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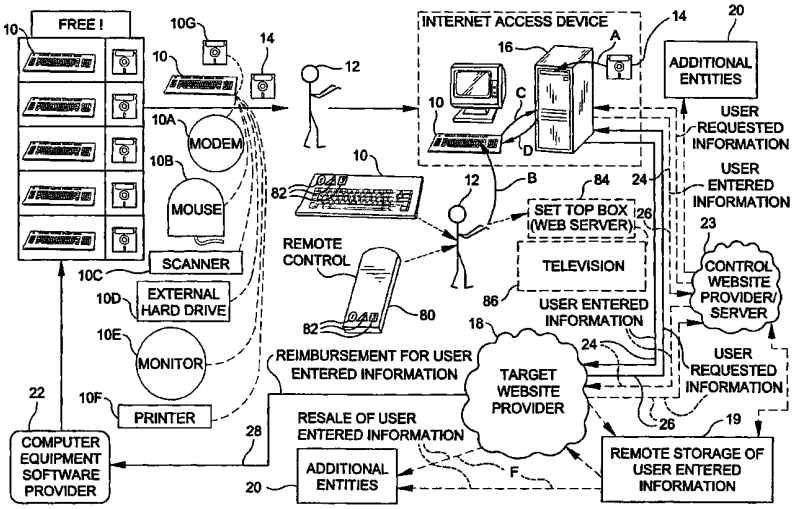

(57) Abstract: A method and apparatus for obtaining information from a user accessing a target site (18) on the Internet includes the steps of providing computer equipment and software (22) to a user (12), store information entered by user (19), accessing target site on the Internet either directly or via a control site (23), retrieving the stored information in response to a request by an Internet Website Provider who then reimburses the computer equipment provider. The user provides information to be incorporated into the computer equipment prior to delivery of the computer equipment to the user. The information automatically provide to the control or target Website Provider when the user access the Website. A remote control (80) can be used to access the target Website with a set-top box (84). The control Website determines the address of the target Website from information transmitted from the set-top box and linking a specific target Website to predetermined time slots and user information.

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METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR OBTAINING INFORMATION FROM USERS ACCESSING AN INTERNET SITE

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION

This application is a continuation-in-part of co-pending U.S. Application Serial No. 09/401,247, filed on September 23, 1999.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Field of the Invention

This invention relates generally to the Internet, and more particularly to the collection of information from users accessing a Website on the Internet.

Description of the Prior Art

The Internet consists of tens of thousands of interconnected packet-switched networks worldwide, all of which use an Internet Protocol (IP). The Internet has developed largely without any central plan, and no single entity can control or speak for the entire system. The technology of the Internet allows new types of services to be layered on top of existing protocols. Numerous users can share physical facilities, and the mix of traffic through any point changes constantly through the actions of the distributed network of thousands of routers.

As of January 1997, there were over 16 million host computers on the Internet, more then ten times the number of hosts five years earlier. Several studies have produced different estimates of the number of people with Internet access, but the numbers are clearly substantial and growing. Some industry studies estimate the number of subscribers in the United States at between 40 and 50 million. Although

the United States is still home to the largest proportion of Internet users and traffic, more then 175 countries are now connected to the Internet.

The Internet market comprises several segments, including network services (such as Internet Service Providers (ISP)), hardware (such as routers, modems and computers) and software (such as server software and other applications) enabling services (such as directory and tracking services), expertise (such as system integrators and business consultants) and content providers (including on-line entertainment, information and shopping). There are now some three thousand Internet access providers in the United States, ranging from small start-ups, to established corporations and consumer on-line service providers. According to various industry studies, the Internet market exceeded 1 billion dollars in the U.S. in 1995, and is expected to grow to between 22 billion dollars and 25 billion dollars in the year 2000. Estimates from many sources suggest as many as a half a billion people will use the Internet by the year 2000. As the Internet grows, methods of accessing the Internet also expand and fuel further growth, and as these new access technologies are being developed, new Internet clients are entering the market place. Low-cost Internet devices such as WebTV and its competitors allow users to access Internet services through an ordinary television, which is far less costly than a personal computer. Various other devices including network computers for business users, and Internet-capable video game stations for consumers, promise to reduce the up-front costs of Internet access even further.

The World Wide Web (WWW) or Web has grown to become one of the most sophisticated and popular services on the Internet. Although no specific organization exercises administrative control over the Web, order is imposed by the languages and protocols that constitute worldwide standards, such as a Hyper Text Transfer Protocol (HTTP) and a Hyper Text Markup Language (HTML).

The Web can be described as a dynamic, interactive, graphically oriented, distributed, platform-independent, hypertext information system. The Web is dynamic because it changes daily, and new Web servers are continually being added.

New information is also continually being added as new hypertext links and innovative services. The Web is interactive in that specific information can be requested through various search engines and returned moments later in the form of lists, with each item weighted according to how well it matches the search parameters. The Web is graphically oriented in that the use of graphics not only makes the Web visually appealing, but easy to navigate as well. The Web is distributed in that information resides on tens of thousands of individual Web servers around the world. The Web is platform-independent, which means that virtually any client can access the Web regardless of the operating system being used. The Web makes extensive use of hypertext links, usually identified by an underlined word, phrase or graphic symbol which lead the user to textual documents, maps, forms, images, audio and video clips, applications and other Internet services.

An important trend in recent years has been the growth in Intranets and other corporate applications. Intranets are internal corporate networks that use the Transmission Control Protocol/Internet Protocol (TCP/IP) of the Internet. These networks are either completely separate from the public Internet, or are connected through firewalls that allow corporate users to access the Internet to prevent outside users from accessing information on the corporate network. Corporate users are often ignored in discussions about the number of households with Internet access. However, these users represent a substantial portion of Internet traffic. In addition, Intranets generate a tremendous amount of revenue since companies tend to be willing to pay more than individual users to receive a higher level of service.

The increasing popularity of the Internet has led to an explosion in the number of new sites created by those wishing to attract attention and revenue from a growing consumer market. Competition between sites has become particularly acute, and is a natural outgrowth of the limited amount of time that an average Internet user can devote to searching for and utilizing on-line resources. Thus, information regarding target users has become critical to Website providers competing for the finite attention and dollars of the Internet consumer market. Such user information typically includes demographics, personal information (such as age, physical characteristics, address,

telephone number and recreational interests), purchasing habits and browsing habits. This information is particularly useful to Website providers that must tailor such variables as the content and presentation of information on their site to a target segment of the Internet consumer market.

Unfortunately, accurate information from visitors to a given Website has historically been difficult to obtain. Conventional methods of filling out often lengthy questionnaires to register or gain access to a particular Website have typically discouraged and frustrated potential consumers from accessing the cite and have provided incorrect and/or incomplete information. In addition, many Internet users consider such questions to be personally invasive and not worth the expenditure of effort in return for the services provided by the Website.

Therefore, it would be advantageous if a method and apparatus could obtain accurate, complete and valuable information from visitors accessing a Website for use by the Website provider and other interested entities.

OBJECTS AND SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

It is an object of the present invention to provide a method for obtaining accurate, complete, extensive and valuable information from a user accessing a Website on the Internet.

It is another object of the present invention to provide an effective incentive for persons accessing a Website on the Internet to provide information concerning personal information, demographics, buying habits, browsing habits, and the like.

It is yet another object of the present invention to provide, remote controls, computer equipment and software to a consumer in exchange for information concerning the consumer to enable the computer equipment to function with an Internet access device.

It is still a further object of the present invention to provide, remote controls computer equipment and software to a consumer at a cost which is substantially less than that which the consumer would pay if this equipment were purchased in a retail store.

It is an object of the present invention to provide remote controls, computer equipment and software which makes it easier and less intimidating for a consumer to access the Internet.

It is another object of the present invention to provide a consumer with access to Websites, which are specifically tailored to the consumer's interests, preferences, viewing/purchasing habits and the like.

It is yet another object of the present invention to provide a method whereby accurate information concerning Internet users can be obtained at a relatively low cost.

It is still another object of the present invention to provide a method whereby a consumer can access Websites on the Internet, which are continuously tailored to the consumer's interests and preferences without requiring the user to enter his interests and preferences during each Internet session.

It is another object of the present invention to provide a method of generating revenue in response to access to an Internet Website.

It is an object of the present invention to provide a method of accessing a Website, the identity of which is optionally dependent upon additional parameters, such as a particular user's demographics, in response to selecting an icon on a remote control or keyboard.

It is another object of the present invention to provide a method of linking a user to an advertiser's Website, which incorporates links that can be leased to the advertiser according to parameters, such as time slot, channel, and user demographics.

It is yet another object of the present invention to provide a remote control device, which includes user-selectable icons that enable access to a Website, the identity of which is optionally dependent upon additional parameters, such as a particular user's demographics.

It is still another object of the present invention to provide a remote control device which directs a user to an advertiser's Website with links that can be leased to the advertiser according to parameters, such as time slot, channel, and user demographics.

In accordance with one form of the present invention, a method of obtaining information from a user accessing a site on the Internet is provided, which includes the steps of providing computer equipment and software to a user, installing the software on an Internet access device, entering and storing information concerning the user on the Internet access device, accessing a site on the Internet either directly or via control site on the Internet, retrieving the stored information by an Internet site provider and reimbursing the computer equipment provider in exchange for the stored information. The software must be installed on the computer and the information must be entered to enable the computer equipment to operate with the Internet access device.

Alternatively, the information can be obtained from the user and incorporated into the computer equipment prior to providing the user with the computer equipment. For instance, the name of the user can be incorporated into a Uniform Resource Locator (URL) chosen by the user, which is transmitted from a wireless keyboard in response to the user selecting one of a set of pre-programmed function keys. The Internet site providers will then utilize the name of the user to retrieve additional user information stored either locally or remotely to the Internet site provider.

In accordance with another form of the present invention, a method of obtaining information from a user accessing a site on the Internet is provided, which includes providing a first unit and a second unit of software to a user, installing the software on an Internet access device, entering and storing information concerning the

user on the Internet access device, accessing a target site on the Internet either directly or via a control site on the Internet, retrieving the stored information and reimbursing the software provider for the stored information. The second unit of software must be installed on the Internet access device, and the second unit of software requires that the information be entered to enable the first unit of software to operate on the Internet access device.

Alternatively, the information can be obtained from the user and incorporated into the software prior to providing the user with the software. For instance, the name of the user can be incorporated into a Uniform Resource Locator (URL) chosen by the user, which is transmitted from the Internet access device in response to the user installing the software on the Internet access device and accessing the Internet while the software is operational. The target and/or control Internet site providers will then utilize the name of the user to retrieve additional user information stored either locally or remotely.

In accordance with yet another form of the present invention, an apparatus for obtaining information from a user accessing a site on the Internet is provided, which includes computer equipment and a software program. The software program must be installed on an Internet access device, and the user must enter information to enable the computer equipment to operate with the Internet access device. The information is stored in the Internet access device, and is retrieved by the target and/or control site providers when the user accesses a site on the Internet. The site provider reimburses the computer equipment provider in exchange for the stored information.

In accordance with still another form of the present invention, an apparatus for obtaining information from a user accessing a site on the Internet is provided, which includes a storage medium accessible to the user. The storage medium includes a first unit and a second unit of software. The second unit of software must be installed on the computer to enable the first unit of software to operate with the computer, and the second unit of software requires information to be entered and stored on the computer. When the user accesses a site on the Internet, the stored information is retrieved by

the target and/or control site provider, which reimburses the software provider in exchange for the stored information.

In accordance with yet another form of the present invention, a method of accessing a site on the Internet includes the steps of providing a remote control device to a user, transmitting a first signal from the remote control device to a set-top box, transmitting a second signal from the set-top box to a control Website server, determining an address of a target Website in response to receiving the second signal, and accessing the target Website using the address of the target Website. The remote control device includes at least one icon, which is selectable by the user. The first signal is transmitted in response to the user selecting the icon, and the second signal is transmitted in response to the set-top box receiving the first signal. The second signal is representative of at least a portion of the information in the first signal. The address of the target Website is determined from at least a portion of the information included in the second signal and information linking the address of the target Website to at least a portion of the information included in the second signal.

In accordance with still another form of the present invention, an apparatus to access a site on the Internet includes a remote control device and a set-top box. The remote control device includes at least one icon, which is selectable by the user. The remote control device transmits a first signal to the set-top box in response to the user selecting the icon, and the set-top box transmits a second signal to a control Website server in response to receiving the first signal The second signal is representative of at least a portion of the information in the first signal. The control Website server determines an address of the target Website in response to receiving the second signal. The address of the target Website is determined from at least a portion of the information included in the second signal and information linking the address of the target Website to at least a portion of the information included in the second signal.

These and other objects, features and advantages of the present invention, will become apparent from the following detailed description of illustrative embodiments thereof, which is to be read in connection with the accompanying drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Figure 1 shows a pictorial representation of an apparatus and method for obtaining information from a consumer in exchange for computer equipment or software formed in accordance with the present invention.

Figure 2 shows a relational flowchart of the method for obtaining information from a consumer in exchange for computer equipment shown in Figure 1.

Figure 3 shows a pictorial representation of an alternative embodiment of an apparatus and method for obtaining information from a consumer in exchange for computer equipment or software formed in accordance with the present invention.

Figure 4 shows a relational flowchart of the method for obtaining information from a consumer in exchange for computer equipment shown in Figure 3.

Figure 5 shows a pictorial representation of an alternative embodiment of an apparatus and method for obtaining information from a consumer in exchange for access to a target Website formed in accordance with the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

Figure 1 shows a pictorial representation of a method and apparatus for obtaining information from a consumer accessing an Internet Website in accordance with the present invention. Application software 10G or computer equipment, such as a wireless keyboard 10, a modem 10A, a manual entry device (such as a mouse 10B), a scanner 10C, a storage medium controller (such as a floppy disk controller or an external hard drive 10D), a monitor 10E, a printer 10F, and the like is provided free or at a reduced cost to a user or consumer 12 along with a program or software 14 required to be installed on an Internet access device, such as a cable set-top box, WebTV or a computer 16 to enable the operation of the computer equipment or

software with the Internet access device. The reduced cost is preferably less than that at which the user 12 could purchase the software 10G or computer equipment 10A-F at a retail store.

The software 14 is preferably provided on a disk, but can also be provided to the user 12 from an on-line resource such as via downloading from an Internet Website. The reduced cost of the wireless keyboard 10 provides a substantial incentive for the user 12 to obtain the wireless keyboard 10 since such computer equipment is costly when purchased at the retail level. Alternatively, potential users 12 could be provided with the wireless keyboard 10 via direct shipment to their home or office.

The user installs the software 14 on the computer 16 by inserting the disk into a floppy drive of the computer 16 as shown by arrow A, and completing an installation procedure, which is well known in the art. To initialize and setup the wireless keyboard 10 and enable its operation with the computer 16, the software 14 requires that the user 12 enter information into the computer 16 as shown by arrow B. The information entered by the user preferably includes information associated with the user, such as the user's name, age, physical characteristics, purchasing habits, browsing habits, address, telephone number, recreational interests and the like. The user-entered information can also include information associated with the computer 16, such as the manufacturer, model, performance specifications and hardware specifications of the computer 16. The user-entered information is stored on the computer 16 as shown by arrow C.

Once the user entered information has been stored in the computer 16, such as on a hard drive of the computer 16, the software 14 will setup and initialize the wireless keyboard 10 to enable it to operate with the computer 16 as shown by arrow D. The user-entered information 24 is typically stored in the computer 16 as what is commonly referred to as a "cookie".

Cookies were originally intended to make life easier for Web surfers. The idea was to make it possible for the user to go through a sign-on or registration

procedure once and never have to do so again on return visits. This was accomplished by storing the "account information" entered during the initial registration in the cookie, and retrieving the cookie automatically the next time the user accessed that particular Website.

Cookies can be used to store not only unique identification information associated with the user, but also information on buying and browsing habits while accessing a specific Website. In this way, the next time the user visits the Website, the Internet Website provider or site provider can retrieve the cookie from the hard drive of the computer 16 to learn what the user viewed the last time the user visited the Website. In addition, all subsequent visits to the Website are recorded as well, so that eventually the cookie represents an extensive profile of the user and his interests.

Such profiles are extremely valuable to companies specializing in offering mass e-mail to marketers, or to companies who have the software needed to locate the user's home, business address or phone number when only an Internet e-mail address is provided. In addition, such information is valuable to Internet Website providers who must compete for the limited attention of a lucrative consumer market on the Internet.

When the user 12 accesses a target Internet Website maintained and controlled by a target Website provider 18, the target Website provider 18 will request and obtain the user entered information 24 by retrieving the information stored as the cookie in the computer 16. The user-entered information may be stored locally to the target Website provider 18 or at a remote storage location 19. Preferably, some form of user identification, such as the user's name, address or a serial number associated with the computer equipment or software is used to access the user entered information whether it is stored locally or remotely to the Internet Website provider 18. Naturally, the user 12 obtains user requested information 26 from the target Website provider 18 during interactive sessions on the Internet as is well known in the art.

The user entered information 24 is extremely valuable to the target Website provider 18 who may alternatively or additionally resell this information to other entities 20, such as demographic collection and analysis services and Internet commerce providers as indicated by dashed arrows F. The user entered information 24 is particularly valuable to the target Website provider 18 and enables the presentation and type of goods and services offered on the Website to be tailored to better attract and satisfy the needs of the user 12 in particular, and the desired Internet market in general.

In exchange for the user entered information 24, the target Website provider 18 reimburses 28 the computer equipment/software provider 22, which essentially enables the wireless keyboard 10 and software to be provided cost-free or at a reduced cost to the user 12, and the cyclical method continues in accordance with the present invention.

The user 12 may optionally be required to access a control Website provider 23 in order to gain access to the target Website provider 18. Such a control Website provider 23 preferably extracts the user-entered information 24 and uses it for substantially the same purposes described above with respect to the target Website provider 18. The control Website provider 23 essentially functions as a gate through which the user entered information 24, and optionally the user requested information 26, must pass. Naturally, the control Website provider 23, has access to this information, and can do anything it likes with this information including reselling it to additional entities 20 and remotely storing the information 19. As a result, the control Website provider 23 can ensure and be a source of revenue generation in exchange for information sought by the user 12 from the target Website provider 18.

In the preferred embodiment, the control Website provider 23 will initially be accessed during each Internet session and the user entered information, or some portion of it, will be collected by the control Website provider 23. However, after initially accessing the control Website provider 23, the user will be "handed-off" or "referred" to the target Website provider 18. The control Website provider 23

preferably relinquishes its control and connection to both the user and the target Website provider 18 once the user is referred to the target Website provider 18. The control Website provider 23 then receives a "referral fee" for performing its function as intermediary between the user and the target Website provider 18.

Figure 2 shows a relational flow chart of the method in accordance with the present invention. The relational flow chart locates tasks underneath a heading associated with the entity performing the task, such as the computer equipment/software provider, user (Internet access device), or the control/target Website provider. In step 30, the computer equipment/software provider makes the computer equipment or application software and the software required to operate the computer equipment or application software available to the user. The user then installs the software on the Internet access device in step 32, and enters user information required by the software in step 34. The user entered information is stored as a cookie in the computer in step 36, and the software performs the setup and initialization of the computer equipment or application software to enable its operation with the Internet access device in step 38.

Upon accessing the Internet Website in step 40, the target Website provider requests, in step 42, the user entered information stored as a cookie in the Internet access device. The target access device then transmits the user-entered information, and requests user requested information in step 44. The target Website provider receives the user entered information and transmits the user requested information in step 46, which is received by the Internet access device in step 48. The target Website provider can store the user-entered information locally or remotely in step 47. The user-entered information is preferably accessed either locally or remotely using user identification, such as the user's name, address or a serial number associated with the computer equipment or application software. In exchange for receiving the user entered information, the target Website provider reimburses the computer equipment/software provider in step 50, which is received by the computer equipment/software provider and applied to cover expenses associated with the computer equipment or application software in step 52. The target Website provider

can optionally resell the user entered information in step 54 to additional entities. Following step 52, the computer equipment/software provider can continue to provide additional computer equipment or software of the same or different types to potential users, thus continuing the cyclical method of exchanging computer equipment or application software for information from the user in accordance with the method of the present invention.

Optionally, the user can be required to access the control Website provider in order to gain access to the target Website. The user entered information, and optionally the user requested information, would be available to the control Website provider 23 for resale, storage, analysis and other revenue generating functions. Therefore, the control Website provider preferably performs one or more of the tasks associated with the target Website provider, as indicated on Figure 2 by dashed lines surrounding blocks 42, 46, 47, 50 and 54. Preferably, the control Website provider is initially accessed and collects the user entered information, or some portion of it. The control Website provider then "hands-off" or "refers" the use to the target Website provider, and collects its fee or records the event for subsequent collection of its fee.

Figure 3 shows a pictorial representation of an alternative embodiment of the method and apparatus for obtaining information from the consumer in accordance with the present invention. The alternative embodiment is similar to that shown in Figure 1, except that the software 14 is not required to enable the computer equipment 10, 10A-F or application software 10G to operate with the Internet access device. Rather, the user 12 provides user entered information directly or via an Internet Website 21 to the computer equipment/software provided 22. The computer equipment/software provider 22 then incorporates the user entered information into the computer equipment 10, 10A-F or application software 10G, which is then made available to the user 12. The user-entered information can optionally be provided directly to the target or control Website provider 18, 23 as shown by dashed arrows E. The user entered information is preferably tagged with user identification information, such as the user's name or address, to enable subsequent access and retrieval by the

target or control Website provider 18, 23 given only the user identification information.

For example, if the computer equipment provided to the user is the wireless keyboard 10, user identification information, such as the name or address of the user 12 or the serial number of the wireless keyboard 10 is preferably incorporated into a command signal to be transmitted by the wireless keyboard 10 in response to one of a set of preprogrammed "hot keys" or function keys on the wireless keyboard 10 being selected. When the user 12 selects one of these function keys, a Uniform Resource Locator (URL), which is specified by the user 12 in the user entered information initially provided to the computer equipment/software provider 22, is transmitted by the wireless keyboard 10 to the Internet access device. This URL directs the Internet access device to access an Internet Website specified by the user 12 in the user-entered information.

The user identification information can be passed with the URL as a form or a parameter by means well known in the art. The user identification information is preferably used by the target or control Website provider 18, 23 to access the user entered information previously provided to the Website providers by the computer equipment/software provider 22 as shown by the dashed arrows E. The user identification information is stored by the target or control Website provider 18, 23 either locally or in remote storage 19. Alternatively, the user information can be incorporated in its entirety within the command signal transmitted from the wireless keyboard 10 to the Internet access device. However, this approach is less efficient than merely utilizing the user identification information to access the user entered information since it involves the redundant transmission of user entered information each time one of the function keys is selected by the user 12.

Thus, following installation of, for instance, a new cable set-top box, the user is told to access the control or target Website 21 (www.freekeyboard.uselec.com) and is prompted to fill out a questionnaire. The questionnaire prompts the user for identification information, such as an account number, the user's name and address

and the serial number of the keyboard 10. The questionnaire includes questions concerning user preferences and interests, such as his URL preferences, buying/browsing habits, and delivery information for the wireless keyboard 10. Preferably, the questionnaire uses tick boxes in addition to textual fields to solicit accurate and complete information from the user 12 since such questionnaires are typically lengthy.

The user entered information from the questionnaire is stored by a server maintaining the control or target Website, and an order for the wireless keyboard 10 is generated with a specific serial number and URL function key configuration to be shipped to the user 12. The configuration of URL function keys is determined by the user's answers to the questionnaire. For example, an algorithm for scoring the user's responses could be designed that enables individual advertisers to derive an "answer key" which assigns point values to each answer in the questionnaire. The user's responses would then be graded according to the answer key derived by each of the individual advertisers. The user's interest in a particular advertiser would preferably be proportional to the score the user's questionnaire received. Thus, those advertisers whose answer keys yielded the highest scores when grading the user's responses, would be given the opportunity of having their URL's incorporated into the function keys on the wireless keyboard 10 provided to the user 12.

When the user 12 receives his wireless keyboard 10, an exemplary URL may be http://www.uselec.com/keyboard?serial=12345. The number "12345" in this URL represents the serial number assigned to the wireless keyboard 10. The serial number enables the owner of the Website (www.uselec.com) to retrieve the information entered by the user in response to the questionnaire, which was tagged with the same serial number (12345). The serial number is preferably longer than the example provided, and may optionally include a password field to restrict access to the corresponding information. In addition, the serial number may optionally change each time it is transmitted by the keyboard 10 according to an algorithm known only to the computer equipment/software provider 22. In such a situation, the target or control Website provider 18, 23 would need to query the computer

equipment/software provider 22 each time it wanted access to the user entered information. As a result, the computer equipment/software provider 22 could charge for the user entered information on a per access basis. It is to be noted that although the selection and entry of the URL at the wireless keyboard 10 is not expressly performed by the user 12 when he accesses the Internet, the Internet Website obtained thereby is specifically tailored to the user's interests, preferences, viewing/purchasing habits and so forth.

The user 12 may optionally be required to access a control Website provider 23 in order to gain access to the target Website provider 18. Such a control Website provider 23 preferably extracts the user-entered information 24 and uses it for substantially the same purposes described above with respect to the target Website provider 18. The control Website provider 23 essentially functions as a gate through which the user entered information 24, and optionally the user requested information 26, must pass. Naturally, the control Website provider 23, has access to this information, and can do anything it likes with this information including reselling it to additional entities 20 and remotely storing the information 19. As a result, the control Website provider 23 can ensure and be a source of revenue generation in exchange for information sought by the user 12 from the target Website provider 18.

In the preferred embodiment, the control Website provider 23 will initially be accessed during each Internet session and the user entered information, or some portion of it, will be collected by the control Website provider 23. However, after initially accessing the control Website provider 23, the user will be "handed-off" or "referred" to the target Website provider 18. The control Website provider 23 preferably relinquishes its control and connection to both the user and the target Website provider 18 once the user is referred to the target Website provider. The control Website provider 23 preferably receives a "referral fee" for performing its function as intermediary between the user and the target Website provider 18.

Figure 4 shows a relational flow chart of the method in accordance with the present invention shown in Figure 3. In step 56, the user provides information to the

computer equipment/software provider directly or via a questionnaire on an Internet Website. The computer equipment/software provider then incorporates the user-entered information into the computer equipment or application software, making it user-specific, and provides the user-specific computer equipment or application software available to the user in step 58. The user initializes the user-specific computer equipment or application software to enable its operation with the Internet access device in step 60.

In step 62, the user accesses the target Website with the user-specific computer equipment or application software, thereby transmitting the user entered information incorporated into the user-specific computer equipment or application software. The target Website provider receives the user-entered information and tailors the Internet Website accordingly in step 64. The user-entered information can optionally be stored remotely from the target Website provider in step 72, and user identification information can be used as an index for subsequently accessing the locally or remotely stored user entered information.

As is typically the case in interactive sessions on the Internet, the user requests information in step 66, the user requested information is transmitted by the target Website provider in step 68, and the user receives the requested information in step 70. The target Website provider then reimburses the computer equipment/software provider for the user entered information in step 74, and the reimbursement is received and used to cover expenses associated with providing the user-specific computer equipment or application software at reduced cost to the user in step 76. The target Website provider in step 78 can optionally resell the user-entered information. The method continues with step 56, wherein the user provides information for use in additional user-specific computer equipment or application software.

Optionally, the user can be required to access the control Website provider in order to gain access to the target Website. The user entered information, and optionally the user requested information, would be available to the control Website

provider 23 for resale, storage, analysis and other revenue generating functions. Therefore, the control Website provider preferably performs one or more of the tasks associated with the target Website provider, as indicated on Figure 2 by dashed lines surrounding blocks 64, 68, 72, 74 and 78. Preferably, the control Website provider is initially accessed and collects the user entered information, or some portion of it. The control Website provider then "hands-off" or "refers" the use to the target Website provider, and collects its fee or records the event for subsequent collection of its fee.

The computer equipment/software provider can be a manufacturer, a retail distributor, a wholesale distributor, and the like. The Internet Website provider can be any person or entity having an interest in providing on-line resources and/or services.

From the foregoing description, it will be appreciated by those skilled in the art that a method and apparatus formed in accordance with the present invention can obtain accurate, complete, extensive and valuable information from a user accessing a Website on the Internet, such as demographics, buying habits, browsing habits and the like while providing computer equipment or application software to the user at a reduced cost. It will also be appreciated by those skilled in the art that a method and apparatus formed in accordance with the present invention can make it easier and less intimidating for a consumer to access the Internet while providing the consumer with access to Websites which are specifically tailored to the consumer's interests, preferences, viewing habits and purchasing habits without requiring the user to re-enter this information during each session on the Internet.

As shown in Figure 1, an alternative embodiment for obtaining information from users accessing an Internet site includes the use of a remote control device, such as a remote control 80 or the keyboard 10. The remote control 80 includes one or more buttons or icons 82 thereon, which are preferably formed in different geometric shapes, such as a circle, a triangle and a square. The remote control 80 is provided to the user 12 who can then use it to control a set-top box 84 via wireless technology, such as infrared or radio frequency signals well known in the art. The set-top box 84

includes a Web browser and is coupled to a television 86. Thus, the set-top box 84 has access to the control Website provider/server 23 on the Internet.

The remote control 80 is preferably preprogrammed with a remote control identification code or serial number, which uniquely identifies the specific remote control. As shown in greater detail in Figure 5, in response to the user 12 depressing one of the icons 82 on the remote control 80, the remote control 80 transmits information to the Web browser in the set-top box 84. This information preferably includes the URL of the control Website server 23 (e.g., http://adke.com), the remote control identification code (e.g., 22222), and an icon identification code (e.g., 1, 2, or 3), which are preferably included in one composite URL. The Web browser uses the URL of the control Website server 23 in the composite URL to access the control Website server 23.

The control Website server 23 preferably contains one or more lookup tables in memory. A first table returns user information, such as a zip code, age, income and additional geographic and/or demographic information concerning the user in response to receiving the remote control identification code. Preferably, the user has provided this information when completing, for instance, a buyer survey or warranty registration card either physically or via responses to an on-line questionnaire. A second table maintained by the control Website server 23 preferably provides the URL of an advertiser's (target) Website 18 given the time slot or time of day, the icon identification code and the user information.

For example, if the remote control 80 includes three icons 82, such as a circle, a triangle, and a square, the URL transmitted in response to selecting each of the icons 82 could be as follows:

circle: http://adke.com/122222 (where 1 represents the circle icon and 22222 represents the remote control identification or serial number);

triangle: http://adke.com/222222 (where 2 represents the triangle icon and 22222 represents the remote control identification or serial number); and

square: http://adke.com/322222 (where 3 represents the square icon and 22222 represents the remote control identification or serial number).

The control Website server 23 examines the icon identification (e.g., 1, 2 , 3) and the remote control identification of the request (e.g., 22222) in response to the control Website server 23 (adke.com) receiving a request from the set-top box 84. Based on the remote control identification, the control Website server 23 determines information concerning the user and his zip code (or other geographic indicator or grouping) from the first table. Based on the current time, the icon identification and the user information obtained from the first table, the URL to the advertiser's Website 18 is determined from the second table, which directs the user to the appropriate Website. Alternatively, any number of tables can be used as long as all or a portion of the information received by the monitoring Website provider/server 23 is used to access the URL of the advertiser's Website.

Thus, the control Website server 23 can lease or rent the use of an icon to a specific advertiser for a given time slot in given zip codes (or other groupings such as a specific cable system, Internet service provider, and the like). For instance, the triangle can be leased to the following:

advertiser "A" from 7:00 to 7:10 PM for zip code 11776;

advertiser "B" from 7:00 to 7:10 PM for zip code 11733;

advertiser "C" from 7:10 to 7:20 PM nationally (all zip codes);

while the circle can be leased to the following:

advertiser "D" from 7:00 to 7:10 PM for zip code 11776;

advertiser "A" from 7:10 to 7:20 PM for zip code 11733.

Thus, an icon can be purchased with local or national significance by an advertiser. In addition, an icon can be purchased nationally with local significance by an advertiser.

The advertiser preferably superimposes the icon on the advertisement that is shown on the television 86 during the given time slot. The user can then press the icon 82 on the remote control 80 corresponding to the chosen icon appearing on the television 86 and obtain access to the appropriate advertiser's Website. Since the URL to the advertiser's Website is optionally dependent upon user information, such as the zip code which is known by the control Website server 23, the Website displayed can be specifically tailored to the user's needs and/or interests. For instance, the same or a different Website could display snowblowers in response to a zip code from Maine, while during the same time slot display lawn mowers in response to a zip code from Florida. Since information concerning users accessing the target Website 18 is known by the control Website server 23, this information can optionally be made available to the target Website provider 18 or additional entities 20 automatically or upon request in the form of a report.

Although illustrative embodiments of the present invention have been described herein with reference to the accompanying drawings, it is to be understood that the invention is not limited to those precise embodiments, and that various other changes and modifications may be effected therein by one skilled in the art without departing from the scope or spirit of the invention.

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method of obtaining information from a user accessing a site on the Internet, the method comprising the steps of:

providing computer equipment to a user, the computer equipment being provided by a computer equipment provider;

entering information into an Internet access device, the information being required to enable the computer equipment to operate with the Internet access device;

storing the information;

accessing a control site on the Internet, the control site being accessed with the Internet access device, the control site being provided by a control site provider;

accessing a target site on the Internet, the control site being required to be accessed to enable access to the target site, the target site being provided by a target site provider; and

retrieving the stored information from the Internet access device, the stored information being retrieved by at least one of the control site provider and the target site provider.

2. A method of obtaining information from a user accessing a site on the Internet as defined by Claim 1, further including the steps of

providing software to the user, the software being required to be installed on the Internet access device to enable the computer equipment to operate with the Internet access device; and

installing the software on the Internet access device, the information being required by the software to enable the computer equipment to operate with the Internet access device.

3. A method of obtaining information from a user accessing a site on the Internet as defined by Claim 1, further comprising the step of reimbursing the computer equipment provider, the computer equipment provider being reimbursed by at least one of the control site provider and the target site provider in exchange for the stored information.

4. A method of obtaining information from a user accessing a site on the Internet as defined by Claim 1, further comprising the step of reselling the information to an entity, the information being resold by at least one of the control site provider and the target site provider.

5. A method of obtaining information from a user accessing a site on the Internet, the method comprising the steps of:

providing a first unit of software to a user, the first unit of software being provided by a software provider;

providing a second unit of software to the user, the second unit of software being required to be installed on an Internet access device to enable the first unit of software to operate with the Internet access device;

installing the first unit of software and the second unit of software on the Internet access device;

entering information into the Internet access device, the information being required by the second unit of software to enable the first unit of software to operate with the Internet access device;

storing the information;

accessing a control site on the Internet, the control site being accessed with the Internet access device, the control site being provided by a control site provider;

accessing a target site on the Internet, the control site being required to be accessed to enable access to the target site, the target site being provided by a target site provider; and

retrieving the stored information, the stored information being retrieved by at least one of the control site provider and the target site provider.

6. A method of obtaining information from a user accessing a site on the Internet as defined by Claim 5, further comprising reimbursing the software provider, the software provider being reimbursed by at least one of the control site provider and the target site provider in exchange for the stored information.

7. A method of obtaining information from a user accessing a site on the Internet as defined by Claim 5, further comprising the step of reselling the information to an entity, the information being resold by at least one of the control site provider and the target site provider.

8. A method of obtaining information from a user accessing a site on the Internet, the method comprising the steps of:

providing information to a computer equipment provider, the information being provided by the user;

incorporating at least a portion of the information into the computer equipment;

providing the computer equipment to the user, the computer equipment being provided by the computer equipment provider, the computer equipment being able to operate with an Internet access device;

accessing a control site on the Internet, the control site being accessed with the Internet access device, the control site being provided by a control site provider;

accessing a target site on the Internet, the control site being required to be accessed to enable access to the target site, the target site being provided by a target site provider; and

transmitting at least a portion of the information incorporated into the computer equipment to at least one of the control site provider and the target site provider in response to at least one of the control site and the target site being accessed.

9. A method of obtaining information from a user accessing a site on the Internet as defined by Claim 8, further comprising the step of reimbursing the computer equipment provider, the computer equipment provider being reimbursed by at least one of the control site provider and the target site provider in exchange for the information.

10. A method of obtaining information from a user accessing a site on the Internet as defined by Claim 8, wherein the computer equipment includes a keyboard, the keyboard including at least one function key, wherein the step of transmitting at least a portion of the information includes the step of transmitting a command signal in response to selection of the at least one function key, wherein the step of incorporating at least a portion of the information into the computer equipment includes the step of incorporating at least a portion of the information into the command signal transmitted in response to selection of the at least one function key.

11. A method of obtaining information from a user accessing a site on the Internet as defined by Claim 10, wherein the step of incorporating at least a portion of the information into the command signal transmitted in response to selection of the at least one function key includes the step of incorporating at least a portion of the information in a URL in the command signal.

12. A method of obtaining information from a user accessing a site on the Internet as defined by Claim 8, wherein the step of providing information includes the step of providing information associated with the user, the information including at

least one of a name, age, physical characteristic, purchasing habit, browsing habit, address, telephone number and recreational interest associated with the user.

13. A method of obtaining information from a user accessing a site on the Internet as defined by Claim 8, wherein the step of providing information includes the step of providing information associated with the Internet access device, the information including at least one of a manufacturer, model designation, performance specification and hardware specification associated with the Internet access device.

14. A method of obtaining information from a user accessing a site on the Internet as defined by Claim 8, further comprising the steps of:

storing at least a portion of the information remotely to at least one of the control site provider and the target site provider; and

accessing the stored information using the portion of the information transmitted to at least one of the control site provider and the target site provider.

15. A method of obtaining information from a user accessing a site on the Internet as defined by Claim 14, wherein the step of accessing the stored information includes the step of appending a password field to the portion of the information transmitted to the site provider, the password field requiring entry of a password to enable access to the stored information.

16. A method of obtaining information from a user accessing a site on the Internet as defined by Claim 8, further comprising the step of altering the portion of the information transmitted to at least one of the control site provider and the target site provider each time the information has been transmitted, the portion of the information being altered according to a predetermined algorithm, the predetermined algorithm known to the computer equipment provider.

17. A method of obtaining information from a user accessing a site on the Internet, the method comprising the steps of:

providing information to a software provider;

incorporating at least a portion of the information into the software;

providing the software to the user, the software being provided by the software provider, the software being able to operate with an Internet access device;

installing the software on the Internet access device;

accessing a control site on the Internet, the control site being accessed with the Internet access device, the control site being provided by a control site provider;

accessing a target site on the Internet, the control site being required to be accessed to enable access to the target site, the target site being provided by a target site provider; and

transmitting at least a portion of the information incorporated into the software to the site provider in response to at least one of the control site and the target site being accessed.

18. A method of obtaining information from a user accessing a site on the Internet as defined by Claim 17, further comprising the step of reimbursing the software provider, the software provider being reimbursed by at least one of the control site provider and the target site provider in exchange for the stored information.

19. A method of obtaining information from a user accessing a site on the Internet as defined by Claim 17, wherein the step of transmitting at least a portion of the information includes the step of transmitting a command signal in response to at least one of the control site and the target site being accessed, wherein the step of incorporating at least a portion of the information into the software includes the step of incorporating at least a portion of the information into the command signal transmitted in response to at least one of the control site and the target site being accessed.

20. A method of obtaining information from a user accessing a site on the Internet as defined by Claim 19, wherein the step of incorporating at least a portion of

the information into the command signal transmitted in response to at least one of the control site and the target site being accessed includes the step of incorporating at least a portion of the information in a URL in the command signal.

21. A method of obtaining information from a user accessing a site on the Internet as defined by Claim 17, wherein the step of providing information includes the step of providing information associated with the user, the information including at least one of a name, age, physical characteristic, purchasing habit, browsing habit, address, telephone number and recreational interest associated with the user.

22. A method of obtaining information from a user accessing a site on the Internet as defined by Claim 17, wherein the step of providing information includes the step of providing information associated with the Internet access device, the information including at least one of a manufacturer, model designation, performance specification and hardware specification associated with the Internet access device.

23. A method of obtaining information from a user accessing a site on the Internet as defined by Claim 17, further comprising the steps of:

storing at least a portion of the information remotely to at least one of the control site provider and the target site provider; and

accessing the stored information using the portion of the information transmitted to at least one of the control site provider and the target site provider.

24. A method of obtaining information from a user accessing a site on the Internet as defined by Claim 23, wherein the step of accessing the stored information includes the step of appending a password field to the portion of the information transmitted to at least one of the control site provider and the target site provider, the password field requiring entry of a password to enable access to the stored information.

25. A method of obtaining information from a user accessing a site on the Internet as defined by Claim 17, further comprising the step of altering the portion of

the information transmitted to the at least one of the control site provider and the target site provider each time the information has been transmitted, the portion of the information being altered according to a predetermined algorithm, the predetermined algorithm known to the software provider.

26. A method of accessing a site on the Internet, the method comprising the steps of:

providing a remote control device to a user, the remote control device including at least one icon, the icon being selectable by the user;

transmitting a first signal from the remote control device to a set-top box, the first signal being transmitted in response to the user selecting the icon, the first signal including information;

transmitting a second signal from the set-top box to a control Website server, the second signal being transmitted in response to the set-top box receiving the first signal, the second signal including information representative of at least a portion of the information in the first signal;

determining an address of a target Website in response to receiving the second signal, the address of the target Website being determined from at least a portion of the information included in the second signal and information linking the address of the target Website to at least a portion of the information included in the second signal; and

accessing the target Website using the address of the target Website.

27. A method of accessing a site on the Internet as defined by Claim 26, wherein the step of transmitting the first signal includes the step of transmitting at least one of a remote control device identification, an address of the control Website server and an icon identification, the remote control device identification being indicative of the remote control device, the icon identification being indicative of the icon selected.

28. A method of accessing a site on the Internet as defined by Claim 26, wherein the step of transmitting the second signal includes the step of transmitting at least one of a remote control device identification, an address of the control Website server and an icon identification, the remote control device identification being indicative of the remote control device, the icon identification being indicative of the icon selected.

29. A method of accessing a site on the Internet as defined by Claim 28, wherein the step of determining the address of the target Website includes the steps of:

determining user information from the remote control device identification, the user information being indicative of the user; and

determining the address of the target Website from at least one of the user information, a time of day and the icon identification.

30. A method of accessing a site on the Internet as defined by Claim 26, further comprising the step of generating a report, the report including at least a portion of the information included in at least one of the first signal and the second signal.

31. An apparatus for accessing a site on the Internet, the apparatus comprising:

a remote control device, the remote control device including at least one icon, the icon being selectable by a user; and

a set-top box, the remote control device transmitting a first signal to the set-top box, the first signal including information, the first signal being transmitted in response to the user selecting the icon, the set-top box transmitting a second signal to a control Website server, the second signal being transmitted in response to the set-top box receiving the first signal, the second signal including information representative of at least a portion of the information in the first signal, the control Website server

determining an address of a target Website in response to receiving the second signal, the address of the target Website being determined from at least a portion of the information included in the second signal and information linking the address of the target Website to at least a portion of the information included in the second signal.

32. An apparatus for accessing a site on the Internet as defined by Claim 31, wherein the first signal includes at least one of a remote control device identification, an address of the control Website server and an icon identification, the remote control device identification being indicative of the remote control device, the icon identification being indicative of the icon selected.

33. An apparatus for accessing a site on the Internet as defined by Claim 31, wherein the second signal includes at least one of a remote control device identification, an address of the control Website server and an icon identification, the remote control device identification being indicative of the remote control device, the icon identification being indicative of the icon selected.

34. An apparatus for accessing a site on the Internet as defined by Claim 33, wherein the control Website server determines user information from the remote control device identification, the user information being indicative of the user, and wherein the control Website server determines the address of the target Website from at least one of the user information, a time of day and the icon identification.

35. An apparatus for accessing a site on the Internet as defined by Claim 31, wherein the remote control device includes a keyboard.

36 A method of obtaining information from a user accessing a site on the Internet as defined by Claim 1, wherein the step of storing the information includes the step of storing the information as a cookie.

37. A method of obtaining information from a user accessing a site on the Internet as defined by Claim 1, wherein the step of providing computer equipment includes the step of providing at least one of a keyboard, a modem, a monitor, a manual entry device, a printer, a scanner and a storage medium controller.

38. A method of obtaining information from a user accessing a site on the Internet as defined by Claim 1, wherein the step of entering information includes the step of entering information associated with the user, the information including at least one of name, age, physical characteristics, purchasing habits, browsing habits, an address, a telephone number and recreational interests associated with the user.

39. A method of obtaining information from a user accessing a site on the Internet as defined by Claim 1, wherein the step of entering information includes the step of entering information associated with the Internet access device, the information including at least one of a manufacturer, a model, performance specifications and hardware specifications associated with the Internet access device.

40. A method of obtaining information from a user accessing a site on the Internet as defined by Claim 5, wherein the step of storing the information includes the step of storing the information as a cookie.

41. A method of obtaining information from a user accessing a site on the Internet as defined by Claim 5, wherein the step of entering information includes the step of entering information associated with the user, the information including at least one of name, age, physical characteristics, purchasing habits, browsing habits, an address, a telephone number and recreational interests associated with the user.

42. A method of obtaining information from a user accessing a site on the Internet as defined by Claim 5, wherein the step of entering information includes the step of entering information associated with the Internet access device, the information including at least one of a manufacturer, a model, performance specifications and hardware specifications associated with the Internet access device.

43. An apparatus for obtaining information from a user accessing a site on the Internet comprising:

computer equipment, the computer equipment being able to operate with an Internet access device, the computer equipment being provided by a computer equipment provider;

a software program, the software program being required to be installed on the Internet access device to enable the computer equipment to operate with the Internet access device, the software program requiring a user to enter information to enable the computer equipment to operate with the Internet access device, the information being stored in the Internet access device, the user accessing a site on the Internet, the site being provided by a site provider, the information being retrieved by the site provider in response to the user accessing the site, the site provider reimbursing the computer equipment provider in exchange for the stored information.

44. An apparatus for obtaining information from a user accessing a site on the Internet as defined by Claim 43, wherein the computer equipment is provided at a reduced cost to the user.

45. An apparatus for obtaining information from a user accessing a site on the Internet as defined by Claim 43, wherein the reduced cost is about zero.

46. An apparatus for obtaining information from a user accessing a site on the Internet as defined by Claim 43, wherein the computer equipment includes at least one of a keyboard, a modem, a monitor, a manual entry device, a printer, a scanner and a storage medium controller.

47. An apparatus for obtaining information from a user accessing a site on the Internet as defined by Claim 46, wherein the keyboard is able to operate with the Internet access device without being electrically coupled to the Internet access device.

48. An apparatus for obtaining information from a user accessing a site on the Internet as defined by Claim 43, wherein the information is associated with the user, the information including at least one of name, age, physical characteristics, purchasing habits, browsing habits, an address, a telephone number and recreational interests associated with the user.

49. An apparatus for obtaining information from a user accessing a site on the Internet as defined by Claim 43, wherein the information is associated with the Internet access device, the information including at least one of a manufacturer, a

model, performance specifications and hardware specifications associated with the Internet access device.

50. An apparatus for obtaining information from a user accessing a site on the Internet comprising:

a storage medium, the storage medium being made available to a user, the storage medium including:

a first unit of software, the first unit of software being able to operate with an Internet access device, the first unit of software being provided by a software provider;

a second unit of software, the second unit of software being required to be installed on the Internet access device to enable the first unit of software to operate with the Internet access device, the second unit of software requiring a user to enter information to enable the first unit of software to operate with the Internet access device, the information being stored in the Internet access device, the user accessing a site on the Internet, the site being provided by an site provider, the information being retrieved by the site provider in response to the user accessing the site, the site provider reimbursing the software provider in exchange for the stored information.

51. An apparatus for obtaining information from a user accessing a site on the Internet as defined by Claim 50, wherein the information is associated with the user, the information including at least one of name, age, physical characteristics, purchasing habits, browsing habits, an address, a telephone number and recreational interests associated with the user.

52. An apparatus for obtaining information from a user accessing a site on the Internet as defined by Claim 50, wherein the information is associated with the Internet access device, the information including at least one of a manufacturer, a model, performance specifications and hardware specifications associated with the Internet access device.

FIG. 1

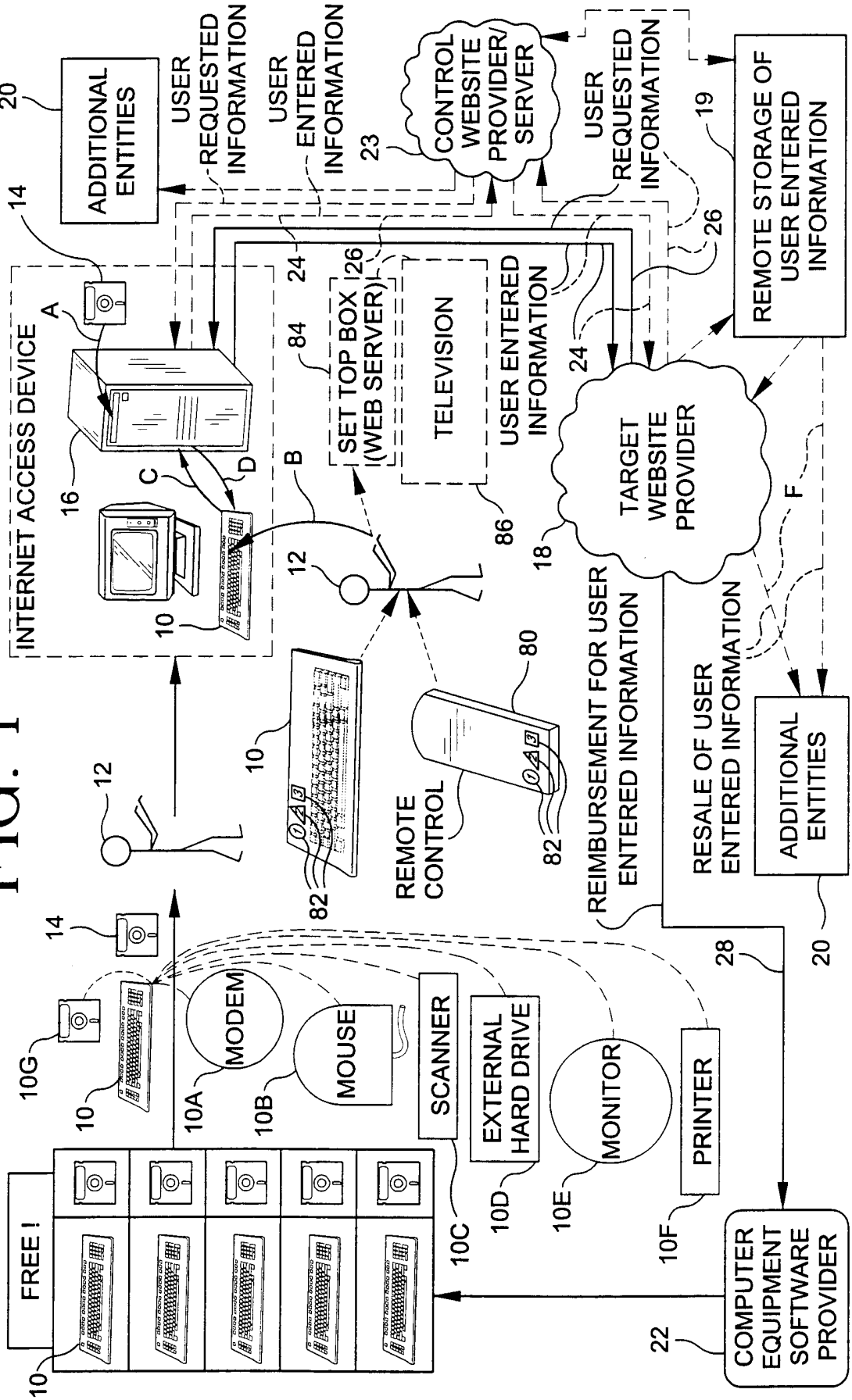
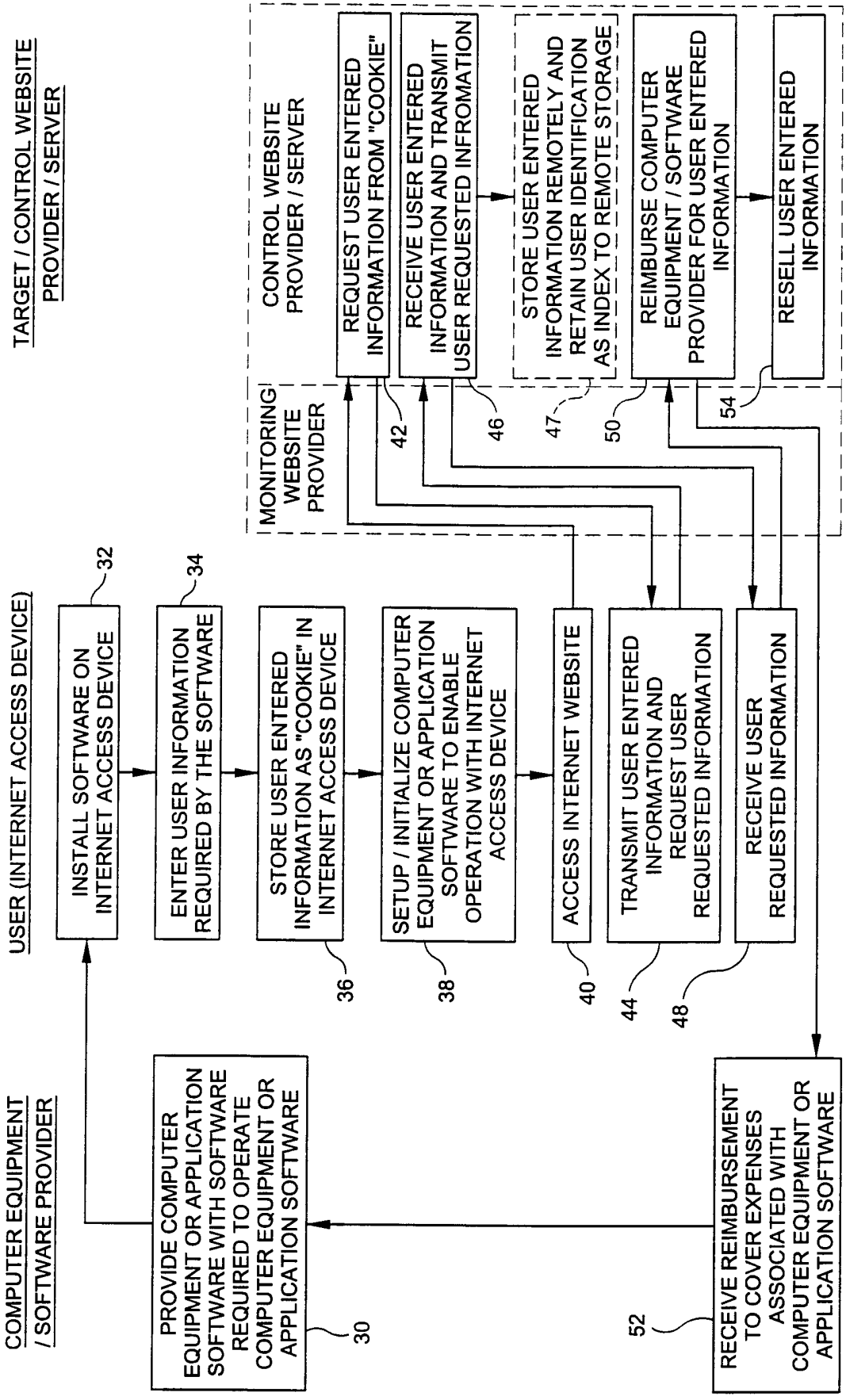

ADDITIONAL ENTITIES
20
USER REQUESTED INFORMATION
USER ENTERED INFORMATION
CONTROL WEBSITE PROVIDER/ SERVER
23
USER REQUESTED INFORMATION
19
REMOTE STORAGE OF USER ENTERED INFORMATION
14
INTERNET ACCESS DEVICE
A
16
C
D
B
SET TOP BOX (WEB SERVER)
84
TELEVISION
24
26
USER ENTERED INFORMATION
TARGET WEBSITE PROVIDER
18
86
12
10
REMOTE CONTROL
80
82
F
REIMBURSEMENT FOR USER ENTERED INFORMATION
RESALE OF USER ENTERED INFORMATION
ADDITIONAL ENTITIES
28
10G
10A
MODEM
10B
MOUSE
SCANNER
10C
EXTERNAL HARD DRIVE
10D
MONITOR
10E
PRINTER
10F
FREE !
COMPUTER EQUIPMENT SOFTWARE PROVIDER
22

FIG. 2


COMPUTER EQUIPMENT / SOFTWARE PROVIDER
USER (INTERNET ACCESS DEVICE)
TARGET / CONTROL WEBSITE PROVIDER / SERVER
MONITORING WEBSITE PROVIDER
CONTROL WEBSITE PROVIDER / SERVER
PROVIDE COMPUTER EQUIPMENT OR APPLICATION SOFTWARE WITH SOFTWARE REQUIRED TO OPERATE COMPUTER EQUIPMENT OR APPLICATION SOFTWARE
30
INSTALL SOFTWARE ON INTERNET ACCESS DEVICE
32
ENTER USER INFORMATION REQUIRED BY THE SOFTWARE
34
STORE USER ENTERED INFORMATION AS "COOKIE" IN INTERNET ACCESS DEVICE
36
SETUP / INITIALIZE COMPUTER EQUIPMENT OR APPLICATION SOFTWARE TO ENABLE OPERATION WITH INTERNET ACCESS DEVICE
38
ACCESS INTERNET WEBSITE
40
REQUEST USER ENTERED INFORMATION FROM "COOKIE"
42
TRANSMIT USER ENTERED INFORMATION AND REQUEST USER REQUESTED INFORMATION
44
RECEIVE USER ENTERED INFORMATION AND TRANSMIT USER REQUESTED INFROMATION
46
RECEIVE USER REQUESTED INFORMATION
48
STORE USER ENTERED INFORMATION REMOTELY AND RETAIN USER IDENTIFICATION AS INDEX TO REMOTE STORAGE
47
REIMBURSE COMPUTER EQUIPMENT / SOFTWARE PROVIDER FOR USER ENTERED INFORMATION
50
RESELL USER ENTERED INFORMATION
54
RECEIVE REIMBURSEMENT TO COVER EXPENSES ASSOCIATED WITH COMPUTER EQUIPMENT OR APPLICATION SOFTWARE
52

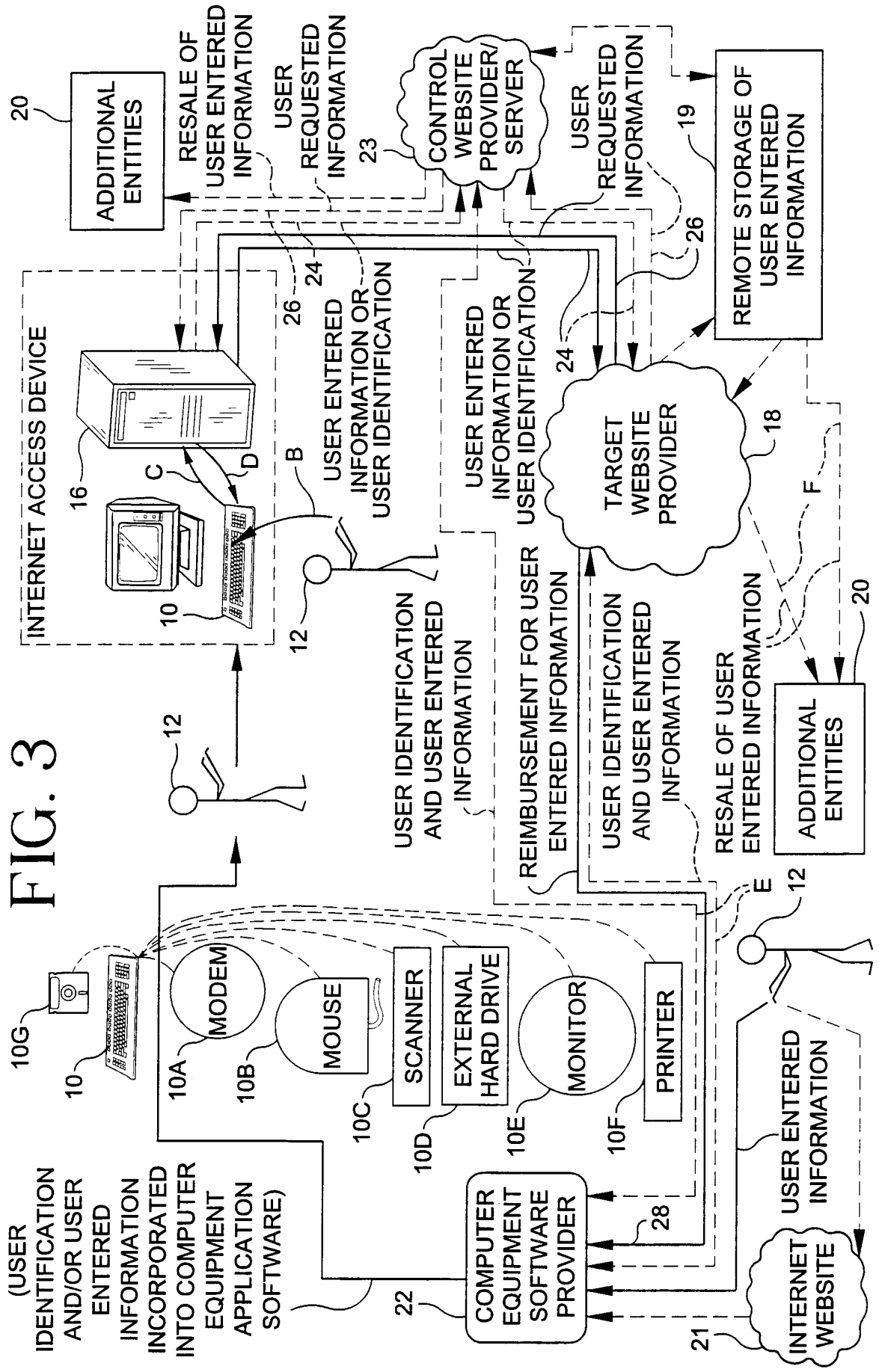

ADDITIONAL ENTITIES
20
RESALE OF USER ENTERED INFORMATION
USER REQUESTED INFORMATION
CONTROL WEBSITE PROVIDER/ SERVER
23
USER REQUESTED INFORMATION
19
REMOTE STORAGE OF USER ENTERED INFORMATION
INTERNET ACCESS DEVICE
16
C
D
B
26
24
USER ENTERED INFORMATION OR USER IDENTIFICATION
10
12
USER ENTERED INFORMATION OR USER IDENTIFICATION
24
TARGET WEBSITE PROVIDER
18
F
USER IDENTIFICATION AND USER ENTERED INFORMATION
REIMBURSEMENT FOR USER ENTERED INFORMATION
USER IDENTIFICATION AND USER ENTERED INFORMATION
RESALE OF USER ENTERED INFORMATION
ADDITIONAL ENTITIES
20
12
E
10G
10
MODEM
10A
MOUSE
10B
SCANNER
10C
EXTERNAL HARD DRIVE
10D
MONITOR
10E
PRINTER
10F
(USER IDENTIFICATION AND/OR USER ENTERED INFORMATION INCORPORATED INTO COMPUTER EQUIPMENT APPLICATION SOFTWARE)
22
COMPUTER EQUIPMENT SOFTWARE PROVIDER
28
USER ENTERED INFORMATION
INTERNET WEBSITE
21

FIG. 3

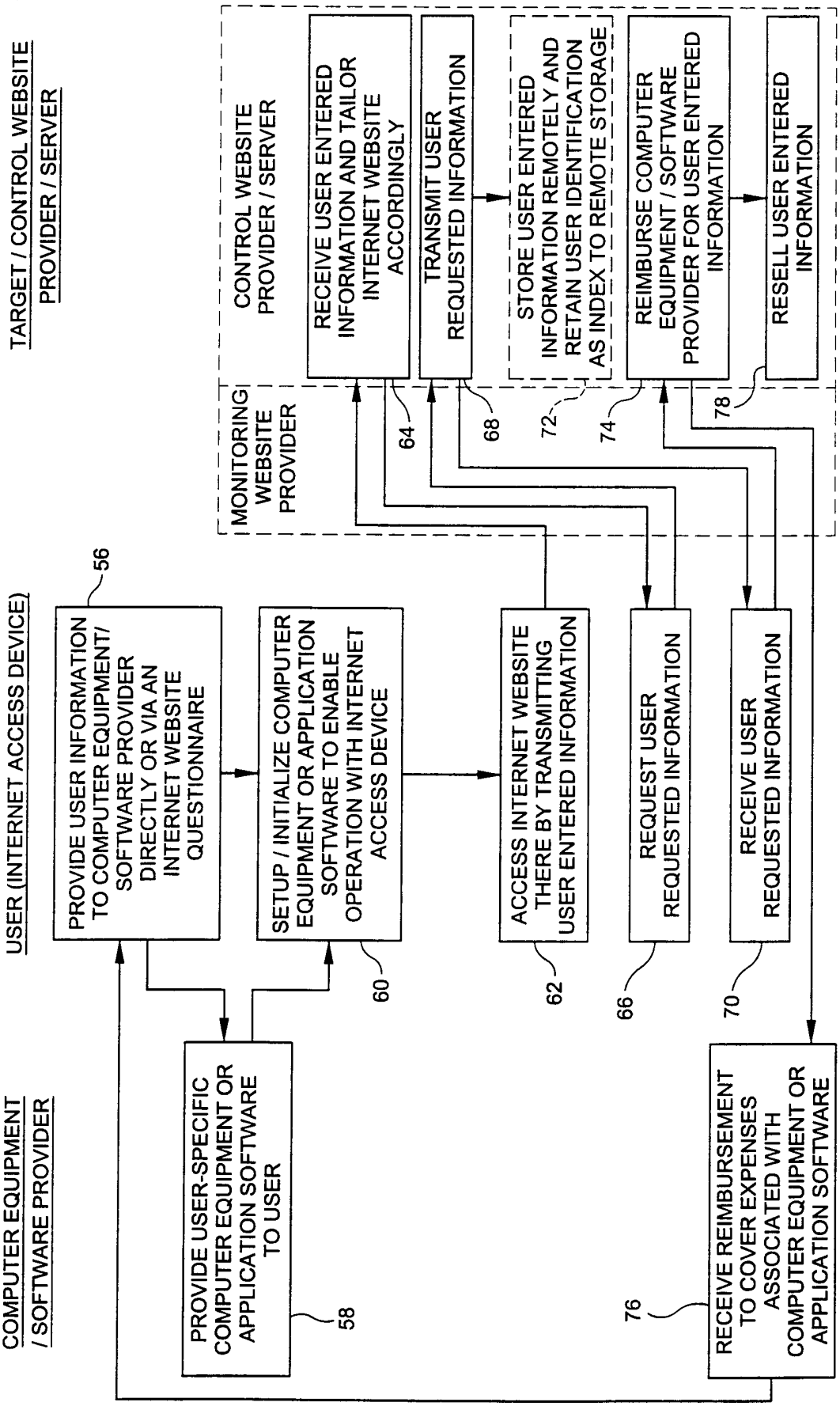
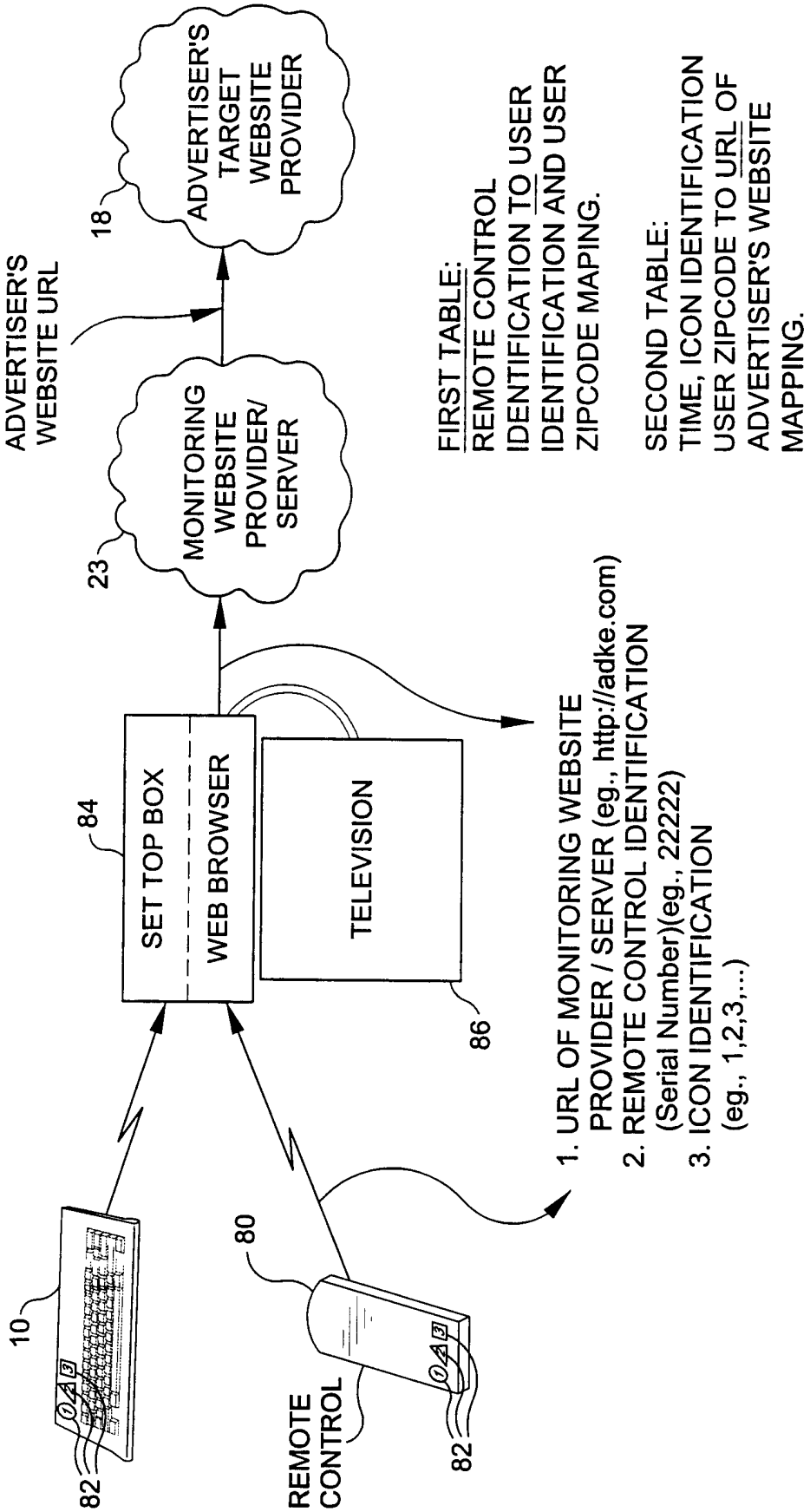

COMPUTER EQUIPMENT / SOFTWARE PROVIDER
USER (INTERNET ACCESS DEVICE)
TARGET / CONTROL WEBSITE PROVIDER / SERVER
MONITORING WEBSITE PROVIDER
CONTROL WEBSITE PROVIDER / SERVER
PROVIDE USER-SPECIFIC COMPUTER EQUIPMENT OR APPLICATION SOFTWARE TO USER
58
PROVIDE USER INFORMATION TO COMPUTER EQUIPMENT/ SOFTWARE PROVIDER DIRECTLY OR VIA AN INTERNET WEBSITE QUESTIONNAIRE
56
SETUP / INITIALIZE COMPUTER EQUIPMENT OR APPLICATION SOFTWARE TO ENABLE OPERATION WITH INTERNET ACCESS DEVICE
60
ACCESS INTERNET WEBSITE THERE BY TRANSMITTING USER ENTERED INFORMATION
62
REQUEST USER REQUESTED INFORMATION
66
RECEIVE USER REQUESTED INFORMATION
70
RECEIVE REIMBURSEMENT TO COVER EXPENSES ASSOCIATED WITH COMPUTER EQUIPMENT OR APPLICATION SOFTWARE
76
RECEIVE USER ENTERED INFORMATION AND TAILOR INTERNET WEBSITE ACCORDINGLY
64
TRANSMIT USER REQUESTED INFORMATION
68
STORE USER ENTERED INFORMATION REMOTELY AND RETAIN USER IDENTIFICATION AS INDEX TO REMOTE STORAGE
72
REIMBURSE COMPUTER EQUIPMENT / SOFTWARE PROVIDER FOR USER ENTERED INFORMATION
74
RESELL USER ENTERED INFORMATION
78

FIG. 4

FIG. 5


ADVERTISER'S TARGET WEBSITE PROVIDER
18
ADVERTISER'S WEBSITE URL
MONITORING WEBSITE PROVIDER/ SERVER
23
FIRST TABLE:
REMOTE CONTROL IDENTIFICATION TO USER IDENTIFICATION AND USER ZIPCODE MAPING.
SECOND TABLE:
TIME, ICON IDENTIFICATION USER ZIPCODE TO URL OF ADVERTISER'S WEBSITE MAPPING.
84
SET TOP BOX
WEB BROWSER
TELEVISION
86
1. URL OF MONITORING WEBSITE PROVIDER / SERVER (eg., http://adke.com)
2. REMOTE CONTROL IDENTIFICATION (Serial Number)(eg., 22222)
3. ICON IDENTIFICATION (eg., 1,2,3,...)
10
82
80
REMOTE CONTROL
82

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.
PCT/US00/25900

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

IPC(7) :G06F 17/30
US CL :705/26, 27

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

U.S. : 705/26, 27

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
A	US 5,708,780 A (LEVERGOOD et al.) 13 JANUARY 1998, ALL	1-52
A	US 5,712,979 A (GRABER et al.) 27 JANUARY 1998, ALL	1-52
A	US 5,715,314 A (PAYNE et al) 03 FEBRARY 1998, ALL	1-52
A	US 5,724,424 A (GIFFORD) 03 MARCH 1998, ALL	1-52
A	US 5,819,285 A (DAMICO et al.) 06 OCTOBER 1998, ALL	1-52
A	US 5,848,396 A (GERACE), 08 DECEMBER 1998, ALL	1-52

[X] Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C. [ ] See patent family annex.

*	Special categories of cited documents:	"T"	later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention
"A"	document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance	"X"	document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone
"E"	earlier document published on or after the international filing date	"Y"	document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art
"L"	document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)	"&"	document member of the same patent family
"O"	document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means		
"P"	document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed		

Date of the actual completion of the international search 04 DECEMBER 2000	Date of mailing of the international search report 22 DEC 2000
Name and mailing address of the ISA/US Commissioner of Patents and Trademarks Box PCT Washington, D.C. 20231 Facsimile No. (703) 305-3230	Authorized officer JAMES TRAMMELL Telephone No. (703) 305-3900

Form PCT/ISA/210 (second sheet) (July 1998)★

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.
PCT/US00/25900

C (Continuation). DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
A, P	US 6,029,141 A (BEZOS et al.) 22 FEBRUARY 2000, ALL	1-52
A, P	US 6,016,504 A (ARNOLD et al.) 18 JANUARY 2000, ALL	1-52