



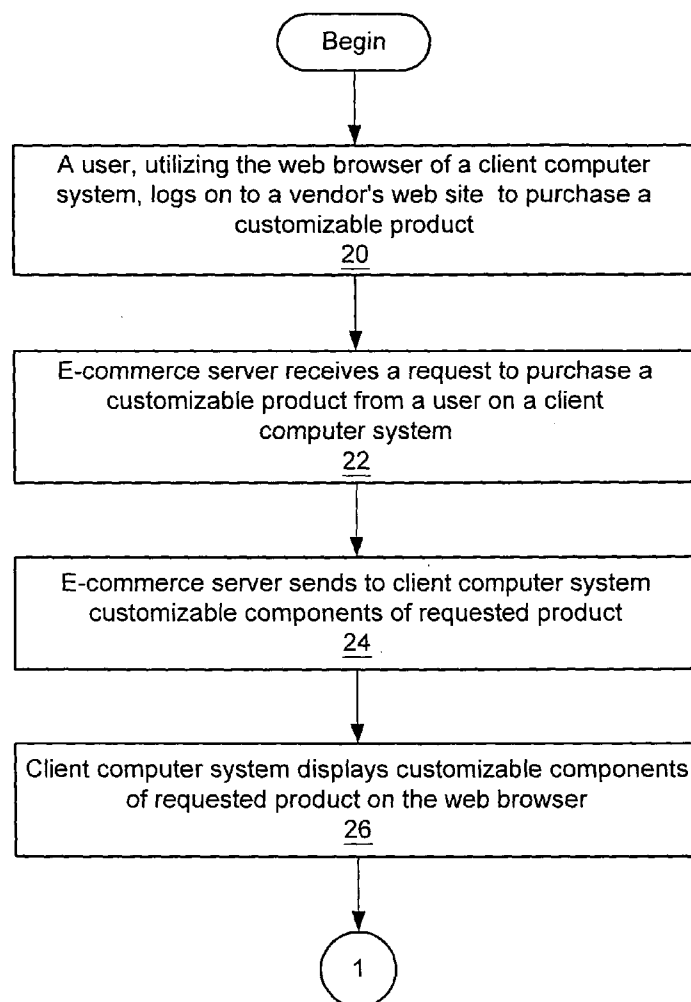
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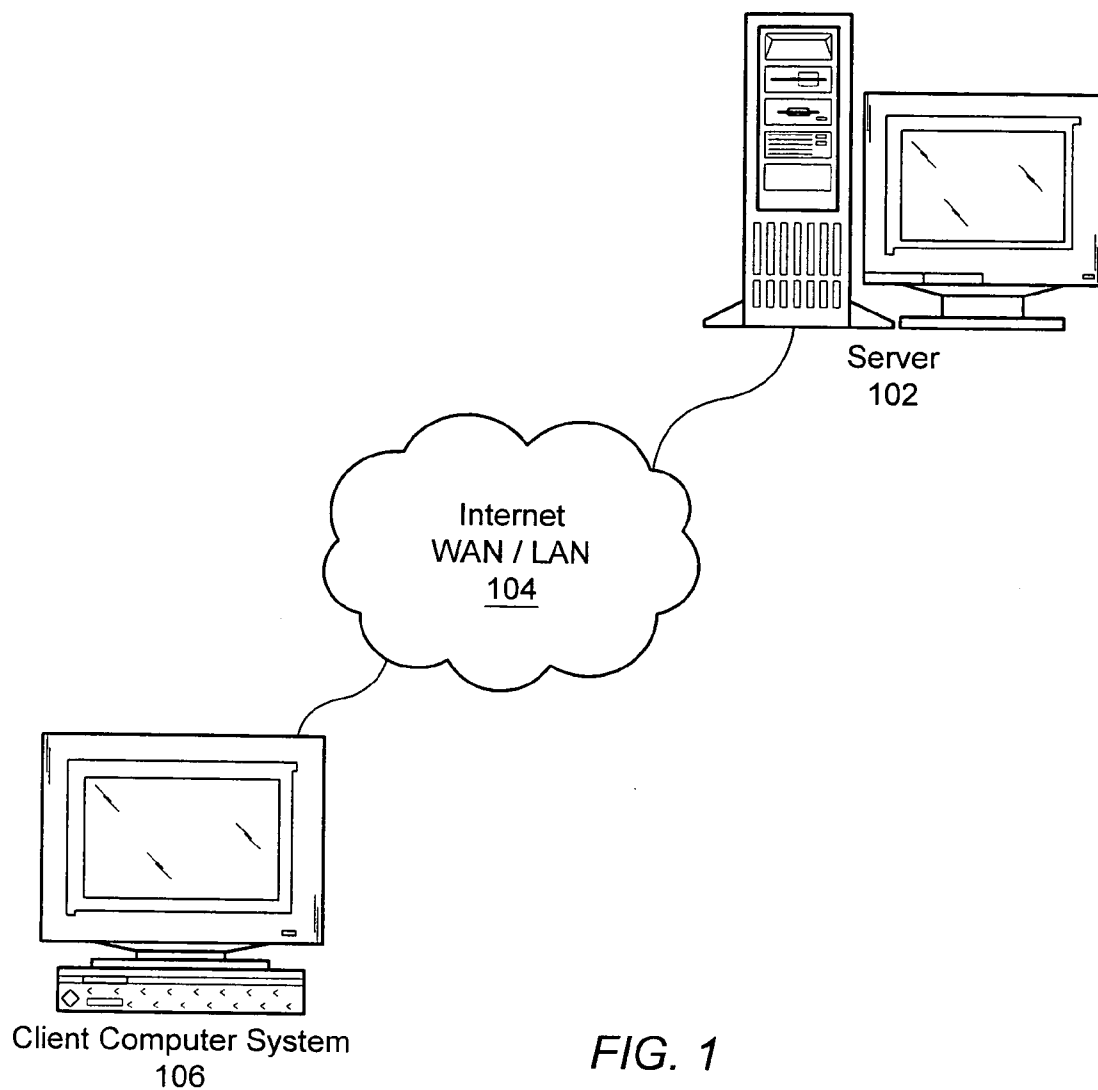
(19) **United States**(12) **Patent Application Publication** (10) **Pub. No.: US 2005/0102199 A1**
Lee (43) **Pub. Date: May 12, 2005**(54) **SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR ENABLING A
USER OF AN E-COMMERCE SYSTEM TO
VISUALLY VIEW AND/OR CONFIGURE A
PRODUCT FOR PURCHASE****Publication Classification**(51) **Int. Cl.⁷ G06F 17/60**(52) **U.S. Cl. 705/27**(75) **Inventor: Reid Lee, Austin, TX (US)**

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Feb. 7, 2000.**(57) **ABSTRACT**

A system and method that enables a user to configure a customizable product for purchase in an e-commerce system. A user may launch a web browser on a client computer system to access a vendor's web site to purchase a customizable product. The user may customize the product for purchase by selecting one or more customizable components of the product. A user may select one or more customizable components of the product by using a forms/menu interface or a visual graphical user interface. The vendor's web site may receive the one or more user selections for the customized product and may, in response, send data and information to client computer system to visually depict the 'as purchased' customized product for user verification and product checkout.





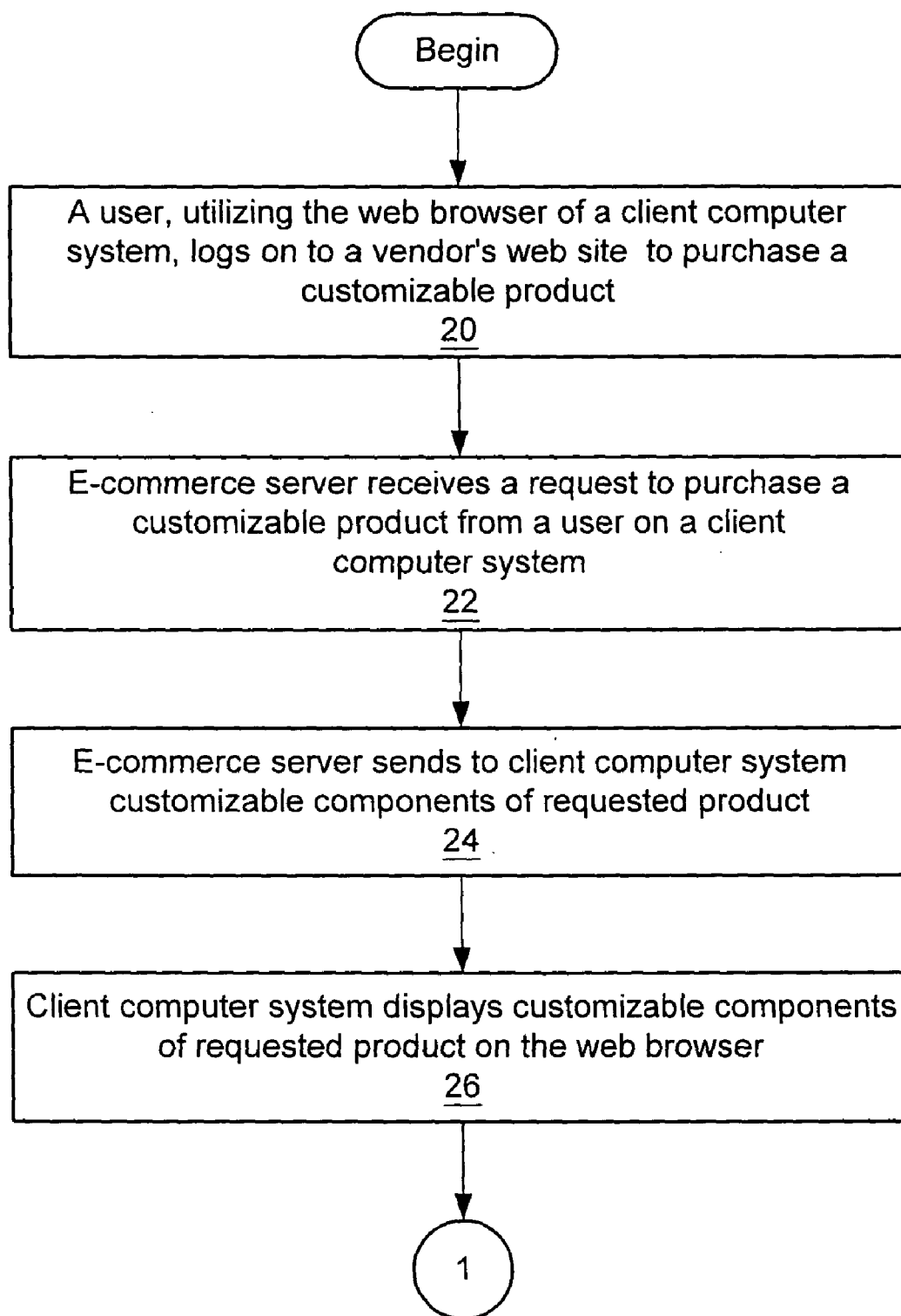


FIG. 2A

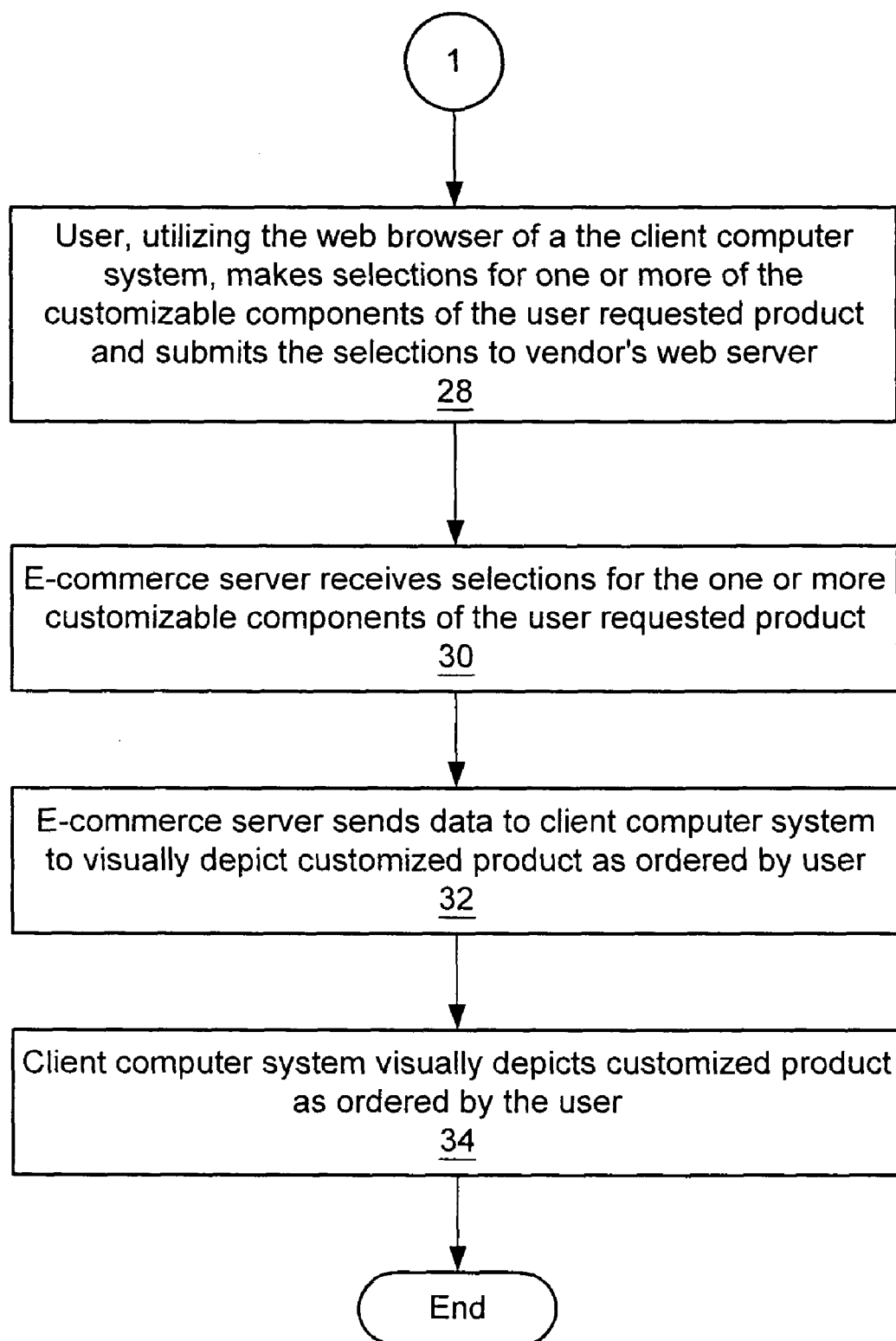


FIG. 2B

The screenshot shows a Netscape browser window with the address bar displaying <http://www.ni.com/pxiconfig/pxiconfig.htm>. The browser's menu bar includes File, Edit, View, Favorites, Tools, and Help. The toolbar contains icons for Back, Forward, Stop, Refresh, Home, Search, Favorites, History, Mail, and Print. The main content area is titled "PXI Configurator" and "PXI Chassis Options". On the left, there is a sidebar with links for "PXI Products Main", "Help", and a "Search Site:" field with a "Seek" button. The main content area contains three numbered steps for configuration:

1. Select your PXI chassis:
 - ☒ [PXI-1000](#) (1 controller slot, 7 PXI/CompactPCI peripheral slots)
 - ☐ [PXI-1010](#) (1 controller slot, 7 PXI/CompactPCI peripheral slots, 4 SCSI slots)
 - ☐ [PXI-1020](#) (1 controller slot, 7 PXI/CompactPCI peripheral slots, built-in LCD screen, CD-ROM drive, and pointing device)
 - ☐ [PXI-1025 MegaPAC](#) (1 controller slot, 7 PXI/CompactPCI peripheral slots, built-in LCD screen, CD-ROM drive, and keyboard in rugged chassis)
2. Select your power supply type:
 - ☒ Universal AC input power supply (300 W)
 - ☐ Combination DC and AC input power supply (150 W) - n/a on PXI-1010
3. Select a power cord:

<input type="checkbox"/> U.S. 120 VAC	<input type="checkbox"/> Japan 100 VAC
<input type="checkbox"/> United Kingdom 240 VAC	<input type="checkbox"/> Swiss 220 VAC
<input type="checkbox"/> Australian 240 VAC	<input type="checkbox"/> Universal Euro 240 VAC

FIG. 3

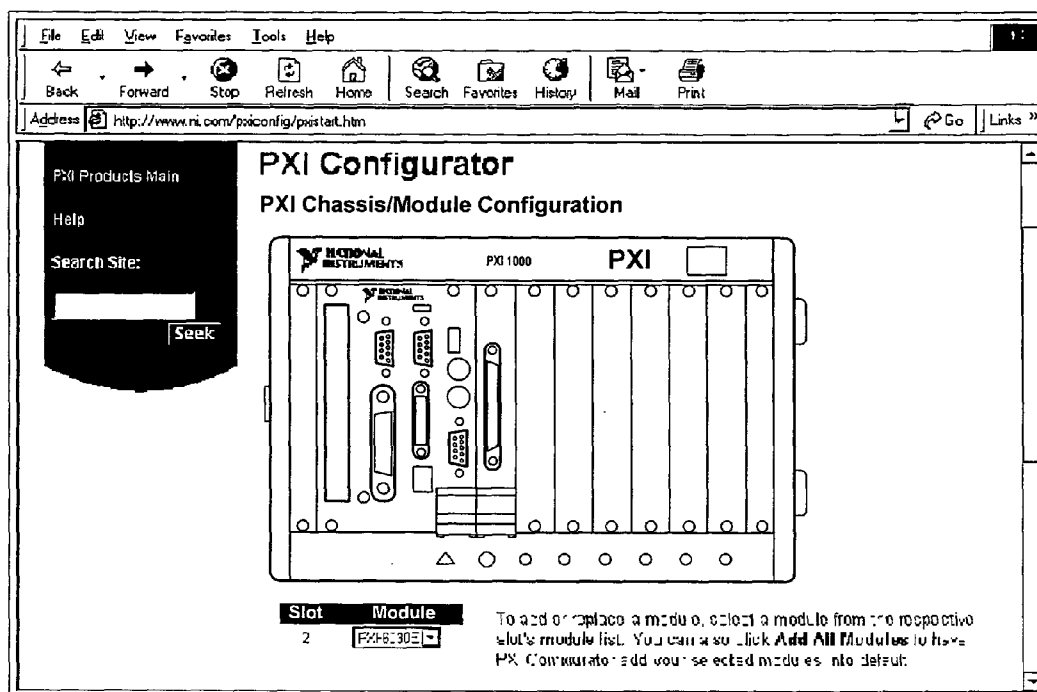


FIG. 4

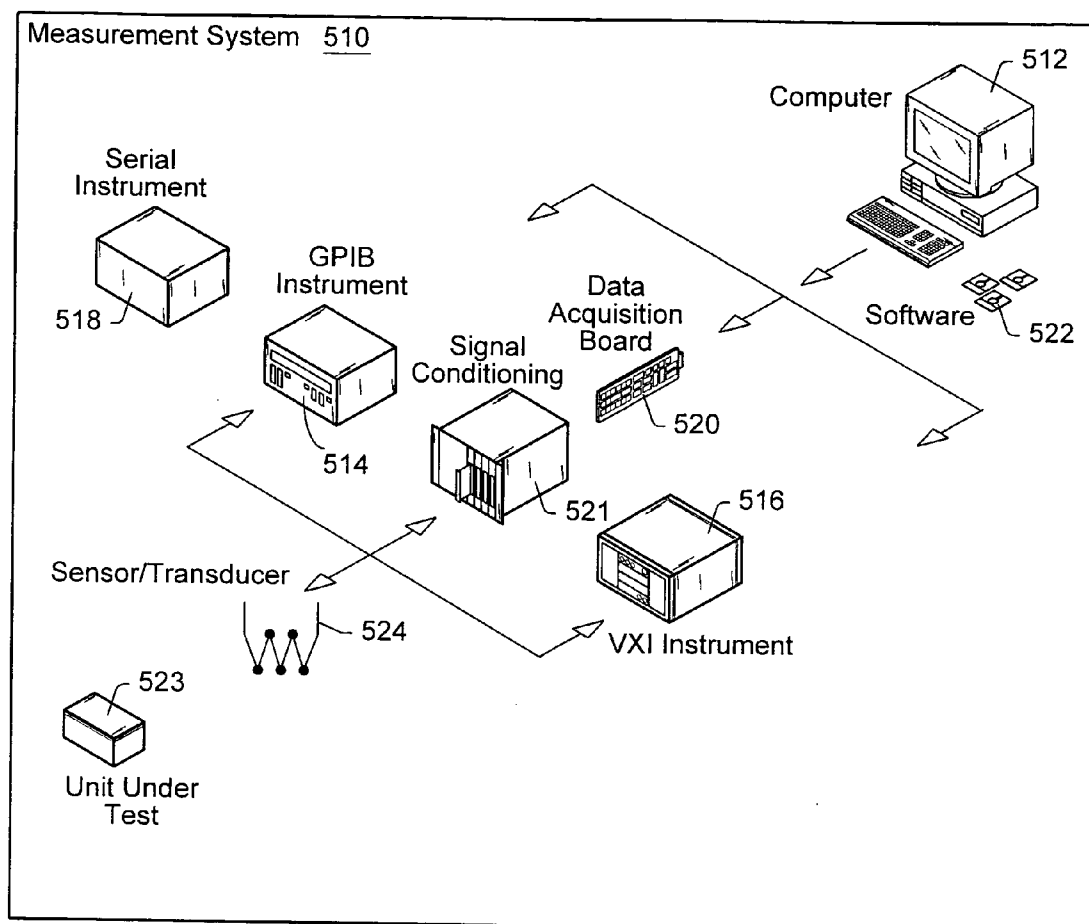


FIG. 5

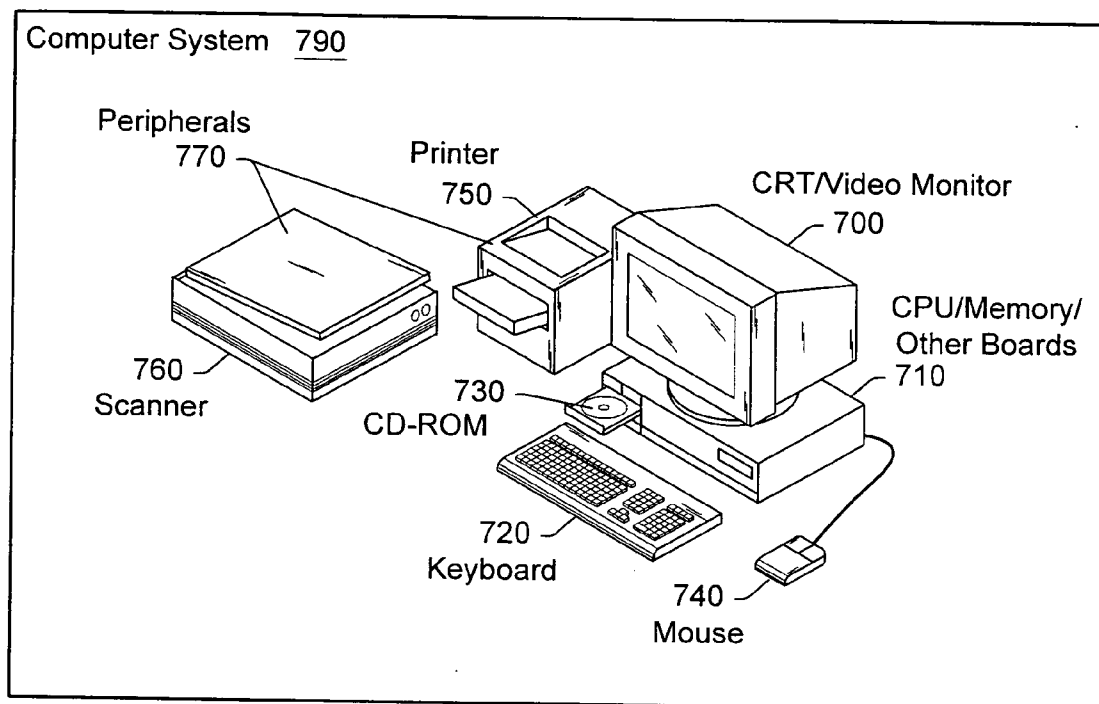


FIG. 6

**SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR ENABLING A USER
OF AN E-COMMERCE SYSTEM TO VISUALLY
VIEW AND/OR CONFIGURE A PRODUCT FOR
PURCHASE**

**CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED
APPLICATIONS**

[0001] The present application is a continuation of U.S. application Ser. No. 09/498,698, filed Feb. 7, 2000, entitled "System and Method for Enabling a User of an E-Commerce System to Visually View and/or Configure a Product for Purchase" by Lee (Attorney Docket No. 5150-40800) which is incorporated herein in its entirety.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0002] The present invention generally relates to the field of electronic commerce. More particularly, the present invention relates to a system and method for enabling a user of an e-commerce system to visually view and/or configure a product for purchase.

DESCRIPTION OF THE RELATED ART

[0003] Electronic commerce or Internet commerce has become an increasingly popular form of commerce in the United States and throughout the world. In general, electronic commerce or Internet-based commerce, often referred to as e-commerce, provides vendors and service providers the ability to greatly increase their sales channel and distribution network with minimal cost. An electronic commerce site provides a convenient and effective mechanism for potential customers to use, select and purchase products in an easy and simple fashion.

[0004] E-commerce based applications are gaining rapid acceptance in various industries ranging from retail to healthcare. Products sold via e-commerce range from consumer goods to heavy industrial equipment. A major benefit of e-commerce technology is the ability to customize a product or a service to solve a problem for a specific user or customer.

[0005] Various systems have been developed for purchasing products over the Internet. However, these systems have generally provided a very limited visualization capability to display the specific product being purchased by the prospective purchaser or user. For example, some systems display a bill of materials for the product being purchased. This method may provide specific components included with the product being purchased, but it fails to provide a graphical visualization of the product being purchased. Some other systems may display an image of a general product being ordered, but it may not represent the specific product being purchased by the user. For example, if a purchaser orders a personal computer over the Internet, the web site may display a general photo or an image of the type of personal computer being ordered, but the web site may not be able to visually display the customizable attributes of the specific personal computer being purchased.

[0006] Purchasing of a configurable or a complex product, such as a computer system, an automobile, a test system or an automation system, via the Internet, each with numerous customizable attributes, complicates the purchasing decision for the user. A configurable product, often simply referred to

as a system, may include many user selectable or configurable components. These components are often assembled and packaged together on a customized basis for a specific purchase order. However, with current e-commerce systems a user may experience difficulty in the selection or configuration of various options or components in the system. The user may further experience difficulty in simply visualizing the various possible options or components in the system and their relative position or orientation with respect to the system as a whole.

[0007] It may be desirable to provide a more graphical or visual method for enabling a user to select or configure components in a system to be purchased. It may also be highly desirable to utilize a 'What You See Is What You Get' (WSYIWYG) philosophy for products purchased in electronic commerce. Thus, it would be highly desirable to provide a system and method enabling a user of an e-commerce system to visually or graphically configure a product as well as to visually depict the final configured product, consistent with the user configured product options.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0008] The problems outlined above are in large part solved by a system and method that enables a user to visually or graphically configure and/or view a customizable product, such as for purchase in an e-commerce system. In one embodiment, the e-commerce system includes an e-commerce server, maintained by an e-commerce vendor. The e-commerce server hosts an e-commerce site or a web site of the e-commerce vendor. The e-commerce system also preferably includes a client system which includes web browser software for accessing the web site of the e-commerce vendor.

[0009] A user may launch the web browser on the client system to access the vendor's web site to purchase a customizable product. The e-commerce server for the vendor's web site may present, in one embodiment, a forms based GUI to display customizable component options of a product on a client computer system. In another embodiment the GUI may be in the form of an image or graphics visually depicting the customizable product. Images of the customizable components of the product may be visually depicted on the client display in close proximity to their respective locations on the image of the customizable product displayed.

[0010] The user may customize the product for purchase by selecting one or more customizable component options of the product. A user may select one or more customizable component options of the product by using a forms/menu interface or a visual graphical user interface. In one embodiment, the user may select a customizable component for configuration by selecting the visually displayed image of the customizable component, wherein the customizable components may be positioned on the image of the customizable product corresponding to their actual position in the system. After a customizable component has been selected, the customizable component options may then be selected, such as by using a pop-up menu or by the user selecting images of the options.

[0011] The vendor's web site may receive the one or more user selections for the customized product and may, in response, send data and information to client computer

system using dynamic web page generation technology to visually depict the current or final 'as purchased' customized product. The user may verify the visually depicted customized product for accuracy, completeness, etc. prior to proceeding with payment and final check out.

[0012] The present invention provides a number of benefits to e-commerce vendors as well as e-commerce users or customers. First, the system and method may increase the amount of revenue for e-commerce vendors through increased closure and/or volume of purchases. In addition, the system and method may decrease the number of product returns due to incorrectly configured products. The present invention may also provide a number of benefits to the user, including ease of use in the selection, configuration and ordering of products using the Internet.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0013] A better understanding of the present invention can be obtained when the following detailed description of the preferred embodiment is considered in conjunction with the following drawings, in which:

[0014] **FIG. 1** illustrates an Exemplary Network System for Performing E-Commerce;

[0015] **FIGS. 2A and 2B** are a flowchart diagram illustrating one embodiment of an E-commerce transaction;

[0016] **FIG. 3** shows a graphical user interface to select customizable component selections of a product;

[0017] **FIG. 4** shows a graphical user interface to visually depict a customized product purchased by the customer;

[0018] **FIG. 5** illustrates a measurement system, an embodiment of a customizable product; and

[0019] **FIG. 6** illustrates a computer system, another embodiment of a customizable product.

[0020] While the invention is susceptible to various modifications and alternative forms, specific embodiments thereof are shown by way of example in the drawings and will herein be described in detail. It should be understood, however, that the drawings and detailed description thereto are not intended to limit the invention to the particular form disclosed, but on the contrary, the intention is to cover all modifications, equivalents and alternatives falling within the spirit and scope of the present invention as defined by the appended claims.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0021] **FIG. 1:** Network System for Performing E-Commerce

[0022] **FIG. 1** illustrates a simplified and exemplary electronic commerce (e-commerce) or Internet commerce network system according to one embodiment of the present invention. The embodiment illustrated in **FIG. 1** includes one e-commerce server **102** and one client system **106**, which may be connected to a network **104** such as the Internet. However, it is noted that the present invention may be utilized with respect to any number of e-commerce servers **102** and client systems **106**.

[0023] As shown in **FIG. 1**, a vendor who offers products, for sale over network **104**, such as the Internet, preferably maintains the e-commerce server **102**. One example of an e-commerce vendor is Amazon.com, which sells books and other items over the Internet. The e-commerce server **102** may offer various products for sale. As used herein, the term "product" is intended to include various types of products, such as books, CDs, content subscription services, furniture, online auction items, clothing, ISP service, consumer electronics, travel, software, medical supplies, automobiles, computer systems, measurement, test and automation systems, etc.

[0024] As shown, the e-commerce server **102** may be connected to a network **104**, preferably the Internet **104**. The Internet **104** is currently the primary mechanism for performing electronic commerce. However, the present invention may be used with any of various types of wide-area networks, or networks of networks, such as the Internet, which connects computers and networks of computers together, thereby providing the connectivity for enabling electronic commerce to operate. Thus, the network **104** may be any of various types of networks, including wired and wireless networks, or combinations thereof.

[0025] Client system **106** may also be connected to the Internet **104**. The client system **106** may be of various kinds of systems such as a computer system, a network appliance, an Internet appliance, a Personal Digital Assistant (PDA), WEB TV, telephone, two way pager, etc. The client system **106** may execute web browser software for allowing a user of the client system **106** to browse and/or search the Internet **104**, as well as enabling the user to conduct transactions or commerce over the Internet **104**. The web browser software in client computer system **106** may optionally utilize a 64-bit or 128-bit encryption technology to securely communicate with the e-commerce server **102**.

[0026] When the user of the client system **106** desires to purchase a product from a vendor over the Internet **104**, the web browser software preferably accesses the Web site of the respective e-commerce server, such as e-commerce server **102**. The client system **106** may access a web page of the e-commerce server **102** directly or may access the site through a link from a third party. The user of the client computer **106** may also be referred to as a customer, a client or a user.

[0027] The everyday shopping process may be applied in an e-commerce environment. The customer accessing an e-commerce vendor's home page may be analogous to a customer entering a store for shopping. The customer may initiate the electronic commerce shopping process by utilizing a virtual shopping cart, passing through various 'sections' within the virtual store and adding one or more products to the virtual shopping cart. The customer may end the shopping process by checking out, i.e., by paying for the contents of the shopping cart, at a virtual check out counter.

[0028] Server **102**

[0029] The e-commerce server **102** may include various standard components such as one or more processors or central processing units, one or more memory media, and other standard components, e.g., a display device, input devices, a power supply, etc. The e-commerce server **102** may also be implemented as two or more different computer systems.

[0030] The e-commerce server **102** preferably includes a memory medium on which computer programs according to the present invention are stored. The term “memory medium” is intended to include various types of memory or storage, including an installation medium, e.g., a CD-ROM, or floppy disks, a computer system memory, e.g., RAM, such as DRAM, SRAM, EDO RAM, Rambus RAM, etc., or a non-volatile memory such as a magnetic media, e.g., a hard drive, or optical storage. The memory medium may comprise other types of memory as well, or combinations thereof. In addition, the memory medium may be located in a first computer in which the programs are executed, or may be located in a second different computer which connects to the first computer over a network. In the latter instance, the second computer provides the program instructions to the first computer for execution. Also, the server **102** may take various forms, including a computer system, mainframe computer system, workstation, or other device. In general, the term “computer system” or “server” can be broadly defined to encompass any device having a processor that executes instructions from a memory medium.

[0031] The memory medium preferably stores software for an e-commerce system to enable a user to configure and/or view a product according to the methods or flowcharts described below. The software program may be implemented in any of various ways, including procedure-based techniques, component-based techniques, and/or object-oriented techniques, among others. For example, the software program may be implemented using ActiveX controls, C++ objects, Java objects, Microsoft Foundation Classes (MFC), or other technologies or methodologies, as desired. As another example, the dynamic web page generation may be implemented using technologies such as Common Gateway Interface (CGI), Java Servlets, Active Server Pages (ASP) and other similar technologies. A CPU, such as the host CPU, executing code and data from a memory medium comprises a means for implementing an e-commerce system to enable a user to configure a product according to the methods or flowcharts described below.

[0032] Various embodiments further include receiving or storing instructions and/or data implemented in accordance with the foregoing description upon a carrier medium. Suitable carrier media include memory media or storage media such as magnetic or optical media, e.g., disk or CD-ROM, as well as signals such as electrical, electromagnetic, or digital signals, conveyed via a communication medium such as networks and/or a wireless link.

[0033] FIGS. 2A and 2B: E-Commerce Flowchart

[0034] FIGS. 2A and 2B are a flowchart which illustrate one embodiment of an e-commerce method wherein a user of an e-commerce system may visually configure a product, and wherein the product may be visually depicted, consistent with the user configured product options.

[0035] In step **20**, a user or customer, using the client system **106** executing web browser software, submits a request to the e-commerce server **102** to purchase a customizable product offered by the vendor's web site.

[0036] Some products may be purchased ‘off-the-shelf’, i.e., without further modification. Some other products, referred to herein as configurable products, may require the customer to specify additional options or select certain

components of the product, which may require further modification to the ‘off-the-shelf’ product before being shipped to the customer. Purchasing of a configurable product, such as a computer system, an automobile, a test, measurement, or an automation system, each with numerous user selectable attributes, may complicate the purchasing decision for the user. A configurable product, often simply referred to as a system, may include many user selectable or configurable or specifiable components. These components may often be assembled and packaged together on a customer specific basis for a specific purchase order. The process of specifying or selecting or configuring one or more components of the product may be described as customization of the product.

[0037] A product may be described as being customizable if it includes one or more attributes, properties or components that may be selected, configured or specified by the customer. One or more components of a product may be described as being customizable if the one or more components include attributes or properties that may be selected or configured, or where the user may select one of various possible component options. Customizable component options may be included for every customizable component. After a customizable component has been selected for configuration, the customizable component options may then be presented or displayed, wherein the user can select one or several of the customizable component options to specify the customizable component. A customizable component option that is selected by the user becomes a customizable component selection. Customizable component selections applied to a customizable product specify a customized product.

[0038] FIG. 5 illustrates a measurement system, which is one example of a customizable product. Customizable components of a measurement system may include plug-in data acquisition board **520**, software **522**, computer **512**, signal conditioning boards **521**, sensor/transducer **524**, etc. When the user specifies selections for one or more customizable components, the measurement system may be described as a customized product, which has been designed to meet the requirements for a specific user. FIG. 6 illustrates a computer system, which is another example of a customizable product. Other examples of customizable products include, but are not limited to, audio systems, video systems, televisions, automobiles, etc.

[0039] In step **22**, the e-commerce server for the vendor's web site may receive a customer request to purchase a customizable product. The e-commerce server may parse the customer request to generate a response. For example, the customer may be browsing the vendor's web site and select the customizable product for possible purchase.

[0040] In step **24**, the e-commerce server **102** sends data and information related to the requested customizable product to the client system **106** for display. In step **24** the e-commerce server **102** may send data and information related to the customizable component options of the customizable product.

[0041] In step **26**, the client system **106** receives the data and information sent by the e-commerce server **102**. The client system **106** may then display an image or graphics, such as in the form of a graphical user interface (GUI) in response to the data received from the e-commerce server

102. The graphical user interface (GUI) transmitted by the e-commerce server **102** in step **24** which is used to customize the requested product may take various shapes or forms.

[0042] In one embodiment, the GUI may be in the form of a menu. Customizable components of the customizable product and customizable component options for the customizable component may be listed. **FIG. 3** illustrates an example of a portion of a forms based GUI to select customizable components of a product. The user may be allowed to select customizable component options, e.g., select choices, by clicking in a check box, in one embodiment, or selecting a radio button, in another embodiment. Text corresponding to the customizable components of the customizable product and/or the customizable component options may be displayed in close proximity to each other, in one embodiment.

[0043] In another embodiment, the GUI may be in the form of an image or a graphic visually depicting the customizable product. The customizable components of the product may be visually depicted on the image of the customizable product, preferably in close proximity to or "at" the respective location on the product displayed on the client system **106** screen. For example, **FIG. 4** illustrates one embodiment of a GUI visually depicting an image of a measurement system which has already been customized. In **FIG. 4**, each of the slots in the chassis may represent a customizable component. The customizable component options of the customizable components may also be visually depicted. For example, in **FIG. 4** the customizable component options may be displayed in menus under the image of the customizable product. Alternatively, the customizable component options may be displayed in close proximity to the respective location of the customizable component on the image of the customizable product displayed on the client system **106**.

[0044] The customizable components, i.e., the displayed images of the customizable components, may be highlighted or clearly identified in some way to indicate to the user that the respective component is customizable. The user may activate the selection process for a customizable component by clicking on the component or area. In another embodiment, when the user drags a cursor of the client system **106** over the component or area, a pop-up window or menu may appear to enable the user to select or configure the customizable component. The pop-up window, in one embodiment, may include text information displayed in close proximity to the image of the associated customizable component which displays or indicates the customizable component options. In another embodiment, a user may use other drag-and-drop techniques to make customizable component selections.

[0045] In step **28**, in one embodiment, as the user selects or configures the one or more customizable components, i.e., as the user selects customizable component options for each customizable component, the client system **106** submits the selections for the one or more customizable components to the vendor's e-commerce server **102**. In step **30**, the vendor's e-commerce server **102** receives the data and information associated with the customer selections.

[0046] In one embodiment, on receiving the data and information associated with the customer selections, the e-commerce server **102** may perform further processing to prepare a response or display the current configuration

selected. Thus, further processing of the data and information received may include preparing a response to display an image or a drawing to visually depict the current 'as ordered' customized product on a customer screen.

[0047] Instead of having every possible combination of user selectable options and their corresponding product images stored in separate graphics files. In one embodiment, each customizable component image of the product may be stored in graphic files. The e-commerce server **106** preferably dynamically integrates the separately stored images into a single image or a drawing to visually depict the current or final 'as ordered' customized product. The dynamic web page generation can be implemented in an e-commerce server by using technologies like Common Gateway Interface (CGI), Java Servlets, Active Server Pages (ASP) and other similar technologies.

[0048] In step **32**, the vendor's e-commerce server **106** sends the data and information to the client system **106** to enable it to generate a display to visually depict the current or final 'as ordered' customized product. In step **34**, the client system **106**, in one embodiment, generates a GUI to visually depict the 'as ordered' customized product. The GUI, in another embodiment, utilizes 'What You See Is What You Get' (WSYIWYG) techniques to display a photo or an image or a graphic to visually represent the specific, customized product ordered by the customer. **FIG. 4** illustrates one embodiment of a visual depiction of a customized product ordered by the customer. The user may verify the visually depicted customized product for accuracy, completeness, etc. prior to proceeding with payment and final check out.

[0049] In one embodiment, the process of selecting one or more customizable components of a customizable product, then subsequently selecting the customizable component options for the selected customizable component, and then displaying the current configuration, may be an interactive process performed in real-time. The user may select a first customizable component of a customizable product, view a plurality of options for the customizable component, and may then make a first customizable component selection among the various options associated with the first customizable component. The client system **106** may receive and display an image substantially like the current configured product, including an image of the first customizable component selection for the first customizable component, for user verification, etc. Thus where the user has selected a module for a certain slot of the PXI chassis of **FIG. 4**, the e-commerce server **102** may transmit an image displaying the current state of the PXI chassis with the selected module comprised in the chassis. The interactive process may continue until the user has selected the desired number or required number of customizable components and/or customizable component options. Thus steps **28** through **34** may be repeated in an interactive manner in real-time until the user evaluates, confirms and completes the purchase of the customized product.

[0050] In another embodiment, the process of selecting customizable components and visually depicting the selections of the customized product may be a batch process, wherein the user may select options for each of the one or more customizable components of a customizable product and may submit a single request to the e-commerce server

for all user selections. The client system **106** may generate a GUI to visually depict, e.g., an image substantially like the purchased product, the final customized product for user verification, etc. The user may then verify the accuracy, etc. of the visually depicted customized product. If the displayed customized product is found not to meet user requirements, then steps **28** through **34** may be repeated till the user requirements have been met and the user completes the transaction to purchase the customized product.

[0051] FIG. 5: Measurement System—An Example of a Customizable Product

[0052] FIG. 5 illustrates an exemplary measurement system **510**, which is one embodiment of a customizable product. The system **510** comprises a computer **512**, which connects to one or more instruments. The one or more instruments may include a GPIB (general purpose interface bus) instrument **514**, a VXI (VME eXtension for Instrumentation) chassis **516** comprising one or more VXI card instruments, a serial instrument **518** and/or a data acquisition board **520**. The GPIB instrument **514** may be coupled to the computer **512** via a GPIB interface provided by the computer **512**. The VXI instrument **516** may be coupled to the computer **512** via a VXI bus or MXI bus provided by the computer. The serial instrument **518** may be coupled to the computer **512** through a serial port, such as an RS-232 port, provided by the computer **512**. Finally, the data acquisition device **520** may be coupled to the computer **512**, typically by being plugged in to an I/O slot in the computer such as a PCI bus slot, provided by the computer **512**. The data acquisition device **520** may couple through signal conditioning logic. In typical measurement systems an instrument will not be present of each interface type and in fact many systems may only have one or more instruments of a single interface type, such as only GPIB instruments.

[0053] The instruments may be for coupling to a unit under test (UUT) **523**, a process, or are coupled to receive field signals, typically generated by sensors or transducers **524** which have been designed to measure variables such as temperature, flow, pressure, motion, etc. related to the UUT **523**. The measurement system **510** may be used in a data acquisition and control application, or may instead be used in a test and measurement application. If the system **510** is used in a data acquisition application, the system **510** also preferably includes signal conditioning circuitry **521** coupled between the data acquisition board **520** and transducers **524**.

[0054] As discussed above, the user may configure a customized measurement system by specifying customizable component selections of various customizable components in the customizable measurement system. The customization process may be performed in any desired manner, such as starting with the transducers **524** and ending up with the computer **512**. For example, the user may start customization with the selection of the sensor/transducers **524**, selection of signal conditioning modules **521**, selection of the type of data acquisition device **520** that has the desired sample rate, desired number of channels, desired accuracy, etc., and then selection of the appropriate software for the user's application, e.g., LabVIEW, NI-DAQ driver level software, and possibly selection of the type of computer **512**. The customizable components may include, but may not be limited to, one or more types of data acquisition board **520**,

one or more types of signal condition modules that make up signal conditioning circuitry **521**, type of bus interface (GPIB, VXI, MXI, etc.), type of VXI, GPIB or serial instruments, software **522**. The term "instrument" used herein also includes software code or software objects, which implement instrument functionality or are used to control instruments.

[0055] FIG. 6: Computer System—An Example of a Customizable Product

[0056] FIG. 6 illustrates a computer system **790**, which is another embodiment of a customizable product. Customizable components of computer system may include CPU type, memory type and/or amount (system memory and non-volatile memory), and selection of add-in cards or boards **710**, video monitor or display **700**, keyboard **720**, CD-ROM **730**, pointing device **740**, printer **750**, scanner **760**, and other peripherals **770**. Peripherals **770** may include devices such as CRT/video monitor **700**, keyboard **720**, CD-ROM **730**, mouse **740**, printer **750**, scanner **760**, floppy disk (not shown), etc. The customizable components of the computer system may also include the software, e.g., operating system and desired applications. The above are merely examples of customizable components, it being noted that various other components or attributes may be selectable by a user in configuring a computer system

[0057] The various CPU options may include CPU type, e.g., Intel Pentium, Intel Merced, AMD Athlon, PowerPC, as well as the CPU speed, e.g., 500 MHz, 600 MHz, 700 MHz, etc.

[0058] The various memory options may include system memory type, such as standard DRAM, RAMBUS RAM, synchronous DRAM, etc., memory speed, and amount of memory, e.g., 64 Mbytes, 128 Mbytes, 256 Mbytes. The various memory options may also include non-volatile memory options such as size, e.g., 6 Gbytes, 10 Gbytes, 20 Gbytes etc., type, e.g., magnetic or optical storage, and access time, among others.

[0059] The various add-in card options may include choice of sound card and speakers, choice of video card, choice of 3D graphics card, choice of modem or other communications device, choice of network card, and choice of instrument or automation cards, among others.

[0060] The various display options may include display size, e.g., 15" viewable area, 17" viewable area, and display type, e.g., analog CRT, LCD, flat screen, as well as refresh rate, resolution, etc.

[0061] The various peripheral options may include selections among different types of keyboards, such as ergonomic keyboards, type and speed of CD-ROM, type of pointing device, such as mouse, trackball, choice of printer, scanner, and other peripherals.

[0062] The various software options may include the operating system, e.g., Windows 98, Windows 2000, Windows NT, Linux, Mac OS, and applications, such as word processing software, web browser software, games, etc.

[0063] The user may initiate the customization process by selecting the customizable components of the computer system **790**. The customization process may utilize a menu or forms based approach, including use of menus and sub-menus. In another example, as illustrated in **FIG. 6**, the

customization process may utilize a visual approach to customize the customizable components of the product. For example, the vendor may visually depict the computer system on a client system **106** screen, and the user may select images of the customizable components for customization. As noted above, the visual based approach to product customization process may identify, with the use of color, animation, etc., all customizable components of a product. The user may click on an image of a customizable component for further selection and/or specification.

[0064] Using a hierarchical approach in the selection process, the environment related selections may specify a country where the computer may be installed, thereby specifying the power voltage/frequency requirements, telephone requirements, audio/video requirements, language preferences, etc. The hardware selections may include all boards for the computer system **790**, including motherboard, memory board, I/O boards, etc., storage devices and then branching out to the peripheral devices such as printer **750**, etc. The software selections may include the type of operating system, the type of web browser, optional application software, etc.

[0065] Numerous variations and modifications will become apparent to those skilled in the art once the above disclosure is fully appreciated. It is intended that the following claims be interpreted to embrace all such variations and modifications.

What is claimed is:

1. A method for enabling a user to configure a system in an e-commerce system, wherein the e-commerce system includes a client system coupled through a network to an electronic commerce server, the method comprising:

receiving a request from a user of the client system to configure the system, wherein the system includes one or more customizable components;

providing an image of the system to the client system for display, wherein images of at least a subset of the one or more customizable components form at least a portion of the image of the system;

receiving customizable component selections for at least one of the one or more customizable components of the system in response to user input, wherein said receiving customizable component selections comprises:

receiving user input selecting an image of a first customizable component which is visually depicted in the image of the system, wherein said receiving user input selecting the image of the first customizable component operates to select the first customizable component for configuration; and

receiving user input selecting a first customizable component option for the first customizable component, wherein the user input selecting the first customizable component option comprises the customizable component selection for the first customizable component;

wherein the customizable component selections applied to the system specify a configured system.

2. The method of claim 1 further comprising providing an image of the configured system to the client system for

display, wherein the image of the configured system visually depicts the customizable component selections of the user.

3. The method of claim 2 wherein said providing the image of the configured system includes providing customizable component selection images corresponding to the customizable component selections of the user.

4. The method of claim 3 wherein at least a subset of the customizable component selection images are visually depicted at their respective locations on the image of the configured system.

5. The method of claim 2 wherein said providing the image of the configured system includes providing text corresponding to the customizable component selections of the user;

wherein the text is displayed in the image of the configured system.

6. The method of claim 2 wherein the image of the configured system is viewable by the user and used by the user to evaluate and confirm the customizable component selections.

7. The method of claim 2 further comprising:

receiving one or more new customizable component selections for at least one of the one or more customizable components of the configured system after said providing the image of the configured system to the client system, wherein the new customizable component selections applied to the configured system specify a new configured system;

providing an image of the new configured system, wherein the image of the new configured system visually depicts the new customizable component selections of the user.

8. The method of claim 7 wherein said receiving selections includes:

receiving user input selecting a first customizable component;

providing a menu of possible options for the first customizable component to the client system for display after the user input selecting the first customizable component;

receiving user input selecting one of the possible options for the first customizable component.

9. The method of claim 1 wherein said receiving user input selecting the image of the first customizable component further includes:

receiving user input indicating that a position of a cursor of the client system overlaps a location of the image of the first customizable component displayed in the image of the system.

10. The method of claim 1 wherein said receiving customizable component selections further includes:

providing a menu comprising customizable component options of the first customizable component for display on the client system after said receiving user input selecting the image of the first customizable component.

11. The method of claim 10 wherein the menu comprising the customizable component options includes text indicating the customizable component options.

12. The method of claim 10 wherein the menu comprising the customizable component options includes images indicating the customizable component options.

13. The method of claim 10 wherein the menu is operable to be displayed proximate to the location of the image of the first customizable component

14. The method of claim 10 wherein said receiving customizable component selections further includes:

providing a sequence of images corresponding to the customizable component options of the first customizable component after said receiving user input selecting the image of the first customizable component.

15. The method of claim 10 wherein said receiving user input selecting the first customizable component option includes:

providing customizable component option images corresponding to the customizable component options of the first customizable component;

receiving user input selecting a first customizable component option image corresponding to the first customizable component option.

16. The method of claim 1 further comprising:

providing an image of the first customizable component option for display on the client system in response to said receiving user input selecting the first customizable component option for the first customizable component.

17. A method for enabling a user to configure a measurement system in an e-commerce system, wherein the e-commerce system includes a client system coupled through a network to an electronic commerce server, the method comprising:

receiving a request from a user of the client system to configure the measurement system, wherein the measurement system includes one or more customizable components, wherein at least one of the customizable components is a measurement device;

providing an image of the measurement system to the client system for display, wherein images of at least a subset of the one or more customizable components form at least a portion of the image of the measurement system;

receiving customizable component selections for at least one of the one or more customizable components of the measurement system in response to user input, wherein said receiving customizable component selections comprises:

receiving user input selecting an image of a first customizable component which is visually depicted in the image of the measurement system, wherein said receiving user input selecting the image of the first customizable component operates to select the first customizable component for configuration; and

receiving user input selecting a first customizable component option for the first customizable component, wherein the user input selecting the first customizable component option comprises the customizable component selection for the first customizable component;

wherein the customizable component selections applied to the measurement system specify a configured measurement system.

18. The method of claim 17 further comprising providing an image of the configured measurement system to the client system for display, wherein the image of the configured measurement system visually depicts the customizable component selections of the user.

19. The method of claim 18 wherein said providing the image of the configured measurement system includes providing customizable component selection images corresponding to the customizable component selections of the user.

20. The method of claim 19 wherein at least a subset of the customizable component selection images are visually depicted at their respective locations on the image of the configured measurement system.

21. The method of claim 18 wherein said providing the image of the configured measurement system includes providing text corresponding to the customizable component selections of the user;

wherein the text is displayed in the image of the configured measurement system.

22. The method of claim 18 wherein the image of the configured measurement system is viewable by the user and used by the user to evaluate and confirm the customizable component selections.

23. The method of claim 18 further comprising:

receiving one or more new customizable component selections for at least one of the one or more customizable components of the configured measurement system after said providing the image of the configured measurement system to the client system, wherein the new customizable component selections applied to the configured measurement system specify a new configured measurement system;

providing an image of the new configured measurement system, wherein the image of the new configured measurement system visually depicts the new customizable component selections of the user.

24. The method of claim 23 wherein said receiving selections includes:

receiving user input selecting a first customizable component;

providing a menu of possible options for the first customizable component to the client system for display after the user input selecting the first customizable component;

receiving user input selecting one of the possible options for the first customizable component.

25. The method of claim 17 wherein said receiving user input selecting the image of the first customizable component further includes:

receiving user input indicating that a position of a cursor of the client system overlaps a location of the image of the first customizable component displayed in the image of the measurement system.

26. The method of claim 17 wherein said receiving customizable component selections further includes:

providing a menu comprising customizable component options of the first customizable component for display on the client system after said receiving user input selecting the image of the first customizable component.

27. The method of claim 26 wherein the menu comprising the customizable component options includes text indicating the customizable component options.

28. The method of claim 26 wherein the menu comprising the customizable component options includes images indicating the customizable component options.

29. The method of claim 26 wherein the menu is operable to be displayed proximate to the location of the image of the first customizable component

30. The method of claim 26 wherein said receiving customizable component selections further includes:

providing a sequence of images corresponding to the customizable component options of the first customizable component after said receiving user input selecting the image of the first customizable component.

31. The method of claim 26 wherein said receiving user input selecting the first customizable component option includes:

providing customizable component option images corresponding to the customizable component options of the first customizable component;

receiving user input selecting a first customizable component option image corresponding to the first customizable component option.

32. The method of claim 17 further comprising:

providing an image of the first customizable component option for display on the client system in response to said receiving user input selecting the first customizable component option for the first customizable component.

33. A method for enabling a user to configure a computer system in an e-commerce system, wherein the e-commerce system includes a client system coupled through a network to an electronic commerce server, the method comprising:

receiving a request from a user of the client system to configure the computer system, wherein the computer system includes one or more customizable components, wherein at least one of the customizable components is an electronic device;

providing an image of the computer system to the client system for display, wherein images of at least a subset of the one or more customizable components form at least a portion of the image of the computer system;

receiving customizable component selections for at least one of the one or more customizable components of the computer system in response to user input, wherein said receiving customizable component selections comprises:

receiving user input selecting an image of a first customizable component which is visually depicted in the image of the computer system, wherein said receiving user input selecting the image of the first customizable component operates to select the first customizable component for configuration; and

receiving user input selecting a first customizable component option for the first customizable component, wherein the user input selecting the first customizable component option comprises the customizable component selection for the first customizable component;

wherein the customizable component selections applied to the computer system specify a configured computer system.

34. The method of claim 33 further comprising providing an image of the configured computer system to the client system for display, wherein the image of the configured computer system visually depicts the customizable component selections of the user.

35. The method of claim 34 wherein said providing the image of the configured computer system includes providing customizable component selection images corresponding to the customizable component selections of the user.

36. The method of claim 35 wherein at least a subset of the customizable component selection images are visually depicted at their respective locations on the image of the configured computer system.

37. The method of claim 34 wherein said providing the image of the configured computer system includes providing text corresponding to the customizable component selections of the user;

wherein the text is displayed in the image of the configured computer system.

38. The method of claim 34 wherein the image of the configured computer system is viewable by the user and used by the user to evaluate and confirm the customizable component selections.

39. The method of claim 34 further comprising:

receiving one or more new customizable component selections for at least one of the one or more customizable components of the configured computer system after said providing the image of the configured computer system to the client system, wherein the new customizable component selections applied to the configured computer system specify a new configured computer system;

providing an image of the new configured computer system, wherein the image of the new configured computer system visually depicts the new customizable component selections of the user.

40. The method of claim 39 wherein said receiving selections includes:

receiving user input selecting a first customizable component;

providing a menu of possible options for the first customizable component to the client system for display after the user input selecting the first customizable component;

receiving user input selecting one of the possible options for the first customizable component.

41. The method of claim 33 wherein said receiving user input selecting the image of the first customizable component further includes:

receiving user input indicating that a position of a cursor of the client system overlaps a location of the image of

the first customizable component displayed in the image of the computer system.

42. The method of claim 33 wherein said receiving customizable component selections further includes:

providing a menu comprising customizable component options of the first customizable component for display on the client system after said receiving user input selecting the image of the first customizable component.

43. The method of claim 42 wherein the menu comprising the customizable component options includes text indicating the customizable component options.

44. The method of claim 42 wherein the menu comprising the customizable component options includes images indicating the customizable component options.

45. The method of claim 42 wherein the menu is operable to be displayed proximate to the location of the image of the first customizable component

46. The method of claim 42 wherein said receiving customizable component selections further includes:

providing a sequence of images corresponding to the customizable component options of the first customizable component after said receiving user input selecting the image of the first customizable component.

47. The method of claim 42 wherein said receiving user input selecting the first customizable component option includes:

providing customizable component option images corresponding to the customizable component options of the first customizable component;

receiving user input selecting a first customizable component option image corresponding to the first customizable component option.

48. The method of claim 33 further comprising:

providing an image of the first customizable component option for display on the client system in response to said receiving user input selecting the first customizable component option for the first customizable component.

49. A memory medium comprising program instructions for enabling a user to configure a system in an e-commerce system, wherein the e-commerce system includes a client system coupled through a network to an electronic commerce server, wherein the program instructions are executable to implement:

receiving a request from a user of the client system to configure the system, wherein the system includes one or more customizable components;

providing an image of the system to the client system for display, wherein images of at least a subset of the one or more customizable components form at least a portion of the image of the system;

receiving customizable component selections for at least one of the one or more customizable components of the system in response to user input, wherein said receiving customizable component selections comprises:

receiving user input selecting an image of a first customizable component which is visually depicted in the image of the system, wherein said receiving user input selecting the image of the first customiz-

able component operates to select the first customizable component for configuration; and

receiving user input selecting a first customizable component option for the first customizable component, wherein the user input selecting the first customizable component option comprises the customizable component selection for the first customizable component;

wherein the customizable component selections applied to the system specify a configured system.

50. A memory medium comprising program instructions for enabling a user to configure a computer system in an e-commerce system, wherein the e-commerce system includes a client system coupled through a network to an electronic commerce server, wherein the program instructions are executable to implement:

receiving a request from a user of the client system to configure the computer system, wherein the computer system includes one or more customizable components, wherein at least one of the customizable components is an electronic device;

providing an image of the computer system to the client system for display, wherein images of at least a subset of the one or more customizable components form at least a portion of the image of the computer system;

receiving customizable component selections for at least one of the one or more customizable components of the computer system in response to user input, wherein said receiving customizable component selections comprises:

receiving user input selecting an image of a first customizable component which is visually depicted in the image of the computer system, wherein said receiving user input selecting the image of the first customizable component operates to select the first customizable component for configuration; and

receiving user input selecting a first customizable component option for the first customizable component, wherein the user input selecting the first customizable component option comprises the customizable component selection for the first customizable component;

wherein the customizable component selections applied to the computer system specify a configured computer system.

51. A memory medium comprising program instructions for enabling a user to configure a measurement system in an e-commerce system, wherein the e-commerce system includes a client system coupled through a network to an electronic commerce server, wherein the program instructions are executable to implement:

receiving a request from a user of the client system to configure the measurement system, wherein the measurement system includes one or more customizable components, wherein at least one of the customizable components is a measurement device;

providing an image of the measurement system to the client system for display, wherein images of at least a

subset of the one or more customizable components form at least a portion of the image of the measurement system;

receiving customizable component selections for at least one of the one or more customizable components of the measurement system in response to user input, wherein said receiving customizable component selections comprises:

receiving user input selecting an image of a first customizable component which is visually depicted in the image of the measurement system, wherein said receiving user input selecting the image of the

first customizable component operates to select the first customizable component for configuration; and receiving user input selecting a first customizable component option for the first customizable component, wherein the user input selecting the first customizable component option comprises the customizable component selection for the first customizable component;

wherein the customizable component selections applied to the measurement system specify a configured measurement system.

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