

What is claimed is:

1. A system comprising:

one or more local content servers, each local server of the one or more local content servers comprising:

one or more storage devices storing local copies of media content items, the media content items playable using application software resident on portable media playback devices;

one or more communications interfaces configured to establish local connections between the local server and multiple media playback devices, of the portable media playback devices, that are within a certain proximity to the local server;

logic, implemented at least partially by hardware at the local server, configured to cause the local server to send, over the local connections, copies of the media content items stored on the one or more storage devices to the multiple media playback devices when the local connections are established;

a central data repository storing a superset of media content, including at least the media content items;

a central server coupled to a wide area network, the central server configured to send copies of the media content items stored in the central data repository over the wide area network to certain media playback devices of the portable media playback devices, the wide area network not including any of the local connections between the one or more local content servers and the multiple media playback devices.

2. The system of claim 1, wherein at least a first local server of the one or more local content servers is not connected to the Internet and is not connected to any other local content server.

3. The system of claim 1, further comprising: a digital rights management server, separate from the one or more local content servers, configured to generate rights information necessary for the application software to play certain content of the media content items on a given device.

4. The system of claim 1, further comprising: wherein each of the local connections is one of an 802.11 wireless-based connection, Bluetooth connection, or Universal Serial Bus connection, wherein at least two or more of the multiple media playback devices are connected to a given local server concurrently; a digital rights management server, separate from the one or more local content servers,

configured to generate rights information necessary for the application software to play certain content of the media content items on a given device; wherein the application software is configured to: present a menu of available content at the one or more local content servers, receive input selecting content of interest from the menu when no connection to any of the one or more local content servers is available, and automatically download the content of interest upon detecting a connection to one of the one or more local content servers.

5. A system comprising:

one or more local content servers, each local server of the one or more local content servers comprising:

one or more storage devices storing local copies of media content items, the media content items playable using application software resident on portable media playback devices;

one or more communications interfaces configured to establish local connections between the local server and multiple media playback devices, of the portable media playback devices, that are within a certain proximity to the local server;

logic, implemented at least partially by hardware at the local server, configured to cause the local server to send, over the local connections, copies of the media content items stored on the one or more storage devices to the multiple media playback devices when the local connections are established;

a central data repository storing a superset of media content, including at least the media content items;

a content packaging component configured to generate content packages based on the superset of media content;

wherein the one or more local content servers are configured to store the local copies of the media content items in response to receiving the content packages by one or more: receiving the content packages over a wide area network, or reading the content packages from a removable storage device.

6. The system of claim 5, further comprising: a digital rights management server, separate from the one or more local content servers, configured to generate rights information necessary for the application software to play certain content of the media content items on a given device.

7. A system comprising:

one or more local content servers, each local server of the one or more local content servers comprising:

one or more storage devices storing local copies of media content items, the media content items playable using application software resident on portable media playback devices;

one or more communications interfaces configured to establish local connections between the local server and multiple media playback devices, of the portable media playback devices, that are within a certain proximity to the local server;

logic, implemented at least partially by hardware at the local server, configured to cause the local server to send, over the local connections, copies of the media content items stored on the one or more storage devices to the multiple media playback devices when the local connections are established;

a digital rights management server, separate from the one or more local content servers, configured to generate rights information necessary for the application software to play certain content of the media content items on a given device;

wherein the application software is configured to perform one or more of: requesting the rights information from the digital rights management server, or prompting a user to input the rights information;

wherein the application software is further configured to determine whether a device is authorized to play certain content of the media content items based on reading the rights information.

8. A system comprising:

one or more local content servers, each local server of the one or more local content servers comprising:

one or more storage devices storing local copies of media content items, the media content items playable using application software resident on portable media playback devices;

one or more communications interfaces configured to establish local connections between the local server and multiple media playback devices, of the portable media playback devices, that are within a certain proximity to the local server;

logic, implemented at least partially by hardware at the local server, configured to cause the local server to send, over the local connections, copies of the media content items stored on the one or

more storage devices to the multiple media playback devices when the local connections are established;

a digital rights management server, separate from the one or more local content servers, configured to generate rights information necessary for the application software to play certain content of the media content items on a given device; a Short Message Service ("SMS") gateway configured to relay SMS-based messages carrying the rights information from the digital rights management server to one or both of:

the one or more local content servers or the portable media playback devices; wherein the application software is configured to determine whether a device is authorized to play certain content of the media content items based on reading the rights information.

9. A system comprising:

application software, resident on portable media playback devices, configured to play media content items;

one or more local content servers, each local server of the one or more local content servers comprising:

one or more storage devices storing local copies of the media content items;

one or more communications interfaces configured to establish local connections between the local server and multiple media playback devices, of the portable media playback devices, that are within a certain proximity to the local server;

logic, implemented at least partially by hardware at the local server, configured to cause the local server to send, over the local connections, copies of the media content items stored on the one or more storage devices to the multiple media playback devices when the local connections are established;

wherein the application software is further configured to: present a menu of available content based on metadata from the one or more local content servers, receive input selecting content of interest from the menu when no connection to any of the one or more local content servers is available, and automatically download the content of interest upon detecting a connection to one of the one or more local content servers.

10. The system of claim 9, wherein at least a first local server of the one or more local content servers is configured to direct a given portable device to an installer file for the application software

responsive to the given portable device establishing an initial connection to the first local server.

11. The system of claim 9, wherein each of the local connections is one of an 802.11 wireless-based connection, Bluetooth connection, or Universal Serial Bus connection, wherein the media content items include digital movie files, wherein at least two or more of the multiple media playback devices are connected to a given local server concurrently.

12. The system of claim 9, further comprising: a digital rights management server, separate from the one or more local content servers, configured to generate rights information necessary for the application software to play certain content of the media content items on a given device.

13. A method comprising:

based on a library of media content, a content distributor periodically generating one or more content packages comprising digital media content items from the library;

storing the one or more content packages on one or more local media servers deployed at a plurality of different geographic locations, the one or more local media servers operated by promoting entities other than the content distributor;

causing installation of, on the one or more local media servers, server application software comprising instructions that, when executed by the one or more local media servers, cause the one or more local media servers to send digital media content items from the one or more content packages to portable media playback devices that establish local connections to the one or more local media servers, the local connections being local area network connections or wired connections, the portable media playback devices executing client application software code generated by the content distributor, the client application software configured to allow the portable media playback devices to play the digital media content items only upon input of rights information; receiving, at a digital rights management server operated by the content distributor, requests for rights information to access the digital media content items; sending the rights information in response to the requests;

the content distributor periodically updating the one or more content packages to include new media content items; storing the updated one or more content packages on the one or more local media servers.

14. The method of claim 13, wherein the requests for rights information are received via a Short Message Server ("SMS") gateway.

15. The method of claim 13, further comprising:

wherein the instructions of the server application software are configured to, based on the updated one or more content packages, cause a given local media server to automatically send a new content item to which a given device is subscribed responsive to the given device reconnecting to the given local media server.

16. The method of claim 13, further comprising:

the content distributor periodically delivering updated storage devices comprising the updated one or more content packages to the promoting entities.

17. One or more non-transitory computer-readable media storing instructions that, when executed by one or more computing devices, cause:

storing, at a plurality of local media servers, media content collections;

establishing local connections between particular local servers of the local media servers and particular mobile devices of a plurality of mobile devices, the local connections being one or both of:

local area network connections, or peer-to-peer connections;

receiving, at a central digital rights management server, requests to unlock access for the particular mobile devices to content items in the media content collections;

sending, from the central digital rights management server, responses comprising rights information for the particular mobile devices to unlock access to the content items;

transmitting the content items from the particular local servers to the particular mobile devices over the local connections, the mobile devices configured to utilize the rights information to determine whether the mobile devices are permitted to play the content items;

a first mobile device establishing a first connection to a first local server of the plurality of local media servers;

the first mobile device downloading, through a content access application installed on the first mobile device at least one of: metadata describing a catalog of content items available at the first local server, or first content stored at the first local server;

the first mobile device detecting a second mobile device on which the content access application is installed;

responsive to detecting the second mobile device, the first mobile device sharing data with the second mobile device, the data being at least one of:

the metadata describing the catalog to the second mobile device, or the first content;

based on the data shared by the first mobile device, the second mobile device performing at least one of:

displaying information about one or more content items that are newly available at one or more of the local media servers, or playing the first content responsive to reading rights information data from the digital rights management server indicating that the second mobile device is permitted to play the first content.

18. The one or more non-transitory computer-readable media of claim 17, wherein the instructions, when executed by the one or more computing devices, cause:

the first mobile device downloading, through the content access application installed on the first mobile device, the metadata describing the catalog of content items available at the first local server; responsive to the detecting of the second mobile device, the first mobile device sharing the metadata describing the catalog to the second mobile device;

based on the metadata received from the first mobile device, the second mobile device displaying the information about the one or more content items that are newly available at the one or more of the local media servers.

19. The one or more non-transitory computer-readable media of claim 17, wherein the instructions, when executed by the one or more computing devices, cause:

the first mobile device downloading, through the content access application installed on the first mobile device, the first content stored at the first local server;

responsive to the detecting of the second mobile device, the first mobile device sharing the first content with the second mobile device;

the second mobile device playing the first content responsive to reading the rights information data from the digital rights management server indicating that the second mobile device is permitted to play the first content.

20. One or more non-transitory computer-readable media storing instructions that, when executed by the one or more computing devices, cause:

storing, at a plurality of local media servers, media content collections;

establishing local connections between particular local servers of the local media servers and particular mobile devices of a plurality of mobile devices, the local connections being one or both of: local area network connections, or peer-to-peer connections;

receiving, at a central digital rights management server, requests to unlock access for the particular mobile devices to content items in the media content collections;

sending, from the central digital rights management server, responses comprising rights information for the particular mobile devices to unlock access to the content items;

transmitting the content items from the particular local servers to the particular mobile devices over the local connections, the mobile devices configured to utilize the rights information to determine whether the mobile devices are permitted to play the content items;

sending, from the local media servers to the particular mobile devices, partial content-specific decryption keys for the content items;

wherein the rights information sent by the central digital rights management server includes master keys that are specific to one or more of the local media servers;

generating, at the particular mobile devices, based on the partial content-specific decryption keys and the master keys, content-specific decryption keys for decrypting specific items of the content items.

21. One or more non-transitory computer-readable media storing instructions that, when executed by one or more computing devices, cause:

storing, at a plurality of local media servers, media content collections;

presenting, at particular mobile devices of a plurality of mobile devices, menus of available content at the plurality of local media servers;

receiving, at the particular mobile devices, inputs selecting contents of interest from the menu when no connection to any of the plurality of local media servers is available to the particular mobile devices;

establishing local connections between particular local servers of the local media servers and the particular mobile devices, the local connections being one or both of:

local area network connections, or peer-to-peer connections;

automatically downloading the contents of interest to the corresponding particular mobile devices upon detecting the establishing of the respective local connections;

receiving, at a central digital rights management server, requests to unlock access for the particular mobile devices to content items in the media content collections;

sending, from the central digital rights management server, responses comprising rights information for the particular mobile devices to unlock access to the content items;

transmitting the content items from the particular local servers to the particular mobile devices over the local connections, the mobile devices configured to utilize the rights information to determine whether the mobile devices are permitted to play the content items.

22. The one or more non-transitory computer-readable media of claim 21, wherein the instructions, when executed by the one or more computing devices, further cause: a given mobile device establishing a first connection to a first local server of the plurality of local media servers; the first local server directing the given mobile device to install a content access application; the content access application causing the given mobile device to download at least first content items of the content items from the first local server; the given mobile device subsequently establishing a second connection to a second local server of the plurality of local media servers; upon detecting the second connection, the content access application automatically causing the given mobile device to download at least second content items of the content items from the second local server.

23. The one or more non-transitory computer-readable media of claim 21, wherein the instructions, when executed by one or more computing devices, further cause: a given device of the particular mobile devices establishing a wide area network connection with a central media server; the given device downloading metadata describing a catalog of content from the central media server; the given device receiving user input selecting a specific item of content in the catalog for download; the given device downloading at least a portion of the specific item over a local connection from one of the local media servers, instead of from the central media server.

24. The one or more non-transitory computer-readable media of claim 21, further comprising a given device of the plurality of particular mobile devices receiving metadata describing the available content from one of the plurality of local media servers.

25. The one or more non-transitory computer-readable media of claim 24, wherein the instructions, when executed by one or more computing devices, further cause: identifying, by a given device of the plurality of mobile devices, a media profile that is preferred for media playback at the

given device; based on the identified media profile, selecting, by the given device, a specific version of a given content item for download from a given local server.

26. The one or more non-transitory computer-readable media of claim 24, wherein the instructions, when executed by one or more computing devices, further cause: a given device downloading a first portion of a specific item of content over a local connection with a local media server; the given device downloading a second portion of the specific item over a wide area network connection with the central media server.

27. One or more non-transitory computer-readable media storing instructions that, when executed by one or more computing devices, cause:

storing, at a central data repository, media content collections, including at least the media content items;

sending copies of media content items in the media content collections from a central media server over a wide area network to certain media playback devices of a plurality of mobile devices;

storing, at a plurality of local media servers, local copies of the media content collections;

establishing local connections between particular local servers of the local media servers and particular mobile devices of the plurality of mobile devices, the local connections being one or both of: local area network connections, or peer-to-peer connections, the wide area network not including any of the local connections between the particular local servers and the particular mobile playback devices;

receiving, at a central digital rights management server, requests to unlock access for the particular mobile devices to content items in the media content collections;

sending, from the central digital rights management server, responses comprising rights information for the particular mobile devices to unlock access to the content items; transmitting the content items from the particular local servers to the particular mobile devices over the local connections, the mobile devices configured to utilize the rights information to determine whether the mobile devices are permitted to play the content items.

28. The one or more non-transitory computer-readable media of claim 27, wherein the instructions, when executed by the one or more computing devices, further cause:

receiving updated media content collections at the plurality of local media servers;

responsive to a given media device of the particular media devices re-establishing a local connection to one of the plurality of local media servers, automatically downloading new media content from the updated media content collections to the given media device.