US008751056B2

(12) **United States Patent**
Slaby et al.

(10) **Patent No.: US 8,751,056 B2**
(45) **Date of Patent: Jun. 10, 2014**

(54) **USER COMPUTER DEVICE WITH TEMPERATURE SENSING CAPABILITIES AND METHOD OF OPERATING SAME**

(75) Inventors: **Jiri Slaby**, Buffalo Grove, IL (US); **John H. Krahenbuhl**, McHenry, IL (US); **Rachid M. Alameh**, Crystal Lake, IL (US); **Thomas Y. Merrell**, Beach Park, IL (US)

(73) Assignee: **Motorola Mobility LLC**, Chicago, IL (US)

(*) Notice: Subject to any disclaimer, the term of this patent is extended or adjusted under 35 U.S.C. 154(b) by 387 days.

(21) Appl. No.: **13/307,150**

(22) Filed: **Nov. 30, 2011**

(65) **Prior Publication Data**

US 2012/0072044 A1 Mar. 22, 2012

Related U.S. Application Data

(63) Continuation-in-part of application No. 12/744,509, filed on May 25, 2010, now Pat. No. 8,269,210.

(60) Provisional application No. 61/513,460, filed on Jul. 29, 2011.

(51) **Int. Cl.**

G06F 19/00	(2011.01)
G06F 3/041	(2006.01)
G01K 13/00	(2006.01)

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

CPC ***G06F 3/041*** (2013.01); *G06F 2221/0746* (2013.01); *G01K 13/00* (2013.01)

USPC **700/299**; 709/228; 709/230; 709/237

(58) **Field of Classification Search**

CPC G06F 2203/04808; G06F 2213/00; G06F 2221/0746; G01K 13/00

USPC 700/299, 300; 709/228, 230, 237

See application file for complete search history.

(56) **References Cited**

U.S. PATENT DOCUMENTS

4,286,289	A	8/1981	Ottesen et al.
4,806,709	A	2/1989	Evans

(Continued)

FOREIGN PATENT DOCUMENTS

CN	1407506	A	4/2003
CN	101019089	A	8/2007

(Continued)

OTHER PUBLICATIONS

United States Patent and Trademark Office "Non-Final Rejection" for U.S. Appl. No. 12/471,062, filed Feb. 22, 2012, 15 pages.

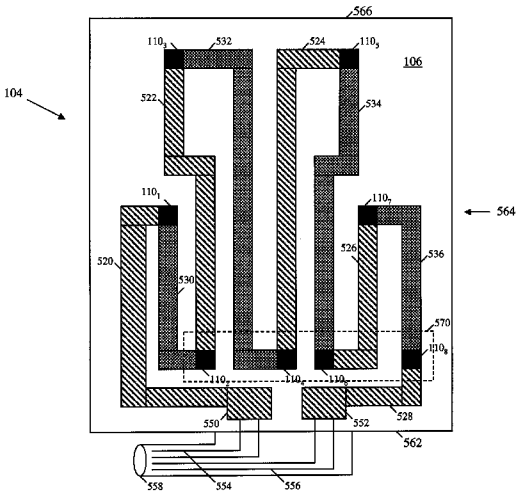
(Continued)

Primary Examiner — Michael D Masinick

(57) **ABSTRACT**

A user computer device is provided that comprises a temperature sensitive touchscreen having a temperature sensitive user interface comprising multiple thermal energy emitter/detector devices, such as thermocouples. The multiple thermal energy emitter/detector devices are capable both of detecting thermal energy and emitting thermal energy. The temperature sensitive user interface generates thermal patterns that may be transferred to other thermally sensitive electronic devices or that may be used to authenticate the user computer device. The user computer device also can detect and thermally communicate with a thermal energy docking station and, based on thermal recognition, activate applications displayed on the temperature sensitive touchscreen. Further, the user computer device can auto-bias a temperature of the temperature sensitive user interface in order to better assure proper operation of the temperature sensitive user interface in all operating conditions.

22 Claims, 18 Drawing Sheets



(56) **References Cited**

U.S. PATENT DOCUMENTS

4,914,624 A 4/1990 Dunthorn
4,967,083 A 10/1990 Kornbrekke et al.
5,179,369 A 1/1993 Person et al.
5,414,413 A 5/1995 Tamaru et al.
5,684,294 A 11/1997 Kouhi
5,781,662 A 7/1998 Mori et al.
5,793,486 A 8/1998 Gordon et al.
5,821,521 A 10/1998 Bridgelall et al.
5,880,411 A 3/1999 Gillespie et al.
5,945,988 A 8/1999 Williams et al.
6,002,427 A 12/1999 Kipust
6,107,994 A 8/2000 Harada et al.
6,147,677 A 11/2000 Escobosa et al.
6,184,538 B1 2/2001 Bandara et al.
6,185,950 B1 2/2001 Baruschke et al.
6,215,116 B1 4/2001 Van Marcke
6,246,407 B1 6/2001 Wilks et al.
6,246,862 B1 6/2001 Grivas
6,292,674 B1 9/2001 Davis
6,330,457 B1 12/2001 Yoon
6,438,752 B1 8/2002 McClard
6,460,183 B1 10/2002 Van Der Vleuten
6,517,257 B2 2/2003 Tohmon et al.
6,525,854 B1 2/2003 Takahashi et al.
6,666,081 B1 12/2003 Babinsky et al.
6,681,056 B1 1/2004 Tseng et al.
6,721,954 B1 4/2004 Nickum
6,804,012 B2 10/2004 Gombert
6,816,154 B2 11/2004 Wong et al.
6,925,413 B2 8/2005 Krieg et al.
6,933,922 B2 8/2005 Casebolt et al.
6,941,161 B1 9/2005 Bobisuthi et al.
7,012,637 B1 3/2006 Blume et al.
7,046,230 B2 5/2006 Zadesky et al.
7,134,092 B2 11/2006 Fung et al.
7,166,966 B2 1/2007 Naugler, Jr. et al.
7,212,835 B2 5/2007 Mantyjarvi et al.
7,220,958 B2 5/2007 Kitamura et al.
7,224,382 B2 5/2007 Baker
7,237,929 B2 7/2007 Stahl
7,324,671 B2 1/2008 Li et al.
7,327,245 B2 2/2008 Krumm et al.
7,340,077 B2 3/2008 Gokturk et al.
7,368,703 B2 5/2008 De Samber et al.
7,380,716 B2 6/2008 Yokoyama
7,468,689 B2 12/2008 Ma et al.
7,486,386 B1 2/2009 Holcombe et al.
7,489,297 B2 2/2009 Hohmann et al.
7,515,177 B2 4/2009 Yoshikawa
7,519,918 B2 4/2009 Trantow
7,532,196 B2 5/2009 Hinckley
7,534,988 B2 5/2009 Kong et al.
7,557,965 B2 7/2009 Taylor et al.
7,561,146 B1 7/2009 Hotelling
7,576,525 B2 8/2009 So et al.
7,630,716 B2 12/2009 Tamura et al.
7,687,774 B2 3/2010 Ohta et al.
7,688,283 B2 3/2010 Jung et al.
7,715,723 B2 5/2010 Kagawa et al.
7,721,310 B2 5/2010 Schaffer et al.
7,728,958 B2 6/2010 Pfaff
7,795,584 B2 9/2010 Mok et al.
7,814,791 B2 10/2010 Andersson et al.
7,855,716 B2 12/2010 McCreary et al.
7,912,376 B2 3/2011 Rollins
7,967,451 B2 6/2011 Chen et al.
7,971,156 B2 6/2011 Albertson et al.
7,991,575 B2 8/2011 Vogel et al.
7,991,896 B2 8/2011 Shen et al.
7,994,468 B2 8/2011 Duijve et al.
7,995,041 B2 8/2011 Chang
8,006,002 B2 8/2011 Kalayjian et al.
8,013,904 B2 9/2011 Tan et al.
8,018,501 B2 9/2011 Sasaki
8,023,061 B2 9/2011 Ra
8,030,914 B2 10/2011 Alameh et al.
8,072,469 B2 12/2011 Ottney
8,104,113 B2 1/2012 Rodenbeck et al.
8,335,593 B2 * 12/2012 Johnson et al. 700/285
8,633,901 B2 * 1/2014 Orr et al. 345/173
2001/0019338 A1 9/2001 Roth
2001/0033475 A1 * 10/2001 Lillios et al. 361/687
2002/0104081 A1 8/2002 Candelore et al.
2002/0122072 A1 9/2002 Selker
2002/0199186 A1 12/2002 Ali et al.
2003/0034439 A1 2/2003 Reime et al.
2003/0063128 A1 4/2003 Salmimaa et al.
2003/0129964 A1 7/2003 Kohinata et al.
2003/0222917 A1 12/2003 Trantow
2004/0183787 A1 9/2004 Geaghan et al.
2004/0207997 A1 10/2004 Stewart et al.
2005/0104860 A1 5/2005 McCreary et al.
2005/0150697 A1 7/2005 Altman et al.
2005/0198029 A1 9/2005 Pohja et al.
2005/0232447 A1 10/2005 Shinozuka et al.
2005/0289182 A1 12/2005 Pandian et al.
2006/0010400 A1 1/2006 Dehlin et al.
2006/0028453 A1 2/2006 Kawabe
2006/0031786 A1 2/2006 Hillis et al.
2006/0049152 A1 3/2006 Matus
2006/0067573 A1 3/2006 Parr et al.
2006/0125799 A1 6/2006 Hillis et al.
2006/0132456 A1 6/2006 Anson
2006/0161870 A1 7/2006 Hotelling et al.
2006/0161871 A1 7/2006 Hotelling et al.
2006/0256074 A1 11/2006 Krum et al.
2007/0057955 A1 * 3/2007 McKay 345/550
2007/0058255 A1 3/2007 Imai et al.
2007/0109266 A1 5/2007 Davis et al.
2007/0137462 A1 6/2007 Barros et al.
2007/0177803 A1 8/2007 Elias et al.
2007/0180392 A1 8/2007 Russo
2007/0195074 A1 8/2007 Gelissen
2007/0220437 A1 9/2007 Boillot
2007/0242054 A1 10/2007 Chang et al.
2007/0247643 A1 10/2007 Nakamura et al.
2008/0005703 A1 1/2008 Radivojevic et al.
2008/0006762 A1 1/2008 Fadell et al.
2008/0024454 A1 1/2008 Everest
2008/0024992 A1 * 1/2008 Pflueger 361/705
2008/0052643 A1 2/2008 Ike et al.
2008/0061899 A1 3/2008 Stolpman
2008/0079902 A1 4/2008 Mandelstam-Manor et al.
2008/0100928 A1 5/2008 Wilson
2008/0122803 A1 5/2008 Izadi et al.
2008/0129688 A1 6/2008 Richardson et al.
2008/0161870 A1 7/2008 Gunderson
2008/0165140 A1 7/2008 Christie et al.
2008/0192005 A1 8/2008 Elgoyhen et al.
2008/0195735 A1 8/2008 Hodges et al.
2008/0204427 A1 8/2008 Heesemans et al.
2008/0211771 A1 9/2008 Richardson
2008/0219672 A1 9/2008 Tam et al.
2008/0225041 A1 9/2008 El Dokor et al.
2008/0240568 A1 10/2008 Tonouchi
2008/0252595 A1 10/2008 Boillot
2008/0256494 A1 10/2008 Greenfield
2008/0259053 A1 10/2008 Newton
2008/0266083 A1 10/2008 Midholt et al.
2008/0280642 A1 11/2008 Coxhill et al.
2008/0297487 A1 12/2008 Hotelling et al.
2008/0303681 A1 12/2008 Herz et al.
2008/0309641 A1 12/2008 Harel et al.
2009/0021488 A1 1/2009 Kali et al.
2009/0031258 A1 1/2009 Arrasvuori et al.
2009/0061823 A1 3/2009 Chu
2009/0092284 A1 4/2009 Breed et al.
2009/0158203 A1 6/2009 Kerr et al.
2009/0277697 A1 11/2009 Bolt et al.
2009/0299633 A1 12/2009 Hawes et al.
2009/0303176 A1 12/2009 Chen et al.
2010/0167783 A1 7/2010 Alameh et al.
2010/0271312 A1 10/2010 Alameh et al.
2010/0271331 A1 10/2010 Alameh et al.

(56) **References Cited**

U.S. PATENT DOCUMENTS

2010/0295772	A1	11/2010	Alameh et al.	
2010/0295773	A1	11/2010	Alameh et al.	
2010/0295781	A1	11/2010	Alameh et al.	
2010/0297946	A1	11/2010	Alameh et al.	
2010/0299390	A1	11/2010	Alameh et al.	
2010/0299642	A1	11/2010	Merrell et al.	
2011/0006190	A1	1/2011	Alameh et al.	
2011/0009194	A1	1/2011	Gabai et al.	
2011/0012716	A1*	1/2011	Miller, IV	340/407.2
2011/0014983	A1*	1/2011	Miller, IV	463/37
2011/0148752	A1	6/2011	Alameh et al.	
2012/0068952	A1	3/2012	Slaby et al.	
2012/0072044	A1	3/2012	Slaby et al.	
2012/0072157	A1	3/2012	Alameh et al.	

FOREIGN PATENT DOCUMENTS

CN	101305337	A	11/2008
CN	1805568	A	12/2008
EP	1445922	A1	8/2004
EP	1553427	A1	7/2005
EP	1657819	A2	5/2006
EP	1760573	A2	3/2007
EP	2000896	A2	12/2008
EP	20037349	A2	3/2009
JP	02280427	A	11/1990
JP	2005293419	A	10/2005
JP	2006010489	A	1/2006
JP	2007042020	A	2/2007
JP	2009085799	A	4/2009
WO	9528777	A1	10/1995
WO	0241129	A2	6/2002
WO	03023701	A2	3/2003
WO	03076870	A1	9/2003
WO	2005076542	A1	8/2005
WO	2005101176	A2	10/2005
WO	2008016394	A2	2/2008
WO	2008073289	A3	6/2008

OTHER PUBLICATIONS

Kim, et al., "The gesture watch: a wireless contact-free gesture based wrist interface", 2007, 11th IEEE International Symposium on Wearable Computers, pp. 15-22.
United States Patent and Trademark Office "Non-Final Rejection" for U.S. Appl. No. 12/646,601, filed Feb. 14, 2012, 9 pages.
Starner et al., The gesture pendant: A self-illuminating, wearable, infared computer vision system for home automation control and medical monitoring:, 2000, IEEE 4th Internatioinal Symposium on Wearable Computers, pp. 87-94.
H. Ruser, Object recognition with a smart low-cost active infared sensor array:, Nov. 21-23, 2005, 1st International Conference on Sensing Technology, pp. 494-499.
United States Patent and Trademark Office "Final Rejection" for U.S. Appl. No. 12/428,187, filed Apr. 10, 2012, 10 pages.
United States Patent and Trademark Office "Final Rejection" for U.S. Appl. No. 12/428,266, filed Mar. 14, 2012, 9 pages.
United States Patent and Trademark Office "Non-Final Rejection" for U.S. Appl. No. 12/500,625, filed Dec. 29, 2011, 7 pages.
United States Patent and Trademark Office "Non-Final Rejection" for U.S. Appl. No. 12/646,199, filed Mar. 9, 2012, 17 pages.
United States Patent and Trademark Office "Non-Final Rejection" for U.S. Appl. No. 12/645,244, filed May 24, 2012, 8 pages.
United States Patent and Trademark Office "Non-Final Rejection" for U.S. Appl. No. 12/648,503, filed Feb. 2, 2012, 7 pages.
Patent Cooperation Treaty, International Search Report and Written Opinion of the International Searching Authority for International Application No. PCT/US2011/031161, Nov. 18, 2011, 14 pages.
Specification of the Bluetooth System: Master Table of Contents & Compliance Requirements; Covered Core Package V.3.0+HS; Apr. 21, 2009, all pages.
G.Yun and M.Kavehrad, "Spot diffusing and fly-eye receivers for indoor infrared wireless communications", Proc. 1992 IEEE, Conf. Sel, Topics in Wireless Comm., Vancouver, BC, Canada, Jun. 25-26, 1992, pp. 286-292.
Kahn, J.M.; You, R., Djahani, P., Weisbin, A.G."Imaging Diversity Receivers for high-speed infrared wireless communication", IEEE Communications Mag., Dec. 1998, Accessed May 7, 2009; 7 pages.
Ward, A.; Jones A.; Hopper A.; "A new location technique for the active office"; IEEE Personal Communications, 1997; 0 accessed May 7, 2009; 11 pages.
Metzger, C.; Anderson, M.; Starner, T., "FreeDigiter: A contact-free device for gesture control"; Wearable Computers, 2004; ISWC 2004, 8th International Symposium, vol. 1, Oct. 31/Oct. 4, 2004, pp. 18-21.
Von Hardenberg, C.; Berard F.; "Bare-hand human-computer interaction" PUI; ACM 1-58113-448-7 Nov. 14, 2001; 0 Orlando, FL, USA; 8 pages.
TracklR: Vector Expansion: True 6DOF view control offer 3-dimensional virtual reality via motion control; TRACKIR by NaturalPoint; www.naturalpoint.com; 2 pages Aug. 2005.
Bricklin, D.; Gestures, the iPhone, and Standards: A Developer's Questions, www.bricklin.com, 10 pages, 1999-2009.
Gearlog, Microsoft's sidesight: something Apple show watch, www.gearlog.com; 5 pages, 1996-2008, Zift Davis Publ. Holdings, Inc.
Hadamard transform—Wikipedia definition; http://en.wikipedia.org/wikilHadamard_transform; 4 pages, Oct. 2009.
Silicon Laboratories, Inc.; Si1120 Evaluation Kit User's Guide, Austin, TX, Dec. 2009, 10 pages; www.silabs.com/supporttpages/contacttechnicalsupport.aspx.
Pavlov, Vladislav et al.: "Model-based object characterization with active infrared sensor array", IEEE Sensors 2007 Conference, 280-31 Oct. 2007, 1-4244-1262-5/07/2007, pp. 360-363.
Christensen, Henrik Vie: "Retrieval of 3D-Position of a Passive Object Using infrared LED's and Photodiodes", Acoustics Speech and Signal Processing 2005, Proceedigns ICASSP 05 IEEE International Conference on (2005), vol. 4, pp. iv/1093-iv/1096 vol. 4.
United States Patent and Trademark Office "Non-Final Rejection" for U.S. Appl. No. 12/744,509 Aug. 29, 2013, 36 pages.
United States Patent and Trademark Office, "Non-Final Rejection" for U.S. Appl. No. 13/307,334 dated Mar. 28, 2014, 9 pages.
The State Intellectual Property Office of the People'S Republic of China, "Notification of the First Office Action" for Chinese Patent Application No. 201080022152.1 dated Oct. 25, 2013, 11 pages.
United States Patent and Trademark Office "Non-Final Rejection" for U.S. Appl. No. 12/641,830 Sep. 20, 2012, 8 pages.
United States Patent and Trademark Office "Non-Final Rejection" for U.S. Appl. No. 12/428,187 Sep. 24, 2012, 8 pages.
The State Intellectual Property Office of the People'S Republic of China, "Notification of the First Office Action" for Chinese Patent Application No. 201080031007.X dated Dec. 18, 2013, 9 pages.
United States Patent and Trademark Office "Final Rejection" for U.S. Appl. No. 12/646,199 (MTA-35935]) Sep. 17, 2012, 21 pages.
McKENNA, Michael "Interactive Viewpoint Control and Three-Dimensional Operations" Proceedings of the 1992 Symposium on Interactive 3D Graphics, 1992, pp. 53-56.

* cited by examiner

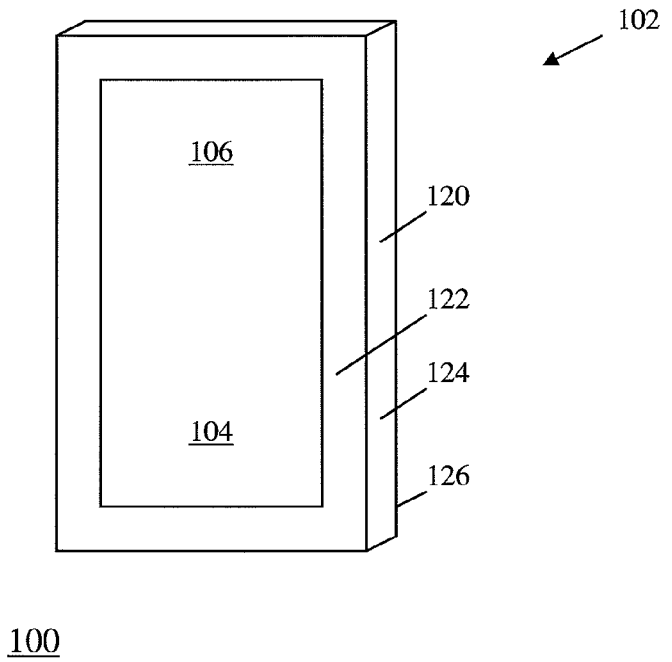

102
106
120
122
124
104
126
100

FIG. 1

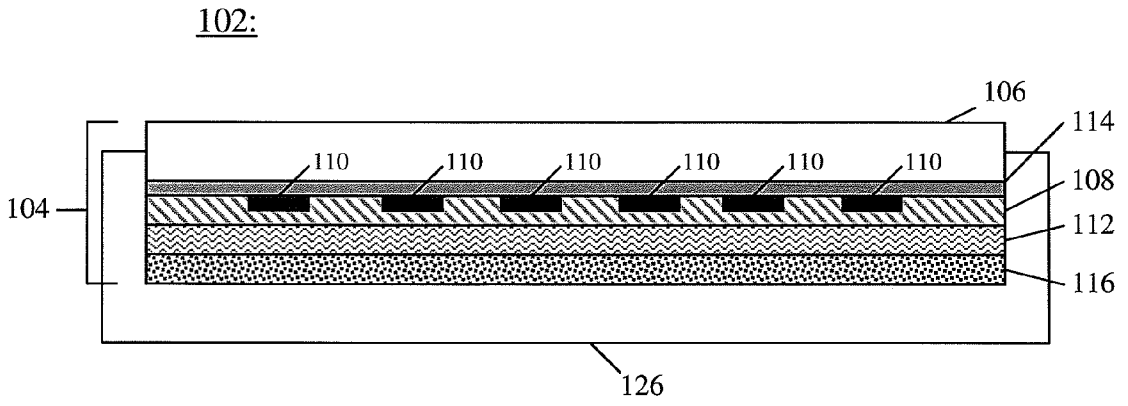

102:
106
114
110
110
110
110
110
110
108
104
112
116
126

FIG. 2

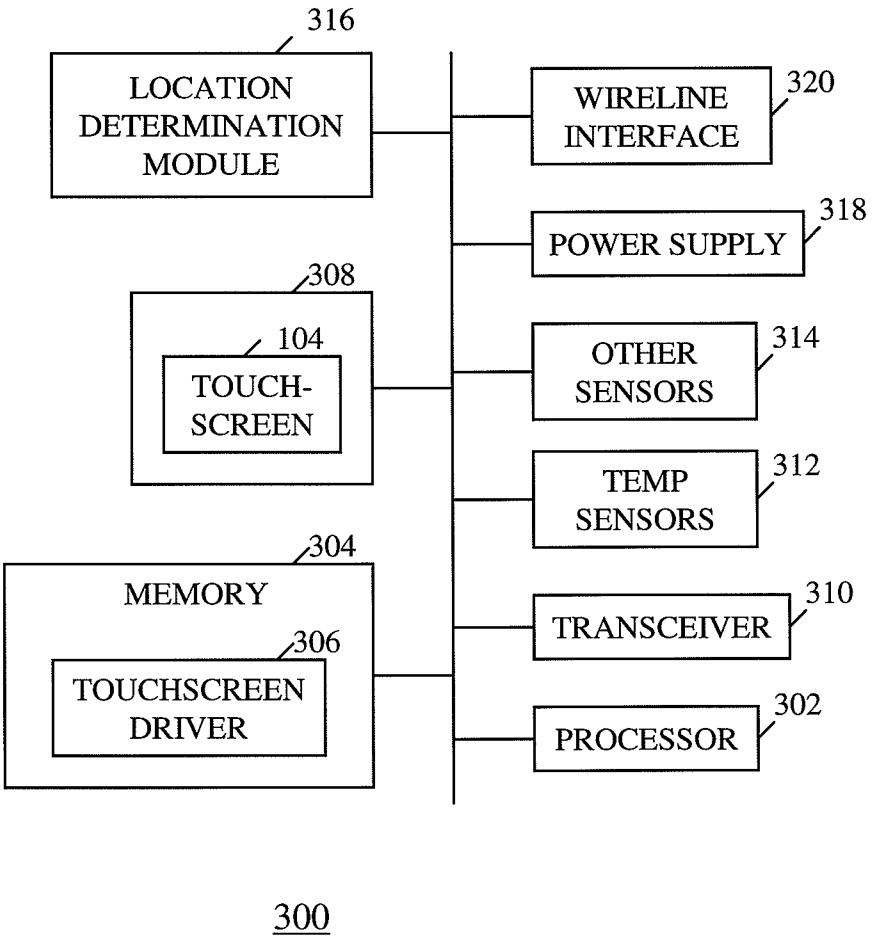

316
LOCATION DETERMINATION MODULE
WIRELINE INTERFACE
320
POWER SUPPLY
318
308
104
TOUCH-SCREEN
OTHER SENSORS
314
TEMP SENSORS
312
304
MEMORY
306
TOUCHSCREEN DRIVER
TRANSCEIVER
310
PROCESSOR
302
300

FIG. 3

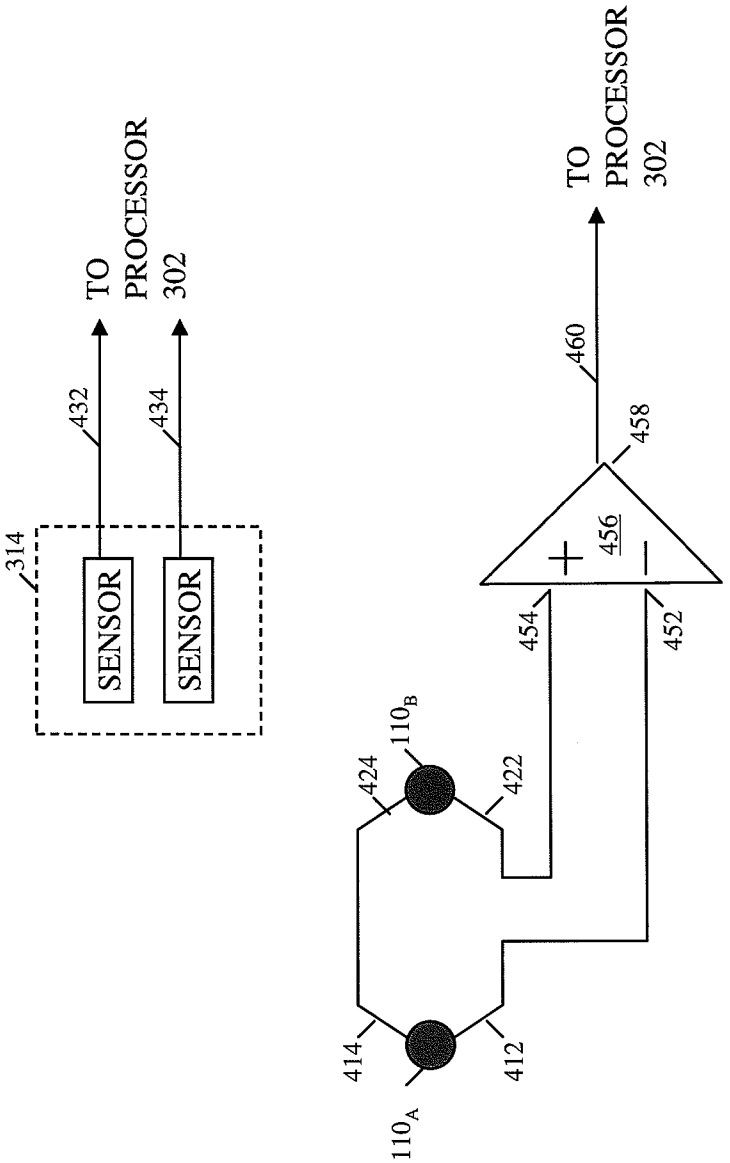

314
SENSOR
SENSOR
432
434
TO PROCESSOR 302
110_A
110_B
414
412
424
422
454
452
456
+
−
458
460
TO PROCESSOR 302
400

FIG. 4

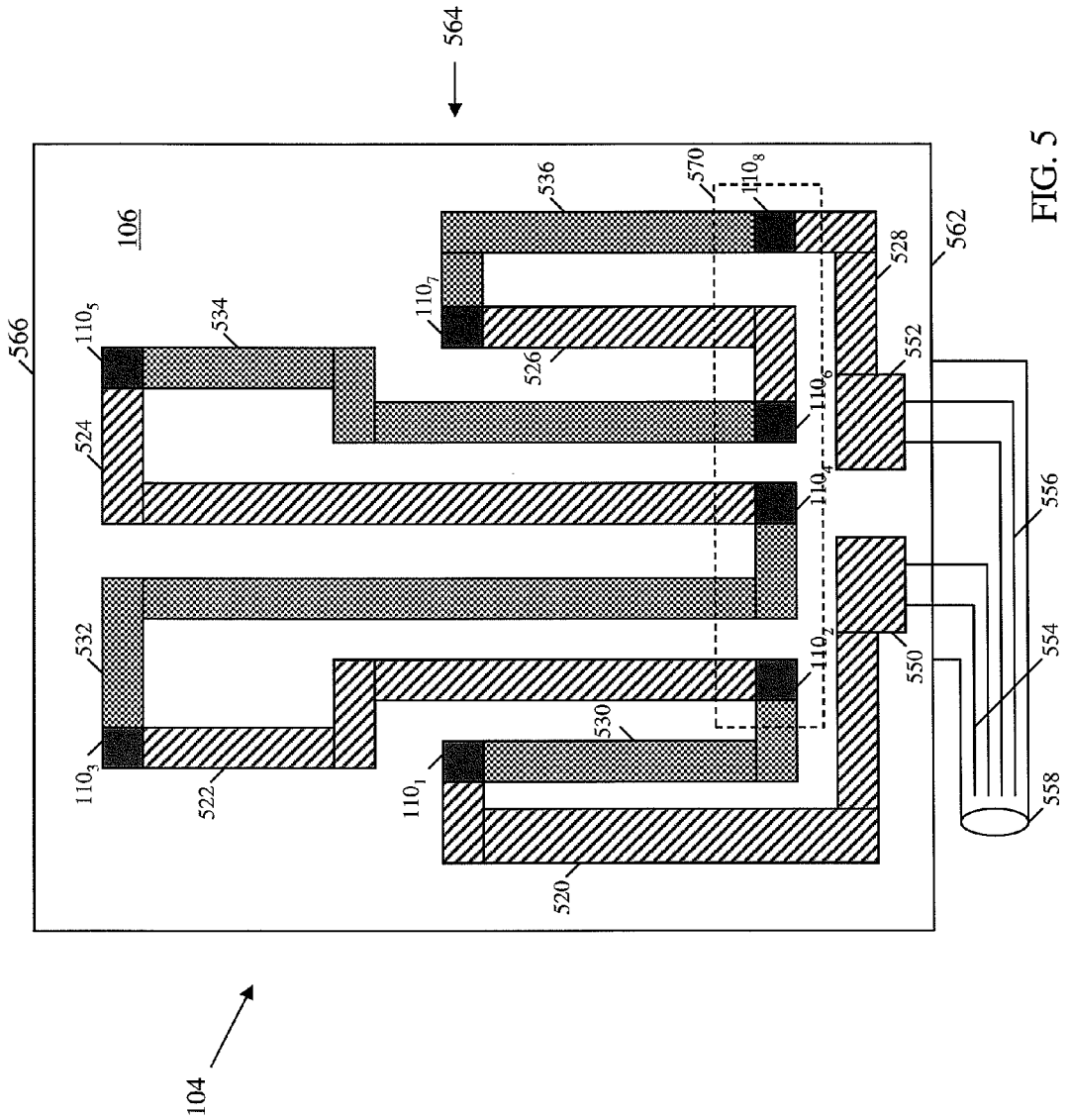

564
566
106
104
110_1
110_2
110_3
110_4
110_5
110_6
110_7
110_8
520
522
524
526
528
530
532
534
536
550
552
554
556
558
562
570

FIG. 5

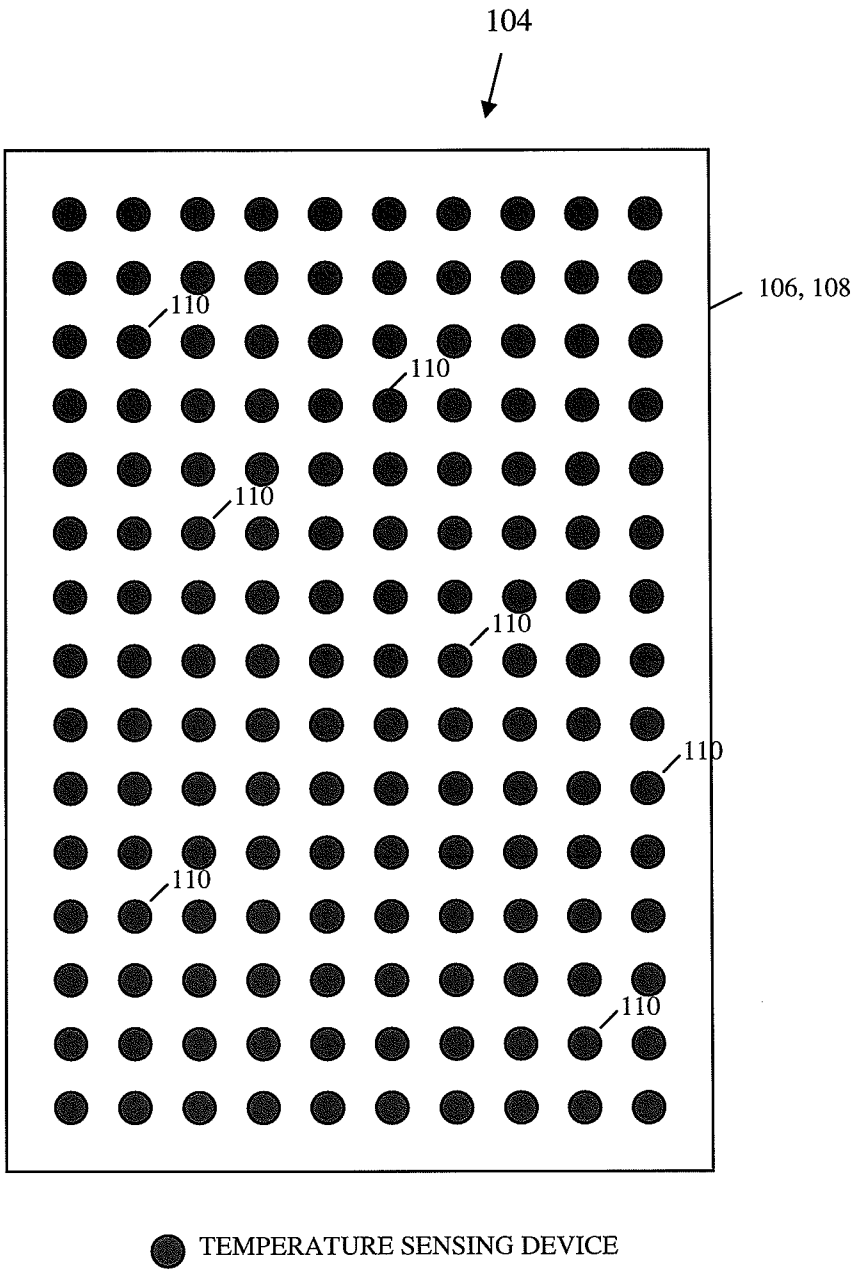

104
106, 108
110
110
110
110
110
110
110
TEMPERATURE SENSING DEVICE

FIG. 6

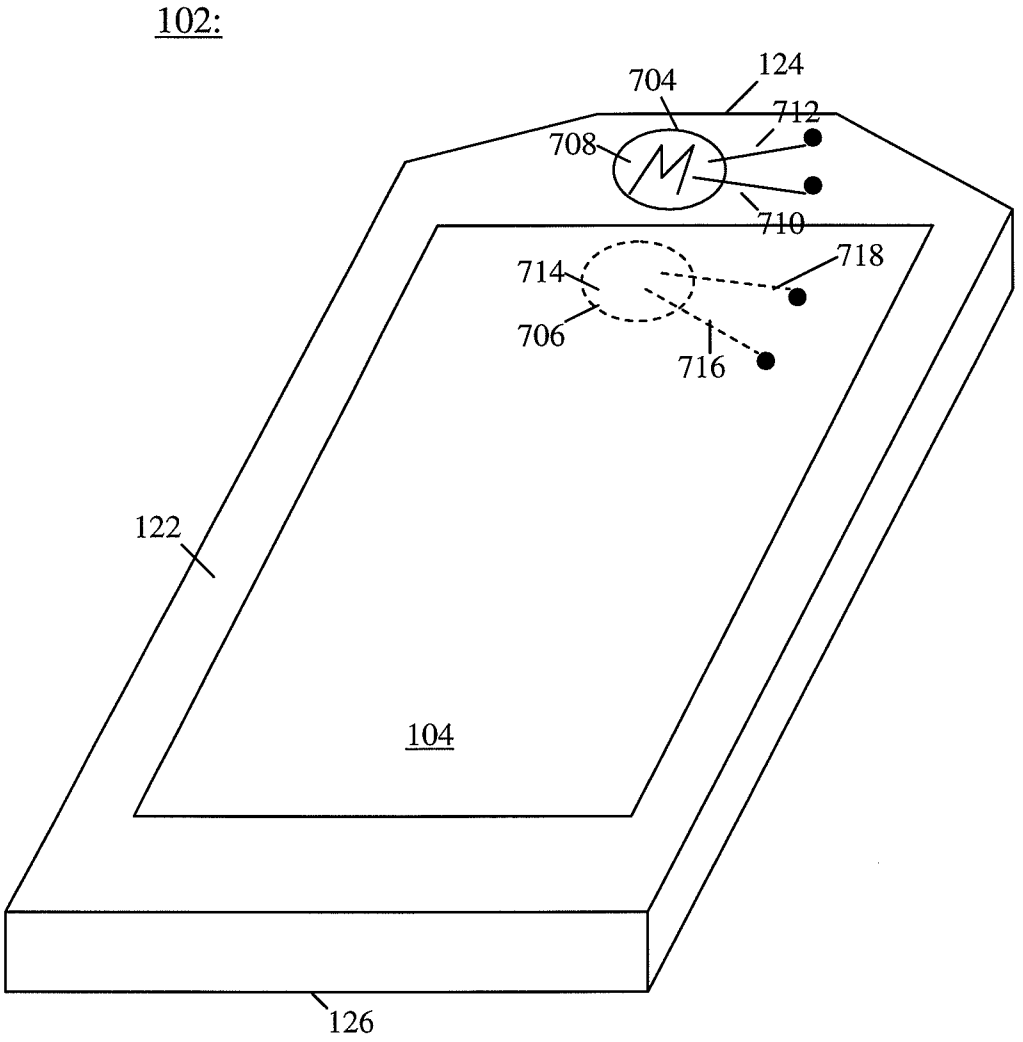


FIG. 7

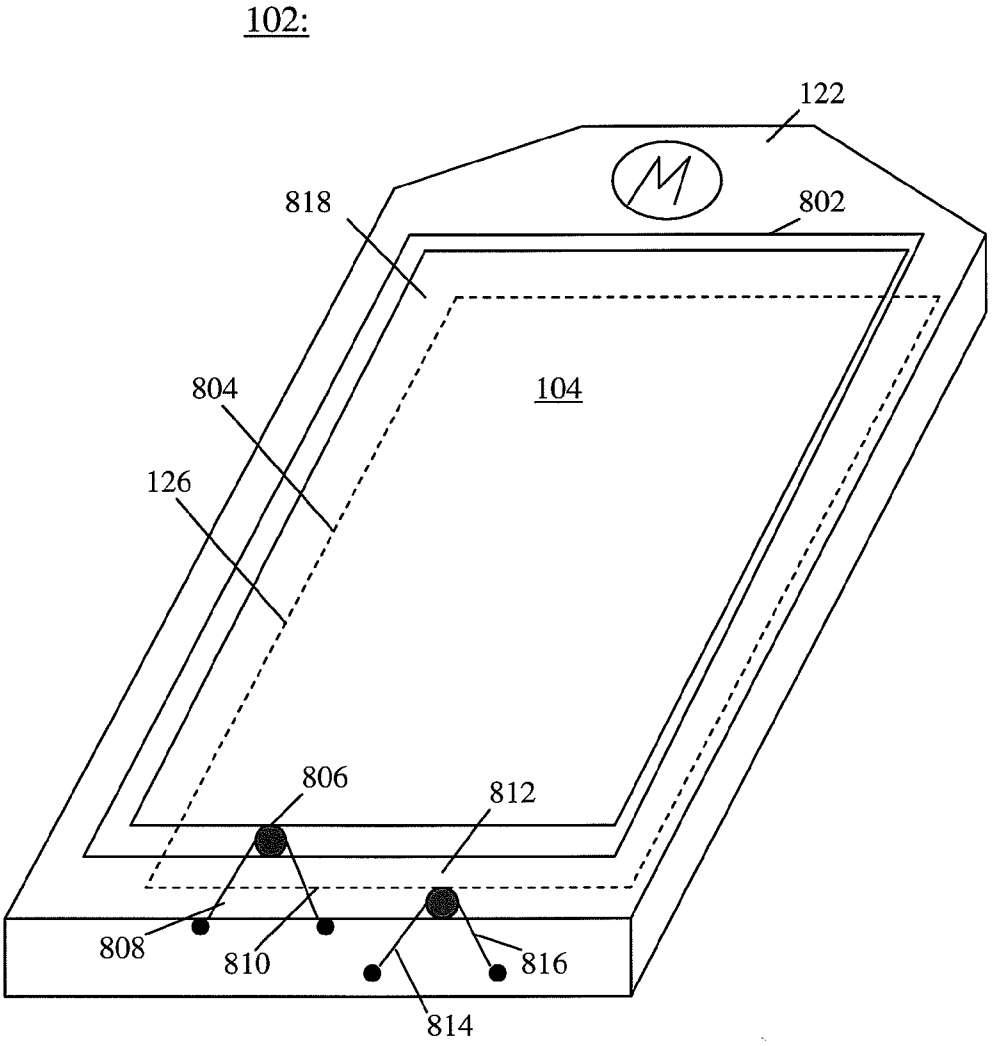


FIG. 8

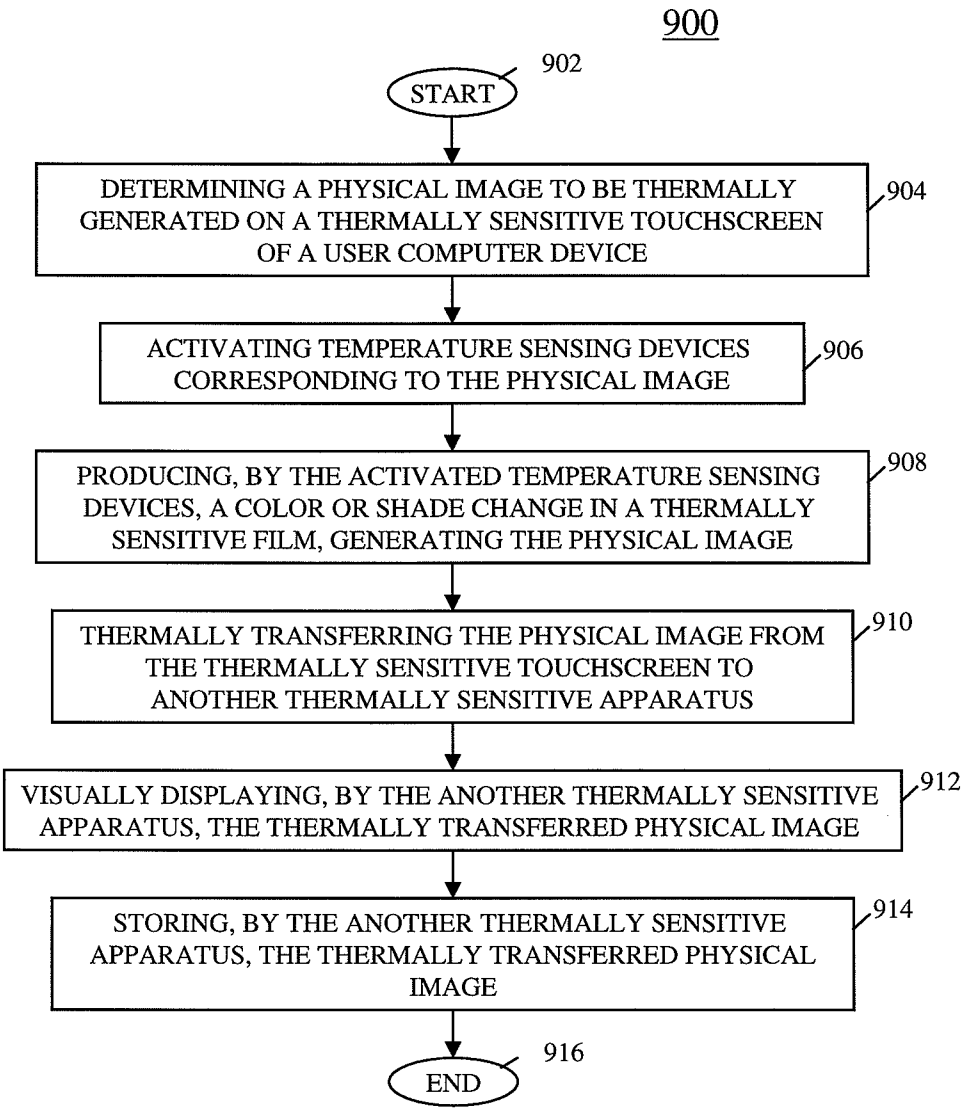

900
START
902
DETERMINING A PHYSICAL IMAGE TO BE THERMALLY GENERATED ON A THERMALLY SENSITIVE TOUCHSCREEN OF A USER COMPUTER DEVICE
904
ACTIVATING TEMPERATURE SENSING DEVICES CORRESPONDING TO THE PHYSICAL IMAGE
906
PRODUCING, BY THE ACTIVATED TEMPERATURE SENSING DEVICES, A COLOR OR SHADE CHANGE IN A THERMALLY SENSITIVE FILM, GENERATING THE PHYSICAL IMAGE
908
THERMALLY TRANSFERRING THE PHYSICAL IMAGE FROM THE THERMALLY SENSITIVE TOUCHSCREEN TO ANOTHER THERMALLY SENSITIVE APPARATUS
910
VISUALLY DISPLAYING, BY THE ANOTHER THERMALLY SENSITIVE APPARATUS, THE THERMALLY TRANSFERRED PHYSICAL IMAGE
912
STORING, BY THE ANOTHER THERMALLY SENSITIVE APPARATUS, THE THERMALLY TRANSFERRED PHYSICAL IMAGE
914
END
916

FIG. 9

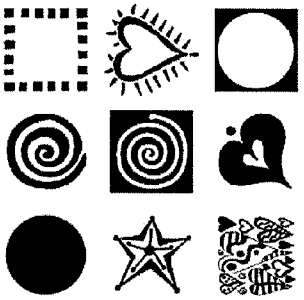


FIG. 10

FIG. 11

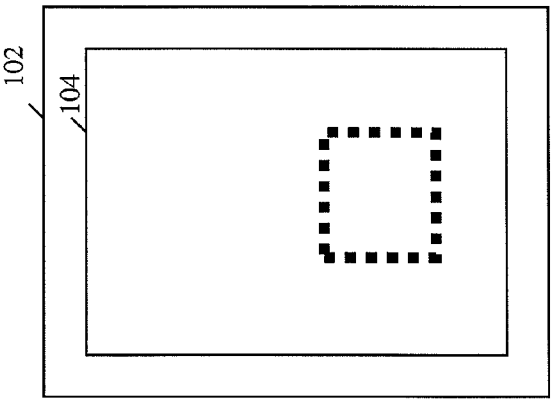


FIG. 12

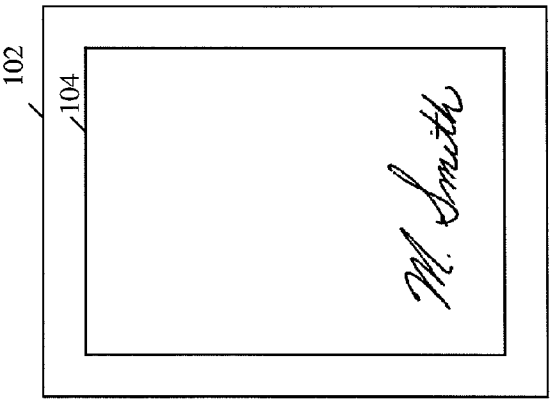


FIG. 13

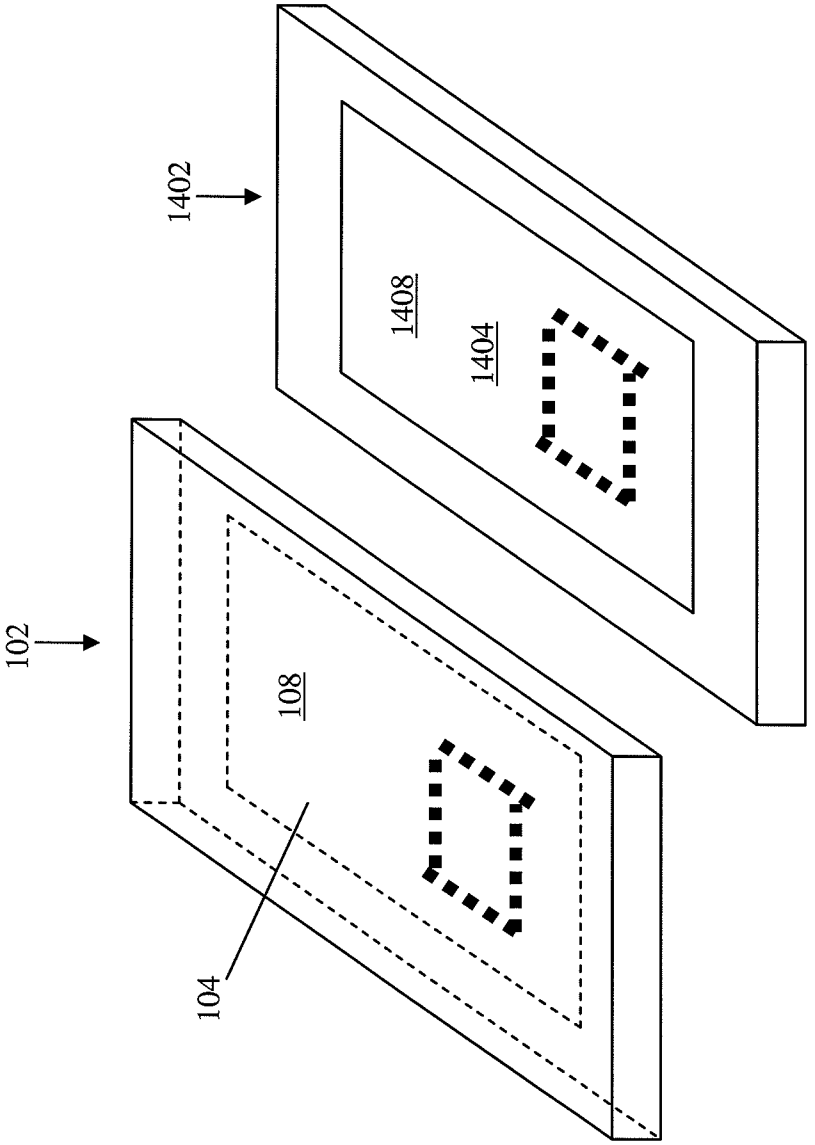


FIG. 14

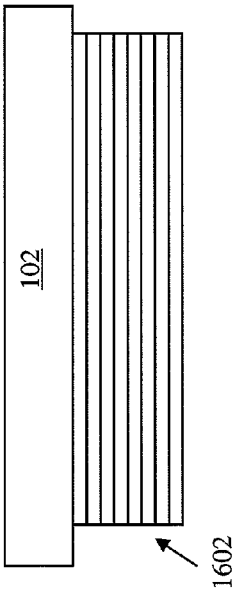

102
1602

FIG. 16

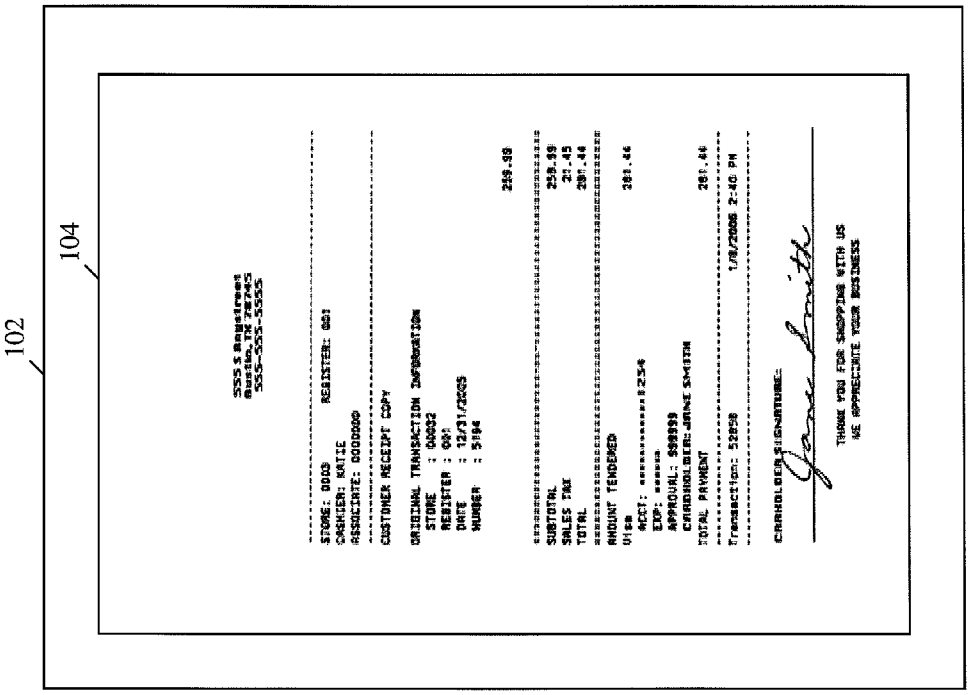

102
104
SSS Apparel
Austin, TX 78745
555-555-5555
STORE: 0003 REGISTER: 001
CASHIER: KATIE
ASSOCIATE: 0000000
CUSTOMER RECEIPT COPY
ORIGINAL TRANSACTION INFORMATION
STORE : 00002
REGISTER : 001
DATE : 12/31/2005
NUMBER : 5194
259.99
SUBTOTAL 259.99
SALES TAX 21.45
TOTAL 281.44
AMOUNT TENDERED
Visa 281.44
ACCT: 1234
EXP: 0000
APPROVAL: 999999
CARDHOLDER: JANE SMITH
TOTAL PAYMENT 281.44
Transaction: 52858 1/8/2006 2:40 PM
CARDHOLDER SIGNATURE:
THANK YOU FOR SHOPPING WITH US
WE APPRECIATE YOUR BUSINESS

FIG. 15

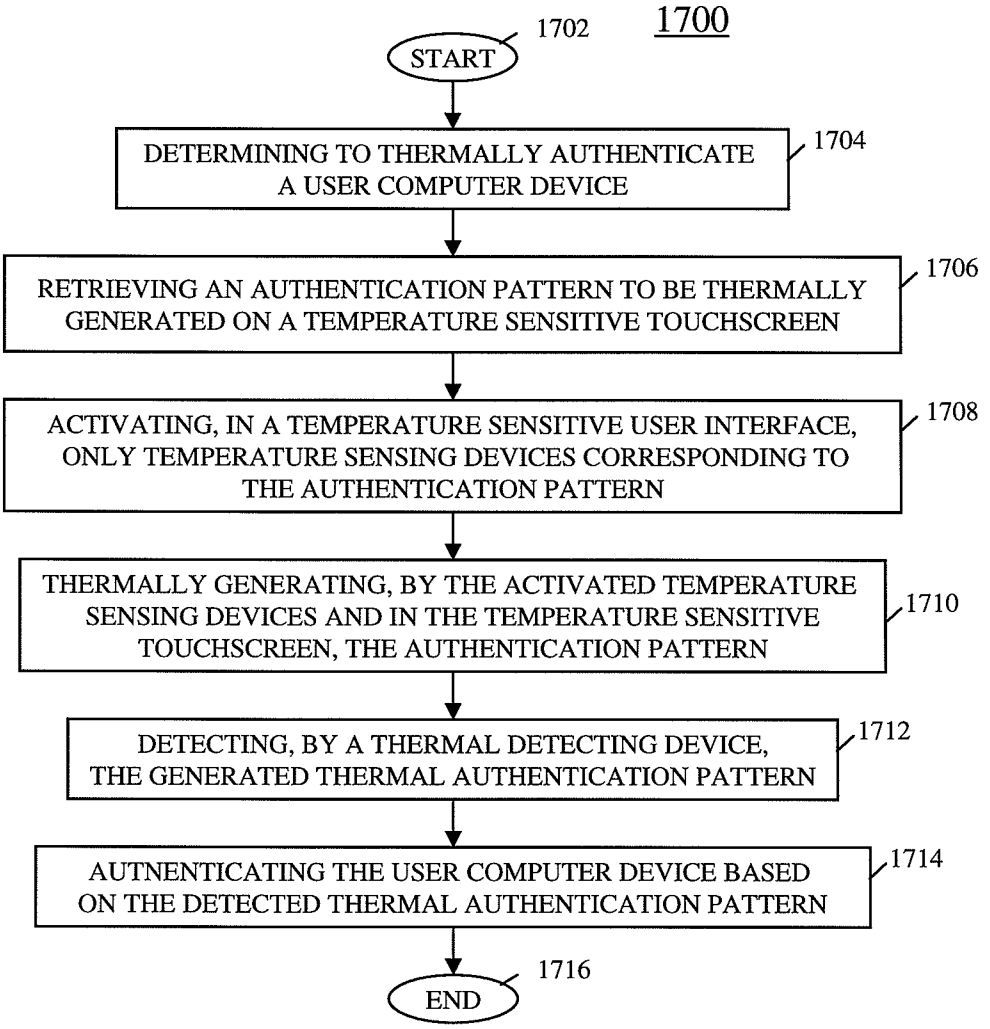

1700
START
1702
DETERMINING TO THERMALLY AUTHENTICATE A USER COMPUTER DEVICE
1704
RETRIEVING AN AUTHENTICATION PATTERN TO BE THERMALLY GENERATED ON A TEMPERATURE SENSITIVE TOUCHSCREEN
1706
ACTIVATING, IN A TEMPERATURE SENSITIVE USER INTERFACE, ONLY TEMPERATURE SENSING DEVICES CORRESPONDING TO THE AUTHENTICATION PATTERN
1708
THERMALLY GENERATING, BY THE ACTIVATED TEMPERATURE SENSING DEVICES AND IN THE TEMPERATURE SENSITIVE TOUCHSCREEN, THE AUTHENTICATION PATTERN
1710
DETECTING, BY A THERMAL DETECTING DEVICE, THE GENERATED THERMAL AUTHENTICATION PATTERN
1712
AUTNENTICATING THE USER COMPUTER DEVICE BASED ON THE DETECTED THERMAL AUTHENTICATION PATTERN
1714
END
1716

FIG. 17

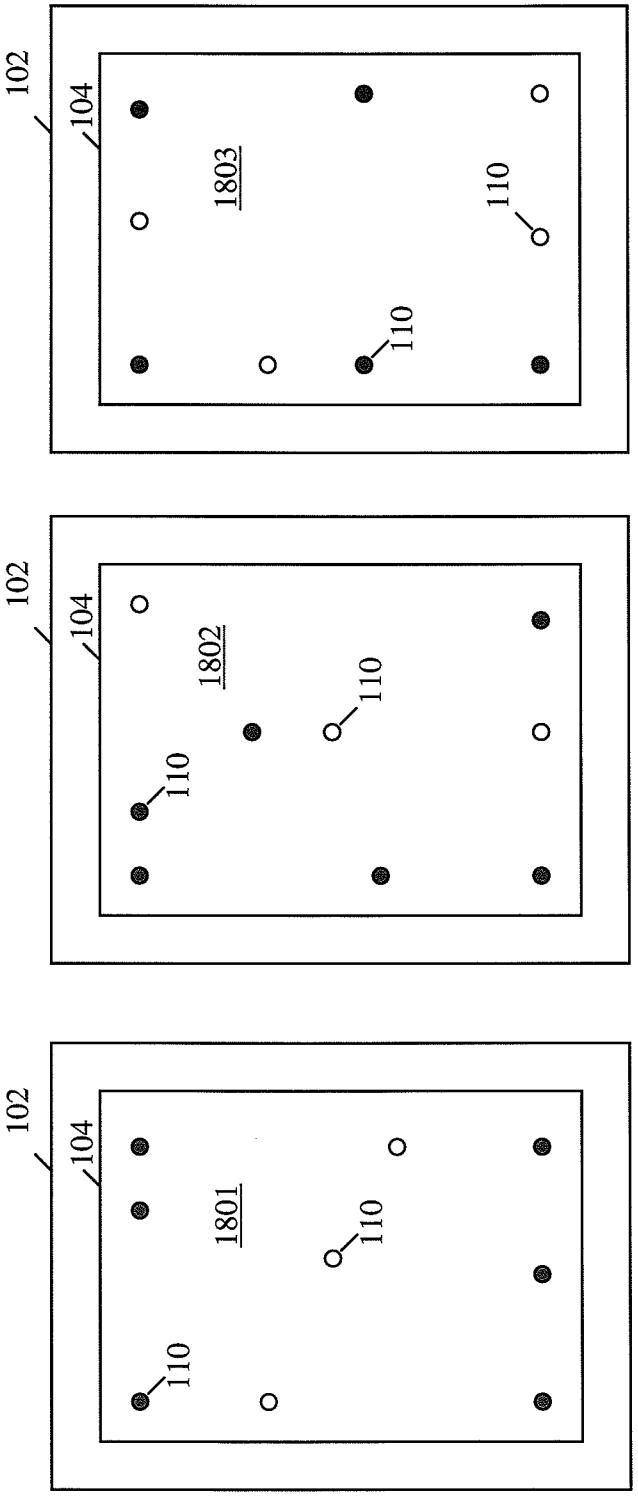


FIG. 18

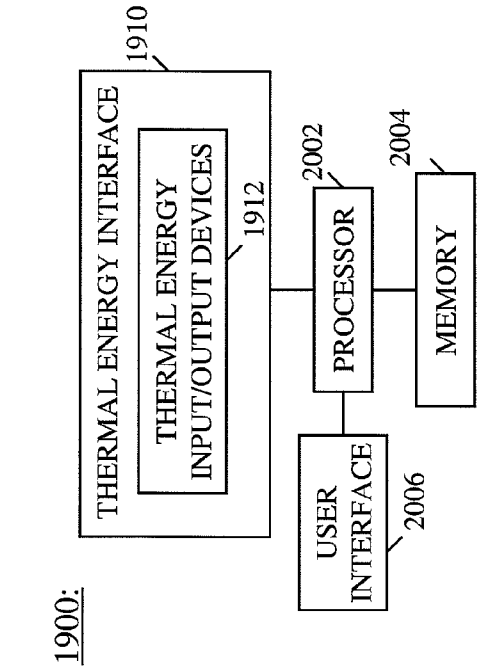


FIG. 20

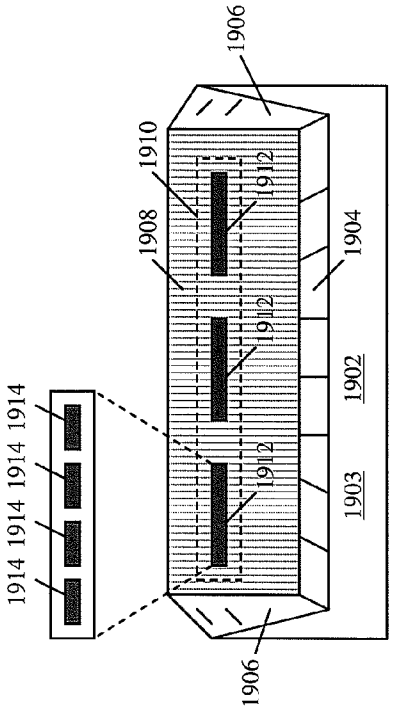


FIG. 19

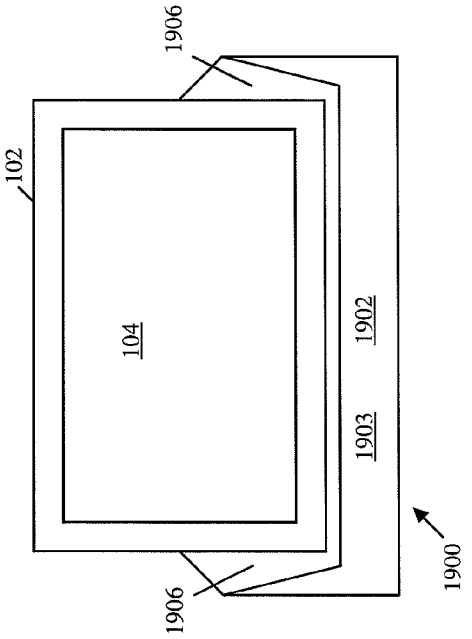


FIG. 22

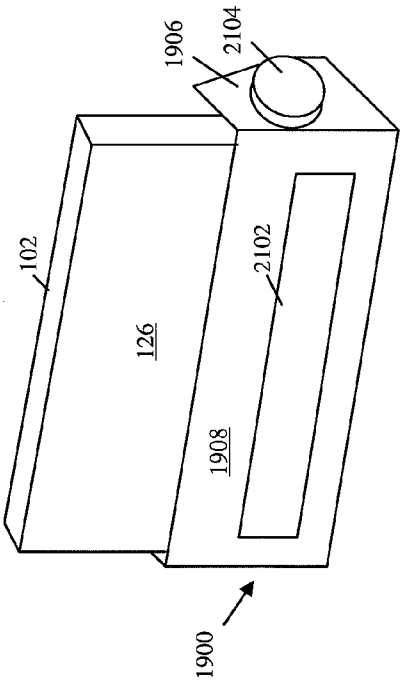


FIG. 21

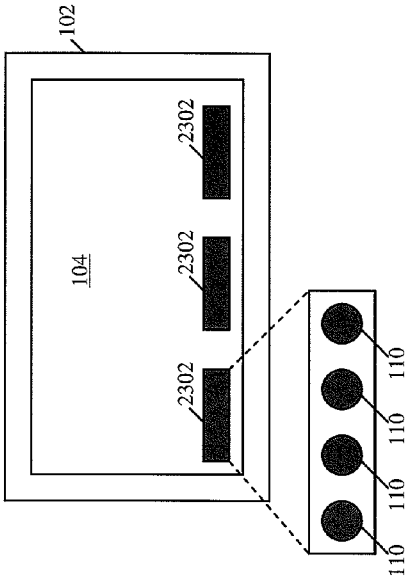


FIG. 23

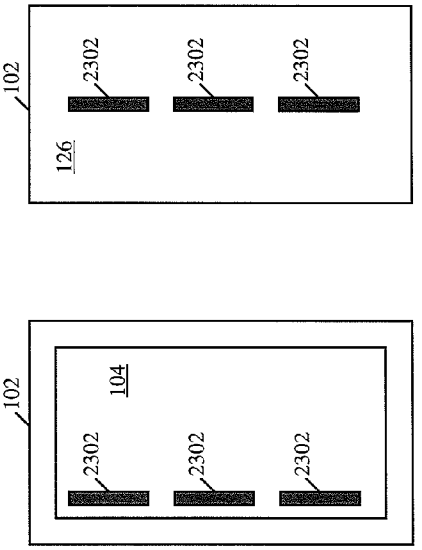


FIG. 24

FIG. 25

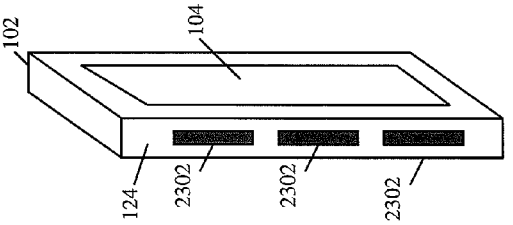


FIG. 26

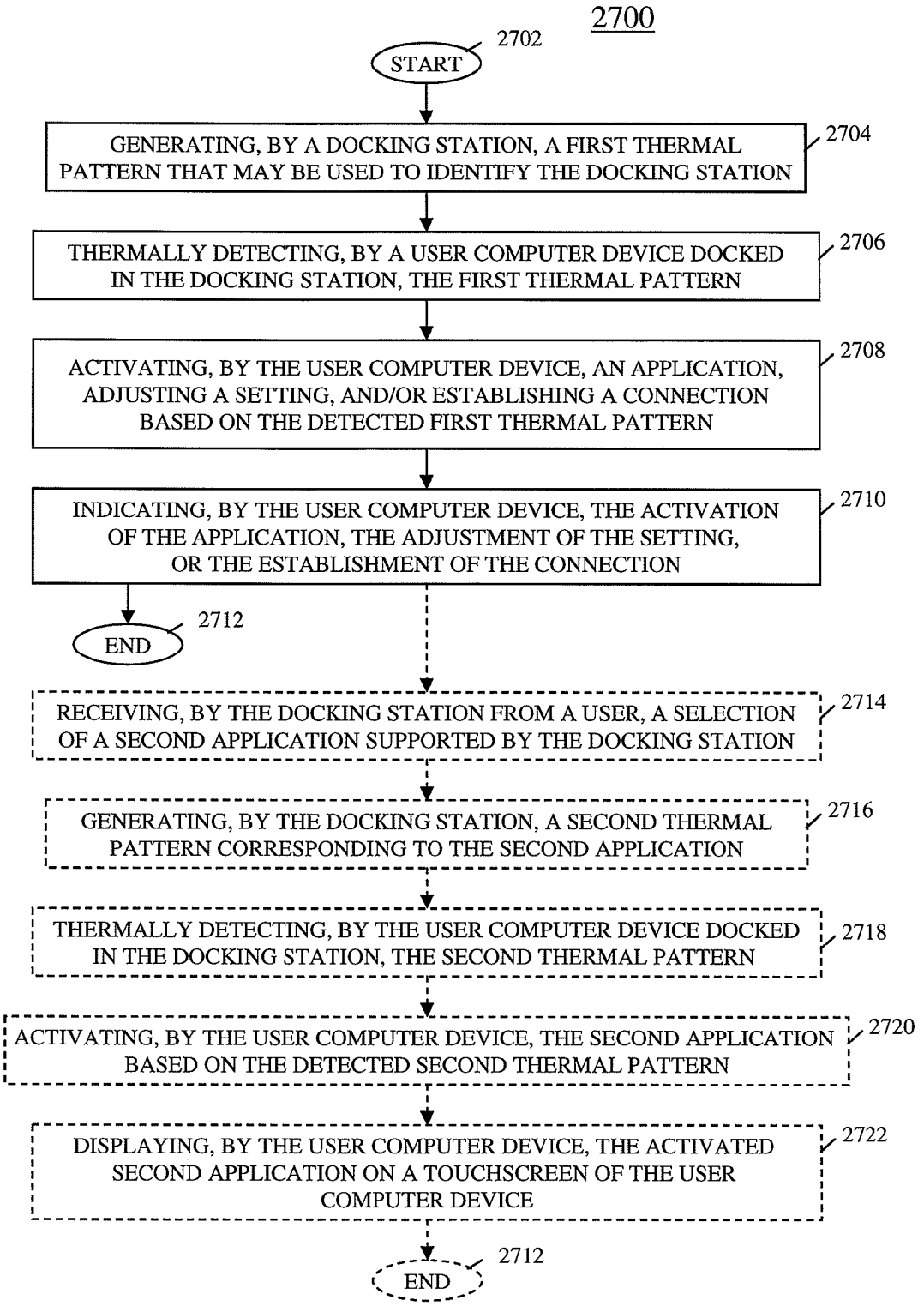

2700
START
2702
GENERATING, BY A DOCKING STATION, A FIRST THERMAL PATTERN THAT MAY BE USED TO IDENTIFY THE DOCKING STATION
2704
THERMALLY DETECTING, BY A USER COMPUTER DEVICE DOCKED IN THE DOCKING STATION, THE FIRST THERMAL PATTERN
2706
ACTIVATING, BY THE USER COMPUTER DEVICE, AN APPLICATION, ADJUSTING A SETTING, AND/OR ESTABLISHING A CONNECTION BASED ON THE DETECTED FIRST THERMAL PATTERN
2708
INDICATING, BY THE USER COMPUTER DEVICE, THE ACTIVATION OF THE APPLICATION, THE ADJUSTMENT OF THE SETTING, OR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CONNECTION
2710
END
2712
RECEIVING, BY THE DOCKING STATION FROM A USER, A SELECTION OF A SECOND APPLICATION SUPPORTED BY THE DOCKING STATION
2714
GENERATING, BY THE DOCKING STATION, A SECOND THERMAL PATTERN CORRESPONDING TO THE SECOND APPLICATION
2716
THERMALLY DETECTING, BY THE USER COMPUTER DEVICE DOCKED IN THE DOCKING STATION, THE SECOND THERMAL PATTERN
2718
ACTIVATING, BY THE USER COMPUTER DEVICE, THE SECOND APPLICATION BASED ON THE DETECTED SECOND THERMAL PATTERN
2720
DISPLAYING, BY THE USER COMPUTER DEVICE, THE ACTIVATED SECOND APPLICATION ON A TOUCHSCREEN OF THE USER COMPUTER DEVICE
2722
END
2712

FIG. 27

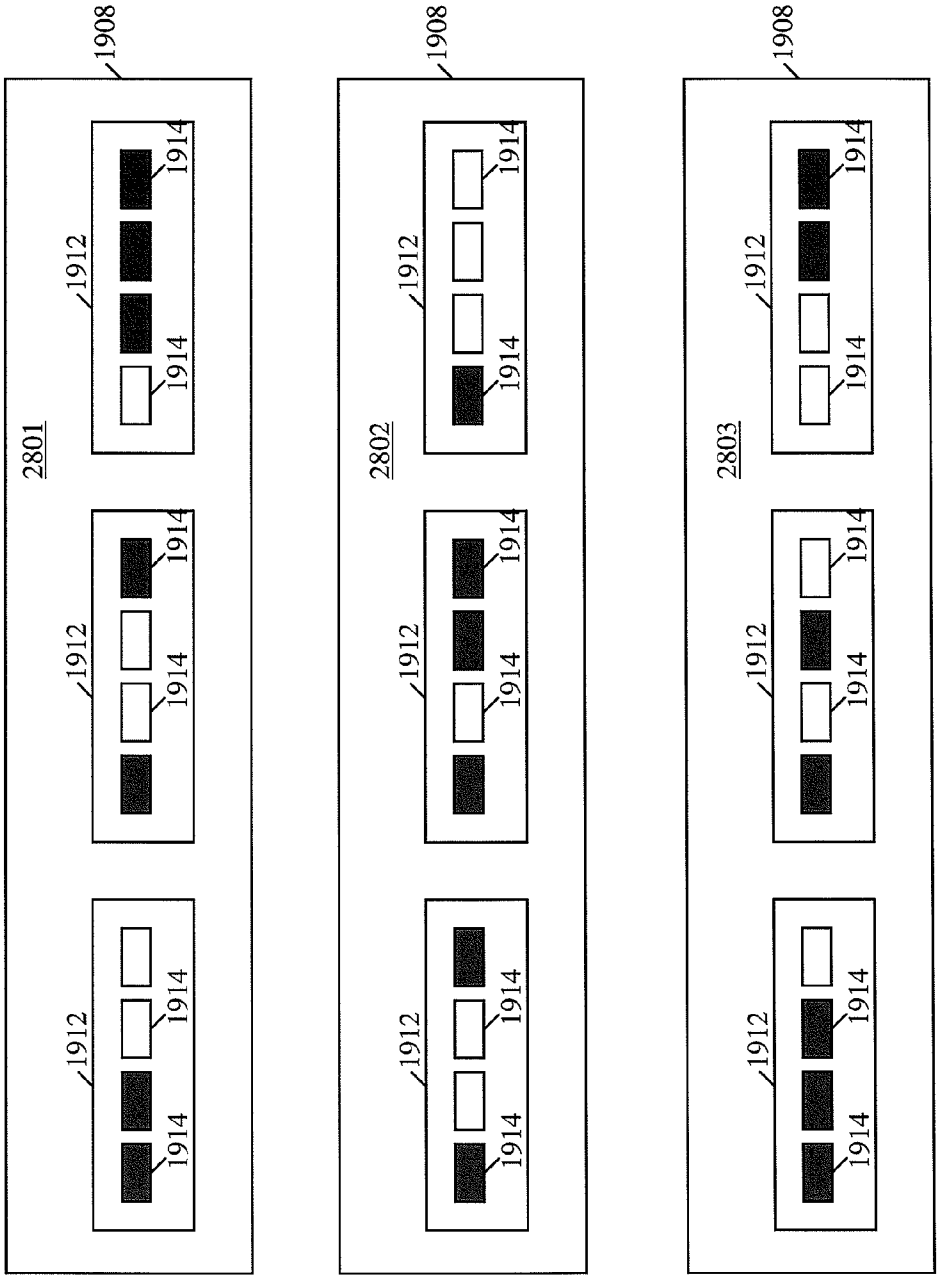


FIG. 28

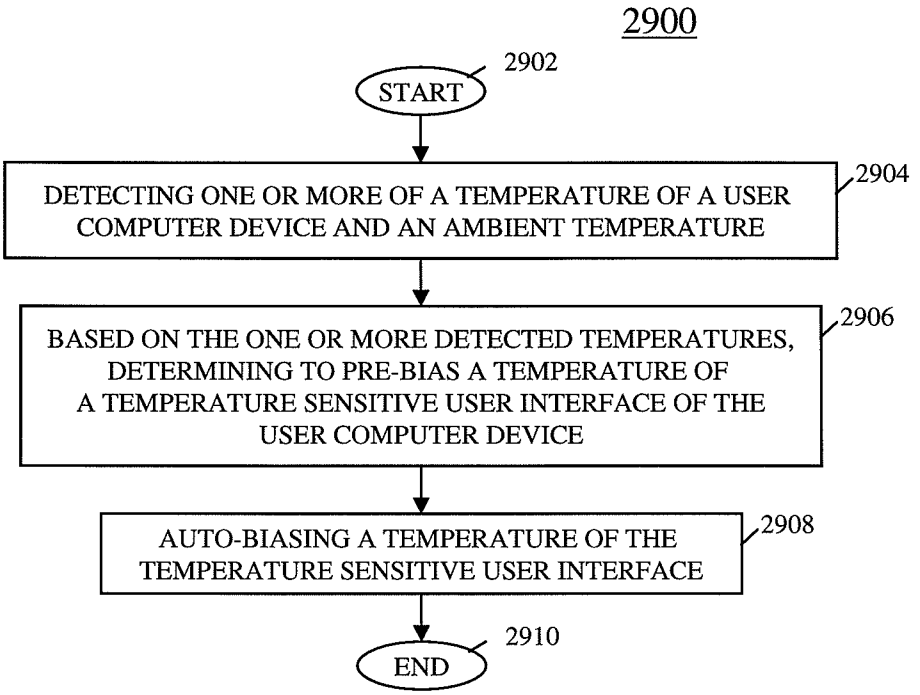

2900
2902
START
DETECTING ONE OR MORE OF A TEMPERATURE OF A USER COMPUTER DEVICE AND AN AMBIENT TEMPERATURE
2904
BASED ON THE ONE OR MORE DETECTED TEMPERATURES, DETERMINING TO PRE-BIAS A TEMPERATURE OF A TEMPERATURE SENSITIVE USER INTERFACE OF THE USER COMPUTER DEVICE
2906
AUTO-BIASING A TEMPERATURE OF THE TEMPERATURE SENSITIVE USER INTERFACE
2908
2910
END

FIG. 29

USER COMPUTER DEVICE WITH TEMPERATURE SENSING CAPABILITIES AND METHOD OF OPERATING SAME

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

This application is a continuation-in-part of, and claims priority from, U.S. patent application Ser. No. 12/774,509, entitled "MOBILE DEVICE WITH TEMPERATURE SENSING CAPABILITY AND METHOD OF OPERATING SAME," and filed May 5, 2010, and also claims priority from U.S. patent application Ser. No. 61/513,460, entitled "USER COMPUTER DEVICE WITH TEMPERATURE SENSING CAPABILITIES AND METHOD OF OPERATING SAME," and filed Jul. 29, 2011, which applications hereby are incorporated herein in their entirety. Further, this application is related to U.S. patent application Ser. Nos. 13/307,232 and 13/307,334 each entitled "USER COMPUTER DEVICE WITH TEMPERATURE SENSING CAPABILITIES AND METHOD OF OPERATING SAME," and each filed on the same date as this application.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates generally to user computer devices and, in particular, to a user computer device with a touchscreen having temperature sensing capabilities.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Mobile devices such as cellular telephones, smart phones and other handheld or portable electronic devices such as personal digital assistants (PDAs), headsets, MP3 players, etc. have become popular and ubiquitous. Such mobile devices now often include numerous different types of input devices and/or sensors that allow for the mobile device to sense/receive signals indicative of a variety of user commands and/or operational conditions. For example, many mobile devices now include not merely buttons that can be pressed by a user, but also input devices such as touch sensitive screens or navigation devices. Also, many mobile devices now include other sensors such as sensors that can detect incoming light signals such as infrared signals, as well as sensors that sense position or movement of the mobile device including, for example, accelerometers.

The operational conditions or context of a mobile device can be of interest for a variety of reasons. Yet, despite the number of different types of input devices/sensors that are already implemented in conventional mobile devices, there still remain a variety of operational conditions that cannot be easily detected, or detected at all, by way of such existing input devices/sensors. Indeed, the use of conventional input devices/sensors can be impeded by particular circumstances so as to preclude accurate determinations regarding certain types of operational conditions.

Therefore, for the above reasons, it would be advantageous if mobile device(s) could be developed that had improved capabilities in terms of detecting one or more mobile device operational conditions and providing support for such improved detection capabilities.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. **1** is a block diagram of a user computer device in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. **2** is a cross-sectional side view of the user computer device of FIG. **1** in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. **3** is a block diagram of an exemplary user computer device in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. **4** is an electrical schematic diagram of the user computer device of FIG. **1** in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. **5** is a schematic diagram of an exemplary layout of multiple thermal energy emitter/detector devices of a temperature sensitive user interface associated with the touchscreen of the user computer device of FIG. **1** in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. **6** is an exemplary layout of the temperature sensitive user interface associated with a touchcreen of the user computer device of FIG. **1** in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention.

FIGS. **7** and **8** are front perspective views of two further exemplary layouts of the temperature sensitive user interface associated with the touchscreen of the user computer device of FIG. **1** in accordance with other embodiments of the present invention.

FIG. **9** is a logic flow diagram illustrating how physical images may be thermally generated and displayed on the temperature sensitive user interface of the user computer device of FIG. **1** in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention.

FIGS. **10** and **11** depict exemplary physical images that may be thermally generated and displayed on the temperature sensitive touchscreen of the user computer device of FIG. **1** in accordance with various embodiments of the present invention.

FIGS. **12** and **13** are block diagrams depicting a display of exemplary thermally generated physical images on the temperature sensitive touchscreen of the user computer device of FIG. **1** in accordance with various embodiments of the present invention.

FIG. **14** is a block diagram depicting a thermal transfer of a thermally generated physical image from the temperature sensitive touchscreen of the user computer device of FIG. **1** to a temperature sensitive touchscreen of another user computer device in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention.

FIGS. **15** and **16** are block diagrams depicting a thermal transfer of an exemplary thermally generated physical image from the temperature sensitive touchscreen of the user computer device of FIG. **1** to temperature sensitive paper in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. **17** is a logic flow diagram illustrating a thermal authentication by the user computer device of FIG. **1** in accordance with various embodiments of the present invention.

FIG. **18** is a block diagram illustrating multiple exemplary thermal authentication patterns that may be employed by the temperature sensitive user interface of the user computer device of FIG. **1** to perform thermal authentication in accordance with various embodiments of the present invention.

FIG. **19** is a front perspective view of a thermal energy docking station in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. **20** is a block diagram of the thermal energy docking station of FIG. **19** in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. **21** is an exemplary rear perspective view of the user computer device of FIG. **1** docked in the thermal energy docking station of FIG. **19** in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. **22** is an exemplary front perspective view of the user computer device of FIG. **1** docked in the thermal energy docking station of FIG. **19** in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention.

FIGS. **23** to **26** are block diagrams of the user computer device of FIG. **1** that illustrate exemplary distributions of multiple temperature sensing regions of the temperature sensitive user interface of the user computer device in accordance with various embodiments of the present invention.

FIG. **27** is a logic flow diagram illustrating thermal recognition of a docking station and user interface setting and control by the user computer device of FIG. **1** in accordance with various embodiments of the present invention.

FIG. **28** is a block diagram illustrating multiple exemplary thermal patterns that may be employed by the thermal energy docking station of FIG. **19** in accordance with various embodiments of the present invention.

FIG. **29** is a logic flow diagram illustrating a pre-tuning of the temperature sensitive user interface of the user computer device of FIG. **1** in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention.

One of ordinary skill in the art will appreciate that elements in the figures are illustrated for simplicity and clarity and have not necessarily been drawn to scale. For example, the dimensions of some of the elements in the figures may be exaggerated relative to other elements to help improve understanding of various embodiments of the present invention. Also, common and well-understood elements that are useful or necessary in a commercially feasible embodiment are often not depicted in order to facilitate a less obstructed view of these various embodiments of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

To address the need for a mobile device that had improved capabilities in terms of detecting one or more mobile device operational conditions and providing support for improved detection capabilities, a user computer device, such as a mobile device, is provided that comprises a temperature sensitive touchscreen having a temperature sensitive user interface comprising multiple thermal energy emitter/detector devices, such as thermocouples. The multiple thermal energy emitter/detector devices are capable both of detecting thermal energy and generating thermal energy. The temperature sensitive user interface generates thermal patterns that may be transferred to other thermally sensitive electronic devices or that may be used to authenticate the user computer device. The user computer device also can detect and thermally communicate with a thermal energy docking station and, based on thermal recognition, activate applications displayed on the temperature sensitive touchscreen. Further, the user computer device can auto-bias a temperature of the temperature sensitive user interface in order to better assure proper operation of the temperature sensitive user interface in all operating conditions.

Generally, an embodiment of the present invention encompasses a method for thermal information transfer by a user computer device comprising a housing and a temperature sensitive touchscreen having a plurality of thermal energy emitter/detector devices. The method includes determining a thermal pattern to be thermally transferred, activating one or more thermal energy emitter/detector devices, of the plurality of thermal energy emitter/detector devices, corresponding to the thermal pattern, producing, by the activated one or more thermal energy emitter/detector devices, the thermal pattern on one or more of the touchscreen and the housing, and thermally transferring the produced thermal pattern to another temperature sensitive touchscreen.

Another embodiment of the present invention comprises a method for thermal authentication of a user computer device. The method includes retrieving an authentication pattern to be thermally generated on a temperature sensitive touchscreen, activating, in a temperature sensitive user interface, only thermal energy emitter/detector devices corresponding to the authentication pattern, and thermally generating, by the activated thermal energy emitter/detector devices, the authentication pattern in the thermally sensitive touchscreen.

Yet another embodiment of the present invention comprises a method for thermal recognition of an external accessory device that may be used in conjunction with a user computer device. The method includes detecting, by the user computer device, a thermal pattern that identifies the external accessory device, in response to detecting the thermal pattern and based on the detected thermal pattern, performing one or more of: activating, by the user computer device, an application corresponding to the detected thermal pattern adjusting, by the user computer device, an operational setting of the user computer device, such as brightness, volume, touch sensitivity, feature priority, and establishing a wireless connectivity, such as a Bluetooth or WiFi connectivity with a detected Bluetooth or WiFi device, based on the detected thermal pattern, and executing, by the user computer device, the one or more of the activated application, the adjusted setting, and the establishment of the wireless connectivity.

Still another embodiment of the present invention comprises a method for biasing a temperature of a temperature sensitive user interface of a user computer device, the method including detecting one or more of a temperature of the user computer device and an ambient temperature, determining to pre-bias the temperature sensitive user interface based on the detected one or more temperatures, and, in response to determining to pre-bias the temperature sensitive user interface, auto-biasing a temperature of the temperature sensitive user interface.

Yet another embodiment of the present invention encompasses a user computer device that includes a housing, an at least one memory device that maintains at least one thermal pattern, a touchscreen comprising a temperature sensitive user interface having a plurality of thermal energy emitter/detector devices, and a processor coupled to the touchscreen and the at least one memory device and that is configured to determine to transfer a thermal pattern of the at least one thermal pattern and activate one or more thermal energy emitter/detector devices, of the plurality of plurality of thermal energy emitter/detector devices, corresponding to the thermal pattern, wherein the activated thermal energy emitter/detector devices produce the thermal pattern on one or more of the touchscreen and the housing.

Still another embodiment of the present invention comprises a user computer device that includes an at least one memory device that maintains an authentication pattern, a touchscreen comprising a temperature sensitive user interface having a plurality of thermal energy emitter/detector devices, a processor coupled to the touchscreen and the at least one memory device and that is configured to retrieve the authentication pattern, activate, in the temperature sensitive user interface, only thermal energy emitter/detector devices corresponding to the authentication pattern, and wherein the activated thermal energy emitter/detector devices thermally generate the authentication pattern in the thermally sensitive touchscreen.

Yet another embodiment of the present invention comprises a user computer device that is capable of thermally

recognizing an external accessory device. The user computer device comprises a housing, an at least one memory device that maintains a thermal pattern that identifies the external accessory device, a temperature sensitive user interface having a plurality of thermal energy emitter/detector devices, and a processor that is coupled to the housing, the at least one memory device, and the temperature sensitive user interface and that is configured to detect, via the temperature sensitive user interface, the at least one thermal pattern that identifies the external accessory device, in response to detecting the thermal pattern and based on the detected thermal pattern, perform one or more of: activating an application corresponding to the detected thermal pattern, adjusting an operational setting of the user computer device, and establishing a wireless connectivity with the external accessory device, and execute the one or more of the activated application, the adjusted setting, or the establishment of the wireless connectivity.

Still another embodiment of the present invention comprises an electronic device for thermally interfacing with a user computer device. The electronic device includes a thermal energy interface that is configured to exchange thermal energy with the user computer device and a processor coupled to the thermal energy interface that is configured to one or more of generate a thermal pattern in the thermal energy interface that may be detected by the user computer device and detect a thermal pattern emitted by the user computer device.

Still another embodiment of the present invention comprises a user computer device that auto-biases a temperature sensitive user interface. The a user computer device includes a housing, a temperature sensitive user interface having a plurality of thermal energy devices that are configured to one or more of emit thermal energy and detect thermal energy, and a processor coupled to the temperature sensitive user interface that is configured to detect one or more of a temperature of the user computer device and an ambient temperature, determine to pre-bias the temperature sensitive user interface based on the detected one or more temperatures, and in response to determining to pre-bias the temperature sensitive user interface, based on the ambient temperature, auto-bias a temperature of the temperature sensitive user interface.

Turning now to the drawings, the present invention may be more fully described with reference to FIGS. **1-29**. FIG. **1** is a block diagram of an exemplary user computer device **102** in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. User computer device **102** may be any user computer device that allows a user to input instructions to the device via a touchscreen **104** and, optionally, may be capable of sending and receiving communication signals on a wireless network. Preferably, user computer device **102** is a wireless mobile device, such as a cellular telephone, a radio telephone, a smart phone, or a personal digital assistant (PDA), a laptop computer or a tablet computer with radio frequency (RF) capabilities, or any other handheld or portable electronic device with a user interface comprising a touchscreen **104** that allows a user to input instructions into the user computer device; however, user computer device **102** may be any type of user computer device, such as a personal computer or a laptop or tablet computer without wireless capabilities, that has a user interface that includes a temperature sensitive touchscreen. User computer device further comprises a housing **120** with a front side **122** that includes touchscreen **104**, side edges **124**, and a back side **126**.

Referring now to FIGS. **1** and **2**, touchscreen **104** is a 'temperature sensitive' touchscreen that includes a touchscreen panel **106**, typically an insulator such as glass or plastic, and a thermal interface, that is, a temperature sensitive user interface **108**. Temperature sensitive user interface **108** includes thermal energy emitter/detector componentry that allows for detection of a temperature differential existing between different locations on temperature sensitive user interface **108**. The thermal energy emitter/detector componentry more particularly includes multiple thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110** positioned proximate to, or embedded in, panel **106** of touchscreen **104**. As will be described further below, each of thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110** may, based on a detected thermal energy, generate electrical signals that are indicative of the temperatures detected at the thermal energy emitter/detector device. The multiple thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110** also, or instead, may be capable of generating and emitting thermal energy, for example, in response to application of a voltage to the device, which emitted thermal energy may be sensed by a user of user computer device **102** or by an external accessory designed to do so, for example, other user computer devices, thermal sensitive paper, or a user computer device thermal docking station as described below. For example, each thermal energy emitter/detector device **110** may be a thermocouple junction capable of generating a voltage in response to detection, by the device, thermal energy and generating thermal energy in response to application, to the device, of a voltage.

By virtue of processing performed by user computer device **102** utilizing the information communicated by way of thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110**, and more particularly, electrical signals generated by the thermal energy emitter/detector devices that reflect detected temperatures, the user computer device is able to sense a temperature differential existing between the temperatures sensed by different sensing devices (or different groups of sensing devices) which is indicative of a temperature differential existing between the locations of those different sensing devices (or groups of sensing devices). This temperature differential information then may used in combination with other information obtained via other types of sensors by user computer device **102** to determine/predict an operational condition or context of the user computer device.

User computer device **102** further may include a layer of thermally sensitive film or ink **112** proximate to temperature sensitive user interface **108** and thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110**. In one embodiment of the present invention, an activating of thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110** causes the devices to generate thermal energy, in turn causing a heating up of the thermally sensitive film or ink **112** proximate to the heated up thermal energy emitter/detector devices, thereby producing an image and/or color change in the film or ink corresponding to the heated up devices, which image may be displayed to a user of the user computer device. However, temperature sensitive user interface **108** need not be restricted to areas of user computer device **102** proximate to touchscreen **104**. For example, housing **120** also, or instead, may include the layer of thermally sensitive film or ink **112**, such as a thermochromic film. As described in greater detail below, temperature sensitive user interface **108** may be located proximate to any outer surface of user computer device **102**, that is, proximate to, or included in, any part of housing **120**. An activation of temperature sensitive user interface **108**, and in particular thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110** of the temperature sensitive user interface, proximate to any part of housing **120** then may produce an image and/or color change in the thermally sensitive film or ink associated with the housing and corresponding to the heated up devices.

Touchscreen **104** further may include a touch-detecting non-temperature-based user interface **114**, such as a capacitive user interface, a resistive user interface, a pressure-sensitive user interface, an optical user interface, or any other user interface that may occur to one of ordinary skill in the art that detects a position of a user's touch on a basis other than temperature, and an active visual display user interface **116** that is implemented using any of multiple well-known backlit display technologies, such as but not limited to a liquid crystal display (LCD), a light emitting diode (LED) display, an organic LED (OLED) display, a plasma display, e-ink, or any other well-known backlit display technology, that displays visual images on touchscreen **104** to a user of the user computer device **102**. One may note that the layers of user interfaces depicted in FIG. **2** are provided merely for the purpose of illustrating the principles of the present invention and are not intended to limit touchscreen **104** to the order depicted and that the layering may be in any order and/or may be intermixed.

Referring now to FIGS. **3-5**, block diagrams are depicted of user computer device **102** in accordance with various embodiments of the present invention. Referring first to FIG. **3**, user computer device **102** includes a processor **302** such as one or more microprocessors, microcontrollers, digital signal processors (DSPs), combinations thereof or such other devices known to those having ordinary skill in the art. The particular operations/functions of processor **302**, and respectively thus of user computer device **102**, are determined by an execution of software instructions and routines that are stored in an at least one memory device **304** associated with the processor, such as random access memory (RAM), dynamic random access memory (DRAM), and/or read only memory (ROM) or equivalents thereof, that store data and programs that may be executed by the corresponding processor. However, one of ordinary skill in the art realizes that the operations/functions of processor **302** alternatively may be implemented in hardware, for example, integrated circuits (ICs), application specific integrated circuits (ASICs), a programmable logic device such as a PLD, PLA, FPGA or PAL, and the like, implemented in the user computer device. Based on the present disclosure, one skilled in the art will be readily capable of producing and implementing such software and/or hardware without undo experimentation. Unless otherwise indicated, the functions described herein as being performed by user computer device **102** are performed by processor **302**.

At least one memory device **304** further maintains multiple applications that may be executed by processor **302**, such as a calendar application, a navigational application, an email application, a music application, a video application, a video game application, and a social network application. In addition, At least one memory device **304** may maintain, in association with each such application, a thermal pattern that identifies the application. By communicating the thermal pattern to the user communication device, a user or external device is able to instruct the user communication device to retrieve the associated application and to execute the retrieved application by processor **302**.

User computer device **102** further includes a user interface **308** and, optionally, one or more of a transceiver **310**, a location determination module **316**, and a wireline interface **320**, for example, a USB (Universal Serial Bus) port, that are each coupled to processor **302**. Transceiver **310** includes at least one wireless receiver (not shown) and at least one wireless transmitter (not shown) for receiving and transmitting wireless signals, such a radio frequency (RF) signals and/or short-range signals such as Bluetooth signals. Location determination module **316**, such as a GPS (Global Positioning Satellite) module comprising a GPS receiver, a module that determines a position based on triangulation of received WiFi or base station signals, or any other location positioning method/module known in the art, determines a geographical location of the user computer device. User interface **308** includes a display screen that comprises 'thermally sensitive' touchscreen **104**, and further may include a keypad, buttons, a touch pad, a joystick, an additional display, or any other device useful for providing an interface between a user and an electronic device such as user computer device **102**.

User computer device **102** further includes a touchscreen driver **306** that is maintained in at least one memory device **304** and that is executed by processor **302**, and temperature sensors **312** and other sensors **314**, for example, an ambient light sensor, an accelerometer, a gyroscope, and any other sensor, and in particular operational setting sensor, known in the art that may be included in a user computer device, such as a handheld or portable electronic device, in communication with the processor. Processor **302** detects images sensed by temperature sensitive user interface **108** and touch-detecting non-temperature-based interface **114**, and controls images displayed by the temperature sensitive user interface and by active visual display user interface **116**, based on programs and data associated with touchscreen driver **306**.

To the extent FIG. **3** is intended to show the internal components of user computer device **102**, the temperature sensors **312** include thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110**. Depending upon the embodiment, temperature sensors **312** can include any arbitrary number of thermal energy emitter/detector devices, and the temperature sensors can include a variety of different types of thermal energy emitter/detector devices. With respect to the other sensors **314**, these can include any one or more of a variety of different types of sensors. In the present embodiment, the other sensors **314** can include a capacitive touch sensor and/or a resistive touch sensor or any other type of touch-sensitive component that are included in touch-detecting non-temperature-based user interface **114**. User computer device **102** also includes a power supply **318**, such as a power converter for interfacing with a power outlet or a limited life power supply such as a removable and/or rechargeable battery, for providing power to the other internal components **302**, **304**, **308**, **310**, **312**, **314**, and **316** of user computer device **102**.

Touchscreen driver **306** comprises data and programs that control an operation of touchscreen **104**, such as sensing a temperature change in temperature sensitive user interface **108** of the touchscreen and determining a location of a touch on the touchscreen, and that may reconfigure an operation of the touchscreen as described in greater detail below. In addition to being a temperature sensitive touchscreen, touchscreen **104** also may be a 'capacitive' touchscreen as is known in the art. For example, touchscreen panel **106**, typically an insulator such as glass, may be coated, on an inner surface, with touch-detecting non-temperature-based user interface **114** comprising a transparent electrical conductor, such as indium tin oxide (ITO). In other examples of a capacitive touchscreen, touch-detecting non-temperature-based user interface **114** may comprise a grid-type pattern of metallic electrodes that may be embedded in touchscreen panel **106** or etched in a conductor coupled to an inner surface of the touchscreen panel or printed on a carrier material, such as any of various known optically clear ITO coated transparent, conductive film products, for example, an ITO on a PET (polyethylene terephthalate) carrier (ITOPET). The electrical conductor is, in turn, coupled processor **302** and is controlled by touchscreen driver **306**. Touching the outer, uncoated surface of touchscreen panel **106** with an electrical conductor, such as

a human body or a capacitive stylus, results in a change in an electrostatic field and a corresponding change in capacitance that is detected by touchscreen driver **306**.

As noted above, touchscreen **104** is a temperature sensitive touchscreen, for example, as described in U.S. patent application Ser. No. 12/774,509, entitled "Mobile Device with Temperature Sensing Capability and Method of Operating Same," and filed on May 5, 2010, and which description of a thermally sensitive mobile device touchscreen is hereby incorporated herein. Temperature sensitive user interface **108** may be proximate to an inner surface of touchscreen panel **106** or may be embedded in the panel. For example, the multiple thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110** may be embedded in, or may be attached to on an inner surface of, the touchscreen panel. Thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110** are devices that sense an applied temperature and output an indication of the sensed temperature, such as a thermocouple formed by a respective junction of first and second types of materials, for example, a Indium Tin Oxide ($InSnO_4$) ceramic material (ITO) and a Indium Tin Oxide Manganese ceramic material (ITO:Mn), and may be distributed throughout temperature sensitive user interface **108**, and correspondingly throughout touchscreen **104** (and in a different plane, that is, above or below, the capacitive user interface associate with the touchscreen, or may be intermixed with the capacitive user interface).

Certain thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110** may be linked to each other by a graphite strip or other thermally-conductive strip so as to maintain the thermal energy emitter/detector devices at a same or substantially a same temperature, which temperature may be set at a temperature level different from that of an item that will touch touchscreen **104**, such as an exposed finger, a gloved finger, or a stylus. Thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110** also may be electrically connected in series to enhance touch sensitivity as well as to enable differential drive functionality. Junctions connected in series result in alternating junction polarities due to thermocouple conductor type order. Junctions in phase are grouped together for additive response and those with opposite polarities are separated and in some cases used to drive opposing device sides for differential response. In yet other cases, opposing polarity junctions are kept at a known and same temperature for reference and are enabled by applying a Graphite type material in their vicinity. By grouping same polarity junctions, touch sensitivity is enhanced. As a result, when two of the thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110** that share a same polarity each experience a same temperature, the voltages generated by the thermal energy emitter/detector devices all tend to increase (or decrease) generally uniformly and tend to be additive, and the resulting output voltage experienced at terminals connected to the thermal energy emitter/detector devices (which voltage is, in turn, read by processor **302** implementing touchscreen driver **306**) will be the sum of the contributions from those thermal energy emitter/detector devices. Whereas when two of the thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110** that are of opposite polarity each experience a same temperature, a voltage increase (or decrease) generated by one of the temperature sensing device due to the particular temperature will tend to be offset by a corresponding voltage increase (or decrease) generated by the other of the temperature sensing device. Thus processor **302** is able to determine a location of a touch based on temperature differentials.

Turning to FIG. **4**, an electrical schematic diagram **400** is provided showing how signals from thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110** can be processed to derive a differential temperature signal, as well as how that differential temperature signal can be processed along with other signals from other supporting sensors **314**, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. As shown, two thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110** (depicted in FIG. **4** as thermal energy emitter/detector devices $\mathbf{110}_A$ and $\mathbf{110}_B$) are coupled in series between an inverting input **452** and a non-inverting input **454** of an operational amplifier **456**. More particularly, a first lead **412** of a first temperature sensing device $\mathbf{110}_A$ of the two thermal energy emitter/detector devices $\mathbf{110}_A$ and $\mathbf{110}_B$, is coupled to the inverting input **452**, a first lead **422** of a second temperature sensing device $\mathbf{110}_B$ of the two thermal energy emitter/detector devices $\mathbf{110}_A$ and $\mathbf{110}_B$ is coupled to the non-inverting input **454**, and a second lead **414** of the first temperature sensing device $\mathbf{110}_A$ is coupled to a second lead **424** of the second temperature sensing device $\mathbf{110}_B$. In response to input signals, for example, voltage or current signals, generated by the first and second thermal energy emitter/detector devices (or groups of devices) $\mathbf{110}_A$, $\mathbf{110}_B$, operational amplifier **456** generates an output signal at output terminal **458** that is proportional to the differential between the two input signals and thus proportional to the difference in temperatures experienced by the two thermal energy emitter/detector devices $\mathbf{110}_A$,$\mathbf{110}_B$.

Additionally as shown in FIG. **4**, the differential temperature output signal provided at output terminal **458** is sent to processor **302** by way of a communication link **460** (although not shown, an analog-to-digital converter can be provided as part of communication link **460** between output terminal **458** and processor **302** so that the differential temperature output signal is in digital form when provided to processor **302**). In addition to receiving the differential temperature output signal, processor **302** also receives one or more signals from one or more other sensors **314**, for example, by way of additional communication links **432** and **434**, respectively. It should be further noted that, while for simplicity of illustration, in FIG. **3** the temperature sensing circuitry depicted in FIG. **4** are all considered to be part of temperature sensors **312** (along with the thermal energy emitter/detector devices $\mathbf{110}_A$ and $\mathbf{110}_B$), in other embodiments such devices/components other than the specific components that sense temperature can be considered to be distinct from the temperature sensors, and can be located physically apart from the temperature sensors. For example, the operational amplifier **456** can, in another embodiment, be considered part of the processor **302**. Depending upon the signals provided to it from the temperature sensors **312** and the other sensors **314**, processor **302** can determine a variety of operational conditions/contexts as will be discussed in further detail below.

Referring now to FIG. **5**, a schematic diagram is provided of an exemplary layout of multiple thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110** as can be arranged on user computer device **102** in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. As illustrated by FIG. **5**, each of multiple thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110**, depicted in FIG. **5** as thermal energy emitter/detector devices $\mathbf{110}_1$-$\mathbf{110}_8$ (eight shown; however, any quantity is possible), is a thermocouple formed by a respective junction of an ITO lead and an ITO:Mn lead, and these leads are all interconnected in a manner by which all of the thermal energy emitter/detector devices $\mathbf{110}_1$-$\mathbf{110}_8$ are connected in series between a first terminal **550** and a second terminal **552**. Further as shown, the first and second terminals **550** and **552** respectively are coupled to respective copper wires **554**, **556** that are surrounded by a flexible plastic sheathe **558** so as to form a two-wire flex link. Although shown in cut-away, it will be understood that the copper wires **554**, **556** and sheathe **558** extend away from the terminals **550**, **552** and allow those terminals to be coupled to other

components (for example, to an operational amplifier that is, in turn, coupled to processor **302**).

More particularly as shown, the first terminal **550**, an ITO lead, is linked to a first temperature sensing device $\mathbf{110}_1$ of the multiple thermal energy emitter/detector devices $\mathbf{110}_1$-$\mathbf{110}_8$ by way of a first ITO lead **520**, and that temperature sensing device is, in turn, linked to a second temperature sensing device $\mathbf{110}_2$ of the multiple thermal energy emitter/detector devices $\mathbf{110}_1$-$\mathbf{110}_8$ by way of a first ITO:Mn lead **530**. A second ITO lead **522** extends from the second temperature sensing device $\mathbf{110}_2$ to a third temperature sensing device $\mathbf{110}_3$ the multiple thermal energy emitter/detector devices $\mathbf{110}_1$-$\mathbf{110}_8$, and a second ITO:Mn lead **532** links the third temperature sensing device $\mathbf{110}_3$ to a fourth temperature sensing device $\mathbf{110}_4$ of the multiple thermal energy emitter/detector devices $\mathbf{110}_1$-$\mathbf{110}_8$. A third ITO lead **524** in turn links the fourth temperature sensing device $\mathbf{110}_4$ to a fifth temperature sensing device $\mathbf{110}_5$ of the multiple thermal energy emitter/detector devices $\mathbf{110}_1$-$\mathbf{110}_8$, which then is connected to a sixth temperature sensing device $\mathbf{110}_6$ of the multiple thermal energy emitter/detector devices $\mathbf{110}_1$-$\mathbf{110}_8$ by way of a third ITO:Mn lead **534**. The sixth temperature sensing device $\mathbf{110}_6$ is, in turn, connected to a seventh temperature sensing device $\mathbf{110}_7$ of the multiple thermal energy emitter/detector devices $\mathbf{110}_1$-$\mathbf{110}_8$ by way of a fourth ITO lead **526**. Finally the seventh temperature sensing device $\mathbf{110}_7$ is connected to an eighth temperature sensing device $\mathbf{110}_8$ by way of a fourth ITO:Mn lead **536**. The eighth temperature sensing device $\mathbf{110}_8$ is linked, by way of a fifth ITO lead **528**, to the second terminal **552**, which is also an ITO lead.

In implementing thermocouple-type thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110**, the manner in which each temperature sensing device **110** is interconnected with other components (and the correspondent polarity of the device relative to other components) often is of significance in implementing the temperature sensing device, particularly where multiple thermal energy emitter/detector devices of this type are connected in series. For example, in an embodiment in which there are two thermocouple-type thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110** that are interconnected as shown in FIG. **4**, it is typical that the respective polarities of the thermal energy emitter/detector devices/thermocouples will be oppositely-orientated so as to allow for differential temperature sensing. Given such an orientation, assuming that the two thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110** each experience the same temperature, a voltage increase (or decrease) generated by one of the thermal energy emitter/detector devices due to the particular temperature will tend to be offset by a corresponding voltage increase (or decrease) generated by the other of the thermal energy emitter/detector devices. Alternatively, assuming that there is a temperature differential between the two thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110** such that the two devices output different voltages, the difference between those voltages will be experienced by an operational amplifier across terminals **550** and **552**.

The embodiment of user computer device **102** depicted in FIG. **5** is an exemplary embodiment in which multiple thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110** are distributed at three different general regions along an inner surface of touchscreen **104** of the user computer device. Notwithstanding the fact that more than two thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110** are employed and coupled together in series, it is possible to obtain meaningful temperature information because of the particular manner in which the thermal energy emitter/detector devices are interconnected. As will be noticed from FIG. **5**, each of the thermal energy emitter/detector devices $\mathbf{110}_2$, $\mathbf{110}_4$, $\mathbf{110}_6$, and $\mathbf{110}_8$ that are located proximate a bottom edge **562** of touchscreen **104** are formed by the intersection of a respective one of the ITO:Mn leads **530**, **532**, **534**, **536** extending away from the respective temperature sensing device generally upwardly (that is, towards a top edge **566** of user computer device **102**) and a respective ITO lead **522**, **524**, **526**, **528** that extends away from each of those respective thermal energy emitter/detector devices also generally upwardly but to the right of the respective ITO lead for that temperature sensing device (except in the case of the eighth temperature sensing device $\mathbf{110}_8$, from which the ITO lead **528** extends downwardly (that is, towards the bottom edge **562** of user computer device **102**)) and to the left. By comparison, each of the first and seventh thermal energy emitter/detector devices $\mathbf{110}_1$, $\mathbf{110}_7$ towards a midregion **564** of touchscreen **104** is connected to a respective one of the ITO leads **520**, **526** extending away from that temperature sensing device generally downwardly and also to one of the ITO:Mn leads **530**, **536** extending generally downwardly and to the right of the respective ITO lead for that device (it is the same for the third and fifth thermal energy emitter/detector devices $\mathbf{110}_3$, $\mathbf{110}_5$ near the top edge **566** of touchscreen **104**).

Given this type of configuration, the second, fourth, sixth, and eighth thermal energy emitter/detector devices $\mathbf{110}_2$, $\mathbf{110}_4$, $\mathbf{110}_6$, and $\mathbf{110}_8$ all share a first polarity, while the first, third, fifth, and seventh thermal energy emitter/detector devices $\mathbf{110}_1$, $\mathbf{110}_3$, $\mathbf{110}_5$, and $\mathbf{110}_7$ all share a second polarity that is opposite the first polarity. Consequently, should a high temperature be experienced generally along the bottom region of the mobile device **562** proximate the sensing devices $\mathbf{110}_2$, $\mathbf{110}_4$, $\mathbf{110}_6$, and $\mathbf{110}_8$, the voltages generated by those respective thermal energy emitter/detector devices all tend to increase (or decrease) generally uniformly and tend to be additive, and the resulting output voltage experienced at the terminals **550** and **552** will be the sum of the contributions from those four sensing devices. Such reinforcing behavior of the thermal energy emitter/detector devices $\mathbf{110}_2$, $\mathbf{110}_4$, $\mathbf{110}_6$, and $\mathbf{110}_8$ is particularly facilitated by the presence of the graphite strip **570**. Likewise, if a particular temperature is experienced along the top edge **566** or the midregion **564**, then the pairs of thermal energy emitter/detector devices $\mathbf{110}_3/\mathbf{110}_5$ and $\mathbf{110}_1/\mathbf{110}_7$ at those respective locations will tend to generate voltages that are additive and reinforcing of one another, and the resulting output voltage experienced at the terminals **550**, **552** will be the sum of the contributions of any one or more of those thermal energy emitter/detector devices.

It should be noted that the configuration of FIG. **5** is reflective of certain assumptions regarding the operation of user computer device **102**. In particular, the arrangement of the multiple thermal energy emitter/detector devices $\mathbf{110}_1$-$\mathbf{110}_8$ presumes that it is unlikely that a user will touch (that is, apply heat proximate to) both one or more of the thermal energy emitter/detector devices $\mathbf{110}_2$, $\mathbf{110}_4$, $\mathbf{110}_6$, and $\mathbf{110}_8$ near the bottom edge **562** while at the same time touch one or more of the thermal energy emitter/detector devices $\mathbf{110}_1$, $\mathbf{110}_3$, $\mathbf{110}_5$, and $\mathbf{110}_7$ at the midregion **564** or near the top edge **566**. Rather, typically a user will only touch one or more of the thermal energy emitter/detector devices near the bottom edge **562** or touch one or more of the other thermal energy emitter/detector devices $\mathbf{110}_1$, $\mathbf{110}_3$, $\mathbf{110}_5$, and $\mathbf{110}_7$, but not both. Such an assumption is especially plausible if the placement of some of the thermal energy emitter/detector devices is at or proximate to a location on user computer device **102** at which heat is less likely to be applied (for example, near a microphone on a mobile device). Given this assumption, it is unlikely that the voltages generated by the thermal energy emitter/detector devices $\mathbf{110}_2$, $\mathbf{110}_4$, $\mathbf{110}_6$, and $\mathbf{110}_8$ will be

cancelled out by the voltages generated by the thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110**$_1$, **110**$_3$, **110**$_5$, and **110**$_7$ due to touching of the user computer device by a user.

The configuration of FIG. **5** additionally illustrates how, in some embodiments of the present invention, various advantages can be achieved by utilizing multiple thermal energy emitter/detector devices provided within a given region of touchscreen **104** rather than utilizing only a single temperature sensing device to sense a temperature at a given region of the touchscreen. In particular, FIG. **5** shows that multiple thermal energy emitter/detector devices, such as the devices **110**$_2$, **110**$_4$, **110**$_6$, and **110**$_8$ can be collectively employed, effectively as a single 'group sensor,' so as to sense the temperature within a given region of touchscreen **104**, that is, proximate the bottom edge **562** of the touchscreen. Likewise, FIG. **5** shows that the multiple thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110**$_1$, **110**$_3$, **110**$_5$, and **110**$_7$ can be collectively employed, again effectively as a group sensor (or as multiple group sensors each made up of two thermal energy emitter/detector devices), to sense the temperature(s) at either one or both of the midregion **564** and proximate the top edge **566** of touchscreen **104**. Insofar as these thermal energy emitter/detector devices operate as group sensors, temperature changes occurring nearing any of the sensing devices of the group sensor are sensed quickly. This is in contrast to other embodiments where only a single temperature sensing device is present within a given region, such that temperature changes must be communicated to the location of that particular temperature sensing device before those changes are sensed.

Additionally, FIG. **5** illustrates how in some operational conditions it is possible for a variety of different temperature conditions within a variety of different regions of the mobile device can be sensed simply by series-connecting any arbitrary number of thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110** and using the simple hardware shown in (or hardware similar to that shown in) FIG. **4**. In particular, it will be understood from FIG. **5** that temperature changes experienced proximate the bottom edge **562** of touchscreen **104** will have twice the effect as temperature changes experienced merely within the midregion **564** of the touchscreen, since four of the thermal energy emitter/detector devices are located near the bottom edge **562** while only two of the thermal energy emitter/detector devices are located near the midregion **564**.

Similarly, in other embodiments, by providing different numbers of thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110** at different regions of interest around touchscreen **104**, the overall voltage signals produced by the series-connection of those thermal energy emitter/detector devices can be interpreted to determine temperature changes occurring at (and temperature differentials occurring between) those numerous different regions of the touchscreen. For example, suppose four thermal energy emitter/detector devices were located in a first region, for example, a 5 millimeter (mm) circle, and are connected in series, and a single thermal energy emitter/detector device was located in another, second region, for example, another 5 mm circle, and assuming that all of the thermal energy emitter/detector devices are referenced to a separate cold junction, then temperature changes occurring at the first region would have four times the impact upon the overall output voltage of the five series-connected thermal energy emitter/detector devices than temperature changes occurring in the second region, and thus the overall output voltage could be interpreted accordingly.

Numerous other embodiments with numerous other types of thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110** and configurations thereof are additionally intended to be encompassed by the present invention. For example, sets of multiple thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110** positioned proximate to different edges of the touchscreen can all be connected in series with one another. Also for example, where a set of thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110** are intended to operate as a 'group sensor' associated with a particular region of the touchscreen, the proximity of those thermal energy emitter/detector devices with respect to one another can vary depending upon the embodiment. Further, for example, in some embodiments, one or more thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110** can serve as a touch sensor. For example, by placing thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110** along sides edges **124** of user computer device **102**, it is then possible to determine which side, or region of a particular side, of the user computer device is warmer and then conclude that the warmer side, or region, is the side or region that the user is holding, or to detect the way user is holding the user computer device.

Further, in some embodiments, sensed temperature information (including sensed temperature information available from groups of sensors) can be interpreted as an indication of keypad entries or other user input signals or instructions. In one embodiment of this type, a first set of thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110**, for example, 20 thermal energy emitter/detector devices, can be placed within a first region of touchcsreen **104** and serve as a first 'button' while a second set of thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110** different in number, for example, one device, can be placed in a second region and serve as a second 'button.' Assuming all of the thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110** of the two sets are coupled in series, the user computer device then can detect whether the first region or the second region is touched based upon whether a voltage signal that is detected is large, for example, from the 20 devices, due to heating of the first region from the user's finger, or small, for example, from the one device, due to heating of the second region from the user's finger.

Further, in still other embodiments of the present invention, thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110** may be implemented so that thermocouple junctions are situated immediately along the exterior of the touchscreen (that is, the junctions just pierce out of the mobile device as "dots"). Such embodiments can provide even more rapid response times, in terms of how fast temperature changes are sensed, than embodiments where the thermocouple junctions are embedded within a touch screen (much less where the junctions are beneath overlying structures). In general, for quickest sensing/response times, it is desirable to minimize the distance between the thermocouple junction and the heat source.

Referring now to FIG. **6**, an exemplary layout is depicted of temperature sensitive user interface **108** associated with touchcreen **104** in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. Temperature sensitive user interface **108** includes a grid of multiple thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110** that are proximate to an inner surface of, or embedded in, touchscreen panel **106** and that are distributed across the touchscreen panel, coupled to processor **302**, and controlled by touchscreen driver **306**. Processor **302** then may determine a location of a touch based on thermal detections at various thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110** in the temperature sensitive user interface as described in greater detail above.

Referring now to FIGS. **6** and **7**, several examples of arrangements and configurations of thermal energy emitter/detector devices in user computer device **102** are shown in accordance with other embodiments of the present invention. It is to be understood, however, that these additional embodi-

ments (as well as the embodiment shown in FIG. **6**) are merely examples of the present invention, and that the present invention is intended to encompass numerous other arrangements and configurations not shown as well as those that are shown.

As depicted in FIG. **7**, in another embodiment of the present invention, user computer device **102** may include a front logo region **704** as well as a rear logo region **706** (shown in phantom) respectively on a front side **122** and a back side **126** of the user computer device. It is at (or, more particularly, around and beneath/inwardly of the front logo region **704** and the rear logo region **706**, respectively, that front and rear thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110** (depicted in FIG. **7** as thermal energy emitter/detector devices **708** and **714**, respectively) are placed. In the embodiment shown, each of the front temperature sensing device **708** and the rear temperature sensing device **714** (which is also shown in phantom) are looped structures that, as discussed in further detail below, in particular include thermocouple junctions that allow for temperature sensing to be accomplished. Given the positioning of the thermal energy emitter/detector devices **708**, **714** adjacent to (underneath) the logo regions **704**, **706**, the respective thermal energy emitter/detector devices sense the temperatures along the logo regions due to thermal conduction through those regions. The use of large areas such as the logo regions **704**, **706** coupled to the thermocouple junctions of the thermal energy emitter/detector devices **708**, **714** can help to assure user contact with the thermal energy emitter/detector devices due to the logo large size.

First and second leads **710** and **712** of first temperature sensing device **708** can be considered analogous to leads **412** and **414**, respectively, of FIG. **4**, while leads **716** and **718** of the second temperature sensing device **714** can be considered analogous to the first and second leads **424** and **422**, respectively, of FIG. **4**. Thus, although further components such as the operational amplifier **456** of FIG. **4** are not shown in FIG. **7**, it can be presumed that thermal energy emitter/detector devices **708** and **714** can be operated and provide signals that are utilized in the same or substantially the same manner as was described with respect to FIG. **4**. Although the logo regions **704**, **706** of user computer device **102** are shown to be positioned proximate an upper edge surface **124** of the user computer device, for example with the logo region **704** particularly being positioned in between the edge surface **124** and touchscreen **104** of the user computer device, it will be understood that the logo regions could be positioned at a variety of other locations along the front and back sides **122**, **126** of the user computer device, as well as on other surfaces (for example, the surfaces of side edge **124** or other edge/side surfaces) of the mobile device.

Referring now to FIG. **8**, in still another embodiment of user computer device **102**, the user computer device may include both a bezel **802** positioned along a front side **122** of user computer device **102** and a back plate **804** forming a surface of the back side **126** of the user computer device. As shown, bezel **802** is a rectangular-shaped structure having an open interior **818**, that is, a shape similar to that of a picture frame. As depicted in FIG. **8**, the user computer device includes at least a first and a second temperature sensing device **110** (depicted in FIG. **8** as thermal energy emitter/detector devices **806**, **812**, respectively) that are positioned proximate the front and back sides **122** and **126**, respectively. As shown, the first temperature sensing device **806** is positioned adjacent to the bezel **802** along the interior side of the bezel. The second temperature sensing device **812** is positioned adjacent to the back plate **804** along the interior side of back plate **804**. The bezel **802** and back plate **804** are heat conductive plates that are either directly exposed to the outside environment or embedded very close to the outer surface of the user computer device.

Each of thermal energy emitter/detector devices **806** and **812**, as with the thermal energy emitter/detector devices **302** and **304**, includes a junction allowing for temperature sensing and includes a respective first lead **808**, **814** as well as a respective second lead **810**, **816**. As was the case with the temperature sensing device **302** and **304**, the leads **808**, **814** of the thermal energy emitter/detector devices can be understood to correspond to the leads **412** and **422** of FIG. **4**, while the leads **810**, **816** of the thermal energy emitter/detector devices can be understood to correspond to the leads **414** and **424** of FIG. **4**. Thus, thermal energy emitter/detector devices **806** and **812** can be implemented in the same or substantially the same manner as discussed with reference to FIG. **4**. Given the positioning of the first temperature sensing device **806** along the interior surface of the bezel **802**, and given the positioning of the second temperature sensing device **812** along the interior surface of the back plate **804**, each of those respective thermal energy emitter/detector devices senses the temperature of a respective location exterior to the phone along the bezel **802** and back plate **804**, or radiates a temperature externally, by virtue of the conductive communication of heat through the bezel or the back plate, respectively. In the embodiments discussed above with respect to FIGS. **4**, **7**, and **8**, user computer device **102** as depicted therein has two thermal energy emitter/detector devices. Nonetheless, in a preferred embodiment of the present invention, user computer device **102** may have any number of interconnected thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110**. Indeed, depending upon the embodiment, user computer device **102** may have any arbitrary number of thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110** positioned on any one or more of the surfaces (and within any one or more regions along those surfaces), and those various thermal energy emitter/detector devices can be interconnected in any of a variety of manners.

Temperature sensitive user interface **108** of user computer device **102** can be used not only to detect a user input to the user computer device, that is, to detect a location of a user contact on a touchscreen such as touchscreen **104**, but also to provide thermal feedback. By providing thermal feedback, a variety of applications for user computer device **102** may be possible through an exchange of thermal energy with another temperature sensing device. For example, by selectively heating one or more thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110** of the user computer device, thermal-based authentication of the user computer device may be performed, information may be thermally transferred by the user computer device to another user computer device or to a thermally activated material (such as a thermal paper), or a color of a phone skin may be dynamically changed using thermochromic films or other methods. Also, temperature sensitive user interface **108**, and more particularly the thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110** of the temperature sensitive user interface, can sense external temperature and provide command to alter color of housing **120** to reflect the associated temperature.

Referring now to FIG. **9-13**, a logic flow diagram **900** is provided that illustrates thermal generation and display of physical images by user computer device **102** and the thermal transfer of such images by the user computer device in accordance with various embodiments of the present invention. Logic flow diagram **900** begins (**902**) when processor **302** determines (**904**) a physical image to be thermally generated by temperature sensitive user interface **108** of user computer device **102** from among one or more physical images maintained in at least one memory device **304**. For example, in

various embodiments of the present invention, the physical image may comprise a pattern, such as the various patterns depicted in FIG. **10**, may comprise a textual image, such as print characters of the signature depicted in FIG. **11**, or may comprise a color change. In the event that user computer device **102** includes the layer of thermally sensitive film or ink **112**, the physical image thermally generated on temperature sensitive user interface **108** also may be displayed in touchscreen **104** or housing **120** by the thermally sensitive film or ink.

In various embodiments of the present invention, the physical images may be pre-programmed into user computer device **102** or may be downloaded, wirelessly or over a wired connection, by the user computer device from a physical image source, such as a web-based server or another user computer device. In various embodiments of the present invention, the physical images may be transferred to, that is, received by, user computer device **102** from another user computer device, via touchscreen **104** and temperature sensitive user interface **108** of user computer device **102**, as described below with respect to FIG. **14**. In still other embodiments of the present invention, the physical images may be created on touchscreen **104** by a user of the user computer device and detected by temperature sensitive user interface **108** of the user computer device (for example, by taking a picture with a camera (not shown) by being sketched on touchscreen **104** by a user of the device). In response to receiving the physical image, the user computer device stores the received image in at least one memory device **304**.

Processor **302** may determine which physical image to generate based on an instruction received from a user of the user computer device **102**. For example, processor **302** may display, on touchscreen **104**, a softkey that is associated with the stored physical images. By touching the softkey, the user inputs to the processor, and the processor receives from the user, an instruction to display the patterns stored by the at least one memory device **304**. The instruction, that is, the user's touch of touchscreen **104**, may be received via temperature sensitive user interface **108** or via touch-detecting non-temperature-based user interface **114**. In response to receiving the instruction, processor **302** retrieves the physical images from the at least one memory device and displays the physical images on touchscreen **104**. The user then may select a physical image by touching one of the displayed physical images, thereby inputting an instruction to the processor, via touch-detecting non-temperature-based user interface **114**, or temperature sensitive user interface **108**, to activate thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110** in temperature sensitive user interface **108** corresponding to the selected physical image.

In another embodiment of the present invention, processor **302** may determine a physical image to be thermally generated by temperature sensitive user interface **108** of user computer device **102** based on a user's touch of a physical image, such as an icon, displayed in the active visual display user interface **116** of by touchscreen **104**, such as an LCD or an LED display technology. That is, as is known in the art, when the active visual display user interface **116** displays a physical image on touchscreen **104**, processor **302** arranges for the image's display by arranging for illumination of appropriate image generating devices, for example, light emitting diodes or liquid crystals, that generate a predetermined image in a predetermined location on touchscreen **104**, which image and location are maintained in at least one memory device **304**. In turn, when a user touches such an image presented on the touchscreen, the user's touch of the image is relayed to the processor via touch-detecting non-temperature-based user interface **114** in accordance with well-known techniques.

In response to receiving an instruction to activate a particular pattern, processor **302** activates (**906**) thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110** corresponding to the determined image displayed in active visual display user interface **116**. For example, processor **302** may selectively apply a current or voltage to thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110** corresponding to the determined physical image. In response to the application of the current, the selected thermal energy emitter/detector devices, that is, thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110** to which current or voltage is selectively applied, activate, that is, heat up, thereby producing (**908**) a corresponding thermal image in temperature sensitive user interface **108**. The thermal image may or may not also be visually displayed on touchscreen **104** or housing **120**, for example, by a color or shade change in areas of the layer of thermally sensitive film or ink **112** proximate to the activated thermal energy emitter/detector devices. That is, the activating of the thermal energy emitter/detector devices may cause a heating up of the thermally sensitive film or ink **112** proximate to the selected thermal energy emitter/detector devices, which in turn may cause a corresponding color or shade change in the heated up areas of the thermally sensitive film or layer of thermally sensitive ink, thereby generating a color change/physical image that corresponds to the heated up devices, which color change/physical image may appear on touchscreen **104** or in housing **120**. For example, FIGS. **12** and **13** depict patterns that may appear on touchscreen **104** of user computer device **102** in response to processor **302** activating thermal energy emitter/detector devices corresponding to a physical image depicted in FIGS. **10** and **11**, respectively.

Further, and referring now to FIGS. **9** and **14**, user computer device **102** then may thermally transfer (**910**) the generated physical image, such as one of the physical images depicted in FIGS. **10** and **11**, to another thermally sensitive apparatus **1402**, such as another user computer device similar to user computer device **102** and that includes a temperature sensitive touchscreen **1404** similar to touchscreen **104** and having a temperature sensitive user interface **1408** similar to temperature sensitive user interface **108** of touchscreen **104**, a layer of thermally sensitive film or ink similar to the layer of thermally sensitive film or ink **112**, and that may further include one or more of a touch-detecting non-temperature-based user interface (not shown), similar to touch-detecting non-temperature-based user interface **114**, and an active visual display user interface (not shown), similar to active visual display user interface **116**. More particularly, the user of user computer device **102** then may place touchscreen **104**, which includes the thermally generated physical image, close enough to touchscreen **1404** that the heat generated by the activated thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110** of user of user computer device **102** and corresponding to the generated physical image is transferred to corresponding thermal energy emitter/detector devices of the temperature sensitive user interface **1408** of touchscreen **1404**.

In response to detecting the heat, the thermal energy emitter/detector devices associated with touchscreen **1404** corresponding to the detected image activate, and thermally sensitive apparatus **1402** visually displays (**912**) the thermally transferred image on touchscreen **1404**. In one such embodiment of the present invention, the activation of the thermal energy emitter/detector devices associated with touchscreen **1404** may produce a corresponding color or shade change in areas of a thermally sensitive film **112** of touchscreen **1404** proximate to the thermal energy emitter/detector devices,

resulting in a display of the thermally transferred image on touchscreen **1404**. In another such embodiment of the present invention, in response to detecting the activated thermal energy emitter/detector devices associated with the thermally transferred image and touchscreen **1404**, the processor of thermally sensitive apparatus **1402** may display the thermally transferred image on the active visual display user interface of touchscreen **1404** in accordance with well known techniques. Further, the processor of thermally sensitive apparatus **1402** may store (**914**) the thermally transferred image, that is, stores data associated with the corresponding activated thermal energy emitter/detector devices of user computer device **1402**, in an at least one memory device of user computer device **1402**. Logic flow **900** then ends (**916**).

In other embodiments of the present invention, user computer device **102** may transfer a thermally generated physical image to any thermally sensitive apparatus. For example, and referring now to FIGS. **9**, **15** and **16**, the thermally generated physical image displayed on touchscreen **104** by user computer device **102** may comprise any type of information that may be desired to be transferred to another device or to thermally sensitive material **1602**, such as thermally active paper. For example, the physical image to be transferred may be a textual pattern such as the receipt displayed on temperature sensitive user interface **108** of touchscreen **104** of user computer device **102** as depicted in FIG. **15**. This textual pattern then may be transferred to another user computer device, as depicted in FIG. **14**, or may be transferred to any thermally sensitive apparatus such as thermally active paper **1602** as depicted in FIG. **16**, by placing touchscreen **104** of user computer device **102** close enough to thermally sensitive material **1602** that the heat generated by temperature sensitive user interface **108**, and in particular by the activated thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110** of user computer device **102** and corresponding to the generated physical image, is transferred to the thermally sensitive material.

While FIG. **14** depicts user computer device **102** thermally transferring a thermal pattern to thermally sensitive apparatus **1402**, one of ordinary skill in the art realizes that user computer device **102** and thermally sensitive apparatus **1402** each may act as a conveyor of a thermally generated pattern as well as a recipient of a thermally generated pattern. That is, the another thermally sensitive apparatus **1402**, such as another user computer device, may, instead of or in addition to receiving a thermally generated pattern from user computer device **102**, thermally convey to user computer device **102**, and user computer device **102** may thermally receive from the another thermally sensitive apparatus, a thermal pattern as described above with reference to FIG. **9**. For example, the another thermally sensitive apparatus **1402** may be a user computer device similar to user computer device **102** that generates a thermal pattern in temperature sensitive user interface **1408**, or may be an electronic stamp that generates an electronic pattern having with a thermal imprint. User computer device **102** then receives the thermal pattern, for example, the stamp pattern with respect to an electronic stamp, via touchscreen **104** and temperature sensitive user interface **108** and processor **302** may process the thermal pattern and/or processor **302** may store the received thermal pattern in at least one memory device **304**.

In yet other embodiments of the present invention, the thermally generated pattern that is generated by user computer device **102** may comprise authentication information that is used to authenticate the device. Referring now to FIGS. **17** and **18**, a logic flow diagram **1700** is provided that illustrates a thermal authentication of user computer device **102** in accordance with various embodiments of the present invention.

Logic flow diagram **1700** begins (**1702**) when processor **302** of user computer device **102** determines (**1704**) to thermally authenticate user computer device **102**. For example, a user of user computer device **102** may input an authentication instruction, for example, by touching a corresponding icon of touchscreen **104**, or user computer device may self-determine to thermally authenticate itself based on a short-range (for example, Bluetooth, infra-red, near field communication (NFC), or thermally-generated) authentication request received from another electronic device or based on a context of the user computer device, for example, when the user computer device thermally detects a thermal energy detecting electronic device, such as detecting that it is docked in a thermal energy docking station as is described in greater detail below.

In response to determining to thermally authenticate user computer device **102**, processor **302** of the user computer device generates an thermal authentication pattern by retrieving (**1706**), from at least one memory device **304** of the user computer device, an authentication pattern to be thermally generated on touchscreen **104** of user computer device **102** and selectively activating (**1708**), in temperature sensitive user interface **108**, only the thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110** corresponding to the retrieved authentication pattern. For example, processor **302** may selectively apply a current or a voltage to thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110** corresponding to the thermal authentication pattern. In response to the application of the current or voltage, the thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110** to which current or voltage is applied activate, that is, heat up, to generate (**1710**) the thermal authentication pattern, which then may be read (**1712**) by a thermal detecting device, such as another user computer device with a temperature sensitive touchscreen or any other kind of electronic device known to one of ordinary skill in the art that is capable of detecting a thermal pattern.

The thermal detecting device then authenticates (**1714**) user computer device **102** based on a recognition of the thermal authentication pattern, and logic flow **1700** then ends (**1716**). For example, the thermal detecting device may maintain, in an at least one memory device of the thermal detecting device, thermal authentication patterns for all devices that have been properly registered with the thermal detecting device. When the thermal detecting device, that is, a processor of the thermal detecting device, reads the thermal authentication pattern generated by user computer device **102**, the processor of the thermal detecting device compares the read thermal authentication pattern to the thermal authentication patterns maintained in the at least one memory device of the thermal detecting device. When the read thermal authentication pattern matches one of the maintained thermal authentication patterns, the thermal detecting device authenticates the user computer device.

For example, and referring now to FIG. **18**, block diagrams are provided that illustrate multiple exemplary thermal authentication patterns **1801-1803** that may be maintained in the thermal detecting device and the at least one memory device **304** of user computer device **102**. As depicted in FIG. **18**, each authentication pattern **1801-1803** comprises nine activated thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110** that are indicated by circles in touchscreen **104** of user computer device **102**; however, one of ordinary skill in the art realizes that a thermal authentication pattern may comprise any number of activated thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110**.

In another embodiment of the present invention, each thermal authentication pattern **1801-1803** may comprise activated thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110** of multiple different temperatures, for example, a first, higher temperature indicated by the shaded thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110** of each thermal authentication patterns **1801-1803** and a second, lower temperature indicated by the unshaded thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110** of thermal authentication patterns **1801-1803**. In one such embodiment, such different temperature levels may be achieved by supplying different levels of current to the activated thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110**, wherein a larger current results in a higher temperature temperature sensing device. While each pattern depicted in FIG. **18** illustrates one or two temperature levels, one of ordinary skill in the art realizes that more than two temperature levels may be employed in a thermal authentication pattern.

In various other embodiments of the present invention, the thermal authentication pattern generated by processor **302** may vary on a time scale. For example, in one such embodiment and referring again to FIG. **18**, processor **302** may activate one or more, but fewer than all, of the thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110** that are included in a pattern at any given time. For example, processor **302** may activate a first one or more thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110** of thermal authentication pattern **1801** during a first time period, a second one or more thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110** of the pattern during a second time period, wherein the first one or more thermal energy emitter/detector devices may be different from the second one or more thermal energy emitter/detector devices, a third one or more thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110** of the pattern during a third time period, wherein the third one or more thermal energy emitter/detector devices may be different from the first and second one or more thermal energy emitter/detector devices, and so on.

In another such embodiment, processor **302** may, instead of or in addition to the embodiment described above, activate a different number of thermal energy emitter/detector devices of thermal authentication pattern **1801** in each of multiple successive time periods. For example, processor **302** may activate a first number of thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110**, for example, two, of thermal authentication pattern **1801** in a first time period 't_1,' activate a second number of thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110**, for example, three, of thermal authentication pattern **1801** in a second time period 't_2,' and activate a third number of temperature sensing device **110**, for example, one, of thermal authentication pattern **1801** in a third time period 't_3,' which two, three, and one thermal energy emitter/detector devices may or may not include one or more of the same thermal energy emitter/detector devices. In another such embodiment, processor **302** may generate a different thermal authentication pattern in each of multiple successive time periods, for example, generating thermal authentication pattern **1801** at first time period 't_1,' generating thermal authentication pattern **1802** at second time period 't_2,' and generating thermal authentication pattern **1803** at third time period 't_3.'

In still other embodiments of the present invention, the thermal authentication pattern generated by processor **302** may be based on an operating context or external context of user computer device **102**, such as a purpose to which the device is being used or a location of the user computer device. In one such embodiment, the particular thermal authentication pattern, such as patterns **1801-1803**, retrieved and generated by processor **302** may be based on a determination, by the processor, of an external context of the device, such as a determination, by the processor, of the user computer device's geographic location by reference to location determination module **316** or a receipt of short range signals, such as Bluetooth or infra-red signals, by the user computer device. In another such embodiment, the thermal authentication pattern generated by processor **302** may be based on a determination, by the processor, of an application selected by a user of the user computer device as is known in the art. Processor **302** then may generate different thermal authentication patterns at different locations or in association with execution of different applications or in association with a different user logged into the device.

By generating thermal patterns that may be thermally recognized by other electronic devices, user computer device **102** is able to provide for thermal pattern transfer, thereby provide for thermal recognition by other devices and providing thermal authentication, among other uses for thermal pattern recognition. Thus user computer device **102** is able to operate in contexts and operating conditions where the capabilities of user computer devices, such as a smart phone or a tablet computer, that have a touchscreen that is not a temperature sensitive touchscreen, are severely restricted, such as a winter environment when a user is outdoors and wearing gloves. Furthermore, by generating a thermal pattern that may be thermally recognized by another electronic device, user computer device **102** is able to transfer that pattern merely by placing the touchscreen of the user computer device against a temperature sensitive touchscreen of another electronic device, thereby facilitating thermal transfer of information for a variety of consumer purposes, such as purchase payments, providing a copy of a consumer purchase receipt (for example, a street vendor or a farmer's market vendor will not have to provide paper receipts), coupon exchange, picture exchange, or using the user computer device as an electronic stamp.

In addition, by generating thermal patterns, user computer device **102** may operate as a 'mood' sensor, changing colors (by use of the layer of thermally sensitive film or ink **112** proximate to activated thermal energy emitter/detector devices) of touchscreen **104** (for example, a background displayed on touchscreen **104**) or housing **120** based on a detected user or ambient temperature, and may even provide for color displays on touchscreen **104** that are activated and altered by sensed temperatures.

As a context-aware device, user computer device **102** also includes the capability of thermally detecting and recognizing an electronic accessory external to the user computer device, such as a user computer device docking station, and automatically making adjustments to user interface **308** and to execute applications in response to detecting the docking station. In particular, user computer device **102** is able to use the thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110** of temperature sensitive user interface **108** to identify the accessory and/or accessory type, such as a docking station and/or a docking station-type, and in response, activate one or more applications and/or retrieve and display user-preferred settings associated with the identified accessory. Other user interface **308** settings, such as display brightness, touchscreen sensitivity, sound volume, feature on/off, wireless connectivity, and so on, also may be adapted based on the identity of the docking station.

Referring now to FIGS. **19-28**, use of user computer device **102** in cooperation with a docking station is depicted in accordance with various embodiments of the present invention. While FIGS. **19-28** depict user computer device **102** interfacing with, that is, operating in cooperation with, a docking station, the docking station is provided as an example of any

of multiple external electronic accessory devices, such as an email reader, a music player, a video player, a video game controller or a video game console, a social networking device, or any other electronic device that may occur to one skilled in the art that may thermally communicate with the user computer device. Referring first to FIG. **19**, a front perspective view of a thermal energy docking station **1900** is depicted in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. Thermal energy docking station **1900** includes a thermal energy interface **1910** that is configured to exchange thermal energy with a user computer device, such as user computer device **102**, and more particularly that includes one or more thermal energy modules **1912** (three shown) that each may emit thermal energy that can be detected by the user computer device and/or may detect thermal energy emitted by the user computer device, for example, a thermal energy pattern generated by the thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110** of the user computer device. Each thermal energy module **1912** comprises one or more thermal energy emitter/detector devices **1914** that generate and emit, and/or detect, thermal energy that respectively can be sensed by, or generated by, thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110** of temperature sensitive user interface **108** of user computer device **102** (which temperature sensitive user interface, again, may be located near any external surface of the user computer device (for example, front side, back side, or sides of the device)). While FIG. **19** depicts four thermal energy emitter/detector devices **1914** per thermal energy generating module **1912**, one of ordinary skill in the art realizes that, depending upon the embodiment, each thermal energy module **1912** can include any arbitrary number of thermal energy emitter/detector devices **1914**. By detecting the thermal energy output by the one or more thermal energy output devices **1914**, user computer device **102** can determine that it is docked in docking station **1900** and further may detect a docking station-type and docking station functionality, and trigger execution of a specific application, such as a specific user interface display (UI), adjustment of a user computer device operational context, such as adjusting a brightness, adjusting a volume, turning features on/off, and so on, or establishment of a wireless connectivity with the external electronic accessory device via a short-range wireless protocol, such as the Bluetooth protocol or a Wireless Local Area Network (WLAN) protocol that operates in accordance with the IEEE (Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers) 802.xx standards, for example, the 802.11 or 802.16 standards.

The thermal energy modules **1912** may be distributed around thermal energy docking station **1900** in any manner so long as they are proximate to, and their generated thermal energy can be detected by, the thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110** of temperature sensitive user interface **108** of user computer device **102**. For example, as depicted in FIG. **19**, thermal energy docking station **1900** comprises a bed in which user computer device **102** may be placed, that is, docked, which bed includes a bottom side **1904** atop a base **1902** of the docking station, two side walls **1906**, and a back side **1908**. FIG. **19** further depicts multiple thermal energy generating modules **1912** (three shown) distributed across an inner side of the back **1908** of the bed of the thermal energy docking station. However, in other embodiments of the present invention, the thermal energy modules **1912** may be located anywhere in the bed of thermal energy docking station **1900**, so long as the locations of the thermal energy modules **1912** are proximate to, and can be sensed by, thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110** of temperature sensitive user interface **108** of user computer device **102**. The docking station's thermal energy emitter/detector devices **1914** not only generate recognition patterns and other information, but also may sense recognition patterns and other information from the user computer device, for example, generated by the temperature sensitive user interface **108** of the user computer device. Thus, the user computer device can provide instructions to the docking station (or accessory device) and vice versa.

FIG. **20** is a block diagram of thermal energy docking station **1900** in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. Thermal energy docking station **1900** includes a processor **2002** such as one or more microprocessors, microcontrollers, digital signal processors (DSPs), combinations thereof or such other devices known to those having ordinary skill in the art. The particular operations/functions of processor **2002**, and respectively thus of thermal energy docking station **1900**, are determined by an execution of software instructions and routines that are stored in a respective at least one memory device **2004** associated with the processor, such as random access memory (RAM), dynamic random access memory (DRAM), and/or read only memory (ROM) or equivalents thereof, that store data and programs that may be executed by the corresponding processor. For example, at least one memory device **2004** maintains a list of multiple applications that may be executed by a user computer device that can be docked in the thermal energy docking station, such as applications that may be stored in the at least one memory device **304** of, and executed by processor **302** of, user computer device **102**, for example, a calendar application, a navigational application, an email application, a music application, a video application, a video game application, and a social network application. The at least one memory device **2004** further maintains, in association with each such application, a thermal pattern that identifies the application, which thermal identification patterns also are maintained, in association with each such application, in the at least one memory device of the dockable user computer device, that is, user computer device **102**.

One of ordinary skill in the art realizes that the operations/functions of processor **2002** alternatively may be implemented in hardware, for example, integrated circuits (ICs), application specific integrated circuits (ASICs), a programmable logic device such as a PLD, PLA, FPGA or PAL, and the like, implemented in the user computer device. Based on the present disclosure, one skilled in the art will be readily capable of producing and implementing such software and/or hardware without undo experimentation. Unless otherwise indicated, the functions described herein as being performed by thermal energy docking station **1900** are performed by processor **2002**.

Thermal energy docking station **1900** further includes thermal energy interface **1910**, having multiple thermal energy emitter/detector devices **1914**, in communication with processor **2002**. Each thermal energy emitter/detector device **1914** may be any type of device that emits thermal energy when an electrical current is applied to the device and/or a voltage differential is applied across the device, or in other embodiments detects thermal energy emitted by an external thermal energy source, such as user computer device **102**. For example, each thermal energy emitter/detector device **1914** may comprise a resistor or a capacitor that output thermal energy in response to application of a current or a voltage differential, or may comprise a thermocouple, such as a thermocouple formed by a respective junction of first and second types of materials such as a Indium Tin Oxide ($InSnO_4$) ceramic material (ITO) and a Indium Tin Oxide Manganese ceramic material (ITO:Mn), that may emit or detect thermal energy. Generally, the greater the number of thermal energy

emitter/detector devices **1914** included in a thermal energy generating module **1912**, the greater the amount of thermal energy that may be generated by the module. Furthermore, by including multiple thermal energy emitter/detector devices **1914** in a thermal energy generating module **1912** and/or by including multiple thermal energy generating modules **1912** in docking station **1900**, a variety of thermal energy patterns may be generated by the docking station, which allows user computer device **102** to detect a wider range of docking station types and docking station functions as well as to authenticate docking stations in order to access docking station functions.

Thermal energy docking station **1900** further includes a user interface **2006** that allows a user to interact with the docking station, for example, to input instructions into the docking station and to receive information from the docking station. For example, and referring now to FIGS. **21** and **22**, user interface **2006** may include a display screen **2102**, for example, included in a front side **1903**, an outside of a side wall **1906**, or the back side **1908** of the docking station (depicted, in FIG. **21**, as included in the back side **1908**), for displaying information generated by processor **2002**, and may further include a mechanical control **2104**, such as a knob, lever or any other type of mechanical device that allows a user to input instructions into thermal energy docking station **1900**. For example, when mechanical control **2104** comprises a knob, the user of the docking station can, by turning the knob, instruct the docking station to switch applications being implemented by the docking station. In turn, the application currently being implemented, and/or an application or menu of applications available for selection by the user of the docking station when operating mechanical control **2104**, may be indentified on display screen **2102**. Display screen **2102** may be a liquid crystal display (LCD), a light emitting diode (LED) display, a plasma display, or any other means for visually displaying information, and further may be a touchscreen via which a user may input instructions into thermal energy docking station **1900**. In addition, it can also be just control buttons w/o display.

Thermal energy docking station **1900** also includes a power source (not shown), such as a power converter that may be connected to a power outlet or a limited life power supply, such as a removable and/or rechargeable battery, for providing power to the other components of the thermal energy docking station.

Referring now to FIG. **23-26**, block diagrams of user computer device **102** are depicted that illustrate exemplary distributions of multiple temperature sensing regions **2202** (three shown) of temperature sensitive user interface **108** of user computer device **102** in accordance with various embodiments of the present invention. As depicted in FIG. **23**, each temperature sensing region of the multiple temperature sensing regions **2302** comprises one or more thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110** (four shown). Temperature sensing regions **2302** may be distributed anywhere on user computer device **102**. For example and referring now to FIGS. **24-26**, in various exemplary embodiments of the present invention the temperature sensing regions **2302** may be distributed across front side **122** of the user computer device, for example, across touchscreen **104** as depicted in FIG. **24**, or the temperature sensing regions **2302** may be distributed across back side **126** of the user computer device as depicted in FIG. **25**, or the temperature sensing regions **2302** may be distributed across any side edge **124** of the user computer device as depicted in FIG. **26**. Regardless of the locations of the temperature sensing regions **2302** of temperature sensitive user interface **108** of user computer device **102**, so long as the locations are proximate to, and can sense the thermal energy generated by, the thermal energy generating modules **1912** of thermal energy docking station **1900**, user computer device **102** may detect thermal energy patterns generated by the docking station and process the detected patterns.

For example, and referring again to FIGS. **21** and **22**, block diagrams are provided illustrating an exemplary placement of user computer device **102** in the bed of thermal energy docking station **1900**. More specifically, FIG. **21** is an exemplary rear perspective view of user computer device **102** docked in thermal energy docking station **1900**, and FIG. **22** is an exemplary front perspective view of the user computer device docked in the thermal energy docking station. When the thermal energy generating modules **1912** of thermal energy docking station **1900** are distributed across the inner side of the back **1908** of the bed of the thermal energy docking station, as depicted in FIG. **19**, it may be preferable that the temperature sensing regions **2302** of user computer device **102** be similarly distributed across back side **126** of the user computer device, for example, as depicted in FIG. **25**. By way of another example, when the thermal energy generating modules **1912** of thermal energy docking station **1900** are distributed across the bottom side **1904** of the bed of the thermal energy docking station, it may be preferable that the temperature sensing regions **2302** of user computer device **102** be similarly distributed across a side edge **124** of the user computer device, for example, as depicted in FIG. **26**.

Referring now to FIG. **27**, a logic flow diagram **2700** is provided that illustrates a thermal recognition of thermal energy docking station **1900**, and a setting and control of user interface **308**, by user computer device **102** in accordance with various embodiments of the present invention. Logic flow diagram **2700** begins (**2702**) when thermal energy docking station **1900** generates (**2704**) a first thermal pattern, that is, a thermal pattern that may be used to thermally identify the docking station. More particular, based on instructions and a thermal pattern maintained in at least one memory device **2004** of thermal energy docking station **1900**, processor **2002** activates one or more thermal energy output devices **1914** to generate the first thermal pattern. When docked in thermal energy docking station **1900**, user computer device **102**, that is, processor **302** via temperature sensitive user interface **108** of the user computer device, thermally detects (**2706**) thermal energy docking station **1900** by detecting the first thermal pattern. More particularly, the thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110** of temperature sensitive user interface **108** of user computer device **102** detect the thermal pattern generated by the thermal energy emitter/detector devices **1914** of the thermal energy docking station.

For example, and referring now to FIG. **28**, a block diagram is provided that illustrates multiple exemplary thermal patterns **2801-2803** that may be maintained in at least one memory device **2004** and generated by thermal energy docking station **1900**, wherein each thermal pattern **2801-2803** comprises twelve activated thermal energy output devices **1914**. While six or seven activated thermal energy emitter/detector devices **1914** (indicated by the shaded thermal energy output devices) are depicted in each thermal pattern **2801-2803** shown in FIG. **28**, one of ordinary skill in the art realizes that a thermal pattern may comprise any number of activated thermal energy emitter/detector devices **1914**. In another embodiment of the present invention, each thermal pattern **2801-2803** may comprise activated thermal energy emitter/detector devices **1914** of multiple different temperatures, for example, a first, higher temperature indicated by the shaded thermal energy emitter/detector devices **1914** of each thermal patterns **2801-2803** and a second, lower temperature

indicated by the unshaded thermal energy emitter/detector devices **1914** of thermal patterns **2801-2803**. In one such embodiment, such different temperature levels may be achieved by supplying different levels of current to the thermal energy emitter/detector devices **1914**, wherein a larger current results in a higher temperature thermal energy emitter/detector device. While each pattern depicted in FIG. **28** illustrates one or two temperature levels, one of one of ordinary skill in the art realizes that more than two temperature levels may be employed in a thermal pattern.

In various other embodiments of the present invention, the thermal pattern generated by processor **2002** may vary on a time scale. For example, in one such embodiment and referring again to FIG. **28**, processor **2002** may activate one or more, but fewer than all, of the thermal energy emitter/detector devices **1914** that are included in a pattern at any given time, for example, activating a different two or three of the thermal energy emitter/detector devices **1914** of thermal pattern **2801** at a time, as the processor cycles through the pattern. In another such embodiment, processor **2002** may activate a different thermal energy generating module **1912** or a different number of thermal energy emitter/detector devices **1914** of thermal pattern **2801** in each of multiple successive time periods, for example, activating two of the thermal energy emitter/detector devices **1914** in a first time period, three of the thermal energy emitter/detector devices **1914** in a second time period, and activating a single thermal energy emitter/detector device **1914** in a third time period, which two, three, and one thermal energy emitter/detector devices may or may not include one or more of the same thermal energy emitter/detector devices. In another such embodiment, processor **2002** may generate a different thermal pattern in each of multiple successive time periods, for example, generating thermal pattern **2801** at the first time period, generate thermal pattern **2802** at second time period, and generate thermal pattern **2803** at third time period.

In still other embodiments of the present invention, the thermal pattern generated by processor **2002** may be based on an operating context of thermal energy docking station **1900**, such as an application being run on the docking station. In one such embodiment, the particular thermal pattern, such as patterns **2801-2803**, retrieved and generated by processor **2002** may be based on a determination, by the processor, of an operating context of the docking station, such as a determination, by the processor, of an application selected by a user of the docking station as is known in the art. Processor **2002** then may generate different thermal patterns in association with execution of different applications.

Referring again to logic flow diagram **2700**, based on the thermal detection of thermal energy docking station **1900**, that is, the detection of the first thermal pattern, user computer device **102** activates (**2708**) a particular application, adjusts an operational setting of the user computer device, such as changing a display background or adjusting a brightness, a volume, a touch sensitivity, a feature priority, and/or establishes a wireless connectivity, such as a Bluetooth or WiFi connectivity with a detected Bluetooth or WiFi device and in accordance with well-known wireless connectivity establishment techniques, corresponding to the detected first thermal pattern and indicates (**2710**), for example, displays on touchscreen **104**, the activation of the application, the adjustment of the operational setting, and/or the establishment of the wireless connection. Logic flow **2700** then ends (**2712**). That is, user computer device **102** may maintain, in the at least one memory device **304** of the user computer device, identifiers of multiple thermal patterns, for example, indicators of the thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110** that are activated in association with each such pattern, in association with corresponding applications. When user computer device **102** detects a thermal pattern, the user computer device compares the detected thermal pattern to the maintained thermal patterns, and when a match occurs then the user computer device determines, and activates, the associated application, brightness, volume, features on/off, wireless connectivity, etc.

For example, if thermal energy docking station **1900** is a calendar-based docking station, then in response to detecting the docking station, for example, detecting a thermal pattern identifying the docking station as a calendar-based docking station, user computer device **102**, and in particular processor **302** of the user computer device, may execute a time-and-date application maintained by at least one memory device **304** and may display, on touchscreen **104**, a current time of day and a current date. By way of another example, if thermal energy docking station **1900** is a navigational docking station, then in response to detecting the docking station, for example, detecting a thermal pattern identifying the docking station as a navigational docking station, user computer device **102**, and in particular processor **302**, may execute a navigational application maintained by at least one memory device **304**, for example, the GOOGLE® MAPS application provided by Google Inc., of Mountain View, Calif., or any other of many well-known navigational applications, and may display, on touchscreen **104**, a map that identifies a current location of the user computer device.

In another embodiment of the present invention, for example, when thermal energy docking station **1900** supports multiple different applications for example, maintains thermal patterns associated with the multiple different applications, the thermal pattern generated by the docking station may be a thermal pattern corresponding to a particular application of the multiple different applications. For example, thermal energy docking station **1900** may support a calendar application, a navigational application, an email application, a social network application, such as the FACEBOOK® application provided by Facebook, Inc., of Palo Alto, Calif. A user of thermal energy docking station **1900** may input to thermal energy docking station **1900**, and the thermal energy docking station may receive from the user, a selection of an application from among the multiple applications supported by the docking station. For example, the user may input his or her selection via user interface **2006**, for example, by selecting an application via mechanical control **2104**.

In response to receiving the selection from the user, thermal energy docking station **1900** generates a thermal pattern corresponding to the selected application, by activating thermal energy output devices **1914** corresponding to the thermal pattern. When docked in thermal energy docking station **1900**, user computer device **102**, and in particular processor **302** via temperature sensitive user interface **108** of the user computer device, thermally detects the selected thermal pattern generated by thermal energy docking station **1900**. More particularly, the thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110** of temperature sensitive user interface **108** of user computer device **102** detect the thermal pattern generated by the thermal energy thermal energy emitter/detector devices **1914** of the thermal energy docking station. Based on the thermal detection of the thermal pattern generated by thermal energy docking station **1900**, user computer device **102** then activates an application corresponding to the detected thermal pattern and displays the activated application on touchscreen **104**.

In yet another embodiment of the present invention, a user of user computer device **102** subsequently may change the application executed by the user computer device by chang-

ing the thermal pattern generated by thermal energy docking station **1900**. That is, subsequent to docking user computer device **102** in thermal energy docking station **1900**, the user may input to thermal energy docking station **190**, and the thermal energy docking station may receive (**2714**) from the user, a selection of a second application from among the multiple applications supported by the docking station. Again, the user may input the selection via user interface **2006**, for example, by selecting the second application via mechanical control **2104**. In response to receiving the selection from the user, thermal energy docking station **1900** generates (**2716**) a thermal pattern corresponding to the second application by activating of thermal energy emitter/detector devices **1914**. User computer device **102**, and in particular processor **302** via temperature sensitive user interface **108** of the user computer device, thermally detects (**2718**) the second thermal pattern generated by thermal energy docking station **1900**. Based on the thermal detection of the second thermal pattern, corresponding to the second application, user computer device **102** then activates (**2720**) the second application, corresponding to the detected second thermal pattern, and displays (**2722**) the activated application on touchscreen **104**. Logic flow **2700** then ends (**2712**).

By providing for thermal communication between user computer device **102** and docking station **1900**, user computer device **102** can execute, and display, a variety of applications merely by placing the user computer device in the docking station, without any need to plug the user computer device into the docking station or to connect any cables. Furthermore, the application displayed on the user computer device when docked in the docking station may be adjusting by merely inputting an instruction into the docking station, without the need to remove the user computer device from the docking station or the need to going through a variety of menus to find the desired application on the user computer device.

It is foreseeable that a user of user computer device **102** may use the user computer device in both indoor and outdoor environments and in all kinds of temperature conditions. As a result, user computer device **102** may be operated in conditions where a user's temperature is very close to an ambient temperature of the environment in which the user computer device is operating or to an operating temperature of the device itself. In such an instance, the temperature of the thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110** of temperature sensitive user interface **108** of the user computer device **102** may be close to a body temperature of the user, and more particularly to a temperature of the user's fingers, with the result that the temperature sensitive user interface may be unable to detect the user's touch. In order to facilitate an operation of temperature sensitive touchscreen **104** in all environmental and operating conditions, user computer device **102** further provides for an auto-biasing, that is, a pre-tuning, of a temperature of the thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110** of temperature sensitive user interface **108**.

Referring now to FIG. **29**, a logic flow diagram **2900** is provided that illustrates a pre-biasing of temperature sensitive user interface **108** of user computer device **102**, and in particular of the thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110** of the temperature sensitive user interface, in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. Logic flow diagram **2900** begins (**2902**) when user computer device **102** detects (**2904**) one or more of a temperature of user computer device **102**, such as a temperature of temperature sensitive user interface **108** and/or an operating temperature of the user computer device itself, and an ambient temperature, that is, a temperature of an environment in which the user computer device is operating. For example, the ambient temperature may be a temperature of an immediate physical context of user computer device **102**, such as a temperature of a pocket or carrying bag, such as a purse, containing the user computer device, or may be a more remote physical context, such as an outdoor temperature of a geographical location in which a user of user computer device **102** is located, for example, an outdoor temperature in Chicago, Ill. or an indoor temperature of a building, or room in a building, in which the user is located.

For example, sensors **314** of user computer device **102** may include a thermistor that detects an operating temperature of the user computer device and outputs a corresponding voltage to processor **302** in accordance with known techniques. Based on the level of the voltage, processor **302** is able to determine an operating temperature of the user computer device. By way of another example, sensors **314** of user computer device **102** may include a temperature sensor, such as a thermometer, that measures an ambient temperature of the device, or user computer device **102** may execute an application maintained in the at least one memory device **304** and that uses a received broadcast of weather data to estimate the temperature corresponding to your GPS position, such as the 'Thermometer' from Mobiquite, of Niort, France, or weather applications available from WeatherBug®, from Earth Networks, of Germantown, Md., or The Weather Channel® of Cobb County, Georgia, that provide for broadcast of local forecast and temperature information.

Based on the one or more detected temperatures, user computer device **102** determines (**2906**) to auto-bias, or pre-tune, a temperature of temperature sensitive user interface **108**. For example, user computer device **102** may maintain, in at least one memory device **304**, a pre-determined temperature range comprising one or more temperature thresholds, for example, a lower temperature threshold and an upper temperature threshold. However, in other embodiments of the present invention, only a single threshold may be used, for example, to trigger auto-biasing when the detected temperature of user computer device **102**, such as of temperature sensitive user interface **108**, or the detected ambient temperature is below a first temperature threshold or above a second temperature threshold. User computer device **102** then compares the detected temperature to the one or more temperature thresholds and determines whether to auto-bias, or pre-tune, temperature sensitive user interface **108** based on the comparison. For example, if the pre-determined temperature range is a temperature range centered at an average skin temperature, and the detected temperature is inside of the temperature range (for example, above a first, lower temperature threshold and below a second, higher temperature threshold), then user computer device **102** may determine to auto-bias, or pre-tune, temperature sensitive user interface **108** to a temperature outside of the range, for example, by adjusting a temperature of temperature sensitive user interface **108** either below the first temperature threshold or above the second temperature threshold. Thus, a temperature differential between the detected temperature (which may be assumed to be an approximation of the temperature of the user computer device) and a user's touch can more easily be detected. On the other hand, if the detected temperature is outside of the temperature range, then user computer device may determine not to auto-bias, or pre-tune, temperature sensitive user interface **108**. In other embodiments of the present invention, only a single threshold may be used, such as either the first, lower temperature threshold or the second, higher temperature threshold, and user computer device **102** may determine to

auto-bias, or pre-tune, a temperature of temperature sensitive user interface **108** to a lower temperature when the detected temperature is above the first threshold or to a higher temperature when the detected temperature is below the second threshold.

In another embodiment of the present invention, wherein user computer device **102** detects both the temperature of temperature sensitive user interface **108** and the ambient temperature, user computer device **102** may determine to increase or to decrease a temperature of temperature sensitive user interface **108** based on a comparison of the two detected temperatures. For example, user computer device may determine a difference between the detected temperature of temperature sensitive user interface **108** and the detected ambient temperature. When the temperature difference is less than a temperature differential threshold, then user computer device **108** may determine to auto-bias, for example, to increase (or decrease) the temperature of temperature sensitive user interface **108**, that is, to adjust the temperature of temperature sensitive user interface **108** such that the difference between the temperature of the temperature sensitive user interface and the ambient temperature is greater than the temperature differential threshold. On the other hand, when the temperature difference is greater than the temperature differential threshold, then user computer device **108** may determine not to auto-bias the temperature of temperature sensitive user interface **108**.

When user computer device **102** determines to auto-bias, or pre-tune, temperature sensitive user interface **108**, the user computer device auto-biases (**2908**), that is, self-tunes, a temperature of the temperature sensitive user interface **108**, that is, adjusts a temperature of thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110** of temperature sensitive user interface **108**. For example, user computer device **102** may determine to adjust a temperature of the thermal energy emitter/detector devices to a pre-determined temperature level and/or elevate or decrease a temperature of the thermal energy emitter/detector devices by a predetermined amount, which predetermined amount may be based on the detected temperatures (for example, based on the amount of adjustment required to change the temperature of temperature sensitive user interface **108** to being above or below a temperature threshold or to produce a temperature differential between temperature sensitive user interface **108** and the ambient temperature that is greater than the temperature differential threshold). The temperature thresholds, as noted above, the temperature differential threshold, the pre-determined temperature level, and the predetermined amount may each be maintained in at least one memory device **304** of user computer device **102**. Logic flow **2900** then ends (**2910**).

For example, in response to determining to auto-bias temperature sensitive user interface **108**, user computer device **102** may auto-bias one or more thermocouple junctions of temperature sensitive user interface **108**, or auto-bias a plate carrying the thermocouple junctions, by adjusting a temperature of the one or more thermocouple junctions or the plate to a temperature different from their current temperature, for example, such that a temperature of the thermocouple junctions is different from a user temperature. In one such embodiment of the present invention, the auto-biasing could be enabled by placing a heating element, such as a resistive element, for example, a resistor, near the thermocouple junction areas. Power (for example, an applied voltage or current) then could be continuously applied to the heating elements or could be applied in bursts in time (averaging effects) until the thermocouple junction temperatures are elevated by few degrees, for example, 5-10 degrees.

In another embodiment of the present invention, the auto-biasing of the thermocouple junctions of temperature sensitive user interface **108** could be generated in a TDMA (Time Division Multiple Access) fashion. For example, touchscreen driver **306** may be configured to switch between an input (thermal energy sensing) topology and an output (thermal energy generating) topology in successive time periods, such as sequential time slots. Specifically, during one time slot, the thermocouple junctions are configured as thermocouple touch sensors, generating an output voltage as a function of detected junction temperature. During a next time slot, the thermocouple junctions may be configured as a heating element, generating heat in relation to an applied input voltage.

In still another embodiment of the present invention, auto-biasing could be achieved by harvesting heat already generated by running hardware of user computer device **102**. For example, when the user computer device is on and operational, processor **302** generates a high amount of heat. Instead of dissipating all such heat through use of heat sinks, user computer device **102** may use such heat to elevate the temperature of the thermocouple junctions, thereby auto-biasing the junctions. When touched, the thermocouple junctions cool down by dissipating heat into a hand contact area, which may be detected as a delta temperature change.

In yet another embodiment of the present invention, user computer device **102** may store, in at least one memory device **304**, a queue of processor intensive (heat generating) tasks that processor **302** of the user computer device needs to perform but is waiting for some condition to occur, such as being plugged into a power outlet or being within range of a WiFi node. If the auto-biasing needs to be performed, the processor could decide to perform one or all of the intensive tasks now, rather than waiting for the occurrence of the condition, so that the internally generated heat can be used to bias the thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110**.

In still other embodiments of the present invention, user computer device **102** may decrease a temperature of the temperature sensitive user interface **108**, and more particularly of thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110**, through use of a thermoelectric cooling system or a liquid coolant system. For example, user computer device **102** may activate a fan (not shown) included in the user computer device or may decrease a temperature of the temperature sensitive user interface through use of a thin-film thermoelectric material (not shown), that may be laminated onto touchscreen **104** and that exhibits significant localized cooling and the potential to pump a significant localized heat flux, or through use of a microscale thermoelectric cooler such for example, the Opto-Cooler· family of thermoelectric coolers available from Nextreme Thermal Solutions, of Durham, N.C. By way of another example, user computer device may decrease a temperature of the temperature sensitive user interface by activating a liquid coolant system, for example, by removing heat from the thermal energy emitter/detector devices by use of heat-pipes or any other liquid refrigerant system that may occur to one of ordinary skill in the art.

By providing for an auto-biasing of the temperature sensitive user interface **108**, user computer device **102** better assures a proper operation of the temperature sensitive user interface in all operating conditions, for example, regardless of environmental temperature and even when an ambient temperature, and a corresponding temperature of the thermal energy emitter/detector devices **110** of the temperature sensitive user interface, is approximately the same as a temperature of a user's touch.

In the foregoing specification, specific embodiments have been described. However, one of ordinary skill in the art

appreciates that various modifications and changes can be made without departing from the scope of the invention as set forth in the claims below. Accordingly, the specification and figures are to be regarded in an illustrative rather than a restrictive sense, and all such modifications are intended to be included within the scope of present teachings.

The benefits, advantages, solutions to problems, and any element(s) that may cause any benefit, advantage, or solution to occur or become more pronounced are not to be construed as a critical, required, or essential features or elements of any or all the claims. The invention is defined solely by the appended claims including any amendments made during the pendency of this application and all equivalents of those claims as issued.

Moreover in this document, relational terms such as first and second, top and bottom, and the like may be used solely to distinguish one entity or action from another entity or action without necessarily requiring or implying any actual such relationship or order between such entities or actions. The terms "comprises," "comprising," "has", "having," "includes", "including," "contains", "containing" or any other variation thereof, are intended to cover a non-exclusive inclusion, such that a process, method, article, or apparatus that comprises, has, includes, contains a list of elements does not include only those elements but may include other elements not expressly listed or inherent to such process, method, article, or apparatus. An element proceeded by "comprises . . . a", "has . . . a", "includes . . . a", "contains . . . a" does not without more constraints, preclude the existence of additional identical elements in the process, method, article, or apparatus that comprises, has, includes, contains the element. The terms "a" and "an" are defined as one or more unless explicitly stated otherwise herein. The terms "substantially," "essentially," "approximately," "about," or any other version thereof, are defined as being close to as understood by one of ordinary skill in the art, and in one non-limiting embodiment the term is defined to be within 10%, in another embodiment within 5%, in another embodiment within 1% and in another embodiment within 0.5%. The term "coupled" as used herein is defined as connected, although not necessarily directly and not necessarily mechanically. A device or structure that is "configured" in a certain way is configured in at least that way, but may also be configured in ways that are not listed.

The Abstract of the Disclosure is provided to allow the reader to quickly ascertain the nature of the technical disclosure. It is submitted with the understanding that it will not be used to interpret or limit the scope or meaning of the claims. In addition, in the foregoing Detailed Description, it can be seen that various features are grouped together in various embodiments for the purpose of streamlining the disclosure. This method of disclosure is not to be interpreted as reflecting an intention that the claimed embodiments require more features than are expressly recited in each claim. Rather, as the following claims reflect, inventive subject matter lies in less than all features of a single disclosed embodiment. Thus the following claims are hereby incorporated into the Detailed Description, with each claim standing on its own as a separately claimed subject matter.

What is claimed is:

1. A method for thermal recognition of an external accessory device that may be used in conjunction with a user computer device, the method comprising:

detecting, by the user computer device, a thermal pattern that identifies the external accessory device;

in response to detecting the thermal pattern and based on the detected thermal pattern, performing one or more of:

activating, by the user computer device, an application corresponding to the detected thermal pattern;

adjusting, by the user computer device, an operational setting of the user computer device;

establishing a wireless connectivity with the external accessory device; and

executing, by the user computer device, the one or more of the activated application, the adjusted setting, and the establishment of the wireless connectivity.

2. The method of claim **1**, wherein the external accessory device is a docking station for the user computer device.

3. The method of claim **1**, wherein establishing a wireless connectivity with the external accessory device comprises establishing a wireless connectivity in accordance with a short-range wireless protocol.

4. The method of claim **3**, wherein the short-range wireless protocol comprises one or more of a Bluetooth protocol and an Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) 802 protocol.

5. The method of claim **1**, wherein detecting comprises receiving, via a temperature sensitive touchscreen of the user computer device, the thermal pattern.

6. The method of claim **1**, further comprising determining to thermally authenticate the external accessory device and wherein the thermal pattern is an authentication pattern.

7. The method of claim **1**, wherein detecting the thermal pattern comprises detecting a first thermal pattern during a first time period and detecting a second thermal pattern during a second time period, wherein the first thermal pattern is different from the second thermal pattern.

8. The method of claim **1**, wherein in response to detecting the thermal pattern and based on the detected thermal pattern, the user computer device activates an application corresponding to the detected thermal pattern and wherein the method further comprises changing the application executed by the user computer device in response to detecting a change in the thermal pattern.

9. The method of claim **1**, wherein the detected thermal pattern identifies the external accessory device as one or more of a calendar-based device, a navigational device an email reader, a music player, a video player, a video game controller, a video game console, and a social networking device, and wherein the method comprises one or more of, in response to detecting that the external accessory device is a calendar-based device, executing a time-and-date application, in response to detecting that the external accessory device is a navigational device, executing a navigational application, in response to detecting that the external accessory device is an email reader, executing a email application, in response to detecting that the external accessory device is a music player, executing a music application, in response to detecting that the external accessory device is a video player, executing a video application, in response to detecting that the external accessory device is one of a video game controller and a video game console, executing a video game application, and in response to detecting that the external accessory device is a social networking device, executing a social networking application.

10. A user computer device comprising:

a housing;

an at least one memory device that maintains at least one thermal pattern that identifies an external accessory device;

a temperature sensitive user interface having a plurality of thermal energy devices that are configured to one or more of emit thermal energy and detect thermal energy; and

a processor coupled to the temperature sensitive user interface and the at least one memory device and that is configured to detect, via the temperature sensitive user interface, the at least one thermal pattern that identifies the external accessory device, in response to detecting the thermal pattern and based on the detected thermal pattern, perform one or more of: activating an application corresponding to the detected thermal pattern, adjusting an operational setting of the user computer device, and establishing a wireless connectivity with the external accessory device, and execute the one or more of the activated application, the adjusted setting, and the establishment of the wireless connectivity.

11. The user computer device of claim **10**, wherein the external accessory device is a docking station for the user computer device.

12. The user computer device of claim **10**, wherein the processor is configured to establish a wireless connectivity with the external accessory device by establishing a wireless connectivity in accordance with a short-range wireless protocol.

13. The user computer device of claim **12**, wherein the short-range wireless protocol comprises one or more of a Bluetooth protocol and an Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) 802 protocol.

14. The user computer device of claim **10**, wherein the temperature sensitive user interface is part of a temperature sensitive touchscreen of the user computer device.

15. The user computer device of claim **10**, wherein the processor is configured to determine to thermally authenticate the external accessory device and wherein the thermal pattern is an authentication pattern.

16. The user computer device of claim **10**, wherein the processor is configured to detect the thermal pattern by detecting a first thermal pattern during a first time period and detecting a second thermal pattern during a second time period, wherein the first thermal pattern is different from the second thermal pattern.

17. The user computer device of claim **10**, wherein in response to detecting the thermal pattern and based on the detected thermal pattern, the processor activates an application corresponding to the detected thermal pattern and wherein the processor is configured to change the application executed by the user computer device in response to detecting a change in the thermal pattern.

18. The user computer device of claim **10**, wherein the detected thermal pattern identifies the external accessory device as one or more of a calendar-based device, a navigational device, an email reader, a music player, a video player, a video game controller, a video game console, and a social networking device, and wherein the processor is configured to one or more of, in response to detecting that the external accessory device is a calendar-based device, execute a time-and-date application, in response to detecting that the external accessory device is a navigational device, execute a navigational application, in response to detecting that the external accessory device is an email reader, executing a email application, in response to detecting that the external accessory device is a music player, executing a music application, in response to detecting that the external accessory device is a video player, executing a video application, in response to detecting that the external accessory device is one of a video game controller and a video game console, executing a video game application, and in response to detecting that the external accessory device is a social networking device, executing a social networking application.

19. An electronic device for thermally interfacing with a user computer device, the electronic device comprising:

a thermal energy interface that is configured to exchange thermal energy with the user computer device; and

a processor coupled to the thermal energy interface that is configured to one or more of generate a thermal pattern in the thermal energy interface that may be detected by the user computer device and detect a thermal pattern emitted by the user computer device.

20. The electronic device of claim **19**, further comprising an at least one memory device coupled to the processor that maintains a list of applications that may be executed by the user computer device and that maintains, in association with each such application, a thermal pattern that identifies the application.

21. The electronic device of claim **19**, further comprising a user interface that is configured to receive instructions from a user of the electronic device and to provide information to the user of the electronic device.

22. The electronic device of claim **19**, wherein the electronic device comprises a docking station for the user computer device.

* * * * *