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2000 0412-6

INTERNATIONAL APPLICATION PUBLISHED UNDER THE PATENT COOPERATION TREATY (PCT)

(51) International Patent Classification 6 : H04N 7/173

A1

(11) International Publication Number: WO 99/14953

(43) International Publication Date: 25 March 1999 (25.03.99)

(21) International Application Number: PCT/US98/18485

(22) International Filing Date: 15 September 1998 (15.09.98)

(30) Priority Data:
08/931,971 15 September 1997 (15.09.97) US

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(81) Designated States: AL, AM, AU, AZ, BA, BB, BG, BR, BY, CA, CN, CU, CZ, EE, GE, GH, GM, HU, ID, IL, IS, JP, KE, KG, KP, KR, KZ, LC, LK, LR, LS, LT, LV, MD, MG, MK, MN, MW, MX, NO, NZ, PL, RO, RU, SD, SG, SI, SK, SL, TJ, TM, TR, TT, UA, UG, UZ, VN, YU, ZW, European patent (AT, BE, CH, CY, DE, DK, ES, FI, FR, GB, GR, IE, IT, LU, MC, NL, PT, SE), OAPI patent (BF, BJ, CF, CG, CI, CM, GA, GN, GW, ML, MR, NE, SN, TD, TG).

Published
With international search report.
Before the expiration of the time limit for amending the claims and to be republished in the event of the receipt of amendments.

(54) Title: ACCESS SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR PROVIDING INTERACTIVE ACCESS TO AN INFORMATION SOURCE THROUGH A NETWORKED DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM

(57) Abstract

An access system (10) and method provide interactive access to an information source, such as the Internet, through a networked distribution system, such as a television distribution system (11). Each user in the television distribution system can access the Internet through an associated terminal (54) by sending commands through an upstream channel (22) to a headend server (38) which is interfaced between a television network headend (34) and an Internet Service Provider (ISP) (60). The headend server manages all Internet information requests from the terminals by forwarding the requests to the ISP and receiving the requested information therefrom. An Internet Protocol (IP) address is assigned only to the headend server which keeps track of the terminals requesting information by means of terminal identification numbers or codes associated with each request. The headend server also maintains a plurality of Internet browser applications (75) active at all times to insure that a terminal requesting Internet access can be immediately interfaced to the ISP through one of the active browser applications. Each of the downstream television signals includes a vertical synchronization signal that is preferably employed to generate a framing signal for synchronizing upstream transmission of the data packets comprising the information requests from the terminals.

