INVENTORY POOLING FOR MULTIPLE MERCHANTS

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION

[0001] This application claims the benefit of U.S. non-provisional application no. 13/044,823, filed March 10, 2011, entitled "Inventory Pooling for Multiple Merchants," which is incorporated by reference herein in its entirety.

BACKGROUND

[0002] An electronic marketplace facilitates sales of items by multiple merchants through a common network site. Some electronic marketplaces may be associated with a fulfillment network. A merchant who participates in the electronic marketplace may be able to ship inventory to one or more fulfillment centers in the fulfillment network in order to outsource order fulfillment. The inventory of the merchant remains identified as owned by the merchant and separated from other products while being held at the fulfillment centers.

SUMMARY

[0002a] According to a first aspect of the present invention, there is provided a non-transitory computer-readable medium embodying a program executable in a computing device, the program comprising:

code that obtains a request from a first merchant to contribute a first inventory of a product to a common pool of inventory of fungible products, the first inventory of the product being held on behalf of the first merchant in at least one fulfillment center in a fulfillment network;

code that determines whether the product is fungible with respect to the common pool of inventory of fungible products;

code that contributes the first inventory of the product to the common pool of inventory of fungible products in response to the request when the product is fungible, the common pool of inventory of fungible products including a second inventory of the product contributed by a second merchant and held in at least one other fulfillment center in the fulfillment network;

code that, in response to determining the product is fungible, associates a quantity of inventory credits for the product with the first merchant, the quantity corresponding to the first inventory of the product contributed by the first merchant to the common pool of inventory of fungible products;

code that, in response to determining the product is fungible, initiates a transfer of at least a portion of the common pool of inventory of fungible products held at a first fulfillment center in the fulfillment network to a second fulfillment center in the fulfillment network in response to a projected demand for the product in a region served by the second fulfillment center;

code that, in response to determining the product is fungible, obtains an order for the product from a customer of the first merchant in the region served by the second fulfillment center;

code that, in response to determining the product is fungible, initiates fulfillment of the order from the common pool of inventory of fungible products held at the second fulfillment center;

code that, in response to determining the product is fungible, debits the quantity of inventory credits associated with the first merchant in response to the order; and

wherein the order is fulfilled from the second inventory of the product contributed by the second merchant, and a quantity of inventory credits associated with the second merchant is not debited in response to the order.

[0002b] According to a second aspect of the present invention, there is provided a system, comprising:

at least one computing device; and

an inventory management application executable in the at least one computing device, the inventory management application comprising:

logic that contributes a first inventory of a fungible item held at a

first fulfillment center on behalf of a first merchant to a common pool of inventory of fungible items, wherein the fungible item is considered fungible with respect to the common pool of inventory of fungible items if the fungible item shares a unique identifier with another fungible item within the common pool of inventory of fungible items;

logic that contributes a second inventory of the fungible item held at a second fulfillment center on behalf of a second merchant to the common pool of inventory of fungible items; and

logic that, in response to receiving an order for the fungible item placed by a customer of the first merchant, initiates fulfillment of the order from the second inventory of the fungible item that was contributed to the common pool of inventory of fungible items.

[0002c] According to a third aspect of the present invention, there is provided a method, comprising the steps of:

obtaining, in at least one computing device, a request from a merchant to contribute an inventory of a fungible item to a common pool of inventory of fungible items, the inventory of the fungible item being held on behalf of the merchant in at least one fulfillment center in a fulfillment network;

determining, in the at least one computing device, whether the fungible item is fungible with respect to the common pool of inventory of fungible items;

contributing, in the at least one computing device, the inventory of the fungible item to the common pool of inventory of fungible items in response to the request, the common pool of inventory of fungible items including another inventory of the fungible item contributed by

at least one other merchant and held in at least one other fulfillment center in the fulfillment network; and

associating, in the at least one computing device, a quantity of inventory credits for the fungible item with the merchant, the quantity corresponding to the inventory of the fungible item contributed by the merchant to the common pool of inventory of fungible items.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0003] Many aspects of the present disclosure can be better understood with reference to the following drawings. The components in the drawings are not necessarily to scale, emphasis instead being placed upon clearly illustrating the principles of the disclosure. Moreover, in the drawings, like reference numerals designate corresponding parts throughout the several views.

[0004] FIG. 1 is a drawing of a networked environment according to various embodiments of the present disclosure.