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SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR MANAGING, CONVERTING AND DISPLAYING ADVERTISING VIDEO CONTENT ON A VIDEO-ON-DEMAND PLATFORM, INCLUDING ADS USED FOR DRILL-DOWN NAVIGATION AND AND PARTICULARLY CONSUMER-GENERATED CONTENT FOR CLASSIFIED ADS

SPECIFICATION

TECHNICAL FIELD

[0001]   This invention generally relates to the provision of interactive television services through cable TV infrastructure, and more particularly, to a system and method for managing, converting and displaying advertising video content on a video-on-demand platform, and particularly, advertising displays used for drill-down navigation and displays of consumer-generated content for classified ads on TV.

BACKGROUND OF INVENTION

[0002]   Cable television (CATV) systems are used to deliver television services to a vast majority of TV-viewing homes in the U.S. and other technologically advanced countries. The typical CATV system has a cable service provider head end equipped with video servers to transmit CATV program signals through distribution lines to local nodes and from there to TV subscriber homes. Within the subscriber homes, the CATV program signals are transmitted routed to one or

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more customer-premises TVs which are which are coupled to external CATV-supplied set-top boxes for channel tuning or which are equipped with internal cable channel tuners.

[0003]   Current CATV set-top boxes provide various functions for channel switching access and program access between subscribers and the CATV head end. The more advanced digital set-top boxes are individually addressable from the CATV head end, and also allow subscribers to input via remote control units communicate their selection inputs for transmission on a back channel of the connecting cable to the CATV head end, thereby enabling subscribers to access interactive television services and other types of advanced digital premium CATV services. A primary type of interactive television system is referred to generally , such as a "video-on-demand" (VOD) system, wherein a viewer can enter a selection choice for a video program via the remote control unit to the set-top box and have the desired video program delivered instantaneously for display on the TV. Such VOD applications can include on-demand movies, documentaries, historic sports events, TV programs, infomercials, advertisements, music videos, short-subjects, and even individual screen displays of information. VOD-based interactive television services generally allows a viewer to use the remote control to cursor through an on-screen menu and select from a variety of titles for pre-recorded stored video programs or segments for individual viewing on demandat any time. Advanced remote control units include button controls with VCR-like functions that enable the viewer to start, stop, pause, rewind, or replay a selected video program or segment. In the future, VOD-based interactive television services may be integrated with or delivered with other advanced interactive television services, such as webpage the functionality offered in CATV set-top boxes is expected to expand further to offer Internet browsing, capabilities, e-mail, television purchase ("te-commerce") transactions, advanced communications functions such as voice calls over Internet (VoIP) and videoconferencing, and other forms of multimedia delivery.

[0004]   With the increasing interactive functionality and customer reach of interactive television services, CATV systems, advertisers and content providers are find it will increasingly

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attractive ~~view the cable TV delivery platform as the platform of choice for~~ to employ on-demand ~~delivering~~ advertising, program content, and TV transactions ~~for~~ services ~~to~~ home ~~TV~~ viewers. ~~Cable TV delivery infrastructures are therefore~~ VOD content delivery platforms are being designed ~~being designed~~ to seamlessly and conveniently deliver a wide range of types of advertising, content, and transaction services on demand to home ~~TV~~ viewers. An example of an advanced VOD ~~particular CATV platform delivery system of high interest is the~~ delivery ~~of advertising and promotional video content on the VOD~~ platform. ~~For example, is the advanced~~ N-Band (TM) system offered by Navic Systems, Inc., d/b/a Navic Networks, of Needham, MA. This is an integrated system which provides an application development platform for ~~wherein~~ third party application developers to ~~can~~ develop new VOD service applications, viewer ~~menu~~ interfaces, and ancillary interactive services ~~and advertising/promotions delivery applications~~ for deployment on VOD channels of CATV operators in cable service areas throughout the U.S. A detailed description of the Navic N-Band system, ~~as an example of an advanced VOD application development platform,~~ is contained ~~provided~~ in U.S. Patent Application 2002/066,106, filed on May 30, 2002, which is incorporated herein by reference.

[0005] A ~~The~~ advanced digital set-top boxes also have ~~provides~~ the ability to collect data such as a log of ~~the~~ channels tuned to ~~watched by~~ and ~~or video-on-demand~~ programs watched ~~selections made~~ by the viewer ~~over time.~~ The set top box can ~~thus~~ be designed to collect and report this data automatically ~~information~~ to the cable head end. At the head end location, the ~~is~~ viewer data can be aggregated over many users with personally identifying data removed, and ~~coupled with other information, such as viewer demographics, and~~ provided ~~in reportage back~~ to advertisers and program sponsors for information ~~so that they can~~ in designing and targeting new ads and programs for ~~the indicated~~ viewer preferences, thereby resulting in increased viewership, higher viewer impressions per ad or program, and ultimately increased revenues ~~for advertisers in relation to advertising costs.~~

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[0006]   Current However, current VOD ads and program offerings delivery and feedback to advertisers are only provided in aggregate, and VOD ads and programs are generally produced for mass audiences. It would be particularly desirable to adapt use a VOD delivery platform to deliver ads, promotions, programs, and or informational content by allowing viewers to navigate readily and visually to specific items of interesttargeted to or requested by individual viewers. Such visual navigation for one-on-one content delivery would be more likely has a much higher likelihood of to create a satisfying ing individual viewer experienceinterest, and also to engage motivating the individual viewers to engage in on-demand TV services and transactions-. It would also be a particularly desirable to adapt a VOD delivery platform to receive uploads of user ads from individuals such as through an online network for search, navigation, and display to TV subscribers. involving the subject matter advertised or promoted (referred to herein as "Drill-Down Ads"). Conversely, it would be highly desirable to enable the individual user to upload advertising or informational content to a CATV system which other viewers may find of interest to engage in transactions involving the subject matter advertised or promoted (referred to herein as "Classified Ads").

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0007]   In accordance with a first objective of the present invention, a video-on-demand (VOD) content delivery system for delivery templatized VOD content comprises:

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(a) a VOD Application Server located at a Cable Head End which manages a Database of templates for generating templatized VOD content in response to requests for specific video content elements by viewer request signals transmitted from the TV equipment of a viewer to the Cable Head End;

(b) a Video Server for storing video content encoded as video content elements and

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for supplying a requested video content element in response to the VOD Application Server for delivery to the TV equipment of the viewer; and

(c) an Application Data Center for creating and storing a plurality of different templates ordered in a hierarchy for presentation of video content elements of different selected types categorized in hierarchical order, wherein a template for display of a video content element in a higher level of the hierarchy includes a link to one or more templates and video content elements in a lower level of the hierarchy, said plurality of hierarchically-ordered templates and links being stored in the Database managed by the VOD Application Server, and

wherein said VOD Application Server, in response to viewer request for a selected video content element of a higher order in the hierarchy, retrieves the corresponding template from said Database and corresponding video content element from said Video Server to provide a templatized VOD content display on the viewer's TV equipment which includes one or more links to video content elements in a lower order of hierarchy, and upon viewer request selecting a link displayed in the templatized VOD content to a video content element in the lower order of hierarchy, retrieves the corresponding template and video content element of lower order hierarchy for display on the viewer's TV equipment, thereby enabling the viewer to use drill-down navigation through TV displays of templatized VOD content.

[0008] In a preferred embodiment of the templatized VOD content delivery system, the system employs the templatized content delivery to create a User Interface for the viewer to navigate through progressively more specific template (display ad) types linked in series to reach an end subject of interest to the viewer. Referred to herein as "Drill-Down Ads", the series of progressively more specific display ad types allow the subscriber to navigate to an end subject of interest while at the same time having a unique visual experience of moving visually through a series of ads mirroring the viewer's path to the end subject of interest.

[0007] As an example involving automobile advertising, the
It is therefore a primary objective of the present invention is to provide a system for controlling.

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