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(19) **United States**(12) **Patent Application Publication** (10) **Pub. No.: US 2005/0050218 A1**
Sheldon (43) **Pub. Date: Mar. 3, 2005**(54) **VIDEO DELIVERY WORKFLOW**(52) **U.S. Cl. 709/231**(75) **Inventor: Andrew K. Sheldon, Redwood City, CA (US)**(57) **ABSTRACT**

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Each transmission received from a video asset owner includes information regarding a video asset that is available for real time distribution during a future time period to third parties. Following a selection from among the video assets, the corresponding video asset owners receive transmissions requesting the selected video assets and one or more initial templates. The video asset owners transmit final templates that conform to the initial templates and contain information descriptive of the video assets. Each final template, and the corresponding video asset, is transmitted to predetermined network resource, such as a headend, at a predetermined time corresponding to the future time period of availability. The predetermined network resource can then distribute video assets to viewers that were requested from the corresponding video storefront by viewers.

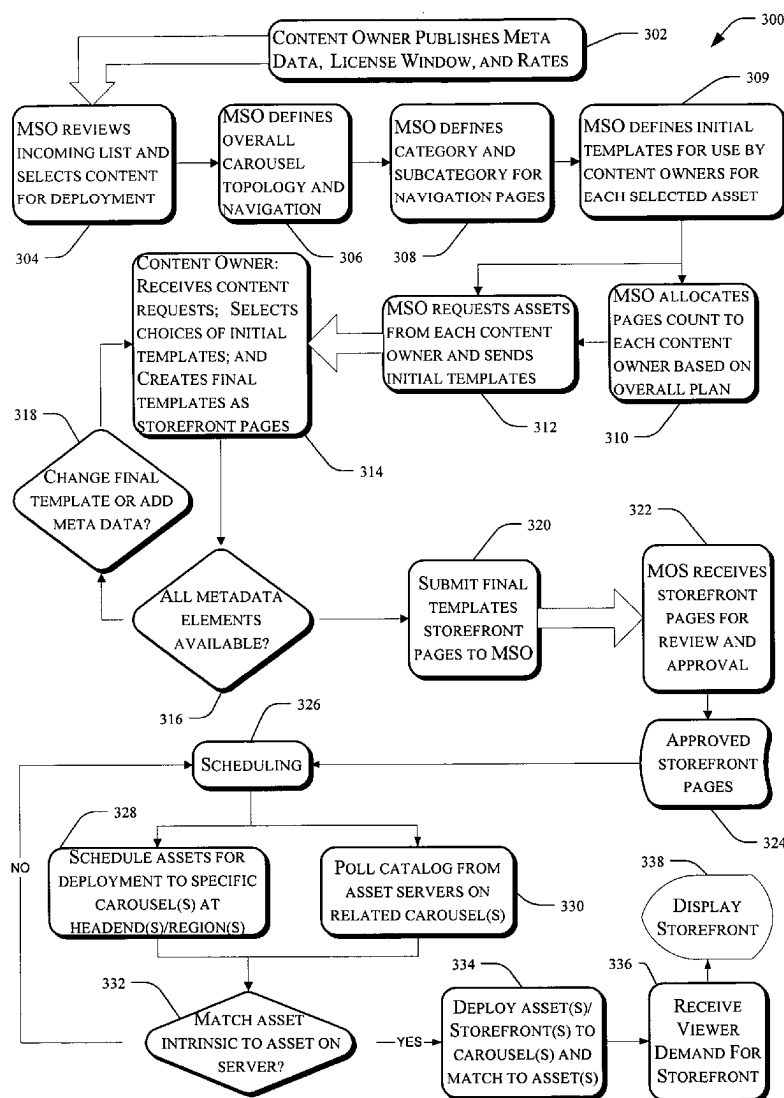
(73) **Assignee: Microsoft Corporation**(21) **Appl. No.: 10/653,567**(22) **Filed: Sep. 2, 2003****Publication Classification**(51) **Int. Cl.⁷ G06F 15/16**

Fig. 1

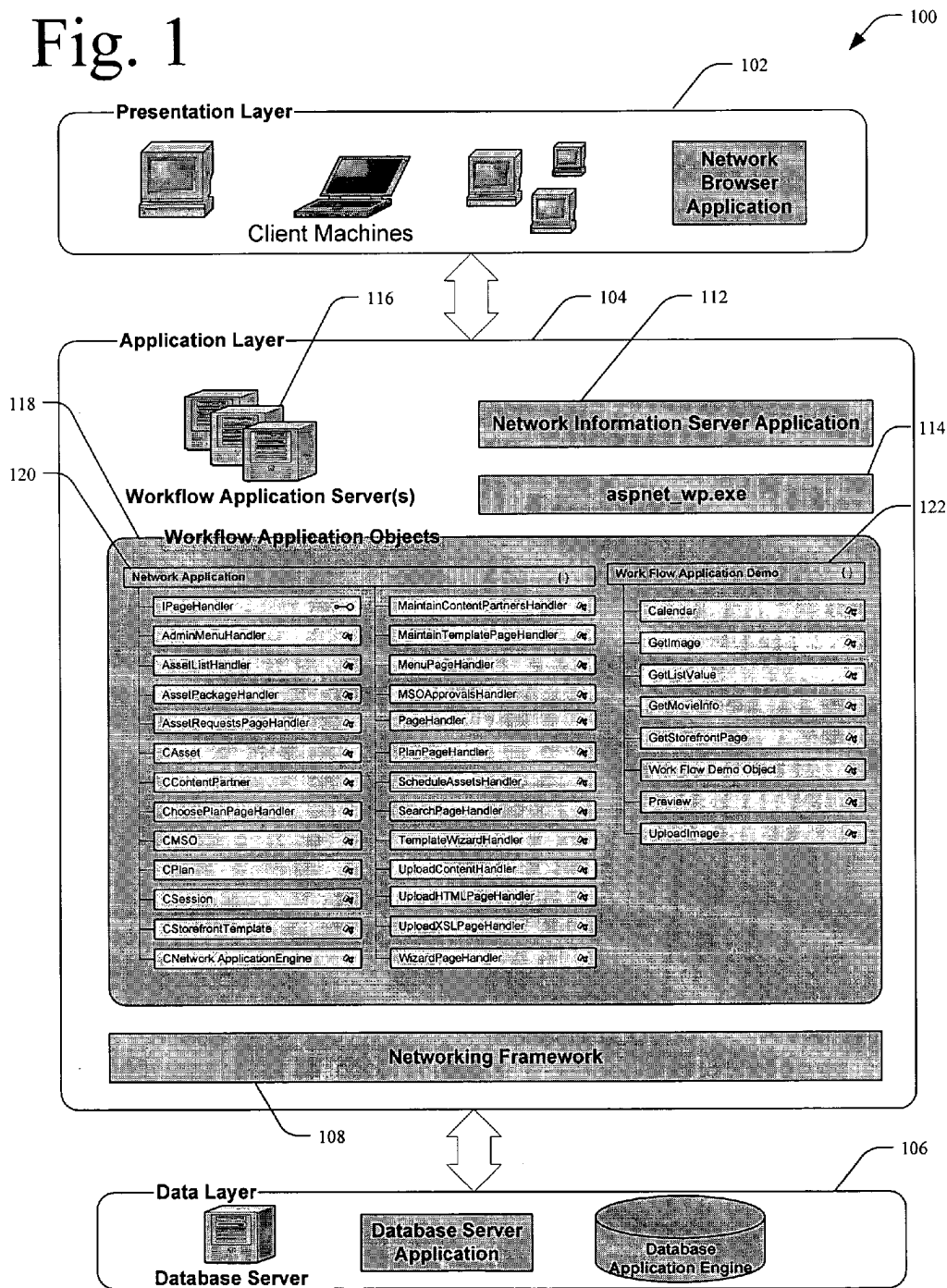
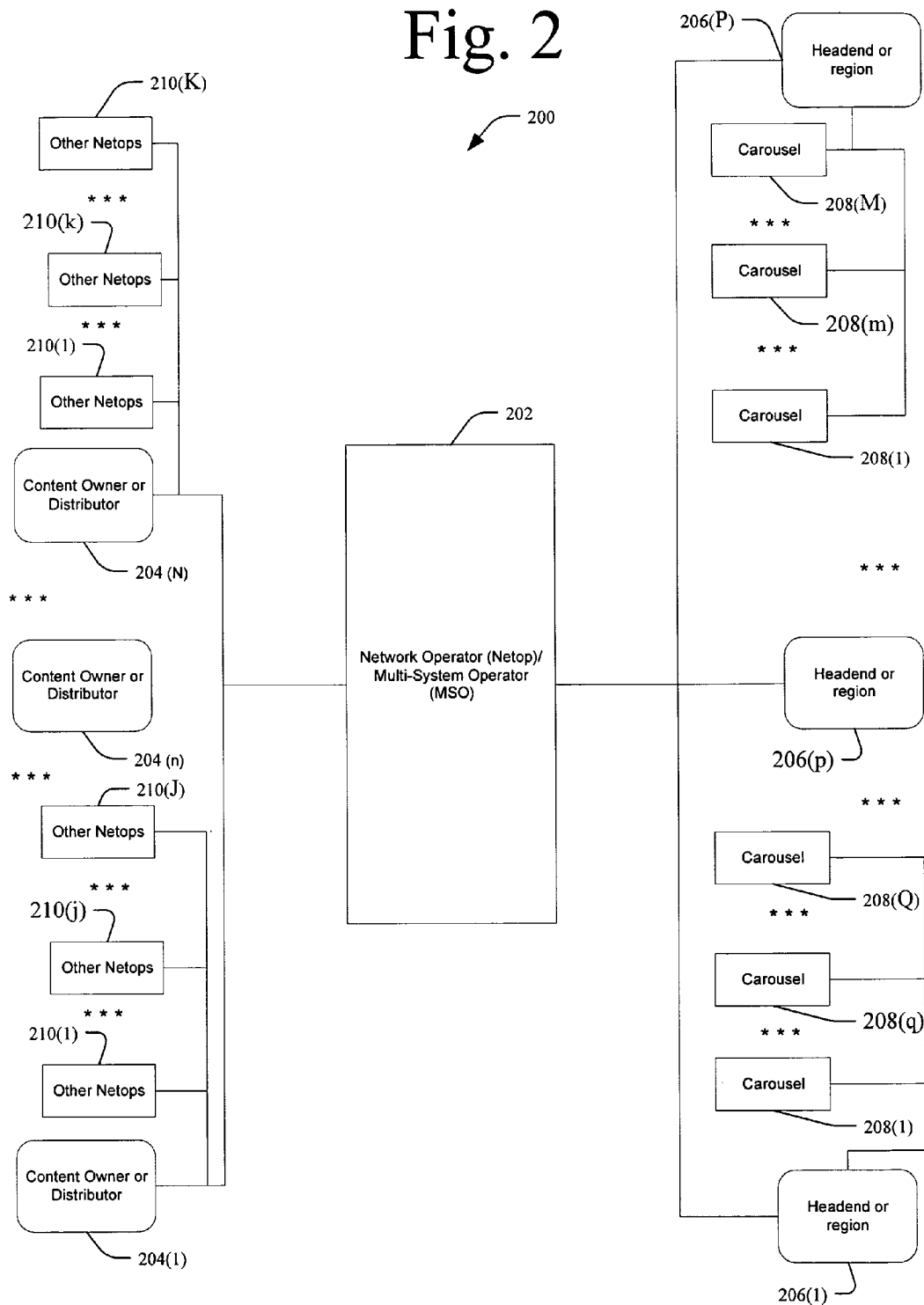


Fig. 2



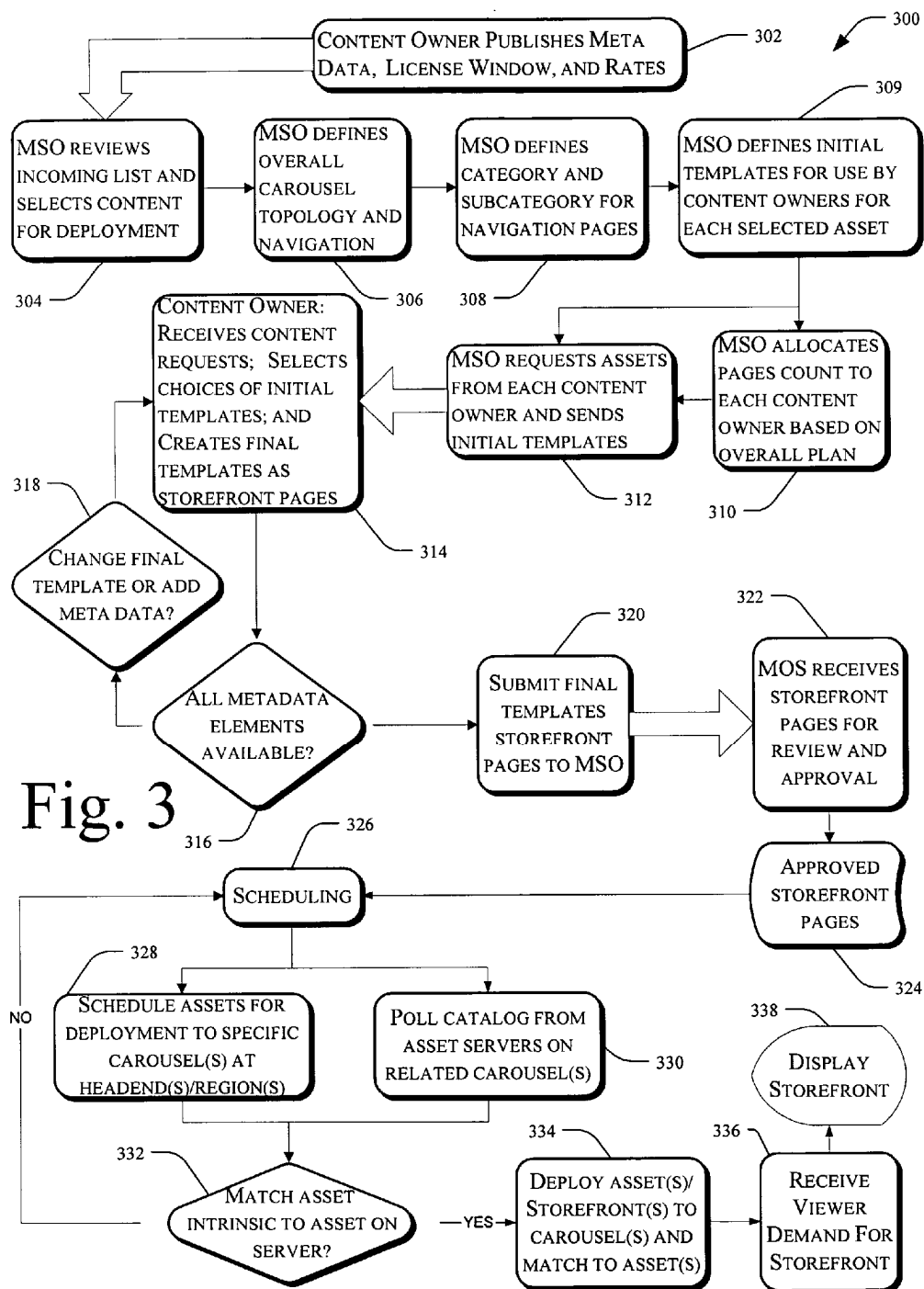


Fig. 4



400

402

Fig. 5

MSTV: Mardes Gray - Microsoft Internet Explorer

REQ	TITLE	DISTRIBUTOR	STUDIO	BOX OFFICE	RATING	GENRE	LICENSE START	LICENSE END	RUN TIME (MIN)	SRP
☒	About Schmidt	Warner Bros.	New Line Cinema	\$26M	R	Drama	06/01/2003	09/15/2003	123	1.99
☐	Four Weddings and a Funeral	Warner Bros.	Columbia TriStar	\$32M	PG-13	Comedy	03/01/2003	06/30/2003	123	1.99
☒	My Big Fat Greek Wedding	Warner Bros.	HBO Video	\$88M	PG	Comedy	03/01/2003	08/31/2003	96	1.99
☐	My New Movie	Warner Bros.	HBO Video		PG-13	Comedy	03/01/2003	09/30/2003	15	1.99
☒	Snatch	Warner Bros.	Columbia TriStar	\$32M	R	Comedy	03/01/2003	06/30/2003	103	2.99
☐	The Sopranos #1	HBO on Demand	HBO Video		NR	Entertainment	01/01/2003	12/31/2003	56	1.50
☒	The Transporter	Warner Bros.	20th Century Fox	\$37M	PG-13	Action	04/01/2003	06/30/2003	90	2.49

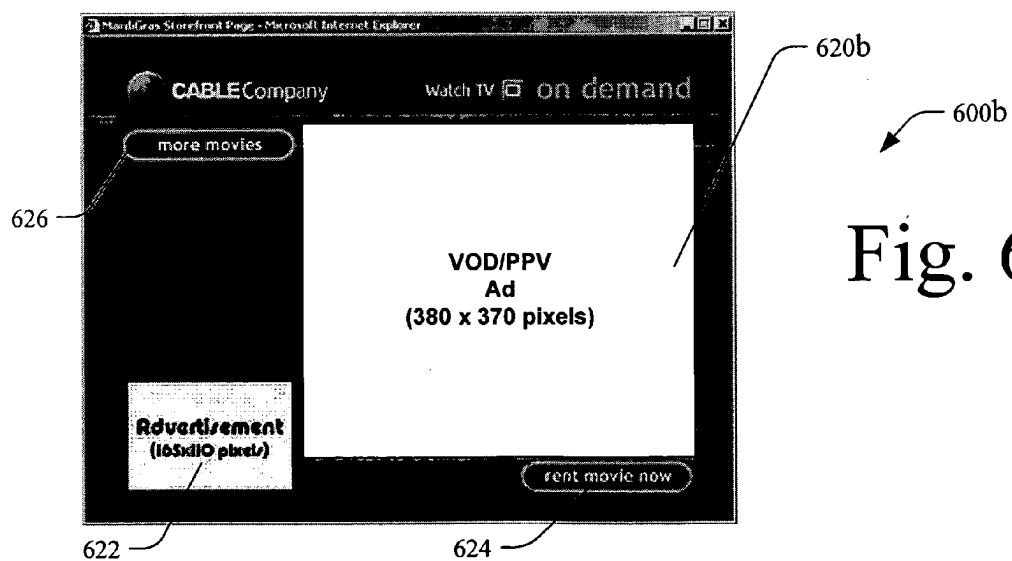
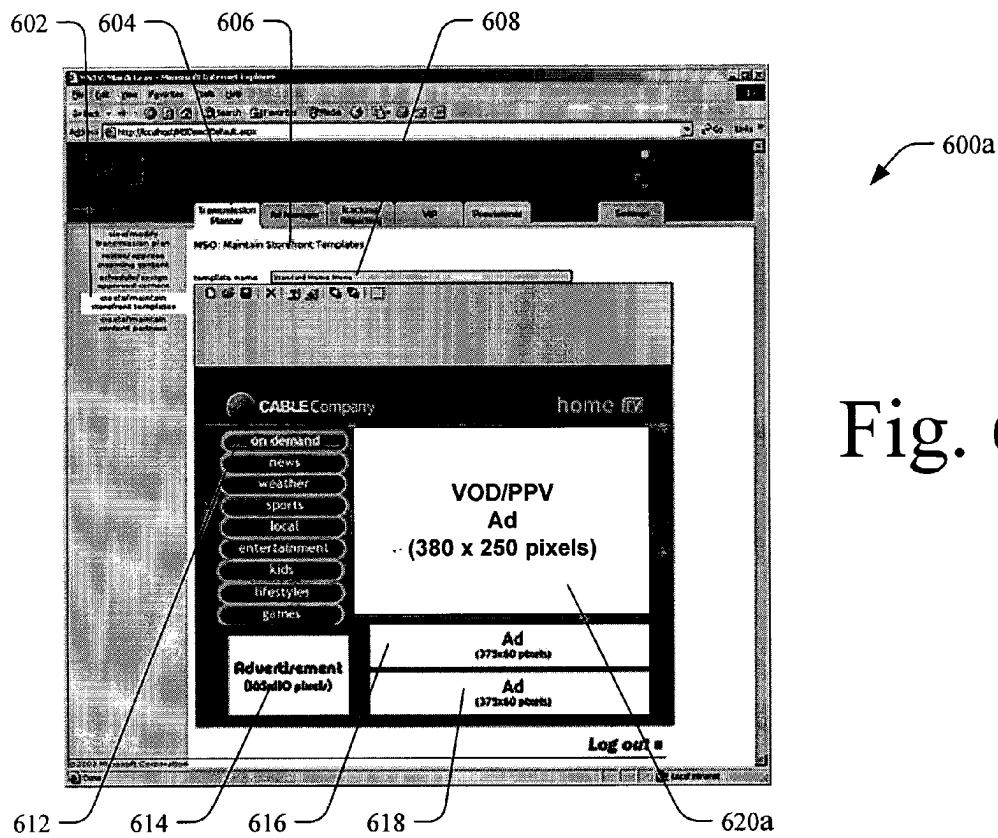


Fig. 7

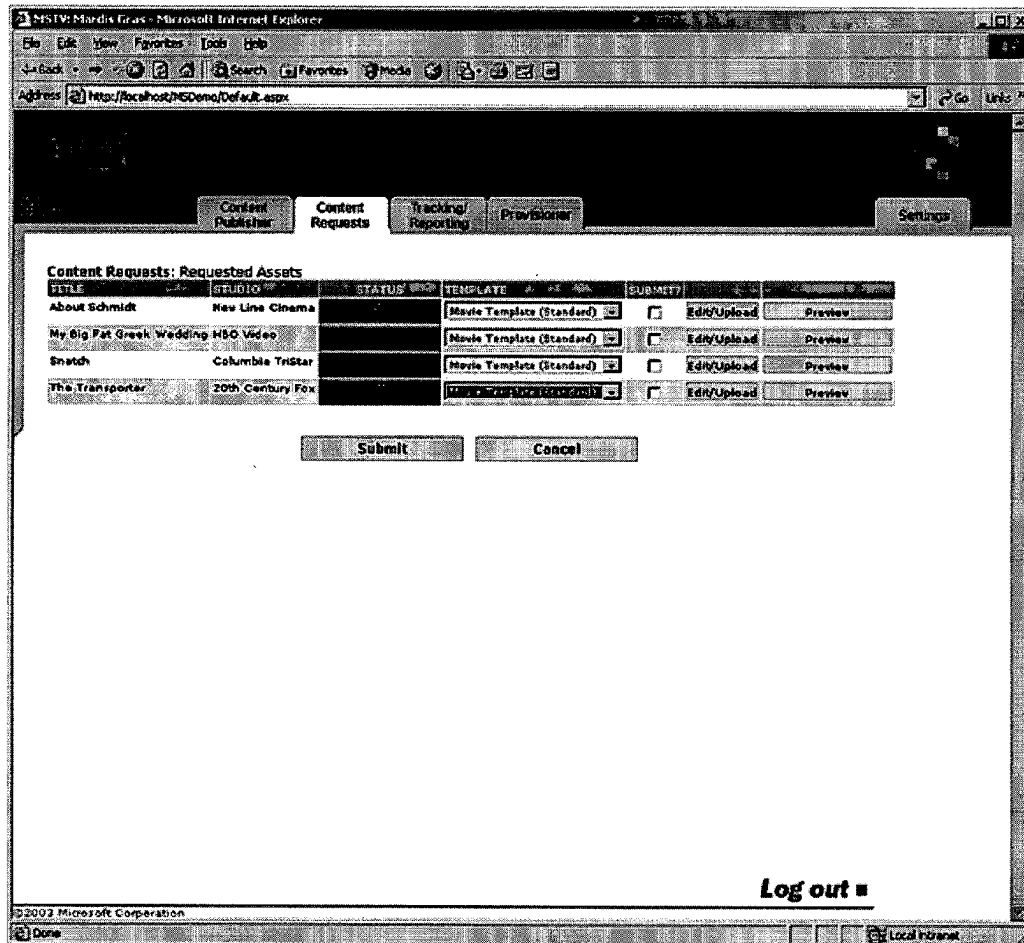


Fig. 8

The screenshot shows a web browser window titled "MSDN: Harder Gray - Microsoft Internet Explorer". The address bar displays "http://localhost/MCDemo/Default.aspx". The browser's menu bar includes "File", "Edit", "View", "Favorites", "Tools", and "Help". The toolbar contains buttons for "Back", "Forward", "Home", "Search", "Favorites", "Media", "Print", "Stop", and "Go".

The web application interface has a navigation bar with tabs: "Content Publisher", "Content Requests", "Tracking/Reporting", "Provisioner", and "Settings". The "Content Publisher" tab is active.

The main content area is titled "Content Publisher: Maintain Asset Package". It contains the following fields:

- Package Name:** A text input field containing "Package1 Snatch".
- VOD Billing ID:** A text input field containing "8000051MAD".
- Studio:** A dropdown menu showing "Columbia TriStar".
- License Window:** Two date pickers showing "08/01/2003" and "08/29/2003" with a "to" label between them.

Below these fields is a section with tabs: "Feature", "Pricing", "Assets", and "Ads". The "Assets" tab is active. It contains a "Browse..." button and a "Back Images" link. Below this is a large media player area. On the left side of the media player is a thumbnail for a "snatch" video, labeled "SPECIAL EDITION" and "WATCH IT LIVE! WATCH IT LIVE! WATCH IT LIVE!". The main area of the media player is dark and appears to be a video player. Below the media player is a "Browse..." button.

At the bottom of the form are "Save" and "Cancel" buttons. In the bottom right corner, there is a "Log out" link.

The footer of the browser window shows "© 2003 Microsoft Corporation" and "Local intranet".

Fig. 9a

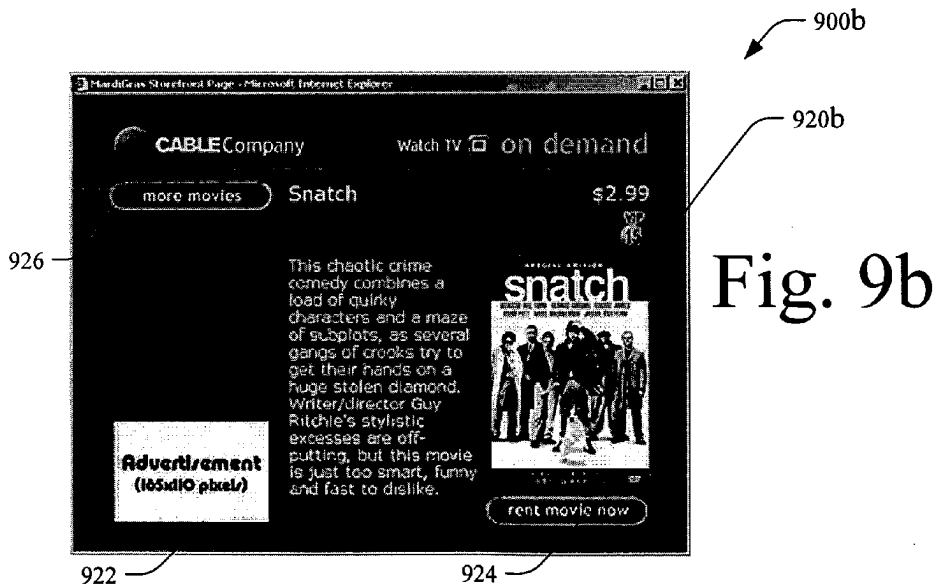
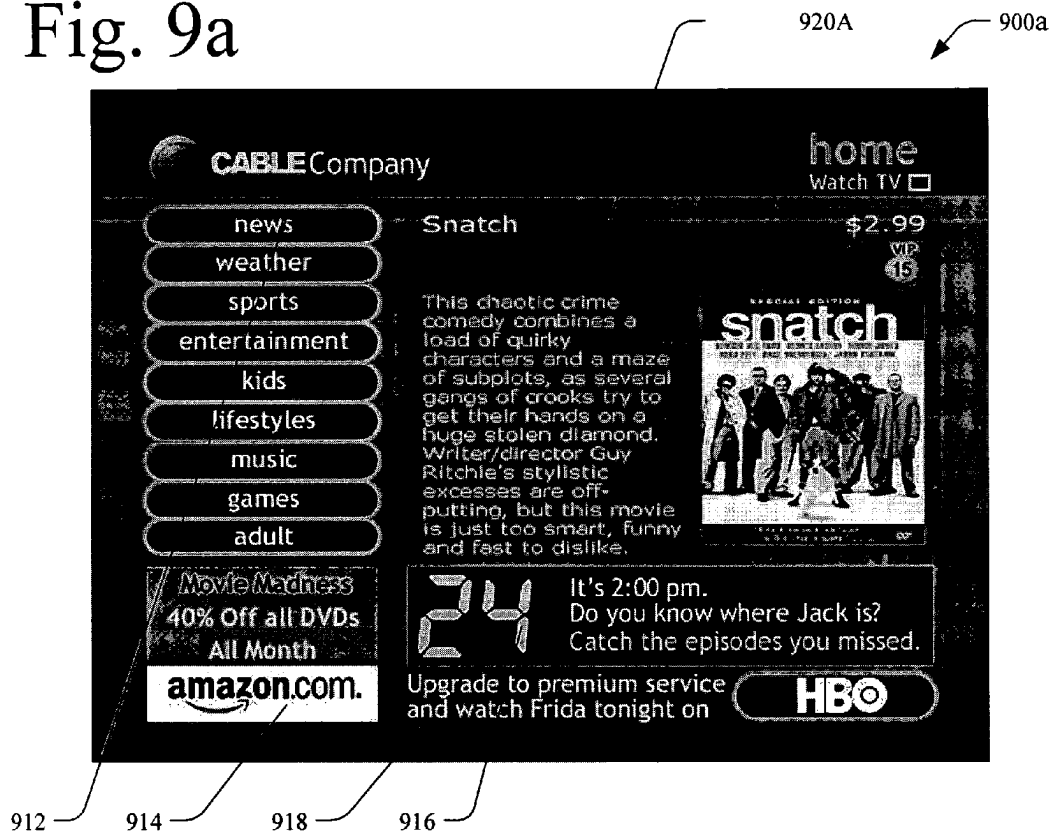


Fig. 10

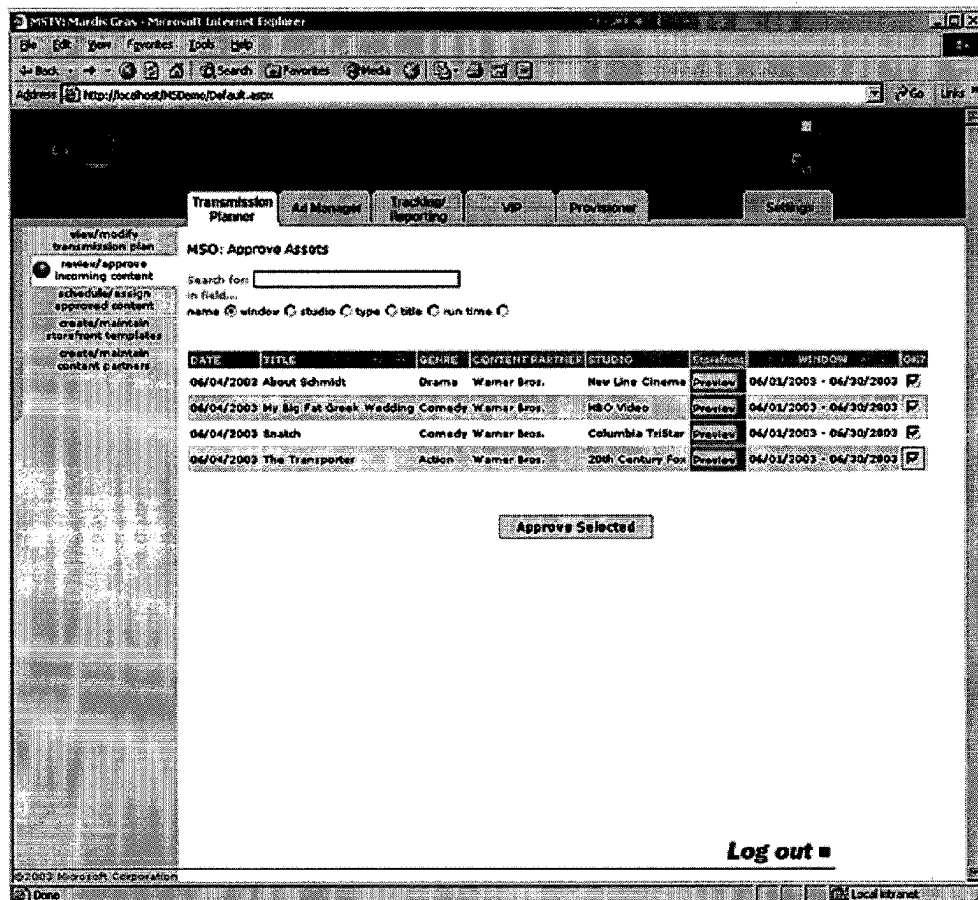


Fig. 11

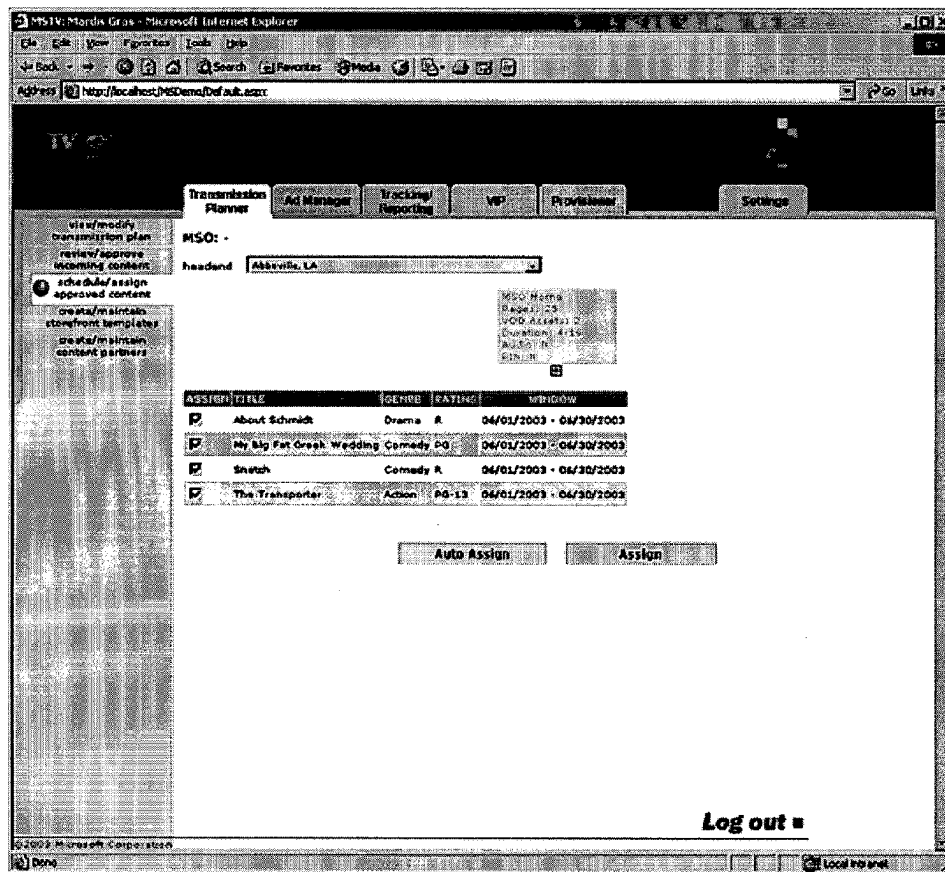


Fig. 13

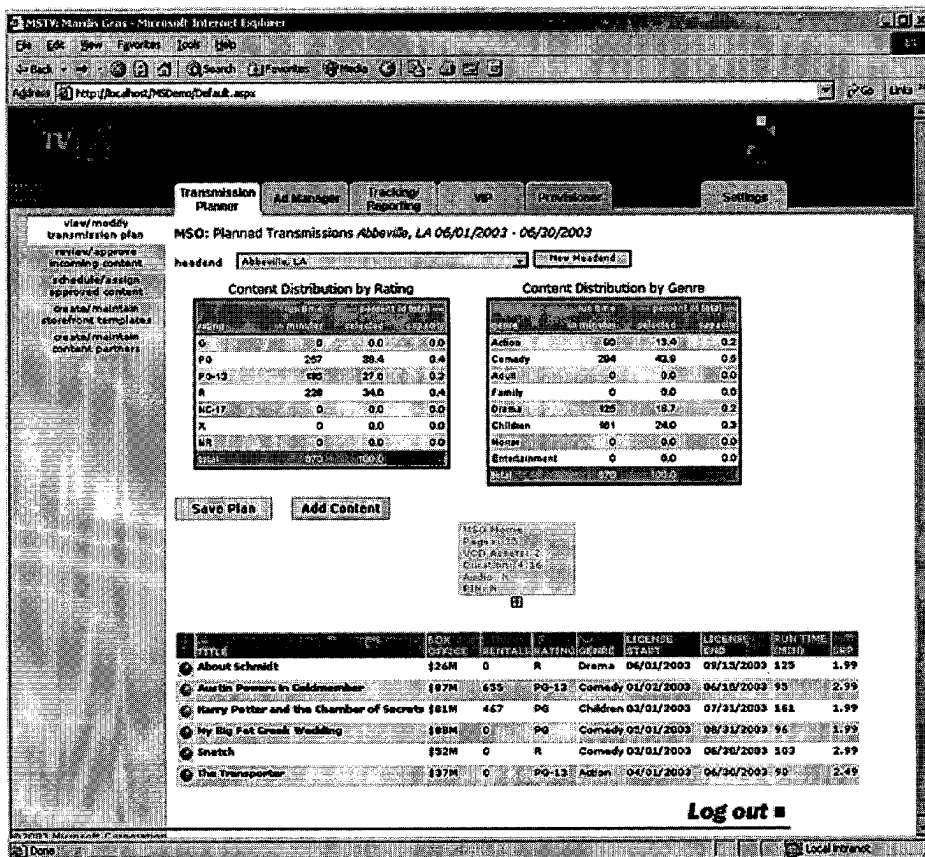
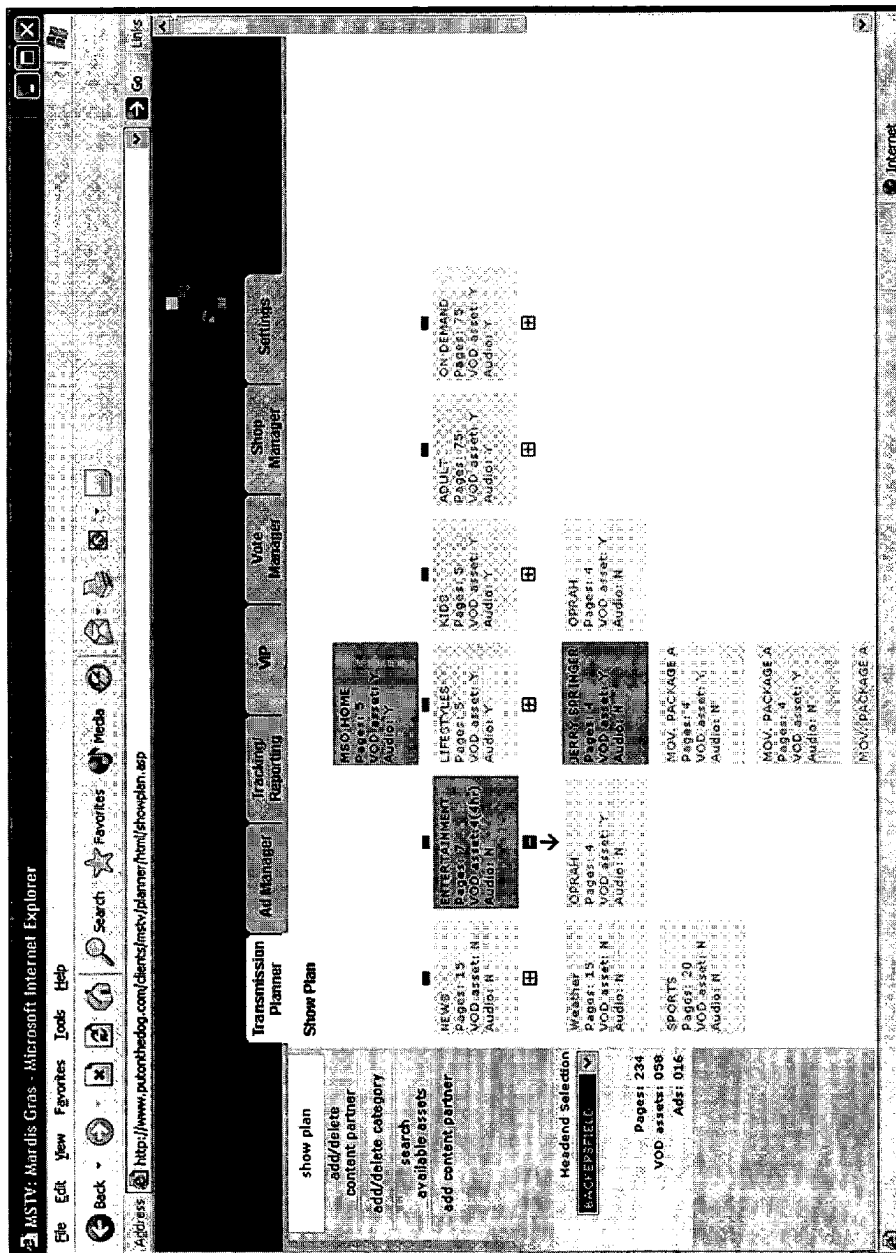


Fig. 14



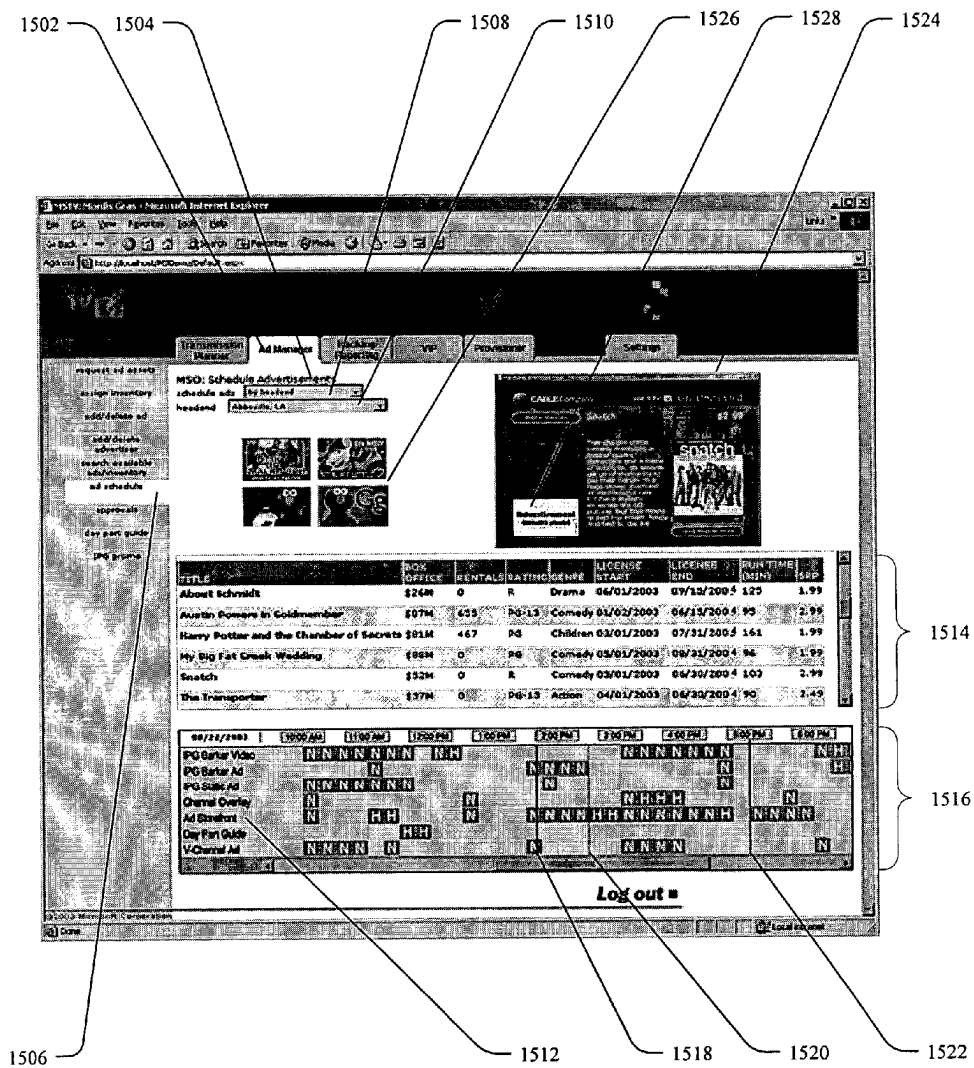


Fig. 15

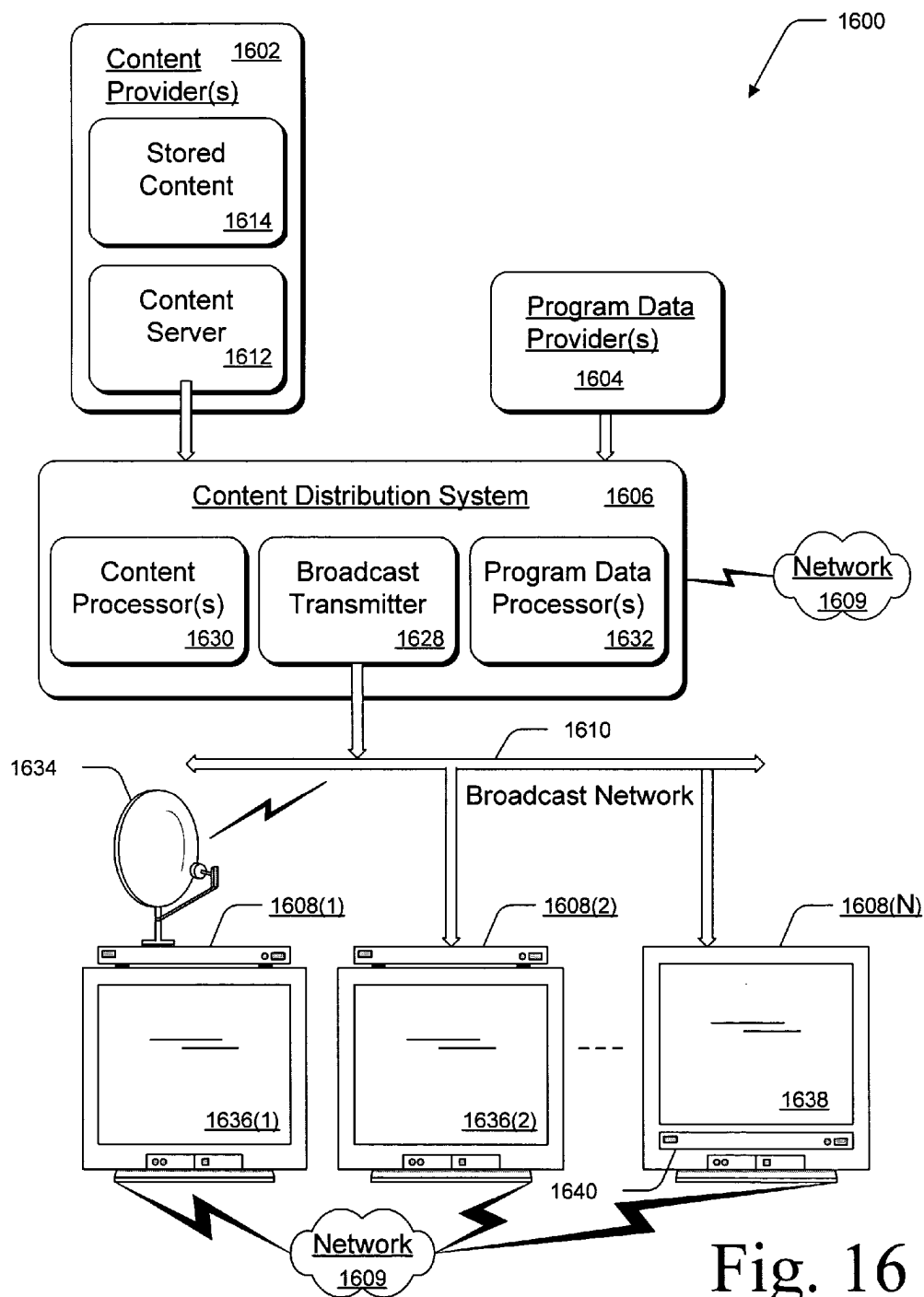


Fig. 16

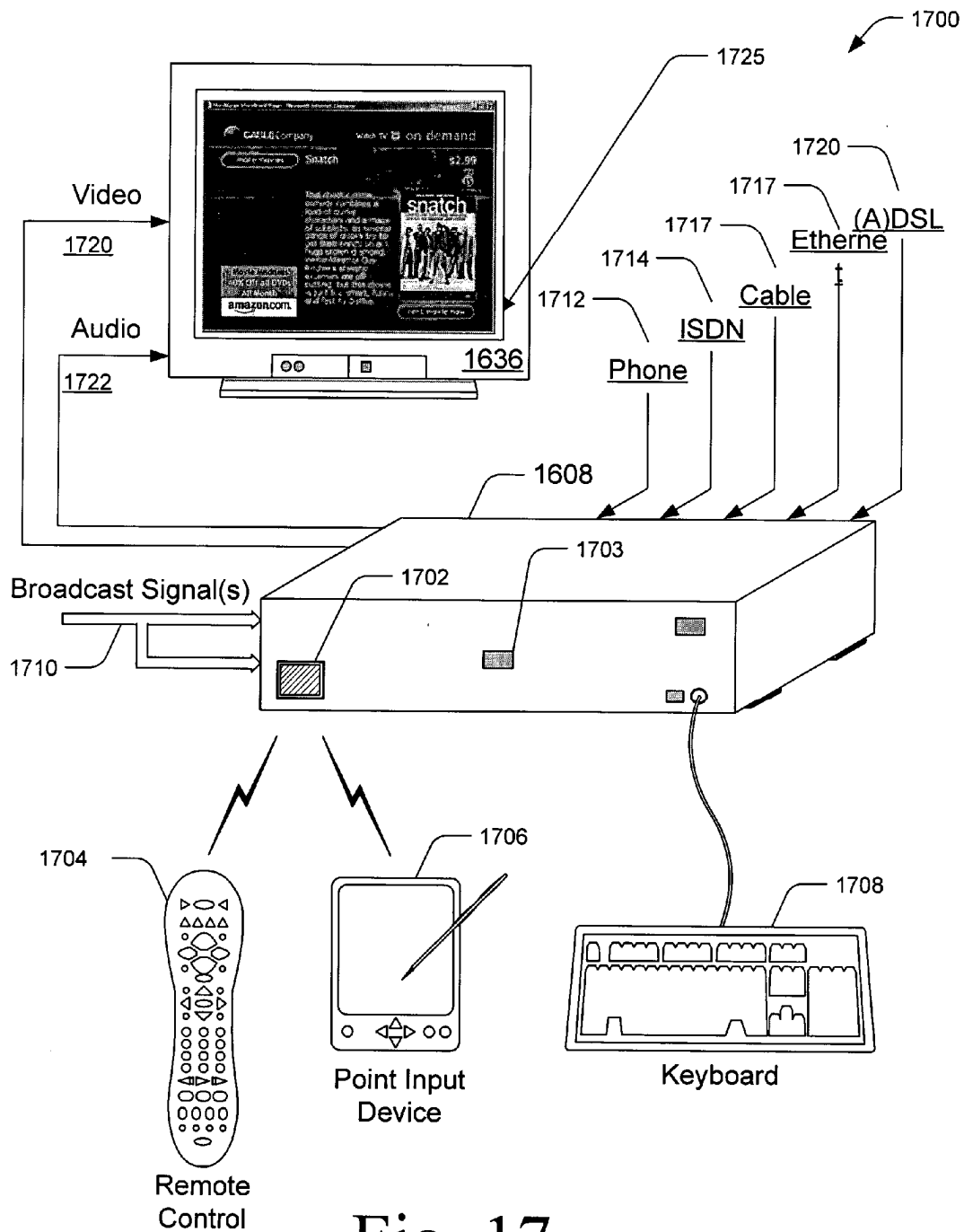


Fig. 17

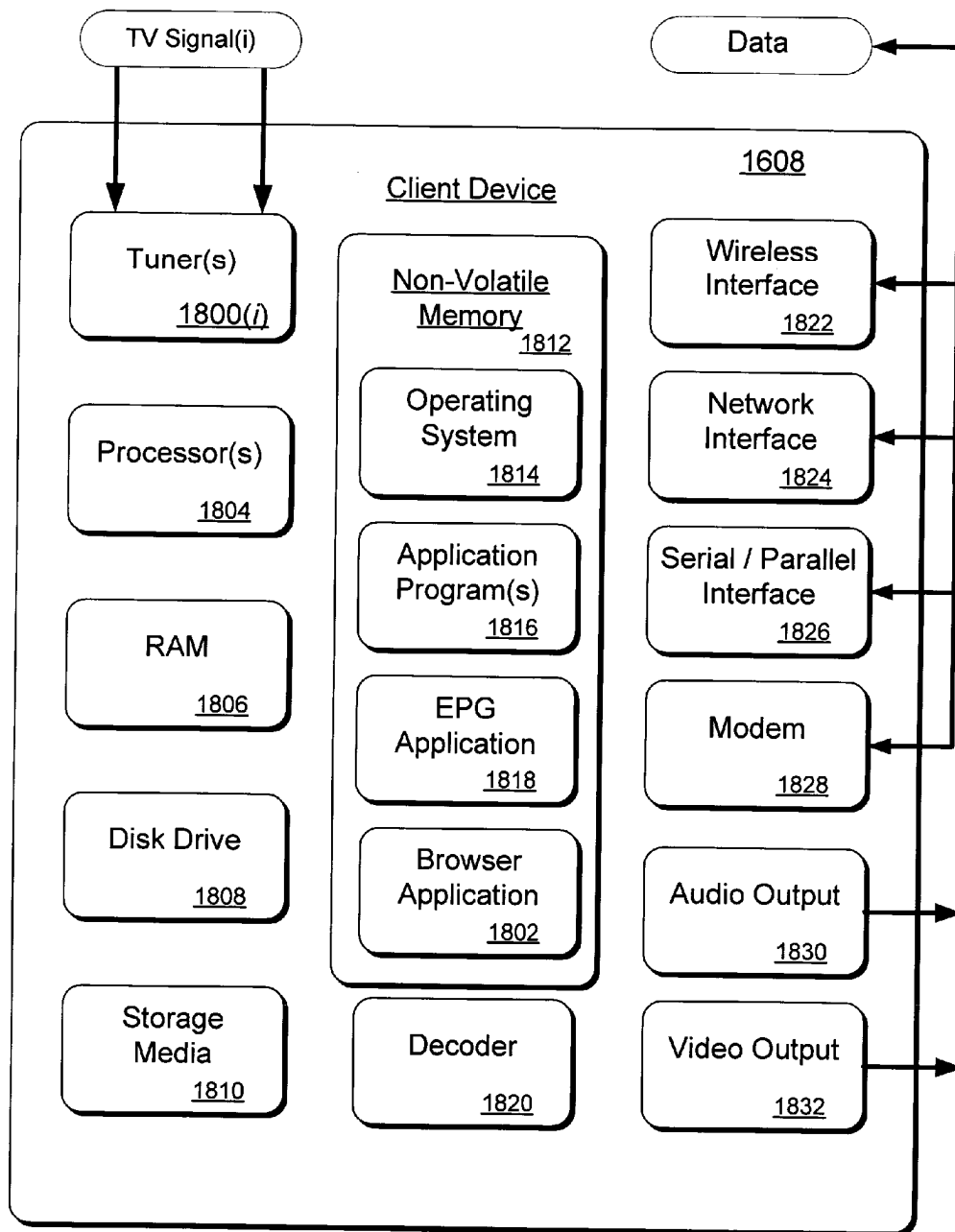


Fig. 18

VIDEO DELIVERY WORKFLOW

TECHNICAL FIELD

[0001] The present invention relates generally to audio-video entertainment systems, and more particularly to the advertisement of video delivery services to viewers such as video on demand and pay per view.

BACKGROUND

[0002] Multimedia home entertainment is desirable to consumers who seek out new kinds of listening and viewing content that are made available through a variety of communication media, including wireless broadcast and cable systems. Two such forms of multimedia home entertainment are pay per view (PPV) and video-on-demand (VOD) services. Each service offers a viewer a video (e.g., a motion picture) that is delivered for viewing by the viewer who orders and pays for the viewing. The VOD service offers the viewer a video that can be requested at any time and is available for viewing at the discretion of the viewer. Each service can be offered and delivered by wireless communication, such as satellite or cellular telephone services, or by wired communication, such as a cable television service.

[0003] Both the PPV service provider and the VOD service provider are referred to herein as a video delivery service provider, a network operator (netop) or a multisystem operator (MSO). The MSO offers video delivery services to viewers via a communication system by the distribution of PPV assets and/or VOD assets, which are collectively and individually referred to here as video assets. Examples of video assets include movies, TV shows, special interest programming, etc. Video assets are obtained from a content provider or other service having ownership rights in the video assets. The video delivery service provider, in turn, has received distribution rights from the content provider. As an enticement to the viewer, the video delivery service provider may provide an advertisement about a video asset. This advertisement may be referred to a video storefront. The video storefront is made up of discrete viewing panels or screens, each of which represents one video storefront page. Thus, the video storefront is made up of a plurality of video storefront pages.

[0004] The creation of the video storefront pages for a video storefront entails production time and management for both the content owner (or its designated third party) and the MSO (or its designated third party video asset aggregator). The various tasks necessary for a MSO to make one or more requests of the content owner for the video asset(s) and supporting the video storefront page creation requires significant coordination and communication between these two or more parties. The structure of a carousel at a headend of an MSO and common navigation controls made available for use by a viewer in order to select a video asset for viewing on an viewer input device (such as Home and Back buttons) must be communicated to a designer of the video storefront pages. This complication is significantly compounded by the normal business factors that constitute the MSO business operations. These normal MSO business operations include, but are not limited to, multiple headend locations, variations in headend infrastructure, disparate video delivery servers and back office systems, multiple

content partners, different subscriber access rules, large disparities in video asset usage and license rights, and multiple video asset viewing windows. Coordinating the distribution of video assets to viewers, each of which can have complicated content ownership rights and distribution rights, can be a difficult and complicated task to perform by the MSO. There is, at present, an absence of automation tools to facilitate communication between several video asset owners partnered with an MSO. This lack of automated communication makes the tasks of collecting and scheduling video assets and video storefront pages advertising the same at each appropriate headend somewhat hindered. This hindrance diminishes the ability of the MSO to use a video storefront as a vehicle to promote video assets so as to increase video delivery buy rates by viewers. It would advantageous to provide systems and other tools to implement such an automated communication.

SUMMARY

[0005] Communications are automated between video asset owners and a multisystem operator (MSO) who provides video delivery services. These communications coordinate the distribution of video assets in accordance with content ownership and distribution rights granted from each video asset owner to the MSO. The automated communication can be used by the MSO and the video asset owners to create video storefronts and to select and distribute video assets. This automated communication system enables the video asset owners and the MSO to accomplish their respective tasks by accessing a single system.

[0006] The video asset owner determines assets to be made available to the MSO during a particular license time period and adds those video assets to the distribution system of the MSO. An operator, on behalf of the MSO, selects one or more video assets specified by one or more video asset owners and the corresponding periods of time during which the video asset is to be offered to viewers. The operator is provided with a total run time for each category or genre of the selected video assets for those periods of time. The MSO can then send a request for the operator-selected assets to each video asset owner. Upon receipt, the video asset owner is alerted of the MSO operator's request. The video asset owner can then service the request of the selected video assets or the video asset owner can modify the request.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0007] A more complete understanding of the implementations may be had by reference to the following detailed description when taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings wherein:

[0008] FIG. 1 depicts an exemplary environment having components for implementations in which client machines communicate using a network browser with an application layer for video delivery workflow servers, where the application layer includes various workflow application objects, where the application layer interfaces with a data layer executing on a database server, and where the database layer includes a database server application and a database application engine.

[0009] FIG. 2 is a block diagram depicting an exemplary environment in which a multisystem operator interfaces with a plurality of video asset owners and with a plurality of headends.

[0010] FIG. 3 is a flow chart depicting an implementation of a process by which an MSO selects video assets from a video asset owner, the video asset owner provides video storefront pages for each selected video asset, and by which the MOD schedules each selected video asset that is to be offered in a video delivery service to viewers.

[0011] FIG. 4 is a screen shot of an exemplary log screen in a browser application through which access is obtained by both an MSO and video asset owners to a system for delivering video assets and corresponding video storefronts to viewers.

[0012] FIG. 5 is a screen shot of a browser application through which a MSO selects among various video assets that are being offered for distribution to the MSO by different video asset owners.

[0013] FIGS. 6a-6b are two different screen shots in a browser application of respective user interfaces for creating and maintaining an initial template, where the initial template can be sent from a MSO to a video asset owner for further design so as to form a video storefront that serves as an advertisement for a particular video asset or advertisement, and where other information can also be added into the design that is formed from the initial template.

[0014] FIG. 7 is a screen shot in a browser application through which a MSO can submit a request for video assets to one or more video asset owners, where the request is submitted along with an initial template for modification by the video asset owner to design one or more pages of a video storefront as an advertisement for the video asset.

[0015] FIG. 8 is a screen shot in a browser application through which a video asset owner can input or modify information about a video asset in response to a request for same from an MSO, and where the information can be presented for review and editing via activation of various on-screen buttons.

[0016] FIGS. 9a-9b are screen shots in a browser application of respective pages of a video storefront that have been designed by a video asset owner from an initial template received from an MSO, where the video asset storefront serves to place an advertisement or to advertise a video asset that is available for distribution to viewers.

[0017] FIG. 10 is a screen shot in a browser application of a report summarizing video assets that have been requested by an MSO from various video asset owners and are available to the MSO for delivery in a video delivery service, where an operator for the MSO can approve each video asset being offered by a corresponding video asset owner, and where such approval can be generated by activating an on-screen button.

[0018] FIG. 11 is a screen shot in a browser application of a report summarizing video assets that are to be scheduled or assigned to a particular headend by an operator for an MSO, and where such assignment can be generated by activating an on-screen button.

[0019] FIG. 12 is a screen shot in a browser application of a report summarizing the current video assets that available for delivery during a present time period from a particular headend, and from which a transmission plan for the particular headend can be generated by activating an on-screen button.

[0020] FIG. 13 is a screen shot in a browser application of a planning tool useful to an operator of an MSO to create a transmission plan for video assets to be distributed from a selected network, regions within the network, or headends within each region, and where scheduled video asset summaries for each headend are presented including genres and video storefront pages in each genre.

[0021] FIG. 14 is a screen shot in a browser application of a transmission plan that summarizes the planned video assets that are to be transmitted during a future time period from a particular headend.

[0022] FIG. 15 is a screen shot in a browser application of an advertising management planning tool for scheduling advertisements that are to appear on video storefronts such that the advertisements are to be shown to viewers during certain hours of a day during a future time period from a particular headend.

[0023] FIG. 16 illustrates an exemplary environment in which a viewer can receive multimedia content via a client device as may be implemented by the systems, apparatus, methods, and computer readable medium described herein.

[0024] FIG. 17 illustrates of an example client device, a television, and various input devices that interact with the client device.

[0025] FIG. 18 is a block diagram that illustrates components of the example client device(s) shown in FIGS. 16, and 17.

[0026] The same numbers are used throughout the disclosure and figures to reference like components and features. Series 100 numbers refer to features originally found in FIG. 1, series 200 numbers refer to features originally found in FIG. 2, series 300 numbers refer to features originally found in FIG. 3, and so on.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0027] A video delivery service storefront workflow tool, in various implementations, provides a web-based environment for a multisystem operator (MSO) to plan, communicate, receive, review and schedule video storefront pages to accompany video assets for each headend or group of headends. The video delivery service provides video assets as video-on-demand (VOD) and/or pay per view (PPV) services to viewers. The workflow tool provides a password protected log in for both the MSO and video asset owners. The MSO is provided with a workflow tool for creating a transmission plan within a specified time period or 'viewing window'. The available video assets are determined by the video asset owners that upload into a database the video assets that they will license for the given period.

[0028] A search conducted by the MSO returns those video assets that fall within a time period that is specified by the MSO. The MSO can also choose to view a list of video assets that are available for partial months within the specified viewing window. The MSO then selects which video assets to license and is provided with a list of an aggregate total-run-time (TRT) by genre or category of the selected video assets. The MSO then uses a user interface of the workflow tool to interactively activate a selection function to thereby form a communication that is sent over a network

(e.g., the Internet) to each video asset owner corresponding to the selected video assets of the MSO.

[0029] The video asset owner, upon receipt of the communication from the MSO, is alerted by the workflow tool that a request for a video asset is pending. The video asset owners can then respond to the request and communicate the status of the request back to the requesting MSO. When the video assets are received by the requesting MSO, they are presented in an “approvals” screen. The approvals screen provides an operator of the MSO with a means to review, modify, or reject each previously requested video asset prior to scheduling the video asset for transmission.

[0030] Two interfaces are depicted between three layers of an exemplary workflow tool 100 in FIG. 1 for video delivery. A presentation layer 102 interfaces with an application layer 104 and a data layer 106 interfaces with the application layer 104. The presentation layer 102 embodies client machines that access the application layer through a browser application, such as a browser application communicating over a network like the Internet.

[0031] The application layer 104 is in communication with the presentation layer 102 by a network connection to one or more servers 116 that execute workflow objects 118 in a network application 120 and in a work flow application demonstration 122. The network application 120 contains numerous modules that fulfill parts of an entirely interactive part of the workflow tool 100. The work flow application demonstration 122 contains specific data and routines that store procedures integral to the workflow tool 100.

[0032] A network information server application 112 also executes on the one or more servers 116. The application layer 104 can be based upon the “.NET” networking framework 108 as provided by the Microsoft Corporation of Redmond, Wash., USA. As such, instead of requiring each MSO of video asset owner to interact with an application or a single Web site, the .NET framework will connect each operator of the workflow tool 100 to an array of computers and services that will exchange and combine objects and data. The application layer 104 also includes an application 114 for “aspnet₁₃ wp.exe” that embodies a set of technologies that constitute a framework for building Web applications and XML Web services. The application 114 processes HTTP requests (Web requests) and can include Web pages, XML Web services, HTTP handlers, and HTTP modules. The data layer 106 is in communication with the application layer 104 by a network connection to a database server that executes a database server application and a database application engine.

[0033] The software installation for implementations of workflow tool 100 include a light software installation of a network browser at the presentation layer 102 resident at the video asset owners, and an extensive software installation at application layer 104 for use by an operator of an MSO.

[0034] An exemplary environment 200 is seen in FIG. 2 in which an MSO 202 is in communication with a plurality of video asset owners 204(n), each of which can be in communication with one or more other network operators (netops) 210(j) who also can provide video assets. Each netop 210(j) can also be a provider of video delivery services—an end to end technical service for delivering of video assets. For example, a netop 210(j) can be a cellular

telephone service provider that enables a video-telephone user to watch a VOD asset on the video-telephone via the end to end delivery of content by the cellular telephone service provider.

[0035] The MSO 202 is depicted as being in communication with a plurality of headends or regions 206(p), each of which is in communication with one or more carousels 208(q). The workflow tool 100 seen in FIG. 1 can perform in various implementations in the environment 200.

[0036] FIG. 3 is a flow chart depicting an implementation of a process 300 by which the workflow tool 100 can be implemented. At block 302, a video asset owner or content owner 208(n) publishes information, such as a universal asset package, to announce that a video asset is available for distribution by video delivery service providers. The published information includes but is not limited to metadata, a license or viewing time period window for the video asset, and a rate for the video asset. These three packets of information make the video delivery service provider aware of the video asset that is being made available to be put into a video delivery service. For instance, when the offer is made by the video asset owner the offer can include an entire movie, a trailer for the movie, and behind the scenes shots during production of the movie. All three are video clips of various lengths that make up the universal asset package for the movie.

[0037] An arrow between blocks 302 and 304 indicates a transmission from the content owner to the video delivery service provider, which can be MSO 202, but can also be an individual region or headend 206(p). Upon receipt of the transmission at block 304, the operator of a MSO 202 reviews the incoming lists of video assets and selects among them for deployment as a video asset that is to be made available to viewers. After block 304, process 300 moves to block 306 where the operator of the MSO 202 defines the overall topography and navigation for each carousel 208(q) that is to be scheduled for video delivery services. At block 306, various content in different genres are planned by the operator of the MSO 202 for deployment in video delivery services. For instance, the video assets being planned for deployment may be required to fall into certain genres, such as children’s programming, lifestyles or home and living, music, and action movies. Previously, the content owner will likely have classified each offered video asset by genre.

[0038] The topography of the carousel 208(q) is a hierarchical structure of pages, where the lowest order of the pages may be a starting homepage. The topology is similar to a web site having web pages that make up the web site, where a viewer first accesses the web site at its homepage. A viewer that navigates the topography of the carousel 208(q) can navigate deeper into the topography so as to access different branches. One such branch might be the action movie genre branch. Similarly, the viewer may navigate from the homepage to the genre of lifestyles, within which an episode of the television program called “Oprah” might be selected by the viewer that was available as a video asset for delivery to the viewer. This procedure for drilling down, or entering into the topography from the homepage to an individual page or pages, can be used to support the process of viewer selections for making a request for delivery of a video asset—by pay per view (PPV) or by VOD (video-on-demand). The published pages generally represent offerings by the MSO 202 for video delivery services.

[0039] At block 308, the network operator for MSO 202 defines categories and subcategories for navigation pages, then process 300 moves to block 309 where the network operator for MSO 202 designates initial templates for use by video asset owners for each of the video assets that were selected. Depending upon the MSO 204(n) of the netop 210(j) that provides the video delivery service, the templates can be quite varied. For example, if a particular movie has a series of trailers that could be shown on a video-phone provided by a cellular telephone company, a precise format may be required for the trailer videos to be properly delivered. The initial template can be selected based upon the type of end-to-end service provided by the video delivery service provider who is operating a network where viewer buy a service and view a video asset distributed by the video delivery service provider—who in turn has relationships with video asset owners for distributing that content. Thus, the viewer of video assets could be provided with this service through a wireless videophone, a television, a land-line telephone, or a monitor in communication with a power line from an electrical power utility that also provides delivery services for video assets.

[0040] At block 310, the network operator for MSO 202 allocates a particular page count to each video asset owner to be used for designing an advertisement made up of video storefront pages for a corresponding video asset, where the video storefront pages are designed based upon the designed initial template. The allocated page count is based upon an overall plan for all of the video storefronts. If, however, the templates have already been designed, process 300 can skip block 310 and move directly to block 312. At block 312, MSO 202 forms a communication that identifies the selected video assets and the initial templates for transmission to the corresponding video asset owners.

[0041] Blocks 302 through 312 identify exemplary tasks performed interactively by the network operator for MSO 202 to plan what video assets are to be made available for the video delivery service. The network operator for MSO 202 can search a database of video assets made available by video asset owners. The database is essentially uploaded or updated by each video asset owner. This upload can include the title of the video asset, a mechanically reproducible copy of the video asset, the genre or rating of the video asset, the price of the video asset, and the window that expresses the license period in which the video asset can be offered to video delivery service consumers (e.g., viewers). The network operator for MSO 202 searches available video assets to then select which ones that they want to use or they want to license or acquire. A request is then made to the video asset owner who then will service the request by delivering the pages that support the requested video asset once it has been deployed to a headend or region of headends.

[0042] The initial templates designed by the network operator for MSO 202 define how video asset information can be provided to MSO 202. Because carousels at headends have limitations, both technically and visually, the initial template is designated so as to prevent the video asset owner from advertising with a video storefront that will not function properly with a carousel that can not accommodate the video asset owner's design.

[0043] The initial template can be defined so as to prominently display the brand of the MSO 202. One such tem-

plate, for example, may be designated for a children's movies storefront page. The MSO 202 might also have a special brand for their kids programming. As such, that brand would be in the initial template such that any page that had a movie in the children's programming genre would display that special brand for all kids programming. This initial template would then be provided by MSO 202 to the video asset owner 204(n) for use to upload their children's programming genre video assets so as to fall into the format of the initial template.

[0044] At block 314, the video asset owner 204(n) receives content requests. The video asset owner 204(n) who has received the content request selects choices, if any, of the initial templates and then creates or designs corresponding video storefronts. The video asset owner 204(n) will create an advertisement design that will attract viewers, thereby increasing the buy rate of their video assets by video delivery service consumers (e.g., viewers).

[0045] Process 300 moves to block 316 which queries whether all the metadata elements of a video asset are available to supply information being required by an initial template. Some initial templates can require little design effort because they will require only typical metadata that is available for a video asset, and thus lack much creative design flexibility. Other initial templates may require more design effort on the part of the video asset owner 204(n) and have greater design flexibility. Depending on the video asset owner and the category into which the video asset falls, the initial template may require little or more effort and inversely proportional design efforts.

[0046] In one implementation, the workflow tool 100 examines each initial template for each video asset and automatically populates the initial template from corresponding fields in the metadata of the respective video asset. For instance, if the initial template requires an image of a box cover for the movie and the image has been uploaded, the workflow tool 100 will automatically size and place the box cover image in the initial template. If the initial template requires a short description, the workflow tool 100 will match the metadata for this requirement for a short description and it will be placed into the initial template. As such, little design effort was required on the part of the video asset owner in completing the initial template so as to form the requested page(s) of the video storefront.

[0047] Other data, however, may not be automatically populated by workflow tool 100. This can occur at block 318 of process 300. At block 318, a template may have a requirement for a data field that is not in the metadata. The workflow tool 100 then flags the requirement with an appropriate diagnostic. The template designer then has a choice to either change the template to a template that doesn't have the requirement or to upload the required data to the metadata or to a table for the metadata. Then, blocks 314-316 can be repeated to complete the video storefront page and process 300 can move on to block 320 at which the final templates of the video storefronts are submitted in a transmission to the MSO 202.

[0048] At block 322, MSO 202 receives the transmission from each video asset owner. At block 322, the operator for MSO 202 receives the video storefront pages for review and approval. At block 322, MSO 202 has essentially received the storefront pages that have been submitted by the video

asset owner and the workflow tool **100** indicates to the operator that these pages are in a queue pending approval. The queue gives the operator of MSO **202** an opportunity to look at the video assets that are being submitted and to verify that the video asset owners have used the correct initial templates and that the final template proposed by the video asset owner is correct. For instance, some discretion may be allowed to the operator of MSO **202** as to approval of the proposed video storefronts.

[0049] A clearing house file **324** of the approved video storefront pages is stored, ready for publishing to an actual carousel that has or will be designed via the scheduling through processing steps beginning at block **326**. At block **326**, a split for dual processing occurs by block **328** for scheduling of assets for deployment to specific carousels **208(q)** at headends/regions **206(p)**, and by block **330** where a poll is taken of catalogs from video delivery servers and related carousels from data layer **106** as seen in **FIG. 1**. In essence, various video storefront pages have been approved that are not to be scheduled for deployment until the corresponding video asset is resident and available on the video delivery server from data layer **106**. This prevents a viewer from requesting a video asset that is not actually resident on the video delivery server from data layer **106** such that the request would not be able to be accommodated. The workflow tool **100** at block **330** polls what is called the catalogue. The catalogue is a published application program interface (API) that lists all of the titles of video assets that have been successfully loaded on the video delivery server from data layer **106**. When the polling of the catalogue at block **330** determines that there is an asset on the video delivery server whose metadata corresponds to a page that is sitting in the clearing house of files at block **324**, video asset in the clearing house **324** is flagged to announce that the video asset is then ready for scheduling. The polling and checking process at block **330** ensures that a video storefront page is scheduled on the carousel at block **328** when its corresponding video asset is available to the carousel.

[0050] A query is performed at block **332** where an attempt is made to match a video asset intrinsic to a video asset on the video delivery server from data layer **106**. The function performed at block **332** corresponds to an on-screen graphic button on a video storefront page. If the button is selected by a viewer using an input device, such as a remote control, workflow tool **100** would send a command that would activate the video delivery service for a video asset being requested by the viewer. The intrinsic represents an argument to automatically confirm the presence of the viewer-requested video asset from the catalogue to the video delivery server so that the video asset can be properly deployed at block **334** in an automated fashion. If the check at block **332** has not been satisfied, process **300** returns to the scheduling block **326** for a repetition of the foregoing.

[0051] At block **334**, after the check at block **332** has been satisfied, a deployment of the video asset is made to the designated carousel and a match is made to the video asset. The procedure undertaken to the point of block **334** can be summarized by way of the following example. A navigation page has a list of titles of movies that are in a particular category, of one of which is titled "MOVIE A". That navigation page is automatically and dynamically created by the workflow tool **100** based on all of the video assets that have been created or have been assigned for this specific

category. For that navigation page, if the "MOVIE A" title does not appear in the process of polling the catalogue, then "MOVIE A" will not be shown in the navigation page because there is a way to navigate to the actual page which in turn doesn't have the "MOVIE A" video asset associated with it. So the effect of this double checking is that the workflow tool **100** makes sure that the overall end to end system of supplying a requested video asset is going to work as represented to the viewers. When a viewer demands to see a storefront for a requested video asset by way of input (e.g., a remote control device operated by a viewer), the demand is received at block **336** and the storefront is displayed for the viewer at block **338**.

[0052] **FIGS. 4 through 14** provide exemplary screen shots of a user interface to the workflow tool **100** as explained below. **FIG. 4** is a screen shot **400** of an exemplary log on screen that can be used by an operator for an MSO or for a video asset owner to access the workflow tool **100**. The log on screen is accessible by using a browser application through which access is obtained by both an MSO and video asset owners to a system for providing video assets and corresponding video storefronts to viewers. Both user name and password can be entered via entry fields **402**.

[0053] Once a MSO **202** has received a communication from a video asset owner that a video asset is available for use in a video delivery service, an operator for the MSO requests video assets from those video asset owners offering the same. **FIG. 5** is a screen shot of a browser application through which an operator for an MSO selects among various video assets that are being offered by different video asset owners for distribution to the MSO.

[0054] **FIGS. 6a-6b** are initial templates that can be created and maintained for the purposes of developing pages that will be advertising storefronts viewed by viewers. Initial templates are designed so as to be technologically compatible with a relevant headend of the MSO **202** that will be transmitting a final version thereof to viewers. **FIG. 6a** is a screen shot depicting a tab **602** on the screen **600a**, on the left hand side, for "create/maintain storefront templates". This tab **602** initiates functions through which initial templates can be created and maintained. Diagnostic **606** of screen shot **600a** indicates the current function to be "Maintain Storefront Templates". Initial templates are specified by the MSO **202** for use by video asset owners **204(n)** who have content that they would like a viewer to view. The content may be a video on demand program, a pay per view movie, a video advertisement, or a static page that features graphics, text, and/or other content. Each created initial template may be saved in unique categories as appropriate for different categories of video assets (e.g., children's programming, home and garden, action movies, documentaries, etc.). The initial template can be sent from the MSO **202** to a video asset owner **204(n)** for further design so as to form a video storefront that serves as an advertisement for a particular video asset, and where other information (e.g., advertisements) can also be added into the design that is formed from the initial template.

[0055] Tab **604** of screen shot **600a** indicates a tab for a transmission planner used by MSO **202** to plan video content that is to be transmitted to viewers from various systems or headends operated by MSO **202**. Tab **608** indicates that the initial template in screen shot **600a** is a

standard home menu or a homepage storefront. Regions **614**, **616** and **618** on screen shot **600a**, and region **622** on screen shot **600b**, are areas that are available to place advertisements from video asset owners **204(n)**, from other third parties, or by the MSO **202**. On-screen button **612** is a highlighted “on demand” button that, when activated by a viewer, will initial a display of available video assets for a video-on-demand service. Region **620a** is an area on screen shot **600a** in which an advertisement can be placed for a pay per view program or for a video on demand program.

[0056] Advertisements that can be placed into the regions **614**, **616** and **618** are not limited to static advertising. Both moving video and/or sound could be seen and/or heard by viewers of the regions **614**, **616** and **618**. For instance, more than one tuner can be incorporated into a set top box, or other client device, where each of the tuners could be used to tune to different audio, video, or audio-visual media streams that includes both static ads as well as moving video and/or sound. Each of the media streams received by one of the tuners could then be output, respectively, to the regions **614**, **616** and **618**. Then, when a viewer highlights or otherwise selects one of the regions **614**, **616** and **618**, the audio portion of the stream would be heard by the viewer for the selected region. As an alternative to multiple tuners, a different video delivery platform could be used to obtain different media streams that includes both static ads as well as moving video and/or sound, such as Internet Protocol Television.

[0057] Screen shot **600b** in **FIG. 6b** shows region **620b** where a storefront can be placed for a pay per view program or for a video on demand program. By way of example, when a viewer uses an input device to activate region **620a** in **FIG. 6a**, the workflow tool **100** will link to the page seen **FIG. 6b**. The viewer can then decide, based upon their subjective opinion of the storefront region **620b**, whether to activate a “rent movie now” button **624** on screen shot **600b** so as to pay for and begin watching the corresponding video asset. Alternatively, the viewer can activate a “more movies” button **626** in **FIG. 6b** such that the workflow tool **100** will link to a page (not shown) that will show the viewer additional pay per view and/or video on demand video assets that can be ordered.

[0058] **FIG. 7** is a screen shot in a browser application through which an operator for an MSO can submit a request for further information about video assets to one or more video asset owners who are offering the video assets to video delivery service providers. The screen shot depicts on-screen diagnostics to inform the operator of reasons as to why a video asset has an invalid status. The diagnostic in **FIG. 7** shows that the video asset “Snatch” is missing a box image that is to be inserted into an initial template. The operator is offered the option, via an on-screen button, to perform an edit on a video storefront page corresponding to a video asset. The request is submitted by an upload function along with an initial template for modification by the video asset owner to design one or more pages of a video storefront as an advertisement for the video asset.

[0059] **FIG. 8** is a screen shot depicting a content publisher user interface screen for maintaining an asset package. Entry fields are shown for package name, VOD billing ID, and License Window. A feature field, a trailer field, and a box image field are also shown. An operator for a video asset

owner can input or modify information about a video asset in response to a request for the video asset from an MSO. The information can be presented for review and editing via activation of various on-screen buttons that operate through a browser application.

[0060] **FIGS. 9a-9b** are screen shots in a browser application of pages of respective storefronts that have been designed by a video asset owner. Each design was built from an initial template received from an MSO by the video asset owner, such as those seen respectively in **FIGS. 6a-6b**. A video asset storefront advertises a video asset to viewers who, upon payment for same, will receive delivery of the video asset for viewing. Regions **914**, **916** and **918** on screen shot **900a**, and region **922** on screen shot **900b**, are advertisements from the video asset owners **204(n)** for “amazon.com”, “HBO”, “the 24 TV program”, and another third party such a brand ad from the MSO **202**. On-screen button **912** is a highlighted “on demand” button that, when activated by a viewer, will initial a display of available video assets for a video-on-demand service. Region **920a** in screen shot **900a** is an advertisement for the movie “Snatch” that can be ordered as a video on demand program. Screen shot **900b** in **FIG. 9b** shows region **920b** that corresponds to region **920a** in **FIG. 9a**. Region **920b** is a storefront for the video on demand movie “Snatch”. When a viewer uses an input device, such as a remote control, to activate region **920a** in **FIG. 9a**, the workflow tool **100** will link to the page seen **FIG. 9b**. The viewer can then decide, based upon the content and appearance of the “Snatch” storefront region **920b**, whether to activate a “rent movie now” button **924** on screen shot **900b** so as to pay for and begin watching the “Snatch” video asset. Thus, button **924** of screen shot **900b**, when activated, initiates the ‘purchase’ or ‘buy’ of the “snatch” movie that is the featured video asset **920b** by viewers as a video delivery service. Alternatively, the viewer can activate a “more movies” button **926** in **FIG. 9b** such that the workflow tool **100** will link to a page (not shown) that will show the viewer additional pay-per-view and/or video on demand video assets that can be ordered for the viewer’s viewing.

[0061] **FIG. 10** is a screen shot of a report summarizing video assets that have been requested by an MSO from various video asset owners and are available to the MSO for transmission in a video delivery service. An operator for the MSO can approve each video asset being offered by a corresponding video asset owner. The approval can be generated by activating an on-screen button in a browser application.

[0062] **FIG. 11** is a screen shot of a report summarizing video assets that are to be scheduled or assigned to a particular headend by an operator for an MSO. The assignment can be generated by activating an on-screen checkmark button in a browser application.

[0063] **FIG. 12** is a screen shot of a report summarizing the current video assets that are available for transmission during a present time period from a particular headend. A transmission plan for the particular headend can be generated by activating an on-screen button in a browser application.

[0064] **FIG. 13** is a screen shot of a planning tool useful to an operator of an MSO to assign a show plan for video assets that are to be distributed from a selected network,

from regions within the network, or from headends within each region. The scheduled video asset summaries for each headend are presented, including genres and video storefront pages in each genre. The planning tool features several on-screen buttons that can be activated in a browser application.

[0065] FIG. 14 is a screen shot of a transmission planner function of workflow tool 100, where a transmission plan is shown in the screen shoot. Under the Transmission Planner tab on the screen there are, on the left hand side, several tabs “show plan”, “add/delete category”, “search available assets”, “add content partner”—each of which represents a self explanatory plan function related to transmission planning and are basically for used by the operator for MSO 202.

[0066] Several rows and columns are seen in the screen shot of FIG. 14. The first column in the upper left side shows an entry listing “NEWS”, “Pages: 15”, “Video asset: N”, “Audio: N”. This entry describes a category level for news, in which there are 15 storefront pages associated with the news category, and where the entry is not for a Video asset because the news category, being contemporary and topical, is rarely a considered to be a video on demand or pay per view asset. An “Audio: Y” entry would mean that a separate audio feed is available when a viewer tunes to the storefront pages for a category. Another entry shows “Jerry Springer”, “Pages: 4”, “Video asset: yes”, “Audio: no”, which means that there are four (4) separate storefront pages, no audio feed, and one (1) or more separate video assets. Thus, the transmission planner is a way to quickly see the overall structure and contents of the carousel.

[0067] Screen shot 1500 in FIG. 15 is shown in the same browser application as was shown for FIG. 14, where an advertising management planning tool for scheduling advertisements is indicated, respectively, at a tab 1502, a function category 1504, and a specific function 1506. An ad scheduling function 1508 allows a user to ‘Schedule ads by headend’ via a selection from a pull down menu. The ad scheduling function 1508 allows the user to select other choices, such as ‘Schedule ads by network’, ‘Schedule ads by region’, etc. A headend selection field 1510 is operated as a pull down menu and shows the headend ‘Abbeville, LA’ as being the headend that was selected by the user.

[0068] A video storefront 1524 is selected by a user from the list of storefronts seen at reference numeral 1514, where the selected video storefront 1524 has the name ‘Snatch’ seen in the list at reference numeral 1514. The list at reference numeral 1514 represents only those video storefronts that have corresponding video assets correctly deployed on a carousel and corresponding video on demand server for the headend ‘Abbeville, LA’. Additionally, the respective licensing periods of the video assets must be valid for the day of Aug. 22, 2003, as set forth in the list at reference numeral 1514. Also, only video storefronts that have advertising space in which ads can be placed will appear in the list at reference numeral 1514. As seen in FIG. 15 at reference numeral 1528, an advertisement space having the size of 165×110 pixels is available for ad placement on the “Snatch” video storefront 1524. Also appearing on FIG. 15 are ad elements 1526 each of which has been validated for ad placement in the ad space at reference numeral 1528. The validation process for each ad element 1526 can include the requirement that each ad element have

exactly the size of 165×110 pixels. For instance, each ad element 1526 may have been previously designed by the respective advertisers according to an ad element template that had been specified by a MSO to have the size of 165×110 pixels. One or more checks for compliance with business rules may also be part of the validation process for the available ad elements 1526. One such check may be mandated by the video asset owner for the video storefront 1524, for example, where the ad element can not be an ad for a video asset that is associated with a competing movie studio, or where the ad element can only be an ad for a video asset from the same movie studio. As previously discussed with respect to the regions 614, 616 and 618 of FIG. 6a, the ad elements 1526 need not be static ads but can also be moving pictures with sound. For example, the ad elements 1526 can each be a movie trailer for a video asset, or can be a video advertisement of a product or service that is being offered for sale.

[0069] The user can schedule when an ad element will appear on the video storefront 1524. To schedule an ad element on the video storefront 1524 for viewing by viewers, the user clicks on a name of the video storefront in the list at reference numeral 1514. When the user clicks on the name, the video storefront appears on screen shot 1500, such as is seen at reference numeral 1524. After clicking on the name of the video storefront in list 1514, the user then selects one of the ad elements 1526 by clicking on the user’s selection. The user then drags the selected ad element 1526 to an available time slot in an Ad Storefront Row 1512 in a timeline schedule 1516. For example, the timeline schedule 1516 shows in the Ad Storefront Row 1512 that advertisements have already been scheduled to appear with the “Snatch” video storefront 1524 for Aug. 22, 2003. As such, the selected ad element 1526 can be scheduled to appear at ad space 1528 on video storefront 1524 for all but the time slots that have already been scheduled as shown in screen shot 1500.

[0070] The ad scheduling aspect of the ad management application may be configured to such that a user can schedule an ad to appear on a video storefront by using only the Ad Storefront Row 1512 in timeline schedule 1516, and no other of the rows in timeline schedule 1516. Other rows in timeline schedule 1516, not relevant to the present discussion, represent other visual content that can be displayed to a viewer under various conditions of interaction with the viewer. In timeline schedule 1516, an icon “H” indicates individual headend scheduling and an “N” icon indicates network-wide scheduling.

[0071] The timeline schedule 1516 is shown in screen shot 1500 as being divided by markers 1518, 1520, and 1522. The ad scheduling aspect of the ad management application may be configured to set these markers on the timeline schedule 1516. For instance, a marker of one color and weight could be automatically set at a time that separates the different specific time of day, such as at a division between the afternoon and the evening, as is shown at 5:00 PM. The application can also be configured to set a marker at the current time of day. Alternatively, the user may be enabled to set other markers at their time of their own discretion.

Exemplary Environment

[0072] FIG. 16 illustrates an exemplary environment in which a viewer can receive multimedia content via a client

device as may be implemented by the systems, apparatus, methods, and computer readable medium described herein. Exemplary environment **1600** is a television entertainment system that facilitates distribution of content and program data to multiple viewers. The environment **1600** includes one or more content providers **1602**, one or more program data providers **1604**, a content distribution system **1606**, and multiple client devices **1608(1)**, **1608(2)**, . . . , **1608(N)** coupled to the content distribution system **1606** via a broadcast network **1610**. By way of analogy, environment **1600** corresponds to environment **200**, where content providers **1602** correspond to content owners **204**, and where content distribution system **1606** corresponds to MOS **202**.

[0073] Content provider **1602** includes a content server **1612** and stored content **1614**, such as movies, television programs, commercials, music, and similar audio and/or video content. Content server **1612** controls distribution of the stored content **1614** from content provider **1602** to the content distribution system **1606**. Additionally, content server **1602** controls distribution of live content (e.g., content that was not previously stored, such as live feeds) and/or content stored at other locations to the content distribution system **1606**.

[0074] Program data provider **1604** stores and provides an electronic program guide (EPG) database as well as storefronts. Program data in the EPG includes program titles, ratings, characters, descriptions, actor names, station identifiers, channel identifiers, schedule information, and so on. The terms “program data” and “EPG data” are used interchangeably throughout this discussion. For discussion purposes, an electronic file maintains the program data that may include a program title, a program day or days to identify which days of the week the program will be shown, and a start time or times to identify the time that the program will be shown on the particular day or days of the week.

[0075] The program data provider **1604** processes the EPG data prior to distribution to generate a published version of the program data which contains programming information for all channels for one or more days. The processing may involve any number of techniques to reduce, modify, or enhance the EPG data. Such processes might include selection of content, content compression, format modification, and the like. The program data provider **1604** controls distribution of the published version of the program data to the content distribution system **1606** using, for example, a file transfer protocol (FTP) over a TCP/IP network (e.g., Internet, UNIX, etc.). Further, the published version of the program data can be transmitted from program data provider **1604** via a satellite **1634** directly to a client device **1608** by use of a satellite dish **1634**.

[0076] Content distribution system **1606** includes a broadcast transmitter **1628**, one or more content processors **1630**, and one or more program data processors **1632**. Broadcast transmitter **1628** broadcasts signals, such as cable television signals, across broadcast network **1610**. Broadcast network **1610** can include a cable television network, RF, microwave, satellite, and/or data network, such as the Internet, and may also include wired or wireless media using any broadcast format or broadcast protocol. Additionally, broadcast network **1610** can be any type of network, using any type of network topology and any network communication protocol, and can be represented or otherwise implemented as a combination of two or more networks.

[0077] Content processor **1630** processes the content received from content provider **1602** prior to transmitting the content across broadcast network **1608**. Similarly, program data processor **1632** processes the program data received from program data provider **1604** prior to transmitting the program data across broadcast network **1610**. A particular content processor **1630** may encode, or otherwise process, the received content into a format that is understood by the multiple client devices **1608(1)**, **1608(2)**, . . . , **1608(N)** coupled to broadcast network **1610**. Although FIG. 16 shows a single content provider **1602**, a single program data provider **1604**, and a single content distribution system **1606**, exemplary environment **1600** can include any number of content providers and/or program data providers coupled to any number of content distribution systems.

[0078] Content distribution system **1606** is representative of a headend service with one or more carousels that provides storefronts and EPG data, as well as content, to multiple subscribers. Each content distribution system **1604** may receive a slightly different version of the program data that takes into account different programming preferences and lineups. The program data provider **1604** creates different versions of EPG data (e.g., different versions of a program guide) that include those channels of relevance to respective headend services, and the content distribution system **1606** transmits the EPG data to the multiple client devices **1608(1)**, **1608(2)**, . . . , **1608(N)**. In one implementation, for example, content distribution system **1606** utilizes a carousel file system to repeatedly broadcast the EPG data and storefronts over an out-of-band (OOB) channel to the client devices **1608**.

[0079] Client devices **1608** can be implemented in a number of ways. For example, a client device **1608(1)** receives broadcast content from a satellite-based transmitter via satellite dish **1634**. Client device **1608(1)** is also referred to as a set-top box or a satellite receiving device. Client device **1608(1)** is coupled to a television **1636(1)** for presenting the content received by the client device (e.g., audio data and video data), as well as a graphical user interface. A particular client device **1608** can be coupled to any number of televisions **1636** and/or similar devices that can be implemented to display or otherwise render content. Similarly, any number of client devices **1608** can be coupled to a single television **1636**.

[0080] Client device **1608(2)** is also coupled to receive broadcast content from broadcast network **1610** and provide the received content to associated television **1636(2)**. Client device **1608(N)** is an example of a combination television **1638** and integrated set-top box **1640**. In this example, the various components and functionality of the set-top box are incorporated into the television, rather than using two separate devices. The set-top box incorporated into the television may receive broadcast signals via a satellite dish (similar to satellite dish **1634**) and/or via broadcast network **1610**. In alternate implementations, client devices **1608** may receive broadcast signals via network **1609**, such as the Internet, or any other broadcast medium.

[0081] Each client device **1608** runs an electronic program guide (EPG) application that utilizes the program data. An EPG application enables a television viewer to navigate through an onscreen program guide and locate television shows of interest to the viewer. With an EPG application, the

television viewer can look at schedules of current and future programming, set reminders for upcoming programs, and/or enter instructions to record one or more television shows.

[0082] The EPG application enables the television viewer to look at EPG and storefronts for the purpose of ordering and viewing linear programming as well as pay per view and/or video on demand programming. As such, one or more of the program data providers **1604** can include stored on-demand content, such as Video On-Demand (VOD) movie content, and near VOD such as pay per view movie content. The stored on-demand and near on-demand content can be viewed with a client device **1608** through an onscreen movie guide, for example, and a viewer can enter instructions to stream a particular movie, or other stored content, down to a corresponding client device **1608**.

[0083] Each client device **1608** (1 through N) and the content distribution system **1606** are in communication with a network **1609** that provides two-way communications there between. The content distribution system **1606** servers EPG data and storefronts to any requesting client device **1608** (1 through N). To request EPG data and storefronts on the two-way network **1609**, each client device **1608** transmits a request to the content distribution system **1606**.

Exemplary Client Device

[0084] FIG. 17 illustrates an exemplary implementation **1700** of a client device **1608** shown as a standalone unit that connects to a television **1736**. Client device **1608** can be implemented in any number of embodiments, including as a set-top box, a satellite receiver, a TV recorder with a hard disk, a game console, an information appliance, and so forth. Client device **1608** includes a wireless receiving port **1702**, such as an infrared (IR) or Bluetooth wireless port, for receiving wireless communications from a remote control device **1704**, a handheld input device **1706**, or any other wireless device, such as a wireless keyboard. Handheld input device **1706** can be a personal digital assistant (PDA), handheld computer, wireless phone, or the like. Additionally, a wired keyboard **1708** is coupled to communicate with the client device **1608**. In alternate embodiments, remote control device **1704**, handheld device **1706**, and/or keyboard **1708** may use an RF communication link or other mode of transmission to communicate with client device **1608**.

[0085] Client device **1608** receives one or more broadcast signals **1710** from one or more broadcast sources, such as from a satellite or from a broadcast network. Client device **1608** includes hardware and/or software for receiving and decoding broadcast signal **1710**, such as an NTSC, PAL, SECAM or other TV system video signal. Client device **1608** also includes hardware and/or software for providing the viewer with a graphical user interface by which the viewer can, for example, access various network services, configure the client device **1608**, and perform other functions.

[0086] Client device **1608** is capable of communicating with other devices via one or more connections including a conventional telephone link **1712**, an ISDN link **1714**, a cable link **1716**, an Ethernet link **1718**, an ADSL and/or DSL link **1720**, and the like. Client device **1608** may use any one or more of the various communication links **1712-1720** at a particular instant to communicate with any number of other

devices and/or to establish a two-way communication with the content distribution system **1606** seen in FIG. 16.

[0087] Client device **1608** generates video signal(s) **1720** and audio signal(s) **1722**, both of which are communicated to television **1636**. The video signals and audio signals can be communicated from client device **1608** to television **1636** via an RF (radio frequency) link, S-video link, composite video link, component video link, or other communication link. At reference numeral **1703** in FIG. 17, client device **1608** includes one or more lights or other indicators identifying the current status of the device or for diagnostic reports to a viewer. Additionally, the client device may include one or more control buttons, switches, or other selectable controls for controlling operation of the device.

[0088] FIG. 18 illustrates selected components of client device(s) **1608** shown in FIGS. 16 and 17. Client device **1608** includes one or more tuners **1800(i)**. Tuners **1800(i)** are representative of one or more in-band tuners that tune to various frequencies or channels to receive television signals, as well as an out-of-band tuner that tunes to the broadcast channel over which the EPG data, including storefronts, is broadcast to client device **1608**.

[0089] Client device **1608** also includes one or more processors **1804** and one or more memory components. Examples of possible memory components include a random access memory (RAM) **1806**, a disk drive **1808**, a mass storage component **1810**, and a non-volatile memory **1812** (e.g., ROM, Flash, EPROM, EEPROM, etc.). Alternative implementations of client device **1608** can include a range of processing and memory capabilities, and may include more or fewer types of memory components than those illustrated in FIG. 18. For example, full-resource clients can be implemented with substantial memory and processing resources, including a disk drive **1808** to store content for replay by the viewer. Low-resource clients, however, may have limited processing and memory capabilities, such as a limited amount of RAM **1806**, no disk drive **1808**, and limited processing capabilities. Nevertheless it is intended that client device **1608** include a capability for video recording, either locally or remotely from client device **1608**.

[0090] Processor(s) **1804** process various instructions to control the operation of client device **1608** and to communicate with other electronic and computing devices. The memory components (e.g., RAM **1806**, disk drive **1808**, storage media **1810**, and non-volatile memory **1812**) store various information and/or data such as content, EPG data, storefronts, configuration information for client device **1608**, and/or graphical user interface information.

[0091] An operating system **1814** and one or more application programs **1816** may be stored in non-volatile memory **1812** and executed on processor **1804** to provide a runtime environment. A runtime environment facilitates extensibility of client device **1608** by allowing various interfaces to be defined that, in turn, allow application programs **1816** to interact with client device **1608**. In the illustrated example, an EPG application **1818** is stored in memory **1812** to operate on the EPG data and generate a program guide. The application programs **1816** and the EPG application **1818**, when executed, perform the video storefront functions as disclosed herein, which execution may be implemented at client device **1608**. The application programs **1816** can also include an email program to facilitate electronic mail, and so on.

[0092] FIG. 18 shows non-volatile memory 1812 having a browser application 1802 which, when executed by processor(s) 1804, browses the Web. Browser application 1802 can be used to initiate a request to display a storefront and also initiates a demand for the viewing of a pay per view and/or video on demand program from content distribution system 1606 seen in FIG. 16 via a two-way network. The request and demand are executed by one or more processors 1804 of browser application 1802 so as to retrieve the storefront and programming which can be then be stored in any location within any memory device of client device 1608, such as in non-volatile memory 1812, RAM 1806, disk drive 1808, and/or storage media 1810. The communication on the two-way network to the content distribution system 1606 is made using network interface 1824, wireless interface 1822, serial/parallel interface 1826, modem 1828, or other well known communication hardware/software algorithms and protocol for computing devices. By way of example, such communication can be architected similar to that seen in FIG. 16 via two-way network 1609. Although not shown, client device 1608 may also include other types of data communication interfaces to communicate with other devices. Modem 1828 facilitates client device 1608 communications with other electronic and computing devices via a conventional telephone line. Components seen at reference numerals 1816 and 1822-1828 facilitate applications where client device 1608 has Internet access or communicates data on a two-way network.

[0093] Client device 1608 also includes an audio output 1830 and a video output 1832 that provide signals to a television or other device that processes and/or presents or otherwise renders the audio and video data. Although shown separately, some of the components of client device 1608 may be implemented in an application specific integrated circuit (ASIC). Additionally, a system bus (not shown) typically connects the various components within client device 1608. A system bus can be implemented as one or more of any of several types of bus structures, including a memory bus or memory controller, a peripheral bus, an accelerated graphics port, or a local bus using any of a variety of bus architectures. By way of example, such architectures can include an Industry Standard Architecture (ISA) bus, a Micro Channel Architecture (MCA) bus, an Enhanced ISA (EISA) bus, a Video Electronics Standards Association (VESA) local bus, and a Peripheral Component Interconnects (PCI) bus also known as a Mezzanine bus.

[0094] General reference is been made herein to one or more client devices, such as client device 1608. As used herein, "client device" means any electronic device having data communications, data storage capabilities, and/or functions to process signals, such as broadcast signals, received from any of a number of different sources.

[0095] Implementations extend to methods, client devices, digital video recorders, computer programs, and systems for recording programming content by requesting and receiving real time data. The implementations may comprise a special purpose or general purpose computer including various computer hardware as discussed by way of example in greater detail above.

[0096] Implementations also include computer-readable media for carrying or having computer-executable instructions or data structures stored thereon. Such computer-

readable media can be any available media which can be accessed by a general purpose or special purpose computer. One example of a special purpose computer is a set top box. By way of example, and not limitation, such computer-readable media can comprise RAM, ROM, EEPROM, CD-ROM, DVR-R or other optical disk storage, magnetic disk storage or other magnetic storage devices, or any other medium which can be used to carry or store desired program code means in the form of computer-executable instructions or data structures and which can be accessed by a general purpose or special purpose computer. When information is transferred or provided over a network or another communications connection (either hardwired, wireless, or a combination of hardwired or wireless) to a computer, the computer properly views the connection as a computer-readable medium. Thus, any such a connection is properly termed a computer-readable medium. Combinations of the above should also be included within the scope of computer-readable media. Computer-executable instructions comprise, for example, instructions and data which cause a general purpose computer, special purpose computer, or special purpose processing device to perform a certain function or group of functions.

[0097] The Figures and the foregoing discussion are intended to provide a brief, general description of a suitable computing environment in which the invention may be implemented. Although not required, the invention has been described in the general context of computer-executable instructions, such as program modules, being executed by computers in network environments. Generally, program modules include routines, programs, objects, components, data structures, etc. that perform particular tasks or implement particular abstract data types. Computer-executable instructions, associated data structures, and program modules represent examples of the program code means for executing steps of the methods disclosed herein. The particular sequence of such executable instructions or associated data structures represent examples of corresponding acts for implementing the functions described in such steps.

[0098] Those skilled in the art will appreciate that the invention may be practiced in network computing environments with many types of computer system configurations, including set top boxes, personal computers, hand-held devices, multi-processor systems, microprocessor-based or programmable consumer electronics, network PCs, mini-computers, mainframe computers, and the like. The invention may also be practiced in distributed computing environments where tasks are performed by local and remote processing devices that are linked (either by hardwired links, wireless links, or by a combination of hardwired or wireless links) through a communications network. In a distributed computing environment, program modules may be located in both local and remote memory storage devices.

[0099] The present invention may be embodied in other specific forms without departing from its spirit or essential characteristics. The described embodiments are to be considered in all respects only as illustrative and not restrictive. The scope of the invention is, therefore, indicated by the appended claims rather than by the foregoing description. All changes which come within the meaning and range of equivalency of the claims are to be embraced within their scope.

What is claimed is:

1. A method comprising:
 - receiving, from one or more content providers, one or more transmissions each including information regarding a multimedia content program available for real time distribution during a future time period to third parties;
 - receiving input selecting at least one said multimedia content program;
 - transmitting to one or more of the content providers:
 - a request for the selected at least one said multimedia content program; and
 - one or more initial templates;
 - receiving from the one or more content providers, in one or more transmissions, one or more final templates each conforming to a corresponding said initial template and containing information descriptive of the selected at least one said multimedia content program; and
 - transmitting, to a predetermined network resource at a predetermined time corresponding to the time period of availability, each said final template and the multimedia content program corresponding thereto for real time distribution during the future time period from the predetermined network resource to third parties.
2. A method as described in claim 1, further comprising:
 - receiving a request from one said third party for a real time distribution of one said multimedia content program; and
 - initiating the real time distribution of the one said multimedia content program to said third party from the corresponding said network resource.
3. A method as described in claim 1, wherein each said receiving of the information regarding the multimedia content program, each said transmitting of the request and the one or more initial templates, and each said receiving of the one or more final templates are performed through the internet.
4. A method as described in claim 1, wherein each said multimedia content program is either a pay per view or a video on demand.
5. A method as described in claim 1, wherein the information regarding the multimedia content program is selected from the group consisting of:
 - a title of the multimedia content program;
 - the future time period;
 - a genre;
 - the name of the content provider;
 - a studio corresponding to the multimedia content program;
 - a preview of a storefront corresponding to the multimedia content program;
 - the run time for the multimedia content program;
 - the type of the multimedia content program;
 - a value for the box office revenue generated by the multimedia content program during its theatrical release;
 - a rating value; and
 - a combination of the foregoing.
6. A method as described in claim 1, wherein each said multimedia content program comprises:
 - a preview of a multimedia presentation; and
 - the multimedia presentation.
7. A method as described in claim 1, wherein:
 - each said initial template is one or more storefront web pages; and
 - each said final template is a storefront web page.
8. A method as described in claim 1, wherein each said final template comprises a title, a textual description, and an image associated with the multimedia content program corresponding thereto.
9. A method as described in claim 1, wherein each said final template comprises one or more markup language pages.
10. A method as described in claim 1, wherein the transmitting to the predetermined network resource further comprises an interactive scheduling routine for the predetermined network resource that corresponds to the time period of availability of the multimedia content program.
11. A method as described in claim 1, wherein the predetermined network resource is selected from the group consisting of:
 - a carousel;
 - a headend;
 - a plurality of headends;
 - a server;
 - a production server;
 - a staging and preview server; and
 - a combination of the foregoing.
12. A method as described in claim 1, wherein each said third party is selected from the group consisting of:
 - a client device;
 - a set top box for receiving a communication service; and
 - a personal computer.
13. A computer readable medium comprising instructions that, when executed by a computer, perform the method of claim 1.
14. A method comprising:
 - sending, to a network operator, one or more transmissions each including information regarding a multimedia content program available for real time distribution during a future time period to third parties;
 - receiving from the network operator:
 - a request for one or more said multimedia content programs; and
 - one or more initial templates;
 - associating information descriptive of one said requested multimedia content program with one said initial template to form a final template for each said requested multimedia content program; and

transmitting, to the network operator, each said final template and the multimedia content program corresponding thereto for real time distribution by the network operator during the future time period to third parties.

15. The method as described in claim 14, wherein the sending, the receiving, the associating, and the transmitting are performed by interactive operation of an internet browser application.

16. A method as described in claim 14, wherein each said multimedia content program is a video on demand.

17. A method as described in claim 14, wherein the information regarding the multimedia content program is selected from the group consisting of:

- a title of the multimedia content program;
- the future time period;
- a genre;
- the name of the content provider;
- a studio corresponding to the multimedia content program;
- a preview availability for the multimedia content program;
- the run time for the multimedia content program;
- the type of the multimedia content program;
- a value for the box office revenue generated by the multimedia content program during its theatrical release;
- a rating value; and
- a combination of the foregoing.

18. A method as described in claim 14, wherein:

each said initial template is one or more video on demand storefront web pages; and

each said final template is one or more video on demand storefront web pages.

19. A method as described in claim 14, wherein each said final template comprises one or more markup language pages.

20. A method as described in claim 14, the associating information descriptive of one said requested multimedia content program with one said initial template to form a final template for each said requested multimedia content program further comprises, for each said final template, an input process selected from the group consisting of:

- interactive retrieval of text and an image for addition to the initial template to form the final template;
- an automatic retrieval of text and an image for addition to the initial template to form the final template; and
- a combination of the foregoing.

21. A method as described in claim 14, wherein the information descriptive of one said requested multimedia content program that is associated with one said initial template to form the final template comprises a title, a textual description, and an image associated with the multimedia content program corresponding to the final template.

22. A method as described in claim 14, wherein each said third party is selected from the group consisting of:

a client device;

a set top box for receiving a communication service; and

a personal computer.

23. A computer readable medium comprising instructions that, when executed by a computer, perform the method of claim 14.

24. A system comprising:

means for assessing a data store to request one or more content assets that are available during a corresponding licensing period, wherein the data store stores data regarding content assets availability for video delivery services to third parties during respective licensing periods;

means for receiving additional data through the network connection regarding each said content asset corresponding to each said request; and

means for receiving each said requested content asset, and the additional information regarding the same, to a network resource for the provision of a video delivery service of the requested content asset to third parties during the corresponding licensing period.

25. A system as described in claim 24, wherein the data regarding content assets availability for video delivery services to third parties during respective licensing periods is selected from the group consisting of:

- a title of the content asset;
- the future time period;
- a genre;
- the name of a content provider;
- a studio corresponding to the content asset;
- a preview availability for the content asset;
- the run time for the content asset;
- the type of the content asset;
- a value for the box office revenue generated by the content asset during its theatrical release;
- a rating value of the content asset; and
- a combination of the foregoing.

26. A system as described in claim 24, wherein each said content asset comprises:

- a preview of a content asset; and
- the content of the content asset.

27. A system as described in claim 24, wherein the additional data comprises a video on demand storefront web page.

28. A system as described in claim 24, wherein the additional data comprises a title, a textual description, and an image associated with the content asset.

29. A system as described in claim 24, wherein the additional data comprises one or more markup language pages.

30. A system as described in claim 24, further comprising means for receiving input of an interactive scheduling routine for the predetermined network resource that corresponds to the time period of availability of the content asset.

31. A system as described in claim 24, wherein the predetermined network resource is selected from the group consisting of:

- a carousel;
- a headend;
- a plurality of headends;
- a server;
- a production server;
- a staging and preview server; and
- a combination of the foregoing.

32. The system as described in claim 24, further comprising:

- means for receiving a request through the network connection from one said third party for a real time distribution of one said multimedia content program; and
- means for initiating the real time distribution of the one said multimedia content program to said third party from the corresponding said network resource.

33. The system as described in claim 24, wherein the assessing is performed interactively by a video delivery service provider.

34. The system as described in claim 24, wherein the data regarding content assets availability for video delivery services to third parties during respective licensing periods is received by a means for receiving one or more transmissions through the network connection from a content provider.

35. An apparatus comprising:

- means for receiving one or more transmissions each including information regarding a multimedia content program available for real time distribution during a future time period to third parties;

- means for receiving input, interactively, to select one or more said multimedia content programs;

- means for transmitting:

- a request for the one or more said multimedia content programs; and
- one or more initial templates;

- means for receiving, in one or more transmissions, one or more final templates each conforming to a corresponding said initial template and containing information descriptive of one said requested multimedia content program including the future time period of availability for real time distribution to third parties; and

- means for deploying, to a predetermined distribution network at a predetermined time corresponding to the time period of availability, each said final template and the multimedia content program corresponding thereto.

36. A user interface comprising a panel depicted on a display screen to depict a video on demand (VOD) storefront that:

- corresponds to a VOD that is available for distribution to each of a plurality of subscribing viewers from an associated headend during a calendar period;

has an advertising space into which an ad element of corresponding size may be placed, wherein the ad element can be distributed to the plurality of subscribing viewers for display in the advertising space during a predetermined time period of a day; and

makes the ad element selectable by input received from each subscribing viewer so as to initiate a real time distribution of one or more video images corresponding to the ad element when the subscribing viewer provide input to make a selection of the ad element.

37. A user interface comprising a video storefront display screen to depict one or more ad elements each having a corresponding navigational link to a real time distribution of one or more video images corresponding to the ad element that is available for distribution to each subscribing viewer from an associated headend during a predetermined time period of a day of a calendar period, wherein each said ad element:

is distributed by the associated headend to each subscribing viewer for display on the video storefront display screen only during the predetermined time period of the day of the calendar period; and

is selectable by each subscribing viewer to initiate a linking from the video storefront display screen via the corresponding navigational link to the corresponding real time distribution of the one or more video images corresponding to the ad element from the associated headend, wherein the video storefront display screen includes a navigational link selectable by each subscribing viewer to initiate the corresponding real time distribution to the subscribing viewer making the selection of the one or more video images corresponding to the ad element.

38. The user interface as defined in claim 37, wherein the video storefront display screen comprises a video storefront for the corresponding VOD that is navigated to when the subscribing viewer selects a VOD ad.

39. A user interface for a video storefront comprising a display including one or more ad elements each having a corresponding navigational link to a real time distribution of the one or more video images corresponding to the ad element that is available for distribution to viewers from an associated network resource during a specified day during a specific time period therein, wherein each said ad element:

is coordinated by the network resource to be in the display only during the specific time period of the specified day that corresponds to a time period of availability of the corresponding multimedia program; and

is viewer selectable to initiate a linking from the ad element via the corresponding navigational link to the corresponding real time distribution of the one or more video images corresponding to the ad element from the associated network resource.

40. A video on demand (VOD) system comprising:

means for executing a browser application to display:

a video storefront depicting:

a VOD ad that:

has a corresponding navigational link to a real time distribution request page for a corresponding VOD that is available for distribution to a

subscribing viewer from an associated headend during any day of a calendar period; and

has an ad element, displayed with the VOD ad, only during a predetermined time period of a day within the calendar period;

a real time distribution request page for the corresponding VOD that is available for distribution from the associated headend to the subscribing viewer upon selection of the corresponding VOD ad;

means for receiving input from the subscribing viewer to the means for executing the browser application;

means for interpreting the input as a selection from the subscribing viewer; and

means for applying each said selection, via the use of the means for receiving input, to initiate:

upon the subscribing viewer upon selection of the ad element, a real time distribution of the one or more video images corresponding to the ad element from the associated headend; and

the real time distribution of the corresponding VOD to the subscribing viewer making input to select the VOD from the real time distribution request page for the corresponding VOD.

41. A video on demand (VOD) system, comprising:

a set top box having memory, a processor, and an input device; and

a browser application stored in the memory and executed on the processor to:

display a video storefront depicted on a display screen to depict:

a VOD; and

a plurality of ad elements each corresponding one navigational link to a corresponding real time distribution of the one or more video images corresponding to the ad element from an associated headend;

facilitate a selection, via use of the input device by a subscribing viewer, the VOD, wherein:

the VOD is available for distribution to the subscribing viewer from the associated headend during a calendar period;

each said ad element is available for distribution to the subscribing viewer from the associated headend;

each said ad element is displayed on the video storefront only during a predetermined time period of one day within the calendar period;

the VOD is selectable by the subscribing viewer to initiate the real time distribution of the corresponding VOD to the subscribing viewer from the associated headend; and

each said ad element is selectable by the subscribing viewer to initiate the real time distribution of the one or more video images corresponding to the ad element from the associated headend.

42. The VOD system as defined in claim 41, wherein the browser application is executed on the processor to receive and to display:

the real time distribution of the corresponding VOD to the subscribing viewer from the associated headend upon a requesting input received via the input device during the display of the video storefront; and

the real time distribution of the one or more video images corresponding to the ad element from the associated headend upon a requesting input received via the input device during the display of the video storefront.

43. The VOD system as defined in claim 41, wherein each said ad element is selected from the group consisting of:

a static image; and

moving images

44. The VOD system as defined in claim 43, wherein:

the ad element comprises moving images;

the set top box includes a component selected from the group consisting of:

means for tuning to more than channel; and

means for receiving different media streams that includes both static ads as

well as moving video and/or sound; and

a combination of the foregoing.

* * * * *