



US007599881B2

(12) **United States Patent**
Likourezos et al.

(10) **Patent No.:** **US 7,599,881 B2**
(45) **Date of Patent:** **Oct. 6, 2009**

(54) **SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR OFFERING AN INCENTIVE TO A USER OF AN ELECTRONIC COMMERCE WEB SITE**

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(*) Notice: Subject to any disclaimer, the term of this patent is extended or adjusted under 35 U.S.C. 154(b) by 0 days.

(21) Appl. No.: **11/510,088**

(22) Filed: **Aug. 25, 2006**

(65) **Prior Publication Data**

US 2007/0005432 A1 Jan. 4, 2007

Related U.S. Application Data

(63) Continuation of application No. 09/764,618, filed on Jan. 17, 2001, now Pat. No. 7,483,856.

(51) **Int. Cl.**
G06Q 40/00 (2006.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.** **705/37; 705/36; 705/35**

(58) **Field of Classification Search** **705/35-38**
See application file for complete search history.

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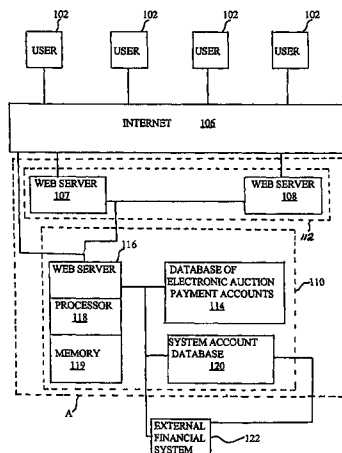
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

The invention provides a computerized electronic auction payment system and method for effecting a real-time payment for an item won in an electronic auction by setting up and maintaining electronic auction payment accounts for prospective bidders and sellers. The prospective bidders provide funds to their electronic auction payment accounts maintained by the computerized electronic auction payment system, prior to being deemed as winning bidders, via direct deposit, using a credit card, or sending a check, money order, or other financial document to an operator of the computerized electronic auction payment system. In one embodiment, upon being deemed as a winning bidder, the winning bidder accesses a payment page, enters the total amount of funds to be transferred to the seller, and authorizes the computerized electronic auction payment system to effect a real-time payment by debiting his, i.e., the winning bidder's, respective electronic auction payment account and crediting the electronic auction payment account of the seller, and/or another account specified by the seller. In an alternate embodiment, the prospective bidder authorizes the computerized electronic auction payment system to effect a real-time payment to the seller upon the prospective bidder being deemed the winning bidder (i.e., immediately following the conclusion of the auction). That is, without the winning bidder having to access the payment page.

54 Claims, 9 Drawing Sheets



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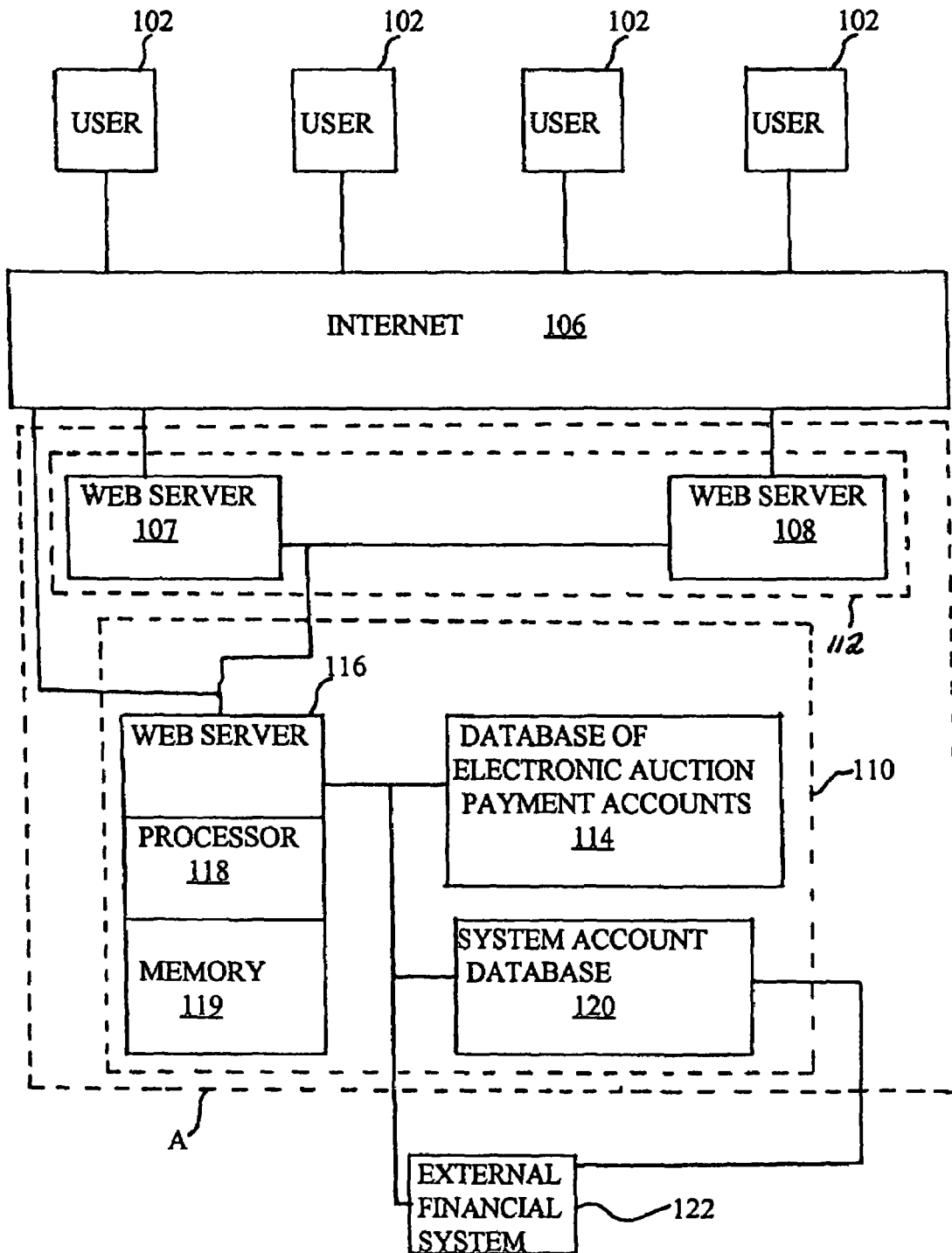


FIG. 1

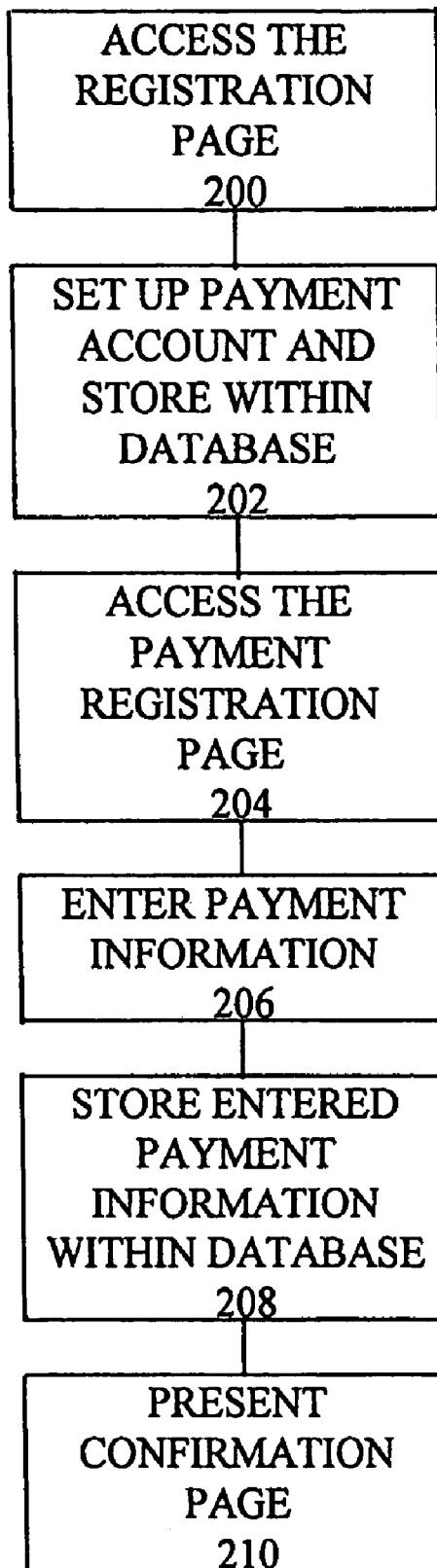


FIG. 2A

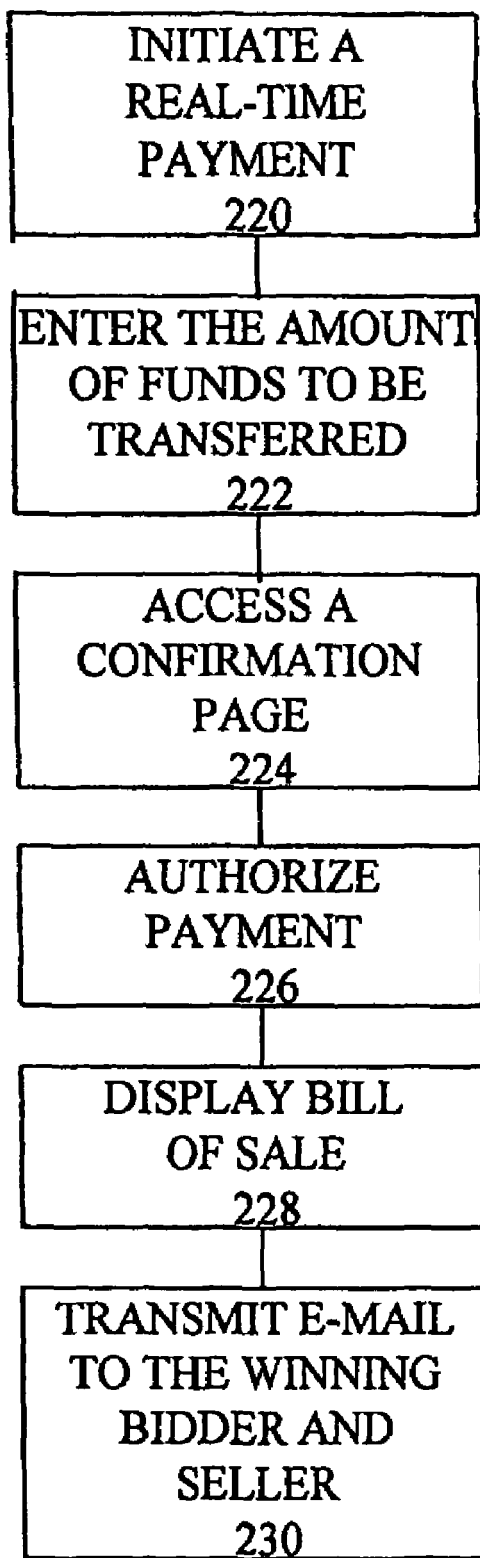


FIG. 2B

300

PLEASE REGISTER

<u>FIRST NAME</u>	<u>M.I.</u>	<u>LAST NAME</u>	<u>DATE OF BIRTH</u>
<u>SOCIAL SECURITY NO</u>			
<u>MAILING ADDRESS</u>		<u>COUNTRY OF CITIZENSHIP</u>	
<u>CITY</u>	<u>STATE</u>	<u>ZIP CODE</u>	<u>COUNTRY</u>
		<u>USER-NAME</u>	
		<u>PASSWORD</u>	
			NEXT →

} 302

} 304

} 306

↙ 308

FIG. 3

<u>I. BANK ACCOUNT INFORMATION</u>		<u>II CREDIT CARD INFORMATION</u>	
<u>NAME OF BANK ACCOUNT NUMBER</u>		<u>CREDIT CARD NO. EXP. DATE</u>	
<u>MAILING ADDRESS NAME OF ACCOUNT HOLDER</u>		<u>NAME ON CREDIT CARD</u>	
<u>CITY</u>	<u>STATE</u>	<u>CREDIT CARD ISSUER (VISA, ETC.)</u>	
<u>% OF FUNDS FROM I.</u>		<u>MAIL BANK ACCOUNT INFO., CREDIT CARD INFO., OR CHECK/ MONEY ORDER TO:</u>	
<u>% OF FUNDS TO BE TRANSFERRED TO I.</u>		<u>AUCTIONS PAYMENT LED.</u>	
<u>% OF FUNDS TO BE TRANSFERRED TO II.</u>		<u>15 MERCER LANE, NY, NY 10015</u>	
<u>ENTER AMOUNT OF FUNDS TO DEPOSIT IN THE ELECTRONIC AUCTION PAYMENT ACCOUNT</u>		<u>ENTER AMOUNT OF FUNDS TO BE WITHDRAWN</u>	
↑ 412		↑ 414	
		<u>AUTOMATIC PAYMENT YES (Y) OR NO(N)</u>	
		↙ 416	

FIG. 4A

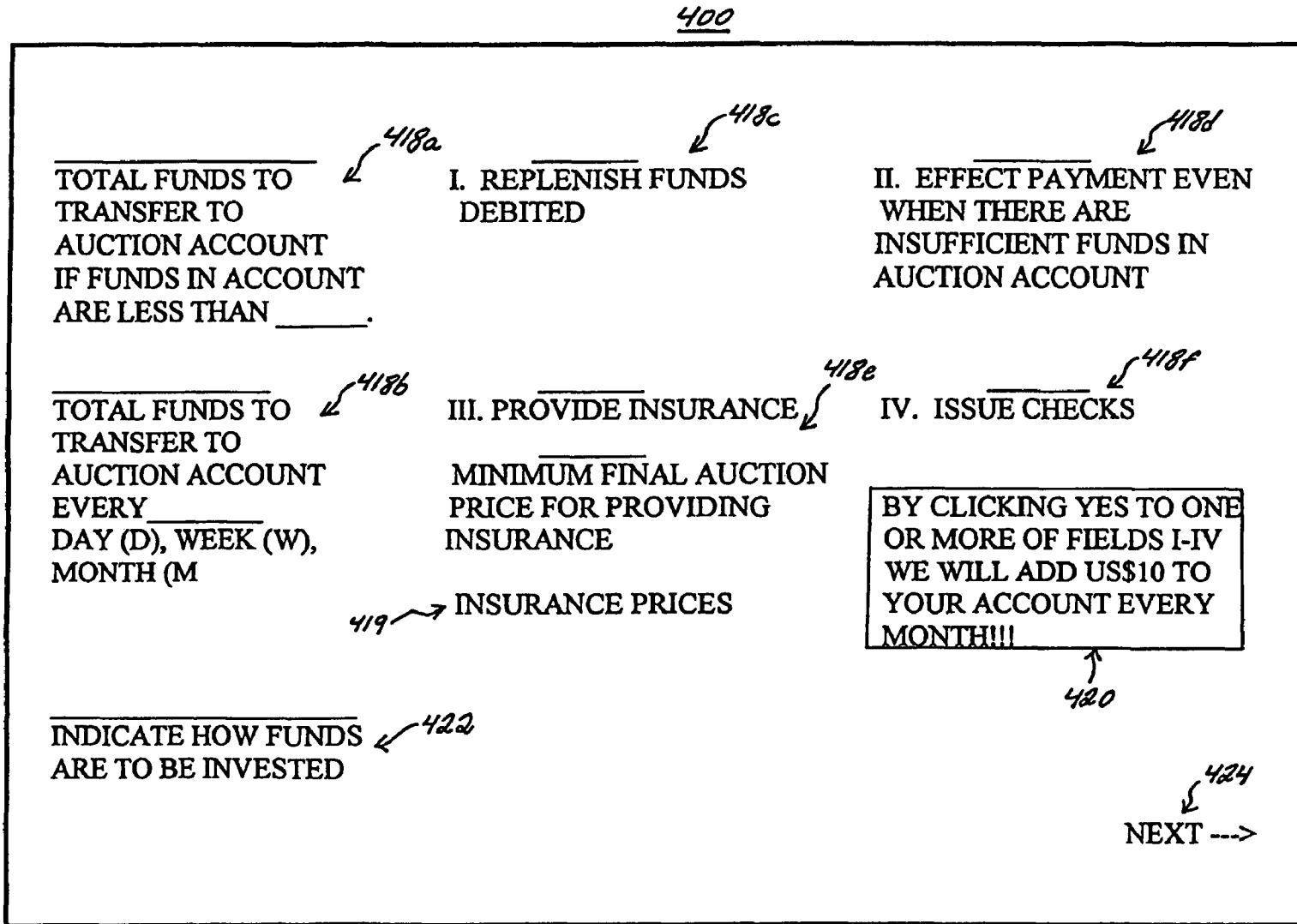


FIG. 4B

500

PAYMENT PAGE

AUCTION ITEM NO. 42134698

ITEM DESCRIPTION: SILVER BOWL (CIRCA 1920)

SELLER USER-NAME: SILVERRADO

BUYER USER-NAME: I LOVE COLLECTING

FINAL AUCTION PRICE: US \$115.00

502 → ENTER TOTAL FUNDS TO TRANSFER: _____

504 → INSURANCE (OPTIONAL): _____

INSURANCE PRICES ← 506

ENTER PASSWORD: _____ ← 510

512
↓
NEXT --->

FIG. 5

600

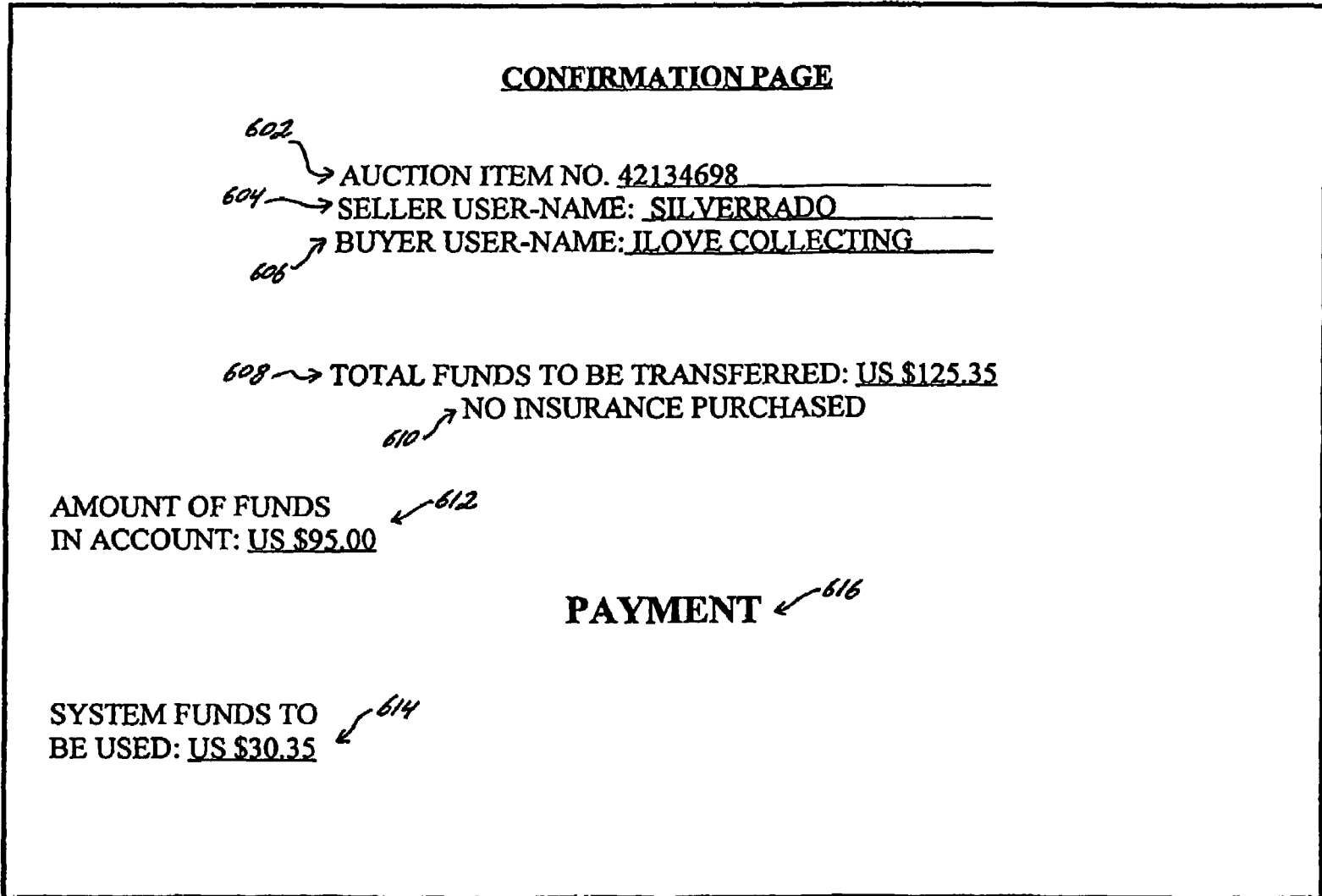


FIG. 6

700

BILL OF SALE

702 → AUCTION ITEM NO. 42134698

704 → ITEM DESCRIPTION: SILVER BOWL (CIRCA 1920)

706 → SELLER USER-NAME: SILVERRADO

708 → BUYER USER-NAME: ILOVE COLLECTING

ELECTRONIC AUCTION PAYMENT ACCOUNT NO.: 2695478 ← 710

TOTAL FUNDS TRANSFERRED: US \$125.35 ← 712

NO INSURANCE PURCHASED ← 714

PRINT ← 716

FIG. 7

SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR OFFERING AN INCENTIVE TO A USER OF AN ELECTRONIC COMMERCE WEB SITE

The present application is a continuation application of an application filed on Jan. 17, 2001 and assigned U.S. patent application Ser. No. 09/764,618.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to a computerized electronic auction payment system and a method for effecting a real-time payment using the computerized electronic auction payment system for an item won on an electronic auction, where users access the computerized electronic auction payment system by remote terminals via an electronic network, such as the Internet.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

A conventional auction is a prior art process in which bids from bidders are received by an auctioneer for an item to be sold. The bidder whose bid is the highest at the termination of the auction (the "successful or winning bidder") becomes the purchaser of the item.

With the advent of electronic networks, such as the Internet, electronic auctions have become tremendously popular. Electronic auctions typically entail a seller of an item accessing an electronic auction web site, such as EBAY™ and YAHOO!™ Auctions, using a remote terminal and a web browser via the electronic network. The prospective seller then lists the item for sale with a short description describing the item which may include a scanned photograph of the item, provides a beginning selling price, and a date and time for the auction to end. Generally, the date and time for the auction to end must be at least seven to ten days from the present date and time; the present date and time is generally set as the date and time for the auction to begin by an auction management system, such as software and hardware modules, overseeing the electronic auction web site.

The seller can also provide, prior to initiating the commencement of the electronic auction, any additional costs the winning bidder will have to pay, such as shipping and handling fees and taxes, and any additional costs the winning bidder is recommended to pay, such as shipping insurance. Additional information which is provided by the seller or the electronic auction web site management system, prior to the commencement of the electronic auction, includes identification information corresponding to the seller, e.g., the seller's user-name, and the seller's location.

During the auction, a prospective bidder using a remote terminal accesses the electronic auction web site via the electronic network and views the item for sale. The prospective bidder can then submit a bid by typing a bid amount, which is greater than a displayed current selling price, and entering his user-name. The auction web site then informs the user or bidder whether he is or is not currently the highest bidder. If the bidder is not the highest bidder, the electronic auction web site informs the bidder of the current selling price and offers the bidder an opportunity to bid again.

The bidder may not be the highest bidder even though the bidder may have entered a bid amount greater than the displayed current selling price, because each bidder is allowed to enter a maximum bid amount, i.e., the most the bidder is willing to pay for the item. The electronic auction web site, however, typically displays an amount less than the maximum bid amount, which is sufficient to surpass a previous bid,

as the displayed current selling price. Hence, a current bidder's bid amount may be greater than the displayed current selling price, but not greater than the previous bidder's maximum bid amount. Therefore, the current bidder will need to bid again if he desires to surpass the previous bidder's maximum bid amount and become the current high bidder.

The electronic auction web site also offers a prospective bidder the option of sending an e-mail to the seller via the electronic network in order to obtain additional information about the item offered for sale, prior to bidding for the item. The seller can then e-mail the prospective bidder with the additional information which may assist the prospective bidder in determining whether to bid or not to bid for the item. Further, if the seller realizes that the additional information can be helpful to other prospective bidders, the seller can append the description of the item with the additional information to allow anyone accessing the section of the electronic auction web site listing the item to read the additional information.

At the conclusion of the electronic auction, the electronic auction web site management system deems the bidder who has the highest bid as the winning bidder. To effect payment for the item, an e-mail is sent to the seller and the winning bidder informing them to contact each other to proceed with a payment transaction. Upon the seller notifying the winning bidder of where to send payment, e.g., a check or money order, the winning bidder sends payment equal to the highest bid plus any other costs, such as shipping and handling, shipping insurance, and taxes, as indicated by the seller. Soon after receiving the payment from the winning bidder, the seller ships the item to the winning bidder.

Another prior art method for effecting payment for the item won on the electronic auction entails clicking an icon on the electronic auction web site and accessing a payment web site (or a payment segment of the electronic auction web site). The payment web site typically lists the seller's user-name and the item won. While at the payment web site, the winning bidder enters credit card information and the amount to be charged to his credit card. Subsequently, a management system overseeing the payment web site charges the credit card for the entered amount to a company or entity affiliated with an operator or owner of the payment web site. Upon payment confirmation, an e-mail is sent to the seller instructing the seller to ship the item to the winning bidder. After two to three business days, the payment web site management system pays the seller by direct deposit an amount equal to the charged amount minus a commission and a transaction fee. The commission typically paid to the operator or owner of the electronic auction web site and the transaction fee is paid to the operator or owner of the payment web site.

A variation of this method is for the winning bidder to directly transfer his credit card information to the seller. The seller then charges the credit card information and waits for a payment confirmation prior to shipping the item to the winning bidder.

It is a drawback of the prior art methods for effecting payment for the item won on the electronic auction in that the winning bidder is apt to waiting prior to effecting payment, since the winning bidder will need to perform several tasks, such as, for example, draft a check made payable to the seller, and mail the check to the seller. The winning bidder is also apt to waiting when he is bidding on other items, since the winning bidder usually prefers to draft checks, obtain money orders, etc. and mail them to the various sellers at one time.

Another drawback is that the seller must wait at least two business days to several weeks before being paid. For example, in the first prior art method described above, the

winning bidder must draft a check, obtain a money order, or some other payment document, and mail it to the seller. This two-step process of paying for the item won typically causes the winning bidder to wait several days before proceeding with payment. Hence, this prior art method causes a delay from the time an auction ended until the time the seller is paid.

With the second prior art method described above, the winning bidder must enter his credit card information every time he wins an item on the electronic auction. Besides being cumbersome, a percentage of the population does not own credit cards and a percentage of the population feels uneasy transferring their credit card information via the electronic network, especially to unknown sellers. Further, the winning bidder is apt to waiting until the start of a new credit card billing cycle before transferring his credit card information to pay for the item won on the electronic auction. Again, this prior art method causes a delay from the time the auction ended until the time the seller is paid.

Another drawback with regards to the prior art methods is that the operator of the electronic auction web site must wait several days to several weeks before being paid a commission by the seller. The operator generally gets paid its commission by charging the seller's credit card, usually after e-mailing the seller and asking for the seller's authorization. It is apparent that there exists a delay from the time the auction ended until the time the operator of the electronic auction web site is paid its commission.

Accordingly, there exists a need for effecting a real-time payment for an item won on an electronic auction which overcomes the drawbacks provided above. Further, there exists a need for allowing the winning bidder to effect payment for an item won on an electronic auction without having to type and transfer credit card information over an electronic network. Further still, there exists a need for allowing a winning bidder who does not own a credit card or feels uneasy transferring credit card information via the electronic network to effect payment for an item won on an electronic auction without having to mail a check, a money order, or other payment document to the seller. Finally, there exists a need for allowing an operator of an electronic auction web site to get paid its commission in real-time at the conclusion of an auction.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention provides a computerized electronic auction payment system and method for effecting a real-time payment for an item won in an electronic auction using the computerized electronic auction payment system, where users access the computerized electronic auction payment system by remote terminals, such as a personal computer, PDA, cellular phone, etc., via an electronic network, such as the Internet. The computerized electronic auction payment system and method of the present invention overcomes the drawbacks of prior art methods and affords additional advantages.

According to an aspect of the present invention, the computerized electronic auction payment system and method effect a real-time payment for an item won in an electronic auction by setting up and maintaining electronic auction payment accounts for prospective bidders and sellers. The prospective bidders provide funds to their electronic auction payment accounts maintained by the computerized electronic auction payment system, prior to being deemed as winning bidders, via direct deposit, using a credit card, or sending a check, money order, or other financial document to an operator of the computerized electronic auction payment system. In

one embodiment, upon being deemed as a winning bidder, the winning bidder accesses a payment page, enters the total amount of funds to be transferred to the seller, and authorizes the computerized electronic auction payment system to effect a real-time payment by debiting his, i.e., the winning bidder's, respective electronic auction payment account and crediting the electronic auction payment account of the seller, and/or another account specified by the seller.

In an alternate embodiment, the prospective bidder authorizes the computerized electronic auction payment system to effect a real-time payment to the seller upon the prospective bidder being deemed the winning bidder (i.e., immediately following the conclusion of the auction). That is, without the winning bidder having to access the payment page.

According to another aspect of the present invention, the computerized electronic auction payment system and method enable a winning bidder to effect payment for an item won on an electronic auction without having to type and transfer credit card information over an electronic network.

Further, according to another aspect of the present invention, the computerized electronic auction payment system and method enable a winning bidder who does not own a credit card or feels uneasy transferring credit card information via an electronic network to effect payment for an item won on an electronic auction without having to mail a check, a money order, or other payment document to the seller.

Further, according to another aspect of the present invention, the computerized electronic auction payment system and method enable an operator of an electronic auction web site to get paid its commission in real-time at the conclusion of an auction or upon authorization by a winning bidder.

Further still, according to another aspect of the present invention, the computerized electronic auction payment system and method provide insurance to a winning bidder, in the case where the item won is never shipped to the winning bidder or the item turns out to be non-genuine and/or damaged without the fault of the courier, i.e., shipping insurance will not cover the damaged item. Accordingly, an operator of the computerized electronic auction payment system and method is deemed as being an insurance agent.

Further yet, according to another aspect of the present invention, the computerized electronic auction payment system and method invest funds stored within electronic auction payment accounts set up by users of an electronic auction web site. Accordingly, an operator of the computerized electronic auction payment system and method is deemed as being an investment broker.

Yet still, according to another aspect of the present invention, the computerized electronic auction payment system and method are capable of cashing checks drafted against electronic auction payment accounts set up by users of an electronic auction web site. Accordingly, an operator of the computerized electronic auction payment system and method is deemed as being a banker.

Also, according to another aspect of the present invention, the computerized electronic auction payment system and method make loans to users of an electronic auction web site who have set up electronic auction payment accounts. Accordingly, an operator of the computerized electronic auction payment system and method is deemed as being a loan officer.

Finally, according to another aspect of the present invention, the computerized electronic auction payment system and method provide incentives to users of an electronic auction web site for setting up and maintaining electronic auction payment accounts for buying and selling items using the electronic auction web site. Accordingly, an operator of the

computerized electronic auction payment system and method is deemed as being a promoter.

In particular, the present invention provides a payment system for effecting payment to a seller of an item offered for an auction sale and won by a winning bidder at the conclusion of an electronic auction. The system includes a database containing a plurality of electronic auction payment accounts, where the plurality of electronic auction payment accounts are configured for storing funds therein, and where one of the plurality of electronic auction payment accounts corresponds to the winning bidder and one of the plurality of electronic auction payment accounts corresponds to the seller; and a web server computer including application software for effecting payment by accessing the database and debiting an electronic auction payment account corresponding to the winning bidder and crediting at least one account corresponding to the seller.

The present invention also provides a method for effecting payment of an item offered for an auction sale by a seller and won by a winning bidder at the conclusion of an electronic auction where computer terminals of potential purchasers are used to access a computer site maintained by an auction server computer. The method includes the steps of: debiting an electronic auction payment account corresponding to the winning bidder, where the electronic auction payment account is configured for storing funds therein; and crediting at least one account corresponding to the seller to effect payment of the item won by the winning bidder.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The foregoing and other aspects and advantages will be better understood from the following detailed description of preferred embodiments of the invention with reference to the drawings, in which:

FIG. 1 is an overview of a network computing environment including the computerized electronic auction payment system according to the invention;

FIG. 2A is a flow chart illustrating logic processing steps for setting up electronic auction payment accounts using the computerized electronic auction payment system according to the invention;

FIG. 2B is a flow chart illustrating logic processing steps for effecting a real-time payment using the computerized electronic auction payment system where the winning bidder accesses a payment page according to the invention; and

FIG. 3 illustrates a print of a registration page that the computerized electronic auction payment system provides to a user for entering registration information;

FIGS. 4A-4B illustrates prints of a payment registration page that the computerized electronic auction payment system provides to a user for entering payment information;

FIG. 5 illustrates a print of the payment page that the computerized electronic auction payment system provides to the winning bidder at the conclusion of an electronic auction;

FIG. 6 illustrates a print of a confirmation page that the computerized electronic auction payment system provides to the winning bidder to confirm the entered payment information; and

FIG. 7 illustrates a print of a bill of sale page that the computerized electronic auction payment system provides to the winning bidder upon authorizing payment to the seller.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

FIG. 1 is an overview of a network computing environment 100 which includes the computerized electronic auction pay-

ment system according to the invention designated generally by reference numeral 110. The network computing environment 100 is designed to allow a host of users shown as 102 access to an electronic auction web site via a network, such as the Internet 106. Each of the users 102 has a computer terminal with the appropriate software, e.g., a web browser, for accessing the Internet 106. The users 102 are unknown to web server computers 107 and 108 of an electronic auction system 112, such as EBAY™. The web server computers 107 and 108 include custom written application software to maintain the electronic auction web site and allow each user 102 to browse the electronic auction web site and bid for items and/or sell items as known in the art.

The web server computers 107 and 108 of system 112 also allow each user to access the computerized electronic auction payment system 110 for effecting a real-time payment at the conclusion of an electronic auction. The web server computers 107 and 108 also provide data to the computerized electronic auction payment system 110, such as the names of the winning bidder and seller at the conclusion of the electronic auction.

The computerized electronic auction payment system 110 includes a database of electronic auction payment accounts 114 and a web server computer 116 having a processor 118 capable of executing a set of programmable instructions stored within a memory 119. The set of programmable instructions are custom written application software to enable the computerized electronic auction payment system 110 to perform various functions and methods described herein, such as maintaining the database of electronic auction payment accounts 114, and executing user-specified instructions, such as to loan funds to the user 102 if the user 102 has insufficient funds in his account to effect payment. The set of programmable instructions also enable the computerized electronic auction payment system 110 to perform the inventive method of enabling a winning bidder to effect the real-time payment of an item won on the electronic auction web site as described below with reference to FIGS. 2A-7.

As shown by the large dotted box marked "A" in FIG. 1, the computerized electronic auction payment system 110 is located locally with the web server computers 107 and 108 and is connected to the Internet 106 directly and via the web server computers 107 and 108. The computerized electronic auction payment system 110 maintains a payment segment of the electronic auction web site and also enables a user 102 to access the payment segment.

It is contemplated that the computerized electronic auction payment system 110 can also be located remotely from the web server computers 107 and 108 for maintaining the payment segment or an auction payment web site independent from the electronic auction web site and for enabling the user 102 to access the payment segment or the auction payment web site. The payment segment of the electronic auction web site or the independent auction payment web site are accessed by conventional methods, e.g., by the user 102 clicking an icon on the electronic auction web site, by the user 102 clicking a hyperlink on an e-mail, and by the user 102 typing the appropriate URL in the user's web browser.

The web server computers 107 and 108 share the responsibility for servicing the users of the electronic auction web site. The web server computer 116 has the responsibility for registering users of the system 110 and servicing the registered users as described below.

The web server computers 107 and 108 are identical and can be duplicated as additional load on the electronic auction system 112 occurs. The web server computer 116 can also be duplicated as additional load on the computerized electronic

auction payment system **110** occurs. The duplication arrangement provides for immediate expandability of the electronic auction system **112** and the computerized electronic auction payment system **110** by merely adding additional web server computers as necessary. It is contemplated that network computing environment **100** is provided with one type of computer server for performing the functions of the web server computers **107** and **108** and the web server computer **116**.

Each electronic auction payment account is configured for storing funds (similar to a bank account) which can be used to effect payment, and not information relating to sources which can be used to initiate payment, such as a credit card information. Further, each electronic auction payment account is configured for the system **110** to loan funds to, in case there are insufficient funds therein, to effect payment, as described below.

With reference to FIG. 2A there is shown a flow chart illustrating logic processing steps for setting up an electronic auction payment account for effecting the real-time payment using the electronic auction web site's payment segment maintained by the computerized electronic auction payment system **110**. Step **200** provides for the user **102** of the electronic auction web site, such as EBAY™ and YAHOO!™ Auctions, to access a registration page **300** (see FIG. 3) of the payment segment to register and set up the electronic auction payment account.

With reference to FIG. 3, the registration page **300** includes several fields **302** for the user **102** to enter identifying information, such as first name, last name, date of birth, citizenship, mailing address, and social security number. It is contemplated that fields can also be provided for registering corporations, organization, legal partnerships, etc. Such fields could require the user **102** to enter a corporate name and a tax identification number.

The registration page **300** also includes a field **304** for the user **102** to enter a user-name. The user-name could be identical to a user-name which the user **102** has been previously assigned by the electronic auction system **112**. The registration page **300** further includes a field **306** for the user **102** to enter a password. The password could be identical to a password which the user **102** has been previously assigned by the electronic auction system **112**.

Upon entering the appropriate information on the registration page **300**, the user **102** then clicks on a "NEXT" soft button **308**. Upon clicking the "NEXT" soft button **308**, the computerized electronic auction payment system **110** sets up the electronic auction payment account having the entered information and stores the electronic auction payment account within the database of electronic auction payment accounts **114** (step **202**). The process then proceeds to step **204** where a payment registration page **400** (see FIG. 4A) of the payment segment is accessed.

It is contemplated that prior to proceeding to step **204**, the system **110** forwards the entered information to a credit checking system to verify the credit rating of the user **102**.

With reference to FIG. 4A, the payment registration page **400** allows each user **102** to enter payment information (step **206**). The payment registration page **400** includes several fields **402** for entering bank account information corresponding to a bank account the user **102** wants the computerized electronic auction payment system **110** to transfer funds from and to his electronic auction payment account.

The payment registration page **400** also includes several fields **404** for entering credit card information, in order for the computerized electronic auction payment system **110** to charge the user's credit card and deposit funds to the user's electronic auction payment account, prior to the user **102**

being deemed a winning bidder for an item won on the electronic auction web site. The credit card information entered within fields **404** are also used by the computerized electronic auction payment system **110** to credit the user's credit card where the user **102** is the seller as described below. It is contemplated that the payment registration page **400** includes additional fields for entering other types of sources, such as other credit cards, other bank accounts, investment brokerage and corporate accounts, to be used for transferring funds to and from the user's electronic auction payment account.

The payment registration page **400** also provides an address **406** for the user **102** to mail his payment information (e.g., bank account information, and credit card information) or a check/money order payable to an operator of the computerized electronic auction payment system **110**, if the user **102** feels uneasy transferring his bank account and/or credit card information over the Internet **106**. A phone number is also listed for the user **102** to be able to call a representative of the system **110** to provide payment information.

The payment registration page **400** of the payment segment further includes allocation fields **408** for the user **102** to indicate what percentage of funds deposited to his electronic auction payment account should be derived from charging his credit card and what percentage of funds deposited to his electronic auction payment account should be derived by transferring funds from his bank account. If only a single source is entered in payment registration page **400**, then 100% of funds deposited to the user's electronic auction payment account are derived from that source, and the user **102** does not need to enter any percentages in allocation fields **408**.

The payment registration page **400** also includes allocation fields **410** for the user **102** to indicate what percentage of funds transferred to his electronic auction payment account from other electronic auction payment accounts should subsequently be credited to his credit card and what percentage of funds transferred to his electronic auction payment account should subsequently be transferred by direct deposit to his bank account. If the percentages entered in each of the allocation fields **410** total less than 100%, then a percentage of the funds transferred to the user's electronic auction payment account from other electronic auction payment accounts are retained within the user's electronic auction payment account. Accordingly, the total percentages entered plus the percentage of funds retained within the user's electronic auction payment account equals 100%.

It is contemplated that the system **110** automatically transfers the percentage of funds allocated to user-specified accounts without first transferring these funds to the user's electronic auction payment account.

Since each user **102** of the electronic auction system **112** can use the system **112** to buy and sell items, it is preferred that each user **102** provide allocation percentages in fields **408** and **410**. The fields **408** and **410** can be expanded for entering additional percentages relating to other accounts, such as investment brokerage and corporate accounts, which could be used for depositing and withdrawing funds to and from the electronic auction payment accounts.

The percentages entered in allocation fields **408** and **410**, like other information entered within the payment segment of the electronic auction web site, can be changed and/or reviewed by the user **102** accessing his electronic auction payment account stored within the database of electronic auction payment accounts **114**. The user **102** can access his electronic auction payment account by clicking a "MY PAYMENT ACCOUNT" icon while in the electronic auction web

site to access a sign-in or log-in page for entering one's user-name and password, and clicking a "LOG-IN" icon.

The payment registration page **400** also includes a deposit field **412** for the user **102** to enter the amount of funds he wants to deposit into his electronic auction payment account from the various sources entered in fields **402** and **404**. A withdrawal field **414** is also provided for the user **102** to enter the amount of funds he wants to withdraw from his electronic auction payment account and transfer to the various sources entered in fields **402** and **404**.

An automatic payment field **416** is further provided for the user **102** to authorize the computerized electronic auction payment system **110** to debit the user's electronic auction payment account in real-time every time the user **102** is deemed a winning bidder. If the user **102** checks this field, then, at the conclusion of an electronic auction, if the user **102** is deemed the winning bidder, then the system **110** in real-time debits the user's electronic auction payment account and credits an electronic auction payment account corresponding to the seller, and/or other user-specified accounts corresponding to the seller as described above with reference to fields **402** and **404**. The computerized electronic auction payment system **110** is provided with the names and identification information of the winning bidder and seller by the electronic auction system **112**.

If the user **102**, i.e., the winning bidder, has no funds in his respective electronic auction payment account, the computerized electronic auction payment system **110** loans system funds to the user **102** to effect the real-time payment. The system **110** loans system funds to the user **102**, only if the user **102** has authorized the system **110** to loan system funds as described below. Preferably, the system **110** stores system funds in a system account maintained by a system account database **120**, as shown by FIG. 1. The system account database **120** is accessible by the web server **116** for transferring and loaning system funds stored in the system account to the user's electronic auction payment account.

The system account database **120** is also accessible by an external financial system **122**, such as a financial institution's local area network, for transferring funds to and from the system account maintained by the system account database **120**, upon authorization by the web server **116**. For example, the web server **116** can authorize the external financial system to wire funds in the amount of US\$100,000 to the system account. These funds can then be used as system funds for loaning to users **102** of the system **110** and for other purposes.

The funds debited from the winning bidder's electronic auction payment account and credited to the seller's electronic auction payment account in real-time by the computerized electronic auction payment system **110** are preferably equal to the final auction price plus any shipping and handling fees, and taxes. It is contemplated that the computerized electronic auction payment system **110** is provided with the total amount of the shipping and handling fees from the electronic auction system **112**. The system **112** stores these fees from the moment they were inputted by the seller at the time the seller listed the item on the electronic auction web site.

It is further contemplated that the computerized electronic auction payment system **110** debits the winning bidder's electronic auction payment account and credits the seller's electronic auction payment account to cover for taxes when the winning bidder and seller are from the same state or locality. This is determined by checking the state or locality corresponding to the winning bidder and the seller as stored within the database of electronic auction payment accounts **114**. If the states or localities match, then the computerized elec-

tronic auction payment system **110** accordingly debits the winning bidder's electronic auction payment account to cover for taxes corresponding to that state or locality. It is, however, understood that the system **110** can be programmed to debit the winning bidder's electronic auction payment account to cover for taxes (equal to a pre-programmed percentage corresponding to the state or locality and credit the seller's payment account) even when the states or localities do not match, and/or to only debit to cover for taxes when the seller has indicated to the system **110** during the registration process or afterwards that he is a merchant, or other entity obligated by law to charge and pay taxes.

The computerized electronic auction payment system **110** further withholds a predetermined percentage of the funds obtained by debiting the winning bidder's electronic auction payment account while effecting the real-time payment when the automatic payment field **416** is checked. These funds are withheld by the system **110** to pay the commission fees of the operator of the system **110** and/or the operator of the electronic auction system **112**. The withheld funds are preferably stored within the system account maintained by the system account database **120**. The remaining or non-withheld funds are then credited to the electronic auction payment account of the seller, and/or other seller-specified accounts as described above with reference to fields **402** and **404**.

Additionally, the computerized electronic auction payment system **110** debits the winning bidder's electronic auction payment account for purchasing insurance and/or to cover personal guarantee fees, if the winning bidder has accordingly indicated as described below. These funds are stored within the system account maintained by the system account database **120** to cover personal guarantee fees, or are transferred to the external financial system **122** to purchase insurance.

At the conclusion of the real-time payment, an e-mail is transmitted to the winning bidder and the seller confirming the transaction. The e-mail also indicates the total amount of funds debited, withheld and transferred, the mailing address of the winning bidder, the auction item, and the final auction price. The mailing address of the winning bidder is preferably obtained from the database of electronic auction payment accounts **114**. The auction item and the final auction price are obtained or transmitted from the electronic auction system **112**. The e-mail can further include a hyperlink for linking to a web site where the winning bidder and seller can leave comments regarding their payment transaction. A hyperlink can also be included for viewing and/or printing a bill of sale or receipt.

It is contemplated that the automatic payment feature is overridden if the winning bidder does not have enough funds in his electronic auction payment account and has not indicated to the computerized electronic auction payment system **110** to use system funds as described below. If this is the case, the system **110** informs the winning bidder by e-mail, by sending a page, facsimile, etc. of the fact that the winning bidder does not have enough funds within his electronic auction payment account to effect a real-time payment of the item won.

The winning bidder can then transfer funds into his electronic auction payment account and then access the payment page **500** as described below with reference to FIG. 5; authorize the system **110** to use system funds and then access the payment page **500** as described below; or mail a check, money order, etc. to the seller.

With reference to FIG. 4B, the payment registration page **400**, or a sub-page thereof, further includes option fields **418a-f**. Option field **418a** permits the user **102** to specify an

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amount of funds to be transferred by the computerized electronic auction payment system **110** from sources specified in fields **402** and **404** to the user's electronic auction payment account, if the total amount of funds within the user's electronic auction payment account is less than a user-specified amount.

Option field **418b** permits the user **102** to indicate an amount of funds to be transferred by the computerized electronic auction payment system **110** from sources specified in fields **402** and **404** to the user's electronic auction payment account on a user-specified periodic basis, e.g., daily, weekly, or monthly.

Option fields **418c-f** are yes/no option fields. If the field is clicked, then the user **102** has indicated "yes"; if the field is not clicked, then the user **102** has indicated "no". Option field **418c** permits the user **102** to indicate whether the computerized electronic auction payment system **110** should replenish, from sources specified in fields **402** and **404**, any funds debited for transferring funds to other electronic auction payment accounts, e.g., upon effecting a payment after the conclusion of an auction. Option field **418d** permits the user **102** to indicate whether the computerized electronic auction payment system **110** should use system funds, as stored within the system account, to effect payment for items won by the user **102**, if the user's electronic auction payment account does not have sufficient funds to effect payment for the item won.

It is contemplated that the computerized electronic auction payment system **110** charges the user **102** interest for using system funds to effect payment. The interest charged is stored within the user's electronic auction payment account in order to allow the user **102** to view the outstanding interest charges by accessing his account. The total interest charged to all the users is preferably stored in the system account database **120** to allow the system **110** to easily determine the amount of interest due to the operator of the system **110**. It is further contemplated that the computerized electronic auction payment system **110** automatically, or on a periodic basis, withdraws funds which are transferred to the user's electronic auction payment account and transfers these funds to the system account database **120**, if the system **110** has used system funds to effect payment for the user **102** and the funds are currently outstanding, i.e., not paid.

It is further contemplated that the computerized electronic auction payment system "locks out" the user **102** from using the electronic auction web site, if the user **102** owes money greater than a predetermined amount to the system **110** and the user **102** has not paid a predetermined percentage of the money owed for a predetermined period of time. For example, the user **102** gets "locked out" if he owes the system **110** US\$400 and has not paid 10% or US\$40 to the system **110** during the last four weeks.

Option field **418e** permits the user **102** to indicate whether the computerized electronic auction payment system **110** should effect insurance coverage for items won by the user **102**. This field also permits the user **102** to indicate a minimum final auction price for effecting insurance coverage. For example, the user **102** can indicate that the system **110** should effect insurance coverage only when the final auction price is greater than or equal to US\$500. An icon **419** is displayed which the user can click to view a listing of the insurance charges for a range of final auction prices.

If the user **102** indicates in option field **418e** that the system **110** should effect insurance coverage for items won where the final auction price is greater than or equal to the minimum final auction price, then in every such instance, the system **110** also withdraws from (or, in case there are insufficient

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funds in the user's electronic auction payment account and the user **102** has indicated "yes" in option field **418d**, loans to) the user's electronic auction payment account an amount equal to the insurance charge for the item won, if the final auction price is greater than or equal to the user-specified minimum final auction price. The system **110** stores these funds in the system account within the system account database **120** and then uses a portion of these funds, as directed by the web server **116**, to purchase insurance for the item won by the user **102** from the external financial system **122** which may be an independent or affiliated insurance company or broker. The system **110** retains the other portion of the funds as an insurance purchase service fee. The retained portion can be stored within the system account, or preferably transferred to an interest-bearing account corresponding to the operator of the system **110**. The interest-bearing account can be maintained by the external financial system **122**. If the item turns out to be non-genuine and/or damaged, then the user **102** who bought insurance on the item can make a claim, to recover the funds transferred to the seller.

It is also contemplated that field **418e** indicates to the user **102** that by indicating "yes", then any items won having a final auction price greater than or equal to the minimum final auction price are personally guaranteed by the operator of the computerized electronic auction payment system **110** for a predetermined guarantee fee. Accordingly, the operator of the computerized electronic auction payment system **110** personally guarantees any auction items won by the user **102** which have a final auction price which is greater than or equal to the user-specified minimum final auction price. Hence, the system **110** debits the winning bidder's electronic auction payment account to cover for personal guarantee fees and transfers the debited funds to the system account maintained by the system account database **120**.

Option field **418f** permits the user **102** to indicate whether the computerized electronic auction payment system **110** should issue and mail checks to the user **102**. The user **102** can then use the issued checks to draft checks against his respective electronic auction payment account. The computerized electronic auction payment system **110** or an independent accounting system, e.g., the external financial system **122**, keeps track of checks drafted against electronic auction payment accounts and instructs the system **110** to deduct funds from the appropriate accounts.

The payment registration page **400** also offers the user **102** incentives for providing information in option fields **418a** and **418b** and for indicating "yes" to one or more of option fields **418c-f**. For example, as indicated by icon **420**, the user **102** can be offered the incentive of the system **110** periodically adding a predetermined amount of funds to the user's electronic auction payment account if the user **102** indicates "yes" in option fields **418c-f**. The user **102** can also be offered the incentive of the computerized electronic auction payment system **110** paying any shipping and handling charges for items won by the user **102** on the electronic auction web site.

The user **102** can also be offered incentives based on the amount of funds periodically transferred to his electronic auction payment account as indicated in option field **418b**. For example, if the user **102** transfers less than or equal to US\$50 to his electronic auction payment account every week, then he has a 20% chance of winning a weekly sweepstakes drawing for a prize as conducted by the electronic auction payment system **110**. If the user **102** transfers less than or equal to US\$100 to his electronic auction payment account every week, then he has a 30% chance of winning the weekly sweepstakes drawing as conducted by the electronic auction payment system **110**, and so on. A similar incentive can also

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be offered to the user **102** based on an average amount of funds used by the user **102** to buy auction items during a predetermined period, e.g., in a given month.

It is contemplated that these and other incentives are also indicated on the electronic auction web site where unregistered and registered users can view the incentives. For example, one incentive which could be offered by the electronic auction payment system **110** and indicated on the electronic auction web site is that all registered users of the system **110** are automatically entered in periodic sweepstakes where they have the opportunity to win various prizes, such as US\$1,000.

Investment fields **422** are also provided by the payment registration page **400** of the payment segment for the user **102** to indicate how he wants his funds within his electronic auction payment account invested, e.g., a money market fund, a mutual fund account, etc. The funds can be invested by transferring the funds, upon instructions from the web server **116**, to the external financial system **122**, which could be, for example, an investment brokerage firm's system. If none of the investment fields **422** are selected by the user **102**, the computerized electronic auction payment system **110** does not invest the user's funds.

The computerized electronic auction payment system **110** periodically adds funds to the user's electronic auction payment account reflecting any interest accrued by investing the user's funds. The computerized electronic auction payment system **110** retains a portion of the interest accrued by investing the user's funds as an investment service fee, prior to adding funds to the user's electronic auction payment account. The retained interest is stored within the system account, or preferably, transferred to an interest-bearing account corresponding to the operator of the system **110** and maintained by the external financial system **122**. It is contemplated to provide incentives to the user **102** for authorizing the computerized electronic auction payment system to invest the user's funds.

Upon entering the appropriate information on the payment registration page **400**, the user **102** then clicks on a "NEXT" soft button **424**. Upon clicking the "NEXT" soft button **424**, the computerized electronic auction payment system **110** appends the respective electronic auction payment account with the information entered in payment registration page **400** and stores the appended electronic auction payment account within the database of electronic auction payment accounts **114** (step **208** of FIG. 2A).

At step **210**, a confirmation message page (not shown) is then presented to the user **102** indicating that his electronic auction payment account has been appropriately set up or changed (in case the user **102** accessed a previously set up electronic auction payment account and changed the information provided therein). The confirmation message page also indicates if any transactions are set to occur or have occurred based upon the information entered in the payment registration page **400**. For example, a message can indicate that US\$325 was withdrawn from the user's electronic auction payment account and transferred to the user's bank account as specified in field **402**. Another message can indicate that US\$325 was withdrawn from the user's bank account as specified in field **402** and transferred to the user's electronic auction payment account.

It is contemplated that a message is also presented to the user **102** asking for a confirmation from the user **102** prior to the computerized electronic auction payment system **110** proceeding with a specified transaction, such as "By clicking the YES button, US\$325 will be transferred to Republic Bank Account No. 4356123. By clicking the CANCEL button, the transaction will be canceled."

A description will now be provided with reference to FIG. 2B for effecting a real-time payment using the computerized electronic auction payment system **110** at the conclusion of

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an electronic auction provided by the electronic auction system **112**. The flow chart of FIG. 2B illustrates a real-time payment as initiated by the winning bidder by accessing a payment page of the payment segment of the electronic auction web site or an independent auction payment web site. That is, if the user **102** has not indicated "yes" in automatic payment field **416**. As described above, a real-time payment can also be performed in real-time by the computerized electronic auction payment system **110** if the winning bidder has indicated "yes" in automatic payment field **416**.

At step **220**, after the winning bidder wins an auction item from the electronic auction web site, the winning bidder initiates a real-time payment, e.g., by clicking an icon on the electronic auction web site or by clicking a hyperlink provided on an e-mail transmitted by the electronic auction system **112** to the winning bidder and seller for accessing the payment segment. At step **222**, the payment page, designated by reference numeral **500** in FIG. 5, is accessed, and the winning bidder then enters the amount of funds to be transferred to the seller in field **502**. The amount of funds to be transferred to the seller could be, for example, the sum of the final auction price, the shipping and handling fees, and the taxes.

In the payment page **500**, the winning bidder can also enter the amount of funds to be transferred to the system account database **120** in field **504**, if the winning bidder elects to purchase insurance and/or have the operator of the system **110** personally guarantee the item won. It is noted that field **504** is already filled out by the system **110** if the winning bidder has pre-designated in field **418e** for the system **110** to automatically provide insurance and/or personally guarantee the item won, and the final auction price is greater than or equal to the minimum final auction price provided in field **418e**. The winning bidder can click on icon **506** for a list of insurance prices, similarly, to icon **419**.

The payment page **500** also includes fields **508** providing various information. Fields **508** can provide, for example, the auction item number of the item won by the winning bidder, a description of the item, the seller's user-name, the buyer's user-name, and the final auction price. The winning bidder then enters his password in field **510**, and then clicks the "NEXT" soft button **512**. Upon clicking the "NEXT" soft button **512**, the winning bidder accesses a confirmation page in step **224**. The confirmation page is shown by FIG. 6 and designated generally by reference numeral **600**.

The confirmation page **600** includes several fields: field **602** provides the auction item number; field **604** provides the seller's user-name; field **606** provides the buyer's user-name; field **608** provides the amount of funds to be transferred to the seller as entered in field **502** of the payment page **500**; and field **610** indicates the amount of insurance purchased or if no insurance was purchased.

Field **612** indicates the amount of funds within the winning bidder's electronic auction payment account, and field **614** indicates the total amount of system funds to be used, if there are insufficient funds in the winning bidder's payment account and the winning bidder has indicated in field **418d** for the system **110** to use system funds. Once the winning bidder has read the information provides by the confirmation page, he then authorizes payment at step **226** by clicking the "PAYMENT" soft button **616**.

Upon clicking the "PAYMENT" soft button **612**, the computerized electronic auction payment system debits the winning bidder's electronic auction payment account in by an amount equal to the amount entered in field **502** and credits the seller's electronic auction payment account and/or other accounts indicated by the seller in fields **402** and **404** in real-time, in accordance with the percentages entered in field **410**. If insurance/personal guarantee has been specified by the winning bidder in field **504**, the system **110** accordingly debits the winning bidder's electronic auction payment account

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in real-time, as described above, to purchase insurance and/or personal guarantee the auction item and to pay itself a service fee.

It is noted that if the winning bidder's electronic auction payment account does not have sufficient funds, the system **110** loans system funds from the system account to the winning bidder to effect payment, if the winning bidder has so indicated in field **418d**. The amount of funds debited from the winning bidder's electronic auction payment account are replenished from sources indicated in field **408**, if the winning bidder has so indicated in field **418c**. Further, a pre-specified amount of funds are transferred to the winning bidder's electronic auction payment account, if the total amount of funds in the winning bidder's payment account are less than the pre-specified amount of funds as indicated in field **418a**, following the transfer of funds to the seller's electronic auction payment account.

The computerized electronic auction payment system **110** withholds a predetermined percentage of the funds entered in field **502** upon the "PAYMENT" soft button **612** being clicked. These funds are withheld by the system **110** to pay the commission fees of the operator of the system **110** and/or the operator of the electronic auction system **112**. The withheld funds are preferably stored within the system account maintained by the system account database **120**.

It is contemplated that the payment transaction is stopped if the winning bidder does not have enough funds in his electronic auction payment account and has not indicated in field **418d** for the computerized electronic auction payment system **110** to use system funds. If this is the case, the system **110** informs the winning bidder by a message upon the winning bidder clicking the "PAYMENT" soft button **612** of the fact that the winning bidder does not have enough funds to effect a real-time payment of the item won. The winning bidder can then transfer funds into his electronic auction payment account and then re-access the payment page **500**; authorize the system **110** to use system funds by clicking field **418d** and then re-access the payment page **500**; or mail a check, money order, etc. to the seller.

At step **228**, the computerized electronic auction payment system **110** displays a bill of sale or receipt, as shown by FIG. **7** and designated generally by reference numeral **700**, indicating completion of the payment. The bill of sale **700** includes several fields: field **702** provides the auction item number; field **704** provides a description of the item won; field **706** provides the seller's user-name; field **708** provides the winning bidder's user-name; field **710** provides the electronic auction payment account number of the winning bidder's electronic auction payment account; field **712** provides the amount of funds transferred to the seller; and field **714** indicates if insurance was purchased by the winning bidder. The winning bidder can then click soft button **716** to print the bill of sale **700**.

At step **230**, an e-mail is transmitted to the winning bidder and the seller confirming the transaction. The e-mail also indicates the total amount of funds debited, withheld and transferred, the mailing address of the winning bidder, the auction item, and the final auction price. The mailing address of the winning bidder is preferably obtained from the database of electronic auction payment accounts **114**. The auction item and the final auction price are obtained or transmitted from the electronic auction system **112**. The e-mail can further include a hyperlink for linking to a web site where the winning bidder and seller can leave comments regarding their payment transaction. A hyperlink can also be included for viewing and/or printing the bill of sale or receipt as shown by FIG. **7**.

For simplicity only a particular type of electronic auction has been described above in accordance with the system and method of the present invention. However, one skilled in the

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art can apply the inventive system and method to other types of electronic auctions, such as electronic Dutch auctions.

Although various preferred embodiments of the present invention have been described herein in detail, it will be appreciated by those skilled in the art, that variations may be made thereto without departing from the spirit of the invention or the scope of the appended claims.

We claim:

1. An electronic commerce method comprising:

offering a user of an electronic commerce web site via a graphical user interface an incentive to use funds stored in a payment account corresponding to the user to effect payment for an electronic commerce transaction;

receiving authorization from the user by at least one processor to use funds stored in the payment account corresponding to the user to effect payment for the electronic commerce transaction; and

rewarding by the at least one processor the user for responding to the incentive for using funds stored in the payment account corresponding to the user to effect payment for the electronic commerce transaction, wherein the incentive is not rewarded by the at least one processor if the user uses a payment source other than the Payment account to effect payment for the electronic commerce transaction,

wherein the payment account is maintained by a database maintaining a plurality of payment accounts each corresponding to a respective user of a plurality of users, including the user, of said electronic commerce web site, each of said plurality of payment accounts storing funds therein and each being used for electronic commerce transactions,

wherein at least one payment source is used to obtain funds for storing within the payment account corresponding to the user prior to using funds stored in the payment account corresponding to the user to effect payment for the electronic commerce transaction, wherein the at least one payment source is selected from the group comprising: a bank account and a credit card account.

2. The method according to claim 1, wherein the step of rewarding includes entering the user in a sweepstakes drawing.

3. The method according to claim 2, wherein the sweepstakes drawing is a weekly sweepstakes drawing.

4. The method according to claim 2, wherein the sweepstakes drawing includes a prize having a predetermined monetary value.

5. The method according to claim 1, further comprising displaying the offered incentive on the electronic commerce web site.

6. The method according to claim 2, wherein the user's chance of winning the sweepstakes drawing is based on an amount of funds deducted from the payment account during a predetermined period.

7. The method according to claim 2, wherein the user's chance of winning the sweepstakes drawing is based on an average amount of funds from the payment account used to effect payment during a predetermined period.

8. The method according to claim 1, wherein the electronic commerce web site is an electronic auction web site.

9. An electronic commerce method comprising:

debiting a specific payment account corresponding to a user of an electronic commerce web site by at least one processor, said specific payment account storing funds therein; and

entering the user by the at least one processor in a sweepstakes drawing based on the user authorizing the specific

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payment account to be debited, wherein the user is not entered in the sweepstakes drawing if the user authorizes a payment account other than the specific payment account to be debited.

10. The method according to claim 9, wherein the sweepstakes drawing is a weekly sweepstakes drawing. 5

11. The method according to claim 9, wherein the sweepstakes drawing includes a prize having a predetermined monetary value.

12. The method according to claim 9, wherein the sweepstakes drawing is provided as an incentive to the user. 10

13. The method according to claim 9, wherein the user's chance of winning the sweepstakes drawing is based on an amount of funds deducted from the specific payment account during a predetermined period. 15

14. The method according to claim 9, wherein the user's chance of winning the sweepstakes drawing is based on an average amount of funds from the specific payment account used to effect payment during a predetermined period.

15. The method according to claim 9, wherein the electronic commerce web site is an electronic auction web site. 20

16. An electronic commerce method comprising:

offering a user of an electronic commerce web site via a graphical user interface to be entered into a sweepstakes drawing if said user uses funds stored within a specific payment account corresponding to the user to effect payment for an electronic commerce transaction; and entering the user in the sweepstakes drawing by at least one processor if said user used funds stored within the specific payment account to effect payment for the electronic commerce transaction, wherein the user is not entered in the sweepstakes drawing if the user used a payment source than the specific payment account to effect payment for the electronic commerce transaction. 30

17. The method according to claim 16, wherein the sweepstakes drawing is a weekly sweepstakes drawing. 35

18. The method according to claim 16, wherein the user's chance of winning the sweepstakes drawing is based on an amount of funds from the specific payment account used to purchase at least one item offered for sale via the electronic commerce web site. 40

19. The method according to claim 16, wherein the user's chance of winning the sweepstakes drawing is based on an amount of funds deducted from the specific payment account during a predetermined period. 45

20. The method according to claim 16, wherein the user's chance of winning the sweepstakes drawing is based on an average amount of funds from the specific payment account used to effect payment during a predetermined period. 50

21. An electronic commerce method comprising:

offering a user of an electronic commerce web site via a graphical user interface an incentive for using a specific payment system to effect payment for an electronic commerce transaction originating via the electronic commerce web site, wherein the specific payment system comprises a database storing a plurality of payment accounts, each of the plurality of payment accounts storing funds therein for use in effecting payment for electronic commerce transactions originating via the electronic commerce web site; 55

determining by at least one processor if the user originated the electronic commerce transaction via the electronic commerce web site, and, if yes, determining if payment for the electronic commerce transaction was effected using a payment account corresponding to the user and stored within the database of the specific payment system; and 65

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rewarding by the at least one processor to the user the offered incentive if the payment account corresponding to the user and stored within the database of the specific payment system was used to effect payment for the electronic commerce transaction, wherein the incentive is not rewarded by the at least one processor if the user uses a payment system other than the specific payment system to effect payment for the electronic commerce transaction,

wherein at least one payment source is used to obtain funds for storm within the payment account corresponding to the user prior to using the payment account corresponding to the user to effect payment for the electronic commerce transaction, wherein the at least one payment source is selected from the group comprising: a bank account and a credit card account.

22. The method according to claim 21, wherein the incentive is selected from the group consisting of providing free shipping for an item purchased via the electronic commerce transaction, and entering the user in a sweepstakes drawing.

23. The method according to claim 21, wherein the specific payment system includes a payment server executing application software for determining the payment account from the plurality of payment accounts corresponding to the user and for deducting funds from the payment account for effecting payment for the electronic commerce transaction, and wherein access to the specific payment system is provided via a link displayed on at least one web page corresponding to the electronic commerce web site.

24. The method according to claim 21, wherein each of the plurality of payment accounts including payment information for use in effecting payment for electronic commerce transactions originating via the electronic commerce web site.

25. The method according to claim 24, wherein the specific payment system includes a payment server executing application software for determining payment information corresponding to the user and using said payment information for effecting payment for the electronic commerce transaction, and wherein access to the specific payment system is provided via a link displayed on at least one web page corresponding to the electronic commerce web site.

26. The method according to claim 24, wherein the payment information includes information selected from the group consisting of credit card information, and bank account information.

27. The method according to claim 21, further comprising displaying the offered incentive on the electronic commerce web site.

28. The method according to claim 22, wherein the user's chance of winning the sweepstakes drawing is based on an amount of funds transferred to the payment account corresponding to the user during a predetermined period, and wherein the payment account is created and maintained by the specific payment system.

29. The method according to claim 22, wherein the user's chance of winning the sweepstakes drawing is based on an average amount of funds from the payment account used to effect payment during a predetermined period, and wherein the payment account corresponds to the user and is created and maintained by the specific payment system.

30. The method according to claim 21, wherein the electronic commerce web site is an electronic auction web site.

31. A method for rewarding an incentive offered to a user of an electronic commerce web site maintained by an electronic commerce system, the method comprising:

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receiving at least one input from the user via a payment web page to effect payment via a specific payment system, in operative communication with the electronic commerce system, to another user of the electronic commerce web site;

effecting payment to the another user of the electronic commerce web site via the specific payment system; and rewarding the incentive by at least one processor to the user of the electronic commerce web site for using the specific payment system to effect payment, the incentive offered is displayed on at least one web page associated with the electronic commerce system, the specific payment system comprises a database storing a plurality of payment accounts, each of the plurality of payment accounts storing funds therein for use in effecting payment for electronic commerce transactions originating via the electronic commerce web site, wherein the incentive is not rewarded by the at least one processor if the user uses a payment system other than the specific Payment system to effect payment,

wherein a plurality of payment sources are used to obtain funds for storing within the plurality of payment accounts prior to using funds stored in the plurality of payment accounts to effect payment for the electronic commerce transactions originating via the electronic commerce web site, wherein the plurality of payment sources are selected from the group comprising: bank accounts and credit card accounts.

32. The method according to claim **31**, wherein the incentive is selected from the group consisting of providing free shipping for an item offered for sale via the electronic commerce web site and purchased by the user, and entering the user in a sweepstakes drawing.

33. The method according to claim **31**, wherein the specific payment system includes a payment server executing application software for determining a payment account from the plurality of payment accounts corresponding to the user and for deducting funds from the payment account for effecting payment for an electronic commerce transaction originating via the electronic commerce web site, and wherein access to the specific payment system is provided via a link displayed on at least one web page corresponding to the electronic commerce web site.

34. The method according to claim **31**, wherein each of the plurality of payment accounts including payment information for use in effecting payment for electronic commerce transactions originating via the electronic commerce web site.

35. The method according to claim **34**, wherein the specific payment system includes a payment server executing application software for determining payment information corresponding to the user and using said payment information for effecting payment for the electronic commerce transaction, and wherein access to the specific payment system is provided via a link displayed on at least one web page corresponding to the electronic commerce web site.

36. The method according to claim **35**, wherein the payment information includes information selected from the group consisting of credit card information, and bank account information.

37. The method according to claim **31**, wherein the incentive is entering the user in a sweepstakes drawing, wherein the user's chance of winning the sweepstakes drawing is based on an amount of hands transferred to a payment account corresponding to the user during a predetermined period, and wherein the payment account is created and maintained by the specific payment system.

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38. The method according to claim **31**, wherein the incentive is entering the user in a sweepstakes drawing, wherein the user's chance of winning the sweepstakes drawing is based on an average amount of hands from a payment account used to effect payment during a predetermined period, and wherein the payment account corresponds to the user and is created and maintained by the specific payment system.

39. The method according to claim **31**, wherein the electronic commerce web site is an electronic auction web site.

40. An electronic commerce method comprising:

rewarding a user of an electronic commerce web site by at least one processor an incentive having a monetary value, wherein the incentive is rewarded to the user for using a specific payment method for effecting payment for an electronic commerce transaction, and wherein the incentive is displayed by at least one web page accessible via at least one web page of the electronic commerce web site maintained by an electronic commerce system, wherein the incentive is not rewarded if the user uses a payment method other than the specific payment method to effect payment for the electronic commerce transaction; and

redeeming the rewarded incentive by the at least one processor for the user when effecting payment for an item purchased via the electronic commerce web site by the user,

wherein the specific payment method comprises the steps of:

debiting by the at least one processor a payment account corresponding to the user, wherein said payment account is stored within an electronic database of a plurality of payment accounts corresponding to a plurality of users of said electronic commerce web site, wherein said database and a payment segment of said electronic commerce web site are maintained by an electronic commerce payment system integrated with said electronic commerce system, each of said plurality of electronic commerce payment accounts storing funds therein and each being used for user transactions in the electronic commerce system; and

crediting by the at least one processor at least one account to effect payment for the item purchased via the electronic commerce web site,

wherein at least one payment source is used to obtain funds for storing within the payment account prior to debiting said payment account to effect payment.

41. The method according to claim **40**, wherein the incentive is a predetermined amount of funds, and wherein the step of rewarding comprises depositing the predetermined amount of funds into a payment account corresponding to the user.

42. The method according to claim **40**, wherein the at least one payment source is selected from the group comprising: a bank account and a credit card account.

43. An electronic commerce system comprising:

means for offering a user of an electronic commerce web site an incentive for using funds stored in a payment account corresponding to the user to effect payment for an electronic commerce transaction;

means for receiving authorization from the user to use funds stored in the payment account corresponding to the user to effect payment for the electronic commerce transaction; and

means for rewarding the user for responding to the incentive for using funds stored in the payment account corresponding to the user to effect payment for the electronic commerce transaction, wherein the incentive is

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not rewarded if the user uses a payment source other than the payment account to effect payment for the electronic commerce transaction;

wherein the payment account is maintained by a database maintaining a plurality of payment accounts each corresponding to a respective user of a plurality of users, including the user, of said electronic commerce web site, each of said plurality of payment accounts storing funds therein and each being used for electronic commerce transactions,

wherein at least one payment source is used to obtain funds for storing within the payment account corresponding to the user prior to using funds stored in the payment account corresponding to the user to effect payment for the electronic commerce transaction, wherein the at least one Payment source is selected from the group comprising: a bank account and a credit card account.

44. The system according to claim 43, wherein the means for rewarding comprises means for entering the user in a sweepstakes drawing.

45. The system according to claim 43, further comprising means for causing the display of the offered incentive on at least one web page of the electronic commerce web site.

46. An electronic commerce system comprising:

means for offering a user of an electronic commerce web site an incentive for using a specific payment system to effect payment for an electronic commerce transaction originating via the electronic commerce web site, wherein the specific payment system comprises a database storing a plurality of payment accounts, each of the plurality of payment accounts storing funds therein for use in effecting payment for electronic commerce transactions originating via the electronic commerce web site;

means for determining if the user originated the electronic commerce transaction via the electronic commerce web site, and, if yes, determining if payment for the electronic commerce transaction was effected using a payment account corresponding to the user and stored within the database of the specific payment system; and

means for rewarding the user the offered incentive if the payment account corresponding to the user and stored within the database of the specific payment system was used to effect payment for the electronic commerce transaction, wherein the incentive is not rewarded if the user uses a payment system other than the specific payment system to effect payment for the electronic commerce transaction,

wherein at least one payment source is used to obtain funds for storing within the payment account corresponding to the user prior to using the payment account corresponding to the user to effect payment for the electronic commerce transaction, wherein the at least one payment source is selected from the group comprising: a bank account and a credit card account.

47. The system according to claim 46, wherein the incentive is selected from the group consisting of providing free shipping for an item purchased via the electronic commerce transaction, and entering the user in a sweepstakes drawing.

48. The system according to claim 46, wherein the specific payment system includes a payment server executing application software for determining a payment account from the plurality of payment accounts corresponding to the user and for deducting funds from the payment account for effecting

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payment for the electronic commerce transaction, and wherein access to the specific payment system is provided via a link displayed on at least one web page corresponding to the electronic commerce web site.

49. The system according to claim 46, wherein each of the plurality of payment accounts including payment information for use in effecting payment for electronic commerce transactions originating via the electronic commerce web site.

50. The system according to claim 49, wherein the specific payment system includes a payment server executing application software for determining payment information corresponding to the user and using said payment information for effecting payment for the electronic commerce transaction, and wherein access to the specific payment system is provided via a link displayed on at least one web page corresponding to the electronic commerce web site.

51. The system according to claim 46, further comprising means for displaying the offered incentive on the electronic commerce web site.

52. An electronic commerce system comprising:

means for rewarding a user of an electronic commerce web site an incentive having a monetary value, wherein the incentive is rewarded to the user for using a specific payment method for effecting payment for an electronic commerce transaction, and wherein the incentive is displayed by at least one web page accessible via at least one web page of the electronic commerce web site maintained by an electronic commerce system, wherein the incentive is not rewarded if the user uses a payment method other than the specific payment method to effect payment for the electronic commerce transaction; and means for redeeming the rewarded incentive for the user when effecting payment for an item purchased via the electronic commerce web site by the user, wherein the specific payment method comprises the steps of:

debiting by the at least one processor a payment account corresponding to the user, wherein said payment account is stored within an electronic database of a plurality of payment accounts corresponding to a plurality of users of said electronic commerce web site, wherein said database and a payment segment of said electronic commerce web site are maintained by an electronic commerce payment system integrated with said electronic commerce system, each of said plurality of electronic commerce payment accounts storing funds therein and each being used for user transactions in the electronic commerce system; and crediting by the at least one processor at least one account to effect payment for the item purchased via the electronic commerce web site,

wherein at least one payment source is used to obtain funds for storing within the payment account prior to debiting said payment account to effect payment.

53. The system according to claim 52, wherein the incentive is a predetermined amount of funds, and wherein the step of rewarding comprises depositing the predetermined amount of funds into a payment account corresponding to the user.

54. The system according to claim 52, wherein the at least one payment source is selected from the group comprising: a bank account and a credit card account.

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