US007155451B1

(12) **United States Patent**
Torres

(10) **Patent No.: US 7,155,451 B1**
(45) **Date of Patent: Dec. 26, 2006**

(54) **AUTOMATED BROWSING SYSTEM FOR PUBLISHERS AND USERS ON NETWORKS SERVING INTERNET AND REMOTE DEVICES**

(76) Inventor: **Damon C. Torres**, 245 E. 11th St., Apt. 5J, New York, NY (US) 10003

(*) Notice: Subject to any disclaimer, the term of this patent is extended or adjusted under 35 U.S.C. 154(b) by 1072 days.

(21) Appl. No.: **09/144,906**

(22) Filed: **Sep. 1, 1998**

Related U.S. Application Data

(63) Continuation-in-part of application No. 08/922,063, filed on Sep. 2, 1997.

(60) Provisional application No. 60/025,360, filed on Sep. 3, 1996.

(51) **Int. Cl.**
G06F 17/00 (2006.01)
G06F 7/00 (2006.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.** **707/104.1**; 715/501.1; 715/704

(58) **Field of Classification Search** 707/10, 707/103, 104, 501; 395/200.48, 200.49; 345/340–342, 348–350
See application file for complete search history.

(56) **References Cited**

U.S. PATENT DOCUMENTS

5,287,266 A * 2/1994 Malec et al. 705/1
5,363,482 A * 11/1994 Victor et al. 345/804
5,515,490 A * 5/1996 Buchanan et al. 707/500.1
5,548,702 A * 8/1996 Li et al. 345/346
5,654,886 A * 8/1997 Zereski et al. 702/3
5,717,923 A 2/1998 Dedrick 395/613
5,721,827 A * 2/1998 Logan et al. 395/200.47
5,732,216 A * 3/1998 Logan et al. 395/200.33
5,740,549 A * 4/1998 Reilly et al. 705/14
5,748,190 A 5/1998 Kjorsvik 345/329
5,758,151 A 5/1998 Milligan et al. 395/611
5,760,771 A * 6/1998 Blonder et al. 345/854
5,768,528 A 6/1998 Stumm 395/200.61
5,774,123 A 6/1998 Matson 345/357

(Continued)

FOREIGN PATENT DOCUMENTS

EP 0749081 A1 * 12/1996

OTHER PUBLICATIONS

Alan Braverman, "CCI Slide Show," @ <http://www.ncs2.uiuc.edu/sdg/software/xmosaic/cci/cci-slide-show.html>, Accesssed Jul. 20, 1999, Sep. 22, 1994.*

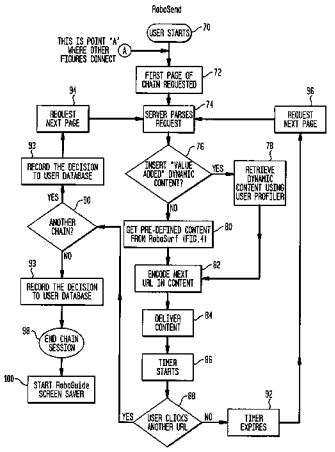
(Continued)

Primary Examiner—Luke S. Wassum
(74) *Attorney, Agent, or Firm*—Sofer & Haroun, L.L.P.

(57) **ABSTRACT**

A method of sequencing and scheduling web resources, via a software application that collects URLs and feeds them to a Web browser, so that the amount of clicks and decisions are reduced when browsing the Internet. The method begins after a computer user with Net-access encounters a URL that leads to a collection of other URLs that the software application has arranged to be presented in a continuous, show manner. This collection of resources then plays automatically, going from one resource to the next without the user being required to make a decision or click. The decision-making process is not inhibited, it is made optional. A method of inserting full-screen advertising, public service announcements, news, etc. has been developed. The server software application module described herein allows a publisher to stream URLs to a user who does not have the client-side software. The publishing module allows a user to format resources to a particularly desirable size and characteristic that promotes readability during a show viewing session. This same module can publish collections of nodes for others to view as a whole sequence, accessible via e-mail, screen saver or as a web resource.

64 Claims, 9 Drawing Sheets



U.S. PATENT DOCUMENTS

5,774,664	A		6/1998	Hidary et al.	395/200.48
5,774,666	A	*	6/1998	Portuesi	725/110
5,778,181	A		7/1998	Hidary et al.	395/200.48
5,778,187	A		7/1998	Monteiro et al.	395/200.61
5,781,186	A	*	7/1998	Jennings	707/500.1
5,796,952	A		8/1998	Davis et al.	395/200.54
5,799,157	A	*	8/1998	Escallon	395/227
5,799,292	A		8/1998	Hekmatpour	706/11
5,806,077	A		9/1998	Wecker	707/501
5,809,247	A	*	9/1998	Richardson et al.	709/218
5,819,273	A		10/1998	Vora et al.	707/10
5,822,525	A	*	10/1998	Tafoya et al.	395/200.34
5,848,396	A	*	12/1998	Gerace	705/10
5,905,492	A	*	5/1999	Straub et al.	345/333
5,918,012	A	*	6/1999	Astiz et al.	395/200.47
5,995,951	A	*	11/1999	Ferguson	706/10
6,008,807	A	*	12/1999	Bretschneider et al.	345/732
6,009,429	A	*	12/1999	Greer et al.	707/10
6,038,367	A	*	3/2000	Abecassis	386/46
6,084,582	A	*	7/2000	Qureshi et al.	345/302
6,182,072	B1		1/2001	Leak et al.	707/10
6,233,591	B1		5/2001	Sherman et al.	707/501
6,317,594	B1	*	11/2001	Gossman et al.	455/414

OTHER PUBLICATIONS

Franz J. Hauck, "Supporting Hierarchical Guided Tours in the World Wide Web," Fifth International World Wide Web Conference, @ <http://wwwsconf.inria.fr/pich_html/papers/p30/overview.html >, Accessed Jun. 30, 1999, May 1996.*

Hauck, Franz J. "Supporting Hierarchical Guided Tours in the World Wide Web", Fifth International World Wide Web Conference, May 6-10, 1996, downloaded from http://www5conf.inria.fr/fich_html/papers/P30/Overview.html, accessed Jun. 30, 1999.*

Hauck, F. "Supporting Hierarchical Guided Tours in the World Wide Web", Fifth International World Wide Web Conference, May 6-10, 1996.*

Microsoft Press, "Microsoft Powerpoint Handbook", Redmond:Microsoft Press, 1992, pp. 30-43, 274-285, 479-496.*

PCT Search Report Dated Jan. 28, 1999 (Citing the above 4 patents).

Video Tape Demonstration, "Celebrating the Past by Looking to the Future," Date Unknown.

"*Guided Tours and On-Line Presentation: How Authors make Existing Hypertext Intelligible for Readers*" Catherine C. Marshall and Pessy M. Irish. ACM Hypertext '89 Proceedings p. 15-26 Nov. 1989.

* cited by examiner

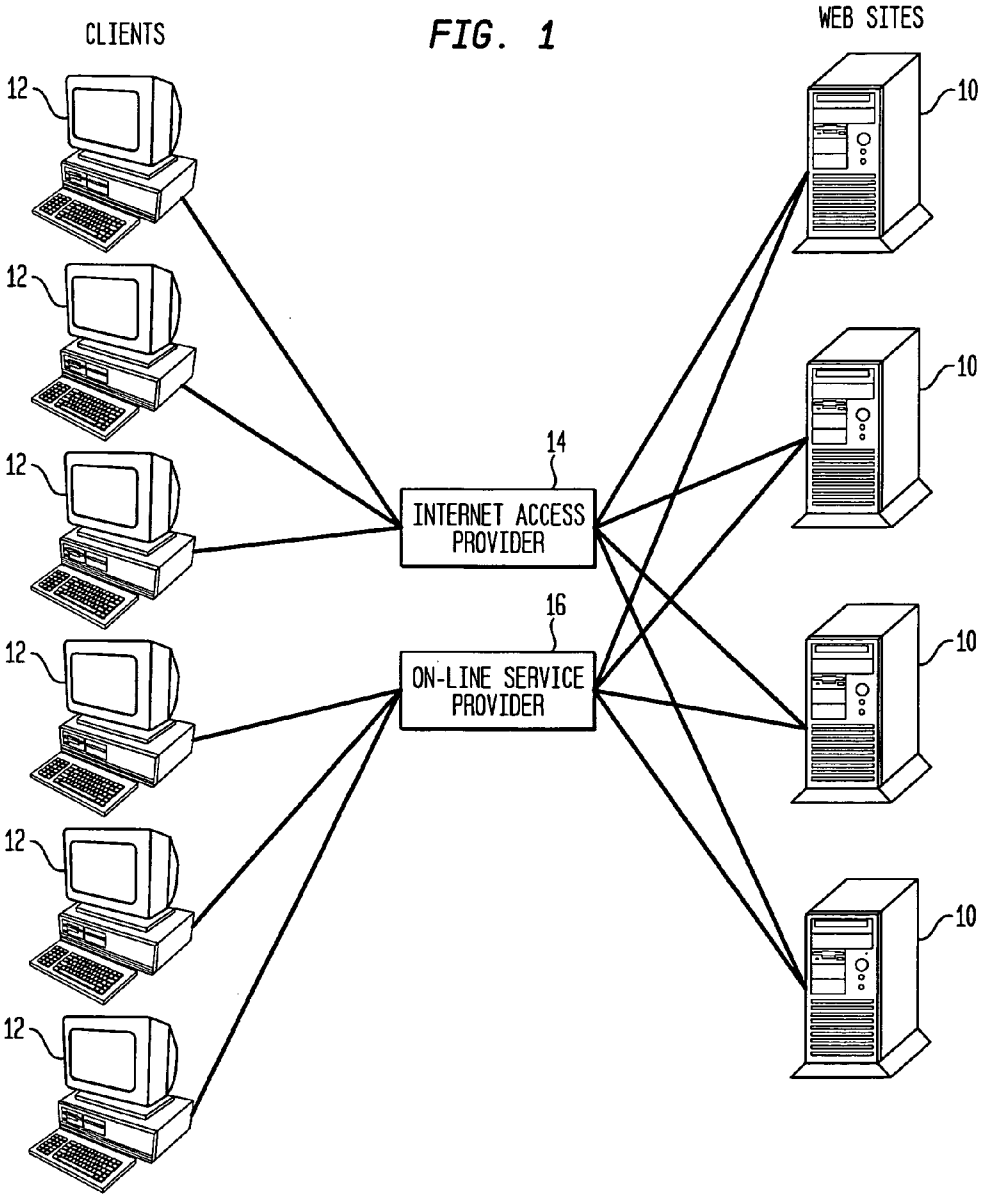
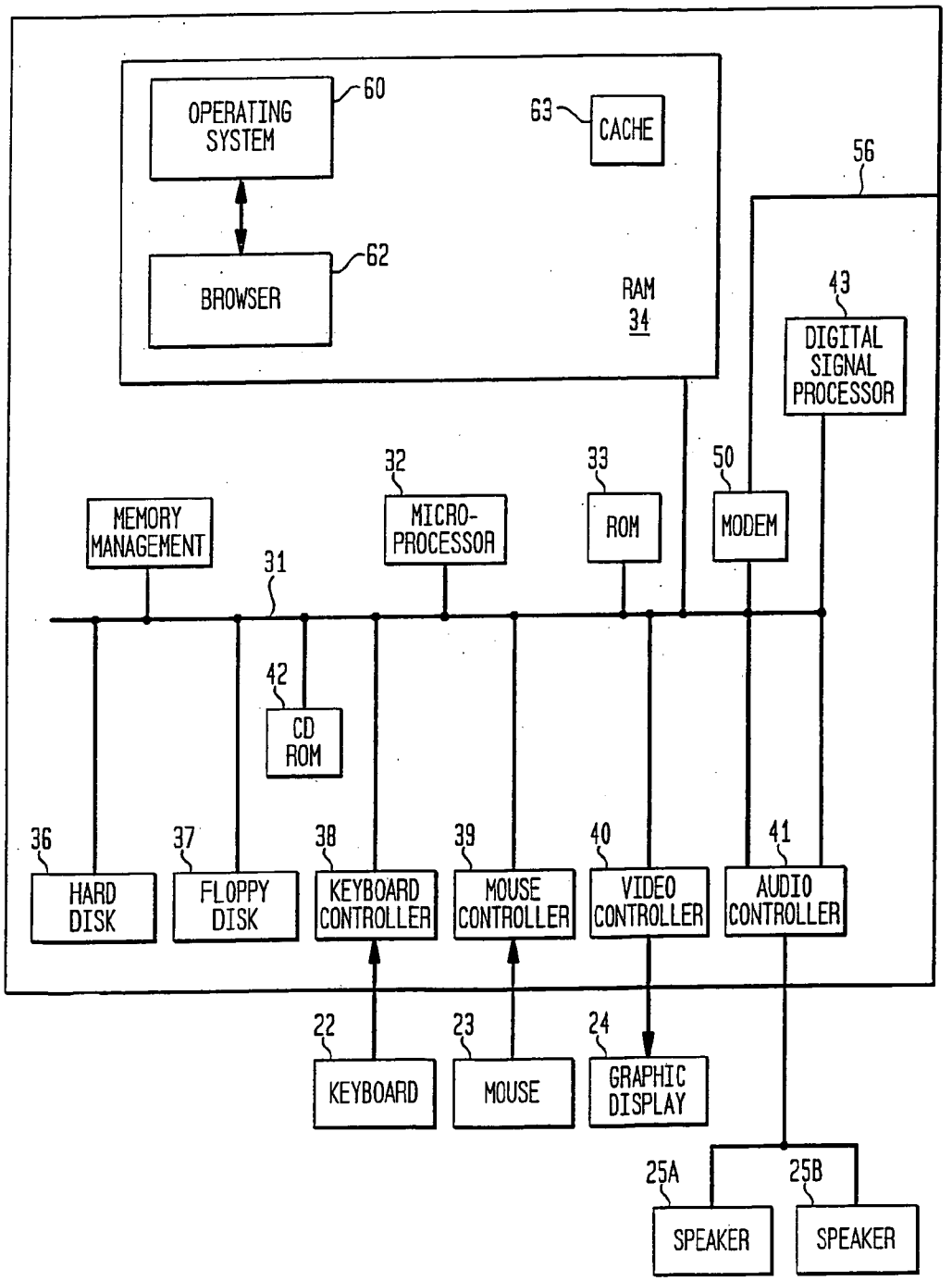
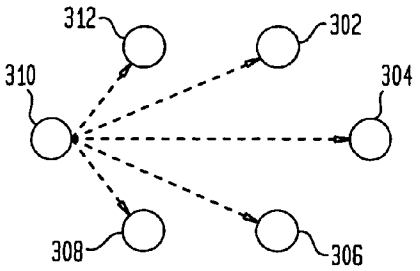

CLIENTS
FIG. 1
WEB SITES
12
12
12
12
12
12
14
INTERNET ACCESS PROVIDER
16
ON-LINE SERVICE PROVIDER
10
10
10
10

FIG. 2A


OPERATING SYSTEM
60
63
CACHE
56
BROWSER
62
RAM
34
43
DIGITAL SIGNAL PROCESSOR
32
33
50
MEMORY MANAGEMENT
MICRO-PROCESSOR
ROM
MODEM
31
42
CD ROM
36
37
38
39
40
41
HARD DISK
FLOPPY DISK
KEYBOARD CONTROLLER
MOUSE CONTROLLER
VIDEO CONTROLLER
AUDIO CONTROLLER
22
23
24
KEYBOARD
MOUSE
GRAPHIC DISPLAY
25A
25B
SPEAKER
SPEAKER

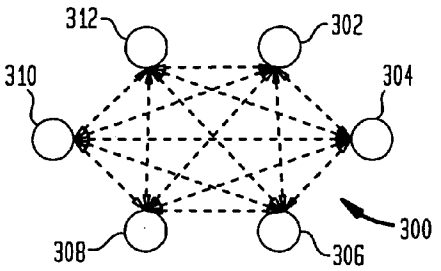
NODES AND PATHS THROUGH STRUCTURES

FIG. 2C



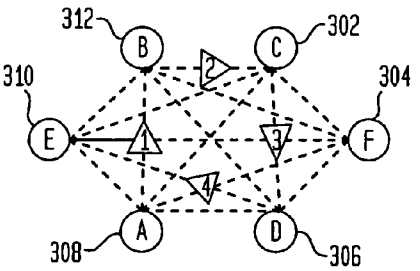
UNIQUE PATHS WITH THE SAME STARTING POINT AND A LENGTH OF ONE IN A NETWORK OF SIX RESOURCES

FIG. 2B



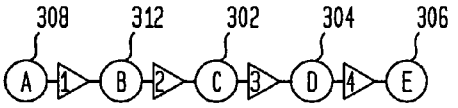
ALL POSSIBLE PATHS FROM ONE NODE TO ANOTHER IN A NETWORK OF SIX RESOURCES

FIG. 2D1



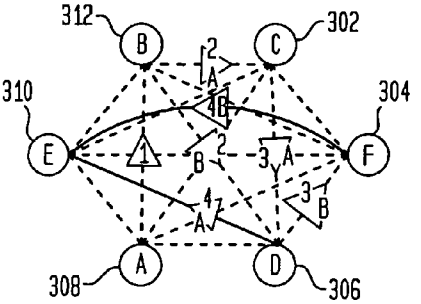
A PATH WITH A LENGTH OF FOUR IN A NETWORK OF SIX RESOURCES

FIG. 2D2



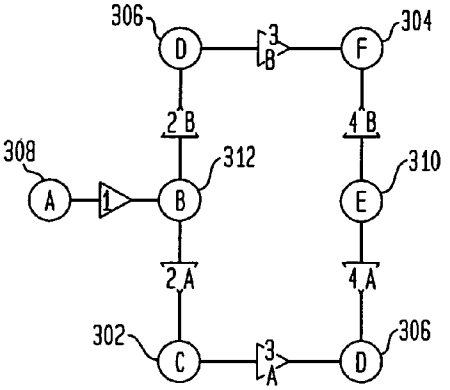
THE STATE MAP OF THE PREVIOUS PATH

FIG. 2E



A MULTIPATH WITH A LENGTH OF FOUR IN TWO POSSIBLE PATHS IN A NETWORK OF SIX RESOURCES

FIG. 2F



THE STATE MAP OF THE PREVIOUS PATH

FIG. 3
RoboSend

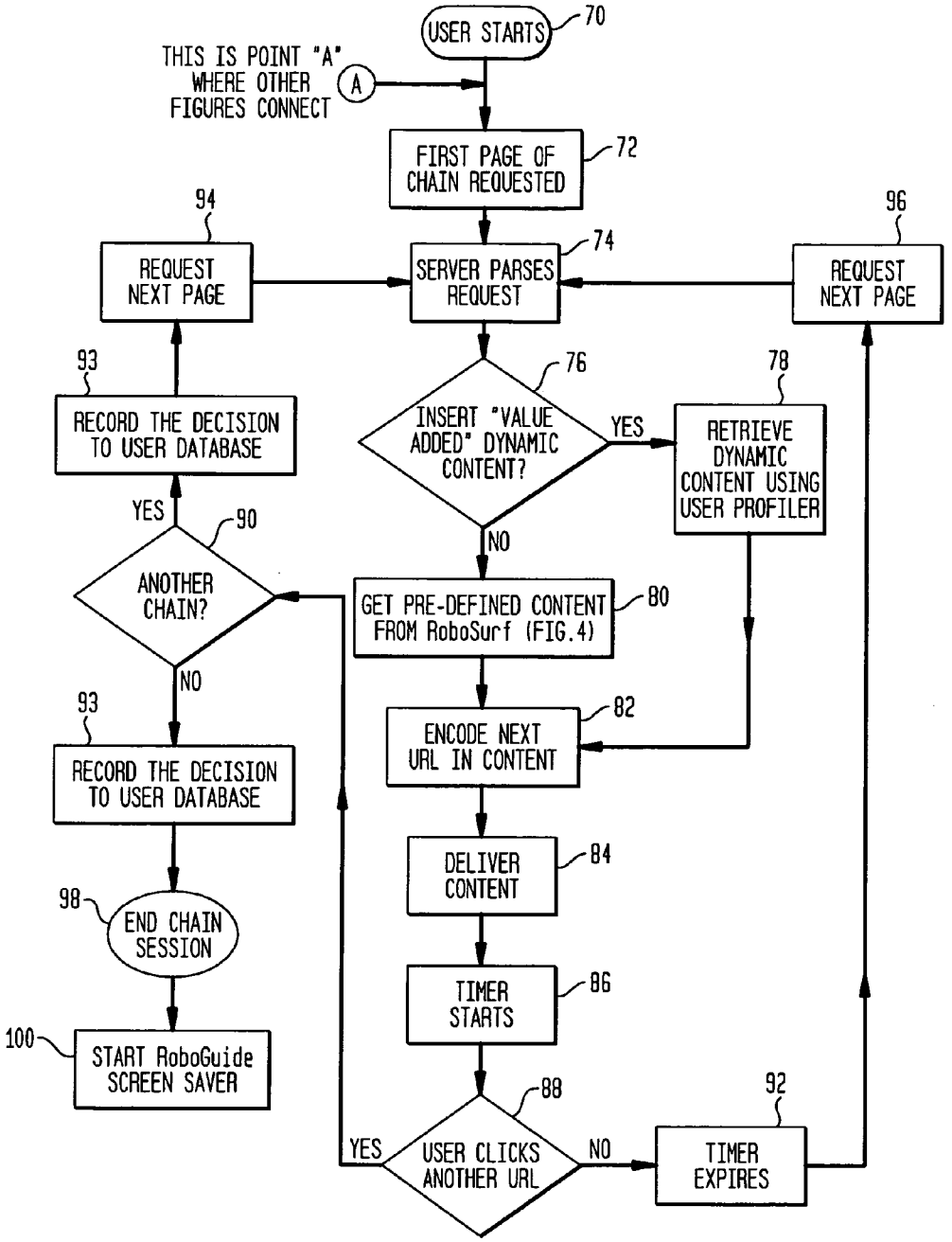


FIG. 4
RoboSurf

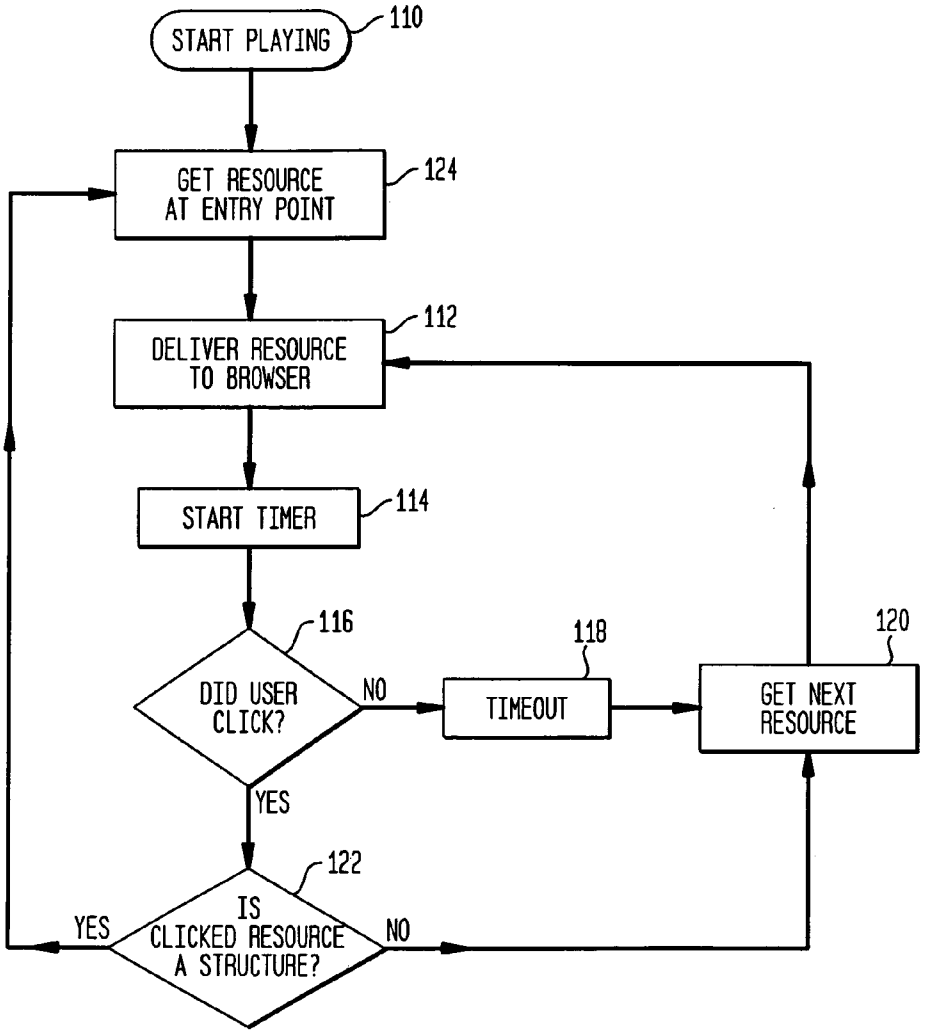


FIG. 5
RoboGuide

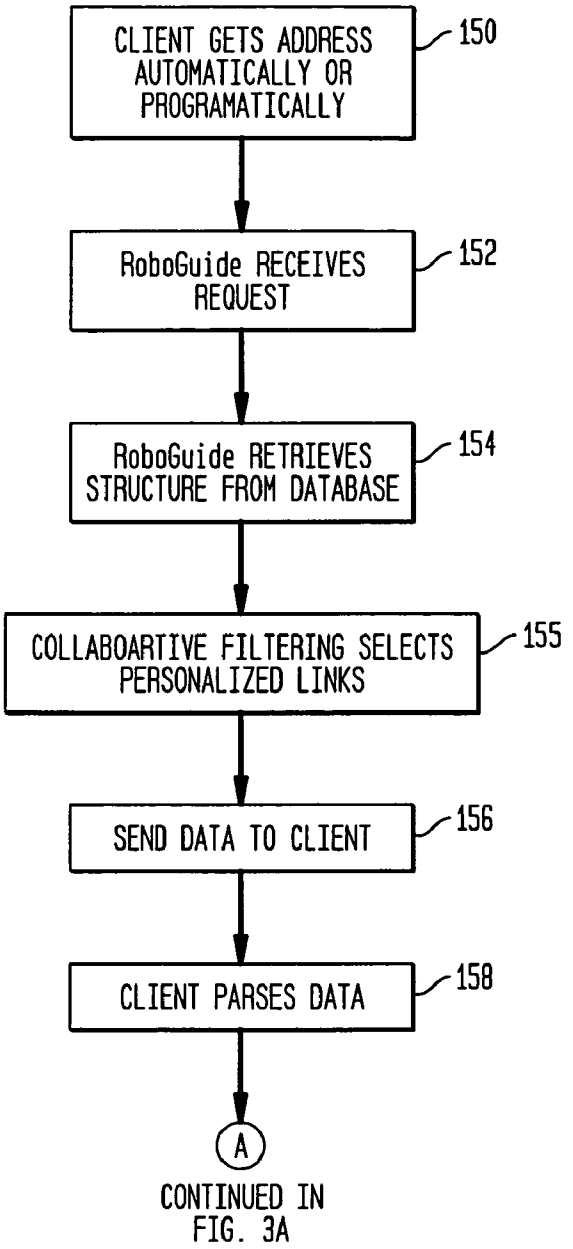


FIG. 6
RoboPublisher

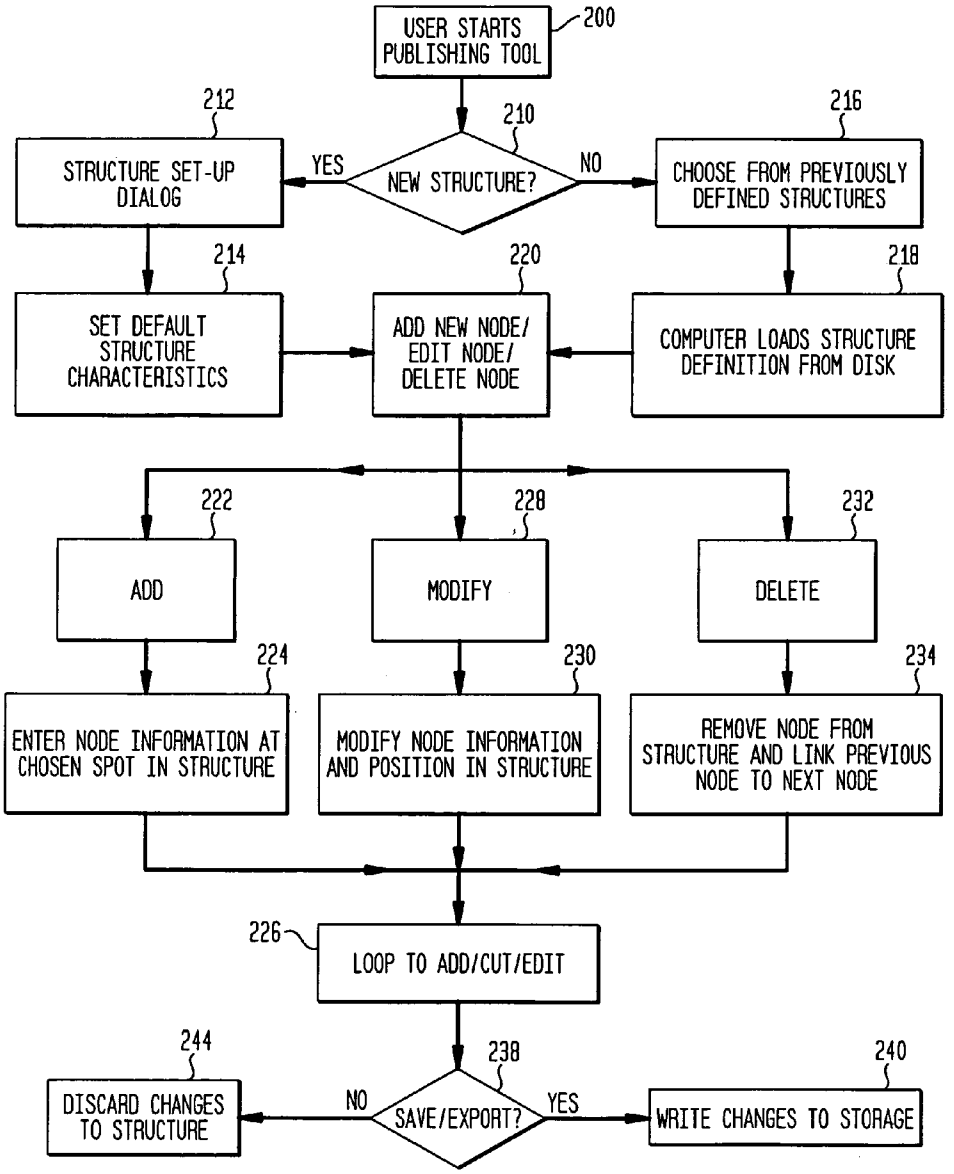
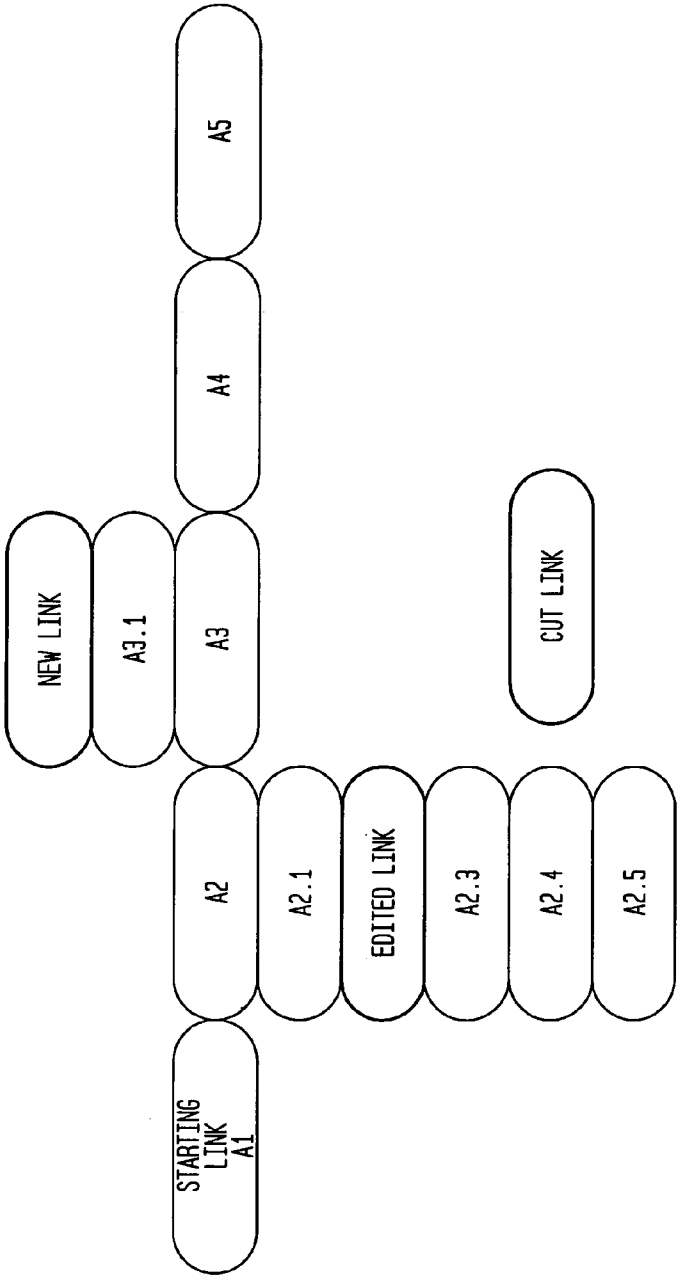


FIG. 6A


NEW LINK
A3.1
A3
A4
A5
STARTING LINK A1
A2
A2.1
EDITED LINK
A2.3
A2.4
A2.5
CUT LINK

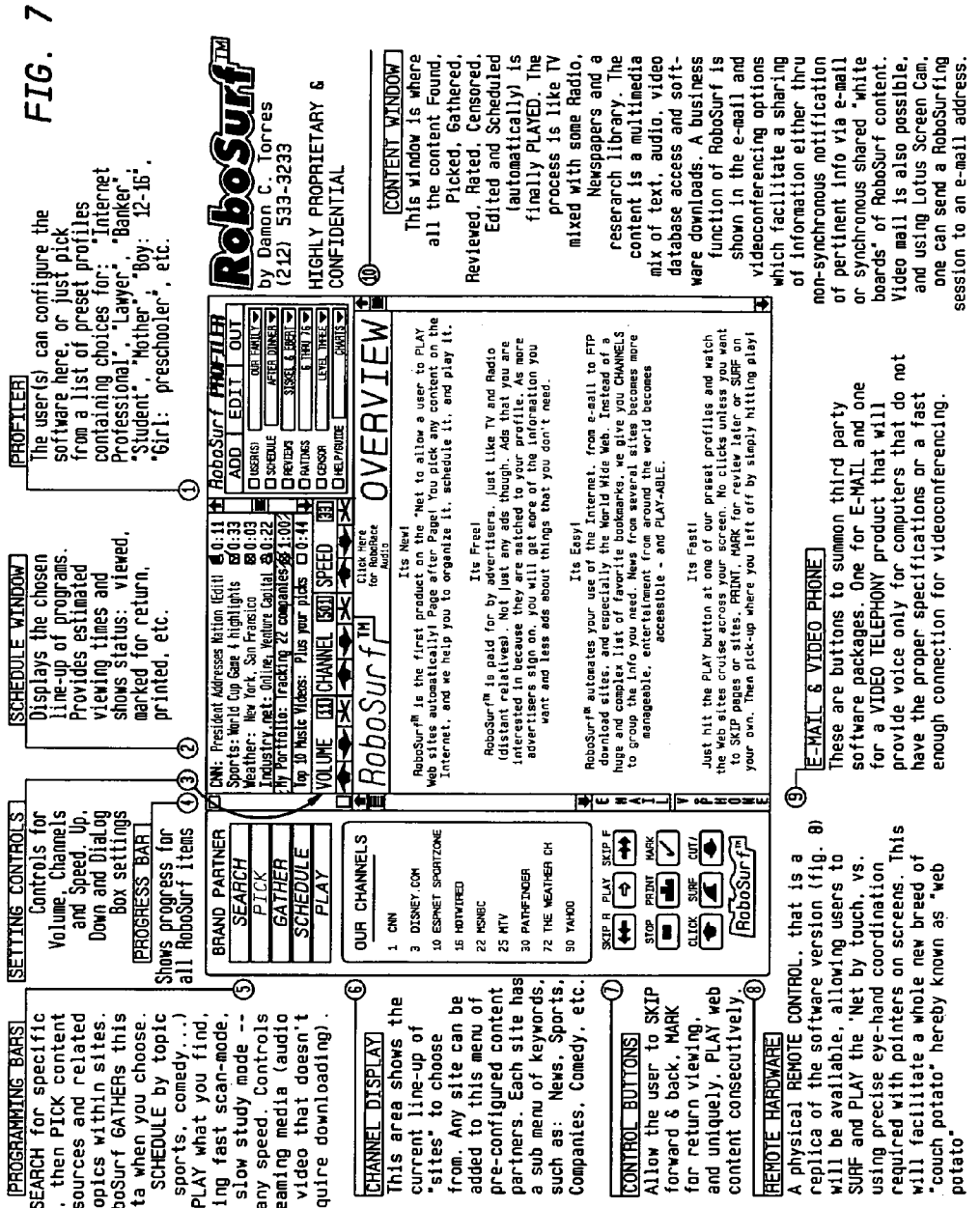


FIG. 7
PROGRAMMING BARS
SEARCH for specific info, then PICK content sources and related topics within sites. RoboSurf GATHERs this data when you choose. SCHEDULE by topic (news, sports, comedy...) PLAY what you find, using fast scan-mode, slow study mode -- any speed. Controls streaming media (audio & video that doesn't require downloading).
SETTING CONTROLS
Controls for Volume, Channels and Speed. Up, Down and DiaLog Box settings
PROGRESS BAR
Shows progress for all RoboSurf items
SCHEDULE WINDOW
Displays the chosen line-up of programs. Provides estimated viewing times and shows status: viewed, marked for return, printed, etc.
PROFILER
The user(s) can configure the software here, or just pick from a list of preset profiles containing choices for: "Internet Professional", "Lawyer", "Banker", "Student", "Mother", "Boy: 12-16", "Girl: preschooler", etc.
RoboSurf PROFILER
ADD EDIT OUT
DESIGN(S)
SCHEDULE
REVIEWS
RATINGS
CENSOR
HELP/QUIT
OUR FAMILY
AFTER DINNER
SISSEL & BRIT
E THRU 7G
LEVEL THREE
CONTENT WINDOW
This window is where all the content Found, Picked, Gathered, Reviewed, Rated, Censored, Edited and Scheduled (automatically) is finally PLAYED. The process is like TV mixed with some Radio, Newspapers and a research library. The content is a multimedia mix of text, audio, video database access and software downloads. A business function of RoboSurf is shown in the e-mail and videoconferencing options which facilitate a sharing of information either thru non-synchronous notification of pertinent info via e-mail or synchronous shared "white boards" of RoboSurf content. Video mail is also possible, and using Lotus Screen Cam, one can send a RoboSurfing session to an e-mail address.
RoboSurf™
by Damon C. Torres
(212) 533-3233
HIGHLY PROPRIETARY & CONFIDENTIAL
CNN: President Addresses Nation (Edit) 0:11
Sports: World Cup Game & highlights 0:33
Weather: New York, San Francisco 0:03
Industry net: Online, Venture Capital 0:22
My Portfolio: Tracking 22 companies 1:00
Top 10 Music Videos: Plus your picks 0:44
VOLUME CHANNEL SPEED
RoboSurf™
Click Here for Whatever Audio
OVERVIEW
Its New!
RoboSurf™ is the first product on the Net to allow a user to PLAY Web sites automatically! Page after Page! You pick any content on the Internet, and we help you to organize it, schedule it, and play it.
Its Free!
RoboSurf™ is paid for by advertisers. Just like TV and Radio (distant relatives). Not just any ads though. Ads that you are interested in because they are matched to your profile. As more advertisers sign on, you will get more of the information you want and less ads about things that you don't need.
Its Easy!
RoboSurf™ automates your use of the Internet, from e-mail to FTP download sites, and especially the World Wide Web. Instead of a huge and complex list of favorite bookmarks, we give you CHANNELS to group the info you need. News from several sites becomes more manageable, entertainment from around the world becomes accessible - and PLAY-ABLE.
Its Fast!
Just hit the PLAY button at one of our preset profiles and watch the Web sites cruise across your screen. No clicks unless you want to SKIP pages or sites, PRINT, MARK for review later or SURF on your own. Then pick-up where you left off by simply hitting play!
E-MAIL
PHONE
BRAND PARTNER
SEARCH
PICK
GATHER
SCHEDULE
PLAY
OUR CHANNELS
1 CNN
3 DISNEY.COM
10 ESPNET SPORTZONE
15 HOTWIRED
22 MSNBC
25 MTV
30 PATHFINDER
72 THE WEATHER CH
90 YAHOO
SKIP R PLAY SKIP F
STOP PRINT MARK
CLICK SURF CUT/
RoboSurf™
CHANNEL DISPLAY
This area shows the current line-up of "sites" to choose from. Any site can be added to this menu of pre-configured content partners. Each site has a sub menu of keywords, such as: News, Sports, Companies, Comedy, etc.
CONTROL BUTTONS
Allow the user to SKIP forward & back, MARK for return viewing, and uniquely, PLAY web content consecutively.
REMOTE HARDWARE
A physical REMOTE CONTROL, that is a replica of the software version (fig. 8) will be available, allowing users to SURF and PLAY the 'Net by touch, vs. using precise eye-hand coordination required with pointers on screens. This will facilitate a whole new breed of "couch potato" hereby known as "web potato"
E-MAIL & VIDEO PHONE
These are buttons to summon third party software packages. One for E-MAIL and one for a VIDEO TELEPHONY product that will provide voice only for computers that do not have the proper specifications or a fast enough connection for videoconferencing.

AUTOMATED BROWSING SYSTEM FOR PUBLISHERS AND USERS ON NETWORKS SERVING INTERNET AND REMOTE DEVICES

RELATED APPLICATION

This is a continuation-in part application of a currently pending application Ser. No. 08/922,063 filed Sep. 2, 1997 which in turn is based on U.S. Provisional Application 60/025360 filed Sep. 3, 1996, both of which applications are incorporated herein by reference.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

This invention relates generally to computer networks, and specifically to a method of sequencing and scheduling web pages, via a suite of software applications.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The worldwide network of computers commonly known as the "Internet" has grown tremendously since the creation of a subset known as the "World Wide Web" (WWW or Web), popularized in 1993. The emergence of the Web, and its accompanying standards enabled users to move beyond traditional on-line data exposure, which required knowledge of protocols and other low-level computer constructs, to a much more filtered and full-featured interface in the form of a "Web Browser." The Web Browser filters out the computer constructs, displaying only pertinent content, such as text, images, animations and sounds, while hiding from the user the computer codes that are used to negotiate access, generate and display this content.

Some of the standards popularized by the web are Hypertext Transfer Protocol (HTTP), Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) and the Uniform Resource Locator (URL). HTTP allows HTML documents, which carry many forms of information, from text and images, to audio and video, to be easily found via a URL from a collection of networks known as the Internet. These networks have public and private files which are accessed via routing tables. The routing tables reside on Domain Name Servers (DNS) and are regularly updated.

Two innovations provided by the Browser environment, HTTP and the Internet are: specialized display of data (certain text and graphics) and "Hyperlinks" which appear as "clickable-buttons" or "links" made of text or graphics in the Graphical User Interface (GUI) presented by the Browser. These links contain an address for another location on the Internet. Instead of seeing computer language full of telecommunications protocols and an occasional listing of a graphic file's name, the user sees only human pertinent text and an automatically displayed image within this text. The user is shown graphical or textual links to facilitate navigation instead of having to properly enter complex path names.

This combination of features, coupled with the ease of use that HTML provides as a page publishing format, have proved to be very popular, leading to a mass adoption of this new medium by many constituencies. These include education, most areas of business (publishing, finance, commerce, entertainment, etc.) and government. Given the increasing adoption of the Web, many non-technically oriented users use this new medium to go from page to page, shifting from one computer network to the next simply by making decisions on which links to click. Search engines which index the Web allow these users to quickly locate URLs and their

associated links. In addition, content aggregators collect and publish collections of Web pages. In just a few years, the Web has evolved from static pages to pages containing animation, personalized data, commerce-level security and streaming audio and video. A more recent innovation is the "Push Technology" model which is found in the more recently released browsers.

Push technology, pioneered by Pointcast™, has been adopted by Netscape™ and Microsoft™, the two browser giants, as the next way to connect viewers with content. As implemented by Pointcast, push technology began in 1996 as a personalized data gathering service. Users select content sources from a list and the Pointcast service automatically provides updated information which is displayed by the user's screen saver in a uniform format. Information providers who send information to users using the Pointcast system must first format their information according to requirements set by Pointcast. Thus, the "pages" of information displayed by the Pointcast screen saver are specially prepared screens. A user of the Pointcast system can access information only from those sources which have prepared information in the Pointcast format.

By collecting user interest profiles, the current "4.x" level browsers can constantly update a specific set of topics, from news, sports and weather, to financial and entertainment content. Thus, push technology enables information to come to the user instead of requiring the user to seek out the information. This not only facilitates a new distribution method for publishers and advertisers, but it also fosters new community models and demographics to go with them. As web browsing has evolved it has changed from a mere novelty, to a relied upon conduit of information flow.

Recently, problems with access to a major on-line service provider produced lawsuits stemming from lack of access to mission-critical information, in both receipt and transmission. As this technology has moved from budding curiosity browsing to true reliance, the blossoming of the technology has yet to show what mature fruit it will provide. Commerce is a large part of the development of the medium as companies like Cisco and Boeing conduct exclusive web-based sales in excess of one billion dollars. In addition, consumer and small business oriented vendors such as Dell have sales in excess of $1 million per day via their website. But what other services, beyond a catalog of information and products, will the Internet and its Web offer? The subject invention proposes a next-level of functionality that may provide an insight.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

In accordance with one embodiment of the invention, a presentation software is employed in a web browser software. A triggering event, such as a mouse click on a single "link" commences the presentation of a series of resources instead of one resource at a time. This arrangement of resources, is defined as a "show structure" or "structure," which contains a set of nodes. Each node represents a resource such as a web page, an executable file, or a data file stored at a predetermined location and accessed via its corresponding address. This structure allows access to one or several topics of information from several sources in a continuous arrangement. The topics of information include multimedia data such as audio, video, graphics and text that together define a presentation show to a user.

It is noted that in accordance with one embodiment of the invention the nodes that define a show structure or a structure may be arranged as a multidimensional sequence. An

array of nodes may be available for a multimedia presentation or show. Each node in the array is accessible from the other nodes in the array. These nodes or a portion of these nodes are selected for presentation. A show structure is defined by one or more paths that are spanned through these nodes.

The information conveyed by displaying the resources arranged may be interspersed with advertising and public service announcements (PSAs). The presentation of all resources may be adjusted for different pacing attributes of individual users. While the invention may automate a number of the decisions that a user makes in viewing a plurality of resources, it in no way inhibits the interactivity currently present on the Web. The decision-making process is not inhibited: it is optional, allowing for preprogramming and navigating the arrangement of resources on-the-fly or simply watching a series of pre-edited resources. The present invention serves as an enhancement which refocuses the state of content delivery to a user via a communication medium, such as the Internet, TV/PC hardware and software offerings.

In accordance with another embodiment of the present invention a method of presenting information content is provided, which includes the steps of accessing and providing the information from an arrangement of content sources, or a show structure of nodes. Each node in the structure includes both an address from which the information may be accessed and an indication of the duration for which the content will be presented. For each node, the method locates the content source, accesses the content and presents it for the indicated duration.

According to another aspect of the invention, while the requested information is being presented, the method queues and caches the next resource, then loads the next resource for viewing.

According to yet another aspect of the invention, a method is provided by which structures of content sources may be generated. A user may select and organize content from a variety of sources by several methods including a bookmark list, a list of search results and through the creation of a structure of nodes by a "drag-and-drop" technique.

According to yet another aspect of the invention, a method is provided for generating and publishing these structures. When a plurality of nodes are available for presentation, the system determines the order of such presentation based on predetermined set of criteria. Furthermore, a user may specify additional criteria for arranging the order of nodes in order to create a show structure. The method further includes provisions for a filter which customizes a preexisting structure by automatically conforming variable items in the structure to a predefined user profile.

In accordance with another embodiment of the invention, the presentation system and method of displaying resources includes a system for presentation of a user's local computer resources. Therefore, the arrangement of resources may include a show structure wherein each node in the structure represents a resource that exists locally within the user's computer. These resources may be scheduled in accordance with a specifiable arrangement and executed in accordance with the schedule.

In accordance with another embodiment of the invention, the method for creating a show structure may be employed by a variety of user terminals, such as computer PCS, dumb terminals, TV sets and other terminals that are capable of displaying information. Furthermore, for certain applications, the method for creating and displaying content from various resources, in accordance with one embodiment of the invention, may function as an operating system for managing resources for display on the user's terminal.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. **1** is a block diagram which illustrates the Internet and the World Wide Web environment in which the invention operates.

FIG. **2**A is a block diagram of a hardware system for utilizing the present software invention.

FIGS. **2**B–**2**F is an illustration of an exemplary node arrangements that define various show structures in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. **3** is a flow-chart diagram which is useful for describing a software application which runs on a server and sequences and displays URLs and predefined structure automatically in accordance with timer settings while monitoring the navigation decisions of the user, if any.

FIG. **4** is a flow-chart diagram of a client-side software application or Apple, which processes URLs and predefined structures automatically while monitoring the timer settings and navigation decisions of the user.

FIG. **5** is a flow-chart diagram which illustrates the process by which initial structures of content are personalized and delivered to the user.

FIG. **6** is a flow-chart diagram which illustrates a method of formatting individual resources and collections of resources for use with the resource scheduling and organizing software shown in FIGS. **3** through **5**.

FIG. **6**A is a graphical depiction of a process for editing a structure of nodes.

FIG. **7** is a computer screen diagram of an exemplary user interface for the invention that is useful for describing features of the invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

FIG. **1** is a simplified block diagram which is useful for describing the connectivity of users and content providers on the Internet. Briefly, the Internet includes a large collection of content providers **10** which may be accessed by the users **12**. Typically, a user accesses content on a "server" by establishing a data communications connection to the server through the network of computers **14**, **16** defined by the Internet. Each server **10** operates a "web site" which includes data files that contain text, images, audio or video content. The web site typically includes a group of linked HTML documents or pages that contain links to the data files. A user **12** may access the content in a file by simply selecting one of these links. The file may be transferred to a cache in the user's computer and presented using the browser or the content may be provided directly by the server **10** to the user **12** as an encoded data stream (e.g. an audio program) which is decoded and played out by the user's computer **12**.

Content accessed by the browser may not be in a file on a remote computer but may be generated by the remote computer and transmitted to the user directly. Much of the data that may be accessed by a browser on a remote computer is classified by Multipurpose Internet Mail Extension (MIME) type. One MIME type is an HTML file, another is a JPEG file, a still picture that is encoded according to the standard developed by the Joint Picture Experts Group. Mime types can also be proprietary data. In this instance, the browser may need to be configured with a "plug-in" program in order to decode and present the

proprietary data. An example of such a plug-in is the Macromedia™ flash technology which allows streaming animation to be displayed with accompanying audio. For more information on MIME types, see Netscape's User Handbook at http://home.netscape.com/eng/mozilla/1.1/handbook/docs/answers.html, HTTP (HyperText Transfer Protocol) servers use HTML formatting. Netscape software has the built-in capability to read HTML-formatted pages (as well as the GIF, JPEG, and XBM graphic file formats). Netscape can interpret many other file formats with the help of external helper applications. To accommodate the file formats requiring helper applications, Netscape keeps a mapping of file formats to helper applications. MIME (Multipurpose Internet Mail Extensions) is a standardized method for organizing divergent file formats. The method organizes file formats according to the file's MIME type. When Netscape software retrieves a file from a server, the server provides the MIME type of the file. Netscape uses the MIME type to establish whether the file format can be read by the software's built-in capabilities or, if not, whether a suitable helper application is available to read the file.

For servers that do not provide a MIME type with a file, Netscape interprets the file's extension (a suffix appended to a file name). For example, the .HTML extension in the file name index.html suggests a file in the HTML format. Likewise, a zip extension suggests a compressed file, an .rtf extension suggests a file in the Rich Text Format, and so on.

The Internet content relating to a show structure, in accordance with one embodiment of the invention, may be implemented as a new MIME type. Thus a show structure may be created by a show originator who intends to present a corresponding arrangement of resources to a user at a specifiable rate. The show structure may be transmitted to a plurality of users via the Internet. Thus, in order to ensure the integrity of a show structure a security arrangement in accordance with one embodiment of the invention is provided as described hereinafter.

Thus, the software that creates the show structure allows the show originator, to encode the identity of its creator. Furthermore, a mechanism is employed to automatically verify that the show structure comprising the show has not been tampered with. In one exemplary implementation, this is accomplished by using cryptographic techniques; for example the Digital Signature Initiative (c.f. http://w3c.org/Dsig/Overview.html). The identity of the show originator is thus represented by a digital signature. The security status of the currently selected show structure is then visible at all times to the user. If a user chooses to edit a sequence of a show, the previously attached signature will be discarded and the user will be made aware of it's new unsigned status.

Today it is taken for granted that, to access services, information and entertainment on the Web, a user must make certain choices, position the mouse pointer and click the mouse buttons appropriately to indicate the decisions. For example, in a typical Web access, these selections are made at a rate of approximately once per minute. The result of each mouse click is another page and another set of decisions. Typically, a user is expected to click one of the several dozen links provided on any given page, (see, for example, cnn.com). Alternatively, a user may type in a URL or access a bookmark to visit a favorite search engine. In addition, a user may access a collection of "channels" of "push content" via Netscape Communicator's Netcaster or Microsoft Internet Explorer's Active Desktop and sit back for a few seconds to view an animated presentation of a specific publisher's offerings. The user may even choose a headline of a story presented in Pointcast's screen saver to receive more information about that topic grouping within the application, or to transfer to a relevant website. All of these methods typically require a significant amount of user effort and decision-making to drive the web surfing experience.

Although the users and servers are shown as separate machines in FIG. **1**, it is well known that a computer being used as a server may host users and may also serve as a conduit for connecting a user to a remote server.

FIG. **2** is a block diagram which illustrates the basic layout of a typical user's computer, be it a personal computer (PC) or a network computer (NC), as typified by webtv™ or a Java Station™. The computer may also be a dedicated workstation coupled to a local area network or a terminal connected to a mainframe computer which is, in turn, coupled to the Internet or other communication networks. The user requires no special hardware to use this invention. No additional cards with TV tuners are required, but they can be used as an enhancement. This diagram illustrates one possible environment for the invention and should not be interpreted as limiting the invention. It is contemplated that the invention may employ user terminals which may have radically different hardware, including but not limited to hand held devices, public kiosks, dumb terminals, set-top boxes, TV sets, and even "credit card-sized" configurations.

The exemplary system includes a microprocessor **32** a random access memory (RAM) **34**, a memory management circuit, a disk drive **36**, a floppy disk drive **37**, a read only memory (ROM) **33** which includes the basic I/O system (BIOS) for the computer system, a CD ROM drive **42**, a modem **50**, a digital signal processor **43**, a keyboard controller **38**, a mouse controller **39**, a video controller **40**, and an audio controller **41** which are all connected by a system bus **31**. A keyboard **22**, a mouse **23** and a graphic display monitor **24** are connected to the keyboard controller **38**, mouse controller **39**, and video controller **40**. Stereo speakers **25**A and **25**B are connected to the audio controller **41**. In the exemplary system, the connection to the on-line-service provider **16** (shown in FIG. **1**) is made through the modem **50** via a telephone line **56**.

As shown in FIG. **2**, the memory **34** includes an operating system **60**, for example, Windows 95™; a browser **62** for example, Netscape Navigator™ 4.0; and a cache memory **63**. The hard disk **36** is the main data storage device for the system shown in FIG. **1**. It includes the software needed to run the browser and libraries of software used by the operating system to control the operation of all of the components that are connected to the system bus **31**. The hard disk **36** also includes a disk cache (not shown) for the browser. When data on a remote computer is accessed by the browser, it may be transferred by Hypertext Transfer Protocol (HTTP) or File Transfer Protocol (FTP) and stored in this disk cache temporarily. The component of the invention which is used on the user computer **12** may be, for example, a browser plug in. While, in this example, the user component is a browser plug-in, it is contemplated that it may be an Applet which runs on a virtual computer defined by the browser, it may also be a stand-alone program, which includes the functionality that is typically provided by a browser, or it may be a distributed application. The user component is described below with reference to FIG. **4** and is referred to as the program RoboSurf™. The RoboSurf program allows a user to view a show having content that corresponds to a show structure as will be explained in more detail later.

It is noted that in accordance with one embodiment of the invention the nodes that define a show structure or a structure may be arranged as a multidimensional sequence. FIG.

2*b* illustrates an array **300** of nodes that may be available for a multimedia presentation or show. Each node identifies an available resource and the time the resource may be presented to the user. As illustrated in FIG. **2**B nodes **302**, **304**, **306**, **308**, **310** and **312** are available for presentation in accordance with an exemplary arrangement. Each node in the array is accessible from the other nodes in the array. For a typical show or presentations, an arrangement of these nodes or a portion of these nodes is selected for presentation as described in reference with FIGS. **2***c* through **2***f* Thus, a show structure is defined by one or more paths that are spanned through these nodes.

FIG. **2***c* illustrates a show structure that simultaneously spans multiple paths from the same starting node such as node **310** to each one of the remaining nodes **312**, **302**, **304**, **306** and **308**. Thus, a show in accordance with the structure presented in FIG. **2***c* simultaneously presents the contents identified by nodes **312**, **302**, **304**, **306** and **308**, after the content identified by node **310** is presented.

Alternatively, as illustrated in FIGS. **2***d*-**1** a show structure can span a path with a length of four beginning at node **308** and traversing to nodes **312**, **302** and **306**. The state map of this path is illustrated in FIGS. **2***d*-**2**. Thus, a show in accordance with the structure presented in FIG. **2***d*-**1** first presents the contents identified by node **308**, followed by contents identified by nodes **312**, **302** and **306**.

In a still alternative arrangement, a show structure can be created that also spans multiple paths concurrently, as illustrated in FIG. **2***e*. For example a first path spans nodes **308**, **302**, **306** and **310**. The second path spans nodes **312**, **306**, **304** and **310**. As illustrated nodes **302**, **306** and **310** are spanned simultaneously with nodes **306**, **304** and **310**. Thus a show in accordance with the structure presented in FIG. **2***e* first presents the contents identified by node **310**, followed by the contents identified by node **312**. Thereafter, the show structure presents contents identified in nodes **302**, and **306** at the same time that is presents the contents identified in nodes **306** and **304**. Finally, the structure presents contents identified in node **310**.

Thus, a show structure may include one or more paths that can be presented sequentially and/or concurrently. It is noted that a path may include portions that is presented sequentially and other portions that are presented concurrently. Furthermore, one node to many nodes paths and many nodes to one node paths can also define a show structure. Every time that a node is detected the corresponding content of that node is presented to the user's terminal regardless of whether a plurality of nodes have been detected at the same time or separately.

It is noted that the process that creates and/or organizes and manages the arrangement of these nodes and ultimately the corresponding resources, may be implemented as a user specific operating system in accordance with one embodiment of the invention. The operating system then allows the paths to be selected and arranged in accordance with interactive user specifications or in accordance with predefined criteria. Thus, the operating system, among other things, organizes and arranges the available resources as identified by available nodes; allows end users to select and interact with files and applications; and make certain files and or resources available to be shared by all the other resources. For example, during a presentation of a show, certain sound effects and visual effects may be shared by all resources that may have use for such effects. Such an operating system can be employed for many applications described herein in accordance with various embodiments of the invention.

A show structure may be presented on a server that can be accessed by a user who visits a corresponding site on the server. This component on the server is described below with reference to FIG. **3**, and is referred to as the program Robosites™. Robosites may perform the actual transfer operations to obtain the pages from other web sites.

In addition to RoboSurf and Robosites, the exemplary system includes RoboGuide™, described below with reference to FIG. **5**, a program that allows several users to access a prepared show structure of nodes or links and have it customized to their respective preferences. The system also includes a program referred to as RoboPublisher™, described below with reference to FIG. **6**, which functions as a publishing software so as to help a publisher to prepare show structures. The entire suite of programs is referred to below as RoboCast.

Referring again to FIG. **3** a flow-chart diagram which illustrates the operation of the server-side application, Robosites is explained in more detail. The first two steps in FIG. **3** represent activities occurring at a user's computer **12**. At step **70**, the user starts to access the Internet or other network via a Personal Computer (PC) a Network Computer (NC), Web-Enabled TV Set, or other similar device. At step **72**, the user encounters and selects a URL, for example, within a screen saver, an e-mail message, or a website, which is designated as an entry node in a show structure of resources. The URL may be so designated by its association within a list generated by a publisher, by results that are automatically generated by a search engine or because it is the first URL in a show structure of URL's that was manually collected by the user. The server stores a plurality of show structures each structure including nodes that represent a resource on the Internet. Thus, each structure represents a show that is available for the user's preview.

Accessing the resources referred to by the URL initiates a structure of events in the application Robosites which is running on server **10**, shown in FIG. **1**. At step **74**, the server parses the request into task sets, initiating the look-up of the resources indicated by the URL. This step gathers the relevant data and custom packages it for the browser **62**, shown in FIG. **2**. As part of its custom packaging application Robosites provides a set of contents that can be displayed on the user's display terminal in the form of a persistent content window. Therefore, a small window on the user's screen begins to display contents that is provided by the server, such as advertising or user specific messages. Furthermore, as part of its custom packaging application, Robosites may arrange the location on the screen where the user can view a selected show, and also updates show structures that had been previously used by a user and had been cached in the user's computer.

At step **76**, Robosites checks whether the user is intended to receive information in a dynamic arrangement referred to as value added dynamic content. As will be explained in more detail below such value added dynamic content may include additional URL locations or files that are deemed by Robosite system to be of interest to the user, such as advertising material. Such dynamic content is usually based on, among other things, the user's profile. For example, some of the factors relating to a user profile, which are considered include a particular sports team preference; a demographic; or a pre-set profile as specified in the software. This information is used as selection criteria which is sent to a database and, at step **78**, a page, conforming to the user's preferences, is retrieved by the server, either locally or from a remotely located database. Thus, this dynamic content may be presented in the persistent content window of the user's

display screen or as information and messaging contents selectively interspersed between a show structure.

At step **80**, if the resource addressed by the URL does not include dynamic content or if the user is unable to receive dynamic content, a resource having pre-defined content is retrieved, either directly from a Robocast-operated resource, or from a third party with prior authorization to handle such content requests. For example, a resource having a default set of advertising content may be presented to the user.

At step **82**, either the dynamic or pre-defined URL is accessed and the content associated with the URL is retrieved, encoded and delivered to the browser at step **84**. The content provided from the location addressed by the URL may be among other formats, include HTML, DHTML or XML documents. The delivered information may contain references for many other data types, including animation, streaming and non-streaming audio and video, Virtual Reality Modeling Language (VRML) Quicktime VR, and front-ends for several flavors of database applications, to name a few.

At step **84** the content retrieved by RoboSites is delivered ty the user's browser for a show presentation. This step is inherent in the operation of browser **62** (shown in FIG. **2**), accordingly, it is not described in detail. At step **86**, a timer is started in response to a message produced by the browser **62** indicating that the retrieved content has been delivered and is ready to be presented. This timer is set from a value provided in the corresponding node in a show structure which indicates an amount of time that the content accessed from the associated URL is to be displayed. It is noted that RoboSites provides an additional code to the content corresponding to the amount of time the content is displayed. For example, for an HTML file, Robosites includes additional tags corresponding to the duration that the HTML document will be displayed by the user's browser.

At step **88**, Robosites determines if the user has selected another URL before the timer expires. It is noted that the user may select another URL either manually or via a RoboSurf program that resides on the user's computer. In that event the newly selected URL is based on a node within a show structure that is being executed by the user's RoboSurf program. If another URL has been selected, the program will do one of two things: 1) forward that user away from the predetermined course of the show structure that was entered at the beginning of this process and take the user on another course, based on the other URL selected; or 2) skip them forward on the predetermined course that is being played for the user in accordance with the selected structure. This latter scenario is advantageous for a quick reader, or someone who has seen the presented content before, or in the case of content that the viewer chooses to skip (even an advertisement or PSA).

If the user has selected a new URL during the display time allowed by the timer, then, at step **90** Robosites determines whether the next URL relates to a show structure or not. This may be determined simply by the lack of new URL requests. It may also be determined by checking the header information of the new URL, as described below with reference to Table 1. As shown in step **93**, the user's decisions are recorded to a database at this point, providing a list of feedback for advertisers and content providers in some cases. If, for example, an advertisement for cat food is displayed, a user may skip over the advertisement or otherwise indicate that cat food advertisements are not interesting. This information is recorded at step **93** and used to direct only advertisements that are of interest to the user.

At step **94** the system requests the next resource in the show structure and returns to step **74** described above. It is noted that in accordance with another embodiment of the invention, it is possible to change the course of events to be displayed to the viewer by substituting next resource request at step **94** with a previous resource request. For example, if the forward going display provides a first URL content relating to weather forecast to a second URL content relating to sports news, the reverse going display provides the sports news before the weather forecast.

It is also noted that a user may switch to another set of show structure at any time by selecting a desired structure, for example by a Robosurf program employed by the user's computer. The instructions relating to the newly selected path in a structure may be provided via point A as illustrated in FIG. **3**. Furthermore, a newly selected path in a structure may also be diverted back to the prior show structure by using the application's "surf" feature (described below with reference to FIG. **7**). The user's selections are tracked by the user's Robosurf program. Thus, for example when a URL relating to a second show structure is selected, by being clicked for the first time, the system remembers where the user left the initial structure and returns the user to that point in the structure upon the second click of that surf button. Alternatively, the history feature, inherent in most browsers, may be used to return the user to pages that were presented moments before or days before.

If, at step **88**, the user does not interact with the system within the allotted time (which is set by the user or publisher), the timer expires at step **92** and that signals the request for another resource, thus enabling the play sequence for automatic surfing.

At step **96**, the program requests the next node in the currently playing show structure. While this sequence has been described as a simple display of preprogrammed URLs, it is contemplated that, in more complex forms, this process may stream URLs to the viewer, while monitoring the user's habits (e.g. which sites are skipped and which sites the user views for the full display time) and injecting targeted content, including news, advertising and PSAs into the data stream.

If the URL selected at step **88**, before the time-out, is not another show structure, the Robosites process displays the selected content and resets the timer. If no additional content is available, a user-specified show structure will be optionally displayed.

FIG. **4** is a flow-chart diagram which illustrates the operation of the exemplary user component of the system, referred to as the RoboSurf program, in accordance with one embodiment of the invention. Briefly, this program allows a user to schedule, personalize and play content obtained from Web addresses. Using RoboSurf, a user may access almost any accessible website as a node in a structure. It is noted that while RoboSurf is described as a browser plug-in, it may be an Applet, stand-alone program or distributed application.

The RoboSurf process illustrated by FIG. **4** begins at step **110** to access a default list of URLs that may be generated by, for example, one of several sources, such as: 1) RoboCast's web server network that will supply a general listing of available show structures; 2) a pre-selected list generated by the server in response to information obtained about the user from a Profiler program (e.g. structures defined for an Intranet described below with reference to FIG. **6**); 3) the results of a Search initiated through the RoboCast system or

through a non-affiliated search engine; 4) an e-mail message, 5) the contents of a screen saver's play queue; or 6) other delivery methods.

At step **112** the URL is delivered to the browser **62** by one of these methods in a traditional manner. This corresponds to step **84** of FIG. **3**, described above. Also at step **112**, the content is received and/or activated either automatically or programmatically for presentation to the user. Once RoboSurf begins to display the content, it starts a timer, at step **114**. This timer has a duration that is determined from the information contained in each node of the current show structure that corresponds to this URL.

At step **116**, while the timer is running, RoboSurf monitors the user's actions to determine if the user wants to manually override the play sequence by clicking a URL before the time-out. The user may act in several ways to override the play sequence. First, the user may select a node or a link on the displayed resource at step **122**. In this instance, if the selected link is itself part of a show structure, the program goes to step **124**, and the newly selected show structure replaces the current structure. If the selected link is not part of a show structure, the program goes to step **120** to get the next resource of the initial structure and the timer is reset and play continues at step **112**.

Second, the user may click on the Surf button, in the control buttons **7**, shown in FIG. **7**, and then select a link on the displayed resource. By pressing the Surf button, the user temporarily suspends the display of the original show structure, to review contents of pages accessible by hyperlinks presented on a displayed page. When this review is complete, the show structure may be restarted at the point of departure by simply clicking on the Surf button a second time.

At step **118** if the user has not selected any URLs, the time-out occurs and the play sequence resumes at step **120**. In the exemplary embodiment of the invention, this step highlights the next item in the schedule window **2** (shown in FIG. **7**), selects the corresponding URL and branches back to step **112**, causing Robosites to deliver the content at the requested URL to the browser **62**. It is noted that in accordance with one embodiment of the invention, either RoboSurf or Robosites programs may operate independently without interaction with the other.

FIG. **5** is a flow-chart diagram which illustrates the operation of the RoboGuide component of the RoboCast program suite. RoboGuide is a helper application that provides a viewing guide which offers a personalized look at various show structures of content that have been cached at the server. RoboGuide interacts with information produced by a Profiler program to modify the cached show structures to eliminate content or add alternate content according to a user's preferences.

RoboGuide program starts at step **150** where the user starts access to the Internet or other network via a Personal Computer (PC) a Network Computer (NC), Web-Enabled TV Set, or other similar device. The user encounters and selects a URL which has been designated as the entry node in a show structure of resources by a publisher. This URL may be encountered, for example, within a screen saver, an e-mail message, or a website.

In accordance with one embodiment of the invention, the server terminal that employs the RoboGuide program stores a plurality of various show structures that may be of interest to the users. These show structures may relate to different topics or subjects that visitors may have access via the server. An example of such a server may be a search engine such as those available by YAHOO® or EXCITE®. In accordance with one embodiment of the invention, the RoboGuide program may prepare various show structures based on a user's search specifications. The results of a search may include a plurality of URL locations that contain pertinent information relating to the search topic. In response, the RoboGuide program creates a show structure that includes all or portion of the uncovered URL locations as the result of the search.

At step **152** the RoboGuide program receives a request from a user for a URL location that is provided by the server. At step **154**, the program retrieves from its database a show structure corresponding to the user's request. For example, the server may present a show on travel defined by a show structure prepared by the RoboGuide program.

It is noted that in accordance with one embodiment of the invention, the RoboGuide program may create a customized show structure based on the user's preferences that can be obtained in accordance with various filtering techniques commercially available. The server may already have information on the user, for example, via a profiler program that the user had previously updated via a RoboSites program as described above in reference with FIG. **3**. Thus, based on such adaptive filtering technique the RoboGuide program creates a personalized content that can be delivered for each user or groups of users.

At step **155** the program employs a filtering technique to create the customized show structure. An exemplary filtering process may be that which is available from Firefly.net, described below. This filtering is based on rating the resources (e.g. rating a cat food advertisement as inappropriate if the user profile does not indicate that the user has a cat or if the user indicates disinterest in cat food advertisements either explicitly by clicking on an on-screen "button" (not shown) indicating disinterest or implicitly as may be inferred from a pattern of skipping over cat food advertisements when they are presented). The information generated by the Profiler program is fed to the server based on "cookie technology," a common method of maintaining information about a client on the web. The server reads the cookie for preferences and date information then feeds a personalized request to the database which sends a dynamically generated list of URLs to the user.

At step **158**, in response to the received show structures, the RoboSurf program residing at the user's terminal parses the data and displays the nodes in the structure in its Schedule window **2** (shown in FIG. **7**). In response to the user's request a show structure is then presented to the user by either a RoboSurf program as described in reference with FIG. **4** or by a RoboSites program as described in reference with FIG. **3**.

The following description of an exemplary filtering technique used by Firefly.net was obtained from their Web site at http://www.firefly.net/products/CollaborativeFiltering.html#Summary. Collaborative filtering technology is a powerful technology that can effectively address the problem of information and content overload, especially in highly subjective domains. Collaborative filtering systems use human intelligence instead of machine intelligence to address the limitations of content-based filtering systems. By leveraging human opinions, collaborative filtering systems automate the word of mouth process among users. Automated Collaborative Filtering (ACF) systems automate the word of mouth process on a global scale across hundreds of thousands of users and catalog items. Most ACF systems recommend items using the following three step process:

1. Capture a set of opinions from the user in the form of numerical ratings for items
2. Compute a set of "nearest neighbor users" for the user. These nearest neighbor users are users with opinions most like the given user.
3. Use the nearest neighbors ratings to compute a set of recommendations for the given user. While standard ACF systems are effective in subjective domains, they suffer from certain limitations that may cause them to make incorrect conclusions in broad domains. This is mainly due to their tendency to ignore information about the items being recommended, even when such information is readily available.

Feature-Guided Automated Collaborative Filtering (FGACF) is Firefly Network Inc.'s powerful technology that combines the benefits of collaborative filtering with those of content-based filtering to overcome the limitations that affect standard ACF systems. FGACF utilizes simple feature information about items in a catalog to dynamically partition the space of items on a personalized basis, so as to more effectively apply the ACF algorithm in the appropriate sub-space.

Designers and developers of commercial collaborative filtering systems need to address several challenging issues. The foremost issue in building large scale collaborative filtering systems is the scaleability of the system. The accuracy of the underlying collaborative filtering technology, and the set of functionality offered, are important factors for designers of such systems.

Firefly Network Inc.'s Catalog Navigator product is scalable to handle loads of hundreds of thousands of users, catalog sizes in the half million range, with number of ratings in the millions, and still provide sub-second response times to queries. It has already been successfully deployed in applications on high-traffic sites. In addition, the Catalog Navigator is the only commercial implementation this powerful FGACF technology and offers one of the most comprehensive sets of catalog and community navigation functionality to a customer. © Firefly Networks Inc. 1997.

It is noted that in accordance with another embodiment of the invention, the information presented to the user based on the show structures may be reformatted in accordance with certain default structure characteristics. For example, such reformatting may include the tasks, such as: making Web resources more reader-friendly when using RoboSurf, RoboSites or RoboGuide programs, by utilizing formatting parameters, such as restraining page size to a default screen size and cuing automatic playing of audio upon displaying a new page; providing "Play," "Stop," "Forward," "Reverse," and "Pause" indications to facilitate the user's viewing of a show presentation; making pages into parts of a of content; providing information tags relating to the duration that a content is going to be displayed on the user's terminal; and, encoding pages with certain demographic and keyword-based information to aid the filtering operations explained above.

Table 1 shows an exemplary HTML code that may be added in accordance with one embodiment of the invention, to the Web resources or other content that is being reformatted. Note that the HTML of a page can be altered in this way between downloading it from a server and presenting it to the user. This "Tagging" process only requires a few milliseconds and can be done on the fly.

Essentially, this module uses the abilities of a HTML page publishing package like Pagemill from Adobe (www.adobe.com) to add HTML code of the type shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1

```
<!DOCTYPE HTML PUBLIC "-//IETF//DTD HTML 3.0//EN">
        <html>
        <head>
        <title>RoboGuide 11/3/97</title>
        <META name="author" content="© 1997 Damon Torres,
Brian Foy">
        <META name="generator" content="RoboSites
1.0">
        <META name="keywords" content="news, sports, weather, lifestyles, jane q. public,
nyc weather, san francisco weather, washington d.c. weather, yankees, knicks, non-violent news,
parenting info, content filter 530145x2a, ad filter 398543*kjfd23, psa filter 19284jksd8sfj*659">
        <META name="description" content="Jane Q. Public's personalized news, sports and
weather. Contains preferences for cities, teams, content filters (i.e. sex, violence, language) and
preferences for advertising and public service announcement categories. Wildcard paramaters are
indicated by an asterix (*).">
        <META HTTP-EQUIV="Expires" content="Tue, 04
Nov 1997 18:45:23 GMT">
        <!-- see http://www.sandia.gov/sci_compute/elements.html for details -->
        <LINK rel="previous" href="some url">
<LINK rel="next" href="some url">
        <LINK rel="toc" href="url of channel description"><!--
            toc=Table of
Contents-->
</head>
<body>
<!-- content goes here -->
</body>
</html>
```

FIG. **6** is a flow chart diagram that is useful for describing the operation of a RoboPublisher program, which is the publishing tool used to create and modify show structures for viewing via RoboGuide, RoboSurf and/or Robosites. The first step represents activities occurring at the user's computer **12**. At step **200** the user access the program described in this flowchart. At step **210** the user selects between editing an existing show structure or creating a new one. This can be an existing structure that has been previously made, or a structure that another content provider has published. If the user is creating a new structure, the resources, or nodes of the structure, can be gathered from their local hard drive or server or from a remote server.

At step **212** the user is presented with a dialog box. At step **214** the user is presented with the dialog box options for setting general preferences for all of the resources that will be linked in the structure, such as duration for all resources, duration estimate based on word count, and default "page turn" sound to accompany an automatic resource delivery.

At step **216** the user has chosen to load a previously defined structure, and, at step **218** the computer requests and loads the structure from the local or remote drive. Beginning at step **220** the user has many options, presented by an interface that will allow the user to choose to "Add, Edit or Cut" a node for the structure they are building. This can be accomplished graphically, as shown for example, in FIG. **6**A or via a list. In step **222** the user may Add a node from a standard dialog box that enables browsing from all available drives and from a special cache area that RoboSites, RoboSurf and/or Robosites produce. This cache area allows users to collect URLs from the Internet by, for example, browsing, implementing searches, or culling their e-mail for additional show structures. At step **224** the user adds the node at the chosen spot in the structure.

At step **226** the user has the option to commit to changes or cancel and start again. At step **228** the Modify Choice selection gives the user options **230** to edit the parameters of the "next" node (i.e. changing the next node destination or previous node in the structure from, for example, a local news link to a local weather link). The duration choice pertains to how long the node will be displayed before a subsequent node is loaded. This can be done on a per resource basis, since some resources require more time than others. The expiration option allows the publisher to choose a "kill date" for the node, automatically triggering a replacement search, or a skip to next action. This is useful for dated information such as weather.

At step **232** the user has the option to delete a node from the structure. Again, this can be done graphically (as shown in FIG. **6**A) or via a list. This step leads to step **234** where the previous structure is linked to the node that succeeds the deleted node. Step **236** allows the user to choose to continue adding, editing and/or cutting by branching back either to step **220** or **238**, to save the work and/or export it for a preview or viewing by others. If the user does not choose to save or export, then, at step **244**, the program reverts to the last saved version or cancels the session. If the user does export then, at step **240** the program writes the changes to the local disk **36** (shown in FIG. **2**). The RoboSites program may, in turn, write header information to the files to which the user may access locally or even to remote server files. It should be noted that the writing of header information into the HTML documents is an option, providing a convenience for RoboSurf and Robosites programs. The page playing actions can be achieved without this header information present. The publisher completes its work at step **242** where it gives the option to preview for the publisher using RoboCast browser enhancements, or to publish for other RoboCast product users.

FIG. **7** is a screen diagram of the interface presented by the RoboSurf program. Item **1** on the screen is an interface to the Profiler program. This program allows a user to specify several profiles for RoboSurf. The user may select from prepared profiles, for individuals or groups for example, "Internet Professional," "Lawyer," "Student," "Family.1" and "Girl: Preschool" and modify these or create a new profile. In the Profiler window, the User field allows a name to be attached to the profile. The Schedule field allows a user to associate the profile with a particular structure, also referred to as a Schedule. In this instance, the structure of URLs being displayed in the Schedule window **2** is named "After Dinner."

The Reviews field allows a user to specify one of several sources for website or show structure reviews. Using the Ratings field, the user can specify limitations on the type of website or structure that will be reviewed using the familiar MPAA rating system. The Censor Level field may be used to control the Web content that the user will see. Different Censor Levels will allow different types of content to be displayed. The RoboSurf program may compare the specified Censor Level to voluntary content ratings obtained from the Web resources or it may interface with an existing content monitoring system such as Cyber Patrol to ensure that undesirable content is blocked. The final field in the Profiler window allows a user to specify a Help or Guide function. It is contemplated that both text-oriented and voice synthesized help would be available. For voice-synthesized help, the user may identify a particular voice with a name (e.g. "Chris") as shown in FIG. **7**.

Item **2** in FIG. **7** is the Schedule window. As described above, this window shows the current structure of URLs that is being displayed by RoboSurf. The window contains a brief textual description of each URL and a time in hours and minutes and seconds for which content provided from the URL will be displayed. The URL from which content is currently being displayed is highlighted. Each URL in the schedule list also includes a small box which is marked with an "x" after a URL has been viewed and may be marked with a " " to indicate that the user wants to return to this site.

Item **3** in FIG. **7** are controls for volume, channel and speed. The volume control works as would be expected to increase or decrease the level of sound provided. The Channel button allows a viewer to move a pointer up and down in the channel window to select a new channel. As used in this description, a "channel" is a collection of resources, such as web pages, which are linked into a structure by a content provider. The Speed button allows a user to specify the amount of time between the content of resources. The "*" button on each of the volume, channel and speed buttons brings up a separate dialog box in which specific entries may be entered manually.

Item **4** in FIG. **7** is the progress bar. This bar displays progress of the system in whatever it has been requested to do. During play mode, this bar displays progress through the structure as a percentage of time remaining in the display of the structure. In search mode, the bar may display progress in a search and the preparation of a show structure derived from the search. In gather mode, the bar may display the progress of the gathering operation.

Item **5** in FIG. **7** are the programming bars. The Search button allows the user to establish criteria for a search of the Internet for URLs to be included in a show structure. The Pick button lets a user select categories within established

information sources in order to make selections within the specified sites. Once Search Criteria and Pick categories have been established, the Gather button retrieves information from the selected sources according to the user's criteria at a specified time and frequency. The Schedule button allows the user to group site content by topic and then set the time when specific group will be played. The Play button begins the presentation of information. In the exemplary embodiment of the invention, the Play button also lets a user set parameters such as size of the content window, length of time each item is displayed and, if RoboSurf is being used as a screen saver, screen saver activation parameters (e.g. delay time, autostart position of cursor and password).

Channel window **6** displays structure publishers that may be accessed by a "point and click" operation. This window is analogous to a "favorite places" list in a conventional browser.

Control window **7** contains buttons which allow a user to Skip backwards and forwards through the show structure displayed in the Schedule window, Play the information provided from the structure of URLs, Stop playing this information, Print the information that is currently being viewed, and Mark the current resources for later viewing. In the exemplary embodiment of the invention, the Mark button interacts with the Play and Print buttons. While viewing contents relating to a show structure, a user may mark individual resources. After viewing the show structure, the user may specify that the marked resource be displayed again, queued for printing or displayed and printed. This feature may be activated, for example, through the play or print buttons by activating the buttons with a modifier key, for example, the right mouse button.

In addition to these buttons, the control window also includes an Add/Up button which allows a user to add resources to a structure when it is being set up in schedule mode and allows a user to move up the hypertext links that are being displayed on the screen during play mode. The Cut/Down button conversely allows a user to delete a site from the structure during schedule mode and move down the hypertext links during play mode. The function of the Surf button is described above. This button allows a user to temporarily suspend the viewing of a structure with a first button press and resume at the suspended site with a second button press. In accordance with another embodiment of the invention the functions described above in reference with FIG. **7** are embodiment in a separate remote control hardware device.

The e-mail and video phone buttons, item **9** on the display shown in FIG. **7**, invoke third-party software packages, one for e-mail and one for a video telephone product. Item **10** in the display is the content window. This is where all of the content which is Found, Picked, Gathered, Reviewed, Rated, Censored, Edited and Scheduled is finally and automatically played. The process of playing the content is like television mixed with radio, newspapers and a research library.

While the invention has been described in terms of an Internet browser application which allows a user to view or create a show structure of content from various sites, it is contemplated that it may be used for other purposes. For example, the invention may be used as a jukebox to schedule and present successive audio or video recordings or to schedule and view pay-per-view movies or videos.

As illustrated in FIG. **6**A a show structure of resources may be created and played in accordance with various embodiments of the invention. These resources may include, for example, various local application files on a user's computer. Thus, a user may view information relating to various executable programs in a selected arrangement on a desired schedule. A typical example, involves a user system that contains an accounting software, an on-line banking software, an Intranet e-mail program, and a calendar program. The user creates a show structure that executes each of these programs and displays the relevant information at a predetermined rate. This allows the user to automate various tasks that are currently accomplished manually. Thus, for example, the user on a daily basis can check received e-mail, followed by the user's schedule for the day, available funds in the user's bank account. The selected information are presented automatically in an organized arrangement. It is noted that in accordance with another embodiment of the invention, a show structure may include the user's local resources and other remote resources as those explained above in reference with Internet applications.

While only certain features of the invention have been illustrated and described herein, many modifications, substitutions, changes or equivalents will now occur to those skilled in the art. It is therefore, to be understood that the appended claims are intended to cover all such modifications and changes that fall within the true spirit of the invention.

I claim:

1. A method for displaying on a user's computer, content derived from a plurality of resources in an organized arrangement comprising the steps of:

creating a show structure of nodes, each node identifying a resource from a plurality of accessible resources;

without requiring user input, automatically accessing a plurality of said resources each of said resources identified by each of said nodes; and

displaying a content corresponding to each of said resources automatically in accordance with said show structure, wherein said step of creating further comprises the step of providing an interactively variable duration information, representing the duration within which a corresponding content to said resource is being displayed so as to enable a user to vary said duration.

2. The method in accordance with claim **1**, wherein said step of creating further comprises the step of providing a duration information, representing the duration within which a corresponding content to said resource is being displayed.

3. The method in accordance with claim **1**, wherein said step of accessing further comprises the step of executing an application file residing in the user's computer.

4. The method in accordance with claim **3** further comprising the step of generating a data file resulting from said executing step.

5. The method in accordance with claim **4** further comprising the step of storing said data file for each resource accessed.

6. The method in accordance with claim **5**, further comprises the step of retrieving each of said data files.

7. The method in accordance with claim **6** wherein said step of displaying further comprises the step of reformatting said data files in accordance with a predetermined arrangement.

8. The method in accordance with claim **7** further comprising the step of displaying control buttons for controlling the display of said data files.

9. The method in accordance with claim **8** further comprising the step of receiving control button commands for pausing said display of said data files, and for reversing the sequence of said display of said data files and for fast forwarding said display of said data files.

10. A method for displaying in a sequential arrangement on a user's terminal display, content derived via a communications network from a plurality of resources the method comprising the steps of:

identifying at least one resource from a plurality of accessible resources via said communications network, wherein each of said resources is associated with a corresponding icon displayed on a first section of said user's terminal;

creating a show structure of nodes, each node identifying a corresponding resource by recording a sequence of said resources by dragging and dropping said icons on a second section of said user's terminal;

without requiring user input, automatically accessing each of said resources identified by each of said nodes in accordance with said show structure;

automatically retrieving a content corresponding to each of said accessed resources; and

displaying each of said retrieved contents automatically in accordance with said show structure.

11. The method in accordance with claim 10, wherein said step of creating further comprises the step of providing an interactively variable duration information, representing the duration within which a corresponding content to said resource is being displayed.

12. The method in accordance with claim 10, wherein said step of accessing further comprises the step of downloading a file from a server residing within said communications network.

13. The method in accordance with claim 12 further comprising the step of receiving a dynamic content from a predetermined server.

14. The method in accordance with claim 13 further comprising the step of displaying a persistent content window for receiving said dynamic content within said persistent content window.

15. The method in accordance with claim 13 further comprising the step of inserting resource identifiers interspersed within said show structure relating to said dynamic content.

16. The method in accordance with claim 15 wherein said dynamic content is an advertising message.

17. The method in accordance with claim 15 further comprising the step of providing said dynamic content in accordance with said user's profile.

18. The method in accordance with claim 17 further comprising the step of storing said content for each resource accessed.

19. The method in accordance with claim 18 wherein said step of displaying further comprises the step of reformatting said content in accordance with a predetermined arrangement.

20. The method in accordance with claim 18 further comprising the step of displaying control buttons for controlling the display of said contents.

21. The method in accordance with claim 20 further comprising the step of receiving control button commands for pausing said display of said content, and for reversing the said display of said content and for fast forwarding said display of said content.

22. A method for transmitting in a sequential arrangement to a user's computer, content derived via a communications network from a plurality of resources the method comprising the steps of:

performing an on-line search, in response to which a plurality of search results and their corresponding URL resources are received;

automatically creating and storing a show structure of nodes, each node identifying a resource from a plurality of accessible resources via said communications network wherein said show structure is created in response to said search results received in response to said on-line search;

without requiring user input accessing each of said resources identified by each of said nodes;

retrieving a content corresponding to each of said accessed resources; and

automatically delivering said content to said user for display on said user's computer in accordance with said show structure.

23. The method in accordance with claim 22, wherein said step of storing further comprises the step of providing a duration information, representing the duration within which a corresponding content to said resource is being displayed.

24. The method in accordance with claim 22, wherein said step of accessing further comprises the step of downloading a file from a server residing within said communications network.

25. The method in accordance with claim 24 further comprising the step of transmitting to said user a dynamic content.

26. The method in accordance with claim 25 further comprising the step of formatting said dynamic content for displaying within a persistent content window on said user's terminal.

27. The method in accordance with claim 26 further comprising the step of inserting resource identifiers interspersed within said show structure relating to said dynamic content.

28. The method in accordance with claim 27 wherein said dynamic content is an advertising message.

29. The method in accordance with claim 28 further comprising the step of providing said dynamic content in accordance with said user's profile.

30. The method in accordance with claim 29 further comprising the step of storing said content for each resource accessed.

31. The method in accordance with claim 30 wherein said step of delivering further comprises the step of reformatting said content in accordance with a predetermined arrangement.

32. The method in accordance with claim 31 further comprising the step of transmitting information to said user for displaying control buttons for controlling the display of said contents.

33. The method in accordance with claim 32 further comprising the step of receiving control button commands for pausing said display of said content, and for reversing the said display of said content and for fast forwarding said display of said content.

34. The method in accordance with claim 32 further comprising the step of monitoring said user's instructions corresponding to interruption of said show structure within said duration.

35. The method in accordance with claim 32 further comprising the step of inserting advertisement displays between display of said contents corresponding to each of said nodes.

36. The method in accordance with claim 35 further comprising the step of selecting said advertisement displays based on said users' profiles.

37. A method for displaying on a user's computer, content derived from a plurality of resources in an organized arrangement comprising the steps of:

creating a multidimensional show structure of nodes, each node identifying a resource from a plurality of accessible resources;

without requiring user input accessing each of said resources identified by each of said nodes wherein at least two of said nodes are spanned concurrently;

automatically displaying a content corresponding to each of said resources in accordance with said show structure, wherein contents of said at least two nodes are displayed during an overlapping time period.

38. The method in accordance with claim **37** further comprising the step of providing a duration information, representing the duration within which a corresponding content to each of said resources is being displayed.

39. A method for displaying in a sequential arrangement to a user's computer, content derived via a communications network from a plurality of resources the method comprising the steps of:

selecting a category from a predefined list of categories;

performing an on-line search related to said selected category, in response to which a plurality of search results and their corresponding URL resources are received;

automatically creating and storing a show structure of nodes, each node identifying a resource from a plurality of accessible resources via said communications network wherein said show structure is created in response to said search results received in response to said on-line search;

without requiring user input retrieving each of said resources identified by each of said nodes; and

automatically delivering said content to said user for display on said user's computer in accordance with said show structure.

40. The method in accordance with claim **39**, wherein prior to said step of automatically delivering the method further comprises the step of filtering the retrieved plurality of said resources to determine which of the retrieved resources are to be displayed.

41. The method in accordance with claim **39**, further comprises the step of automatically replacing each of said displayed content to said user with a following retrieved resource, after a specified period of time.

42. The method in accordance with claim **39**, further comprising the step of allowing an option to bookmark each of the resources being displayed for later viewing.

43. The method in accordance with claim **39**, further comprising the step of allowing an option to bookmark each of the resources being displayed for printing a selected subset of said retrieved resources.

44. The method in accordance with claim **39**, wherein each of said retrieved resources is a World Wide Web page.

45. The method in accordance with claim **44**, further comprising the step of displaying a schedule window, for displaying a set of chosen line-up of show structures and time of their display, each corresponding to one of said categories.

46. A method for transmitting in a sequential arrangement to a user's computer, content derived via a communications network from a plurality of resources the method comprising the steps of:

creating a user profile by specifying a plurality of user preferences;

conducting an online search to locate a plurality of of web pages and their associated URL addresses corresponding to said user profile;

without requiring user input retrieving each of said web pages located by said search; and

automatically delivering said content to said user for display on said user's computer in accordance with said show structure.

47. The method in accordance with claim **46**, wherein prior to said step of automatically delivering said content the method further comprises the step of filtering the retrieved plurality of said resources to determine which of the retrieved resources are to be displayed.

48. The method in accordance with claim **46**, further comprises the step of automatically replacing each of said displayed content to said user with a following retrieved resource, after a specified period of time, wherein said period of time is interactively variable by said user.

49. The method in accordance with claim **46**, wherein said step of filtering further comprises the step of reviewing each of said web pages in accordance with a predefined rating system.

50. The method in accordance with claim **49**, wherein said rating system is MPAA rating system.

51. The method in accordance with claim **46**, further comprising the step of censoring each of said retrieved web pages in accordance to a specified censor level.

52. The method in accordance with claim **46**, further comprising the step of allowing an option to bookmark each of the resources being displayed for later viewing.

53. The method in accordance with claim **46**, further comprising the step of allowing an option to bookmark each of the resources being displayed for printing a selected subset of said retrieved resources.

54. The method in accordance with claim **46**, further comprising the step of displaying a schedule window, for displaying a set of chosen line-up of show structures corresponding to one of said categories, and their corresponding display time.

55. An automated content displayer which is used to sequentially present, to a remote user, information content derived from selected websites, comprising:

means for storing at least one list of websites, each website of said at least one list having a corresponding address and an amount of time for which information content from said website is to be displayed to said remote user;

means for receiving from said remote user a selection of said list;

means, responsive to said selection of said list, for automatically retrieving information content from the websites in said list, without a user input;

means, for automatically providing the retrieved information content to said remote user;

means, for caching and queuing content from subsequent websites within said list, while a content corresponding to a current website is being displayed; and

a timer for controlling the duration that said information content is displayed to said user in accordance with the stored amount of time and for determining a time for retrieving information content corresponding to a next item in the list, wherein said duration that said information content is displayed is also interactively variable so as to enable a user to vary said duration.

56. An automated content displayer in accordance with claim **55**, further comprising means to determine whether one of said remote users requesting information is capable of receiving dynamic content.

57. An automated content displayer in accordance with claim **56**, further comprising means for determining a profile of said remote user, when said user is capable of receiving dynamic content.

58. An automated content displayer in accordance with claim **57**, further comprising means for transmitting the type of dynamic content sent to said remote user based on said profile of said user.

59. An automated content displayer in accordance with claim **55**, further comprising means to dynamically modify said stored addresses based on sites skipped by said user before expiration of said timer.

60. An automated content displayer in accordance with claim **59**, further comprising means for transmitting advertising content to each one of said users in response to said dynamic modification.

61. An automated content displayer in accordance with claim **60**, wherein said advertising content is based on preferences of each one of said users.

62. An automated content displayer in accordance with claim **55**, further comprising means to monitor whether one of said users has selected a new site before expiration of said timer.

63. An automated content displayer in accordance with claim **62**, further comprising means to determine whether said new site is within said stored list of selected sites.

64. An automated content displayer in accordance with claim **63**, further comprising a database configured to store decisions made by said user while viewing contents of said sites corresponding to said stored list of selected sites.

* * * * *