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United States Patent [19]

Hughes

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[54] **VIDEO REAL ESTATE INFORMATION SERVICE**

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[73] Assignee: **E-Systems, Inc.**, Dallas, Tex.

[21] Appl. No.: **427,847**

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[51] **Int. Cl.**[6] **G09B 3/00**

[52] **U.S. Cl.** **345/326**

[58] **Field of Search** 395/152, 154, 395/155, 161; 345/156, 326, 329, 333, 334, 473

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[57] **ABSTRACT**

Apparatus and a method for providing real estate agents, persons relocating to another home or acquiring an interest in a property, and providers of home insurance, with an audio-visual presentation of a property supplied over existing cable, telephone, ISDN or other types of broadband network facilities. The audio-visual presentation is mode on a computer monitor from a database containing a visual walkthrough and a textual description of the property and surrounding areas.

13 Claims, 3 Drawing Sheets

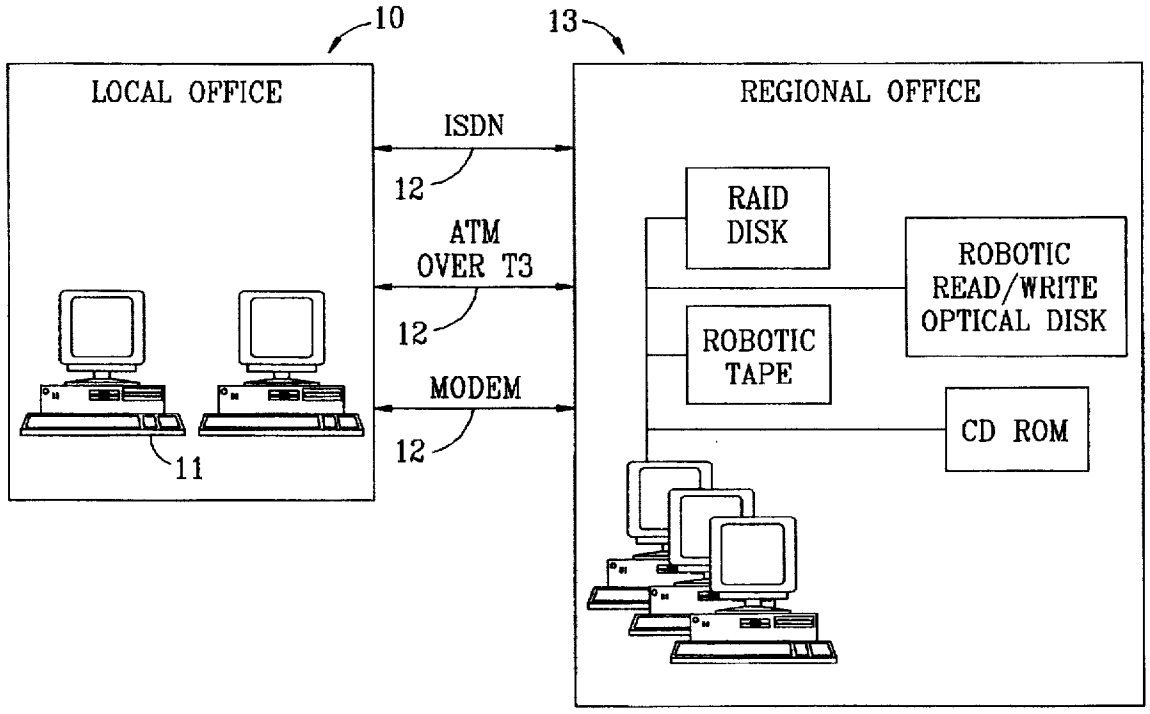

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FIG. 1

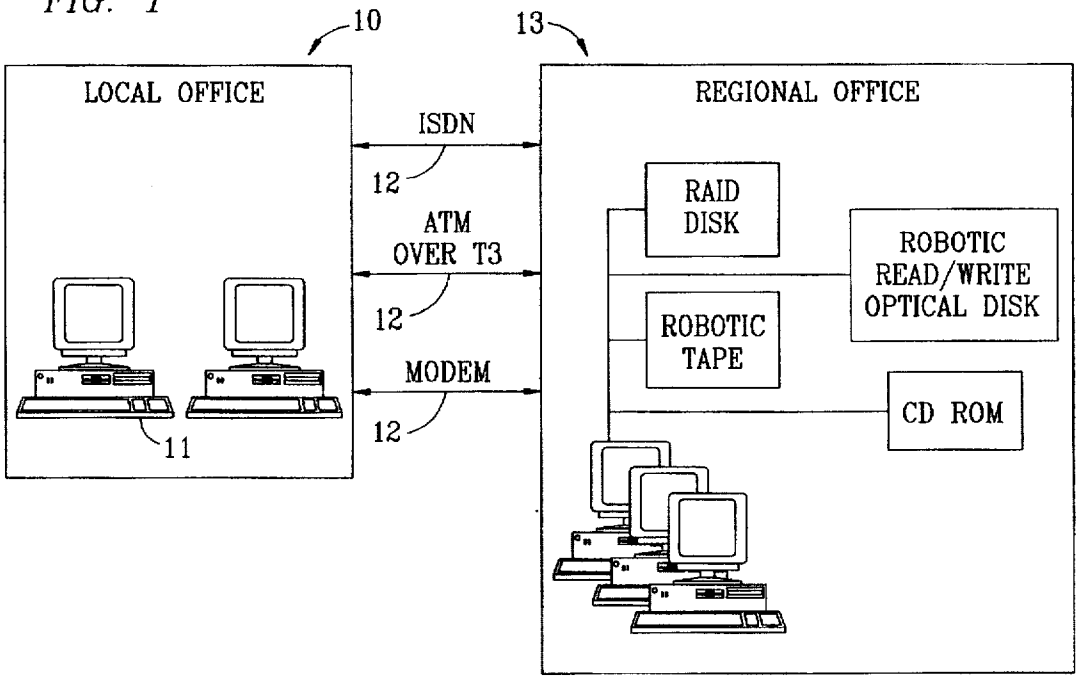

FIG. 2

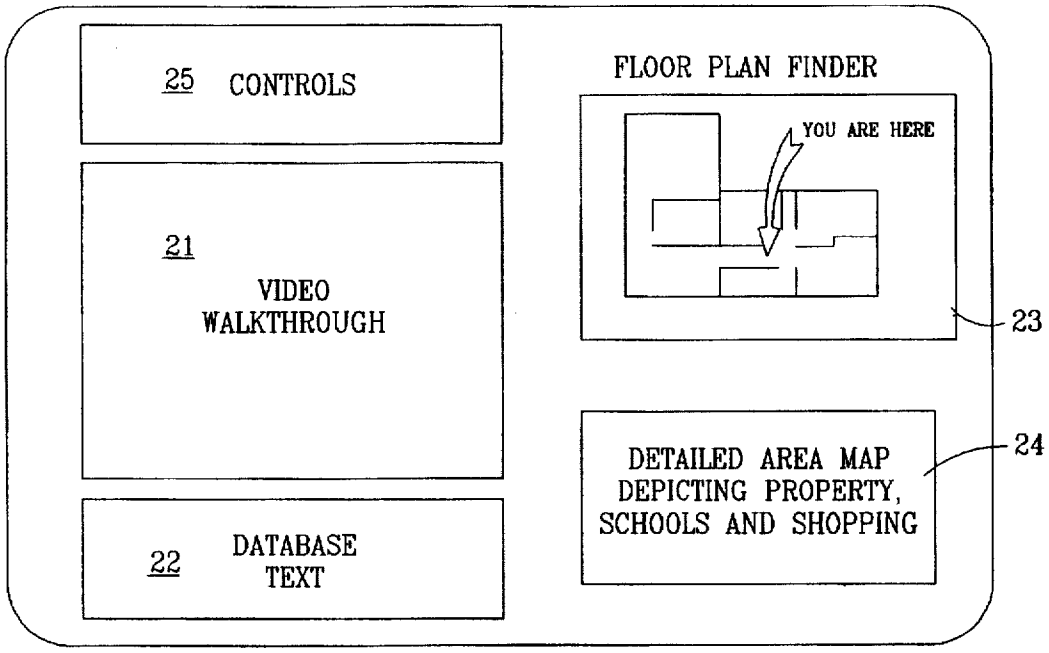

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FIG. 3

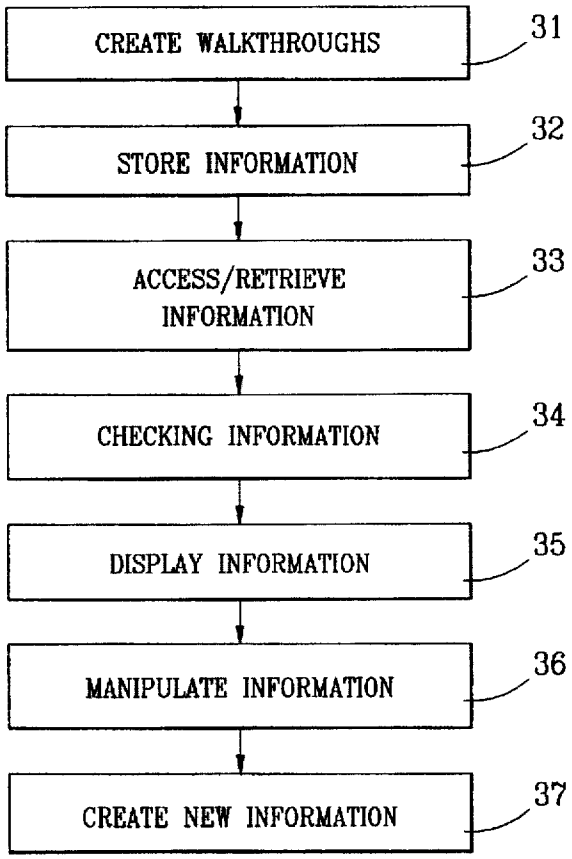

FIG. 5

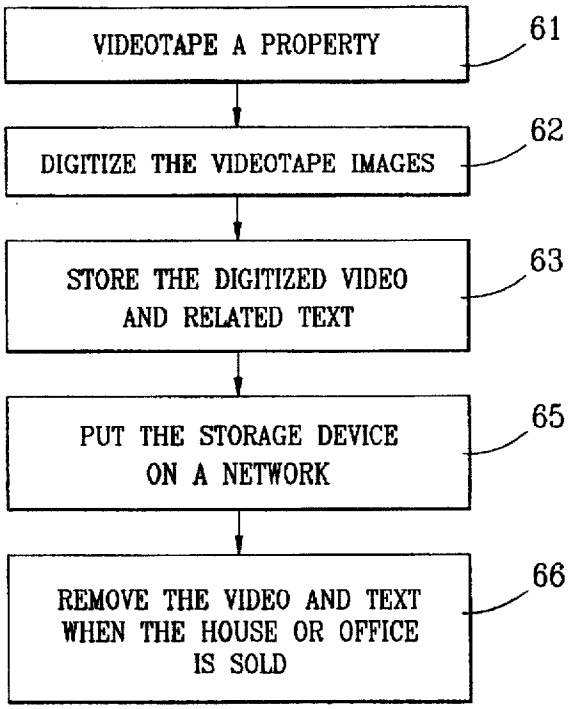

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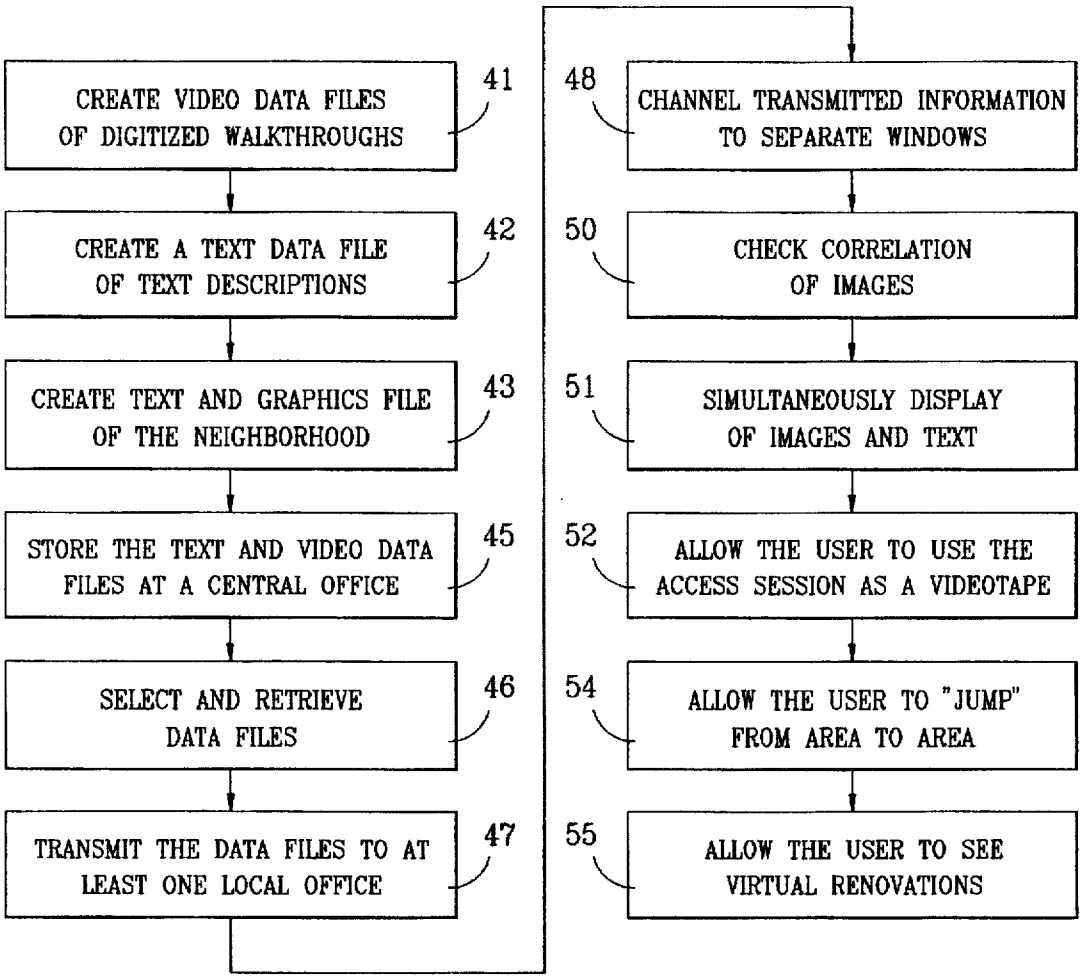
FIG. 4



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VIDEO REAL ESTATE INFORMATION SERVICE

TECHNICAL FIELD

This invention relates to combining images with other information of real estate presented on the same screen, storing and filing all the information centrally or locally, and providing the combined information over a communications network.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Presently, potential purchasers of real estate begin their search for a new home or property by contacting a real estate agent and describing to the real estate agent some criteria regarding the property that the buyer wants. The real estate agent responds by describing properties listed with that particular agent's office that generally meet the buyer's criteria. Unfortunately, an oral description cannot completely inform the client about the neighborhood, or what the property "feels" like. Typically, the real estate agent and the potential purchaser of a property select a small number of properties meeting the purchaser's requirements, and then drive together to several properties, often taking a great deal of time. Many clients tire of this viewing after just a few visits. Also, due to inadequate description by the client or to misunderstanding by the agent, the agent might not have a clear idea of what the client wants; and so the client might not have a chance to see some of the most appropriate properties. Furthermore, many clients, upon seeing the properties in the price range or otherwise meeting the criteria that they have outlined to the real estate agent, alter their requirements, necessitating a return to the real estate office to look at more photographs.

Because of the distances involved, a client wishing to relocate to another city generally must fly to the destination city weeks in advance and scout out a location, a task that often requires driving around in a strange city under stringent time constraints.

Other approaches to selling or buying a property include listing the property in a newspaper or posting a notice in various locations around the city in which the property is located. But these methods are haphazard: the buyer might miss a particular advertisement in a newspaper or not look through the newspaper that day, or might never see the posted notice. They are also severely restricted in geographical circulation, and may have time limitations as well.

Another approach is the use of a computer listing service. Like other computer matching services, computer listing services often provide buyers and sellers with questionnaires, and then use a computer to pair buyers with sellers. Unfortunately, because a computer is performing the selection, both parties are limited to the literal meaning of their responses to questionnaires. Furthermore, the services provide only a textual description of the property, usually without a picture, and the information provided by these services is limited to the seller's opinion of the property, rather than any objective presentation.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention overcomes the foregoing and other problems by providing an apparatus and a method for conveying video images in a manner that gives the client the "feel" of visiting a property for sale or lease without actually visiting the property. The invention provides a client with a great deal of information regarding the property and the surrounding neighborhood in a concise, easily understood format and enables the client to select properties from a database storing information in the real estate agent's file, quickly and at the client's leisure, without having to visit the property. This allows clients and agents to spend far less time driving and viewing properties, and further allows clients to view properties that may be of only slight interest. It also allows clients to "experience" walking through properties in distant geographic areas or other cities without the time and expense of travel.

The invention is equally applicable in the commercial real estate field, and would be as useful to renters as to buyers of real estate. Apartment complexes and real estate developers, would also benefit from the opportunities to communicate with potential customers in such a convenient manner.

According to one aspect of the invention, video images of portions of a property are combined with other information, including text descriptions of each room and a floor plan of the property on a single display screen in a manner to create a "feel" of a walk through the property. One area of the screen, or one window, presents a video image of what the client would see if the client were walking through the property, while another area of the display screen (window) shows a floor plan of the entire property and indicates the room being shown in the video image. The client is able to stop and replay images, obtain more detailed information about the property or office space, or skip to other properties. Audio descriptions are also available to provide both verbal descriptions and other sounds that help the viewer "experience" a simulated visit.

In accordance with the another aspect of the invention a central regional office maintains files containing video images and associated data and makes the files available for playing via a network or modem connections. The central office may also maintain regional information, including area maps showing property, schools, shopping areas, and other points of interest, as well as a detailed floor plan and descriptive text.

Also, in accordance with the invention, a method of gathering and combining data regarding a property is disclosed, wherein information is gathered, edited and stored in such a way that it may be accessed, processed, and transmitted quickly and accurately. A "walking tour" of the property may be simulated. The viewer can stop the tour at any point and obtain more detailed information about particular rooms, and can simulate moving about the property. In one possible embodiment of this invention, the data is stored in a central office according to the variety of real estate, so that industrial real estate is maintained separately from residential apartments, for example. In another embodiment of the invention, files are also maintained on communities and cities, so that a potential buyer of real estate might learn about schools, shopping centers, commuter routes, and points of interest near the site of the property.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

For a more complete. understanding of the present invention and the advantages thereof, reference is now made to the following Detailed Description taken in conjunction with the accompanying Drawings in which:

FIG. **1** is a diagram of a data storage facility and a network for delivering video images from a regional office to a local office;

FIG. **2** is a typical display in one embodiment;

FIG. **3** is a flowchart representing the steps in creating and modifying a walkthrough of a property;

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