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**APPLICATION NUMBER: 60/201,118
FILING DATE: *May 02, 2000***



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05/02/00
JC777 U.S. PTO

05-03-007
HANDAL & MOROFSKY
Counsellors at Law
80 Washington Street
Norwalk, Connecticut 06854

A/PROV

Paul Morofsky 1926-1986
District of Columbia Office
American Center - Tysons Corner
Suite 500
8300 Boone Boulevard
Vienna, Virginia 22182

Telephone: 203-838-8589
Facsimile: 203-838-8794
Telex: 429283 PATSLAW

May 2, 2000
Express Mail Label No. EL465269000US

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60/201118
05/02/00

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Assistant Commissioner for Patents
Washington, D.C. 20231

Re: Inventor: Nicholas STILIADIS
New PROVISIONAL Patent Application
Serial No: Unknown, Filed: Herewith
Attorney Docket No.: STILIADIS
"MULTIMEDIA MARKETING AND DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM"

NO FEES ARE PAID OR AUTHORIZED AT THIS TIME.

SIR:

We enclose herewith:

- [X] Specification (44 pages), Claims (5 pages)
- [X] Ten (10) Sheets Drawings
- [X] Acknowledgment Postcard

The Commissioner is hereby authorized to charge payment of the fees associated with subsequent communications on this application or credit any overpayment to Deposit Account No. 08-0570.

Applicant hereby petitions under 37 CFR 1.136 or other applicable rule to have the response period extended the number of months necessary to render the attached communication timely if a petition is required.

Respectfully submitted,



Anthony H. Handal
Reg. No. 26, 275

Attorney Docket No. STILIADIS

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In re application of:

Nicholas STILIADIS

10

MULTIMEDIA MARKETING AND DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

15 Not Applicable.

STATEMENT REGARDING FEDERALLY SPONSORED
RESEARCH OR DEVELOPMENT

Not Applicable.

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Not Applicable

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Technical Field

5 The present invention relates to the marketing and distribution of multimedia material, including digitally generated film, video, graphics and audio, and analogues traditionally media converted into digital movie and television programs, and associated marketing materials for distribution over a computer network to exhibitors and broadcasters.

2. Description of the Related Art

10 The explosive growth of computer networks, like the Internet, has provided a convenient way for computer users to obtain from remote sites information in the form of text, graphics and audio, as well as video. A computer connected to the Internet or other computer network can also be utilized to interact in real-time with other computers connected to the computer network.

15 The film and television industries have evolved over the years with the audiovisual image becoming omnipresent. Yet despite the incursion of the new

technologies into many fields of business with the microchip and digital technology changing many aspects of modern life including marketing and distribution systems: the movie and television business remains largely unchanged still the motion picture and television industry today can benefit greatly by reducing overhead costs with the attendant improvement in profit margins. These overhead costs include the replication and distribution of hundreds of celluloid prints, of movies, video tapes, advertising materials and so forth.

Today, these costs remain substantially of the same character and nature as upon the industry was relatively young because the sale of audiovisual materials has undergone little change in decades. Typically, films are sold by distributors through film markets, catalogue sales and long established relationships between purchasers and sellers.

Another problem facing producers and distributors is the high cost of transportation and shipping of the films themselves and marketing and advertising materials associated therewith. Part of this problem includes delayed and damaged shipments adding to the costs involved. Another high-cost

component involves responding to requests for previews, marketing materials, contract negotiations, and collecting and tracking sales data for royalties and further marketing programs. Finally, with regard to promotional materials, there is little opportunity to select the same, and wasteful production and transport often occurs.

Another problem addressed by the present invention is the time involved in marketing and distributing multimedia products, especially motion picture films. The longer the time taken to introduce and distribute a multimedia product the higher the financing costs become since revenues take longer to be returned.

Yet another problem with the present distribution system is that the producers and owners must market the products through several different channels requiring similar expenditures in each of those market areas. Each purchase usually involves multiple charges for each item sent, such as trailers, sample materials, duplicates and masters. These costs, especially when incurred across continents can double a buyer's cost, thereby significantly cutting into operating margins. In addition, obtaining prospective purchaser lists, and the purchase history of those purchasers, in locations around the globe is difficult and thus

very costly.

Many elements are generated during the production of a typical feature film.

The storage, handling and administration of these elements is time consuming,

5 labor intensive and thus costly. The delivery process necessitates working with a

variety of suppliers to successfully assemble the required elements, including

thirty five millimeter release prints, audio and music tracks, foreign language

tracks and transcripts, still pictures, video masters in a variety of formats, such as

NTSC, PAL, Beta, one inch, D1 and D2. Scripts, legal documents and a variety of

10 other documents must be stored and shipped. Multiple versions of films are

often required to comply with foreign rating regulations. Each time, a new

purchase is made for a new market, the process must be repeated. The

elimination of physically handling all of these elements significantly reduces

labor costs. Therefore, the present invention is designed to reduce or nearly

15 eliminate such handling.

The market for many films is now worldwide, yet communication between

smaller markets around the world remains challenging. Many movies continue

to produce revenue long after their first release by being re-released in these

smaller markets. In addition, television programming for major markets can continue producing revenue when local television stations around the world seek programming. Nevertheless, servicing the smallest markets remain grossly inefficient. The problems and costs associated with marketing and distributing to these markets is currently not cost effective. The present invention addresses and minimizes these problems by substantially reducing the costs making the marketing and distribution of movies and television programming to these markets economically feasible.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The inventive method of marketing and distributing multimedia such as motion picture films, television programming and the like comprises receiving multimedia material from a producer or owner of the material. If necessary, the material is converted to digital format. The digital material is then stored on a computer readable storage medium. A server system is provided that is accessible over a communication network. The server system accesses data from the computer readable storage medium for transfer over the communication network to exhibitors. The server can provide samples of the multimedia material to potential purchasers depending upon the marketing strategy employed by the

producer or owner.

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The inventive system provides for the download, upon request, from the server system over a public or private network of multimedia material and then advertising material to exhibitors purchasing rights over the inventive communications network. This allows exhibitors and broadcasters to locally use the multimedia material.

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The method of marketing and distributing multimedia is dependant upon the format in which the media is embodied. One method of receiving multimedia material is by downloading via the communication network. If the media is not in an electronic format, the producer or owner must convert the media to such a format or physically transport the media to the server for conversion to an electronic format. The preceding arrangement is employed in accordance with the invention for motion picture movies that are commonly produced only in a film format, or in a lower quality on magnetic video tape.

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30 The inventive method of marketing and distributing multimedia also includes the capacity to digitize any non-digital media for storage on the computer readable storage medium.

While the inventive system may be employed to deliver films, advertising, coming attraction strips, etc. In conventional form, the inventive method of marketing and distributing multimedia include the option of providing a server system accessible over a public communication system, such as the Internet. The distribution of the multimedia includes downloading digital material from the server system for digital display to an audience. In addition to the base media, advertising materials can be downloaded from the server system.

In addition to providing multimedia to users, the server system collects data about the users and information respecting the economics and sales success of exhibitors and broadcasters. This makes possible the provision of sales and marketing data users, producers and owners.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SEVERAL VIEWS OF THE DRAWING

These and other features and advantages of the present invention will be readily apparent from the following detailed description of the invention, the scope of the invention being set out in the appended claims. The detailed description will be better understood in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, wherein like reference characters represent like elements throughout the various views of

the drawings and wherein:

55 Figure 1 is a block diagram generally illustrating the inventive system for marketing and distributing multimedia products;

Figure 2 is a block diagram showing a method for loading multimedia of various formats on a computer readable storage medium in accordance with the invention;

60 Figure 3 is an illustration of a computer screen suitable for serving as a home page in accordance with the method and apparatus of the present invention;

Figure 4 is a web page screen for the selection of material;

Figure 5 is flow chart illustrating the inventive method for obtaining product over the Internet;

65 Figure 6 is an illustration of a secondary web page for the entry of financial data in a web site constructed in accordance with present invention;

Figure 7 is an illustration of a web page for selecting download of various products;

70 Figure 8 is an illustration of a web page for selecting delivery options for multimedia material selected in accordance with the present invention; and

Figure 9 is a block diagram showing the structure of input and output systems at the central server and at an exhibitor's facility utilizing a communications link which may be a publicly accessible network such as the Internet.

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DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

Referring now to Figure 1, a computer or communications network 10 implementing the method of the present invention is illustrated. In the illustrated embodiment, the system exchanges information through the use of cyberspace 12, which may be either a private computer-based communications system or a public system, such as that known under the alleged trademark the Internet. In accordance with the invention, an owner of rights in a particular work, such as a multimedia producer 14, is linked through network 10 to a central server 16 which functions as a distribution web site in accordance with the invention. Multimedia producer 14 may also be connected to central server 16 via a private network link 20, thus providing either a faster data link, a more secure link, or both. In addition, in accordance with the invention, it is contemplated that communications between the owner of rights may also take

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90 traditional forms, such as the transfer of print masters, or the like.

Similarly, a plurality of exhibitors, including a movie theater 18a, a television station 18b, a satellite television operator 18c, a cable television operator 18d and a high school 18e, are also connected through cyberspace 12 to central server 16.

95 It is noted that in accordance with the invention, the servicing of smaller facilities, such as high school 18e is particularly cost-effective as compared to conventional methods for transporting film and associated promotional materials.

100 Multimedia producer 14, central server 16, and each of the exhibitors 18a-e obtain and/or send product and associated information through facilities which comprise computers with various peripheral devices, such as a communications modem, display screen, keyboard, various printers, scanners, and the like, as will be discussed in greater detail below. In the case of central server 16, relatively robust commercial systems may be employed. However, sufficient functionality
105 can be achieved by exhibitors 18a-e using high-end personal computers with enhanced RAM and hard drives.

Referring now to Figure 2, a flow chart is presented that generally shows how

various multimedia formats can be loaded into a computer readable storage
media 28 by producers and other persons who own rights in various
cinematographic properties. In accordance with the invention the same are
loaded into a computer readable storage media 28, which is located at central
server 16. Media 28 may take any one of a number of different forms, but in
accordance with the preferred embodiment comprises a hard drive with high-
speed access and large capacity. Alternatively, the same may be a combination of
a large hard drive for materials other than feature-length or program-length
movies, while such movies and programs are made available via a jukebox
arrangement involving access to multiple disks and mechanical systems for
moving those disks to one or a plurality of player heads.

In accordance with present invention, there are a plurality of input paths over
which films and associated materials can be transported for storage in media 28.
In the simplest case, all such media material is physically delivered to central
server 16. An operator at central server 16 logs onto a central processor unit
located at the premises of the website operator at step 30 in Figure 2. After
logging on, the operator of the system inputs an identifier, such as a title of a
movie, associated with the material to be entered, converted, and stored on

storage media 28. Such material associated with the title may include the actual film, in the case of a feature length film, graphics for a newspaper advertisement, a radio spot, a poster, a coming attractions film segment, handbills or the like.

In accordance with the invention, it is also contemplated that producers may log onto the website from a remote location. Likewise, the official operator of the website can also log onto the system had a remote location.

Input of Materials into the System

If we first consider the case of a remote official operator logging onto the system at step 30, such operator gives his name and password, thus identify himself.

The system thus knows the identity of the person using the system from the name and password of the individual logging onto the system, in this case the official operator. The official operator is treated as the equivalent of an owner because he acts for owners to input materials into the system. When the operator is identified, at step 31 the system makes the determination that the operator is acting for owners of product. At this point the system presents the operator with a list of titles at step 32 and gives the operator access to implement the system whose operation is illustrated in Figure 2.

If, on the other hand the system determines that the person logging onto the system is an exhibitor, it proceeds along path 29 through the inventive method steps toward implementation of distribution of product over the Internet to the exhibitor, the charging of the account of the exhibitor, and to various other steps, as will be described in detail below.

One embodiment of the invention will now be described in connection with the input of a movie entitled "ABC". Initially, this movie is received on seventy millimeter film (celluloid). The producer or owner of the movie also provides the operator of the inventive web site with advertising posters, newspaper advertisements, radio promotional spots on audiocassette or compact disc, television promotional spots on video cassette or videodisc, trailers on celluloid or video cassette, a film strip comprising a coming events announcement, and text, such as all or portions of the script and critic's reviews. All of these materials and other types of materials which are normally transported physically from the owner, such as the producer or other owner of rights, to the person licensing the movie, are digitized and stored in storage media 28 in accordance with the invention.

When these materials are in-house, the operator, who is to enter the material into the information storage media 28 for availability over the Internet from central server 16, enters the title, ABC, at step 32. In accordance with the invention, a screen for the entry of the title is provided. The screen has a line into which the title is to be entered which may be highlighted, whereby the title of the movie may be typed in. The system, in this respect behaves like other systems where the beginning of the typing of the name results in the system following the keystrokes to come to the title, if that title is in storage. In this respect, the system operates much like help topics in many programs. Likewise, it is possible to cursor through the list of titles, again as in the case of the help topics screen. If no material associated with the title is in storage, the title will not be found. It then becomes necessary that, in accordance with the invention, the title must be entered into the system at step 33.

In this respect, the central processor 22 at step 34 checks computer readable storage media 28 to see if the title has previously been entered into the system. If the title is already in the system, the operator will be given the opportunity to enter or select various versions of the media and select materials, such as a television version, director's cut, poster, European version and the like, as

185 appears more fully below.

If it is a new title, the system, at step 36, assigns an identifier to the title ABC and, at step 38, stores that information in storage storage media 28. The operator can then input any additional data at step 40, such as the producer or owner of the
190 title. The object of this additional entry of data is to allow the identification of products in ways other than the title.

This allows additional flexibility when it comes time to output product from the system. For example, if one wanted to search the work of Stanley Kubrick, or
195 dramatizations of Mario Puzo novels, such additional information provides for this facility. In addition, more than one piece may have the same title.

Accordingly, such additional information allows positive identification of the particular item to be furnished to an exhibitor or broadcaster. In accordance with the invention it is contemplated that after a title has been entered into the system
200 and given an identifier, the title may be retrieved at step 33 from storage media 28 and presented to the operator at step 40, where additional materials can be added if desired.

Returning to description of the inventive method for inputting materials into the
205 system, the operator indicates the type of media at step 42 that is to be converted
into digital format, if necessary, and stored on storage media 28. For example,
the material may be identified as a feature film on celluloid, an hourlong
television program on video, a radio spot for a movie, the magazine
advertisement for a television show, or the like. Once rendered and stored
210 digitally on central server 16, audio and visual materials are easily accessible by
business to business customers around the globe.

The invention may be applied, for example, to the various types of media
illustrated in Figure 2, namely celluloid, video, audio, text, and graphics. At step
215 46, visual media, such as film or video tape is input into the system for
conversion. Movie film can come in several formats of its own, such as seventy
millimeter, thirty-five millimeter, and sixteen millimeter, each of which can be in
such formats as interpositive, duplicate negative, original negative, low contrast
print, or release print.

220 In the case of such film inputs into the system, it is necessary for the film to be
scanned at step 48 and turned into an analog RGB video signal. The video signal

resulting from the scanning of the celluloid film can then be digitized using an analog to digital converter and stored in RAM at step 50. Because of the high bandwidth of the resulting video signals and the very large information content associated with a video signal, it has relatively large storage requirements.

However, video signals are also highly redundant. Accordingly, compression of video signals is highly effective and desirable. Accordingly, after the signal has been digitized in RAM at step 50, the signal is compressed at step 52, given an address at step 54 and stored in media 28. At step 54, the type of the particular product which has been stored will be indicated in storage, in this case, film, and details respecting the nature of that film will also be indicated in storage. For example, the product may be designated as seventy millimeter, feature length, documentary footage shot for television in 1984. Other details respecting the particular product, such as the producer, director, actors cover and other information may also be sent to storage for later retrieval.

In accordance with the present invention, in order to avoid a need for excessive storage space in media 28, the video signal, whether it was generated by scanning conventional celluloid film or originated as a video signal on videotape, is not put into RAM for compression in one large operation, but is, instead,

digitally compressed portion by portion to reduce bandwidth and file size, and then stored at step 54. However, after one video portion has been stored in media 28 at step 54, the system returns to step 46, where additional video is input into the system and processed as described above, and the entire process repeated until the entire video has been transformed into RAM. It is noted that the redundancy in a video signal resides largely in corresponding pixel to corresponding pixel redundancy from one frame to the next. Accordingly, it is highly desirable that portions to be compressed be more than one frame in size, and that each frame of each such portion is compared to the prior frame, corresponding pixel by corresponding pixel. This will effectively remove redundancy and maximize the reduction of file size.

In accordance with the invention, it is also contemplated that electronic video recordings may also be the input into the system, digitized and stored in media 28. For example, possible video formats include VHS, 12, digital Betacam, D1, D2, BetacamSP, and the new high-resolution formats. When a video signal is to be digitized, scanning is not necessary and after input of the footage at step 56, the system proceeds directly to digitize the signal and store it in RAM at step 58. The digitized movie is then compressed at step 60, and stored in RAM together with

its associated other information, as described above the connection with film input at step 46, under its identifier address at step 62 in computer readable storage 28. Here again, because of the high information content of video, digitizing and compression is done in portions at steps 58 and 60, the information is stored at step 62, and the system proceeds back to step 56 to repeat the process for the next portion of input video.

As alluded to above, the objective of the system is to store not only such things as feature films, but also associated promotional and other materials. For example, marketing materials may be stored along with a feature film. This allows such materials to be sent in digital form directly from producer 14 to central server 16 via either cyberspace 12 or private link 20, as shown in Figure 1. With the advent of motion pictures being "filmed" digitally, this transfer will be relatively easy. However, since almost all existing feature films are on celluloid, they must be converted by scanning and digitizing, and then compressed and stored, or converted and compressed through the use of equivalent techniques.

Referring back to the objective of storing associated materials, if, for example, a radio spot is to be input into the system, the system proceeds to step 64, where

280 audio material can be entered. This is done by the system activating a soundcard
or similar device in the computer associated with the storage of information on
disk storage 28. In accordance with the invention, analog audio may simply be
coupled to the soundcard. The same can be generated using any playback
285 device, or, alternatively, or may arrive from a remote location by wire, for
example, over the telephone system. Audio may input into the system by a
producer 14 in any format such as DA-88, DAT, thirty-five millimeter magnetic
tape, sixteen millimeter magnetic tape, 1/4² audio tape, thirty-five millimeter
optical tack, computer session, compact disc, audio from video formats noted
above, or any other source, including live performance. If audio is input at step
290 64 in an analog format, it is converted to digital at analog/digital conversion step
58. Digital audio may then optionally be compressed in memory at step 68. The
audio spot is then stored at step seventy under a selected identifier which
associates it was the particular feature film or other product for later retrieval
from readable storage 28 via the Internet, private link, or the like.

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It is also contemplated that the inventive system will be used to make graphics,
such as movie posters, handbills, newspaper advertisements, and the like
inexpensively and quickly available at remote locations. In the event that the

operator wishes to input such materials into the system, the system proceeds to
300 step 72 in response to the selection of the media type at step 42. The operator
activates the input graphics at step 72, after the system activates a scanner at step
74.

In accordance with the invention, it is contemplated that the input of graphics at
305 step 72 and scanning at step 74 will consist generally letter size or smaller
graphics and text (typical of magazines and smaller newspaper advertising,
handbills and the like). Over the system also contemplates application to
oversize graphics with and without text (such as posters of the type commonly
seen at movie theaters). After the performance of scanning at step 74, the output
310 of the scanner is digitized at step 76. The file containing the graphics entered into
the system is then compressed at step 78, although this is optional. The final
version of the material is then stored in memory at step 80. Such storage at step
80 in disk storage 28 is done under the selected identifier that associates it with
the particular feature film or to like. Such storage also includes the description of
315 the media type (graphics) so that the same is available from storage media 28.

There has been described above a process for moving graphics of a conventional

caption data for the hearing-impaired. Where such alphanumeric data has been selected for input at step 42, the system proceeds to look up the film's identification address which is then associated with the material at step 44 . The system then receives such alphanumeric data at step 82, and stores that material at step 84.

Inasmuch as such alphanumeric material is generally available in digital form, it is contemplated that the same will be downloaded to disk storage 28 through the use of the Internet or conventional magnetic disk storage, such as floppy disks, or the like. However, in the event that such information is only available in hardcopy, the same may be scanned using optical character recognition software, with an OCR reader and the optical character recognition software being activated at step 42 upon the identification of the type of material.

In accordance with the invention, it is also contemplated that other materials not specifically identified above, may also be input into the system for later retrieval from disk storage 28 via the Internet or other means. It is also noted that, in accordance with the invention, it is preferred that material be input into the system through the use of existing digital materials, through the use of remote

transport over the Internet or other communications network.

In accordance with the method of the present invention, the presentation of the program illustrated by the flowchart of Figure 2 is done on the monitor of a computer in conjunction with the number of screens which form the graphical user interface between the inventive system and the person implementing the storage of film and materials in disk storage 28. More particularly, Figure 3 is an example of a display screen for implementation of steps 30 and 32 in Figure 2.

Graphical User Interface

Referring now to Figure 3, a screen 100 is shown that is a simplified web site home page to be viewed by a producer or an exhibitor looking to transact business or communicate with the operator of the inventive web site. A log-on block 102 for implementation of step 30 is provided. A person working on behalf of any owner of rights which participates in the system (such as a producer 14 as illustrated Figure 1) or any one of the exhibitors 18a-e can enter his organization's name and password in order to gain access to the rest of the web site. If a valid password is entered the user can then make a selection or enter a desired title. Once logged on, a user can enter a title or click on search button 104 to locate a

375 particular type of movie.

Searching is done by way of a secondary group of screens allowing searching according to any of various search criteria, such as producer, director, lead actor, supporting actors, subject matter, etc. once the searching has been completed, 380 the title of the product which the user is interested in obtaining appears after "Movie Title:" in screen 100.

Screen 100 has two sets of functions associated with it. The first set of functions is implemented when the system recognizes that it is dealing with a producer or 385 other order of rights. On the other hand, a second set of functions is active and implemented when the system recognizes that it is dealing with an exhibitor.

In the case where the system recognizes the person logging onto the web site as an owner of rights, it implements the first set of functions. Accordingly, if the 390 user is a producer or other owner of rights and wishes to view the conditions for use of the web site to distribute his product for various types of products, he clicks on an enter sales data button 106. Upon the clicking of button 106, if the user is unknown to the system, the user is instructed in subsequent screens to

enter such data as the type of product which he licenses, the performers
395 associated with the product, the content (i.e. dramatic, musical, news, etc.), and
historical income data. If the user is already known to the system, much
information is already known to the system, such as the location of the exhibitor,
the nature of his business, his existing contractual relationships with exhibitors
and with the operator of the web site, and the like. This allows the system to give
400 the exhibitor cost factors in accordance with his contracts and other information.
Naturally, these figures are a function of agreements between the web site
operator and the owner of rights.

In addition to using the home page 100 as an entry point to subsequent screens
405 for providing information, and providing for the input of product into the
system, the home page also provides a portal for a client, such as an exhibitor or
an owner of rights, to view his account status, as will be described more fully
below.

410 In addition, an exhibitor make click on an email button 110 to be added to an
email list to receive announcements for such things as newly, in the case of an
exhibitor, added titles on a regular basis. In the case of owners of rights, other

subject matter will be implemented in regular e-mail communication. In addition, a "send e-mail" button 112 may be provided on home page 100 to allow
415 messages to be sent to the web site operator.

A button 114 for requesting additional information about the web site may also be placed on the home page illustrated in Figure 3. This information may be on the home page to give unregistered visitors an idea of what the web site is all
420 about. Clicking on button 114 will bring the users to a secondary page or pages giving information on the web site (not illustrated).

It is also contemplated that various advertisements 116 may also appear on the home page. In accordance of the invention it is contemplated that such
425 advertisements will be specific to particular users, their geography and the like and will be based on information held in the system with respect to prior exhibition of various titles, their popularity and the like. The objective of the system is to use data inside the database of the web site to predict successful products and to make such products available to users by way of advertisements,
430 and to further include in said advertisements information with respect to the fact that such product is expected to be successful and why such success is to be

expected. Such information may include information on previous box office, Nielsen ratings, or the like in other cities.

435 Such information may also include the fact that the product is generally popular, but has not been seen in the area for years. This is of particular interest to television operators who are sometimes not well staffed and thus not able to do the research which would make their stations successful. As is alluded to above, it is the objective of this invention to store in its database all information
440 respecting licensing of films and other products, their location, the time at which licensing of the same occurred, box office, and so forth for later use in targeted advertising and in checking the accuracy of reported box office (in order to prevent fraud), and for other uses known to those in the industry.

445 Returning to the description of the function of screen 100 as a portal for exhibitors or the official web site operator to enter products into storage media 28, once the title is entered data entry logon block 102 and button 118 is click on, the system proceeds to screen 120 in Figure 4. Screen 120 provides for the input of three types of material, namely, text and graphics, they feature film, and audio.
450 The user would then click the button associated with the particular type of

470 44 becomes a generally available web page and functions for numerous
producers 16 as it does for an operator at central server 16 to enter new
multimedia material, such as a new version for a movie, or simply to update a
critics comments on a poster or press release. Even different departments with
an individual producer 16 may have access to such a web site of central server 16.

Remote Access to Product and Transfer of Same over the Internet

475 If the user is an exhibitor and wishes to view the conditions for sale of the
particular product selected, the exhibitor clicks on an enter sales data button 106
480 in Figure 3. Upon the clicking of button 106, the user is instructed in subsequent
screens to enter such data as his expected box office figures. Other information is
already known to the system, such as the location of the exhibitor, the nature of
his business, his existing contractual relationships with producers or owners and
with the operator of the web site, and the like. This allows the system to give the
485 exhibitor cost factors in accordance with his contracts and other information.
Naturally, these figures are a function of agreements between the web site
operator and the owner of rights in the particular title sought by the user.

In addition to using the home page 100 as an entry point to subsequent screens
490 for searching and purchasing rights in product and arranging for the transport of
the same via the Internet or otherwise, including conventional means, the home
page also provides a portal for an exhibitor as well as an owner of rights, to view
his account status.

495 If the exhibitor wishes to obtain media, the exhibitor clicks on button 118, and
this brings up screen 120 illustrated in Figure 4. As illustrated in Figure 4, the
select media type screen 120 presents the operator with several choices with
respect to media type and format. The exhibitor is thus invited to click on
various buttons to obtain various products. It is noted that this screen is greatly
500 simplified or purposes of illustration and may include any products that the
operator of the web site wishes to make available, such as posters, radio
advertisements, and so forth, and that screen 120 may have specific entries of it
which show the availability of such products, their length, their size, and so forth.

505 Once a title and its associated marketing material has been stored on computer
readable storage media 28 of central server 16 as described above, it can be

accessed by an exhibitor 18a-18d from anywhere in the world through a connection to cyberspace 12, in this example, the Internet. The steps of inventive method 122 for implementing the transport of product already in storage at the central server is illustrated in Figure 5.

In particular, an exhibitor 18, after reaching the central server's web site, can log on at step 30 by entering a name known to the system and confirming the same with a password. This is done on the site's home page as illustrated Figure 3.

Alternatively, the exhibitor may click on a become a member button 124 and be sent to a data entry step 98. Such a data entry step is associated with a screen with basic information about interests and the nature of the user. Later, the system sends the visitor to a financial data entry screen 126, as illustrated Figure 6, and as will be more fully described below. In accordance with the invention, it is anticipated that the ability of small facilities, such as high schools, colleges and the like to obtain first quality product will be enhanced. This is because of the cost savings associated with the automated transfer of product over the Internet. Accordingly, such users will be paying relatively small amounts of money and a credit card financing arrangement may become the rule rather than the exception. Such an arrangement is easily implemented using screen 126.

However, in the case of "trade" users, more sophisticated arrangements may become necessary with correspondingly different input screens. Such arrangements may involve automatic debiting of bank accounts, 30 days credit, or other arrangements typically used in the entertainment industry. It is also contemplated that charges may be key to Nielsen ratings in the case of television exhibitors, and that the output of the Nielsen ratings system may be input into the system for automatic charging of the accounts of television exhibitors after a particular product has been transported to the exhibitor and exhibited on television, provided that the Nielsen system has monitored the subject exhibition.

Referring back to Figure 5, central server 16 examines the log on entry at step 31 to determine whether the individual is an exhibitor who is going to transport material to the database, or an exhibitor who will have product downloaded to his site for exhibition, posting, advertising for the like. If the system determines that the individual is an owner or other person wishing to download information into the web site at step 31, it will proceed along path 128 and through the method steps illustrated in Figure 2.

If, on the other hand, the system detects at step 31 that the person who has

logged on is an exhibitor 18, it implements the method steps illustrated Figure 5.

In particular, it moves along path 29 to step 130, where it determines whether the user is already signed as a subscriber to the product transport service provided by the operator of the inventive web site. In the event that the individual is not a subscriber, certain limited functions will be allowed to function. The purpose of this is to interest the individual visiting the web site into becoming a member of the service.

Referring back to Figure 5, if the user does not have a valid password, or is a new user, the user can enter and sign-up by giving certain data at step 132. After the data entry screen has been populated with all necessary data by the person visiting the web site, the system proceeds to step 134 where a financial data information screen 126, as illustrated Figure 6, is presented to enable the visitor to enter either credit card and/or financial institution information.

It is contemplated that many different types of transactions will be available. For example, a user does not purchase a major motion picture with a credit card, since payment is usually based on revenues, such as a royalty payment, often keyed to box office receipts. However, a credit card make sense for the purchase

royalty.

585

After user 18 completes the entry of financial data at step 134, the system proceeds to a credit approval step 136. In the case of a credit card, this is simply the verification that the account has the amount of money needed to consummate the transaction. In the case of a more substantial accounts, such as a theater in a major city, the system may log itself off after receiving data necessary for credit check, and the credit check implemented in a conventional way.

590

After the credit check has resulted in a determination, the system sends the user an e-mail telling him to contact the web site. The user then logs onto the web site and continues the process. If the credit of the user has been disapproved, he is told us at step 136 and the system proceeds to log off at step 138.

595

After the credit of the user, now a prospective exhibitor has been approved at step 136, the system proceeds to the select action step 140. Likewise, in the system had determined at step 130 that the individual was already an exhibitor known to the system after checking the name and password, the system also proceeds to the select action step 140.

600

At the select action step, a select action menu is presented to the exhibitor in the form of a select action screen 142 which gives the exhibitor the opportunity to take various actions with respect to the title previously selected, as illustrated Figure 7. An example of such a secondary web page 142 shows the various choices that a verified user may make. By way of example, and not by way of limitation, a user may click on a change language button 144 to view the web site in a different language. A user may click on a preview movie button 146 to preview a selected movie title or click on a preview other programing button 148 to view television programing or the like. A user may click on a download movie or program button 150 to download a selected title or program. A download advertising button 152 may be provided that either downloads an advertising package containing preselected material or allows the user to select from a list of available material. Since there may be advertising supplements available a download advertising supplements button 154 may be present. Other marketing materials that may be made available for the title selected in the previous screen, and having their own buttons in screen 142, may include include previews and trailers button 156, audio segments button 158, ownership verification button 160, contract information button 162, a terms button 164, and a sales history and related information button 166, all for the previously selected feature film,

program or other product.

After the selection is made at step 140, that selection is recorded at step 168 along
625 with an identification designation associated with the exhibitor who has made
that selection. This enables a record to be kept of each user's requests, along with
selected data such as date and time of request. It also enables the collection of
some of the statistical data to be used by the system.

630 If at the select action step a selection was made which indicates that the user is
interested in exhibiting a particular product, such as buttons 146, 150, 152, or 166,
the system proceeds to step 170. A title availability function is performed at step
170 to determine whether the particular title is available. If the title is not
available, the screen receives and presents an indication that the title is not
635 available and provides a button for the user to make another selection. If the title
is not available, the exhibitor is returned to select action step 140 to select another
action, or change the title, either manually or through activation of the search
button in screen 142 illustrated in Figure 7.

640 Once a title that is in the system has been selected its identifier is noted in

memory and the exhibitor is able then to make appropriate selections. Several functions may be available on a single screen as described above. A user may call up a review movie function at step 172. At step 172 the exhibitor is given the opportunity to either review an entire movie or portions thereof. After that, the exhibitor has the opportunity to decide whether to select another title and be sent to select action step 140 or decide to proceed with purchasing or leasing the movie.

Where the exhibitor has decided to purchase the product after being presented with an alphanumeric invitation to do so, screen at the web site, the exhibitor is then presented with a contract for the particular material for the selected title and accepts or refuses the contract at contract acceptance function 174. User 18 then selects type of material that is desired at the select format step 176. For example, if a poster is desired, the resolution must be selected to fit the size that the poster will be, for example, handbill-size, or marquee-size. This selection is also recorded at step 168 for later analysis. The selected material is then downloaded at step 180 and the download is stored on the user's local storage media at step 182. Step 180 is implemented in a separate screen illustrated in Figure 8, which will be described in detail below. The exhibitor's account or credit card is

660 charged at 184. The user is then permitted to either select another title or leave the web site at step 128.

As alluded to above, Figure 8 illustrates a web site page for enabling an exhibitor to select delivery options including download (via Internet) indicated by a
665 selector box 186, overnight delivery indicated by a selector box 188, regular surface indicated by a selector box 190, fax indicated by a selector box 192 (if appropriate media requested), and a telephone confirmation of request option indicated by a selector box 194. The exhibitor clicks on any one of the above selector boxes 186 through 192, and, if desired, telephone confirmation selector
670 box 194. executing their marked request(s) by clicking on send request button 180. After the appropriate boxes have been selected by the exhibitor, the exhibitor then clicks on button 196 to send this information to the system.

Referring now to Figure 9, the relationship between central server 16 and
675 exhibitor 18 is shown in greater detail in block diagram form along with certain functions occurring at each location. As previously discussed, media having different formats is loaded or stored onto computer readable data storage media 28 using peripherals connected to central server 16. Examples of peripheral

equipment include film scanner 198 which scans visual material in the form of
680 celluloid film to be digitized and turns it into a digital signal which is
compressed, and stored on data storage media 28. Sound board 200 is utilized in
conjunction with devices capable of playing audio material in various formats as
discussed above to digitize the material for later compression and storage on data
storage media 28. Scanner 202 is a letter size scanner for digitizing text, small
685 graphical material and the like of marketing materials, such as newspaper and
radio advertisements to be used by a local theater or television station owner. A
large format scanner 204 is used to digitize media such as the posters that are
common in theaters for hyping patrons with respect to coming attractions.

690 The computer readable data storage media 28 is made available to exhibitors 18
using their own central processor units 206 and its associated memory,
communicating with the central server 16 over a communication network such as
the Internet. In the case of using the Internet for a connection, user's computer
206 acts through the web site computer, which serves as the central server 16, to
695 access data storage media 28. Once digitized media materials may be
downloaded to user's computer 206 using an appropriate data storage media
depending upon the size of the media to be downloaded. In particular, any

selected material material can be printed out on a poster size printer doorway,
printed on a letter size printer 210, recorded on an audio connection or system
700 212, or a digital projector 214 in the case of a theater. However, in the case of a
television transmitter associated with a television station, the material may be
downloaded to videotape or any other format for playback by the television
station.

705 While the foregoing description and drawings represent the preferred
embodiments of the present invention, it will be understood that various
additions, modifications and substitutions may be made without departing from
the spirit and scope of the present invention as defined in the accompanying
claims. In particular, it will be clear that the present invention may be embodied
710 in other specific forms, structures, arrangements, proportions, and with other
elements, materials, and components, without departing from the spirit or
essential characteristics thereof.

The presently disclosed embodiments are therefore to be considered in all
715 respects as illustrative and not restrictive. The metes and bounds of the
invention being defined by the appended claims, and not limited to the foregoing

description.

CLAIMS

720 Claims:

1.A method of marketing and distributing multimedia, the method comprising:

725 receiving multimedia material from a producer or owner of said material;

storing said material on a computer readable storage medium;

730 providing a server system accessible over a communication network;
said server system accessing data from said computer readable storage medium
for transfer over said communication network;

providing samples over said server system of said multimedia
material to potential purchasers;

downloading upon request over said server system said multimedia
material; and

735 providing advertising material to purchasers over said
communication network allowing purchasers to locally market and sell said
multimedia material.

2. The method of marketing and distributing multimedia of claim 1, including receiving multimedia material by downloading via said communication network.

740 3. The method of marketing and distributing multimedia of claim 1, wherein receiving multimedia material includes receiving non-digital media such as celluloid media, printed media, video cassettes, and audio tape.

745 4. The method of marketing and distributing multimedia of claim 3, including the step of digitizing said non-digital media for storage on said computer readable storage medium.

5. The method of marketing and distributing multimedia of claim 1, including providing a server system accessible over a public communication system.

750 6. The method of marketing and distributing multimedia of claim 1, including downloading digital material from said server system for digital display to an audience.

7. The method of marketing and distributing multimedia of claim 1, including providing downloadable advertising materials on said sever system.

755 8. The method of marketing and distributing multimedia of claim 1, including providing sales and marketing data based upon visitors to said server

system.

9. The method of marketing and distributing multimedia of claim 8, including providing marketing data based upon actual users of said server system.

760 10. A method of distributing movies comprising;
receiving a movie on celluloid;
scanning said movie converting it into a digital format, storing said
digital format in a computer readable memory;
transferring said digital format to a theater via a communications
765 network and storing said digital format on a computer readable memory located
at said theater; and
projecting said digital format using a digital projector onto a screen for
display to an audience.

770 11. A distribution system for distributing multimedia comprising:
a first central processing unit;
a first memory associated with said first central processing unit;
a communications network accessible by said first central processing
unit for transferring data into and out of said first memory;

775 an input device connected for data transfer to said first central processing unit, said input device receiving multimedia and transferring it into said first memory via said central processing unit;

a second central processing unit;

780 a second memory, said second memory associated with said second central processing unit with said communications network being accessible by said second central processing unit for transferring data into and out of said second memory; and

785 a digital feature film projector in data communication with said second central processing unit for displaying a feature film onto a screen for presentation to an audience, said feature film stored in digital form in said second memory after being transferred via said communications network from said first memory.

790

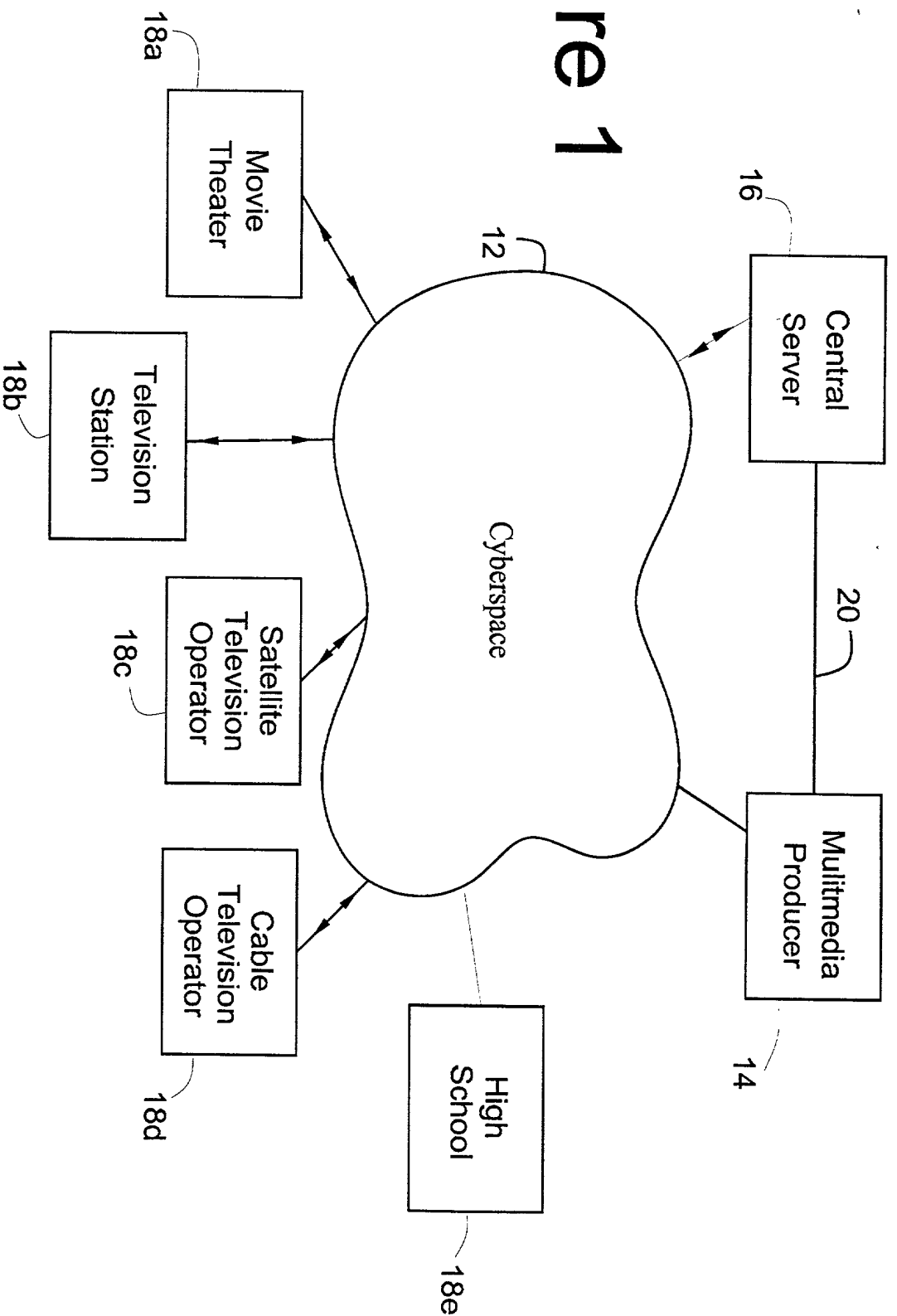
ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

A central server having a computer readable storage media for storing multimedia material, such as motion pictures and television programming, in digital format is connected to a communications network such as the Internet. Exhibitors, such as theaters and television stations, can access the central server, preview available programming, verify the ownership of such material, review contract provisions for obtaining and paying for the desired programming, and download the programming along with marketing materials for the program or movie. The central server loads material onto the storage media as it is received from producers and owners of such material. In addition, central server retains data regarding requests for material, such as titles requested, who requested such, and where the requesters are located geographically. This information can be used to help producers market their material more economically.

795

800

Figure 1



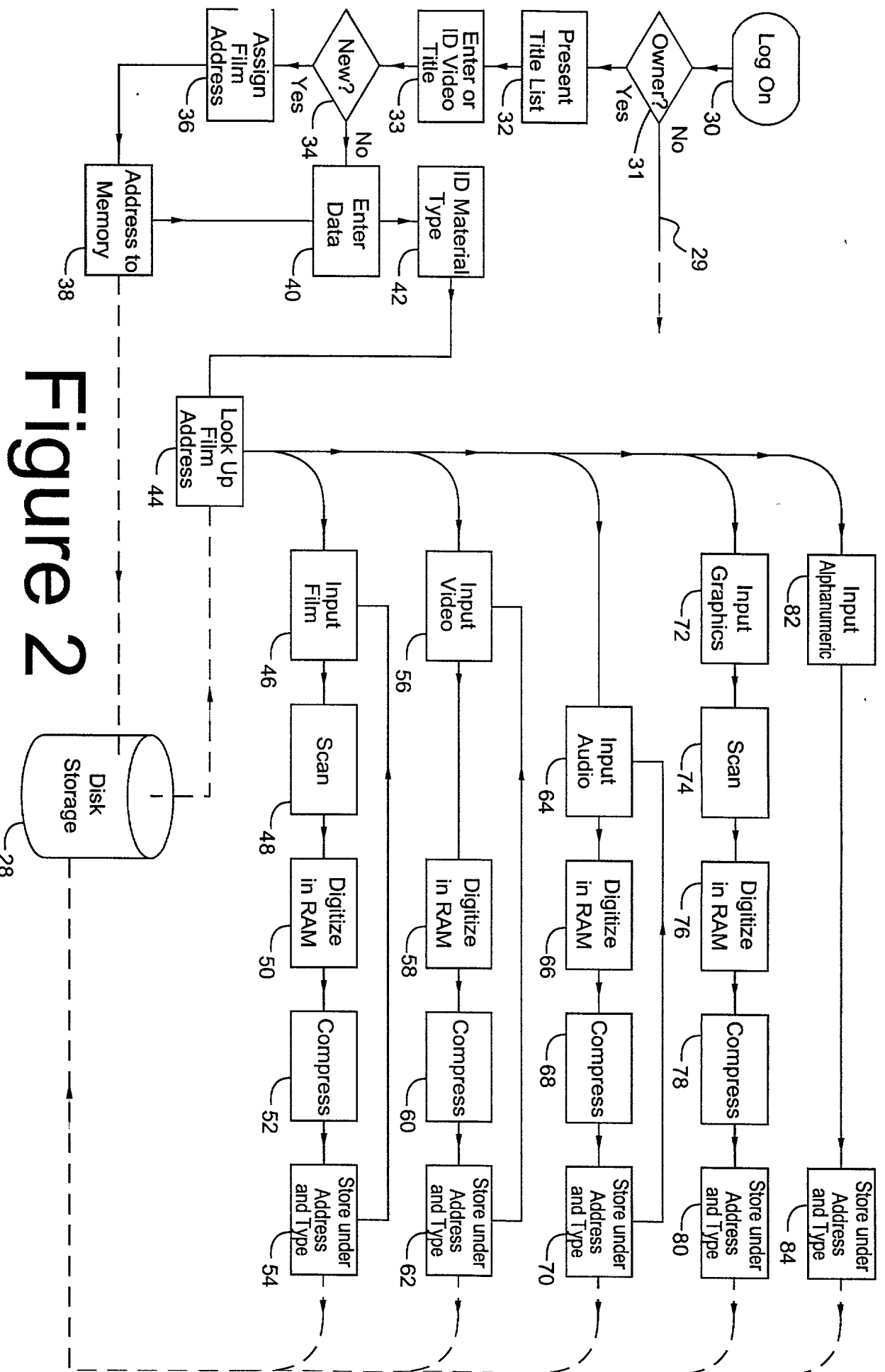


Figure 2

100

FilmSellers.Com

Name: _____
Password: _____

BANNER ADVERTISING AVAILABLE

Movie Title: _____

- 108
- 110
- 109
- 118
- 106
- 112
- 114

BANNER ADVERTISING AVAILABLE

Fig. 3

120

Feature film

Digital



8.5 x 11

[illegible]

Fig. 4

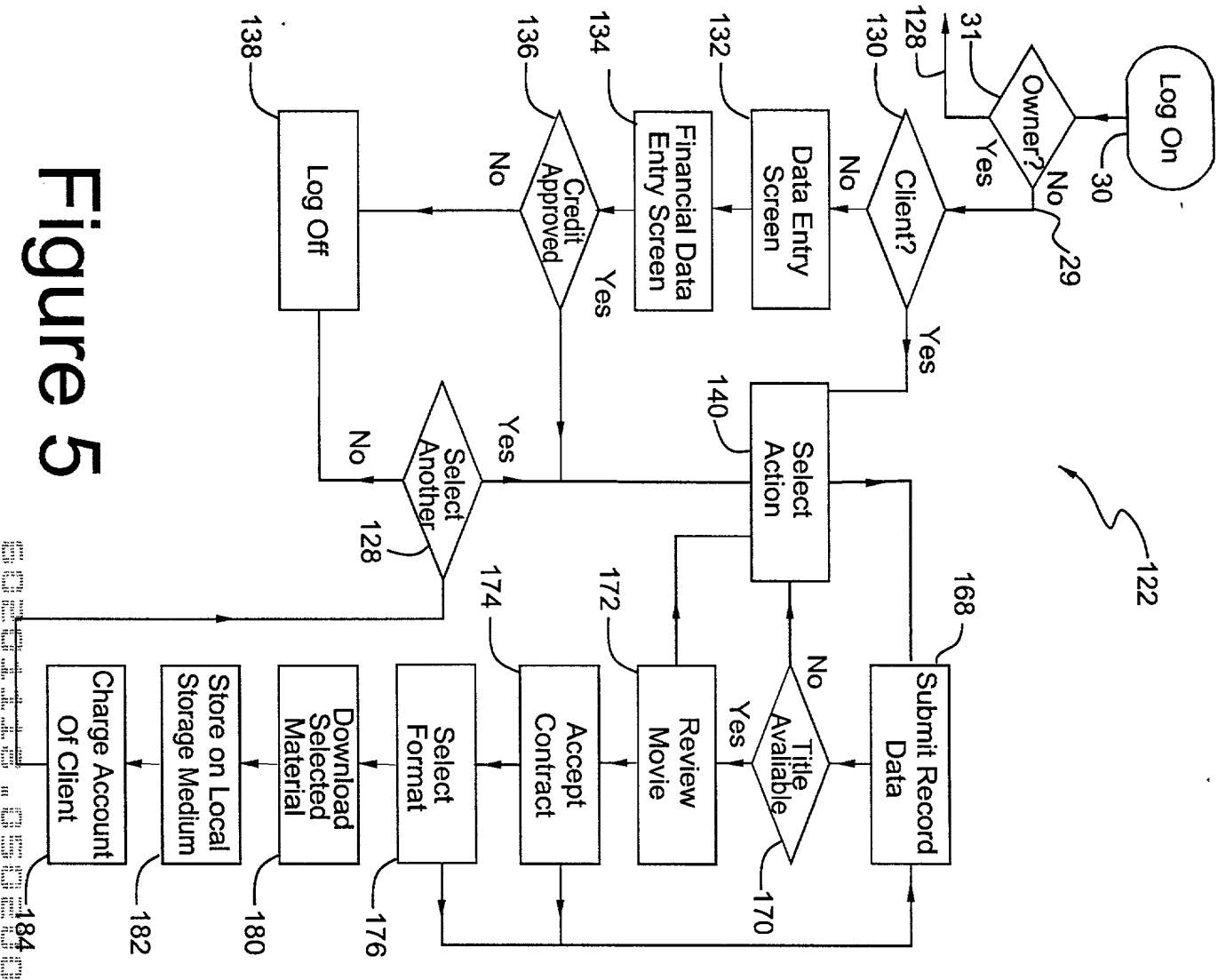


Figure 5

FilmSellers: Com

In order to process your request, we need you to give us some information on your credit.

Name:

Address:

City:

State:

Zip Code:

E-Mail Address:

Telephone:

Fax:

Credit Card Number:

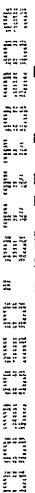
Date of Expiration:

Bank: **Account No.:**

Type: ☐ VISA ☐ Mastercard

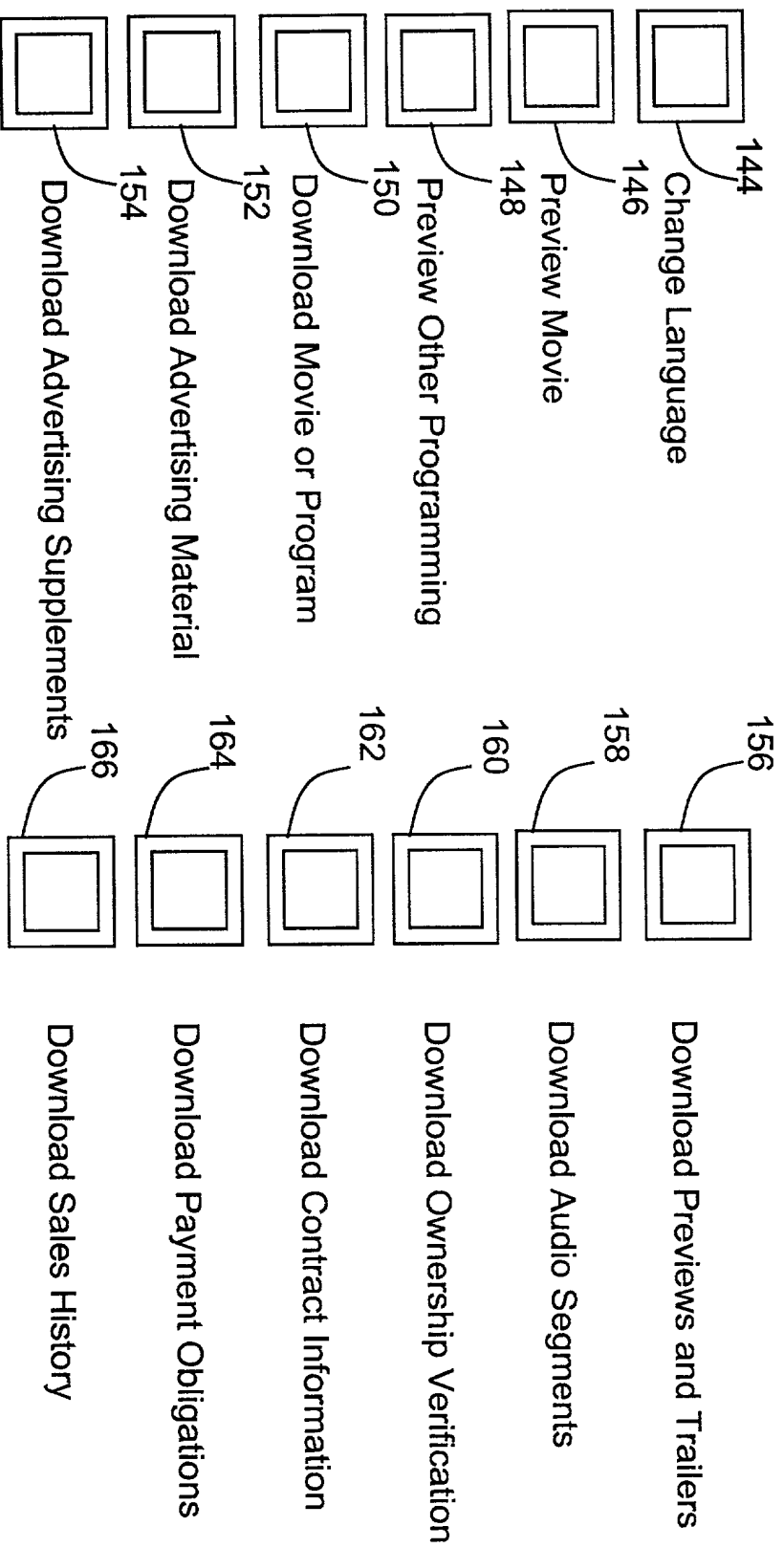
Branch:

Figure 6



FilmSellers.Com

Movie Title: ABC



142

Figure 7

FilmSellers.Com

Delivery Options (Mark All That Apply)

- 186 ☐ Download
- 188 ☐ Overnight Delivery
- 190 ☐ Regular Three Day
- 192 ☐ Fax
- 194 ☐ Telephone Confirmation

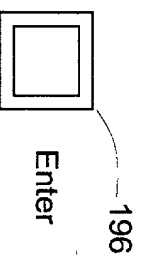
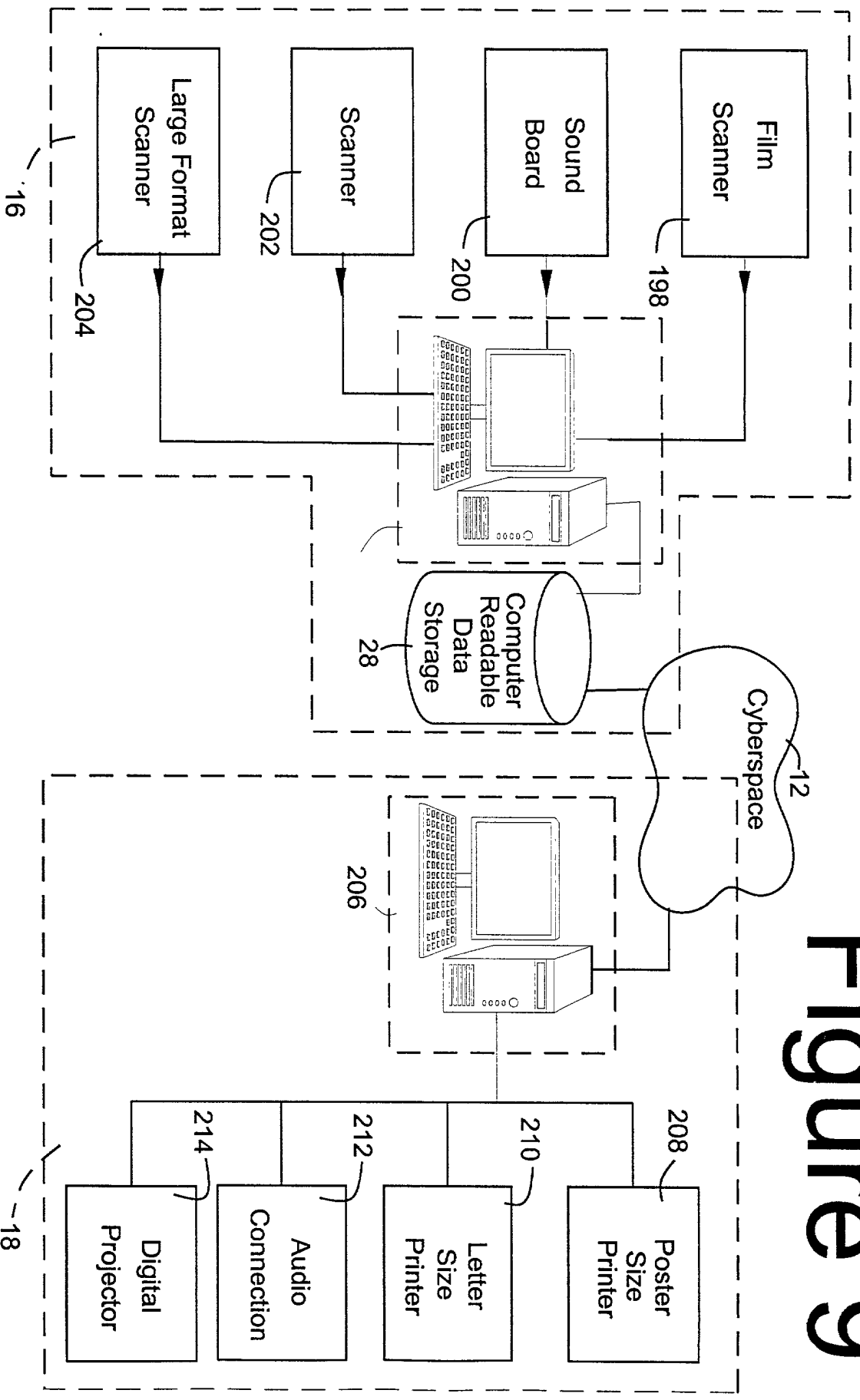


Fig. 8

Figure 9



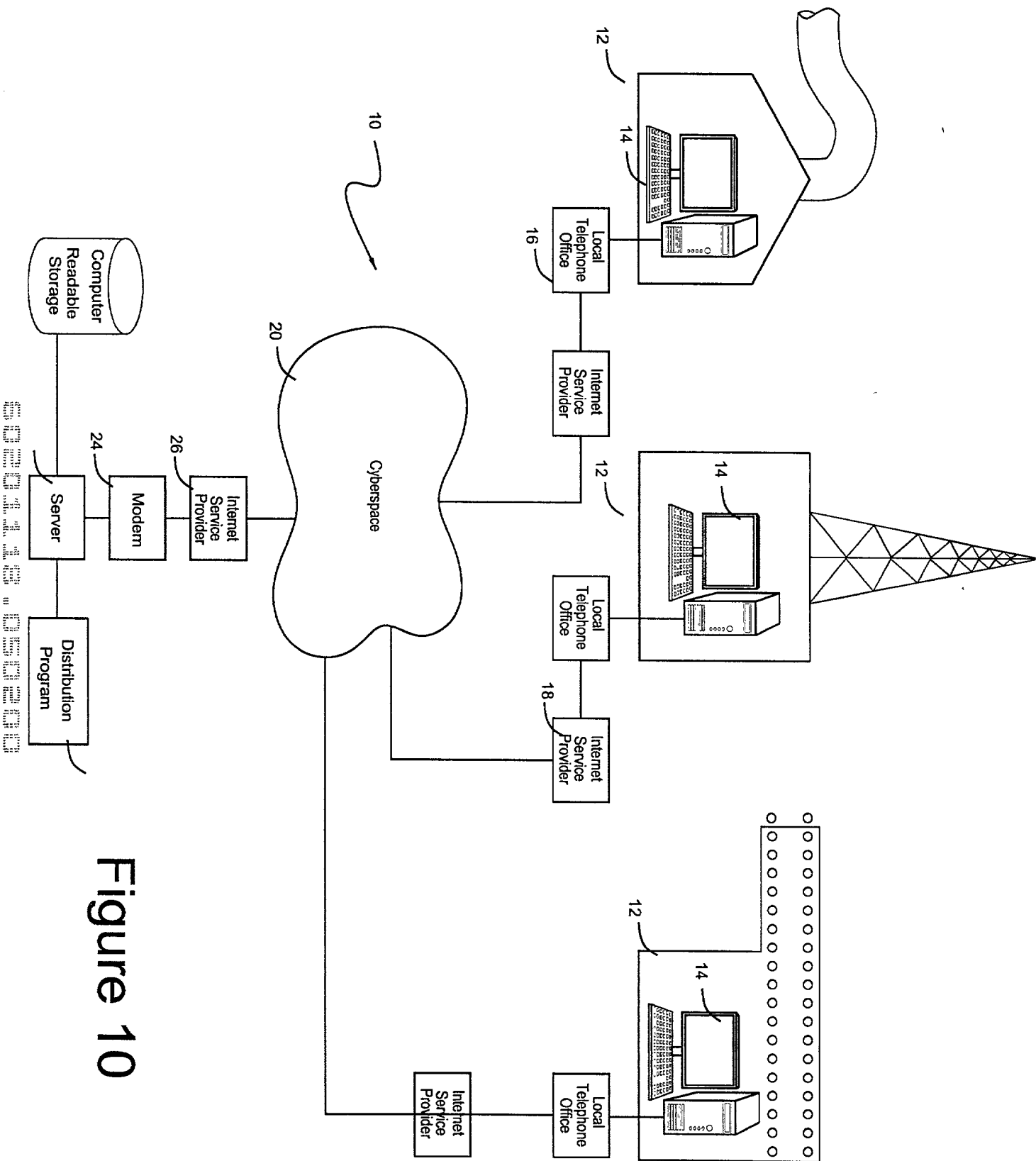


Figure 10