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(71) Applicant *(for all designated States except US)*: **NORTEL NETWORKS LIMITED** [CA/CA]; World Trade Center Of Montreal, 380 St. Antoine Street West, 8th Floor, Montreal, Québec H2Y 3Y4 (CA).

(72) Inventors; and

(75) Inventors/Applicants *(for US only)*: **DAVIES, Elwyn, B.** [GB/GB]; 60 The Butts, Ely, Cambridgeshire CB7 5AW (GB). **HARKER, Andrew, Newton** [GB/GB]; 20A Nursery Road, Bishop's Stortford, Hertfordshire CM23 3HL (GB). **STRINGER, David, Robert** [GB/GB]; 72 Broom Grove, Knebworth, Hertfordshire SG3 6BQ (GB). **PARSONS, Eric, W.** [CA/CA]; 19 Carlisle Circle RR4, RR4, Ashton, Ontario K0A 1B0 (CA). **ARMSTRONG, Steven, M.** [CA/CA]; 24 Hillview Road, Nepean, Ontario K2H 5G5 (CA).

(74) Agent: **CUTFORTH, Peter**; Nortel Networks, London Road, Harlow, Essex CM17 9NA (GB).

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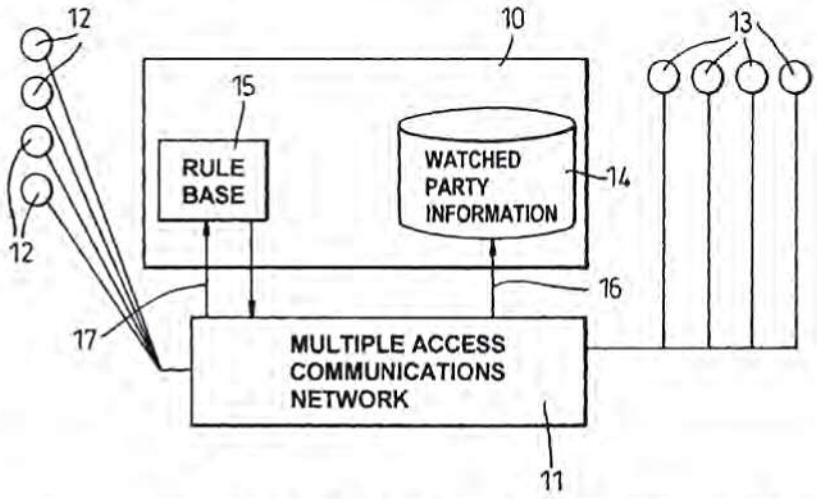
(54) Title: ANONYMITY IN A PRESENCE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM



(57) Abstract: A presence management system is described whereby connections between watching parties and watched parties in a multiple access communications network are managed. When the presence management system receives a contact request from a watching party it determines whether the required watched party is available for contact. The system then provides information about this to the watching party who made the request. The presence management system chooses the best mode of communication (e.g. email or fax) taking into account the watched parties preferences and details about the facilities available to the watching party. If, the presence management system informs the watching party that the watched party is unavailable, the watching party is able to set up a monitor. In determining whether the required watched party is available for contact, the presence management system uses stored information about the watched party, information about the required connection (e.g. size and type) and also rules.

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ANONYMITY IN A PRESENCE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

Background of the Invention

Field of the Invention

This invention relates to a presence management system for use in a multiple access communications network.

Description of the prior art

Telecommunication users of today are faced with ever increasing choice over how they communicate. A typical user has several different kinds of communications terminal such as mobile telephones, fax machines, personal computers, lap-top computers. Also a typical user also often has more that one of a given type of communications terminal, for example, more than on· E-mail account, or home and work telephone numbers. This produces complexity and confusion both for senders and receivers of communications.

Receivers of communications have to work hard to field all incoming communications and such users often find that interruptions from alerts, such as telephone calls and instant messages, are intrusive.

Typically, receivers of communications have little control over what communications are received, at which times, and in which modes. In face to face communications, humans are able to control the degree of interaction which they allow with particular people or groups. However, with today's communication networks the degree and resolution of

the control of electronically mediated communications is much less. For example, telephone numbers are often fully public (in a directory) and are typically issued on demand to others who explicitly ask and know the full address. Also, a telephone number, once released to others, has continuing validity unless the telephone number is changed at great inconvenience and expense. Similar problems apply for email addresses. This means that it is easy for others, such as salesmen or nuisance callers to contact you more times than desired. In order to prevent this problem, telephone numbers and email addresses may be withheld but this gives the disadvantage of isolating the "owner" of the telephone number or email address.

Senders of communications also experience problems because they are often unsure about which mode of communication to use at a given time for a particular destination. In order to determine the most appropriate method of access there are many factors to be considered. These include factors to do with the sender such as what they are trying to communicate and factors to do with the receiver such as where the intended recipient is and what they are doing at the time.

Two examples of instant messaging services are now described:

Microsoft Network (MSN) messenger service

MSN messenger service is an instant messaging service for use on the Internet. Users are able to identify when

others are online and to send and receive instant messages. By identifying when others are online it is possible to send an instant message to other online individuals or to communicate with several other online individuals at once. In this way the communication and messages are more "real time" than conventional email for example, where an email message may simply remain in an individual's email inbox for some time before it is accessed. The service enables a user to identify when another party in an internet conversation is typing at their computer terminal keyboard. That is, using the instant message service it is possible to "talk" to more than one person at a time in a similar way to an online chat session. The user is also able to control which other parties are able to identify or "see" when the user is online and also to control who is able to send messages to the user. In this respect the MSN service differs from conventional online chat programs. Automatic notification of receipt of messages is provided. However, instant messages in MSN messenger service have a temporary quality. Unless the user deliberately saves these messages they are lost when the message service is shut down. This contrasts with conventional email messages in most email systems which remain until a user actively deletes them. Information about MSN messenger service is provided on the Internet at http://messenger.msn.com.

ICQ ("I seek you")

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