

EXHIBIT B

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Rojas

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(54) **SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR INSTANT VOIP MESSAGING**

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H04M 3/533 (2006.01)
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H04L 29/06 (2006.01)

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7/006 (2013.01); **H04M 2203/4536** (2013.01); **H04L 65/40** (2013.01); **H04M 3/533** (2013.01)
USPC **370/352**; 709/206; 379/88.17

(58) **Field of Classification Search**

CPC **H04L 65/40**; **H04M 3/533**; **H04M 2203/4536**
USPC **370/352**; 709/206
See application file for complete search history.

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Primary Examiner — Creighton Smith

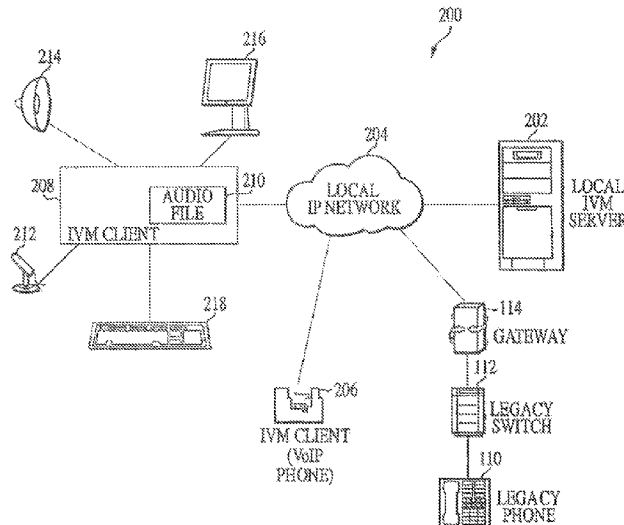
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(57)

ABSTRACT

Methods, systems and programs for instant voice messaging over a packet-switched network are provided. A method for instant voice messaging may comprise receiving an instant voice message having one or more recipients, delivering the instant voice message to the one or more recipients over a packet-switched network, temporarily storing the instant voice message if a recipient is unavailable; and delivering the stored instant voice message to the recipient once the recipient becomes available.

27 Claims, 9 Drawing Sheets



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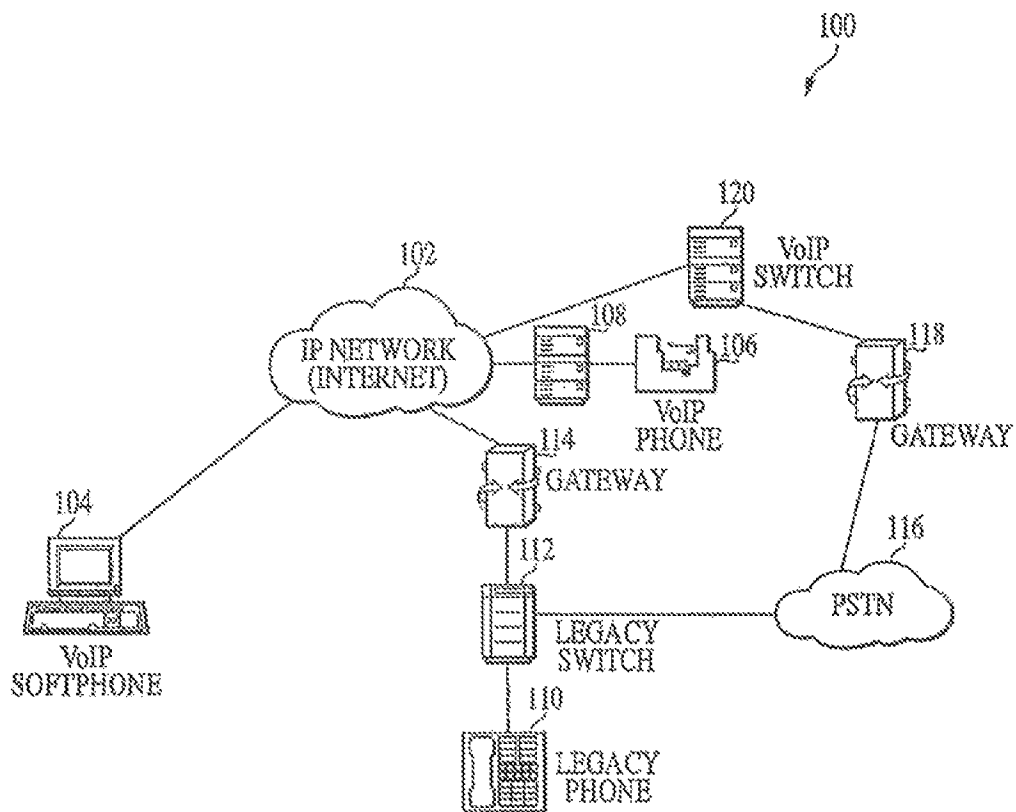


FIG. 1
(PRIOR ART)

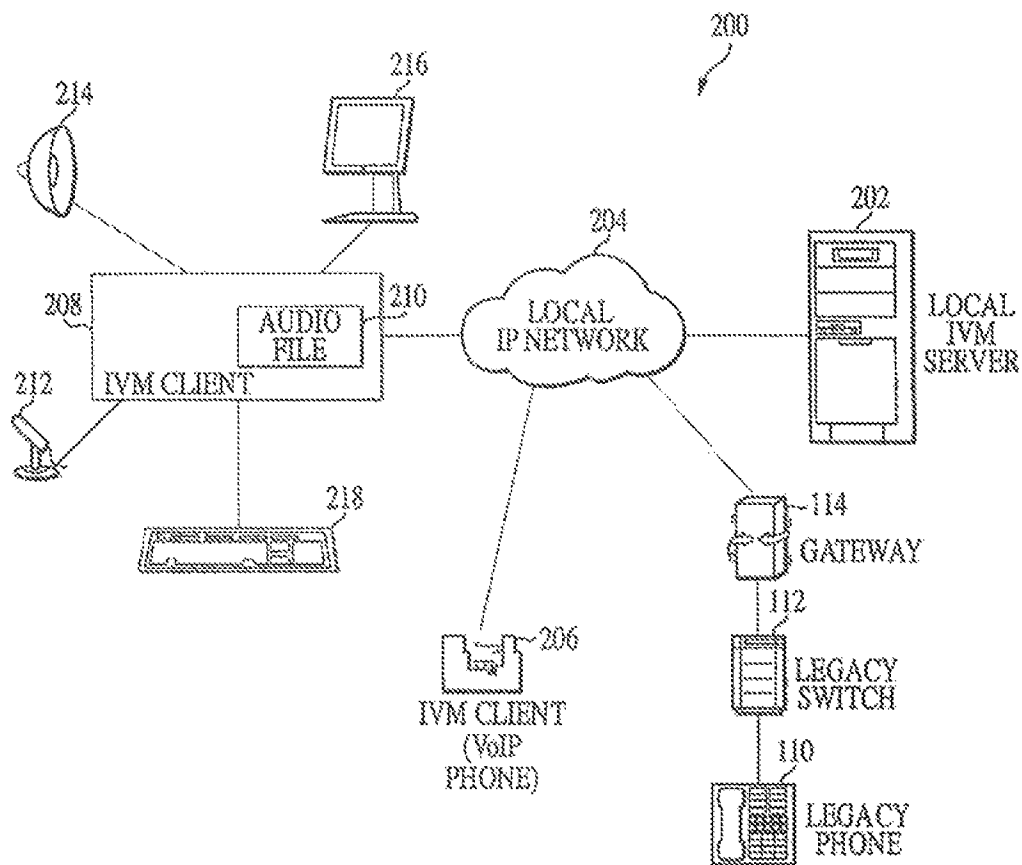


FIG. 2

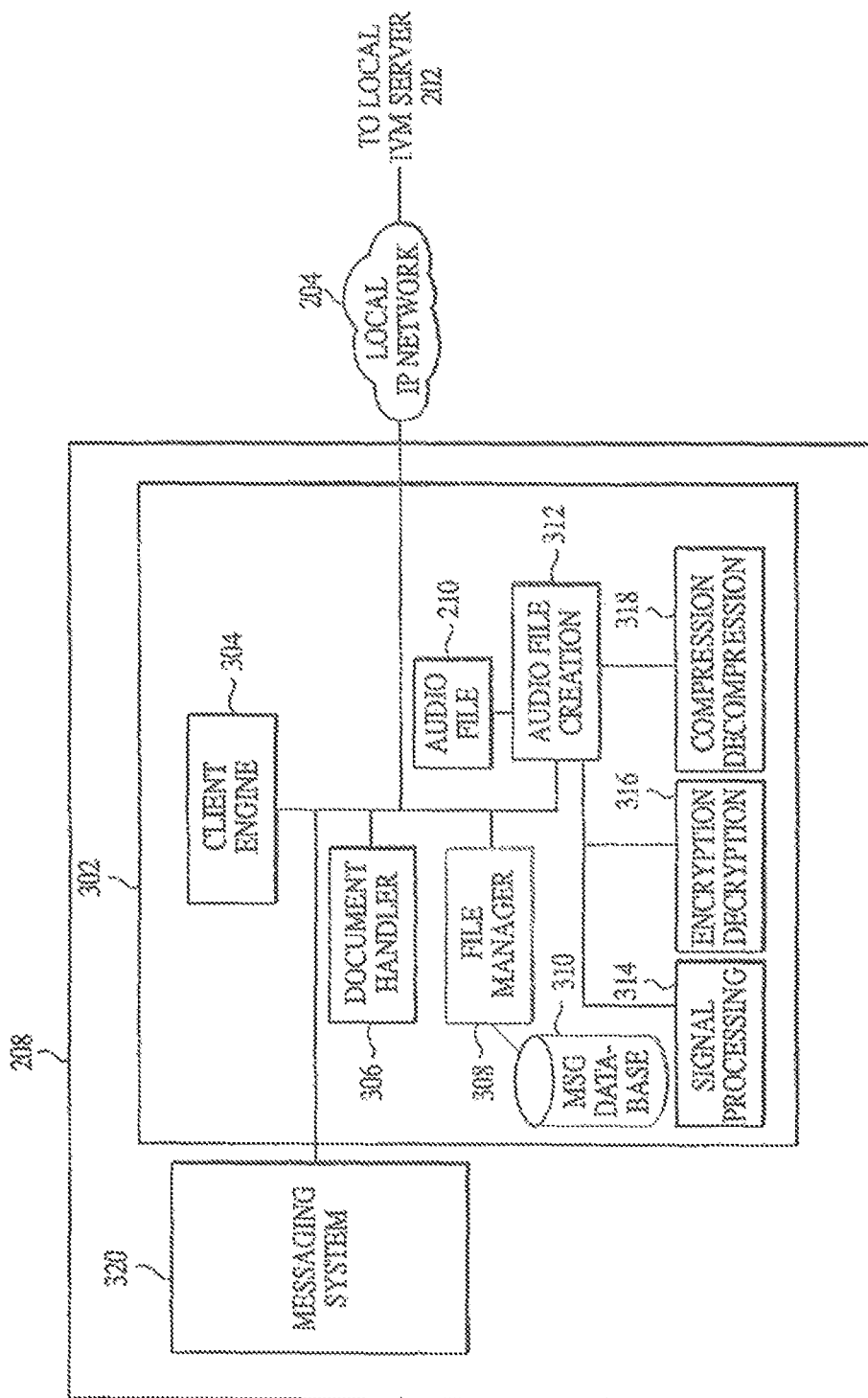


FIG. 3

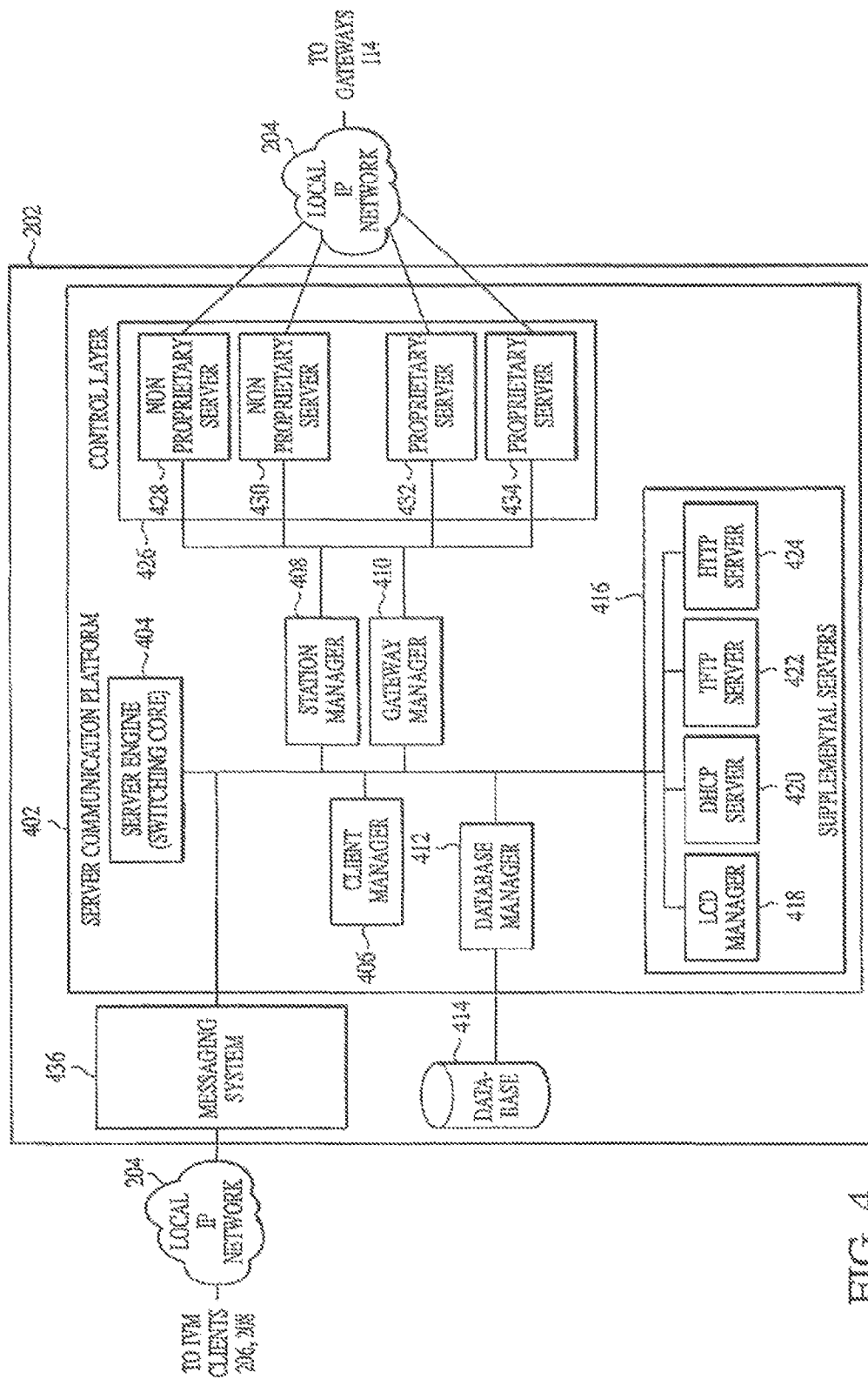


FIG. 4

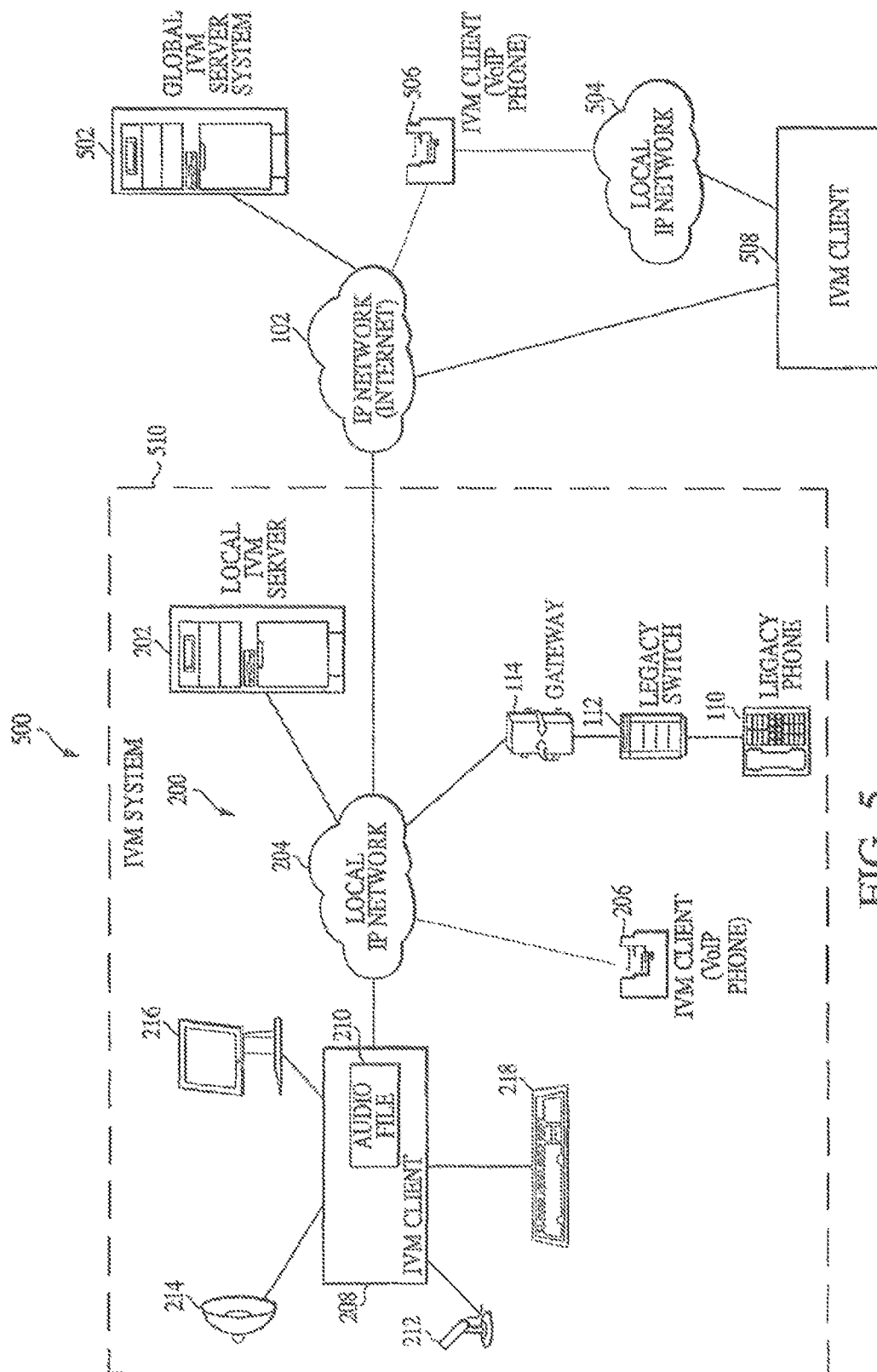


FIG. 5

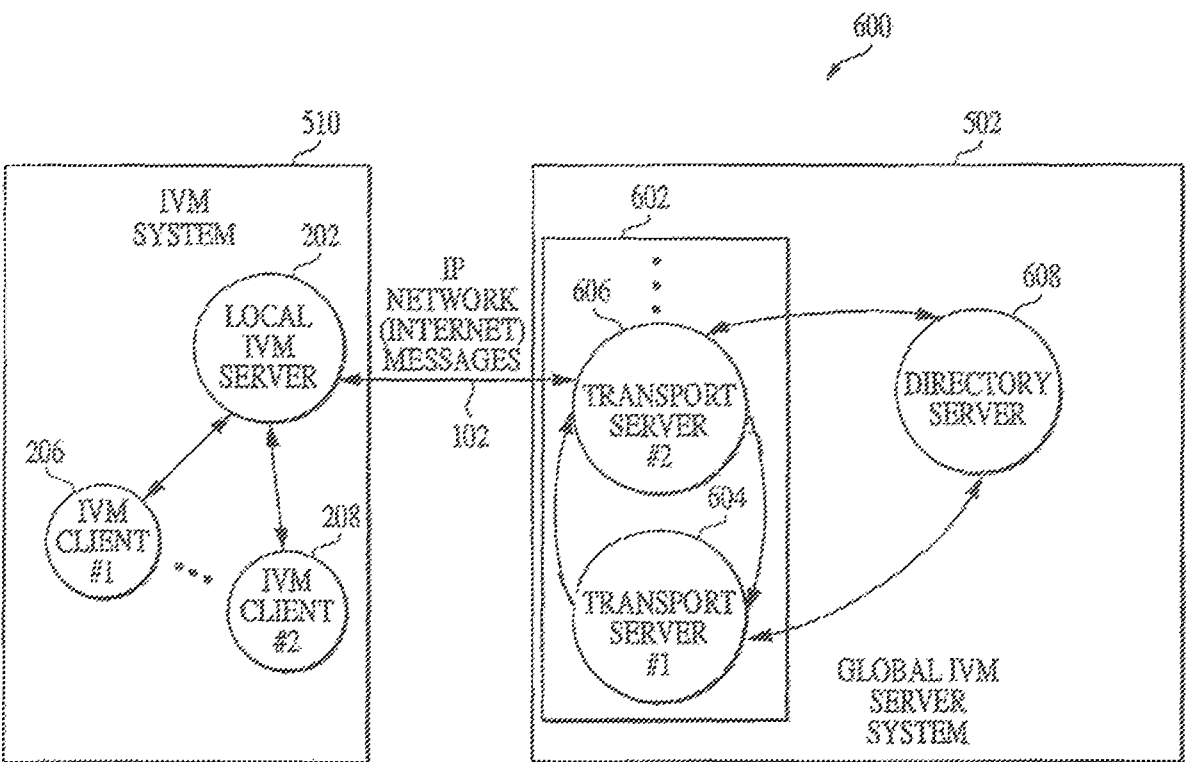


FIG. 6

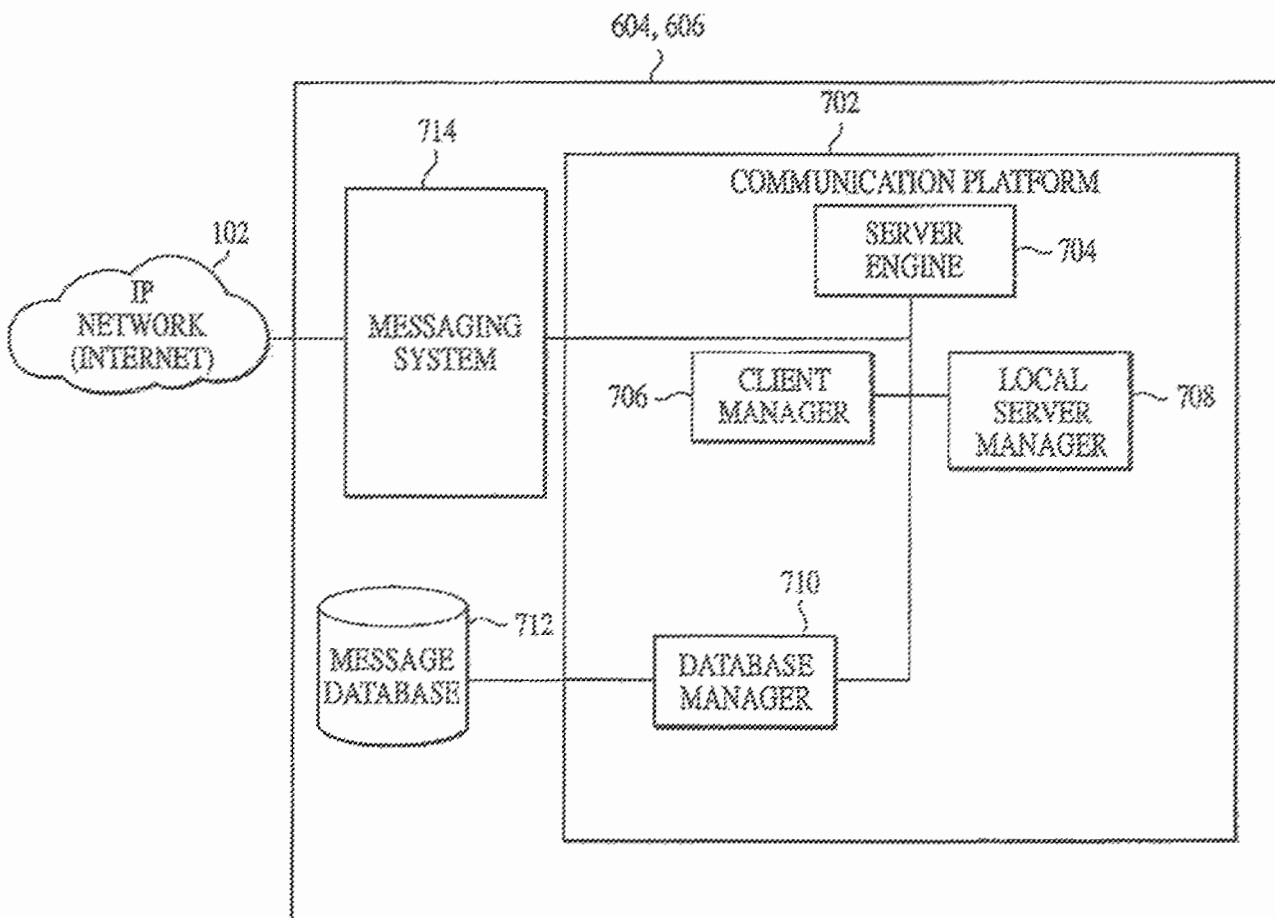


FIG. 7

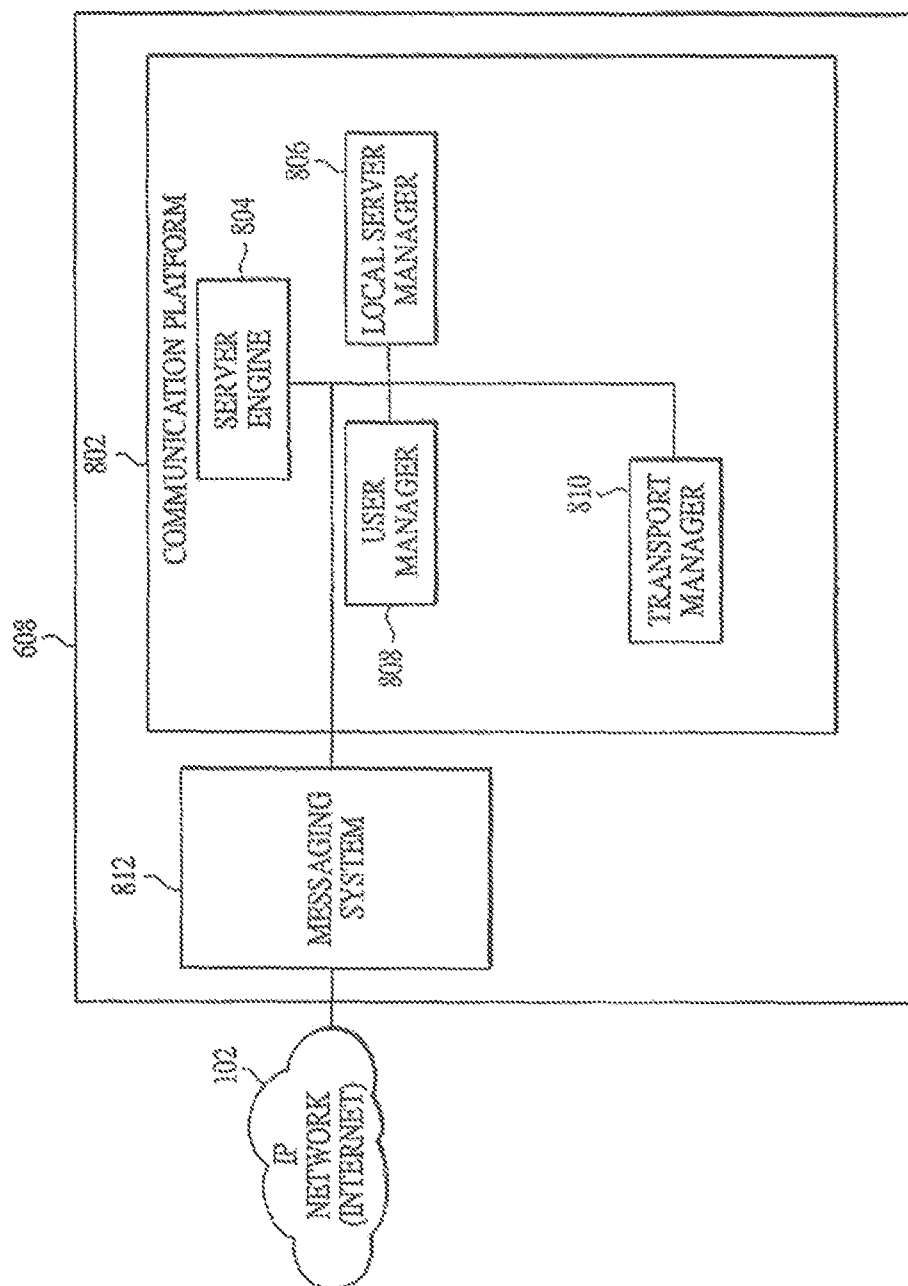
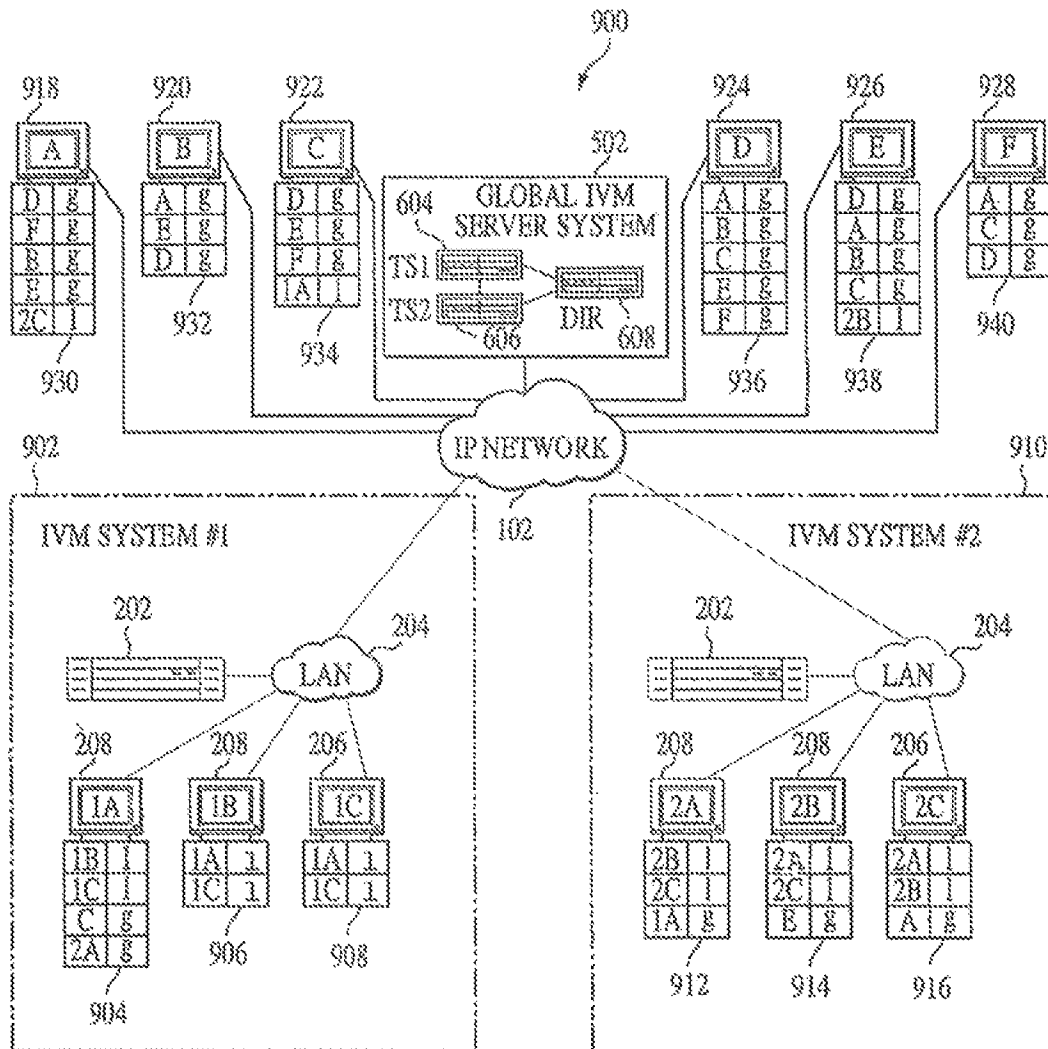


FIG. 8



SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR INSTANT VOIP MESSAGING

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION

This application is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 13/546,673, filed Jul. 11, 2012, which is a continuation of U.S. application Ser. No. 12/398,063 filed Mar. 4, 2009, now U.S. Pat. No. 8,243,723, issued Aug. 14, 2012, which is a continuation of U.S. application Ser. No. 10/740,030 filed on Dec. 18, 2003, now U.S. Pat. No. 7,535,890, issued May 19, 2009, the entire content and disclosure of which is incorporated by reference.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Technical Field of the Invention

The present invention generally relates to Internet telephony (IP telephony). More particularly, the present invention is directed to a system and method for enabling local and global instant VoIP messaging over an IP network, such as the Internet, with PSTN support.

2. Description of the Prior Art

Traditional telephony is based on a public switched telephone network (i.e., "PSTN"). In the PSTN, a telephone terminal is electrically connected to a conventional or legacy switch. The telephone terminal and the legacy switch communicate via a proprietary protocol, which may be different depending on the vendor of the legacy switch. Circuit switching provides a communication path (i.e., dedicated circuit) for a telephone call from the telephone terminal to another device over the PSTN, including another telephone terminal. During the telephone call, voice communication takes place over that communication path.

An alternative to the PSTN is Voice over Internet Protocol (i.e., "VoIP"), also known as IP telephony or Internet telephony. In the IP telephony, a VoIP terminal device is connected to a packet-switched network (e.g., Internet) and voice communication from the VoIP terminal device is digitized, packetized and transmitted over the packet-switched network to a destination VoIP terminal device, which reconstructs the packets and audibly plays, stores or otherwise processes the transmission. The VoIP terminal device may be a VoIP telephone or a general-purpose personal computer (PC) enabled for IP telephony. More specifically, the PC is programmed with the software and equipped with audio input/output devices (e.g., a combination of microphone and speaker or a headset) to serve as a VoIP terminal device. The PC so enabled and equipped will herein be referred to as a VoIP terminal device or a VoIP softphone.

FIG. 1 is an illustrative example of a prior art IP telephony system **100**. The IP telephony system **100** comprises a packet-switched IP network **102**, such as the Internet, which transmits VoIP traffic from and to a plurality of terminal devices **104**, **106** and **110**. Terminal device **104** is a VoIP softphone that is enabled for IP telephony over the network **102**. Terminal device **106** is a VoIP telephone, which is connected to the network **102** via a softswitch **108**. The VoIP softswitch **108** is disposed on the packet-switched network (e.g., Internet) **102** between an origination terminal device (such as VoIP softphone **104**) and a destination terminal device (such as VoIP telephone **106**), and routes packets over the packet-switched IP network **102**. The softswitch **108** may also manage and perform administrative functions for the terminal device or devices (e.g., VoIP telephone **106**) to which it is connected. Whether the terminal device is a VoIP softphone **104** or a VoIP

telephone **106**, the terminal device is connected to the IP network **102** via a networking standard such as Ethernet, Bluetooth, IEEE 1394 (also known as "Firewire"), IEEE 802.11 (also known as "WiFi"), or networking over serial communication channels such as the Universal Serial Bus (i.e., "USB"). Data communication over the network then takes place using a connection protocol, e.g., transfer control protocol/Internet protocol (i.e., "TCP/IP").

Further regarding FIG. 1, terminal device **110** is a legacy telephone that is connected to a legacy switch **112** for (circuit-switched) voice communications over the PSTN **116** with other terminal devices. A media gateway **114** may be provided between the legacy switch **112** and the packet-switched network **102** to enable IP telephony between the legacy telephone **110** and a VoIP terminal device, such as a VoIP softphone **104** or VoIP telephone **106**. More specifically, the media gateway **114** converts the audio signal carried over PSTN to packets carried over the packet-switched IP network **102**. In addition, a media gateway **118** may be disposed over the PSTN **116** and connected to a softswitch **120** to convert the audio signal from the legacy telephone **110** to packets routed over the IP network **102** via the softswitch **120**.

Voice messaging in both the VoIP and PSTN is known. More specifically, the foregoing systems may be provided with a facility to allow users to leave voice messages for recipients, which is a feature that is familiar to anyone who uses a telephone. Conventionally, leaving a voice message involves dialing the recipient's telephone number (often without knowing whether the recipient will answer), waiting for the connection to be established, speaking to an operator or navigating through a menu of options, listening to a greeting message, and recording the message for later pickup by the recipient. In that message, the user must typically identify himself or herself in order for the recipient to return the call.

Instant text messaging is likewise known. More specifically, a user is provided with a client terminal, which is typically a general-purpose PC programmed with instant text messaging software and in data communication over an IP network with an instant text-messaging server. The instant text-messaging server presents the user, via the client terminal, with a list of persons who are currently "online" and ready to receive text messages on their own client terminals. The user then uses the client terminal to select one or more persons to whom the message will be sent and types in a text message. The text message is sent immediately via the text-messaging server to the selected one or more persons and is displayed on their respective client terminals.

However, notwithstanding the foregoing advances in the VoIP/PSTN voice communication and voice/text messaging, there is still a need in the art for providing a system and method for providing instant VoIP messaging over an IP network. More particularly, there is a need in the art for providing local and global instant voice messaging over VoIP with PSTN support.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention is directed to a system and method for enabling local and global instant VoIP messaging over an IP network, such as the Internet.

According to an embodiment of the present invention, there is provided an instant voice messaging system for delivering instant messages over a packet-switched network, the system comprising: a client connected to the network, the client selecting one or more recipients, generating an instant voice message therefor, and transmitting the selected recipients and the instant voice message therefor over the network;

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and a server connected to the network, the server receiving the selected recipients and the instant voice message therefor, and delivering the instant voice message to the selected recipients over the network, the selected recipients being enabled to audibly play the instant voice message.

According to another embodiment of the present invention, there is provided an instant voice messaging system for delivering instant messages over a packet-switched network enabling public switched telephone network (PSTN) support, the system comprising: a PSTN telephone connected to the network for providing input audio; a client connected to the network, the client selecting one or more recipients, generating an instant voice message therefor using the input audio provided by the PSTN telephone, and transmitting the selected recipients and the instant voice message therefor over the network; a server connected to the network, the server receiving the selected recipients and the instant voice message therefor, and delivering the instant voice message to the selected recipients over the network, the selected recipients being enabled to audibly play the instant voice message.

According to a further embodiment of the present invention, there is provided an instant voice messaging system for delivering instant messages over a packet-switched network, the system comprising: a voice-over-internet-protocol (VoIP) telephone connected to the network for providing input audio; a client connected to the network, the client selecting one or more recipients, generating an instant voice message therefor using the input audio provided by the VoIP telephone, and transmitting the selected recipients and the instant voice message therefor over the network; a server connected to the network, the server receiving the selected recipients and the instant voice message therefor, and delivering the instant voice message to the selected recipients over the network, the selected recipients being enabled to audibly play the instant voice message.

According to still another embodiment of the present invention, there is provided an instant voice messaging system for delivering instant messages over a plurality of packet-switched networks, the system comprising: a client connected to a local network, the client selecting one or more external recipients connected to an external network outside the local network, generating an instant voice message therefor, and transmitting the selected recipients and the instant voice message therefor over the local network and the external network; and a server connected to the external network, the server receiving the selected recipients and the instant voice message therefor, and delivering the instant voice message to the selected recipients over the external network, the selected recipients being enabled to audibly play the instant voice message.

According to yet another embodiment of the present invention, there is provided an instant voice messaging system for delivering instant messages over a plurality of packet-switched networks enabling public switched telephone network (PSTN) support, the system comprising: a PSTN telephone connected to a local network for providing input audio; a client connected to the local network, the client selecting one or more external recipients connected to an external network outside the local network, generating an instant voice message therefor using the input audio provided by the PSTN telephone, and transmitting the selected recipients and the instant voice message therefor over the local network and the external network; a server connected to the external network, the server receiving the selected recipients and the instant voice message therefor, and delivering the instant

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voice message to the selected recipients over the external network, the selected recipients being enabled to audibly play the instant voice message.

According to yet a further embodiment of the present invention, there is provided an instant voice messaging system for delivering instant messages over a plurality of packet-switched networks, the system comprising: a voice-over-internet-protocol (VoIP) telephone connected to a local network for providing input audio; a client connected to the local network, the client selecting one or more external recipients connected to an external network outside the local network, generating an instant voice message therefor using the input audio provided by the VoIP telephone, and transmitting the selected recipients and the instant voice message therefor over the local network and the external network; an server connected to the external network, the external server receiving the selected recipients and the instant voice message therefor, and delivering the instant voice message to the selected recipients over the external network, the selected recipients being enabled to audibly play the instant voice message.

According to still a further embodiment of the present invention, there is provided an instant voice messaging system for delivering instant messages over a plurality of packet-switched networks, the system comprising: a client connected to an external network, the client selecting one or more recipients connected to a local network, generating an instant voice message therefor, and transmitting the selected recipients and the instant voice message therefor over the external network; an external server system connected to the external network, the external server system receiving the selected recipients and the instant voice message, and routing the selected recipients and the instant voice message over the external network and the local network; a local server connected to the local network, the local server receiving the selected recipients and the instant voice message therefor, and delivering the instant voice message to the selected recipients over the local network, the selected recipients being enabled to audibly play the instant voice message.

According to an embodiment of the present invention, there is provided a method for instant voice messaging over a packet-switched network, the method comprising: selecting one or more recipients for instant voice messaging at a client; generating an instant voice message for the selected recipients at the client; transmitting the selected recipients and the instant voice message therefor over the network from the client to a server; receiving the selected recipients and the instant voice message therefor at the server; delivering the instant voice message from the server to the selected recipients over the network; and audibly playing the instant voice message at the selected recipients.

According to another embodiment of the present invention, there is provided a method for instant voice messaging over a packet-switched network enabling public switched telephone network (PSTN) support, the method comprising: providing input audio via a PSTN telephone connected over the network; selecting one or more recipients for instant voice messaging at a client; generating an instant voice message using the input audio from the PSTN telephone for the selected recipients at the client; transmitting the selected recipients and the instant voice message therefor over the network from the client to a server; receiving the selected recipients and the instant voice message therefor at the server; delivering the instant voice message from the server to the selected recipients over the network; and audibly playing the instant voice message at the selected recipients.

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According to a further embodiment of the present invention, there is provided a method for instant voice messaging over a packet-switched network, the method comprising: providing input audio via a voice-over-internet-protocol (VoIP) telephone connected over the network; selecting one or more recipients for instant voice messaging at a client; generating an instant voice message using the input audio from the VoIP telephone for the selected recipients at the client; transmitting the selected recipients and the instant voice message therefor over the network from the client to a server; receiving the selected recipients and the instant voice message therefor at the server; delivering the instant voice message from the server to the selected recipients over the network; and audibly playing the instant voice message at the selected recipients.

According to still another embodiment of the present invention, there is provided a method for instant voice messaging over a plurality of packet-switched networks, the method comprising: selecting one or more external recipients for instant voice messaging at a client connected to a local network, the one or more external recipients connected to an external network outside the local network; generating an instant voice message for the selected external recipients at the client; transmitting the selected external recipients and the instant voice message therefor over the local network and the external network; receiving the selected external recipients and the instant voice message therefor at an external server connected to the external network; delivering the instant voice message to the selected external recipients over the external network; and audibly playing the instant voice message at the selected external recipients.

According to yet another embodiment of the present invention, there is provided a method for instant voice messaging system over a plurality of packet-switched networks enabling public switched telephone network (PSTN) support, the method comprising: providing input audio via a PSTN telephone connected to a local network; selecting one or more external recipients for instant voice messaging at a client, the one or more external recipients connected to an external network outside the local network; generating an instant voice message for the one or more external recipients using the input audio provided by the PSTN telephone; transmitting the selected recipients and the instant voice message therefor over the local network and the external network; receiving the selected recipients and the instant voice message therefor at a server connected to the external network; delivering the instant voice message to the selected recipients from the server over the external network; and audibly playing the instant voice message at the selected recipients.

According to still a further embodiment of the present invention, there is provided a method for instant voice messaging system over a plurality of packet-switched networks, the method comprising: providing input audio via a voice-over-internet-protocol (VoIP) telephone connected to a local network; selecting one or more external recipients for instant voice messaging at a client, the one or more external recipients connected to an external network outside the local network; generating an instant voice message for the one or more external recipients using the input audio provided by the VoIP telephone; transmitting the selected recipients and the instant voice message therefor over the local network and the external network; receiving the selected recipients and the instant voice message therefor at a server connected to the external network; delivering the instant voice message to the selected recipients from the server over the external network; and audibly playing the instant voice message at the selected recipients.

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According to yet a further embodiment of the present invention, there is provided a method for instant voice messaging over a plurality of a plurality of packet-switched networks, the method comprising: selecting one or more recipients connected to a local network at a client connected to an external network; generating an instant voice message for the selected recipients at the client; transmitting the selected recipients and the instant voice message therefor over the external network from the client to an external server system; receiving the selected recipients and the instant voice message at the external server system; routing the selected recipients and the instant voice message over the external network and the local network; receiving the selected recipients and the instant voice message therefor at a local server connected to the local network; delivering the instant voice message to the selected recipients over the local network; audibly playing the instant voice message at the selected recipients.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The objects, features and advantages of the present invention will become apparent to one skilled in the art, in view of the following detailed description taken in combination with the attached drawings, in which:

FIG. 1 illustrates an example of a prior art IP telephony system;

FIG. 2 illustrates an exemplary local IVM system for enabling instant voice messaging according to the present invention;

FIG. 3 illustrates an exemplary IVM client of FIG. 2 for enabling instant voice messaging according to the present invention;

FIG. 4 illustrates an exemplary IVM server of FIG. 2 for enabling instant voice messaging according to the present invention;

FIG. 5 illustrates an exemplary global IVM system comprising a local IVM system and global IVM clients, according to the present invention;

FIG. 6 illustrates an exemplary global IVM server system depicted in FIG. 5, according to the present invention;

FIG. 7 illustrates an exemplary transport server depicted in FIG. 6, according to the present invention;

FIG. 8 illustrates an exemplary directory server depicted in FIG. 6, according to the present invention; and

FIG. 9 illustrates an exemplary global IVM system comprising a plurality of local IVM systems and global IVM clients, according to the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

The present invention is directed to a system and method for enabling local and global instant VoIP messaging over an IP network with PSTN support.

FIG. 2 is an exemplary illustration of a local instant voice messaging (IVM) system 200 according to the present invention. The instant voice messaging system 200 comprises a local IVM server 202 that provides the core functionality for enabling instant voice messaging with PSTN support according to the present invention. The architecture of the local IVM server 202 will be described in detail hereinbelow with reference to FIG. 4. According to the exemplary IVM system 200, the local IVM server 202 is enabled to provide instant voice messaging to one or more IVM clients 206 and 208, as well support instant voice messaging for PSTN legacy telephones 110. It is noted that although FIG. 2 depicts one of each IVM client 206, 208 and legacy telephone 110 for clarity and brevity, the local IVM server 202 is enabled to support a

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plurality of each of the foregoing IVM clients **206**, **208** and legacy telephone **110**. The local packet-switched IP network **204** interconnects the IVM clients **206**, **208** and the legacy telephone **110** to the local IVM server **202** as well as interconnecting the local IVM server **202** to the local IP network **204**. The network **204** may be a local area network (LAN), a wide area network (WAN), or the like, which supports both wired and wireless devices. The exemplary IVM client **208** is a VoIP softphone, the architecture of which will be described in detail hereinbelow with reference to FIG. 3. A microphone **212** is connected to the IVM client **208** and enables the recording of an instant voice message according to the present invention into an audio file **210** for transmission to the local IVM server **202** over the network **204**. An input device **218** (e.g., a keyboard) is connected to the IVM client **208** to select one or more recipients that are to receive the recorded instant voice message. Although not depicted in FIG. 2, the input device **218** may include a trackball, digitizing pad or mouse, or the like. A display device **216** is connected to the IVM client **208** to display instant voice messages recorded and/or received by a user of the IVM client **208**. An audio device **214**, such as external speaker, is connected to the IVM client **208** to play received instant voice messages. It is noted that the microphone **212**, audio device **214**, display device **216** and input device **218** may form integral parts of the IVM client **208**.

Further with reference to FIG. 2, IVM client **206** is interconnected via the network **204** to the local IVM server **202**. An exemplary IVM client **206** is a VoIP telephone, which comprises a screen display (not shown) capable of displaying instant voice messages recorded and/or received by a user of the IVM client **206** according to the present invention. The VoIP telephone **206** further comprises a handset and/or speakerphone for recording instant voice messages and listening to instant voice messages received at the VoIP telephone **206** according to the present invention. The VoIP telephones which may be implemented to provide instant voice messaging functionality according to the present invention are commercially available from many vendors, including Alcatel™, Lucent™, NEC™ and Cisco™, to name just a few. In addition to the foregoing IVM clients **206**, **208**, the IVM system **200** supports a legacy telephone **110** for instant voice messaging according to the present invention. The legacy telephone **110** is connected to a legacy switch **112**. The legacy switch **112** is further connected to a media gateway **114**. Both the legacy switch **112** and the media gateway **114** interconnect the legacy telephone **110** via the network **204** to the local IVM server **202**, thereby facilitating instant voice messaging according to the present invention. The media gateway **114** may be a gateway that supports trunk pack network control (i.e., "TPNCNP") protocol, media gateway control protocol (i.e., "MGCP"), or a media gateway control H.428 protocol (i.e., "MEGACO"). As previously mentioned, the media gateway **114** converts the audio signal carried over PSTN to packets to be transmitted over a packet-switched IP network, such as the local network **204**.

The implementation of the instant voice messaging for IVM client **208** will be described first and will be followed by the implementations for IVM client **206** and legacy telephone **110**, with reference to the local IVM system **200** depicted in FIG. 2. These implementations implement a "record mode" of the instant voice messaging according to the present invention. There will further be described an "intercom mode" of the instant voice messaging according to the present invention. Therefore, in operation of the IVM client **208** according to FIG. 2, the IVM client (IVM softphone) **208** is connected over the network **204** to the IVM server **202**, which as afore-

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mentioned enables instant voice messaging functionality over the network **204**. The IVM client **208** displays a list of one or more IVM recipients on its display **216**, provided and stored by the local IVM server **202**, as will be particularly described hereinbelow with reference to FIG. 4. The user operates the IVM client **208** by using the input device **218** to indicate a selection of one or more IVM recipients from the list. The user selection is transmitted to the IVM server **202**. The user selection also generates a start signal to the IVM client **208** that the user is ready to begin instant voice messaging according to the present invention. In response to the start signal, the IVM client (softphone) **208** listens to the input audio device **212** and records the user's speech into a digitized audio file **210** (i.e., instant voice message) stored on the IVM client **208**. The audio file **210** at the IVM client **208** is finalized via a stop signal, which is generated by the user via the input device **218** or a preset time period without speech input via the input audio device **212** on the IVM client **208**. Once the recording of the user's speech is finalized, IVM client **208** generates a send signal indicating that the digitized audio file **210** (instant voice message) is ready to be sent to the selected recipients. The user generates the send signal when the user operates the IVM client **208** via the input device **218**, e.g., pressing a key on a keyboard or clicking a button on a mouse. The IVM client **208** transmits the digitized audio file **210** and the send signal to the local IVM server **202**. In response to the send signal indicating that the instant voice message is ready to be sent, the IVM client **208** sends the recorded audio file **210** destined for the selected one or more recipients via local IVM server **202**. After receiving the audio file **210**, the IVM server **202** thereafter delivers the transmitted instant voice message to the selected one or more recipients via the local IP network **204**. The one or more recipients are enabled to display an indication that the instant voice message has been received and audibly play the instant voice message to an associated user. It should be understood that only the available IVM recipients, currently connected to the IVM server **202**, will receive the instant voice message. It is noted that if a recipient IVM client is not currently connected to the local IVM server **202** (i.e., is unavailable), the IVM server temporarily saves the instant voice message and delivers it to the IVM client when the IVM client connects to the local IVM server **202** (i.e., is available).

There are several embodiments for the operation of the IVM client (VoIP telephone) **206** within the IVM system **200**, according to the present invention. In the first embodiment, the VoIP telephone **206** is a standalone IVM client **206** enabled for instant voice messaging according to the present invention. In the second embodiment, the VoIP telephone **206** operates synchronously either with the IVM client **208** or IVM server **202** to enable instant voice messaging according to the present invention. Thus, in operation according to the first embodiment in FIG. 2, the IVM client (VoIP telephone) **206** is connected over the network **204** to the IVM server **202**, which as aforementioned enables instant voice messaging functionality over the local network **204**. The IVM client **206** displays a list of one or more IVM recipients on its associated display provided and stored by the local IVM server **202**, as will be particularly described hereinbelow with reference to FIG. 4. The user operates the IVM client **206** by using a keypad on the VoIP telephone **206** to indicate a selection of one or more IVM recipients from the list. The VoIP telephone **206** transmits the selection to the IVM server **202**. The user selection also generates a start signal to the IVM client **206** indicating the user is ready to begin instant voice messaging according to the present invention. The user speaks into the handset of the IVM client **206** or a speakerphone on the IVM

client **206**. Although not shown in FIG. 2, the VoIP telephone **206** may provide a dedicated storage device, which in response to the start signal records an audio file, similar to the audio file **210** in the IVM client **208**. The audio file is finalized via a stop signal. The stop signal is generated when the user presses a button on the keypad, a preset time period without speech input to the VoIP telephone **206**, or when the user returns the handset to the cradle of the VoIP telephone **206**. Once the recording of the user's speech is complete, a send signal is generated indicating that the instant voice message is ready to be sent to the selected recipients. The user generates the send signal when the user presses a button on the keypad or returns the handset of the VoIP telephone **206** to its cradle (on-hook). In response to the send signal, the IVM client **206** sends the recorded audio to the local IVM server **202** via the network **204**. The IVM server **202** thereafter delivers the instant voice message to the selected one or more recipients via the IP network **204**. As before, the one or more recipients are enabled to display an indication that the instant voice message has been received and audibly play the instant voice message. As aforementioned, if a recipient IVM client is not currently connected to the local IVM server **202**, the IVM server **202** temporarily saves the instant voice message and delivers it to the IVM client when the IVM client connects to the local IVM server **202**.

In the second embodiment of the IVM client **206** according to FIG. 2, the VoIP telephone **206** operates synchronously either with the IVM client **208** or the IVM server **202** to enable instant voice messaging according to the present invention. Thus, in operation according to the second embodiment, the IVM client (VoIP telephone) **206** is still connected over the network **204** to the IVM server **202**, which as aforementioned enables instant voice messaging functionality over the local network **204**. However, VoIP telephone **206** cooperates with the IVM client **208** or IVM server **202** to record and send an instant voice message. More specifically, the VoIP telephone **206** is only used as a recording/listening device for recording or listing to instant voice messages, while the IVM client **208** is used for displaying and selecting instant voice message recipients as described hereinabove. In operation, the IVM client **208** displays a list of IVM recipients on the display device **216** provided and stored by the local IVM server **202**. The user operates the IVM client **208** by using the input device **218** on the IVM client **208** to indicate a selection of one or more IVM recipients from the list. The user selection is transmitted to the IVM server **202**. The user selection generates a start signal to the IVM server **202** indicating that the user is ready to begin instant voice messaging according to the present invention. In response to receiving the start signal, the IVM server **202** transmits a ring signal to the VoIP telephone **206**, thereby indicating to the user the IVM system **200** is ready to record an instant voice message. The IVM server **202** also signals the IVM client **208** to generate audio file **210** to record the instant voice message. As the user picks up the handset of the VoIP telephone **206** (off-hook), a connection is established via the network **204** between the local IVM server **202** and the VoIP telephone **206**. Thereafter, the IVM server **202** forwards the user's speech transmitted from VoIP telephone **206** to the IVM client **208** for storage into digitized audio file **210** on the IVM client **208**. The audio file **210** is finalized by returning the handset to its cradle (on-hook) or by pressing a designated button on the keypad VoIP telephone **206**, which transmits the stop signal to the IVM server **202** and further from the IVM server **202** to the IVM client **208**. Returning the handset to its cradle preferably generates a send signal to the IVM server **202**, which transmits the signal to the IVM client **208**. The IVM client

thereafter transmits the recorded audio file **210** (instant voice message) to IVM server **202** for delivery to the selected one or more IVM recipients. Alternatively, the user may press a key on the keyboard **218** to initiate the send signal. In response to the send signal, the IVM client **206** sends the recorded audio to the local IVM server **202** via the network **204**. The IVM server **202** thereafter delivers the instant voice message to the selected one or more recipients via the IP network **204**. The one or more recipients are enabled to display an indication that the instant voice message has been received and audibly play the instant voice message. If a recipient IVM client is not currently connected to the local IVM server **202**, the IVM server **202** temporarily saves the instant voice message and delivers it to the IVM client when the IVM client connects to the local IVM server **202**.

In operation of the legacy telephone **110** according to FIG. 2, the legacy telephone **110** is connected to the local IVM server **202** via media gateway **114** and legacy switch **112**. The legacy telephone **110** cooperates with the IVM client **208** to record and send an instant voice message. More specifically, the legacy telephone **110** is used as a recording/listening device for recording or listing to instant voice messages, while the IVM client **208** is used for displaying and selecting instant voice message recipients as described hereinabove. Thus, in operation the IVM client **208** displays a list of IVM recipients on the display device **216** provided and stored by the local IVM server **202**. The user operates the IVM client **208** by using the input device **218** on the IVM client **208** to indicate a selection of one or more IVM recipients from the list. The user selection is transmitted to the IVM server **202**. The user selection generates a start signal to the IVM server **202** indicating that the user is ready to begin instant voice messaging according to the present invention. In response to receiving the start signal, the IVM server **202** transmits an emulation code to the legacy telephone **110** to ring, thereby indicating to the user the IVM system **200** is ready to record an instant voice message. As the user picks up the handset of the legacy telephone **110** (off-hook), a connection is established via the network **204** between the legacy telephone **110** and the IVM server **202**. Thereafter, the IVM server forwards the user's speech transmitted from the legacy telephone **110** to the IVM client **208** for storage into the digitized audio file **210** (i.e., instant voice message). The audio file on the IVM client **208** is finalized by returning the handset of the legacy telephone **110** to its cradle (on-hook) or by pressing a designated button on the keypad of the legacy telephone **110**, which transmits a stop signal to the IVM server **202** and further to the IVM client **208**. Returning the handset to its cradle also generates a send signal to the IVM server to transmit the recorded audio file (instant voice message) to the selected one or more IVM recipients. The IVM server **202** thereafter delivers the instant voice message to the selected one or more recipients via the IP network **204**. The one or more recipients are enabled to display an indication that the received instant voice message has been received and audibly play the instant voice message. If a recipient IVM client is not currently connected to the local IVM server **202**, the IVM server **202** temporarily saves the instant voice message and delivers it to the IVM client when the IVM client connects to the local IVM server **202**.

Regarding the operational embodiments described with reference to FIG. 2 for recording and transmitting an instant voice message according to the present invention, the digitized audio file is preferably compressed by applying a compression algorithm before sending the audio file to the one or more selected recipients. The audio file is preferably compressed within the IVM clients **206**, **208** before forwarding

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the audio file to the IVM server **202** for subsequent delivery to the one or more selected recipients. Alternatively, the compression may be implemented within the IVM server **202** before the audio file is transmitted to the one or more selected recipients. A Lempel-Ziv compression algorithm is preferably used to compress the audio file according to the present invention. It is noted that many suitable compression algorithms are known to persons of skill in the art, including Huffman encoding, audio compression standards promulgated by the Moving Pictures Experts Group ("MPEG"), G.722 wideband speech encoding standard, fractal compression, and wavelet compression. Any of the foregoing compression algorithms may be implemented within the scope of the present invention.

Further regarding the operational embodiments described with reference to FIG. 2 for recoding and transmitting an instant voice message according to the present invention, the digitized audio file (which may or may not be compressed as described above) is further preferably encrypted via an encryption algorithm before transmitting the audio file to the one or more selected recipients. The encryption is preferably implemented within the IVM clients **206**, **208** before forwarding the audio file to the IVM server **202** for subsequent delivery to the one or more selected recipients. Alternatively, the encryption may be implemented within the IVM server **202** before the audio file is transmitted to the one or more selected recipients. An AES (Rijndael) encryption algorithm is preferably used to encrypt the audio file according to the present invention. It is noted that many suitable encryption algorithms are known to persons skilled in the art, including DES, Triple DES, Blowfish, Twofish, Serpent, and the like. Any of the foregoing encryption algorithms may be implemented within the scope of the present invention.

Lastly with reference to FIG. 2, in addition to the "record mode" of instant voice messaging, the instant voice messaging system **200** also supports an "intercom mode" of voice messaging. The "intercom mode" represents real-time instant voice messaging. In the "intercom mode," instead of creating an audio file **210**, one or more buffers (not shown) of a predetermined size are generated in the IVM client **206**, **208** or local IVM server **202**. The one or more buffers are used to automatically write successive portions of the instant voice message. Once a first buffer is full, i.e., input audio of the predetermined size is written to the buffer, the content of the first buffer is automatically transmitted to the IVM server **202** for transmission to the one or more IVM recipients. A second buffer is meanwhile written with the next successive portion of input audio. Once, the second buffer is full, i.e., input audio of the predetermined size is written to the buffer, the content of the second buffer is transmitted to the IVM server **202** for transmission to the one or more IVM recipients. If the entire instant voice message or a successive portion thereof (such as a last successive portion in the instant voice message) written to either buffer is smaller the predetermined size, then the buffered content of less than the predetermined size is automatically transmitted to the IVM server **202**. The foregoing buffering using the first and second buffers is repeated until the entire instant voice message has been transmitted to the IVM server **202** for transmission to the one or more IVM recipients. It is noted that the invention is not limited to a particular number of buffers. The foregoing buffering and transmission allows a "real-time" instant voice message to be transmitted to the one or more IVM recipients. The "intercom mode" may be designated as a default mode when an IVM recipient is on-line, while the "record mode" may be designated as a default if the IVM recipient is unavailable, i.e., not on-line. The user may easily change the "intercom mode" to

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the "record mode" on the respective IVM client **206**, **208**. Finally, the audio contents of the buffers may be signal processed (for clarity), encrypted and compressed before transmission, as will be described in more detail hereinbelow with reference to FIG. 3.

FIG. 3 is an exemplary illustration of the architecture in the IVM client **208** for enabling instant voice messaging according to the present invention. More specifically, the IVM client **208** comprises a client platform **302** for generating an instant voice message and a messaging system **320** for messaging between the IVM client **208** and the IVM server **202** for enabling instant voice messaging according to the present invention. The IVM client **208** is a general-purpose programmable computer equipped with a network interface (not shown), such as an Ethernet card, to provide connectivity to the network **204**. It is noted that any suitable networking protocol, not only Ethernet, could be used to connect the IVM client to a network **204** and thus is considered within the scope of the present invention. The client platform **302** comprises a client engine **304**, which controls other components, namely the document handler **306**, file manager **308**, audio file creation **312**, signal processing **314**, encryption/decryption **316**, and compression/decompression **318**. The messaging system **320** and the client engine **304** communicate via standard inter-process communication. The messaging system **320** and client engine **304** also communicate with the IVM server **202** over the network interface via the network **204**. The document handler **306** oversees the retrieving, sending, receiving and storing of one or more documents (or files) attached to instant voice messages from/to the one or more selected IVM recipients that may be communicating with the IVM client **208**. More specifically, when an instant voice message is to be transmitted to the one or more IVM recipients, one or more documents may be attached to the instant voice message to be, stored or displayed by the one or more selected IVM recipients. The file manager accesses a message database **310**, in which both the received and recorded instant voice messages are represented as database records, each record comprising a message identifier and the instant voice message. The file manager **308** services requests from the user to record, delete or retrieve messages to/from the message database **310**. Audio file creation **312** creates an instant voice message as audio file **210**, and is responsible for receiving input speech for the instant voice message from audio input device **212** or via network **204** and storing the input speech into audio file **210**. Signal processing **314** performs noise removal and signal optimization in the audio file **210**. Encryption/decryption **316** provides for respectively encrypting/decrypting of outgoing/incoming audio files (i.e., instant voice messages), and compression/decompression **318** respectively compresses/decompresses the outgoing/incoming audio files.

Further with reference to FIG. 3, the reception of an instant voice message is described as follows. It is assumed that the local IVM server **202** has determined that the IVM client **208** is available to receive an instant voice message by checking the IVM client's **208** current status, i.e., whether the IVM client **208** is "on-line." The local IVM server **202** maintains the current status of the IVM clients connected to the local IVM server **202**, i.e., IVM clients **206**, **208**. It is further assumed that an IVM client has transmitted an instant voice message to the IVM client **208**. The local IVM server **202** receives the instant voice message over the local IP network **204** and forwards the instant voice message to the IVM client **208**. Upon receipt at the IVM client **208**, the instant voice message is decrypted at **316**, decompressed at **318**, and stored in the message database **310** using the file manager **308**. Any

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files attached to the instant voice message are also stored in the message database 310 using the file manager 308. A visual and/or sound effect is initiated to notify a user of the IVM client 208 that a new instant voice message has been received at the IVM client 208. At this point in time, the instant voice message and any file attachments are available to the user. The user can select the instant voice message from a listing of available instant voice messages displayed on the IVM client 208 and play the newly received instant voice message. The user may also open any file attachments and move or save the files to a separate location on the client using a drag-and-drop process.

Still further with reference to FIG. 3, the generation and transmission of an instant voice message is described as follows. The user selects the available one or more IVM recipients and initiates the creation of an instant voice message as described above with reference to FIG. 2. The client engine 304 detects the start signal and invokes audio file creation 312 of the audio file 210. The audio file 210 is initialized and captures the audio voice message input by the user. Once the client engine 304 detects a stop signal, the instant voice message is finalized in the audio file 210 via audio file creation 312. The audio file 210 is adjusted for gain, and noise is removed via signal processing 314. The audio file 210 is further compressed at 318 and encrypted at 316. The completion of these processes causes the client engine 304 to inform the user via display 216 that the instant voice message is available to be sent. After the client engine 304 detects the send signal from the user, the instant voice message (audio file 210) is transferred to the local IVM server 202. Before the transmission of the instant voice message (i.e., before the send signal), the user has the option to review the instant voice message, re-record the instant voice message, delete the instant voice, as well as attach one or more files (i.e., documents). The attachment of one or more files is enabled conventionally via a methodology such as "drag-and-drop" and the like, which invokes the document handler 306 to make the appropriate linkages to the one or more files and flags the messaging system 320 that the instant voice message also has the attached one or more files.

FIG. 4 is an exemplary illustration of the local IVM server 202 for enabling instant voice messaging according to the present invention. The IVM server 202 is a general-purpose programmable computer equipped with a network interface, such as an Ethernet card, to provide connectivity to a network 204. It is noted that any suitable networking protocol may be implemented to connect the IVM server 202 to a network 204. The IVM server 202 comprises a server communication platform 402, a messaging system 436 and a database 414, thereby enabling instant voice messaging according to the present invention. The server communication platform 402 comprises a server engine 404, client manager 406, station manager 408, gateway manager 410, database manager 412 that accesses database 414, supplemental servers 416 (including particular server subsystems 418-424), as well as a control layer 426 (including non-proprietary server subsystems 428, 430 and proprietary server subsystems 432, 434). The messaging system 436 and the server engine 304 communicate via standard inter-process communication. The messaging system 436 and the server engine are also able to communicate with the IVM clients 206, 208 over the network interface via the network 204. The database 414 stores users (e.g., IVM clients as well as legacy telephone clients) that are known to the IVM server 202 via the database manager 412. The users are represented in the database as records, each record comprising a user name, a password, and a contact list (a list of other users with whom the user wishes to exchange

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instant voice messages), and other data relating to the user. The database manager 412 services requests to add, update, delete, or retrieve database records to/from the database 414. The password may be stored in the database 414 as plaintext, in encrypted form, or as a hash (e.g., MD5 hash). The messaging system 436 communicates to the server engine 404 via message objects.

A message object comprises an action field, an ID field, a source field, a destination field, and an object field. The content of the action field is selected from a list of permitted actions, which among other actions includes: connect, disconnect, subscribe, unsubscribe, and post message. In addition, the actions include: determining if an IVM client is awake (i.e., pinging), disconnecting from the IVM client, processing an IVM client message, and notifying IVM clients if the IVM server 202 goes down. The client messages include sending an instant voice message portions, checkin message, send message, set status message, send a phone command message, and send control parameters message. The content of the ID field represents a unique identifier for the message object. The content of the source field is a globally unique identifier ("GUID") that uniquely identifies the sender of the message. This unique identifier can be generated by any known way, including the Globally Unique ID function call available in the Microsoft Windows and Microsoft .NET environments. In some circumstances, the source field is set to a special value to indicate that the sender of the message object is entitled to special privileges. The senders with special privileges are in fact IVM servers. This allows the IVM servers to broadcast messages to one another, subscribe to special events, and directly send messages to specific IVM servers. These privileges can depend upon whether the IVM servers are local servers or global servers. As an example, there can exist more than one local IVM server, each of these local IVM servers automatically has privileges to communicate to other local IVM server. On a global server system, a directory server can communicate with one or more transport servers. The content of the destination field is a GUID of an intended IVM recipient of the instant voice message. The content of the object field is a block of data being carried by the message object, which may be, for example, a digitized instant voice message. Depending on the circumstances in which the message object is sent, some of the message object fields may be left blank or ignored. For example, the message object may merely require an action to be performed based upon the GUID supplied. In this case, the action does not necessarily require any data to be sent or received and some of the message object's fields may be left blank or ignored.

Connection objects maintain the logical connections between the IVM server 202 and IVM clients 206, 208 connected to the IVM server 202. More specifically, a connection object comprises data representing the state of the connection and code (one or more methods) for establishing and maintaining the logical connections between the IVM server 202 and the IVM clients 206, 208 within the IVM system 200 of FIG. 2. The connection object can contain both data and/or commands, including information that describes the socket, the size of the data to be transferred, and the priority of the transfer (e.g., high, normal, low, unknown). On start up the local IVM server 202 generates and maintains a list for each IVM client 206, 208. The local IVM server 202 then waits to receive connection objects from the IVM clients 206, 208 that are stored in the respective lists, decodes the received connection objects to obtain specific requests, and then services the specific requests from the IVM clients 206, 208.

Further with reference to FIG. 4, the server engine 404 controls all other subsystems in the server communication

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platform **402**, and it is responsible for startup and shutdown of the IVM server **202** and the IVM system **200**. The client manager **406** controls the IVM clients **206**, **208**, providing contact presence (connection) information and message scheduling and delivery. The station manager **408** controls the individual legacy telephone **110** and coordinates its activity to work synchronously with the IVM client **208** and server **202**. The gateway manager **410** enables the IVM server **202** to communicate with the legacy telephones, such as legacy telephone **110**. The control layer **426** comprises a plurality of server subsystems **428-434**, each of which provides translation services to different proprietary and non-proprietary gateways **114**, such as TPNCP, MGCP, and MEGACO gateways. The proprietary server subsystems **428**, **430** and non-proprietary server subsystems **432**, **434** are connected to respective gateways **114** via the local IP network **204**. The supplemental server subsystems **416** provide a number of required services such as display manager subsystem **418**, dynamic host configuration protocol (i.e., "DHCP") subsystem **420**, trivial file transfer protocol (i.e., "TFTP") server subsystem **422**, and hypertext transfer protocol (i.e., "HTTP"). Each of the supplemental servers **418-424** in the subsystem **416** is used during the initial set-up of the IVM system **200**. The boot-up process and allocation of IP addresses to IVM clients **206**, **208** are performed through an LCD panel (not shown) associated with the local IVM server **202**. The LCD manager **418** supports this boot-up process. The DHCP server **420** is used to allocate IP addresses as required and allows the advanced configuration of network settings in the instant voice messaging system. The TFTP server **422** provides a TCP/IP file transfer capability. Lastly, the HTTP server **424** provides services for a web server.

FIG. 5 is an exemplary illustration of a global instant voice messaging (IVM) system **500**, according to the present invention. In the global IVM system **500**, the local IVM system **200** is depicted as a local IVM system **510**, which is connected to a packet-switched network **102** (i.e., Internet). The global IVM system **500** comprises the local IVM system **510**, global IVM server system **502**, and global IVM clients **506** and **508** that are optionally connected via local IP network **504**. The global IVM server system **502** is connected to the IP network (i.e., Internet) **102** for enabling the local IVM clients **206**, **208** and legacy telephone **110** in the local IVM system **510** to generate and send instant voice messages to the global IVM clients **506**, **508**, as well as the local IVM clients **206**, **208** to receive instant voice messages from the global IVM clients **506**, **508**. The implementation of the global instant voice messaging for the IVM client **208** will be described first and will be followed by the implementations for IVM client **206** and legacy telephone **110**, with reference to the global IVM system **500** depicted in FIG. 5. Thereafter, instant voice messaging for global clients **506** and **508** will be described according to the present invention. These implementations implement a "record mode" of the instant voice messaging according to the present invention. Thereafter, there will lastly be described an "intercom mode" of the instant voice messaging according to the present invention.

Therefore, in operation of the IVM client **208** according to FIG. 5, the IVM client **208** is connected via the networks **204**, **102** to the global IVM server system **502**, which enables the global instant voice messaging functionality outside the local IVM system **510** over the network (i.e., Internet) **102**. More specifically, the IVM client **208** requests from the global IVM server system **502** a global contact list (not shown) of global one or more IVM recipients with which the IVM client **208** may exchange instant voice messages. For the purposes of illustration, it is assumed that global IVM clients **506**, **508** are

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in the contact list. The global IVM server system **502** stores and maintains this contact list. Thus, the global IVM server system **502** responds by transmitting the contact list to the IVM client **208**. The IVM client **208** displays the contact list on its display **216**. Alternatively, the global contact list may be replicated to the local IVM server **202** within the local IVM system **510**, in which case the local IVM client **208** obtains the global contact list from the local IVM server **202**. The user operates the IVM client **208** by using the input device **218** to indicate a selection of one or more IVM recipients from the global contact list. Here, for the purposes of illustration it is again assumed that IVM client **208** selected global IVM clients **506**, **508**. The user selection is transmitted to the IVM server **202**. The user selection also generates a start signal to the IVM client **208** that the user is ready to begin instant voice messaging. In response to the start signal, the IVM client **208** listens to the input audio device **212** and records the user's speech into a digitized audio file **210** (i.e., instant voice message) stored on the IVM client **208**. The audio file **210** is finalized via a stop signal, which is generated by the user via the input device **218** or a preset time period without speech input via the input audio device **212**. Once the recording is finalized, the IVM client **208** generates a send signal indicating that the digitized audio file **210** (instant voice message) is ready to be sent to the selected one or more IVM recipients. The user generates the send signal when the user operates the IVM client **208** via the input device **218**. The IVM client **208** transmits the digitized audio file **210** and the send signal to the global IVM server system **502** via the local IP network **204** and the global IP network **102**. After receiving the audio file **210**, the global IVM server system **502** delivers the transmitted instant voice message to the selected one or more recipients (e.g., IVM clients **506** and **508**) via the IP network **102**. The one or more recipients are enabled to display an indication that the instant voice message has been received and audibly play the instant voice message to an associated user. It is noted that if a recipient IVM client **506**, **508** is not currently connected to the global IVM server system **502**, the global IVM server system **502** temporarily saves the instant voice message and delivers it to the global IVM client **506**, **508** when the IVM client connects to the global IVM server system **502**.

There are several embodiments for the operation of the IVM client (VoIP telephone) **206** within the global IVM system **500** of FIG. 5, according to the present invention. In the first embodiment, the VoIP telephone **206** is a standalone IVM client **206** enabled for instant voice messaging according to the present invention. In the second embodiment, the VoIP telephone **206** operates synchronously with the IVM client **208** to enable instant voice messaging according to the present invention. Thus, in operation according to the first embodiment in FIG. 5, the IVM client **206** is connected via the networks **204**, **102** to the global IVM server system **502**, which enables instant voice messaging functionality over the IP network (Internet) **102**. As mentioned previously, the IVM client **206** is also connected to the local IVM server **202**. The IVM client **208** requests from the global IVM server system **502** a global contact list (not shown) of the global one or more IVM recipients with which the IVM client **206** may exchange instant voice messages. For the purposes of illustration, it is assumed that the global IVM clients **506**, **508** are in the contact list. The global IVM server system **502** stores and maintains this contact list. Thus, the global IVM server system **502** responds by transmitting the global contact list to the IVM client **206**. Alternatively, the global contact list may be replicated to the local IVM server **202** within the local IVM system **510**, in which case the local IVM client **206** obtains

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the global contact list from the local IVM server 202. The IVM client 206 displays a list of the one or more IVM recipients on its associated display. The user operates the IVM client 206 by using a keypad on the VoIP telephone 206 to indicate a selection of one or more IVM recipients from the list. The VoIP telephone 206 transmits the selection to the global IVM server system 502. The user selection also generates a start signal to the IVM client 206 indicating the user is ready to begin instant voice messaging according to the present invention. The user speaks into the handset of the IVM client 206 or a speakerphone on the IVM client 206. Although not shown in FIG. 5, the VoIP telephone 206 may provide a dedicated storage device, which in response to the start signal records an audio file, similar to the audio file 210 in the IVM client 208. The audio file is finalized via a stop signal. The stop signal is generated when the user presses a button on the keypad, a preset time period without speech input to the VoIP telephone 206, or when the user returns the handset to the cradle of the VoIP telephone 206. Once the recording of the user's speech is complete, a send signal is generated indicating that the instant voice message is ready to be sent to the selected recipients. The user generates the send signal when the user presses a button on the keypad or returns the handset of the VoIP telephone 206 to its cradle. In response to the send signal, the IVM client 206 sends the recorded audio file (instant voice message) to the global IVM server system 502 via the networks 204, 102 for delivery to the selected one or more IVM recipients. The global IVM server system 502 thereafter delivers the instant voice message to the selected one or more recipients (e.g., IVM clients 506 and 508) via the IP network 102. As before, the one or more recipients are enabled to display an indication that the instant voice message has been received and audibly play the instant voice message. If a recipient IVM client is not currently connected to the global IVM server system 502, the global IVM server system 502 temporarily saves the instant voice message and delivers it to the IVM client when the IVM client connects to the global IVM server system 502.

In the second embodiment of the IVM client 206 according to FIG. 5, the VoIP telephone 206 operates synchronously with the IVM client 208 to enable global instant voice messaging according to the present invention. Thus, in operation according to the second embodiment in FIG. 5, the VoIP telephone 206 is connected over the network 204 to the IVM client 208 and the IVM client 208 is connected via the networks 204, 102 to the global IVM server system 502, which enables instant voice messaging functionality over the IP network (Internet) 102. The VoIP telephone 206 cooperates with the IVM client 208 to record and send a global instant voice message outside the local IVM system 510. The IVM client 208 displays a global contact list of IVM recipients (not shown) on the display device 216 provided by the global IVM server system 502, as described hereinabove. Alternatively, the global contact list may be replicated to the local IVM server 202 within the local IVM system 510, in which case the IVM client 208 obtains the global contact list from the local IVM server 202. The user operates the IVM client 208 by using the input device 218 to indicate a selection of one or more IVM recipients from the contact list. The user selection generates a start signal in the IVM client 208 indicating that the user is ready to begin instant voice messaging according to the present invention. In response to the start signal, the IVM client 208 generates audio file 210 to record an instant voice message and transmits a ring signal to the VoIP telephone 206. As the user picks up the handset of the VoIP telephone 206 (off-hook), a connection is established via the network 204 between the local IVM client 208 and the VoIP

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telephone 206. Thereafter, the VoIP telephone 206 forwards the user's speech to the IVM client 208 for storage into the audio file 210. The audio file 210 is finalized by returning the handset its cradle (on-hook) or by pressing a designated button on the keypad VoIP telephone 206, which transmits the stop signal to the IVM client 208. Returning the handset to its cradle preferably generates a send signal to the IVM client 208. The IVM client thereafter transmits the recorded audio file 210 (instant voice message) to the global IVM server system 502 via networks 204, 102 for delivery to the selected one or more IVM recipients. Alternatively, the user may press a key on the keyboard 218 to initiate the send signal. In response to the send signal, the IVM client 208 sends the recorded audio file to the global IVM server system 502 for delivery to the selected one or more IVM recipients. The global IVM server system 502 thereafter delivers the instant voice message to the selected one or more recipients (e.g., IVM clients 506 and 508) via the IP network 102. As before, the one or more IVM recipients are enabled to display an indication that the instant voice message has been received and audibly play the instant voice message. If a recipient IVM client is not currently connected to the global IVM server system 502, the global IVM server system 502 temporarily saves the instant voice message and delivers it to the IVM client when the IVM client connects to the global IVM server system 502.

In operation of the legacy telephone 110 according to FIG. 5, the legacy telephone 110 is connected to the local IVM client 208 via media gateway 114, legacy switch 112 and network 204. The legacy telephone 110 cooperates with the IVM client 208 to record and send an instant voice message outside the local IVM system 510. More specifically, the legacy telephone 110 is used as a recording/listening device for recording or listening to instant voice messages, while the IVM client 208 is used for displaying and selecting instant voice message recipients as described hereinabove. Thus, in operation the IVM client 208 requests from the global IVM server system 502 a global contact list of global one or more IVM recipients with which the IVM client 208 may exchange instant voice messages. Alternatively, the global contact list may be replicated to the local IVM server 202 within the local IVM system 510, in which case the IVM client 208 obtains the global contact list from the local IVM server 202. The IVM client 208 displays the global list of IVM recipients, as described hereinabove. The user operates the IVM client 208 to indicate a selection of one or more IVM recipients from the global contact list. The IVM client 208 transmits the user selection to the global IVM server system 502. The user selection generates a start signal in the IVM client 208 indicating that the user is ready to begin instant voice messaging according to the present invention. In response to the start signal, the IVM client 208 transmits an emulation code to the legacy telephone 110 to ring, thereby indicating to the user the global IVM system 500 is ready to record an instant voice message. As the user picks up the handset of the legacy telephone 110 (off-hook), a connection is established via the network 204 between the legacy telephone 110 and the IVM client 208. Thereafter, the user's speech is transmitted from the legacy telephone 110 to the IVM client 208 for storage into the digitized audio file 210 (i.e., instant voice message). The audio file 210 is finalized by returning the handset of the legacy telephone 110 to its cradle (on-hook) or by pressing a designated button on the keypad of the legacy telephone 110, which transmits a stop signal to the IVM client 208. Returning the handset to its cradle may also generate a send signal to the IVM client 208 to transmit the recorded audio file (instant voice message) to the global IVM server system 502 for

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delivery to the selected one or more IVM recipients. Alternatively, the send signal is preferably generated from the IVM client **208** as described hereinabove. The global IVM server system **502** thereafter delivers the instant voice message to the selected one or more IVM recipients via the IP network (Internet) **102**. The one or more recipients are enabled to display an indication that the instant voice message has been received and audibly play the instant voice message. If a recipient IVM client is not currently connected to the global IVM server system **502**, the global IVM server system **502** temporarily saves the instant voice message and delivers it to the IVM client when the IVM client connects to the global IVM server **502**.

Further with reference to FIG. 5, the instant voice messaging for global clients **506** and **508** will be described according to the present invention. In a first embodiment, each of the global IVM clients **506**, **508** is enabled to independently send an instant voice message. The IVM clients **506**, **508** have like peripheral devices and functionality described respectively with reference to local IVM clients **206**, **208** in FIG. 2. In second embodiment described below, the VoIP telephone **506** operates in conjunction with the IVM client **508** to send an instant voice message. Therefore, in operation of the global IVM clients **506** and **508** according the first embodiment in FIG. 5, the IVM clients **506**, **508** are connected via the networks **204**, **102** to the global IVM server system **502**, which enables the global instant voice messaging functionality outside the local IVM system **510** over the network (i.e., Internet) **102**. Each of the global IVM clients **506**, **508** is enabled to request from the global IVM server system **502** a contact list (not shown) of global one or more IVM recipients with which each of the global IVM client **506**, **508** may exchange instant voice messages. For the purposes of this illustration, it is assumed that the IVM clients **206** and **208** within the local IVM system **510** are in the contact list for each global IVM client **506**, **508**. The global IVM server system **502** stores and maintains the foregoing contact list for each global IVM client **506**, **508**. Upon request, the global IVM server system **502** responds by transmitting the contact list to each of the IVM clients **506**, **508**. Each of the IVM clients **506**, **508** displays the contact list on its display. The user operates the IVM client **506**, **508** to indicate a selection of one or more IVM recipients from the contact list. Each of the global IVM clients **506**, **508** transmits the user selection to the global IVM server system **502**. The user selection also generates a start signal to the IVM clients **506**, **508** that the user is ready to begin instant voice messaging. In response to the start signal, the IVM clients **506**, **508** record the user's speech into a digitized audio file (i.e., instant voice message) stored on the global IVM clients **506**, **508**. The audio file is finalized via a stop signal, which is generated by the user by operating the global IVM client **506**, **508**. Once the recording is finalized, the IVM client **506**, **508** generates a send signal indicating that the digitized audio file (instant voice message) is ready to be sent to the selected one or more recipients. The user generates the send signal when the user operates the global IVM client **506**, **508**. The IVM client **208** transmits the digitized audio file and the send signal to the global IVM server system **502**. After receiving the audio file, the global IVM server system **502** delivers the transmitted instant voice message to the local IVM server **202** in the local IVM system **510** for delivery to the selected one or more recipients (e.g., local IVM clients **206** and **208**) via the local IP network **204**. The one or more recipients IVM **206**, **208** are enabled to display an indication that the instant voice message has been received and audibly play the instant voice message to an associated user. It is noted that if a recipient IVM client **206**, **208** is not

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currently connected to the local IVM server **202**, the IVM server **202** temporarily saves the instant voice message and delivers it to the local IVM client **206**, **208** when the IVM client connects to the local IVM server **202**.

In the second embodiment of the IVM client **506** according to FIG. 5, the VoIP telephone **506** operates synchronously with the IVM client **508** to enable global instant voice messaging according to the present invention. In this embodiment, the VoIP telephone **506** and the IVM client **508** may be located in a user's residence and be connected to a local IP network **504**. This local IP network **504** can be a WiFi network or a local area network (i.e., LAN), which is also within the user's residence. The local IP network **504** may be connected to the IP network (Internet) **102** via a digital subscriber line (i.e., DSL) connection, cable connection, dialup connection, or the like. As noted above, the IVM clients **506**, **508** have like peripheral devices and functionality described respectively with reference to local IVM clients **206**, **208** in FIG. 2. Thus, in operation according to this embodiment in FIG. 5, the global IVM client **508** requests from the global IVM server system **502** a contact list of global one or more IVM recipients with which each of the global IVM client **508** may exchange instant voice messages. For the purposes of this illustration, it is assumed that the IVM clients **206** and **208** within the local IVM system **510** are in the contact list for the global IVM client **508**. The global IVM server system **502** stores and maintains the foregoing contact list for the global IVM client **508**. The IVM client **508** displays a contact list of IVM recipients on the associated display device provided by the global IVM server system **502**, as described hereinabove. The user operates the IVM client **508** by using the associated input device to indicate a selection of one or more IVM recipients from the contact list. The user selection generates a start signal in the IVM client **508** indicating that the user is ready to begin instant voice messaging according to the present invention. In response to the start signal, the IVM client **508** generates audio file to record an instant voice message and transmits a ring signal to the VoIP telephone **506** via local IP network **504**. As the user picks up the handset of the VoIP telephone **206** (off-hook), a connection is established via the local network **504** between the local IVM client **508** and the VoIP telephone **506**. Thereafter, the VoIP telephone **506** forwards the user's speech to the IVM client **508** for storage into the audio file at the IVM client **508**. The audio file is finalized by returning the handset its cradle (on-hook) or by pressing a designated button on the keypad associated with the VoIP telephone **506**, which transmits the stop signal to the IVM client **508**. Returning the handset to its cradle preferably generates a send signal to the IVM client **508**. The IVM client thereafter transmits the recorded audio file (instant voice message) to the global IVM server system **502** for delivery to the selected one or more IVM recipients. Alternatively, the user may press a key on the input device associated with the IVM client **508** to initiate the send signal. In response to the send signal, the IVM client **508** sends the recorded audio file to the global IVM server system **502** for delivery to the selected one or more IVM recipients. The global IVM server system **502** thereafter transmits the instant voice message to the local WM server **202** for delivery selected one or more recipients (e.g., local IVM clients **206** and **208**) via the local IP network **204**. As before, the one or more recipients are enabled to display an indication that the instant voice message has been received and audibly play the instant voice message. If a recipient IVM client is not currently connected to the local IVM server **202**, the local IVM server **202** tem-

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porarily saves the instant voice message and delivers it to the IVM client when the IVM client connects to the local IVM server 202.

Lastly with reference to FIG. 5, in addition to the “record mode” of instant voice messaging as described above, the instant voice messaging system 500 also supports an “intercom mode” of the instant voice messaging. The “intercom mode” represents real-time instant voice messaging. In the “intercom mode,” instead of creating an audio file as described hereinabove, one or more buffers (not shown) of a predetermined size are generated. The buffers may be generated in any one of the IVM clients 206, 208, 506 and 508, depending on how the global IVM system 500 is defined. The one or more buffers are used to automatically write successive portions of the instant voice message. Once a first buffer is full, i.e., input audio of the predetermined size is written to the buffer, the content of the first buffer is automatically transmitted. If the transmission is generated at a local IVM client 206, 208 and destined for one or more local IVM recipients, the content of the first buffer is transmitted to the local IVM server 202 for delivery to the local one or more recipients. If the transmission is generated at a local IVM client 206, 208 and destined for one or more global IVM recipients 506, 508, the content of the first buffer is transmitted to the global IVM server system 502 for delivery to the one or more global recipients. In addition, if the transmission is generated at a global IVM client 506, 508 and destined for the other global IVM clients, the content of the first buffer is transmitted to the global IVM server system 502, such as for example clients 506, 508. Lastly, if the transmission is generated at a global IVM client 506, 508 and destined for the local IVM clients 206, 208, the content of the first buffer is transmitted to the global IVM server system 502 and further transmitted by the global IVM server 502 to the local IVM server 202 for delivery to clients 206, 208 within the local IVM system 510. A second buffer is meanwhile written with the next successive portion of input audio. Once, the second buffer is full, i.e., input audio of the predetermined size is written to the buffer, the content of the second buffer is transmitted in similar fashion to the first buffer. If the entire instant voice message or a successive portion thereof (such as a last successive portion in the instant voice message) written to either buffer is smaller than the predetermined size, then the buffered content of less than the predetermined size is automatically transmitted to the IVM server 202. The foregoing buffering using the first and second buffers is repeated until the entire instant voice message has been transmitted as described above. It is noted that the invention is not limited to a particular number of buffers. The foregoing buffering and transmission allows a “real-time” instant voice message to be transmitted to the one or more local, as well as global, IVM recipients. The “intercom mode” may be designated as a default mode when an IVM recipient is on-line, while the “record mode” may be designated as a default if the IVM recipient is unavailable, i.e., not on-line. The user may easily change the “intercom mode” to the “record mode” on the respective IVM client 206, 208, 506, 508. Finally, the audio contents of the buffers may be signal processed (for clarity), encrypted and compressed before transmission, as was described previously.

FIG. 6 is an exemplary detailed illustration 600 of the global IVM server system 502 depicted in FIG. 5, according to the present invention. More specifically, the local IVM system 510 described in FIG. 5 is connected via the IP network (Internet) 102 to the global IVM server system 502. The global IVM server system 502 comprises an IVM transport server mesh 602 and an IVM directory server 608. The IVM transport server mesh 602 comprises a plurality of intercon-

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nected IVM transport servers 604, 606. Although the mesh 602 is depicted as having two IVM transport servers 604, 606, it is to be understood that as many IVM transport servers as are desired or required for redundancy and load balancing may be interconnected in a mesh. The IVM transport servers 604, 606 may be centrally located and configured to communicate (i.e., forward and receive messages) with local IVM clients 206, 208, local IVM server 202 and global IVM client 506, 508 (not depicted in FIG. 6). The plurality of IVM transport servers 604, 606 in the IVM transport server mesh 602 permits load balancing and redundancy in the global IVM system 500. The directory server 608 maintains a transport server list of all the IVM transport servers 604, 606 currently connecting to the mesh 602. Each of the IVM transport servers 604, 606 first connects to the directory server 608. The directory server 608 informs each of the connecting IVM transport servers 604, 606 of all the other IVM transport servers currently in the mesh 602 based on an active list (not shown) of transport servers 604, 606 in the mesh 602. The connecting IVM transport server then connects to each of the IVM transport servers in the transport server list, resulting in an interconnected mesh 602 of IVM transport servers 604, 606. The IVM transport servers 604, 606 and the IVM directory server 608 communicate via messages.

Further with reference to FIG. 6, the IVM transport servers 604, 606 connected in the mesh 602 share a database (not shown) of IVM clients, so that each IVM transport server 604, 606 refers to the same client database. It is preferable that each IVM transport server 604, 606 maintains its own copy of the client database, which is mirrored and replicated conventionally amongst the IVM transport servers 604, 606 in the mesh 602. The client database may further be replicated to the local IVM server 202. Alternatively, the client database is stored on a separate file server (not shown) in data communication with the IVM transport servers 604, 606 over a network (not shown).

FIG. 7 is an exemplary detailed illustration of a transport server 604, 606 depicted in FIG. 6, according to the present invention. The IVM transport server 604, 606 is a general-purpose programmable computer comprising a network interface (not shown) connected to IP network (Internet) 102, a communication platform 702, a message database 712, and a messaging system 714. The communication platform 702 comprises a server engine 704, which controls a user manager 706, a local server manager 708, and a storage manager 710. The messaging system 714 and the server engine 704 communicate via standard inter-process communication. The storage manager 710 handles retrieving, sending, and storing of messages, including instant voice messages and attachments thereto, to/from the message database 712. The user manager 706 is responsible for creating/maintaining IVM clients 206, 208, 506, 508, identifying them and relaying their status to the server engine 704. When an IVM client communicates an instant voice message within the global IVM system 500, the user manager 706 notifies the server engine 704 whether the one or more recipients are unavailable, and thereby the instant voice message is saved in the message database 712. When the one or more IVM recipients become available, the user manager 706 notifies the server engine 704, which instructs the storage manager 710 to retrieve any undelivered instant voice messages for the one or more recipients and delivers the instant voice messages to the designated one or more IVM recipients. The local server manager 708 is responsible for creating/maintaining and providing the status of available local IVM servers, such as IVM server 202 in FIG. 2. The availability status of the local IVM servers is checked periodically and updated.

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FIG. 8 is an exemplary detailed illustration of a directory server 608 depicted in FIG. 6, according to the present invention. The directory server 608 is a general-purpose program-
mable computer equipped with a network interface (not shown) connected to IP network (Internet) 102, a messaging system 812, and a communication platform 802. The communication platform 802 comprises a server engine 804, which controls a local server manager 806, a user manager 808, and a transport manager 810. The messaging system 812 and the server engine 804 communicate via standard inter-
process communication. The transport manager 810 maintains the status of the IVM transport servers 604, 606 in the IVM transport server mesh 602 within the global IVM system 500 and using a load-balancing mechanism distributes instant voice messages to available transport server 604, 606 for routing to the one or more IVM recipients. The user manager 808 is responsible for creating/maintaining IVM clients 206, 208, 506, 508, identifying and relaying their status via the server engine 804 to the IVM transport server 604, 606 to be used. The local server manager 806 is responsible for creating/maintaining and providing the status of available local IVM servers, such as IVM server 202 in FIG. 2. The availability status of the local IVM servers is checked periodically and updated.

FIG. 9 illustrates an exemplary a global instant voice messaging (IVM) system 900, which comprises a plurality of local IVM systems and a plurality of global IVM clients, according to the present invention. In the global IVM system 900, there are depicted a plurality of local IVM systems 902, 910 connected to the global IP network 102. The internal representation and functionality of each local IVM system 902, 904 is identical to the local IVM system 510 described with reference to FIG. 5. In global IVM system 900 of FIG. 9, there are also depicted a plurality of global IVM clients 918-928 and a global IVM server system 502 connected to the global IP network (i.e., Internet) 102. The internal representations of the global IVM client 918-928 and the global IVM server system 502 are identical to the respective IVM client 508 (and/or IVM client or 506) and the global IVM server system 502 described with reference to FIG. 5. In the local IVM system 902, each local IVM client 206, 208 is enabled to request local IVM recipients from the local IVM server 202 and global IVM recipients from either the global IVM server system 502 or the local IVM server 202. For example, the local IVM client 1A 208 displays a list 904 to a user, comprising both local and global IVM recipients. More specifically, the list 904 enables IVM client 1A to send instant voice messages according to the present invention to local IVM clients 1B 208 and 1C 206, global IVM client C 922 and global IVM client 2A 208 in the local IVM system 910. Similar lists 906-916 are displayed to the users of the respective IVM clients 1B-1C in local IVM system 902, and 2A-2C in local IVM system 910. In addition, the global clients A-F 918-928 are enabled to request IVM recipients from the global IVM server system 502 and display the respective lists of IVM recipients 930-940 on the respective IVM clients 918-928.

While the invention has been particularly shown and described with regard to preferred embodiments thereof, it will be understood by those skilled in the art that the foregoing and other changes in form and details may be made therein without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention.

What is claimed is:

1. A system comprising:
an instant voice messaging application including a client platform system for generating an instant voice message

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and a messaging system for transmitting the instant voice message over a packet-switched network via a network interface;

wherein the instant voice messaging application displays a list of one or more potential recipients for the instant voice message;

wherein the instant voice messaging application includes a message database storing the instant voice message, wherein the instant voice message is represented by a database record including a unique identifier; and

wherein the instant voice messaging application includes a file manager system performing at least one of storing, deleting and retrieving the instant voice messages from the message database in response to a user request.

2. The system according to claim 1, wherein the message database includes a plurality of instant voice messages received over the packet-switched network.

3. The system according to claim 2, wherein the instant voice messaging application displays at least one of the plurality of instant voice messages stored in the message database.

4. The system according to claim 1, wherein the instant voice messaging application includes an audio file creation system creating an audio file for the instant voice message based on input received via an audio input device.

5. The system according to claim 1, wherein the instant voice messaging application includes an encryption/decryption system for encrypting the instant voice messages to be transmitted over the packet-switched network and decrypting the instant voices messages received over the packet-switched network.

6. A system comprising:

an instant voice messaging application including a client platform system for generating an instant voice message and a messaging system for transmitting the instant voice message over a packet-switched network via a network interface;

wherein the instant voice messaging application displays a list of one or more potential recipients for the instant voice message;

wherein the instant voice messaging application includes a file manager system performing at least one of storing, deleting and retrieving the instant voice messages from a message database in response to a user request; and

wherein the instant voice messaging application includes a compression/decompression system for compressing the instant voice messages to be transmitted over the packet-switched network and decompressing the instant voice messages received over the packet-switched network.

7. The system according to claim 1, wherein the instant voice messaging application displays an indicia for each of the one or more potential recipients indicating whether the potential recipient is currently available to receive an instant voice message.

8. The system according to claim 1, wherein the instant voice message application generates an audible or visual effect indicating receipt of an instant voice message.

9. A system, comprising:

an instant voice messaging application comprising:

a client platform system for generating an instant voice message;

a messaging system for transmitting the instant voice message over a packet-switched network, and

wherein the instant voice message application attaches one or more files to the instant voice message.

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10. The system according to claim 9, wherein the packet-switched network comprises a WiFi network.

11. The system according to claim 9, wherein the instant voice messaging application displays one or more controls for audibly playing the instant voice message.

12. The system according to claim 9, wherein the instant voice messaging application encrypts the instant voice message.

13. The system according to claim 9, wherein the instant voice messaging application displays a selectable control for generating an instant voice message using an intercom mode based on a connectivity status of an intended recipient of the instant voice message.

14. The system according to claim 9, wherein the instant voice messaging application invokes a document handler to create a link between the instant voice message and the one or more files.

15. The system according to claim 9, wherein the instant voice messaging application displays the attachment.

16. The system according to claim 9, wherein the instant voice messaging application displays one or more controls for performing at least one of reviewing, re-recording or deleting the instant voice message.

17. The system according to claim 9 further comprising an instant voice messaging server receiving the instant voice message and an indication of one or more intended recipients of the instant voice message.

18. The system according to claim 17 further comprising one or more buffers, wherein the client platform system buffers each of a plurality of successive portions of the instant voice message into the one or more buffers, and wherein the client platform system transmits each successive buffered portion to the instant voice messaging server for delivery to the one or more intended recipients.

19. The system according to claim 18, wherein the instant voice messaging server transmits each successive buffered portion to an instant voice messaging application.

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20. The system according to claim 18, wherein the instant voice messaging server transmits each successive buffered portion to a legacy telephone.

21. The system of claim 18, wherein the client platform system automatically transmits the content of a first buffer to the instant voice messaging server for delivery to the one or more intended recipients, and wherein the client platform system writes to a second buffer the next successive portion of the instant voice message.

22. The system of claim 18, wherein the content of a buffer is encrypted.

23. The system of claim 18, wherein the instant voice messaging server transmits a ring signal to an intended recipient.

24. The system of claim 23, wherein the instant voice messaging server establishes a connection between the instant voice messaging application and the intended recipient upon detecting an off-hook event.

25. The system of claim 17 wherein the instant voice messaging server determines availability of the one or more intended recipients for receipt of the instant voice message.

26. The system of claim 25, wherein the instant voice messaging server:

delivers the instant voice message to the one or more intended recipients who are determined to be currently available;

stores the instant voice message for the one or more intended recipients who are not currently available; and delivers the instant voice message to the one or more intended recipients who are not currently available when the instant voice messaging server determines that the not currently available one or more intended recipients become available.

27. The system of claim 26, wherein the instant voice messaging server deletes the instant voice message from the instant voice messaging server after delivery to the one or more intended recipients.

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