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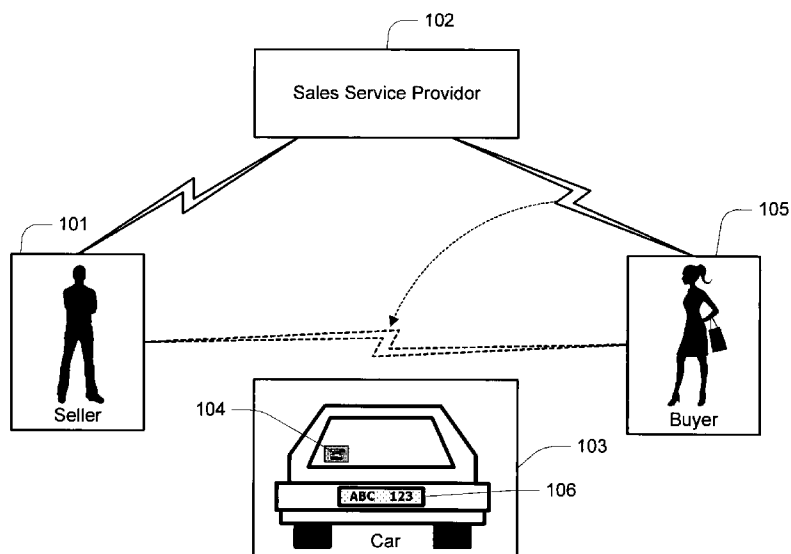
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(57) Abstract: A system and method for interfacing buyers and sellers. In one embodiment a seller contacts a sales service provider to arrange advertising for sale of a vehicle; whereby the seller uses a telephone to place a premium-rate call to a number specified by the service provider. The seller provides details to the service provider regarding the desired sale. The seller places on the vehicle a marker indicative of the sales service provider to notify prospective buyers that the vehicle is advertised through the service provider. An interested buyer places a premium-rate call to the service provider, submits the registration plate number for the vehicle, and is provided with the description of the vehicle that was submitted by the seller. The buyer then optionally requests to be transferred to the seller's telephone number to speak directly with them, or optionally provides a message for delivery to the seller.

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SYSTEMS AND METHODS FOR INTERFACING BUYERS AND SELLERS

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0001] The present invention relates to systems and methods for interfacing buyers and sellers. Embodiments of the invention have been particularly developed for facilitating the advertising and/or sale of registered vehicles such as cars, trucks, boats and motorcycles, although various other embodiments are applicable for facilitating the advertising and/or sale of substantially any goods and/or services. Although the invention is described hereinafter with particular reference to such applications, it will be appreciated that the invention is applicable in broader contexts.

BACKGROUND

[0002] Any discussion of the background art throughout the specification should in no way be considered as an admission that such background art is widely known or forms part of common general knowledge in the field.

[0003] Traditionally, there have been two common techniques for advertising the private sale of a vehicle: placing a “for sale” sign on the vehicle itself, and advertising the vehicle via a media source such as a website or newspaper.

[0004] Placing a “for sale” sign on a vehicle is relatively cheap and often effective, however, this approach suffers from a number of downsides. The amount of detail available to the viewer is limited by the size of the sign. Furthermore, it is inherently difficult to read the sign (particularly detailed aspects) from any distance - particularly when the vehicle is in motion. Details are often important, given that potential buyers might not wish to go to the effort of speaking with a seller until they have established some preliminary details such as year of registration, kilometers traveled and asking price. As a further complication, some sellers might be reluctant to advertise their personal phone numbers in public, even though they are open to the idea of being contacted. On the other hand, a benefit of the “for sale” sign approach is that a prospective buyer is able to closely inspect the car, and in doing so identify faults and blemishes on the vehicle that may not be obvious or have been strategically omitted on advertising photographs.

[0005] Advertising a vehicle via a media source, such as print media or an Internet location, allows a reasonable amount of information regarding the vehicle to be conveniently communicated to a relatively large number of prospective buyers. Varying physical geographical locations of sellers and buyers that locate one another by way of such media sources can lead to difficulties. For example, buyers are often unwilling to travel long distances to inspect a car, and sellers equally unwilling to travel long distances to show a car. Moreover, there are a number of criteria that can be quickly assessed by a buyer upon a quick visual inspection that might not be readily assessed by way of a media advertisement.

[0006] A common problem with media or web-based car advertisements is that potential buyers search or browse based on specific makes or models of car. For example, a buyer knows of several models of car that desirable, and searches accordingly. However, there may be alternate suitable car models available, and the buyer might not be familiar with the name of these models. The suitability of such models might be immediately apparent following a visual inspection.

[0007] The issues discussed above are by no means limited to the sale of vehicles, and extend across a variety of goods and services. There is a need in the art for new methods and systems that facilitate the sale of vehicles, and other goods and services as a whole.

SUMMARY

[0008] One embodiment provides a method for interfacing buyers and sellers, the process including the steps of:

[0009] (i) accepting as input data indicative of an item identifier for identifying an item for sale by a seller;

[0010] (ii) searching a database for a record associated with the item identifier, the database including a plurality of records, each record being associated with an item identifier, each record including contact information for the seller;

[0011] (iii) in the case that a record associated with the item identifier is found, accepting as input data indicative of one or more information requests relating to the record;

- [0012]** (iv) in the case that an information request accepted at (iii) is a contact request, providing as output data indicative of the contact information for the record associated with the item identifier.
- [0013]** In one embodiment the item identifier is a vehicle registration plate number for identifying a vehicle for sale by the seller.
- [0014]** In one embodiment the input accepted at (i) and (iii) originates from the user of a telephone.
- [0015]** In one embodiment the input accepted at (i) and (iii) originates from the user of a telephone who calls a predetermined premium-rate service.
- [0016]** In one embodiment providing as output data indicative of the contact information at (iv) includes connecting the telephone to a contact location identified by the contact information.
- [0017]** In one embodiment providing as output data indicative of the contact information at (iv) includes providing a message to a contact location identified by the contact information, the message being indicative of buyer contact information.
- [0018]** In one embodiment each record includes contact information and description information.
- [0019]** In one embodiment the process includes the step of:
- [0020]** (v) in the case that an information request accepted at (iii) is a description request, providing as output data indicative of the description information for the record associated with the item identifier.
- [0021]** In one embodiment the output provided at (v) is an audible representation of the description information.
- [0022]** In one embodiment the process includes the step of:
- [0023]** (vi) accepting as input either a seller request or a buyer request.
- [0024]** In one embodiment the process includes the step of:
- [0025]** (vii) In the case that the input accepted at (vi) is a buyer request, providing output indicative of a prompt to provide an item identifier.

[0026] In one embodiment the process includes the step of:

[0027] (viii) In the case that the input accepted at (vi) is a seller request, providing output indicative of a prompt to provide an item identifier and a seller identification number.

[0028] In one embodiment the process includes the steps of:

[0029] (ix) In the case that the input accepted at (vi) is a buyer request, accepting as input data indicative of an item identifier for identifying an item and data indicative of a seller identification number for identifying the seller;

[0030] (x) searching a database for a record that is associated with the item identifier;

[0031] (xi) in the case that no record is found at (x), creating a record associated with the item identifier and including the seller identifier;

[0032] (xii) in the case that a record is found at (x), determining whether the found record includes the seller identification number;

[0033] (xiii) in the case that the found record includes the seller identification number, or in the case that a record is created at (xi), accepting as input data indicative of one or more information requests relating to the record.

[0034] In one embodiment the one or more information requests include any one or more of the following:

[0035] a request to add/review/modify description information; and

[0036] a request to add/review/modify contact information.

[0037] According to a second aspect of the invention there is provided computer-readable carrier medium carrying a set of instructions that when executed by one or more processors cause the one or more processors to carry out a process according to the first aspect.

[0038] According to a third aspect of the invention there is provided a method for interfacing buyers and sellers, the method including the steps of:

- [0039]** providing a marker displayable on an item for sale by a seller, the a marker for notifying one or more buyers that the item is for sale, the item also displaying an item identifier;
- [0040]** providing an interface accessible by a buyer, the interface being responsive to input indicative of the item identifier for facilitating communication between the buyer and the seller.
- [0041]** In one embodiment the item is a vehicle, and the item identifier is provided on a registration plate carried by the vehicle.
- [0042]** In one embodiment the interface is accessible by telephone.
- [0043]** In one embodiment the interface is accessible by telephone as a premium rate service.
- [0044]** In one embodiment facilitating communication between the buyer and the seller includes connecting the telephone to a contact location representative of the seller.
- [0045]** In one embodiment the interface allows a seller to provide information regarding the item for sale, the information including the item identifier, contact information for identifying the contact location, and description information for describing the item.
- [0046]** In one embodiment the interface allows a buyer to obtain data indicative of the description information.
- [0047]** In one embodiment the interface allows access to a computation platform that performs the process of the first aspect.
- [0048]** According to a forth aspect, there is provided a system for interfacing buyers and sellers, the system including:
- [0049]** a database for maintaining a plurality of records, each record being associated with an item identifier, each record including contact information for the seller;
- [0050]** a server coupled to the database for selectively allowing querying and modification of the database;

- [0051]** an interface coupled to the server, the interface allowing a buyer to access functionalities provided by the server, the functionalities including access to at least some information included in the records including the contact information.
- [0052]** In one embodiment the item identifier is a vehicle registration plate number for identifying a vehicle for sale by a seller.
- [0053]** In one embodiment the server accepts data that originates from the user of a telephone.
- [0054]** In one embodiment the server accepts data that originates from the user of a telephone who calls a predetermined premium-rate service.
- [0055]** In one embodiment the functionalities include output connecting the telephone to a contact location identified by the contact information.
- [0056]** In one embodiment the server performs the process of the first aspect.
- [0057]** According to a fifth aspect, there is provided a system for interfacing buyers and sellers, the system including:
- [0058]** a first input for accepting data indicative of an item identifier for identifying an item for sale by a seller;
- [0059]** a first processor responsive to the first input for searching a database for a record associated with the item identifier, the database including a plurality of records, each record being associated with an item identifier, each record including contact information for the seller;
- [0060]** a second input that is responsive to the first processor for, in the case that a record associated with the item identifier is found, accepting data indicative of one or more information requests relating to the record;
- [0061]** a second processor that is responsive to the second input for, in the case that an accepted information request is a contact request, defining output data indicative of the contact information for the record associated with the item identifier;
- [0062]** an output for providing the output data.

- [0063]** In one embodiment the item identifier is a vehicle registration plate number for identifying a vehicle for sale by a seller.
- [0064]** In one embodiment the first and second inputs accept data that originates from the user of a telephone.
- [0065]** In one embodiment the first and second inputs accept data that originates from the user of a telephone who calls a predetermined premium-rate service.
- [0066]** In one embodiment the output connects the telephone to a contact location identified by the contact information.
- [0067]** Another embodiment provides a method for processing remote user input, the method including the steps of:
- [0068]** (i) accepting as input a signal including a plurality of sequential identifiers, each identifier being associated with one or more alphanumeric symbols;
- [0069]** (ii) on the basis of the signal, querying a database to identify one or more registration plate identifiers corresponding to one or more possible permutations of the respective alphanumeric symbols associated with the plurality of sequential identifiers;
- [0070]** (iii) assigning a relevance rating to each of the one or more identified registration plate identifiers;
- [0071]** (iv) determining the registration plate identifier having the highest relevance rating;
- [0072]** (v) providing audible output indicative of the registration plate identifier having the highest relevance rating.
- [0073]** In one embodiment step (iii) includes determining a first geographical location data associated with the provider of the signal and comparing this with second geographical location data respectively associated with each of the one or more identified registration plate identifiers.
- [0074]** Another embodiment provides a method for processing remote user input, the method including the steps of:

- [0075]** (i) accepting as input a signal including a plurality of sequential identifiers, each identifier being associated with one or more alphanumeric symbols;
- [0076]** (ii) on the basis of the signal, querying a database to identify one or more records corresponding to one or more possible permutations of the respective alphanumeric symbols associated with the plurality of sequential identifiers;
- [0077]** (iii) assigning a relevance rating to each of the one or more identified records;
- [0078]** (iv) determining the record having the highest relevance rating;
- [0079]** (v) providing audible output indicative of at least an aspect of the record having the highest relevance rating.
- [0080]** A further embodiment provides a process for interfacing buyers and sellers, the process including the steps of:
- [0081]** (i) accepting as input data indicative of an item identifier for identifying an item for sale by a seller;
- [0082]** (ii) searching a database for a record associated with the item identifier, the database including a plurality of records, each record being associated with an item identifier, each record including contact information for the seller;
- [0083]** (iii) in the case that a record associated with the item identifier is found, providing an audible message associated with the record;
- [0084]** (iv) subject to receipt of a request, providing as output data indicative of the contact information for the record associated with the item identifier.
- [0085]** A further embodiment provides a process for interfacing buyers and sellers, the process including the steps of:
- [0086]** (i) accepting as input data indicative of a vehicle registration plate number for a vehicle that is for sale by a seller;
- [0087]** (ii) searching a database for a record associated with the registration plate number, the database including a plurality of records, each record being associated with a respective registration plate number, each record including contact information for the seller;

- [0088]** (iii)in the case that a record associated with the item identifier is found, providing an audible message associated with the record;
- [0089]** (iv)subject to receipt of a request, providing as output data indicative of the contact information for the record associated with the item identifier.
- [0090]** A further embodiment provides a process for interfacing buyers and sellers, the process including the steps of:
- [0091]** (i) accepting from a buyer's cellular telephone as input data indicative of a vehicle registration plate number for a vehicle that is for sale by a seller;
- [0092]** (ii) searching a database for a record associated with the registration plate number, the database including a plurality of records, each record being associated with a respective registration plate number, each record including contact information for the seller's cellular telephone;
- [0093]** (iii)in the case that a record associated with the item identifier is found, providing an audible message associated with the record;
- [0094]** (iv)subject to receipt of a request, connecting the buyer's cellular telephone to the seller's cellular telephone.
- [0095]** A further embodiment provides a process for interfacing buyers and sellers, the process including the steps of:
- [0096]** (i) accepting from a buyer's cellular telephone as input data indicative of a vehicle registration plate number for a vehicle that is for sale by a seller;
- [0097]** (ii) searching a database for a record associated with the registration plate number, the database including a plurality of records, each record being associated with a respective registration plate number, each record including contact information for the seller's cellular telephone;
- [0098]** (iii)in the case that a record associated with the item identifier is found, providing an audible message associated with the record;
- [0099]** (iv)subject to receipt of a request, providing data indicative of contact information relating to the buyer's cellular by way of an electronic message to the seller's cellular telephone.

[00100] One embodiment provides a process for interfacing buyers and sellers, the process including the steps of:

- (i) accepting as input data indicative of an item identification number communicated by way of an advertisement by a seller;
- (ii) searching a database for a record associated with item identification number, the database including a plurality of records, each record being associated with a respective item identification number;
- (iii) in the case that a record associated with the item identification identifier is found, either:
 - a. providing as output data indicative of seller contact information for the record associated with the item identifier; or
 - b. providing as output data indicative of an instruction to provide further data associated with the record to the buyer.

[00101] One embodiment provides a process for interfacing buyers and sellers, the process including the steps of:

- (i) accepting as input data indicative of an advertisement identification number communicated by way of an advertisement by a seller;
- (ii) searching a database for a record associated with the advertisement identification number, the database including a plurality of records, each record being associated with a respective advertisement identification number, each record including contact information for the seller;
- (iii) in the case that a record associated with the advertisement identification number is found, providing an audible message associated with the record;
- (iv) subject to receipt of a request, either:
 - a. providing as output data indicative of the contact information for the record associated with the item identifier; or
 - b. providing as output data an instruction to provide further data associated with the record to the buyer.

[00102] One embodiment provides a process for interfacing buyers and sellers, the process including the steps of:

- (i) accepting as input data indicative of an advertisement identification number communicated by way of an advertisement by a seller;
- (ii) searching a database for a record associated with advertisement identification number, the database including a plurality of records, each record being associated with a respective advertisement identification number, each record including contact information for the seller;
- (iii) in the case that a record associated with the advertisement identification number is found, providing an audible message associated with the record;
- (v) subject to receipt of a request, providing as output data indicative of the contact information for the record associated with the item identifier.

[00103] One embodiment provides a process for interfacing buyers and sellers, the process including the steps of:

- (i) accepting as input data indicative of an advertisement identification number communicated by way of an advertisement by a seller;
- (ii) searching a database for a record associated with advertisement identification number, the database including a plurality of records, each record being associated with a respective advertisement identification number, each record including contact information for the seller;
- (iii) in the case that a record associated with the advertisement identification number is found, providing an audible message associated with the record;
- (iv) subject to receipt of a request, providing as output data an instruction to provide further data associated with the record to the buyer.

[00104] Reference throughout this specification to “one embodiment” or “an embodiment” means that a particular feature, structure or characteristic described in connection with the embodiment is included in at least one embodiment of the present invention. Thus, appearances of the phrases “in one embodiment” or “in an embodiment” in various places throughout this specification are not necessarily all

referring to the same embodiment, but may. Furthermore, the particular features, structures or characteristics may be combined in any suitable manner, as would be apparent to one of ordinary skill in the art from this disclosure, in one or more embodiments.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[00105] Embodiments of the invention will now be described, by way of example only, with reference to the accompanying drawings in which:

[00106] FIG. 1 schematically illustrates a system according to an embodiment.

[00107] FIG. 2 schematically illustrates a system according to another embodiment.

[00108] FIG. 3 is an exemplary table of database information.

[00109] FIG. 4 illustrates a method according to an embodiment.

[00110] FIG. 5 illustrates a method according to another embodiment.

[00111] FIG. 5A illustrates a method according to another embodiment.

[00112] FIG. 6 illustrates a method according to another embodiment.

[00113] FIG. 6A illustrates a method according to another embodiment.

[00114] FIG. 7 schematically illustrates a system according to another embodiment.

[00115] FIG. 8 schematically illustrates a system according to another embodiment.

[00116] FIG. 9 illustrates a method according to another embodiment.

[00117] FIG. 10 illustrates a method according to another embodiment.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[00118] Described herein are systems and methods for interfacing buyers and sellers, and in particular systems and methods for interfacing buyers and sellers for the purchase and sale of vehicles. For example, some embodiments are implemented in the context of computer hardware and/or software. It should be appreciated that a system or method according to an embodiment of the present invention need not directly interface a buyer and a seller. Rather, some embodiments simply provide a

framework by which such interactions are able to be facilitated. For example: by providing a seller's contact details to a buyer, or vice-versa.

[00119] In one embodiment a seller 101 contacts a sales service provider 102 to arrange advertising for sale of a vehicle 103. In the present embodiment seller 101 uses a cellular or conventional telephone to place a premium-rate call to a number specified by service provider 102, although in other embodiments other communication techniques such as SMS are used. Seller 101 submits by telephone, for example by way of a DTMF or IVR interface, details regarding the desired sale. These details include the registration plate number for vehicle 103, a description of vehicle 103, and a telephone number at which seller 101 may be contacted. The seller also places on the vehicle itself a marker indicative of the sales service provider, such as an adhesive label 104. This label is to notify prospective buyers that vehicle 103 is advertised through service provider 102. An interested buyer 105 sees label 104 and, if interested in purchasing vehicle 103, places a premium-rate call to service provider 102. Buyer 105 submits the registration plate number 106 for vehicle 103, and is provided with the description of the vehicle that was submitted by seller 101. Buyer 105 then optionally requests to be transferred to the to seller's telephone number to speak directly with them, or in some embodiments optionally requests for a message to be delivered to the seller (for example to allow the seller to contact the buyer).

[00120] In another embodiment, seller 101 interacts with sales service provider 102 way of a website for the purpose of arranging advertising for sale of vehicle 103 by. For example, seller 101 uses a personal computer or other Internet-enabled device to access a website provided by, on behalf of, or in conjunction with service provider 102. Seller 101 provides to this website details regarding the desired sale, for example in a conventional manner by which goods/services are submitted for advertising via existing websites. Details provided by the seller include the registration plate number for vehicle 103, a description of vehicle 103, and a telephone number at which seller 101 may be contacted. The seller also places on the vehicle itself a marker indicative of the sales service provider, such as an adhesive label 104. In some cases this adhesive label is delivered by mail to seller 101 following interactions with the website. This label is to notify prospective buyers that vehicle 103 is advertised through service provider 102. An interested buyer 105 sees label 104 and, if interested

in purchasing vehicle 103, places a premium-rate call to service provider 102. Buyer 105 submits the registration plate number 106 for vehicle 103, and is provided with the description of the vehicle that was submitted by seller 101. For example, in some embodiments a selection of the details provided by the seller to the website are converted to an audible format (such as an MP3 or other digital audio format, or via a text-to-speech converter) and audibly communicated to the buyer by way of the buyer's phone. Buyer 105 then optionally requests to be transferred to the seller's telephone number to speak directly with them, or in some embodiments optionally requests for a message to be delivered to the seller (for example to allow the seller to contact the buyer).

[00121] The term "vehicle" should be read broadly to include the likes of cars, motorcycles, boats, trucks and trailers. Although embodiments described herein are particularly concerned with the sale of vehicles, it will be appreciated that these embodiments are readily implemented for the sale of "items" in a broader context. The term "item" refers to either or both of goods and services. In some alternate embodiments "items" include houses, livestock, and consumer goods/services in a broad context. All that is required in some embodiments is for the item to carry some form of a unique item identifier. In the case of vehicles this is often conveniently satisfied by the registration plate number, and in the case of real property items the street address (or a portion thereof) is optionally used. However in the case of certain other items it is necessary to purposefully provide a unique item identifier for display on the item. In some embodiments the unique identifier is provided on the marker.

[00122] The term "marker" should also be read broadly. Although in some embodiments the marker is an adhesive label such as label 104, in other embodiments alternate markers are used. Examples of other markers include both printed markers such as adhesive and non-adhesive labels, posters, and signs, and non-printed markers such as letters that are hand-drawn using paint or ink. The general underlying notion is that a marker should identify the sales service provider. In some embodiments this identification is by way of a logo, web address, telephone number, or trading name associated with the service provider, typically in combination with a marketing scheme implemented by the service provider to increase consumer brand awareness and cause consumers to associate the logo or alternative with the service provider and, in some

embodiments, a premium-rate phone number. In some embodiments the identification is by way of alphanumeric text, such as the premium-rate phone number itself, which may be provided in a stylized form. In some embodiments a combination of a logo and alphanumeric text is used.

[00123] The terms “buyer” and “seller” are used in a descriptive sense, and should not be read to imply that something has actually been bought or sold, or that something will necessarily actually be bought or sold. Unless the context clearly requires otherwise, the term seller should generally be read as “person wishing to make a sale” and the term buyer should generally be read as “person considering the option of making a purchase”. In some circumstances a seller acts on behalf of an owner. In some circumstances a buyer acts on behalf of a party who is to become the owner.

[00124] The term “registration plate number” is used to describe an alphanumeric string of characters typically carried by a registered vehicle to facilitate convenient external recognition of that vehicle. Although the term “number” is used, a registration plate number often includes both numbers and letters. A “registration plate” is also commonly known as a “number plate” or “license plate”. It is typically a printed plate that is externally mounted at the front and/or rear of a vehicle. Although in the present embodiment a registration plate number provides a convenient item identifier, in other embodiments alternate item identifiers are used. For example, for boats having printed names, the boat’s name is often used. For a house, the address may be used. In some embodiments an item identifier is purposely provided on an item.

[00125] FIG. 2 illustrates a system 201 for interfacing buyers and sellers to facilitate the sale of vehicles, based around the general concept of FIG. 1. System 201 includes a database 202 for maintaining a plurality of vehicle records. Each vehicle record in database 202 includes entries for maintaining the following information:

- A registration plate number for a vehicle. This is the primary identifying detail for a record, and as such each record is, from a terminology perspective, considered as being “associated with” a registration plate number.
- Contact information. In one embodiment this includes a telephone number provided by the seller during the vehicle submission process.

- Vehicle description information. In one embodiment this includes a digital audio file for containing an audible description of a vehicle.

[00126] In some cases the database additionally includes, for each record, an entry corresponding to a seller identification number. In one embodiment this is a four-digit number or username/password combination defined by a seller when submitting a vehicle for sale. In some cases the seller identification number is associated with a username/password combination, the seller providing the username/password combination for identification purposes, and being generally oblivious to the actual number itself.

[00127] In some embodiments the database additionally includes, for each record, an entry corresponding to a DTMF input for the registration plate number. For example, "ABC-123" corresponds to DTMF "222123". In some embodiments this is used to simplify a process whereby records are identified on the basis of DTMF input. That is, where DTMF input is provided by a caller to identify a vehicle, the DTMF input is used to identify one or more records in the database. Where more than one record is identified (for example DTMF "222123" identifies "ABC-123" and "ABB-123"), the caller is asked to verify the desired one manually, for example one-by-one using a "yes/no" interface. Preferably, a rating protocol is implemented to increase the probability of the first record for which verification is sought being the desired record. For example, newly advertised vehicles are given a more favorable rating. In some embodiments, geographical information gained for the caller is determined (for example based on receiving base-station), and this is compared with personal information regarding the buyer to facilitate rating. In this manner, vehicles expected to be in the same area (suburb, city, state) state as the caller are provided higher ratings.

[00128] FIG. 3 shows an exemplary extract from database 202 in tabular form. This is provided for the sake of illustration only, and should not be regarded as limiting in any way.

[00129] As shown in FIG. 3, some records in database 202 include null entries. This occurs, for example, whilst a record is being created and not all information has been submitted. In one embodiment database 202 is periodically audited to identify incomplete or incorrect records – steps are selectively taken to instruct a concerned

seller to update an incomplete record, or steps are taken to delete one or more incomplete records. In some embodiments a record is held for a predetermined period of time, after which the relevant sellers is contacted and asked to reconfirm or amend the existing record. In one embodiment this period is fourteen days. It will be appreciated that such an approach assists in maintaining the integrity of database 202, and also results in sellers being additionally charged for extended periods of advertising.

[00130] A server 203 is coupled to database 202 for querying and modifying records in database 202. Server 203 includes a processor 204 coupled to a memory unit 205. Memory unit 205 includes software instructions 206 that, when executed on processor 205, allow server 203 to provide various functionalities, including the performance of processes and methods according to embodiments of the present invention.

[00131] Although server 203 is illustrated as a discrete unit having a single processor and memory unit, in some embodiments server 203 includes a plurality of discrete units. In some embodiments the or each unit includes a plurality of processors and/or memory units. In some embodiments server 203 is defined across a distributed networked computing system.

[00132] Functionalities provided by server 203, particularly functionalities relating to the sale of vehicles, are made available to users by way of an interface 211, in this embodiment including an IVR/DTMF platform 212 (although in some embodiments a web-based interface, such as a website, is used in combination or as an alternative). This platform provides for Interactive Voice Response (IVR) and Dual-Tone Multi-Frequency (DTMF) interaction. In the case of the former, platform 212 is responsive to voice commands provided by a user. In the case of the latter, platform 212 is responsive to telephone handset keypad button presses provided by a user. In some embodiments platform 212 is integrated with server 203, in other embodiments it is a discrete unit. For example, in one embodiment platform 212 is provided by a portion of software instructions 206 that, when executed, provide an IVR/DTMF engine.

[00133] In some embodiments only one of IVR and DTMF is used. In further embodiments alternate or supplementary interfaces are used to interface phone-based

or other users with server 203. Some examples are discussed further below, including a website and an SMS platform.

[00134] A buyer or seller wishing to use system 101 places a call to a specified phone number using a telephone, such as cellular telephone 215. In some instances an alternate telephone is used, such as a conventional “land-line” or a satellite phone.

[00135] In the context of FIG. 1, this specified phone number is advertised by service provider 102, and in some embodiments is provided on label 104. In other embodiments marketing is carried out by service provider 102 to increase consumer brand awareness such that label 104 is readily recognized by consumers and associated with the specified phone number. Preferably the specified phone number includes a “phoneword” to facilitate consumer awareness. For example: 555-CAR-SALE.

[00136] In one embodiment the specified phone number is a premium rate number. A premium-rate number is, in most cases, a phone number that, when dialed, results in the caller being charged a premium rate including a component payable to network provider (such as the provider of the network to which cellular phone 215 is connected), a component payable to service provider 102. In some cases additional components are payable to other parties – for example in one embodiment a component is paid to a business partner such as the provider of an affiliated online vehicle advertising source. In practice, the caller is typically provided with a single bill from their usual network provider in the conventional manner, this bill reflecting the total spent on premium rate calls and the service providers to whom those calls were placed. The apportionment of the call cost is carried out behind the scenes and not necessarily brought to the attention of the caller. In one embodiment the premium rate is charged on a time-basis, in other embodiments as a flat rate.

[00137] Although embodiments described herein focus on the use of a premium rate telephone number, this should not be regarded as limiting. In other embodiments conventional or free-call numbers are used as an alternative. It will be appreciated that the use of a premium rate telephone number is useful in a commercial model where the service provider wishes to generate revenue based on telephone usage. However, in another embodiment a commercial model is implemented where revenue is instead

generated by the sale of markers such as label 104, and the service is accessed by way of a free-call or convention telephone number.

[00138] Some commercial models make use of a free-call or convention telephone number, and charges are only levied in the case that the caller selects predetermined options in the course of a call.

[00139] Some commercial models generate revenue by way of advertising – for example a free-call number is used, and the caller is played audible advertising media prior to accessing services, and in some cases periodically.

[00140] Some commercial models generate revenue by redirection to other service providers. For example, services such as insurance services, finance services, vehicle inspection services and detailing services are accessible by way of a call to service provider 102. Provider 102 puts buyers or sellers in contact with providers of other such services, and provider 102 earns revenue from this on any one or more of a flat rate, monthly fee, and referral bonus. In one embodiment a caller, during a call to service provider 102, is provided with an option to be transferred to a sales representative of an insurance company. In one model the insurance company pays a first amount each month to service provider 102 in consideration for this option being provided to callers, and a further amount each month based on the value of insurance sales made by the company as a result of the referral from service provider 102.

[00141] In the example of FIG. 2, upon calling the specified phone number, phone 215 connects to a main switch 216. Switch 216 then sends a message indicative of the call to a Computer-Telephony-Integration (CTI) system 217. The CTI system subsequently provides a Dialed Number Identification Service (DNIS) or similar message to platform 212. A DNIS message is typically used with premium rate numbers, given that multiple premium rate numbers often channel into the same Private Branch Exchange (PBX) system. Once the call enters the PBX system, a DNIS message will identify which number was dialed and record that information. The call will also be appropriately handled by server 203.

[00142] Once a call reaches platform 212, platform 212 allows cellular phone 215 and server 203 to communicate with one another, noting that this is communication

between a human caller and an automated system. This allows the caller to access functionalities of server 203, as discussed further below.

[00143] It will be appreciated that various other hardware arrangements are used to perform the same general functionalities in substantially the same way. In this way, embodiments of the present invention are by no means limited to specific hardware described herein.

[00144] FIG. 4 to FIG. 6 show processes implemented by server 203 based on software instructions 206 (in this context, “process” and “method” are essentially synonymous). This process guides interactions between a caller and the server, via platform 212. These are provided for the sake of illustration only, and it will be appreciated that various modifications, variations, and additions may be effected without straying from the general underlying concepts.

[00145] At sub-process 401, the caller is prompted to identify as a buyer or a seller. In one embodiment this includes a spoken prompt “press 1 if you are selling a vehicle, or press 2 if you are interested in buying a vehicle”. It will be appreciated that this prompt is seeking a DTMF type response. Input indicative of either buyer or seller status is received at sub-process 402. At decision 403 it is considered whether the input is indicative of buyer status or seller status. In the case of buyer status, the process moves to sub-process 501. In the case of seller status, the process moves to sub-process 601.

[00146] In some embodiments, telephone-based interactions are provided for buyers only, with seller functionality being made available via a website or the like.

[00147] Dealing initially with a buyer aspect of the process, as shown in FIG. 5, at sub-process 501 the caller is prompted to provide a registration plate number. It will be appreciated that, in jurisdictions where registration plate numbers include both numbers and letters, registration plate number information is perhaps most conveniently submitted using IVR. Where IVR is not used, the caller provides the registration plate number via a telephone keypad.

[00148] In one embodiment where IVR is not used, the caller provides by way of DTMF a numeric string representing a registration plate number. Each individual number in this string might represent a number, or alternately a letter corresponding to

that number based on accepted keypad lettering conventions. Server 203 queries database 202 for records associated with any registration plate number that could be identified by the numeric string, or a logically reduced selection of registration plate number that could be identified by the numeric string. For example, the number "123456" might identify "123456", "1A3456", "1B3456", and so on. If multiple records are identified, the relevant registration plate numbers are communicated to the caller, who is directed to identify the appropriate one.

[00149] In another embodiment where IVR is not used, the caller provides by way of DTMF an alphanumeric string representing a registration plate number. This string is provided much in the same way as letters and numbers in conventional text messaging interfaces. In one such embodiment platform 212 communicates an audible representation corresponding to each button press to assist the caller in this regard. For example, if the caller presses the 2 button once, platform 212 communicates "two". If the caller presses the 2 button twice in quick succession, platform 212 communicates "a".

[00150] Further examples regarding the manner in which a registration plate number is entered by way of DTMF are discussed greater detail further below.

[00151] Input indicative of a registration plate number is received at 502. In some embodiments there is a confirmation loop whereby the accepted registration plate number is audibly communicated to the caller for confirmation or rejection. At 503 server 203 searches database 202 for a record associated with the accepted registration plate number. If no such record is found at 504 the caller is prompted to enter another registration plate number at 501, although in some embodiments with a slightly varied prompt indicating that the previous number was not found in the database. In one embodiment call charges are contained at a reduced rate (or zero) until a record is found, the rationale being to reduce cost to consumers in instances where label 104 is provided on vehicles that are not identified in database 202. In other embodiments the caller accepts the risk that a car carrying a label 104 may not actually be for sale.

[00152] If a record is found at 504, the caller is provided with a plurality of buyer information request options at 505. A caller selects one of these options using DTMF keypad presses as prompted by an audible message at 505. Input indicative of

selection of one of these information requests is received at 506. For the present purposes only two types of information requests are considered: a description request, and a contact request.

[00153] If, at decision 507, a description request is received at 506, the description information for the relevant record is provided to the user. In the present embodiment the description information is stored as a description message in a digital audio file, and this information is played to the user at 508. In some embodiments the description information is stored as a text packet for conversion to digital audio at an appropriate time by a text-to-speech converter, such that an audible description is provided at 508. In another embodiment the description information is additionally or alternately forwarded to the user in a SMS, email, or other electronic message.

[00154] Once the description message has been communicated, the process then loops back to 505.

[00155] If a contact information request is received at 506, server 203 provides an instruction such that cellular telephone 215 is automatically connected to the contact location identified by the contact information of the relevant record at 509. For example, this location may be another cellular telephone. In one embodiment this is a proxy connection via the PBX of system 201 such that a premium rate is charged to the caller even whilst in communication with the seller.

[00156] In some embodiments alternate communication options are provided. For example, in one embodiment server 203 first makes a telephone call to the seller to determine (by way of an automated interactive message) whether the seller wishes to speak with a prospective buyer prior to connecting the parties. In another embodiment the seller is provided by SMS, email or other messaging means a message providing a number on which the prospective buyer may be contacted. In some embodiments this is a premium rate number, which is by proxy routed to the buyer. Under such an approach the seller pays to speak with prospective buyers. Other approaches are used in other embodiments.

[00157] Other types of request are used in some embodiments, including a request to enter another registration plate number, a request for technical assistance, a request to be directed to a peripheral service provider or a request to report misuse. Misuse may

occur where, for example, a seller has recorded a description message that is not within the general spirit or official terms and conditions of system 201.

[00158] FIG. 5A illustrates a variation of FIG. 5. In this variation, the method progresses directly from 504 to 508. That is, the description message is communicated by default once a record is found. The caller is then provided with information request options at 510, with data indicative of a selected request being received at 512. Depending on the selected request (determined at 513), the method either loops to 508 to replay the message, progresses to 509 (as discussed above), or progresses to 514 where a SMS message is provided to the contact location identified by the contact information of the relevant record such that the seller is able to contact the buyer by telephone.

[00159] Turning now to the seller aspect of the process, as shown in FIG. 6, at sub-process 601 the caller is prompted to provide a registration plate number. The caller provides this number at 602. At 603 server 203 queries database 202 to determine whether a record exists for that registration plate number. If, at decision 604, such a record is not found, the user is asked at 605 whether he or she wishes to sell a car having the provided registration plate number, the number being audibly communicated for confirmation purposes. At 606 the caller responds with a yes/no identifier.

[00160] In the case of a “no” identifier, the process loops to 601. Otherwise, a record is defined in database 202 at 607 and the user prompted to define a user identification number at 608. A user identification number is accepted at 609, and the record updated at 610. The user is then prompted to provide contact information at 611, in the present embodiment by DTMF button presses or by selecting a “use the number from which I am calling” option, this is received at 612 the relevant record is again updated at 613. At 614 the user is prompted to record a description message, and such a message is recorded at 615, and the record updated with a relevant audio file representative of this message at 616.

[00161] At 650 the caller is provided with a plurality of seller information request options. These options allow the caller to review or change a description message or contact information, and access more advanced options.

[00162] If, at decision 604, a record is found corresponding to the registration number furnished, the user is prompted to provide his/her seller identification number at 617. The database is queried at 618 to determine whether the furnished seller identification number corresponds to the seller identification number recorded in database 202 for the record to which the current registration plate number relates. If, at 620, the numbers correspond, the process moves to 650. Otherwise the process loops to 601, typically with a brief message informing the caller of the incorrect number.

[00163] In another embodiment both a registration plate number and a seller identification number are accepted prior to querying database 202. It will be appreciated that this and other similar variations are readily made to the general call process described above.

[00164] FIG. 6A illustrates a variation of FIG. 6. In this variation, the method progresses directly from 403 to 660, where an audible message is provided to inform the caller of a website at which an item can be registered for sale. The caller is then provided with information request options at 661, with data indicative of a selected request being received at 662. Depending on the selected request (determined at 663), the method either loops to 660 to replay the message, or progresses to where a SMS message is provided to the caller's contact location. This SMS carries information regarding the website.

[00165] In various examples provided above, predetermined charges are optionally levied in respect of the selection of options by a caller. For example, a specific charge is levied to a buyer for requesting to be directly connected with the seller. In some cases the callers are made aware of such charges at relevant junctures, and additional confirmation steps may be implemented to verify that proposed charges are accepted.

[00166] In overview, the present systems and methods allow a model for the sale and purchase of vehicles that is particularly useful in relation to interfacing buyers and sellers who are geographically proximal to one another. For instance, a buyer sees a vehicle prior to calling to find out details about the vehicle. The buyer therefore already knows the general location of the vehicle, which is particularly valuable in the case of buyers who do not wish to travel long distances. It also allows for some level

of preliminary inspection – a buyer sees a vehicle, and is able to make an instant decision as to whether it is suitable from a visual point of view.

[00167] Additionally, a vehicle may be used for transportation or recreational purposes whilst carrying a label 104 without necessarily adversely affecting advertising efficiency. Advertising requires only a small label yet recognizable label, and from this small label a buyer is able to conveniently access additional information detailed about the vehicle. A seller is able to take a vehicle to a new location, such as interstate, and in doing so automatically advertise specifically to buyers in that interstate location. In such cases, the seller and buyers are often geographically proximal one another for only a short period of time, and as such the convenience of a quick contact system is exaggerated.

[00168] From a marketing perspective, labels 104 are in one embodiment made freely available via the likes of gas stations, convenience stores, magazines, newspapers and so on. In one embodiment a seller may order a label 104 by telephone via server 203 at or after the time of submitting vehicle details. It will be appreciated that a comprehensive marketing and brand awareness scheme, in combination with having a large number of labels in circulation, allows the systems and methods to generally self propagate.

[00169] In some embodiments service provider 102 enters into a business relationship with (or alternately is defined by) an existing web-service provider or print-media service provider, the intention being to encourage users of the existing services to take advantage of those provided by service provider 102. In some embodiments service provider 102 operates under the banner of the existing service provider.

[00170] In some embodiments the seller is automatically or manually directed to the sales service provider 102 from an online sales site or print media, by SMS, or by email. In one embodiment an existing web-service provider provides to its clients an SMS inviting them to register for the call-based system described above. In such cases database 202 is often able to be pre-populated with existing information about sellers and their vehicles. In another embodiment an existing web-service provider automatically makes all vehicles advertised by the website available via the call-based system, although this typically demands having access to seller contact details.

[00171] In the embodiment of FIG. 7 server 203 and database 203 operate in conjunction with a website 701. Website 701 allows a buyer or seller to place an advertisement for a vehicle or view placed advertisements using a personal computer 702, or other Internet compatible computational platform. The general structure of the advertisements is typically generally compatible with the nature of records discussed above. However, in some embodiments additional media is able to be uploaded using website 701, such as images and additional text information. In one embodiment text information or images can be requested by a buyer using a cellular telephone. For example, in one embodiment a buyer at 506 requests an image of the vehicle and, assuming one is available, an image is sent to the buyer's cellular telephone by MMS or other messaging protocol. In one embodiment text description provided by website 701 is converted into a description message using a text-to-speech converter. It will be appreciated that a website is also a useful tool for advertising terms and conditions of use.

[00172] In the above embodiments, interaction between cellular phone 215 and server 203 has been primarily by way of in-call interaction. In other embodiments the interaction is messaging based, for example SMS based. An example of this is shown in FIG. 8, where interaction between cellular phone 215 and server 203 is by way of an interface in the form of an SMS platform 801.

[00173] In one embodiment using the general hardware of FIG 8, a seller sends by SMS to a premium rate number the registration plate number for a vehicle he/she wishes to sell, and vehicle description information. A buyer subsequently sends that registration plate number by SMS to a premium-rate number, and in response server 203 provides an SMS including the vehicle description information. In one embodiment this SMS also includes a premium-rate number that is selectively called to contact the seller.

[00174] In one embodiment text-to-speech and/or speech-to-text converters are implemented to provide a hybrid system where in-call interaction and SMS interaction are able to be used as alternatives depending on a users preference. For example, a seller submits a vehicle via SMS, and a buyer listens to a text-to-speech conversion of the SMS description message by telephone.

[00175] In some embodiments a relatively advanced cellular network is used, such as a 3G network. It will be appreciated that in such embodiments the ability to have rich content (such as images and video) communicated to mobile handsets is increased, and this is leveraged by some embodiments. For example, in one embodiment video and images of vehicles are communicated to a buyer during or following a call to service provider 102.

[00176] FIG. 9 illustrates a further method according to one embodiment. This method is particularly suitable for the purpose of implementing a method of interfacing buyers and sellers in combination with an existing sale registration website, for example as that shown in FIG. 7. In overview, the general notion is that a seller registers an item for sale via the website, initially with the intention of the item being advertised via online and/or print media forms (depending on the inherent business service provided by the party responsible for the website). The seller is provided with an option to participate in a call-in sales facilitation process along the lines of FIG. 1.

[00177] The method of FIG. 9 commences at 901, where a seller registers an item, in the present example being a vehicle, for sale via a website. This includes providing vehicle description information, and typically personal information including an address and cellular telephone number (although in some cases these are provided at a later stage in the method, or in some cases such information is already known to an administrator of the website). At 902 the seller is provided with an option to advertise the vehicle by way of a call-in sales facilitation process along the lines of FIG. 1. In the event that the seller declines, the method of FIG. 9 is completed. Otherwise, in the event that the seller accepts, the method progresses to 903 and 904.

[00178] At 903 a process is commenced to arrange for the delivery of a label (such as label 104) to be delivered to the seller. Where available, address information provided at 901 is used for this purpose. Otherwise, such address information is sought. The process commenced at 903 is ideally automated in whole or in part, including printing of envelopes and coordinating of delivery. In some embodiments 903 is omitted.

[00179] At 904 a record in database is updated such that the relevant vehicle is made available via the call-in sales facilitation process.

[00180] In some embodiments, 904 includes extracting various aspects of information received through step 901 (and optionally seeking further information, if need be) and defining a record in database 202. In some cases aspects of information corresponding to a vehicle description are processed to define an audio file playable to a caller, or alternately a text packet audibly conveyable to a caller by way of a text-to-speech converter.

[00181] In some embodiments the website inherently provides a website capable of providing the functionality of database 202. In such cases a simplified variation of step 904 is implemented, including tagging a relevant record to indicate that it is to be made available to callers. That is, in the context of the method of FIG. 5, only appropriately tagged records are considered at 503.

[00182] In some cases, concurrently to steps 903 and 904, a commission is paid (or allocated for payment) to a third party responsible for facilitating in whole or in part technology underlying the call-in sales facilitation process.

[00183] FIG. 10 illustrates an exemplary method according to another embodiment, this method being concerned with identifying a registration plate number in database 202 based on DTMF input. Essentially, this is a method for processing remote user input, whereby a signal is received (presently a DTMF signal) including a plurality of sequential identifiers (a string of DTMF tones). Each identifier is associated with one or more alphanumeric symbols, customarily in accordance with the T9 protocol. The DTMF signal is processed to identify an appropriate one or more records in database 202. It will be appreciated that efficiently converting DTMF input to a registration plate number of a challenging technical task.

[00184] A numerical string is entered via a telephone keypad, and a corresponding DTMF signal received at 1001. This string is processed at 1002 to determine possible registration plate numbers. In some embodiments, this includes determining all possible permutations. However, more preferably, a more analytical approach is implemented. For example, in one embodiment the string is processed digit-by-digit to continually narrow down viable permutations by reference to existing registration numbers in database 202. In some embodiments permutations are initially limited to

common registration number formats (i.e. sequencing of letters and numbers, such as ABC-123 or 123-ABC).

[00185] The database is queried at 1003 to identify records corresponding to the DTMF string by virtue of their respective registration plate numbers. If only a single record is identified at 1004, an audible output indicative of the registration plate number is provided at 1005, and a verification process is performed at 1006. If the verification process fails, the method completes at 1007. Otherwise the method of FIG. 10 completes at 1010.

[00186] If multiple records are identified at 1004, relevance ranks are assigned to each of these at 1008. In some embodiments this includes determining first geographical location data associated with the provider of the signal and comparing this with second geographical location data respectively associated with each of the one or more identified registration plate identifiers. By such an approach, a vehicle likely to be in the same geographical region as the caller is provided a higher relevance rating. Other techniques for determining relevance are used in other embodiments.

[00187] An audible output indicative of the registration plate number is provided at 1009, and a verification process is performed at another instance of 1006. If the verification process fails, the method completes loops to 1009, with the record having the next highest relevance rating being considered (if all records are already considered, the method completes at 1007). Otherwise the method of FIG. 10 completes at 1010.

[00188] As foreshadowed, in some embodiments an item identifier is purposely provided on an item (i.e. the item does not inherently carry a unique identifier in a similar manner to a vehicle that has an inherent registration plate number or an item of real property that has an inherent address). By way of a further example, in some embodiments, an item identifier is provided on an advertisement, and an approach as described herein is used to interface the buyer with the seller associated with that advertisement. This is referred to as an "advertisement identifier". The "seller" in this situation may be represented by an advertising agency or other intermediary, and the term "seller" should, as noted above, be afforded a broad definition accordingly. In

such embodiments, the advertisement may be substantially of any nature. For example:

- Printed advertising, such as that found in magazines, newspapers, billboards, or the like. In such cases, a unique identifier is provided in printed form.
- Audible advertising, such as that provided via radio, podcast, or loudspeaker broadcast. In such cases, a unique identifier is generally provided audibly.
- Video advertising, such as that provided by way of television, public display monitors, or stored on digital/analogue media for playback via a display screen. In such cases a unique identifier is provided visually and/or audibly.

[00189] Preferably, the identifier is readily associable with the service provider. For example, in the case of visual media, it is provided adjacent a mark, other logo, or contact details associated with the service provider.

[00190] A buyer, who sees the advertisement and has an interest in the goods/services advertised, places a call to a service provider and provides the advertisement identifier, much in the same way as a buyer who sees a vehicle places a call to a service provider and provides the vehicle registration number in examples considered above. The subsequent procedure varies between embodiments. For example:

- In some embodiments an audible message regarding the goods/services is communicated via the buyer's phone. For example, this audible message may be stored as a text or audio file in a database, and is identified based on the advertisement identification number.
- In some embodiments the buyer is directly connected to the seller. For example, contact information for the seller is stored in a database, and is identified based on the advertisement identification number.
- In some embodiments the buyer directs that the seller should make contact with the buyer. For example, contact information for the seller is stored in a

database, and is identified based on the advertisement identification number, and data indicative of the buyer's contact details are provided to the seller. In this regard, the buyer's contact details may include the telephone number from which the buyer is calling, an email address, a mailing address, personal secure digital site, or another electronic personal contact location.

[00191] In some embodiments a combination of two or more of these are implemented, generally with an electronic automated interface allowing the buyer to place requests and in doing so select between options, generally as discussed further above. For example, in one embodiment a buyer places a call to the service provider, provides an advertisement identifier (for example by way of DTMF), and is provided with a number of options, including listening to a message regarding the advertised goods/services, being connected to a representative of the seller to discuss the goods/services or place an order (for example to a call center), or having information regarding the goods/services delivered (for example by SMS, MMS, email, standard mail, or delivery to a personal secure digital site).

[00192] In some such embodiments, a database is maintained for storing records corresponding to each advertisement, each record including a unique the advertisement identifier and further details such as, seller contact information, description information, and so on. In one embodiment, an advertising agency submits (electronically or otherwise) the further details to an administrator of the database (optionally being the service provider) and is provided with a unique advertisement identifier. A new record in the database is subsequently defined and the advertisement finalized, thereby completing the loop such that buyers are able to interface with the seller (advertised party) as discussed herein.

[00193] The term "contact information" as used herein, should be read broadly to include a variety of forms of contact information. One specific example is volatile-type contact information (such as cellular/landline telephone, or digital means such as IP/VOIP/SKYPE/etc), these being volatile in the sense that the party only receives communications directed by way of that contact information by "answering" (for example, in the manner a telephone call is "answered"). In absence of answering, the communication is lost (noting that answering might be effected by automated means,

such as voicemail). Another specific example is nonvolatile-type contact information (such as email address, a physical mailing address, personal secure digital site, or another electronic location), these being nonvolatile in the sense that information is able to be delivered for perusal by the relevant party in due course. In some cases volatile-type contact information also allows for nonvolatile-type communication (for example, cellular telephone contact information is able to be used for indirect contact by way of SMS, MMS or the like).

[00194] Unless specifically stated otherwise, as apparent from the following discussions, it is appreciated that throughout the specification discussions utilizing terms such as "processing," "computing," "calculating," "determining", "analyzing" or the like, refer to the action and/or processes of a computer or computing system, or similar electronic computing device, that manipulate and/or transform data represented as physical, such as electronic, quantities into other data similarly represented as physical quantities.

[00195] In a similar manner, the term "processor" may refer to any device or portion of a device that processes electronic data, e.g., from registers and/or memory to transform that electronic data into other electronic data that, e.g., may be stored in registers and/or memory. A "computer" or a "computing machine" or a "computing platform" may include one or more processors.

[00196] The methodologies described herein are, in one embodiment, performable by one or more processors that accept computer-readable (also called machine-readable) code containing a set of instructions that when executed by one or more of the processors carry out at least one of the methods described herein. Any processor capable of executing a set of instructions (sequential or otherwise) that specify actions to be taken are included. Thus, one example is a typical processing system that includes one or more processors. Each processor may include one or more of a CPU, a graphics processing unit, and a programmable DSP unit. The processing system further may include a memory subsystem including main RAM and/or a static RAM, and/or ROM. A bus subsystem may be included for communicating between the components. The processing system further may be a distributed processing system with processors coupled by a network. If the processing system requires a display, such a display may be included, e.g., an liquid crystal display (LCD) or a cathode ray

tube (CRT) display. If manual data entry is required, the processing system also includes an input device such as one or more of an alphanumeric input unit such as a keyboard, a pointing control device such as a mouse, and so forth. The term memory unit as used herein, if clear from the context and unless explicitly stated otherwise, also encompasses a storage system such as a disk drive unit. The processing system in some configurations may include a sound output device, and a network interface device. The memory subsystem thus includes a computer-readable carrier medium that carries computer-readable code (e.g., software) including a set of instructions to cause performing, when executed by one or more processors, one of more of the methods described herein. Note that when the method includes several elements, e.g., several steps, no ordering of such elements is implied, unless specifically stated. The software may reside in the hard disk, or may also reside, completely or at least partially, within the RAM and/or within the processor during execution thereof by the computer system. Thus, the memory and the processor also constitute computer-readable carrier medium carrying computer-readable code.

[00197] Furthermore, a computer-readable carrier medium may form, or be included in a computer program product.

[00198] In alternative embodiments, the one or more processors operate as a standalone device or may be connected, e.g., networked to other processor(s), in a networked deployment, the one or more processors may operate in the capacity of a server or a user machine in server-user network environment, or as a peer machine in a peer-to-peer or distributed network environment. The one or more processors may form a personal computer (PC), a tablet PC, a set-top box (STB), a Personal Digital Assistant (PDA), a cellular telephone, a web appliance, a network router, switch or bridge, or any machine capable of executing a set of instructions (sequential or otherwise) that specify actions to be taken by that machine.

[00199] Note that while some diagrams only show a single processor and a single memory that carries the computer-readable code, those in the art will understand that many of the components described above are included, but not explicitly shown or described in order not to obscure the inventive aspect. For example, while only a single machine is illustrated, the term "machine" shall also be taken to include any

collection of machines that individually or jointly execute a set (or multiple sets) of instructions to perform any one or more of the methodologies discussed herein.

[00200] Thus, one embodiment of each of the methods described herein is in the form of a computer-readable carrier medium carrying a set of instructions, e.g., a computer program that are for execution on one or more processors, e.g., one or more processors that are part of building management system. Thus, as will be appreciated by those skilled in the art, embodiments of the present invention may be embodied as a method, an apparatus such as a special purpose apparatus, an apparatus such as a data processing system, or a computer-readable carrier medium, e.g., a computer program product. The computer-readable carrier medium carries computer readable code including a set of instructions that when executed on one or more processors cause the processor or processors to implement a method. Accordingly, aspects of the present invention may take the form of a method, an entirely hardware embodiment, an entirely software embodiment or an embodiment combining software and hardware aspects. Furthermore, the present invention may take the form of carrier medium (e.g., a computer program product on a computer-readable storage medium) carrying computer-readable program code embodied in the medium.

[00201] The software may further be transmitted or received over a network via a network interface device. While the carrier medium is shown in an exemplary embodiment to be a single medium, the term "carrier medium" should be taken to include a single medium or multiple media (e.g., a centralized or distributed database, and/or associated caches and servers) that store the one or more sets of instructions. The term "carrier medium" shall also be taken to include any medium that is capable of storing, encoding or carrying a set of instructions for execution by one or more of the processors and that cause the one or more processors to perform any one or more of the methodologies of the present invention. A carrier medium may take many forms, including but not limited to, non-volatile media, volatile media, and transmission media. Non-volatile media includes, for example, optical, magnetic disks, and magneto-optical disks. Volatile media includes dynamic memory, such as main memory. Transmission media includes coaxial cables, copper wire and fiber optics, including the wires that comprise a bus subsystem. Transmission media also may also take the form of acoustic or light waves, such as those generated during radio wave and

infrared data communications. For example, the term "carrier medium" shall accordingly be taken to include, but not be limited to, solid-state memories, a computer product embodied in optical and magnetic media, a medium bearing a propagated signal detectable by at least one processor of one or more processors and representing a set of instructions that when executed implement a method, a carrier wave bearing a propagated signal detectable by at least one processor of the one or more processors and representing the set of instructions a propagated signal and representing the set of instructions, and a transmission medium in a network bearing a propagated signal detectable by at least one processor of the one or more processors and representing the set of instructions.

[00202] It will be understood that the steps of methods discussed are performed in one embodiment by an appropriate processor (or processors) of a processing (i.e., computer) system executing instructions (computer-readable code) stored in storage. It will also be understood that the invention is not limited to any particular implementation or programming technique and that the invention may be implemented using any appropriate techniques for implementing the functionality described herein. The invention is not limited to any particular programming language or operating system.

[00203] Reference throughout this specification to "one embodiment" or "an embodiment" means that a particular feature, structure or characteristic described in connection with the embodiment is included in at least one embodiment of the present invention. Thus, appearances of the phrases "in one embodiment" or "in an embodiment" in various places throughout this specification are not necessarily all referring to the same embodiment, but may. Furthermore, the particular features, structures or characteristics may be combined in any suitable manner, as would be apparent to one of ordinary skill in the art from this disclosure, in one or more embodiments.

[00204] Similarly it should be appreciated that in the above description of exemplary embodiments of the invention, various features of the invention are sometimes grouped together in a single embodiment, figure, or description thereof for the purpose of streamlining the disclosure and aiding in the understanding of one or more of the various inventive aspects. This method of disclosure, however, is not to be interpreted

as reflecting an intention that the claimed invention requires more features than are expressly recited in each claim. Rather, as the following claims reflect, inventive aspects lie in less than all features of a single foregoing disclosed embodiment. Thus, the claims following the Detailed Description are hereby expressly incorporated into this Detailed Description, with each claim standing on its own as a separate embodiment of this invention.

[00205] Furthermore, while some embodiments described herein include some but not other features included in other embodiments, combinations of features of different embodiments are meant to be within the scope of the invention, and form different embodiments, as would be understood by those in the art. For example, in the following claims, any of the claimed embodiments can be used in any combination.

[00206] Furthermore, some of the embodiments are described herein as a method or combination of elements of a method that can be implemented by a processor of a computer system or by other means of carrying out the function. Thus, a processor with the necessary instructions for carrying out such a method or element of a method forms a means for carrying out the method or element of a method. Furthermore, an element described herein of an apparatus embodiment is an example of a means for carrying out the function performed by the element for the purpose of carrying out the invention.

[00207] In the description provided herein, numerous specific details are set forth. However, it is understood that embodiments of the invention may be practiced without these specific details. In other instances, well-known methods, structures and techniques have not been shown in detail in order not to obscure an understanding of this description.

[00208] As used herein, unless otherwise specified the use of the ordinal adjectives "first", "second", "third", etc., to describe a common object, merely indicate that different instances of like objects are being referred to, and are not intended to imply that the objects so described must be in a given sequence, either temporally, spatially, in ranking, or in any other manner.

[00209] In the claims below and the description herein, any one of the terms comprising, comprised of or which comprises is an open term that means including at

least the elements/features that follow, but not excluding others. Thus, the term comprising, when used in the claims, should not be interpreted as being limitative to the means or elements or steps listed thereafter. For example, the scope of the expression a device comprising A and B should not be limited to devices consisting only of elements A and B. Any one of the terms including or which includes or that includes as used herein is also an open term that also means including at least the elements/features that follow the term, but not excluding others. Thus, including is synonymous with and means comprising.

[00210] Similarly, it is to be noticed that the term coupled, when used in the claims, should not be interpreted as being limitative to direct connections only. The terms "coupled" and "connected," along with their derivatives, may be used. It should be understood that these terms are not intended as synonyms for each other. Thus, the scope of the expression a device A coupled to a device B should not be limited to devices or systems wherein an output of device A is directly connected to an input of device B. It means that there exists a path between an output of A and an input of B which may be a path including other devices or means. "Coupled" may mean that two or more elements are either in direct physical or electrical contact, or that two or more elements are not in direct contact with each other but yet still co-operate or interact with each other.

[00211] Thus, while there has been described what are believed to be the preferred embodiments of the invention, those skilled in the art will recognize that other and further modifications may be made thereto without departing from the spirit of the invention, and it is intended to claim all such changes and modifications as fall within the scope of the invention. For example, any formulas given above are merely representative of procedures that may be used. Functionality may be added or deleted from the block diagrams and operations may be interchanged among functional blocks. Steps may be added or deleted to methods described within the scope of the present invention.

CLAIMS

1. A process for interfacing buyers and sellers, the process including the steps of:
 - (i) accepting as input data indicative of an item identifier for identifying an item for sale by a seller;
 - (ii) searching a database for a record associated with the item identifier, the database including a plurality of records, each record being associated with an item identifier, each record including contact information for the seller;
 - (iii) in the case that a record associated with the item identifier is found, accepting as input data indicative of one or more information requests relating to the record;
 - (iv) in the case that an information request accepted at (iii) is a contact request, providing as output data indicative of the contact information for the record associated with the item identifier.
2. A process according to claim 1 wherein the item identifier is a vehicle registration plate number for identifying a vehicle for sale by the seller.
3. A process according to claim 1 wherein the input accepted at (i) and (iii) originates from the user of a telephone.
4. A process according to claim 1 wherein the input accepted at (i) and (iii) originates from the user of a telephone who calls a predetermined premium-rate service.
5. A process according to claim 3 wherein providing as output data indicative of the contact information at (iv) includes connecting the telephone to a contact location identified by the contact information.
6. A process according to claim 3 wherein providing as output data indicative of the contact information at (iv) includes providing a message to a contact location identified by the contact information, the message being indicative of buyer contact information.

7. A process according to claim 1 wherein each record includes contact information and description information.
8. A process according to claim 7 including the step of:
 - (v) in the case that an information request accepted at (iii) is a description request, providing as output data indicative of the description information for the record associated with the item identifier.
9. A process according to claim 8 wherein the output provided at (v) is an audible representation of the description information.
10. A process according to claim 1 including the step of:
 - (vi) accepting as input either a seller request or a buyer request.
11. A process according to claim 10 including the step of:
 - (vii) In the case that the input accepted at (vi) is a buyer request, providing output indicative of a prompt to provide an item identifier.
12. A process according to claim 10 including the step of:
 - (viii) In the case that the input accepted at (vi) is a seller request, providing output indicative of a prompt to provide an item identifier and a seller identification number.
13. A process according to claim 10 including the steps of:
 - (ix) In the case that the input accepted at (vi) is a buyer request, accepting as input data indicative of an item identifier for identifying an item and data indicative of a seller identification number for identifying the seller;
 - (x) searching a database for a record that is associated with the item identifier;
 - (xi) in the case that no record is found at (x), creating a record associated with the item identifier and including the seller identifier;
 - (xii) in the case that a record is found at (x), determining whether the found record includes the seller identification number;

- (xiii) in the case that the found record includes the seller identification number, or in the case that a record is created at (xi), accepting as input data indicative of one or more information requests relating to the record.

14. A process according to claim 13 wherein the one or more information requests include any one or more of the following:

- a request to add/review/modify description information; and
- a request to add/review/modify contact information.

15. A computer-readable carrier medium carrying a set of instructions that when executed by one or more processors cause the one or more processors to carry out a process according to any one of claims 1 to 14.

16. A method for interfacing buyers and sellers, the method including the steps of:

- providing a marker displayable on an item for sale by a seller, the a marker for notifying one or more buyers that the item is for sale, the item also displaying an item identifier;

- providing an interface accessible by a buyer, the interface being responsive to input indicative of the item identifier for facilitating communication between the buyer and the seller.

17. A method according to claim 16 wherein the item is a vehicle, and the item identifier is provided on a registration plate carried by the vehicle.

18. A method according to claim 16 wherein the interface is accessible by telephone.

19. A method according to claim 16 wherein the interface is accessible by telephone as a premium rate service.

20. A method according to claim 17 wherein facilitating communication between the buyer and the seller includes connecting the telephone to a contact location representative of the seller.

21. A method according to claim 18 wherein the interface allows a seller to provide information regarding the item for sale, the information including the item identifier, contact information for identifying the contact location, and description information for describing the item.

22. A method according to claim 21 wherein the interface allows a buyer to obtain data indicative of the description information.

23. A method according to claim 16 wherein the interface allows access to a computation platform that performs the process of any one of claims 1 to 14.

24. A system for interfacing buyers and sellers, the system including:

- a database for maintaining a plurality of records, each record being associated with an item identifier, each record including contact information for the seller;

- a server coupled to the database for selectively allowing querying and modification of the database;

- an interface coupled to the server, the interface allowing a buyer to access functionalities provided by the server, the functionalities including access to at least some information included in the records including the contact information.

25. A system according to claim 24 wherein the item identifier is a vehicle registration plate number for identifying a vehicle for sale by a seller.

26. A system according to claim 24 wherein the server accepts data that originates from the user of a telephone.

27. A system according to claim 24 wherein the server accepts data that originates from the user of a telephone who calls a predetermined premium-rate service.

28. A system according to claim 27 wherein the functionalities include output connecting the telephone to a contact location identified by the contact information.

29. A method according to claim 24 wherein the server performs the process of any one of claims 1 to 14.

30. A system for interfacing buyers and sellers, the system including:

a first input for accepting data indicative of an item identifier for identifying an item for sale by a seller;

a first processor responsive to the first input for searching a database for a record associated with the item identifier, the database including a plurality of records, each record being associated with an item identifier, each record including contact information for the seller;

a second input that is responsive to the first processor for, in the case that a record associated with the item identifier is found, accepting data indicative of one or more information requests relating to the record;

a second processor that is responsive to the second input for, in the case that an accepted information request is a contact request, defining output data indicative of the contact information for the record associated with the item identifier;

an output for providing the output data.

31. A system according to claim 30 wherein the item identifier is a vehicle registration plate number for identifying a vehicle for sale by a seller.

32. A system according to claim 30 wherein the first and second inputs accept data that originates from the user of a telephone.

33. A system according to claim 30 wherein the first and second inputs accept data that originates from the user of a telephone who calls a predetermined premium-rate service.

34. A system according to claim 32 wherein the output connects the telephone to a contact location identified by the contact information.

35. A method for processing remote user input, the method including the steps of:

- (i) accepting as input a signal including a plurality of sequential identifiers, each identifier being associated with one or more alphanumeric symbols;
- (ii) on the basis of the signal, querying a database to identify one or more registration plate identifiers corresponding to one or more possible permutations of the respective alphanumeric symbols associated with the plurality of sequential identifiers;

- (iii) assigning a relevance rating to each of the one or more identified registration plate identifiers;
- (iv) determining the registration plate identifier having the highest relevance rating;
- (v) providing audible output indicative of the registration plate identifier having the highest relevance rating.

36. A method according to claim 35 wherein step (iii) includes determining first geographical location data associated with the provider of the signal and comparing this with second geographical location data respectively associated with each of the one or more identified registration plate identifiers.

37. A method for processing remote user input, the method including the steps of:

- (i) accepting as input a signal including a plurality of sequential identifiers, each identifier being associated with one or more alphanumeric symbols;
- (ii) on the basis of the signal, querying a database to identify one or more records corresponding to one or more possible permutations of the respective alphanumeric symbols associated with the plurality of sequential identifiers;
- (iii) assigning a relevance rating to each of the one or more identified records;
- (iv) determining the record having the highest relevance rating;
- (v) providing audible output indicative of at least an aspect of the record having the highest relevance rating.

38. A process for interfacing buyers and sellers, the process including the steps of:

- (i) accepting as input data indicative of an item identifier for identifying an item for sale by a seller;
- (ii) searching a database for a record associated with the item identifier, the database including a plurality of records, each record being associated with an item identifier, each record including contact information for the seller;
- (iii) in the case that a record associated with the item identifier is found, providing an audible message associated with the record;
- (iv) subject to receipt of a request, providing as output data indicative of the contact information for the record associated with the item identifier.

39. A process for interfacing buyers and sellers, the process including the steps of:
- (i) accepting as input data indicative of a vehicle registration plate number for a vehicle that is for sale by a seller;
 - (ii) searching a database for a record associated with the registration plate number, the database including a plurality of records, each record being associated with a respective registration plate number, each record including contact information for the seller;
 - (iii) in the case that a record associated with the registration plate number is found, providing an audible message associated with the record;
 - (iv) subject to receipt of a request, providing as output data indicative of the contact information for the record associated with the item identifier.
40. A process for interfacing buyers and sellers, the process including the steps of:
- (i) accepting from a buyer's cellular telephone as input data indicative of a vehicle registration plate number for a vehicle that is for sale by a seller;
 - (ii) searching a database for a record associated with the registration plate number, the database including a plurality of records, each record being associated with a respective registration plate number, each record including contact information for the seller's cellular telephone;
 - (iii) in the case that a record associated with the registration plate number is found, providing an audible message associated with the record;
 - (iv) subject to receipt of a request, connecting the buyer's cellular telephone to the seller's telephone.
41. A process for interfacing buyers and sellers, the process including the steps of:
- (i) accepting from a buyer's cellular telephone as input data indicative of a vehicle registration plate number for a vehicle that is for sale by a seller;
 - (ii) searching a database for a record associated with the registration plate number, the database including a plurality of records, each record being associated with a respective registration plate number, each record including contact information for the seller's cellular telephone;
 - (iii) in the case that a record associated with the item identifier is found, providing an audible message associated with the record;

- (iv) subject to receipt of a request, providing data indicative of contact information relating to the buyer's cellular telephone by way of an electronic message to the seller's cellular telephone.

42. A process for interfacing buyers and sellers, the process including the steps of:

- (i) accepting as input data indicative of an item identification number communicated by way of an advertisement by a seller;
- (ii) searching a database for a record associated with item identification number, the database including a plurality of records, each record being associated with a respective item identification number;
- (iii) in the case that a record associated with the item identification identifier is found, either:
 - a. providing as output data indicative of seller contact information for the record associated with the item identifier; or
 - b. providing as output data indicative of an instruction to provide further data associated with the record to the buyer.

43. A process for interfacing buyers and sellers, the process including the steps of:

- (i) accepting as input data indicative of an advertisement identification number communicated by way of an advertisement by a seller;
- (ii) searching a database for a record associated with the advertisement identification number, the database including a plurality of records, each record being associated with a respective advertisement identification number, each record including contact information for the seller;
- (iii) in the case that a record associated with the advertisement identification number is found, providing an audible message associated with the record;
- (iv) subject to receipt of a request, either:
 - a. providing as output data indicative of the contact information for the record associated with the item identifier; or
 - b. providing as output data an instruction to provide further data associated with the record to the buyer.

44. A process for interfacing buyers and sellers, the process including the steps of:

- (i) accepting as input data indicative of an advertisement identification number communicated by way of an advertisement by a seller;
- (ii) searching a database for a record associated with advertisement identification number, the database including a plurality of records, each record being associated with a respective advertisement identification number, each record including contact information for the seller;
- (iii) in the case that a record associated with the advertisement identification number is found, providing an audible message associated with the record;
- (v) subject to receipt of a request, providing as output data indicative of the contact information for the record associated with the item identifier.

45. A process for interfacing buyers and sellers, the process including the steps of:

- (i) accepting as input data indicative of an advertisement identification number communicated by way of an advertisement by a seller;
- (ii) searching a database for a record associated with advertisement identification number, the database including a plurality of records, each record being associated with a respective advertisement identification number, each record including contact information for the seller;
- (iii) in the case that a record associated with the advertisement identification number is found, providing an audible message associated with the record;
- (iv) subject to receipt of a request, providing as output data an instruction to provide further data associated with the record to the buyer.

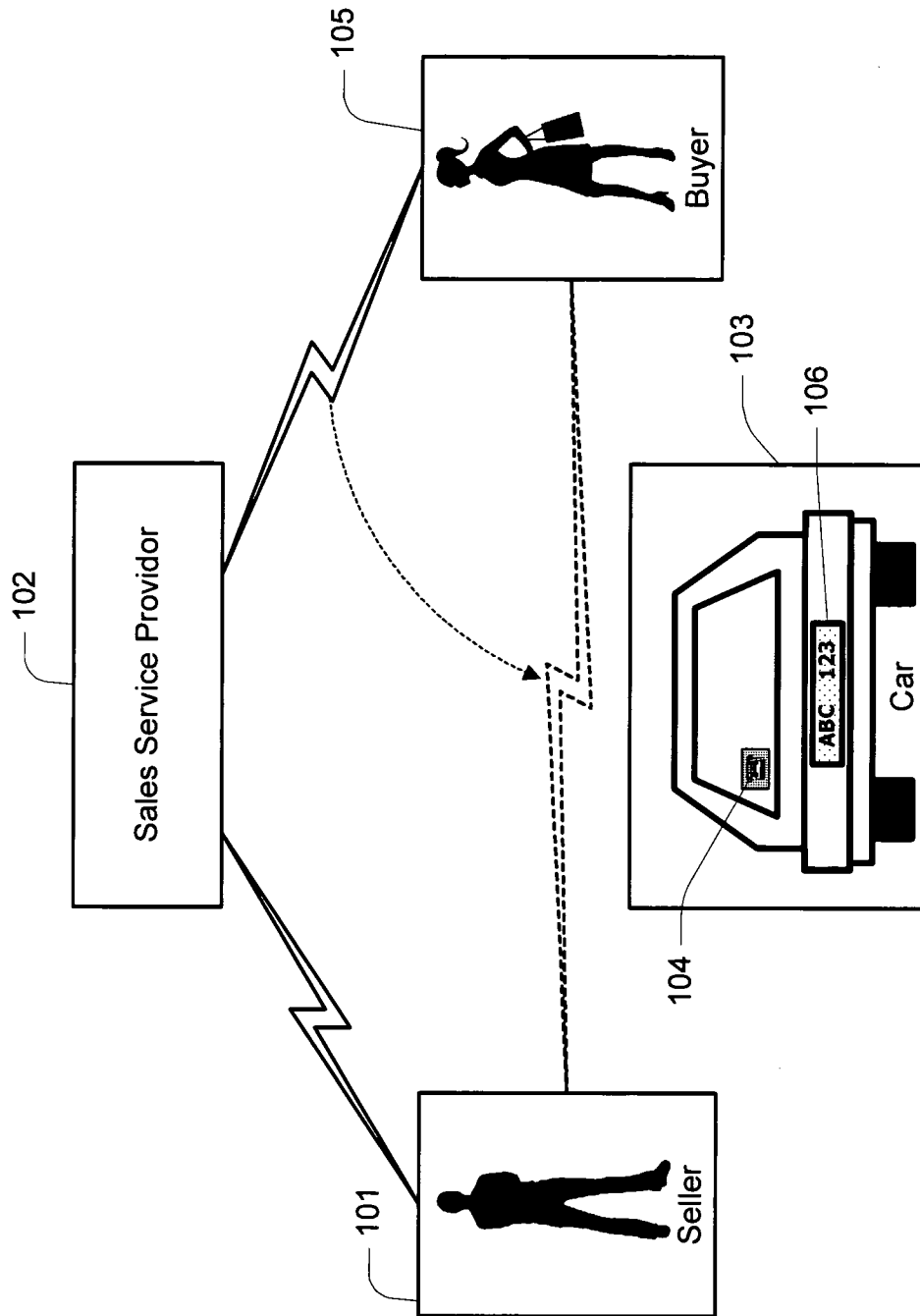


FIG. 1

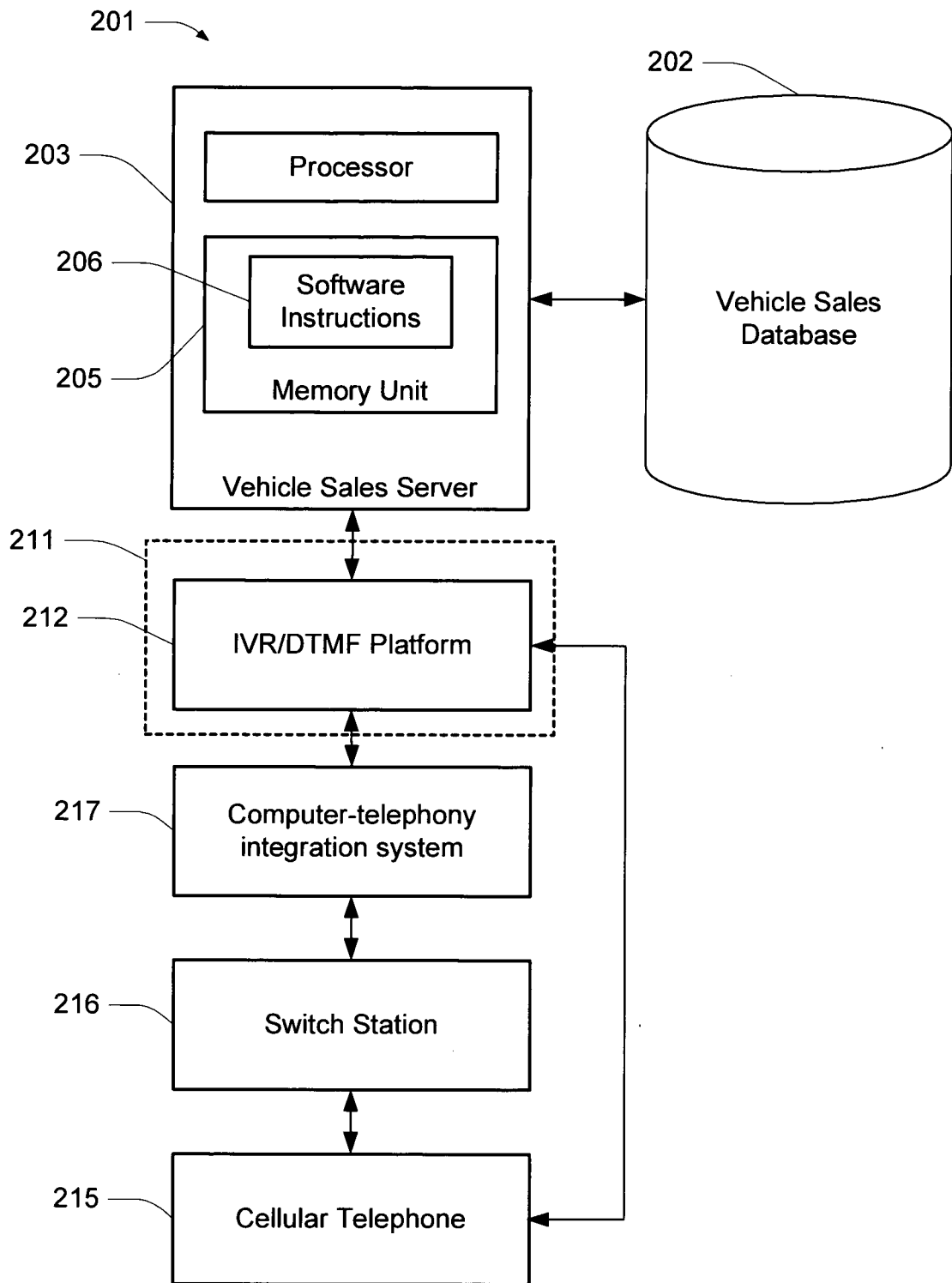


FIG. 2

Registration ID	Seller ID	Description Information	Contact Information
ABC 123	1455	ABC123.WAV	555-2837
ABC 124	9347	NULL	555-3838
ABC 130	2283	ABC130.WAV	555-0922
.	.	.	.
.	.	.	.
.	.	.	.
.	.	.	.
.	.	.	.
.	.	.	.

FIG. 3

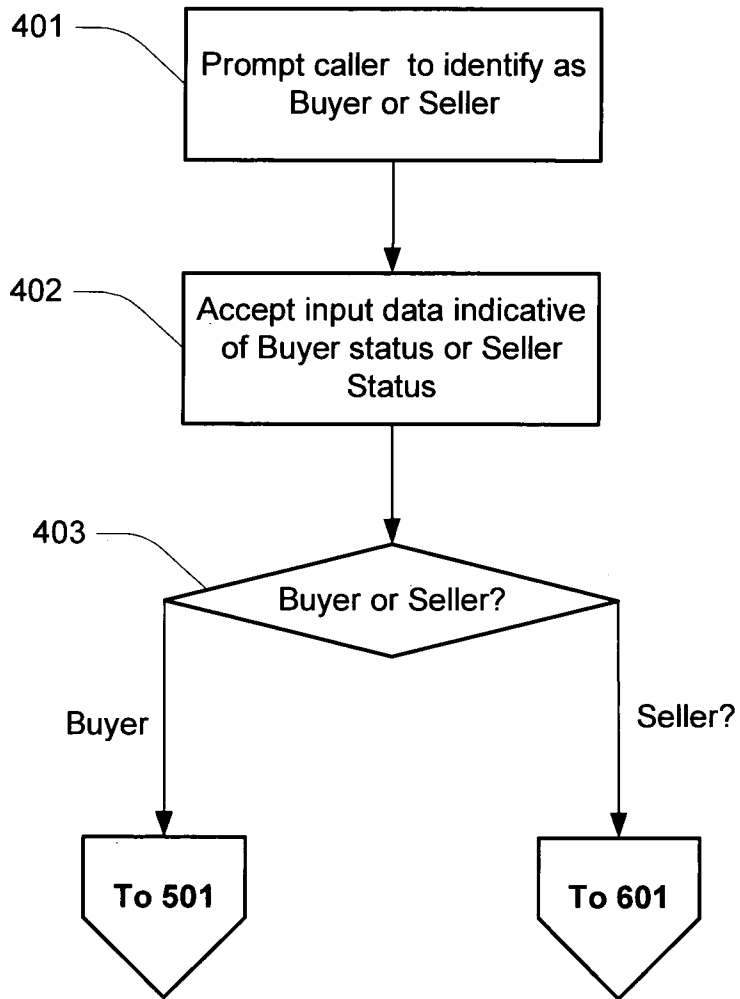


FIG. 4

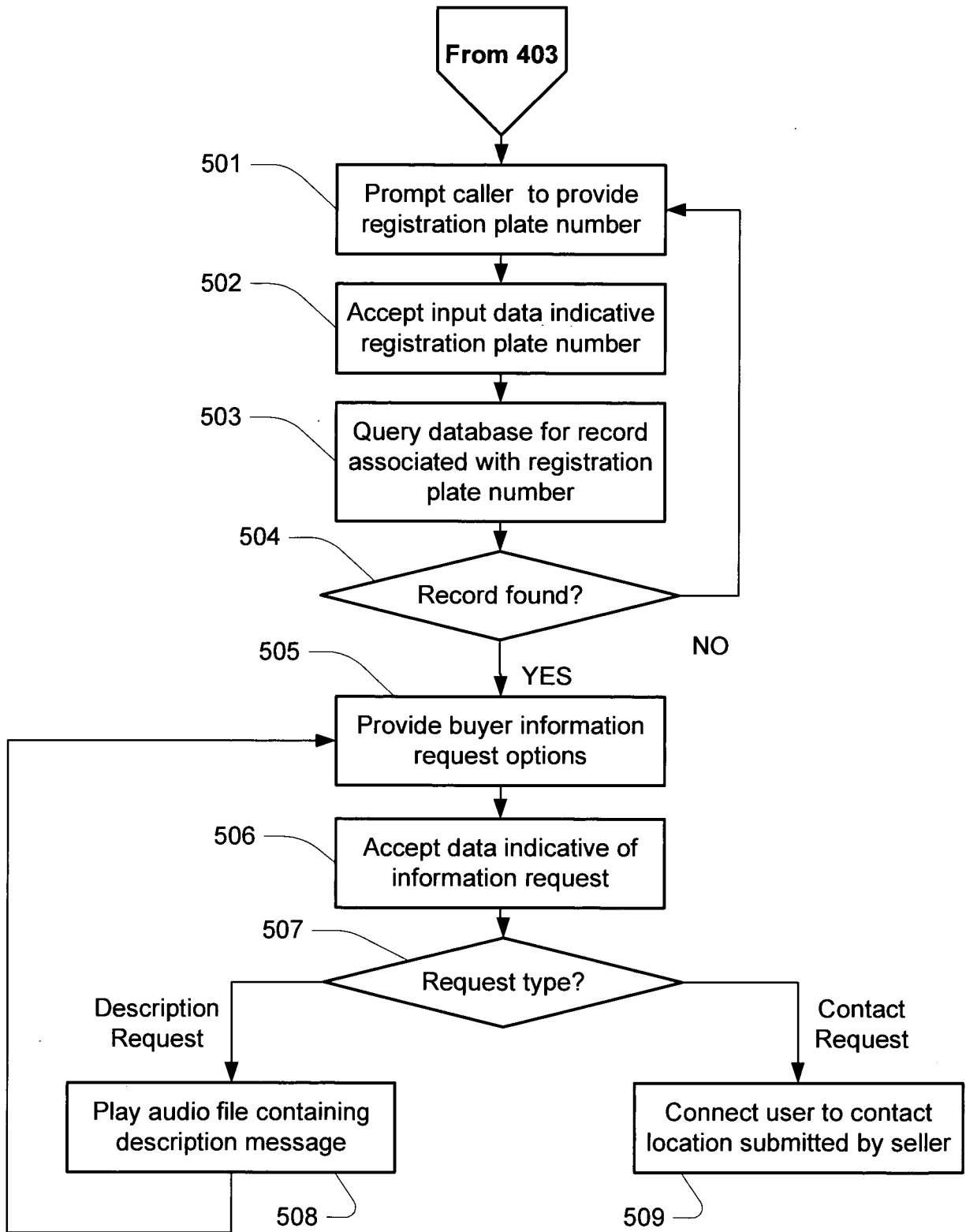


FIG. 5

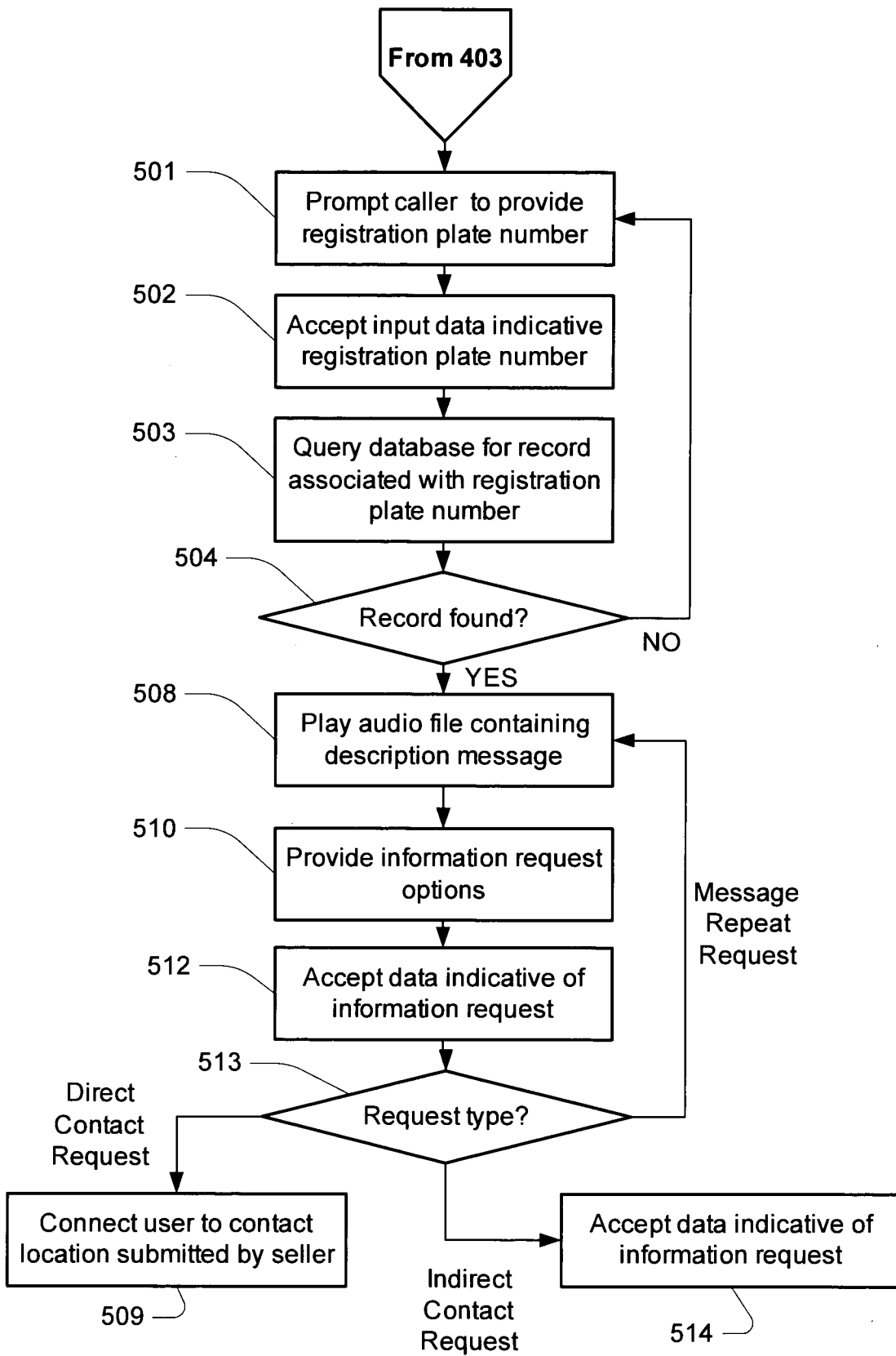


FIG. 5A

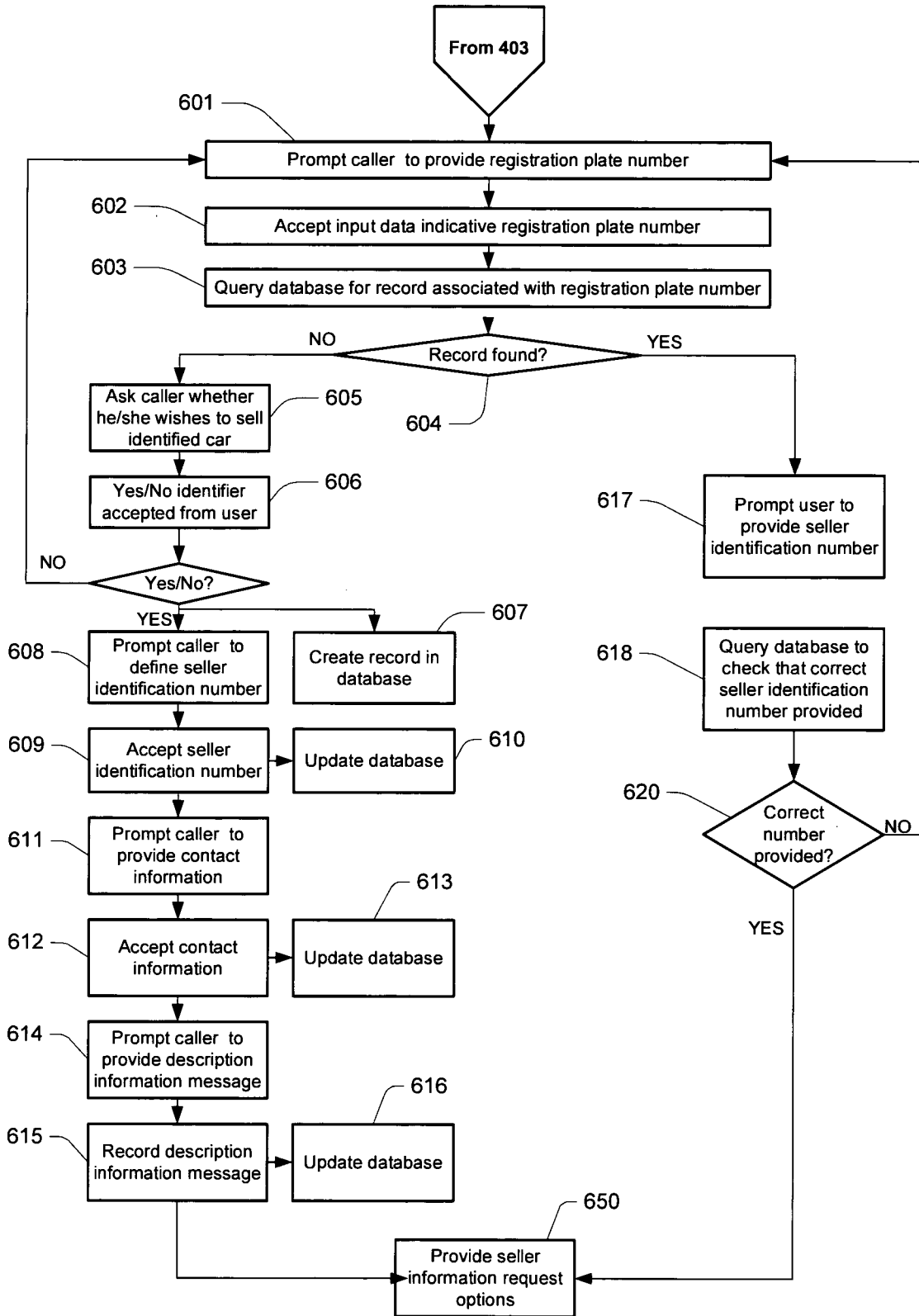


FIG. 6

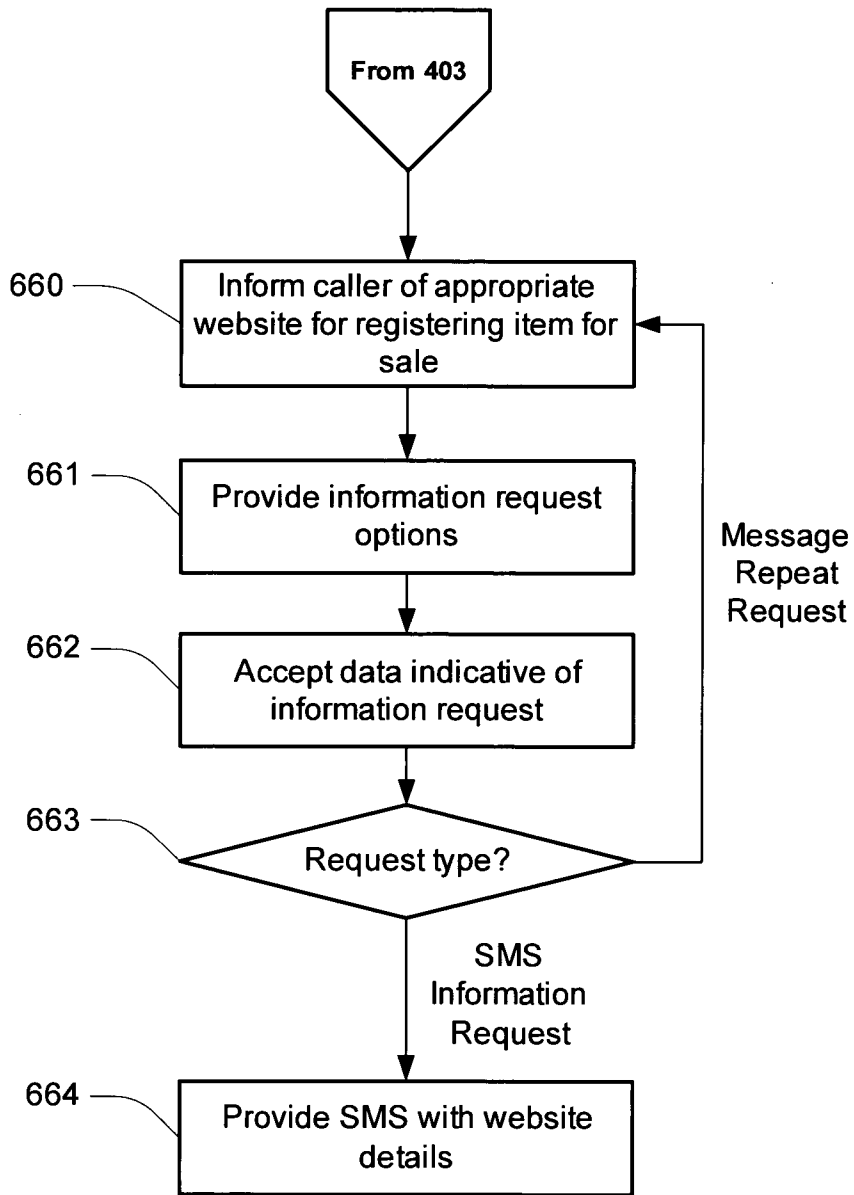


FIG. 6A

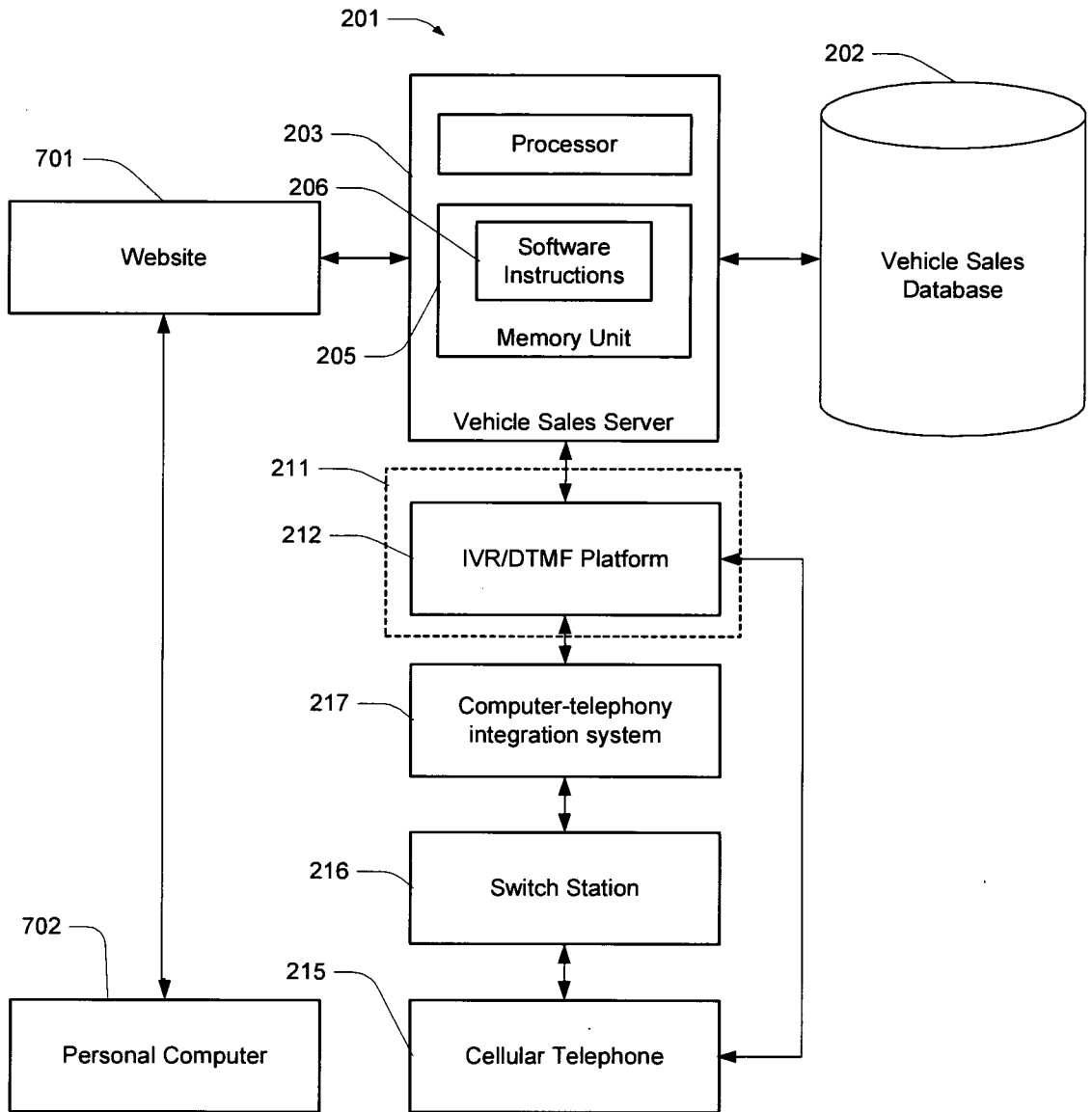


FIG. 7

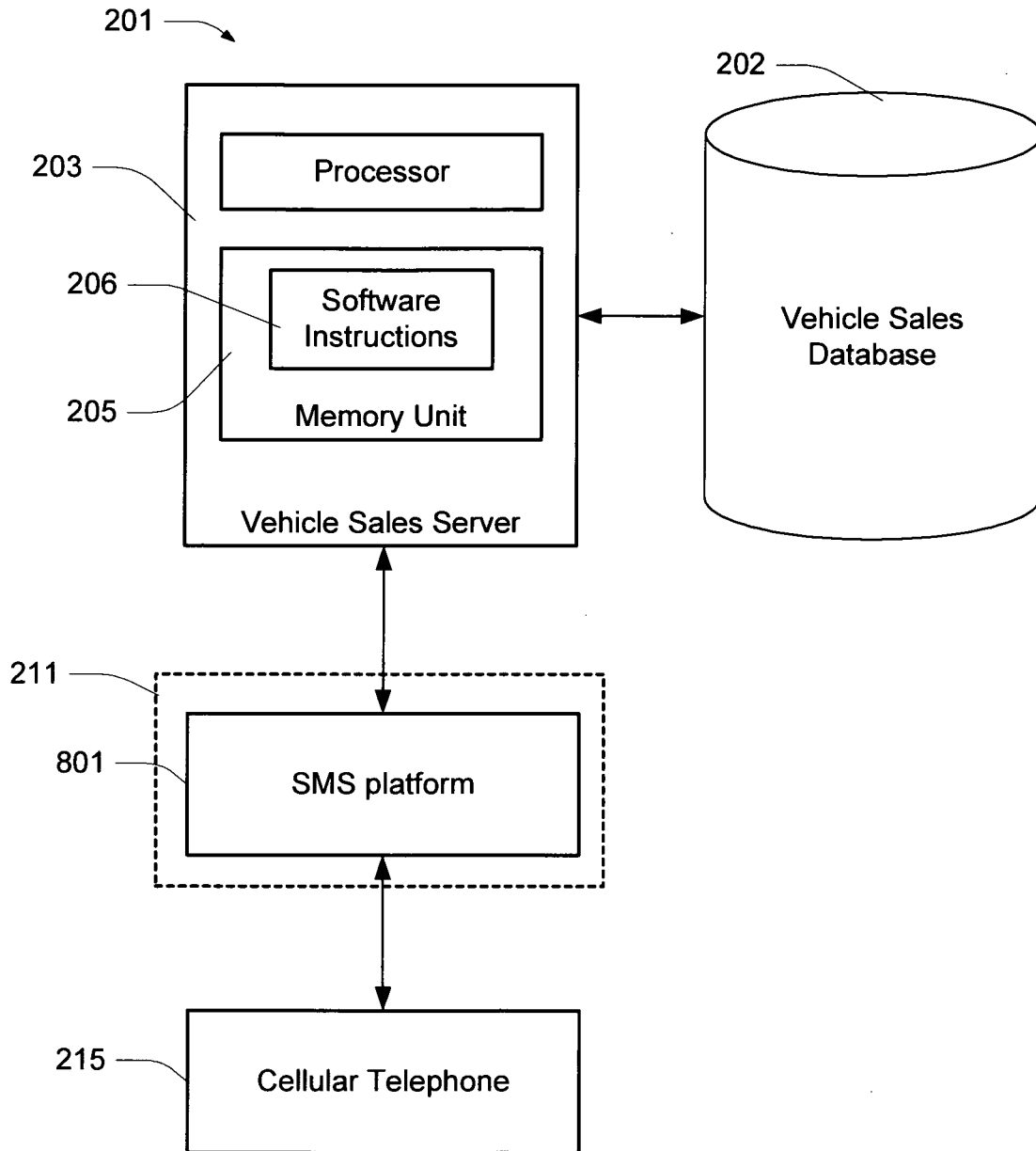
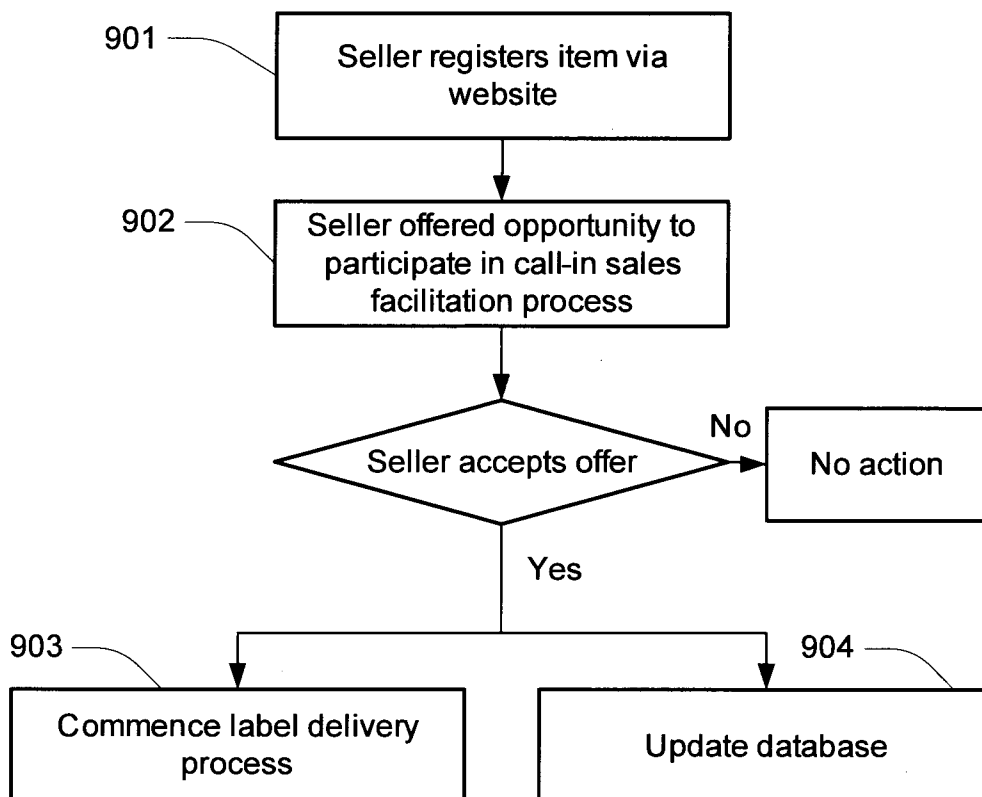


FIG. 8

**FIG. 9**

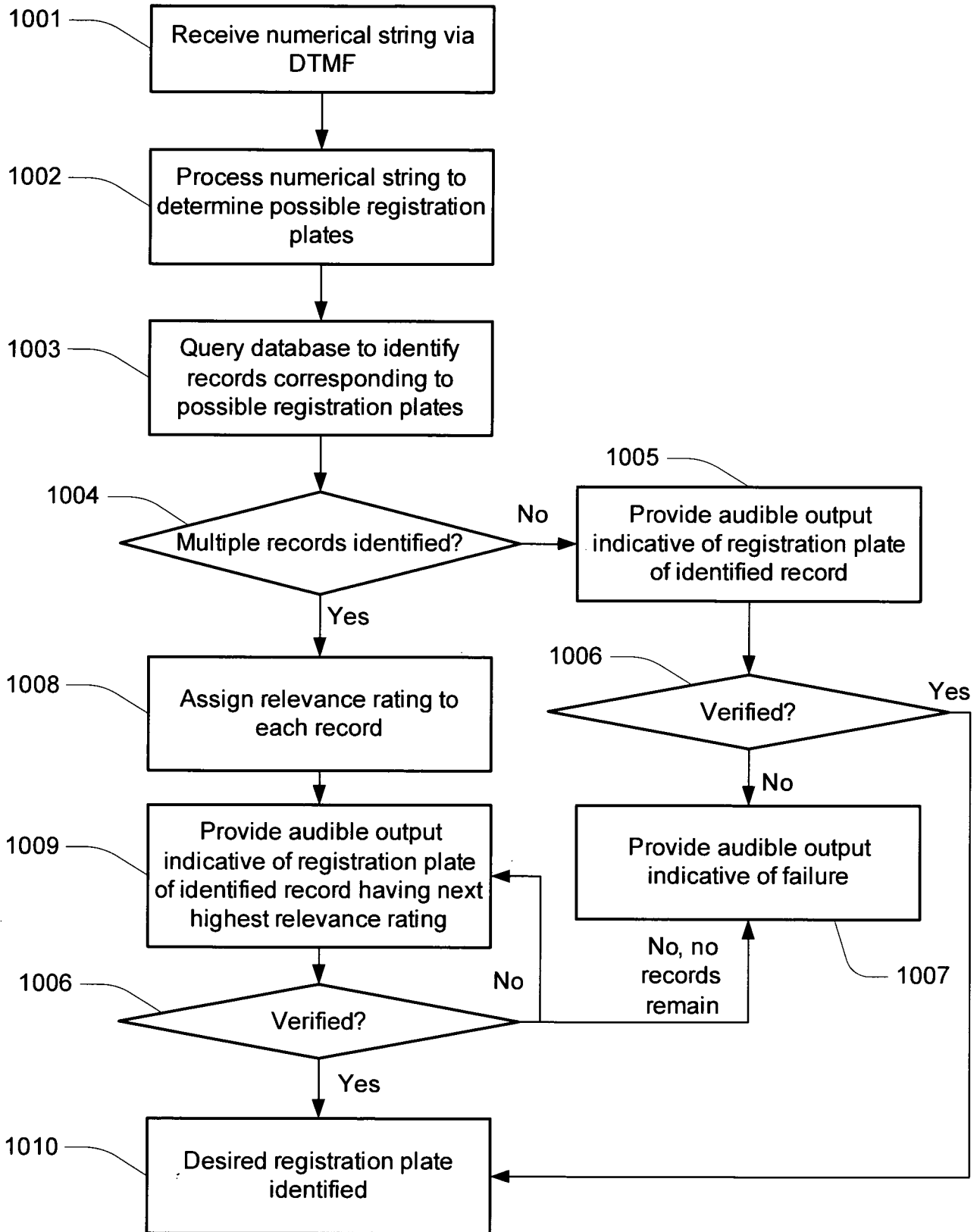


FIG. 10

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.
PCT/AU2007/001728**A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER**

Int. Cl.

G06Q 30/00 (2006.01)

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)

Internet, USPTO, DWPI using keywords: advertising, marketing, classified, unique, identifier, buyer, customer, vendor, seller, Internet, sticker, decal, sign, interactive, vehicle, car, motor, private sale, FSBO

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X	US 2006/0085208 A1 (NELSON ET AL.) 20 April 2006 See whole document, in particular: Abstract, Paras 0034 – 0067, Figs 1 – 7	1 – 45
A	US 2005/0116935 A1 (EVANS) 1 June 2006 See whole document.	
A	US 6641037 B2 (WILLIAMS) 4 November 2003 See whole document	

Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C

See patent family annex

* Special categories of cited documents:		
"A" document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance	"T" later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention	
"E" earlier application or patent but published on or after the international filing date	"X" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone	
"L" document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)	"Y" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art	
"O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means	"&" document member of the same patent family	
"P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed		

Date of the actual completion of the international search
05 December 2007Date of mailing of the international search report
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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

Information on patent family members

International application No.

PCT/AU2007/001728

This Annex lists the known "A" publication level patent family members relating to the patent documents cited in the above-mentioned international search report. The Australian Patent Office is in no way liable for these particulars which are merely given for the purpose of information.

Patent Document Cited in Search Report		Patent Family Member					
US	2006085208	NONE					
US	2005116935	DE	1020040582	JP	2005161058		
US	6641037	AU	2002353300	GB	2399918	US	2003111531
		US	2005055281	WO	03050734		
Due to data integration issues this family listing may not include 10 digit Australian applications filed since May 2001.							
END OF ANNEX							