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Merrett

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(54) **WIRELESS MESSAGING METHOD AND SERVER**

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CPC ***H04W 4/14*** (2013.01); ***H04L 51/56*** (2022.05); ***H04L 51/58*** (2022.05); ***H04L 69/24*** (2013.01);
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CPC H04W 4/14; H04W 4/18; H04W 8/183; H04W 84/12; H04W 88/06; H04L 51/56; H04L 51/58; H04L 69/24; H04L 51/04
See application file for complete search history.

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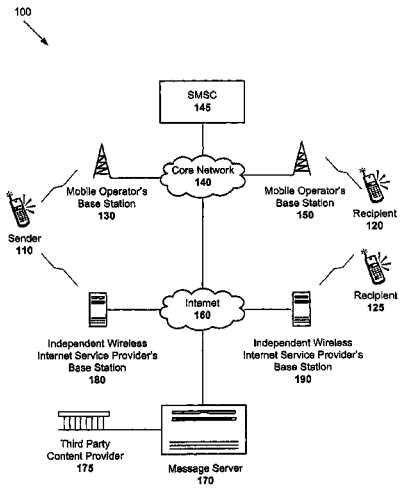
(57) **ABSTRACT**

A method performed by a mobile wireless device may comprise receiving an SMS message or an EMS message indicating a client program, when a phone number associated with the mobile wireless device is not associated with a subscriber of a service associated with the client program at the time of receiving the SMS message. The method may further comprise downloading the client program on the mobile wireless device and authenticating, via the client program, the phone number associated with the mobile wireless device to the service via SMS protocol. After the authenticating, the client program may cause transmission of first information comprising a first phone number. The client program may receive a first response to the transmission of the first information indicating that the first phone number is associated with a subscriber of the service.

30 Claims, 7 Drawing Sheets



APPLE 1001

Related U.S. Application Data

No. 18/143,387, filed on May 4, 2023, which is a continuation of application No. 18/100,273, filed on Jan. 23, 2023, which is a continuation of application No. 17/959,697, filed on Oct. 4, 2022, now Pat. No. 11,653,183, which is a continuation of application No. 17/872,378, filed on Jul. 25, 2022, now Pat. No. 11,533,587, which is a continuation of application No. 17/740,919, filed on May 10, 2022, now Pat. No. 11,445,338, which is a continuation of application No. 17/717,720, filed on Apr. 11, 2022, now Pat. No. 11,425,541, which is a continuation of application No. 17/348,348, filed on Jun. 15, 2021, now Pat. No. 11,432,115, which is a continuation of application No. 17/228,210, filed on Apr. 12, 2021, now Pat. No. 11,218,847, which is a continuation of application No. 17/131,103, filed on Dec. 22, 2020, now Pat. No. 11,044,584, which is a continuation of application No. 16/897,161, filed on Jun. 9, 2020, now Pat. No. 10,893,395, which is a continuation of application No. 16/714,113, filed on Dec. 13, 2019, now Pat. No. 11,089,450, which is a continuation of application No. 15/966,965, filed on Apr. 30, 2018, now abandoned, which is a continuation of application No. 15/011,000, filed on Jan. 29, 2016, now abandoned, which is a continuation of application No. 14/307,166, filed on Jun. 17, 2014, now abandoned, which is a continuation of application No. 13/762,347, filed on Feb. 7, 2013, now Pat. No. 8,918,127, which is a continuation of application No. 12/452,883, filed as application No. PCT/AU2008/001043 on Jul. 18, 2008, now Pat. No. 8,401,576.

(51) **Int. Cl.**

H04L 51/58	(2022.01)
H04L 69/24	(2022.01)
H04W 4/14	(2009.01)
H04W 4/18	(2009.01)
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H04W 88/06	(2009.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.**

CPC ***H04W 4/18*** (2013.01); ***H04W 8/183*** (2013.01); *H04L 51/04* (2013.01); *H04W 84/12* (2013.01); *H04W 88/06* (2013.01)

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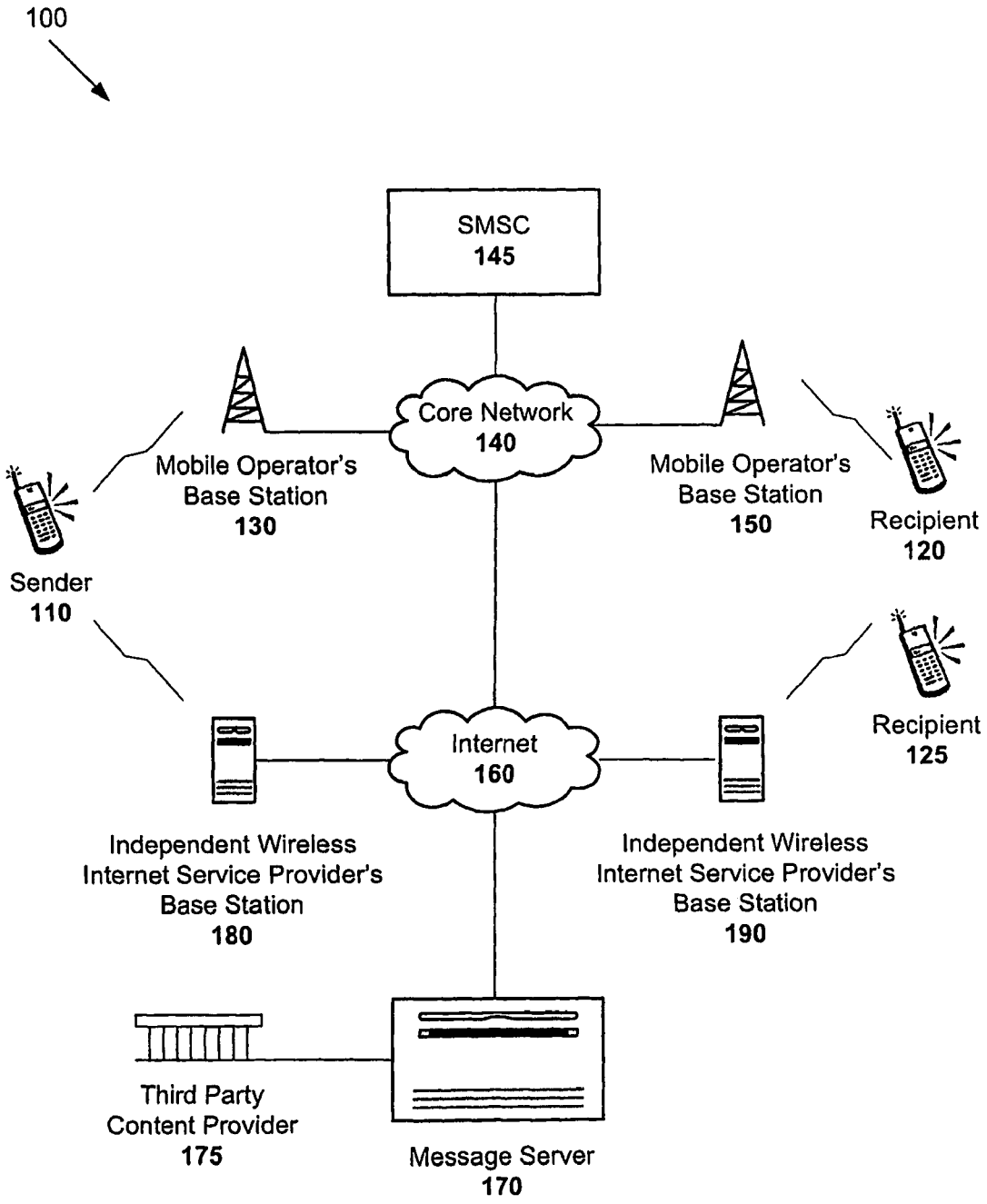

100
SMSC
145
Core Network
140
Mobile Operator's
Base Station
130
Mobile Operator's
Base Station
150
Recipient
120
Sender
110
Recipient
125
Internet
160
Independent Wireless
Internet Service Provider's
Base Station
180
Independent Wireless
Internet Service Provider's
Base Station
190
Third Party
Content Provider
175
Message Server
170

FIG. 1

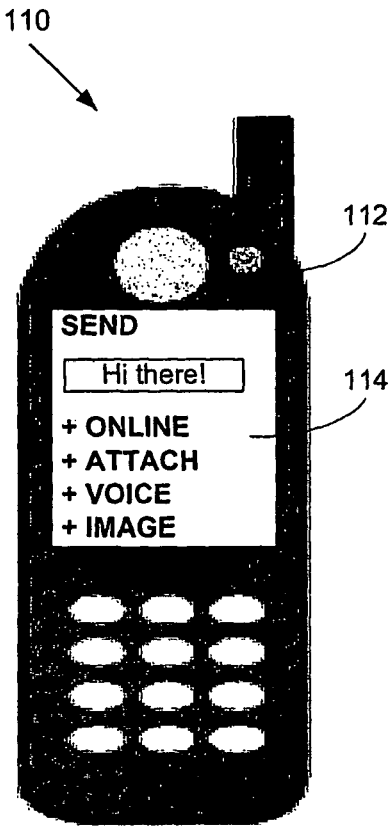

110
112
SEND
Hi there!
114
+ ONLINE
+ ATTACH
+ VOICE
+ IMAGE

FIG. 2A

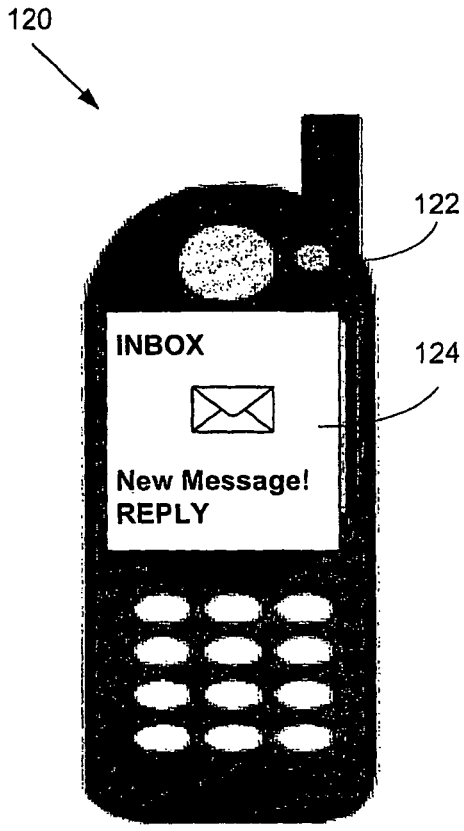

120
122
INBOX
124
New Message!
REPLY

FIG. 2B

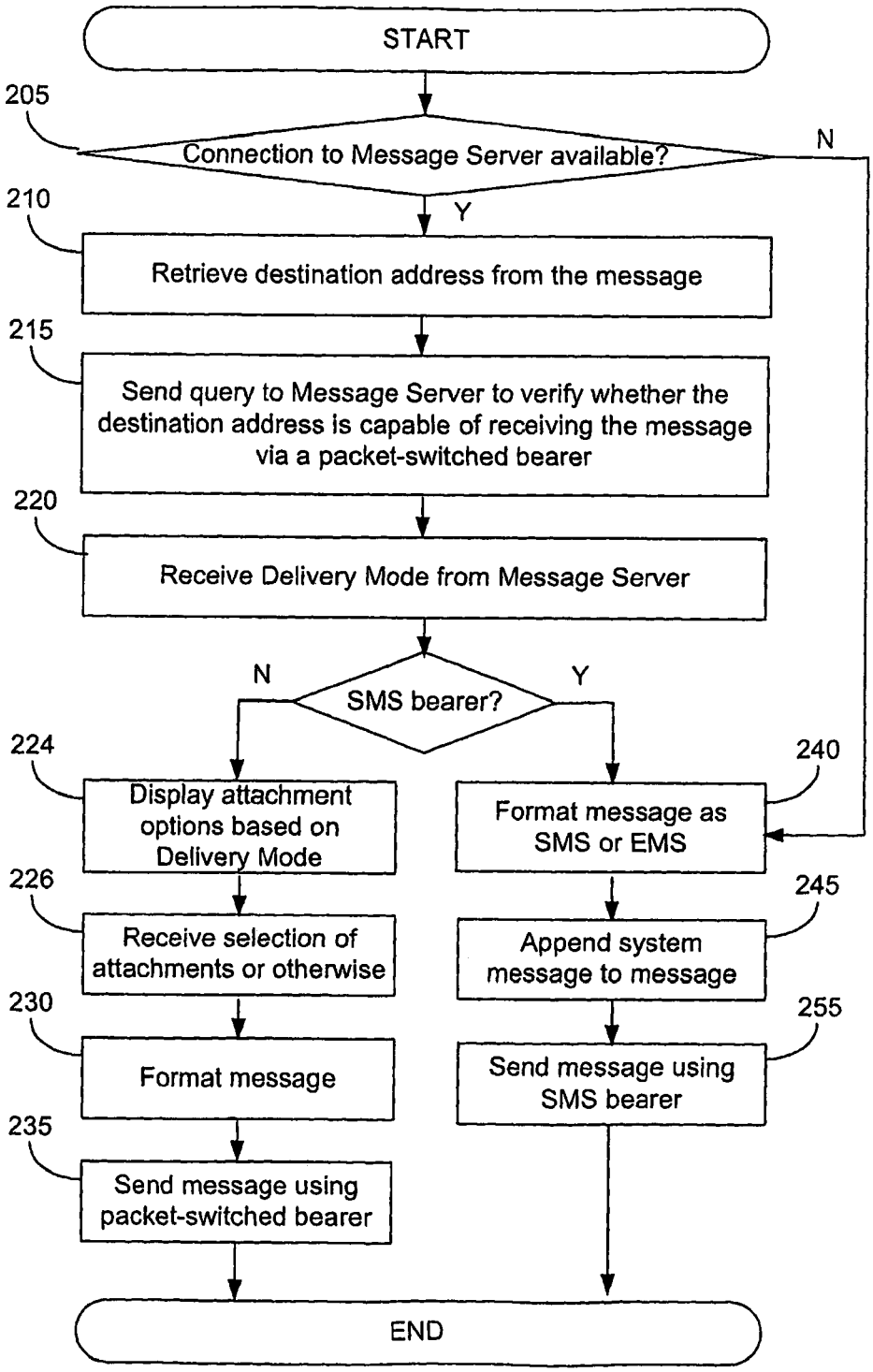

START
205
Connection to Message Server available?
N
Y
210
Retrieve destination address from the message
215
Send query to Message Server to verify whether the destination address is capable of receiving the message via a packet-switched bearer
220
Receive Delivery Mode from Message Server
N
SMS bearer?
Y
224
Display attachment options based on Delivery Mode
240
Format message as SMS or EMS
226
Receive selection of attachments or otherwise
245
Append system message to message
230
Format message
255
Send message using SMS bearer
235
Send message using packet-switched bearer
END

FIG. 3

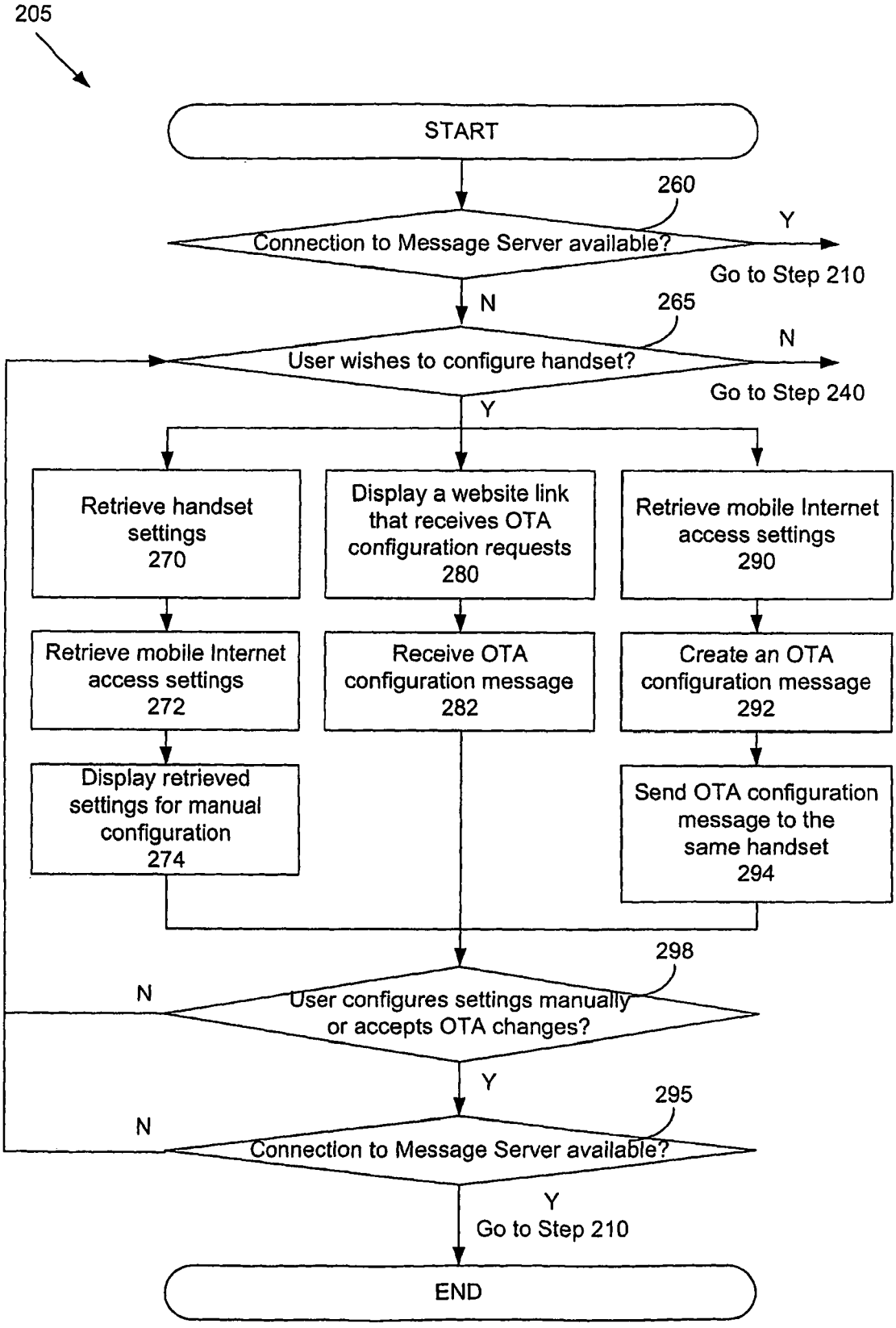

205
START
260
Connection to Message Server available?
Y
Go to Step 210
N
265
User wishes to configure handset?
N
Go to Step 240
Y
Retrieve handset settings 270
Display a website link that receives OTA configuration requests 280
Retrieve mobile Internet access settings 290
Retrieve mobile Internet access settings 272
Receive OTA configuration message 282
Create an OTA configuration message 292
Display retrieved settings for manual configuration 274
Send OTA configuration message to the same handset 294
298
N
User configures settings manually or accepts OTA changes?
Y
295
N
Connection to Message Server available?
Y
Go to Step 210
END

FIG. 4

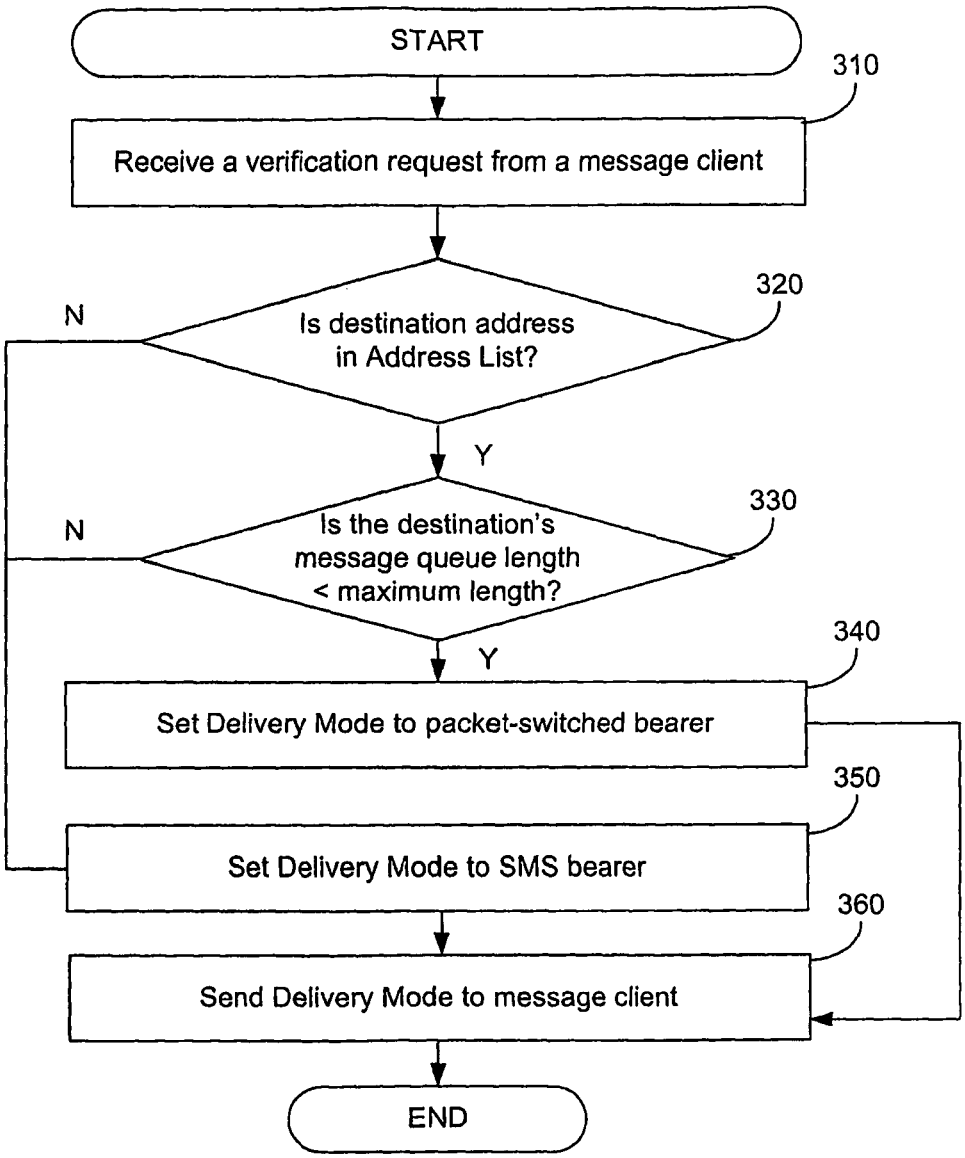

START
310
Receive a verification request from a message client
320
N
Is destination address in Address List?
Y
330
N
Is the destination's message queue length < maximum length?
Y
340
Set Delivery Mode to packet-switched bearer
350
Set Delivery Mode to SMS bearer
360
Send Delivery Mode to message client
END

FIG. 5

FIG. 6A

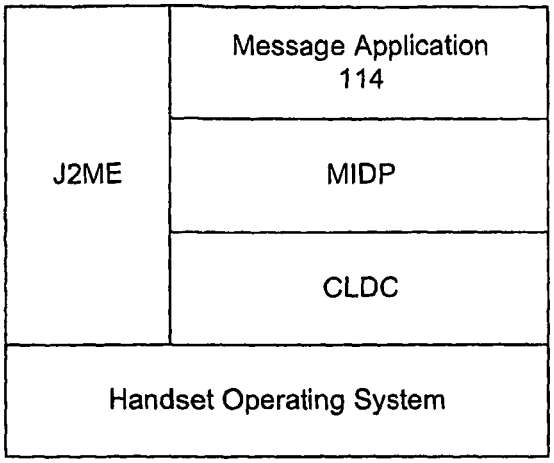
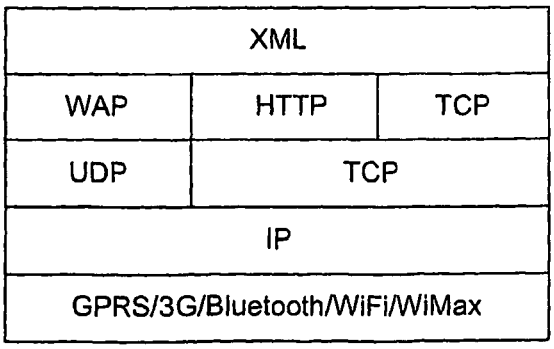


FIG. 6B

```
<message>
  <to>
    +1 555 1234
  </to>
  <body>
    Hi there!
  </body>
  <attachment>
    <photo>
      0xf6,0x34,0xa7...
    </photo>
    <voicemail>
      0xf6,0x34,0xa7...
    </voicemail>
  </attachment>
</message>
```

FIG. 6C



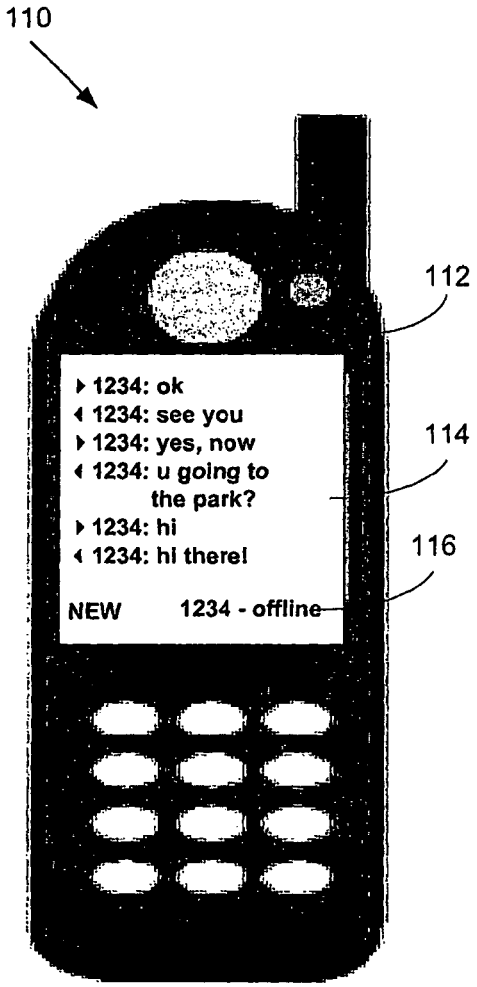

110
112
1234: ok
1234: see you
1234: yes, now
1234: u going to the park?
1234: hi
1234: hi there!
114
116
NEW
1234 - offline

FIG. 7

WIRELESS MESSAGING METHOD AND SERVER

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

This Application is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 18/207,802, filed Jun. 9, 2023, which is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 18/143,387, filed on May 4, 2023, which is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 18/100,273, filed on Jan. 23, 2023, which is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 17/959,697, filed on Oct. 4, 2022, which issued as U.S. Pat. No. 11,653,183, on May 16, 2023, which is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 17/872,378, filed on Jul. 25, 2022, which issued as U.S. Pat. No. 11,533,587 on Dec. 20, 2022, which is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 17/740,919, filed May 10, 2022, which issued as U.S. Pat. No. 11,445,338 on Sep. 13, 2022, which is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 17/717,720 filed Apr. 11, 2022, which issued as U.S. Pat. No. 11,425,541 on Aug. 23, 2022, which is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 17/348,348 filed Jun. 15, 2021, which issued as U.S. Pat. No. 11,432,115 on Aug. 30, 2022, which is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 17/228,210 filed Apr. 12, 2021, which issued as U.S. Pat. No. 11,218,847 on Jan. 4, 2022, which is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 17/131,103 filed Dec. 22, 2020, which issued as U.S. Pat. No. 11,044,584 on Jun. 22, 2021, which is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 16/897,161 filed Jun. 9, 2020, which issued as U.S. Pat. No. 10,893,395 on Jan. 12, 2021, which is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 16/714,113, filed on Dec. 13, 2019, which issued as U.S. Pat. No. 11,089,450 on Aug. 10, 2021, which is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 15/966,965, filed Apr. 30, 2018, which is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 15/011,000, filed Jan. 29, 2016, which is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 14/307,166, filed on Jun. 17, 2014, which is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 13/762,347, filed on Feb. 7, 2013, which issued as U.S. Pat. No. 8,918,127 on Dec. 23, 2014, which is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 12/452,883, filed on Jul. 7, 2010, which issued as U.S. Pat. No. 8,401,576 on Mar. 19, 2013, which claims priority to PCT Patent Application No. PCT/AU2008/001043, filed Jul. 18, 2008, that claims priority to Australian Patent Application No. 2007903979, filed Jul. 24, 2007, and Australian Patent Application No. 2007906230, filed Nov. 13, 2007, all of which are incorporated herein by reference.

TECHNICAL FIELD

This invention concerns a messaging service in a wireless communications network.

BACKGROUND ART

Short Messaging Service (SMS) is a technology for sending and receiving short text messages between mobile users. It was first introduced in the Global System for Mobile Communications (GSM) standards in the 1990s but was subsequently included in other wireless standards such as Code Division Multiple Access Systems (CDMA). Although SMS is extremely popular, one of its biggest drawbacks is that an SMS message can only carry a small amount of data due to limitations imposed by the Mobile Application Part (MAP) protocol of SS7. An SMS message can only contain up to 160 8-bit alphanumeric or binary characters and any message longer than 160 characters is usually sent in multiple messages.

A Short Messaging Service Centre (SMSC) is responsible for handling the delivery of SMS messages in a wireless communications network. An SMS message sent by a mobile user is first delivered to the user's network SMSC before being routed to the recipient. If the recipient's network is operated by a different provider or employs a different wireless standards, the message may pass more through more than one SMSC or SMSC gateway before reaching its final destination. Signalling System 7 (SS7) provides the transport mechanism for SMS traffic.

There are several messaging services that provide an extension to SMS. Enhanced Messaging Service (EMS), which uses existing SMS infrastructure, allows up to 255 SMS messages to be packaged as one EMS message having richer content such as animation, pictures, sounds and formatted text. Unlike SMS and EMS, Multimedia Messaging Service (MMS) messages are delivered using a mobile packet data network. MMS was first introduced in 2.5 generation networks such as GPRS, which provides an Internet Protocol (IP) overlay to the existing GSM networks. A multimedia message may contain images, audio clips and videos.

On the other hand, Mobile Instant Messaging (MIM) technology enables mobile devices to engage in real-time, instant messaging via an IP data network. Users need to register a user name tag or "handle" with an instant messaging service provider to send and receive messages. Many current MIM services also require users to maintain a persistent connection with the Internet during a chat session.

SUMMARY

A method performed by a mobile wireless device may comprise receiving a short message service (SMS) message or an enhanced message service (EMS) message indicating a client program, when a phone number associated with the mobile wireless device is not associated with a subscriber of a service associated with the client program at the time of receiving the SMS message. The method may further comprise downloading the client program on the mobile wireless device and authenticating, via the client program, the phone number associated with the mobile wireless device to the service via SMS protocol. After the authenticating, the client program may cause transmission of first information comprising a first phone number. The client program may receive a first response to the transmission of the first information indicating that the first phone number is associated with a subscriber of the service. The method may further comprise transmitting, via the client program and a wireless local area network (WLAN), based on the first response, first message content, to a mobile wireless device associated with the first phone number and transmitting, via the client program, second information comprising a second phone number. The client program may receive a second response to the transmission of the second information, when the second phone number is not associated with a subscriber of the service. The client program may insert second message content into a message for delivery to a mobile wireless device associated with the second phone number. The second message content may be received by the mobile wireless device associated with the second phone number via SMS or EMS protocol.

The service may be a service for exchanging message content between subscribers. The service may restrict third parties from receiving certain subscriber information absent subscriber consent.

DISCLOSURE OF THE INVENTION

In a first aspect, the invention is a method for providing a messaging service on a wireless device in a wireless communications network; the method comprising the steps of:

Retrieving the destination address of an outgoing message on the device.

Verifying whether the destination address is capable of receiving the message via a packet-switched bearer.

If verification is affirmative, then automatically sending the message to the destination address via a packet-switched bearer, but otherwise, automatically sending the message to the destination address via an SMS bearer.

Unlike conventional SMS, EMS and MIM clients, the invention combines existing messaging solutions to offer a single interface for sending and receiving both text and multimedia messages. The automatic bearer selection enables the user to have the widest range of messaging options, including text, voice, video, picture, based on knowledge of the status and capability of the recipient's device.

The SMS bearer may be a conventional GSM SS7 signalling channel. The packet-switched bearer may be a HSDPA, WCDMA, CDMA2000, GPRS or similar data bearer. The packet-switched bearer may also supported by other wireless technologies such as Bluetooth, WiFi, WiMax. Further, the packet-switched bearer may be operated by a sender's mobile operator or an independent mobile Internet service provider. Compared with an SMS bearer, a packet-switched data bearer is able to send a message with unlimited size at a higher speed.

The destination address may be a mobile phone number or a numeric "shortcode" or alias representing one or more, or a combination of, phone numbers, email addresses, instant messaging user handles and IP addresses. Therefore, for all users of the messaging service, and unlike conventional MIM clients, the invention utilises a user's mobile phone number as the identifier of the user, and does not require the user to register a user name, tag or handle, thus providing a single number for message sending.

A message client running on the device may programmatically and dynamically construct an outgoing message in the correct syntax given the user's preferences and given the dynamic requirements of the message server for a particular service.

The message client may interpret incoming SMS or incoming messages from the message server that are identified in their contents as being requirements for the dynamic construction of a message, when the user views the message.

Alternatively, the message client may interpret incoming SMS or incoming messages from the message server that are identified in their contents as being requirements for the dynamic construction of a message, and store the requirements for the dynamic construction of a message, such that they may be invoked by selecting a dynamic menu option.

The requirements may be set out in a structured format using XML such that the message client shall, when a user opens a message containing requirements for the dynamic construction of a message, or when a user selects a dynamic menu:

- Present the user with options to choose from; and
- For each option, know the intended destination and bearer of the message; and
- Prompt the user for input or to select a file to be sent with the constructed message; and
- Construct a message of the correct syntax based on the user's choices and input.

The method may further comprise the step of connecting to a message server before verifying the destination address. If connection to the message server is not available, the invention may support several configuration methods in order to configure the mobile device so as to be able to establish a connection to the message server.

Firstly, the method may comprise the step of retrieving connection parameters and displaying the retrieved parameters on the mobile device if connection to a message server is not available. A mobile user may then use the retrieved parameters to manually configure the handset before retrying to connect to the message server.

Besides manual configuration, the invention may support manual and automatic over-the-air (OTA) programming. The method may further comprise the step of displaying a link for a sender to request an OTA configuration message if connection to the message server is not available. For example, a user may then access a website to request a configuration message to be sent to the user's mobile device.

The method may further comprise the step of retrieving connection parameters, automatically creating an OTA configuration message based on the retrieved parameters and sending the generated configuration message from the mobile device to the same mobile device. Using such automatic OTA configuration, users do not have to manually change the settings on their mobile device to establish a connection with the message server. The OTA configuration message may be a binary SMS.

The step of verifying the destination address may involve sending an address verification request to a message server and then receiving a notification from the message server specifying whether the destination address is capable of receiving the message via a packet-switched bearer.

The destination address may be capable of receiving the message via a packet-switched bearer if the address is on a subscriber address list. The subscriber address list may be a list of destination addresses that subscribes to the messaging service. The subscriber address list may be maintained by the message server.

The destination address may be capable of receiving the message using a packet-switched bearer if the address is on the subscriber address list and has an active status. For example, the recipient is inactive if the length of the message queue of the destination address exceeds a maximum allowable length.

The method may further comprise the step of automatically providing options to add one or more attachments to the outgoing message before sending the message if a packet-switched bearer is selected. The attachment may be a text, voice, video or picture file. On the other hand, an outgoing message that is sent using an SMS bearer can only be either an SMS or EMS message and not have attachments.

Using the invention, a sender may optimally add attachments to an outgoing message depending on the capability of a recipient's mobile device. For example, a user may attach a voice or video message a text message if the recipient is able to receive and play the attachment. Further,

the invention uses a push model to deliver a voicemail to a mobile user without the need of retrieval.

The method may further comprise the step of formatting the outgoing message according to the mode of delivery before sending the message. If the message is sent via a packet-switched data bearer, the message may be formatted as an XML ASCII string.

The method may further comprise the step of appending a system message to the outgoing message if an SMS bearer is selected.

The system message may comprise an invitation to add the destination address to a subscriber address list if the destination address is not on the list. Otherwise, if the destination address is on the subscriber address list but has an inactive status, the system message may comprise an invitation to retrieve messages in the message queue of the destination address.

By sending an invitation to non-subscribers to add their destination address to the subscriber address list, new users may subscribe to the messaging service without having to actively source how to obtain the service. This viral, peer-to-peer invitation method also does not require central monitoring nor generate additional traffic since an invitation is appended to an outgoing message.

The method may further comprise the step of notifying the recipient, if the recipient is on the subscriber list, when either a message has been received (if the recipient is connected to the message server), or when a message is queued but not yet delivered (if the recipient is not connected to the message server). The notification method may be a single ring to the recipient's mobile device. A notification message may also be sent to the sender of the message.

The method may further comprise queuing an outgoing message for later delivery if the message is undelivered. For example, a message cannot be delivered if the destination address is on the subscriber address list, but the recipient is not, at the time of sending, connected to the message server by a packet-switched bearer.

In another aspect, the invention is a mobile device programmed to perform the method. In a further aspect, the invention is a software program to implement the method.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

An example of the invention will now be described with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which:

FIG. **1** is a diagram of a messaging system.

FIG. **2**A is the user interface on a sender's mobile device.

FIG. **2**B is the user interface on a recipient's mobile device.

FIG. **3** is a flowchart of the routine performed by a message client.

FIG. **4** is a flowchart of the routine performed by a message client to establish a connection with a message server.

FIG. **5** is a flowchart of the address verification routine performed by a message server.

FIG. **6**A is a diagram of the architecture of a message client.

FIG. **6**B is an exemplary message format.

FIG. **6**C is a diagram of a TCP/IP protocol model used by a message client.

FIG. **7** is the user interface on a sender's mobile device during a chat session.

BEST MODES OF THE INVENTION

Referring first to FIG. **1**, the messaging system **100** comprises a message server **170** in communication with network users **110**, **120** and **125** via the Internet **160** and base stations **130**, **150**, **180** and **190**. Base stations **130** and **150** are typical based stations in a GSM, CDMA, 3G, 3.5G or similar network that supports a HSDPA, WCDMA, CDMA2000, GPRS or similar data bearer and are connected to an SMSC via Core Network **140**.

Network users **110**, **120** and **125** may be part of a wireless personal area network

(WPAN), a wireless local area network (WLAN) or a wireless wide area network (WWAN). Base stations **180** and **190** are wireless Internet base stations operated by an independent wireless service provider. For example, the users may access the wireless Internet using technologies such as Bluetooth, ZigBee or mesh networking in a WPAN; WiFi in a WLAN or WiMax in a WWAN.

In this example it is assumed that a first user **110** ("the sender") is sending a message to a second user **120** ("the recipient"). The message contains the phrase "Hi there!" as well as a photo and a voicemail as attachments. Referring now to FIG. **2**A, a message client **114** runs on the mobile device **112** and is responsible for choosing the mode of delivery of an outgoing message.

To use the invention, the message client **114** needs to be activated by the sender **110**. However, the message client **114** may be also activated automatically when the handset is switched on if such feature is supported by the handset's operating system. Having activated the message client **114**, the sender **110** then selects or enters a destination number. The message client **114** then decides on how the message can be sent.

The recipient **120** may be on a network operated by the same or a different service provider. The sender and the recipient are each associated with an address. The destination address is either a mobile phone number or a numeric "shortcode" or "channel", which is an alias representing one or more phone number, email address or instant message handle. For example, certain number ranges may be controlled by the messaging server (e.g. 1 800 xxxxxx), some under users' control as destinations as aliases for a group of numbers and addresses (e.g. 1 801 xxxxxx), and some for accessing content services (e.g. 1 900 xxxxxx). Shortcodes are unique and private to a user, hence the same numeric shortcode may be used by multiple users.

Shortcodes are created by users and maintained by message server **170**. For example, a user creates a shortcode by sending a message with the following content to the message server **170**:

Add channel20 andrew@messmo.com, robert@yahoo.com, 0423789080, 98765432@jabber.org.

The shortcode **20** is an alias for a group comprising two email addresses, one mobile number and an instant message handle. For example, to send a message to the shortcode created, the destination address will be set to 1801 20.

The syntax of messages in the example above is strict, however the user is not limited in their use of services by limits in their own knowledge of the message syntax.

The message client **114** is able to programmatically and dynamically construct an outgoing message in the correct syntax given the user's preferences and given the dynamic requirements of the message server **170** for a particular service.

The message client **114** interprets incoming SMS or incoming messages from the message server **170** that are identified in their contents as being requirements for the dynamic construction of a message. The interpretation can occur either when the user views the message (for example a message titled "Click to create a Channel"), and/or the

message client may interpret the incoming SMS, or incoming messages from the message server **170**, and store the requirements for the dynamic construction of a message, such that they may be invoked by selecting a dynamic menu option.

The requirements are set out in a structured format using XML such that the message client **114** shall, either when a user opens a message containing requirements for the dynamic construction of a message, or selects a dynamic menu:

- Present the user with options to choose from; and
- For each option, know the intended destination and bearer of the message; and
- Prompt the user for input or to select a file to be sent with the constructed message; and
- Construct a message of the correct syntax based on the user's choices and input. If the message contained requirements for the dynamic construction of a message, where those requirements are by way of example set out as:

```
<MessageConstructorRequirements>
    <MCTitle>Shortcode</ MCTitle >
  <Option>
      <OptionTitle>Subscribe</ OptionTitle>
      <Bearer>SMS</Bearer>
      <Destination>1800</Destination>
      <OutputToken DataType='String' InputMethod='Constant'
      Count='1'>Add Channel</OutputToken>
      <OutputToken DataType='Number' InputMethod='Input'
Count='1'>Channel</OutputToken>
      <OutputToken DataType='String' InputMethod='Input'
      Count='4'>Destination</0utputToken>
  </Option>
<I
MessageConstructorRequirem
ents >
```

The message client **114** would present the user with a message titled 'Shortcode', where the message client would:

- Present the user with the option 'Subscribe'; and if this option is selected
- Prompt the user for one shortcode eg. User inputs **20**; and
- Prompt the user for four destinations eg. User inputs andrew@messmo.com, robert@yahoo.com, 0423789080, 98765432@jabber.org; and
- Construct a message eg. 'Add Channel20 andrew@messmo.com, robert@yahoo.com, 0423789080, 98765432@jabber.org' to be sent to 1900 via SMS bearer.

Thus enabling the benefit to the user of the use of a service where they otherwise may have been unfamiliar with, or unwilling to input, the strict syntax of the message required for the service.

When a message is sent to a shortcode, the message can be sent either as a conventional SMS or EMS message using a conventional SMS bearer or a packet-switched data bearer. If a SMS bearer is used, the message will be sent via a GSM or GPRS signalling channel to Core Network **140**, SMSC **145**, base station **150** before finally reaching recipient **120**. If an SMS bearer is used the attachments such as the photo and voicemail will not be sent.

If a packet-switched data bearer is used, the message client has a choice of sending the message using a packet-switched bearer supported by the mobile operator's or a third party's network. For example, in a GSM system with General Packet Radio Service (GPRS) overlay, an SMS bearer may be an SS7 signalling channel while a packet-switched data bearer may be a shared transmission channel that combines multiple timeslots in a GSM TDMA frame. The packet-switched data bearer may also be a Bluetooth, WiFi, WiMax or any other WPAN, WLAN, or WWAN wireless data transfer protocol.

Referring now to FIG. **3**, the client **114** first checks whether the sender **110** is connected to the Internet **160** and message server **170**; see step **205**. As shown in FIG. **1**, the sender **110** may be connected to the message server **170** via a mobile operator's data network (base stations **130**) or a network provided by an independent mobile Internet service provider (base station **180**).

The step of connecting to the message server **170** (step **205**) will now be explained with reference to FIG. **4**. The client **117** first checks whether connection to the message server **170** is available. If the connection is not available, the client **117** displays options for the sender **110** to configure the handset such that connection to the message server **170** can be established; see step **265**.

The client **117** supports three configuration methods. Firstly, manual configuration may be used; see steps **270**, **272** and **274**. In this case, the client **117** first retrieves information specific to the handset and the mobile Internet service provider. As mentioned, the mobile Internet service provider may be a mobile operator or an independent provider. The client **117** then displays the retrieved information such that the sender **110** can configure the handset manually; step **274**.

Alternatively, if the sender's mobile device is capable of receiving and processing OTA messages, the client **117** may provide a link to a website that solicits OTA configuration requests; steps **280** and **282**. The website may be operated by the message server **170** or a third party and accessed via a PC, WAP connection from the sender's mobile device or other means. Upon receiving the OTA configuration message, the sender's mobile device will ask the sender to accept the changes to its mobile Internet access settings according to the configuration message; step **298**. If the changes are accepted, the client **117** then retries to connect to the message server **170**; step **295**.

Besides manual configuration and manual OTA configuration requests, the client **117** is capable of performing self-configuration; see steps **290**, **292** and **294**. Assuming that the client **117** is aware of the specific parameters necessary to configure the sender's mobile device to access the mobile Internet, the client **117** first creates an OTA configuration message based on the parameters. The client **117** then sends the OTA message to the sender's handset (same device). For example, the message may be sent as an OTA binary SMS. Upon receiving the OTA configuration message, the sender's mobile device asks the sender to accept the changes to its mobile Internet access settings according to the configuration message; step **298**. Similarly, the client **117** then retries to connect to the message server **170** when under the new settings; step **295**.

The above configuration steps may be repeated until either the message server **170** is connected or the user has abandoned the configuration in step **265**. In this case, that is the connection to the message server **170** is not available, the client **117** will select an SMS bearer as the mode of delivering the outgoing message and proceeds to format the message in step **240**. Note that besides configuring the mobile Internet access settings of a mobile device, the client **117** may generate OTA messages to configure other settings such as email, WAP, MMS and video streaming.

If the sender has access to the message server **170**, the client **114** then retrieves from the message without reference

to the message server the destination address of the outgoing message **220**; see step **210**. The client then sends a verification request to the message server **170** via base station **130** or **180** and the Internet **160**; step **215**.

Upon receiving an address verification request, the message server **170** performs the method shown in FIG. **5**. The message server **170** first checks whether the destination address is on a list of subscribing addresses; step **320**. If the destination address is not known to the message server **170**, the mode of delivery will be set to an SMS bearer; step **350**.

If the destination is on the list of subscribing addresses, the message server **170** proceeds to check the status of the recipient, that is whether the destination message queue length has exceeded a predetermined maximum length; **330**. If the recipient has a long inactive queue, the message server **170** will notify the message client **114** to send the message using an SMS bearer; see step **350**. Otherwise, the mode of delivery is set to a packet-switched bearer; see step **360** in FIG. **5**.

Referring to FIG. **3** again, the message client **114** at the sender **110** provides options for format and attachment of the outgoing message based on the mode of delivery; steps **224**, **226**, **230** and **240**. The mode of delivery, using information about the recipient's handset stored in the message server, provides an indication of the capabilities of the recipient's handset and the type of message that can be received by the recipient's **120**. If the recipient **120** is an active user, the full range of the recipient's capabilities is assumed. However, if the recipient **120** is an inactive or past subscriber, the message server's **170** knowledge of the recipient's capabilities may be outdated if the recipient has changed its handset. The recipient **120** may then be invited to update its information.

The message client **114** then intelligently advises the sender **110** whether the recipient **120** is able to read attachments or non-text messages. For example, if the mode of delivery is a packet-switched bearer, the sender **110** is offered with the "ATTACH" option to add voice, picture or video attachments to the message; see FIG. **2**A and steps **224** and **226** in FIG. **3**.

If the mode of delivery is an SMS bearer, the "ATTACH" option will be disabled. Further, depending on configurable settings on the sender's mobile device, the client **117** also appends a system message to the outgoing message in step **245**. If the destination address is not on the list of subscribing addresses, an invitation to download the client will be added to the outgoing SMS or EMS. For example, the invitation may read:

"Go to www.clientdownload.com to download <name of message client>".

The message client **114** can then be downloaded to the recipient's mobile device **120**. Then upon starting the message client, the message client will generate a unique authentication identifier, either randomly or derived from the mobile devices hardware identification or generated by the message server. The message client will then initiate a connection to the message server and communicate the authentication identifier. The message client will in parallel send a SMS containing the authentication identifier to a SMS gateway service. The SMS gateway service then sends the message, including the originating phone number and the body of the message containing the authentication identifier, to the message server via HTPP, SMTP, SMPP or a similar protocol.

Upon receipt of the details of a SMS, the message server will determine the originating phone number of the mobile device from the details of the SMS, and hence add the new address (originating phone number) to the list of subscribing addresses. By matching the authentication identifier, either the message server will send the message client confirmation that the mobile device and user has been authenticated, or the message client will initiate the action and request the same confirmation from the message server. This authentication method allows new users to be authenticated and to subscribe to the messaging service via one SMS without requiring any registration or data entry.

If the destination address is on the list of subscribing addresses but the recipient **120** is inactive, a message to remind the recipient **120** to connect to the message server **170** will be appended to the outgoing SMS or EMS. For example, the system message may read:

"You have 50 unread messages on <name of message client>." Returning to the sending mobile device **110**, if the mode of delivery is a packet-switched bearer, the message client manages the delivery of the message similar to a MIM client such as Jabber. An exemplary architecture of the message client is shown in FIG. **6**A, where the message client may be a Java 2, Mobile Edition (J2ME) program installed on a mobile device. The formatted message is sent as an XML ASCII string via a TCP/IP socket to the message server or a HTTP post, an example of which is shown in FIG. **6**B. The message contains a text phrase "Hi there!" in the body and two attachments. A photo attachment is defined between <photo> and </photo> and a voicemail is defined between <voicemail> and </voicemail>.

FIG. **6**C illustrates the five-layer TCP/IP protocol model used by the message client. GPRS, 3G, 3.5G or other wireless protocols such as Bluetooth, WiFi and Wimax are used in the data link layer to deliver the message from the mobile device to the wireless communications network, IP is used in the network layer to deliver the packet from the sender to the recipient, UDP and TCP form the transport layer and HTTP, WAP and XML are used in the application and presentation layers.

FIG. **2**B shows the user interface of the recipient **120** when a message is received. The recipient **120** may receive a notification when the message has been successfully received as the recipient while being connected to the messaging server, may be using another function of the mobile device. The notification may be a single ring of the recipient's mobile device.

If the destination address is a shortcode, steps **320** and **330** in FIG. **5** are repeated for each phone number, email address and user name tag represented by the shortcode. If not all addresses in the shortcode are capable of receiving the message via a packet-switched data bearer, the reply by message server **170** may be an array of binary answers. For example, if a shortcode represents three addresses and only the first has installed the message client, the mode of delivery is set to $m_1m_2m_3$=100, where 1 represents a packet-switched bearer and 0 represents an SMS bearer.

A delivery confirmation message may also be sent to the sender **110** by the message **170** if the message is sent using a packet-switched bearer. The message client **114** maintains a copy of recent messages sent by a user, for example, for a limited time. If a message is unsuccessfully delivered, it will be queued for later delivery. For example, a message cannot be delivered if the recipient **120** is not connected to the message server **170** when the message is sent. In this case the recipient **120** may receive a notification that a message is queued for later delivery. The notification may be a single ring of the recipient's mobile device, generated by the message server **170**, but using a different originating number from that used for the notification when the message has

been delivered, so as to enable the user to optionally utilize mobile device features such as distinct ringtones mapped to sending numbers.

A sender **110** and a recipient **120** may send and receive multiple messages during a chat session. The user interface may be similar to that of a desktop instant messaging program. For example, an exemplary user interface of sender **110** is shown in FIG. **7**. A left arrow indicates a message sent by the sender while a right arrow represents a received message. Depending on configurable user preferences, the recipient **120** with phone number 1234 may choose to have his or her presence known to the sender **110**; see **116** in FIG. **7**. Using the presence information, the sender **110** may then stop sending new messages to the recipient **120** if the latter has gone offline.

Besides performing address verification, the message server **170** also maintains user authentication. Authentication is simple and does not require a user to create a user name tag like existing MIM servers. Instead, the user's mobile phone number is the default identifier. Authentication adds the mobile phone number to the subscriber address list.

Referring to FIG. **1** again, the message server **170** receives each message that is sent using a packet switched bearer. Each message is in an XML format, and the message server parses the message to determine the destination address.

The message server **170** is also in communication with third-party content providers **175** over the Internet **180**. When the message server identifies a destination address corresponding to a third party content provider, it automatically sends the message to the third party. The third party may, for example depending on the presence of keywords, send additional information related to the keywords to the sender **110**. However, a user may disable this feature.

For example, if the message contains the name of a certain brand, BUYME, information concerning where to buy the product or its latest promotion will be retrieved from the third party content provider in communication with the message server. In this case, depending on the capability of the recipient's mobile device, the information may be sent as a conventional SMS or as a text message via a packet-switched bearer, with optionally one or more attachments.

User privacy may be protected by not revealing a user's phone number to a third party without the consent of the user. For example, a user may send a query to a third party content provider **175** to ask about the weather forecast in a particular location via the message server **170**. To hide a user's identity, the message server may dynamically create a random number that maps to the user's actual mobile number and passes the query to the third party content provider **175**. Further, this mapping may be dynamic, not static, to ensure that the third party is not able to determine information about the general behavior of the users.

Similar to user-to-user messages, the type of advertising and marketing message that is sent to a user also depends on the capabilities of the user's handset. Therefore since the message server is aware of the capabilities of user's handsets, as user handsets are upgraded, the message server **170** is able to target those users with enhanced, multimedia message content.

It will be appreciated by persons skilled in the art that numerous variations and/or modifications may be made to the invention as shown in the specific embodiments without departing from the spirit or scope of the invention as broadly described. For instance, the current application outlines how a user, when using a message client, will be prompted to use an SMS, if the recipient is not a user of the message service. The existing context of this is that the user is initiating the message. The functionality can be extended to the situation where a message is sent using the message client with the goal of prompting the user to send a response SMS. This can be useful in generating SMS traffic from third parties by sending one message that prompted the recipients to select one or more voting buttons each of which causes an SMS to be sent to a specific premium number.

Conversely the same concept works well for a community of users of a message client who do not wish to use premium numbers. The entire community can be polled. Each receives an indication to select a voting button, and the selections each cause a message with predetermined text to be sent to a predetermined recipient. This minimizes the event of false responses that cannot be counted.

The present embodiments are, therefore, to be considered in all respects as illustrative and not restrictive.

The invention claimed is:

1. A method performed by a mobile wireless device, the method comprising:

receiving a short message service (SMS) message indicating a client program or an enhanced message service (EMS) message indicating the client program, when a phone number associated with the mobile wireless device is not associated with a subscriber of a service associated with the client program at the time of receiving the SMS message or the EMS message;

downloading the client program on the mobile wireless device;

authenticating, via the client program, the phone number associated with the mobile wireless device to the service via SMS protocol;

after the authenticating:

transmitting, via the client program, first information comprising a first phone number;

receiving, via the client program, a first response to the transmitting of the first information, wherein the first response indicates that the first phone number is associated with a subscriber of the service;

transmitting, via the client program and a wireless local area network (WLAN), based on the first response, first message content, to a mobile wireless device associated with the first phone number;

transmitting, via the client program, second information comprising a second phone number,

wherein the second phone number is not associated with a subscriber of the service; and

inserting, via the client program, second message content into a message for delivery to a mobile wireless device associated with the second phone number, wherein the second message content is received by the mobile wireless device associated with the second phone number via SMS or EMS protocol;

wherein the service is a service for exchanging message content between subscribers;

wherein the service restricts third parties from receiving certain subscriber information absent subscriber consent.

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

receiving an SMS message, including content originated by a subscriber of the service, subsequent to the phone number associated with the mobile wireless device being authenticated to the service.

3. The method of claim **1**, wherein the first message content includes one or more images.

4. The method of claim 1, wherein the service is adapted to identify a subscriber based on a phone number absent user input of a username and absent user input of an email address.

5. The method of claim 1, wherein the client program is adapted to send a message to a subscriber based on each one of a user name, phone number and email address.

6. The method of claim 1, wherein a server of the service which maintains a subscriber list is located outside of a cellular network.

7. The method of claim 1, further comprising:

transmitting, via the client program, third information comprising a third phone number; and

receiving, via the client program, an indication that a user name associated with the third phone number is associated with a subscriber of the service.

8. The method of claim 1, wherein the client program automatically determines whether a phone number is associated with a subscriber and when a phone number is not associated with a subscriber, the client program is adapted to provide an invitation, via SMS, for a non-subscriber to subscribe to the service.

9. The method of claim 1, wherein the service distinguishes between active and inactive subscribers.

10. The method of claim 1, wherein the second message content includes an invitation to subscribe to the service.

11. The method of claim 1, wherein the second message content includes a universal resource locator (URL) indicative of the service.

12. The method of claim 1, wherein the client program is adapted to:

receive as input, address information consisting of a third phone number;

receive as input, address information consisting of a fourth phone number;

send a group message, via a packet switched bearer, to a plurality of mobile wireless devices, based on the third phone number and the fourth phone number.

13. The method of claim 1, further comprising:

receiving, via the client program, at least one message from at least one subscriber, via a push model.

14. The method of claim 1, wherein the certain subscriber information is comprised of contact information, wherein the contact information is information used to send messages to the client program.

15. The method of claim 1, wherein, based on a second response, the mobile wireless device associated with the second phone number receives an SMS message having content originated via the client program.

16. The method of claim 1, wherein the first message content includes at least one of an image, video or animation.

17. The method of claim 1, wherein the first phone number is retrieved, by the client program, from a message being composed.

18. A server system for supporting a plurality of client programs, the server system comprising: a storage device; and a network interface that supports Internet Protocol (IP): wherein the server system: authenticates a phone number associated with a first mobile wireless device, upon which a client program operates, to a service for sending and receiving packet switched messages, via short message service (SMS) protocol; adds the phone number to a subscriber list, stored on the storage device, based on the authentication; receives information, from the client program, comprising a numeric identifier; determines that a user name is associated with the numeric identifier; sends a response, to the client program, the response indicating that the user name associated with the numeric identifier is associated with a subscriber of the service; receives content originated from the client program, via the network interface, and provides the content to another client program operable on a second mobile wireless device associated with the user name; receives a first phone number, from the client program; provides a first response to the receipt of the first phone number indicating that the first phone number corresponds to a subscriber of the service; receives a second phone number, from the client program and determines that the second phone number does not correspond to a subscriber of the service; wherein the client program is adapted to insert message content into a message to be sent to a third mobile wireless device which is not associated with a subscriber of the service, wherein the message to be sent is addressed to a phone number.

19. The server system of claim 18, wherein the server system routes graphical content between subscribers.

20. The server system of claim 18, wherein the client program is adapted to send messages based on voice input.

21. The server system of claim 18, wherein the user name comprises an @ symbol.

22. The server system of claim 18, wherein the server system receives another request, from the first mobile wireless device, the another request comprising an email address;

wherein the server system determines whether the email address of the another request is on the subscriber list and provides a response to the another request.

23. The server system of claim 18, wherein the server system does not disclose certain information to third parties absent user consent.

24. The server system of claim 18, wherein the numeric identifier is in a format of a phone number.

25. A system comprising:

a base station; and

a server system that:

receives a subscription message, from a first mobile wireless device having a message client, the subscription message indicating that the first mobile wireless device is subscribing to a service for sending and receiving messages other than Short Message Service (SMS) messages, Enhanced Messaging Service (EMS) messages and Multimedia Messaging Service (MMS) messages;

receives a first request, from the first mobile wireless device via the base station, the first request comprising a numeric identifier in the format of a phone number, wherein the numeric identifier is retrieved, by the first mobile wireless device, from a message being composed;

determines that an email address is associated with the numeric identifier and that the email address is associated with a second mobile wireless device;

sends, based on the determination that the email address is associated with the second mobile wireless device, a first response to the first request, to the first mobile wireless device, the first response indicating that a message to the second mobile wireless device is to be sent via the service;

receives a second request, from the first mobile wireless device, the second request comprising another phone number which is different than the numeric identifier; and

sends a second response to the second request, to the first mobile wireless device, the second response indicating that a message to a third mobile wireless device is not to be sent via the service.

26. The system of claim **25**, wherein the server system determines that the second mobile wireless device is inactive, subsequent to the second response being sent;

wherein the server system provides information indicating that messages to the second mobile wireless device should not be sent via the service, to a plurality of mobile wireless devices.

27. The system of claim **25**, wherein the server system performs a short message service (SMS) based authentication procedure on a phone number associated to the first mobile wireless device and adds the phone number associated to the first mobile wireless device to a subscriber address list subsequent to the SMS based authentication procedure;

wherein at least one message to the second mobile wireless device is routed via the email address and via the service.

28. The system of claim **25**, wherein a plurality of mobile wireless devices are associated with the numeric identifier.

29. The system of claim **28**, wherein the server system receives message content from the first mobile wireless device and provides the message content to each one of the plurality of mobile wireless devices associated with the numeric identifier.

30. The system of claim **25**, wherein the second response to the second request indicates that a message being composed on the first mobile wireless device should be sent via SMS;

wherein at least one message to the second mobile wireless device is routed via the email address and via the service.

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