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Wexler

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[54] **THIRD-PARTY ON-LINE ACCOUNTING SYSTEM AND METHOD THEREFOR**

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[52] **U.S. Cl.** **705/14**; 709/224; 709/245; 709/218; 707/501

[58] **Field of Search** 705/14, 26, 27, 705/30; 395/200.54, 200.57, 200.48, 200.75; 707/501, 513, 104; 380/23, 24, 25; 379/118, 127, 142; 709/218, 224, 227, 245

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[57] **ABSTRACT**

A system and method for providing on-line third party accounting and statistical information is disclosed. A third party accounting service receives a download request signal ultimately intended for an advertiser Web site. The download request signal is generated when a user clicks on a banner displayed on a Web page of a frequently-visited Web site. The banner is published by the frequently-visited Web site for the benefit of the advertiser. The third party receives the download request since, rather than pointing to the advertiser Web site, the banner is configured to point to the third party Web site. The third party Web site maintains a count of all received download request signals generated by clicking on the banner. Since an advertiser banner may be displayed at more than one frequently-visited Web site, the third party Web site further maintains a log containing the address of the frequently-visited Web site that displayed the banner that generated the click, as well as other information provided by tile user Web browser. The third party sends a redirect signal to the user Web browser causing it to send a download request to the advertiser Web site. The advertiser Web site then downloads the information originally sought by the user to his Web browser. The third party accumulates and tabulates statistical information including the number of clicks on the advertiser banner, and data indicative of the effectiveness of the banner-publisher frequently-visited Web site as an advertising medium. Such information is provided to the advertiser and/or the banner publisher.
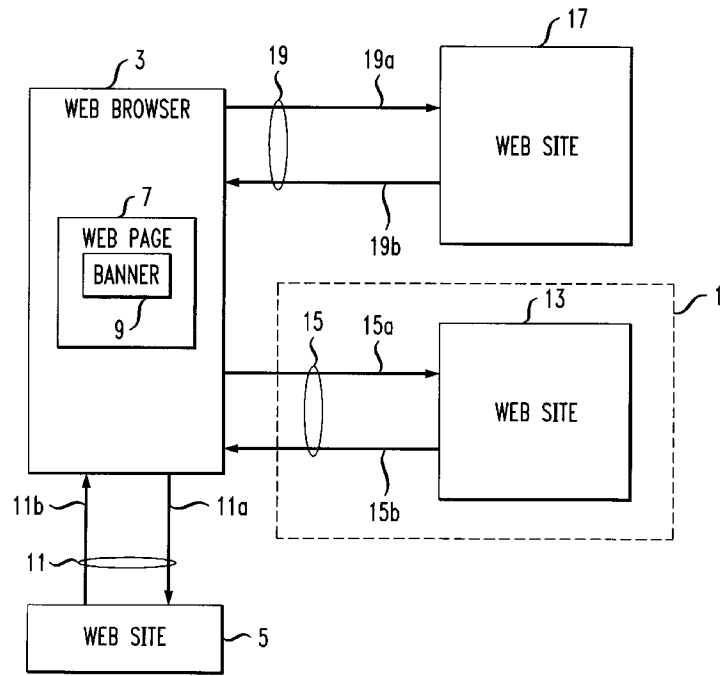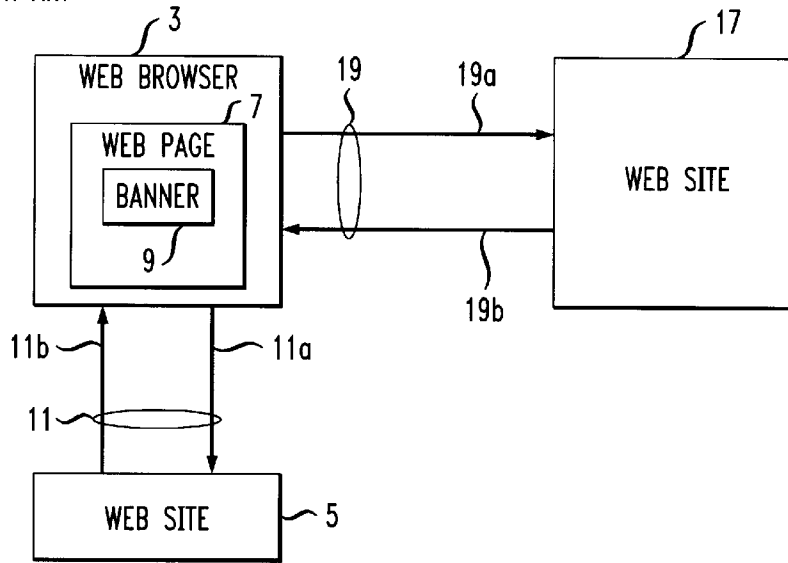
11 Claims, 2 Drawing Sheets

FIG. 1

PRIOR ART

3

WEB BROWSER

7

WEB PAGE

BANNER

9

19   19a

17

WEB SITE

19b

11b   11a

11

WEB SITE   5

FIG. 2

3

WEB BROWSER

19   19a

17

WEB SITE

19b

7

WEB PAGE

BANNER

9

15   15a

13

1

WEB SITE

15b

11b   11a

11

WEB SITE   5

FIG. 3


```
┌─────────────────────────┐
│   POINT BANNER TO       │ ～ 101
│     THIRD PARTY         │
└─────────────────────────┘
            │
            ▼
┌─────────────────────────┐
│   RECEIVE DOWNLOAD      │ ～ 103
│   REQUEST SIGNAL        │
└─────────────────────────┘
            │
            ▼
┌─────────────────────────┐
│  INCREMENT COUNT OF     │
│  RECEIVED DOWNLOAD      │ ～ 105
│  REQUEST SIGNALS        │
└─────────────────────────┘
            │
            ▼
┌─────────────────────────┐
│  REDIRECT DOWNLOAD      │
│  REQUEST SIGNAL TO      │ ～ 107
│  ADVERTISER             │
└─────────────────────────┘
```
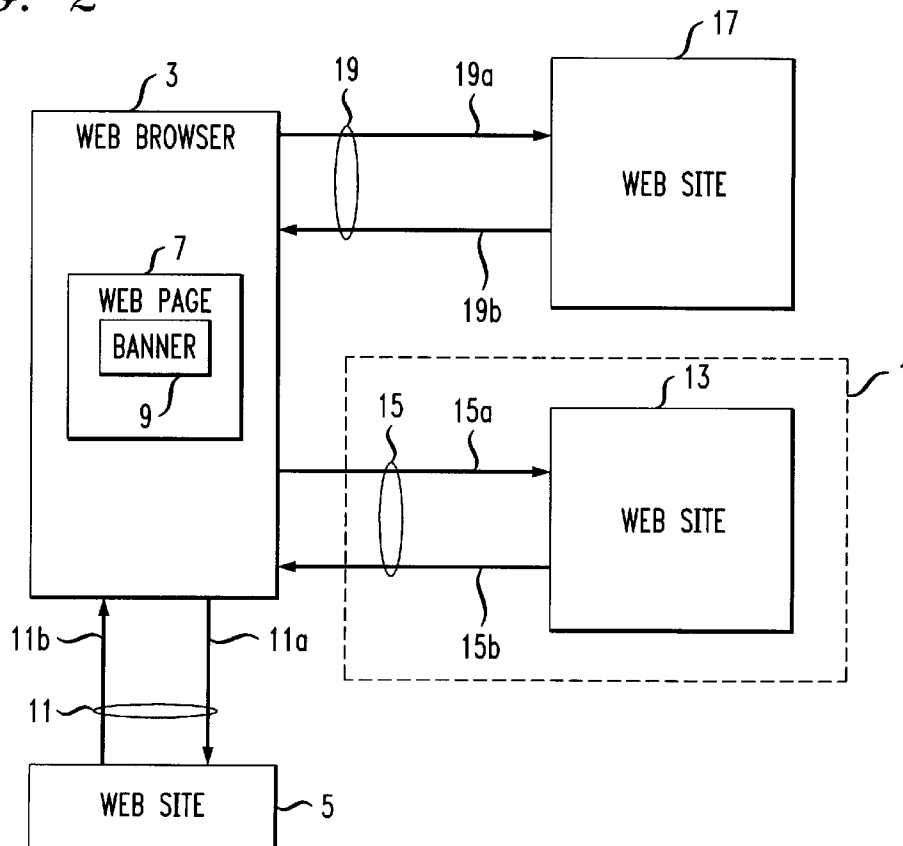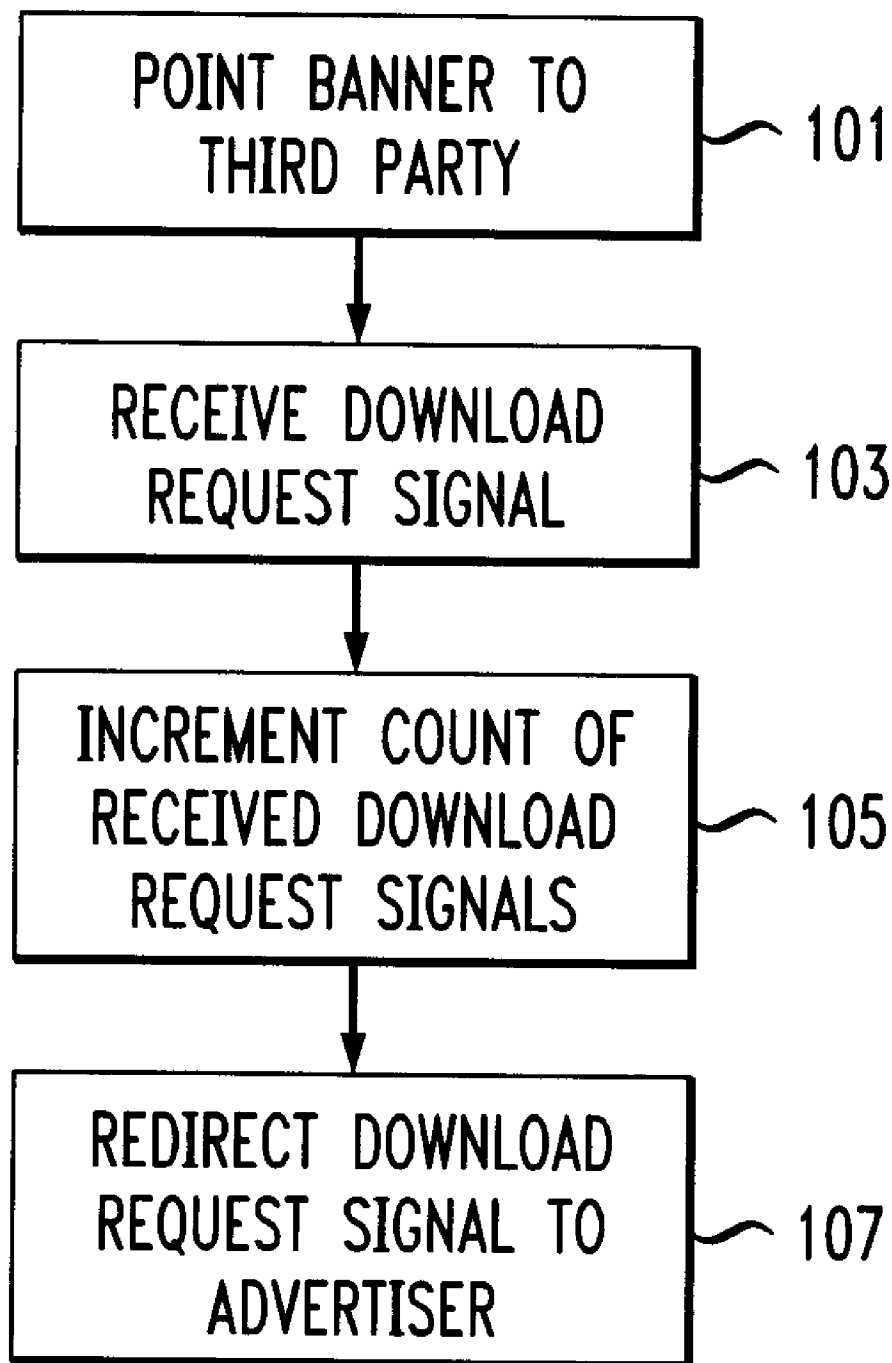
THIRD-PARTY ON-LINE ACCOUNTING SYSTEM AND METHOD THEREFOR

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to Internet services.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Until as recently as five years ago, the Internet was used primarily by the scientific and technical community and was relatively unknown outside of such circles. And now, five years hence, knowledge of the Internet, and its use, are ubiquitous.

Businesses have recognized the benefits of establishing a presence on the Internet, and, more particularly, on the World Wide Web (Web). One benefit is that it is a convenient way for both the buyer and the seller to do business; products and services can be ordered on-line. Another benefit to a business is that for the money spent, its advertising can reach a lot of prospective customers.

One form of Internet advertising is to establish a Web site operable to download at least one "Web page" to a user "visiting" that Web site. A Web page contains a single file of hypertext information, which may be text, graphics and even sound. The main Web page of a given Web site is referred to as a "Home page." The Home page is typically the first page a user will see when visiting a site. The Home page usually contains hypertext "links," to other subsidiary Web pages providing additional information about the business.

A Web site is ineffective as an advertising tool unless someone visits it, And, the only ones visiting the site are those that have sought it out. To increase the likelihood of such visitations, businesses may list their Web site on one or more Web directories. A user interested in particular products or services can use a search engine to search the Web directory and identify businesses providing such products or services and their Web address. The user can then "browse" the Web sites of the businesses offering the products/services of interest.

A directory listing increases the likelihood of a user finding the Web site of a particular business. Still, an advertiser listing will be found only if the user is looking for the goods or services provided by the advertiser. As such, many frequently-visited Web sites offer businesses a more aggressive alternative to a simple directory listing. In particular, a business can choose to have a "banner" displayed or "published" by such a frequently-visited site.

The banner describes an area of a Web page that can be used to display logos, etc., that will hopefully entice the reader to obtain further information pertaining to the banner. If so enticed, the reader can "click" on the banner, assuming the banner is a link, and follow the link to, for example, the Web site of the business "behind" the banner. The banner provides substantially more of an advertising presence to the advertiser than a directory listing, since, at least for a contracted period of time, the banner is conspicuously displayed on the Web page. Thus, regardless of a user purpose for visiting such a site, he may see the advertiser banner displayed.

While there is typically no cost for having one Web site listed in a directory, advertising with a banner is typically provided for a fee. The cost of advertising at such a site may be based, for example, on the number of times the site displays the banner or on the number of times a user clicks on the banner linked to the advertiser Web site. And, of course, the cost is based on the popularity of the frequently-visited site. While anyone with a Web site can display a banner, advertisers will want to advertise at frequently-visited sites, such as Web directories and large service providers that offer their own information and online resources as well as Internet access such as America Online, Compuserve, Prodigy and the like.

Regardless of the fee basis, both the advertiser and the administrator of the banner-publishing site will typically have an interest in knowing certain statistics pertaining to advertising effectiveness. For example, if the fee for the advertising is based on the number of clicks on the banner, then both parties will want this statistic. The advertiser can obtain this information by interrogating an access log maintained by the advertiser Web site. This information, however, is not directly available to the banner-publishing site. While it can be obtained from the advertiser, the publishing-site administrator would presumably prefer receiving the relevant statistics from an unbiased source.

Further, since advertisers will often advertise at more than one location, both the advertisers and the publishers will typically have an interest in the statistics pertaining to the effectiveness of an individual publishing site at generating leads for the advertiser. In other words, they will be interested in knowing the percentage of the total number of "clicks" on the banner generated by each publishing site. Currently, such information is not readily available. To obtain it requires that the appropriate expertise is available, and that the server at the advertiser Web site is appropriately configured.

In view of the value of such statistics, and the relative inconvenience in obtaining such information, a need presently exists for an unbiased, readily available source of statistical/accounting information for Internet advertisers and advertising publishers.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

A system and method for providing on-line third party accounting and statistical information is disclosed. According to the invention, a banner, displayed for the purpose of enticing a first party (user) to visit a fourth party's (advertiser) Web site, is served to the user's Web browser by a second party (banner publisher). The banner is operable to download the address of a third-party (accounting and statistical service) to the user's Web browser and establish a link between the user and the third party service. The third party service receives a download request signal from the user's Web browser when the link is established, and maintains a count of received request signals and a log entry containing the second party's Web site address and other information provided by the user's Web browser. The third party service redirects the Web browser's download request signal to the advertiser's Web site, which serves a Web page to the user's Web browser. The method is transparent to the user; i.e., as far as the user is aware, the banner takes him directly to the advertiser's Web site.

The third party accumulates and tabulates statistical information including the number of clicks on the advertiser's banner, and further provides data indicative of the effectiveness of the banner publisher's Web page as an advertising medium.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWING

Further features of the invention will become more apparent from the following detailed description of specific embodiments thereof when read in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, in which:

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FIG. **1** shows a conventional system for advertising with a banner;

FIG. **2** is an exemplary embodiment of an on-line third party accounting and statistical system according to the present invention; and

FIG. **3** is a flow diagram of an illustrative method for implementing the system of FIG. **2**.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

The present invention can be implemented over a network such as the Internet. It is understood that such a network is comprised of many computers linked over telecommunication lines and communicating using various standard protocols. Servers, which are programs that provide Internet resources (e.g, a Web page), and clients, which are programs that access those resources on a user's behalf (e.g., a Web browser), are resident on such computers. Details concerning such computers and software, and the process of establishing communication links are known to those skilled in the art and will not be described herein except as appropriate for an understanding of the present invention.

Moreover, for clarity of explanation, this specification contains terminology and conventions familiar to those skilled in the art. Such terminology is often more metaphorical than literal in nature. For example, while those skilled in the art may refer to "visiting" a particular Web site, it should be appreciated that a user does not actually travel to the web site. Rather, a source file that is operable, in conjunction with the user's Web browser, to generate a Web page on a user's computer monitor is downloaded to the user's computer. Those skilled in the art are familiar with such metaphorical terminology and have an understanding of its literal implications and implementations.

FIG. **1** shows a prior art on-line system for advertising with a banner **9**. As shown in FIG. **1**, a user's Web browser **3** establishes a link or connection **11** with a Web site **5** of an entity displaying the banner ("banner publisher"). The banner publisher is anyone who presents advertising on behalf of an advertiser. The banner publisher will typically be a Web directory or a large service provider such as America Online, Compuserve, Prodigy and the like that offers their own information and online resources, as well as Internet access.

Once the user is on-line, i.e., connected to the Internet through an Internet Service Provider (ISP), the link **11** to the Web site **5** is established by "entering" the address, i.e., the uniform resource locator (URL), of the Web site **5** into the Web browser **3**. Once the link **11** is established, the Web browser **3** sends a download request signal **11**a to the Web site **5**. In response, the Web site **5** downloads information, indicated by the reference numeral **11**b, to the user's Web browser **3**. The downloaded information includes a Web page **7** having a banner **9**. The banner **9** is an area of the Web page **7** that can be used to display logos, etc., that will hopefully entice a user reading the banner to obtain further information pertaining to the banner.

As will be appreciated by those skilled in the art, a Web page is a hypertext file or source located on a specific computer. The hypertext source includes text as well as instructions for the user's browser as to how to display such text. The instructions are coded using a set of specifications referred to as Hypertext Markup Language (HTML).

The hypertext source contains one or more hypertext "links" that "point," i.e., provide the address, to another hypertext file. If a user wishes to "follow" the link, the user

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can "click" on it, such as by depressing a mouse button. The user's browser then connects to the, appropriate Web site (computer), as dictated by the URL associated with the link, and sends a download request signal for a copy of the hypertext source associated with the URL. When the copy arrives, the browser displays the file in a format dictated by the HTML, generating a Web page on the user's browser. Included in the downloaded copy are the specifications of the banner **9** and associated links.

If enticed by the banner **9**, the user can "click" on it, assuming the banner has a link associated with it. In the prior art, a banner typically points to the Web site **17** of the advertiser. A download request signal **19**a is sent from the user's Web browser **3** to the advertiser's Web site **17**. The Web site **17** downloads information, indicated by the reference numeral **19**b, to the user's Web browser **3**. The downloaded information is a copy of a hypertext source file operable to generate a Web page of the advertiser.

FIG. **2** shows an exemplary embodiment of an on-line third party accounting and statistical system **1** according to the present invention. As shown in FIG. **2**, the system **1** includes the elements of FIG. **1**, as well as the Web site **13** of a third party accounting and statistical service, and the link created between the user's Web browser and the third party Web site **13**. With the addition of the Web site **13** of the third party service, and appropriate programming, the information flow between the user and the various Web sites changes, as described below.

As described above for conventional systems, the link **11** to the Web site **5** is established by entering the URL of the Web site **5** into the Web browser **3**. Once the link **11** is established, the Web browser **3** sends a download request signal **11**a to the Web site **5**. In response, the Web site **5** downloads information, indicated by the reference numeral **11**b, to the user's Web browser **3**. The downloaded information includes a copy of the requested hypertext source file operable to generate a Web page **7** having a banner **9**.

As before, if the user is interested in more information about the banner **9**, he may click on it. According to the present invention, the banner **9** points to the third party Web site **13** rather than the advertiser's Web site **17** as in conventional arrangements. As such, in a system according to the present invention, clicking on the banner **9** establishes a link between the user's Web browser **3** and the third party Web site **13**. This is facilitated by the operation described in operation block **101** of the flow diagram of FIG. **3**, which is an exemplary method according to the present invention. According to operation block **101**, the hypertext file that generates the Web page **7** and the banner **9** is edited or originally coded so that the banner **9** is operable, in conjunction with the user's Web browser **3**, to form a hypertext link to the third party Web site **13** when clicked upon. The aforementioned coding includes the URL pointing to the third party site **13**.

If a user clicks on the banner **9** forming a link to the third party, then, as indicated in operation block **103** of FIG. **3**, the third party accounting and statistical service **13** receives a download request signal **15**a from the user's Web browser **3**. The third party service **13** accepts the download request signal **15**a and increments a counter that keeps track of the number of received request signals, as indicated in operation block **105**. Additionally, the third party service **13** logs a variety of information available from the user's Web browser **3**. Such information can include the origin of the user, the address of the banner publisher, and so forth. In this manner, the third party service **13** accumulates statistical information useful to the banner publisher and the advertiser.

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