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Xu et al.

(54) **PROCESSING UNIT ENCLOSED OPERATING SYSTEM**

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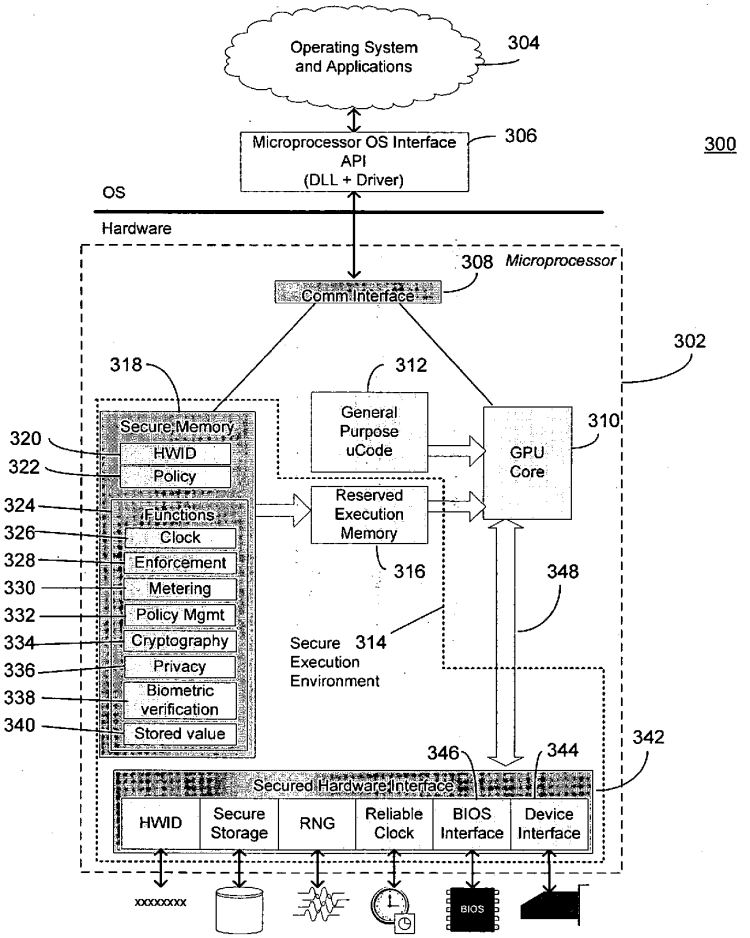
(57) **ABSTRACT**

A processing unit for use in an electronic device includes standard instruction processing and communication interfaces and also includes functional capability in addition to or in place of those found in an operating system. A secure memory within the processing unit may contain a hardware identifier, policy data, and subsystem functions such as a secure clock, policy management, and policy enforcement. Data in functions within the secure memory are not accessible from outside the processing unit.



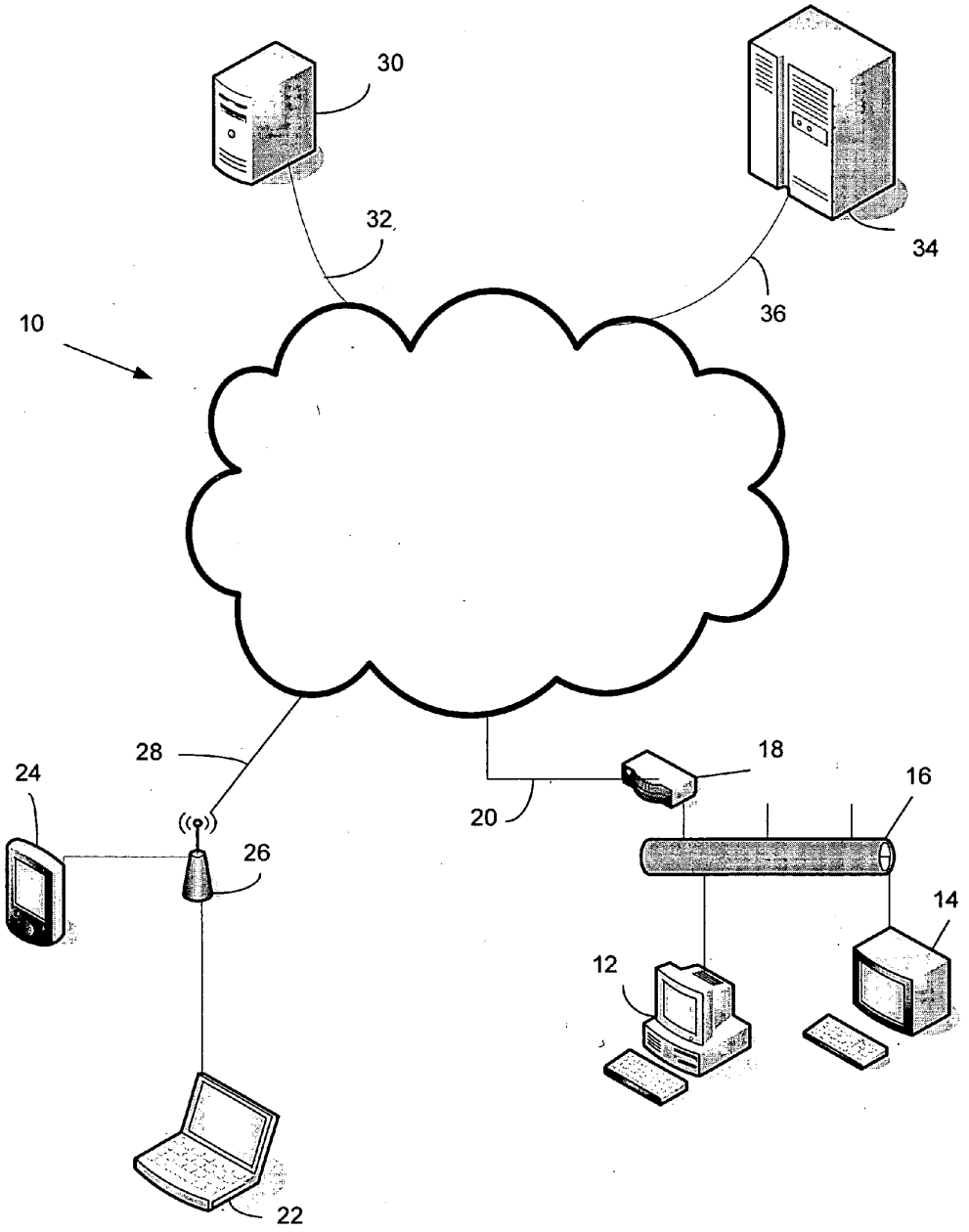


FIG. 1

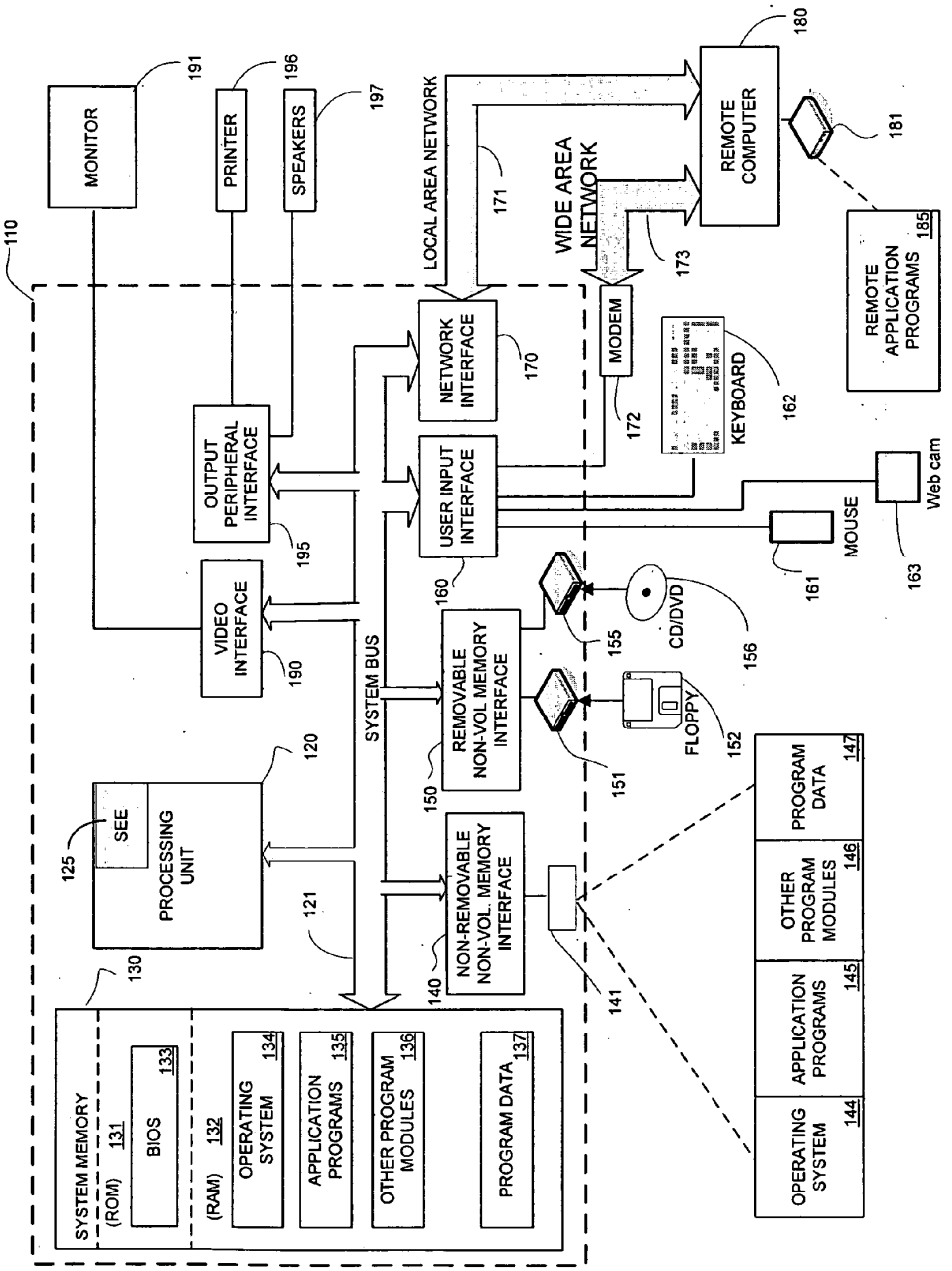

110
MONITOR
191
PRINTER
196
SPEAKERS
197
LOCAL AREA NETWORK
171
WIDE AREA NETWORK
173
REMOTE COMPUTER
180
181
REMOTE APPLICATION PROGRAMS
185
NETWORK INTERFACE
170
MODEM
172
KEYBOARD
162
OUTPUT PERIPHERAL INTERFACE
195
USER INPUT INTERFACE
160
MOUSE
161
Web cam
163
VIDEO INTERFACE
190
SYSTEM BUS
REMOVABLE NON-VOL MEMORY INTERFACE
150
155
CD/DVD
156
FLOPPY
151
152
120
PROCESSING UNIT
125
SEE
121
NON-REMOVABLE NON-VOL. MEMORY INTERFACE
140
141
130
SYSTEM MEMORY
(ROM) 131
BIOS 133
(RAM) 132
OPERATING SYSTEM 134
APPLICATION PROGRAMS 135
OTHER PROGRAM MODULES 136
PROGRAM DATA 137
OPERATING SYSTEM 144
APPLICATION PROGRAMS 145
OTHER PROGRAM MODULES 146
PROGRAM DATA 147

Fig. 2

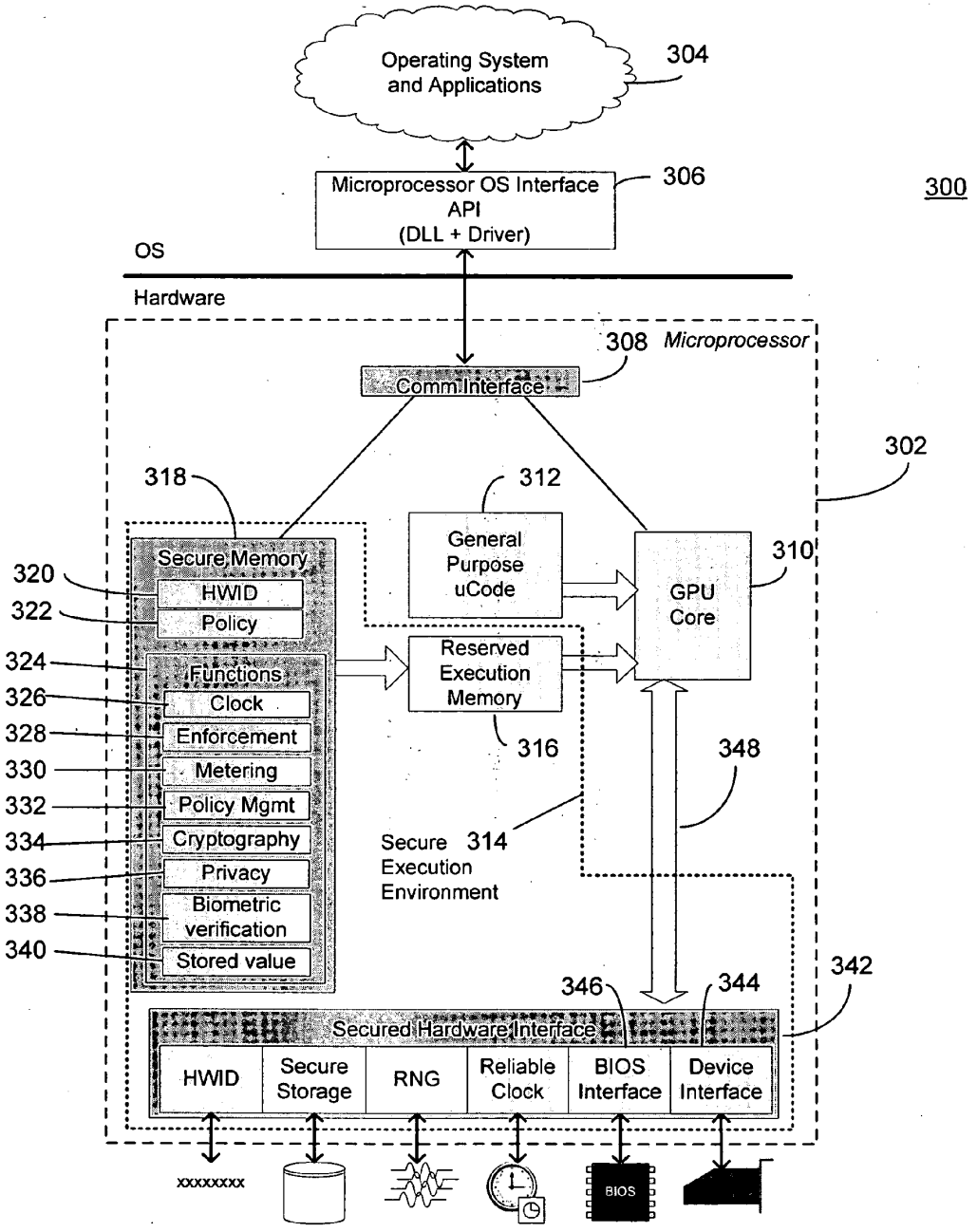

Operating System and Applications
304
Microprocessor OS Interface API (DLL + Driver)
306
300
OS
Hardware
308
Microprocessor
Comm Interface
302
318
312
Secure Memory
HWID
Policy
Functions
Clock
Enforcement
Metering
Policy Mgmt
Cryptography
Privacy
Biometric verification
Stored value
General Purpose uCode
GPU Core
310
Reserved Execution Memory
316
348
Secure Execution Environment
314
346
344
342
Secured Hardware Interface
HWID
Secure Storage
RNG
Reliable Clock
BIOS Interface
Device Interface
320
322
324
326
328
330
332
334
336
338
340
xxxxxxxx
BIOS

Fig. 3

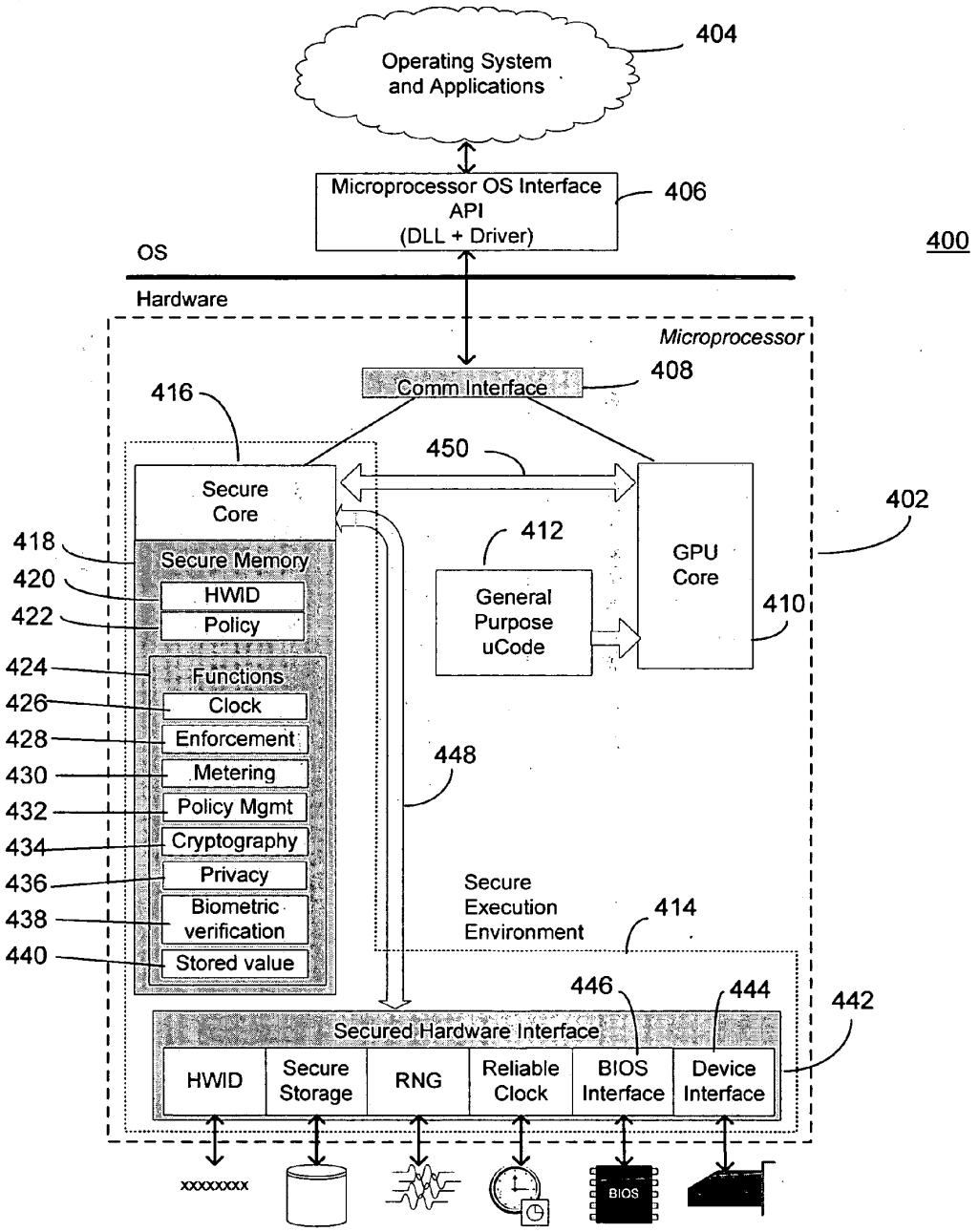

Operating System and Applications
404
Microprocessor OS Interface API (DLL + Driver)
406
400
OS
Hardware
Microprocessor
Comm Interface
408
416
450
Secure Core
402
418
Secure Memory
412
420
HWID
GPU Core
422
Policy
General Purpose uCode
410
424
Functions
426
Clock
428
Enforcement
448
430
Metering
432
Policy Mgmt
434
Cryptography
436
Privacy
Secure Execution Environment
414
438
Biometric verification
440
Stored value
446
444
442
Secured Hardware Interface
HWID
Secure Storage
RNG
Reliable Clock
BIOS Interface
Device Interface
xxxxxxxx
BIOS

Fig. 4

PROCESSING UNIT ENCLOSED OPERATING SYSTEM

BACKGROUND

[0001] Computers that operate using an architecture with a hardware processing platform hosting a software operating platform, or operating system are in use. The operating system is designed to be independent of the processing platform (at least within broad parameters) and conversely, the processing platform is designed independently (within the generally same broad parameters) from the operating system. For example, either Linux or Microsoft Windows may be run on most versions of Intel x86 processor. By using a virtual machine monitor (VMM) or hypervisor, it is possible to run both operating systems concurrently. Similarly, some operating systems, such as UNIX, may run on more than one kind of processor, for example, IBM PowerPC and Sun Sparc processors.

[0002] This independence between processing platform and operating system introduces security risks that can be exploited by would-be hackers, in part because of the difficulty in establishing trust between the processor and operating system, that is, between the hardware and the software of the computer. Current microprocessors enter a "fetch and execute" cycle that blindly executes the instructions given to it and are not concerned with the contents or; ramifications of the executed instructions nor do they participate in policy decisions related to use of the electronic device.

SUMMARY

[0003] A processing unit with embedded system functions provides a secure base for enforcing security and/or operating policies, for example, for use in enforcing pay-per-use, pay-as-you-go, or other metered operation of an electronic device such as a computer, cellular telephone, personal digital assistant, media player, etc. The processing unit may include features and functional support found in most or all modern microprocessors and also support additional functions providing a hardware identifier, a tamper-resistant clock, and secure storage. Other functional capabilities such as a cryptographic unit, may be present as well. The result is a processing unit that is not reliant on any outside components, particularly operating system software, a trusted computing module (TCM), or secure-boot BIOS to establish the basis for computer capable of being operated in compliance to a usage policy.

[0004] When booted, the processing unit determines what policy is active and sets the system configuration in accordance with the policy, for example, setting limits on available memory, number or type of peripherals, or network communications. The clock provides a trustworthy time for use in metering usage, such as use over a period of time, and as a reference to detect tampering with the system clock.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0005] FIG. **1** is a simplified and representative block diagram of a computer network;

[0006] FIG. **2** is a block diagram of a computer that may be connected to the network of FIG. **1**;

[0007] FIG. **3** is a block diagram of a computer showing details of the processing unit; and

[0008] FIG. **4** is a block diagram of a computer showing details of an alternate embodiment of the processing unit of FIG. **3**.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF VARIOUS EMBODIMENTS

[0009] Although the following text sets forth a detailed description of numerous different embodiments, it should be understood that the legal scope of the description is defined by the words of the claims set forth at the end of this disclosure. The detailed description is to be construed as exemplary only and does not describe every possible embodiment since describing every possible embodiment would be impractical, if not impossible. Numerous alternative embodiments could be implemented, using either current technology or technology developed after the filing date of this patent, which would still fall within the scope of the claims.

[0010] It should also be understood that, unless a term is expressly defined in this patent using the sentence "As used herein, the term '_____' is hereby defined to mean . . . " or a similar sentence, there is no intent to limit the meaning of that term, either expressly or by implication, beyond its plain or ordinary meaning, and such term should not be interpreted to be limited in scope based on any statement made in any section of this patent (other than the language of the claims). To the extent that any term recited in the claims at the end of this patent is referred to in this patent in a manner consistent with a single meaning, that is done for sake of clarity only so as to not confuse the reader, and it is not intended that such claim term by limited, by implication or otherwise, to that single meaning. Finally, unless a claim element is defined by reciting the word "means" and a function without the recital of any structure, it is not intended that the scope of any claim element be interpreted based on the application of 35 U.S.C. § 112, sixth paragraph.

[0011] Much of the inventive functionality and many of the inventive principles are best implemented with or in software programs or instructions and integrated circuits (ICs) such as application specific ICs. It is expected that one of ordinary skill, notwithstanding possibly significant effort and many design choices motivated by, for example, available time, current technology, and economic considerations, when guided by the concepts and principles disclosed herein will be readily capable of generating such software instructions and programs and ICs with minimal experimentation. Therefore, in the interest of brevity and minimization of any risk of obscuring the principles and concepts in accordance to the present invention, further discussion of such software and ICs, if any, will be limited to the essentials with respect to the principles and concepts of the preferred embodiments.

[0012] FIG. **1** illustrates a network **10** that may be used to implement a pay-per-use computer system. The network **10** may be the Internet, a virtual private network (VPN), or any other network that allows one or more computers, communication devices, databases, etc., to be communicatively connected to each other. The network **10** may be connected to a personal computer **12** and a computer terminal **14** via an Ethernet **16** and a router **18**, and a landline **20**. On the other hand, the network **10** may be wirelessly connected to a laptop computer **22** and a personal data assistant **24** via a wireless communication station **26** and a wireless link **28**.

Similarly, a server **30** may be connected to the network **10** using a communication link **32** and a mainframe **34** may be connected to the network **10** using another communication link **36**.

[**0013**] FIG. **2** illustrates a computing device in the form of a computer **110** that may be connected to the network **10** and used to implement one or more components of the dynamic software provisioning system. Components of the computer **110** may include, but are not limited to, a processing unit **120**, a system memory **130**, and a system bus **121** that couples various system components including the system memory to the processing unit **120**. The system bus **121** may be any of several types of bus structures including a memory bus or memory controller, a peripheral bus, and a local bus using any of a variety of bus architectures. By way of example, and not limitation, such architectures include Industry Standard Architecture (ISA) bus, Micro Channel Architecture (MCA) bus, Enhanced ISA (EISA) bus, Video Electronics Standards Association (VESA) local bus, and Peripheral Component Interconnect (PCI) bus also known as Mezzanine bus.

[**0014**] The processing unit **120** may be a microprocessor such as a microprocessor available from Intel, or others, as is known in the art. The processing unit may be a single chip or may be a multiple processor unit and may include associated peripheral chips (not depicted) or functional blocks (not depicted). Such associated chips may include pre-processors, pipeline chips, simple buffers and drivers, or may include more complex chips/chip sets such as the "Northbridge" and "Southbridge" chips known in some current technology computer architectures. The processing unit **120** may also include a secure execution environment **125**, either on the same silicon as the microprocessor or as a related chip as part of the overall processing unit. The secure execution environment **125** and its interaction with the processing unit **120**, or equivalent devices, is discussed in more detail below with respect to FIG. **3** and FIG. **4**.

[**0015**] The computer **110** typically includes a variety of computer readable media. Computer readable media can be any available media that can be accessed by computer **110** and includes both volatile and nonvolatile media, removable and non-removable media. By way of example, and not limitation, computer readable media may comprise computer storage media and communication media. Computer storage media includes volatile and nonvolatile, removable and non-removable media implemented in any-method or technology for storage of information such as computer readable instructions, data structures, program modules or other data. Computer storage media includes, but is not limited to, RAM, ROM, EEPROM, flash memory or other memory technology, CD-ROM, digital versatile disks (DVD) or other optical disk storage, magnetic cassettes, magnetic tape, magnetic disk storage or other magnetic storage devices, or any other medium which can be used to store the desired information and which can accessed by computer **110**. Communication media typically embodies computer readable instructions, data structures, program modules or other data in a modulated data signal such as a carrier wave or other transport mechanism and includes any information delivery media. The term "modulated data signal" means a signal that has one or more of its characteristics set or changed in such a manner as to encode information in the signal. By way of example, and not limitation, communication media includes wired media such as a wired network or direct-wired connection, and wireless media such as acoustic, radio frequency, infrared and other wireless media. Combinations of the any of the above should also be included within the scope of computer readable media.

[**0016**] The system memory **130** includes computer storage media in the form of volatile and/or nonvolatile memory such as read only memory (ROM) **131** and random access memory (RAM) **132**. A basic input/output system **133** (BIOS), containing the basic routines that help to transfer information between elements within computer **110**, such as during startup, is typically stored in ROM **131**. RAM **132** typically contains data and/or program modules that are immediately accessible to and/or presently being operated on by processing unit **120**. By way of example, and not limitation, FIG. **2** illustrates operating system **134**, application programs **135**, other program modules **136**, and program data **137**.

[**0017**] The computer **110** may also include other removable/non-removable, volatile/nonvolatile computer storage media. By way of example only, FIG. **2** illustrates a hard disk drive **140** that reads from or writes to non-removable, nonvolatile magnetic media, a magnetic disk drive **151** that reads from or writes to a removable, nonvolatile magnetic disk **152**, and an optical disk drive **155** that reads from or writes to a removable, nonvolatile optical disk **156** such as a CD ROM or other optical media. Other removable/non-removable, volatile/nonvolatile computer storage media that can be used in the exemplary operating environment include, but are not limited to, magnetic tape cassettes, flash memory cards, digital versatile disks, digital video tape, solid state RAM, solid state ROM, and the like. The hard disk drive **141** is typically connected to the system bus **121** through a non-removable memory interface such as interface **140**, and magnetic disk drive **151** and optical disk drive **155** are typically connected to the system bus **121** by a removable memory interface, such as interface **150**.

[**0018**] The drives and their associated computer storage media discussed above and illustrated in FIG. **2**, provide storage of computer readable instructions, data structures, program modules and other data for the computer **110**. In FIG. **2**, for example, hard disk drive **141** is illustrated as storing operating system **144**, application programs **145**, other program modules **146**, and program data **147**. Note that these components can either be the same as or different from operating system **134**, application programs **135**, other program modules **136**, and program data **137**. Operating system **144**, application programs **145**, other program modules **146**, and program data **147** are given different numbers here to illustrate that, at a minimum, they are different copies. A user may enter commands and information into the computer **20** through input devices such as a keyboard **162** and pointing device **161**, commonly referred to as a mouse, trackball or touch pad. Another input device may be a camera for sending images over the Internet, known as a web cam **163**. Other input devices (not shown) may include a microphone, joystick, game pad, satellite dish, scanner, or the like. These and other input devices are often connected to the processing unit **120** through a user input interface **160** that is coupled to the system bus, but may be connected by other interface and bus structures, such as a parallel port, game port or a universal serial bus (USB). A monitor **191** or other type of display device is also connected to the system

bus **121** via an interface, such as a video interface **190**. In addition to the monitor, computers may also include other peripheral output devices such as speakers **197** and printer **196**, which may be connected through an output peripheral interface **195**.

[**0019**] The computer **110** may operate in a networked environment using logical connections to one or more remote computers, such as a remote computer **180**. The remote computer **180** may be a personal computer, a server, a router, a network PC, a peer device or other common network node, and typically includes many or all of the elements described above relative to the computer **110**, although only a memory storage device **181** has been illustrated in FIG. **2**. The logical connections depicted in FIG. **2** include a local area network (LAN) **171** and a wide area network (WAN) **173**, but may also include other networks. Such networking environments are commonplace in offices, enterprise-wide computer networks, intranets and the Internet.

[**0020**] When used in a LAN networking environment, the computer **110** is connected to the LAN **171** through a network interface or adapter **170**. When used in a WAN networking environment, the computer **110** typically includes a modem **172** or other means for establishing communications over the WAN **173**, such as the Internet. The modem **172**, which may be internal or external, may be connected to the system bus **121** via the user input, interface **160**, or other appropriate mechanism. In a networked environment, program modules depicted relative to the computer **110**, or portions thereof, may be stored in the remote memory storage device. By way of example, and not limitation, FIG. **2** illustrates remote application programs **185** as residing on memory device **181**. It will be appreciated that the network connections shown are exemplary and other means of establishing a communications link between the computers may be used.

[**0021**] FIG. **3** depicts a simplified block diagram of a computer **300**. The computer includes a processing unit **302**, that may be similar to or the same as the processing unit **120**. The block diagram also depicts the computer **300** having an operating system and applications **304** that are coupled to the processing unit **302** by an interface application program interface (API) **306**. The API **306** may communicate with a communication interface **308** in the processing unit **302**. The communication interface **308** may take the form of an interrupt handler or, message processing handler, parsing unit, etc. As found in conventional microprocessors, the processing unit **302** may include a general processing unit (GPU) core **310** that processes general-purpose instructions received through the communication interface **308** using a general-purpose set of microcode **312**. The operation of the GPU core **310** and its relationship to the general-purpose microcode **312** is well-documented and understood in the industry, and is exemplified in processors such as the Intel Pentium™ series, ARM™ processors from Advanced Risc Machines Limited, and IBM's PowerPC™ processor.

[**0022**] A secure execution environment **314** may supplement the general processing capabilities provided by the GPU core and microcode **310312**. The secure execution environment; **314** may include a reserved execution memory **316**. The reserved execution memory **316** may provide a highly secure location for the execution of instructions having an elevated privilege level within the processing unit **302**. This elevated privilege level of operation may allow the processing unit **302** to execute code that is not directly accessible from outside the processing unit **302**. For example, a particular interrupt vector may set the processing unit **302** into secure operation, or instructions may be evaluated for content requiring secure resources. When operating in this elevated privilege mode, the processing unit **302** acts as a full subsystem and does not require any external assets, for example BIOS resources, program memory, or a TCM, to build a secure processing environment.

[**0023**] A secure memory **318** may store, in a tamper-resistant manner, code and data related to the secure operation of the computer **302**. The communication interface **308** may determine which instructions entering the processor **302** should be directed to the secure memory **318**, and subsequently for execution in the reserved execution memory **316**. Data in the secure memory **318** may include an identification indicia or hardware identifier **320** and policy data **322** that may specify policy related operational directives such as metering, reporting, update requirements, etc. The secure memory **318** may also include code or data required to implement various functions **324**. The functions **324** may include a clock **326** or timer implementing clock functions, enforcement functions **328**, metering **330**, policy management **332**, cryptography **334**, privacy **336**, biometric verification **338**, and stored value **340** to name a few.

[**0024**] The clock **326** may provide a reliable basis for time measurement and may be used as a check against a system clock maintained by the operating system **134** to help prevent attempts to fraudulently use the computer **300** by altering the system clock. The clock **326** may also be used in conjunction with policy management **332**, for example, to require communication with a host server to verify upgrade availability. The enforcement functions **328** may be loaded into the reserved execution memory **316** and executed when it is determined that the computer **300** is not in compliance with one or more elements of the policy **322**. Such actions may include restricting system memory **132** by directing the processing unit **302** to allocate generally available system memory for use by the secure execution environment **314**. By reallocating system memory **134** to the secure execution environment **314**, the system memory **134** is essentially made unavailable for user purposes.

[**0025**] Another function **324** may be metering **330**. Metering **330** may include a variety of techniques and measurements, for example, those as discussed in co-pending U.S. patent application Ser. No. 11/006,837. Whether to meter and what specific items to measure may be a function of the policy **322** is implemented by the policy management function **332**. A cryptography function **334** may be used for digital signature verification, digital signing, random number generation, and encryption/decryption. Any or all of these capabilities may be used to verify updates to the secure memory **318** or to established trust with an entity outside the processing unit **302** whether inside or outside of the computer **300**.

[**0026**] The secure execution environment **314** may allow several special-purpose functions to be developed and used. A privacy manager **336** may be used to manage personal information for a user or interested party. For example, the

privacy manager **336** may be used to implement a "wallet" function for holding address and credit card data for use in online purchasing. A biometric verification function **338** may be used with an external biometric sensor to verify personal identity. Such identity verification may be used, for example, to update personal information in the privacy manager **336** or when applying a digital signature. As mentioned above, the cryptography function **334** may be used to establish trust and a secure channel to an external biometric sensor (not depicted).

[**0027**] A stored value function **340** may also be implemented for use in paying for time on a pay-per-use computer or while making an external purchases, for example, online stock trading transactions.

[**0028**] The use of data and functions from the secure memory **318** for execution in the reserved execution memory **316** allows presentation of a secured hardware interface **342**. The secured hardware interface **342** allows restricted and or monitored access to peripheral devices **344** or the BIOS **346**. Additionally the functions **324** may be used to allow external programs, including the operating system **134**, to access secure facilities such as hardware ID and random number generation via logical connection **348** between the GPU **310** in the secured hardware interface **342**. In addition, each function discussed above, as implemented in code and stored in the secure memory **318** may be implemented in logic and instantiated as a physical circuit. The operations to map functional behavior between hardware and software are well known in the art and are not discussed here in more detail.

[**0029**] In operation, a designated interrupt may be processed by the communication interface **308** causing data or one or more functions to be loaded from the secure memory **318**; to the reserved execution memory **316**. The GPU **310** may execute from the reserved execution memory **316** to implement the function. In one embodiment, the functions **324** available may supplement or replace standard functions available in the operating system **134**. When configured in this manner, a corresponding operating system **134** will only operate when paired with processing unit **302**. Carrying this concept to another level, another embodiment of the processing unit **302** may be programmed to trap external operating system functions unless executed from the reserved execution memory **316**. For example, attempts to allocate memory by the external operating system **134** may be denied or redirected to internally stored functions. When configured in this manner, only an operating system specifically configured for processing unit **302** will operate correctly. In yet another embodiment, policy data **322** and policy management functions **332** may test operating system **134**, application program **135**, and hardware parameters to ensure that authorized software and hardware is present.

[**0030**] In one embodiment, the computer **300** boots using a normal BIOS startup procedure. At a point when the operating system **134** is being activated, the processing unit **302** may load the policy management function **332** into reserved execution memory **316** for execution to configure the computer **300** according to the policy data **322**. The configuration process may include allocation of memory, processing capacity, peripheral availability and usage as well as metering requirements. When metering is to be enforced, policies relating to metering, such as what measurements to take, for example, by CPU usage or over a period of time, may be activated. Additionally, when usage is charged per period or by activity, a stored value balance may be maintained using the stored value function **340**. When the computer **300** has been configured according to the policy **322**, the normal boot process may continue by activating and instantiating the operating system **134** and other application programs **135**. In other embodiments the policy may be applied to different points in the boot process or normal operation cycle.

[**0031**] Should non-compliance to the policy be discovered, the enforcement function **328** may be activated. A discussion of enforcement policy and actions may be found in co-pending application U.S. patent application Ser. No. 11/152,214. The enforcement function **328** may place the computer **300** into an alternate mode of operation when all attempts to restore the computer to compliance with the policy **322** fail. For example, in one embodiment, a sanction may be imposed by reallocating memory from use as system memory **130** and designating it as secure memory **318**. Since secure memory **318** is not addressable by outside programs including the operating system **134**, the computer's operation may be restricted, even severely, by such memory allocation.

[**0032**] Because the policy and enforcement functions are maintained within the processing unit **302**, some typical attacks on the system are difficult or impossible. For example, the policy may not be "spoofed" by replacing a policy memory section of external memory. Similarly, the policy and enforcement functions may not be "starved" by blocking execution cycles and their respective address ranges.

[**0033**] To revert the computer **300** to normal operation, a restoration code may need to be acquired from a licensing authority or service provider (not depicted) and entered into the computer **300**. The restoration code may include the hardware ID **320**, a stored value replenishment, and a "no-earlier-than" time used to verify the clock **326**. The restoration code may typically be encrypted and signed for confirmation by the processing unit **302**.

[**0034**] Additional updates to the data in the secure memory **318** may be allowed only when specific criteria are met, for example, when the updates are verified by digital signature.

[**0035**] FIG. **4** is a block diagram of a computer **400** showing an alternate embodiment of the processing unit **302** shown in FIG. **3**. The computer **400** has a processing unit **402**, an operating system **404** and a microprocessor operating system interface application program interface (API) **406**. The processing unit **402** includes a communication interface **408** that may operate in a fashion similar to the communication interface **308** by directing data traffic to an appropriate microprocessor function based on a criteria such as interrupt characteristics or address range. The processing unit **402** may have a conventional general processing unit (GPU) **410** and corresponding general purpose microcode **412**. A secure execution environment **414** may include the same or similar functions found in the secure execution environment **314** with the addition of a separate secure core processor **416**. The secure core processor **416** may allow an additional level of independence from the GPU core **410** and a corresponding increase in security of the processing unit **402**.

[0036] The secure memory **418** may include a hardware ID **420** and policy data **422** in addition to general purpose functions **424** that operate as discussed above with respect to FIG. **3**, for example clock **426**, enforcement **428**, metering **430**, policy management **432**, and cryptography **434**. Additionally, special-purpose functions such as privacy management **436**, biometric verification **438**, and stored value **440** may be present. The general purpose and special-purpose functions **424** are given by way of example and not limitation, as other functions are easily imagined by those of ordinary skill.

[0037] The presentation of devices to the secured hardware interface **442**, such as a device interface **444** and the BIOS interface **446**, as well as the presentation of functions such as a reliable clock and random number generator may be made through virtual connection **448**. Communication between the GPU core **410** in the secured core processor **416** may be made via a communication bus **450**. In one embodiment, the communication bus **450** may transmit data over a secure channel to extend the trusted relationship from the secure core processor **416** to the GPU **410**.

[0038] Described above are several specific embodiments including hardware and software embodiments for delicate metering of computer usage. A more fair and accurate method of determining and measuring beneficial usage is disclosed by monitoring and evaluating activity levels of one or more components of the computer **110** and applying appropriate business rules. This benefits a broad range of home, office and enterprise pay-per-use or metered-use applications. However, one of ordinary skill in the art will appreciate that various modifications and changes can be made to these embodiments, including but not limited to the use of different combinations of hardware or software for activity monitoring, multiple rate schedules, as well as more or less complex rules associated with determining an appropriate usage schedule. Accordingly, the specification and drawings are to be regarded in an illustrative rather than restrictive sense, and all such modifications are intended to be included within the scope of the present patent.

1. A processing unit for use in an electronic device comprising:

an instruction processing unit;

a communication interface;

an identification indicia;

a policy management circuit;

an enforcement circuit;

a clock circuit providing a monotonically increasing time base; and

a tamper-resistant memory storing data corresponding to a usage policy that regulates operation of the electronic device in compliance with the usage policy.

2. The processing unit of claim 1, wherein the usage policy specifies a system setting corresponding to resource usage in the electronic device.

3. The processing unit of claim 1, wherein the usage policy comprises an operational value corresponding to at least one of metering by time and metering by usage.

4. The processing unit of claim 1, further comprising software code stored in the tamper-resistant memory implementing a privacy function, the privacy function for securing information corresponding to user data.

5. The processing unit of claim 1, wherein the communication interface provides data to an application program interface for communicating policy updates.

6. The processing unit of claim 1, wherein the policy management circuit determines when to meter usage of the electronic device.

7. The processing unit of claim 1, wherein the enforcement circuit limits the operation of the electronic device when the policy management circuit determines operation is not in compliance with the policy.

8. The processing unit of claim 1, further comprising software code stored in the tamper-resistant memory for implementing a biometric authentication function.

9. The processing unit of claim 1, further comprising software code stored in the tamper-resistant memory for implementing a cryptographic function, whereby a policy update is cryptographically verified before installation.

10. The processing unit of claim 9, wherein the cryptographic function is operable to establish a trusted relationship with another component of the electronic device.

11. The processing unit of claim 1, wherein the policy defines a hardware configuration.

12. The processing unit of claim 1, wherein the policy defines a memory configuration that excludes external system memory from general use by allocating the external system memory to the tamper-resistant memory.

13. The processing unit of claim 1, further comprising software code stored in the tamper-resistant memory for implementing a stored value function.

14. A computer adapted for use in compliance with a policy corresponding to at least one of a memory configuration, a processing capacity, a metering requirement, and authorization for a peripheral, the computer comprising:

a volatile memory;

a non-volatile memory;

an input interface;

a communication interface; and

a processing unit coupled to the volatile memory, the non-volatile memory, the input interface, and the output interface, the processing unit comprising:

an instruction processing unit;

a data bus interface;

a policy management function;

an enforcement function;

a tamper-resistant clock; and

a secure memory storing the policy;

wherein the computer operates in accordance with the policy stored in the secure memory.

15. The computer of claim 14, wherein data corresponding to the policy is received via one of the input interface and the communication interface.

16. The computer of claim 14, wherein the processing unit further comprises a cryptographic function.

17. A method of operating a computer having a processing unit with a tamper-resistant memory, the method comprising:

executing computer instructions to boot the computer;

executing computer instructions to read a policy from the tamper-resistant memory, the policy corresponding to at least one of a memory configuration, a processing capacity, a metering requirement, and authorization for a peripheral; and

executing computer instructions to operate the computer according to the policy.

18. The method of claim 17, further comprising:

placing the computer in a restricted usage mode;

receiving a restoration code including a time indication; and

comparing the time indication to an internal clock function.

19. The method of claim 17, further comprising:

determining when the policy requires metered usage of the computer;

metering the usage according to the policy.

20. The method of claim 17, wherein executing computer instructions to operate the computer according to the policy further comprises executing computer instructions to reallocate system memory to the tamper-resistant memory making it unavailable for general use by the computer.

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