



US007610244B2

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

(10) **Patent No.:** **US 7,610,244 B2**  
 (45) **Date of Patent:** **\*Oct. 27, 2009**

(54) **SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR EFFECTING  
 PAYMENT FOR AN ITEM OFFERED FOR AN  
 ELECTRONIC AUCTION SALE**

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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 336 days.

This patent is subject to a terminal dis-  
 claimer.

(21) Appl. No.: **10/044,075**

(22) Filed: **Jan. 11, 2002**

(65) **Prior Publication Data**

US 2002/0095379 A1 Jul. 18, 2002

**Related U.S. Application Data**

(63) Continuation-in-part of application No. 09/993,818,  
 filed on Nov. 14, 2001, which is a continuation-in-part  
 of application No. 09/946,616, filed on Sep. 5, 2001,  
 now Pat. No. 7,567,937, which is a continuation-in-  
 part 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.** ..... **705/40; 705/37**

(58) **Field of Classification Search** ..... 705/43,  
 705/46, 37, 38, 36, 40, 39, 34; 382/139;  
 380/24; 235/379

See application file for complete search history.

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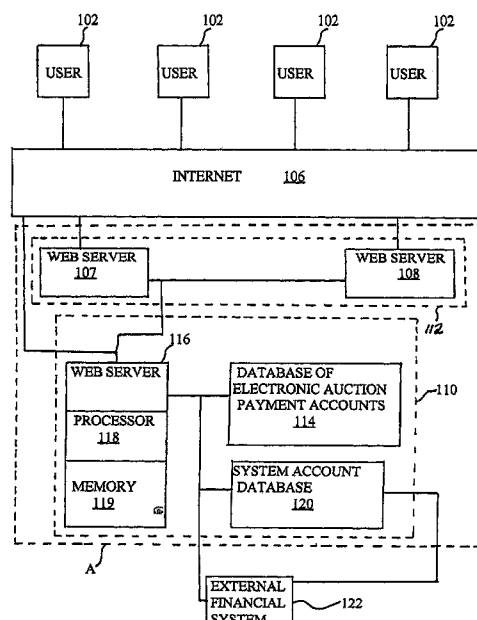
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

A computerized electronic auction payment system and  
 method for effecting payment for at least one item sold via an  
 electronic auction web site maintained by an electronic auc-  
 tion system are provided. The system sets up and maintains  
 electronic auction payment accounts for prospective users,  
 e.g., bidders and sellers, of the electronic auction web site.  
 The method includes the step of deducting funds the payment  
 account corresponding to the buyer of the at least one item  
 following authorization from the buyer to deduct funds from  
 the payment account. The method for effecting payment does  
 not provide for any interaction between the buyer and the  
 seller. It is provided that the buyer's payment account is  
 deducted automatically, if the at least one input is not received  
 within a predetermined time period.

**57 Claims, 9 Drawing Sheets**



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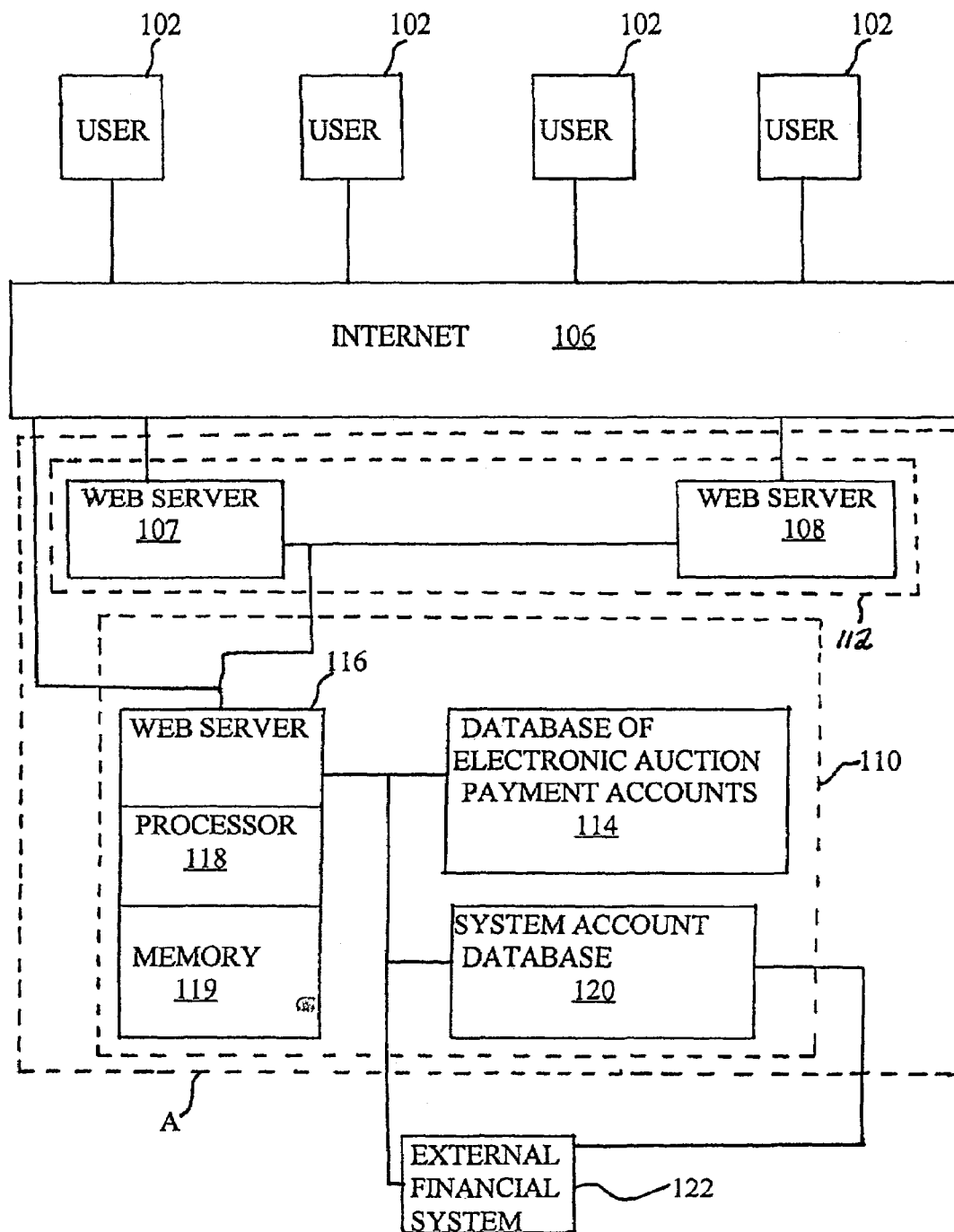
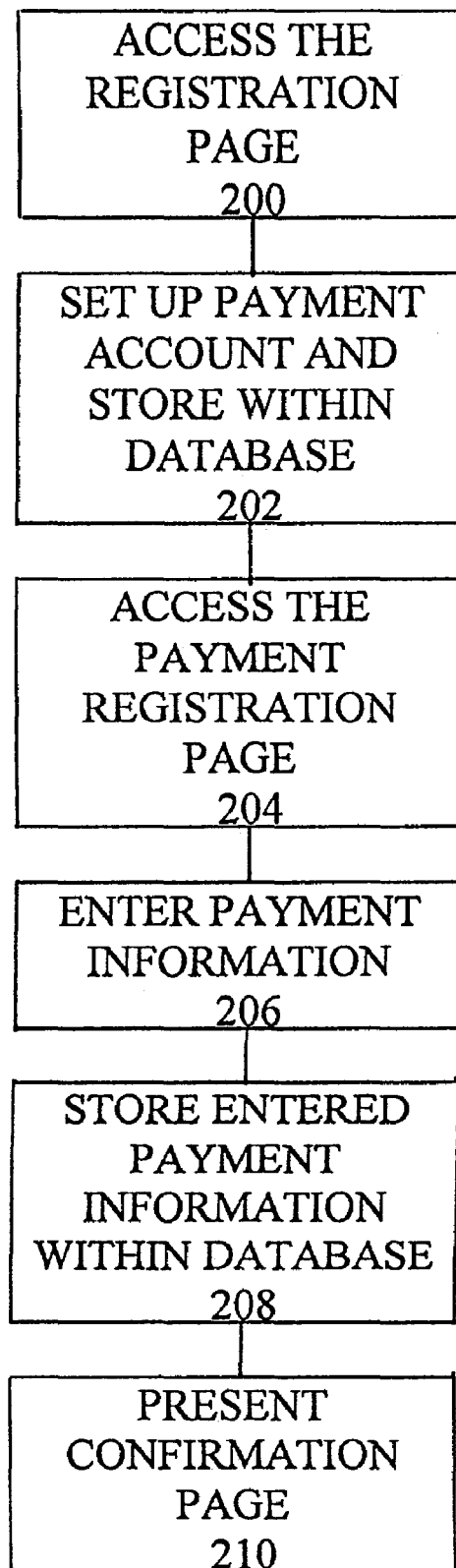
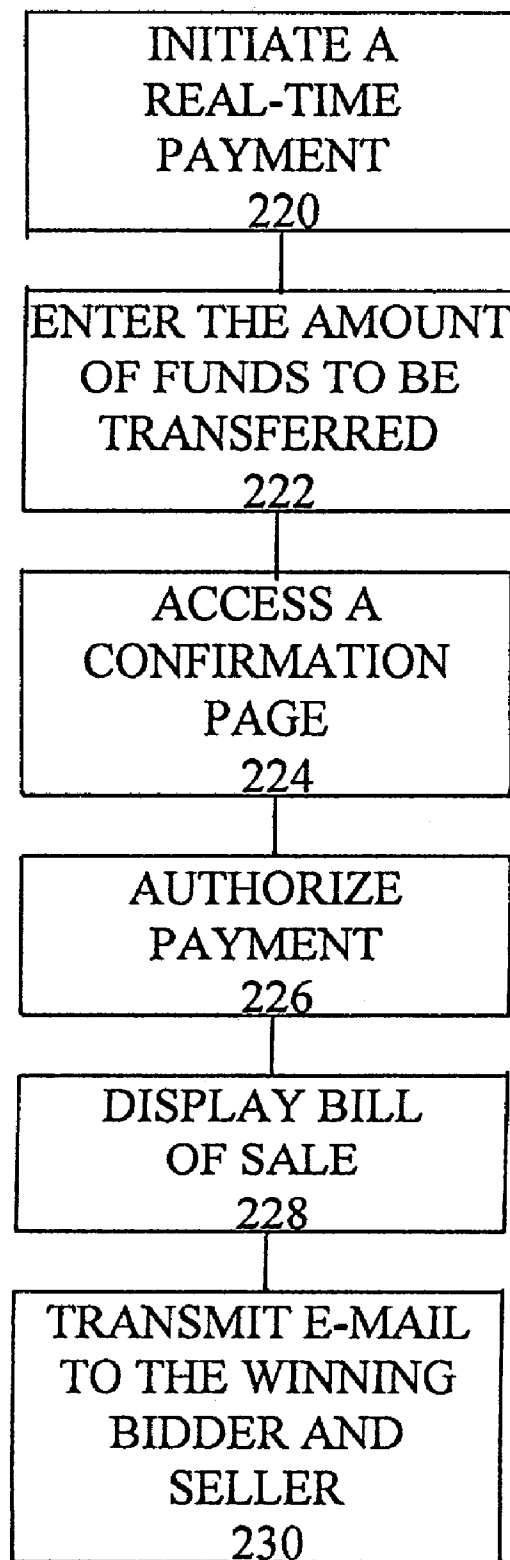


FIG. 1

**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>CITY</u>			<u>COUNTRY OF CITIZENSHIP</u>
<u>STATE</u>	<u>ZIP CODE</u>	<u>COUNTRY</u>	
		<u>USER-NAME</u>	} 304
		<u>PASSWORD</u>	
			} 306

302

308  
NEXT ---->

FIG. 3

402		400		404	
<b><u>I. BANK ACCOUNT INFORMATION</u></b>			<b><u>II CREDIT CARD INFORMATION</u></b>		
NAME OF BANK		ACCOUNT NUMBER		CREDIT CARD NO.      EXP. DATE	
MAILING ADDRESS		NAME OF ACCOUNT HOLDER		NAME ON CREDIT CARD	
CITY	STATE	ZIP CODE		CREDIT CARD ISSUER (VISA, ETC.)	
408 → % OF FUNDS FROM I.		% OF FUNDS FROM II.		MAIL BANK ACCOUNT INFO., CREDIT CARD INFO., OR CHECK/ MONEY ORDER TO: AUCTIONS PAYMENT LED. 15 MERCER LANE, NY, NY 10015 (212) 555-2490 ← 406	
410 → % OF FUNDS TO BE TRANSFERRED TO I.		% OF FUNDS TO BE TRANSFERRED TO II.			
ENTER AMOUNT OF FUNDS TO DEPOSIT IN THE ELECTRONIC AUCTION PAYMENT ACCOUNT ↑ 412		ENTER AMOUNT OF FUNDS TO BE WITHDRAWN ↑ 414		AUTOMATIC PAYMENT YES (Y) OR NO(N) ← 416	

FIG. 4A



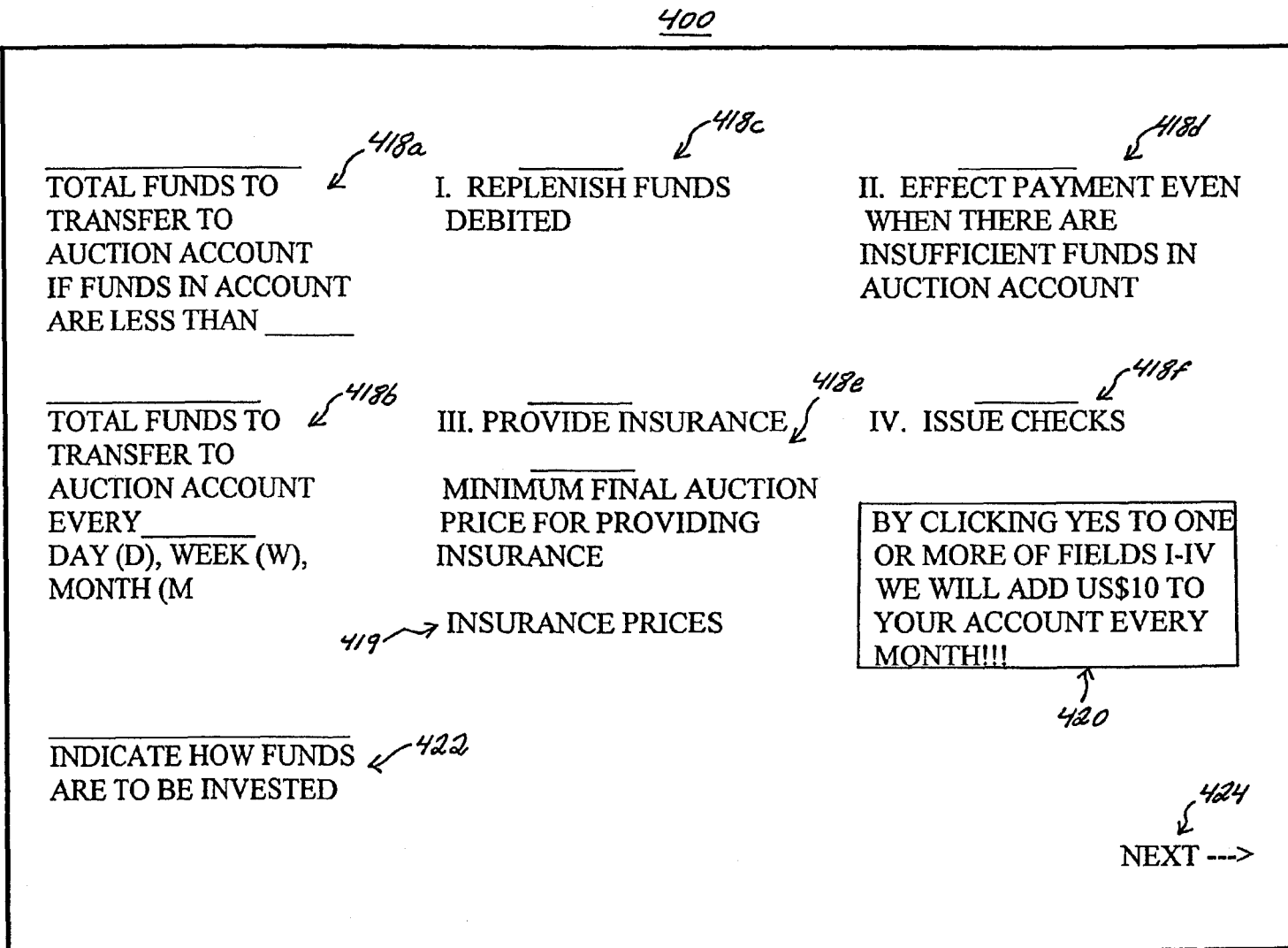


FIG. 4B

500**PAYMENT PAGE**

AUCTION ITEM NO. 42134698  
ITEM DESCRIPTION: SILVER BOWL (CIRCA 1920)  
SELLER USER-NAME: SILVERRADO  
BUYER USER-NAME: ILOVE COLLECTING  
FINAL AUCTION PRICE: US \$115.00

508

502 → ENTER TOTAL FUNDS TO TRANSFER: \_\_\_\_\_  
504 → INSURANCE (OPTIONAL): \_\_\_\_\_

INSURANCE PRICES ← 506

ENTER PASSWORD: \_\_\_\_\_ ← 510

512  
NEXT →**FIG. 5**

600CONFIRMATION PAGE

602 → AUCTION ITEM NO. 42134698  
604 → SELLER USER-NAME: SILVERRADO  
606 → BUYER USER-NAME: I LOVE COLLECTING

608 → TOTAL FUNDS TO BE TRANSFERRED: US \$125.35  
610 → NO INSURANCE PURCHASED

AMOUNT OF FUNDS  
IN ACCOUNT: US \$95.00 ← 612

PAYMENT ← 616

SYSTEM FUNDS TO  
BE USED: US \$30.35 ← 614

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**

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# SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR EFFECTING PAYMENT FOR AN ITEM OFFERED FOR AN ELECTRONIC AUCTION SALE

## PRIORITY

This patent application is a continuation-in-part application of a patent application filed on Nov. 14, 2001 and assigned U.S. patent application Ser. No. 09/993,818 which is a continuation-in-part application of a patent application filed on Sep. 5, 2001 and assigned U.S. patent application Ser. No. 09/946,616 which is a continuation-in-part application of a patent application filed on Jan. 17, 2001 and assigned U.S. patent application Ser. No. 09/764,618, the contents of the priority patent applications are incorporated herein by reference.

## 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

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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. It is provided that the winning bidder's (or any user's) electronic auction payment account is deducted automatically and the deducted funds are transferred to the electronic auction payment account of the seller, and/or another account specified by the seller, if the winning bidder fails to access the payment page within a predetermined time period.

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.

Funds can be automatically transferred to the electronic auction payment accounts on a periodic basis and after funds are deducted from the payment accounts to replenish the funds deducted from the payment accounts. A fee can be charged by an operator of the computerized electronic auction payment system for automatically transferring funds to the electronic auction payment accounts and for automatically replenishing the payment accounts.

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

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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.

Further still, according to another aspect of the present invention, the computerized electronic auction payment system and method maintain and provide data relating to at least one item having been offered for sale via at least one electronic commerce web site and purchased by a user of the at least one electronic commerce web site over a given time period by using at least funds within a payment account corresponding to the user and/or at least funds loaned to the user. Accordingly, an operator of the computerized electronic auction payment system and method is deemed as being a data analyst and/or manager.

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 electronic auction sale and won by a winning bidder at the conclusion of the electronic auction sale. 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 capable of being configured for automatically having funds transferred thereto from various sources, 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 without any intervention by the winning bidder following the conclusion of the electronic auction. The steps of debiting the electronic auction payment account corresponding to the winning bidder and crediting the at least one account corresponding to the seller occur in real-time.

The present invention also provides a method for effecting payment for an item offered for an electronic auction sale by a seller and won by a winning bidder at the conclusion of the electronic auction sale where computer terminals of potential purchasers are used to access an electronic auction web 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 capable of being configured for automati-

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cally having funds transferred thereto from at least one source corresponding to the winning bidder of the item; and crediting at least one account corresponding to the seller to effect payment for the item won by the winning bidder. The steps of debiting the electronic auction payment account corresponding to the winning bidder and crediting the at least one account corresponding to the seller occur in real-time.

Further, the method includes the steps of automatically replenishing the payment account corresponding to the user after the step of automatically deducting funds from the payment account, and charging a fee for automatically replenishing the payment account corresponding to the user of the electronic auction web site.

## 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 illustrate 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 payment 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 username 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.

It is contemplated that the user **102** can opt to be loaned funds directly from a payment system of the external financial system **122** and not to be loaned system funds, i.e., funds stored within the system account. It is further contemplated that the user **102** can access a web site corresponding to the external financial system **122** by clicking or selecting an icon displayed by the electronic auction payment web site or the payment segment of the electronic auction web site. Upon accessing the web site corresponding to the external financial system **122**, the user **102** can register to be automatically loaned funds for the automatic payment of future payments, or for authorizing the loaning of funds to effect a current payment(s). In either case, the electronic auction payment system **110** communicates with the external financial system **122** for loaning funds to the user **102**. For example, after the user **102** registers with the system **122** and the user **102** has indicated in field **418d**, as described below, to be loaned funds in case there are insufficient funds in the user's electronic auction payment account, then when the system **110** detects there are insufficient funds in the user's payment account, the system **110** instructs the external financial system **122** to directly loan funds to the user **102**. It is further contemplated that the financial institution overseeing the external financial system **122** is owned and/or operated by the operator of the electronic auction payment system **110** and/or the operator of the electronic auction system **112**.

Further still, it is contemplated that the external financial system **122** includes local area networks of more than one financial institution. Accordingly, the system **110** can communicate with several financial institutions to receive funds from one or more of the financial institutions and in turn loan the funds on behalf of the financial institution(s) to the registered users **102** of the electronic auction payment system **110** and/or the electronic auction system **112**.

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It is also contemplated that the system **110** charges the users **102** a fixed or variable service fee for communicating with the financial institution(s) and receiving funds therefrom for loaning on behalf of the financial institution(s) to the users **102**. The system **110** can also charge a one-time fixed or variable service fee to the financial institution(s) for loaning funds on its (their) behalf to the users **102**. The system **110** can further charge an on-going fee to the financial institution(s). The on-going fee is preferably based, e.g., a predetermined percentage, on the periodic interest earned by the financial institution(s) for the funds loaned to the users **102**.

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 electronic 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.

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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 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. It is contemplated to charge the user a service fee for providing this service.

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 at least transferring funds to other electronic auction payment accounts, e.g., upon effecting a payment after the conclusion of an auction, or the system account. It is contemplated to charge the user a service fee for providing this service. The service fee could be fixed, or variable based on the total amount of funds transferred from sources specified in fields **402** and **404** to replenish the user's electronic auction payment account.

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.

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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, in order to effect payment to the operator of the system **110**.

It is contemplated that the user provides authorization to the system **110** prior to the system **110** automatically, or on a periodic basis, withdrawing or deducting funds which are transferred to the user's electronic auction payment account. It is further contemplated to charge the user a service fee and to deduct funds to cover the service fee for automatically, or on a periodic basis, withdrawing funds from the user's electronic auction payment account and transferring the funds to the system account. The service fee could be fixed, or variable based on the total amount of funds transferred to the system account.

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 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

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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 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

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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 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.

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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. It is provided that the winning bidder's payment account is deducted automatically and the deducted funds are transferred to appropriate accounts, if the winning bidder fails to respond to the e-mail and/or access the payment segment within a predetermined time period, e.g., five days. It is further provided that the seller provides notification to the operator of the electronic auction system 112 if payment has not been effected within a predetermined time period by the winning bidder, i.e., the winning bidder has not accessed the payment segment and has not provided authorization to deduct his electronic auction payment account. After determining that notification has been received from the seller, the electronic auction system 112 effects payment by automatically deducting funds from the winning bidder's electronic auction payment account and transferring the deducted funds to the 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.

If the winning bidder initiates the real-time payment at step 220, then 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.

It is provided that the winning bidder can initiate the real-time payment at step 220 by activating a character recognition mode while viewing the e-mail transmitted by the electronic auction system 112. The character recognition mode can be activated by the winning bidder pressing a key on a keyboard, and/or selecting an icon on the e-mail or e-mail computer screen.

After activating the character recognition mode, the winning bidder can enter one or more characters corresponding to a portion of the hyperlink and the character recognition mode recognizes the intended hyperlink and automatically highlights the hyperlink. For example, if the hyperlink is "Payment Page", the winning bidder can enter, for example, the characters "paym" or "ment P" and the character recognition mode automatically highlights the hyperlink "Payment Page". The winning bidder can then activate the hyperlink by pressing "ENTER" on the keyboard, by clicking the highlighted hyperlink using a mouse or other device, etc. Preferably, a window pops up when the character recognition mode is activated to enable the winning bidder to view the characters as they are being typed.

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

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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 provided 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 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

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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 art can apply the inventive system and method to other types of electronic auctions via the electronic auction web site, such as electronic Dutch auctions, and direct purchase transactions, e.g., the "Buy It Now" feature offered by EBAY™, where the item offered for electronic auction sale via the electronic auction web site is purchased before any bids are submitted by registered users of the electronic auction web site.

It is provided that the electronic auction payment system 110 and/or the electronic auction system 112 store data relating to each item purchased or sold over a given time period by the winning bidder (or other electronic auction participant, such as a direct purchaser, i.e., one who purchases the item via a direct purchase) and seller, respectively. It is contemplated that the data are stored only if the winning bidder's (or other electronic auction participant's) and/or seller's electronic auction payment account was debited or credited, respectively. The data are also stored if funds were loaned by the operator of the electronic auction payment system 110 to the winning bidder (or other electronic auction participant) to effect payment for the item purchased via the electronic auction web site.

The data stored for each item includes, but not limited to, identification information, such as name, identification number, address, user-name, etc., for the winning bidder (or any purchaser of the item) and the seller; the type of item, e.g., ceramic plate, United States postage stamp, etc.; manufacturing information relating to the item, e.g., the name of the manufacturer, the year the item was manufactured, and the place the item was manufactured; whether a certificate of

authenticity or other similar document was provided by the seller of the item; a final auction price or direct purchase price for the item; an indication of whether the item was sold via an electronic auction or whether the item was sold by a direct purchase via the electronic auction web site; total amount of funds transferred from the electronic auction payment account corresponding to the winning bidder or purchaser (in case of a direct purchase); the total amount of funds, if any, loaned to the winning bidder or purchaser to effect payment for the item; a total amount of interest charges incurred if funds were loaned to the winning bidder or purchaser; an auction category for the item, such as antiques and art, books, collectibles, computers, home and garden, pottery and glass, stamps, and toys; and a date and time the final sale price for the item was determined.

The stored or maintained data are provided to the winning bidder (or purchaser), the seller, and/or a third party, such as a promotions/marketing company, by the operator of the system 110 and/or system 112. It is contemplated that the data are provided to the third party only if the winning bidder (or purchaser) and/or seller provided authorization to the operator of the system 110 and/or system 112. It is further contemplated that at least a portion of the data is statistically analyzed by the operator of the system 110 and/or system 112 and is provided in statistical form, e.g., pie charts, bar graphs, percentages, etc. Further still, it is contemplated that at least a portion of the data is provided to the winning bidder (or purchaser), the seller, and/or a third party according to a periodic basis, such as daily, weekly, monthly and/or yearly, and/or a user-specified time basis. It is also contemplated that the operator of the system 110 and/or system 112 charges a fixed or variable fee for maintaining and/or providing the data. The fee could be charged to the winning bidder (or purchaser), the seller, and/or the third party.

It is provided that the above-described methods of the present invention, in particular the method of maintaining and providing data relating to items having been offered for sale via the electronic auction web site and purchased by a user of the electronic auction web site, can be incorporated or expanded within systems maintaining or supporting other electronic commerce web sites, such as electronic travel web sites and an electronic marketing web sites.

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. A method for effecting payment for at least one item offered for auction sale by a seller via an electronic auction web site and won by a winning bidder, where the electronic auction web site is accessible by a plurality of users and maintained by an electronic auction system, the method comprising:

receiving informational data from the plurality of users via at least one web page accessible via at least one web page of the electronic auction web site;

creating a plurality of payment accounts configured for storing funds therein and corresponding to the plurality of users of the electronic auction web site using the informational data received via the at least one web page accessible via the at least one web page of the electronic auction web site, wherein funds stored within the plurality of payment accounts can be used by said plurality of users for effecting payment for network transactions associated with said electronic auction web site;

providing the plurality of users an option to enable an automatic payment service, wherein the automatic payment service automatically effects payment after occurrence of a termination event associated with the network transactions;

linking said plurality of payment accounts to at least one computing device of the electronic auction system;

displaying a link on the electronic auction web site for providing said plurality of users which includes the winning bidder access to their respective payment accounts for viewing the amount of funds stored therein;

determining the conclusion of the auction sale by the electronic auction system; and

interacting with said winning bidder by the electronic auction system by performing the steps of:

sending an e-mail by the electronic auction system to the winning bidder;

receiving, via one of the electronic auction web site and the e-mail, at least one input from the winning bidder indicating an initiation to effect payment to the seller;

providing a payment page to the winning bidder after receiving the at least one input from the winning bidder, said payment page displaying the amount of funds to be deducted from a payment account of the plurality of payment accounts corresponding to the winning bidder, said payment account having been created using informational data received via the at least one web page accessible via the at least one web page of the electronic auction web site; and

receiving, via the payment page, authorization from the winning bidder to proceed with effecting payment to the seller;

deducting funds from the payment account storing funds therein and corresponding to the winning bidder; and using at least a portion of the deducted funds to effect payment to at least the seller, wherein the method for effecting payment does not require any interaction between the winning bidder and the seller.

2. The method according to claim 1, further comprising using at least another portion of the deducted funds to effect payment to an operator of the electronic auction web site.

3. A method for effecting payment for at least one item offered for sale by a seller and purchased by a buyer via an electronic auction web site, where the electronic auction web site is accessible by a plurality of users and maintained by an electronic auction system, the method comprising:

receiving informational data from the plurality of users via at least one web page accessible via at least one web page of the electronic auction web site;

creating and maintaining a plurality of payment accounts configured for storing funds therein and corresponding to the plurality of users of the electronic auction web site using the informational data received via the at least one web page accessible via the at least one web page of the electronic auction web site, wherein funds stored within the plurality of payment accounts can be used by said plurality of users for effecting payment for network transactions associated with said electronic auction web site;

providing the plurality of users an option to enable an automatic payment service, wherein the automatic payment service automatically effects payment after occurrence of a termination event associated with the network transactions;

linking said plurality of payment accounts to at least one computing device of the electronic auction system;

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displaying a link on the electronic auction web site for providing said plurality of users which includes the buyer access to their respective payment accounts for viewing the amount of funds stored therein;  
determining the identity of the buyer by the electronic auction system; and  
interacting with said buyer by the electronic auction system by performing the steps of:  
sending an e-mail by the electronic auction system to the buyer of the at least one item;  
receiving, via one of the electronic auction web site and the e-mail, at least one input from the buyer indicating an initiation to effect payment to the seller;  
providing a payment page to the buyer after receiving the at least one input from the buyer;  
receiving, via the payment page, authorization from the buyer to effect payment to the seller of the at least one item; and  
effecting payment to at least the seller of the at least one item by transferring funds to one of the plurality of payment accounts corresponding to the seller.

4. A method for effecting payment for at least one item offered for sale by a seller and purchased by a buyer via an electronic auction web site, where the electronic auction web site is accessible by a plurality of users and maintained by an electronic auction system, the method comprising:

- maintaining a payment account configured for storing funds therein and corresponding to the seller, said payment account being created by receiving informational data via at least one web page accessible via at least one web page of the electronic auction web site and said informational data having been transmitted from the seller via the at least one web page accessible via the at least one web page of the electronic auction web site;
- providing an option to enable an automatic payment service, wherein the automatic payment service automatically effects payment after occurrence of a termination event associated with at least one electronic auction-related transaction;
- receiving, via one of the electronic auction web site and an e-mail transmitted by the electronic auction system, at least one input from the buyer indicating an initiation to effect payment; and
- initiating and effecting payment to the seller after receiving the at least one input by deducting funds from a payment account storing funds therein and corresponding to the buyer and transferring at least a portion of the deducted funds to the payment account corresponding to the seller, wherein the method for effecting payment does not require any interaction between the buyer and the seller, and wherein both payment accounts are created by receiving informational data via the at least one web page accessible via the at least one web page of the electronic auction web site and both payment accounts are configured for storing funds therein for use in effecting payment for network transactions associated with the electronic auction web site.

5. The method according to claim 4, wherein the step of effecting payment comprises:

- transferring at least a portion of the deducted funds to at least one account corresponding to an operator of the electronic auction web site.

6. A method for effecting payment for at least one item offered for sale by a seller and purchased by a buyer via an electronic auction web site, where the electronic auction web site is accessible by a plurality of users and maintained by an electronic auction system, the method comprising:

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maintaining a plurality of payment accounts by an operator of the electronic auction system, each of the plurality of payment accounts configured for storing funds therein and each capable of being used for effecting payment for network transactions associated with said electronic auction web site, one of the plurality of payment accounts corresponds to the buyer and is accessible by the buyer via the electronic auction web site for changing at least one payment source used for funding said payment account and for authorizing the loaning of funds to said buyer, wherein the loaning of funds to the buyer does not include charging a credit card associated with the buyer;

- providing an option to enable an automatic payment service, wherein the automatic payment service automatically effects payment after occurrence of a termination event associated with the network transactions;
- receiving at least one input from the buyer to initiate a payment method; and
- initiating the payment method, wherein the payment method is at least one of deducting funds from the payment account storing funds therein and corresponding to the buyer and loaning funds to the buyer for effecting payment, wherein the method for effecting payment does not require any interaction between the buyer and the seller.

7. The method according to claim 1, wherein the e-mail includes a link to an electronic auction payment system, wherein the step of receiving at least one input from the buyer comprises the step of receiving an indication via the link to connect the buyer to the electronic auction payment system, wherein the electronic auction payment system is in electronic operative communication with the electronic auction system via at least one of an Internet and a non-Internet connection, and wherein the step of sending the e-mail by the electronic auction system to the buyer is performed automatically without receiving any input from the seller or the buyer after a determination is made by the electronic auction system as to the identity of the buyer.

8. An integrated electronic commerce and electronic payment platform for effecting payment for at least one item offered for sale via an electronic commerce web site by a seller and purchased by a buyer, where the electronic commerce web site is accessible by a plurality of users for listing items for sale and purchasing listed items, the electronic commerce web site being maintained by an electronic commerce system, the integrated electronic commerce and electronic payment computer platform having application software for performing a method comprising:

- providing an incentive offer to the plurality of users;
- maintaining a plurality of payment accounts of said integrated platform, each of said plurality of payment accounts configured for storing funds therein and each capable of being used for effecting payment for network transactions associated with said electronic commerce web site and for complying to said incentive offer, said incentive offer being based on using a payment account of said plurality of payment accounts and corresponding to a user of said plurality of users for effecting payment for the at least one item, wherein said incentive offer provides for the user of said plurality of users to perform an activity via said electronic commerce web site which will cause a change in the amount of funds stored in a payment account corresponding to the user in exchange for an incentive provided by the incentive offer;
- receiving at least one input from the buyer indicating an initiation to effect payment;



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providing at least one payment page to the buyer after receiving the at least one input from the buyer; receiving, via the at least one payment page, authorization from the buyer to use a particular payment method to effect payment to the seller;

5 automatically determining in accordance with the particular payment method at least one payment account from the plurality of payment accounts which corresponds to the buyer for deducting funds therefrom;

10 deducting funds from the at least one payment account corresponding to the buyer; and

transferring at least a portion of the deducted funds to at least one payment account from the plurality of payment accounts which corresponds to the seller to effect payment to the seller, wherein the at least one payment account corresponding to the buyer and the at least one payment account corresponding to the seller are stored within a database system of the integrated platform, and wherein data stored within the database system are accessible by the plurality of users via a link of the electronic commerce web site.

9. The method according to claim 1, further comprising: investing the funds within the at least one payment account corresponding to the buyer; and

transferring at least a portion of funds earned by investing to the payment account corresponding to the buyer.

10. The method according to claim 4, further comprising automatically sending the e-mail by the electronic auction system to the buyer without receiving any input from the seller or the buyer after a determination is made by the electronic auction system as to identity of the buyer, wherein the e-mail includes a link to an electronic auction payment system, wherein the step of receiving at least one input from the buyer comprises the step of receiving an indication via the link to connect the buyer to the electronic auction payment system, and wherein the electronic auction payment system is in electronic operative communication with the electronic auction system via at least one of an Internet and a non-Internet connection.

11. A method for effecting payment for at least one item offered for sale via an electronic commerce web site by a seller and purchased by a buyer, where the electronic commerce web site is accessible by a plurality of users for listing items for sale and purchasing listed items, the electronic commerce web site being maintained by an electronic commerce system, the method comprising:

receiving inputs via at least one web page accessible via at least one web page of the electronic commerce web site;

creating a plurality of payment accounts corresponding to the plurality of users using the inputs received via the at least one web page accessible via the at least one web page of the electronic commerce web site, each of said plurality of payment accounts configured for storing funds therein and each capable of being used by said plurality of users for effecting payment for network transactions associated with said electronic commerce web site;

providing the plurality of users an option to enable an automatic payment service, wherein the automatic payment service automatically effects payment after occurrence of a termination event associated with the network transactions;

sending an e-mail by the electronic commerce system to the buyer of the at least one item;

receiving, via one of the electronic commerce web site and the e-mail, at least one input from the buyer indicating an initiation to effect payment;

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providing at least one payment page to the buyer after receiving the at least one input from the buyer; receiving, via the at least one payment page, authorization from the buyer to effect payment to the seller of the at least one item; and

5 effecting payment to at least the seller of the at least one item by transferring funds to one of the plurality of payment accounts corresponding to the seller.

12. The method according to claim 11, wherein the step of effecting payment to at least the seller comprises:

deducting funds from a payment account of the plurality of payment accounts storing funds therein and corresponding to the buyer; and

transferring at least a portion of the deducted funds to at least one account corresponding to an operator of the electronic commerce web site.

13. The method according to claim 8, wherein the incentive offer is selected from the group consisting of adding a predetermined amount of funds to the at least one payment account corresponding to the buyer, adding a predetermined amount of funds to the at least one payment account corresponding to the seller, paying shipping charges for shipping the at least one item from the seller to the buyer, offering at least one of the buyer and the seller at least one chance of winning a prize drawing, and automatically entering at least one of the buyer and the seller in a periodic sweepstakes.

14. The integrated electronic commerce and electronic payment platform according to claim 8, wherein the electronic commerce system is an electronic auction system and the electronic commerce web site is an electronic auction web site.

15. A method for effecting an immediate payment for at least one item offered for auction sale by a seller and purchased by a buyer via an electronic commerce web site prior to the conclusion of the auction sale, where the electronic commerce web site is accessible by a plurality of users and maintained by an electronic commerce system, the method comprising:

providing an option to enable an automatic payment service, wherein the automatic payment service automatically effects payment after occurrence of a termination event associated with at least one electronic commerce web site-related transaction;

receiving via the electronic commerce web site at least one input from the buyer indicating an initiation to purchase the at least one item offered for auction sale prior to said electronic commerce system receiving any bids for said at least one item;

providing at least one payment page to the buyer after receiving the at least one input from the buyer;

receiving, via the at least one payment page, authorization from the buyer to transfer funds from at least one payment account corresponding to the buyer to at least one payment account corresponding to the seller;

transferring funds from the at least one payment account storing funds therein and corresponding to the buyer to the at least one payment account corresponding to the seller in real-time to effect the immediate payment, wherein the at least one payment account corresponding to the buyer and the at least one payment account corresponding to the seller are configured for storing funds therein, wherein said at least one payment account corresponding to the buyer and said at least one payment account corresponding to the seller have been created using informational data respectively received from the buyer and the seller via at least one web page accessible via at least one web page of the electronic auction web



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site, and wherein the method for effecting the immediate payment does not require any interaction between the buyer and the seller;

terminating the auction sale by the electronic commerce system; and

notifying said plurality of users, including the seller, that a buyer purchased the at least one item prior to any bids being received by the electronic commerce system.

16. The method according to claim 15, further comprising transferring funds to at least one account corresponding to an operator of the electronic commerce web site.

17. The method according to claim 15, wherein the at least one payment account corresponding to the buyer and the at least one payment account corresponding to the seller are stored within a database of a payment system integrated with the electronic commerce system.

18. The method according to claim 1, further comprising enabling the plurality of users to use funds stored within the plurality of accounts for complying to an incentive offer made by an operator of the electronic auction web site, wherein said incentive offer provides for the performance of an activity via said electronic auction web site which will cause a change in the amount of funds stored in a user's corresponding payment account.

19. A method for effecting payment to an electronic commerce merchant, said method comprising:

providing an option via a first web page to enable an automatic payment service, wherein the automatic payment service automatically effects payment after occurrence of a termination event associated with at least one electronic commerce-related transaction;

receiving instructions from an electronic commerce customer via a second web page to authorize payment to said electronic commerce merchant;

determining whether the instructions include an authorization to use funds associated with a financial system and which are not owned by the electronic commerce customer to effect payment to said electronic commerce merchant;

instructing said financial system to use funds associated with said financial system if the instructions include an authorization to use funds associated with the financial system for effecting payment to said electronic commerce merchant; and

facilitating the transfer of funds associated with said financial system to a payment account associated with said electronic commerce merchant to effect payment to said electronic commerce merchant, wherein said method for effecting payment does not require the disclosure of credit card information corresponding to said electronic commerce customer to said financial system.

20. The method according to claim 19, further comprising accruing interest charges against said electronic commerce customer for the use of funds associated with said financial system for effecting payment to said electronic commerce merchant.

21. An electronic commerce payment method for effecting payment for an electronic commerce transaction, the method comprising:

providing an option via a first web page to enable a first payment service, wherein the first payment service automatically effects payment after occurrence of a termination event associated with at least one electronic commerce-related transaction;

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displaying a graphical user interface associated with a second web page and corresponding to an electronic commerce web site, said graphical user interface having a payment icon;

receiving an input indicating user selection of said payment icon;

displaying a graphical user interface corresponding to a second payment service provided by a payment web site independent of the electronic commerce web site;

receiving authorization via user selection of an icon displayed by the graphical user interface corresponding to the second payment service to effect payment for the electronic commerce transaction using the second payment service; and

effecting payment for the electronic commerce transaction using the second payment service.

22. The electronic commerce payment method according to claim 21, wherein said first and second payment services are operated by an operator different from an operator of said electronic commerce web site.

23. The electronic commerce payment method according to claim 21, wherein said step of effecting payment comprises deducting funds from a payment account corresponding to a first party of the electronic commerce transaction.

24. The electronic commerce payment method according to claim 23, wherein said step of effecting payment comprises transferring at least a portion of the deducted funds to a payment account corresponding to a second party of the electronic commerce transaction.

25. The electronic commerce payment method according to claim 23, wherein said step of effecting payment comprises loaning funds to the first party.

26. The electronic commerce payment method according to claim 24, wherein the funds are loaned from an account associated with the second payment service.

27. The electronic commerce payment method according to claim 24, wherein the payment account corresponding to the first party and the payment account corresponding to the second party are maintained by an operator of the second payment service.

28. An online electronic funds transfer and management platform comprising:

a database having a plurality of payment accounts configured for storing funds therein and for use in effecting payment for electronic commerce transactions, said plurality of payment accounts having been created using informational data received from a plurality of users via at least one web page accessible via at least one web page of an electronic commerce web site;

a computing device in operative communication via a network for receiving funds transferred by a plurality of users from a plurality of accounts;

a processor for allocating received funds to at least one of the plurality of payment accounts; and

application software configured for execution by said processor for providing an option to said plurality of users to enable an automatic payment service, wherein the automatic payment service automatically effects payment after occurrence of a termination event associated with at least one electronic commerce transaction.

29. The platform according to claim 28, wherein said processor further invests the received funds and allocates at least a portion of funds earned by investing the received funds to the at least one of the plurality of payment accounts.

30. The platform according to claim 28, wherein said processor uses said received funds to loan funds to at least one of

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the plurality of users for use in effecting payment for an electronic commerce transaction.

31. The platform according to claim 28, wherein said processor further transfers the received funds to an external financial system.

32. An integrated system for performing an online auction and effecting payment for a winning bidder, said system comprising:

a database storing a plurality of payment accounts corresponding to potential bidders of the online auction and configured for storing funds therein;

an auction server executing application software for listing an item for sale via the online auction and determining the winning bidder of the online auction at the conclusion of the online auction; and

a payment server in operative communication with the auction server and the database for identifying a payment account from the plurality of payment accounts corresponding to the winning bidder, and effecting payment for the winning bidder by deducting funds from the identified payment account and transferring at least a portion of the deducted funds to at least one payment account, wherein the plurality of payment accounts are created by receiving informational data from the plurality of potential bidders via at least one web page accessible via at least one web page of an online auction web site, wherein the payment server includes application software for performing an automatic payment method following the conclusion of the online auction, wherein the automatic payment method does not require for the winning bidder to interact with a graphical user interface of the integrated system following the conclusion of the online auction.

33. The system according to claim 32, wherein the payment server effects payment via one of the automatic payment method and a manual payment method, wherein the manual payment method requires for the winning bidder to interact with the graphical user interface following the conclusion of the online auction.

34. A method for effecting payment for at least one item offered for auction sale by a seller via an electronic auction web site and won by a winning bidder, where the electronic auction web site is accessible by a plurality of users and maintained by an electronic auction system, the method comprising:

providing the plurality of users an option to enable an automatic payment service, wherein the automatic payment service automatically effects payment after occurrence of a termination event associated with the auction sale;

determining the conclusion of the auction sale by the electronic auction system;

sending an e-mail by the electronic auction system to the winning bidder;

receiving, via one of an icon displayed by the electronic auction web site and the e-mail, at least one input from the winning bidder indicating an initiation to effect payment to the seller;

providing a payment page to the winning bidder after receiving the at least one input from the winning bidder; receiving, via the payment page, authorization from the winning bidder to proceed with effecting payment to the seller;

effecting payment to at least the seller comprising:

deducting funds from a payment account storing funds therein and corresponding to the winning bidder, the payment account having been created prior to the

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conclusion of the auction sale using informational data received via at least one web page accessible via at least one web page of the electronic auction web site; and

transferring at least a portion of the deducted funds to at least one payment account corresponding to at least the seller; and

enabling performance of at least one payment account management function via access to the payment account corresponding to the winning bidder via a link displayed on a graphical user interface of the electronic auction web site, said at least one payment account management function including changing a source for use in obtaining funds for transferring to the payment account;

wherein the method for effecting payment does not require any interaction between the winning bidder and the seller following the conclusion of the auction sale.

35. The method according to claim 34, further comprising: receiving informational data from the plurality of users via at least one web page accessible via at least one web page of the electronic auction web site; and

creating a plurality of payment accounts configured for storing funds therein and corresponding to the plurality of users of the electronic auction web site using the informational data received via the at least one web page accessible via at least one web page of the electronic auction web site, wherein funds stored within the plurality of payment accounts can be used by said plurality of users for effecting payment for network transactions associated with said electronic auction web site, and wherein one of the plurality of payment accounts is the payment account corresponding to the winning bidder.

36. The method according to claim 35, further comprising: linking said plurality of payment accounts to at least one computing device of the electronic auction system; and displaying a link on the electronic auction web site for providing said plurality of users which includes the winning bidder access to their respective payment accounts for viewing the amount of funds stored therein.

37. The method according to claim 34, wherein the step of sending an e-mail by the electronic auction system provides for sending the e-mail automatically and without requiring any interaction by the seller with the electronic auction system following the conclusion of the auction sale.

38. The method according to claim 35, wherein said payment page includes a field for displaying the amount of funds to be deducted from the payment account of the plurality of payment accounts corresponding to the winning bidder.

39. The method according to claim 35, wherein the plurality of payment accounts are maintained by a payment service of the electronic auction web site.

40. The method according to claim 34, further comprising using at least another portion of the deducted funds to effect payment to an operator of the electronic auction web site, and wherein funds are automatically deposited into the payment account corresponding to the winning bidder from a pre-specified source following the step of deducting funds.

41. The method according to claim 34, further comprising enabling the plurality of users to use funds stored within the plurality of accounts for complying to an incentive offer made by an operator of the electronic auction web site.

42. The method according to claim 34, wherein the step of effecting payment comprises using funds loaned to the winning bidder for effecting payment.

43. An integrated electronic commerce and electronic payment platform for effecting payment for at least one item offered for sale via an electronic commerce web site by a

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seller and purchased by a buyer, where the electronic commerce web site is accessible by a plurality of users for listing items for sale and purchasing listed items, the electronic commerce web site being maintained by an electronic commerce system, the integrated electronic commerce and electronic payment computer platform having application software for performing a payment method comprising:

providing the plurality of users an option to enable an automatic payment service, wherein the automatic payment service automatically effects payment after occurrence of a termination event associated with a network transaction;

receiving at least one input from the buyer indicating an initiation to effect payment;

providing at least one payment page to the buyer after receiving the at least one input from the buyer;

receiving, via the at least one payment page, authorization from the buyer to use a particular payment method to effect payment to the seller;

automatically determining in accordance with the particular payment method at least one payment account from a plurality of payment accounts which corresponds to the buyer for deducting funds therefrom, the plurality of payment accounts having been created using informational data received from the plurality of users via at least one web page accessible via at least one web page of the electronic commerce web site;

deducting funds from the at least one payment account corresponding to the buyer; and

transferring at least a portion of the deducted funds to at least one payment account from the plurality of payment accounts which corresponds to the seller to effect payment to the seller, wherein the at least one payment account corresponding to the buyer and the at least one payment account corresponding to the seller are stored within a database system of the integrated platform, and wherein data stored within the database system are accessible by the plurality of users via a link displayed by the electronic commerce web site for performing at least one payment account management function including changing a source for use in obtaining funds for transferring to the at least one payment account.

44. The integrated electronic commerce and electronic payment platform according to claim 43, further comprising maintaining a plurality of payment accounts of said integrated platform, each of said plurality of payment accounts configured for storing funds therein and each capable of being used for effecting payment for network transactions associated with said electronic commerce web site.

45. The integrated electronic commerce and electronic payment platform according to claim 44, further comprising enabling the plurality of users to use their respective payment account of the plurality of payment accounts to comply to an incentive offer.

46. The integrated electronic commerce and electronic payment platform according to claim 43, wherein the electronic commerce system is an electronic auction system and the electronic commerce web site is an electronic auction web site.

47. An electronic commerce method for effecting payment for at least one item offered for sale by a seller and purchased by a buyer via an electronic commerce web site, where the electronic commerce web site is accessible by a plurality of users for listing items for sale and purchasing listed items for sale, and where the electronic commerce web site is maintained by an electronic commerce system, the method comprising:

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providing the plurality of users an option to enable an automatic payment service, wherein the automatic payment service automatically effects payment after occurrence of a termination event associated with a network transaction;

receiving an input from the buyer via selection of an icon displayed by a graphical user interface of the electronic commerce web site, said electronic commerce web site being maintained by at least one computing device;

displaying a payment page by a payment web site maintained by a payment system and being independent of the electronic commerce web site for effecting payment for the at least one item offered for sale by the seller via the electronic commerce web site following receipt of said input, said payment system being in operative communication with the electronic commerce system for receiving descriptive information and payment information corresponding to the at least one item from the electronic commerce system and displaying said received information on said payment page;

receiving an input from the buyer via selection of an icon displayed by the payment page indicating authorization to effect payment for the at least one item to the seller; and

effecting payment for the at least one item comprising the step of deducting funds from at least one payment account storing funds therein.

48. The method according to claim 47, further comprising identifying the at least one payment account from a database having a plurality of payment accounts prior to the effecting payment step, wherein the plurality of payment accounts are maintained by an operator of the payment web site.

49. The method according to claim 47, further comprising generating and transmitting an email to at least one of the buyer and seller following the effecting payment step, said email including information relating to the payment.

50. The method according to claim 47, wherein the at least one payment account corresponds to at least one of a third party, an operator of the payment system, and the buyer.

51. The method according to claim 47, wherein the payment page includes fields selected from the group consisting of a description of the at least one item, an identification name of the seller, and an identification name of the buyer.

52. A method for effecting payment for at least one item offered for sale by a seller and purchased by a buyer via an electronic auction web site, where the electronic auction web site is accessible by a plurality of users and maintained by an electronic auction system, the method comprising the steps of:

providing the plurality of users an option to enable an automatic payment service, wherein the automatic payment service automatically effects payment after occurrence of a termination event associated with a network transaction;

sending an e-mail by the electronic auction system to the buyer of the at least one item;

receiving, via one of the electronic auction web site and the e-mail, at least one input from the buyer indicating an initiation to effect payment;

providing a payment page to the buyer after receiving the at least one input from the buyer;

receiving, via the payment page, authorization from the buyer to at least one of deduct funds from a payment account corresponding to the buyer and loaning funds if the payment account has insufficient funds;

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deducting funds from the payment account corresponding to the buyer if the payment account has sufficient funds, loaning funds if the payment account has zero funds, or deducting funds and loaning funds if the payment account has greater than zero funds and less than a total amount of funds required to satisfy payment; and

using at least a portion of the deducted funds to effect payment to at least the seller, wherein the method for effecting payment does not require any interaction between the buyer and the seller.

**53.** The method according to claim **52**, further comprising the step of using at least another portion of the deducted funds to effect payment to an operator of the electronic auction system.

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**54.** The method according to claim **52**, further comprising the step of sending an e-mail to at least the seller indicating that payment has been made by the buyer.

**55.** The method according to claim **54**, wherein the e-mail sent to the seller contains a link to a web site for leaving comments regarding the payment transaction between the buyer and the seller.

**56.** The method according to claim **52**, wherein the step of sending the e-mail occurs after an auction conducted by the electronic auction system for the at least one item has ended.

**57.** The method according to claim **52**, further comprising the step of receiving authorization from the buyer to loan funds thereto for effecting payment prior to the step of deducting funds.

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