

1. A computer implemented method for verifying a membership certificate,
presented on a purported member's website, the computer implemented method
5 comprising
 activating the membership certificate;
 retrieving an organization certificate associated with the organization that created
the membership certificate, the organization certificate including a predetermined set of
information elements associated only with a particular type of organization and defining
10 the membership;
 comparing the presented elements in the membership certificate with the
organization certificate; and
 verifying the membership certificate if and only if the presented elements in the
membership certificate match the predetermined set of information elements associated
15 with the particular type of organization within the organization certificate.
2. The computer implemented method as defined in claim 1 wherein the
organization certificate is created by a bona fide certification authority (CA) and the
method includes the step of validating the organization certificate with respect to the
20 certification authority.
3. The computer implemented method as defined in claim 1 wherein a local
computer performing the method includes a cache of valid organization certificates.
- 25 4. The computer implemented method as defined in claim 1 wherein a local
computer performing the method obtains a listing of current and valid organization
certificates from a network database.
5. The computer implemented method as defined in claim 1 wherein the
30 comparison of the presented elements to the predetermined listing of elements includes a
check for inclusion of required information.
6. The computer implemented method as defined in claim 1 wherein the
comparison of the presented elements to the predetermined listing of elements includes a

check for the single occurrence of an information element for a predetermined listing of an element defined as not permitting multiple entries.

5 7. The computer implemented method as defined in claim 1 wherein the method comprises the step of verifying that the organization certificate is properly signed and has not expired.

10 8. The computer implemented method as defined in claim 1 wherein the method comprises the step of verifying that the membership certificate has not expired.

15 9. The computer implemented method as defined in claim 1 wherein the organization certificate and the membership certificate are presented as combined certificate, with the organization certificate first verified before verifying the membership certificate.

20 10. A system for verifying a membership certificate, presented on a purported member's website, the system comprising
computer usable code means for activating the membership certificate;
computer usable code means for retrieving an organization certificate associated with the organization that created the membership certificate, the organization certificate including a predetermined set of information elements associated only with a particular type of organization and defining the membership;
computer usable code means for comparing the presented elements in the membership certificate with the organization certificate; and
25 computer usable code means for verifying the membership certificate if and only if the presented elements in the membership certificate match the predetermined set of information elements associated with the particular type of organization within the organization certificate.

30 11. The system as defined in claim 10 wherein the organization certificate is created by a bona fide certification authority (CA), the computer usable program code means for validating the organization certificate with respect to the certification authority.

12. The system as defined in claim 19, wherein the computer usable program code means performs the step of retrieving a local cache of valid organization certificates.

5 13. The system as defined in claim 19, wherein the computer usable program code means performs the step of retrieving valid organization certificates from a network database.

10 14. The system as defined in claim 19, wherein the computer usable program code performs the step of checking the presented elements for the inclusion of required information.

15 15. The system as defined in claim 19, wherein the computer usable program code means performs the step of checking for a single occurrence of an information element for a predetermined listing of an element defined as not permitting multiple entries.

16. The system as defined in claim 19, wherein the computer usable program code means performs the step of verifying that the organization certificate is properly signed and has not expired.

20 17. The system as defined in claim 19, wherein the organization certificate and membership certificate are presented as a combined certificate with the computer usable program code means first performing a verification of the organization certificate portion and then performing a verification of the membership certificate portion.

25 18. The system as defined in claim 19, wherein the computer usable program code means performs the step verifying that the membership certificate has not expired.

What is claimed is:

1. A computer implemented method for verifying a membership certificate of a purported member of an identified organization, represented as an icon on a purported member's website, the computer implemented method comprising
activating the membership certificate icon;
retrieving the membership certificate linked to the icon, the membership certificate comprising a field identifying an organization that issued the membership certificate and a payload section including specific information pertaining to the purported member, the specific information structured by specific fields;
retrieving an organization certificate associated with the identified organization that created the membership certificate, the organization certificate including a predetermined set of information elements defining the membership, the predetermined set of information elements structured by fixed fields defined by the identified organization and included a pointer to a separate table comprising specific tagged fields that are populated by the identified organization when creating the membership certificate;
comparing the presented elements in the membership certificate with the predetermined set of information elements within the organization certificate; and
verifying the membership certificate if and only if the specific fields structured in the membership certificate match the predetermined set of fixed fields structured within the organization certificate as defined by the identified organization.
2. The computer implemented method as defined in claim 1 wherein the organization certificate is created by a bona fide certification authority (CA) and the method includes the step of validating the organization certificate with respect to the certification authority.
3. The computer implemented method as defined in claim 1 wherein a local computer performing the method includes a cache of valid organization certificates.
4. The computer implemented method as defined in claim 1 wherein a local computer performing the method obtains a listing of current and valid organization certificates from a network database.

5. The computer implemented method as defined in claim 1 wherein the comparison of the membership certificate specific fields to the organization certificate predetermined fixed fields includes a check for inclusion of required information within each specific field.

6. The computer implemented method as defined in claim 1 wherein the comparison of the membership certificate specific fields to the organization certificate predetermined fixed fields includes a check for only a single occurrence of an information element for a predetermined specific field defined as not permitting multiple entries.

7. The computer implemented method as defined in claim 1 wherein the method comprises the step of verifying that the organization certificate is properly signed and has not expired.

8. The computer implemented method as defined in claim 1 wherein the method comprises the step of verifying that the membership certificate has not expired.

9. The computer implemented method as defined in claim 1 wherein the organization certificate and the membership certificate are presented as combined certificate, with the organization certificate first verified before verifying the membership certificate.

10. A computer usable program product comprising a non-transitory computer usable medium including computer usable code for verifying a membership certificate of a purported member of an identified organization, the membership certificate represented by an icon on a purported member's website, the computer usable code comprising
computer usable code for activating the membership certificate icon;
computer usable code for retrieving the membership certificate linked to the icon, the membership certificate comprising a field identifying an organization that issued the membership certificate and a payload section including specific information pertaining to the purported member, the specific information structured by specific fields;
computer usable code for retrieving an organization certificate associated with the identified organization that created the membership certificate, the organization certificate including a predetermined set of information elements defining the membership, the predetermined set of information elements structured by fixed fields defined by the identified organization and included a pointer to a separate table comprising specific tagged fields that are populated by the identified organization when creating the membership certificate;

computer usable code for comparing the presented elements in the membership certificate with the predetermined set of information elements within the organization certificate; and computer usable code for verifying the membership certificate if and only if the specific fields structured in the membership certificate match the predetermined set of fixed fields structured within the organization certificate as defined by the identified organization.

11. The computer usable program product as defined in claim 10 wherein the organization certificate is created by a bona fide certification authority (CA), the computer usable program code for validating the organization certificate with respect to the certification authority.

12. The computer usable program product as defined in claim 10, wherein the computer usable code performs the step of retrieving a local cache of valid organization certificates.

13. The computer usable program product as defined in claim 10, wherein the computer usable code performs the step of retrieving valid organization certificates from a network database.

14. The computer usable program product as defined in claim 10, wherein the computer usable code performs the step of checking the membership certificate specific fields for an inclusion of required information within each specific field.

15. The computer usable program product as defined in claim 10, wherein the computer usable code performs the step of checking for only a single occurrence of an information element for a predetermined specific field defined as not permitting multiple entries.

16. The computer usable program product as defined in claim 10, wherein the computer usable code performs the step of verifying that the organization certificate is properly signed and has not expired.

17. The computer usable program product as defined in claim 10, wherein the computer usable code performs the step verifying that the membership certificate has not expired.

18. The computer usable program product as defined in claim 10 wherein the organization certificate and membership certificate are presented as a combined certificate with specific delimiters used to signify the demarcation between the organization certificate and the

membership certificate, with the computer usable code performing the step of verifying the organization certificate portion before verifying the membership certificate portion of the combined certificate.

19. A system for verifying a membership certificate of a purported member of an identified organization, represented as an icon on a purported member's website, the system comprising a first hardware element including computer usable code means for activating the membership certificate icon;

a second hardware element including computer usable code means for retrieving the membership certificate linked to the icon, the membership certificate comprising a field identifying an organization that issued the membership certificate and a payload section including specific information pertaining to the purported member, the specific information structured by specific fields;

a third hardware element including computer usable code means for retrieving an organization certificate associated with the identified organization that created the membership certificate, the organization certificate including a predetermined set of information elements defining the membership, the predetermined set of information elements structured by fixed fields defined by the identified organization and included a pointer to a separate table comprising specific tagged fields that are populated by the identified organization when creating the membership certificate;

a fourth hardware element including computer usable code means for comparing the presented elements in the membership certificate with the predetermined set of information elements within the organization certificate; and

a fifth hardware element including computer usable code means for verifying the membership certificate if and only if the specific fields structured in the membership certificate match the predetermined set of fixed fields structured within the organization certificate as defined by the identified organization.

20. The system as defined in claim 19 wherein the organization certificate is created by a bona fide certification authority (CA) and the system further comprises a sixth hardware element including computer usable code means for validating the organization certificate with respect to the certification authority.

21. The system as defined in claim 19, wherein the third hardware element including computer usable code means performs the step of retrieving a local cache of valid organization certificates.

22. The system as defined in claim 19, wherein the third hardware element including computer usable code means performs the step of retrieving valid organization certificates from a network database.

23. The system as defined in claim 19, wherein the fifth hardware element including computer usable code performs the step of checking the membership certificate specific fields for an inclusion of required information within each specific field.

24. The system as defined in claim 19, wherein the fifth hardware element including computer usable code means performs the step of checking for only a single occurrence of an information element for a predetermined specific field defined as not permitting multiple entries.

25. The system as defined in claim 19, wherein the fifth hardware element including computer usable code means performs the step of verifying that the organization certificate is properly signed and has not expired.

26. The system as defined in claim 19, wherein the organization certificate and membership certificate are presented as a combined certificate with the fifth hardware element including computer usable code means first performing a verification of the organization certificate portion and then performing a verification of the membership certificate portion.

27. The system as defined in claim 19, wherein the fifth hardware element including computer usable code means performs the step verifying that the membership certificate has not expired.