After lowest purchase cost server 106 searches each of the vendor sites and obtains the appropriate product and price information, server 106 will divide the order into one or more "lowest cost" groups (step 306). For example, a health supplement retailer may be purchasing numerous health supplement products from one or more sources. Lowest purchase cost server 106 can determine which products are being offered by which sources at the lowest costs. Thus, if one source is offering some of the products in an order at a lowest price, and another source is offering the rest of the products in the order at a lowest price for those products, lowest purchase cost server 106 will divide the order into two groups to take advantage of the two separate lowest purchase cost sources. Alternatively, a consumer may only want to go to one source to buy all products listed in an order. In accordance with this aspect of the invention, lowest purchase cost server 106 will determine the total price for a complete order from multiple sources and compare those total prices to determine the lowest. Server 106 then will give the consumer the opportunity to purchase the order from the lowest price provider. As one skilled in the art will appreciate, products or services in an order can be grouped into any number of groups, depending on the number of separate sources providing lowest prices, and depending on the number of different sources a consumer wants to deal with.

After server 106 groups the items into the various groups, server 106 will present the groups of items to the consumer. In addition, server 106 will provide to the consumer one or more sources for the separate groups of items and the prices for each of the groups from each of the sources (step 308). Server 106 can present the product, price, grouping, and source information to the consumer by downloading an interactive application with the information, such as a web page or Java applet, to the consumer's computing device 102, or server 106 can communicate the information to order entry software, which as discussed above, may be residing on computing device 102.

Providing the product and price information to the consumer allows the consumer to choose preferred groupings and sources based on price or irrespective of price. For example, while it may be cheaper for a consumer to break an order into 3 groups and purchase items from 3 separate sources, a consumer may not wish to deal with that many separate sources. Thus, server 106 may give the consumer the option to purchase the 3 separate groups, 2 separate groups, or only a single group. Moreover, while one source may provide an order at a lower price than other sources, a consumer may wish to deal with a source with which he is more familiar. Thus, server 106 will give the consumer the option to choose a source even though it may be more expensive than other sources.

As one skilled in the art will appreciate, server 106 can provide to a consumer any number of different combinations of groups, prices and sources for an order of products and/or services. In fact, when a consumer places an order the ordering software or applications can be configured to solicit preference from the consumer. Thus, a consumer can specify grouping and source preferences (*i.e.*, one group only, multiple groups, preferred sources, etc.)

In accordance with another embodiment of the present invention, in addition to providing merely price information to consumers, server 106 can be configured to obtain from sources or vendors 108 other product specials information, such as coupons, close out items, over-stocked items, etc. and provide that information to the consumers. In addition, server 106 can be configured to provide electronic coupons to consumers.

After server 106 presents the consumer with the grouping, price, and source options (step 208), the consumer then can order the products (step 210). Orders can be placed in a number of different ways. In accordance with one embodiment of the present invention, the consumer can use the product, price, grouping and source information provided to it to make purchasing decisions, and then order the products or services from the sources without the assistance of server 106.

Alternatively, the consumer can use lowest purchase cost server 106 and the associated software or application running on computing device 102 to place the orders. In accordance with this aspect of the present invention, the consumer, using computing device 102, can instruct lowest purchase cost server 106 to purchase the one or more groups of products from the one or more different sources. Serve 106 can store consumer and vendor ordering information, such as consumer name, billing address, delivery address, credit card number, customer credit account number, delivery instruction, or any other information that will help server 106 create orders with sources or vendors 108. Using some or all of this information, server 106 will place the orders and the sources or vendors will delivery the products directly to the consumer. If server 106 presents a source for products or service to a consumer with which the consumer has never dealt, and the consumer wants to order from that source or vendor, server 106 can be configured to facilitate the opening of an account with that source for the consumer. In accordance with this aspect of the invention, server 106 can be configured to apply for credit checks, submit customer applications or anything else that may be needed to facilitate the setting-up of a consumer as a customer of a vendor.

In accordance with yet another embodiment of the present invention, instead of submitting the order for products or service to the vendor, server 106 can be configured to

connect the consumer's computing device 102 directly with the vendors 108, so that the consumer can place the orders directly with the vendors. HTML links or other suitable connection means can be used to connect the consumer's computing devices with the vendors.

In accordance with yet another embodiment of the present invention, the systems and methods of the present invention can be configured with or used by any inventory control and order processing systems known in the art. As one skilled in the art will appreciate, many wholesale and retail stores, manufacturing facilities, and service providers implement inventory control and order processing systems. For example, a retail store may use bar code scanners or other equipment to facilitate purchase and track the inventory of products in the store. By scanning products on the shelf and/or tracking products as they are purchased, the inventory control systems will know when product inventory is getting low. Some product inventory systems can be configured to automatically generate orders for products when inventories get low. In accordance with one embodiment of the present invention, such inventory control systems can be configured to communicate with server 106 in order to locate vendor(s) offering the products being ordered at a lowest price. Moreover, as one skilled in the art will appreciate, "inventory control systems" for the home also can be used with the systems and methods of the present invention. For example, scanning systems and computing devices used in the home to create shopping lists or the like can be configured to generate orders and communicate with server 106 to locate lowest price providers.

In conclusion, the present invention provides novel systems and methods for facilitating lowest price purchases of one or more products and/or services. While detailed descriptions of one or more embodiments of the invention have been given above, various alternatives, modifications, and equivalents will be apparent to those skilled in the art. For example, while the present invention is illustrated and disclosed herein as communicating over the Internet, one skilled in the art will appreciate that any communication connection may be used without varying from the spirit of the invention. Therefore, the above description should not be taken as limiting the scope of the invention, which is defined by the appended claims.

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method for providing products or services to consumers from one or more sources, comprising the steps of:

receiving at a computer system an order from a consumer for a plurality of products or services, the order being generated by a computing device;

electronically searching sources for prices of the plurality of products or services;

grouping the plurality of products or services into one or more groups of products or services;

determining one or more sources that can provide the one or more groups of products or services at a lowest cost; and

facilitating the purchase by the consumer of the one or more groups of products or services from the one or more sources.

2. The method as recited in claim 1 wherein in the grouping step, each of the one or more groups of products or services may comprise one or more products or services.

3 The method as recited in claim 1 wherein the receiving step further comprises the step of:

providing the consumer with software to be loaded on the computing device, the software being configured to receive orders from the consumer and communicate the orders to the computer system via a communication connection; and

after the consumer enters the order for the plurality of products or services, the computer system receiving the order from the computing device.

4. The method as recited in claim 3 wherein the communication connection is a communication connection selected from the group comprising the Internet, a virtual private network, a dedicated private network, a wireless connection, a satellite connection, a phone connection, a local area network, or a wide area network.

5. The method as recited in claim 1 wherein the receiving step further comprises the steps of:

the computer system sending an interactive application to the computing device via a communication connection, the interactive application being configured to receive orders for products or services from the consumer; and

after the consumer enters the order for the plurality of products or services, the computer system receiving the order from the computing device.

6. The method as recited in claim 5 wherein the communication connection is a communication connection selected from the group comprising the Internet, a virtual private network, a dedicated private network, a wireless connection, a satellite connection, a phone connection, a local area network, or a wide area network.

7. The method as recited in claim 5 wherein the interactive application may comprise a web page created using Java, Java 2, HTML, or XML languages.

8. The method as recited in claim 1 wherein the computing device may be a computing device from the group comprising a personal computer, a network workstation, a cellular phone, a satellite phone, an interactive television, a handheld computing device, or a smart card device.

9. The method as recited in claim 1 wherein the electronically searching step comprises the computer system searching a source's database electronically connected to the computer system for the prices.

10. The method as recited in claim 1 wherein the electronically searching step further comprises the steps of:

downloading the prices for the products or services from the sources into a database associated with the computer system; and

electronically searching the database associated with the computer system.

11. The method as recited in claim 1 wherein the determining step comprise the step of determining a single source that can provide the one or more groups of products or services at a lowest cost.

12. The method as recited in claim 1 wherein the facilitating step comprises the step of the computer system placing an order with the one or more sources for the one or more products or services ordered by the consumer.

13. The method as recited in claim 1 wherein the facilitating step comprises the step of connecting the consumer's computing device with the one or more sources so that the consumer can place the order with the one or more sources.

14. The method as recited in claim 1 wherein the determining step further comprises the step of considering one or more additional cost factors other than price, the additional cost factors being selected from the group, including: special discount arrangements between buyers and sellers; special time or volume based sales prices; promotions, coupons, rebates, or buyer/seller co-operative arrangements; product introduction or closeout price rate structures; or shipping, delivery, set-up, or testing costs or estimates.

15. A method for obtaining products or services from one or more sources, comprising the steps of:

a consumer entering an order for one or more products or services into a computing device;

transmitting the order via a communication connection from the computing device to a computer system comprising a lowest cost search engine;

electronically searching sources for prices of the plurality of products or services;

grouping the plurality of products or services into one or more groups of products or services;

determining one or more sources that can provide the one or more groups of products or services at a lowest cost; and

facilitating the purchase by the consumer of the one or more groups of products or services from the one or more sources.

16. The method as recited in claim 15 wherein the entering an order step comprises the steps of:

scanning the bar code of a desired product or service; and

creating an order for the scanned desired product or service.

17. The method as recited in claim 15 wherein in the grouping step, each of the one or more groups of products or services may comprise one or more products or services.

18. The method as recited in claim 15 wherein the receiving step further comprises the step of:

providing the consumer with software to be loaded on the computing device, the software being configured to receive orders from the consumer and communicate the orders to the computer system via a communication connection; and

after the consumer enters the order for the plurality of products or services, the computer system receiving the order from the computing device.

19. The method as recited in claim 18 wherein the communication connection is a communication connection selected from the group comprising the Internet, a virtual private network, a dedicated private network, a wireless connection, a satellite connection, a phone connection, a local area network, or a wide area network.

20. The method as recited in claim 15 wherein the receiving step further comprises the steps of:

the computer system sending an interactive application to the computing device via a communication connection, the interactive application being configured to receive orders for products or services from the consumer; and

after the consumer enters the order for the plurality of products or services, the computer system receiving the order from the computing device.

21. The method as recited in claim 20 wherein the communication connection is a communication connection selected from the group comprising the Internet, a virtual private network, a dedicated private network, a wireless connection, a satellite connection, a phone connection, a local area network, or a wide area network.

22. The method as recited in claim 20 wherein the interactive application may comprise a web page created using Java, Java 2, HTML, or XML languages.

23. The method as recited in claim 15 wherein the computing device may be a computing device from the group comprising a personal computer, a network workstation, a cellular phone, a satellite phone, an interactive television, a handheld computing device, or a smart card device.

24. The method as recited in claim 15 wherein the electronically searching step comprises the computer system searching a source's database electronically connected to the computer system for the prices.

25. The method as recited in claim 15 wherein the electronically searching step further comprises the steps of:

downloading the prices for the products or services from the sources into a database associated with the computer system; and

electronically searching the database associated with the computer system.

26. The method as recited in claim 15 wherein the determining step comprise the step of determining a single source that can provide the one or more groups of products or services at a lowest cost.

27. The method as recited in claim 15 wherein the facilitating step comprises the step of the computer system placing an order with the one or more sources for the one or more products or services ordered by the consumer.

28. The method as recited in claim 15 wherein the facilitating step comprises the step of connecting the consumer's computing device with the one or more sources so that the consumer can place the order with the one or more sources.

29. The method as recited in claim 15 wherein the determining step further comprises the step of considering one or more additional cost factors other than price, the additional cost factors being selected from the group, including: special discount arrangements between buyers and sellers; special time or volume based sales prices; promotions, coupons, rebates, or buyer/seller co-operative arrangements; product introduction or closeout price rate structures; or shipping, delivery, set-up, or testing costs or estimates.

30. A system for providing products or services to consumers from one or more sources, comprising:

a computer system configured to receive an order from a consumer for a plurality of products or services, the order being generated by a computing device, the computer system being configured to;

electronically search sources for prices of the one or more groups of products or services;

group the products or services into one or more groups of products or services;

determine one or more sources that can provide the one or more groups of products or services at a lowest cost; and

facilitate the purchase by the consumer of the one or more groups of products or services from the one or more sources.

31. The system as recited in claim 30 wherein the one or more groups of products or services may comprise one or more products or services.

32. The system as recited in claim 30 wherein the computing device comprises software configured to receive orders from the consumer and communicate the orders to the computer system via a communication connection.

33. The system as recited in claim 32 wherein the communication connection is a communication connection selected from the group comprising the Internet, a virtual private network, a dedicated private network, a wireless connection, a satellite connection, a phone connection, a local area network, or a wide area network.

34. The system as recited in claim 30 wherein the computer system is configured to send an interactive application to the computing device via a communication connection, the interactive application being configured to receive orders for products or services from the consumer and communicate the orders to the computer system.

35. The system as recited in claim 34 wherein the communication connection is a communication connection selected from the group comprising the Internet, a virtual private network, a dedicated private network, a wireless connection, a satellite connection, a phone connection, a local area network, or a wide area network.

36. The system as recited in claim 34 wherein the interactive application comprises a web page created using Java, Java 2, HTML, or XML.

37. The system as recited in claim 30 wherein the computing device is a computing device from the group comprising a personal computer, a network workstation, a cellular phone, a satellite phone, an interactive television, a handheld computing device, or a smart card device.

38. The system as recited in claim 30 wherein the computer system is configured to search a source's database for the product or service prices.

39. The system as recited in claim 30 wherein the computer system is configured to download the prices for the products or services from the sources into a database associated with the computer system and electronically search the database associated with the computer system.

40. The system as recited in claim 30 wherein the computer system is configured to determine a single source that can provide the one or more groups of products or services at a lowest cost.

41. The system as recited in claim 30 wherein the computer system is configured to place an order with the one or more sources for the one or more products or services ordered by the consumer.

42. The system as recited in claim 30 wherein the computer system is configured to connect the consumer's computing device with the one or more sources so that the consumer can place the order with the one or more sources.

43. The system as recited in claim 30 wherein the computer system considers one or more additional cost factors other than price to determine the lowest cost, the additional cost factors being selected from the group, including: special discount arrangements between buyers and sellers; special time or volume based sales prices; promotions, coupons, rebates, or buyer/seller co-operative arrangements; product introduction or closeout price rate structures; or shipping, delivery, set-up, or testing costs or estimates.

44. The system as recited in claim 30 the computing device further comprises:

a bar code scanner for scanning the bar code of a desired product or service; and

software for creating an order for the scanned desired product or service.

SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR PROVIDING LOWEST COSTS PURCHASING

ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

A system and method for providing products and/or services to consumers from one or more sources or vendors is provided. The system comprises a computer system configured to receive an order (or inquiry) from a consumer for a plurality of products or services. The consumer can generate the order using a computing device. The computer system receives the order and electronically searches for prices for each of the products and/or services in the order. The computer system then groups the products and/or services into one or more groups and determines one or more sources or vendors that can provide the one or more groups at a lowest purchase cost after taking into account varied cost factors that may effect the final purchase cost of the order. The computer system then helps facilitate the purchase of the products and/or services from the one or more sources or vendors.

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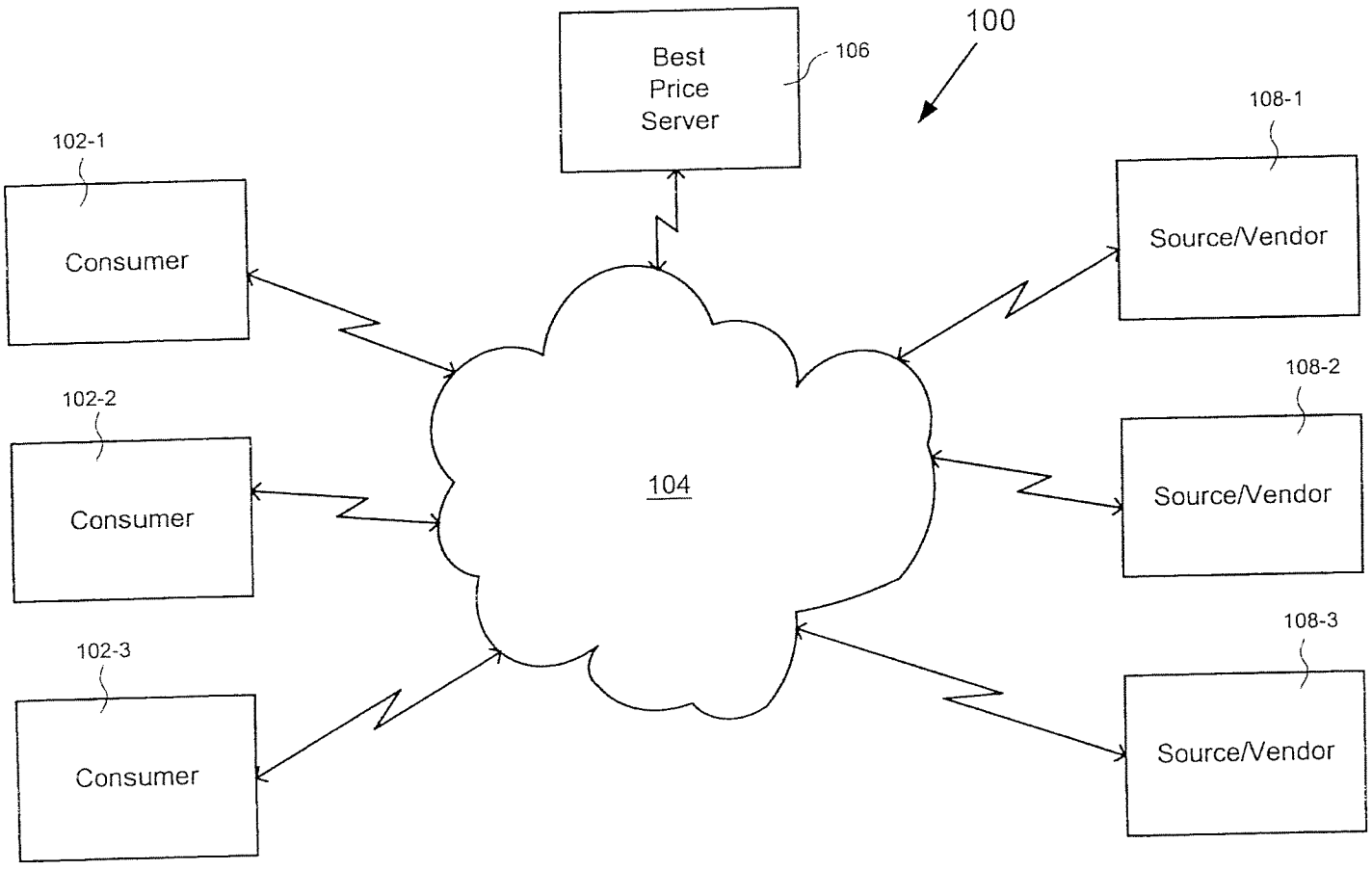
100
Best
Price
Server
106
102-1
Consumer
102-2
Consumer
102-3
Consumer
104
108-1
Source/Vendor
108-2
Source/Vendor
108-3
Source/Vendor

Fig. 1

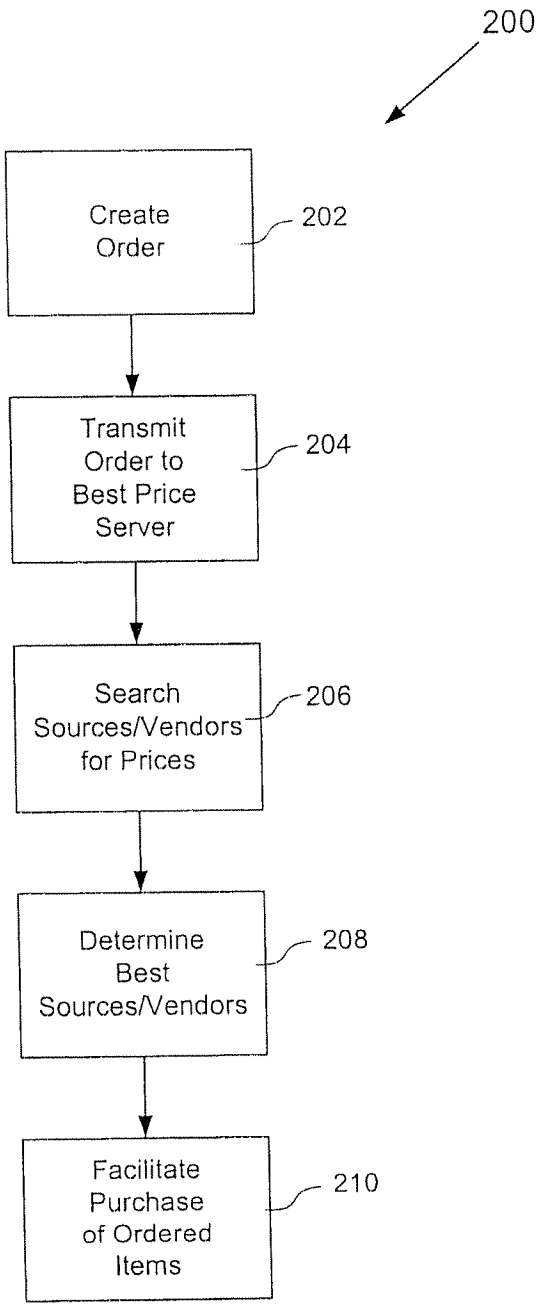
200
Create Order
202
Transmit Order to Best Price Server
204
Search Sources/Vendors for Prices
206
Determine Best Sources/Vendors
208
Facilitate Purchase of Ordered Items
210

Fig. 2

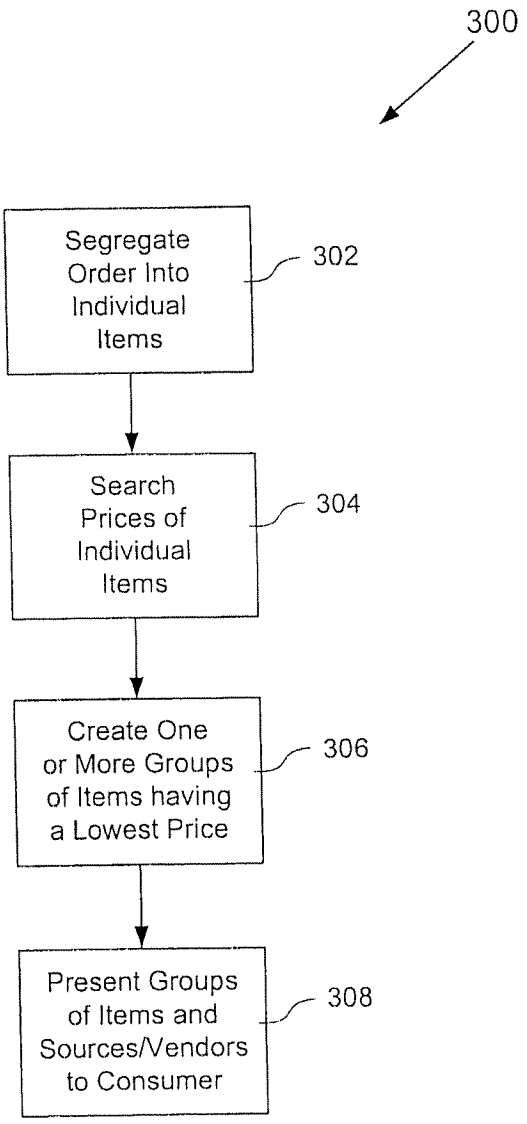
300
Segregate Order Into Individual Items
302
Search Prices of Individual Items
304
Create One or More Groups of Items having a Lowest Price
306
Present Groups of Items and Sources/Vendors to Consumer
308

Fig. 3

JOINT COMBINED DECLARATION AND POWER OF ATTORNEY

We, **Dilip Chopra and Sandeep Sharma**, the below named inventors, declare

Type of Declaration

That this is an **original declaration** for filing;

Inventorship Identification

Sandeep Sharma is a citizen of India having a permanent address in India and an address in the United States of America as set forth below. Dilip Chopra is a citizen of the United States of America having the addresses set forth;

that we believe we are the original, first and joint inventors of the subject matter which is claimed and for which a patent is sought on the invention entitled

Title of Invention; Specification Identification

System and Method For Single-Source, Lowest Price Product Procurement the specification of which is attached hereto;

Acknowledgment of Review of Papers and Duty of Candor

that we have reviewed and understand the contents of the above identified specification, including the claims therein;

that we acknowledge the duty to disclose information which is material to patentability as defined in 37, Code of Federal regulations, § 1.56

that we do not know and do not believe that the subject matter of said application was ever known or used in the United States before our invention or discovery thereof or patented or described in any printed publication in any country before our invention or discovery thereof or more than one year prior to this application.

Priority Claim

We hereby claim foreign priority benefits under Title 35, United States Code, § 119 of any foreign applications for patent or inventor's certificate or of any PCT international applications designating at least one country other than the United States of America listed below and have also identified below any foreign applications for patent or inventor's certificate or any PCT international applications designating at least one country other than the United States of America file by us on the same subject matter having a filing date before that of the applications of which priority is claimed.

Country	*Application Number*	*Date of Filing*	*Priority Claimed Under 37 USC 119*
			___ Yes ___ (No)

Power of Attorney

We hereby appoint LEE G. MEYER (Reg. No. 27,216), 1660 Lincoln Street, Suite 1900, Denver, CO 80264 (telephone 303/830-1776) our attorney with full power of substitution and revocation, to prosecute this application, to make alterations and amendments therein, to receive the patent and to transact all business in the U. S. Patent and Trademark Office connected therewith.

Declaration

Lastly, we declare that all statements made herein of our own knowledge are true and that all statements made on information and belief are believed to be true; and further, that these statements were made with the knowledge that willful false statements and the like are punishable by fine or imprisonment or both under Section 1001 of Title 18 of the United States Code and that such willful false statements may jeopardize the validity of the application or any patent issuing thereon.

Signatures

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This Declaration ends with this page.