to Claim 1, wherein when the requirement information specified by said user is image data, said extraction means extracts image data from the information held in said information holding means, extracts characteristics of said extracted image data, compares said extracted image data with characteristics of



the image data specified by said user, and extracts image data corresponding to the image data specified by said user in accordance with a result of said comparison.

5 6. An apparatus according to Claim 1, wherein said extraction means analyzes a data type of the information held in said information holding means, compares a result of said analysis with a data type of the requirement information specified by said user, and extracts information corresponding to the requirement information specified by said user in accordance with a result of said comparison.

10 7. An apparatus according to Claim 1, wherein said extraction means analyzes a data type of the information held in said information holding means, compares a result of said analysis with a data type of the requirement information specified by said user, and extracts information including information of a data type corresponding to the data type of the requirement information specified by said user in accordance with a result
15 of said comparison.

 8. An apparatus according to Claim 1, wherein said extraction means analyzes an attribute of the information held in said information holding means, compares a result of said analysis with an attribute of the requirement information specified by said
20 user, and extracts information corresponding to the requirement information specified by said user in accordance with a result of said comparison.

 9. An apparatus according to Claim 1, wherein said extraction means performs a search to the information held in said information holding means on the basis
25 of a keyword included in a text portion of said information and a synonym or an analogue of said keyword and extracts information corresponding to the requirement information specified by said user by said search.

 10. An apparatus according to Claim 1, wherein said extraction means
30 forms index information including information concerned by the extracting means, and said output means outputs said index information together with said extracted information extracted by said extraction means.



11. An apparatus according to Claim 1, wherein said output means outputs said extracted information to an apparatus which can output said extracted information in a desired output form of said user in accordance with a selection of said user.

5 12. A network information searching method of a network information searching apparatus which is connected through a network to a plurality of information processing apparatus on the network and is used to search information corresponding to requirement information specified by a user from stored information stored in memory means in each of said information processing apparatuses, comprising:

10 an information collecting step of collecting stored information stored in each of said memory means through said network by preferentially collecting information which is concerned with the requirement information specified by said user at a predetermined probability;

15 an information holding step of holding the stored information into said information holding means;

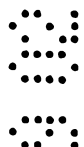
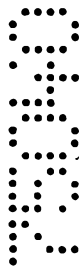
an extracting step of extracting information corresponding to the requirement information specified by said user from the stored information held in said information holding means; and

an output step of outputting said extracted information.

20 13. A method according to Claim 12, further comprising a step of instructing so as to start the collection of the information stored in each of said memory means at a start time set by said user.

25 14. A network according to Claim 12, wherein each of said memory means is controlled by an information management program.

30 15. A method according to Claim 12, wherein in said extracting step, when the information required by said user is image data, image data is extracted from the information held in said information holding means, characteristics of said extracted image data are extracted, said extracted image data is compared with characteristics of the image data specified by said user, and image data corresponding to the image data specified by said user is extracted in accordance with a result of said comparison.



16. A method according to Claim 12, wherein in said extracting step, a data type of the information held in said information holding means is analyzed, a result of said analysis is compared with a data type of the requirement information specified by said user, and information corresponding to the requirement information specified by said user is extracted in accordance with a result of said comparison.

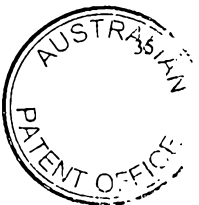
17. A method according to Claim 12, wherein in said extracting step, a data type of the information held in said information holding means is analyzed, a result of said analysis is compared with a data type of the requirement information specified by said user, and information including information of a data type corresponding to the data type of the requirement information specified by said user is extracted in accordance with a result of said comparison.

18. A method according to Claim 12, wherein in said extracting step, an attribute of the information held in said information holding means is analyzed, a result of said analysis is compared with an attribute of the requirement information specified by said user, and information corresponding to the requirement information specified by said user is extracted in accordance with a result of said comparison.

19. A method according to Claim 12, wherein in said extracting step, a search is executed to the information held in said information holding means on the basis of a keyword included in a text portion of said information and a synonym or an analogue of said keyword and information corresponding to the requirement information specified by said user by said search is extracted.

20. A method according to Claim 1, wherein in said extraction step, index information including information concerned in the extracting step is formed, and said index information together with said extracted information extracted by said extraction means is output in said output step.

21. A method according to Claim 13, wherein in said output step, said extracted information is outputted to an apparatus which can output said extracted information in a desired output form of said user in accordance with a selection of said user.



22. A storage medium which is connectable through a network to a plurality of information processing apparatus on the network and in which a network information searching program to search information corresponding to requirement information specified by the user from stored information stored in memory means in each of said information processing apparatuses has been stored,

wherein said network information searching program comprises:

an information collection module for collecting information stored in each of said memory means through said network by preferentially collecting information which is concerned with the requirement information specified by said user at a predetermined probability;

an information holding module for holding said stored information into information holding means;

an extracting module for extracting information corresponding to the requirement information specified by said user from the stored information held in said information holding means; and

an output module for outputting said extracted information.

23. A network information searching system constructed by a plurality of information processing apparatuses and a network information searching apparatus which are mutually connected through a network,

wherein said network information searching apparatus comprises:

information collection means for collecting stored information stored in memory means in each of said information processing apparatuses through said network by preferentially collecting information which is concerned with requirement information specified by said user at a predetermined probability;

information holding means for holding the stored information collection collected by said information collection means;

extracting means for extracting information corresponding to the requirement information specified by said user from the stored information held in said information holding means; and

output means for outputting said extracted information extracted by said extraction.

24. A network information searching apparatus substantially as described herein with reference to Figs. 1 to 13 of the drawings.



25. A network information searching method substantially as described herein with reference to Figs. 1 to 13 of the drawings.

5 26. A storage medium substantially as described herein with reference to Figs. 1 to 13 of the drawings.

27. A network information searching system substantially as described herein with reference to Figs. 1 to 13 of the drawings.

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DATED this fifth Day of September, 2002

Canon Kabushiki Kaisha

Patent Attorneys for the Applicant

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SPRUSON & FERGUSON



FIG. 1

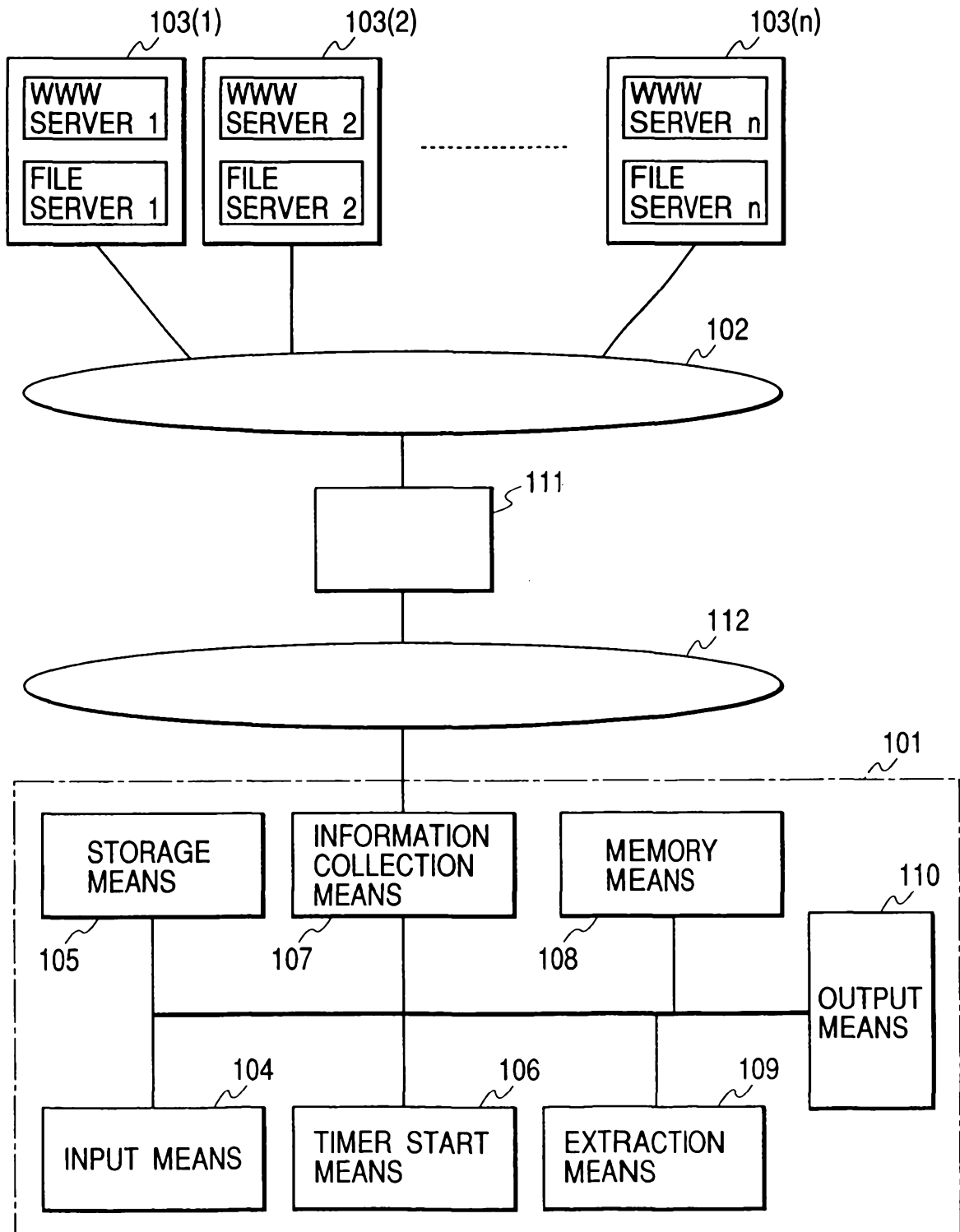


FIG. 2

START			END							
DATE	DAY OF WEEK	TIME 3:00	DATE	DAY OF WEEK	TIME	TIMER SETTING	TIMEOUT	NUMBER OF TIMES OF RETRY	TRANSFER AMOUNT	NUMBER OF SESSIONS

FIG. 3

ACCESS SETTING	SETTING 1	SETTING 2	SETTING 3	SETTING 4	
SERVER ADDRESS				mail.or.jp	
SERVER CLASSIFICATION	www	www	www	MAIL	
URL	URL OF PAGE 702	www.b.co.jp	www.8101.co.jp		
HIERARCHICAL LAYER	3	3	3		
MAIL ADDRESS				aa@mail.or.jp	
DIRECTORY					
USER ID					
PASSWORD					
DIRECTIVITY COLLECTION	NO	NO	NO	NO	
DIRECTIVITY COLLECTION LAYER					

FIG. 4

EXTRACTION CONDITION No.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
ACCESS SETTING No.	1	2	1	1	3	4	
SEARCH EXTRACTION	YES	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	
SYNONYM EXTRACTION	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	
ANALOGUE EXTRACTION	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	
SEARCH OBJECT	ALL	—	—	—	ALL	—	
SEARCH CONDITION 1	PRINTING DEVICE	—	—	—	CANON	—	
	—	—	—	—	—	—	
SEARCH CONDITION n	—	—	—	—	—	—	
DATA TYPE EXTRACTION	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	
DATA TYPE 1	—	—	—	—	—	—	
	—	—	—	—	—	—	
DATA TYPE n	—	—	—	—	—	—	
IMAGE EXTRACTION	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	
IMAGE CONDITION 1	—	—	—	—			
	—	—	—	—			
IMAGE CONDITION n	—	—	—	—			
OUTPUT DESTINATION DESIGNATION	STORAGE DEVICE	PRINTING DEVICE	MAIL	FAX	STORAGE DEVICE	PRINTING DEVICE	
ADDRESS No.			1	2			
EXTRA CONDITION DATA			1	2			

FIG. 6

[illegible]

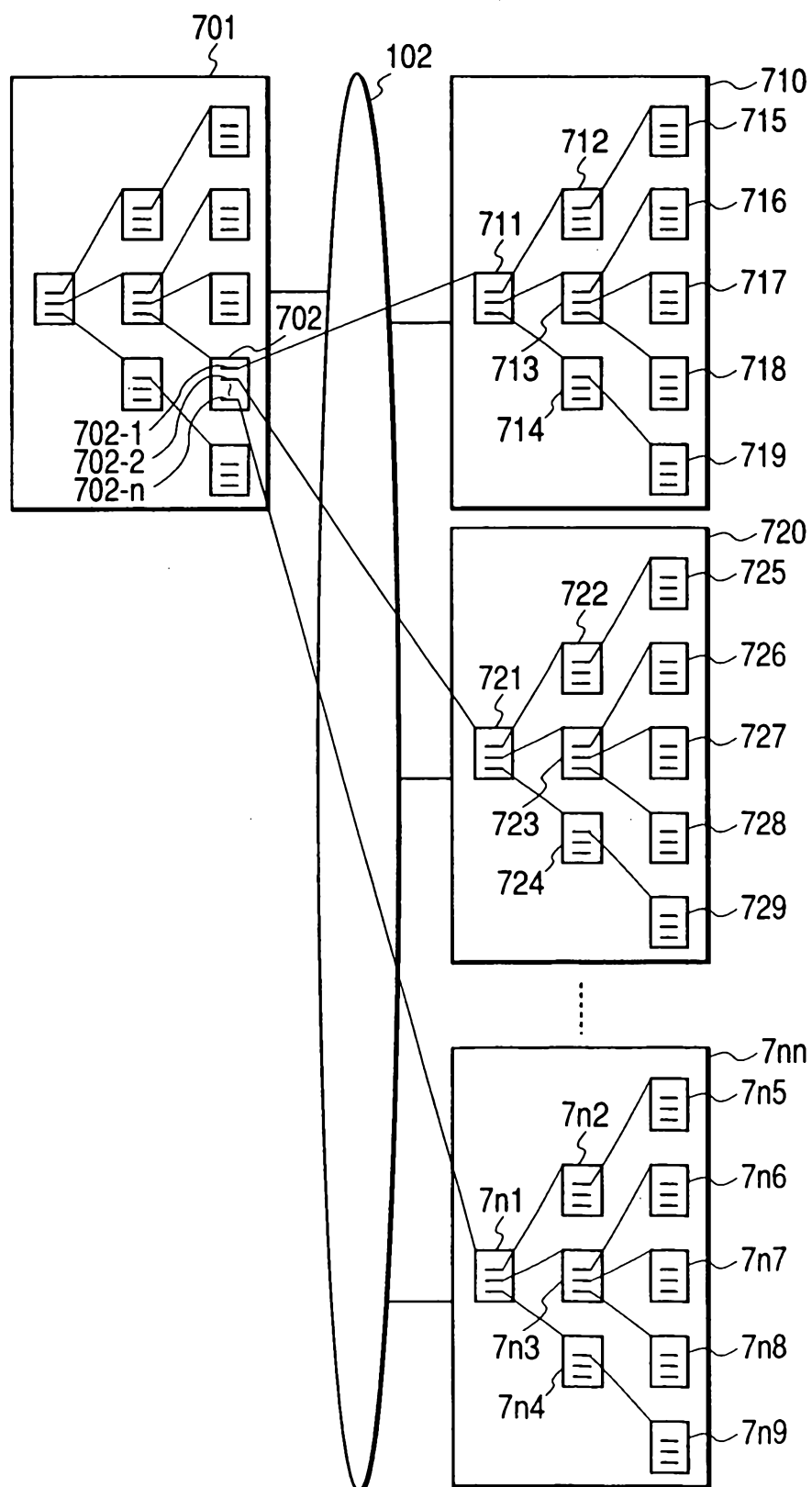
FIG. 7

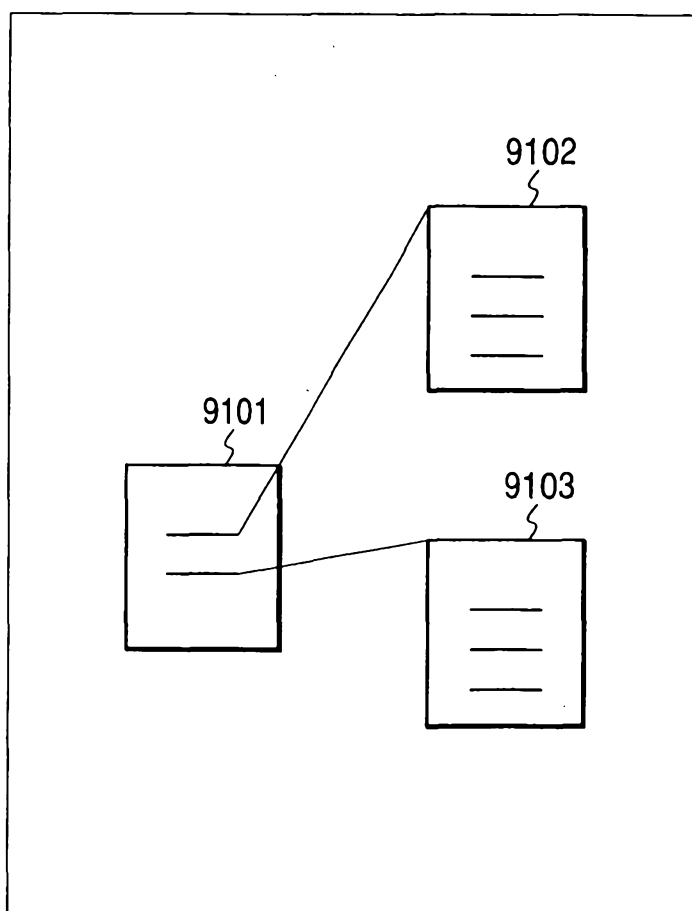
FIG. 8

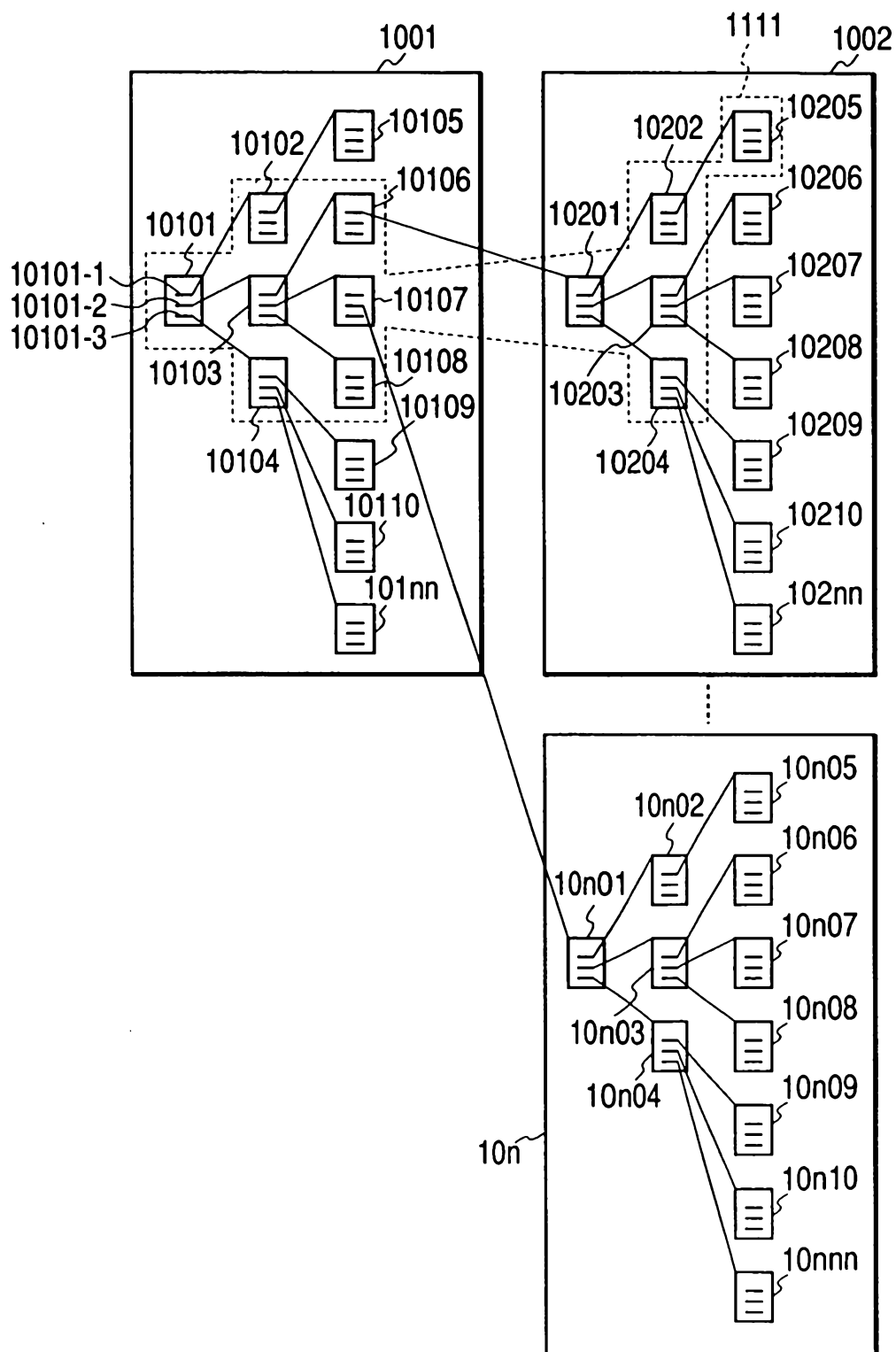
FIG. 9

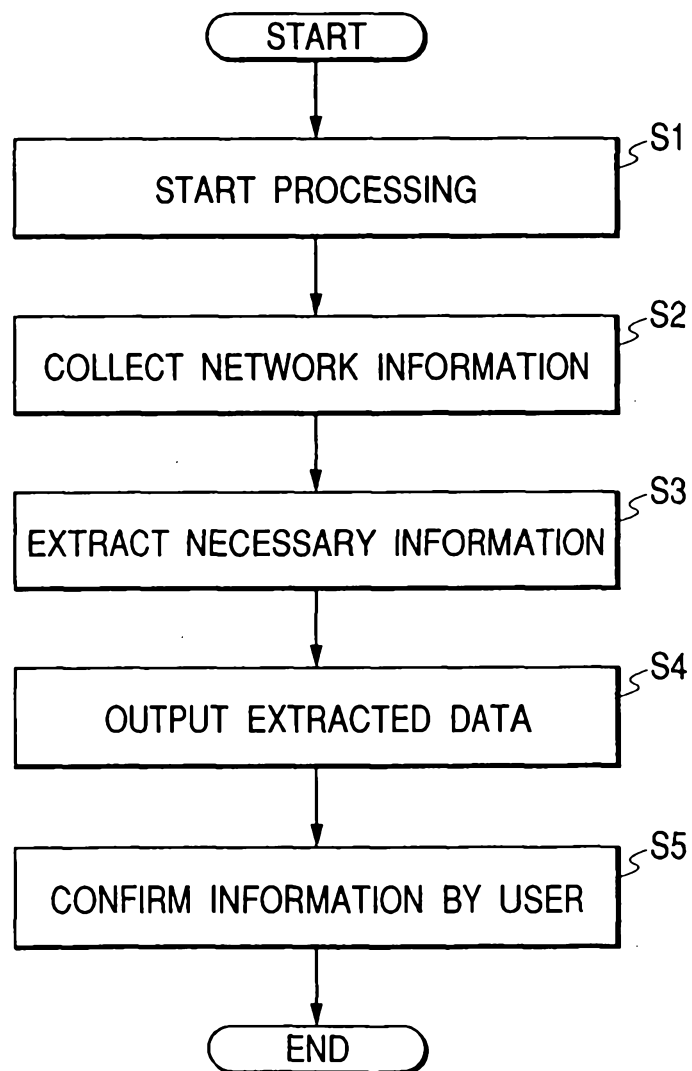
FIG. 10

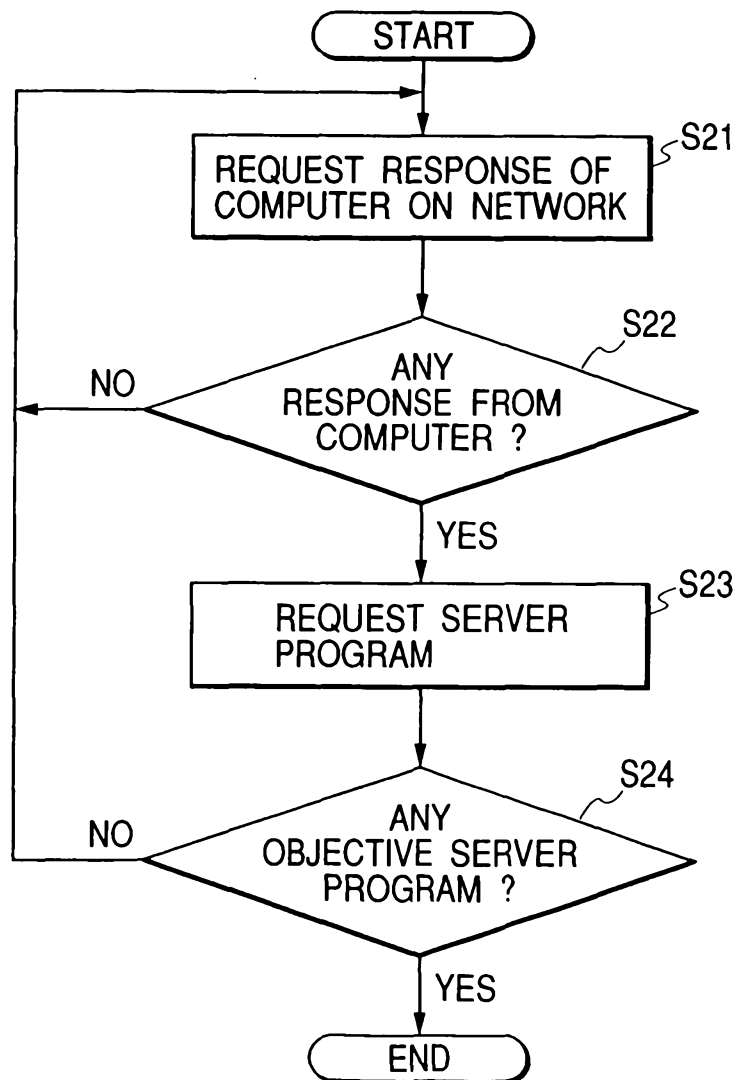
FIG. 11

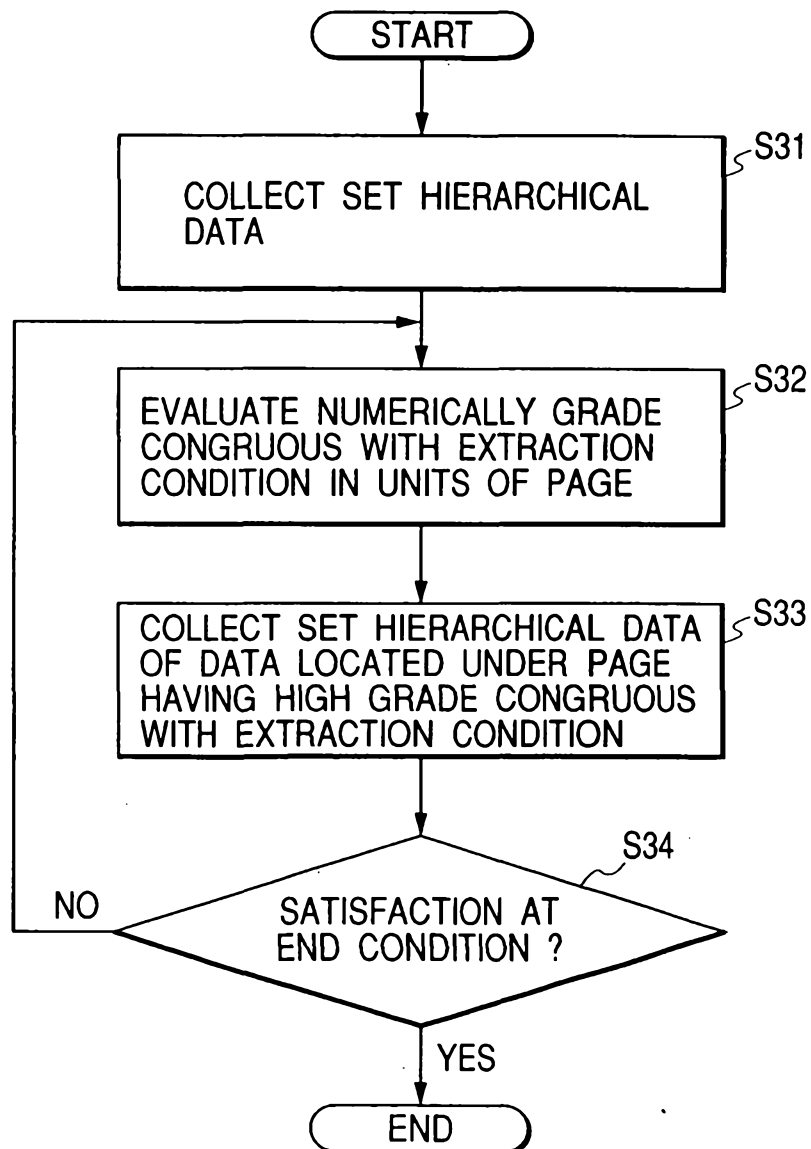
FIG. 12

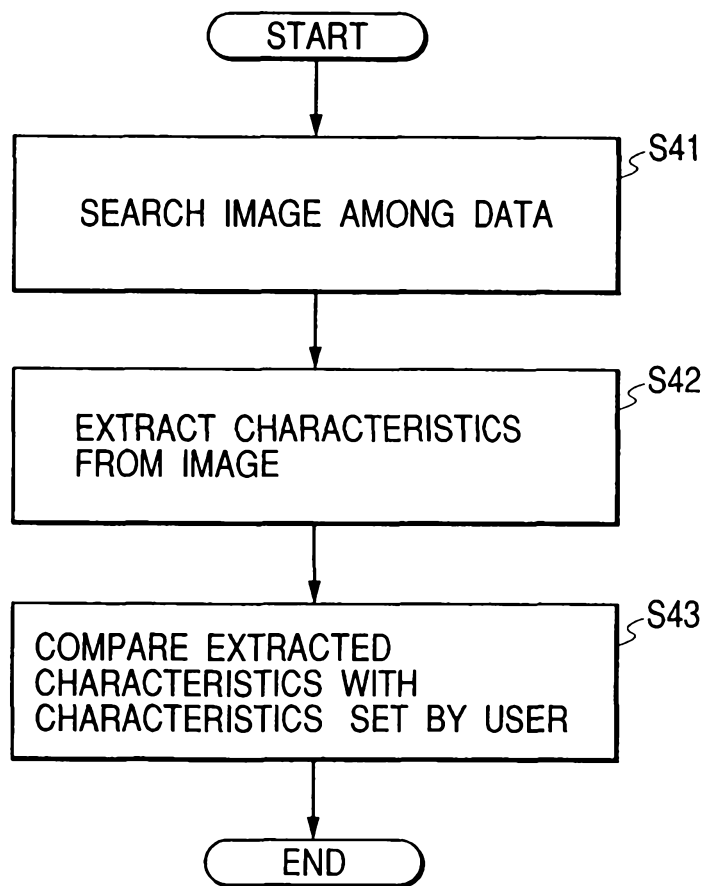
FIG. 13

FIG. 14 PRIOR ART