

METHODS AND APPARATUS FOR SIMULTANEOUSLY HOSTING MULTIPLE SERVICE PROVIDERS ON A NETWORK

BACKGROUND

I. FIELD

[0001] The present invention relates generally to providing services in a network environment, and more particularly, to methods and apparatus for simultaneously hosting multiple service providers on a data network.

II. DESCRIPTION OF THE RELATED ART

[0002] Data networks, such as wireless communication networks, have to trade off between services customized for a single terminal and services provided to a large number of terminals. The distribution of services to a large number of terminals (subscribers) is a complicated problem. This is especially true if the terminals are mobile devices that communicate using relatively slow speed over-the-air communication links. Therefore, it is very important for network administrators and service providers to have a way that allows terminals to easily and efficiently subscribe to receive content and/or other network services.

[0003] In current content delivery/media distribution systems, service providers make services available over proprietary networks, so that devices operating on their networks will have the ability to receive those services. Additionally, service providers have also made available affiliated devices for use on their proprietary networks. For example, a device may be referred to as an “affiliated” device if a particular service provider has provided the device, or services associated with the device, based on an agreement with the user. In return, the device user agrees to operate the device on the particular service provider’s network and/or to receive particular services from that service provider. Thus, in the telecommunication industry for example, device users operate their devices on telecommunication networks and generally receive services offered by the providers of those networks.

[0004] However, it has become increasingly evident that device users would like to receive services from multiple service providers. For example, devices operating on one proprietary network may not have access to services offered on other proprietary network. Unfortunately, there currently exists no way for multiple service providers to make their services available to devices operating on proprietary networks.

[0005] Therefore, what is needed is a way for multiple service providers to make their services available for subscription by a wide range of devices that are connected to one or more proprietary data networks. However, to conform to existing service agreements, the system should also operate so that affiliated devices are limited to subscribing only to services offered by selected service providers according to any affiliation provisions.

SUMMARY

[0006] In one or more embodiments, a system is provided for hosting multiple service providers on a data network. In one embodiment, a content distribution server has access and/or control of services available from one or more service providers. The services comprise any suitable type of service that is available. For example, the services comprises any type of service function or content, such as multimedia content, programs, data, support services, such as customer services, or accounting services. Devices that wish to subscribe to or utilize these services go through an activation process that reveals any existing affiliation provisions. In one embodiment, after the activation process, the content distribution server transmits a database of available services to the activated device. The available services are filtered from all services under the control of the content distribution server based on the discovered affiliations. In another embodiment, the database of services includes all services available from the content distribution server, and the device operates to filter this database according to any affiliations to derive a list of services that are available to that particular device. The device user may then purchase or subscribe to any of the available services by sending a request to the content distribution server. In response, the content distribution server either provides the services directly, or authorizes a third-party to provide the requested services. Therefore, the system operates to host services from multiple service providers at a single entity, and further operates to limit device access to services according to existing affiliation provisions

[0007] In one embodiment, a method is provided for hosting multiple service providers in a data network. The method comprises controlling access to services provided by one or more service providers, and discovering affiliation provisions associated with a device, wherein the affiliation provisions are associated with one or more selected service providers. The method also comprises filtering the services

according to the affiliation provisions to generate a package database of services offered by the one or more selected service providers, and transmitting the package database to the device.

[0008] In one embodiment, apparatus is provided for hosting multiple service providers in a data network. The apparatus comprises processing logic that operates to control access to services offered by one or more service providers, and affiliation logic that operates to discover affiliation provisions associated with a device, wherein the affiliation provisions are associated with one or more selected service providers. The apparatus also comprises package generation logic that operates to filter the services according to the affiliation provisions to generate a package database of services offered by the one or more selected service providers, and transceiver logic that operates to transmit the package database to the device.

[0009] In one embodiment, apparatus is provided for hosting multiple service providers in a data network. The apparatus comprises means for controlling access to services offered by one or more service providers, and means for discovering affiliation provisions associated with a device, wherein the affiliation provisions are associated with one or more selected service providers. The apparatus also comprises means for filtering the services according to the affiliation provisions to generate a package database of services offered by the one or more selected service providers, and means for transmitting the package database to the device.

[0010] In one embodiment, a computer-readable media is provided comprising instructions, which when executed by a processor, operate to host multiple service providers in a data network in a data network. The computer-readable media comprises instructions for controlling access to services offered by one or more service providers, and instructions for discovering affiliation provisions associated with a device, wherein the affiliation provisions are associated with one or more selected service providers. The computer-readable media also comprises instructions for filtering the services according to the affiliation provisions to generate a package database of services offered by the one or more selected service providers, and instructions for transmitting the package database to the device.

[0011] In one embodiment, a method is provided for operating a device in a system that hosts multiple service providers in a data network. The method comprises requesting access to services offered by one or more service providers, and discovering affiliation provisions associated with the device, wherein the affiliation provisions are

associated with one or more selected service providers. The method also comprises receiving a package database, and filtering the package database according to the affiliation provisions to generate a package database of services offered by the one or more selected service providers.

[0012] In one embodiment, apparatus is provided for use in a system that hosts multiple service providers in a data network. The apparatus comprises processing logic that operates to request access to services offered by one or more service providers, and discover affiliation provisions associated with the device, wherein the affiliation provisions are associated with one or more selected service providers. The apparatus also comprises receiving logic that operates to receive a package database, and affiliation filter logic that operates to filter the package database according to the affiliation provisions to generate a package database of services offered by the one or more selected service providers.

[0013] In one embodiment, apparatus is provided for use in a system that hosts multiple service providers in a data network. The apparatus comprises means for requesting access to services offered by one or more service providers, and means for discovering affiliation provisions associated with the device, wherein the affiliation provisions are associated with one or more selected service providers. The apparatus also comprises means for receiving a package database, and means for filtering the package database according to the affiliation provisions to generate a package database of services offered by the one or more selected service providers.

[0014] In one embodiment, a computer-readable media is provided comprising instructions, which when executed by a processor, operate to subscribe for services in a system that hosts multiple service providers in a data network. The computer-readable media comprises instructions for requesting access to services offered by one or more service providers, and instructions for discovering affiliation provisions associated with the device, wherein the affiliation provisions are associated with one or more selected service providers. The computer-readable media also comprises instructions for receiving a package database, and instructions for filtering the package database according to the affiliation provisions to generate a package database of services offered by the one or more selected service providers.

[0015] Other aspects, advantages, and features of the present invention will become apparent after review of the hereinafter set forth Brief Description of the Drawings, Detailed Description, and the Claims.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0016] The foregoing aspects and the attendant advantages of the embodiments described herein will become more readily apparent by reference to the following detailed description when taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings wherein:

[0017] **FIG. 1** shows a network that comprises one embodiment of a system to host multiple service providers;

[0018] **FIG. 2** shows a detailed diagram of one embodiment of a content distribution server suitable for use in one or more embodiments of a system for hosting multiple service providers in a data network;

[0019] **FIG. 3** shows one embodiment of a method for operating a server in one embodiment of a system for hosting multiple service retailers;

[0020] **FIG. 4** shows a detailed diagram of one embodiment of a device suitable for use in one embodiment of a system for hosting multiple service providers; and

[0021] **FIG. 5** shows one embodiment of a method for operating a terminal in one or more embodiments of a system to host multiple service providers.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0022] The following detailed description describes one or more embodiments of a system for hosting multiple service providers in a data network. The system is especially well suited for use in wireless networks environments, but may be used in any type of network environment, including but not limited to, communication networks, public networks, such as the Internet, private networks, such as virtual private networks (VPN), local area networks, wide area networks, long haul network, or any other type of data network.

[0023] It should be noted that certain non-essential information relating to a device subscription system is not presented herein. A full description of one type of subscription system that may be utilized in one or more embodiments can be found in the U.S. Patent Application referenced above.

[0024] The following definitions are used herein to describe one or more embodiments of a system to host multiple service providers.

- Service Provider The term “service provider” is used herein to mean any entity that provides a service.
- Service A service is offered by a service provider. For example, a service comprises service functions or content. For example, the service functions comprise billing and customer service, invoicing, support services, accounting, system services, or any other type of service function. A service may also comprise content such as multimedia content, audio, video, media presentations, programs, scripts, data or any other type of suitable content. For example, a service may comprise a sequence of media presentations that represents the smallest element that may be subscribed to in the subscription system.
- Tier A tier is a collection of one or more services.
- Package A package (or “Service Package”) is a collection of one or more tiers that are offered on a subscription basis.

[0025] FIG. 1 shows a network 100 that comprises one embodiment of a system to host multiple service providers. The network 100 comprises a first service provider 102, a second service provider 104, a third service provider 146, and a content distribution server 106. The service providers 102, 104, and 146 comprise service providers as described above. It should be noted that although only three service providers are shown in FIG. 1, the system is suitable for use with virtually any number of service providers. The first service provider 102 communicates with network A 108 via the communication link 110, which may comprise any type of wired or wireless communication channel. The second service provider 104 communicates with a network B 112 via the communication link 114, which may comprise any type of wired or wireless communication channel. The first service provider 102 and the second service provider 104 operate to provide services as described above to entities in communication with the networks A and B. The third service provider 146 communicates with, and offers services through, the content distribution server 106.

[0026] The network A 108 communicates with a variety of devices shown generally at 116. For example, the devices shown at 116 comprise a desktop computer, notebook computer, PDA and mobile telephone. The devices 116 communicate with the network 108 via communication links shown generally at 118. The communication links 118 comprise any suitable type of wireless and/or wired communication links that allow the

devices **116** to communicate with the network **108**. For example, the communication links **118** comprise CDMA, GSM or other type of mobile telephone link, Bluetooth, WiFi or any other type of wireless communication link, or a wired link such as an Ethernet communication link. The network **108** comprises any suitable type or combination of wired and/or wireless networks.

[0027] The network **112** communicates with a variety of devices shown generally at **120**. For example, the devices shown at **120** comprise a desktop computer, notebook computer, PDA and mobile telephone. The devices **120** communicate with the network **112** via communication links shown generally at **122**. The communication links **122** comprise any suitable type of wireless and/or wired communication links that allow the devices **120** to communicate with the provider network **112**. For example, the communication links **122** comprise CDMA, GSM or other type of mobile telephone link, Bluetooth, WiFi or any other type of wireless communication link, or a wired link such as an Ethernet communication link. The network **112** comprises any suitable type or combination of wired and/or wireless networks.

[0028] In one embodiment, one or more of the devices **116** and **120** are affiliated device that have device “affiliations.” An affiliated device is a device that has been acquired or operates based on a subsidy or support from a particular service provider. For example, a device may be acquired for a discounted price from a selected service provider if the device owner agrees to operate the device on a selected network and/or receive for services provided by a particular service provider. Thus, the devices **116** may have device affiliations that require those devices to receive selected services from service provider **102**, and the devices **120** may have device affiliations that require those devices to receive selected services from service provider **104**. Additionally, the devices may have affiliations with the service provider **146** and obtained selected services from that provider.

[0029] The content distribution server **106** operates to store and/or control access to services provided by the service providers **102**, **104**, and **146**. For example, in one embodiment, the service provider **102** transmits information, services and/or control of available services to the content distribution server **106**, as shown by path **124** utilizing link **126**. Similarly, the service provider **104** transmits information, services and/or control of available services to the content distribution server **106**, as shown by path **128** utilizing link **130**. Furthermore the service provider **148** transmits information, services and/or control of available services directly to the content distribution server **106** as

shown by path **148**. Thus, the content distribution server **106** is provisioned to access and/or control the services provided by the service providers **102**, **104**, and **146**.

[0030] In one embodiment, the content distribution server **106** communicates with a distribution network **132** via communication link **134**. For example, the communication link **134** may comprise any suitable type of wired and/or wireless communication link. The distribution network **132** communicates with other networks and/or network entities via the communication links **136**. For example, the distribution network **132** may communicate with other networks or individual devices (i.e., the devices **116** and **120**).

[0031] The content distribution server **106** also communicates with a transmission tower **138** via the link **140** to allow information to be wirelessly transmitted to receiving terminals. For example, in one embodiment, the receiving terminals may comprise the devices **116** and/or the devices **120**. Thus, information at the content distribution server **106** may be directly transmitted to the devices **116** and **120** without the use of the provider networks **108** and **112**.

[0032] During operation of one embodiment of the system for hosting multiple service providers, the content distribution server **106** operates to control access to services provided by service provider **102**, **104**, and **146**. The devices **116** and **120** are activated (or configured), so that they are recognized by the content distribution server **106** as devices that are authorized to request and receive services. In one embodiment, activation of a device results in either or both of the content distribution server **106** and the device **116** discovering any affiliations associated with the device. A more detailed description of the activation process is provided in another section of this document.

[0033] After activation of a device, a database of available services is delivered to the device from the content distribution server **106**. In one embodiment, if the device is an affiliated device, then the content distribution server **106** operates to filter the available service to provide a database that lists only those services available to the device based on the affiliations associated with the device. For example, the mobile telephone **142** may be an affiliated device that has agreed to receive services from the service provider **102**. The telephone **142** will therefore receive a database listing only those services available from service provider **102** according to existing affiliation. Thus, the filtering of available services according to the device affiliations is performed at the content distribution server **106**.

[0034] In another embodiment, the filtering of available services is performed at the device (i.e., telephone **142**). For example, the content distribution server **106** transmits

a database of all available services (from all service providers) to the telephone **142** and the telephone **142** filters the database so that only those services allowed in accordance with the device affiliations are display to the user of the telephone **142**. Thus, in this embodiment, the telephone **142** operates to filter the list of all available services according any affiliations to generate a list of services available to the telephone **142**.

[0035] Once a device is activated and a list of available service is provided, the device may transmit a request (to receive and/or subscribe to one or more of the available services) to the content distribution server **106**, as shown by path **144**. The content distribution server **106** then operates to process the request and either provide the requested services directly, or authorize a third party to provide the requested services. In one embodiment, the content distribution server **106** operates to notify the service provider associated with the requested services so that invoicing, support, maintenance, and/or other administration functions my be performed.

[0036] In one or more embodiments, a content distribution server operates in a system for hosting multiple service providers by performing one or more of the following steps.

1. Obtain access and/or control of services offered by each service provider.
2. Activate a device to request and receive one or more services, wherein the content distribution server and/or the device discover any existing affiliations associated with the device.
3. Transmit a database of services to the activated device, wherein the database of services are filtered in accordance with any existing affiliations.
4. Accept a request for services from the device.
5. Provide the requested services to the requesting device, or authorize a third party to provide the requested services.

[0037] In one embodiment, the system of hosting multiple service providers operates to provide services directly to receiving devices via the distribution network **132** and/or direct transmissions using the tower **138**. For example, requests for services from one or more devices are received at the content distribution server **106**. The requests may be transmitted via the provider network **108** or the provider network **112**. In another embodiment, the requests may be transmitted using any other type communication channel and/or out-of-band channel that allow remote devices to communicate with the content distribution server **106**. The content distribution server

106 processes the requests for services (accounting for any device affiliations if necessary) and the requested services are provided to the requesting devices via the distribution network **132** or directly transmitted to the requesting devices via the transmission tower **138**. Therefore, it is possible for any service available at the content distribution server **106** to be provided directly to requesting devices without the use of the networks **108** and **112**. Thus, services provided by either the service provider **102** or the service provider **104** may be provided to a requesting device. The operation of this embodiment does not require services to be provided over a particular network, and so it is possible for devices to avoid the limitations associated with device affiliations. Thus, a device may obtain any available services at the content distribution server **106** regardless of which service provider provides the service.

[0038] It should be noted that the network **100** illustrates just one network configuration, and that other network configurations or arrangements are possible within the scope of the described embodiments.

[0039] **FIG. 2** shows a detailed diagram of one embodiment of a content distribution server **200** suitable for use in one or more embodiments of a system for hosting multiple service providers in a data network. For example, the server **200** may be used as the server **106** in **FIG. 1**. The server **200** comprises processing logic **202**, device resources **204**, service database **206**, overhead notification logic **208**, and transceiver logic **210**, all coupled to an internal data bus **212**. The server **200** also comprises activation logic **214**, affiliation logic **222**, and service package generation logic **226**, which are also coupled to the data bus **212**.

[0040] In one or more embodiments, the processing logic **202** comprises a CPU, processor, gate array, hardware logic, memory elements, virtual machine, software, and/or any combination of hardware and software. Thus, the processing logic **202** generally comprises logic to execute machine-readable instructions and to control one or more other functional elements of the server **200** via the internal data bus **212**.

[0041] The device resources and interfaces **204** comprise hardware and/or software that allow the server **200** to communicate with internal and external systems. For example, internal systems may include mass storage systems, memory, display driver, modem, or other internal device resources. The external systems may include user interface devices, printers, disk drives, or other local devices or systems.

[0042] The service database **206** comprises any type of memory device suitable for storing information about service packages available from one or more service

providers. For example, the service database **206** may comprise information such as service provider identifiers, package identifiers, service or tier identifiers, scheduling or licensing information, pricing, and/or any other type of information relevant to available service packages.

[0043] The transceiver logic **210** comprises hardware and/or software that operates to allow the server **200** to transmit and receive data and/or other information with remote devices or systems via communication channel **216**. For example, in one embodiment, the communication channel **216** comprises any suitable type of communication link to allow the server **200** to communicate with one or more data networks. For example, in one embodiment, the communication channel **216** allows the server **200** to communicate with the data networks **108**, **112**, and **132** shown in **FIG. 1**. The transceiver logic **210** also comprises transmission link **224** that allows information to be directly broadcast from a transmission tower. For example, the transmission link **224** may operate as the communication link **140** shown in **FIG. 1**.

[0044] The activation logic **214**, the client **220**, and the overhead notification logic **208** are used by the server **200** during an activation process by which devices are activated, and therefore authorized to request and receive services provided by one or more service providers. A brief description of the operation of these functional elements is provided below.

[0045] The activation logic **214** comprises a CPU, processor, gate array, hardware logic, memory elements, virtual machine, software, and/or any combination of hardware and software. The activation logic **214** operates to activate a device to request and/or subscribe to services available at the server **200**. The activation process need only occur once for each device that desires to request and/or subscribe to services. For example, in one embodiment, the activation logic **214** comprises a client program **220** that is downloaded to the device during the activation process. For example, the client **220** is downloaded to the device using the transceiver logic **210**. Once a device is activated by the activation logic **216**, the client program **220** runs on the device and operates to receive and display information about available service packages to the device user. Thus, the activation logic **214** operates to allow the server **200** to know who a device is, how to invoice the device, authenticate the device, and provision the device to run the client **220**.

[0046] The overhead notification logic **208** comprises hardware and/or software that operates to allow the server **200** to establish and communicate over an overhead

notification channel (ONC) **218**. The ONC **218** allows the server **200** to communicate in the background with the client **220** running on a device. For example, in one embodiment, the ONC **218** comprises a wireless link to a device that allows data to be transmitted to the device in a manner that is transparent to the device user. In one embodiment, the overhead notification logic **208** is used to transparently transmit information about available service packages to a device. In one embodiment, the overhead notification logic **208** is part of the transceiver logic **210** and the ONC **218** is part of the communication channel **216**.

[0047] The affiliation logic **222** comprises a CPU, processor, gate array, hardware logic, memory elements, virtual machine, software, and/or any combination of hardware and software. The affiliation logic **222** operates to determine whether or not a device is an affiliated device. For example, during the activation process, information received at the server **200** about the device is processed by the affiliation logic **222** to determine if the device is an affiliated device. For example, in one embodiment, the device provides a unique identification number that is matched to identification numbers provided to the server **200** by various service providers and stored in the service database **206**. If the device identification number matches a number provided by a selected service provider, then the affiliation logic **222** determines that that device is affiliated with that service provider.

[0048] The service package generation logic **226** comprises a CPU, processor, gate array, hardware logic, memory elements, virtual machine, software, and/or any combination of hardware and software. The generation logic **226** operates to generate a package database of services that are available to a device that has been activated. For example, the generation logic **226** operates to receive input from the affiliation logic **222** and the service database **206** to generate a package database for transmission to a device. The input from the affiliation logic **222** indicates whether or not the device is an affiliated device. The information about the affiliation is used to process information received from the service database **206** to produce a database of services that are available for the device to purchase and/or subscribe to. For example, information from the service database **206** includes information about services offered by a selected service provider that has subsidized or supported the ownership or operation of the device.

[0049] In one embodiment, the system for hosting multiple service providers comprises program instructions stored on a computer-readable media, which when

executed a processor, for instance, the processing logic **202**, provides the functions of the server **200** described herein. For example, instructions may be loaded into the server **200** from a computer-readable media, such as a floppy disk, CDROM, memory card, FLASH memory device, RAM, ROM, or any other type of memory device or computer-readable media that interfaces to the server **200** via the device resources **204**. In another embodiment, the instructions may be downloaded into the server **200** from an external device or network resource that interfaces to the sever **200** via the transceiver logic **210**. The instructions, when executed by the processing logic **202**, provide one or more embodiments of a system for hosting multiple service providers as described herein.

[0050] FIG. 3 shows one embodiment of a method **300** for operating a server in one embodiment of a system for hosting multiple service retailers. For clarity, the method **300** will be described with reference to the server **200** shown in FIG. 2. In one or more embodiments, the processing logic **202** executes program instructions and controls the operation of the server **200** to perform the functions described below.

[0051] At block **302**, the server is provisioned with information about services offered by one or more service providers. For example, the server **200** communicates with the various service providers to retrieve information about the services offered by each provider. The information may include, content, programs, applications, billing, invoicing, licensing information, identification of affiliated devices associated with each service provider, and any other information that may be needed to offer the services of each service provider. In one embodiment, the information provided by each service provider is stored in the service database **206**.

[0052] At block **304**, a device is activated so that it may purchase or subscribe to one or more service packages using one or more embodiments of a system for hosting multiple service providers. For example, the device may be a wireless device that contacts the server **200** and provides the required activation information. In one embodiment, the device communicates with the processing logic **202** via the transceiver logic **210** to provide secure authenticated information for activation purposes. For example, the information may comprise device identity, user identity, billing information, and any other type of relevant information.

[0053] At block **306**, the information provided by the device during the activation process is used to determine whether or not the device is an affiliated device. For example, the information is processed by the affiliation logic **222** to determine if the

device is an affiliated device. In one embodiment, the affiliation logic **222** compares a device identifier provided by the device during activation with device identifiers provided by the service providers and stored in the service database **206**. If a match is found, the device is determined to be affiliated with the service provider associated with the matching identifier. It is also possible to determine if the device is an affiliated device and to which service provider the device is affiliated with by using any other technique.

[0054] At block **308**, an ONC is established between the server and the device, and a client is downloaded to the device. For example, the overhead notification logic **208** establishes the ONC **218** with the device and the client **220** is downloaded and installed on the device.

[0055] At block **310**, a package of services available to the device is generated. For example, the service package generation logic **226** receives information from the affiliation logic **222** that the device is an affiliated device. The service package generation logic **226** receives information about available services from the service database **206**. The information from the service database **206** includes information from the service provider that is affiliated with the device. This information is compiled into a package database that will be transmitted to the device. Thus, the server **200** filters out services that are available to the device from all the services available by all service providers that are stored in the service database **206**.

[0056] At block **312**, the package database is transmitted to the device using the ONC **218** and it is then locally cached on the device. For example, the processing logic **202** controls the overhead notification logic **208** to download the package database to the device using the ONC **218**. Thus, the latest version of the package database is transparently downloaded and stored on the device.

[0057] At block **314**, a test is performed to determine if a subscription request has been received from a device user that would like to subscribe to one or more packages available in the downloaded package database. For example, the client **220** running on the device operates to present the device user with a program guide of available packages for subscription. The device user selects one or more packages and the client **220** assembles a subscription request that is transmitted to the server **200** using a device-to-server protocol. The subscription request includes information about the requesting device and the number and types of packages to which the user wishes to subscribe.

Thus, if a subscription request is received at the server **200**, the method proceeds to block **318**. If a subscription request is not received, the method proceeds to block **316**.

[0058] At block **316**, a test is performed to determine if an update package database is available for transmission to one or more devices. For example, as more service packages become available, the package database that was downloaded to the device is updated with new information (accounting for any device affiliations) to allow devices to subscribe to the newly available service packages. For example, the processing logic **202** operates to update the service database **206** with new service package information provided by all service providers. If a new package database is available for the device, taking into account any affiliations, the method proceeds to block **312** where the new package database is transparently downloaded to the device via the **ONC 218**. If a new package database is not available, the method proceeds to block **314** where the test is performed to determine if a new subscription request has been received.

[0059] At block **318**, the server has received a new subscription request from a device, which is processed to allow the device to subscribe to one or more service packages. For example the subscription request is transmitted using a device-to-server subscription protocol. The subscription request is received and processed by the processing logic **202** so that the device transmitting the subscription request may subscribe to one or more service packages identified in the request. In one embodiment, the service packages are those offered by a particular service provider based on any existing affiliations.

[0060] At block **320**, the requested services that have been subscribed to are provided to the device. For example the server **200** operates to retrieve the requested services from the service database **206** and transmit the services, via the transceiver logic **210**, to the device via a wireless network connection. In another embodiment, the server **200** operates to authorize a content provider, or other third party service provider, to provide the subscribed services to the device. The method then ends at block **322**.

[0061] It should be noted that the method **300** illustrates just one embodiment and that changes, additions, or rearrangements of the described functions may be made without deviating from the scope of the described embodiments. For example, in another embodiment, the functions of the service package generation logic **226** are performed at the device. In this embodiment, filtering of all available service packages is performed at the device. The server **200** operates to transmit a package database to the device that lists all services available from all service providers. The device then

filters this information to display those services available to the device based on any existing affiliations. Thus, the filtering of services may be performed at the content distribution server **200** or the requesting device.

[0062] FIG. 4 shows a detailed diagram of one embodiment of a device **400** suitable for use in one embodiment of a system for hosting multiple service providers. The device **400** comprises processing logic **402**, device resources and interfaces **404**, and transceiver logic **408**, all coupled to a data bus **410**. The device **400** also comprises client logic **406**, package database **412**, and affiliation filter logic **418**, which are also coupled to the data bus **410**.

[0063] In one or more embodiments, the processing logic **402** comprises a CPU, processor, gate array, hardware logic, memory elements, virtual machine, software, and/or any combination of hardware and software. Thus, the processing logic **402** generally comprises logic to execute machine-readable instructions and to control one or more other functional elements of the device **400** via the internal data bus **410**.

[0064] The device resources and interfaces **404** comprise hardware and/or software that allow the device **400** to communicate with internal and external systems. For example, internal systems may include mass storage systems, memory, display driver, modem, or other internal device resources. The external systems may include user interface devices, printers, disk drives, or other local devices or systems.

[0065] The transceiver logic **408** comprises hardware and/or software that operate to allow the device **400** to transmit and receive data and/or other information with external devices or systems via communication channel **414**. For example the communication channel **414** may comprise a network communication link, a wireless communication link or any other type of communication link.

[0066] During operation, the device **400** is activated to operate using one or more embodiments of a system for hosting multiple service providers. For example, the device user controls the device to communicate with a content distribution server (i.e., server **106**) for the purpose of completing a one-time activation process. During the activation process, the device and/or the content distribution server discover any affiliations associated with the device. The client logic **406** is installed on the device, and an overhead notification channel **416** is established with the content distribution server. The server then uses the channel **416** to download a package database **412** to the device.

[0067] In one embodiment, the package database **412** comprises a list of services that are available to the device **400**. In one embodiment, the package database is filtered at the content distribution server so that the identified services represent services from a selected service provider in accordance with device affiliations. In another embodiment, the package database **412** comprises services that are available from all service providers associated with the content distribution server, and the affiliation filter logic **418** operates to filter these services to determine only those services available to the device in accordance with device affiliations. For example, the affiliation filter logic **418** comprises any suitable hardware and/or software to process the package database **412**.

[0068] The client logic **406** provides a user interface (UI) that allows the device user to view the available service packages identified in the package database. The client logic **406** also allows the device user to select one or more packages for subscription. The selected packages are identified in a subscription request that is part of a device-to-server protocol, which is implemented by the client **406**. The client **406** then transmits the subscription request to the content distribution server. In one or more embodiments, the client **406** comprises machine-readable instructions that are executed by the processing logic **402** to perform the functions described herein.

[0069] The package database **412** comprises any type of memory suitable for storing information relating to service packages that are available for subscription. For example, the package database **412** may comprise package and/or service identifiers, scheduling information, pricing, and/or any other information about the available service packages.

[0070] In one embodiment, a device performs one or more of the following functions in one or more embodiments of a system for hosting multiple service providers. It should be noted that the following functions may be changed, rearranged, modified, add to, or otherwise adjusted within the scope of the embodiments.

1. The device is activated with a content distribution system.
2. Affiliations associated with the device are discovered.
3. The device receives and installs a client program and an overhead notification mechanism.
4. The device receives a package database from a content distribution server that is transparently transmitted to the device using the overhead notification mechanism.
5. In one embodiment, the package database includes information about only those service packages available to the device because the content distribution server has filtered the available services in accordance with device affiliations.
6. In another embodiment, the package database includes information about all services available at the content distribution server, and the affiliation filter logic at the device operates to filter the package database to include only those services available to the device in accordance with any affiliations.
7. A program guide displays the available services to the device user.
8. After the user selects one or more service packages, the client assembles a subscription request that is transmitted to the content distribution system using a server-to-device protocol.
9. After the subscription request has been process by the content distribution system, the device receives the services for which the user has subscribed.

[0071] In one embodiment, the system to host multiple service providers comprises program instructions stored on a computer-readable media, which when executed by the processing logic **402**, provides the functions of the device **400** described herein. For example, instructions may be loaded into the device **400** from a computer-readable media, such as a floppy disk, CDROM, memory card, FLASH memory device, RAM, ROM, or any other type of memory device or computer-readable media that interfaces to the device **400** via the device resources **404**. In another embodiment, the instructions may be downloaded into the device **400** from a network resource that interfaces to the device **400** via the transceiver logic **408**. The instructions, when executed by the processing logic **402**, provide one or more embodiments of a system to host multiple service providers as described herein.

[0072] FIG. 5 shows one embodiment of a method 500 for operating a device in one or more embodiments of a system to host multiple service providers. For clarity, the method 500 will be described with reference to the device 400 shown in FIG. 4. For example, the device 400 is suitable for use as any of the devices 116 shown in FIG. 1. In one or more embodiments, the processing logic 402 executes program instructions to control the device 400 to perform the functions described below.

[0073] At block 502, a device user powers on the device. In one embodiment, after powering up, the device operates to establish communication with a data network over a wireless communication link. For example, the processing logic 402 controls the transceiver logic 408 to establish a wireless communication link with a data network, such as the provider network 108.

[0074] At block 504, a test is performed to determine if the device has been activated with a content distribution server. If the device has been activated, the device activates a client program and the method proceeds to block 510. If the device has not been activated, the method proceeds to block 506.

[0075] At block 506, the device is activated with the content distribution server. For example, in one embodiment, the processing logic 402 communicates with a content distribution server via the transceiver logic 408 to identify the device and provide any other activation information that may be required.

[0076] At block 508, the affiliation status of the device is discovered. For example, the content distribution server and/or the device discover that the device is affiliated with a particular service provider. For example, the processing logic 402 operates to determine that the device is an affiliated device.

[0077] At block 510, as part of the activation process, a client is installed on the device and an overhead notification mechanism is established to allow transparent communications between the device and the content distribution server. For example, in one embodiment, the client logic 406 establishes the ONC 416 with the content distribution server. The method then proceeds to block 512.

[0078] At block 512, the client operates to receive the latest package database from the content distribution server. The package database represents service packages that are available for the device to purchase and/or subscribe to. For example the client logic 406 operates to receive the most recent package database in a transparent communication from a content distribution server via the ONC 416. The package database is stored at the device 400 as the package database 412.

[0079] At block **514**, the package database of services is filtered if the package database has not been filtered to account for any affiliations. For example, in one embodiment, the content distribution server filters to package database according to any affiliations discovered during the activation process. In another embodiments the affiliation filter logic **418** filters to the package database at the device. For example, the affiliation filter logic **418** filters the package database to include only those services provided by a particular service provider in accordance with the discovered affiliations. Thus, after filtering, the package database includes only those services that are available to the device for purchase and/or subscription from a particular service provider.

[0080] At block **516**, the client installed on the device operates to display a program guide to the device user. The program guides provides information to the device user about the service packages available for subscription. For example, the information includes scheduling, pricing, availability, and any other relevant information. In one embodiment, the client **406** operates to display information from the package database **412** in the program guide.

[0081] At block **518**, a test is performed to determine if the user wishes to subscribe to one or more available service packages. For example the user may selects one or more service packages from the displayed program guide and request to subscribe to those packages. If the user selects any program packages for subscription, the method proceeds to block **520**. If the user does not select any packages for subscription, the method proceeds to block **510**, where the device may receive an updated copy of the package database if one is available.

[0082] At block **520**, the client program operates to assemble a subscription request to allow the device user to subscribe to the selected packages. For example, the subscription request is assembled in accordance with a device-to-service protocol that allows one or more packages to be identified for subscription. For example, in one embodiment, the client logic **406** operates to assemble the subscription request.

[0083] At block **522**, the completed subscription request is transmitted to a content distribution server. For example, the subscription request may be transmitted to the content distribution server **106** shown in **FIG. 1**. The subscription request identifies one or more service packages to which the device user wishes to subscribe. In one embodiment, the transceiver logic **408** transmits the subscription request, over-the-air, to the content server using the communication link **414**.

[0084] At block **524**, after the content distribution server has processed the subscription request, the subscribed services are delivered to the device. For example, in one embodiment, the subscribed for services are delivered to the device from the content distribution server via the communication link **414**. In another embodiment, the subscribed for services are delivered to the device from a third-party content provider or other content server.

[0085] Thus, the method **500** operates to allow a device to subscribe to one or more service packages provided in a system for hosting multiple service providers. It should be noted that the method **500** illustrates just one embodiment and that changes, additions, or rearrangements of the functional elements may be made without deviating from the scope of the described embodiments.

[0086] Accordingly, while one or more embodiments of a system for hosting multiple service providers has been illustrated and described herein, it will be appreciated that various changes can be made to the embodiments without departing from their spirit or essential characteristics. Therefore, the disclosures and descriptions herein are intended to be illustrative, but not limiting, of the scope of the invention, which is set forth in the following claims.

WE CLAIM:

CLAIMS

1. A method for hosting multiple service providers in a data network, the method comprising:
 - controlling access to services offered by one or more service providers;
 - discovering affiliation provisions associated with a device, wherein the affiliation provisions are associated with one or more selected service providers;
 - filtering the services according to the affiliation provisions to generate a package database of services offered by the one or more selected service providers; and
 - transmitting the package database to the device.
2. The method of claim 1, further comprising receiving a request for services from the device, wherein the request includes the affiliation provisions.
3. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of transmitting comprises transmitting the package database to the device using an ONC channel.
4. The method of claim 1, further comprising:
 - controlling access to new services provided by the one or more service providers;
 - filtering the new services according to the affiliation provisions to generate a new package database of services offered by the selected service providers; and
 - transmitting the new package database to the device.
5. The method of claim 1, wherein the steps of discovering and filtering comprise generating a package database of services offered by the service providers.
6. Apparatus for hosting multiple service providers in a data network, the apparatus comprising:
 - processing logic that operates to control access to services offered by one or more service providers;
 - affiliation logic that operates to discover affiliation provisions associated with a device, wherein the affiliation provisions are associated with one or more selected service providers;
 - package generation logic that operates to filter the services according to the affiliation provisions to generate a package database of services offered by the one or more selected service providers; and

transceiver logic that operates to transmit the package database to the device.

7. The apparatus of claim 6, wherein the transceiver logic comprises logic to receive a request for services from the device, wherein the request includes the affiliation provisions.

8. The apparatus of claim 6, wherein transceiver logic that operates to transmit the package database to the device using an ONC channel.

9. The apparatus of claim 6, wherein the processing logic operates to control access to new services provided by one or more service providers.

10. The apparatus of claim 6, wherein the package generation logic operates to generate a package database of services offered by the one or more service providers.

11. Apparatus for hosting multiple service providers in a data network, the apparatus comprising:

means for controlling access to services offered by one or more service providers;

means for discovering affiliation provisions associated with a device, wherein the affiliation provisions are associated with one or more selected service providers;

means for filtering the services according to the affiliation provisions to generate a package database of services offered by the one or more selected service providers; and

means for transmitting the package database to the device.

12. The apparatus of claim 11, further comprising means for receiving a request for services from the device, wherein the request includes the affiliation provisions.

13. The apparatus of claim 11, wherein the means for transmitting comprises means for transmitting the package database to the device using an ONC channel.

14. The apparatus of claim 11, further comprising:

means for controlling access to new services provided by the one or more service providers;

means for filtering the new services according to the affiliation provisions to generate a new package database of services offered by the selected service providers; and

means for transmitting the new package database to the device.

15. The apparatus of claim **11**, wherein the means for discovering and filtering comprise means for generating a package database of services offered by the service providers.

16. A computer-readable media comprising instructions, which when executed by a processor, operate to host multiple service providers in a data network in a data network, the computer-readable media comprising:

instructions for controlling access to services offered by one or more service providers;

instructions for discovering affiliation provisions associated with a device, wherein the affiliation provisions are associated with one or more selected service providers;

instructions for filtering the services according to the affiliation provisions to generate a package database of services offered by the one or more selected service providers; and

instructions for transmitting the package database to the device.

17. The computer-readable media of claim **16**, further comprising instructions for receiving a request for services from the device, wherein the request includes the affiliation provisions.

18. The computer-readable media of claim **16**, wherein the instructions for transmitting comprise instructions for transmitting the package database to the device using an ONC channel.

19. The computer-readable media of claim **16**, further comprising:

instructions for controlling access to new services provided by the one or more service providers;

instructions for filtering the new services according to the affiliation provisions to generated a new package database of services offered by the selected service providers; and

instructions for transmitting the new package database to the device.

20. The computer-readable media of claim **16**, wherein the instructions for discovering and filtering comprise instructions for generating a package database of services offered by the service providers.

21. A method for operating a device in a system that hosts multiple service providers in a data network, the method comprising:

requesting access to services offered by one or more service providers;
discovering affiliation provisions associated with the device, wherein the affiliation provisions are associated with one or more selected service providers;
receiving a package database;
filtering the package database according to the affiliation provisions to generate a package database of services offered by the one or more selected service providers.

22. The method of claim **21**, further comprising:

selecting at least one service from the package database of services.
transmitting a subscription request that identifies the at least one service.

23. The method of claim **21**, further comprising receiving an updated package database.

24. Apparatus for use in a system that hosts multiple service providers in a data network, the apparatus comprising:

processing logic that operates to request access to services offered by one or more service providers, and discover affiliation provisions associated with the device, wherein the affiliation provisions are associated with one or more selected service providers;

receiving logic that operates to receive a package database;

affiliation filter logic that operates to filter the package database according to the affiliation provisions to generate a package database of services offered by the one or more selected service providers.

25. The apparatus of claim **24**, further comprising:

client logic that operates to select at least one service from the package database of services, and

transmitting logic that operates to transmit a subscription request that identifies the at least one service.

26. The apparatus of claim **24**, wherein the receiving logic further comprises logic that operates to receive an updated package database.

27. Apparatus for use in a system that hosts multiple service providers in a data network, the apparatus comprising:

means for requesting access to services offered by one or more service providers;

means for discovering affiliation provisions associated with the device, wherein the affiliation provisions are associated with one or more selected service providers;

means for receiving a package database;

means for filtering the package database according to the affiliation provisions to generate a package database of services offered by the one or more selected service providers.

28. The apparatus of claim **27**, further comprising:

means for selecting at least one service from the package database of services.

means for transmitting a subscription request that identifies the at least one service.

29. The apparatus of claim **27**, further comprising means for receiving an updated package database.

30. A computer-readable media comprising instructions, which when executed by a processor, operate to subscribe for services in a system that hosts multiple service providers in a data network, the computer-readable media comprising:

instructions for requesting access to services offered by one or more service providers;

instructions for discovering affiliation provisions associated with the device, wherein the affiliation provisions are associated with one or more selected service providers;

instructions for receiving a package database;

instructions for filtering the package database according to the affiliation provisions to generate a package database of services offered by the one or more selected service providers.

31. The computer-readable media of claim **30**, further comprising:

instructions for selecting at least one service from the package database of services.

instructions for transmitting a subscription request that identifies the at least one service.

32. The computer-readable media of claim **30**, further comprising instructions for receiving an updated package database.