

PORTABLE TERMINAL AND FUNCTION LIMITING METHOD

CROSS REFERENCES TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

The present invention contains subject matter related to Japanese Patent Application JP 2005-137524 filed in the Japanese Patent Office on May 10, 2005, the entire contents of which being incorporated herein by reference.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Field of the Invention:

The present invention relates to a portable terminal and a function limiting method, particularly to a portable terminal suitably applied to a mobile phone unit or the like incorporating a noncontact IC (Integrated Circuit) card function unit and a method of limiting the use of the noncontact IC card function.

Description of the Related Art:

Regarding a mobile phone unit which uses an SIM (Subscriber Identity Module) card, such as a GSM (Global Systems for Mobile communications) terminal and a UMTS (Universal Mobile Telecommunications System) terminal, when the SIM card having the subscriber number of a third party is inserted therein, the mobile phone unit can be used by the third party. The SIM card is an IC card issued by a mobile phone company, in which subscriber information is recorded.

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discloses an automobile telephone apparatus in which an SIM card is used to enable selective use of a plurality of mobile phone units of different telephone numbers, for example.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

In the case where the noncontact IC card function such as FeliCa® is incorporated in a GSM/UMTS terminal, telephone function based on subscriber information about a third party can be used. In this case, however, the third party may also use a noncontact IC card application which the owner of the mobile phone unit uses.

For example, if the owner of a mobile phone unit lends his/her mobile phone unit incorporating noncontact IC card function to a third party, the third party may use a noncontact IC card application of the mobile phone unit at will.

Example embodiments address the above-identified and other problems associated with conventional methods and apparatuses. It is desirable to provide a portable terminal incorporating noncontact IC card function and capable of being used when inserting a subscriber information card such as an SIM card, in which the noncontact IC card function is prevented from being used by an arbitrary third party.

In accordance with a first aspect of the present invention, there is provided a portable terminal including a noncontact IC card function unit and capable of being used by inserting a subscriber information card, comprising: a memory

unit which stores a noncontact IC card use permission list on which numbers of subscribers permitted to use the noncontact IC card function are registered; and a controller which compares the subscriber number recorded on said subscriber information card with the noncontact IC card use permission list stored in said memory unit to judge whether or not the relevant subscriber number is in the list, and which decides whether or not to permit the use of said noncontact IC card function based on the judgment result; wherein in the case where said relevant subscriber number is not included in the list, only the function of said noncontact IC card function unit is stopped.

In accordance with a second aspect of the present invention there is provided, a function limiting method in a portable terminal including a noncontact IC card function unit and capable of being used by inserting a subscriber information card, comprising the steps of: preparing in advance a noncontact IC card use permission list on which numbers of subscribers permitted to use a noncontact IC card function are registered; judging whether or not the relevant subscriber number is in the list by comparing the subscriber number recorded on said subscriber information card with said noncontact IC card use permission list; and stopping only the function of said noncontact IC card function unit, if said relevant subscriber number is not included in said list.

In example embodiments, when a subscriber information card of third party, which is different from that of the owner of the portable terminal, is inserted and if the subscriber number of the third party is not registered on the noncontact IC card use permission list, the third party is not permitted to use the noncontact IC card function which the owner of the portable terminal uses.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a block diagram showing a circuit configuration of a mobile phone unit according to an embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 2 is block diagram showing a circuit configuration of a subscriber information card according to an embodiment of the present invention; and

FIG. 3 is a sequence diagram of function lock operation

according to an embodiment of the present invention.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

Hereinafter, embodiments of the present invention are explained, however, the present invention is not limited thereto.

First, referring to FIGS. 1 and 2, explanation is made regarding an example of a mobile phone unit to which a portable terminal incorporating noncontact IC card function according to an embodiment of the present invention is suitably applied.

FIG. 1 is a block diagram showing a circuit configuration of a mobile phone unit according to an embodiment of the present invention. As shown in FIG. 1, similarly to a known mobile phone unit performing mobile communication, a mobile phone unit 100 is configured to have: a transmission and reception controller 101 including an antenna for wireless communication with a mobile phone public network 110 through a base station not shown in the figure, an RF circuit, a modem and the like; an audio input/output unit 102 including a speaker which outputs a received audio signal and a microphone which inputs an audio signal to be transmitted; a nonvolatile memory unit 103 functioning as memory means; a user interface unit 104 including operational keys for performing transmission, reception, inputting telephone number and the like, and an image display device used as display means; and a mobile phone controller 105 functioning as control means for controlling those units.

The mobile phone unit 100 further includes: a noncontact IC card function unit 106, such as FeliCa®, which communicates with a reader/writer in a noncontact manner to perform electronic settlement, personal authentication and the like; and a subscriber information card interface (hereinafter referred to as subscriber information card I/F) 107 used as an interface between a subscriber information card 120 such as an SIM card on which subscriber information is recorded and the mobile phone unit. When the subscriber information card 120 is inserted in the mobile phone unit 100 of this embodiment, any function other than application software (hereinafter referred to as application) relating to the noncontact IC card function can be used without restriction.

Note that, the noncontact IC card function unit 106 may be incorporated in a device, or may have a detachable structure such as a card.

FIG. 2 is a block diagram showing a circuit configuration of a subscriber information card according to an embodiment of the present invention. A subscriber information card 120 is an IC card on which subscriber information is recorded, and can be attached to the mobile phone unit 100 in a detachable manner and further can be attached to a plurality of mobile phone units in a detachable manner. The subscriber information card 120 includes: an input/output unit 121 used as an interface for the

mobile phone unit 100; a nonvolatile memory unit 122 functioning as memory means; and a controller 123 functioning as control means which controls those units.

In this embodiment, a subscriber number, such as IMSI (International Mobile Subscriber Identity), given to a subscriber using a service of a particular mobile phone company is stored in the memory unit 122. Further, a list (noncontact IC card use permission list) of the numbers of subscribers permitted to use the noncontact IC card function is stored in the memory unit 103 within the mobile phone unit 100.

Next, function lock operation by the mobile phone unit 100 having the above-described structure is explained.

FIG. 3 is a sequence diagram of the function lock operation according to an embodiment of the present invention. In FIG. 3, after the mobile phone unit 100 is powered on, the mobile phone controller 105 is turned on (Step S1). At this moment, the noncontact IC card function unit 106 does not start noncontact IC card application, but waits for a command to permit/not to permit the use of noncontact IC card (Step S2). After that, the mobile phone controller 105 makes a request for reading the subscriber number from the subscriber information card 120 (Step S3). When the subscriber information card 120 receives through the subscriber information card I/F 107 a request signal sent from the mobile phone controller 105 for reading the subscriber

number, the controller 123 retrieves the subscriber number from the memory unit 122 (Step S4), and then transmits the subscriber number to the mobile phone controller 105.

The mobile phone controller 105 having received the subscriber number through the subscriber information card I/F 107 retrieves the noncontact IC card use permission list from the memory unit 103 (Step S5). After that, the mobile phone controller 105 compares the subscriber number received from the subscriber information card 120 with the noncontact IC card use permission list to decide whether or not the use of a noncontact IC card is permitted (Step S6), and the decision is given to the noncontact IC card function unit 106 as instruction. The noncontact IC card function unit 106 judges whether or not the instruction permits the use of the noncontact IC card (Step S7).

For example, if the relevant subscriber number is registered on the noncontact IC card use permission list, the mobile phone controller 105 instructs the noncontact IC card function unit 106 to permit the use of the noncontact IC card. In response to that, start setting of the noncontact IC card application is made by the noncontact IC card function unit 106 (Step S8). With this, when the noncontact IC card function unit 106 transmits or receives a radio signal, the noncontact IC card application can be started immediately.

On the other hand, if the relevant subscriber number is not

registered on the noncontact IC card use permission list, the mobile phone controller 105 instructs the noncontact IC card function unit 106 not to permit the use of the noncontact IC card. In response to that, stop setting of the noncontact IC card application is made by the noncontact IC card function unit 106 (Step S9). With this, the function of the noncontact IC card function unit 106 can be prevented from being used by a third party.

Note that, the noncontact IC card use permission list is stored in the memory unit 103 within the mobile phone unit 100, only at the time when a mobile phone unit with a noncontact IC card function is purchased. For example, a third party permitted to use a noncontact IC card may be designated at the time of purchase, similarly to a system in which a telephone number is registered for using a service that largely discounts call charge for a telephone number registered in advance.

Alternatively, the function of editing a noncontact IC card use permission list may be provided in the mobile phone unit 100, allowing the user to alter accordingly the subscriber numbers registered on the noncontact IC card use permission list after the purchase.

According to the above-described embodiments, when a mobile phone unit incorporating the noncontact IC card function and capable of being used by inserting a subscriber information card

is lent to a third party after pulling out the subscriber information card of the owner of the mobile phone unit, the third party may be prevented from using the noncontact IC card function that the owner of the mobile phone unit uses, unless the third party is registered on a noncontact IC card use permission list in advance. Therefore, security can be improved.

A modified example of the above-described embodiment, in which main power to the mobile phone unit 100 is cut, namely the power of the mobile phone controller 105 is off, is hereinafter explained.

For example, when the noncontact IC card function unit 106 in the power-off state receives a radio wave from a reader/writer, the noncontact IC card function unit 106 turns on the power of the mobile phone controller 105 and waits for a command to permit/not to permit the use of the noncontact IC card in a similar manner to the process of Step S2. Then, similarly to the process of Step S3, the mobile phone controller 105 makes a request for reading the subscriber number from the subscriber information card 120 (equivalent to Step S2). Subsequent processes are similar to those of Steps S3 to S9 in FIG. 3.

As described above, even if the power of a mobile phone unit 100 is off, operation similar to that at the time when the mobile phone unit 100 is powered on is performed, which is

convenient for the user, because there is no need to turn on the mobile phone unit 100 each time he/she uses the noncontact IC card function.

Further, another modified example of the above-described embodiment is described.

If the noncontact IC card function unit 106 receives a radio wave from a reader/writer when the main power of the mobile phone unit 100 is off, specifically, when the power of the mobile phone controller 105 is off, the noncontact IC card function unit 106 directly makes a request to the subscriber information card 120 for reading the subscriber number from the subscriber information card 120 not through the mobile phone controller 105. Then, the noncontact IC card function unit 106 directly receives the subscriber number from the subscriber information card 120 (equivalent to Step S4), and the subsequent processes of Steps S5 to S9 are all carried out by the noncontact IC card function unit 106.

In this case, since the noncontact IC card function unit 106 and the subscriber information card 120 directly send and receives the subscriber number, the amount of time spent in judging whether to permit or not to permit the use of a noncontact IC card function is reduced. Further, in the case where the mobile phone unit 100 is broken down, operation is still possible by the noncontact IC card function unit 106 alone.

In addition, after the process of Step S9 shown in FIG. 3, the stop setting (lock) of the noncontact IC card application may be canceled by means of password information such as a password or predetermined key operation. That is, a third party using a subscriber information card not registered on the noncontact IC card use permission list may cancel the lock to the noncontact IC card application by inputting password information by means of key operation. Desirably, the password in this case can be changed appropriately by the owner of the mobile phone unit.

For example, the following mode may be considered: a mobile phone unit purchased in the name of a father is given to his child and typically the child is prevented from using noncontact IC card application, but if necessary or in an emergency, the noncontact IC card application can be used by the child directly asking the father the password to cancel the lock.

In such case, permission to use the noncontact IC card application can be selectively given according to need.

Note that, the present invention is not limited to the above-described embodiments, and various modifications and alterations can be made without deviating from the gist of the present invention.

It should be understood by those skilled in the art that various modifications, combinations, sub-combinations and

alterations may occur depending on design requirements and other factors insofar as they are within the scope of the appended claims or the equivalents thereof.

What is claimed is:

1. A portable terminal including a noncontact IC card function unit and capable of being used by inserting a subscriber information card, comprising:

a memory unit which stores a noncontact IC card use permission list on which numbers of subscribers permitted to use the noncontact IC card function are registered; and

a controller which compares the subscriber number recorded on said subscriber information card with the noncontact IC card use permission list stored in said memory unit to judge whether or not the relevant subscriber number is in the list, and which decides whether or not to permit the use of said noncontact IC card function based on the judgment result;

wherein in the case where said relevant subscriber number is not included in the list, only the function of said noncontact IC card function unit is stopped.

2. A portable terminal according to claim 1,

wherein when said portable terminal is powered on, said controller reads the subscriber number of said subscriber information card, and compares the read subscriber number with the noncontact IC card use permission list stored in said memory unit.

3. A portable terminal according to claim 1 or 2,
wherein when the power of said controller is off,
said noncontact IC card function unit turns on the power of
said controller; and

said controller after powered on reads the subscriber
number of said subscriber information card and compares the read
subscriber number with the noncontact IC card use permission
list stored in said memory unit.

4. A portable terminal according to claim 1, 2 or 3,
wherein when the power of said controller is off,
said noncontact IC card function unit reads the subscriber
number of said subscriber information card, comparing the read
subscriber number and the noncontact IC card use permission list
stored in said memory unit to judge whether or not the relevant
subscriber number is in the list, deciding whether or not to
permit the use of said noncontact IC card function based on the
judgment result.

5. A portable terminal according to any one of the
preceding claims,

wherein after the function of said noncontact IC card
function unit is stopped, stop setting of the function of said
noncontact IC card function unit is canceled by inputting
password information.

6. A function limiting method in a portable terminal including a noncontact IC card function unit and capable of being used by inserting a subscriber information card, comprising the steps of:

preparing in advance a noncontact IC card use permission list on which numbers of subscribers permitted to use a noncontact IC card function are registered;

judging whether or not the relevant subscriber number is in the list by comparing the subscriber number recorded on said subscriber information card with said noncontact IC card use permission list; and

stopping only the function of said noncontact IC card function unit, if said relevant subscriber number is not included in said list.