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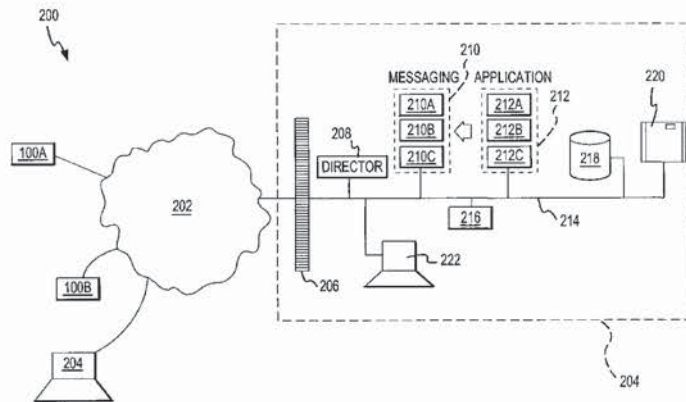
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(54) Title: INTEGRATED SYSTEM AND METHOD OF PROVIDING ONLINE ACCESS TO FILES AND INFORMATION



(57) Abstract: An integrated communications system for exchanging data messages on a data network suitably includes an interface configured to receive said data messages via the data network; a plurality of application servers configured to process data messages and to create output messages in response thereto; and a messenger service configured to route data and output messages between the application servers and users. A method for exchanging data messages on a data network suitably includes receiving data messages at an interface; routing data messages from the interface to an application server with a messaging service; processing the data messages at an appropriate application server to create output messages in response thereto; and providing output messages to a recipient via the messaging service. An exemplary client application suitably includes a network interface module configured to send and receive messages via a digital network; a file transfer module configured to transfer data files between a local storage medium and a remote storage medium via the network interface module; an instant messaging module configured to transfer instant messages between the user and another user via the network interface module; and a user interface module configured to display data files and instant messages for the user, and to accept inputs from the user.



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## **Integrated System and Method of Providing Online Access to Files and Information**

### **FIELD OF THE INVENTION**

The invention relates generally to systems and methods for providing digital content via a computer network. More particularly, the invention relates to user interfaces for searching, obtaining, viewing and processing files and information via a computer network such as the Internet.

### **BACKGROUND**

Digital networks such as the Internet have greatly revolutionized information sharing between individuals, corporate departments, and the like. Applications such as email, the World Wide Web (WWW), file transfer, remote logon and the like have greatly simplified the way people communicate and have greatly increased the amount of information available to various users. As the amount of information increases, however, many users have noticed that finding and using such a large volume of information can become unwieldy. Personal information managers such as the Microsoft Outlook product available from the Microsoft corporation of Redmond, Washington, for example, provides integrated access to calendar, schedule and email information. Such programs typically utilize proprietary protocols for information access and retrieval, however, making their use over a public network (e.g. the Internet) impractical. Similarly, such programs typically do not provide file transfer services or storage of files and data in a convenient location on the network. In recent years, many new services have attempted to expand the functionality of digital networks such as the Internet. The Napster service, for example, provides free access to literally millions of free digital audio files that are distributed amongst millions of users throughout the globe. The Napster service is limited to

MP3 files, however, and does not provide a seamless integration of multiple applications. Similarly, the America Online (AOL) and other internet provider services provide email and instant messaging functionality through the Internet, but do not typically integrate functions such as calendar, email, file sharing, instant messaging and the like into a common application so that data may be easily processed and shared. Moreover, new services such as Idrive and Xdrive provide remote file sharing, but do not otherwise integrate user functionalities into a common application. It is therefore desired to create an application that integrates file sharing, instant messaging and the like into a common application. It is additionally desired that such an application would store information remotely on a digital network so that information is available to users accessing the application from home, work, travel, or the like.

#### **BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF EXEMPLARY EMBODIMENTS**

An integrated communications system for exchanging data messages on a data network suitably includes an interface configured to receive said data messages via the data network; a plurality of application servers configured to process data messages and to create output messages in response thereto; and a messenger service configured to route data and output messages between the application servers and users.

A method for exchanging data messages on a data network suitably includes receiving data messages at an interface; routing data messages from the interface to an application server with a messaging service; processing the data messages at an appropriate application server to create output messages in response thereto; and providing output messages to a recipient via the messaging service.

An exemplary client application suitably includes a network interface module configured to send and receive messages via a digital network; a file transfer module configured to transfer data files between a local storage medium and a remote storage medium via the

network interface module; an instant messaging module configured to transfer instant messages between the user and another user via the network interface module; and a user interface module configured to display data files and instant messages for the user, and to accept inputs from the user.

### **BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWING FIGURES**

The above and other features and advantages are hereinafter described in the following detailed description of illustrative embodiments to be read in conjunction with the accompanying drawing figures, wherein like reference numerals are used to identify the same or similar parts in the similar views, and:

Figures 1A and 1B are user interfaces for an exemplary pod application;

Figure 2 is a block diagram for an exemplary server system;

Figure 3 is a flowchart of an exemplary login process;

Figure 4 is a flowchart of an exemplary data transfer operation;

Figure 5A is a user interface for an exemplary instant message function;

Figure 5B is a flowchart for an exemplary instant message function;

Figure 6A is a user interface for an exemplary file transfer function;

Figure 6B is a flowchart for an exemplary file transfer function; and

Figures 7A-E are user interfaces for other exemplary functions of an exemplary pod application.

### **DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF EXEMPLARY EMBODIMENTS**

Various embodiments of the invention provide a computerized tool (referred to herein as a “pod application”, “pod”, “client”, “client application” or simply “the application”) for users to view, share, modify, communicate, create and/or store information via a digital network. The

pod application suitably performs various functions in conjunction with a server, which may be in logical communication with the pod application via a computer network such as the Internet, a corporate intranet, an extranet, or the like.

Exemplary functions performed by various embodiments of the pod application may include file management; browsing and searching a file system or a network; sending and receiving emails and instant messages (IMs); participating in chat rooms; managing and maintaining personalized buddy lists; playing multimedia files such as video, audio or other multimedia files; providing users with security control and application customization; providing scheduling and/or calendar functions; linking to advertisements for web pages, other pod applications, products, services or the like; viewing pods belonging to other users or services; dragging and dropping files or other information between pods; and providing a tool for creating customized skins to have the pod reflect user personality. Pod applications may also integrate multiple functionalities described above such that file sharing, instant messaging, email and the like (for example) are handled by a single common application. In various embodiments, data for the pod application is stored on a network server so that users have seamless access to their data from multiple computers, remote locations, while travelling, and the like. The pod application may further have the effect of building a community of users, all interacting through a common platform for sharing information and exploiting the network to its fullest.

The systems and processes described herein may be described herein with reference to functional block components and various processing steps. It should be appreciated that such functional blocks may be realized by any number of hardware and/or software components configured to perform the specified functions. The systems described herein, for example, may employ various client and server computers including conventional hardware components, e.g., memory elements, processing elements, logic elements, look-up tables, and the like, which may

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