may be stored in a data store that is accessible to the computing device 106. The components executed on the computing device 106, for example, include a respective one of a plurality of fulfillment systems 178a, 178b ... 178N, and other applications, services, processes, systems, engines, or functionality not discussed in detail herein. The fulfillment system 178 may be executed to facilitate inventory control, pick orchestration, control of automated equipment, packaging of orders, shipping of orders, and may perform other tasks. As an example, the fulfillment system 178 may direct the transferring of inventory from one fulfillment center 112 to another fulfillment center 112. As another example, the fulfillment system ~~112~~178 may direct inventory that is currently separated and identified ~~to~~with a merchant to be moved to a location in the fulfillment center 112 that is associated with a common pool of inventory.

**[0026]** The computing device 106 may also maintain data relating to the respective merchant-identified inventory 181a, 181b ... 181N, data relating to the respective pooled inventory 184a, 184b ... 184N, and/or other data. The merchant-identified inventory 181 corresponds to the items 148 that are recognized as being owned by the merchant and reserved for fulfilling orders of the merchant in the respective fulfillment center 112. The pooled inventory 184 corresponds to items 148 that have been contributed by participating merchants to a common pool of inventory in exchange for inventory credits 166.

**[0027]** The client 118 is representative of a plurality of client devices that may be coupled to the network 121. In various examples, the client 118 may correspond to a merchant or a customer of a merchant. The client 118 may comprise, for example, a processor-based system such as a computer system.

Such a computer system may be embodied in the form of a desktop computer, a laptop computer, personal digital assistants, cellular telephones, smartphones, set-top boxes, music players, web pads, tablet computer systems, game consoles, electronic book readers, or other devices with like capability. In some embodiments, the client 118 may correspond to a server computer of the merchant. The client 118 may include a display 187. The display 187 may comprise, for example, one or more devices such as cathode ray tubes (CRTs), liquid crystal display (LCD) screens, gas plasma-based flat panel displays, LCD projectors, or other types of display devices, *etc.*

**[0028]** The client 118 may be configured to execute various applications such as a browser 190 and/or other applications. The browser 190 may be executed in a client 118, for example, to access and render network pages, such as web pages, or other network content served up by the computing device 103 and/or other servers, thereby generating a rendered network page on the display 187. The client 118 may be configured to execute applications beyond browser 190 such as, for example, email applications, instant message applications, and/or other applications.

**[0029]** Next, a general description of the operation of the various components of the networked environment 100 is provided. To begin, a merchant may ship items 148 corresponding to its identified inventory ~~166~~169 to one or more fulfillment centers 112 in the fulfillment network 115. The items 148 are held in the fulfillment centers 112 on behalf of the merchant in merchant-identified inventory 181. Corresponding offerings 151 may be placed in one or more electronic marketplaces 136.

**[0030]** Orders placed by customers at clients 118 through the electronic commerce application 127 may then be fulfilled from the merchant-identified inventory 181. The fulfillment may be orchestrated by the inventory management application 130. Although orders are generally described herein as being placed through an electronic marketplace 136 and the electronic commerce application 127, it is understood that orders placed elsewhere may be delivered to the inventory management application 130 for fulfillment through the fulfillment network 115.

**[0031]** An order may be placed through a particular merchant in an electronic marketplace 136 or irrespective to a merchant. Where multiple merchants have offerings 151 in an electronic marketplace 136 and the customer has not specified a particular merchant, the electronic commerce application 127 may select the offering 151 associated with a lowest total cost to the customer. Where the lowest total cost is the same among multiple merchants, the electronic commerce application 127 may select an offering 151 on a random or other basis to assure an even distribution. Alternatively, the electronic commerce application 127 may prefer merchant-identified inventory 181 or may use another approach to merchant selection for an order.

**[0032]** A merchant may decide to contribute inventory to the pooled inventory 184 and thereby receive inventory credits ~~163~~166 in return. To this end, the inventory management application 130 may generate various administrative interfaces (*e.g.*, embodied in network pages) to facilitate inventory management by clients 118. When an item 148 is contributed to pooled inventory 184, it is no longer identified as owned by the specific merchant and can be used in fulfilling

orders for other merchants. When an item 148 is removed from pooled inventory 184, the inventory credits ~~163~~166 for the merchant are debited. Items 148 may be removed from pooled inventory 184 when they are retrieved for fulfilling orders. In addition, items 148 may be removed under direction of the merchant in accordance with terms established by the operator of the fulfillment network 115.

**[0033]** By pooling inventory, merchants can advantageously decrease their shipping costs, which may increase overall sales. As a non-limiting example, a first merchant in the United States may stock widgets in a fulfillment center 112 in the U.S. If the merchant were to offer the widget for sale in an electronic marketplace 136 that targets Germany, the international shipping costs may be too high for the merchant to make sales. However, it may be too speculative for the merchant to anticipate sales in Germany and ship the widgets to a fulfillment center 112 in Germany in advance.

**[0034]** Suppose that a similar situation exists for a second merchant in Germany who also sells the same, fungible, widget. Suppose further that both merchants elect to pool their inventory and receive inventory credits ~~163~~166 in return. Consequently, a customer in Germany (or elsewhere in Europe) may choose to purchase the widget from the first merchant, and the widget can be shipped from the inventory originally contributed by the second merchant in a German fulfillment center 112. The shipping costs would be markedly reduced, although they may be higher than from the second merchant originally. Likewise, the second merchant may be able to obtain more sales in the United States. The overall sales for both merchants may increase based on name

different merchant to fulfill the order. An inventory credit ~~163~~166 may be deducted for the merchant, and the operator of the fulfillment network 115 may decide to resell the additional item 148.

**[0038]** Referring next to FIG. 2, shown is a flowchart that provides one example of the operation of a portion of the inventory management application 130 according to various embodiments. It is understood that the flowchart of FIG. 2 provides merely an example of the many different types of functional arrangements that may be employed to implement the operation of the portion of the inventory management application 130 as described herein. As an alternative, the flowchart of FIG. 2 may be viewed as depicting an example of steps of a method implemented in the computing device 103 (FIG. 1) according to one or more embodiments.

**[0039]** Beginning with box 203, the inventory management application 130 obtains a request from a merchant to contribute at least a portion of its identified inventory 169 (FIG. 1) to a common pool of inventory. Although the request may involve multiple items 148 (FIG. 1), the following discussion relates to inventory of a single item 148 for simplicity. In some examples, the merchant may wish to contribute its entire identified inventory 169 involving multiple items 148 to common pools of inventory. In addition, the request may specify that the merchant wishes to offer the item 148 in one or more specified electronic marketplaces 136 (FIG. 1). Such electronic marketplaces 136 may have been cost-prohibitive to serve with the previous identified inventory 169 placements of the merchants.