A method for issuing a virtual financial instrument is disclosed, the method comprising receiving user identification information, receiving balance information, generating a financial instrument having a balance indicated by the balance information for a user indicated by the identification information, and providing a notification to the user that the financial instrument has been generated.
302 RECEIVE USER IDENTIFICATION INFORMATION

304 RECEIVE BALANCE INFORMATION

306 GENERATE FINANCIAL INSTRUMENT

308 PROVIDE NOTIFICATION TO USER

FIG. 3
From: Seller
To: Recipient User
Subject: Instant gratification. Instant reward.

Thank you for completing the product survey. We appreciate your time and input. And to show our thanks, we’re offering a special reward. Click the link below to receive a

$25 Virtual Gift Card.

You can use the funds to purchase items online where major credit cards are accepted. It’s fast. It’s easy. It’s rewarding.

Login ID: Your email address
Password: Your date of birth (MM/DD/YYYY)
FIG. 5

502 AUTHENTICATE USER

504 PROVIDE FIRST NUMBER SEQUENCE

506 PROVIDE SECOND NUMBER SEQUENCE

508 PROVIDE BALANCE INFORMATION

510 RECEIVE DEPOSIT/DEBIT INFORMATION

512 UPDATE BALANCE
Log in here to obtain your Virtual Prepaid Card information

USER ID

PASSWORD

LOGIN
FIG. 8

YOUR CVV NUMBER

ACCOUNT DETAILS
BALANCE: $59.97
Available Balance: $59.97

CARD DETAILS

CARD DETAILS

TRANSACTION HISTORY

1234
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pending Authorizations</th>
<th>Recent Transactions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No Pending Authorization</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Account Details
- Balance: $59.97
- Available Balance: $59.97

### Card Details

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transaction History</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12/34 5678</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/15/2010 point of sale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/15/2010 point of sale</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Debit/Credit Balance
- Debit: $50.00
- Credit: $30.00
- Balance: $120.00
PREPAID VIRTUAL CARD

CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED PATENT APPLICATION


BACKGROUND

[0002] Debit cards are widely used today in payment transactions throughout the world. Prepaid cards such as prepaid debit or gift cards store a fixed amount of value on the cards for use. When the card is used to purchase goods and services, the cost of those goods and services is debited from the account up to the monetary sum stored in the card. Prior to using the card for purchasing goods and services from a seller or merchant, a user typically deposits or stores a sum of money into the account associated with the card. However, current prepaid cards do not provide a sufficient means to issue and/or manage financial instruments such as prepaid cards in a virtual environment.

SUMMARY

[0003] It is to be understood that both the following general description and the following detailed description are exemplary and explanatory only and are not restrictive, as claimed. In an aspect, provided are methods and systems for issuing and/or managing virtual financial instruments. The system and methods of the present disclosure can be used to issue virtual prepaid cards in a network and/or virtual environment. The systems and methods of the present disclosure allow a user of a virtual financial instrument to conduct financial transactions without divulging sensitive personal financial information.

[0004] In an aspect, a method for issuing a virtual financial instrument can comprise receiving user identification information, receiving balance information, generating a financial instrument having a balance indicated by the balance information for a user indicated by the identification information, and providing a notification to the user that the financial instrument has been generated.

[0005] In an aspect, a system for issuing a virtual financial instrument can comprise a storage medium for storing information relating to a financial instrument, and a processor in communication with the memory. The processor can be configured to receive user identification information, receive balance information, generate the financial instrument having a balance indicated by the balance information for a user indicated by the identification information, store the financial instrument on the storage medium, and/or provide a notification to the user that the financial instrument has been generated.

[0006] In an aspect, provided are methods for issuing a virtual financial instrument comprising, receiving recipient identification information from a seller, receiving balance information from the seller, generating a financial instrument having a balance indicated by the balance information for a recipient indicated by the identification information, wherein the balance represents a financial credit for one or more of a good or service provided by the seller, and providing a notification to the recipient that the financial instrument has been generated.

[0007] Additional advantages will be set forth in part in the description which follows or may be learned by practice. The advantages will be realized and attained by means of the elements and combinations particularly pointed out in the appended claims. It is to be understood that both the foregoing general description and the following detailed description are exemplary and explanatory only and are not restrictive, as claimed.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0008] The accompanying drawings, which are incorporated in and constitute a part of this specification, illustrate embodiments and together with the description, serve to explain the principles of the methods and systems:

[0009] FIG. 1 is a block diagram of an exemplary network;
[0010] FIG. 2 is a block diagram of an exemplary computing device;
[0011] FIG. 3 is a flow chart of an exemplary method;
[0012] FIG. 4 is a representation of a web page;
[0013] FIG. 5 is a flow chart of an exemplary method;
[0014] FIG. 6 is a representation of a web page;
[0015] FIG. 7 is a representation of a web page;
[0016] FIG. 8 is a representation of a web page; and
[0017] FIG. 9 is a representation of a web page.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0018] Before the present methods and systems are disclosed and described, it is to be understood that the methods and systems are not limited to specific synthetic methods, specific components, or to particular compositions. It is also to be understood that the terminology used herein is for the purpose of describing particular embodiments only and is not intended to be limiting.

[0019] As used in the specification and the appended claims, the singular forms “a,” “an” and “the” include plural referents unless the context clearly dictates otherwise. Ranges may be expressed herein as from “about” one particular value, and/or to “about” another particular value. When such a range is expressed, another embodiment includes from the one particular value and/or to the other particular value. Similarly, when values are expressed as approximations, by use of the antecedent “about,” it will be understood that the particular value forms another embodiment. It will be further understood that the endpoints of each of the ranges are significant both in relation to the other endpoint, and independently of the other endpoint.

[0020] “Optional” or “optionally” means that the subsequently described event or circumstance may or may not occur, and that the description includes instances where said event or circumstance occurs and instances where it does not.

[0021] Throughout the description and claims of this specification, the word “comprise” and variations of the word, such as “comprising” and “comprises,” means “including but not limited to,” and is not intended to exclude, for example, other additives, components, integers or steps. “Exemplary” means “an example of and is not intended to convey an indication of a preferred or ideal embodiment. “Such as” is not used in a restrictive sense, but for explanatory purposes.

[0022] Disclosed are components that can be used to perform the disclosed methods and systems. These and other components are disclosed herein, and it is understood that when combinations, subsets, interactions, groups, etc. of these components are disclosed that while specific reference
of each various individual and collective combinations and permutation of these may not be explicitly disclosed, each is specifically contemplated and described herein, for all methods and systems. This applies to all aspects of this application including, but not limited to, steps in disclosed methods. Thus, if there are a variety of additional steps that can be performed it is understood that each of these additional steps can be performed with any specific embodiment or combination of embodiments of the disclosed methods.

[0023] The present methods and systems may be understood more readily by reference to the following detailed description of preferred embodiments and the Examples included therein and to the Figures and their previous and following description.

[0024] As will be appreciated by one skilled in the art, the methods and systems may take the form of an entirely hardware embodiment, an entirely software embodiment, or an embodiment combining software and hardware aspects. Furthermore, the methods and systems may take the form of a computer program product on a computer-readable storage medium having computer-readable program instructions (e.g., computer software) embodied in the storage medium. More particularly, the present methods and systems may take the form of web-implemented computer software. Any suitable computer-readable storage medium may be utilized including hard disks, CD-ROMs, optical storage devices, or magnetic storage devices.

[0025] Embodiments of the methods and systems are described below with reference to block diagrams and flowchart illustrations of methods, systems, apparatuses and computer program products. It will be understood that each block of the block diagrams and flowchart illustrations, and combinations of blocks in the block diagrams and flowchart illustrations, respectively, can be implemented by computer program instructions. These computer program instructions may be loaded onto a general purpose computer, special purpose computer, or other programmable data processing apparatus to produce a machine, such that the instructions which execute on the computer or other programmable data processing apparatus create a means for implementing the functions specified in the flowchart block or blocks.

[0026] These computer program instructions may also be stored in a computer-readable memory that can direct a computer or other programmable data processing apparatus to a function in a particular manner, such that the instructions stored in the computer-readable memory produce an article of manufacture including computer-readable instructions for implementing the function specified in the flowchart block or blocks. The computer program instructions may also be loaded onto a computer or other programmable data processing apparatus to cause a series of operational steps to be performed on the computer or other programmable apparatus to produce a computer-implemented process such that the instructions that execute on the computer or other programmable apparatus provide steps for implementing the functions specified in the flowchart block or blocks.

[0027] Accordingly, blocks of the block diagrams and flowchart illustrations support combinations of means for performing the specified functions, combinations of steps for performing the specified functions and program instruction means for performing the specified functions. It will also be understood that each block of the block diagrams and flowchart illustrations, and combinations of blocks in the block diagrams and flowchart illustrations, can be implemented by

special purpose hardware-based computer systems that perform the specified functions or steps, or combinations of special purpose hardware and computer instructions.

[0028] As described in greater detail below, a system can be configured to distinguish a classification of user in order to deliver a unique experience for each class of user.

[0029] FIG. 1 illustrates various aspects of an exemplary network in which the present methods and systems can operate. The present disclosure relates to systems and methods for identifying a class of user. Those skilled in the art will appreciate that present methods may be used in systems that employ both digital and analog equipment. One skilled in the art will appreciate that provided herein is a functional description and that the respective functions can be performed by software, hardware, or a combination of software and hardware.

[0030] The network 100 can comprise a seller device 102 in communication (e.g., directly and/or via a network) with a computing device 104 such as a server, for example. The computing device 104 can be disposed locally or remotely relative to the seller device 102. As an example, the seller device 102 and the computing device 104 can be in communication via a private or public network such as the Internet. Other forms of communications can be used such as wired and wireless telecommunication channels, for example.

[0031] In an aspect, the seller device 102 can be an electronic device such as a computer, a server, a smartphone, a laptop, a tablet, or other device capable of communicating with the computing device 104. As an example, the seller device 102 can comprise a web browser 106 for providing an interface to a user to interact with the seller device 102 and/or the computing device 104. The web browser 106 can be any interface for presenting information to the user and receiving a user feedback such as Internet Explorer, Mozilla Firefox, Google Chrome, Safari, or the like. Other software, hardware, and/or interfaces can be used to provide communication between the user and one or more of the seller device 102 and the computing device 104. As an example, the web browser 106 can request or query various files from a local source and/or a remote source. As a further example, the seller device 102 can be configured to transmit data to the computing device 104. Other devices and interfaces can be used to allow a user to intercommunicate with the computing device 104.

[0032] In an aspect, the seller device 102 can be configured to communicate (e.g., directly and/or via a network) with a point of sale 108. As an example, the point of sale 108 can be an electronic point of sale such as an e-commerce site, website, or software application for processing purchases. As a further example, the point of sale 108 can comprise hardware (e.g., terminal) and/or software components for processing a transaction such as a purchase (e.g., including processing a prepaid card such as a gift card or debit card). In an aspect, the seller device 102 can send/receive information to/from the point of sale 108 for configuring the point of sale 108 and/or retrieving information from the point of sale 108.

[0033] In an aspect, the point of sale 108 can comprise an interface 110 to allow a user to interact with the point of sale 108. As an example, the interface 110 can comprise a web application or interactive web page. As a further example, the interface 110 can render information to a user and receive user feedback. In an aspect, the point of sale 108 can be in communication with the computing device 104 to authenticate a user credential information provided through the interface.
110. Other devices or systems can be used to authenticate a particular user information, login information, and/or credential information.

[0034] In an aspect, the computing device 104 can be a server for communicating with the seller device 102. As an example, the computing device 104 can manage the intercommunication between the seller device 102 and a database 112 for sending and receiving data therebetween. In an aspect, the database 112 can store a plurality of files (e.g., web pages). As an example, the seller device 102 can request a file from the database 112. As a further example, the seller device 102 can retrieve a file from the database 112.

[0035] In an aspect, the database 112 can store a plurality of user records 114. As an example, one or more of the user records 114 can comprise user information 116 relating to the seller, seller device 102, and/or the point of sale 108 of a particular seller. In an aspect, the user information 116 can comprise contact information, mailing information, preferences, and mailing lists, for example. As a further example, user information 116 can comprise financial institution routing information for facilitating the transfer of funds electronically.

[0036] In an aspect, one or more user records 114 can comprise user information 116 relating to one or more end-users, clients, consumers, purchasers, and the like. As an example, user information 116 can comprise demographic information, contact information, user credentials 118 or login credentials, a unique identifier 120, or password, and preferences. As a further example, one or more of the user records 114 can comprise financial information 122 such as an account balance, an available balance, transaction history, and/or virtual card information. Other information can be stored in the database 112 can/or associated with a particular user record 114.

[0037] In an aspect, a user device 124 can be in communication with the computing device 104. The computing device 104 can be disposed locally or remotely relative to the user device 124. As an example, the user device 124 and the computing device 104 can be in communication via a private or public network such as the Internet. Other forms of communications can be used such as wired and wireless telecommunication channels, for example.

[0038] In an aspect, the user device 124 can be an electronic device such as a computer, a server, a smartphone, a laptop, a tablet, or other device capable of communicating with the computing device 104. As an example, the user device 124 can comprise a web browser 126 for providing an interface to a user to interact with the user device 124, the computing device 104, and/or the point of sale 108. The web browser 126 can be any interface for presenting information to the user and receiving a user feedback such as Internet Explorer, Mozilla Firefox, Google Chrome, Safari, or the like. Other software, hardware, and/or interfaces can be used to provide communication between the user and one or more of the user device 124 and the computing device 104. As an example, the web browser 126 can request or query various files from a local source and/or a remote source. As a further example, the user device 124 can be configured to transmit data to the computing device 104. Other devices and interfaces can be used to allow a user to intercommunicate with the computing device 104.

[0039] In an aspect, a user can use the user device 124 to communicate with computing device 104 to transmit/receive data therebetween. As an example, the user device 124 can be configured to receive data from the computing device such as a promotion, advertisement, notification, or other communication. As a further example, the user device 124 can be configured to communicate with the point of sale 108 in order to allow the user to conduct a transaction such as a purchase. Other devices can be used to facilitate communication between a user and the computing device 104 and/or point of sale 108.

[0040] In an exemplary aspect, the methods and systems can be implemented on a computing system such as computing devices 201 as illustrated in FIG. 2 and described below. By way of example, one or more of the seller device 102, the computing device 104, and the user device 124 of FIG. 1 can be a computer as illustrated in FIG. 2. Similarly, the methods and systems disclosed can utilize one or more computers to perform one or more functions in one or more locations. FIG. 2 is a block diagram illustrating an exemplary operating environment for performing the disclosed methods. This exemplary operating environment is only an example of an operating environment and is not intended to suggest any limitation as to the scope of use or functionality of operating environment architecture. Neither should the operating environment be interpreted as having any dependency or requirement relating to any one or combination of components illustrated in the exemplary operating environment.

[0041] The present methods and systems can be operational with numerous other general purpose or special purpose computing system environments or configurations. Examples of well known computing systems, environments, and/or configurations that can be suitable for use with the systems and methods comprise, but are not limited to, personal computers, server computers, laptop devices, and multiprocessor systems. Additional examples comprise set top boxes, programmable consumer electronics, networked PCs, minicomputers, mainframe computers, distributed computing environments that comprise any of the above systems or devices, and the like.

[0042] The processing of the disclosed methods and systems can be performed by software components. The disclosed systems and methods can be described in the general context of computer-executable instructions, such as program modules, being executed by one or more computers or other devices. Generally, program modules comprise computer code, routines, programs, objects, components, data structures, etc. that perform particular tasks or implement particular abstract data types. The disclosed methods can also be practiced in grid-based and distributed computing environments where tasks are performed by remote processing devices that are linked through a communications network. In a distributed computing environment, program modules can be located in both local and remote computer storage media including memory storage devices.

[0043] FIG. 2 is a block diagram illustrating an exemplary operating environment for performing the disclosed methods. This exemplary operating environment is only an example of an operating environment and is not intended to suggest any limitation as to the scope of use or functionality of operating environment architecture. Neither should the operating environment be interpreted as having any dependency or requirement relating to any one or combination of components illustrated in the exemplary operating environment.

[0044] The present methods and systems can be operational with numerous other general purpose or special purpose computing system environments or configurations. Examples of
well known computing systems, environments, and/or configurations that can be suitable for use with the systems and methods comprise, but are not limited to, personal computers, server computers, laptop devices, and multiprocessor systems. Additional examples comprise set top boxes, programmable consumer electronics, network PCs, minicomputers, mainframe computers, distributed computing environments that comprise any of the above systems or devices, and the like.

[0045] The processing of the disclosed methods and systems can be performed by software components. The disclosed systems and methods can be described in the general context of computer-executable instructions, such as program modules, being executed by one or more computers or other devices. Generally, program modules comprise computer code, routines, programs, objects, components, data structures, etc. that perform particular tasks or implement particular abstract data types. The disclosed methods can also be practiced in grid-based and distributed computing environments where tasks are performed by remote processing devices that are linked through a communications network. In a distributed computing environment, program modules can be located in both local and remote computer storage media including memory storage devices.

[0046] Further, one skilled in the art will appreciate that the systems and methods disclosed herein can be implemented via a general-purpose computing device in the form of a computer 201. The components of the computer 201 can comprise, but are not limited to, one or more processors or processing units 203, a system memory 212, and a system bus 213 that couples various system components including the processor 203 to the system memory 212. In the case of multiple processing units 203, the system can utilize parallel computing.

[0047] The system bus 213 represents one or more of several possible types of bus structures, including a memory bus or memory controller, a peripheral bus, an accelerated graphics port, and a processor or local bus using any of a variety of bus architectures. By way of example, such architectures can comprise an Industry Standard Architecture (ISA) bus, a Micro Channel Architecture (MCA) bus, an Enhanced ISA (EISA) bus, a Video Electronics Standards Association (VESA) local bus, an Accelerated Graphics Port (AGP) bus, and a Peripheral Component Interconnects (PCI), a PCI-Express bus, a Personal Computer Memory Card Industry Association (PCMCIA), Universal Serial Bus (USB) and the like. The bus 213, and all buses specified in this description can also be implemented over a wired or wireless network connection and each of the subsystems, including the processor 203, a mass storage device 204, an operating system 205, financial software 206, financial data 207, a network adapter 208, system memory 212, an Input/Output Interface 210, a display adapter 209, a display device 211, and a human machine interface 202, can be contained within one or more remote computing devices 214a,b,c at physically separate locations, connected through buses of this form, in effect implementing a fully distributed system.

[0048] The computer 201 typically comprises a variety of computer readable media. Exemplary readable media can be any available media that is accessible by the computer 201 and comprises, for example and not meant to be limiting, both volatile and non-volatile media, removable and non-removable media. The system memory 212 comprises computer readable media in the form of volatile memory, such as random access memory (RAM), and/or non-volatile memory, such as read only memory (ROM). The system memory 212 typically contains data such as financial data 207 and/or program modules such as operating system 205 and financial software 206 that are immediately accessible to and/or are presently operated on by the processing unit 203.

[0049] In another aspect, the computer 201 can also comprise other removable/non-removable, volatile/non-volatile computer storage media. By way of example, FIG. 2 illustrates a mass storage device 204 which can provide non-volatile storage of computer code, computer readable instructions, data structures, program modules, and other data for the computer 201. For example and not meant to be limiting, a mass storage device 204 can be a hard disk, a removable magnetic disk, a removable optical disk, magnetic cassettes or other magnetic storage devices, flash memory cards, CD-ROM, digital versatile disks (DVD) or other optical storage, random access memories (RAM), read only memories (ROM), electrically erasable programmable read-only memory (EEPROM), and the like.

[0050] Optionally, any number of program modules can be stored on the mass storage device 204, including by way of example, an operating system 205 and financial software 206. Each of the operating system 205 and financial software 206 (or some combination thereof) can comprise elements of the programming and the financial software 206. Financial data 207 can also be stored on the mass storage device 204. Financial data 207 can be stored in any of one or more databases known in the art. Examples of such databases comprise, DB2®, Microsoft® Access, Microsoft® SQL Server, Oracle®, mySQL, PostgreSQL, and the like. The databases can be centralized or distributed across multiple systems.

[0051] In another aspect, the user can enter commands and information into the computer 201 via an input device (not shown). Examples of such input devices comprise, but are not limited to, a keyboard, pointing device (e.g., a “mouse”), a microphone, a joystick, a scanner, tactile input devices such as gloves, and other body coverings, and the like. These and other input devices can be connected to the processing unit 203 via a human machine interface 202 that is coupled to the system bus 213, but can be connected by other interface and bus structures, such as a parallel port, game port, an IEEE 1394 Port (also known as a Firewire port), a serial port, or a universal serial bus (USB).

[0052] In yet another aspect, a display device 211 can also be connected to the system bus 213 via an interface, such as a display adapter 209. It is contemplated that the computer 201 can have more than one display adapter 209 and the computer 201 can have more than one display device 211. For example, a display device can be a monitor, an LCD (Liquid Crystal Display), or a projector. In addition to the display device 211, other output peripheral devices can comprise components such as speakers (not shown) and a printer (not shown) which can be connected to the computer 201 via Input/Output Interface 210. Any step and/or result of the methods can be output in any form to an output device. Such output can be any form of visual representation, including, but not limited to, textual, graphical, animation, audio, tactile, and the like.

[0053] The computer 201 can operate in a networked environment using logical connections to one or more remote computing devices 214a,b,c. By way of example, a remote computing device can be a personal computer, portable computer, a server, a router, a network computer, a peer device or other common network node, and so on. Logical connections
between the computer 201 and a remote computing device 214a,b,c can be made via a local area network (LAN) and a general wide area network (WAN). Such network connections can be through a network adapter 208. A network adapter 208 can be implemented in both wired and wireless environments. Such networking environments are conventional and commonplace in offices, enterprise-wide computer networks, intranets, and the Internet 215.

[0054] For purposes of illustration, application programs and other executable program components such as the operating system 205 are illustrated herein as discrete blocks, although it is recognized that such programs and components reside at various times in different storage components of the computing device 201, and are executed by the data processor (s) of the computer. An implementation of financial software 206 can be stored on or transmitted across some form of computer readable media. Any of the disclosed methods can be performed by computer readable instructions embodied on computer readable media. Computer readable media can be any available media that can be accessed by a computer. By way of example and not meant to be limiting, computer readable media can comprise “computer storage media” and “communications media.” “Computer storage media” comprise volatile and non-volatile, removable and non-removable media implemented in any methods or technology for storage of information such as computer readable instructions, data structures, program modules, or other data. Exemplary computer storage media comprises, but is not limited to, RAM, ROM, EEPROM, flash memory or other memory technology, CD-ROM, digital versatile disks (DVD) or other optical storage, magnetic cassettes, magnetic tape, magnetic disk storage or other magnetic storage devices, or any other medium which can be used to store the desired information and which can be accessed by a computer.

[0055] The methods and systems can employ Artificial Intelligence techniques such as machine learning and iterative learning. Examples of such techniques include, but are not limited to, expert systems, case based reasoning, Bayesian networks, behavior based AI, neural networks, fuzzy systems, evolutionary computation (e.g., genetic algorithms), swarm intelligence (e.g., ant algorithms), and hybrid intelligent systems (e.g. Expert inference rules generated through a neural network or production rules from statistical learning).

[0056] As described in greater detail below, provided are methods for issuing a virtual financial instrument such as a virtual prepaid card, wherein the virtual prepaid card can be used at a point of sale to accomplish a financial transaction such as making a purchases.

[0057] In an aspect, FIG. 3 illustrates an exemplary method for generating and/or issuing a virtual financial instrument. The method illustrated in FIG. 3 will be discussed in reference to FIGS. 1-2. In step 302, the computing device 104 can receive user identification information such as user contact information (e.g., e-mail, SMS contact, telephone number, facsimile, etc.) and/or user credentials 118. Other devices or system can receive the user identification information. As an example, the device (e.g., computing device 104) or system receiving the user identification information can process the information in order to generate a communication or notification to be transmitted to a user associated with the user identification information.

[0058] In an aspect, the user identification information can be received from the seller device 102, wherein a particular seller can identify one or more intended recipients of a prepaid virtual card or notification of available card promotions. As an example, the user identification information can comprise the user credentials 118 and the unique identifier 120. In an aspect, the user credentials 118 and the unique identifier 120 can be subsequently used to allow user access to the prepaid virtual card and/or funds. As an example, the user identification information can comprise instructions to store/retrieve the user credentials 118 and/or the unique identifier 120 to/from the database 112 or other storage medium.

[0059] In step 304, the computing device 104 can receive balance information (e.g., financial information 122). Other devices or system can receive the balance information. In an aspect, the balance information can comprise a dollar amount. Accordingly, the device (e.g., computing device 104) or system receiving the balance information can process the balance information in order to manage electronic funds associated with a particular user identification information or user record 116. As a further example, the balance information can be received from the seller device 102, wherein a particular seller can identify one or more intended recipients of a predetermined amount of electronic funds.

[0060] In step 306, a financial instrument can be generated. As an example, the financial instrument can comprise a prepaid virtual card. As a further example, the financial instrument can comprise a balance of funds indicated by the balance information associated with a user indicated by the user identification information. In an aspect, the financial instrument can comprise a first number sequence (e.g., virtual card number) and a second number sequence (e.g., card security code or card verification value (CVV)). As an example, a user can use the financial instrument in a manner similar to a credit card, debit card, or bank card. As a further example, the financial instrument can be associated with dedicated funds, wherein certain funds can only be used to transact business with one or more of particular vendors, points of sale, sellers, and/or designated agents of the same.

[0061] In an aspect, a particular seller can provide designated balance information to be associated with the financial instrument, wherein the designated balance information can comprise funds that can only be used for purchases on products/services offered by the seller that provided the balance information.

[0062] In step 308, a notification can be generated and/or transmitted to a particular user. As an example, the notification can be transmitted to a user based upon the user identification information provided in step 302. As a further example, a notification 400 can comprise a link 402 to a website and/or login credentials 404 (e.g., user credentials 118, unique identifier 120) for accessing the website, as illustrated in FIG. 4, for illustrative purposes only. Other information such as brand specific identifiers can be included in the notification. In an aspect, a user can access the website identified in the notification 400 after an authentication of the login credentials 404. Once authenticated, the user can access the financial instrument. As an example, each of a plurality of financial instruments and associated notification can be processed individually or in a batch process.

[0063] In an aspect, a plurality of notifications are generated based upon a pre-defined rule set, whereby users meeting the rule set are added to a contact list for distribution of the notifications. Once the notification is received, a user can elect to accept the financial instrument, whereby the financial instrument for the particular user is generated. As an example,
unique messaging can be rendered in the notification based upon a particular brand, promotion or recipient of the notification.

[0064] In an aspect, notifications and/or financial instruments can be tracked in order to provide feedback relating to at least the activation and use of the financial instruments. As an example, a seller can launch a promotion, whereby a plurality of users are identified by user identification information provided to the computing device 104. The computing device 104 can process the user identification information to generate a notification to one or more of the identified user/ recipients. The notification can comprise attributes of the promotion of the particular seller. When a user receives the notification and activates a link in the notification, the computing device can log information about the user that activated the link. In this way, the seller can manage specific promotions based upon user response and interaction.

[0065] In an aspect, information relating to user records, virtual prepaid cards issued to customers, and notifications, can be managed, viewed, and/or monitored. As an example, the computing device 104 can store such information and can be accessed by a user, seller, or other authorized or designated device, person, or entity. As a further example, the computing device 104 can provide analysis of the information stored thereon such as usage tracking/monitoring/logging, generating statistics useful for advertising, generating statistic based upon virtual card activation and/or usage such as spending patterns based on location or other demographic information, generating feedback reports relating to advertisement and/or promotional campaigns (e.g., to evaluate success of a particular campaign). Other devices and/or systems can be configured to store and/or analyze information relating to sellers, users, card holders, recipients of notifications, and points of sale, for example. Various analysis techniques can also be used and various results can be generated.

[0066] As described in greater detail below, provided are methods for accessing, using, and managing a virtual financial instrument. In an aspect, FIG. 5 illustrates an exemplary method for using a financial instrument. The method illustrated in FIG. 5 will be discussed in reference to FIGS. 1-4.

[0067] In an aspect, in step 502, a user or login information (e.g., login credentials 404, user credentials 118, unique identifier 120) can be authenticated. As an example, a website 600 or web application can be provided to allow a user to input a user identification and a password (e.g., login credentials 404, user credentials 118, unique identifier 120). As a further example, the inputted user identification and password can be processed (e.g., compared or other authentication procedure) to authenticate and/or validate a user’s right to access certain information.

[0068] In an aspect, in step 504, a first number sequence (e.g., card number) is provided to a user. As an example, once the user is authenticated, the first number sequence can be rendered to the user via an electronic file, e-mail, website or webpage. As a further example, FIG. 7 illustrates an exemplary webpage 700 rendering a first number sequence 702. Other means of communicating the first number sequence to a particular user can be used. In an aspect, information relating to a particular user is retrieved from the database 112 and rendered to the user. Any information can be retrieved and rendered including user information 116 and financial information 122, for example.

[0069] In an aspect, in step 506, a second number sequence (e.g., security code or value) is provided to a user. As an example, once the user is authenticated, the second number sequence can be rendered to the user via an electronic file, e-mail, website or webpage. As a further example, FIG. 8 illustrates an exemplary webpage 800 rendering a second number sequence 802. Other means of communicating the second number sequence to a particular user can be used. In an aspect, information relating to a particular user is retrieved from the database 112 and rendered to the user.

[0070] In an aspect, in step 508, financial information (e.g., financial information 122, balance information, transaction information) is provided to a user. As an example, once the user is authenticated, the financial information can be provided to the user via an electronic file, e-mail, website or webpage. As a further example, FIG. 9 illustrates an exemplary webpage 900 rendering financial information 802. Other means of communicating the financial information to a particular user can be used. In an aspect, information relating to a particular user is retrieved from the database 112 and rendered to the user.

[0071] In an aspect, in step 510, the financial instrument can be used to conduct a financial transaction such as a purchase. As an example, the financial instrument can be used at the point of sale 108 or another point of purchase (e.g., brick and mortar, e-commerce site, webpage, online transaction site, etc.). As a further example, certain financial instrument can only be used for financial transaction associated with a particular seller such as the seller that provided the balance information for generating the financial instrument.

[0072] In an aspect, a user can use the first number sequence and the second number sequence of the financial instrument to conduct a financial transaction in a similar manner as a conventional credit card (e.g., telephone order, online order, in-person order, etc). Accordingly, purchases are debited from a balance of funds associated with the financial instrument and deposits, credits, or refunds are credited to the balance of funds associated with the financial instrument.

[0073] In an aspect, in step 512, the balance information associated with the financial instrument is updated to reflect debits and credits associated with the financial instrument. As an example, a computing device (e.g., computing device 104) can track transaction information relating to one or more financial instruments and can update financial information such as balances associated with the one or more financial instrument and related user records or accounts. As a further example, as shown in FIG. 9, a user can access a website 900 or other information source to view account information 902 relating to the financial instrument such as account balance, recent purchase or transactions, pending purchases, settings, etc.

[0074] Accordingly, a user can conduct a financial transaction using a prepaid virtual card without divulging personal financial information such as banking information or credit information.

[0075] While the methods and systems have been described in connection with preferred embodiments and specific examples, it is not intended that the scope be limited to the particular embodiments set forth, as the embodiments herein are intended in all respects to be illustrative rather than restrictive.

[0076] Unless otherwise expressly stated, it is in no way intended that any method set forth herein be construed as requiring that its steps be performed in a specific order. Accordingly, where a method claim does not actually recite
an order to be followed by its steps or it is not otherwise specifically stated in the claims or descriptions that the steps are to be limited to a specific order, it is no way intended that an order be inferred, in any respect. This holds for any possible non-express basis for interpretation, including: matters of logic with respect to arrangement of steps or operational flow; plain meaning derived from grammatical organization or punctuation; the number or type of embodiments described in the specification.

[0077] Throughout this application, various publications are referenced. The disclosures of these publications in their entirety are hereby incorporated by reference into this application in order to more fully describe the state of the art to which the methods and systems pertain.

[0078] It will be apparent to those skilled in the art that various modifications and variations can be made without departing from the scope or spirit. Other embodiments will be apparent to those skilled in the art from consideration of the specification and practice disclosed herein. It is intended that the specification and examples be considered as exemplary only, with a true scope and spirit being indicated by the following claims.

What is claimed is:

1. A method for issuing a virtual financial instrument, comprising:
   - receiving user identification information;
   - receiving balance information;
   - generating a financial instrument having a balance indicated by the balance information for a user indicated by the identification information; and
   - providing a notification to the user that the financial instrument has been generated.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein receiving user identification information comprises receiving an email address and a unique identifier.

3. The method of claim 1, wherein receiving balance information comprises receiving a dollar amount.

4. The method of claim 1, wherein generating a financial instrument having a balance indicated by the balance information for a user indicated by the identification information comprises issuing a first and a second number sequence.

5. The method of claim 4, wherein the first number sequence is a bank card number and the second sequence is a card security code.

6. The method of claim 1, wherein providing a notification to the user that the financial instrument has been generated comprises emailing the user a link to a website and login credentials for the website.

7. The method of claim 1, further comprising providing a website configured to receive login credentials and process a claim for the financial instrument.

8. The method of claim 7, wherein the website is further configured to provide the user with the financial instrument.

9. The method of claim 1, wherein the method is performed for a plurality of users as part of a batch process.

10. A system for issuing a virtual financial instrument, comprising:
    - a storage medium for storing information relating to a financial instrument;
    - a processor in communication with the memory, the processor configured to:
      - receive user identification information;
      - receive balance information;
      - generate the financial instrument having a balance indicated by the balance information for a user indicated by the identification information; and
      - store information relating to the financial instrument on the storage medium; and
    - provide a notification to the user that the financial instrument has been generated.

11. The system of claim 10, wherein receiving user identification information comprises receiving an email address and a unique identifier.

12. The system of claim 10, wherein receiving balance information comprises receiving a dollar amount.

13. The system of claim 10, wherein generating a financial instrument having a balance indicated by the balance information for a user indicated by the identification information comprises issuing a first and a second number sequence.

14. The system of claim 13, wherein the first number sequence is a bank card number and the second sequence is a card security code.

15. The system of claim 10, wherein providing a notification to the user that the financial instrument has been generated comprises emailing the user a link to a website and login credentials for the website.

16. The system of claim 10, further comprising providing a website configured to receive login credentials and process a claim for the financial instrument.

17. The system of claim 16, wherein the website is further configured to provide the user with the financial instrument.

18. The system of claim 10, wherein the method is performed for a plurality of users as part of a batch process.

19. A method for issuing a virtual financial instrument, comprising:
    - receiving recipient identification information from a seller;
    - receiving balance information from the seller;
    - generating a financial instrument having a balance indicated by the balance information for a recipient indicated by the identification information, wherein the balance represents a financial credit for one or more of a good or service provided by the seller; and
    - providing a notification to the recipient that the financial instrument has been generated.

20. The method of claim 19, further comprising providing a website configured to receive login credentials and process a claim for the financial instrument.

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