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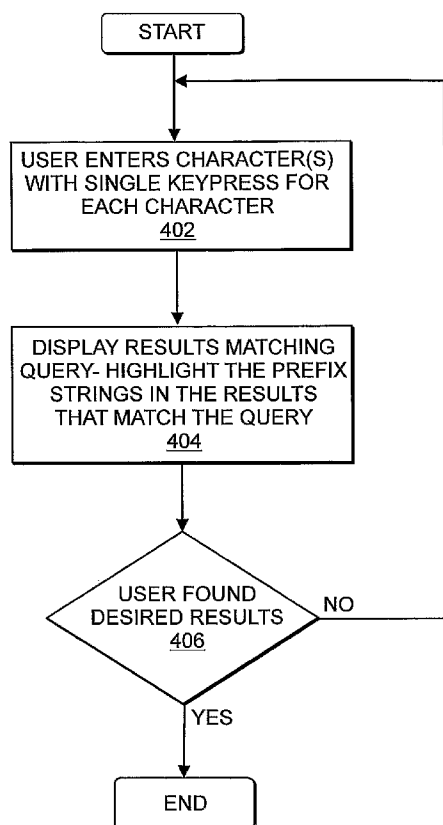
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(54) Title: METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR DYNAMICALLY PROCESSING AMBIGUOUS, REDUCED TEXT SEARCH QUERIES AND HIGHLIGHTING RESULTS THEREOF



(57) Abstract: A method and system are provided of processing a search query entered by a user of a device having a text input interface with overloaded keys. The search query is directed at identifying an item from a set of items. The system receives from the user an ambiguous search query directed at identifying a desired item. The search query comprises a prefix substring of at least one word in the name of the desired item. The system dynamically identifies a group of one or more items from the set of items. The system orders the one or more items of the group in accordance with given criteria. The names of the one or more items of the identified group are output as ordered with the characters of the one or more words in the names corresponding to the prefix substring of the search query being highlighted.

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METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR DYNAMICALLY PROCESSING AMBIGUOUS, REDUCED TEXT SEARCH QUERIES AND HIGHLIGHTING RESULTS THEREOF

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Field of Invention

[0001] The present invention generally relates to processing search queries and, more particularly, to methods and systems for processing ambiguous, reduced text, search queries and highlighting results thereof.

Description of Related Art

[0002] There are many user-operated devices such as mobile phones, PDAs (personal digital assistants), and television remote control devices that have small keypads, which a user can use for text entry. In many of these devices, largely because of device size constraints, the keypad is small and has only a small number of keys, which are overloaded with alpha-numeric characters. Text input using these keypads is cumbersome.

[0003] FIGURE 1 illustrates a common twelve-key keypad interface found in many cell phones and other mobile devices, and also increasingly in devices like television remote control devices. The keypad 10 includes twelve keys 12, most of which are overloaded with multiple alpha-numeric characters or functions. The same key can be pressed to enter different characters. For instance, the "2" key can be used to enter the number "2" and the letters "A", "B" and "C". Text entry using such a keypad with overloaded keys can result in an ambiguous text entry, which requires some type of a disambiguation action. For instance, with a so-called multi-press interface, a user can press a particular key multiple times in quick succession to select a desired character (e.g., to choose "B", the user would press the "2" key twice quickly, and to choose "C", the user would press the key three times quickly). Alternatively, text entry can be performed using the so-called T9 and other text input mechanisms that provide vocabulary based completion choices for each word entered. Neither of these methods is however particularly suitable for use in performing searches because of the number of steps needed to get to the result. One deficiency of the multi-press interface is that too many key strokes are needed. A drawback of applying a vocabulary based word completion interface is the need for the additional step of making a choice from a list of all possible word matches generated by the ambiguous text input. Furthermore vocabulary based word disambiguation systems are

designed typically for composition applications (as opposed to search applications) where user explicitly disambiguates each word by performing a word completion action to resolve that word before proceeding to the next word in the composition. This deficiency is even more apparent for a multi-word search system where results could ideally be obtained by the entry of just a few characters. These methods suffer from the fact that the fewer the number of characters entered, the greater the ambiguity of the input. (The ambiguity decreases as the input character count increases.) This has the undesirable consequence of reducing the usefulness of a search engine that has the potential to retrieve results with just a few input characters.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF EMBODIMENTS OF THE INVENTION

[0004] In accordance with one or more embodiments of the invention, a method and system are provided of processing a search query entered by a user of a device having a text input interface with overloaded keys. The search query is directed at identifying an item from a set of items. Each of the items has a name comprising one or more words. The system receives from the user an ambiguous search query directed at identifying a desired item. The search query comprises a prefix substring of at least one word in the name of the desired item. The system dynamically identifies a group of one or more items from the set of items having one or more words in the names thereof matching the search query as the user enters each character of the search query. The system also orders the one or more items of the group in accordance with given criteria. The names of the one or more items of the identified group are output to be displayed on the device operated by the user as ordered with the characters of the one or more words in the names corresponding to the prefix substring of the search query being highlighted.

[0005] These and other features will become readily apparent from the following detailed description wherein embodiments of the invention are shown and described by way of illustration. As will be realized, the invention is capable of other and different embodiments and its several details may be capable of modifications in various respects, all without departing from the invention. Accordingly, the drawings and description are to be regarded as illustrative in nature and not in a restrictive or limiting sense with the scope of the application being indicated in the claims.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0006] For a more complete understanding of various embodiments of the present invention, reference is now made to the following descriptions taken in connection with the accompanying drawings in which:

[0007] FIGURE 1 illustrates a keypad with overloaded keys in accordance with the prior art.

[0008] FIGURE 2 illustrates a search system in accordance with one or more embodiments of the invention.

[0009] FIGURE 3 illustrates exemplary device configuration options for various devices for performing searches in accordance with one or more embodiments of the invention.

[0010] FIGURE 4 is a flow chart illustrating a method for finding and highlighting results of a reduced text, ambiguous search query made using an overloaded keypad in accordance with one or more embodiments of the invention.

[0011] FIGURE 5A illustrates the different match possibilities for a single-word and multi-word prefix query in accordance with one or more embodiments of the invention.

[0012] FIGURE 5B illustrates possible ordering criteria for search results in accordance with one or more embodiments of the invention.

[0013] FIGURES 6A and 6B illustrate an exemplary text input interface and a display interface, respectively. The display interface shows the results of a sample incremental search where the user has entered a single-word query in accordance with one or more embodiments of the invention.

[0014] FIGURES 7A and 7B illustrate an exemplary text input interface and a display interface, respectively. The display interface shows the results of a sample incremental search where the user has entered a multi-word query in accordance with one or more embodiments of the invention.

[0015] Like reference numerals generally refer to like elements in the drawings.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

[0016] Briefly, methods and systems are provided in accordance with various embodiments of the invention for performing searches using ambiguous text input from devices having limited text input interfaces, and highlighting results of the searches.

[0017] As described in further detail below, in accordance with various embodiments of the invention, methods and systems are provided for processing a search query entered by a user of a device having a text input interface with overloaded keys. The search query is directed at identifying an item from a set of items. Each of the items has a name comprising one or more words.

[0018] Using the text input interface, the user can enter an ambiguous search query directed at identifying a desired item. The search query comprises a prefix substring of at least one word in the name of the desired item. A prefix substring of a word is a variable length string of characters that contains fewer than all the characters making up the word.

[0019] The system dynamically identifies a group of one or more items from the set of items having one or more words in the names thereof matching said search query as the user enters each character of said search query. The group of the one or more items is displayed on the device operated by the user with the characters of the one or more words in the names corresponding to the prefix substring of the search query being highlighted. The items are preferably displayed in an order of expected interest to the user.

[0020] The user types in the prefix input query by pressing overloaded keys of the text input interface once to form each character of an ambiguous query string. In accordance with one or more embodiments of the invention, the search space containing the searchable items is initially indexed by performing a many-to-many mapping from the alphanumeric space of terms to numeric strings corresponding to the various prefixes of each alphanumeric term constituting the query string. In a numeric string, each alphanumeric character in the string is replaced by its corresponding numeric equivalent based on the arrangement of characters on the keypad, e.g., the commonly used twelve-key reduced keypad shown in FIGURE 1. This mapping scheme enables the system in accordance with one or more embodiments to incrementally retrieve results matching the ambiguous alphanumeric input query, as the user types in each character of the query. The user does not have to explicitly specify the termination of each word in the query to

assist the system in disambiguating the input query; instead, the user only enters an input query that includes prefix substrings from the one or more words of the query. If multiple word prefixes are entered, the system can leverage off the multiple word prefixes to disambiguate it. A multiple word prefix based disambiguation method can reduce the amount of text and steps needed to enter a multiple word input query and retrieve results.

[0021] There are various possible applications for the search techniques described herein including, e.g., assisting television viewers in identifying desired television content items and channels, and assisting users of mobile devices such as cell phones and PDAs in performing searches for items in various databases (e.g., performing searches in directories of people or businesses, searching for and purchasing products/services like airline tickets, and searching for transportation schedules such as airline and train schedules, and for searching for audio and/or video content).

[0022] In the context of television systems, the term “television content items” can include a wide variety of video/audio content including, but not limited to, television shows, movies, music videos, or any other identifiable content that can be selected by a television viewer. Searching for television content items can be performed across disparate content sources including, but not limited to, broadcast television, VOD, IPTV, and PVR (local and network).

[0023] FIGURE 2 schematically illustrates an overall system for performing searches with reduced text entry using various devices in accordance with one or more embodiments of the invention. The system includes a server farm or system 202, a network 204, and a variety of devices 206, 208, 210 operated by users with text input interfaces. In accordance with one or more embodiments of the invention, the server 202 processes search queries received from the user devices 206, 208, 210. In other embodiments, the search queries are processed on the devices themselves. As discussed below, the server 202 can be the source of search data and relevance updates. If part of a television system, the server 202 can also be the source of or be linked to a source of at least some of the available television content (e.g., a cable or satellite television operator) from which the user can obtain content associated with search results.

[0024] The network 204 functions as the distribution framework for transmitting data from the server 202 to the devices operated by the users. The distribution network 204 could be wired or wireless connections or some combination thereof. Examples of possible networks include computer networks, cable television networks, satellite television networks, IP-based television

networks, mobile communications networks (such as, e.g., wireless CDMA and GSM networks), wired telephone networks, and IP-based wired and wireless networks.

[0025] The search devices could have a wide range of interface capabilities. A device, e.g., could be a hand-held mobile communications device 206 such as a cellular phone or PDA having a limited display size and a reduced keypad with overloaded keys. Another type of search device is a television system 204 with a remote control device 208 having an overloaded keypad. Another possible search device is a desk telephone 210 with a reduced keyboard and a small display screen.

[0026] FIGURE 3 illustrates multiple exemplary configurations for search devices in accordance with various embodiments of the invention. In one configuration, a search device (e.g., devices 206, 208, 210) can have a display 302, a processor 304, volatile memory 306, text input interface 308, remote connectivity 310 to the server 202 through the network 204, and a persistent storage 312. A device configuration for a device such as the hand-held device 206 might not include local persistent storage 312. In this case, the device 206 could have remote connectivity 310 to submit the query to the server 202 and retrieve results from it. Another configuration of the devices 206, 208, 210 may not have remote connectivity 310. In this case, the search database may be locally resident on a local persistent storage 312. The persistent storage 312 may be, e.g., a removable storage element such as SD, SmartMedia, CompactFlash card etc. In a configuration of the device with remote connectivity 310 and persistent storage 312 for performing searches (e.g., a television system 208), the device may use the remote connectivity for search relevance data update or for the case where the search database is distributed on the local storage 312 and on the server 202. A preferred configuration in a memory constrained device is the search data residing remotely on a server. Unlike composition applications where the “most frequently used or popular terms space” are small in size and can be maintained in a local vocabulary, search spaces are typically larger inherently because people instinctively use unique word “signatures” to recall an item of interest. Hence maintaining search spaces locally may not be practical in many devices that have limited local memory, making a network based search configuration preferable.

[0027] In one exemplary embodiment, a television system 208 may have a set-top box or other device with a one-way link to a satellite network. In this configuration, all search data including relevance updates may be downloaded to the device through a satellite link to perform

local searching. In this case, the set-top box preferably has sufficient storage capacity to maintain search spaces locally. Local storage is preferably large in this case to circumvent the deficiency of a one-way link.

[0028] FIGURE 4 illustrates a search process in accordance with one or more embodiments of the invention. At step 402, the user enters a character using an ambiguous text input interface, e.g., using a keypad with overloaded keys where a single key press is performed for each character entered. At 404, an incremental search system determines and displays at least some of the results that match the input character entered at 402. Since the input is ambiguous, the match of results would include the matches for all the ambiguous input characters represented by the single key press (including those not of interest to the user). To address this increased set of matches, an ordering scheme is preferably used to order the results to improve accessibility to results expected to be more of interest to the user. The ordering of results can be based on a variety of criteria including, e.g., temporal relevance, location relevance, popularity and personal preferences (that may have been determined implicitly or explicitly) or some combination of these criteria. (In a television application, temporal relevance can be used to favor programs whose timing may be more of interest to the viewer. For example, if the user entered NBA, then the system would list the games in order of temporal relevance such as those in progress or are scheduled to begin in the near future are listed at the higher on the list. The popularity criterion can be used to favor programs or channels that are more popular than others. The personal preference criterion can be used to favor programs or channels that the user has indicated preference for in prior user selections. For example, if a user frequently scrolls down to "CNBC" and selects it, the system would over time place CNBC higher in the list of results over a more generally popular channel such as CNN. Furthermore, identity independent time-based usage pattern learning algorithms can be applied in conjunction with personalization to apply the results ordering rules in an appropriate context. Also, e.g., when using a PDA or cell phone to search for a business, the system may use location relevance as part of the ordering criteria.)

[0029] In addition, other ordering schemes can be used in addition to or instead of the schemes indicated above such as character count based subspace biasing. In a character count based subspace biasing scheme, items in the search space do not have a constant relevance value, but rather have a relevance value that is a function of the number of characters entered so far in the prefix substring. In such a scheme, the search space (i.e., set of items that can be searched

for) can be divided into multiple subspaces. The relative relevance of a given subspace (and all the items contained therein) is dynamically boosted or suppressed as a function of the number of characters in the search query. As an example, a subspace containing television channel names might be boosted when the character count is one because television viewers might expect to find a channel with a single key press. Various examples of character count based subspace biasing are described in U.S. Patent Application Serial No. 11/246,432 entitled "Method And System For Incremental Search With Reduced Text Entry Where The Relevance Of Results Is A Dynamically Computed Function Of User Input Search String Character Count" and filed on October 7, 2005, which is assigned to the assignee of the present application and is incorporated by reference herein in its entirety.

[0030] The ordering criteria can also give preference to the results matching the search query based on a lexical match of the type of query input, e.g., in the following order of preference: single term prefixes, multiple term prefixes, and lastly abbreviation matches.

[0031] In accordance with various embodiments of the invention and as will be described below with reference to FIGURES 6B and 7B, the characters in the search result items that match the search prefix substring characters are highlighted to provide the user with a visual indication of the relationship between the key or keys pressed and the incremental match results. This facilitates identification by the user of the item of interest from the group of items displayed.

[0032] If the user does not find the desired results at 406, he or she can continue to enter more characters to the search query at step 402. Then at step 404, the system will perform the search based on the cumulative substring of characters of the search query entered by the user up to that point.

[0033] In the scenario where user does not reach the result due to misspelling or due to the case of a word whose uniqueness (e.g., Tom Brown, Todd Brown) is embedded in the suffix of a word in the query (as opposed to the prefix), the user would have to either go back to the first word and enter more characters or erase one or more of the typed characters and re-enter characters to reach the desired result. The dynamic highlight of the prefix strings in the results for each character entry enables the user to recover from an error during the text entry process itself, in contrast to discovering that no results match after typing the entire text.

[0034] FIGURE 5A illustrates the two broad categories of input queries and the various potential matches they could have in the results space. Input queries that do not include an explicit space or other break character form a single-word prefix query. A single-word query 501 can either match a single-word term 503 or an abbreviation representing multiple words 505. Input queries that explicitly include a space character or other break character between character entries form a multi-word prefix query. A multi-word prefix query 502 can match a multi-word term 504 or an abbreviation presenting multiple words. In an exemplary search of a movie database, the matches could be a direct match on terms representing a title (e.g., for the search query “go mu”, a match could be the movie title Gods Must Be Crazy) or it could be matches on terms representing different types of information (e.g., if a user is searching for a movie starring Tom Hanks that features volleyball, he or she may enter the search query “to vo” to get the result: Tom Hanks Volleyball). As described earlier, these matches are then ordered in decreasing relevance, and in one or more embodiments, in the following order: single-word term matches 506 and multi-word term matches 507 followed by multi-word abbreviation matches 508 as illustrated in FIGURE 5B.

[0035] FIGURES 6A and 6B illustrate an example of highlighted search results in accordance with one or more embodiments of the invention. FIGURE 6A illustrates an overloaded keypad interface 602, which can in a television application, be an on-screen interface. In this example, the user has entered a single-word text input query “866” using the keypad 602. The results of the search input are shown in FIGURE 6B, which shows single-word term matches 603 and 604 ordered before abbreviation matches 605 and 606. Because each key pressed by the user is overloaded and represents multiple possible search prefixes, simply displaying the text input “866” with the results will not provide the user sufficient information to associate his or her input with the match results. The “8” character entered initially by the user matches all items in the search database containing any word which begins with any of the alphanumeric characters “8”, “T”, “U” or “V”. Examples of matches to the first character would be “8MM” 604 and “Star Trek” (not shown here since what is shown is the result of the query 866, not 8). The “6” character next entered by the user limits these search results only to items containing words that begin with the alphanumeric characters “8”, “T”, “U” or “V” and whose second character is one of the alphanumeric characters “6”, “M”, “N” or “O” or to items containing words that begin with the alphanumeric characters “8”, “T”, “U” or “V” and that also

contain subsequent words that begin with the alphanumeric characters “6”, “M”, “N” or “O”. The earlier match, “Star Trek”, would drop out of the match results when the user pressed the overloaded “6” key because the “r” following the “T” matched by the “8” character does not match “6”, “M”, “N” or “O” and there are no words following “Trek” to match the “6”, “M”, “N” or “O”.

[0036] The next “6” character entered by the user as the third overloaded character further limits the search result to only those matches that also contain the alphanumeric characters “6”, “M”, “N” or “O” immediately following one of the matched characters for the first “6” previously entered or that contain subsequent words that begin with the alphanumeric characters “6”, “M”, “N” or “O”. This relationship between the overloaded characters entered by the user and the match results is complicated and not necessarily intuitive to the user. In various embodiments of the invention, the characters in the search result that match the overloaded single-word search prefix characters are highlighted, providing the user with a visual indication of the relationship between the key pressed and the incremental match results. This facilitates identification by the user of the item of interest from the group of items displayed.

[0037] The term “highlighting” as used herein refers to making more prominent or otherwise making more distinct characters of interest in the search results relative to other characters. Non-limiting examples of highlighting include bolding, italicizing, coloring, underlining, or changing font of (or some combination thereof) the characters of interest relative to the others.

[0038] In another example, FIGURE 7B illustrates the results for a multi-word text input “866 2” using a 12-key keypad 702 shown in FIGURE 7A. As discussed earlier, the multi-word term matches 703 are preferably ordered ahead of multi-word abbreviation matches. The difference between the single-word search illustrated in FIGURE 6B and the multi-word search illustrated in FIGURE 7B is that the use of an explicit word separator in the user input (in this case a space character) before the “2” entry, further limits results of the search. Only the results of the search illustrated in FIGURE 6B for prefix substring “866” that also contain at least two words and in which a subsequent word begins with “2”, “A”, “B”, or “C” are included in the results displayed to the user. A title such as “Tomb Raider” would not match the multi-word search even though the word “Tomb” matches the overloaded keys “8”, “6”, “6”, “2” because the “2” must match the first letter in a subsequent word. As in the FIGURE 6B example, the characters in the ordered result that match the multi-word overloaded search prefix characters are

highlighted to provide the user with immediate feedback relating the key pressed to the incremental match results.

[0039] Methods of processing ambiguous search query inputs from users and highlighting results in accordance with various embodiments of the invention are preferably implemented in software, and accordingly one of the preferred implementations is as a set of instructions (program code) in a code module resident in the random access memory of a computer. Until required by the computer, the set of instructions may be stored in another computer memory, e.g., in a hard disk drive, or in a removable memory such as an optical disk (for eventual use in a CD ROM) or floppy disk (for eventual use in a floppy disk drive), or downloaded via the Internet or some other computer network. In addition, although the various methods described are conveniently implemented in a general purpose computer selectively activated or reconfigured by software, one of ordinary skill in the art would also recognize that such methods may be carried out in hardware, in firmware, or in more specialized apparatus constructed to perform the specified method steps.

[0040] Having described preferred embodiments of the present invention, it should be apparent that modifications can be made without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention.

[0041] Method claims set forth below having steps that are numbered or designated by letters should not be considered to be necessarily limited to the particular order in which the steps are recited.

CLAIMS

1. A method of processing a search query entered by a user of a device having a text input interface with overloaded keys, said search query being directed at identifying an item from a set of items, each of said items having a name comprising one or more words, said method comprising:

(a) receiving from the user an ambiguous search query directed at identifying a desired item, said search query comprising a prefix substring of at least one word in the name of the desired item;

(b) dynamically identifying a group of one or more items from said set of items having one or more words in the names thereof matching said search query as said user enters each character of said search query;

(c) ordering said one or more items of said group identified in (b) in accordance with one or more given criteria; and

(d) outputting the names of said one or more items of said group identified in (b) to be displayed on the device operated by said user as ordered in (c) with the characters of the one or more words in said names corresponding to said prefix substring of said search query being highlighted.

2. The method of claim 1 wherein said characters are highlighted by being colored, bolded, italicized, underlined, or changed to a different font, or some combination thereof.

3. The method of claim 1 wherein said one or more given criteria include one or more of: temporal relevance, location relevance, popularity, personal preferences and character count.

4. The method of claim 1 wherein said one or more items are ordered such that items having single-word or multi-word term matches are displayed before items having single-word or multi-word abbreviation matches.

5. The method of claim 1 wherein said overloaded keys each represent a number and at least two alphabetic characters, and wherein said method further comprises indexing said items by performing a many-to-many mapping of said names associated with said items to numeric strings corresponding to various search query prefix substrings.

6. The method of claim 1 wherein said search query is processed by a server system remote from said user.

7. The method of claim 1 wherein said search query is processed by said device operated by said user.

8. The method of claim 1 wherein said items comprise television content items, or a product or service sought by the user.

9. The method of claim 1 wherein said device is a cell phone, desk phone, a PDA, or a remote control device for a television.

10. A system for processing a search query entered by a user of a device having a text input interface with overloaded keys, said search query being directed at identifying an item from a set of items, each of said items having a name comprising one or more words, said system comprising:

a memory for storing the name of each item in said set of items; and

a processor for (a) receiving from the user an ambiguous search query directed at identifying a desired item, said search query comprising a prefix substring of at least one word in the name of the desired item; (b) dynamically identifying a group of one or more items from said set of items having one or more words in the names thereof matching said search query as said user enters each character of said search query; (c) ordering said one or more items of said identified group in accordance with one or more given criteria; and (d) outputting the names of said one or more items of said identified group to be displayed on the device operated by said user as ordered with the characters of the one or more words in said names corresponding to said prefix substring of said search query being highlighted.

11. The system of claim 10 wherein said characters are highlighted by being colored, bolded, italicized, underlined, or changed to a different font, or some combination thereof.

12. The system of claim 10 wherein said one or more given criteria include one or more of: temporal relevance, location relevance, popularity, personal preferences and character count.

13. The system of claim 10 wherein said one or more items are ordered such that items having single-word or multi-word term matches are displayed before items having single-word or multi-word abbreviation matches.

14. The system of claim 10 wherein said overloaded keys each represent a number and at least two alphabetic characters, and wherein said processor further indexes said items by performing a many-to-many mapping of said names associated with said items to numeric strings corresponding to various search query prefix substrings.

15. The system of claim 10 wherein said system comprises a server system remote from said user.

16. The system of claim 10 wherein said system is incorporated in or proximate said device operated by said user.

17. The system of claim 10 wherein said items comprise television content items, or a product or service sought by the user.

18. The system of claim 10 wherein said device is a cell phone, desk phone, a PDA, or a remote control device for a television.

19. A system for processing search queries entered by users of devices having a text input interface with overloaded keys, each search query being directed at identifying an item from a set of items, each of said items having a name comprising one or more words, said system comprising:

a server;

a plurality of devices operated by said users, said devices each having a text input interface with overloaded keys, said devices each transmitting to the server an ambiguous search query directed at identifying a desired item, said search query comprising a prefix substring of at least one word in the name of the desired item;

a network for transmitting data between said server and said devices; and

a database for storing the name of each item in said set of items;

wherein for each search query received from a device, said server dynamically identifies a group of one or more items from said set of items having one or more words in the names thereof matching said search query as the user of said device enters each character of said search query; orders said one or more items of said identified group in accordance with one or more given criteria; and transmits the names of said one or more items of said identified group to be displayed on the device operated by said user as ordered with the characters of the one or more words in said names corresponding to said prefix substring of said search query being highlighted.

20. The system of claim 19 wherein said characters are highlighted by being colored, bolded, italicized, underlined, or changed to a different font, or some combination thereof.

21. The system of claim 19 wherein said one or more given criteria include one or more of: temporal relevance, location relevance, popularity, personal preferences and character count.

22. The system of claim 19 wherein said one or more items are ordered such that items having single-word or multi-word term matches are displayed before items having single-word or multi-word abbreviation matches.

23. The system of claim 19 wherein said overloaded keys each represent a number and at least two alphabetic characters, and wherein said server further indexes said items by performing a many-to-many mapping of said names associated with said items to numeric strings corresponding to various search query prefix substrings.

24. The system of claim 19 wherein said items comprise television content items, or a product or service sought by the user.

25. The system of claim 19 wherein said devices comprise cell phones, desk phones, PDAs, or remote control devices for a television.

26. A computer program product for processing a search query entered by a user of a device having a text input interface with overloaded keys, said search query being directed at identifying an item from a set of items, each of said items having a name comprising one or more words, the computer program product residing on a computer readable medium having a plurality of instructions stored thereon which, when executed by a processor, cause that processor to:

(a) receive from the user an ambiguous search query directed at identifying a desired item, said search query comprising a prefix substring of at least one word in the name of the desired item;

(b) dynamically identify a group of one or more items from said set of items having one or more words in the names thereof matching said search query as said user enters each character of said search query;

(c) order said one or more items of said group identified in (b) in accordance with one or more given criteria; and

(d) output the names of said one or more items of said group identified in (b) to be displayed on the device operated by said user as ordered in (c) with the characters of the one or more words in said names corresponding to said prefix substring of said search query being highlighted.

27. The computer program product of claim 26 wherein said characters are highlighted by being colored, bolded, italicized, underlined, or changed to a different font, or some combination thereof.

28. The computer program product of claim 26 wherein said one or more given criteria include one or more of: temporal relevance, location relevance, popularity, personal preferences and character count.

29. The computer program product of claim 26 wherein said one or more items are ordered such that items having single-word or multi-word term matches are displayed before items having single-word or multi-word abbreviation matches.

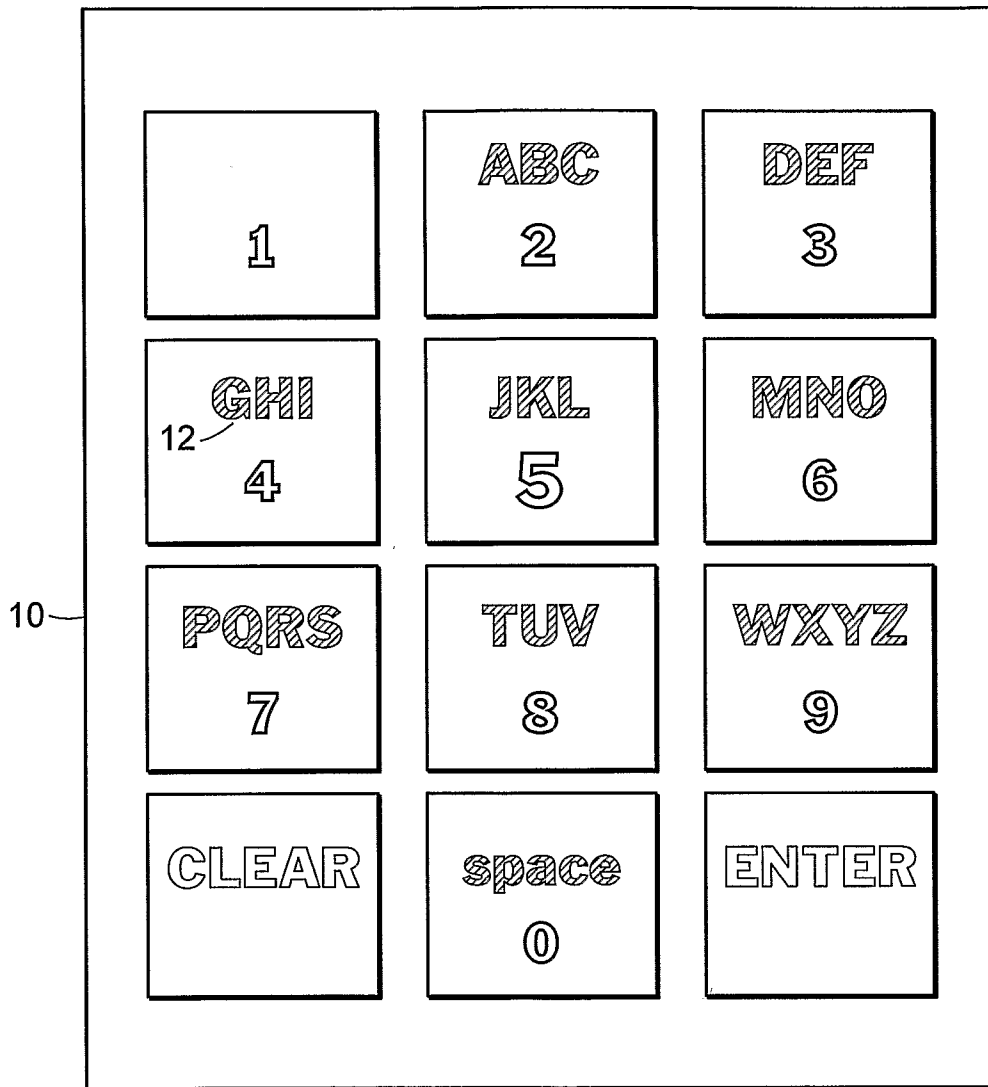
30. The computer program product of claim 26 wherein said overloaded keys each represent a number and at least two alphabetic characters, and wherein said method further comprises indexing said items by performing a many-to-many mapping of said names associated with said items to numeric strings corresponding to various search query prefix substrings.

31. The computer program product of claim 26 wherein said search query is processed by a server system remote from said user.

32. The computer program product of claim 26 wherein said search query is processed by said device operated by said user.

33. The computer program product of claim 26 wherein said items comprise television content items, or a product or service sought by the user.

34. The computer program product of claim 26 wherein said device is a cell phone, desk phone, a PDA, or a remote control device for a television.



PRIOR ART
FIG. 1

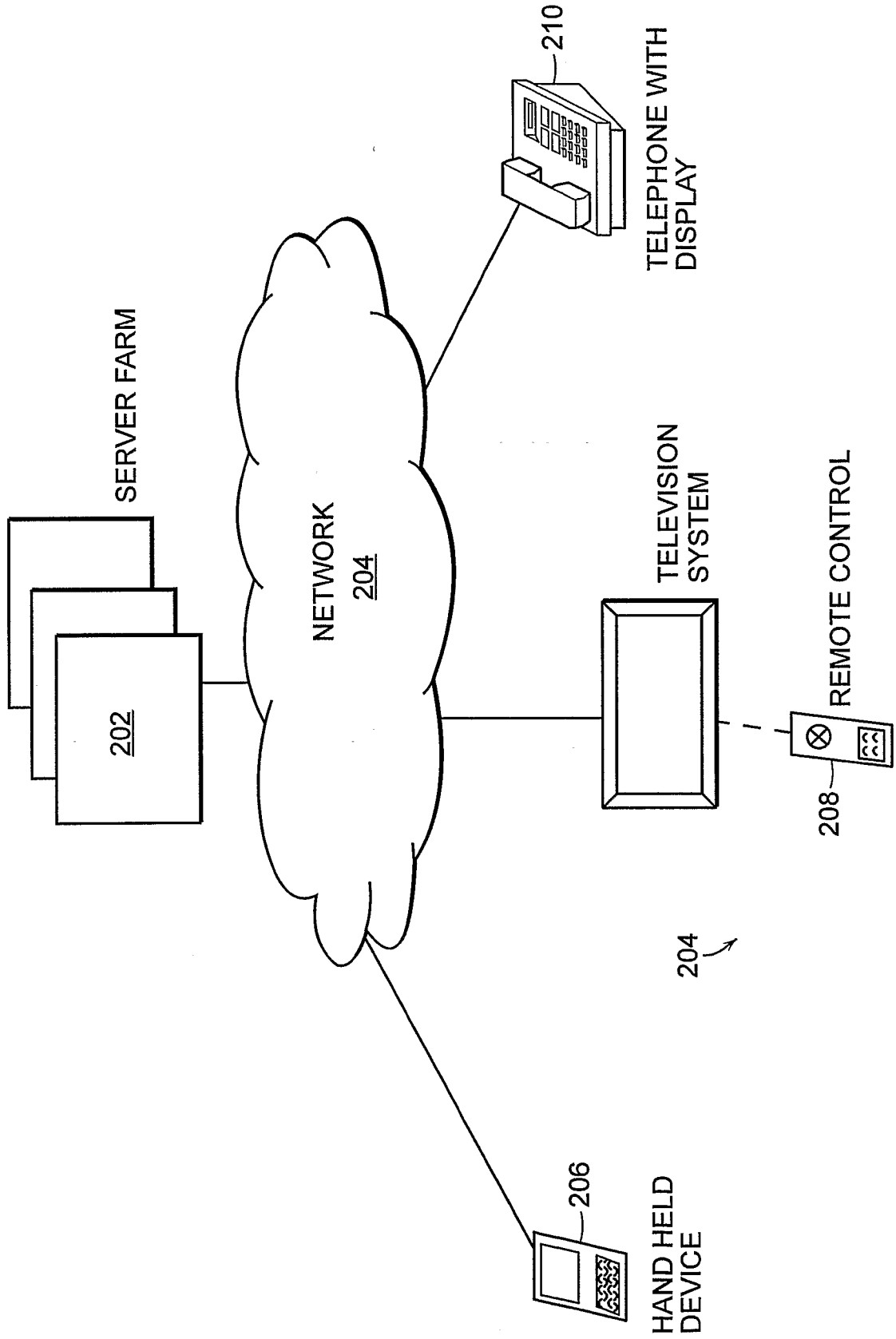


FIG. 2

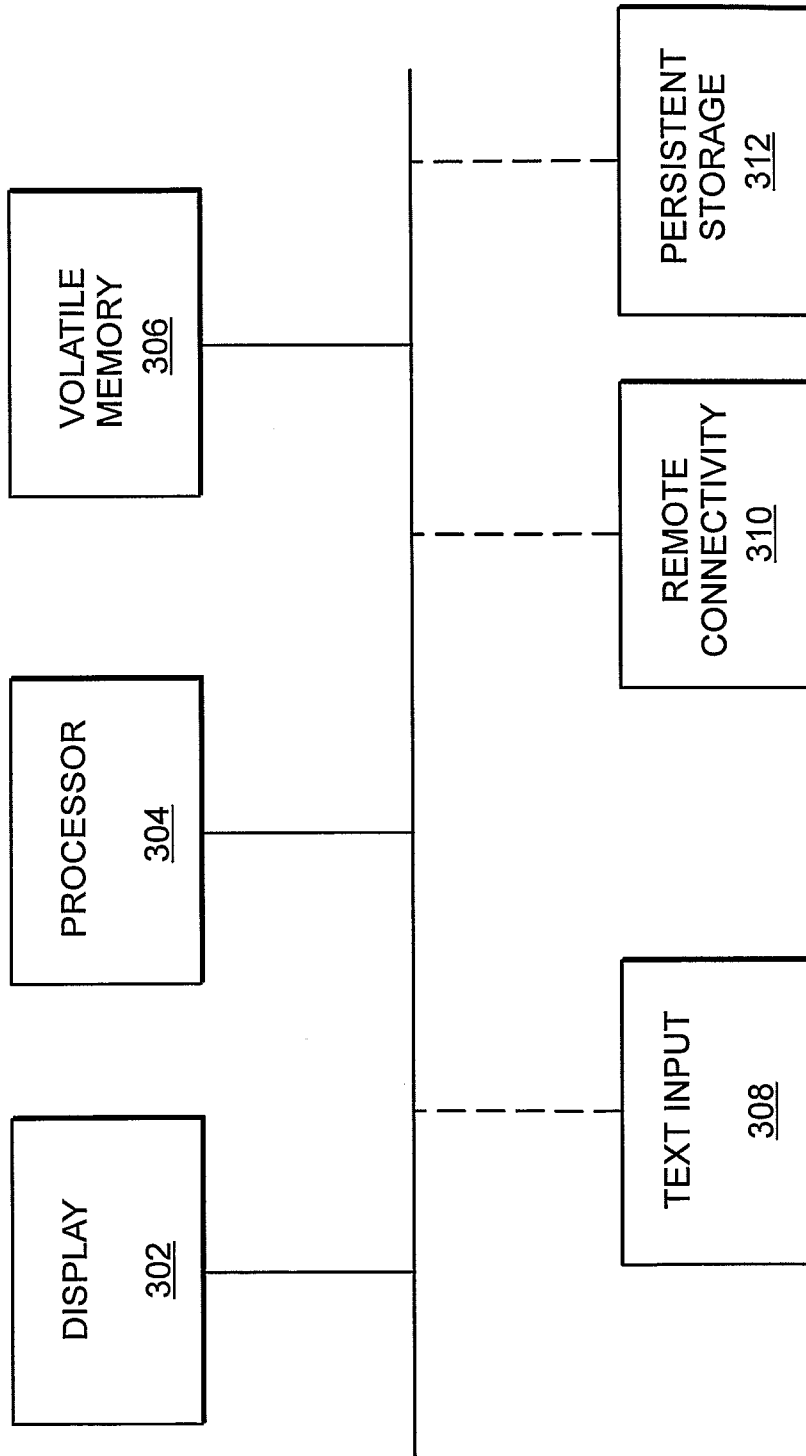


FIG. 3

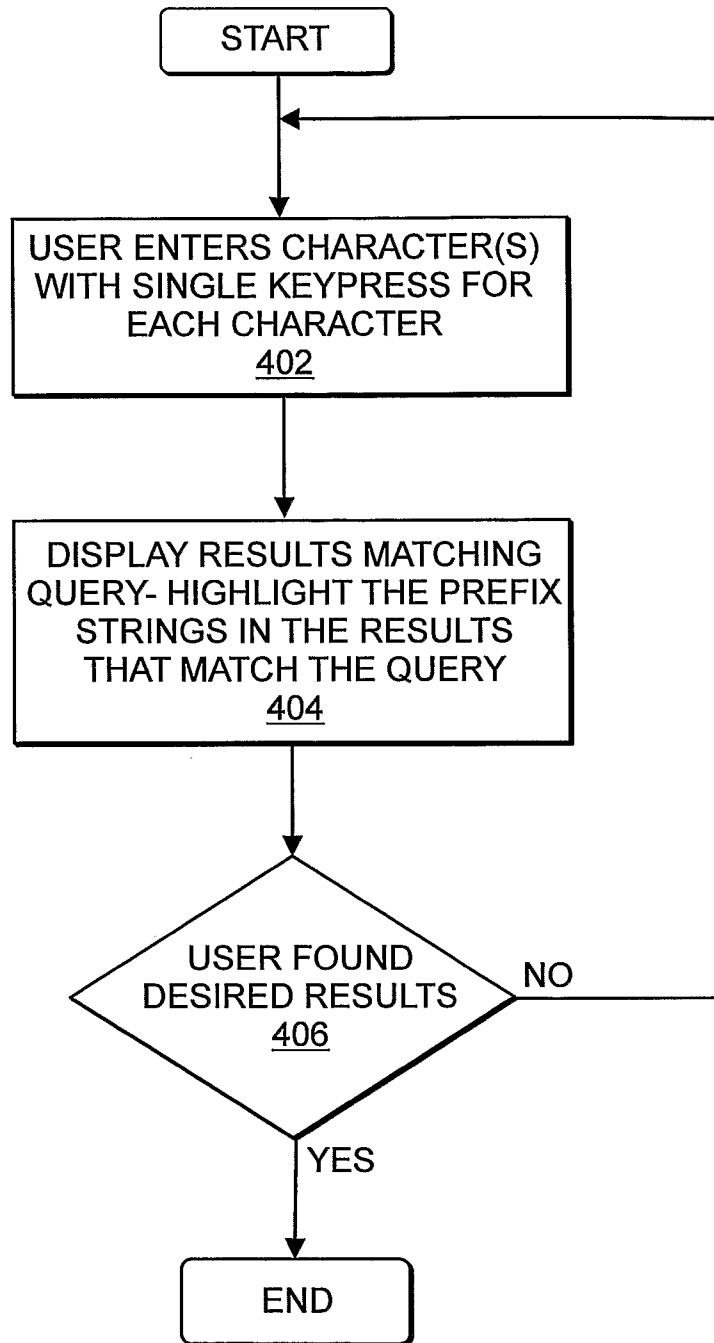


FIG. 4

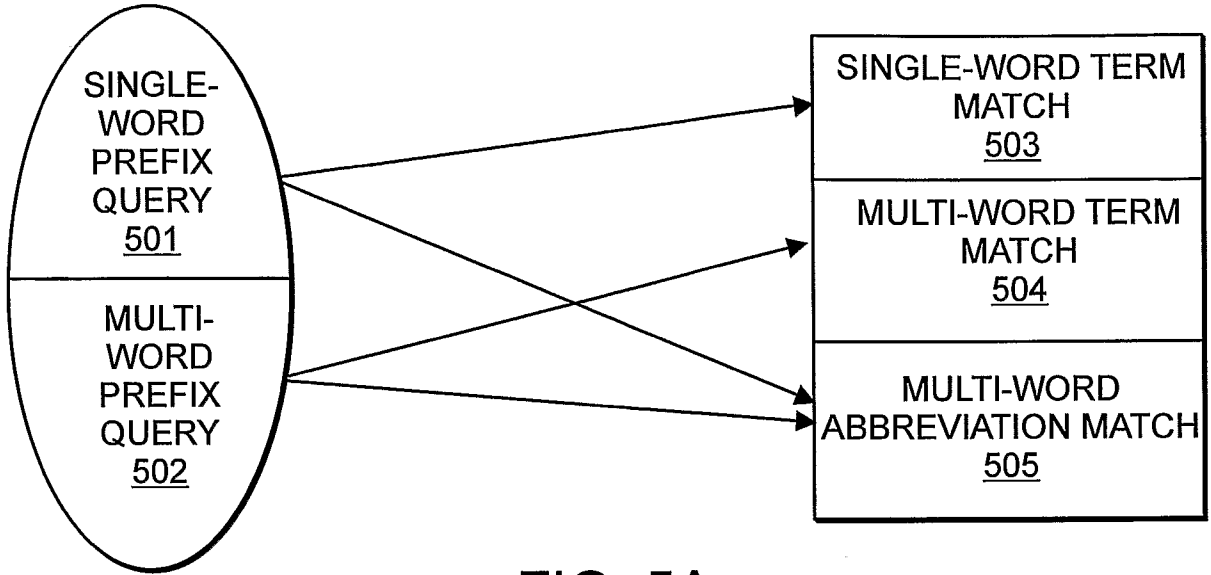


FIG. 5A

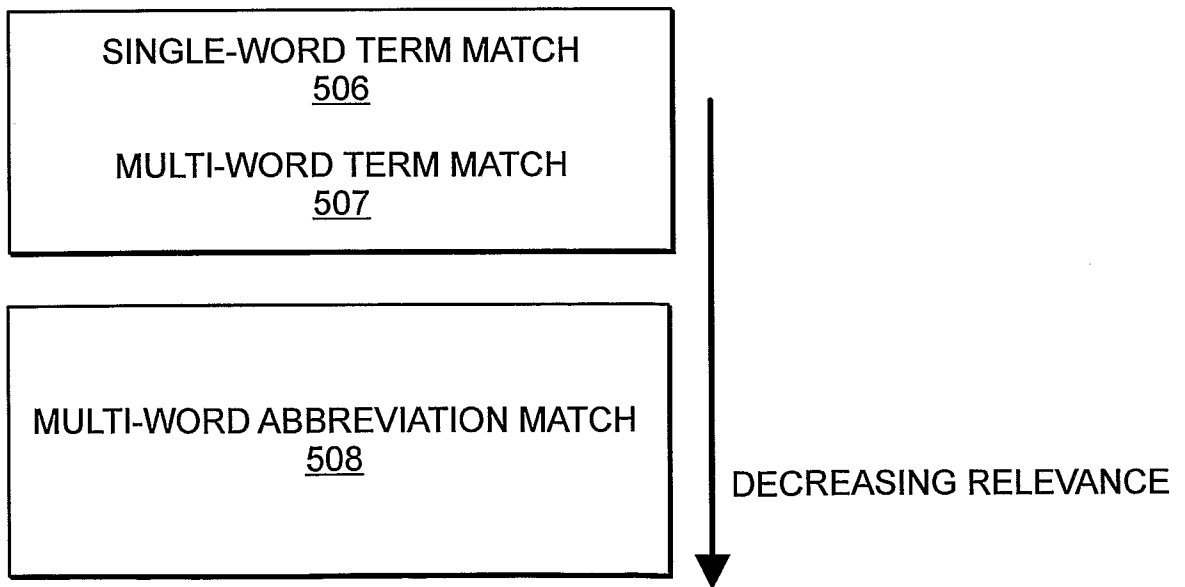
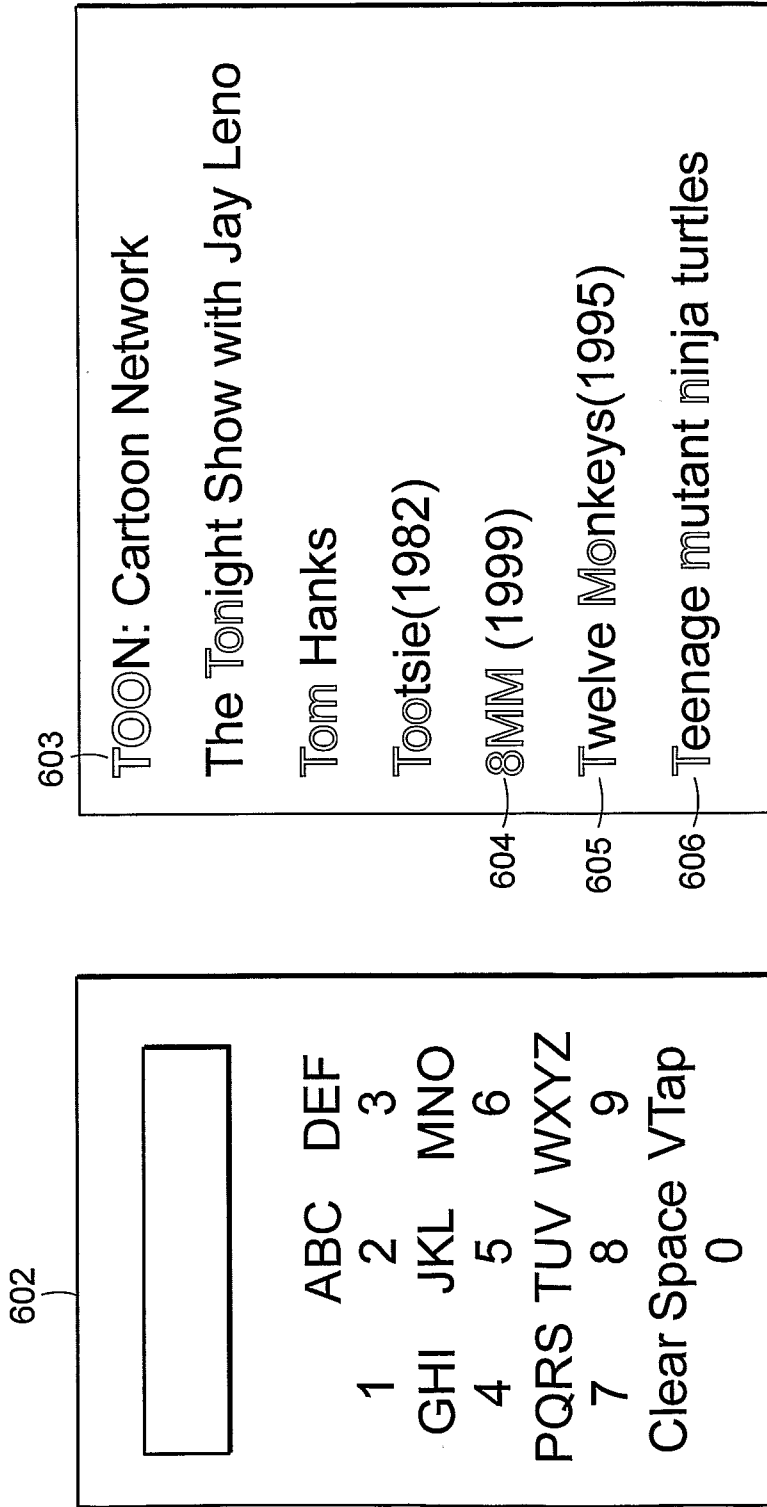


FIG. 5B



USER INPUT: 866

FIG. 6A

FIG. 6B

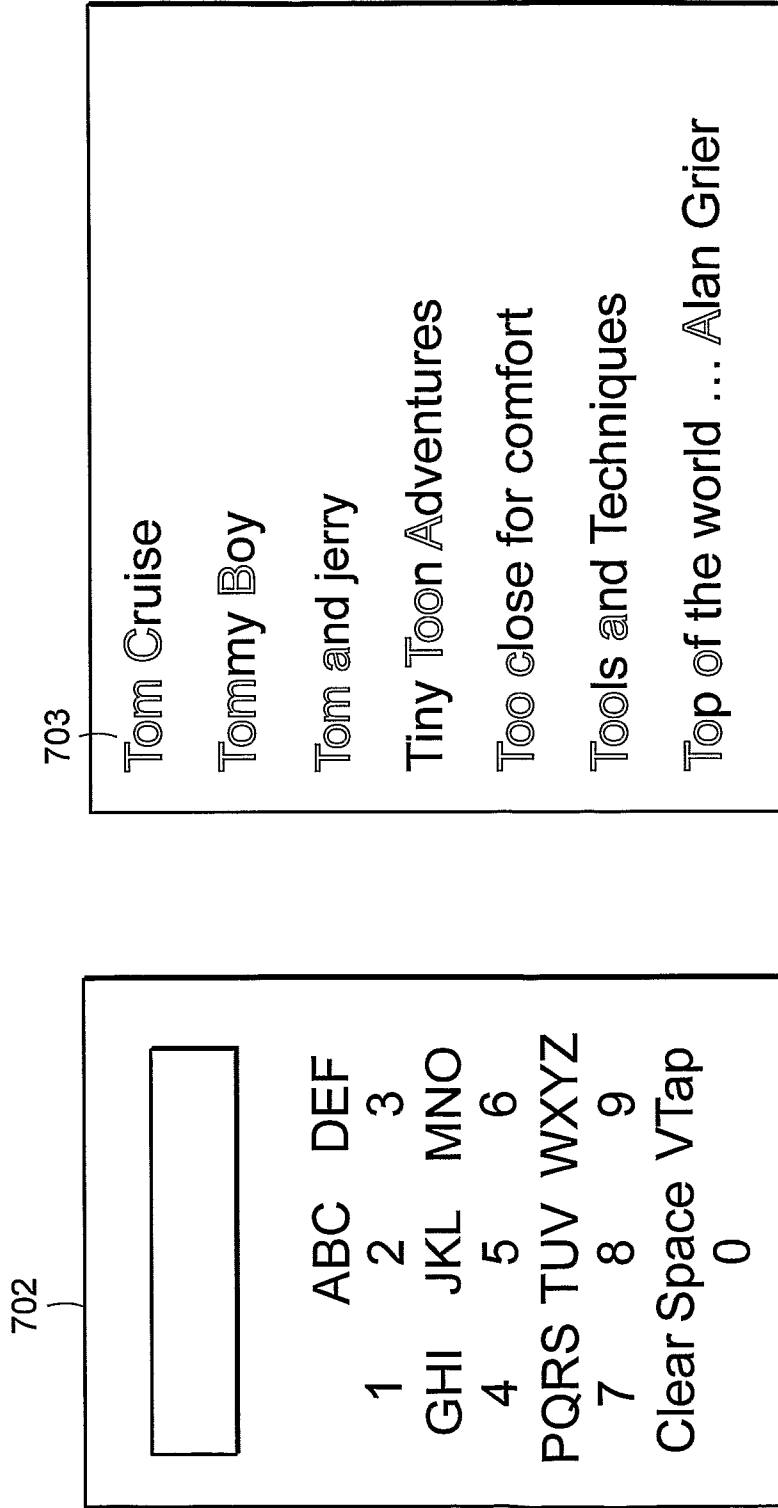


FIG. 7A

FIG. 7B