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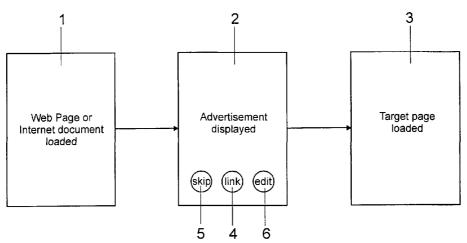
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(54) Title: COMMUNICATING INFORMATION ON THE INTERNET OR LIKE COMMUNICATIONS NETWORK



(57) Abstract: A system i provided for the presentation of information, in particular advertising matter, on a "push" basis is provided for use in a computer based network system, and in particular the Internet. The network has at least one service provider, and generally many, wherein each service provider has a plurality of web sites resident on a web server so that network users are able to access such web sites. At least some of the web sites include a web page having links providing for selective connection to a chosen target web page which may be one of a plurality of possible target web pages. At least one or some of the web pages transferred to a user station are each based on primary data for creating the requested target page display at the user station and secondary data for either itself creating a secondary page display, typically an advertisement, at said user station or for streaming in data from elsewhere to create a secondary page display at said user station. The programming of the system is such that following a request for the target web page, the secondary page display is displayed automatically in advance of the target page being displayed, generally for a limited period of time. Various optional refinements and variations to the system are provided.

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COMMUNICATING INFORMATION ON THE INTERNET OR LIKE COMMUNICATIONS NETWORK

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FIELD OF THE INVENTION

This invention relates to the communication of information on the Internet or any other such computer based information technology network and, more particularly, to the communication of information on a "push" basis wherein the information is provided to an Internet or network user in spite of the fact that the information has not been requested. The information is generally of an advertising nature but this is not necessarily so.

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It is to be noted that although this specification will refer specifically to the Internet it is intended that the scope of the invention include any other appropriate computer based information system in which access to a computerized server, that either itself provides requested information or seeks requested information elsewhere, is achieved by way of a computer utilizing either a modem and land lines or wireless communication as well as any other electronic communications device such as, for example, appropriate types of mobile telephones, in particular cellular telephones.

25 BACKGROUND TO THE INVENTION

Communicating information on the Internet on a "push" basis can tend to irritate Internet users by virtue of the way in which the information (herein referred to as advertising information irrespective of its actual nature) is presented.

One method commonly used to present advertising information is the socalled banner advertisement in which advertisements occupy a small window within the screen on a computer monitor and various advertisements can be displayed in a sequential manner in this window. This method is generally regarded as being distracting to someone trying to concentrate on the activity in which they are involved.

Another method is the so-called pop-up advertisement that simply appears in a window, usually in the middle of the screen, at any unexpected moment and this is similarly irritating or upsetting to the Internet user. This method therefore has the same disadvantage as the so-called banner advertisement.

On the other hand, advertising on the Internet may generally be regarded as essential because a huge amount of information is made available on various web sites on the Internet free of charge with the only benefit to the proprietor of the web site being that obtained as a result of advertising.

OBJECT OF THE INVENTION

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It is, accordingly, an object of this invention to provide for the presentation of information on a "push" basis on the Internet or other similar type of network that may be considered to be more acceptable from a user's point of view whilst nevertheless providing those wishing to present information, and in particular, advertisers, with the opportunity of communicating with the network user.

For the purpose of the understanding of this specification the term web site will be used in what applicant believes to be the correct sense thereof in that a web site consists of a plurality of web pages with each web page consisting generally of a single file (usually at the present time primarily an HTML file with multiple susidiary files of various other formats) capable of display on a

computer screen at one time albeit by scrolling up and down. The term home page is taken to mean an entry web page of a web site from which connection with other web pages of that web site can be made by way of links displayed on the home page. Of course any web page may, and usually does, have links displayed thereon that can be used to connect with other web pages (including the home page) of that particular web site or with other web sites. The term target page or target web page should be taken to mean a web page of the same or another web site that has been requested by a network user in consequence of the user having clicked on a link associated with that target web page.

It should also be understood that, whilst the terms discussed above are particularly used in relation to the Internet, the invention is not in any way limited in application to the Internet itself and the terms should be interpreted as applying to equivalent items in any other computer server based network.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

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In accordance with one aspect of this invention there is provided a computer based network system composed of at least one service provider and wherein the or each service provider has a plurality of web sites resident on a web server so that network users are able to access such web sites and wherein further, at least some of the web sites include a web page (including a home page) having links providing for selective connection to a chosen target web page which may be one of a plurality of possible target web pages, the system being characterized in that at least one or some of the web pages transferred to a user station are each based on primary data for creating a target page display at the user station and secondary data for either itself creating a secondary page display at said user station or for streaming in data from elsewhere to create a secondary page display at said user station and wherein the programming is such that following a request for

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the target page the secondary page display is displayed automatically in advance of the target page being displayed.

Further features of this aspect of the invention provide for the computer based network to be the Internet; for the secondary page display to include advertising material of an advertiser; for the secondary page display to have thereon selection activator means in the form of a link for enabling a user to access the web site of the advertiser and also optionally for the arrangement to be such that clicking anywhere in the advertisement will also connect the user with the web site of the advertiser; for the secondary page display to be adapted to display for a limited period of time of the order of from three to ten seconds, preferably from three to five seconds, before proceeding to display of the target page; for the secondary page display to have thereon selection activator means whereby, at the user's option, termination of the display of the secondary page display can be requested in which case the programming may optionally provide for the secondary page display to persist for a minimum period of time irrespective of operation of the selection activator means; for the secondary page display to include selection activator means for accessing a selection program whereby a user is able to select or deselect categories of advertising material falling within a series of different categories; and for there to be two or more different sets of secondary data for displaying alternative secondary pages according to user selection stored at the server or user end, for example.

The latter feature enables advertising matter most appropriate to a particular user to be made available to that user. Also, where there are a series of different sets of secondary data pertaining to advertisements of a significant number of advertisers, a particular set of secondary data may be selected, within the constraints of user selection indicated above, on a sequential or a random basis. At the time of receipt of a request for a target page, accordingly, a particular set of secondary data is selected and associated

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with the primary data of the target page and then transferred to the user station.

In the implementation of the invention over the Internet via a conventional modem the secondary data is generally loaded together with the primary data so as to be instantly available. In the case of fast communication means such as cable, the secondary data can be called up from a remote server as and when required in which case the secondary data accompanying the primary data simply identifies the address at which the secondary data for forming the secondary page display is to be obtained.

Implementation of the invention therefore gives rise to a situation in which, at the request of a target page, the secondary display will firstly appear on the screen of the computer at the user station and this secondary display which will almost invariably embody advertising material will generally, but not of necessity, at least have activation means enabling the user to skip further display thereof, albeit only after a non-evadable limited period of time, in order to proceed directly to the target page.

20 In the preferred form of the invention the secondary page display will also have a link enabling a user to connect to the relevant advertiser's web site and it is also preferred that a third activation means be provided for enabling a user to enter a selection program to choose categories of advertisements from a variety of different categories which the particular user would like to be given the opportunity to view and more particularly to deselect categories optionally only down to a pre-selected minimum number of categories. As a default setting all categories would generally be selected and it would be up to the user to deselect categories not of interest down to the preset minimum.

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In the preferred form the secondary display could therefore display a selection of three activation means say in the form of three "buttons" or the

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like which can be clicked selectively to choose to skip the advertisement as quickly as possible; to link to the advertiser's web site or a particular web page; or to enter the selection program indicated above. As indicated above, linking with the advertiser's web site could also be arranged to be achieved by clicking anywhere within the advertisement itself.

The invention thus envisages a situation in which a plurality, and generally an appreciable number, of different advertisements could be available to form the secondary display with one being selected according to the preferences entered by a user by way of the selection program, and then possibly on the random or sequential basis indicated above. Alternatively, each primary display could have associated with it secondary display data of one particular advertisement in which case, if the user has not selected the relevant category, the primary data of the target page will be immediately displayed without a secondary display preceding it.

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In accordance with a second aspect of the invention there is provided a web server on which there are resident a plurality of web sites including web pages capable of becoming target pages and wherein the server is programmed such that web pages sent to a requesting user station are based on primary and secondary data as defined above and wherein the web page or web server, or both, includes program material ensuring the display of a secondary display corresponding to secondary data in advance of the display of the associated primary display corresponding to the primary data at the said requesting user station.

The invention still further provides web page generating data having associated therewith program material ensuring the display of a secondary display corresponding to secondary data as defined above before the display of an associated primary display corresponding to primary data as defined above.

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The invention also provides a web page composed of primary and secondary data adapted for inclusion in a system as defined above.

Preferably the secondary display will occupy a full screen of a computer monitor although it is also within the scope of the invention for the secondary display to be displayed as a part screen display along the lines of a pop-up displayed over the target page. Whichever the configuration the secondary display is dominant at least until the "skip" facility is initiated or the default time period for which the secondary display is programmed to be displayed has expired.

In accordance with a third aspect of the invention there is provided a method of advertising on the Internet comprising the steps of adding advertising secondary data to web page primary data requested by a user station and wherein the secondary data and primary data are programmed such that the advertising secondary data gives rise to a secondary display of an advertisement ahead of the display of the requested web page primary data.

In order that the invention may be more fully understood the more detailed application thereof will now be described with reference to the accompanying drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

- 25 In the drawings:-
 - Figure 1 illustrates the sequence of the display during the process of connecting with a target page; and,
- Figure 2 illustrates the inter-association of the various servers involved in the procedure.

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DETAILED DESCRIPTION WITH REFERENCE TO THE DRAWINGS

The following description will be directed at the Internet and, more particularly, the description will relate to an Internet web page in a web site whether for viewing via a web browser, including a web browser in a mobile telephone such as a cellular telephone, interactive television, Web TV, or other devices into which an HTML-based Internet document may be loaded.

In terms of this invention, and as illustrated in Figure 1, when a target web page is requested by a user station as a result of the user clicking on a link in any web page of a web site, particularly a home page, during the loading process of a primary data file constituting the target web page (1), a secondary data file (or files), constituting the secondary data referred to above, and containing one or more internet advertisements (2) is loaded at the same time but is not visible. The secondary data file may alternatively be streamed to the user when a link is clicked on. The secondary data file could be of any suitable type such as an animated GIF, Macromedia Shockwave Flash, Dynamic HTML, or similar file making use of graphics, vector graphics, sound, and animation.

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The advertisement (2) is then immediately displayed, without delay, in the same web browser window or page for a period of time before the target page (3) is loaded and displayed. The particular link that is clicked on in order to request a target page may determine, at least some extent, which advertisement out of a whole range of advertisements (in the event that a whole range exists which will generally be the case) is displayed. The actual advertisement may thus be determined as follows.

All of the secondary data files of advertisements available may be divided into a predetermined number of categories, in the first place, and may also be made available for use in association with particular links and then in

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particular web pages or web sites. As will be apparent from the aforegoing and the following, the various categories of advertisements can be deselected down to a predetermined minimum number of categories, for example two or three. A user will therefore be compelled to receive at least advertisements within the minimum number of categories in the manner provided by this invention.

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The association of a particular advertisement to a particular link that is activated on a particular web page is therefore produced in one of two ways, or both. The advertisement to be displayed would have to fall within a category that has not been deselected and, in the event that there is a plurality of possibilities available in respect of the link that has been activated and in the selected categories then the selection of a particular advertisement may take place in a random fashion or in a sequential fashion progressively as different users click on the same link. And the selection of a particular advertisement may also take place in a program manner dependent on, for example, a higher or lower fee being paid by the advertiser.

A record of whether or not a user has deselected any particular categories would preferably be maintained on a data base associated with the web server and any particular user would be recognized, in the usual way, by a cookie installed in the users computer at the time of first use of the particular web server. Thus, on the occasion of a first use, a default selection of categories would be employed and this default selection would generally be all of the categories.

A selected secondary display, namely the advertisement, thus appears on the screen ahead of the web page requested being the primary display and the advertisement is displayed for a predetermined period of time, as indicated above, from say three to ten seconds and preferably from three to five seconds. The secondary display has, in the preferred implementation of the invention three buttons (4, 5, 6) providing the user with three alternatives other than waiting for the default time period for which the advertisement is to be displayed to expire.

These three alternatives are that by clicking on the one button (4) the user can be connected with the web site or a web page of the advertiser. As indicated above, it is also preferred that clicking on any part of the advertisement would also connect the user with the advertiser's web site.

Clicking on the second button (5) will curtail the display of the advertisement to a minimum period of time, say three seconds, whereafter the display will immediately proceed to the target web page corresponding to the primary web page data. It is within the scope of this invention, of course, that there be no minimum period in which case the display would immediately proceed to the target web page in the event that this button is clicked.

Clicking on the third button (6) would have the effect of calling up a selection program in which there would be displayed a full list of all categories in which the advertisements are stored and the user would be given the option to deselect any or all of the categories but generally down to a pre-selected minimum of say two or three. Compelling a user to view at least a limited number of advertisements would generally be considered as being equitable to the advertisers although it is also within the scope of the invention that all categories could be deselected.

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Turning now to the practical implementation of the invention for use in a web browser on the Internet, the following components could be employed:

(i) An HTML page with JavaScript tags [named herein the "Ad-Click Function" in the example] that result in the primary web page data being hidden and the secondary advertising data being displayed when clicking on any links with the JavaScript Trigger tag included in

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it. The JavaScript Trigger tag also includes the location and name of the file to be displayed as an advert. An additional feature is the preloading of these files by means of standard JavaScript preload functions for image files such as GIF or JPG, or in the case of Macromedia Shockwave Flash (flash) files, embedding these files in the primary page 1 pixel x 1 pixel in size so as to hide them from being viewed by the user.

- (ii) A secondary data file containing an advert (for the purposes of this explanation a flash file) with scripts embedded in the file allowing for: clicking on the three buttons referred to above, namely the "button" indicated by numeral (4) to view the advertisers web site; the "button" indicated by numeral (5) for advancing immediately, or after a minimum delay, from the advert; and the "button" indicated by numeral (6) for configuring the users viewing preferences in terms of what categories of adverts or promotions have the users interest.
 - (iii) A database and administrative application for managing the adverts and user preferences and serving the specified adverts and preferences to the system on an on-demand basis.
 - (iv) A site indexing engine for creating content to advert associations in particular by automatically installing the necessary meta tags.
- 25 (v) An auditing system for tracking and reporting on the number of times an advert is viewed, clicked on, skipped or any other relevant information pertaining to the billing of an advertiser and / or statistical analysis.

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The following is an example of HTML code including advertisement scripts:

```
<SCRIPT LANGUAGE="Javascript">
     //----- InPage AdClick Function (included in header of all pages) ------
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     function adclick(url,ad){
            adtext='<OBJECT CLASSID="..."
                  + 'WIDTH="100%" HEIGHT="100%"
10
                  + 'CODEBASE="...">'
                  + '<PARAM NAME="MOVIE" VALUE="" + ad +"">'
                  + '<PARAM NAME="PLAY" VALUE="true">'
                  + '<PARAM NAME="LOOP" VALUE="false">'
                  + '<PARAM NAME="QUALITY" VALUE="high">'
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                  + '<PARAM NAME="MENU" VALUE="false">'
                  + '<EMBED SRC=" + ad + ""
                  + 'WIDTH="100%" HEIGHT="100%"
                  + 'PLAY="true"
                  + 'LOOP="false"
20
                  + 'QUALITY="high"
                  + 'MENU="false"
                  + 'TYPE="application/x-shockwave-flash"
                  + 'PLUGINSPAGE="...">'
                  + '</EMBED>'
25
                  + '</OBJECT>';
            document.close();
            document.open();
            document.write('<');
30
            document.write('SCRIPT>');
            document.write('function jumpto(){window.location = "" + url + "";}');
            document.write('</');
            document.write('SCRIPT>');
            document.write('<HTML><BODY><CENTER>' + adtext +
35
     '</BODY></HTML>');
            document.write('<');
```

```
document.write('SCRIPT>');
            timerID=setTimeout('jumpto()',5000);
     }
 5
     </SCRIPT>
     <HTML>
10
     <title>InPage.com</title>
     <BODY>
     <!----- Preload Flash Adverts – not visible (dynamically generated from
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     advert database) ----->
     <object classid="..." codebase="..." width=1 height=1>
        <param name="movie" value="advert01.swf">
        <param name=quality value=high>
        <param name=bgcolor value=#FFFFFF>
20
        <embed src="advert01.swf" quality=high bgcolor=#FFFFFF width=1 height=1</pre>
     type="shockwave-flash">
        </embed>
     </object>
25
     <object classid="... " codebase="..." width=1 height=1>
        <param name="movie" value="advert02.swf">
        <param name=quality value=high>
        <param name=bgcolor value=#FFFFFF>
        <embed src="advert02.swf" quality=high bgcolor=#FFFFFF width=1 height=1</pre>
30
     type="shockwave-flash">
       </embed>
     </object>
```

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<!- Page Links with JavaScript Triggers (adverts associated with links dynamically generated from advert database) ->

```
<a href="javascript:adclick('link01.htm','advert01.swf');">Link01</a><br>
<a href="javascript:adclick('link02.htm','advert02.swf');">Link02</a><br>
<a href="javascript:adclick('link03.htm','advert01.swf');">Link03</a><br>
<a href="javascript:adclick('link04.htm','advert02.swf');">Link04</a>
```

</BODY>

10 </HTML>

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In one practical application of the invention the secondary data file of an advertisement is served up by a computerized server (proxy server) that is interposed between the content server from which the primary data of a web page is served and the site users. This computerized server transparently adds the secondary data of advertisements and code (Ad-Click Functions) to existing web page data on the content server as they go through it to reach the end user. Therefore, the system of this invention can be implemented with minimal or no modification to an existing content server.

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The invention may therefore be implemented by using an inline caching, or proxy, server.

For the proof of concept implementation a proxy server was used but ideally it is envisaged that the invention will be implemented as a transparent proxy with unnumbered interfaces between the content server and the network.

The proxy server is adapted to check all http responses from the content server and parses any content with a text/html mimetype. The parsing involves scanning the HTML for specific META tags applied in terms of this invention; applying the secondary data in the form of JavaScript to the html; and attaching the "unseen" secondary data content. The proxy then reconstructs the HTTP headers to compensate for the response size

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changes and sends the parsed content on to the end user's browser.

The proxy server method was chosen because it appears that it is presently the most scalable system available. It can be implemented on any platform and is not reliant on any of the content servers features. Doubtless other methods can be used and such methods are all intended to fall within the scope of this invention.

However, the use of a proxy server results in independence from the content server which makes the system of this invention easy to implement across a wide variety of platforms with the least effort.

A few meta tags have been created for use with the system of the invention to better target adverts and allow for a certain degree of customization and troubleshooting. The META tags are placed in the <HEAD> section of the content HTML document. Some examples of the META tags used are:

Systemsection

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The name of the site section that this page belongs to. Sections are created by the application administrator so as to organise the advertisements according to site section.

Systemkeywords

A comma separated list of keywords that can relate to advertisements. Keywords are matched with keywords that are associated with adverts when they are added by the system administrator. This allows for advertisements being served that are content targeted.

Systemcat

A comma seperated list of pre-defined system categories that the page belongs to. These categories are fixed and are used by the system to allow users to profile which advertisements they would like to receive across all system enabled sites.

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SystemnoAds

If this tag is found in the document no system advertisements are added to the document. This is useful for framesets and other pages that do not require advertisements in them. This can also be used to remove advertisements in any section of the site where advertisements are not desirable.

The first 3 tags along with the users profile (if it exists) are used by the advertisements selection algorithm to define which advertisements should be added to a web page. The more detailed the tags the more targeted the advertisements become.

There are, of course numerous different ways of implementing the concepts of this invention and the aforegoing is purely illustrative.

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CLAIMS:

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- 1. A computer based network system composed of at least one service provider and wherein the or each service provider has a plurality of web sites resident on a web server so that network users are able to access such web sites and wherein further, at least some of the web sites include a web page having links providing for selective connection to a chosen target web page which may be one of a plurality of possible target web pages, the system being characterized in that at least one or some of the web pages transferred to a user station are each based on primary data for creating a target page display at the user station and non-requested secondary data for either itself creating a secondary page display at said user station or for streaming in data from elsewhere to create a secondary page display at said user station and wherein the programming is such that following a request for the target web page the secondary page display is displayed automatically in advance of the target page being displayed.
- 2. A computer based network system as claimed in claim 1 in which the network is the Internet.
 - A computer based network system as claimed in either one of claims 1
 or 2 in which the secondary page display includes advertising material
 of an advertiser.

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4. A computer based network system as claimed in claim 3 in which the secondary page display has thereon selection activator means in the form of a link for enabling a user to access the web site of the advertiser.

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5. A computer based network system as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 4 in which the secondary page display is adapted to display for a limited period of time of the order of from three to ten seconds before proceeding to display of the requested target web page.

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- 6. A computer based network system as claimed in claim 4 in which the limited time period is from three to five seconds.
- 7. A computer based network system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims in which the secondary page display has thereon selection activator means whereby, at the user's option, termination of the display of the secondary page display can be requested.
 - 8. A computer based network system as claimed in claim 7 in which secondary page display persists for a minimum period of time in total irrespective of operation of the selection activator means.
 - 9. A computer based network system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims in which the secondary page display includes selection activator means for accessing a selection program whereby a user is able to select or deselect categories of advertising material that can be used as said secondary data falling within a series of different categories.
- 25 10. A computer based network system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims in which the system is programmed such that, at the time of receipt of a request for a target web page, a particular set of secondary data is selected and associated with the primary data of the target page and then transmitted to the requesting user station.

- 11. A computer based network system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims in which the secondary data is loaded together with the primary data so as to be instantly available.
- 12. A computer based network system as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 10 in which the secondary data is called up from a remote server as and when required in which case the secondary data accompanying the primary data simply identifies the site at which the secondary data for forming the secondary page display is to be obtained.

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13. A web server for use in a system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims and on which there are resident a plurality of web sites including web pages capable of becoming target pages and wherein the server is programmed such that web pages sent to a requesting user station are based on primary and secondary data as defined herein and wherein the web page or web server, or both, includes program material ensuring the display of a secondary display corresponding to secondary data in advance of the display of the associated requested primary display corresponding to the primary data at the said requesting user station.

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14. Web page generating data for use in a system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims and having associated therewith program material ensuring the display of a secondary display corresponding to secondary data as herein defined above before the display of an associated primary display corresponding to primary data.

15. A method of advertising on the Internet comprising the steps of adding advertising secondary data to web page primary data requested by a user station and wherein the secondary data and primary data are programmed such that the advertising secondary data gives rise to a

secondary display of an advertisement ahead of the display of the requested web page primary data.

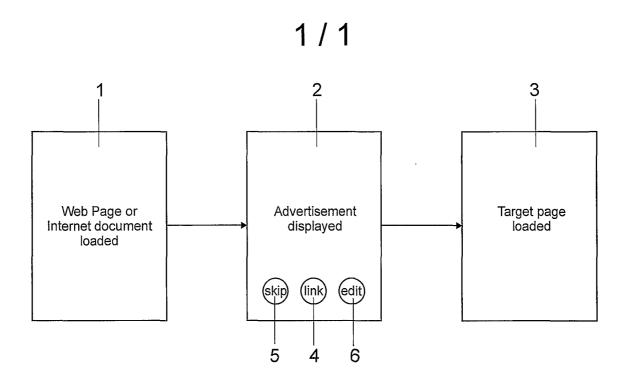


Fig 1

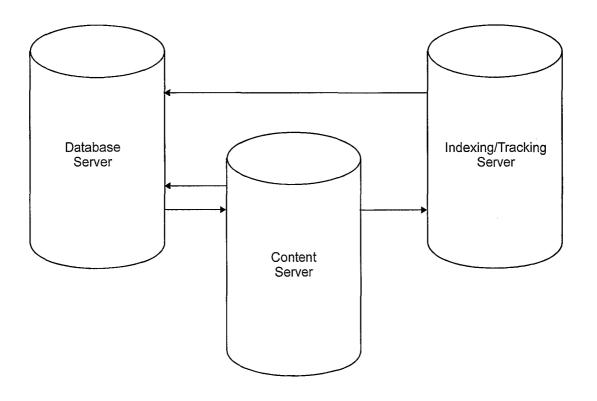


Fig 2