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(54) **DISPLAY OF USER SELECTED ADVERTISING CONTENT IN A DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT**

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This patent is subject to a terminal disclaimer.

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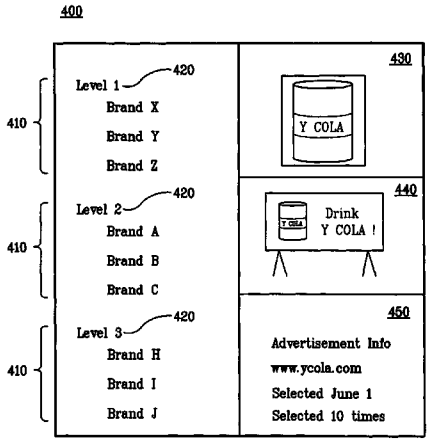
(57) **ABSTRACT**

A system and method for placing an advertisement in a digital environment based upon a user's choice, subject to certain predetermined parameters, is disclosed. Through the method, a user is assigned a rating based upon, for example, his performance in a game. A list of advertisements which correspond to that rating is displayed to the user, who may then select a desired advertisement from the list. The selected advertisement is then displayed in the digital environment. Reports may be generated based upon the advertisements selected and the number of selections and/or impressions (e.g., uses or viewings) by the user, which may be sent to advertisers.

21 Claims, 6 Drawing Sheets



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U.S. Appl. No. 14/028,327 Office Action mailed Nov. 7, 2013.
U.S. Appl. No. 11/586,990 Office Action mailed Nov. 20, 2013.
U.S. Appl. No. 11/586,958 Office Action mailed Nov. 6, 2013.
U.S. Appl. No. 11/586,958 Final Office Action mailed Feb. 14, 2011.
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U.S. Appl. No. 11/588,036 Final Office Action mailed Apr. 15, 2014.
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U.S. Appl. No. 11/586,959 Final Office Action mailed Jul. 31, 2014.
U.S. Appl. No. 12/703,188 Final Office Action mailed Jul. 14, 2014.
JP 2013-039681, Decision of Refusal dated Feb. 3, 2015.
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U.S. Appl. No. 11/588,036 Office Action mailed Jan. 15, 2015.
U.S. Appl. No. 11/586,958 Office Action mailed Jan. 14, 2015.
U.S. Appl. No. 11/586,959 Final Office Action mailed Dec. 8, 2014.
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U.S. Appl. No. 13/857,082 Office Action mailed Apr. 16, 2015.
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U.S. Appl. No. 14/308,313 Office Action mailed Apr. 27, 2015.
U.S. Appl. No. 14/091,327 Office Action mailed Mar. 12, 2015.
U.S. Appl. No. 14/315,694 Office Action mailed Apr. 10, 2015.
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U.S. Appl. No. 11/586,959 Office Action mailed Jul. 9, 2015.
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US 8,689,348, 04/2014, Navar (withdrawn)

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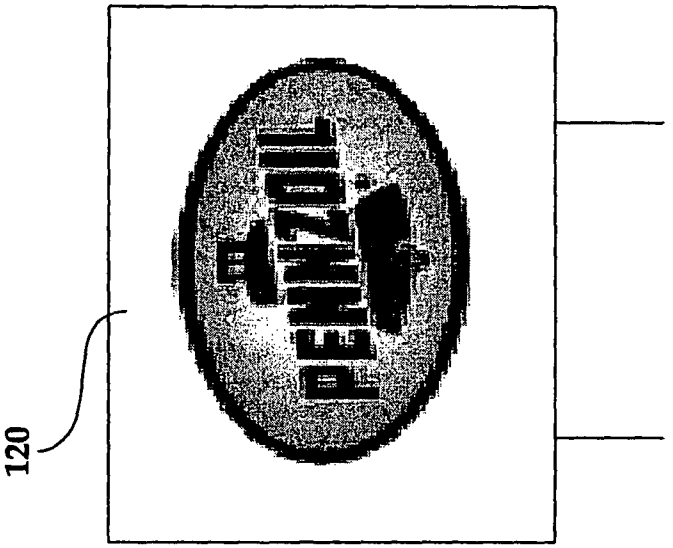


FIGURE 1B

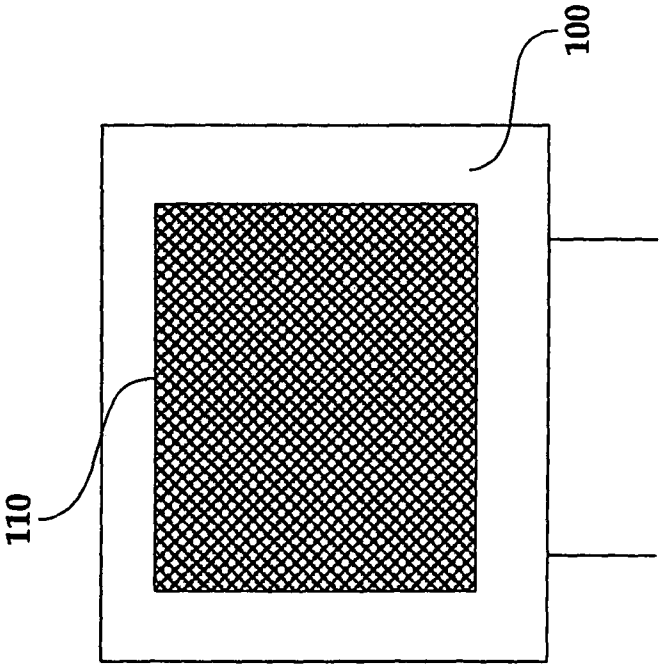


FIGURE 1A

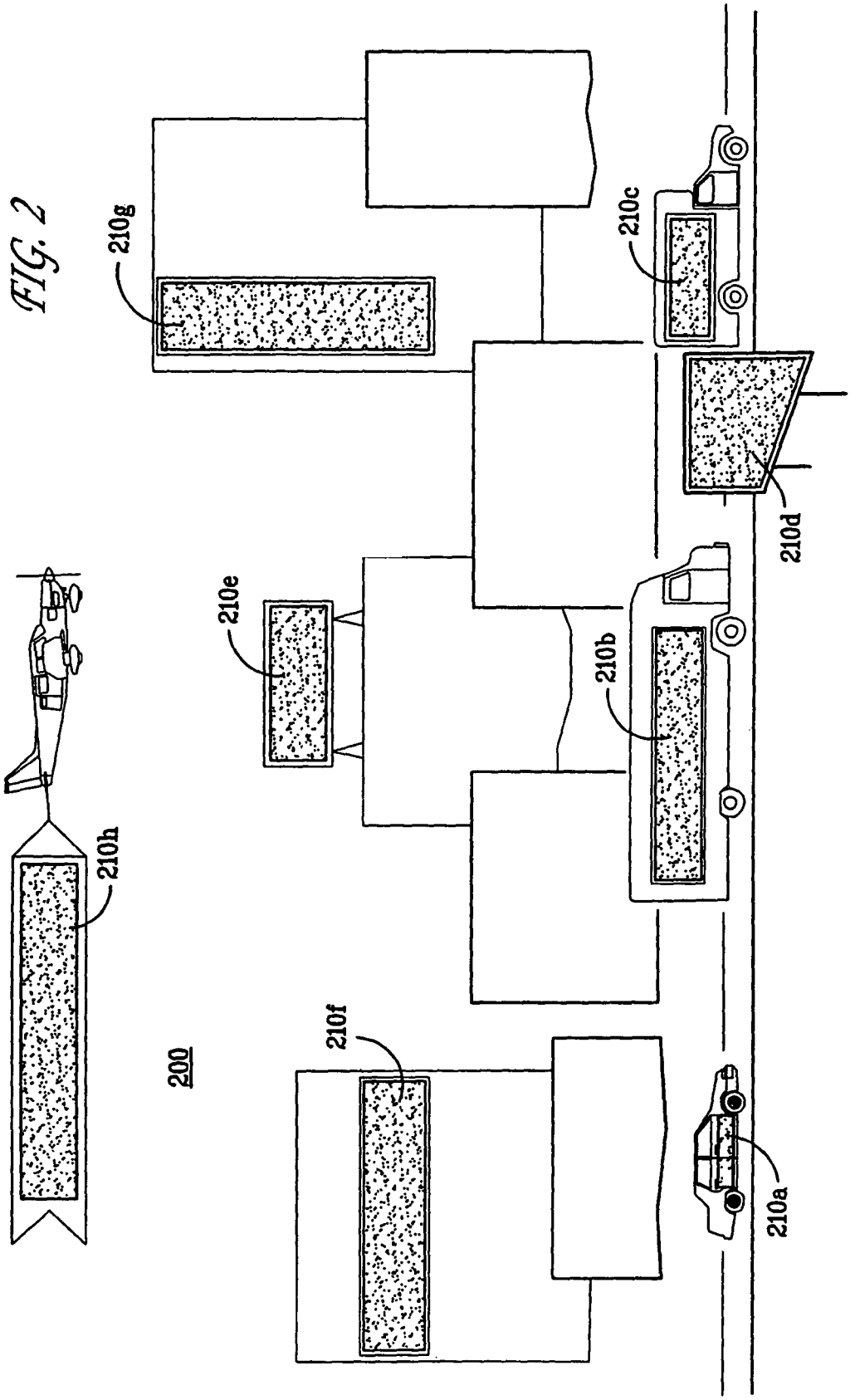


FIG. 2

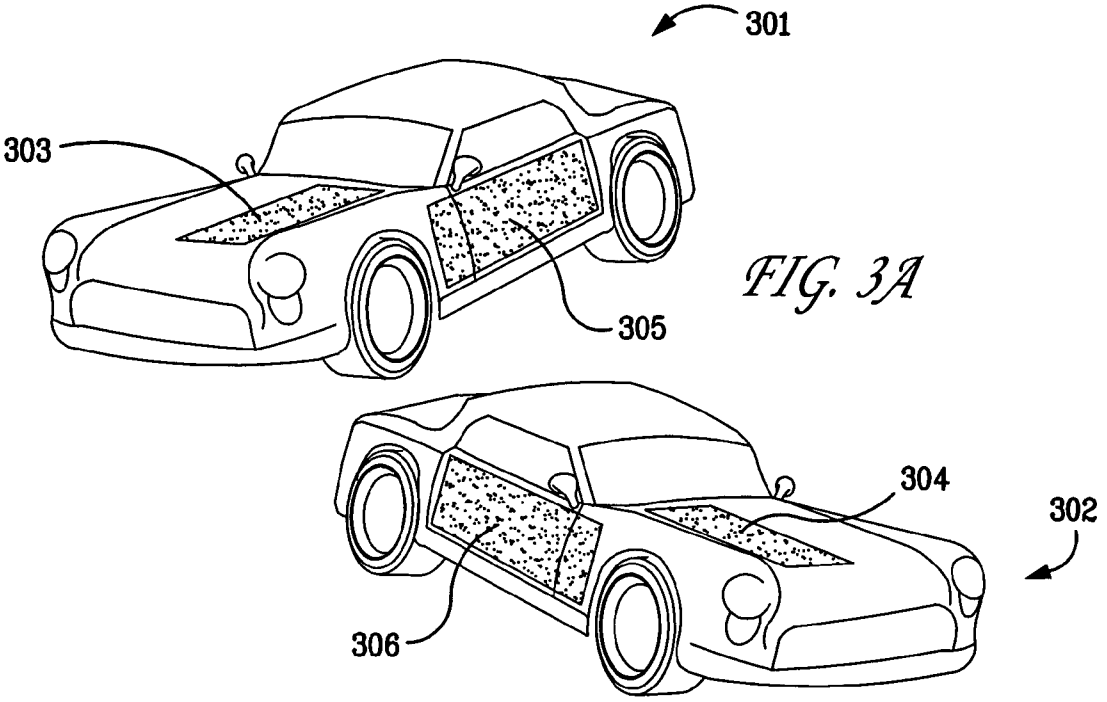


FIG. 3A

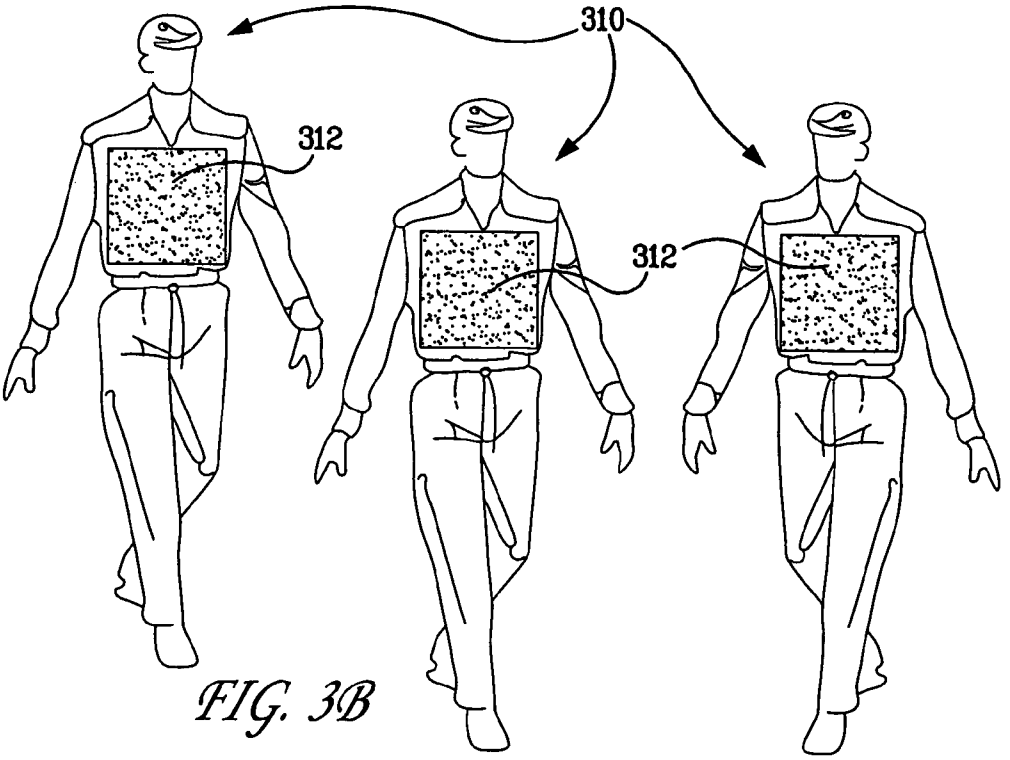


FIG. 3B

FIG. 4

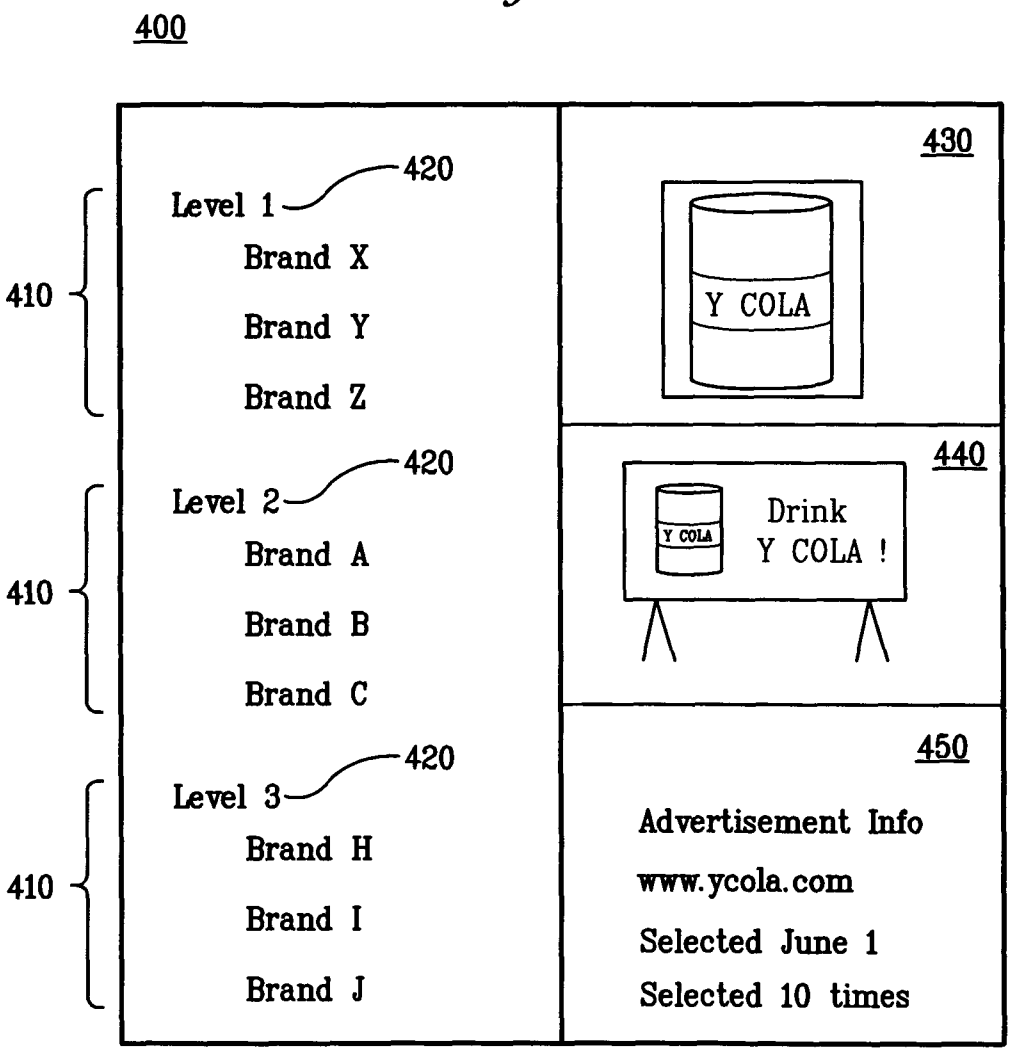
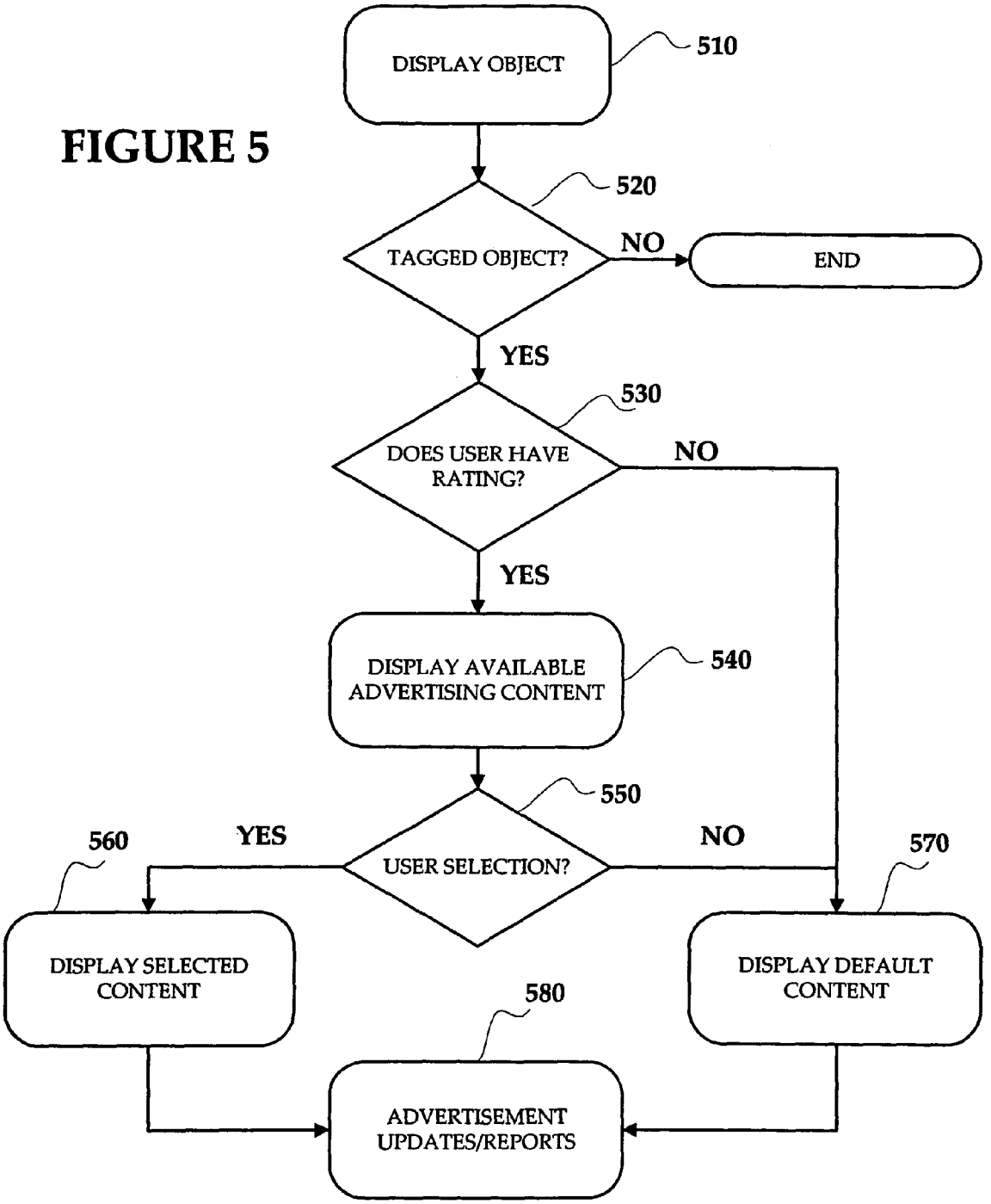

400
420
Level 1
Brand X
Brand Y
Brand Z
410
420
Level 2
Brand A
Brand B
Brand C
410
420
Level 3
Brand H
Brand I
Brand J
410
430
Y COLA
440
Y COLA
Drink
Y COLA !
450
Advertisement Info
www.ycola.com
Selected June 1
Selected 10 times

FIGURE 5


DISPLAY OBJECT
510
520
TAGGED OBJECT?
NO
END
YES
530
DOES USER HAVE RATING?
NO
YES
DISPLAY AVAILABLE ADVERTISING CONTENT
540
550
560
YES
USER SELECTION?
NO
570
DISPLAY SELECTED CONTENT
DISPLAY DEFAULT CONTENT
580
ADVERTISEMENT UPDATES/REPORTS

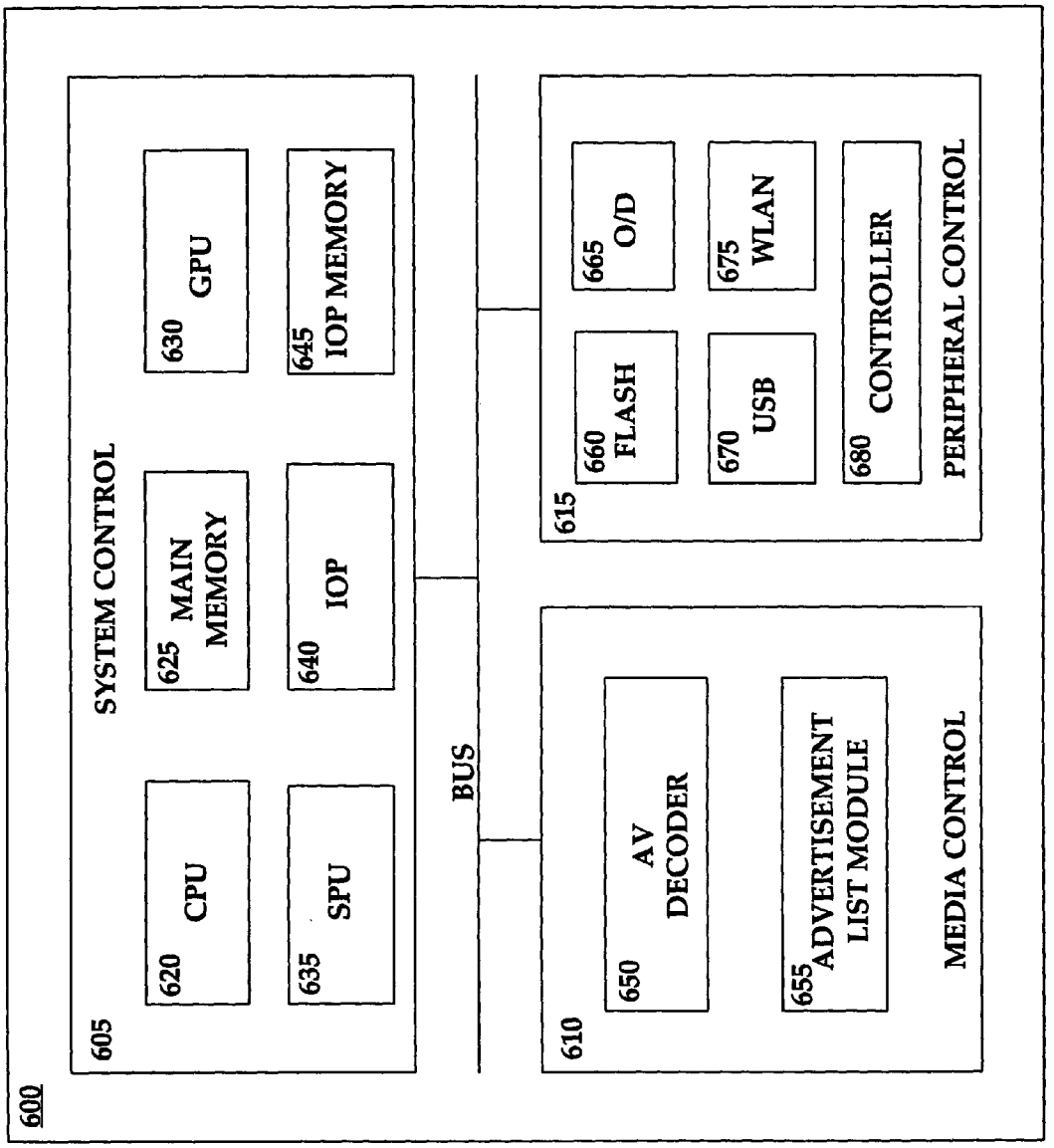

600
605
SYSTEM CONTROL
620
CPU
625
MAIN MEMORY
630
GPU
635
SPU
640
IOP
645
IOP MEMORY
BUS
610
MEDIA CONTROL
650
AV DECODER
655
ADVERTISEMENT LIST MODULE
615
PERIPHERAL CONTROL
660
FLASH
665
O/D
670
USB
675
WLAN
680
CONTROLLER

FIGURE 6

DISPLAY OF USER SELECTED ADVERTISING CONTENT IN A DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

This application is a continuation-in-part and claims the priority benefit of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 11/241,229 filed Sep. 30, 2005 and entitled "Advertising Impression Determination," the disclosure of which is incorporated herein by reference.

This application is related to U.S. patent application Ser. No. 09/780,995 for an "In-Contents Advertising Method, In-Contents Advertising Server, and Program-Transferring Medium for Realizing In-Contents Advertising," the disclosure of which is incorporated herein by reference.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

This invention relates generally to advertisements in a digital medium. More specifically, this invention relates to placing advertisements for products, services and/or advertisers that may be of interest to a particular consumer in a digital medium, such as an interactive video game, based in part upon the consumer's preferences, and tracking the advertisements that are selected and how often those advertisements are viewed by the consumer.

2. Description of the Related Art

At one time, advertisements were limited to handbills and word-of-mouth. As new mediums for communication developed, so did opportunities and means for advertising. For example, with the advent of newspapers and magazines, advertisements soon began to fill the pages alongside the daily or weekly news.

Such advertising generally proved to be a benefit to all parties involved. Advertisers were able to tout their latest products or services (or those of their clientele); newspapers and magazines were able to offset the costs of printing through the sale of advertising space; and consumers were able to learn of new products of interest through their interaction with these various forms of media. This beneficial relationship amongst the advertiser, media, and consumer held true with regard to the arrival of radio and television.

Advertisers and media outlets are now, however, finding themselves challenged by the rise of digital media, especially with regard to video games and portable digital media devices. As the advertising power of older mediums decreases due to the rise of video games and portable digital media as forms of entertainment, advertising buys for product and service offerings are seen by less people as a whole and, demographically, less of the power-buying public. As such, there has become an increased effort to expand advertising to digital media.

Despite the ability to introduce advertising content into, for example, a video game environment, the user may often dislike an advertisement selected automatically or at random, or may wish to customize the environment or game. For example, in a racing game, a user might wish to customize his or her racecar with advertising content such as a name, logo, or other advertising for a particular product or service, as is done in real life, to enhance the appearance of the car. Similarly, in a sports game, a user might wish to display particular advertising content on the shirt or uniform of a game character or team, rather than leave the shirt or uniform blank, or displaying some default or random selection.

Many users have a genuine interest in a particular product or service, to the extent that they may wish to incorporate advertising content related to that product or service that they find appealing into their game or other digital environment. Similarly, advertisers spend considerable sums of money for the placement of advertising content in a particular game environment, and may be willing to pay more when they know that the user deems the content to be desirable. Accordingly, there is a need for users to be able to select those advertisements for products and/or services that are of interest to appear in a digital environment and to track those selections so that advertisers may know which content is considered more desirable by the users.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

An embodiment of the present invention provides a method for placing an advertisement in a digital environment based upon a user's choice, subject to certain predetermined parameters. Through the method, a user is assigned a rating. A list of advertisements that correspond to that rating is displayed to the user, who may then select a desired advertisement from the list. The selected advertisement is then displayed in the digital environment. Reports may be generated based upon the advertisements selected and the number of selections and/or impressions (e.g., uses, interactions, or viewings) by the user, which may be reported to advertisers.

An exemplary system for implementing the aforementioned interaction-based advertising display method is also disclosed as is a software-medium for implementing the same.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. **1**A illustrates a 'tagged' object in a digital environment such as a video game.

FIG. **1**B illustrates a 'tagged' object wherein an advertisement has been 'inserted' into the 'tagged' area.

FIG. **2** illustrates an exemplary digital video game environment with a variety of 'tagged' objects for the insertion of advertising content.

FIG. **3**A illustrates an alternative object that may appear in an exemplary digital video game environment with a variety of 'tagged' objects for the insertion of advertising content.

FIG. **3**B illustrates an alternative object that may appear in an exemplary digital video game environment with a variety of 'tagged' objects for the insertion of advertising content.

FIG. **4** illustrates an available advertisement reference list in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. **5** illustrates an exemplary method for modifying an available advertisement reference list in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. **6** illustrates an exemplary system for modifying an available advertisement reference list in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Certain objects in a digital medium such as a video game may be 'tagged,' these 'tagged' areas being subject to the insertion or placement of advertising content. For example, and as shown in FIG. **1**A, the face of a billboard **100** may be 'tagged' (**110**) to indicate that an advertisement may be embedded in that location. In this way, an advertising system like that disclosed in U.S. patent application Ser. Nos. 09/780,995 and 11/241,229 may, via an advertising client embodied in video game software or system hardware, identify various

tagged areas **110** and provide advertising content that may be imposed through texturing or other graphic rendering techniques that make it appear as if the advertisement was designed specifically for the billboard as shown in FIG. **1**B (**120**). Such dynamic advertising content may be pushed or pulled into the video game or other digital environment via, for example, an end-user client and/or advertising server.

Advertising content may also be loaded into digital media during development and subsequently 'unlocked' by a game player after purchase of the media. For example, a user may input a special code or obtain an 'Easter egg' in a game whereby specific advertisements embedded in the game are made available for association with one or more tagged advertising assets (e.g., tagged objects). Similar codes or 'Easter eggs' may be used to unlock special content delivered over a network, such as advertisements hosted by an advertisement server. The code may be a reward for performance in the game.

Various methodologies for 'inserting' content into a 'tagged' asset are known in the art. For example, U.S. Pat. No. 5,946,664 for an "Apparatus and Method for Executing a Game Program Having Advertisements Therein" discloses receiving, at predetermined times, advertising data that relates to at least one advertisement in a video game. The advertising data is then displayed in particular locales in the game environment in accordance with the particular game program. U.S. Pat. No. 6,539,544 for a "Game Machine System, Broadcasting System, Data Distribution System, and Method, Program Executing Apparatus and Method" discloses a system configured to distribute digital data in response to software start enable signals and identification signals. These signals may correspond to commercial advertisements for substitution or insertion into a portion of the data at the receiver side system. The disclosure of both U.S. Pat. No. 5,946,664 and U.S. Pat. No. 6,539,544 are incorporated herein by reference.

FIG. **2** illustrates an exemplary digital video game environment **200**—a cityscape—with a variety of advertisements as may be implemented in an embodiment of the present invention. The cityscape game environment **200** may reflect any number of objects and structures as may be found in a city environment, for example: a number of buildings in addition to vehicles that travel throughout the general landscape (e.g., hills, mountains, etc.) via a series of roadways. Certain objects may also appear in the video game environment **200** surrounding the city, such as airplanes and the like.

While a cityscape is depicted in FIG. **2**, any number of different video game environments may be utilized within the scope of the present invention. For example, the video game environment may be a race-track, which might reflect the racing surface and grandstands filled with spectators, and even the race cars. 'Pit-row' might run along side a particular portion of the race-track. Alternatively, the video game environment **200** may be a modern or medieval battlefield in addition to any number of natural environments (e.g., underwater, outer space, open fields, forests, mountains, etc.), or a sports game taking place in an arena or stadium. The present invention may be implemented in any video game environment **200**. Regardless of the particular video game environment **200**, game designers and engineers will attempt to make the environment as realistic as possible by including objects and structures that lend to realism of that particular environment.

In the case of the cityscape of FIG. **2**, part of that realism may be attributed to various types of signage, specifically advertisements, trade names, and trademarks or corporate logos (collectively referred to as advertisements) that indicate the source or quality of certain goods and/or services. Various structures in the video game environment **200** of FIG. **2** exhibit numerous types of signage and advertisements **210**.

For example, advertisement **210***a* is an advertisement as may be found on the side of a taxi-cab. The advertisement may be the taxi-cab company name and phone number or for a particular good or service in the region serviced by the taxi-cab (e.g., a night club). Similarly, advertisement **210***b* is an advertisement as may be found on the side of a bus, which may be for the local newspaper, a local radio show, or an upcoming movie. Likewise, advertisement **210***c* found on the side of, for example, an industrial vehicle may be for a particular shipping company (e.g., a moving company) or for the name of the company whose cargo is being shipped (e.g., a furniture company).

Advertisements may also be on billboards as in the case of advertisement **210***d* and advertisement **210***e*. Such billboards may be alongside a road (like advertisement **210***d*) or may be a top a building (like advertisement **210***e*). Any variety of good or services may be found on such billboards as is the case in the real world. Signage and related advertisements and indicia of sponsorship or ownership may also be found on the face of a building (like advertisement **210***f*), which could reflect the name of the company occupying the building or may also be a poster of some sort applied to the face of a building that may be permanent or temporary (like advertisement **210***g*).

Advertisements may be found in a variety of other mediums in the video game environment **200** such as skywriting, banners that follow behind an airplane (like advertisement **210***f*), or on the actual body of the airplane or a vehicle (e.g., painted on the body or frosted on the glass versus an affixed sign or placard). Advertisements may also be seen on any variety of posters and signs as may be found at bus stops or on televisions in an electronics store. Similarly, advertisements may be seen on handbills, flyers or other printed media in the video game environment **200**. Additionally, certain advertising effects may be achieved through audio advertising over the radio or a loudspeaker or the spoken word of other characters in the video game environment **200** as is further discussed below.

Advertising 'tags' (as referenced in FIG. **1**A) may reflect not only the space in a game environment **200** where advertising content may be 'inserted' but may also reflect information such as size limitations, coloring and shading requirements, pointers to variables that track state and impression data, functions and programs associated with the advertisement, hyperlinks, mini-games associated with the advertisement, user-profile filters and, in some embodiments, even advertising relevance. For example, various parties may impose and apply rules and metadata related to the 'tagging' of assets as well as the advertising content that is ultimately inserted into these assets. As a result of 'tagging' various advertisement areas, not only may relevant advertising content (i.e., targeted advertising based on a user profile) be delivered to a user but the generation of an available advertisement reference list may take place as is further described below.

Advertising 'tags' are not limited to non-moving 'print-like' advertisements (e.g., a billboard). Moving items such as cars or players may also contain advertising tags. For example, FIG. **3**A shows race cars **301** and **302** having advertising tags **303** and **304** (respectively) on their hoods, and tags **305** and **306** (respectively) on their sides. FIG. **3**B shows players **310** wearing uniforms or jerseys containing advertising tags **312**. The 'tagging' of various other objects in a video

game environment including non-traditional advertising objects is within the scope and spirit of the present disclosure.

Advertising 'tags' may also be associated with other visual formats such as audio and video. For example, a television in a video game may be 'tagged' as to reflect that the user tuning the television to a particular channel will cause a full motion video advertisement to be streamed. Various other advertisements may be streamed or rendered on additional channels subject to the whim of the game designer and the extent of 'tagging' of assets for advertisement introduction. Similar attributes may be reserved for providing real-time programming and the like (e.g., short films, movie previews and so forth).

Similarly, audio may be 'tagged' for advertising purposes. For example, if a user plays a video game with a radio (e.g., in an automobile), the game designer may create different stations whereby actual music from actual musical artists is played. That music may be interspersed with various advertisements as one might hear over the radio in the real-world. Similarly, the actual music a user listens to may be a dynamic play list as in the case of a real-world radio station instead of a one-time, static soundtrack. In that way, the user may play the game today or five years from now and be able to listen to not only relevant advertisement but relevant music that is current and popular as of the day the user plays the game.

In one embodiment of the present invention, a user is assigned a rating. This rating may be based on the user's performance in a video game as a whole (e.g., overall performance) or in part (e.g., with regard to specific objectives or missions). For example, a user may be awarded ratings points for winning races or games, completing combat missions, or accomplishing certain other tasks. The higher (or better) the user's performance in a particular game environment, the higher the user's rating.

The rating may be assigned by a variety of entities. For example, a particular video game may assign ratings points in the context of the game. A game character (in a military example) may start off as a private. That rank may be is associated with a particular rating or may in and of itself be the rating. The game character may (through excellence in combat, for example) be promoted (e.g., to corporal, to sergeant, to lieutenant, to captain, to major, to colonel, to general) or receive various awards and commendations (e.g., the Silver Star, the Purple Heart, and so forth). The ratings may also be assigned in a sports context. For example, in a baseball game, a game character may start off at a Single A minor league farm team. Again, that assignment may be associated with a particular rating or may be the rating itself. As the game character progresses through the game (e.g., through winning games, striking out opponents, and the like), the character may be promoted to the Double-AA farm team, to the Triple AAA farm team and eventually to the major leagues.

Various ratings may also comprise subsidiary ratings. For example, the military example, a character might be a second lieutenant or a first lieutenant. The character may also be a brigadier general (i.e., a one-star general), a major general (i.e., a two-star general), a lieutenant general (i.e., a three-star general), and so forth. Similarly, and in the baseball example, a pitcher may be a starting pitcher, a short- or long-relief pitcher, or a closer.

Each rating may have associated with it a list of advertising content that is available to the user if the user has achieved that particular rating. From this list of advertising content, the user may select particular advertising content for insertion in a digital environment. For example, the user may select particular content for application to a vehicle as in the case of FIG. **3**A. The user may similarly select advertisements for display on a uniform as is the case in FIG. **3**B.

The user may also be free to select advertising content associated with ratings below the user's particular rating but not from higher ratings. For example, the user may select a name, logo, picture, or other advertising element to insert in a particular advertising 'tag' from the available list based upon the user's preference. By doing so, the user may customize his race car, team, or character jersey, etc., in a way pleasing to the user while maintaining game realism and still offering an advertising benefit to advertisers or manufacturers and/or providers of goods and/or services.

In one embodiment of the present invention, a higher user rating may result in access to more desirable advertising content. For example, a user with a low rating may be limited to selecting advertising content for generic fictitious (or real-world) advertisers such as "Joe's Bail Bonds" or "Sam's Seafood" to place on a car in a racing game, on jerseys in a sports game, on billboards, or in other 'tagged' assets in a game environment like that described in FIG. **2**. A user with a higher rating, however, may have access to advertising content from top-tier or more desirable advertising offerings such as Coca-Cola or Nike.

Any desired number of ratings (or sub-ratings) of a game player and/or levels (or sub-levels) of advertising content as they pertain to the aforementioned user ratings may be implemented within the scope of the present invention. Thus, the user may be encouraged to accomplish the goals of the particular game and obtain a higher rating in order to gain access to more desirable advertising content so that the user may customize the game and its environment to their particular liking.

In another embodiment of the present invention, the user may choose to interact with an advertisement for a product or service by means other than placing or selecting a logo, name or picture on an item or character. For example, a user may cause their game character to listen to a particular song on the radio or watch a particular movie or television program. Similarly, the user may cause their character to drive a particular automobile or to drink a particular beverage. The user may further cause their character to interact with certain items in the environment such as articles of clothing, fashion accessories, or any other good or service.

Interactions may include an information exchange, a communication, observation, detection of sound, and direct or indirect physical contact. For example, an interaction may constitute an exchange of information via a conversation. An interaction may also be represented by the receipt of information via observations. Alternatively, a character may interact directly with an object that has been 'tagged' with advertising. For example, a game character may pick up a soft drink sold by a particular soft drink manufacturer. In a further embodiment, a game character may hear a communication, for example, from a television or a radio broadcast or between other game characters. In yet another embodiment, a game character may indirectly come into contact with a product; for example by discharging a weapon at a vending machine or a billboard. The above described game interactions are exemplary; the scope of the present invention covers all types of interactions with an advertisement, product, or service.

FIG. **4** illustrates an available advertisement list **400** reflecting advertising content (or indicia of that content) that may (presently or in the future) be available for insertion into an game environment (like that disclosed in FIG. **2**) with advertising 'tags' or other means for the display of advertising content. Items in the list (i.e., advertisement identifiers **410** reflecting different products/services or brand names) may be

sorted into different groups, levels, or categories **420**. Each of the groups **420** may be associated with a specific user rating. Which groups **420** (and the identifiers **410** therein) are associated with a particular rating may be determined in different ways. In one embodiment, the placement of an identifier **410** in a particular group may be subject to certain priorities as established through various advertisers 'buying in' to an advertisement network. That is, one advertiser may pay a premium fee for their product name (an identifier **410**) to be listed in a particular group **420** associated with a higher user rating than other product names (identifiers **410**) and thus harder to obtain in that a game player must exhibit exceptional skill to achieve access to that group **420** and the identifiers **410** therein. Even placement of a particular identifier **410** within the group **420** could command a different fee (e.g., which identifier **410** is listed first and which identifier **410** is listed last).

Thus, advertising content (identifier **410**) in a group **420** corresponding to the highest rating will be seen and used by only those few players who are able to achieve that rating. This may create a "premium" effect in which the advertiser pays more to have its name and content considered as requiring more skill and perseverance to obtain and thus more "valuable" or desirable to a user in that it represents the user's ability to obtain it. On the other hand, default content, or content corresponding to low ratings, may be available to many more players and thus will be seen more often, but may not be considered by the players to be worthy of much attention.

Other methodologies may be used to list or sort the advertisement identifiers **410**. Listings may be categorized by product sector or service sector, for example: food, movies, and music. Sub-categories may also be used, for example, with regard to food: fine-dining, exotic, fast food, etc. Any number of categorization and arrangement schemes may be implemented in available advertisement list **400** including, but not limited, to a rotating basis within a particular group **420** or among all the identifiers **410** as a whole (e.g., one product may be in a low group like Level 1 but rotated to a high group like Level 3 the following day). Alternatively, the advertiser may pay a fee each time its advertising content is displayed, with content in the higher categories commanding a higher price than content in the lower categories.

Available advertisement list **400** may also comprise an advertisement preview window **430** that may show the advertisement (or a portion thereof) as that advertisement will be imported to a particular game environment. In this way, a user may preview the particular advertisement that is associated with advertisement identifier **410** before that advertisement is selected for insertion into a game environment.

Available advertisement list **400** may also comprise an environment window **440** that shows a variety of advertising assets subject to the insertion of advertising (e.g., a billboard as shown in FIG. **2** or a race car as shown in FIG. **3**A). The user may, in an embodiment of the present invention, drag-and-drop an advertisement (such as may be displayed in advertisement preview window **430**) into the particular advertising asset displayed in the environment window **440**. The environment window **440**, after identifying the asset for advertisement insertion, may request user confirmation and then present the next asset available for insertion. In some embodiments of the present invention, a family or group of assets may be displayed in the environment window **440** such that a particular selected advertisement (or related group of advertisements) is dragged-and-dropped into a particular group of assets such that advertisement selection may be accelerated to allow the user to advance to actual game play in the newly populated advertisement environment.

For example, a particular shape of billboard as may be displayed in environment window **440** may be populated with a particular advertisement associated with an identifier **410** (e.g., a specific advertisement) or a group of advertisements associated with an identifier **410** (e.g., a broader advertisement campaign), or a general family of advertisements (e.g., fast food). A particular series of advertisement assets may also be displayed in the environment window **440**—for example, a series of billboards on a particular street or a series of televisions in a particular electronics store. Further, various tagged assets in a digital environment (or a specific number of assets) may be purchased or leased by a particular company through an advertising network. User selection of a particular advertisement, advertisement campaign, or advertisement family may be applied across the random group of tagged assets currently leased or sold through the network.

Selection of advertisements may also be achieved in other means other than 'drag-and-drop.' For example, a user may simply point-and-click or highlight and select a particular identifier **410** or group **420** and the appropriate collection of advertisements will randomly be displayed in various 'tagged' assets. Similarly, a user may individually select advertisements as they pertain to individual assets but without using a 'drag-and-drop' method (e.g., point-and-click). In still further embodiments, advertisement insertion may be 100% random but limited as to the particular availability of advertisements as those advertisements pertain to a particular user rating.

Available advertisement list **400** may also comprise an advertisement information window **450** that may display additional information about a presently selected advertisement such as a website, a brief summary of the product, the last date the advertisement was selected, the number of times the advertisement was selected, a particular association of an advertisement with a particular user rating and so forth. Advertisement information window **450** may list information about the advertisement generated by the user (e.g., generated through a virtual keyboard or voice-recognition software via a USB-microphone) or as may be provided specifically by the advertiser through an advertisement network.

Available advertisement list **400** may list only those groups **420** and/or identifiers **410** available to a particular skill set or user rating. That is, as of yet unavailable or unachieved identifiers **410** and/or groups **420** may not be displayed. In other embodiments, unavailable identifiers **410** and/or groups **420** may be listed but 'grayed out' or otherwise identified as being presently unavailable as an option for advertisement insertion. Previews may or may not be displayed in the preview window **430** depending on the unavailability. For example, by previewing the available advertisement as a 'teaser,' a game player may be motivated to accomplish certain in-game tasks or objectives such that they may be rewarded by access to the advertisement. Advertisements associated with various identifiers **410** may also rotate or change on a regular basis (e.g., new content is pushed in by an advertising server or made accessible by a server).

In some embodiments of the present invention, the information displayed through available advertisement list **400** may be integrated or further associated with a advertisement reference as described in co-pending and commonly owned U.S. patent application No. 60/798,240 filed May 5, 2006 and entitled "Population Of An Advertisement Reference List," the disclosure of which is incorporated herein by reference.

The advertisement identifier **410** of the present invention may also comprise a hyperlink to additional information

about the product or service. This hyperlink may be embedded in the identifier **410** or explicitly provided in the advertisement information window **450**. For example, a user may select an identifier **410** (or associated link) from the available advertisement list **400** via a controller device, and the link may then cause the launching of a web browser or other interface tool such that more detailed data about the particular service or product may be provided. This link may, in some instances, lead directly to the product manufacturer or service provider's website as may occur over a network connection. Upon arrival, the user may then peruse the website or other data portal of the service/product and learn more about the appropriate service/product or make a purchase. Selecting a particular identifier **410** may also lead to a third-party site where similar or identical information about a product or service may be provided.

In some instances, the aforementioned third-party site may be a shopping portal such as Amazon.com. In these instances, the user may then begin a commercial transaction to purchase the product. In one embodiment, user data as may be stored on a memory card or otherwise accessible due to, for example, having logged onto the network. This user data may automatically be populated into an order form (e.g., name, billing address, etc.) in order to expedite the purchase. In other instances, the third-party site may be a consumer review type website or portal wherein information about a product or service as generated by actual users/purchasers of the particular service or product may be reviewed.

In other instances, selecting the identifier **410** may lead to the option for the manufacturer or an intermediary party to provide more information about the product or service via an alternate communications medium. For example, the user may request information via e-mail or direct mail. The user may further request informative brochures or videos or a call from a customer service representative. Such an exchange may further occur on-line via, for example, a VoIP exchange or a textual chat session.

While data may be accessed over a network (e.g., the Internet) or via various sites hosted by manufacturers, service providers or other third-parties, various data may also be retained and accessed locally. For example, if a particular software title on a CD-ROM is embedded with particular advertisements, additional information about products in those advertisements may also be embedded on the CD. Alternatively, the information may be located in a local storage medium, the data having been accessed over a network during a download or update procedure not necessarily related to the particular viewing of any given advertisement although such information may be obtained concurrently as well.

FIG. **5** illustrates an exemplary method **500** for displaying a selected advertisement in response to a user request in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention. In step **510**, an object is displayed in a digital environment, for example, on a billboard (**100**) like that described in FIG. **1**A. In step **520**, a determination is made as to whether that object comprises a 'tagged' area (e.g., area **110** in FIG. **1**A) wherein certain advertisement data may be implemented, inserted, or otherwise displayed. If the object is not 'tagged' or otherwise capable of receiving dynamic advertising content, the method (at least with respect to the present object) terminates. It should be noted that this method may be executing simultaneously with respect to a number of objects capable of being rendered in a digital environment.

At step **530** it is determined whether the user has a rating, and, if so, the rating the user has obtained. For example, a user may not have a rating if it is the user's first time playing the game. If a user rating is found (as may be stored in, for example, main memory **625** or memory accessible by control engine **615** as both are described in FIG. **6**), a list of the advertising content associated with that rating is displayed at step **540**. This display may comport with the available advertisement list discussed in the context of FIG. **4** or another exemplary interface offering for advertisement selection and implementation. If there is no user rating assigned to the user, default content (e.g., a fake advertisement) may be displayed for that particular object as in step **570**. Alternatively, the default may be that no content is displayed at all.

In step **550**, a determination is made as to whether the user has selected desired advertising content from the available advertisement list **400**. If it is determined that the user has selected desired content, the selected content is displayed on the tagged area (**110**) as in FIG. **1**B (**120**) in step **560** when that asset is rendered in the environment (e.g., during the course of game play). If no selection has been made, default content (or no content) may be displayed as in step **570**.

In some embodiments, the selection of an advertisement identifier **410** in the aforementioned available advertisement list **400** for insertion into a digital environment may be reported in step **580** to the advertiser. For example, a counter indicating the number of times the content has been displayed may be incremented, where the content was displayed or the time and/or length of the display may be noted, etc. Certain updates as they pertain to the user (e.g., user notes concerning an advertisement as may be displayed in information window **450**) may also be updated.

As above, in some embodiments, a premium fee may be charged to particular advertisers in that the association of their content (via advertisement identifier **410**) with a particular category **420** on available advertisement list **400** provides a somewhat more exclusive contact with the user. In these cases, the modification of an advertisement identifier **410** on a reference list may provide for the imposition of a fee charged to the advertiser because of the benefit of the advertisement having been seen. In that regard, various pricing structures may be implemented in the present invention with regard to the ease of viewing/interacting with an advertisement (e.g., particular settings with regard to an advertisement impression area), the number of times an advertisement appears, placement, availability of ancillary data on an available advertisement list **410**, limitations as to linking, purchases, third-party comments, and so forth.

It should be noted that the available advertisement list **400** may be used in contexts other than video games, especially digital cinema and DVDs. For example, certain objects in a digital movie may be identified as tagged assets and advertisers or viewers alike may cause the population or modification of those 'tagged' assets in the digital environment.

Various embodiments and/or additional steps not shown may be used with the described method. For example, the list of available advertisement content may be displayed in a variety of ways. This display may be integrated into the digital environment, or may be a separate screen or a pop-up window that appears in the environment. The user may expressly call-up the available advertisement list **400** through any variety of controller commands. Similarly, the available advertisement list **400** may be displayed at a variety of times, for example, during game scene loading, at the end of a game level, or at the end of a game. Other means for causing the display of the available advertisement list **400** may be used, possibly including a timer (i.e., the list appears every 'x' minutes), or in response to certain conditions in the gaming environment such as the player not being engaged in combat or traveling at less than a particular speed, both situations that would indicate diverted attention may be possible. The avail-

able advertisement list **400** may also be displayed anytime a user 'pauses' game play or some other media utilizing the reference list (e.g., a DVD). User preference may also be used to determine when the available advertisement list **400** is displayed. This flexibility may allow users to change the appearance of a car, uniform or other elements of the gaming environment at their discretion, so that the user's enjoyment of the game is enhanced.

FIG. **6** illustrates an exemplary system **600** for providing advertisement content in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. The system **600** of FIG. **6** may be implemented in any number of client devices including but not limited to a portable media device or cellular phone, a home entertainment system such as a video game console, and any variety of online gaming devices including desktop and laptop computers.

The exemplary system **600** comprises system control **605**, media control **610**, and peripheral control **615**. System control **605** is responsible for fundamental system operations (e.g., start-up, graphic rendering, input/output control, and so forth). Media control **610** is responsible for handling various audio and video formats including advertisements. Peripheral control **615** is responsible for the interface of various peripherals with the device.

Various combinations of hardware, software, and computer-executable instructions (e.g., program modules and engines) may be utilized with regard to system control **605**, media control **610**, and peripheral control **615**. Program modules and engines include routines, programs, objects, components, data structures, and the like that perform particular tasks or implement particular abstract data types. Computer-executable instructions and associated data structures represent examples of the programming means for executing steps of the methods and implementing particular system configurations disclosed herein.

System control **605** may comprise a central processing unit (CPU) **620**, main memory **625**, a graphics processing unit (GPU) **630**, sound processing unit (SPU) **635**, input/output processor (IOP) **640**, and IOP memory **645**. The various controls (**605**, **610**, and **615**) and the various components therein (e.g., CPU **620** and main memory **625**) may be communicatively coupled via a series of buses both dedicated and shared.

CPU **620** may utilize a dual-core 32-bit MIPS architecture although various other processor architectures may be utilized, including those disclosed in U.S. patent publication number 2002-0138637 for "Computer Architecture and Software Cells for Broadband Networks," the disclosure of which is incorporated herein by reference. CPU **620** executes programs stored in an operating system read only memory (OS ROM) (not shown) and main memory **625**. Main memory **625** may contain pre-stored programs and may also contain programs transferred via IOP **640** from any variety of interfaces controlled by peripheral control **615** (e.g., from an optical disk via optical disk controller interface **665**). IOP **640** controls various exchanges between CPU **620** and GPU **630** as well as media control **610** and the aforementioned peripheral control **615**. GPU **630** executes drawing instructions from the CPU **620** and/or media control **610** to produce images for display on the client device. SPU **635** executes instructions and processes data to produce sound signals that are output on an audio device (not shown) that is coupled to or otherwise integrated with device **630**.

Media control **610** is responsible for handling various audio and video formats as may be introduced to a client device. An AV decoder **650** and advertisement list module **655** are disclosed in the present exemplary embodiment. Media control **610** may further comprise enhanced dynamic random access memory (not shown) and a virtual machine environment (VME) (also not shown) for implementing certain emulation environments to isolate a particular media application from the actual hardware architecture of the device (e.g., an execution 'sandbox').

Through media control **610**, a client device may be able to display still images, audio, and video as may be introduced through a variety of peripherals under the control of peripheral control **615** and working in conjunction with CPU **620** and GPU **630**. In an exemplary embodiment of the present invention, media control **610** implements various audio formats such as MP3, ATRAC3, WMA, WAV, MP4, and AAC. Media control **610** also implements a variety of video formats including MPEG-4 Part 2 as well as H.264/AVC. Still images may also be implemented through media control **610** in formats such as JPEG, GIF, BMP, TIF, and PNG.

AV decoder **650** decompresses and/or decodes a variety of media as may be introduced by peripheral control **615**. Decompressed media may be temporarily stored in eDRAM (not shown) prior to its subsequent rendering and/or audible emission by the device.

Peripheral control **615** controls any variety of peripheral input/outputs that may be present on the client device. For example, the client device may utilize flash memory as may be introduced through flash memory interface **660**. Optical disc interface **665** provides for the introduction of data through any variety of optical discs such as CD-ROM or DVD-ROM but may also include proprietary formats such as the Universal Media Disc from Sony Corporation. Peripheral control **615** may further include a USB 2.0 interface **670**, which may further include a mini-B interface. The client device may also comprise a WLAN interface **675** such that device can exchange data with other computing devices utilizing an 802.11x wireless protocol.

Other data input formats are well within the scope of the present invention, including an InfraRed interface conforming to IRDA standards or a Memory Stick™ interface, the Memory Stick™ being an IC-based recording medium from Sony Corporation. The client device may also comprise an IEEE 1394 ('FireWire') connection in addition to Bluetooth and Ultra Wideband (UWB) radio technology interfaces. Certain embodiments of the present invention may utilize a network adaptor, which may offer an Ethernet connection and/or telephony connection.

Peripheral control **615** also comprises controller interface **680** that allows for the introduction of instructions through a control device, for example, a joystick, directional buttons, and other control buttons. Various other control input methodologies may be used such as a USB-camera like the Eye Toy® from Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. It should be noted that, in some instances, a control device (e.g., the aforementioned USB-camera) may sometimes be introduced to the device through an additional peripheral input such as USB interface **670**.

From metadata in a tagged region (**110**) or an actual advertisement (**120**) inserted into a tagged region or a set of data associated therewith, advertisement list module **655** may identify certain information about the advertisement (**120**) such that necessary information may be imported into or from the available advertisement list **400**. This metadata may include the name of the advertiser, the nature of the product being advertised, a particular display format for the advertisement identifier **410** to be rendered in the available advertisement list **400**, a hyperlink to be established between the advertisement identifier **410** and any additional information sources (e.g., a website). The advertisement list module **655**

(via metadata or other associated data) may further identify any ancillary advertisement data such as logos, other graphics, applets, and the like. Advertisement list module **655** may further control associations between advertisements and ratings or facilitate associations between such information as may be independently generated by a particular video game as it relates to particular advertisement content selections (or groups thereof).

The advertisement list module **655** manages the acquisition of this additional information from the appropriate resource. For example, an advertisement that is to be inserted may be accompanied by a file constituting various ancillary data. The ancillary data may be stored in a memory buffer or other memory means (e.g., flash memory) and accessed as needed. This information may, alternatively, be embedded on a CD-ROM that is being read by the client device. Similarly, the advertisement list module **655** may need to access a communications network in order to pull the needed data from a remote server or other memory store or to receive a push transmission of the same.

Advertisement list module **655** may operate in conjunction with the various rendering hardware and software of the system **600** such as AV decoder **650**, GPU **630**, CPU **620**, and SPU **635** to display the advertisement list **400**, the advertisement identifiers **410** on that list, and any ancillary advertisement data **420**. Advertisement list module **655** may further interact with WLAN interface **675** or some other network interface (not shown) in order to establish a network connection to obtain certain ancillary data or to other a link to another source of data once an advertisement identifier **410** is selected by a user from the advertisement list **400**.

Advertisement list module **655** may further operate with the advertisement client (not shown) in order to determine whether there has been some interaction with an advertisement that would warrant the modification of the advertisement reference identifier **410** to the available advertisement list **400**. The advertisement client may be embodied locally on the system **600** or through software being accessed by the system **600**. In some embodiments of the present invention, the advertisement client may actually be embedded in the advertisement metadata of a tag or advertisement such to impose particular specifications with regard to advertisements. The advertisement client may also be a part of module **655** as has been previously noted.

Advertisement list module **655** may operate to communicate with an external server (not shown) to retrieve new advertisement data such that the available advertisement list **400** is updated and contains current advertisements, rather than advertisement data for, e.g., old or discontinued products and/or brands. Such updating may also include a reorganization of the groups **420** if advertisers have determined that they wish to move their advertisements to higher or lower groups.

Advertisement list module **655** may further operate to report certain interactions with an advertisement to an advertiser (e.g., feedback data). For example, an available advertisement list **400** may be generated but a user may never actually select an identifier **410** on that list **400**. While selecting an identifier **410** may automatically provide an indicator to the advertiser or product manufacturer that an impression has been made by virtue of the user being redirected to a particular website (e.g., the redirection of the user may be accompanied by data concerning the cause and source of the redirection), merely populating the available advertisement list **400** may not. In these instances, advertisement list module **655** may generate data concerning the addition of the identifier **410** to the list **400** as the result of an interaction and/or impression and report that data to a particular advertiser, instructions for which may be embedded in a particular tag or advertisement inserted into the tag.

While the present invention has been described with reference to exemplary embodiments, it will be understood by those skilled in the art that various changes may be made and equivalents may be substituted for elements thereof without departing from the true spirit and scope of the present invention. In addition, modifications may be made without departing from the essential teachings of the present invention. Various alternative systems may be utilized to implement the various methodologies described herein and various methods may be used to achieve certain results from the aforementioned systems.

What is claimed is:

1. A method for displaying an advertisement in a digital environment based on a selection by a user, the method comprising:

maintaining information regarding a plurality of advertisements in memory, wherein each advertisement is associated with a shopping portal and a minimum user rating level specified by an associated advertiser as being allowed to access the advertisement;

maintaining information regarding a plurality of user ratings in memory, wherein each user rating is ordered from highest to lowest;

maintaining a list of advertisements available to the user in memory, the user having a first user rating, wherein the maintained list of advertisements available to the user includes:

advertisements associated with the first user rating, and

advertisements associated with the user ratings lower than the first user rating,

wherein the lower ratings are associated with lower advertising costs;

executing instructions stored in a computer-readable storage medium, wherein execution of the instructions by a processor:

determines that the user has earned a second user rating that is higher than the first user rating, wherein the second user rating is based on at least performance of a task by the user in the digital environment; and

updates the maintained list of advertisements available to the user in memory, wherein the updated list of advertisements available to the user includes:

advertisements associated with the second user rating, and

advertisements associated with user ratings lower than the second user rating, wherein the lower ratings are associated with lower advertising costs, and wherein the advertisements associated with the user ratings lower than the second user rating include the advertisements associated with the first user rating;

displaying at a client device the updated list of advertisements available to the user, wherein:

the advertisements are displayed as respective advertisement identifiers in the updated list, wherein each advertisement identifier includes a link to the shopping portal for the respective advertisement,

each advertisement and the corresponding advertisement identifier are associated with a respective user rating of the plurality of user ratings,

the advertisement identifiers are arranged in the display based on the associated user ratings,

the advertisement identifiers are displayed in a group list associated with the respective user rating, and

placement as a first advertisement identifier in a group list is associated with a higher advertising cost within the respective group list;

receiving selection input from the user, the selection input corresponding to a selection of one of the advertisements on the updated list; and

displaying the selected advertisement in the digital environment at the client device.

2. The method of claim **1**, further comprising receiving a second input from the user indicating a location in the digital environment where the selected advertisement is to be displayed, and wherein displaying the advertisement further comprises displaying the advertisement in the indicated location.

3. The method of claim **1**, wherein the performance of the task by the user includes achieving one or more objectives of the task in a gaming environment.

4. The method of claim **1**, further comprising adding the selected advertisement to a list of advertisements that have been displayed in the digital environment.

5. The method of claim **4**, wherein the list of displayed advertisements includes an indication of a number of times each advertisement is selected by the user for display in the digital environment, the list being reported to an advertiser.

6. The method of claim **4**, wherein the list of displayed advertisements includes an indication of a number of times each advertisement is displayed in the digital environment, the list being reported to an advertiser.

7. The method of claim **1**, further comprising displaying a default advertisement when the user has no user rating or has made no selection of advertisements.

8. The method of claim **7**, wherein generating a list of displayed advertisements includes indicating which of the displayed advertisements were selected by default.

9. The method of claim **1**, wherein displaying the selected advertisement includes designating the selected advertisement for interaction in the digital environment.

10. The method of claim **1**, wherein the digital environment is a video game.

11. The method of claim **1**, further comprising providing additional information about a product or service associated with a selected advertisement in another communications medium.

12. The method of claim **1**, further comprising:

displaying an advertisement preview window, wherein the advertisement preview window provides a preview of an advertisement of the updated list of advertisements available to the user, the preview showing the advertisement in the context of the digital environment.

13. The method of claim **12**, further comprising:

displaying an environment window, wherein the environment window provides a plurality of advertising assets onto which an advertisement may be placed in the digital environment; and

wherein the received selection input is a drag-and-drop, the drag-and-drop corresponding to a selection of the advertisement from the advertisement preview window and a placement of the selected advertisement onto one of the plurality of advertising assets from the environment window.

14. A system for displaying an advertisement in a digital environment based on a selection by a user, the system comprising:

an advertisement source including advertising content maintained in a computer-readable storage medium;

a memory configured to maintain:

information regarding a plurality of user ratings in memory, wherein each user rating is ordered from highest to lowest,

information regarding a plurality of advertisements in memory, wherein each advertisement is associated with a shopping portal and a minimum user rating level specified by an associated advertiser as being allowed to access the advertisement, and

a list of advertisements available to the user from the maintained advertising content, the user having a first user rating, wherein the maintained list of advertisements available to the user includes:

advertisements associated with the first user rating, and

advertisements associated with user ratings lower than the first user rating, wherein the lower ratings are associated with lower advertising costs; and

a computing device configured to:

determine that the user has earned a second user rating that is higher than the first user rather, wherein the second user rating is based on at least performance of a task by the user in the digital environment;

update the maintained list of advertisements available to the user in memory, wherein the updated list of advertisements available to the user includes:

advertisements associated with the second user rating, and

advertisements associated with user ratings lower than the second user rating, wherein the lower ratings are associated with lower advertising costs, and wherein the advertisements associated with the user ratings lower than the second user rating include the advertisements associated with the first user rating;

display at a client device the updated list of advertisements from the advertisement source available to the user, wherein:

the advertisements are displayed as respective advertisement identifiers in the updated list, wherein each advertisement identifier includes a link to the shopping portal for the respective advertisement,

each advertisement and the corresponding advertisement identifier are associated with a respective user rating of the plurality of user ratings,

the advertisement identifiers are arranged in the display based on the associated user ratings,

the advertisement identifiers are displayed in a group list associated with the respective user rating, and

placement as a first advertisement identifier in a group list is associated with a higher advertising cost within the respective group list;

receive a selection signal from the user indicating which advertisement from the updated list of advertisements to display; and

render the advertisement in the digital environment.

15. The system of claim **14**, wherein the list of advertisements displayed to the user is further linked to an additional information source, the additional information source associated with the advertisement.

16. The system of claim **14**, wherein the digital environment is a video game.

17. The system of claim **14**, wherein the computing device is further configured to:

receive a second input from the user indicating a location in the digital environment where the selected advertisement is to be displayed; and

render the selected advertisement in the indicated location.

18. The system of claim **14**, wherein the computing device is further configured to add the selected advertisement to a list of advertisements that have been displayed in the digital environment.

19. The system of claim **18**, wherein the list of displayed advertisements is reported to an advertiser.

20. The system of claim **14**, wherein the computing device is further configured to display a default advertisement when the user has no user rating or no selection signal is received corresponding to selection of advertising content.

21. A non-transitory machine-readable medium comprising instructions executable by machine, the instructions corresponding to a method for displaying an advertisement in a digital environment based on a selection by a user, the method comprising:

maintaining information regarding a plurality of advertisements in memory, wherein each advertisement is associated with a shopping portal and a minimum user rating level specified by an associated advertiser as being allowed to access the advertisement;

maintaining information regarding a plurality of user ratings in memory, wherein each user rating is ordered from highest to lowest;

maintaining a list of advertisements available to the user, the user having a first user rating, wherein the maintained list of advertisements available to the user includes:

advertisements associated with the first user rating, and

advertisements associated with user ratings lower than the first user rating,

wherein the lower ratings are associated with lower advertising costs;

determining that the user has earned a second user rating that is higher than the first user rating, wherein the second user rating is based on at least performance of a task by the user in the digital environment;

updating the maintained list of advertisements available to the user in memory, wherein the updated list of advertisements available to the user includes:

advertisements associated with the second user rating, and

advertisements associated with user ratings lower than the second user rating, wherein the lower ratings are associated with lower advertising costs, and wherein the advertisements associated with the user rating lower than the second user rating include the advertisements associated with the first user rating;

displaying at a client device the updated list of advertisements available to the user, wherein:

the advertisements are displayed as respective advertisement identifiers in the updated list, wherein each advertisement identifier includes a link to the shopping portal for the respective advertisement,

each advertisement and the corresponding advertisement identifier are associated with a respective user rating of the plurality of user ratings,

the advertisement identifiers are arranged in the display based on the associated user ratings,

the advertisement identifiers are displayed in a group list associated with the respective user rating, and

placement as a first advertisement identifier in a group list is associated with a higher advertising cost within the respective group list;

receiving selection input from the user, the selection input corresponding to a selection of one of the advertisements on the updated list; and

displaying the selected advertisement in the digital environment at the client device.

* * * * *