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(54) Title: SYSTEM, METHOD AND COMPUTER PROGRAM PRODUCT FOR GATHERING AND DELIVERING PERSONALIZED USER INFORMATION

(57) Abstract:

System, Method and Computer Program Product for Gathering and Delivering Personalized User Information

Cross-Reference to Related Application

The present application is a non-provisional patent application claiming priority to related U.S. Provisional Patent Application No. 60/196,082 (Attorney Docket No. 36841-162331, formerly A-21189/A-21939) "System, Method and Computer Program Product for Gathering and Delivering Personalized User Information," to Bolnick et al., filed April 11, 2000.

The present invention is also related generally to U.S. Provisional Patent Application No. 60/218,852 (Attorney Docket No. 35850-164486) "System, Method and Computer Program Product for Generating a User Lockable E-Mail," to Bolnick et al., filed July 13, 2000.

Background of the Invention

Field of the Invention

The present invention relates generally to consumer information, and more particularly to centralized distribution of personalized user information.

Related Art

Manufacturers, distributors and retailers of consumer products conventionally maintain private information about consumers and the products they purchase. For example, when a consumer purchases a product such as, e.g., a car, from a manufacturer, a car dealer will capture information from the consumer, which can be forwarded on to a manufacturer. Such information can be manually keyed in or delivered in a digital form to a database of the manufacturer. Some other vital information related to the product is unknown to the consumer. From time to time, such information could be used by the consumer.

Unfortunately, however, there is no convenient, conventional way for the consumer to get this information. For example, the consumer may be interested in the warranty term remaining on the car that the consumer purchased. No conventional convenient means exists to provide this information to the consumer.

With the advent of the Internet, information portals have been provided to provide information to consumers. Unfortunately, conventional information portals are designed to provide information to consumer users in a general format. Conventionally, portals will request user profile information from a user to categorize the user as belonging to a particular group or "profile." Based on the user's profile, the portal such as, e.g., http://www.my.yahoo.com, can deliver information to the user. For example, if the user provides to the portal that the user is interested in Microsoft stock, then the portal can deliver articles about Microsoft to the user. This information is broadcast to all consumer users identifying an interest in Microsoft stock. Thus, conventional information portals do not provide a personalized result to the user. Another example of information that is conventionally provided is weather information. For weather information, the user states a city of interest and the portal broadcasts weather information to the user and others, which have stated an interest in the city.

Conventional information portals, since they broadcast only general information to consumer users, suffer from disloyal users, i.e., users of one portal will often switch to another portal on a whim. Conventional portals provide general information for broadcast to a mass market of users by profile category. This general information is easily retrievable from other portals. Users desire personalized information not provided by conventional portals. Such information can be related to the users' personal preferences and past purchases. An improved method of providing information to users is desired that overcomes the shortcomings of conventional information portals.

A conventional information portal is illustrated in block diagram 100 of FIG. 1A. Specifically, block diagram 100 includes a user 102 interacting with portal 104, via, for example, a computer, phone, or other access device (i.e., not shown) such as, e.g., an

interactive television (TV), a wireless device, etc. User 102 can be a consumer purchaser of a product that was manufactured by , e.g., a manufacturer 108. User 102 can purchase the product directly from the manufacturer 108 or indirectly via, e.g., a wholesaler, distributor, reseller, or retailer, collectively referred to as an association or associate 108. Other users 102 can include, e.g., any purchaser of a product, a purchasing representative or other employee of a business.

User 102 is shown conveying user profile information 110 to information portal component 104. For example, the user 102 could, e.g., subscribe to an online portal account at a portal such as, e.g., http://www.my.yahoo.com, requiring entry of certain personal user profile information 110.

As shown in diagram 100, information portal 104 can then make a general request 112 for information from a content provider 106. In response to the general request 112 for information, content provider 106 can provide information 114 by general profile category to portal 104, as also illustrated in diagram 100. Portal 104 can then broadcast 116 such information by general profile category to users 102, which belong to the general profile category having interest in such general information.

In one embodiment, portal 104 and content provider 106 can be part of the same entity, collectively referred to as entity 120.

In one embodiment, the user 102 can provide information such as, e.g., user personal information 118, to an associate manufacturer 108, or other organization or business (such as, e.g., a retailer, distributor, agency, governmental entity, nonprofit entity, and other associate). The information 118 can be in the form of an information response card to the manufacturer 108, which could then be keyed into a data processing system. Alternatively, the information could be provided electronically or via other manual or automated means. Note that line 118 is unidirectional representing this information is conveyed to the manufacturer 108. There is other information that would be useful in the hands of a consumer, which remains extremely difficult to access at, e.g., a manufacturer or other associate 108. Although some of this useful information may be available elsewhere, e.g., at a website where the user may have

inputted and stored some information, (although much valuable information is not available to the customer), it can be buried deep within various unrelated sites requiring separate logins with potentially separate usernames, interfaces and passwords. Thus, it would be desirable to have a more easily accessible centralized access to useful personal information related to a consumer user or customer.

Associate 108 can manually key-in the information appearing on a response card provided by user 102. Response card information can typically include various types of information such as, e.g., demographic information about the user 102, information about a particular type and model of product purchased, distribution channel used, and other information such as, satisfaction of the user 102 with the product. A cleansing process can be performed on the keyed-in data to ensure the accuracy of the entered data. The keyed-in response card data can be placed in electronic form by data entry clerks by categories. For example, data can be inserted into fields of a database record of a database. The keyed response card information (i.e., if prepared by a third party) can then be provided to the associate 108. If received by the associate 108 from a third party, the associate 108 may perform further cleansing also. The associate 108 could import the data, parse the data, store the data for later use, or discard the data when aged beyond a threshold date. Some associates 108 may choose not to input the registration information to a database at all. Unfortunately such valuable information of users 102 available to associate 108, is conventionally inaccessible to portals 104 and also unfortunately, is inaccessible to users 102.

FIG. 1B illustrates in further detail, in flow diagram 124, an example interaction between user 102, portal 104 and content provider 106, as depicted in block diagram 100.

Specifically, diagram 124 begins with step 126 and continues immediately with step 128. In step 128, user 102 conveys user profile information to the portal 104 via, some means such as, e.g., an electronic communication or e-mail. The diagram 124 then continues as shown with step 130.

In step 130, portal 104 assigns a group profile category or multiple categories to the user 104. Group categories can include, e.g., various demographic and psychographic

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