

(19)



(11)

EP 1 070 290 B1

(12)

EUROPEAN PATENT SPECIFICATION

(45) Date of publication and mention of the grant of the patent:
07.01.2015 Bulletin 2015/02

(21) Application number: **98906484.5**

(22) Date of filing: **12.02.1998**

(51) Int Cl.:
G06F 17/30 (2006.01)

(86) International application number:
PCT/US1998/003017

(87) International publication number:
WO 1999/041675 (19.08.1999 Gazette 1999/33)

(54) **NETWORK IMAGE VIEW SERVER USING EFFICIENT CLIENT-SERVER, TILING AND CACHING ARCHITECTURE**

BILDBETRACHTUNGS-NETZWERKSERVER MIT EFFIZIENTEN KUNDENSERVEN, DATENSEITEN UND CACHEARCHITEKTUR

SERVEUR DE VISUALISATION D'IMAGES EN RESEAU UTILISANT UN SERVEUR CLIENT EFFICACE, UNE ARCHITECTURE EN MOSAIQUE ET A CONCEPT D'ANTEMEMOIRE

(84) Designated Contracting States:
AT BE CH DE DK ES FI FR GB GR IE IT LI LU MC NL PT SE

(43) Date of publication of application:
24.01.2001 Bulletin 2001/04

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- **MEYER E A ET AL: "Borealis Image Server" COMPUTER NETWORKS AND ISDN SYSTEMS, NORTH HOLLAND PUBLISHING. AMSTERDAM, NL, vol. 28, no. 11, May 1996 (1996-05), pages 1123-1137, XP004018214 ISSN: 0169-7552**
- **CURRY C: "Making A Clickable Image Map" N.A., May 1995 (1995-05), XP002235112**
- **"VIRTUAL IMAGE EDITING" IBM TECHNICAL DISCLOSURE BULLETIN, IBM CORP. NEW YORK, US, vol. 39, no. 8, August 1996 (1996-08), pages 93-96, XP000638148 ISSN: 0018-8689**

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Description

1. Field of the Invention

[0001] This invention relates to workstation viewing images of digital documents stored on a network server and in particular to viewing large digital document images using a client-server architecture.

2. Description of the Prior Art

[0002] Current methods for viewing digital document images for workstations in a networked environment use proprietary workstation application software to access a network image file server. To view an image, the application software transfers a copy of the whole image file from the image file server to the networked client workstation. This method has a number of limitations including: inefficient use of the network; high software purchase cost per workstation; high software administrative cost per workstation; high computational demands on the workstation; proprietary software available only for limited workstation types. Some other network image viewers may provide viewing using more optimized image transmission protocols but only with proprietary protocols and proprietary workstation software.

[0003] CURRY C: "Making A Clickable Image Map" N.A., May 1995 (1995-05), XP002235112 presents a way to use a visual directory as a means for accessing underlying files or documents or images that relate to a place on the top level visual directory. The user is required to create a file that links areas on the initial image to the underlying files or documents. A clickable image map allows a user to click on any location of a graphic and receive more information in the form of an enlarged picture or a link to a uniform resource locator (URL). However, this prior art reference fails to disclose a grid of view tiles.

[0004] PERRY, H.: "Spaces between tiled gifs", retrieved from the internet: URL: http://groups.google.com/groups/comp.infosystems.www.authoring.images/browse_thread/23b0ac047b8740e8/6cfcf0bc11b29e0b, 18 March 1997 discusses the so-called tiling of graphics files.

[0005] Further, the tiling of graphics files is also discussed in PERRY, H.: "Spaces between tiled gifs", retrieved from the internet: URL: <http://groups.google.com/group/comp.infosystems.www.authoring.images/msg/c651277ebbf96807?hl=en&mode=source>, 18 March 1997.

[0006] RABINOVICH B. et al.: "Visualization of Large Terrains in Resource-Limited Computing Environments", Proceedings Visualization '97, 24 October 1997 discloses a software system supporting interactive visualisation of large terrains in an environment comprising a low-end client computer accessing a large terrain database server through a low-bandwidth network. The large terrain scene is stored on disk in the form of geometry informa-

tion and texture tiles of fixed size. A low-end client computer loads only those texture tiles of the appropriate resolution which intersect the view footprint, if they are not yet loaded.

[0007] POTMESIL M.: "Maps Alive: viewing geospatial information on the WWW", Computer Networks and ISDN Systems 29 (1997) 1327-1342 discloses a WWW-based system for viewing geospatial information. The system comprises a 2D map browser capable of continuous scroll and zoom of an arbitrarily large sheet, which downloads and caches geographical information, geometrical models and URL anchors in small regions called tiles.

[0008] MEYER E. et al.: "Borealis Image Server" (COMPUTER NETWORKS AND ISDN SYSTEMS, NORTH HOLLAND PUBLISHING, AMSTERDAM, NL, vol. 28, no. 11, May 1996 (1996-05), pages 1123-1137, XP004018214 ISSN: 0169-7552.) discloses an image server for serving watermarked images to client web browsers. The server is programmed with web server software. The server receives requests from a client web browser in the form of an URL encoding an image name, output style such as thumb nail or full size, and optionally a graphic format. Upon receipt of a request, the server loads the file into memory, processes it, and delivers the resulting image to the browser. One of the output styles supported by the image server is the "info" output style. When an image is requested with output style "info", HTML code is returned to the browser defining a full HTML page consisting of the title of the image, an inlined thumbnail of the image which is a link to the full-sized image, and copyright and author/title information. However, the URL does not specify a view of the image file in terms of scale and region. Further, it is not disclosed that the web server determines an array of view tiles that corresponds to the requested view and creates the view tile images. Finally, it is not disclosed that the web server creates an HTML output file including appropriate formatting and references to the created view tile images.

[0009] Therefore, the system as disclosed in "Borealis Image Server" is not sufficiently efficient, which is especially important for viewing large images, i.e. images that cannot be displayed in full.

[0010] Therefore, it is an object of the invention to adapt the systems as disclosed in "Borealis Image Server" to allow efficient viewing of large images.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0011] This object is achieved by a computer network server according to claim 1.

[0012] The invention comprises a computer network server adapted to store digital document image files, programmed to receive requests from a client Web browser in URL code, the URL specifying a view which identifies an image file and format, to compose the requested view, and to transmit HTML code for the resultant view to the client Web browser to display.

[0013] The accompanying drawings, which are incorporated in and constitute a part of the specification, illustrate an embodiment of the invention and together with the general description, serve to explain the principles of the invention.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0014]

FIG. 1 is a diagram of the system architecture showing the relationship of the components of the system and the image view server.

FIG. 2 is a flow diagram of the steps performed by the system to request, compose and display a view of an image.

FIGS. 3A and 3B are diagrams that show the view tile grid as determined by the view scale.

FIGS. 4A and 4B are diagrams that show the grid view tiles composed for an initial image viewS and then for a shifted view of the image.

FIGS. 5A and 5B are diagrams that show the web browser display of view tiles for an initial view and then for a shifted view of the image that correspond to FIGS. 4A and 4B.

FIGS. 6A and 6B are diagrams that show view tiles pre-computed by the background view composer.

FIG. 7 is a high-level flow diagram of the foreground view composer.

FIG. 8 is a flow diagram for the view generator component of the view composer.

FIG. 9 is a flow diagram for the data output component of the view composer.

FIGS. 10A, 10B, and 10C together constitute a flow diagram for the view tile cache garbage collector.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION AND THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

[0015] References will now be made in detail to the presently preferred embodiment of the invention, an example of which is illustrated in the accompanying drawings.

The preferred embodiment is a server PC consisting of an Intel Pentium Pro 200MHz processor, with at least 128MB of RAM, an Ultra-wide Fast SCSI disk controller with at least 4GB of hard disk space, and LAN/WAN/Internet network interface controllers. The server runs the Windows NT Server Version 4 operating system with NT File System, Microsoft Internet Information Server Version 3, and the network image server software. The server and client are configured with TCP/IP network protocols to support the HTTP (Web) protocol. No software other than a Web browser is required on the client. The preferred Web browser is Internet Explorer 3.0 or Netscape 3.0 or higher.

Referring first to FIG. 1, a network comprising client workstations 10 and 20 are connected through network con-

nections to a network image view server 100 comprising a network server interface, preferably a web server 30 which uses the Hypertext Transfer Protocol (HTTP), a request broker 40, a foreground view composer 50, a view tile cache 60, a background view composer 80, a garbage collector 70, and a document repository 90 having image files.

The network image view server, i.e., client workstation, or "workstation," 100 can be implemented on a computer, for example a personal computer configured with a processor, I/O, memory, disk storage, and a network interface. The network image view server 100 is configured with a network server operating system and Web server software 30 to provide the network HTTP protocol link with the client workstations 10 and 20. Typical networks include many workstations served by one, and sometimes more than one, network server, the server functioning as a library to maintain files which can be accessed by the workstations.

In operation according to an embodiment of the method of the invention, using the Web browser software on the client workstation, a user requests an image view 110 (FIG. 2) having a scale and region specified by means of a specially formatted Uniform Resource Locator (URL) code using HTTP language which the Web server can decode as a request to be passed to the image view composition software and that identifies the image file to be viewed, the scale of the view and the region of the image to view. The network image server sends HTML data to the client with pre-computed hyperlinks, such that following a hyperlink by clicking on an area of an image will send a specific request to the server to deliver a different area of the drawing or to change the resolution of the image. The resultant HTML from this request will also contain pre-computed hyperlinks for other options the user may exercise.

The code is sent over the network to the network server where the web server software interprets the request 120, passes the view request URL to the foreground view composer software through a common gateway interface (CGI) that is designed to allow processing of HTTP requests external to the Web server software, and thereby instructs the request broker 130 to get the particular requested view, having the scale and region called for by the URL.

The foreground view composer is initialized 140 and composes the requested view 150 after recovering it from memory on the network server. The foreground view composer software interprets the view request, computes which view tiles are needed for the view, creates the view tiles 160 needed for the view, and then creates Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) output file to describe the view composition to the Web browser, unless the necessary view tiles to fulfill the request are already computed and stored in cache memory of the workstation, in which case the already-computed tiles are recovered by the Web browser. In either case, the foreground view composer formats the output 170 and then initial-

izes background view composer 180 which passes the formatted output to the Web server, which in turn transmits the formatted output over the network to the Web browser 200 on the requesting workstation 10, where the requesting browser displays any view tiles already cached 210, combined with newly computed view tiles 220 which are fetched from the server.

[0016] The generation of the view tiles 160 is handled by an image tiling routine which divides a given page, rendered as an image, into a grid of smaller images (FIG 3A) called view tiles A1, A2, B1, etc. (or just tiles in the image view server context). These tiles are computed for distinct resolutions (FIG 3B) of a given image at the server according to the URL request received from the browser software on the workstation. The use of tiling enables effective image data caching 60 at the image view server and by the browser 10 at the client workstation.

[0017] The preferred view tile format is 128 pixel by 128 pixel GIF image files. The GIF image file format is preferred because of Web browser compatibility and image file size. The GIF image file format is the most widely supported format for graphical Web browsers and therefore gives the maximum client compatibility for the image view server. The GIF image format has the desirable properties of loss-less image data compression, reasonable data compression ratios, color and grayscale support, and a relatively small image file header, which relates to the selection of view tile size. With a raw image data size for monochrome view tiles of 2,048 bytes and a typical GIF compression of 4 to 1, the compressed data for a view tile is approximately 512 bytes. With many image file formats, such as TIFF and JPEG, the image file header (and other overhead information such as data indexes) can be as large or larger than the image data itself for small images such as the view tiles; whereas a GIF header for a monochrome image adds as little as 31 bytes to the GIF image file. Alternate view tile formats such as Portable Network Graphics (PNG) may be used, especially as native browser support for the format becomes common.

[0018] The 128 pixel view tile size is a good compromise between view tile granularity and view tile overhead. The view tile granularity of 128 pixels determines the minimum view shift distance (pan distance) that can be achieved with standard graphical Web browser and level 2 HTML formatting. This allows the adjustment of the view position on a 0.64 inch grid when viewing a 200 pixel-per-inch image at 1 to 1 scale. Reducing the size of the view tiles allows finer grid for view positioning, but has the problem that the view tile overhead becomes excessive.

[0019] A view tile typically represents more or less than 128 x 128 pixels of the image file. If the view being displayed is reduced 2 to 1, then each view tile will represent a 256 x 256 pixel area of the image file that has been scaled down to 128 x 128 pixels. For each possible scale factor there is an array of tiles to represent the view. Fixed size view tiling is beneficial because it allows more ef-

fective use of the caching mechanism at the server and at the client. For example, consider a view of 512 pixels by 512 pixels. Without tiling, this view is composed of a single GIF file that is displayed by the Web browser, and so if the user asks for the view to be shifted by 256 pixels, then a new GIF image of 512 x 512 pixels needs to be created and transmitted to the Web browser. With tiling, the first view would cause 16 view tiles to be computed and transmitted for display by the Web browser. When the request for the view to be shifted by 256 pixels is made, only 8 view tiles representing an area of 256 by 512 pixels need to be computed. In addition only the 8 new view tiles need to be transmitted to the Web browser since the shifted view will reuse 8 view tiles that are available from the Web browser cache. The use of tiling cuts the computation and data transmission in half for this example.

[0020] The use of view tiling also allows the image view server to effectively pre-compute view tiles that may be required by the next view request. The image view server background view composer computes view tiles that surround the most recent view request in anticipation a request for a shifted view. When the shifted view is requested, the foreground view composer can use the pre-computed view tiles and eliminate the time to compute new view tiles for the view. For frequently accessed images there is a good chance that the view tiles for a view may already exist in the view tile cache since the view tile cache maintains the most recently accessed view tiles. Since millions of view tiles may be created and eventually exceed the storage capacity of the image view server, the view tile cache garbage collector removes the least recently accessed view tiles in the case where the maximum storage allocation or minimum storage free space limits are reached.

[0021] The number of view tiles needed to render a given view size increases in inverse proportion to the square of the view tile size. A 64 pixel view tile would require 4 times as many view tiles to render the same view area, and so is less preferred. The view tile overhead exists as quantity of data and as the number of network transactions. The data quantity overhead comes from the image file header size as a proportion of the total image file size as described above and as data needed to make the view tile references in the HTML text file. The network transaction overhead increases with smaller view tiles since each of the view tiles requires a network transaction. The increased number of network transactions required with a smaller view tile size would slow the response to render a view.

[0022] The HTML output file produced by the foreground view composer is passed to the Web server software to be transmitted to the Web browser. The graphical Web browser serves as the image viewer by utilizing the HTML output from the image view server to compose and display the array of view tiles that form a view of an image. The HTML page data list the size, position and the hyperlink for each view tile to be displayed. The view

tiles are stored in the GIF image file format that can be displayed by all common graphical Web browsers. The Web browser will retrieve each view tile to be displayed from a local cache if the view tile is present, otherwise from the image view server.

[0023] The request broker 40 takes the raw request from the network server interface 130, interprets the request, communicates with the other system components and determines what the appropriate response should be. It also determines when the response is returned. In the preferred embodiment the request broker is implemented with the Web server Common Gateway Interface (CGI). Options exist to use other direct Application Program Interfaces (API) to the Web server.

[0024] To support the tiling and caching of many images on the same image view server, each view tile must be uniquely identified for reference by the Web browser with a view tile URL. This uniqueness is accomplished through a combination of storage location and view tile naming. Uniqueness between images is accomplished by having a separate storage subdirectory in the view tile cache for each image. Uniqueness of view tiles for each scale of view is accomplished through the file name for each view tile. The view tile name is preferably of the following form:

V < SCALE > < TILE_NUMBER > . GIF

[0025] The < SCALE > value is a 2 character string formed from the base 36 encoding of the view scale number as expressed in parts per 256. The < TILE NUMBER > value is a 5 character string formed from the base 36 encoding of the tile number as determined by the formula:

$$\text{TILE_NUMBER} = \text{TILE_ROW} * \text{IMAGE_TILE_WIDTH} + \text{TILE_COLUMN}$$

[0026] The TILE_ROW and TILE_COLUMN values start at 0 for this computation. For example the second tile of the first row for a view scaled 2:1 would be named under the preferred protocol:

V3J00001.GIF

[0027] The full URL reference for the second tile of the first row for image number 22 on the image view server would be:

http://hostname/view-tile-cache-path/000022/V3J00001. GIF

[0028] In addition to the view tile position and view scale, other view attributes that may be encoded in the view tile storage location or in the view tile name. These attributes are view rotation angle, view x-mirror, view y-mirror, invert view. A view tile name with these extra view attributes can be encoded as:

V < SCALE > < TILE_NUMBER > < VIEW_ANGLE > < X_MIRROR > < Y_MIRROR > < INVERT > . GIF

[0029] VIEW_ANGLE is of the form A < ANGLE > . X_MIRROR, Y_MIRROR, and INVERT are encoded by the single characters X, Y, and I respectively. An example is:

V3J00001A90XYI.GIF

[0030] The Web server 30 is configured to recognize the above-described specially formatted request Uniform Resource Locators (URL) to be handled by the image view server request broker 40. This is done by association of the request broker 40 with the URL path or with the document filename extension.

[0031] The foreground view composer 50 interprets the view request command 140 to determine what view needs to be composed. The view request may be absolute by defining scale and position, relative by defining scale and position as a delta to a previous view, or implied by relying on system defaults to select the view.

[0032] View computation software routine 150 is illustrated in FIG 7 wherein the command interpreter 151 takes the view request and determines 152 what scale view tile grid is needed for the view and what view tiles within the grid are needed for the view 150 (FIG. 2), and generates the view tile 153, resulting in formatted view output 154.

[0033] The view tile generator routine 160 performs the actual creation of the view tiles according to the preferred steps shown in FIG 8. The view tile generator receives information from the view computation as to what view tiles are needed for the view. It has access to records in the cache 60 that determine which tiles have already been created and are resident in the cache. If a needed view tile is in the cache then its last access time is updated to prevent the cache garbage collector from deleting the view tile. If a needed view tile is not in the cache, then the view tile generator creates the view tile from the image file 90. The view tile generator uses a software imaging library that supports rendering many digital document file formats including monochrome raster images, gray scale raster images, color raster images as well as many content rich non-raster formats such as Adobe Portable Document Format (PDF), PostScript, HPGL, etc. When rendering monochrome image data the imaging library scale-to-gray scaling is used to provide a more visually appealing rendition of the reduced image.

[0034] For example, a specific view request might include tiles B2, C2, B3, and C3 (FIG 4A and FIG 5A). If, after viewing those tiles, the client decides that the view to the immediate left is desired, then the server would send tiles A2 and A3 (FIG 4B and FIG 5B). This assumes that the client retains in a cache the other tiles. If the client does not cache then tiles A2, A3, B2, and B3 are sent.

[0035] Formatted output is created 170 to reference the view tiles needed to display the completed view. The

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