CLAIMS:

1. A method for processing an electronic order, the method carried out at a remotely accessible server (102) and comprising the steps of:

through a first interface (108) with an ordering entity (106), receiving an order for an item placed by a consumer (104) with the ordering entity (106), the order including an identification of the item ordered, delivery details, a price for the item, and a vendor (110) from whom the item is desired;

through a second interface (112) with a number of vendors (110), transmitting the order to the vendor (110) identified in the order;

receiving a notification from the vendor (110) indicating that the order has been accepted and subsequently receiving a notification from the vendor (110) that the order is ready for fulfilment;

upon receiving a notification that the order is ready for fulfilment, though a third interface (116) with a number of delivery providers (114), transmitting a delivery instruction to a delivery provider (114) able to fulfil the delivery;

receiving a notification from the delivery provider (114) that the delivery has been fulfilled;

upon fulfilment of the delivery:

computing a delivery fee due to the delivery provider (114) for delivery of the item based on a pre-set delivery fee formula;

updating a ledger account of the delivery provider (114) with the delivery fee;

updating a ledger account of the vendor (110) with the price for the item minus the delivery fee;

at regular intervals, determining the amount owed between the vendor (110) and the delivery provider (114) and optionally instructing a payment gateway (120) to facilitate settlement thereof.

2. The method as claimed in claim 1, in which the ordering entity (106) is selected from a mobile device application, a call centre, an electronic commerce website, and a point of sale device.

3. The method as claimed in claim 1 or claim 2, in which the first interface includes (108) an application program interface that defines the format with which the ordering entity must transmit the order to the remotely accessible server (102).

4. The method as claimed in any of the preceding claims, in which the vendor (110) receives notification of the fulfilment of the delivery so that the vendor (110) is able to track the order from the time the order is placed until it is fulfilled.

5. The method as claimed in claim 4, in which the vendor (110) is able to track each order on a visual display.

6. The method as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, in which the delivery provider (114) is able to include the details of multiple delivery agents (118) with the remotely accessible server (102), for each delivery agent (118) to have a ledger account with the remotely accessible server (102), and for the ledger account of a specific delivery agent (118) to be updated upon that delivery agent (118) fulfilling a delivery.

7. The method as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, in which the item is a physical item and the delivery provider (114) must physically deliver the item to the consumer (104).

8. The method as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 6, in which the item is a virtual item and the delivery provider (114) delivers the item to the consumer (104) though an electronic communications channel.

9. The method as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 7, in which the delivery details include a geographic location of the consumer (104), and for the method to include the step of identifying a retail outlet of a vendor (110) which is closest to the location of the consumer (104), thereby reducing the required travelling distance and time for delivery of the ordered item to take place.

10. The method as claimed in claim 9, in which the geographic location of the consumer (104) is obtained from a GPS coordinate of a geo-location feature of a mobile device application.

11. A system (100) for processing an electronic order, the system comprising a remotely accessible server (102) having:

a first interface (108) with an ordering entity (106), by means of which the server (102) is configured to receive an order for an item placed by a consumer (104) with the ordering entity (106), the order including an identification of an item ordered, delivery details, a price for the item, and a vendor (110) from whom the item is desired;

a second interface (112) with a number of vendors (110), by means of which the server (102) is configured to transmit the order to the vendor (110) identified in the order, receive a notification from the vendor (110) indicating that the order has been accepted, and subsequently receive a notification from the vendor (110) that the order is ready for fulfilment;

a third interface (116) with a number of delivery providers (114), by means of which the server (102) is configured to transmit a delivery instruction to a delivery provider (114) able to fulfil the delivery, and receive a notification from the delivery provider (114) that the delivery has been fulfilled;

wherein the server (102) is configured, upon fulfilment of the delivery to:

compute a delivery fee due to the delivery provider (114) for delivery of the item based on a pre-set delivery fee formula;

update a ledger account of the delivery provider (114) with the delivery fee;

update a ledger account of the vendor (110) with the price for the item minus the delivery fee;

and wherein the server (102) is configured, at regular intervals, to determine the amount owed between the vendor (110) and the delivery provider (114) and optionally instruct a payment gateway (120) to facilitate settlement thereof.

12. The system as claimed in claim 11, wherein the remotely accessible server (102) is accessible by means of user credentials to the vendors (110) and delivery providers (114), and the vendors (110) and delivery providers (114) are able to create and manage roles for authorized users, with access to the server (102) being determined by the role of a user.

13. The system as claimed in claim 12, wherein the roles for authorized users are assigned a hierarchical status, the position of the role in the hierarchy determining a user's access to the server (102), and a role with sufficient authorization being able to input information such as the pre-set delivery fee formula and a delivery agent fee formula.

CLAIMS:

1. A method for processing an electronic order, the method carried out at a remotely accessible server (102) and comprising the steps of:

through a first interface (108) with an ordering entity (106), receiving an order for an item placed by a consumer (104) with the ordering entity (106), the order including an identification of the item ordered, delivery details, a price for the item, and a vendor (110) from whom the item is desired;

through a second interface (112) with a number of vendors (110), transmitting the order to the vendor (110) identified in the order;

receiving a notification from the vendor (110) indicating that the order has been accepted and subsequently receiving a notification from the vendor (110) that the order is ready for fulfilment;

upon receiving a notification that the order is ready for fulfilment, through a third interface (116) with a number of delivery providers (114), transmitting a delivery instruction to a delivery provider (114) able to fulfil the delivery;

receiving a notification from the delivery provider (114) that the delivery has been fulfilled;

computing a delivery fee due to the delivery provider (114) for delivery of the item based on a pre-set delivery fee formula;

updating a ledger account of the delivery provider (114) with the delivery fee;

updating a ledger account of the vendor (110) with the price for the item minus the delivery fee; and

at regular intervals, determining the amount owed between the vendor (110) and the delivery provider (114) and optionally instructing a payment gateway (120) to facilitate settlement thereof.

2. The method as claimed in claim 1, in which the ordering entity (106) is selected from a mobile device application, a call centre, an electronic commerce website, and a point of sale device.

3. The method as claimed in claim 1 or claim 2, in which the first interface includes (108) an application program interface that defines the format with which the ordering entity must transmit the order to the remotely accessible server (102).

4. The method as claimed in any of the preceding claims, in which the vendor (110) receives notification of the fulfilment of the delivery so that the vendor (110) is able to track the order from the time the order is placed until it is fulfilled.

5. The method as claimed in claim 4, in which the vendor (110) is able to track each order on a visual display.

6. The method as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, in which the delivery provider (114) is able to include the details of multiple delivery agents (118) with the remotely accessible server (102), for each delivery agent (118) to have a ledger account with the remotely accessible server (102), and for the ledger account of a specific delivery agent (118) to be updated upon that delivery agent (118) fulfilling a delivery.

7. The method as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, in which the item is a physical item and the delivery provider (114) must physically deliver the item to the consumer (104).

8. The method as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 6, in which the item is a virtual item and the delivery provider (114) delivers the item to the consumer (104) though an electronic communications channel.

9. The method as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 7, in which the delivery details include a geographic location of the consumer (104), and the method includes the step of identifying a retail outlet of a vendor (110) which is closest to the location of the consumer (104), thereby reducing the required travelling distance and time for delivery of the ordered item to take place.

10. The method as claimed in claim 9, in which the geographic location of the consumer (104) is obtained from a GPS coordinate of a geo-location feature of a mobile device application.

11. A system (100) for processing an electronic order, the system comprising a remotely accessible server (102) having:

a first interface (108) with an ordering entity (106), by means of which the server (102) is configured to receive an order for an item placed by a consumer (104) with the ordering entity (106), the order including an identification of an item ordered, delivery details, a price for the item, and a vendor (110) from whom the item is desired;

a second interface (112) with a number of vendors (110), by means of which the server (102) is configured to transmit the order to the vendor (110) identified in the order, receive a notification from the vendor (110) indicating that the order has been accepted, and subsequently receive a notification from the vendor (110) that the order is ready for fulfilment;

a third interface (116) with a number of delivery providers (114), by means of which the server (102) is configured to transmit a delivery instruction to a delivery provider (114) able to fulfil the delivery, and receive a notification from the delivery provider (114) that the delivery has been fulfilled;

wherein the server (102) is configured to:

compute a delivery fee due to the delivery provider (114) for delivery of the item based on a pre-set delivery fee formula;

update a ledger account of the delivery provider (114) with the delivery fee;

update a ledger account of the vendor (110) with the price for the item minus the delivery fee;

and wherein the server (102) is configured, at regular intervals, to determine the amount owed between the vendor (110) and the delivery provider (114) and optionally instruct a payment gateway (120) to facilitate settlement thereof.

12. The system as claimed in claim 11, wherein the remotely accessible server (102) is accessible by means of user credentials to the vendors (110) and delivery providers (114), and the vendors (110) and delivery providers (114) are able to create and manage roles for authorized users, with access to the server (102) being determined by the role of a user.

13. The system as claimed in claim 12, wherein the roles for authorized users are assigned a hierarchical status, the position of the role in the hierarchy determining a user's access to the server (102), and a role with sufficient authorization being able to input information such as the pre-set delivery fee formula and a delivery agent fee formula.

14. A method of facilitating the integration of a number of different entities in an electronic commerce environment in which orders are processed, comprising, at a remotely accessible server:

integrating an entity with the server so that the entity and the server can communicate with each other through a first interface;

through the first interface, receiving a request from the entity to connect to one or more other entities which are also integrated with the server; and

by means of the server, connecting the entity to the one or more other entities without requiring any modification of the first interface;

so that an order involving multiple entities can be seamlessly processed by the server communicating with the connected entities.

15. A method as claimed in claim 14, wherein the entity is one of, and the other entities are one or more of: a payment gateway, a delivery provider, a vendor, and an ordering entity.