

EXHIBIT B



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Stone et al.

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(54) **INTERNET ADVERTISING SYSTEM AND METHOD**

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(Continued)

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patent is extended or adjusted under 35
U.S.C. 154(b) by 0 days.

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(22) Filed: **Sep. 30, 2004**

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(65) **Prior Publication Data**

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(Continued)

Related U.S. Application Data

(63) Continuation of application No. 10/165,091, filed on
Jun. 7, 2002, now Pat. No. 6,829,587, which is a
continuation of application No. 09/480,303, filed on
Jan. 10, 2000, now Pat. No. 6,446,045.

Primary Examiner—Andrew J. Fischer
(74) *Attorney, Agent, or Firm*—Henry Croskell

(57) **ABSTRACT**

(51) **Int. Cl.**
G06Q 30/00 (2006.01)
(52) **U.S. Cl.** 705/26; 705/14
(58) **Field of Classification Search** 705/26,
705/27, 14
See application file for complete search history.

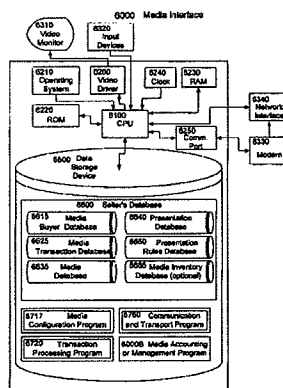
An internet advertising system and method that provides a seller self-serve control for creation, publication, and display of advertisements on internet media venues owned or controlled by entities other than the seller in a form automatically modified to comply with the media venues' presentation rules, which may include design or style standards for "look and feel," editorial standards, and distribution factors. Self-serve, menu driven interfaces are provided for sellers to target internet media venues, and for internet media venues to enter their presentation rules. An ad modification engine processes or customizes the advertisement for publication and display on each internet media venue in compliance with the media venue's presentation rules. The system also includes an online reporting tool, an interface for a seller's accounting management system to automatically update advertisements and control publication timing, and a buyer interface for purchase, reservation, or referral regarding the advertised product or service.

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397 Claims, 35 Drawing Sheets



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Fig. 1a

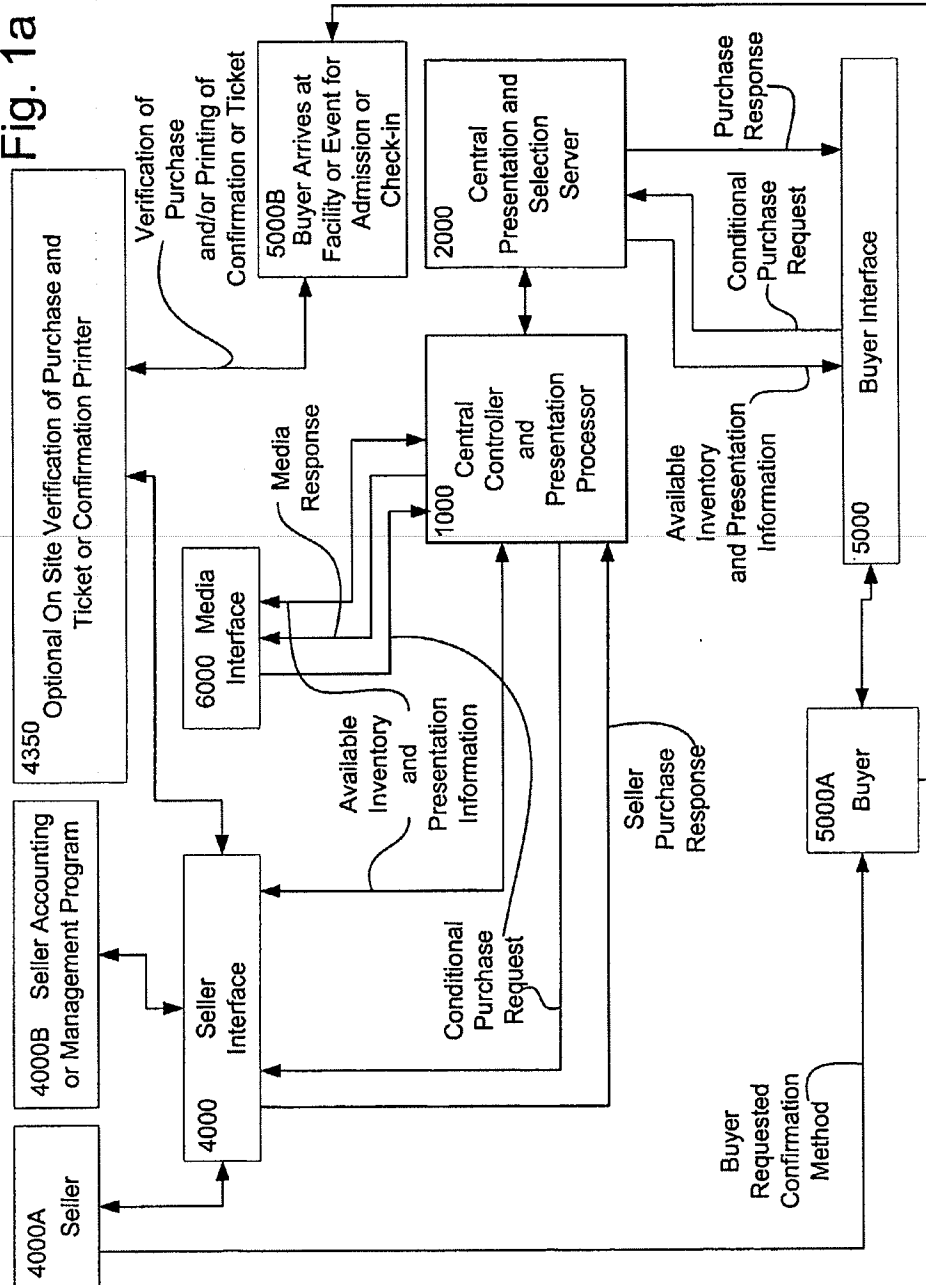


Fig. 1b

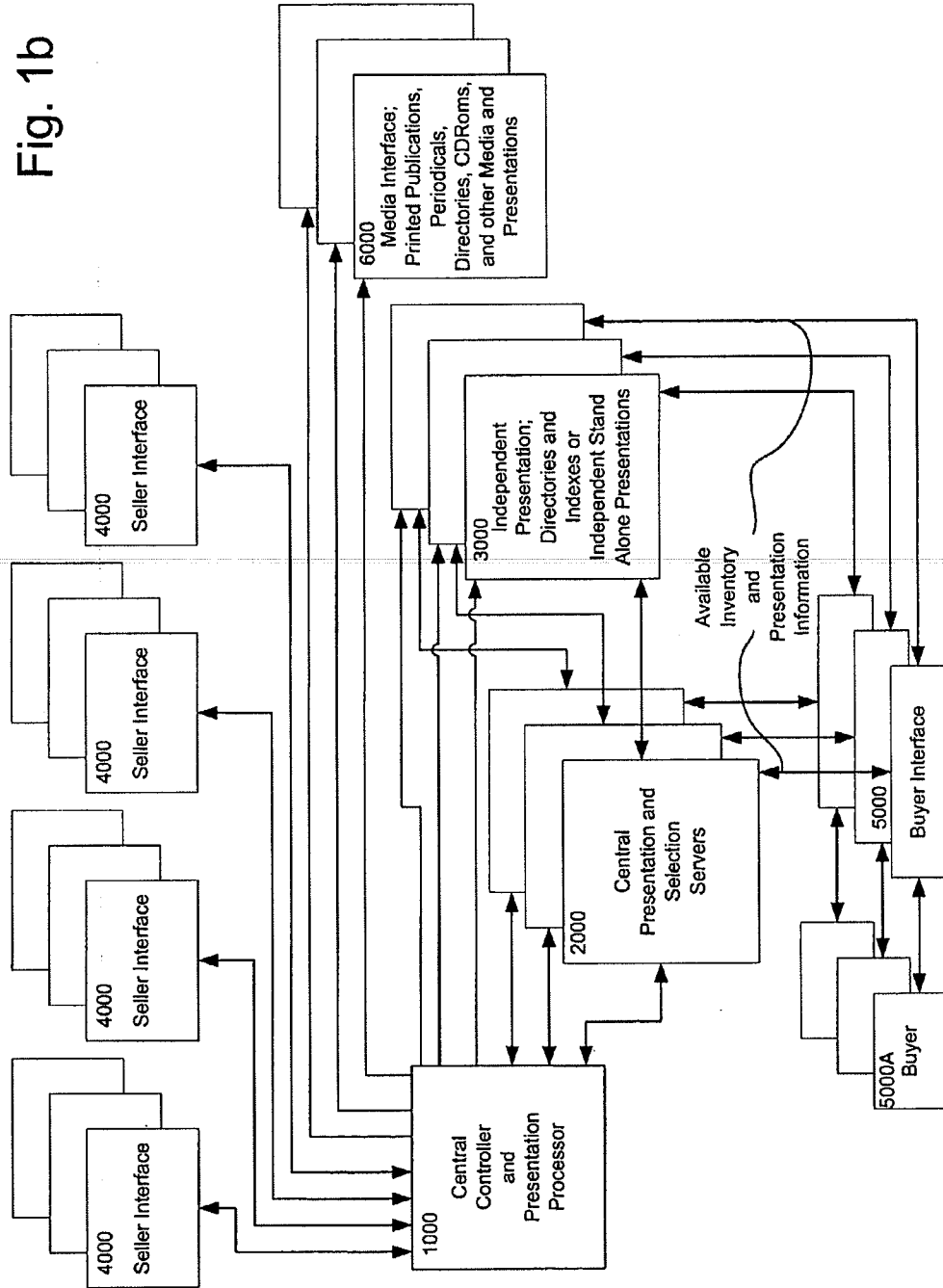


Fig. 2a

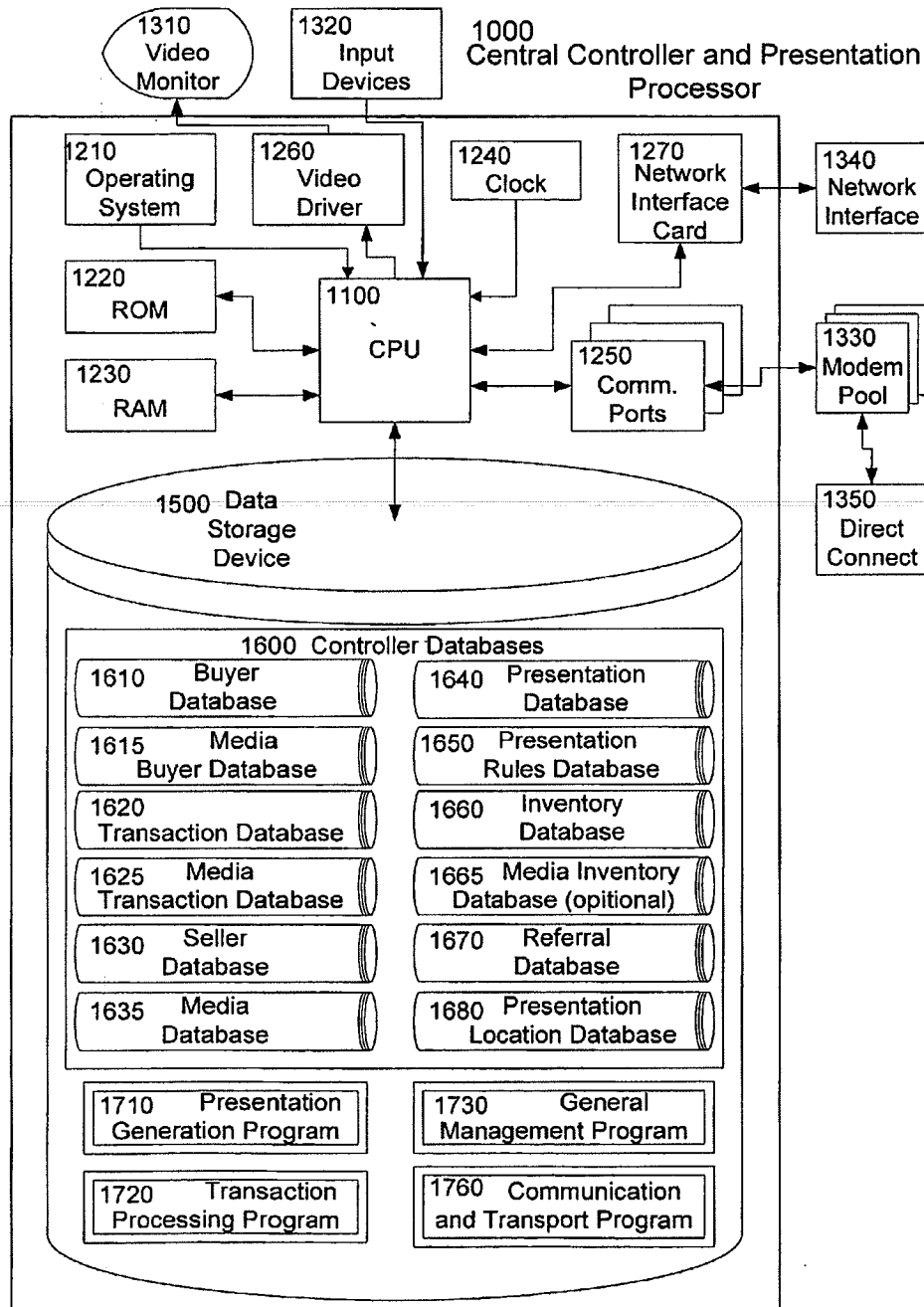


Fig. 2b

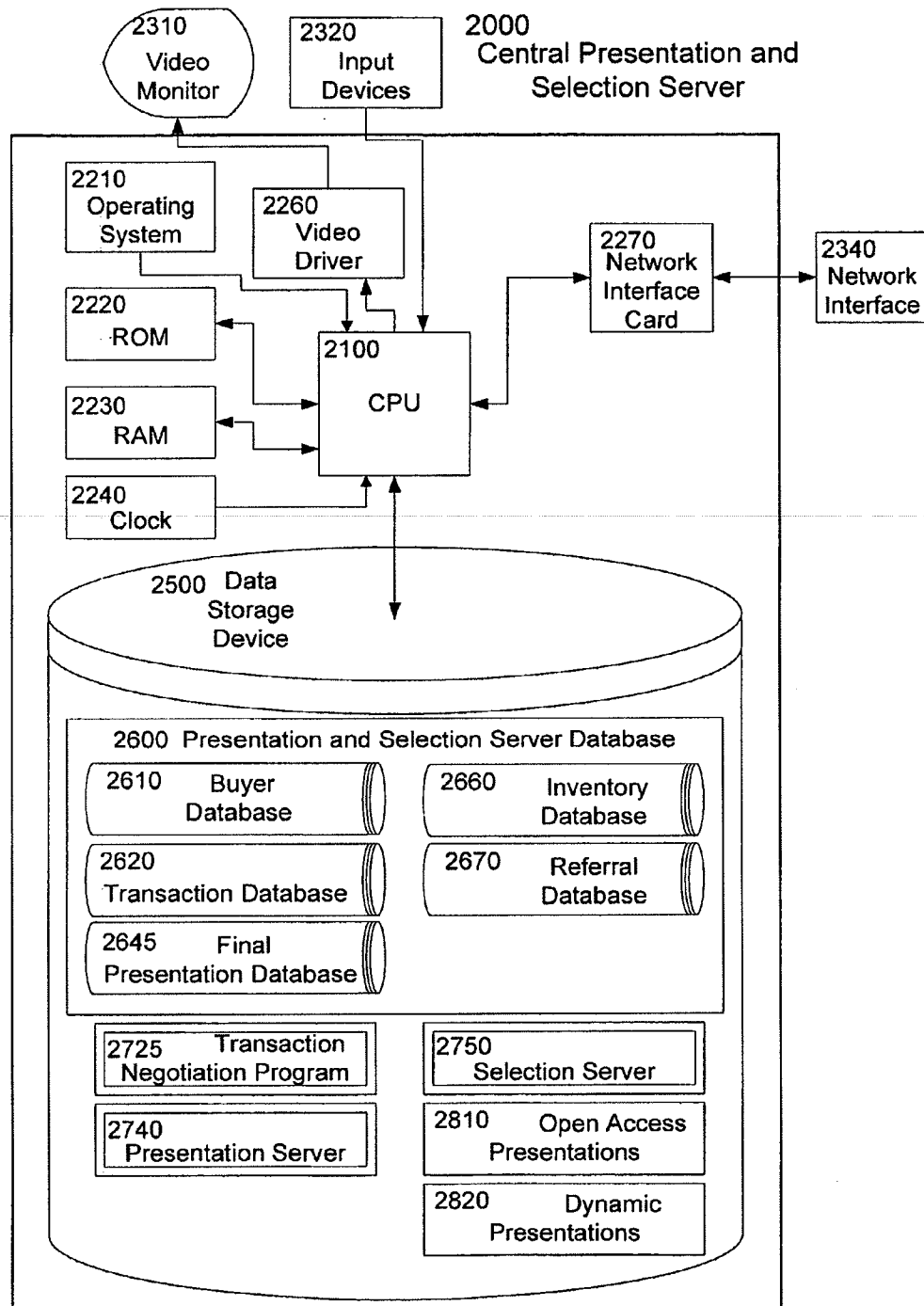


Fig. 2c

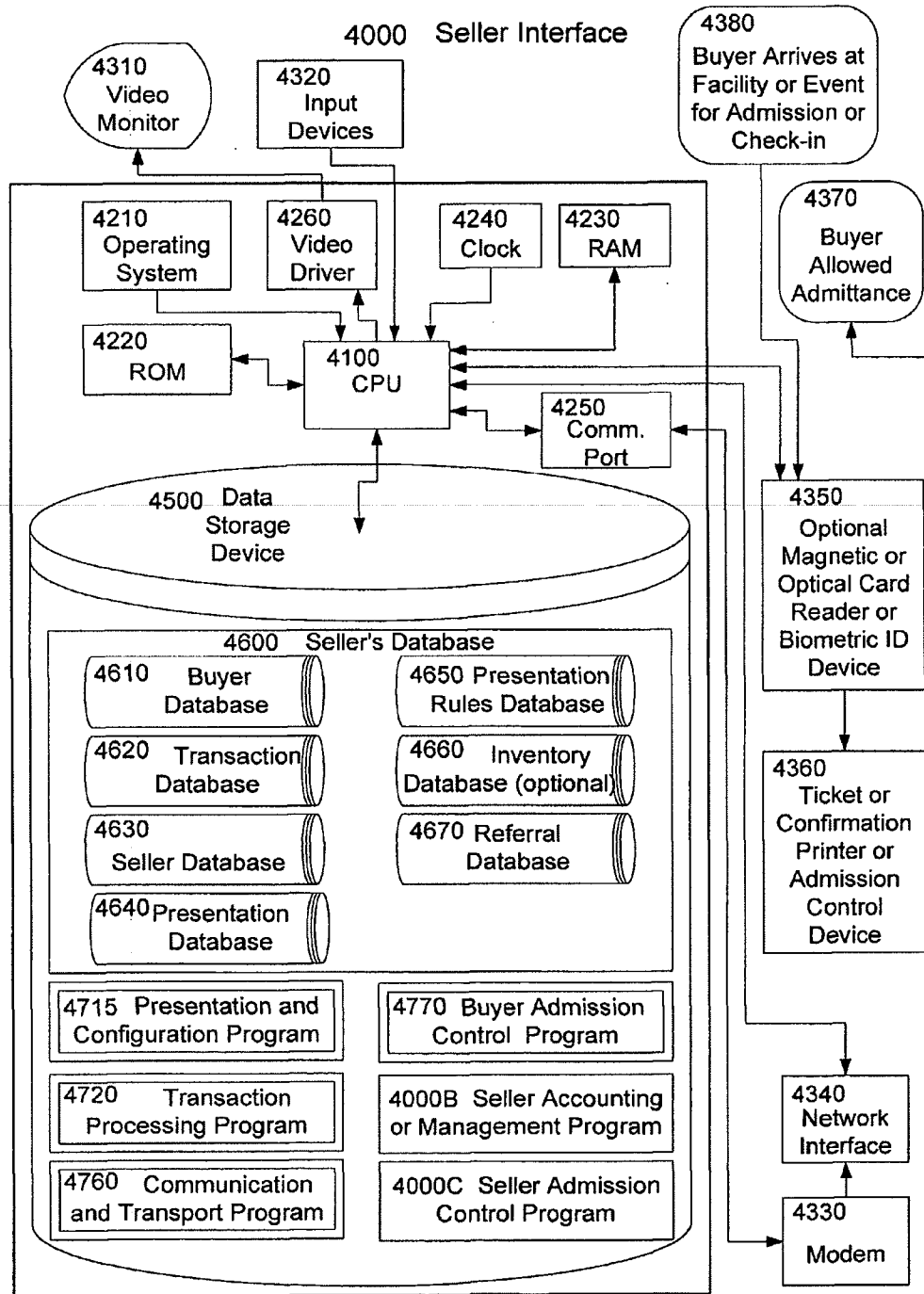


Fig. 2d

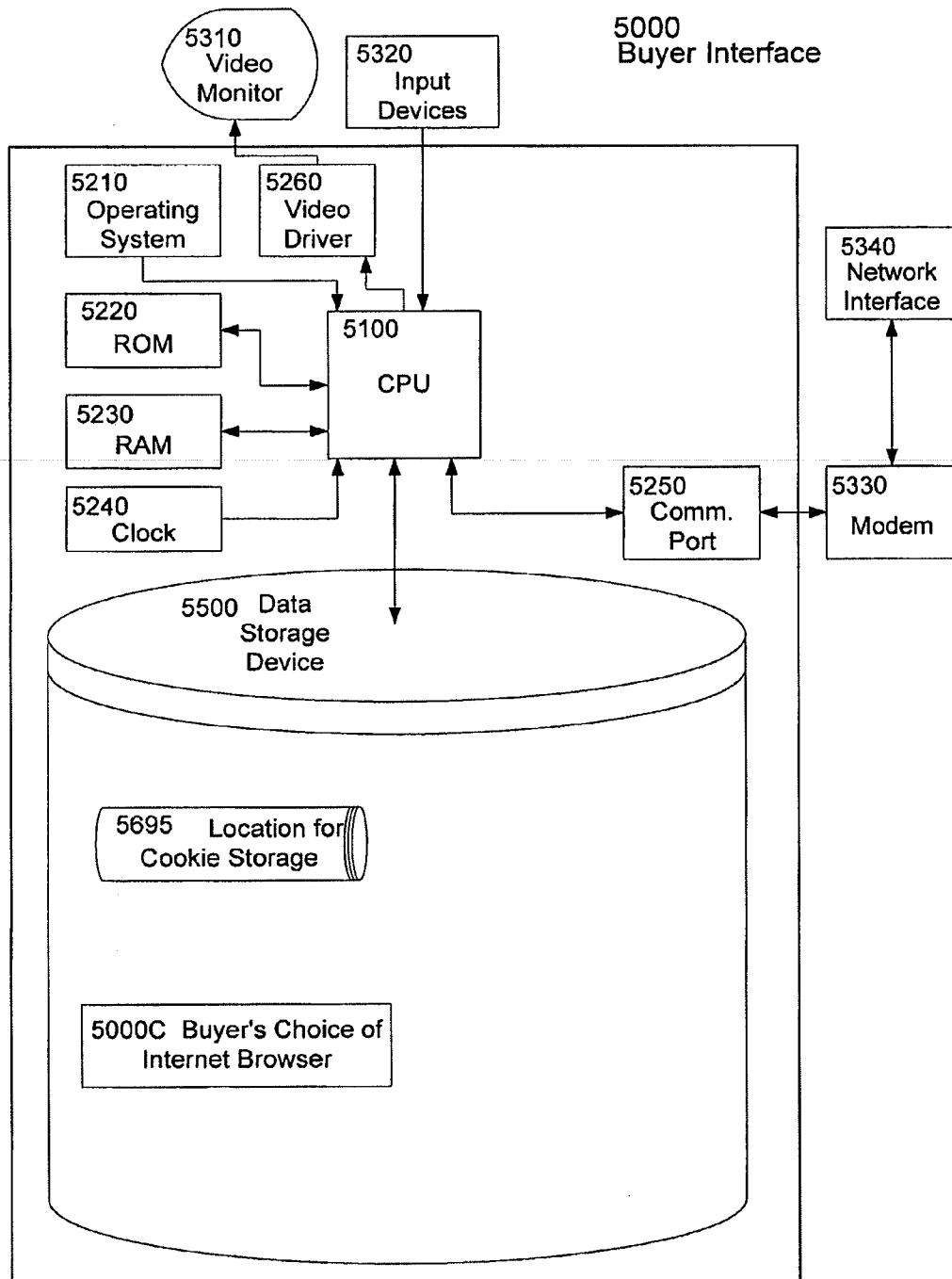


Fig. 2e

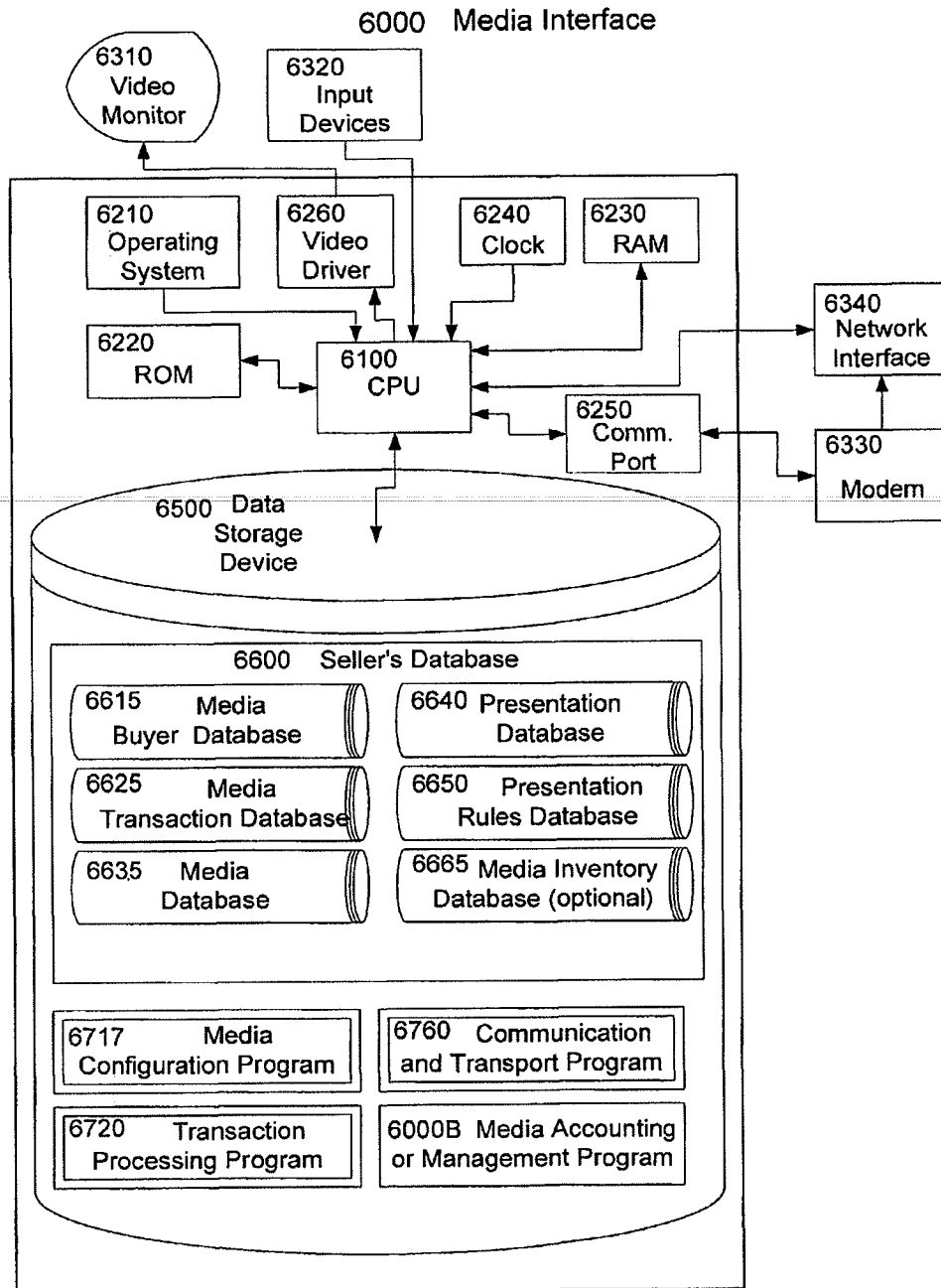


Fig. 3a

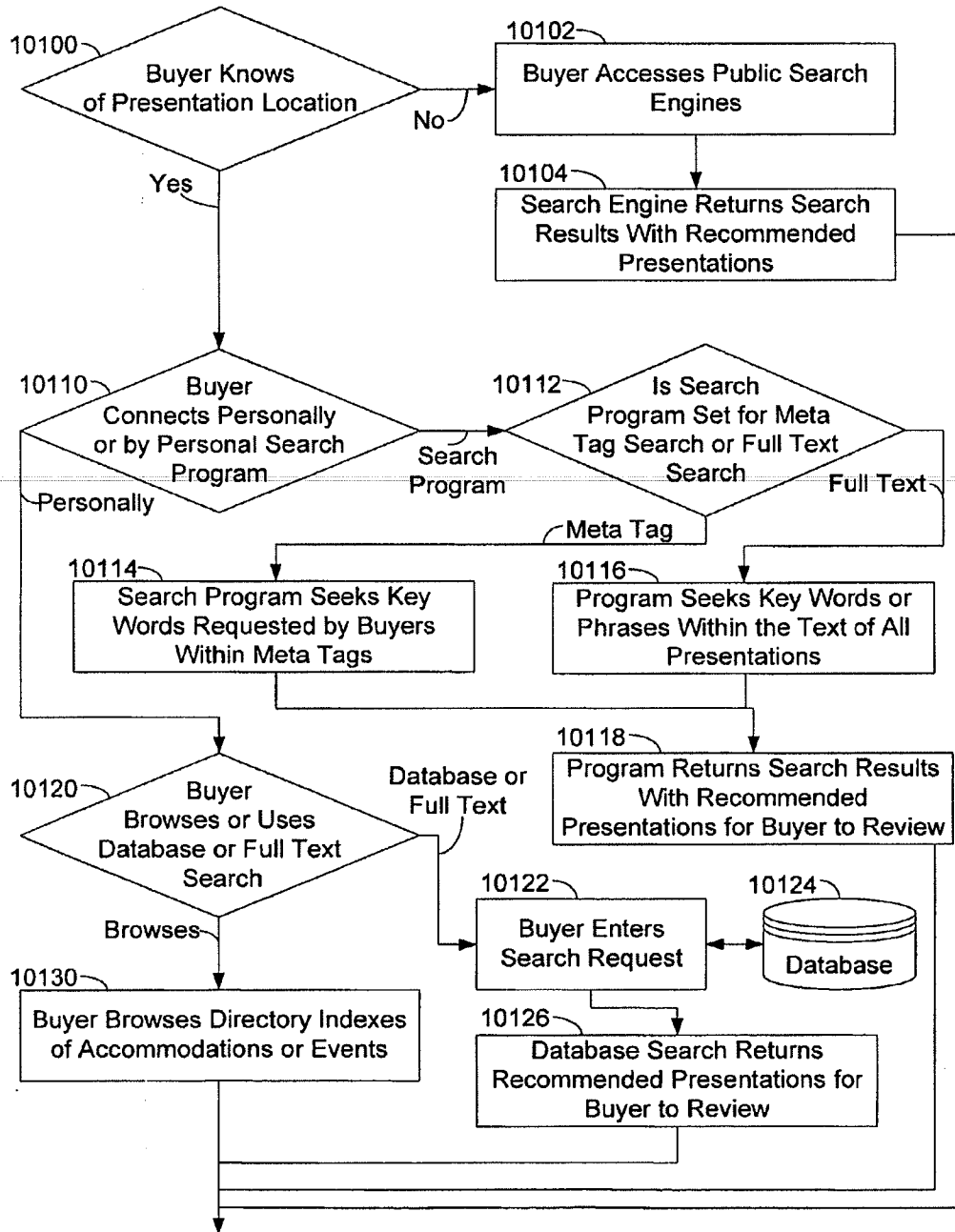


Fig. 3b

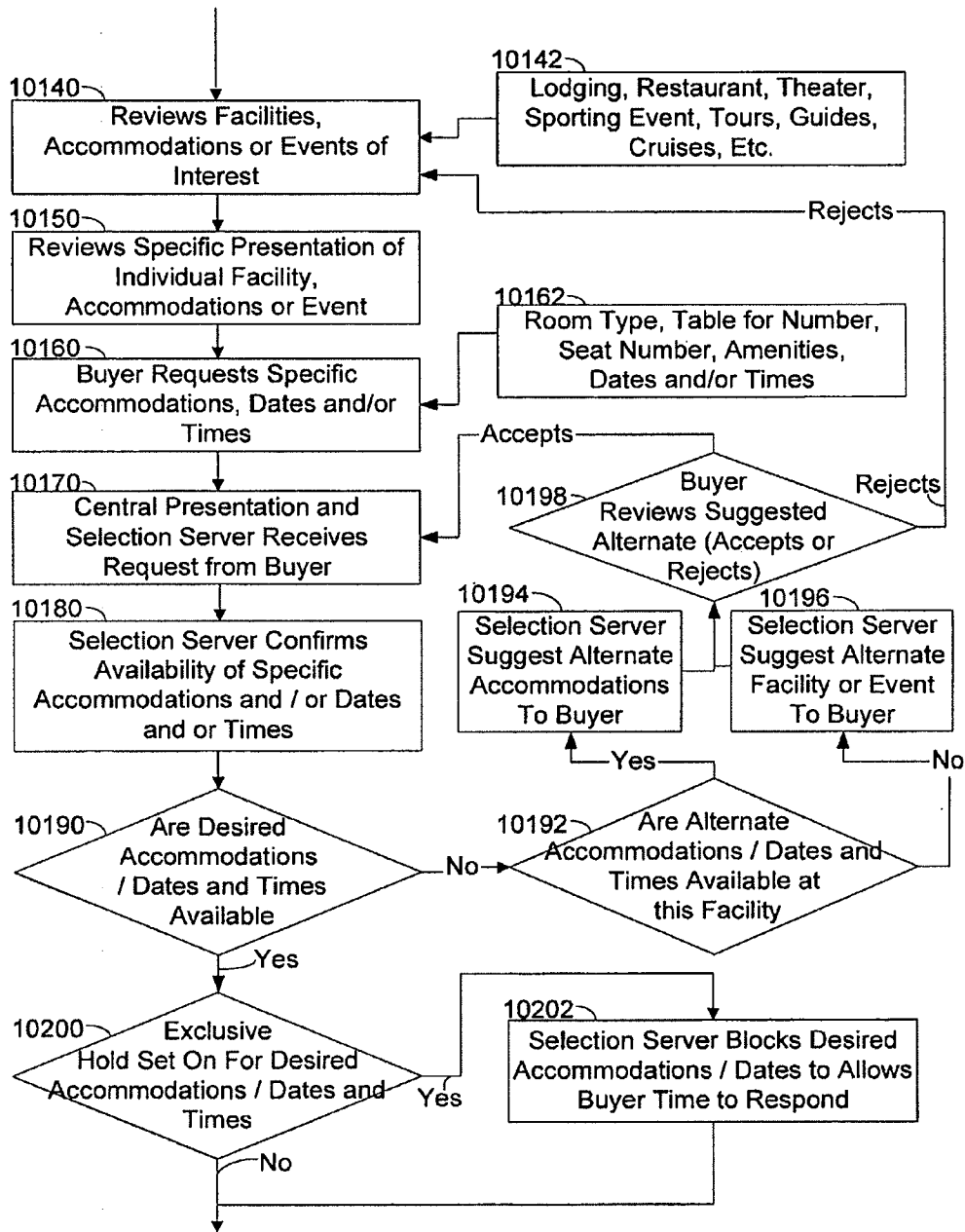


Fig. 3c

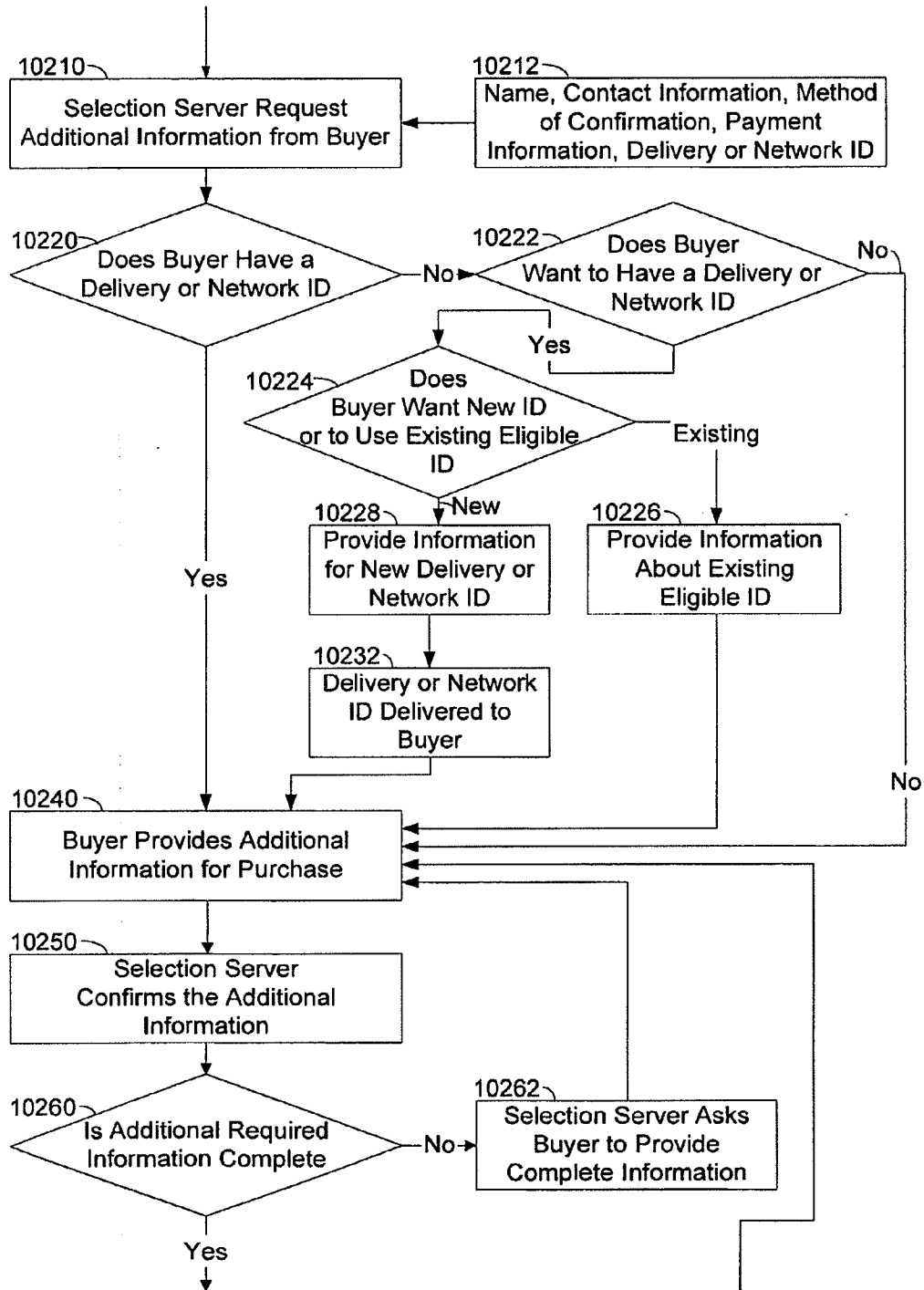


Fig. 3d

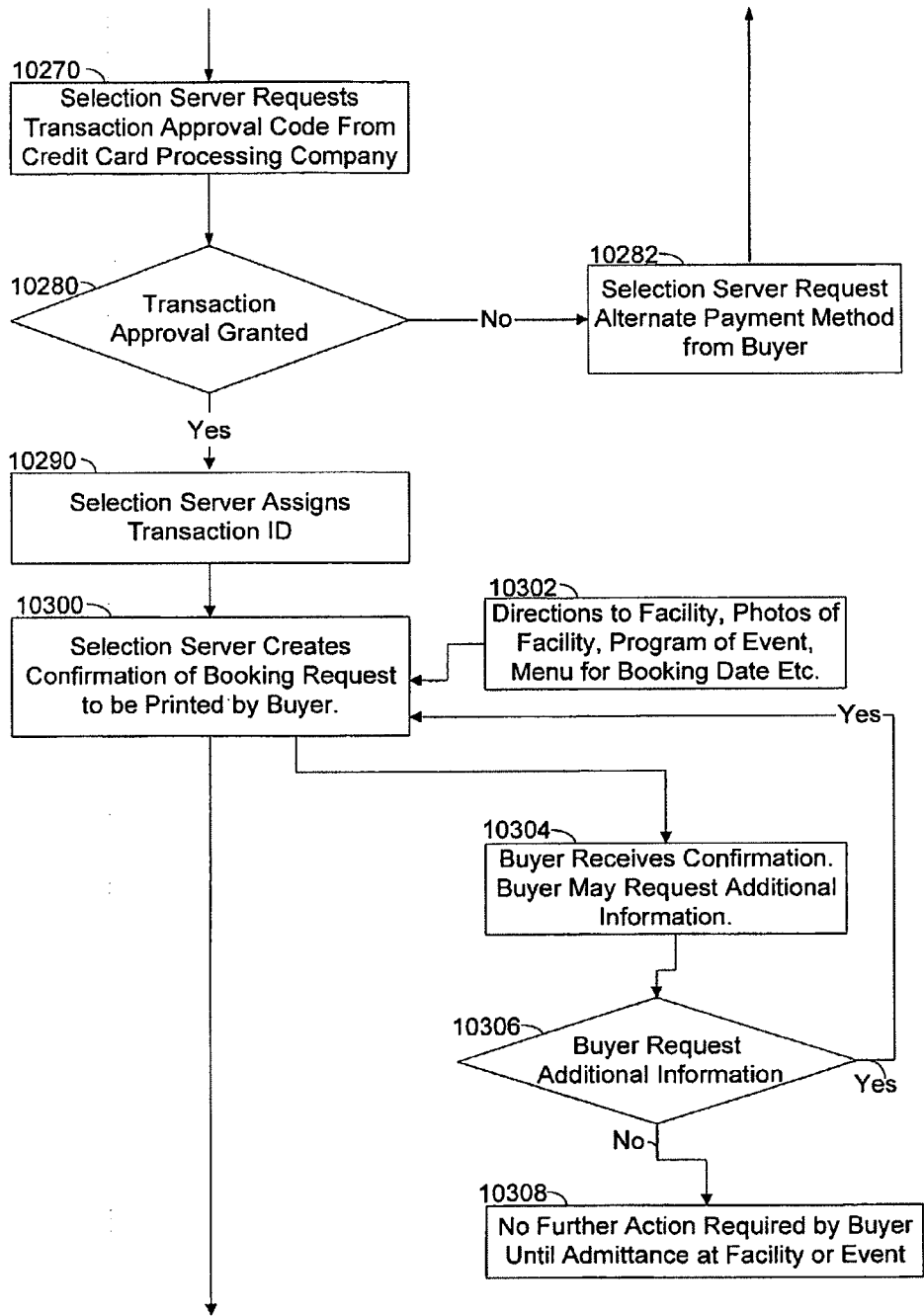


Fig. 3e

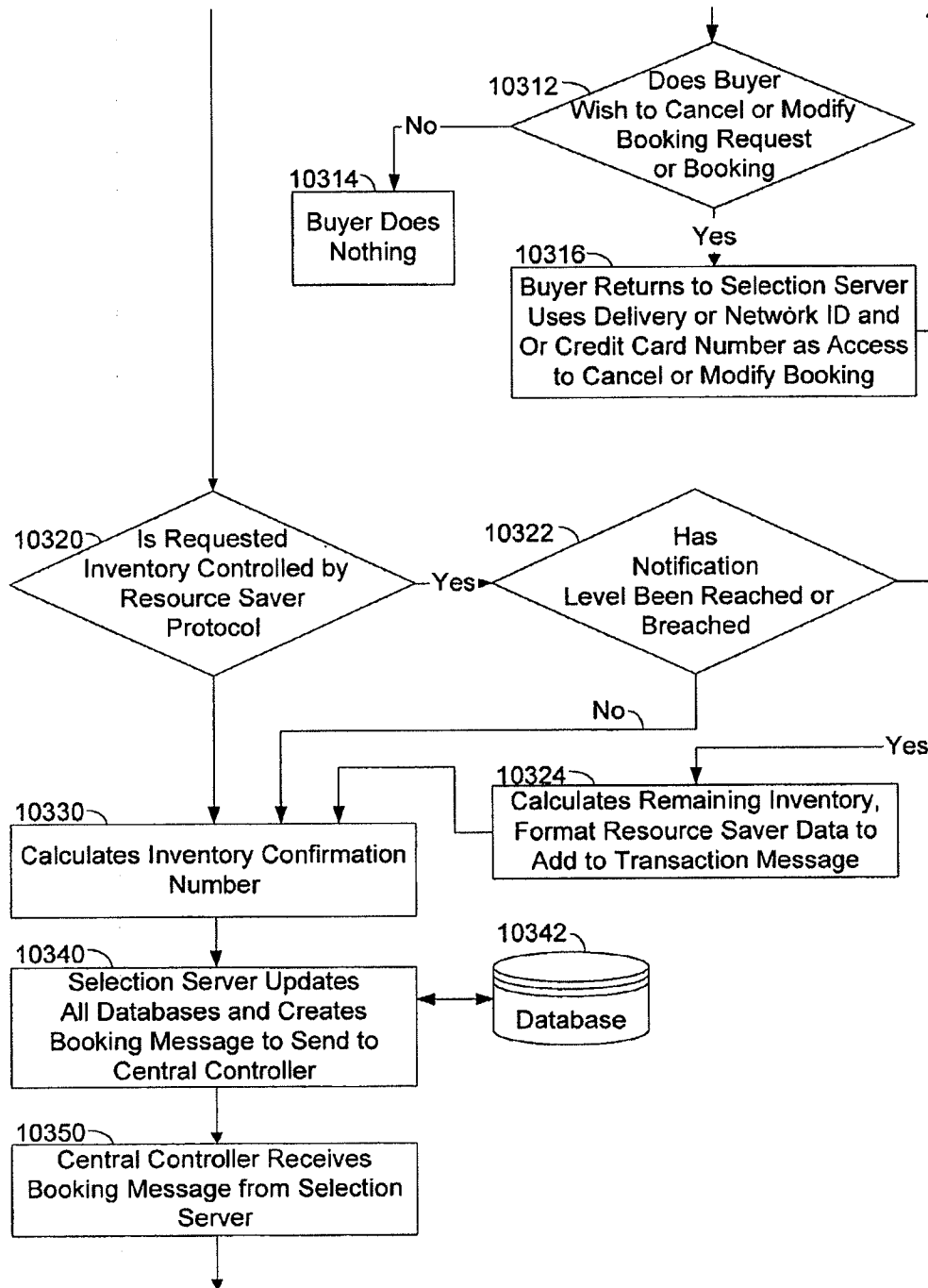


Fig. 3f

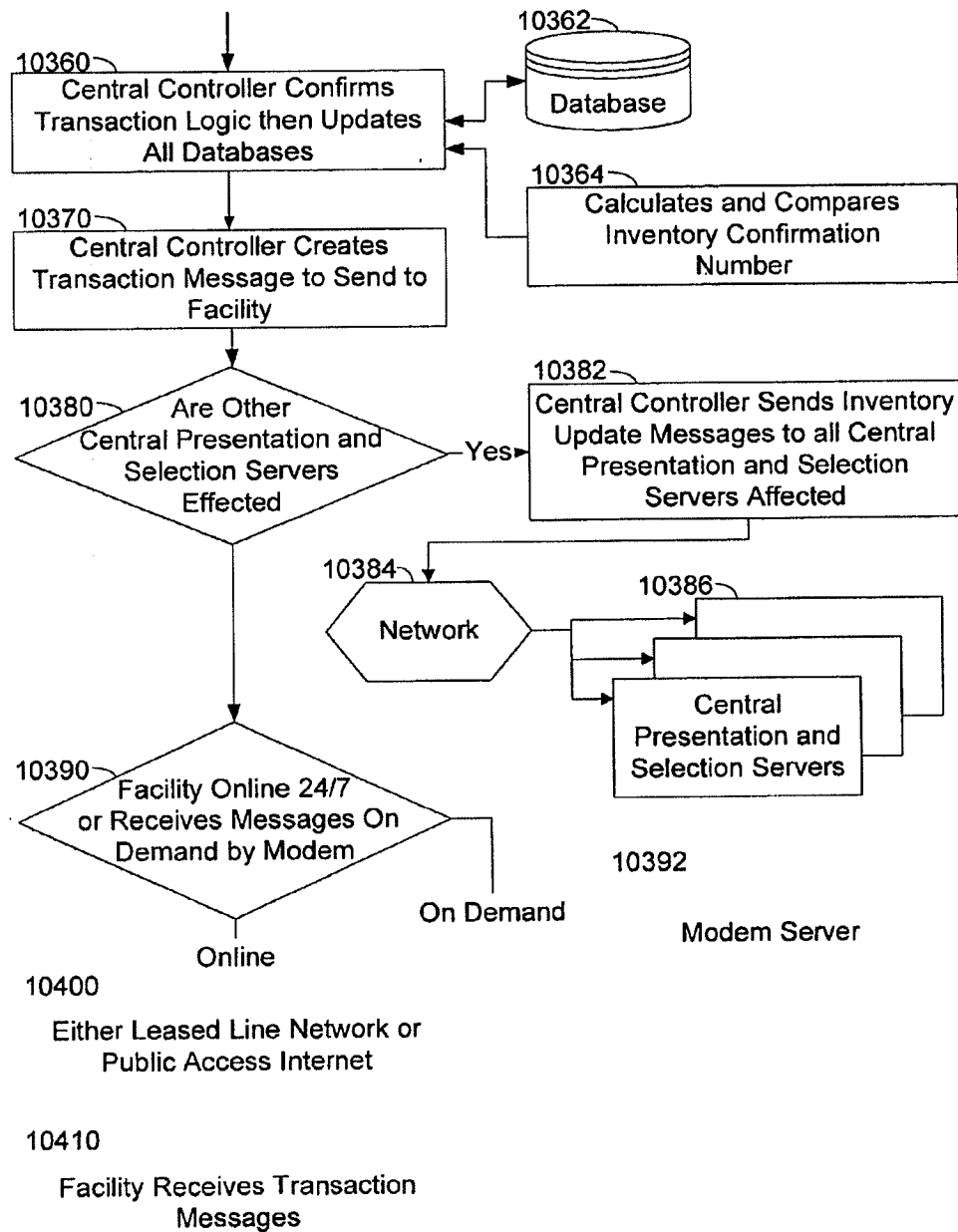


Fig. 3g

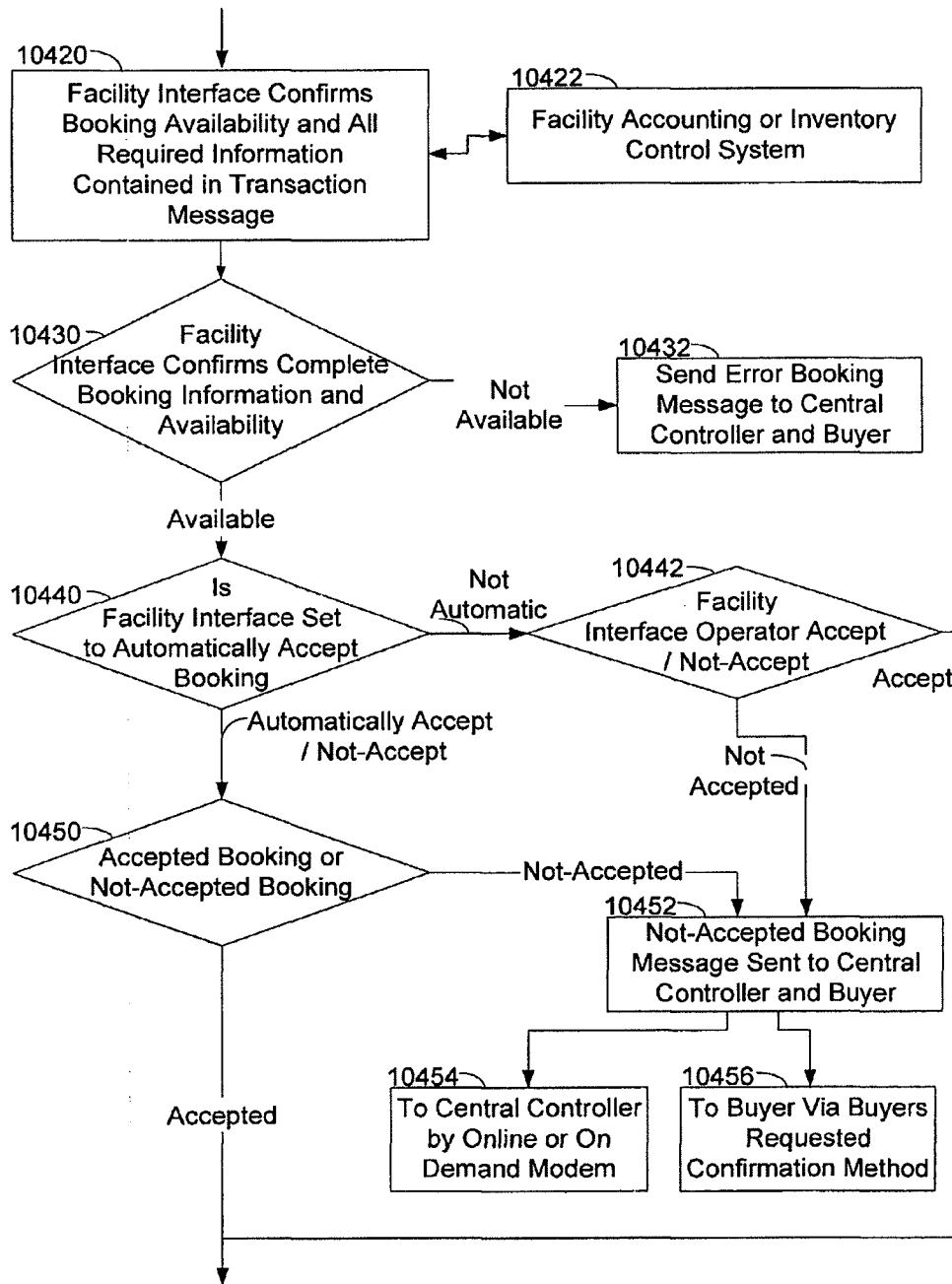


Fig. 3h

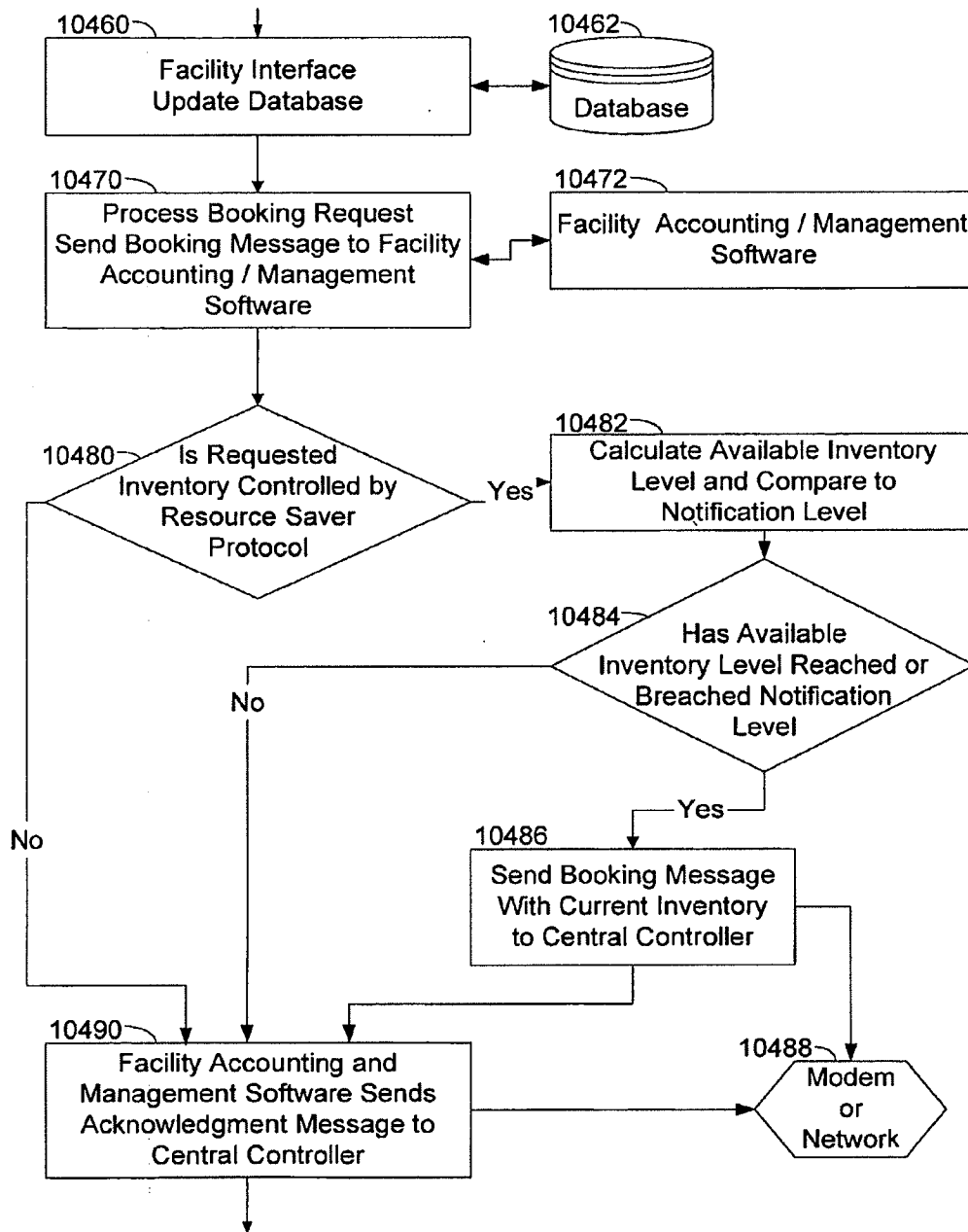


Fig. 3i

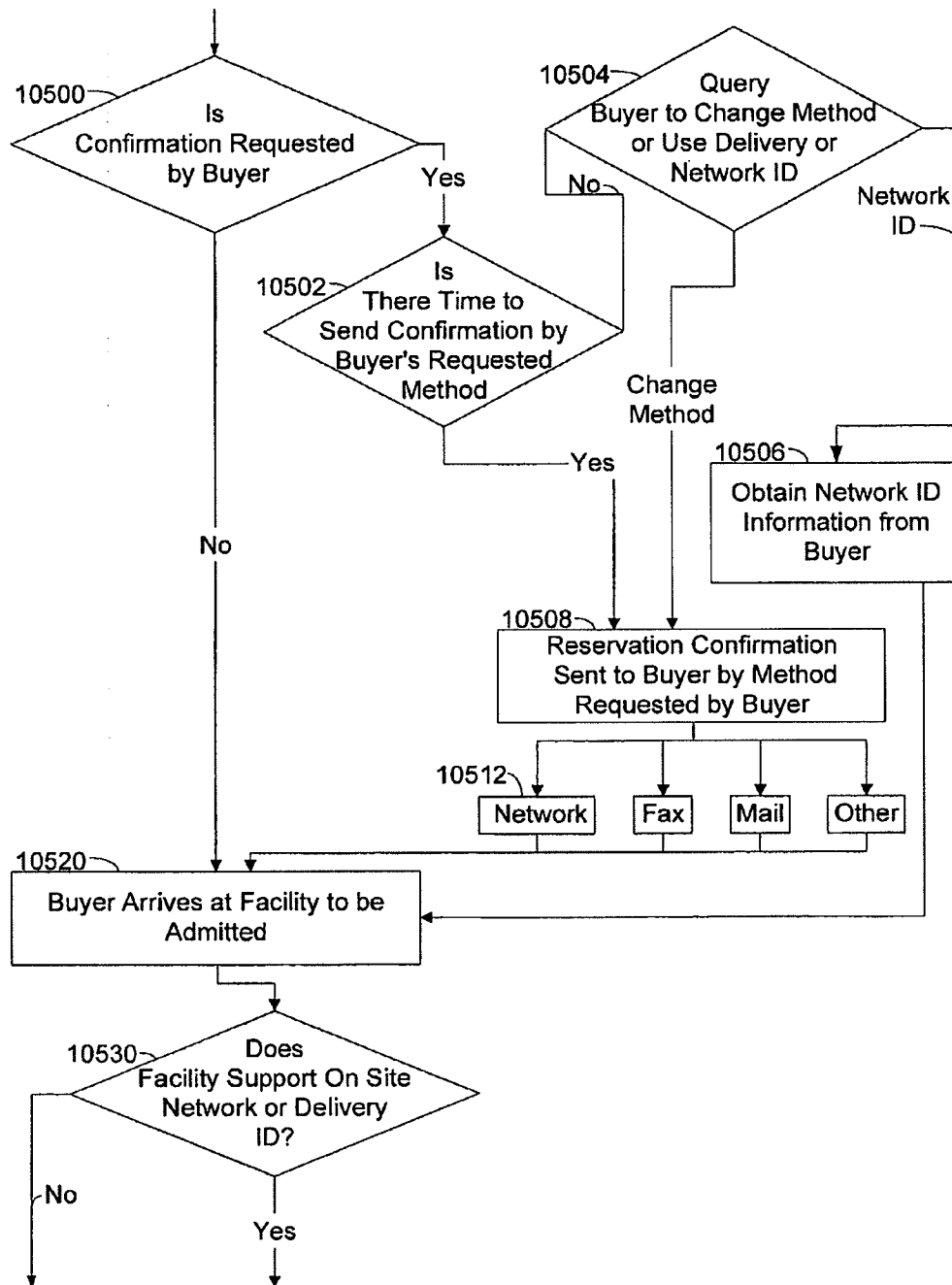


Fig. 3i-a

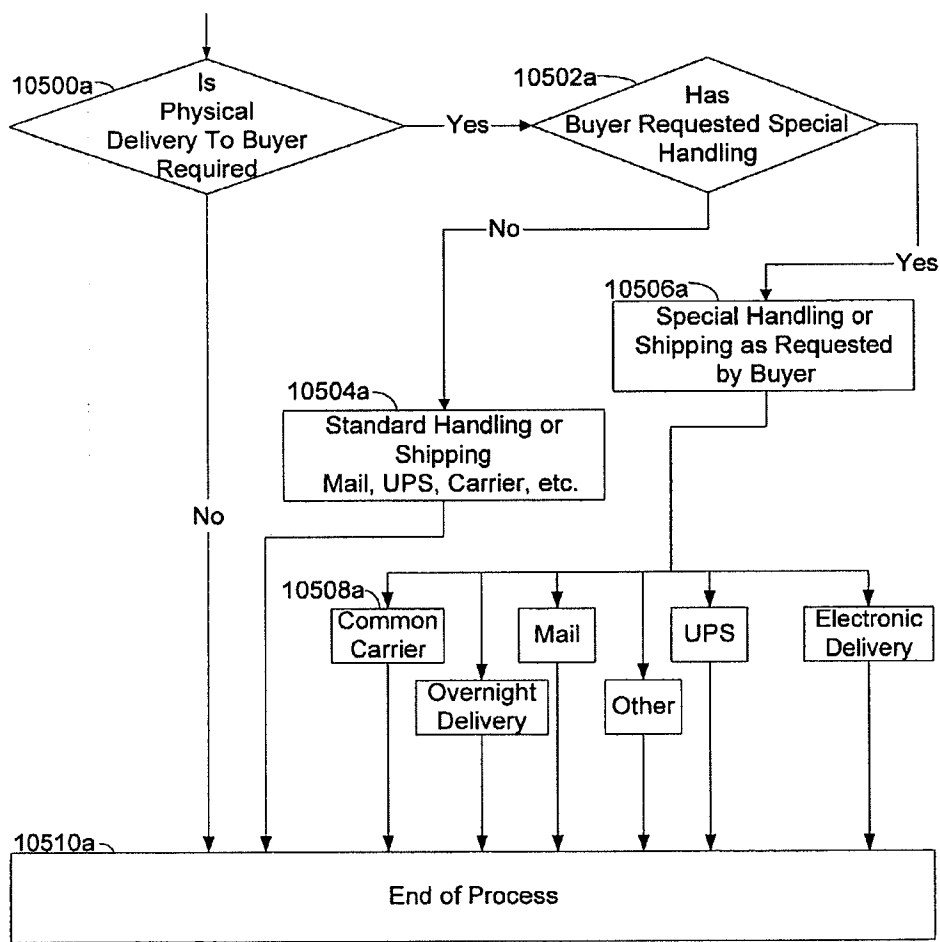


Fig. 3j

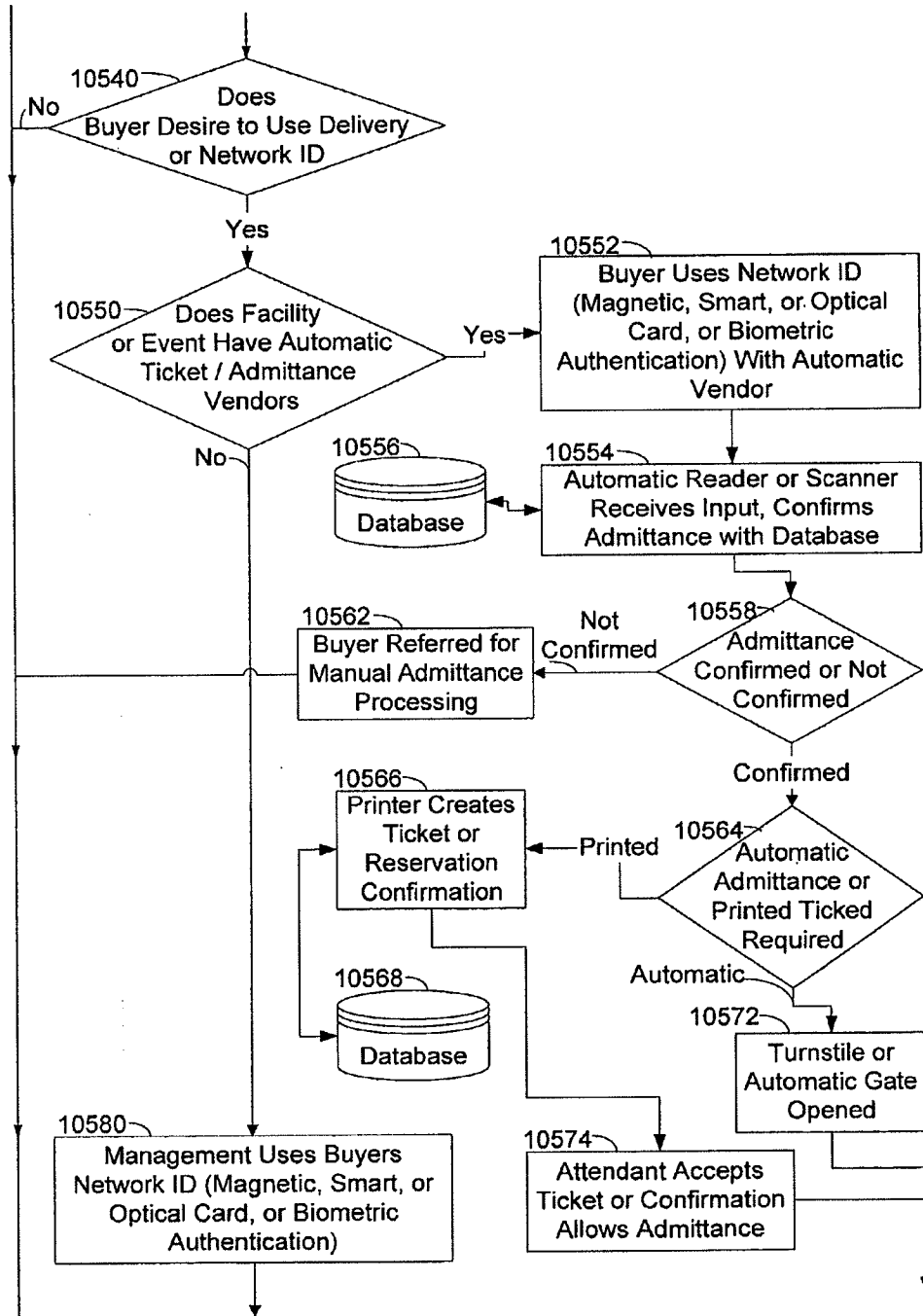


Fig. 3k

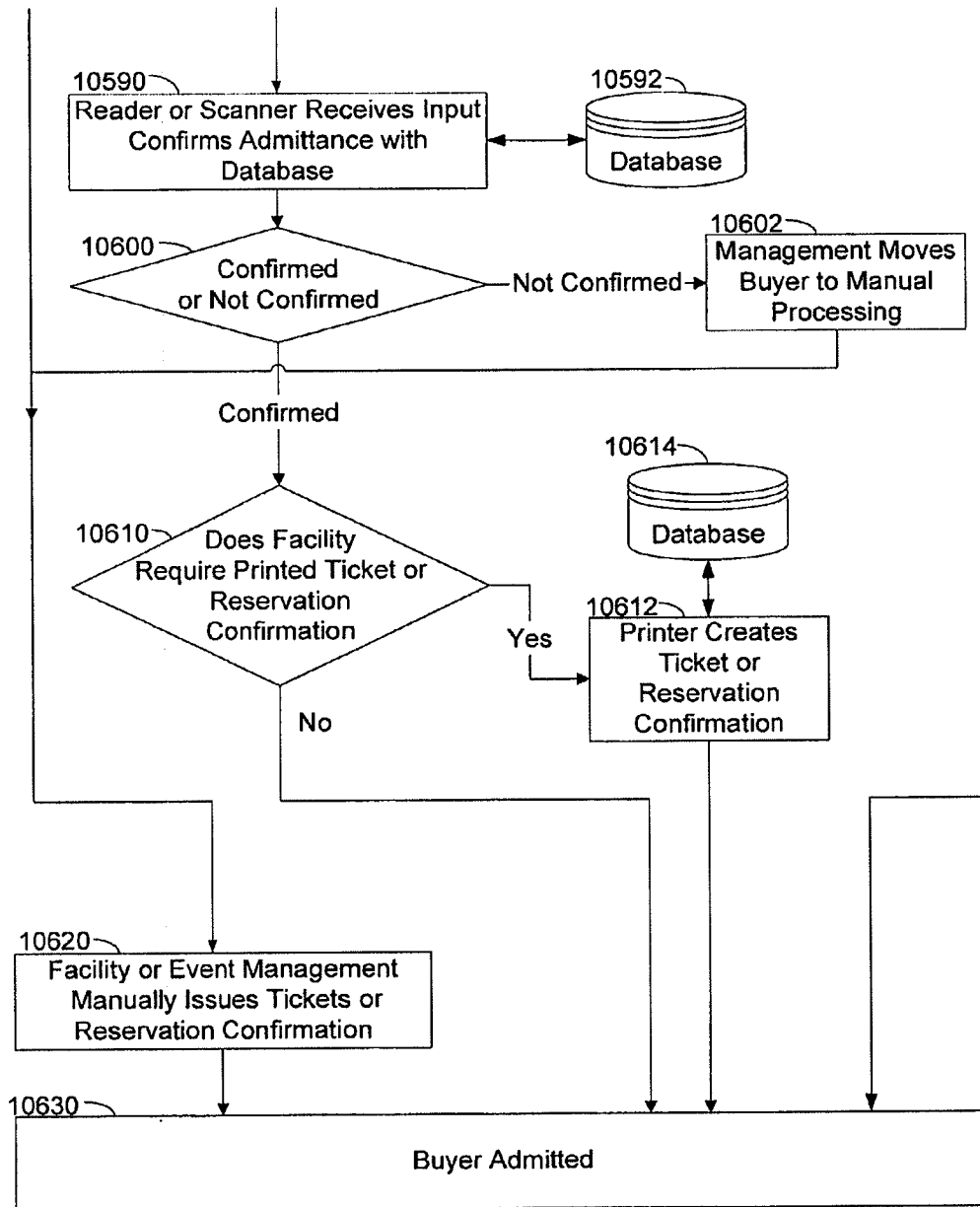


Fig. 4a

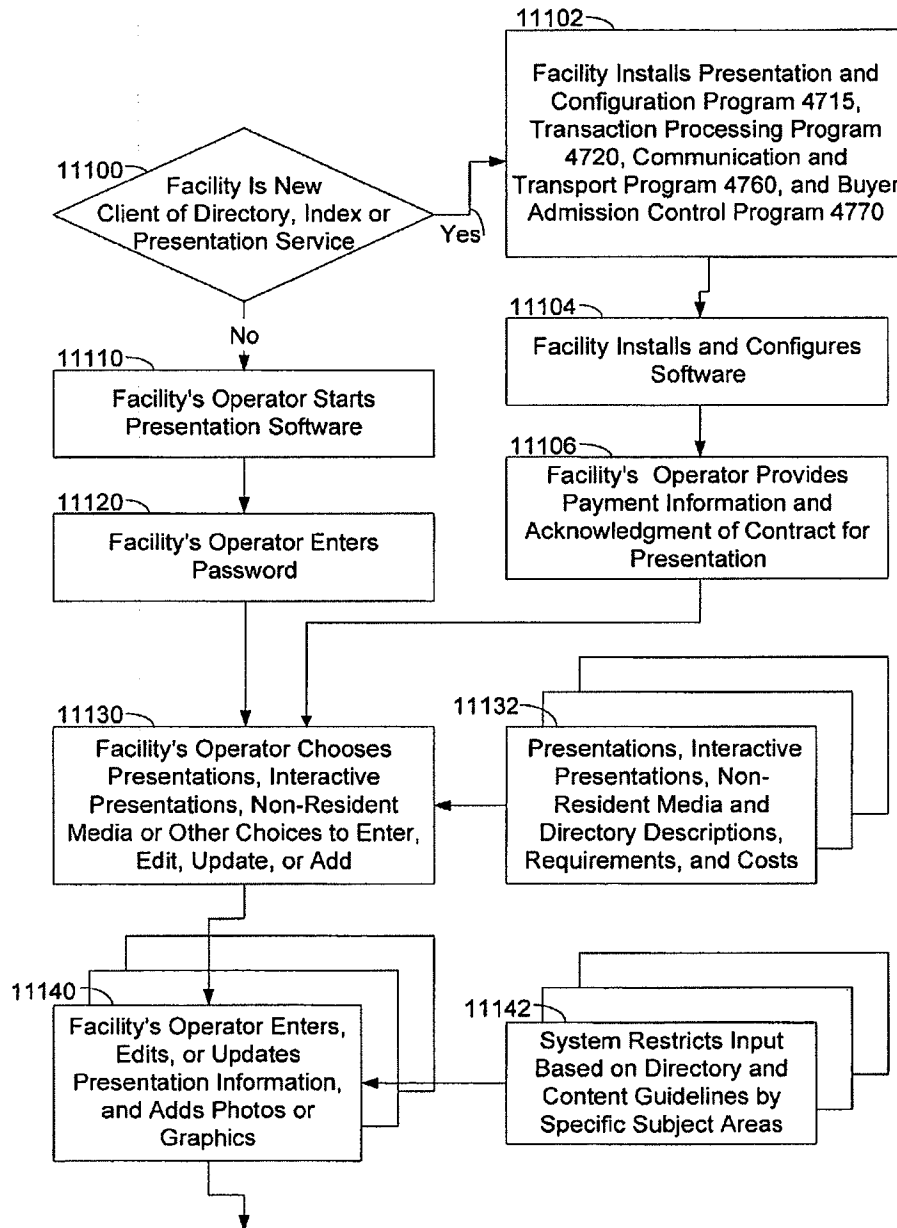


Fig. 4b

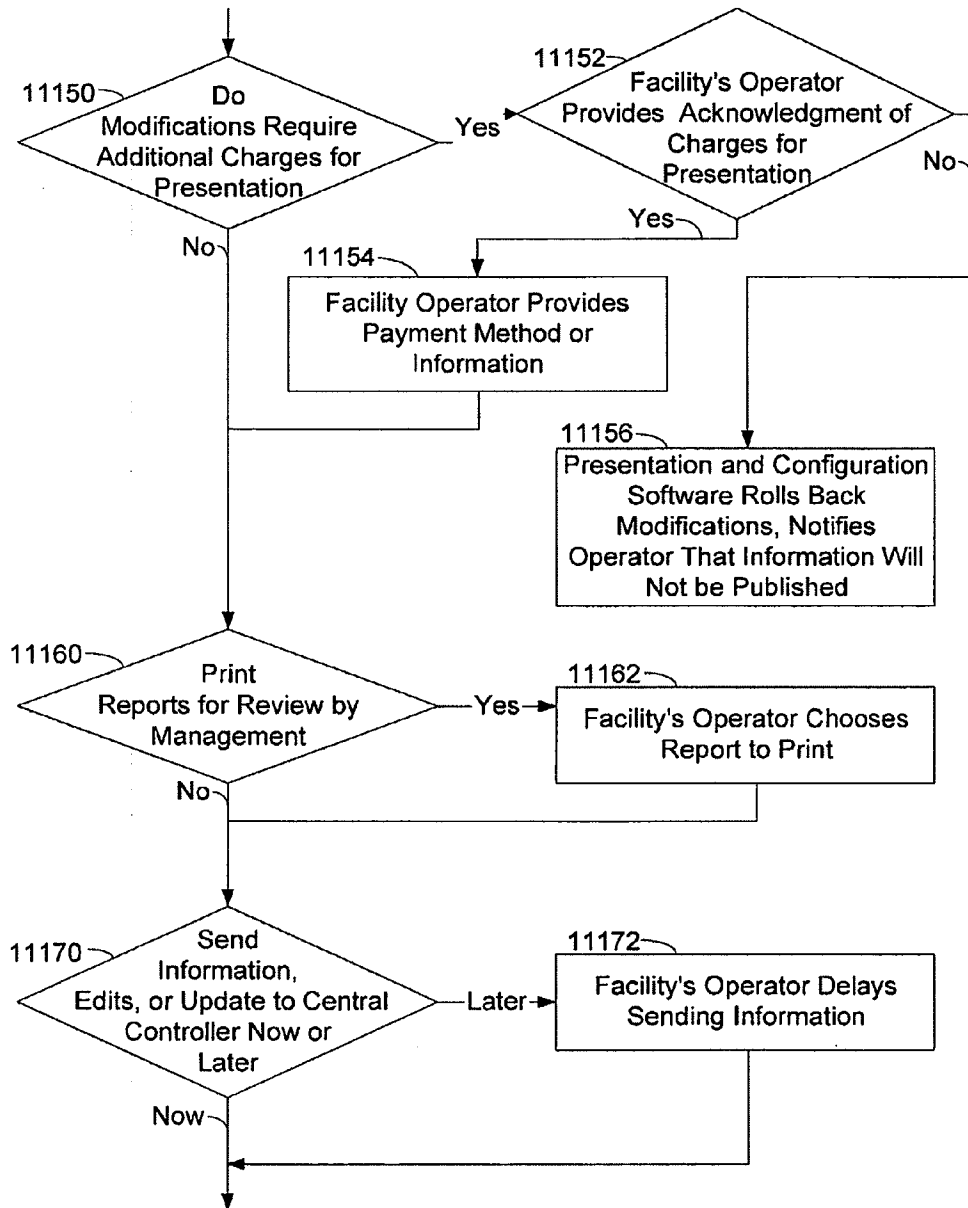


Fig. 4c

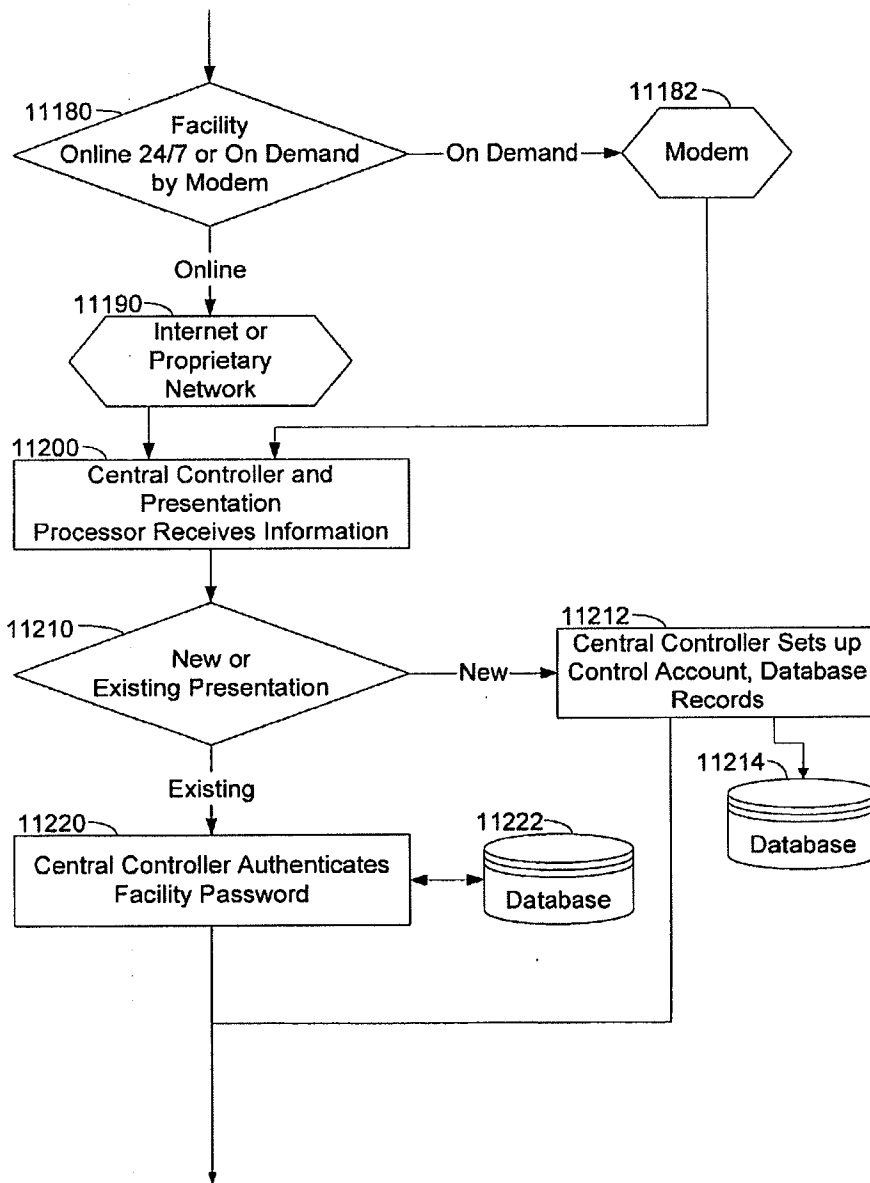


Fig. 4d

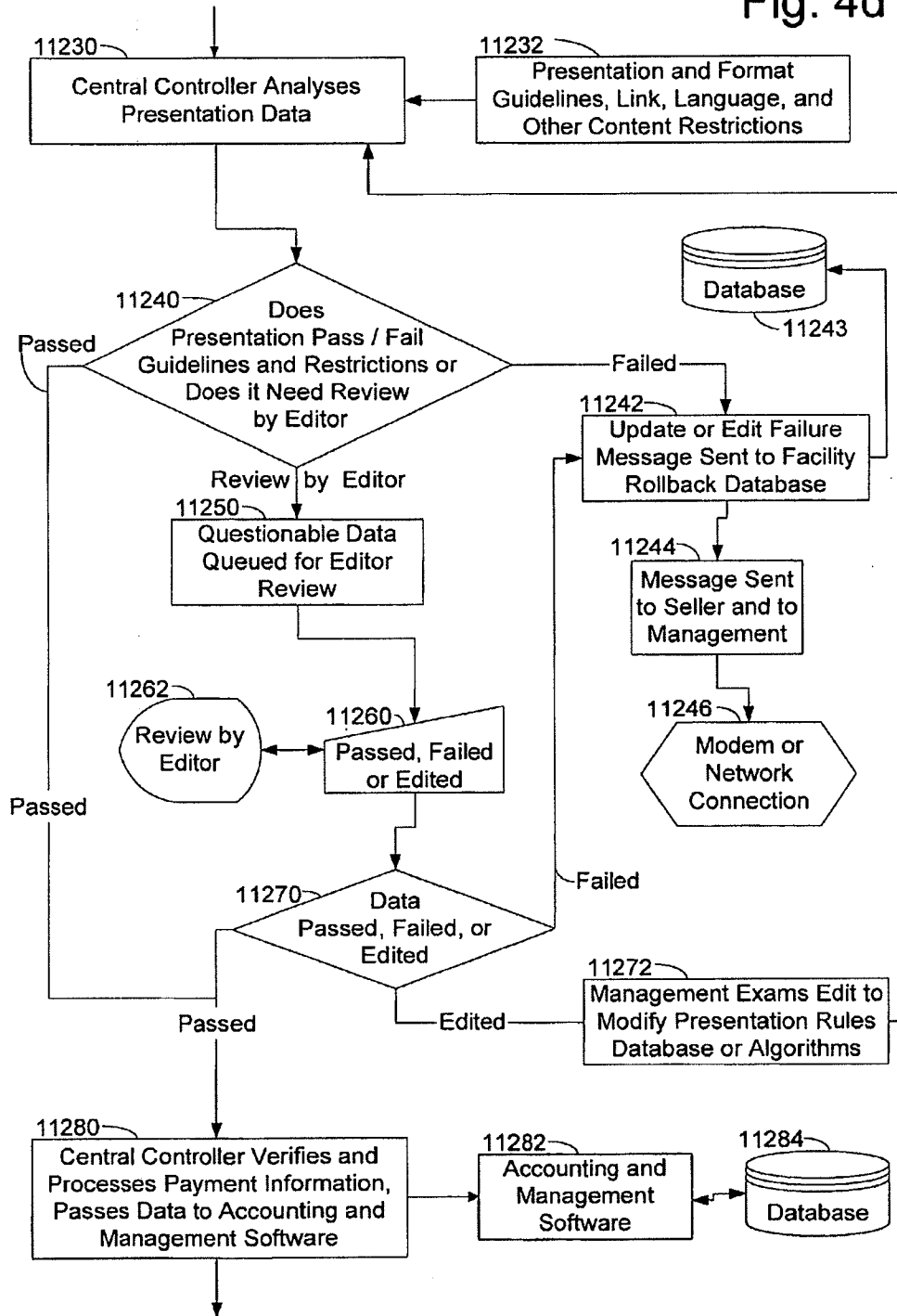


Fig. 4e

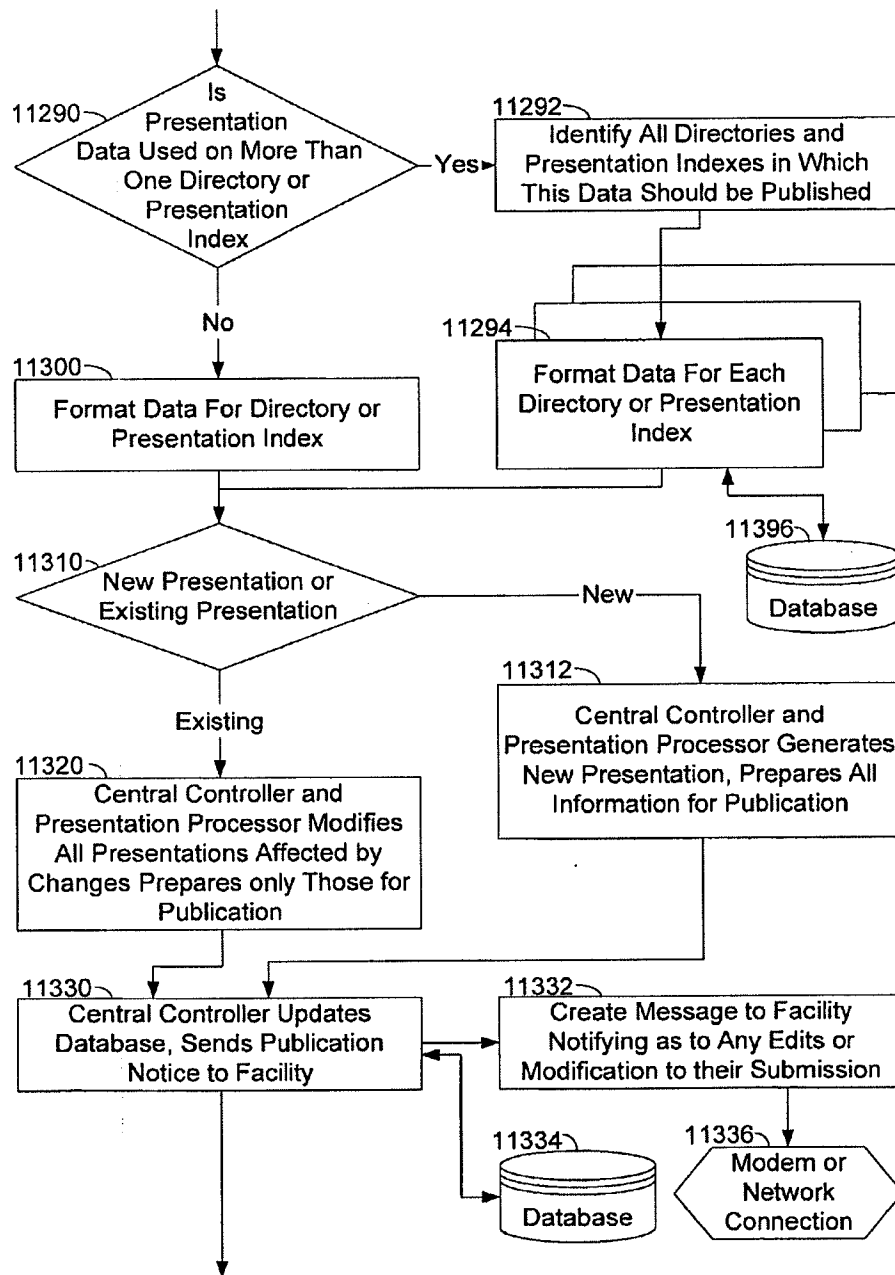


Fig. 4f

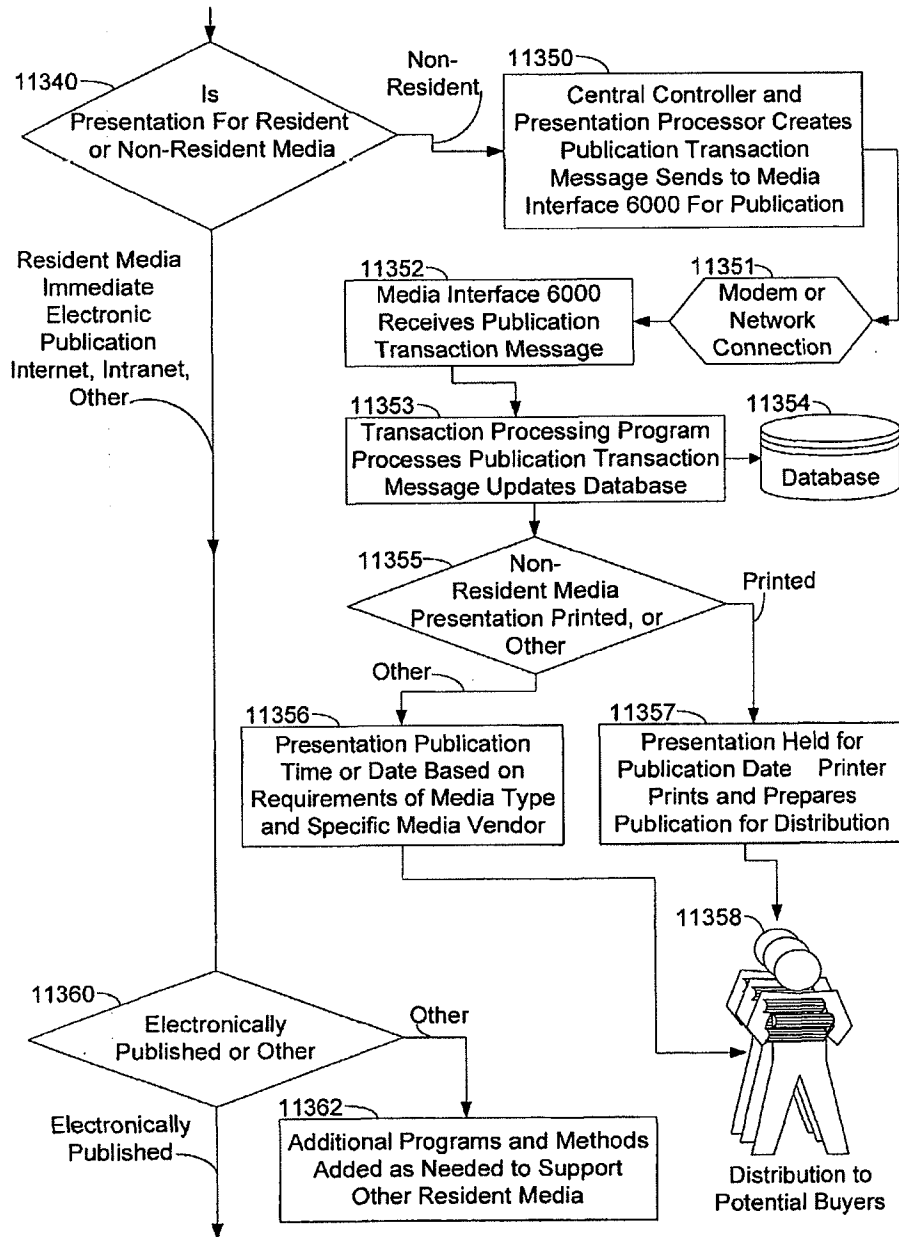


Fig. 4g

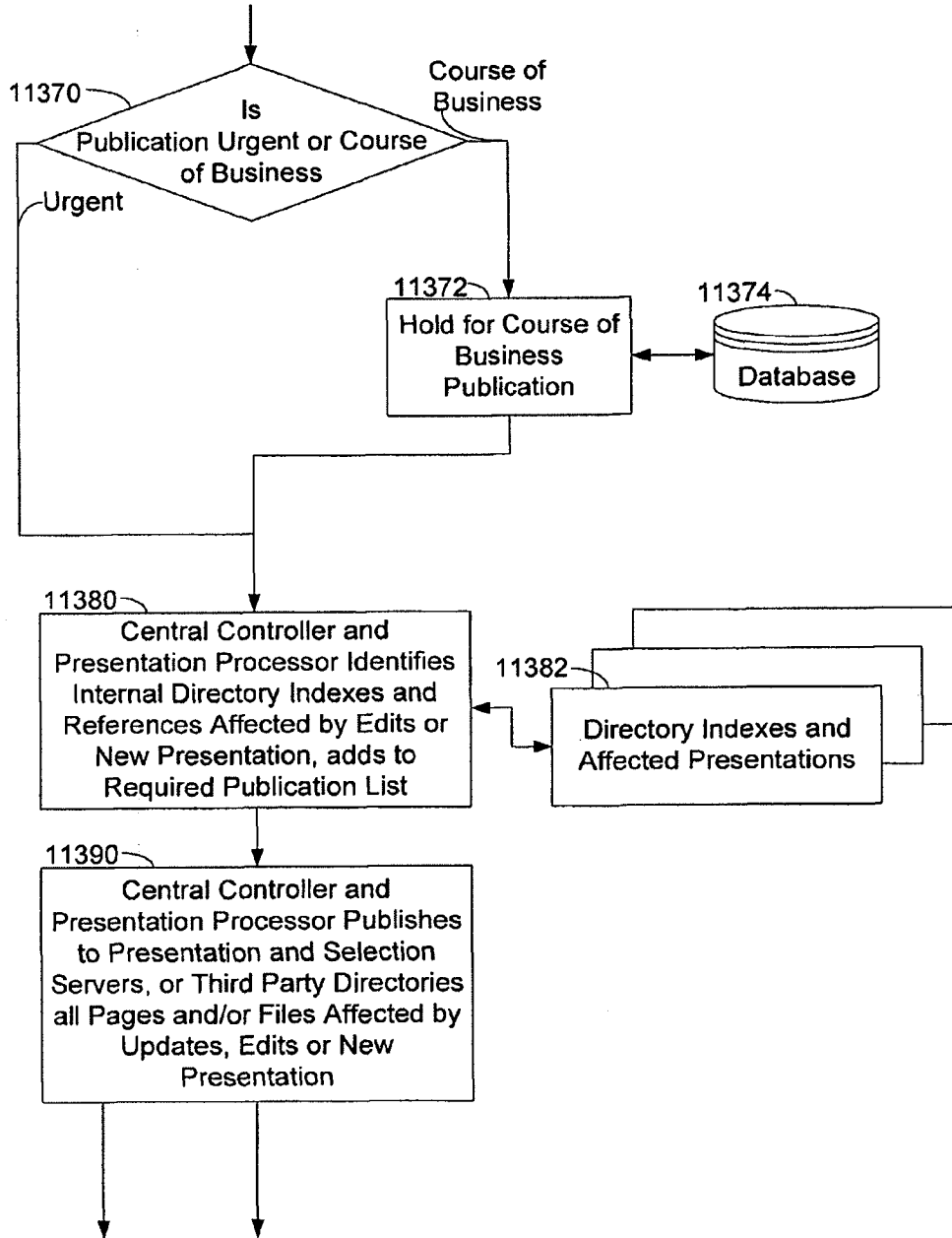


Fig. 4h

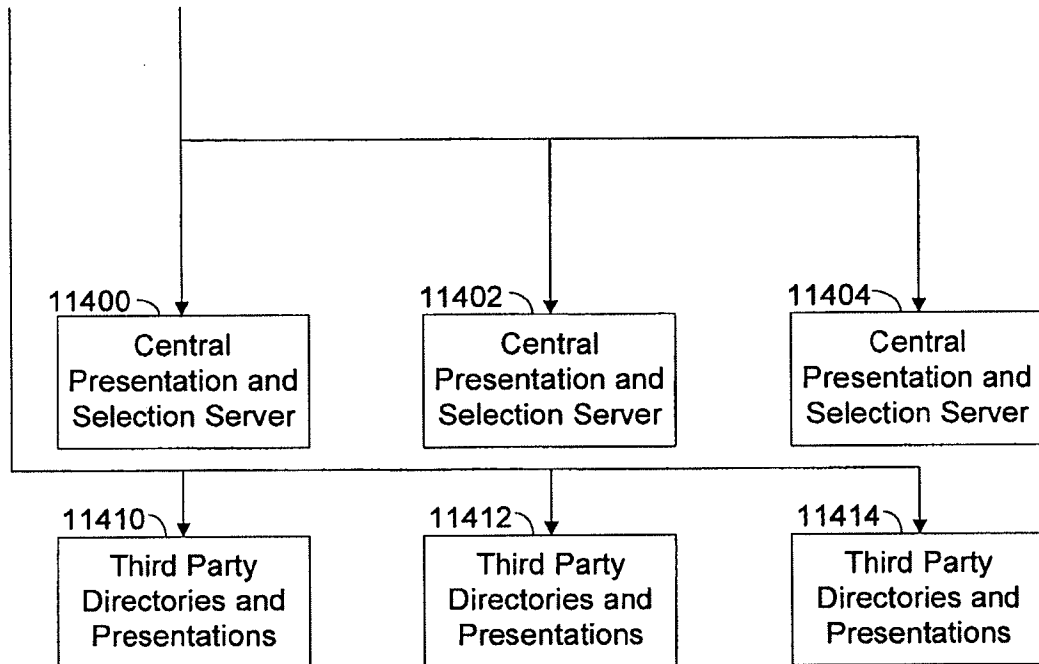


Fig. 5a

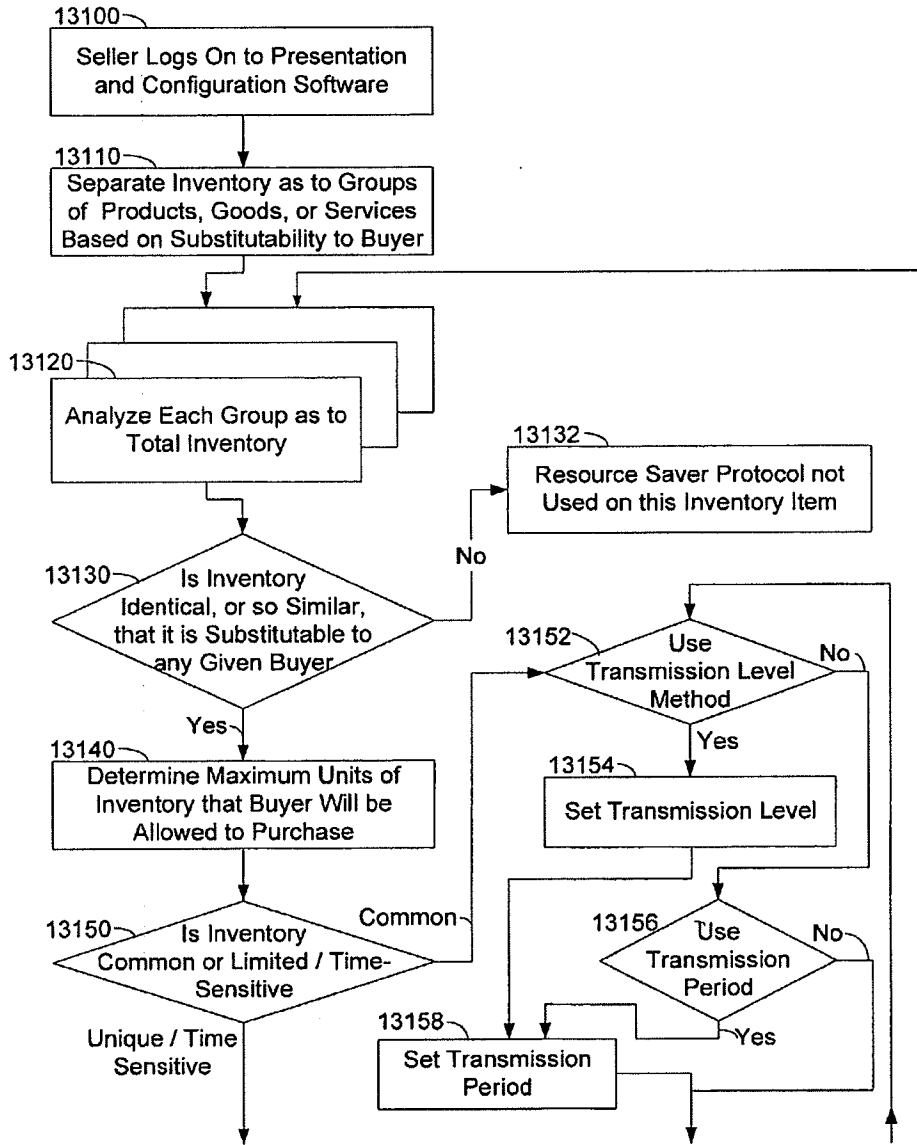


Fig. 5b

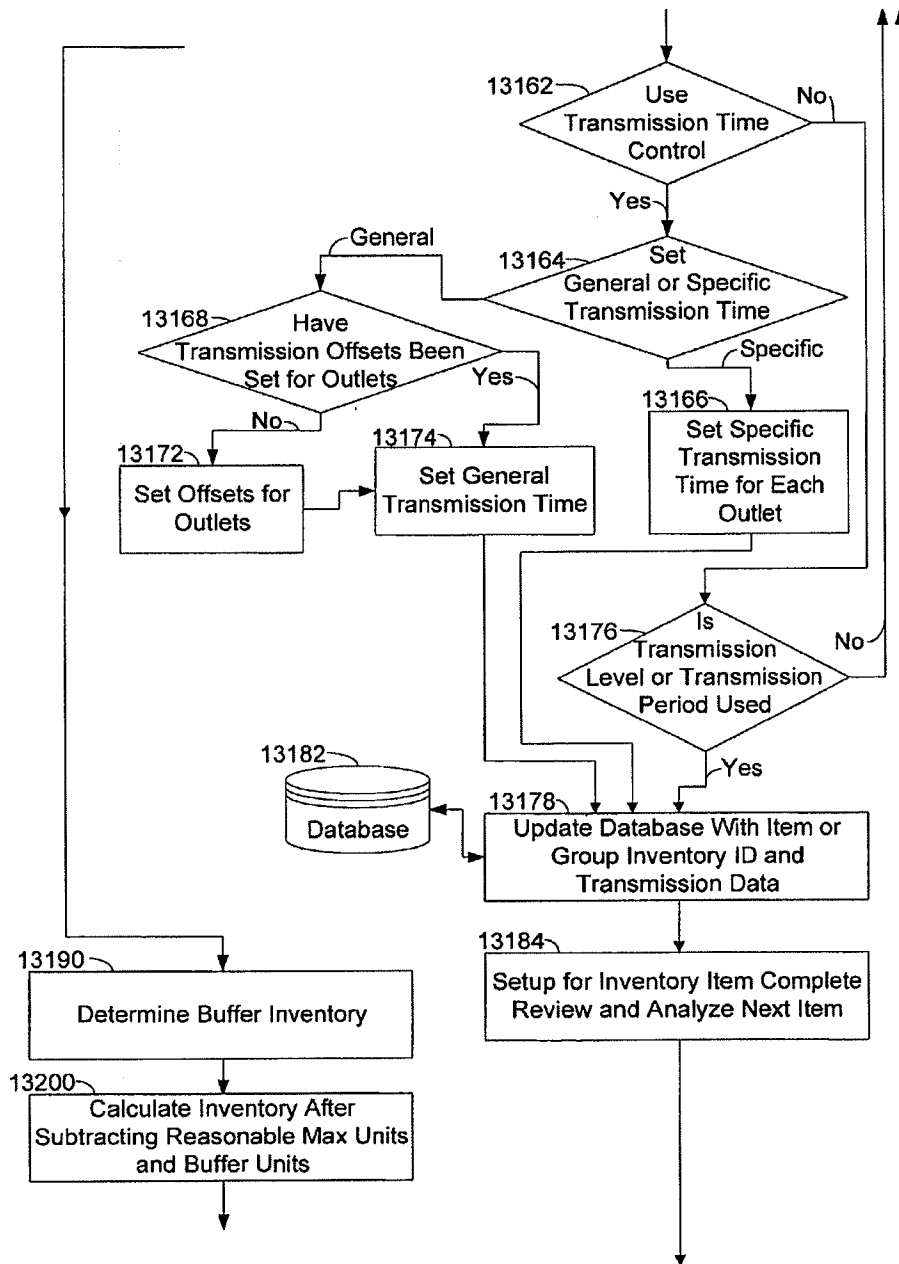


Fig. 5c

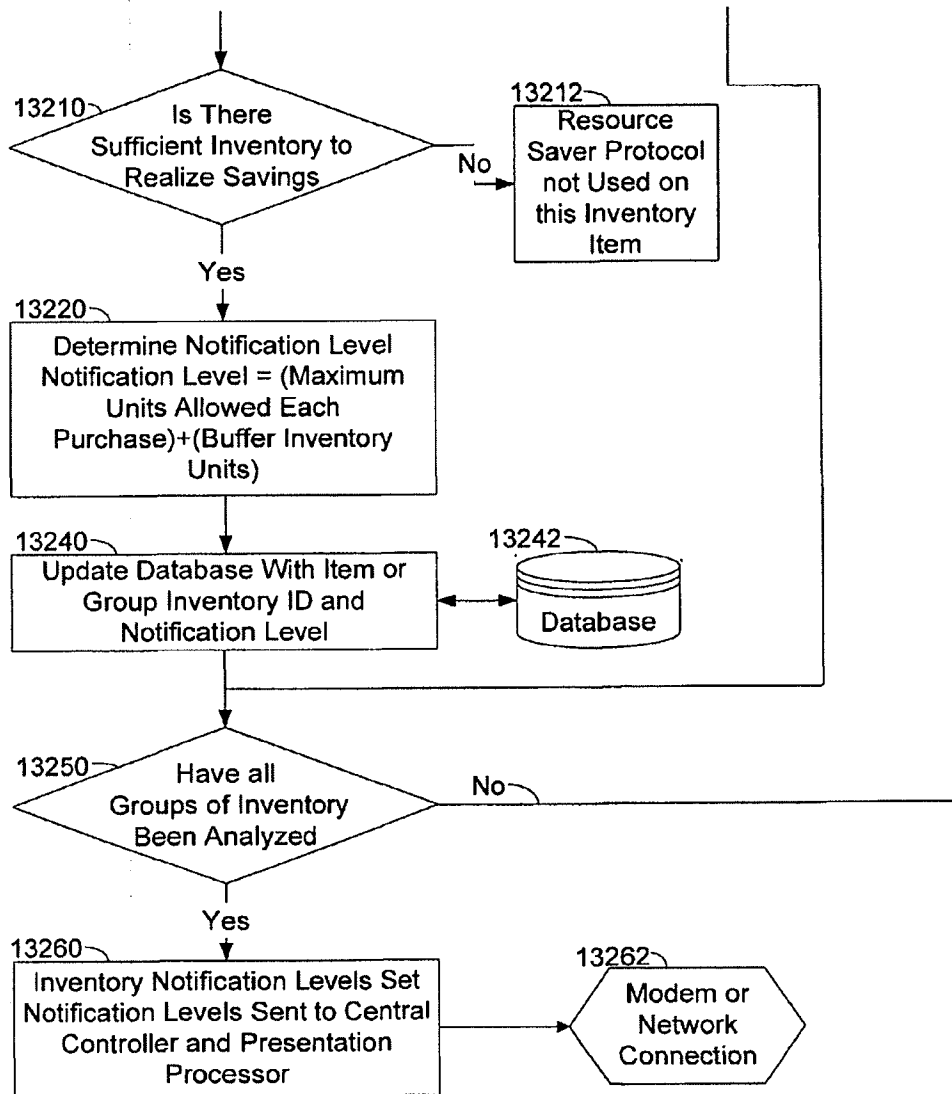


Fig. 5d

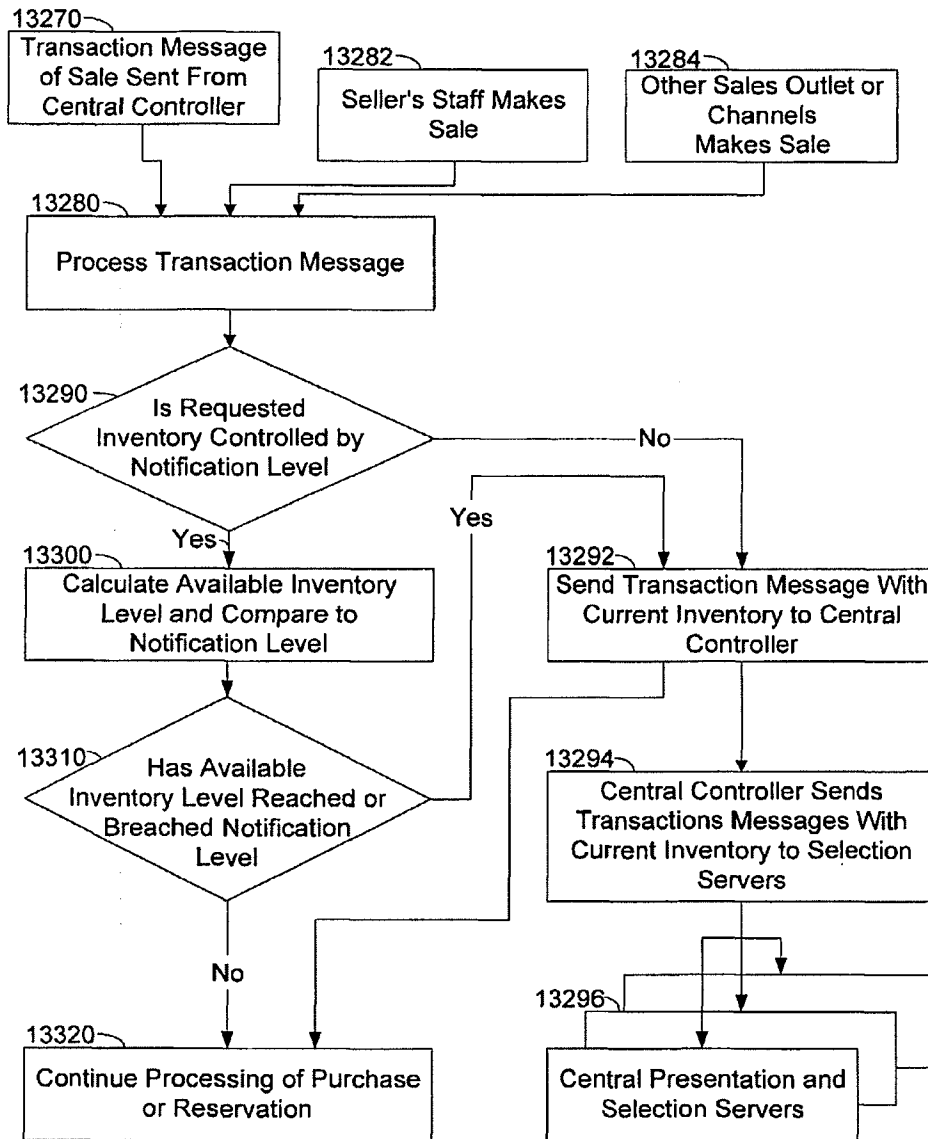


Fig. 5e

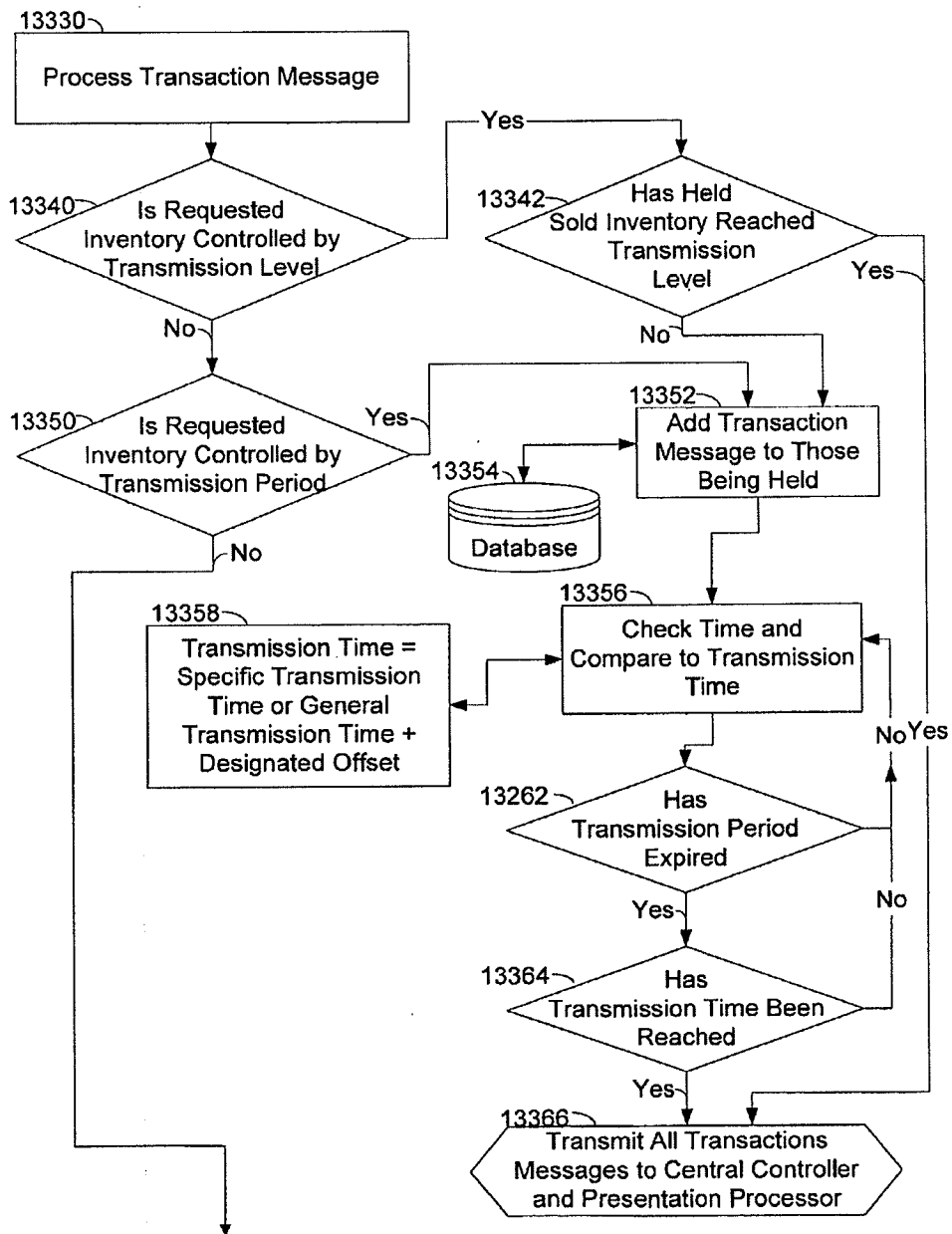


Fig. 5f

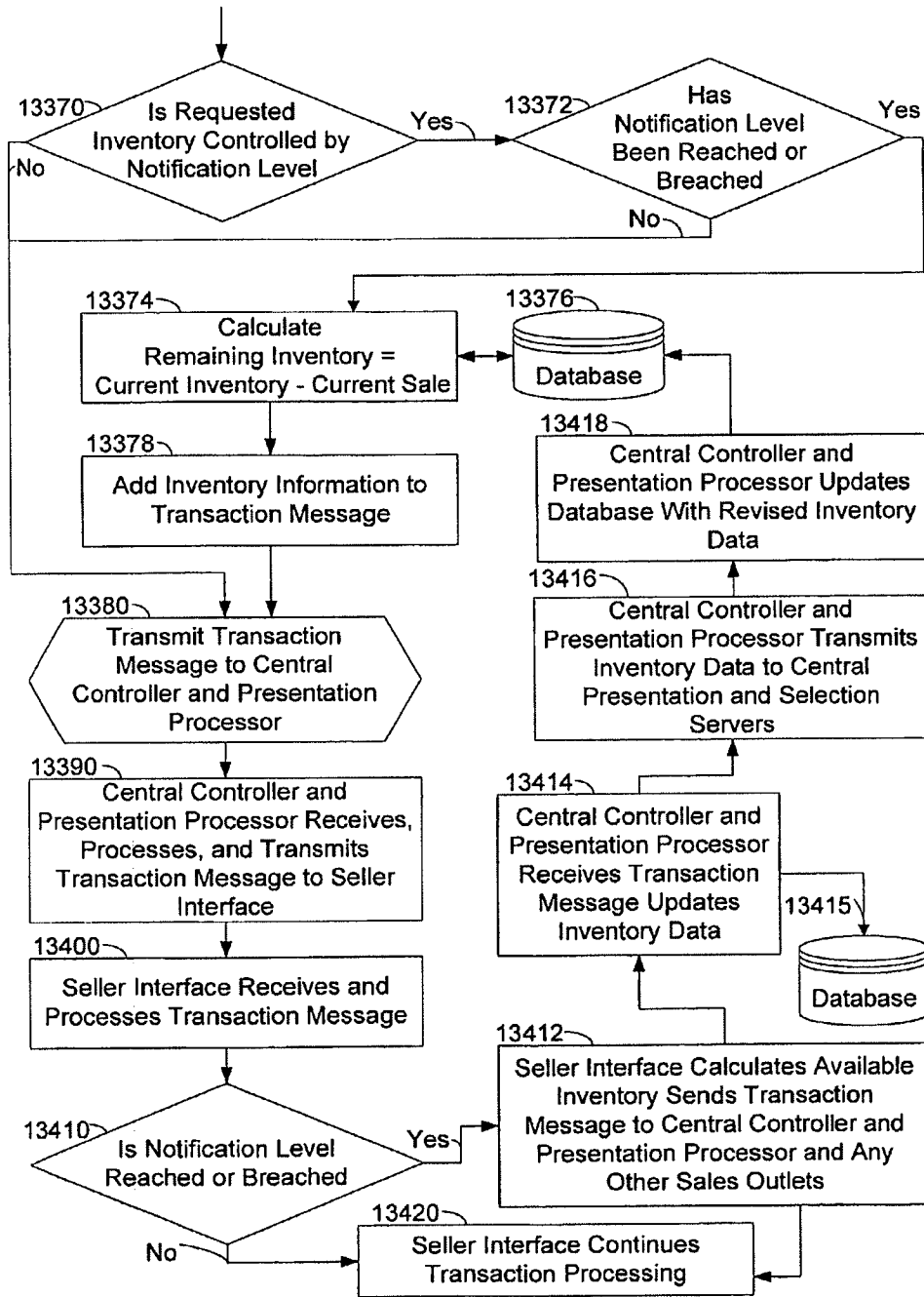


Fig. 5g

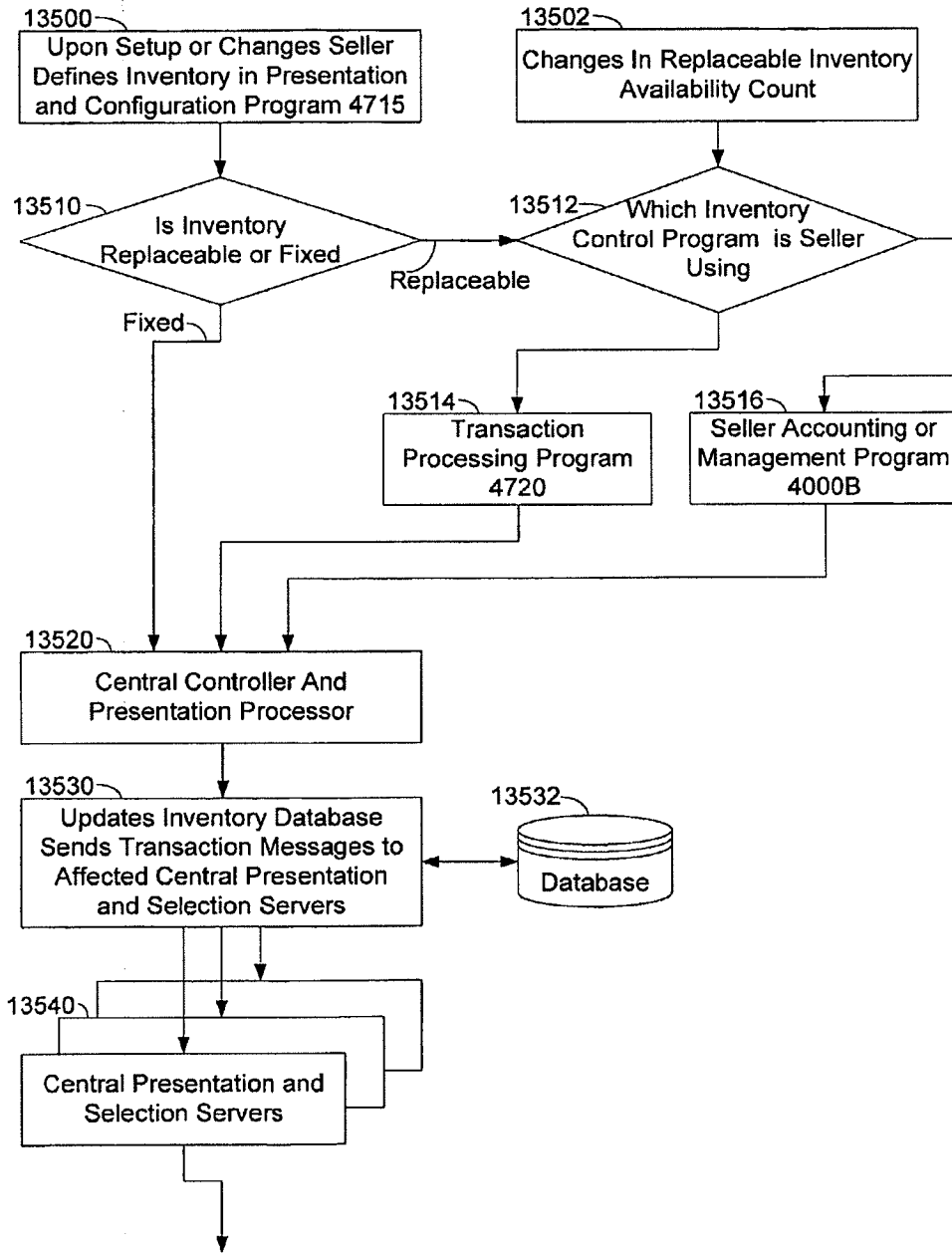
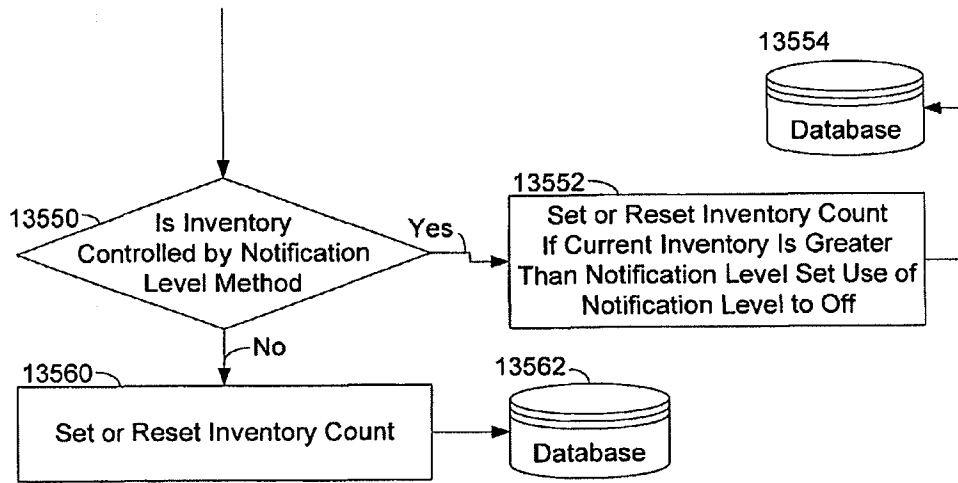


Fig. 5h



INTERNET ADVERTISING SYSTEM AND METHOD

This application is a continuation of parent application Ser. No. 10/165,091, filed Jun. 7, 2002 now U.S. Pat. No. 6,829,587 which was a continuation of the then parent application Ser. No. 09/480,303 filed Jan. 10, 2000, issued as U.S. Pat. No. 6,446,045 on Sep. 3, 2002.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Field of the Invention

The method and apparatus of the present invention is related to Automated Media Creation and Publication Engine with Resource Saver, Inventory Control, and Ticket Distribution Vending System.

The invention also relates to the Automated Media Creation, Publication, Placement, and Control Engine with Processing and Communications Resource Saver, including a Sales and Inventory Control protocol, and a Reservation, Access, and Verification System Utilizing Ticket and Confirmation Replacement Methods.

In another aspect the invention relates to Automated Media Creation, Publication, Placement, and Control Engine with Processing and Communications Resource Saver, including a Sales and Inventory Control protocol, and a Reservation, Access, and Verification System Replacing Traditional Ticket and Confirmation Methods.

In yet another aspect the invention relates to Automated Media Creation, Publication, Placement, and Control Engine, including a Sales and Inventory Control protocol with Processing and Communications Resource Saver, and a Reservation, Access, and Verification System Replacing Traditional Ticket and Confirmation Methods.

Prior art for electronic and other presentations of commercial products, goods, and services is accomplished by individual sellers or seller organizations or their agents submitting materials to each and every media outlet or to stand-alone electronic malls, outlets, or directories. Most sellers choose the media or outlet for the sale of their products, goods, or services; obtain the guidelines and requirements; negotiate a contract; and then compile material and design individual presentations to conform to the requirements for each media. This time consuming and costly business necessity has created huge marketing programs and agencies for large businesses.

When created individually by sellers or seller organizations, media presentations may not be standardized in that they do not carry consistent, up-to-date inventory, pricing, and information for the consumer. A buyer may find conflicting presentations on different electronic or traditional channels or outlets. The management for the advertising and electronic commerce for many small to mid-size sellers falls either as additional duties to current staff or as new departments. In the media of electronic presentations, the lack of experience may result in presentations that are cumbersome, ineffective, or not accessible to the widest range of consumer. Currently, the non-standardized format for the presentation of products, goods, and services provides for both the advantage of allowing unlimited creativeness in presentation and the disadvantage, in inexperienced hands, of not delivering the most effective and motivating sales message. In many cases, this lack of standardization appropriate to each and every venue or media outlet may result in the presenting of goods and services in a way that does not entice the buyer to make a purchase.

In the prior art, electronic Internet and Intranet presentations are developed either as static files that require constant and laborious manual updating or as dynamic (database-driven)

Although the dynamic presentations require less labor to produce and update, the various Internet or Intranet search or retrieval programs do not generally read or index them because of their "dynamic, database-driven" nature. This fact alone substantially reduces their effectiveness in reaching the most motivated buying public because those presentations are largely invisible to the wide range of automated searches conducted by potential buyers. With either design choice, substantial cost is experienced for the small to mid-size seller, either in the form of labor intensive presentation methods or in lost sales opportunity, which can never be recovered.

The electronic Internet malls and electronic directories, although generally much better staffed and able to produce effectively designed and edited content to motivate the buyer, suffer in part from the same dilemma. They are still faced with the same no-win choice between the labor intensive creation and placement for each presentation that gets the maximum visibility to the search methods of potential buyers and the easier database-driven presentation which get minimal visibility. One of the disadvantages to the advertising client of these electronic directories is that they find themselves publishing the same information in multiple directories or indexes as well as in their own stand-alone presentations in order to obtain the maximum coverage for access to the buying public. This supervision of multiple presentations is a control and management problem that is very costly and inefficient for the seller.

Electronic malls and electronic directories also experience a high ratio of cost to generated income associated with sales, billing, and collections. The clients of these electronic malls and directories are typically contracted for some period of time and then billed for that period of time during the contract period.

Currently, the sale of tickets, passes, admission documents, or reserved services is performed in a variety of ways that require the buyer to either call the agent or seller, contact a third-party seller, have a specific ID for that venue or event, or make the purchase electronically using a network presentation of some kind, usually the Internet. Upon the sale of those tickets, passes, admission documents, or reserved services, the transaction requires, or would be enhanced by, the physical delivery of those proofs of purchase. In the prior state of the art, proof of purchase must be picked up at some physical facility or point of sale when the tickets, passes, admission, or reserved services are purchased. Or, they must be delivered via mail or one of the overnight services, delivered by courier, or picked up on a "will call" basis at the facility, site, business, or venue. Or, they must be a member and a holder of a specific ID used by that Seller of goods or services. All of these methods, at the very least, create additional inconvenience for the Buyer, requiring either travel time, waiting in lines, applying for and receiving specific ID card, or the uncertainty of last-minute delivery. In many cases where last-minute purchase decisions are made, there is additional expense to either the Buyer or Seller to insure timely delivery. In prior art, if the buyer is an existing member of an organization that issues special single purpose ID cards, the buyer may apply for and use that special single purpose ID card for access. This forces the buyer to have an individual access ID for each service that he wishes to periodically use.

In regards to the Resource Saver Protocol, prior art requires a message to be recorded and sent for each and every transaction (purchase) at a resource cost for each transaction or transmission. If a Seller has inventory on multiple electronic sites or channels, each and every site must be updated and adjusted on an individual basis, one-by-one manually. It must be noted that prior art does not even communicate in an automated two-way method. This means that in many cases, the Seller has to receive the transmission of sale, record the inventory change manually onto his management or accounting software, and then update each and every place where this inventory is offered for sale. Through prior art, buyers and sellers often experience mistakes in over-selling or overbooking products, goods, or service because of the delays of manual updating.

SUMMARY

The invention allows sellers to present their inventory, products, goods and services in a choice of one or a variety of supported media outlets: in print, such as newspapers, magazines, periodicals, guidebooks, catalogs, brochures, fliers, and directories; in electronic form, such as online directories, web sites, bulletin boards, news groups, CD-ROMs, and interactive media and networks; and in other media, such as billboards, skywriters, bus benches, radio, interactive kiosk and any other form of customer outreach or information distribution. When these media choices are made, the present invention prompts the seller for information that is then used in the creation of presentations for the media outlets he has chosen. The Presentation Rules Database holds all the criteria, formatting architecture, and distribution factors for each participating media outlet. The present invention's Presentation Generation Program, along with the Presentation Rules Database, then creates a presentation for each and every media outlet the seller has chosen. The Presentation Generation Program then either transmits the presentation to the appropriate destination or holds it for a publication date to be submitted for a particular deadline or predetermined promotional market.

The seller can then print out a report that shows him each presentation, distribution or media outlet, and the pricing of each media choice for an overall marketing valuation.

The present invention allows the Seller to update, change, control inventory, and automatically process sales either from his in-house or third party accounting or management software that has a compatible communication component with the present invention or in the present invention. He can accomplish this updating and inventory control to all media outlets simultaneously.

The invention is a method and apparatus that allows for the creation of presentations for the commerce of products, goods and services for any and all size of business; the accessibility of those presentations to a vast population of the buying public both in print, electronic, interactive electronic, and other media; the sale, reservation, and purchasing of those products, goods and services; the confirmation of these purchases and reservations through a Network ID or confirmation system; and the management of inventory control through multiple media outlets while saving resources of processing, transmission, and communications.

The invention is a method and apparatus that allows for the creation of presentations that comply with the design and architectural requirements of any and all participating media. This is applicable to all media either in print, such as newspapers, magazines, advertisements, guidebooks, directories, fliers, and brochures; and electronic media, such as

online directories and malls, web sites, bulletin boards, news groups, CD-ROMs, and interactive media and networks; and other media, such as billboards, skywriters, bus benches, radio, interactive kiosk, and any other form of customer advertising, outreach, or information distribution. These presentations can be updated for either presentation content or inventory control in near real time, by either manual or automatic means, via electronic message units from third-party management or inventory control software. Electronic presentations created can be either static open-access or database driven dynamic server presentations. Where appropriate, these presentations allow for the sale of products, goods, or services and for the making of payments by buyers. Inventory adjustments for production, sales, and other reasons are made in near real time, allowing for an accurate presentation of availability of inventory to buyers. The present invention allows for lower cost to management when used with all media outlets by creating a self-serve, automated billing environment for the seller's creation and display of presentations.

The invention is a method and apparatus that allows for the creation of both static and dynamic Internet and Intranet presentations for the sale of products, goods, and services to be accessible to the maximum number buyers and the interactive purchase of those products, goods and service. The present invention is a method and apparatus that allows buyers to purchase products, goods and service electronically and receive confirmation of that purchase.

The invention allows for the verification and substantiation of the purchase of access or admission to those services or events that traditionally have controlled access by means of tickets, passes, admission documents, reservations, reservation confirmations, or other substantiation at the facility, site, business, or venue. The invention provides several methods for the buyer to provide a ID at the time of purchase, which is then transmitted electronically to the facility, site, business, or venue. That buyer Network ID is then confirmed by the facility, site, business, or venue by means of readers or scanners of the magnetic, smart, or optical ID cards or by other electronic means when biometric authentication is required. This confirmation may automatically result in the printing of the tickets, passes, admission documents, reservation confirmations, or other documents required for admittance or in the automatic and immediate physical admittance of the buyer or ID holder.

The present invention allows for both complete inventory control and management and the global updating and accessibility of real-time and time-sensitive inventory while saving communication resources and time for any and all businesses that sell products, goods, and services regionally or world-wide. The invention allows for a substantial reduction of the communications and computer resources necessary to control and coordinate the availability, presentation, and sales of common, unique, or time-sensitive products, goods, and services. The present invention allows for the sales process to be adjusted so as to optimize the communications and computer resources used in relationship to the sales volume and Seller, Buyer, and usage profiles.

OBJECTS AND ADVANTAGES

Several objects and advantages of the Presentation Generation component of the present invention are:

To provide an effective system of edit and content control for the creation and publishing of commercial sales or information-oriented traditional media and electronic presentations in a cost-effective manner for small, medium, and

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large sellers of products, goods, and services. This invention improves on the prior art by creating a controlled, managed environment for the sellers in which to create their presentations. This invention automatically applies not only editing, style, graphics, data, and content controls but also design specification and architectural requirements to the design environment of all forms of specific member media venues or outlets, both electronic print and all other media formats.

To create open-access electronic presentations that can receive maximum electronic visibility from private, public, or commercial search algorithms and commercial search engines and indexes, as well as from other automated or on-demand computer search systems. This invention improves on the prior art by automatically publishing the information and data received from sellers in an open-access format that is readily available to public automatic search and index programs as well as to on-demand search programs. With this invention, the seller's presentation can be published in several different directories or indexes, taking on a different style, look, and feel in each as a result of the automatic restructuring of the data entered by the seller. This is accomplished by using different presentation formatting guidelines and rules for the targeted directories or indexes. This single-entry and automatically distributed method is more efficient than managing each directory or index individually.

To allow sellers to create presentations on their computers that are automatically transmitted to be published and viewed on electronic networks and other traditional advertising media. The present invention partially resides on the sellers' computers, controls and edits the presentation, and then automatically transmits that information and data for publication in traditional media and electronic networks.

To allow media venues, outlets, vendors, and representatives automated presentations giving media buyers' self-serve access to their products and services.

To allow for the automatic publishing or updating of presentations within a simple environment that does not require lower-level coding or formatting of the presentation material. The present invention employs a text-only entry of information and data, thereby not requiring the seller to have knowledge of presentation computer codes or low-level formatting.

To allow for automatic global updating of the description, price, quantity, and availability of products, goods, and services in traditional periodic media or electronic presentations. The present invention allows for the direct input of this information as well as for the automatic transmission of presentation-related data by compatible third-party, accounting, inventory control, or other management software for the inclusion or updating of the electronic presentation through common message files read and transmitted by the present invention.

To allow for the central control and management of presentations, thereby allowing for a greater degree of promotion and flexibility of the category or group of products, goods, or services by the controlling server in order to attract more buyers. The present invention directs all presentations through a central controller, which standardizes the presentations within the style, editing, and content standards set by the controller standards for each presentation, directory, or index. All electronic interactive presentations are optimized for presentation search visibility by the controller and can then be globally refined, based on traffic analysis.

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To provide lower overhead cost associated with sales, billing, and collections for the operators of the present invention. By creating a self-serve, automated, direct billing environment for the sellers to create their presentations in, the operators of the present invention will experience substantial savings over traditional sales and billing methods. Allowing the sellers to create their presentations with a cafeteria-style selection and billing that presents all their options, including the associated cost up front, will also result in greater add-on sales without the associated sales overhead.

Several objects and advantages of the Resource Saver Protocol component of the present invention are:

To allow for the presentation of availability of products, goods, and services for sale in a real-time environment without requiring constant real-time communications during the sales process.

To allow a substantial portion of the real-time sales to be completed without the overhead of a concurrent verification process.

To reduce the necessary processing and communications resources used to control inventory presentations of products, goods, and services.

To reduce the necessary processing and communications resources used to control sales and/or reservations of products, goods, and services.

To transfer communications and processing resources to time periods of lower utilization of those resources.

Several objects and advantages of the Network ID and Purchase Verification System component of the present invention are:

To allow for the replacement of traditional tickets, passes, admission documents, reservations, reservation confirmations, and other means of verification that require prior or "will call" delivery to the buyer. The present invention improves on the prior art by creating a controlled universal ID at time of purchase that can be transmitted to the facility, site, business, or venue to be used for verification of the buyer and purchase. This ID can be used for one purchase or maintained within the network for future use as a permanent ID for the purchase and access to any facility, site, business, or venue that is represented by that instance of the present invention.

To allow for a more convenient method of purchase of tickets, passes, admission documents, or reserved services, or for the late purchase of those tickets, passes, admission documents, or reserved services beyond what would be feasible if physical delivery of the access or admission documents were required. The present invention allows for purchases to be made and buyer IDs to be transmitted to the facility, site, business or venue within a matter of minutes of the buyer arriving for admittance. By using an electronic network, Internet, Intranet, or phone service, a buyer could literally make the purchase by laptop computer with wireless modem or by cell phone from the car on the way to the facility, site, business, or venue for admittance. The invention, when used in conjunction with an electronic inventory-available presentation, can allow buyers to become aware of and take advantage of last-minute cancellations and changes of availability.

The invention reduces labor and material requirements by the sellers of tickets, passes, admission documents, or reserved services. The invention substantially reduces the labor and material requirement for fulfillment of purchases of tickets, passes, admissions, or reserved services in several ways. By eliminating the requirement of delivery of those documents that allow the buyer admittance, there is no

outgoing correspondence and/or fulfillment package to prepare. The costs associated with shipping, tracking, or follow-up on lost items as well as the customer service costs that accompany late or poorly communicated delivery instructions are reduced or eliminated. At admission time, additional costs are saved with the full implementation of the present invention by the use of automatic vendors that print the admission documents on demand by the buyer and with automated verification of the buyer's ID. This function replaces the "will call" method of admission document delivery and the associated cost in labor and facility overhead.

Further objects and advantages of the present invention will become apparent from a consideration of the drawings and ensuing description.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF DRAWINGS

FIG. 1a diagrams an embodiment of the present invention with a single level of service without Independent Directories.

FIG. 1b diagrams an embodiment of the present invention with a sample depth of service of Sellers, Buyers, Presentation and Selection Servers, Independent Presentations, and Media.

FIG. 2a is a block diagram showing one embodiment of the Central Controller and Presentation Processor.

FIG. 2b is a block diagram showing one embodiment of the Central Presentation and Selection Server.

FIG. 2c is a block diagram showing one embodiment of the Seller Interface.

FIG. 2d is a block diagram showing one embodiment of the Buyer Interface.

FIG. 2e is a block diagram showing one embodiment of the Media Interface.

FIG. 3a through 3k and 3i-a is a block diagram showing the transaction processing and buyer's use of one embodiment of the present invention. This Example Embodiment of this invention is configured for delivery of tickets or reservation confirmation.

FIG. 4a through 4g is a block diagram showing the Seller's use of the invention. This Example Embodiment is configured for delivery of tickets or reservation confirmation.

FIG. 5a through 5h is a block diagram showing the Seller's use of the Resource Saver Protocol of the invention. This Example Embodiment of this invention is configured for delivery of tickets or reservation confirmation.

Further Breakdown of the block diagrams 5a through h.

FIG. 5a through 5c is a block diagram showing Seller's Setup and use of Resource Saver Protocol.

FIG. 5d is a block diagram showing the Seller's Use of Notification Level Processing of Resource Saver Protocol at Seller Interface 4000.

FIG. 5e through 5f is a block diagram showing the Seller's Use of Resource Saver Protocol on Central Presentation and Selection Server 2000 or Other Selling Outlets.

FIG. 5g through 5h is a block diagram showing the Seller's Use of Resource Saver Protocol for Inventory Adjustment or Replacement.

PATENT APPLICATION GLOSSARY

The following are explanations and or definitions of names or descriptors as used in the invention. For the purpose of this invention the following terms have the following definitions. These are meant to aid the reader in

understanding the inventors' descriptions of the present invention and its components, design, use, and purpose.

Advertising

Any presentation or effort to inform or influence target demographics or the general public. This includes all media types and methods such as but not limited to audio and visual, print, electronic, multimedia etc.

Algorithm

The method or logic that performs given functions within a program. Typically can be described as a series of information access, comparisons, decisions, choices, and resulting outputs.

Automatic Searches

These are information text-based searches that are conducted of targeted Internet or Intranet sites on a page-by-page basis using either the information contained within the meta tags of each HTML page or full text searches of all content.

Automatic Vendors

Machines that read or scan the Delivery or Network ID Cards, access a database of Buyer information for confirmation of ID, and then dispense a custom printed ticket, pass, admission document, or reservation confirmation showing the appropriate access information. The tickets, passes, admission documents, reservations, or reservation confirmations could then be processed with normal procedures.

Biometric Identification

Identification that is accomplished by using an individuals distinctive natural biological differences, such as finger prints, iris scans, full face scans, voice prints, DNA etc.

Buyer

Any person, corporation, partnership, group, or any other legal entity that desires or may desire or consume the purchase, reservation, acquisition, consumption, of items, services, or ideas offered by the Seller either paid for or as a gratuity.

Central Controller

Refers to the Controller part or function of the Central Controller and Presentation Processor 1000

Central Processor

The CPU or main processing computer chip or unit within a given computer. Depending on the operating system a computer must have one but may have more than one CPU thereby increasing the processing speed of the computer.

Client Channel

Means, outlet, or avenue of advertising, marketing, distribution, or sales.

Cookies

Information formatted to be delivered or downloaded to the Internet Browser utilized by the Buyer Interface 5000, stored on the Data Storage Device 5500 within the Location for Cookie Storage 5695, and then accessed later by that Internet Browser. This information would thereby provide a carryover of information such as Buyer preferences.

Database

The term Database is used referring not only to the structured or relational storage of data within files, but also to the tables or sub divisions of data storage within

those databases or files or any method or system of organizing data for storage and access by computers.

Directory

A consolidation, accumulation, or compilation of similar, competing, or complementing "Sellers" (see above) that are offered or presented in some logical or systematic presentation allowing "Buyers" (see above) to review, compare, and contrast the offerings or presentations. These directories may or may not allow for direct access or interactive sales or acquisition. These directories may be in any media such as, but not limited to, electronic, Internet, Intranet, CD-ROM, or print.

Dynamic Presentations

These are presentations that are created when the reader or viewer accesses them. They are typically created in response to queries or actions of the reader or viewer and are generated from database information that resides at the server that is being accessed. (See "Static Presentations")

Editorial and Design Standards

These are the editorial, design, and style guidelines, standards, restrictions, and other specifications that are specific to each media venue that control the look and content of all presentations within that media venue.

Electronic Directory

Internet, Intranet, or bulletin board based directories or indexes focusing on narrow based collections of sellers, suppliers, vendors, purveyors, or providers of goods, products, services, information, ideas, etc.

Electronic Mall

A collection of electronic directories, indexes, "Sellers" (see above), or other Internet or Intranet sites at one place.

Fixed Inventory

Refers to Inventory that is limited and constant in its availability. One example might be rooms in a hotel. If the hotel has 300 identical rooms, then the fixed inventory is 300 units for each day into the future that the hotel is open for business. Adjustments can be made for units taken off line or made not available for maintenance etc. but rooms cannot easily be added.

Given Instance

For the purpose of this application the term "Given Instance" refers to a single particular established configuration of the present invention that has been designed to serve a defined demographics of Buyers and/or Sellers. A single copy of the present invention would be an instance of the present invention.

Goods

Merchandise or wares that are to be sold or transferred.

Identification Documents

Any artificial method of specifically Identifying an individual such as Credit Cards, Drivers License, Identification Cards, Membership Cards, and Academic Identification Cards etc. These documents may be read magnetically, optically or in some other manner to allow for verification.

Independent Presentations Directories and Indexes

Those directories and indexes, operated by management other than that of a given instance of the present invention, that have associated themselves with one or more Central Presentation and Selection Servers 2000

of the present invention for the purpose of utilizing the content and interactive services of those Central Presentation and Selection Servers 2000.

Index

Same as "Directory" but with less information or material presented for the "Buyer."

Internet Browser

Any Client-side program that resides on the Buyer Interface 5000 to facilitate the reading and or viewing or pages or presentations on the Internet or Intranet. Typically pages or presentations are based on the HTML display language or one of its successors or derivatives for presentations. Examples of Browser software are Netscape, Internet Explorer, etc.

Inventory

Refers in a very broad and general sense to any identifiable measure, item, or unit that can be sold, transferred, conveyed, or reserved. The term inventory can apply to goods, products, services, reservations for services, or any other identifiable unit to be sold, conveyed, or reserved. Units of Inventory may actually be a function of time with the same item being used over and over such as a room in a lodging facility, a seat in a sports stadium, or a table at a restaurant.

Inventory Substitutability

Inventory (defined above) is used in a very broad sense. The substitutability of those items that make up any given line of inventory being offered within the present invention may not always be clear. Though not always clear, the substitutability of the inventory must be determined and represented by the Seller, who has the clearest understanding of the makeup of the Buyer and their use of the goods, products, and services. If the inventory were a one-of-a-kind item, obviously there can be no substitutability and the inventory is unique. At the other extreme, for example, if the inventory were music CDs, with 1,000,000 copies in stock and another printing anticipated, then the inventory is common and substitutable. In between the extremes is a wide variety of items that are limited in quantity or availability and yet are substitutable. An example of an item that is limited in availability and is substitutable to the Buyer is rooms of a 100-room block at a hotel that are of the same standard (king bed, TV, phone, and desk). Although the rooms are not identical (as the CDs are) due to being on different floors and having different views, they are substitutable to the traveler.

Media

A means of communicating, delivering, or projecting concepts, ideas, or information to potential buyers, such as radio, television, newspapers, magazines, internet, Intranet, CD-ROMs, directories, brochures, flyers, billboards, bus benches, sky writers, direct mail or any other method or means of reaching a large number of people or a smaller number of targeted potential buyers or consumers.

Media Venues or Media Outlets

Those physical or virtual locations where presentations are placed or made available to present the information within the framework of the media so that it is accessible by the end users, consumers, viewers, or Buyers. This may mean an Internet directory, a newspaper, a multimedia CD-ROM, a travel guidebook, or any number of other examples.

Near Real Time

Refers to processing or access that takes place within a time frame that allows for some possibility that human interaction or other process may intercede or interpret that processing or access. For the purpose of this application, Near Real Time is referring to processing or access that take place within time limits that are unlikely to allow interruptions in the normal course of business. As an example, if you have a process that takes place randomly 15 times per day and each process takes within 1 minute due to communications delays, the likelihood of an interruption is approximately 1 chance in 1440 per event.

Network or Delivery ID

Magnetic, smart, or optical identification cards approved for use within the preferred embodiment of the present invention as identification, or biometric identification, that is used as substitution for the delivery of traditional tickets, to access to facilities, events, or venues.

Network of Computers

Two or more computers that may communicate either continuously or on-demand for the purpose of sharing processing, transferring information and data.

Non-Resident Media

Refers to media that is not wholly owned or controlled by the management, operators, or affiliates of the given instance of the present invention but are contracted for, designed, submitted, and controlled through the given instance of the present invention.

On-demand

Functions, programs, or resources that are called or utilized when needed as opposed to being employed, engaged, or utilized continuously.

Presentation

Any content intended to inform or influence the viewers or readers of a given media venue. It may be in an advertising, public service, editorial, informational or any other format. It may be text, graphics, audio, multimedia, or a combination of any communication methods.

Products

Items that are manufactured, assembled, processed or created by the Seller and offered for sale or transfer.

Publishing

The act of placing or making available the presentation or information within the framework of media venue so that it is accessible by the end users, consumers, viewers, or Buyers. This may mean placing an HTML page on an Internet directory, printing a 12-word classified ad in a newspaper, adding a hotel presentation to a multimedia CD-ROM or guidebook, or any number of other examples.

Reader or Viewer Client

The reader or viewer client is the program that computer users use when accessing electronic information servers. The most common of these reader or viewer clients are Netscape Navigator and Internet Explorer, which are Internet Browsers.

Real-time

Refers to processing, communications, information transfer, or access that takes place within fractions of a second so that it is humanly impossible to discern,

intercede or interpret that processing, communications, information transfer, or access. (See "Near Real Time".)

Resident Media

Refers to media that is wholly owned or controlled by the management, operators, or affiliates of the given instance of the present invention.

Replaceable Inventory

This is inventory that can either be purchased, manufactured, produced, or added to easily by the Seller thereby changing the inventory count and availability to the Buyer at any given time.

Reservation

A promise or commitment made by the Buyer and held by the Seller, to take, use, consume, utilize, attend, or enjoy a unit of inventory. Usually reservations are made by Buyers to reserve a time and facility to consume goods, products, or services.

Seller

A person, corporation, partnership, group, or any other legal entity that desires representation of its goods, products, services, reservations for services, ideas, views, or any legal intent or desire to be made public and offered for sale, exchange, trade, or distribution either paid for or free.

Seller Type

Refers to a category of Sellers that are offering comparable or similar information, products, or services classified by that type of information, product, or service.

Static Presentations

Presentations that are fixed in time as to the content that they display or convey to the client reader or viewer. They are created and then set into a presentation framework that can be accessed. These presentations are currently the most familiar to all of us now and are the standard presentations on the Internet or most Intranets. (See "Dynamic Presentations")

Transaction Message

Any unit of information that is transferred or communicated between clients, components, or programs of the present invention or third-party compatible clients, components, or programs.

Services

Duties or work offered to be performed for the buyer or consumer, often but not necessarily specialized or professional in nature.

Standalone Presentations

Refers to independent presentations that are not part of organized Directories or Indexes of complementing and/or competing products or services.

Traffic

Generally refers to the number of times users access Internet or Intranet sites or presentations. More specifically, traffic refers to how many times Buyers access an electronic presentation directory, index, server, or instance of the present invention.

Transmission Level

One of the variables set within the Resource Saver Protocol for use with common inventory. A predetermined number of units that triggers the immediate transmission of inventory sold or reserved. This count

is the total inventory sold or reserved within the Transaction Messages, that are being held awaiting transmission from the Central Presentation and Selection Server 2000 or any other sales outlet to the Central Controller and Presentation Processor 1000.

Transmission Time Control

One of the variables set within the Resource Saver Protocol for use with common inventory. Transmission Time Control is a setting that controls the time of transmission for held transaction messages from the Central Presentation and Selection Server 2000 or any other sales outlet to the Central Controller and Presentation Processor 1000

Transaction Period

One of the variables set within the Resource Saver Protocol for use with common inventory. A setting to control the maximum period in hours that the Central Presentation and Selection Server 2000 or any other sales outlet may hold transaction messages prior to transmitting them to the Central Controller and Presentation Processor 1000.

Will Call

The act of, or a reference to, the picking up of tickets, passes, admission documents, reservations, or reservation confirmations or other access documents from a particular department of a venue for the purpose of being admitted to an event at that venue.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

It should be noted that although specific hardware or software components may be referenced within this detailed description, newer, improved, or successor generations of given hardware or software should be substituted as available to increase reliability, performance, or cost effectiveness or to take advantage of new or replacement technology.

The method and apparatus of the present invention will be discussed with reference to FIGS. 1a, 1b, 2a, 2b, 2c, 2d, and 2e. In one embodiment, the present invention includes a Central Controller and Presentation Processor 1000, Central Presentation and Selection Server 2000, Seller Interface 4000, Buyer Interface 5000, and Media Interface 6000. Each of these components includes hardware, software programs, databases, communications programs and devices. The present invention edits and structures data and information from an individual seller, at a single location, into consistent, designed and controlled presentations. These presentations can be simultaneously published or displayed in a variety of traditional and electronic media as chosen by the Seller through the Seller Interface 4000. The presentations can also be integrated into interactive sales-enabled standalone presentations or as unified presentations of complementing and or competing products, goods, and services. In addition, the present invention allows buyers to purchase, commit to purchase, or reserve products, goods, and services in a real-time or near real-time environment. This also allows, where appropriate, for an alternative to the advance physical delivery of tickets, passes, admission documents, reservations, reservation confirmations, or other physical methods of controlling access or proving purchase or reservation. The present invention also allows sellers to control inventory of common, unique, or time-sensitive products, goods, and services with reduced computer and communications resources while decreasing the time necessary for buyers to

confirm the availability and then confirm the reservation, purchase, or commitment of purchase of that inventory. The interactive portion of the present invention enables the buyer to view or compare the products, goods, and services from a single source or a variety of sellers and then purchase or reserve those products, goods, and services in a real or near real-time environment. Where appropriate, in an embodiment of the present invention, access to events, venues, reserved services, and other access controlled products or services can be accomplished without the requirement of delivery for any tickets, passes, admission documents, reservations, reservation confirmations, or other access documents.

Design and Structure of the Present Invention

The design and structure of the first embodiment of the method and apparatus of the present invention is diagramed with reference to FIGS. 1a, 1b, 2a, 2b, 2c, 2d, and 2e. Shown in FIG. 1a, the components of the present invention are presented as a "1 each" single-level diagram of the interaction between the components. The components are the Central Controller and Presentation Processor 1000, the Central Presentation and Selection Server 2000, Seller Interface 4000, Buyer Interface 5000, and Media Interface 6000. Sub components of Seller Interface 4000 are Seller 4000A as client, Seller Accounting or Management Program 4000B, and Optional On Site Verification of Purchase Magnetic, Optical Card Reader or Biometric ID Reader with Ticket or Confirmation Printer 4350. Sub components and events of Buyer Interface 5000 are Buyer 5000A as client and Buyer Arrives at Facility or Event for Admission or Check-in 5000B as an event.

Communication between the components is accomplished by use of on-demand, direct dial-up public phone lines, network, or Internet connection between Seller Interface 4000, Media Interface 6000, and Central Controller and Presentation Processor 1000; standard Internet connections between Buyer Interface 5000 and Central Presentation and Selection Server 2000; and a high-speed network or Internet connection between Central Controller and Presentation Processor 1000 and Central Presentation and Selection Server 2000. Connections between components may be accomplished by any combination of public switched phone network, cellular, Personal Communication System, dedicated data lines, microwave, private network, shared data network, satellite network, or any other means that will provide data transfer. Seller Interface 4000, Media Interface 6000, and Buyer Interface 5000 represent components that are limited in number only by the capacity of both the Central Controller and Presentation Processor 1000 and Central Presentation and Selection Servers 2000 and the associated communications and data transfer methods. The present invention allows for the modular expansion of capacity by duplicating any component or portions of a component requiring additional capacity and running the new component in parallel with the original existing component. In the embodiment, there is one Central Controller and Presentation Processor 1000 and at least one Central Presentation and Selection Server 2000; however, the Central Controller and Presentation Processor 1000 can support more than one Central Presentation and Selection Server 2000. An example of this embodiment is shown on FIG. 1b. The Central Controller and Presentation Processor 1000 and the Central Presentation and Selection Server 2000 are separate but co-located in the embodiment, however, they could be remotely located with a high-speed data connection. Both the Central Controller and Presentation Processor

1000 and the Central Presentation and Selection Server 2000 could also coexist on the same computer in some specific low traffic or low transaction volume embodiments. In the embodiment, multiple Seller Interface 4000, Independent Presentation 3000, Media Interface 6000, and of course Buyer Interface 5000 are served, with the only limitations being the capacity of the associated processing, data storage, and communications hardware that can, as indicated above, be expanded.

FIG. 2a diagrams the Central Controller and Presentation Processor 1000, which includes a central processor (CPU) 1100, operating system 1210, ROM 1220, RAM 1230, clock 1240, communication ports 1250, video driver 1260, network interface card 1270, video monitor 1310, input devices 1320, modem pool 1330, network interface 1340, and data storage device 1500.

A personal, workstation, or server-grade computer with sufficient processing capacity, program and data storage capacity, and memory may be used as a Central Controller and Presentation Processor 1000. The CPU 1100 may be a single CPU or multiple CPUs as necessary to provide sufficient processing capacity. The Intel Pentium II Processor with a speed of 300 MH or any comparable capacity processor that is compatible with the chosen operating system could be used as CPU 1100. In the embodiment of the present invention, the operating system 1210 should be one that allows for multiple processors, such as Windows NT by Microsoft, so that increases in utilization of the present invention can be handled with increases of processing capacity. The video monitor 1310 is a standard "SVGA" color monitor or its equivalent. The input devices 1320 are a standard keyboard and mouse or other replacement items. The communication ports 1250 are RS232 serial ports with 16550 UART or alternatives that provide comparable connections to the Modem Pool 1330. The Modem Pool 1330 may be made up of modems such as the US Robotics 56K external made by 3Com Inc or any high-grade multi-modem equivalent. The Modem Pool 1330 should be made up of a sufficient number of modems to handle both incoming and outgoing messages from the Seller Interface 4000 using on-demand modem communications. If a given instance of the present invention generates sufficient modem traffic, the Modem Pool 1330 and its overhead and functions may be separated from the Central Controller and Presentation Processor and placed in a Modem Server to handle the Modem Pool 1330 and the associated communications overhead.

The data storage device 1500 may be one or a combination of standard hard disks, optical storage devices, CD-W drives, CD-RW drives, DVD, flash memory, magnetic tape, or other data storage devices. It must be of sufficient capacity to store all the programs and data necessary for the present invention as well as provide for future capacity needs. In the embodiment, mirrored hard disks with separate hard disk controllers provide a redundancy of data storage and therefore increased dependability and data integrity. This configuration allows for easier recovery in case of data corruption or data storage equipment failure. The aforementioned Windows NT operating system allows for this mirrored configuration. In addition to the mirrored hard disk, daily or more frequent backup of all data to tape, which is then taken off-site for storage, is a required procedure to ensure safe data. The present invention has a degree of data security built into it by design, with the most critical data kept with both the Central Controller and Presentation Processor 1000 and the Central Presentation and Selection Server 2000 FIG. 2b. In a catastrophic destruction of either the Central Controller and Presentation Processor 1000 or the Central Pre-

sentation and Selection Server 2000 FIG. 2b, the most critical data can be recovered from the surviving component in order to rebuild the lost data and ensure the integrity of all transactions.

The data storage device 1500 in the embodiment of the present invention contains relational databases controlled and managed by database software such as Microsoft SQL Server 7 by Microsoft Inc. Data used in the client control, the generation of presentations, and the processing of inventory sales in the present invention are contained within the Controller Databases 1600. The Controller Databases are the Buyer Database 1610, Transaction Database 1620, Media Transaction Database 1625, Seller Database 1630, Media Database 1635, Presentation Database 1640, Presentation Rules Database 1650, Inventory Database 1660, Referral Database 1670, the Presentation Location Database 1680, and any other databases necessary or desired to service the Buyers and Sellers.

The Buyer Database 1610 maintains data on Buyers who make interactive purchases or reservations of the products, goods, or services offered by the Sellers over the Central Presentation and Selection Server 2000 FIG. 2a or other Independent Presentation Directories and Indexes 3000 FIG. 1b. The Buyer Database 1610 will have data fields containing Buyer name, network or delivery ID, physical address, phone, email address, credit card information, and any other information deemed necessary to support the Buyers and the Seller's required buyer information. The Buyer has the option to input the information when joining the network prior to attempting a purchase. As an alternative, the Central Presentation and Selection Server 2000 will prompt the Buyer for the information after the Buyer has found a desired product, good, or service to purchase but before forwarding the purchase transaction to the Central Controller and Presentation Processor.

The Media Buyer Database 1615 maintains data on Media Buyers (Sellers) who make selections and purchases of media products or services offered by the Media through the Central Controller and Presentation Processor 1000 and the Seller Interface 4000. The Media Buyer Database 1615 will have data fields containing Media Buyer name, physical address, phone, email address, credit card information, and any other information deemed necessary to support the Media Buyers and the requirements of the Media.

The Transaction Database 1620 maintains data on the Buyers' interactive purchases or reservations of products, goods, or services offered by the Sellers over the Central Presentation and Selection Server 2000 FIG. 2b or other Independent Presentation Directories and Indexes 3000 FIG. 1b. The Transaction Database 1620 will have data fields containing information that relates to the purchases or reservations made by the Buyer. The specific fields within the Transaction Database 1620 will depend on the type of Seller and their product, goods, or service, but would always contain the field for the purchase or reservation tracking ID. As an example, if an embodiment of the present invention were configured to present lodging facilities, the Transaction Database 1620 might contain fields for Buyer ID, room type or specific room, bed type, check-in date, check-out date, number of adults, number of children, smoking or non-smoking, room rate paid, taxes paid, responses to requests, and any special requests such as extra pillows, late check-in, airport pickup service, etc. The information in the Transaction Database 1620 is the result of each requested purchase made with the Central Presentation and Selection Server

2000 FIG. 2b, which is then passed to the Central Controller and Presentation Processor 1000 and then to the Seller Interface 4000 FIG. 2c.

The Media Transaction Database 1625 maintains data on the Sellers' interactive purchases of non-resident media presentations offered by the management or operators of that given instance of the present invention through the Seller Interface 4000. The specific fields within the Media Transaction Database 1625 will depend on the type of media. As one example, if the non-resident media were a newspaper, the Media Transaction Database 1625 might contain publishing deadlines, placement or section requirements, rate paid, taxes paid, and any other information necessary to support that given media.

The Seller Database 1630 will have data fields containing information that relates to the Sellers who have created presentations for traditional media or offer their products, goods, and services interactively over the Central Presentation and Selection Server 2000 or other Independent Presentation 3000 FIG. 1b. The specific fields within the Seller Database 1630 will cover all necessary information on the Seller for use both within the presentations created and by the managers of the present invention for the management of the Seller's account. The Seller Database 1630 will have data fields containing company name, contact name, marketing name, physical address, phone, email address, credit card or other payment information, contract dates, product or reservation types for presentation, data transfer modem numbers, third-party accessible management software, and any other information fields deemed necessary to support the proposed sellers. The seller will input this information when first accessing the present invention and joining as a Seller. The Seller Interface 4000 FIG. 2c, specifically the Configuration and Presentation Program 4715 FIG. 2c, will prompt the Seller for the necessary information as well as obtain an agreement to a contract for the services of the present invention and the distribution and payment of all presentations.

The Media Database 1635 will have data fields containing information that relates to the Non-Resident Media organizations that have contracted with the management or operators of the given instance of the present invention to offer their services to the Sellers that are associated with the given instance of the present invention. The Media Database 1635 will have data fields containing company name, contact name, marketing name, physical address, phone, email address, contract dates, data transfer modem numbers, third-party accessible management software, and any other information fields deemed necessary to support the Non-Resident Media.

The Presentation Database 1640 will have data fields containing information that relates to the Seller's choice of media or venues as well as the presentation of their products, goods, or services offered to the Buyers. This information is the majority of the data that, when combined with portions of the information within the Seller Database 1630 and the Presentation Rules Database 1650 and processed through the Presentation Generation Program 1710, creates the presentations that are transmitted to the Central Presentation and Selection Server 2000 for presentation to the Buyer or to other non-resident media to be published. The data fields held by Presentation Database 1640 will vary from seller type to seller type, depending on the design of the presentations and the types of resident and non-resident media offered by the given instance of the present invention. As an example, if an embodiment of the present invention were configured to present lodging facilities, the Presentation

Database 1640 might contain fields for facility description, facility photos, room descriptions, room photos, facility amenities, room amenities, room service menu, payment types accepted, meeting and reception services offered, meeting rooms, photos of meeting rooms, policies, rates, special package offers, media or venue choices, and any other information to assist in the presentation and sale of the lodging. The Seller Interface 4000, specifically the Configuration and Presentation Program 4715 FIG. 2c, will prompt the Seller for the necessary information for the presentations and non-resident media they have selected. The data relationship between the Presentation Database 4640 FIG. 2c, which is a part of the Seller Interface 4000 FIG. 2c, and the Presentation Database 1640 is one of continual synchronization of the Seller's information. The Presentation and Configuration Program 4715 FIG. 2c and the Communication and Transport Program 4760 maintain that synchronization. The Seller makes any updates or corrections to the presentation within the Presentation and Configuration Program 4715 FIG. 2c, which then updates the Presentation Database 4640 FIG. 2c. The Communication and Transport Program 4760 FIG. 2c sends those updates or corrections to the Central Controller and Presentation Processor 1000 for updating to the Presentation Database 1640. The Presentation Generation Program 1710 in conjunction with the Presentation Database 1640 then creates the new or updated presentations for publishing on the Central Presentation and Selection Servers or the appropriate non-resident media.

The Presentation Rules Database 1650 will have data fields containing information that controls and limits the style and editing of the presentations created by the Presentation Generation Program 1710. The Central Controller and Presentation Processor 1000 administrator or management of that given instance of the present invention inputs this information based on the types of media and interactive presentations that are supported by that given instance. For the non-resident media components of the present invention this information is submitted and updated directly by means of the Media Interface 6000 and specifically the Media Configuration Program 6715. The data fields held by the Presentation Rules Database 1650 will vary from seller type to seller type, as well as from one media type to another, depending on the design of the presentations. Some of the fields that might be maintained are presentation templates; blocked words; blocked phrases; blocked references; presentation cost and options; publication dates and deadlines; blocked URLs; grammar guidelines; spelling dictionaries; presentation size restrictions; photo or graphics specifications such as size, compression, and file format; and any other guidelines, benchmarks, or controlling algorithms. The data within the Presentation Rules Database 1650 will be synchronized with the Presentation Rules Database 4650 FIG. 2c stored on the Seller Interface 4000 FIG. 2c. This synchronization will take place by the sending of updates from the Central Controller and Presentation Processor 1000 to the Presentation and Configuration Program 4715 FIG. 2c, which then updates the Presentation Rules Database 4650.

The Inventory Database 1660 will have data fields containing information that monitors and controls the inventory of products, goods, and services offered for sale by the Sellers within the interactive sales portion of the present invention. The data fields held by the Inventory Database 1660 will vary from seller type to seller type, depending on the type of products, goods, or services that are being sold or reserved. As an example, if an embodiment of the present invention were configured to present lodging facilities, the

Inventory Database 1660 might contain fields for Buyer ID, types of rooms, number of rooms available for each type, blocked rooms, blocked dates, room rates, exception date rates, and any other fields necessary to present and control that room inventory.

The Media Inventory Database 1665 (optional) will have data fields containing information that monitors and controls the media inventory offered by the Non-Resident Media to the Sellers. The data fields held by the Media Inventory Database 1665 (optional) will vary from media seller type to media seller type, depending on the type media supported by the given instance of the present invention. As an example, if an embodiment of the present invention were configured to offer a given newspaper as a Non-Resident Media the Inventory Database 1665 (optional) might contain fields for number display ads available per size, number of classified lines available, number of color pages available, and any other fields necessary to present and control that media inventory.

The Referral Database 1670 will have data fields containing information from the Sellers that refers Buyers to other sources of the same products, goods, or services offered when a given Seller cannot meet the wishes or needs of the Buyer. The information within the Referral Database 1670 is provided by the Seller through prompting by the Presentation and Configuration Program 4715 FIG. 2c. This information is intended and designed to provide the Buyer with alternative sources when the products, goods, or services offered by the Seller interactively are either not available or do not meet the needs of the Buyer. The data fields held by the Referral Database 1670 will vary from seller type to seller type, depending on the type of products, goods, or services that are being sold or reserved. As an example, if an embodiment of the present invention were configured to present lodging facilities, the Referral Database 1670 might contain fields for other alternative accommodations, alternative dates, or alternative lodging facilities. An embodiment of the present invention configured to present professional services might contain alternative professionals or associates that might be acceptable to the Buyer.

The preferred embodiment of the Central Controller and Presentation Processor 1000 has a Presentation Generation Program 1710, Transaction Processing Program 1720, General Management Program 1730, Communication and Transport Program 1760, and other programs as necessary.

The Presentation Generation Program 1710 utilizes the information submitted by the Sellers and held in the Presentation Database 1640, Inventory Database 1660, and Seller Database 1630. The Presentation Generation Program 1710 uses these databases to create the requested presentations for the various desired resident or non-resident media as well as those presentations necessary for the interactive Central Presentation and Selection Servers 2000 with its interactive sales presentations, using the Presentations Rules Database 1650 for style and control guidelines. It should be noted that in the preferred embodiment of the present invention, the same rules and guidelines contained in the Presentation Rules Database 1650 are also held in the Presentation Rules Database 4650 FIG. 2c, which is part of the Seller Interface 4000 FIG. 2c. With the same rules and guidelines as those in the Presentations Rules Database 1650 applied and enforced during data input at the Seller Interface 4000 FIG. 2c module, no modification or editing should be necessary at the Central Controller and Presentation Processor 1000 module. Although the same rules and guidelines are applied and enforced at Seller Interface 4000 FIG. 2c module as at the Central Controller and Presentation Pro-

cessor 1000 module, both processes should be utilized to ensure consistency and quality control. After the initial setup and publishing, the Presentation Generation Program 1710 automatically re-creates presentations either in the event of changes to the data for the Seller which affect any given presentation or upon the addition or deletion of any Seller. While creating or updating the Sellers' presentations, the Presentation Generation Program 1710 will determine which portions of the general presentation framework and structure on the overall directory or index require updating and republishing. This determination is made on a case-by-case basis for each non-resident media presentation requested by the Seller as well as for any interactive presentation on the Central Presentation and Selection Servers 2000 FIG. 2b. This embodiment of the present invention allows the Seller to determine the urgency of original or revised publishing of presentations, depending on the media and the accessibility of republishing. With the present invention, there are two publishing levels of processing. With the choice of "Urgent Publishing," the Presentation Generation Program 1710 would immediately process and publish the Seller's presentation to those non-resident media or Central Presentation and Selection Servers 2000 that are accessible for updating, but the Seller would be surcharged for this service. The Seller's second choice is "Standard Publishing," which does not carry a surcharge. This "Standard Publishing" would be performed in the normal schedule of publishing for the non-resident media. "Standard Publishing" for any Central Presentation and Selection Server 2000 presentations would be done when the Central Controller and Presentation Processor 1000 and the Central Presentation and Selection Servers 2000 FIG. 2b are at their lowest processor and network loads in handling the Buyers' requests and transactions. This economic choice gives a solution to the Seller who truly requires an immediate publishing of data while encouraging the bulk of the publishing to be done during times with less processor load. In this embodiment of the present invention, the Presentation Generation Program 1710 would be set to immediately process any "Urgent Publishing" request and any associated required structures. All other "Standard Publishing" would be processed as a batch at a preset low-traffic or low-utilization time for the Central Controller and Presentation Processor 1000 and the Central Presentation and Selection Server 2000 FIG. 2b. In this embodiment, the Central Controller and Presentation Processor processes the publishing function in the following order: all new Sellers' presentations, all Sellers' updates, then all associated structure and presentation frameworks.

With this embodiment of the present invention, the Transaction Processing Program 1720 is responsible for processing the transaction messages of all interactive sales and/or reservation of products, goods, or services offered by the Sellers and all media selections made by the Sellers from the offerings by the resident and non-resident media.

The Transaction Processing Program 1720 confirms available inventory and rates/pricing, updates any other Central Presentation and Selection Servers 2000 FIG. 2b and Independent Presentations Directories and Indexes 3000 FIG. 1b if necessary, updates databases, and creates and sends the transaction message to the Seller Interface 4000 FIG. 2c. The transmission of transaction messages from the Central Controller and Presentation Processor 1000 to the Seller Interface 4000 FIG. 2c takes place immediately upon processing, as there is no provision for holding those messages at this level. New Media presentation selections of the non-resident media offerings made by the Sellers are pro-

cessed immediately upon receiving them from the Seller Interface 4000 and are sent to the Media Interface 6000.

With this embodiment of the present invention, the General Management Program 1730 is responsible for the business accounting, billing and collections, reporting, trend analysis, general Seller maintenance, and any other necessary functions.

Within this embodiment of the present invention, the Communication and Transport Program 1760 monitors, directs, and controls the receiving and transmitting of messages between the Central Controller and Presentation Processor 1000, Seller Interface 4000 FIG. 2c, and the Media Interface 6000 FIG. 2e.

FIG. 2b diagrams the Central Controller and Presentation Processor 2000, which includes a central processor (CPU) 2100, operating system 2210, ROM 2220, RAM 2230, clock 2240, video driver 2260, video monitor 2310, input devices 2320, network interface 2340, and data storage device 2500.

A personal, workstation, or server-grade computer with sufficient processing capacity, program and data storage capacity, and memory may be used as a Central Presentation and Selection Server 2000. The CPU 2100 may be a single CPU or multiple CPUs as necessary to provide sufficient processing capacity. The Intel Pentium II Processor with a speed of 300 MH or any comparable capacity processor that is compatible with the chosen operating system could be used as CPU 2100. The operating system 2210 should be one that allows for multiple processors, such as Windows NT by Microsoft, so that increases in utilization of the present invention can be handled with increases of processing capacity. The video monitor 2310 is a standard "SVGA" color monitor or its equivalent. The input devices 2320 are a standard keyboard and mouse or other replacement items or methods.

The data storage device 2500 may be one or a combination of standard hard disks, optical storage devices, CD-W drives, CD-RW drives, DVD, flash memory, magnetic tape, or other data storage devices. It must be of sufficient capacity to store all the programs and data necessary as well as provide for future capacity needs. In this embodiment of the present invention, mirrored hard disks with separate hard disk controllers provide a redundancy of data storage and therefore increased dependability and data integrity. This configuration allows for easier recovery in case of data corruption or data storage equipment failure. The aforementioned Windows NT operating system allows for this mirrored configuration. In addition to the mirrored hard disk, daily or more frequent backup of all data to tape, which is then taken off-site for storage, is a required procedure to ensure safe data.

The data storage device 2500 in this embodiment of the present invention contains relational databases controlled and managed by database software such as Microsoft SQL Server 7 by Microsoft Inc. The data used in the Central Presentation and Selection Server 2000 and in the processing of inventory sales in the present invention is contained within the Presentation and Selection Server Databases 2600. The Presentation and Selection Server Databases are the Buyer Database 2610, Transaction Database 2620, Final Presentation Database 2645, Inventory Database 2660, Referral Database 2670, and any other databases necessary or desired to service the Buyers and Sellers.

The Buyer Database 2610 maintains data on Buyers who make purchases or reservations for the products, goods, or services offered by the Sellers over the Central Presentation and Selection Server 2000 or other Independent Presentation Directories and Indexes 3000 FIG. 1b. The Buyer Database

2610 will have data fields containing Buyer name, network or delivery ID, physical address, phone, email address, credit card information, and any other information deemed necessary to support the Buyers and the requirements of the proposed Sellers. The Buyer has the option to input the information when joining the network prior to attempting to make a purchase or reservation. As an alternative, the Central Presentation and Selection Server 2000 will prompt the Buyer for the information after the Buyer has found a desired product, good, or service to purchase, but before forwarding the purchase transaction to the Central Controller and Presentation Processor 1000 FIG. 2a. The information contained in the Buyer Database 2610 is synchronized with that in the Buyer Database 1610 FIG. 2a on the Central Controller and Presentation Processor 1000 FIG. 2a. It should be noted that if an embodiment of the present invention is configured with more than one Central Presentation and Selection Server 2000 and is controlled by a single Central Controller and Presentation Processor 1000 (as in FIG. 1b). Then the Buyers represented on each Central Presentation and Selection Server 2000 Buyer Database 2610 will be represented on the Central Controller and Presentation Processor 1000 Buyer Database 1610 FIG. 2a. However all Buyers on Buyer Database 1610 may not be represented on each Central Presentation and Selection Server 2000 Buyer Database 2610. A similar relationship exists between the Central Controller and Presentation Processor 1000 and the Seller Interface 4000 in that all Buyers are represented within the Buyer Database 1610 FIG. 2a, but only those Buyers that any given Seller has had transactions with are represented within the Buyer Database 4610 FIG. 2c of any given Seller. It should also be noted that any given Buyer might choose to utilize any or all Central Presentation and Selection Servers 2000 controlled by the Central Controller and Presentation Processor 1000. When this happens, the information contained within the associated Buyer Databases 2610 would be the same, but the Transaction Databases 2620 would be different, because the Transaction Database 1620 FIG. 2a represents the cumulative transactions made by that particular buyer.

The Transaction Database 2620 maintains data on the Buyers' purchases of products, goods, or services offered by the Sellers over the Central Presentation and Selection Server 2000 or other Standalone Presentations or Independent Presentation Directories and Indexes 3000 FIG. 1b. The Transaction Database 2620 will have data fields containing information that relates to the purchases or reservations made by the Buyer. The specific fields within the Transaction Database 2620 will depend on the type of Seller and their product, goods, or service, but would always contain the field for the purchase or reservation tracking ID. As an example, if an embodiment of the present invention were configured to present lodging facilities, the Transaction Database 2620 might contain fields for Buyer ID, room type or specific room, bed type, check-in date, check-out date, number of adults, number of children, smoking or non-smoking, room rate paid, taxes paid, responses to requests, and any special requests such as extra pillows, late check-in, airport pickup service, etc. The information in the Transaction Database 2620 is the result of each requested purchase or reservation made with the Central Presentation and Selection Server 2000; this information is then passed to the Central Controller and Presentation Processor 1000 FIG. 2a and then to the Seller Interface 4000. The relationship between the Central Controller and Presentation Processor 1000 Transaction Database 1620 FIG. 2a and the Central Presentation and Selection Server 2000 Transaction Data-

base 2620 is the same as the relationship between the Buyer Database 1610 FIG. 2a and Buyer Database 2610 explained above.

The Final Presentation Database 2645 will have data fields containing information that relates to the Sellers' presentations of their products, goods, or services to the Buyers on this instance of the Central Presentation and Selection Server 2000. This is data that has been designed, edited and created by the Presentation Generation Program 1710 FIG. 2a of the Central Controller and Presentation Processor 1000 FIG. 2a and then transmitted to the instance of the Central Presentation and Selection Server 2000 for presentation to the Buyers. The data fields held by Final Presentation Database 2645 will vary from seller type to seller type, depending on the structure and design of the presentations. As an example, if an embodiment of the invention were configured to present lodging facilities, the Final Presentation Database 2645 might contain fields for combined facility descriptions, room descriptions, facility amenities, room amenities, payment types accepted, meeting rooms, policies, and any other information to assist in the presentation and sale of the lodging. These fields, as used in the lodging example, would contain information for all the lodging facilities represented. The Final Presentation Database 2645 is the result of the information contained within the Presentation Database 1640 FIG. 2a processed by the Presentation Generation Program 1710 FIG. 2a in conjunction with the information contained in the Presentation Rules Database 1650 FIG. 2a. There is no synchronization of this data, as it only exists for the presentations on a given Central Presentation and Selection Server 2000 and is generally not transferable to other Central Presentation and Selection Servers 2000 due to differing presentation designs and structures. However the Presentation Generation Program 1710 FIG. 2a, using the Presentation Rules Database 1650 FIG. 2a and the Presentation Location Database 1680 FIG. 2c to identify and create the differing presentations, maintains the control of the various presentation designs and structures.

The Inventory Database 2660 will have data fields containing information that monitors and controls the inventory of products, goods, and services offered for sale by the Sellers. In the preferred embodiment of the present invention, the Inventory Database 2660 is synchronized with the Inventory Database 1660 FIG. 2a and the Seller Accounting or Management Program 4000B FIG. 2c depending on the inventory type (see discussion on Resource Saver Protocol). The Inventory Database 2660 can also be used as an alternative to Seller Accounting or Management Program 4000B with the optional Inventory Database 4660 FIG. 2c. The data fields held by the Inventory Database 2660 will vary from seller type to seller type, depending on the type of products, goods, or services that are being sold or reserved. As an example, if an embodiment of the present invention were configured to present lodging facilities, the Inventory Database 2660 might contain fields for Buyer ID, types of rooms, number of rooms available for each type, blocked rooms, blocked dates, exception date rates, and any other fields necessary to present and control that room inventory.

The Referral Database 2670 will have data fields containing information, from the Sellers and from the input of the management of the given instance of the present invention. This data refers Buyers to other sources of the same products, goods, or services offered when a given Seller cannot meet the wishes or needs of the Buyer. The information within the Referral Database 2670 is synchronized with the

Referral Database 1670 FIG. 2a. See discussion of Referral Database 1670 FIG. 2a for reasons and origin of data.

The preferred embodiment of the Central Presentation and Selection Server 2000 has a Transaction Negotiation Program 2725, Presentation Server 2740, Selection Server 2750, and other programs as necessary.

Within the embodiment of the present invention, the Transaction Negotiation Program 2725 is responsible for the negotiations and processing of all sales and/or reservation of products, goods, and services.

The Transaction Negotiation Program 2725 of the Central Presentation and Selection Server 2000 negotiates the interactive transaction with the Buyer. The program facilitates the transaction by presenting products, goods, services, offerings, options, add-on items, rates or prices, availability, alternatives or discounts in response to unavailable or denied requests, and other choices to assist the Buyer in making the purchase transaction. During the transaction negotiations, the inventory is held or reserved for that particular Buyer. If the Buyer does not complete the purchase or reservation, the inventory is made available once again. Once the Buyer makes a purchase or reservation decision, the inventory is deemed sold and taken off the available inventory list, and the Transaction Negotiation Program 2725 transmits a transaction message to the Central Controller and Presentation Processor 1000 for confirmation and processing. This transmission either takes place immediately or on a delayed or batch basis depending on the type of inventory being sold or reserved and the settings entered by the Seller. The Transaction Processing Program 1720 FIG. 2a of the Central Controller and Presentation Processor 1000 FIG. 2a performs some of the same functions and calculations as the Transaction Negotiation Program 2725 of the Central Presentation and Selection Server when it receives the transaction message. This duplication serves as both a check of the processes and a validation of the transaction message. It should be noted that although the Transaction Negotiation Program 2725 is referred to as a program, in the embodiment of the present invention it is a collection of programs, procedures and functions that work with the Selection Server 2750 to provide the selection and negotiation environment in which the Buyer can purchase or reserve the products, goods, or services.

The Presentation Server 2740 is a fully functioning Internet or Intranet Web server. In the preferred embodiment of the present invention, the Internet Information Server by Microsoft is the Presentation Server 2740. The Presentation Server 2740 performs the function of controlling the Buyers' access to the Sellers' presentations through the Internet or Intranet. The Presentation Server 2740 is able to allow access either with or without login and password control (in the embodiment of the present invention, no password control is used). The Presentation Server 2740 would allow full access to the Open Access Presentations 2810 without restrictions.

The Selection Server 2750 is a fully functioning Internet or Intranet Dynamic Page Server. This is a server or server component that allows for presentations to be made based on the actions of the user and the functions or algorithms of the presentation designer or programmer. In this embodiment of the present invention, the server component, Active Server Pages by Microsoft, is added to the Presentation Server 2740 to provide this dynamic functionality. The Selection Server 2750 provides the control and access to the presentations held within the Dynamic Presentations 2820. These presen-