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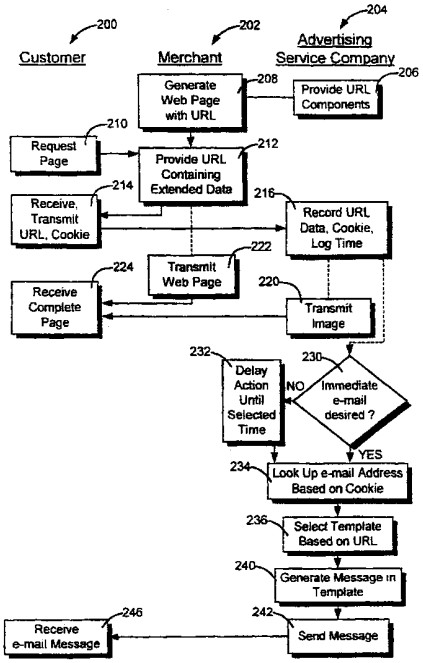
(54) Title: SENDING AN EMAIL MESSAGE IN RESPONSE TO SELECTED WEB BROWSING ACTIVITY



(57) Abstract: A method of electronic communication includes providing a web page on a first computer with an action tag including information about the web page. In repsonse to a user visiting the web page, the action tag is received from the user at a second computer. Based on the action tag, an email message is generated for the user. The method may include receiving a cookie or other device identifier, using the cookie to determine an associated email address in a database, and sending the emial message to the user. The content of the action tag may be used to select a suitable email template, and to fill in the template with suitable content.

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SENDING AN EMAIL MESSAGE IN RESPONSE TO SELECTED WEB BROWSING ACTIVITY

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention is directed to Internet advertising techniques, and more particularly to advertising via email messages.

BACKGROUND AND SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

As computer use, and particularly the use of the World Wide Web, becomes more and more prevalent, the volumes of Internet advertising presented grow larger and larger. A common approach to Internet advertising is the direct email campaign. In a typical direct email campaign, an email message promoting one or more products is sent at an arbitrary time, in an identical form, to a large group of customers.

While many direct email campaigns have been quite successful, the success of many conventional direct email campaigns has been limited by failures of timing and customization. With respect to timing, conventional direct email campaigns fail to target customers at a time when they are likely to buy, and thus frequently reach customers at a time when they are not ready to buy. With respect to customization, because each of the recipients receives the same email, there is no opportunity to target the email message to products or programs in which particular customers may have a special interest.

In view of these disadvantages of conventional direct email campaigns a facility for sending an email message in response to selected web browsing activity would have significant utility.

The present invention overcomes the limitations of the prior art by providing a method of electronic communication that includes providing a web page on a first computer with an action tag including information about the web page. In response to a user visiting the web

page, the action tag is received from the user at a second computer. Based on the action tag, an email message is generated for the user. The method may include receiving a cookie or other device identifier, using the cookie to determine an associated email address in a database, and sending the email message to the user. The content of the action tag may be used to select a suitable email template, and to fill in the template with suitable content.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Figure 1 is a high-level block diagram showing the environment in which the facility preferably operates.

Figure 2 is a schematic block diagram showing the system and method of operation according to a preferred embodiment of the invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF A PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

A software facility for sending an email message in response to selected web browsing activity by a user is provided. In order to tailor the timing and/or content of an email campaign to individual users, the facility observes the web browsing activity of the user when browsing the advertiser's web site. When the user is observed to take predetermined actions, such as viewing a product description web page, completing an order to purchase items, or abandoning a shopping cart containing items without purchasing them, the facility preferably composes and transmits an email to the user. The content of the message is preferably tailored to the action of the user. For example, where the user viewed a description of a product, the email may thank the user for the user's interest in the product. Where the user abandoned a shopping cart without placing an order, the message may offer the user a discount to entice the user to return to the web site to complete the order. Where the user completed an order, the message may contain a suggestion to purchase complementary items.

The timing of each message transmitted by the facility is also tailored to the user, in that each message is sent at a time relative to the time when the user was observed browsing the advertiser's web site and therefore a time when the user likely had some interest in purchasing. The facility preferably permits the time at which a particular message is transmitted to be configured, such as at a time a few seconds after the user performs the observed action, or at a time a few days after the user performs the observed action. By sending customers email messages that are targeted both in terms of their timing and their content, the facility provides a powerful tool for marketing on behalf of online advertisers.

The facility may preferably also be used to automatically send an email message in response to other types of browsing activity, such as visits to an Internet publisher's web site that causes an advertisement to be presented ("advertising impression"). In this case, the facility automatically sends an email message in response to receiving a request for advertising impression.

In accordance with the facility, special "action tags" may be added to the HTML content of significant web pages on the advertiser's website, such as an order or confirmation page to facilitate the facility's observation of the user's actions on the advertiser's website. Each action tag is an HTML image tag coded to retrieve a one-pixel transparent image from a particular URL within the domain of a web server operated by an advertising service, upon which the facility executes. The URL is composed dynamically by the advertiser's computer system in a way that incorporates information about the action taking place between the advertiser's web site and the current customer visiting the tagged web page.

When a web page containing an action tag is received from the advertiser's web server by the customer's computer system, the customer's computer system sends an HTTP request to the advertising service's web server for the URL contained in the action tag. This HTTP request includes a copy of a cookie stored persistently on the customer's

computer system that uniquely identifies the customer's computer system to the advertising service. When the advertising service's web server receives the HTTP request, it extracts the extended data from the URL, and stores the extended data in a log entry along with the customer's cookie. The facility correlates such log rows created by action tags with additional log entries reflecting advertisements presented on the advertiser's behalf on one of a variety of Internet publishers that sell advertising space. As these entries identify the customers that saw their advertisements using the customer's cookie, they can be correlated with the action tag log rows to determine, for each customer that encountered and action tag, whether and where the customer saw advertisements for the advertiser by correlating the data in this manner, the facility can assess the effectiveness of advertising done on behalf of the advertiser in terms of such variables as the identify of the particular advertisement and the Internet publisher on which the advertisement was presented. Moreover, the extended data stored for each action tag encountered can be used by the facility to further illuminate the effect of presenting the advertisements to the customer, by, for example, showing the dollar amount of each order placed by a user that saw advertisements for the advertiser. Other pieces of extended data may be included to indicate preferences shown by the customer and to correlate information gathered in this manner with additional information about the customer provided by the advertiser.

Figure 1 is a high-level block diagram showing the environment in which the facility preferably operates. The diagram shows a number of Internet user computer systems 101-104. An Internet user preferably uses one such Internet user computer system to connect, via the Internet 120, to an Internet publisher computer system, such as Internet publisher computer systems 131 and 132, to retrieve and display a Web page.

In cases where an Internet advertiser, through the Internet advertising service, has purchased advertising space on the Web page

provided to the Internet user computer system by the Internet publisher computer system, the Web page contains a reference to a URL in the domain of the Internet advertising service computer system 140. When a user computer system receives a Web page that contains such a reference, the Internet user computer systems sends a request to the Internet advertising service computer system to return data comprising an advertisement, such as a banner advertisement. When the Internet advertising service computer system receives such a request, it selects an advertisement to transmit to the Internet user computer system in response the request, and either itself transmits the selected advertisement or redirects the request containing an identification of the selected advertisement to an Internet content distributor computer system, such as Internet content distributor computer systems 151 and 152. When the Internet user computer system receives the selected advertisement, the Internet user computer system displays it within the Web page.

The displayed advertisement preferably includes one or more links to Web pages of the Internet advertiser's Web site. When the Internet user selects one of these links in the advertisement, the Internet user computer system de-references the link to retrieve the Web page from the appropriate Internet advertiser computer system, such as Internet advertiser computer system 161 or 162. In visiting the Internet advertiser's Web site, the Internet user may traverse several pages, and may take such actions as purchasing an item or bidding in an auction. Revenue from such actions typically finances, and is often the motivation for, the Internet advertiser's Internet advertising.

The Internet advertising service computer system 140 preferably includes one or more central processing units (CPUs) 141 for executing computer programs such as the facility, a computer memory 142 for storing programs and data, and a computer-readable media drive 143, such as a CD-ROM drive, for reading programs and data stored on a computer-readable medium.

While preferred embodiments are described in terms of the environment described above, those skilled in the art will appreciate that the facility may be implemented in a variety of other environments, including a single, monolithic computer system, as well as various other combinations of computer systems or similar devices.

The facility may preferably be used with a number of different types of templates for email messages. For example, the facility may preferably use textual templates to generate textual email messages, and may use HTML templates, processed as Active Server Pages (ASPs) by a Microsoft corporation ASP processor, to generate HTML email messages. Appendix A shows a sample textual template, while Appendix C shows a sample HTML template of a similar nature.

The sample textual template shown in Appendix A contains several sections that appear in every message produced with the template -- lines 1-7, 12-15, 26, and 46-53. Each appear in every message generated with this template, as can be seen in Appendix B, which shows a textual email generated with the sample textual template. The template also contains portions that are customized for each message generated with the template. For example, in line 8-25 of the template, either an offer for a "PhatGPS" product is included in the message, or an offer for a "Spy Watch" product, depending upon whether the amount of the order just placed by the customer exceeds $100. In lines 27-38, the template uses additional information received via the action tag to query a database for a second offer to be presented to the user. Further, in lines 40-45, the template causes the facility to add a third offer to the message based upon the application of an externally-specified rule based upon parameters received via the action tag.

While embodiments of the facility described above deliver email messages to customers browsing an advertiser's web site, additional embodiments of the facility send messages of varying types to users in response to various types of "visits" to advertisers and other businesses. With respect to messages, the facility is preferably capable of sending

pages, telegrams, faxes, voicemail messages, telephone calls, icq instant messages, and various other types of messages to users. Such messages may be in response to other types of "visits" to the advertiser, including telephone calls to the advertiser, review of physical catalogs and brochures circulated by the publisher, various transactions conducted with the advertiser, and visits to the advertiser's website or other similar electronic presence. Such "visits" may be effectuated using either general-purpose computers or special-purpose devices, including personal digital assistants, cellular and satellite phones, pagers, devices installed in automobiles and other vehicles, automatic teller machines, televisions, and other home appliances.

Figure 2 shows a method of operating under the preferred embodiment of the invention, as discussed above, illustrated for clarity. A customer 200 (operating one of the Internet user computer systems 101-104), a merchant 202 (operating one of the Internet publisher computers 131, 132), and an advertising service company 204 (operating the Internet advertising service computer system 140) are interconnected to transmit information as described above and summarized below.

The process begins in the generation of the merchant's web site, which normally includes numerous web pages. One or more of these pages will include an action tag including a URL, which is generated by the advertising service company 204, and which is transmitted to the merchant in step 206 for inclusion in each desired web page. The action tags typically differ for each page, which helps to identify the page visited and to convey any data collected as noted below. As provided by the advertising service company, the action tags may have certain blank fields, which may be filled in by the merchant, or which may be automatically generated based on the user's web browsing activity. This process generally occurs well in advance of a visit from the customer, during an initial period when the web pages are created at step 208.

The customer requests a web page in step 210. This may be by typing in the URL of the desired page, or more typically by clicking on

a link from another site, or from an advertisement on another site or in a promotional email or other communication. In many instances, the page is requested by navigation among the pages within the merchant's web site, such as by selecting a particular product description page form the main page, by selecting a result returned from a list generated by a search request, by adding a product to a shopping cart, by requesting to check out, and by confirming an order, among a multitude of other commercial or communication events. In typical Internet commerce sites, pages are essentially requested by engaging in the sequential steps of browsing, shopping and placing an order.

In step 212, the merchant transmits the action tag to the user as part of the transmission of the page. In some advanced embodiments, the merchant may modify the action tag by adding extended data pertaining to the details of a sales transaction, for instance, based on the actions taken by the customer. Even without the extended data, the URL is specific to the page on which it is placed, so that it provides a clear indication of which page or product was viewed by the user. The URL is transmitted to the customer, as the rest of the requested web page is transmitted. In step 214, the customer's computer automatically transmits the URL and the customer's cookie to the advertising service company, at the address indicated by the URL. This automatic process is the natural result of the customer's web browser seeking to load all information provided at the page, by retrieving it from various sites using the URLs provided on the page.

In step 216, the advertising service company 204 receives the action tag or URL, extracts the extended data and cookie as described above, and stores the complete data set in a database record associated with the transaction. Also in response to receipt of the URL, the advertising service company transmits the one pixel transparent gif image to the customer in step 220 to fulfill the customer's browser's request. When the merchant has provided all web page data in step 222, the

download is complete 224. The process may continue as the customer continues browsing, or progresses through the steps of a transaction.

If extended data is used in conjunction with the action tag URL, the advertising service company can learn when the user made the request, in response to which advertising campaign, how long the customer waited for each page to load (comparing the time of the request and the time of the receipt of the action tag URL), how long was spent at each page, which sequence of pages were visited, which items were selected for the shopping cart listing potential purchases, which items were purchased, preferred characteristics of the ordered items (*e.g.*, size, color, style, format), the customer number assigned by the merchant, and any of the other items discussed above or of interest to a merchant.

After completion of the user's visit to the web page (or other triggering communication or transaction event), the advertising service company 204 may send an email response to the user. For a given advertising campaign or other set of circumstances, the email may be sent immediately in response to the triggering event, or may be delayed. In step 230, it is determined whether an immediate email is required. If so, an email message is created, addressed, and sent as described below. If not, action is delayed until the selected time, as noted in block 232.

The delay may be a selected time interval following the triggering event, such as two days after the event. The delay may also provide for a selected time of delivery, such as 5:00 PM a selected number of days later, to avoid the cursory deletion of a message that might occur at the beginning of a work day. A weekend delivery might be scheduled for personal products, weekday business hours delivery for messages of commercial business interest. A promotion for a restaurant may be delivered shortly in advance of prime weekend days, or to stimulate demand during slack periods. A user with an extensive recorded history of making purchases at certain days or hours may be targeted to receive messages at their implicitly preferred purchasing times. As with conventional advertising strategies, campaigns may be targeted for certain

holidays, or end-of-month paydays; in addition, personal information such as birthdays and anniversary dates may provide suitable timing triggers.

To avoid concerns regarding the commercial use of personal information, the preferred embodiment is intended to be limited to use for sending messages only to those users who have "opted in", that is, who have affirmatively requested to receive such mailings. Such requests are typically offered as an option to users when making a purchase or otherwise registering at a site. Nonetheless, the principles disclosed herein may be applied to non-consensual email recipients, so that the patent owner may exclude such practices.

When a message is to be sent, the destination email address is determined at step 234. Typically, the advertising service company maintains a database of users. The contents may be provided by the merchant based on information offered by its customers. For instance, when a customer requests to be included on a list for future promotional emails, the merchant (or other entity) records the user's email address, and also collects the "cookie" that uniquely identifies the user's computer or other communication device. A record in the database associates the address and the cookie. The database may include more information in the record, and may include detailed information about the web browsing activities of the user. For example, each advertisement served by the advertising service company to the user may be recorded as having been viewed, so that future advertisements may be offered in a planned sequence. Such data is collected and indexed only by cookie; the user's address remains unknown until such time as he or she opts to disclose the address to the merchant. Thus, the database may contain many records associated with cookies for which no email address is known. Therefore, the process of looking up the email address includes the step of determining whether or not an address is known for the cookie of the user. If not, no email is generated.

An alternate method would have a unique ID (UID) passed as part of the extended data on the action tag. This UID could similarly

be used to reference an email address, provided the advertiser supplied the advertising service with UID/email address pairs. This implementation does not require the joining of anonymous data collected through cookies with personally identifiable information (PII) such as the email address.

If an address is known for the user, an email message is generated. First, a message template is selected at step 236, based on the action tag URL received. For an action tag received from a user who put a particular product in his or her "shopping cart" but did not make a purchase, a template example is:

> Dear <name>,
>
> Thank you for visiting our website and requesting information by email about our products.
>
> While at our site, you read about <product name> and put, but did not opt to make a purchase. This message is to offer you a discount of <discount percent> on that product, in hopes that you return and make a purchase.
>
> Sincerely,
>
> Your friends at goodmerchant123.com

The template selection process may be complex, as the user may visit multiple pages on a single visit to the merchant, many of which may include action tags. In such circumstances, a delay should prevent the immediate sending of email until the user's session is concluded. Then, the system may evaluate the pattern of recorded page views or action tag requests, and thereby determine the appropriate template. Such a system may prioritize purchase activity over specific product viewing activity, and may prioritize specific product viewing over a visit to an entry or home page of the merchant site.

After a template is selected, the message is generated by filling in the blank fields in step 240. Some of the fields may be filled

with information from the action tag URL (*e.g.*, product information); other fields may be filled with information from a pre-existing database record derived from the merchant (*i.e.*, the customer's first name for a salutation). Other information may be derived at least in part from database records from other visits to the merchant's site. For instance, the percentage discount may vary depending on whether the customer has made a purchase (depending on whether it is preferable to reward loyalty or to gain a new customer). Also, the discount may vary depending on the number of prior visits, so that a repeat viewer of a particular product might be offered a different discount than one who looked only one time. If some information is lacking, default terms may be applied (*i.e.*, using "customer" in the <name> field if the customer's name is unavailable, while adequate information is otherwise available.) After the template is fully filled in, it is sent to the user's email address in step 242, and the user receives the message in step 246.

While the above is discussed in terms of preferred and alternative embodiments, the invention is not intended to be so limited. For instance, while the preferred embodiment is illustrated with a user's visit to a merchant's retail website, any of innumerable other communication events may serve as the trigger for generating an email message with timing and or content customized to the particular use based on the timing and content of the communication. Possible triggering events include:

- confirmation of an order by any retail method, including web-based commerce,
- abandonment of a shopping cart of selected goods or services without placing an order (wherein the contents may be recorded and used in an email offering a discount on the items),
- account maintenance (*e.g.*, changing address, credit card information, password),

- viewing an advertisement on any medium, including web browsing,
- viewing an advertisement for the nth time, viewing a selected advertisement in a sequence of advertisements in a campaign,
- viewing the last of a complete set of advertisements in a campaign,
- clicking an advertising banner,
- registering at a web site, including the step of opting to receive promotional emails,
- viewing a selected video transmission, such as by TV, cable, satellite transmission, or streaming,
- changing the channel during a particular advertisement,
- placing a telephone call to a selected merchant or other number,
- receiving a selected voice message,
- engaging in a financial transaction (*e.g.*, investment purchase or sale, use of credit card, ATM usage),
- travel or entertainment activity (*e.g.*, airline flight, restaurant or hotel visit),
- viewing an advertisement on a cellular telephone,
- responding to an advertisement on a cellular telephone.

Appendix A -
Sample text email template

```
What's new at www.geekgadgets.com?
We now have over 650 products online, and expect to have 450 more in
November.
In addition to PDAs and GPS units, GeekGadgets is pleased to announce the
online
debut of our optical wireless product line.  Each order from the web
automatically includes an authentic GeekGadgets shirt.
Check out these new cutting-edge devices:

<%
' Example of inline decision tree
                    if tSalesAmt > 100 then
%>
PB8860 - PhatGPS
GeekGadget's exclusive optical wireless original!
http://geekgadgets.precision-
email.com/go/precision_geekgadgets_1021-1-13/direct/01
<%
                    else
%>
DB3561 - Spy Watch
100% Stainless Steel case and band, wireless interface.
http://geekgadgets.precision-
email.com/go/precision_geekgadgets_1021-1-14/direct/01
<%
                    endif
%>

<%
                    ' query to get an individual offer based on a user
                    objRS = objConn.Open("DSN=Profile")
                    objRS.Open("SELECT * from offer o WHERE o.user =
UID")
%>
<%=objRS.Value("Model")%>
<%=objRS.Value("Description")%>
<%=objRS.Value("Redirect")%>
<%
                    objRS.Close()
                    objConn.Close()
%>

<%
                    ' use of independent rules object
                    ' object returns full offer, including redirect
                    objRule = CreateObject("CampaignRule")
%>
<%=objRule.Offer(iIndex, iUID, iFrequency)%>

Don't forget to register for Geek-O-Rama to qualify for huge upcoming product
giveaways.  And remember, 2-day shipping is free through the upcoming
holiday
season.
We sent you this email because you asked for updates about new products and
```

promotions. To be removed from our list, visit <%=strUnsubscribeLink%>.
Questions? Feedback? Email us @ mailto:info@geekgadgets.com or call us 1-800-
555-3056.

Appendix B -
Sample text email

What's new at www.geekgadgets.com?
We now have over 650 products online, and expect to have 450 more in November.
In addition to PDAs and GPS units, GeekGadgets is pleased to announce the online
debut of our optical wireless product line. Each order from the web automatically includes an authentic GeekGadgets shirt.
Check out these new cutting-edge devices:

PB8860 - PhatGPS
GeekGadget's exclusive optical wireless original!
http://geekgadgets.precision-email.com/go/precision_geekgadgets_1021-1-13/direct/01

GB1114 - Laser Foosball
Foosball at the speed of light!
http://geekgadgets.precision-email.com/go/precision_geekgadgets_1021-1-13/direct/71

MM0004 - Cellular Modem
Stock quotes anywhere!
http://geekgadgets.precision-email.com/go/precision_geekgadgets_1021-1-13/direct/43

Don't forget to register for Geek-O-Rama to qualify for huge upcoming product giveaways. And remember, 2-day shipping is free through the upcoming holiday
season.
We sent you this email because you asked for updates about new products and promotions. To be removed from our list, visit
http://geekgadgets.precision-email.com/unsubscribe. Questions? Feedback? Email
us @ mailto:info@geekgadgets.com or call us 1-800-555-3056.

Appendix C -
Sample Active Server Page HTML email template

```
<html>
<head>
<title>Sale at GeekGadgets!</title>
<meta http-equiv="Content-Type" content="text/html; charset=iso-8859-1">
</head>

<body bgcolor="#FFFFFF">
<table width="449" border="0" cellpadding="0" cellspacing="0">
  <tr>
    <td colspan="3" height="88"><a href="http://geekgadgets.precision-
email.com/go/precision_geekgadgets_1021-1-20/direct/01"><img
src="http://www.geekgadgets.com/email/01/images/Title.gif" width="449"
height="85" alt=""></a></td>
  </tr>
  <tr>
    <td colspan="3" height="8"><img
src="http://www.geekgadgets.com/email/01/images/rule.gif" width="449" height="2"
alt=""></td>
  </tr>
  <tr>
<%
' Example of inline decision tree
            if tSalesAmt > 100 then
                strRedirImage = "http://geekgadgets.precision-
email.com/go/precision_geekgadgets_1021-1-1/direct/01"
                strRedirText = "http://geekgadgets.precision-
email.com/go/precision_geekgadgets_1021-1-3/direct/01"
                strImgSrc =
"http://www.geekgadgets.com/email/01/images/PB8860.jpg"
                strAlt = "PB8860"
                strName = "PhatGPS"
                strPrice = "$215.00"
            else
                strRedirImage = "http://geekgadgets.precision-
email.com/go/precision_geekgadgets_1021-1-2/direct/01"
                strRedirText = "http://geekgadgets.precision-
email.com/go/precision_geekgadgets_1021-1-4/direct/01"
                strImgSrc =
"http://www.geekgadgets.com/email/01/images/DB3561.jpg"
                strAlt = "3561"
                strName = "Spy Watch"
                strPrice = "$49.95"
            endif
%>
    <td>
      <div align="center"><a href=<%=strHref%>><img src=<%=strImgSrc%>
width="84" height="103" align="middle" border="0" alt=<%=strAlt%>></a></div>
    </td>
  </tr>
  <tr>
    <td>
      <div align="center"><font size="-2" ><font size="-1"><a
href=<%=strRedirText%>><%=strName%> </a>
        </font></font></div>
    </td>
```

```
54      </tr>
55      <tr>
56        <td height="12">
57          <div align="center"><font size="-1"><%=strPrice%></font></div>
58        </td>
59      </tr>
60      <tr>
61        <td colspan="3" height="8"><img
62  src="http://www.geekgadgets.com/email/01/images/rule.gif" width="449"
63  height="2"
64  alt=""></td>
65      </tr>
66      <tr>
67        <td colspan="3">
68          <table width="100%" border="0" cellspacing="0" cellpadding="1">
69            <tr>
70              <td><img
71  src="http://www.geekgadgets.com/email/01/images/Globe.gif" width="45"
72  height="40" align="left" vspace="3" hspace="3" alt="globe"></td>
73                <td><font size="3">We sent you this email because you asked
74                  for updates about new products and promotions.  To be removed
75                  from our list, <a href=<%=strUnsubscribeLink%>>click here</a>.
76                  Questions? Feedback? <a
77  href="mailto:info@geekgadgets.com">Email
78  us</a> or call us 1-800-555-3056.</font></td>
79            </tr>
80          </table>
81        </td>
82      </tr>
83  </table>
84  </body>
85  </html>
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CLAIMS

1. A method of electronic communication comprising:

receiving a message containing information about a user's browsing of a selected web page;

in response to the message, generating an email based on the information;

determining an email address associated with the user; and

sending the email to the email address.

2. The method of claim 1 wherein the information includes a device identifier associated with the device used by the user for browsing.

3. The method of claim 1 wherein determining an email address includes searching a database of email addresses provided by a merchant associated with the selected web page.

4. The method of claim 1 wherein the received message is an action tag from the selected web page.

5. The method of claim 1 wherein the information includes data selected from a group of data types including:

a web page identifier;

a product identifier;

an order status;

a shopping cart contents indicator;

a user identifier;

a shopping cart status; and

account maintenance information.

6. The method of claim 1 including sending the email to the user at a selected time with respect to a time at which the action tag is received.

7. The method of claim 1 wherein the web page includes information about a particular product, the action tag includes means to identify the product, and wherein the email pertains to the product.

8. The method of claim 1 including:

based on the information contained by the received message, selecting an email template; and

generating the email message by filling in the template with text information based on the browsing information.

9. The method of claim 8 including sending the email message to the user at a selected time with respect to a time at which the action tag is received.

10. The method of claim 8 including receiving a cookie from the user, and wherein determining an email address includes looking up an email address associated with the cookie.

11. The method of claim 8 wherein the browsing information includes data selected from a group of data types including:

a web page identifier;

a product identifier;

an order status;

a shopping cart contents indicator;

a user identifier;

a shopping cart status; and

account maintenance information.

12. The method of claim 8 wherein the web page includes information about a particular product, the browsing information includes means to identify the product, and wherein the email message pertains to the product.

13. A computer-readable medium whose contents cause a communication system to automatically dispatch a communication in response to selected communication activity by:

receiving an request indicating that a user has performed a selected communication activity, the request including an identifier associated with the user;

using the identifier to identify an address associated with the user; and

dispatching a communication to the identified address in response to receiving the request.

14. The computer-readable medium of claim 13 wherein the address is an email address, and wherein dispatching the communication includes transmitting an email message to the address.

15. The computer-readable medium of claim 13 wherein the request contains information describing a web browsing activity performed by the user, and wherein contents of the computer-readable medium further cause the communication system to select the communication from a plurality of communications based on the information describing the communication activity performed by the user.

16. The computer-readable medium of claim 13 wherein the request contains information describing the communication activity performed by the user, and wherein the contents of the computer-readable medium further cause the communication system to customize the

communication based on the information describing the web browsing activity performed by the user.

17. The computer-readable medium of claim 13 wherein the contents of the computer-readable medium further cause the communication system to:

use the identifier to identify additional information describing the user; and

select the communication from a plurality of communications based on the additional information describing the user.

18. The computer-readable medium of claim 13 wherein the contents of the computer-readable medium further cause the communication system to:

use the identifier to identify additional information describing the user; and

customize the communication based on the additional information describing the user.

19. An electronic communication apparatus comprising:

a first computer providing a web page with an action tag including information about the web page;

a second computer that, in response to a user visiting the web page, receives the action tag from the user; and

an email subsystem that generates an email to the user based on the action tag.

20. The apparatus of claim 19 wherein the email subsystem further receives an identification code from the user, looks up an email address associated with the cookie, and sends the email to the email address.

21. The apparatus of claim 19 wherein the action tag includes extended data selected from a group of data types including:

a web page identifier;

a product identifier;

an order status;

a shopping cart contents indicator;

a user identifier;

a shopping cart status; and

account maintenance information.

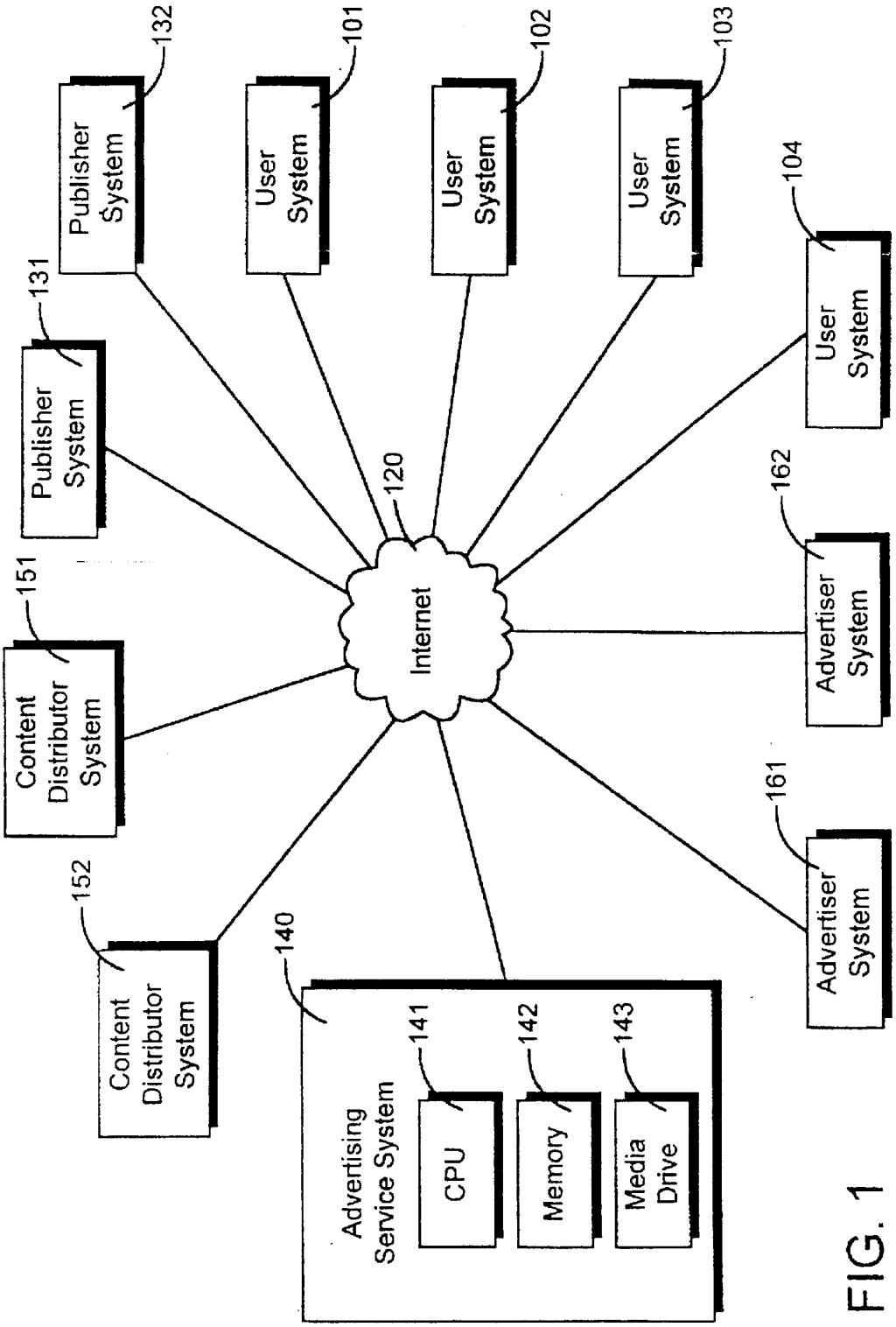
22. The apparatus of claim 19 wherein the web page includes information about a particular product, the action tag includes means to identify the product, and wherein the email pertains to the product.

23. The apparatus of claim 19 wherein the email subsystem selects an email template based on the action tag.

24. The apparatus of claim 23 including a template processing subsystem that adds terms to the template based on the action tag.

25. The apparatus of claim 19 wherein the email subsystem sends the email to the user at a selected time with respect to a time at which the action tag is received.

26. The apparatus of claim 25 wherein the selected time is a selected interval following the a time at which the action tag is received.


Publisher System
132
User System
101
User System
102
User System
103
Publisher System
131
User System
104
Internet
120
Content Distributor System
151
Advertiser System
162
Content Distributor System
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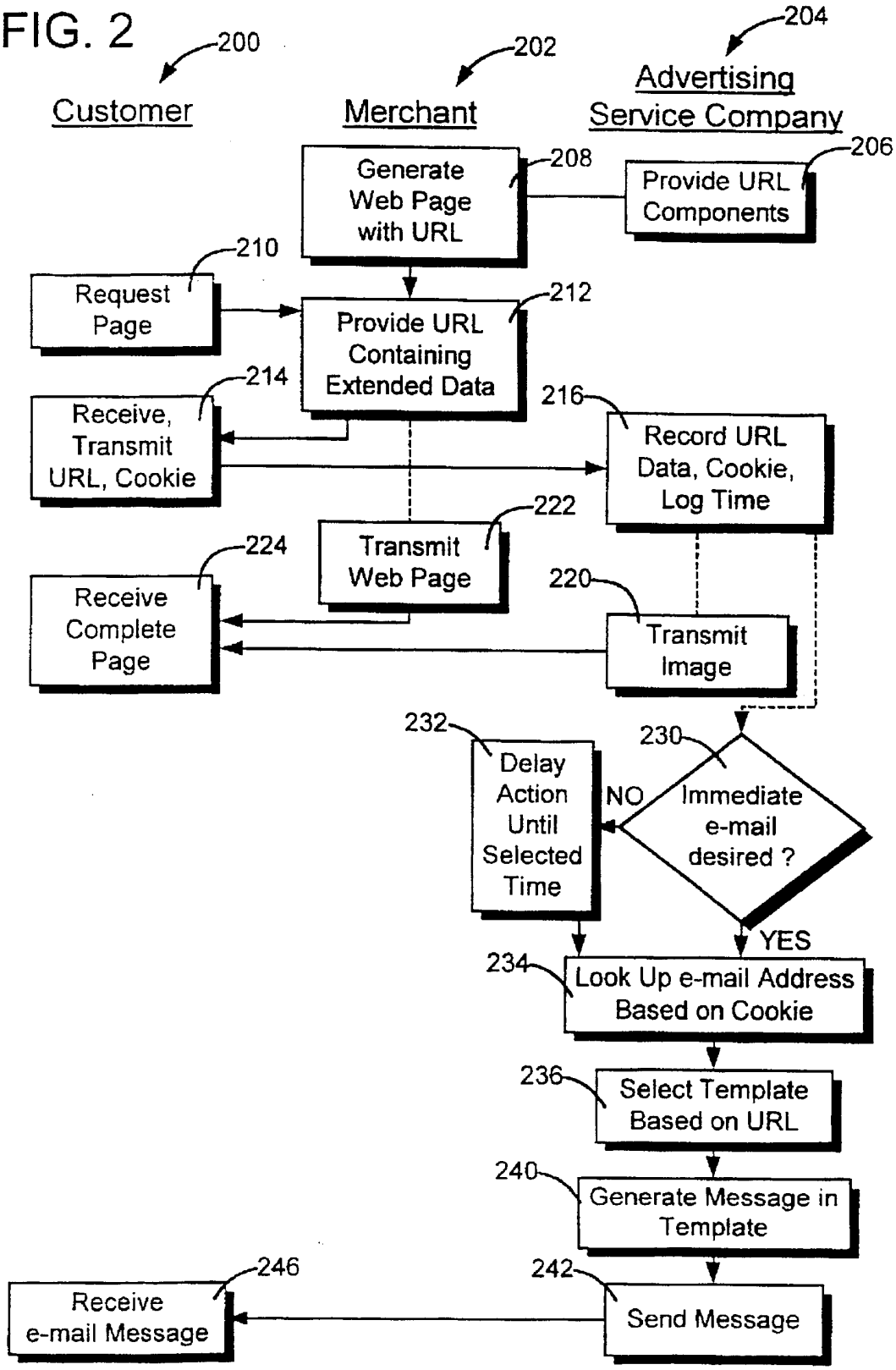
Advertiser System
161
Advertising Service System
140
CPU
141
Memory
142
Media Drive
143

FIG. 1

FIG. 2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Customer
202
Merchant
204
Advertising Service Company
Generate Web Page with URL
208
Provide URL Components
206
Request Page
210
Provide URL Containing Extended Data
212
Receive, Transmit URL, Cookie
214
Record URL Data, Cookie, Log Time
216
Transmit Web Page
222
Receive Complete Page
224
Transmit Image
220
Delay Action Until Selected Time
232
Immediate e-mail desired ?
230
NO
YES
Look Up e-mail Address Based on Cookie
234
Select Template Based on URL
236
Generate Message in Template
240
Send Message
242
Receive e-mail Message
246