CLAIMS

1. A method in an electronic signature service, comprising:

without use of a Portable Document Format processing module,

creating a template that specifies required electronic signature data;

transmitting a URL that identifies the template;

receiving a request based on the transmitted URL;

in response to the received request, preparing a form based on the template;

presenting the form within a Web browser; and

receiving the required electronic signature data.

2. The method of claim 1 wherein the received request includes one or more arguments along with a portion of the transmitted URL, and wherein preparing the form includes populating the form with the included arguments.

3. The method of claim 1 wherein the request is based on a URL that is dynamically generated by a module executing on a client device that executes the Web browser.

4. The method of claim 3 wherein the module executing on the client device is a script executed by the Web browser.

5. The method of claim 1 wherein the request is based on a URL that includes argument values received from data collection performed by a client device that executes the Web browser.

6. The method of claim 1, further comprising:

after transmitting the URL that identifies the template, modifying the template to include additional required electronic signature data; and

in response to the received request, preparing the form to include controls for receiving the additional required electronic signature data.

7. A system comprising:

an electronic signature service computer configured, without use of a Portable Document Format processing module, to:

transmit a URL that identifies a template that specifies required electronic signature data;

receive a request based on the transmitted URL;

in response to the received request, prepare a form based on the template;

present the form within a Web browser; and

receive the required electronic signature data.

8. The system of claim 7 wherein the transmitted URL is included in a Web site accessed by the Web browser.

9. The system of claim 7, wherein the electronic signature service computer is further configured to transmit the received electronic signature data to one or more recipients specified by the template.

10. The system of claim 7, wherein the template specifies usage restrictions, and wherein the electronic signature service computer is further configured to enforce the usage restrictions.

11. The system of claim 10, wherein the usage restrictions specify a maximum number of times the template can be used for electronic signature purposes.

12. The system of claim 7, further comprising:

a client device that executes the Web browser and that is configured, without use of a Portable Document Format processing module, to:

receive the transmitted URL;

dynamically generate the request based on the transmitted URL, by including one or more arguments in the generated request; and

transmit the request to the electronic signature service computer.

13. The system of claim 12, wherein the client device is further configured to execute a module in the Web browser that dynamically generates the request based on the transmitted URL.

14. The system of claim 13, wherein the module is a script executing in the Web browser.

15. The system of claim 12 wherein the client device is further configured to:

collect data values from a user of the client device; and

include the collected data values as the one or more arguments in the generated request.

16. A computer-readable storage medium that includes instructions configured, when executed by a client device, to perform a method for interacting with an electronic signature service, the method comprising:

without use of a Portable Document Format processing module,

receiving a URL that identifies a template that specifies required electronic signature data;

transmitting a request based on the received URL;

receiving a form prepared based on the template;

collecting the required electronic signature data by presenting the received form in a Web browser executing on the client device; and

transmitting the collected data to the electronic signature service.

17. The computer-readable storage medium of claim 16, wherein method further comprises executing a module in the Web browser that dynamically generates the request based on the transmitted URL.

18. The computer-readable storage medium of claim 17 wherein the module is a script executing in the Web browser.

19. The computer-readable storage medium of claim 16 wherein the method further comprises:

collecting data values from a user of the client device; and

including the collected data values as the one or more arguments in the generated request.

Claims:

1. A method in an electronic signature service, comprising:

creating a template that specifies required electronic signature data and that specifies usage restrictions that specify a maximum number of electronic signatures that can be collected via the template;

transmitting a URL that identifies the template;

receiving a request based on the transmitted URL; enforcing the usage restrictions;

determining a number of uses for the template;

in response to the received request, and when it is determined, based on the determined number of uses, that the maximum number of electronic signatures specified by the usage restrictions has not been reached,

preparing a form based on the template;

presenting the form within a Web browser; and

receiving the required electronic signature data; and

in response to the received request, and when it is determined, based on the determined number of uses, that the maximum number of electronic signatures specified by the usage restrictions has been reached,

presenting an error message indicating that the form is not available for signing; and

refusing to prepare and transmit a form based on the template,

wherein the usage restrictions further specify a maximum frequency that the template can be used for electronic signature purposes, the maximum frequency specifying a length of time between signings, wherein a recipient may only sign the form once within the specified length of time.

2. The method of claim 1 wherein the received request includes one or more arguments along with a portion of the transmitted URL, and wherein preparing the form includes populating the form with the included arguments.

3. The method of claim 1 wherein the request is based on a URL that includes argument values received from data collection performed by a client device that executes the Web browser.

4. The method of claim 1, further comprising:

after transmitting the URL that identifies the template, modifying the template to include additional required electronic signature data; and

in response to the received request, preparing the form to include controls for receiving the additional required electronic signature data.

5. The method of claim 1, presenting a user interface for managing electronic signature templates, the user interface configured to:

provide access to a library of templates that provides a common location for storing and accessing templates;

create a template based on a template from the library; and specify usage restrictions via controls for specifying a maximum number of electronic signatures that can be collected via the template.

6. The method of claim 5 wherein the user interface is further configured to specify both an email signing mode and direct signing mode, wherein the email signing mode requires email authentication before a signer can provide an electronic signature, wherein the direct signing mode does not require email authentication before a signer can provide an electronic signature. .

7. The method of claim 5, further comprising:

specifying, via the user interface, that the template is in inactive status; and

receiving a second request based on the URL,

in response to the inactive status and the received second request,

presenting an error message indicating that the form is not available for signing; and

refusing to prepare and transmit a form based on the template.

8. The method of claim 1, further comprising transmitting the form as an attachment to an email.

9. The method of claim 1, wherein the template further specifies a status that indicates that the template is active or inactive, wherein the template further specifies a direct signing mode or an email signing mode, wherein the email signing mode requires email authentication before a signer can provide an electronic signature, and wherein the direct signing mode does not require email authentication before a signer can provide an electronic signature.

10. The method of claim 1, wherein the form is configured, when opened, to request names or email address of other recipients.

11. A system comprising:

an electronic signature service computer that includes a processor and a memory and that is configured to:

transmit a URL that identifies a template that specifies required electronic signature data and that specifies usage restrictions that specify a maximum number of electronic signatures that can be collected via the template;

receive a request based on the transmitted URL;

enforce the usage restrictions;

determining a number of uses for the template;

in response to the received request, and when it is determined, based on the determined number of uses, that the maximum number of electronic signatures specified by the usage restrictions has not been reached, prepare a form based on the template; present the form within a Web browser; and

receive the required electronic signature data; and

in response to the received request, and when it is determined, based on the determined number of uses, that the maximum number of electronic signatures specified by the usage restrictions has been reached,

presenting an error message indicating that the form is not available for signing; and

refusing to prepare and transmit a form based on the template,

wherein the usage restrictions further specify a maximum frequency that the template can be used for electronic signature purposes, the maximum frequency specifying a length of time between signings, wherein a recipient may only sign the form once within the specified length of time.

12. The system of claim 11 wherein the transmitted URL is included in a Web site accessed by the Web browser.

13. The system of claim 11, wherein the electronic signature service computer is further configured to transmit the received electronic signature data to one or more recipients specified by the template.

14. The system of claim 11, further comprising:

a client device that is remote from the electronic signature service computer, that executes the Web browser and that is configured to:

receive the transmitted URL;

dynamically generate the request based on the transmitted URL, by including one or more arguments in the generated request; and

transmit the request to the electronic signature service computer,

wherein the electronic signature service computer is further configured to prepare the form based on the template by populating the form with the included arguments.

15. The system of claim 14, wherein the client device is further configured to execute a module in the Web browser that dynamically generates the request based on the transmitted URL.

16. The system of claim 14 wherein the client device is further configured to:

collect data values from a user of the client device; and include the collected data values as the one or more arguments in the generated request.

17. A non-transitory computer-readable medium that includes instructions configured, when executed an electronic signature service computing system, to perform a method comprising:

transmitting a URL that identifies a template, created via the user interface, that specifies required electronic signature data and that specifies usage restrictions that specify a maximum number of electronic signatures that can be collected via the template;

receiving a request based on the transmitted URL; enforcing the usage restrictions;

determining a number of uses for the template;

in response to the received request, and when it is determined, based on the determined number of uses, that the maximum number of electronic signatures specified by the usage restrictions has not been reached,

preparing a form prepared based on the template; presenting the form within a Web browser executing on a remote client device; and

receiving the required the electronic signature data; and

in response to the received request, and when it is determined, based on the determined number of uses, that the maximum number of electronic signatures specified by the usage restrictions has been reached,

presenting an error message indicating that the form is not available for signing; and

refusing to prepare and transmit a form based on the template,

wherein the usage restrictions further specify a maximum frequency that the template can be used for electronic signature purposes, the maximum frequency specifying a length of time between signings, wherein a recipient may only sign the form once within the specified length of time.

18. The non-transitory computer-readable medium of claim 17, wherein method further comprises executing a module in the Web browser that dynamic ally generates the request based on the transmitted URL, wherein the module is a script executing in the Web browser.

19. The non-transitory computer-readable medium of claim 17 wherein the method further comprises:

collecting data values from a user of the client device; and including the collected data values as the one or more arguments in the generated request.