

**SYSTEMS, METHODS, AND PROGRAM APPLICATIONS FOR SELECTIVELY
RESTRICTING THE PLACESHIFTING OF COPY PROTECTED DIGITAL MEDIA
CONTENT**

PRIORITY CLAIM

[0001] This application claims priority to Foreign Application No. 1922/CHE/2009 filed in India on August 13, 2009. This application also claims priority to U.S. Non-Provisional Patent Application No. 12/623,955 filed on November 23, 2009.

TECHNICAL FIELD

[0002] The present disclosure relates generally to systems, methods, and program applications for selectively restricting the placeshifting of copy protected digital media content.

BACKGROUND

[0003] In the past, consumers generally viewed television programming and other streaming media content as it was received from a network, broadcast, cable, or satellite source. As analog and digital recording devices (e.g., video cassette recorders, as well as digital/personal video recorders) became more prevalent, consumers were increasingly able to temporally shift their media viewing to more convenient viewing times. More recently, the ability to “placeshift” media viewing from one location to another has become more widespread. For example, SLING MEDIA of Foster City, California, currently markets placeshifting products under the trademark SLINGBOX that enable consumers to remotely view on a display device, such as a laptop computer, desktop computer, or mobile phone, television programming provided from a receiver residing in a different physical location than does the display device.

[0004] At present, digital media content is primarily placeshifted from a receiver or recorder over a digital network to a personal computer, wireless phone, or other portable device. However, consumers are becoming increasingly interested in non-traditional sources of digital media content typically viewed on a computer display, such as streaming video received via the Internet or other network. In addition, many consumers now possess video cameras or other equipment for generating their own content. Much of this content is in digital format that is

most readily viewed on a personal computer or other digital computing device. A commercial demand has thus developed for the ability to placeshift video content from a personal computer to a remotely-located television or other display. However, a concern has arisen that, should consumers be provided with the capacity to placeshift video content from a personal computer to a remotely-located television or other remote display, the video content appearing on the remotely-located television could be recorded utilizing a video cassette recorder, a digital video recorder, or similar device connected to the television and thereby circumvent any copy protection measures associated with the video content originating from the personal computer.

[0005] Thus, there exists an ongoing commercial need to provide systems, methods, and program products that enable digital media content to be placeshifted from a computer system to a remotely-located television or other display, while also selectively restricting the placeshifting of copy protected digital media content to deter improper copying. These and other desirable features and characteristics will become apparent from the subsequent Detailed Description and the appended Claims, taken in conjunction with the accompanying Drawings and the foregoing Background.

BRIEF SUMMARY

[0006] Embodiments of a method executable by a computer system are provided. In one embodiment, a method includes the steps of capturing digital media content rendered on the local display by a media player application executed by the computer system; determining whether the media player application is accessing copy protected digital media content; and, if the media player application is not accessing copy protected digital media content, converting the captured digital media content to a media stream and transmitting the media stream over a network for presentation on a remote display.

[0007] Embodiments of a computer-readable medium are further provided that includes instructions stored thereon executable by a computer system to transmit digital media content over a network to a remote display. In one embodiment, the instructions includes a placeshifting program application adapted to perform steps of capturing digital media content rendered on a local display associated with the computer system by a media player application executed by the computer system, converting the captured digital media content to a media

stream in a network-transmittable format, transmitting the media stream over the network for presentation on the remote display, determining whether the media player application is accessing a copy protected digital media file, and blocking transmission of the media stream if it is determined that the media player application is accessing a copy protected digital media file.

[0008] Embodiments of a computer system are further provided for placeshifting digital media content in conjunction with a digital network and a remote display. In one embodiment, the computer system includes a first interface to the digital network, a second interface to a local display, and a processor operatively coupled to the first interface and to the second interface. The processor is configured to selectively execute at least one media player application to render digital media content on the local display. The processor is further configured to: (i) capture at least a portion of the digital media content rendered on the local display, (ii) convert the captured digital media content to a media stream in a network-transmittable format, (iii) transmit the media stream over the network for presentation on the remote display, (iv) determine whether the media player application is accessing a copy protected digital media file, and (v) block transmission of the media stream if the media player application is accessing copy protected digital media content.

[0009] Various additional embodiments, aspects, and other features of the present invention are described in more detail below.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWING FIGURES

[0010] Exemplary embodiments will hereinafter be described in conjunction with the following Drawing Figures, wherein like numerals denote like elements, and:

[0011] FIG. 1 is a block diagram of a generalized placeshifting system in accordance with an exemplary embodiment;

[0012] FIG. 2 is a block diagram of the exemplary computer system included within placeshifting system illustrated in FIG. 1;

[0013] FIG. 3 is a flowchart illustrating an exemplary process that may be carried out by the computer system shown in FIGs. 1 and 2 to selectively restrict the transmission of copy protected digital media content over the digital network and to the remote display shown in FIG. 1;

[0014] FIG. 4 is a flowchart illustrating a first exemplary sub-process that can be performed during the exemplary process illustrated in FIG. 3 to determine whether a media player application is accessing a digital media file containing DRM-protected content;

[0015] FIG. 5 is a flowchart illustrating a second exemplary sub-process that can be performed during the exemplary process illustrated in FIG. 3 to determine whether a media player application is accessing a digital versatile disc file structure including copy protected digital media content; and

[0016] FIG. 6 is a flowchart illustrating an exemplary heuristic technique that can be performed during the exemplary process illustrated in FIG. 3 to yield a narrow list of currently-executed processes that can be evaluated with greater efficiency to determine whether a media player application is currently accessing copy protected media content.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0017] The following Detailed Description is merely exemplary in nature and is not intended to limit the invention or the application and uses of the invention. Furthermore, there is no intention to be bound by any theory presented in the preceding Background or the following Detailed Description.

[0018] FIG. 1 illustrates a digital media (DM) placeshifting system 10 including a personal computer system 12 in accordance with an exemplary embodiment. In addition to computer system 12, DM placeshifting system 10 includes a digital media playback receiver 14 (also referred to as a “media catcher” in certain contexts) having a display 18 associated therewith. Display 18 is remotely located from computer system 12; e.g., display 18 and computer system 12 may reside in different rooms of a single structure, such as a user’s home or office, or within separate buildings. For this reason, display 18 may be referred to as “remotely-located display

18” or, more simply, “remote display 18” herein. Display 18 and playback receiver 14 may be integrally combined as a unitary electronic device, such as a laptop computer, a mobile phone, a personal digital assistant, or the like. However, as indicated in FIG. 1, remote display 18 preferably assumes the form of a conventional television or other freestanding image generating device that is connected to playback receiver 14 utilizing one or more connector cables. During operation of DM placeshifting system 10, digital media playback receiver 14 provides video output signals 24 to remote display 18 to visually render media content received from computer system 12 on display 18 as described more fully below. Video output signals 24 provided from playback receiver 14 to remote display 18 may be formatted in accordance with conventionally-known standards, such as S-video, High-Definition Multimedia Interface (HDMI), Sony/Philips Display Interface Format (SPDIF), Digital Visual Interface (DVI), or IEEE 1394 standards.

[0019] A digital network 16 permits communication between computer system 12 and digital media playback receiver 14. More specifically, digital network 16 enables computer system 12 to transmit streaming media content to digital media playback receiver 14 for playback on remote display 18. Digital network 16 can comprise any communication network enabling the streaming of media content, and specifically the streaming of video content, from computer system 12 to playback receiver 14 in this manner. In instances wherein digital media playback receiver 14 is located relatively far away from computer system 12 (e.g., when playback receiver 14 and computer system 12 reside in separate buildings), network 16 conveniently includes one or more public or private data connections, links, or networks supporting any number of communications protocols. Network 16 can also include the Internet or any other network based upon TCP/IP or other conventional protocols. The foregoing notwithstanding, DM placeshifting system 10 will typically assume the form of a wide area network, a local area network, or a combination of wide and local area networks as indicated in FIG. 1. For example, in one common scenario wherein DM placeshifting system 10 is implemented within a relatively small geographical area (e.g., within a user’s home, office, or other structure), network 16 may comprise one or more local area networks conforming to IEEE 802.3 and/or IEEE 802.11 standards. Network 16 as illustrated in FIG. 1, then, is intended to broadly encompass any digital communications network(s), systems, or architectures for transmitting data between the various components of system 10.

[0020] In the exemplary embodiment illustrated in FIG. 1, DM placeshifting system 10 further includes at least one server 27 communicatively coupled to computer system 12 and digital media playback receiver 14 through digital network 16. In certain embodiments, server 27 can be a conventional Internet server configured to interact with a browser or viewer application executing on digital media playback receiver 14 to provide images, audio, video, and/or other content. In further embodiments, server 27 can be a web server linked to other content servers made available to digital media playback receiver 14. In such embodiments, a user may direct digital media playback receiver 14 to initially contact server 27 and subsequently direct digital media playback receiver 14 to follow hypertext markup language (HTML) or other links provided by server 27. Many different interface options are available across a wide array of equivalent implementations to allow digital media playback receiver 14 to obtain media content from any number of servers 28.

[0021] Digital media playback receiver 14 is conveniently, although not necessarily, capable of receiving digital media from sources other than computer system 12 and possibly server 27. For example, as indicated in FIG. 1, digital media playback receiver 14 may also selectively receive digital media from at least one additional placeshifting device 20 included within DM placeshifting system 10 and communicatively coupled to playback receiver 14 via network 16. If provided, additional placeshifting device 20 will typically include transcoder logic for converting digital media content (e.g., video/audio data) into a packetized format (e.g., MPEG, QUICKTIME, WINDOWS MEDIA, and/or the like) suitable for transmission over network 16 in the commonly known manner. In addition to, or in lieu of, additional placeshifting device 20, DM placeshifting system 10 may further include an auxiliary volume storage device 22 locally connected to digital media playback receiver 14. Auxiliary volume storage device 22 can be combined with playback receiver 14 as a single, freestanding electronic device. Alternatively, auxiliary volume storage device 22 can comprise an external device that is connected to playback receiver 14 utilizing one or more connector cables. Auxiliary volume storage device 22 may be an optical hard disk drive, a magnetic hard disk drive, a flash memory drive, or similar memory device on which a user may store media files (e.g., video files, still imagery, audio files, etc.) for subsequent playback on display 18.

[0022] Digital media playback receiver **14** may comprise any device configured to render media content received from computer system **12** on remote display **18**. Such devices may include, without limitation, any sort of portable or non-portable general computer system, personal digital assistant, mobile phone, video game system, dedicated media player, and the like. When assuming the form of a standalone device, playback receiver **14** will commonly include software or firmware capable of receiving and decoding media streams and providing corresponding video and/or audio output signals to remote display **18**. In many embodiments, digital media playback receiver **14** may receive user input via a number of physical input devices (e.g., buttons, sliders, knobs, etc.) disposed on the housing of playback receiver **14**. Similarly, playback receiver **14** may be responsive to user commands received via a remote control as generally illustrated in FIG. 1 at **26**.

[0023] FIG. 2 is a block diagram illustrating a number of hardware components and logical elements that may be included within computer system **12**. As can be seen in FIG. 2, computer system **12** includes a controller **28**, which is operatively coupled to user interface **30** and a display interface **32**. User interface **30** is any device or devices suitable for receiving input data from a user in the manner described below. User interface **30** will commonly include a keypad (e.g., a QWERTY keyboard) and at least one cursor device, such as a mouse, trackball, touchpad, joystick, or pointing stick. Display interface **32** is any device, logical element, or combination thereof suitable for providing appropriately-formatted display signals from controller **28** to a locally-connected display (identified as “local display **40**” in FIG. 2). In certain embodiments, local display **40** may be integrated within computer system **12** as, for example, the screen of a laptop computer. Alternatively, as indicated in FIG. 2, local display **40** may assume the form of a monitor or other freestanding image generating device connected to display interface **32** of computer system **12** utilizing a conventional connector cable.

[0024] Controller **28** is also operatively coupled to a network interface **34**, which enables packetized data to be sent and received over a communications network (e.g., network **16** illustrated in FIG. 1). Digital network interface **34** may include transcoder logic for converting digital media content (e.g., video/audio data) into a packetized format (e.g., MPEG,

QUICKTIME, WINDOWS MEDIA, and/or the like) suitable for transmission over digital network 16. Network interface 34 can operate utilizing any implementation of protocols or other features to support bi-directional communication over digital network 16. In various embodiments, network interface 34 supports conventional LAN, WAN, or other protocols (e.g., the TCP/IP or UDP/IP suite of protocols widely used on the Internet). In such cases, network interface 34 can interface with network 16 utilizing any sort of LAN adapter hardware, such as a conventional network interface card provided within computer system 12 (not shown).

[0025] Controller 28 is further operatively coupled to a number of memory elements (identified collectively as “memory 36” in FIG. 2). Memory 36 will typically include a central processing unit register, a number of temporary storage areas, and a number of permanent storage areas. Memory 36 can also include one or more mass storage devices, such as magnetic hard disk drives, optical hard disk drives, flash memory drives, and the like on which a user may store digital media content for subsequent playback on local display 40. In certain embodiments, memory 36 may include a freestanding mass storage device, such as an external hard-disc drive, coupled to computer system 12 utilizing a universal serial bus cable or other connector cable. As will be readily appreciated, selected programs (e.g., media player application 48 and/or placeshifting application 50 described below) can be copied to memory 36 as needed prior to execution by controller 28 to facilitate processing.

[0026] As shown in FIG. 2, controller 28 can further be operatively coupled to an optical disc drive 38. Optical disc drive 38 is any device capable of reading a conventionally-formatted high density optical disc, such as optical disc 38 shown in FIG. 2. In a preferred group of embodiments, optical disc drive 38 is compatible with optical discs formatted in accordance with digital versatile disc (DVD) standards and can access DVD file structures stored thereon. As indicated in FIG. 2, optical disc drive 38 can be internal to computer system 12. Alternatively, optical disc drive 38 can comprise a freestanding DVD player or other dedicated media player locally connected to computer system 12.

[0027] During operation, controller 28 generally directs the other hardware components of computer system 12 to perform the functions described herein below. In this regard, controller

28 can include any suitable number of individual microprocessors, microcontrollers, digital signal processors, programmed arrays, and other standard components known in the art. Controller 28 may include or cooperate with any number of software or firmware programs designed to carry out the various methods, process tasks, calculations, and control/display functions described herein. In many embodiments, controller 28 will execute an operating system 44 during operation of computer system 12 to assist the various programs executing on system 12 to access the hardware features of system 12. A non-exhaustive list of operating systems suitable for use as operating system 44 includes various versions of the WINDOWS operating systems available from the Microsoft Corporation of Redmond, Washington; UNIX/LINUX operating systems available from a number of open source and proprietary sources; and the MACOS operating system available from the Apple Corporation of Cupertino, California. Any number of alternate embodiments based upon other operating systems and computing platforms could also readily be created and utilized as operating system 44.

[0028] Computer system 12 further includes a number of services 46, which provide features that assist in the execution of programs on computer system 12 during operation of operating system 44. Services 46 may be incorporated into operating system 44 and/or into specific drivers associated with the hardware components included within computer system 12 and described above. Services 46 may include abstraction services, such as the JAVA or ACTIVE-X products available from Sun Microsystems and the Microsoft Corporation, respectively. Other services may include graphics or other input/output related features, such as the DIRECTX/DIRECT3D or WINDOWS MEDIA PLAYER application programming interface available from the Microsoft Corporation, the Open Graphics Library (OpenGL) product available from numerous sources, the graphics device interface (GDI) product available as part of the Microsoft WINDOWS operating systems, and the Intel Integrated Performance Primitives (IPP) library, to list but a few.

[0029] Computer system 12 further includes a placeshifting application 50 executable by controller 28. Placeshifting application 50 is any application that processes user inputs and/or media content in any manner to produce the media stream provided to digital media playback receiver 14 (FIG. 1). In various embodiments, placeshifting application 50 is a conventional

software application or applet that resides in memory 36 on computer system 12 and that provides some or all of the various features described herein. In some implementations, at least a portion of application 48 is initially executed at system start-up and remains in system memory during operation of system 12 to facilitate rapid access to media content 52. Other embodiments may execute as a plugin or other enhancement to a conventional web browser program, or as any other sort of application, applet, object, module, and/or the like. As will be described more fully below, placeshifting application 50 is able to capture, encode, and transmit a video stream to digital media playback receiver 14 (FIG. 1) over network 16. As noted above, the video stream may be formatted in accordance with WINDOWS MEDIA, QUICKTIME, and/or MPEG standards, although any other standard or proprietary format could be equivalently used. In certain embodiments, placeshifting application 50 is configured to encode a portion of a screen display bitmap into a streaming format that can be transmitted on the media as described more fully below in conjunction with FIG. 3. To accomplish these various tasks, application 48 suitably interoperates with other applications and features of system 12 using operating system 44 and/or services 46.

[0030] Placeshifting application 50 may obtain the media content utilized to produce a media stream in any suitable manner. In various embodiments, placeshifting application 50 communicates with a media player application 48 that receives and renders audio, visual, and/or other media content. For example, as indicated in FIG. 2 at 52, media player application 48 can access video media content obtained from tangible media (e.g., DVD 42) read by optical disc drive 38, digital media files stored within memory 36, and/or media content delivered over digital network 16 and received via network interface 34. As will readily be appreciated, media player application 48 may be any conventional media player application any sort of plugin or other application associated with any sort of browser program, and/or the like. In one group of embodiments, media play application 48 is a version of the well-known WINDOWS MEDIA PLAYER program made commercially available from Microsoft Corporation.

[0031] FIG. 3 is a flowchart illustrating an exemplary placeshifting process 60 that may be carried out by computer system 12 (FIG. 2), and specifically by controller 28 during the execution of placeshifting application 50, to selectively transmit digital media content over

digital network 16 (FIG. 1) and to remote display 18 (FIG. 1), as well as to selectively restrict the transmission of copy protected digital media content over network 16. To commence process 60 (FIG. 3), controller 28 first establishes a network connection with digital media playback receiver 14 utilizing network interface 34. Media player application 48 can identify digital media playback receiver 14 through an intermediating network host and information from digital media playback receiver 14 regarding an encoding frame rate and/or other parameters can subsequently be obtained. In many embodiments, the initially-received frame rate will remain relatively constant throughout the duration of the media stream, even though encoding bit rate and/or other parameters may vary. The connection established between computer system 12 and digital media playback receiver 14 can be established in any manner and in accordance with any format; e.g., conventional TCP/IP or UDP/IP constructs can be employed to establish a stream according to WINDOWS MEDIA, QUICKTIME, or MPEG formats

[0032] After establishing a connection between computer system 12 and digital media playback receiver 14 (STEP 62, FIG. 3), controller 28 next identifies the media content to be placeshifted (STEP 64, FIG. 3). In a preferred group of embodiments, controller 28 identifies the media content to be placeshifted based upon user input received via user interface 30 of computer system 12. As a specific example, controller 28 may receive user input data via user interface 30 indicating that content displayed in a particular window is to be placeshifted. Alternatively, controller 28 may receive user input designating a portion of a window (e.g., a media screen contained within a web browser) to be placeshifted; e.g., in certain embodiments, computer system 12 may enable a user to draw a rectangular or other window on graphical user interface displayed on system 12 to allow the contents of that window to be placeshifted. Drawing the window or otherwise delineating a portion of the display allows the corresponding portion of video memory to be readily identified so that bitmap or other information about the contents of the window can be obtained. In further embodiments, the media content to be placeshifted may be automatically identified by controller 28; e.g., if a user is viewing a known webpage, controller 28 may be configured to placeshift a portion of that page associated with media imagery without placeshifting the remainder of the window or the display.

[0033] Controller 28 of computer system 12 next captures the identified digital media content to be placeshifted (STEP 66, FIG. 3). The identified media content can be captured from video memory (e.g., VRAM) at a frequency sufficient to establish a desired frame rate (e.g., 30 frames/second or so in one embodiment, although other embodiments may utilize any other sampling rate). In various embodiments, the frequency at which data is obtained is determined based upon the capacity or capabilities of playback receiver 14 as determined during STEP 62. As noted above, the size and location of the captured region of the video display may be manually or automatically configured in any manner. Moreover, the size or location of the captured region may change during the streaming session in response to changes in parameters relating to media content 52, to remote display 18, to network 16, or in the digital media playback receiver 14. Black (or other) padding data may be provided, if needed, to fill in the imagery transmitted and displayed.

[0034] Next, during STEP 68 (FIG. 3), the captured digital media content is encoded or otherwise converted into a media stream. In various embodiments, raw video frames captured from video memory are converted from a conventional bitmap or similar format to a compressed streaming video format suitable for transmission and/or routing on digital network 16. Such formats can include, but are not limited to, WINDOWS MEDIA PLAYER format, QUICKTIME format, MPEG format, and the like. For example, a media encoder module associated with placeshifting application 50 can perform encoding/transcoding on the captured frames to create the media stream in the desired format. Compression, encryption, and/or other processing can also be applied. If desired, audio data may be captured in addition to video content during STEP 68 (FIG. 3). Audio data can be captured by, for example, creating an audio device driver as part of placeshifting application 50 (FIGs. 1 and 2). Video, audio, and/or any other streams (e.g., control streams) can then be combined in any manner and transmitted on digital network 16 as desired (STEP 70). In various embodiments, the media stream is packetized into a suitable format and transmitted to media catcher over digital network 16 in conventional TCP/IP and/or UDP/IP packets, although alternative embodiments may utilize other networking schemes and structures.

[0035] Continuing with exemplary placeshifting process 60 illustrated in FIG. 3, controller 28 next determines whether media player application 48 is accessing one or more predetermined types of copy protected media content (STEP 72, FIG. 3). More specifically, during STEP 72 (FIG. 3), controller 28 may determine whether media player application 48 is accessing a digital media file supported by media player application 48 and containing digital rights management (DRM) protected content. Additionally or alternatively, controller 28 may determine whether media player application 48 is accessing a DVD file structure including copy protected video content. Controller 28 may determine whether the digital content accessed by media player application 48 includes either of these two types of copy protected media in any number of different manners. However, by way of non-limiting illustration, a first exemplary sub-process that can be performed during STEP 72 of placeshifting process 60 (FIG. 3) to determine whether media player application is accessing a digital media file supported by media player application 48 and containing DRM-protected content is described below in conjunction with FIG. 4; and a second exemplary sub-process that can be performed during STEP 72 of placeshifting process 60 (FIG. 3) to determine whether media player application is accessing a digital media file supported by media player application 48 and containing DRM-protected content is described below in conjunction with FIG. 5.

[0036] If determining that media player application 48 is not accessing copy protected digital media content during STEP 74 (FIG. 3), controller 28 returns to STEP 66 (FIG. 3) and the above-described placeshifting process is repeated. In this manner, controller 27 continually provides uninterrupted streaming media to digital media playback receiver 14 for playback on remote display 18 if copy protected digital media content is not being accessed. However, if media player application 48 is accessing a copy protected digital media content (STEP 74, FIG. 3), controller 28 advances to STEP 76 (FIG. 3) and blocks transmission of the media stream and, therefore, transmission of the copy protected media content. For example, controller 28 can halt the transmission of the media stream during STEP 76. Alternatively, controller 28 can obscure transmission of the media stream such that video content is still presented remote display 18, but the rendered video is sufficiently blurred or otherwise modified from conventional viewing standards to deter copying. In still further embodiments wherein controller 28 determines whether media player application 48 is accessing copy protected

digital media content prior to commencing streaming of the digital media content (e.g., in embodiments wherein STEP 74 is performed before STEP 70 and possibly before STEPS 66 and 68), controller 28 can prevent the transmission of the media stream if it is determined that media player application 48 is accessing copy protected digital media content during STEP 74. Thus, as utilized herein, the term “blocking” is defined broadly to include halting or obscuring the transmission of a media stream if streaming has commenced, as well as preventing the transmission of a media stream if streaming has not yet commenced.

[0037] In addition to blocking transmission of the media stream, controller 28 may cause a visual copy protection alert to be visually expressed on remote display 18 during STEP 76 (FIG. 3). The visual copy protection alert generated by controller 28 and rendered on remote display 19 preferably explains that video streaming has been blocked due to the detection of copy protected media currently accessed by media player application 48. In one embodiment, controller 28 transmits a signal to digital media playback receiver 14 to generate on remote display 19 a predetermined visual alert stored in memory. In a second embodiment, the content of the visual alert is produced at computer system 12 and then transmitted to digital media playback receiver 14 for presentation on remote display 19. As a specific example, during STEP 76, controller 28 transmit over digital network 16 a bitmap or other image of a text message indicating that video streaming has been blocked due to the detection of currently-accessed copy protected media. The text message transmitted over network 16 during STEP 76 can include a message similar to the following: “PLAYBACK OF COPY PROTECTED CONTENT HAS BEEN PREVENTED. IF DVD IN DRIVE, PLEASE REMOVE.” If desired, a similar visual copy protection alert can also be generated on local display 40 during STEP 76. STEPS 74 and 76 of process 60 are then repeated in a continual loop until it is determined that media player application 48 is no longer accessing copy protected digital media content (e.g., due to the removal of DVD 42 from optical disc drive 38), in which case controller 28 returns to STEP 66 and the placeshifting process is resumed.

[0038] FIG. 4 is a flowchart illustrating a first exemplary sub-process 80 that can be performed during STEP 74 of process 60 (FIG. 3) to determine whether media player application 48 is accessing a digital media file containing DRM-protected content. In this

example, services 46 of computer system 12 include an application programming interface (API) associated with media player application 48 (e.g., a source code interface provided by operating system 44 to support for services requested by computer programs executed on computer system 12). During initial STEP 82 of sub-process 80 (FIG. 4), controller 28 queries the API associated with media player application 48 to determine whether a particular digital media file contains DRM-protected content. In one specific implementation wherein media player application 48 is a WINDOWS MEDIA PLAYER application, controller 28 submits the appropriate query (e.g., the “WMIIsContentProtected” function) to the MEDIA PLAYER API to determine whether digital media file contains DRM-protected content. Controller 28 then receives a response from the media player API and proceeds accordingly (STEP 84, FIG. 4). That is, if the media player API indicates that the digital media file contains DRM-protected content, controller 28 advances to STEP 76 of process 60 (FIG. 3), transmission of the media stream is blocked, and a copy protected media alert is generated as described above and indicated in FIG. 4 at 86. Alternatively, if the media player API indicates that the digital media does not contain DRM-protected content, controller 28 advances to STEP 66 of process 60 (FIG. 3) and the placeshifting process continues (indicated in FIG. 4 at 88).

[0039] FIG. 5 is a flowchart illustrating a second exemplary sub-process 90 that can be performed during STEP 74 of process 60 (FIG. 3) to determine whether media player application 48 is accessing a DVD file structure including copy protected digital media content. Sub-process 90 may be performed in conjunction with, or in lieu of, sub-process 80 (FIG. 4). After initialization of sub-process 90, controller 28 first verifies the location of a DVD file structure currently accessed by media player application 48 (STEP 92, FIG. 5). Although the DVD file structure will typically stored on an optical disc (e.g., DVD 42) read by optical disc drive 38, the DVD file structure can also be obtained from other sources; e.g., the DVD file structure can be stored within memory 36. Next, as indicated in FIG. 5, controller 28 searches at least a portion of the DVD file structure to determine if the DVD file structure includes copy protected media content. Controller 28 can search the DVD file structure for any previously-established type of copy protection mechanism; however, in a preferred group of embodiments, controller 28 searches at least a portion of the DVD file structure for instructions to activate analog copy protection. For example, during STEP 92, controller 28 may search sectors of the

DVD file structure for data indicating that the analog copy protection mechanism marketed by the Rovi Corporation and commonly referred to as "MACROVISION" copy protection should be activated. In accordance with certain MACROVISION copy protection schemes, instructions whether to activate analog copy protection are related by two bits within a particular sector of the DVD file structure (e.g., the video object or .VOB files) corresponding to the particular titles of the DVD containing copy protected media content.

[0040] In certain embodiments, controller 28 may simply search each video object file contained within the DVD file structure to determine whether or not the DVD file structures includes copy protected media content, such as MACROVISION protected video content. However, even if computer system 12 has relatively robust processing capabilities, such a global search of the DVD file structure can place excessive processing and memory demands on computer system 12. More importantly, such a global search will typically require an excessively long time period to be fully carried out and consequently may permit an initial portion of copy protected content to be copied before transmission of the media stream can be blocked. It is therefore desirable for controller 28 to search only a subset of the titles and chapters contained within the DVD file structure to determine whether the DVD file structure contains copy protected media content. It should be noted, however, that a DVD file structure may include titles that include copy protected content (e.g., portions of the feature film), as well as titles that do not include copy protected content (e.g., previews and trailers). Thus, it is typically insufficient for controller 28 to determine whether the DVD file structure contains copy protected media content simply by checking the first title, the middle title, or any other predetermined title number included within the DVD file structure.

[0041] To streamline the search of the DVD file structure and overcome the above-noted limitations, during STEPS 94, 96, and 98 of sub-process 90, controller 28 identifies one or more titles included within the DVD file structure that correspond to the feature film and, thus, are likely to include any instructions to activate analog copy protection. Referring initially to STEP 94 (FIG. 5), controller 28 first accesses information files typically having an .ifo extension. Controller 28 then selects one or more titles to be searched for copy protection based upon title duration (STEP 96, FIG. 5); e.g., controller 28 can select the title having the longest duration,

which typically includes the feature film or a significant portion thereof. Next, controller **28** searches a predetermined number of chapters (e.g., the first ten chapters) within the longest title to determine whether or not the DVD file structure includes copy protected media (STEP **98**, FIG. **5**). That is, during STEP **98** (FIG. **5**), controller **28** can search one or more predetermined sectors of each chapter for instructions to activate an analog copy protection mechanism, such as MACROVISION copy protection.

[0042] If, during STEP **98** (FIG. **5**), controller **28** determines that instruction to activate analog copy protection are detected for at least one chapter in the selected title or titles (STEP **100**, FIG. **5**), controller **28** advances to STEP **76** of process **60** (FIG. **3**), blocks transmission of the media stream, and generates a copy protected media alert as previously described (indicated in FIG. **4** at **104**). However, if no indication of instruction to activate copy protection are detected during STEP **98** (FIG. **5**), controller **28** returns to STEP **66** of process **60** (FIG. **3**) and the above-described placeshifting process continues without interruption (indicated in FIG. **4** at **102**).

[0043] Exemplary sub-process **80** (FIG. **4**) and exemplary sub-process **90** (FIG. **5**) can be performed for each program currently executed on computer system **12**; however, it is preferred that sub-processes **80** and **90** are performed to analyze only a selected subset of the currently-executed programs to improve operational speed and decrease system demands. Thus, one or more heuristic techniques can be performed prior to the execution of sub-process **80** and/or sub-process **90** to exclude certain currently-executed programs from subsequent evaluation. Further emphasizing this point, FIG. **6** is a flowchart illustrating an exemplary heuristic technique **110** that can be performed during the exemplary process illustrated in FIG. **3** to generate a narrow list of currently-executed processes that are potential media player applications currently-accessing copy protected digital media content. To commence heuristic technique **110**, a wide list of processes currently executed on computer system **12** is compiled (STEP **112**, FIG. **6**) by, for example, taking a snapshot of all processes currently being executed by system **12**. Next, steps are performed to narrow the wide list and thus yield a narrow list of currently-executed processes that are potential media players. In the illustrated example, any known non-player processes capable of accessing digital media files are eliminated from the wide list (STEP **114**,

FIG. 6). That is, controller 28 can recall from memory 36 a predetermined list of non-player processes that can access digital media files, such as certain browser applications (e.g., WINDOWS EXPLORER). After eliminating from the wide list any known non-player processes capable of accessing digital media files (STEP 114, FIG. 6), controller 28 next determines which processes to select from the wide list based at least in part upon which processes file names include a predetermined alphanumeric grouping. For example, as indicated in FIG. 6 at STEP 116, controller 28 can select from the wide list all processes that include the letter grouping "DVD." Lastly, controller 28 determines which processes to select from the wide list based at least in part upon which (if any) processes are currently utilizing a module supportive of digital media playback. More specifically, as indicated in FIG. 6 at STEP 118, controller 28 can select all processes currently utilizing a module, such as a link library, supportive of digital media playback. As a specific example, in embodiments wherein media player application 48 is a version of WINDOWS MEDIA PLAYER, controller 28 can select all processes currently utilizing one of the following digital link libraries: Wmvc core.dll (utilized to code and render content), Quartz.dll (a library with functionality for DIRECTSHOW included within DIRECTX), and Ddraw.dll (utilized in conjunction with DIRECT X to enable multimedia applications to draw 2D graphics). After generating the narrow list (STEPS 114, 116, and 118 shown in FIG. 6), controller 28 can advance to STEP 74 of process 60 (FIG. 3) and evaluate each process in the narrow list to determine whether copy protected digital media content is being accessed as described above (indicated in FIG. 6 at 120).

[0044] The foregoing has thus provided multiple exemplary embodiments of systems, methods, and program products that enable digital media content to be placeshifted from a computer system to a remotely-located television or other display, while selectively restricting the placeshifting of copy protected digital media content to deter improper copying. Although described above in conjunction with two particular types of copy protected digital media content (i.e., digital media files containing DRM-protected content and DVD file structures containing instructions to activate an analog protection mechanism, such as MACROVISION protection), it is emphasized that embodiments of the systems, methods, and program products described herein can be utilized to restrict the placeshifting, and thus deter the improper copy of, various other types of copy protected digital media content.

[0045] As utilized herein, the word “exemplary” means “serving as an example, instance, or illustration.” Any implementation described herein as exemplary is not necessarily to be construed as preferred or advantageous over other implementations. While the foregoing Detailed Description will provide those skilled in the art with a convenient road map for implementing various embodiments of the invention, it should be appreciated that the particular embodiments described above are only examples, and are not intended to limit the scope, applicability, or configuration of the invention in any way. To the contrary, various changes may be made in the function and arrangement of elements described without departing from the scope of the invention.

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A method executable by a computer system coupled to a local display, the method comprising:

capturing video media content rendered on the local display by a media player application executed by the computer system and obtained from a digital versatile disc (DVD), the video media content captured from video memory while rendered on the local display by the media player application;

determining whether the media player application is accessing copy protected video content stored on the DVD, determining comprising:

parsing the DVD file structure to find information regarding titles contained within the DVD file structure;

selecting at least one title based, at least in part, upon title duration; and

searching the selected title to determine if the selected title contains instructions to activate analog copy protection;

if it is determined that the selected title does not contain instructions to activate analog copy protection, converting the captured digital video content to a media stream and transmitting the media stream over a network for presentation on a remote display; and

if it is determined that the selected title contains instructions to activate analog copy protection, blocking transmission of the media stream and causing a visual copy protection alert to be displayed on the remote display.

2. A method according to Claim 1 wherein causing a visual copy protection alert to be displayed on the remote display comprises transmitting an image of a text message over the network for presentation on the remote display.

3. A method according to Claim 1 further comprising:

compiling a wide list of processes currently executed by the computer system; and

narrowing the wide list to yield a narrow list of processes currently executed by the computer system and potentially comprising media player applications.

4. A method according to Claim 3 wherein the determining comprises determining whether each process in the narrow list comprises a media player application accessing copy protected digital media content.

5. A method according to Claim 4 wherein the narrowing comprises eliminating from the wide list any known non-player process capable of accessing digital media files.

6. A method according to Claim 4 wherein the narrowing comprises determining which processes to select from the wide list based at least in part upon which, if any, process file names include a predetermined alphanumeric grouping.

7. A method according to Claim 6 wherein the narrowing comprises determining which processes to select from the wide list based at least in part upon which, if any, process file names include the letter grouping "DVD".

8. A method according to Claim 4 wherein the narrowing comprises determining which processes to select from the wide list based at least in part upon which, if any, processes are currently utilizing a module supportive of digital media playback.

9. A method according to Claim 8 wherein the narrowing comprises determining which processes to select from the wide list based at least in part upon which, if any, processes are currently utilizing at least one type of shared library.

10. A method according to Claim 1 wherein the determining further comprises:
establishing if the media player application is accessing a predetermined file type supported by the media player application and containing digital rights management (DRM) protected content; and

blocking transmission of the media stream if the media player application is accessing a predetermined file type supported by the media player application and containing DRM-protected content.

11. A method according to Claim 10 wherein the media player application has an application programming interface associated therewith, and wherein the establishing comprises querying the application programming interface to determine if the media player application is accessing a digital media file containing DRM-protected content.

12. A non-transitory computer-readable medium comprising instructions stored thereon that are executable by a computer system to transmit digital media content over a network to a remote display, wherein the instructions comprise a placeshifting program application adapted to perform steps comprising:

- capturing digital media content rendered on a local display associated with the computer system by a media player application executed by the computer system, the digital media content obtained from a digital versatile disc (DVD) and captured while rendered on the local display;

- converting the captured digital media content to a media stream in a network-transmittable format;

- transmitting the media stream over the network for presentation on the remote display;

- determining whether the media player application is accessing a copy protected digital media file stored on the DVD, determining comprising:

- parsing the DVD to find information regarding titles contained within the DVD;

- selecting at least one title based, at least in part, upon title duration; and

- searching the selected title to determine if the selected title contains instructions to activate analog copy protection; and

- blocking transmission of the media stream if the selected title contains instructions to activate copy protection.

13. A non-transitory computer-readable medium according to Claim 12 wherein the placeshifting program application is further adapted to block transmission of the media stream if the digital media content currently accessed by media player application comprises a digital media file supported by the media player application and containing digital media rights protected content.

14. A computer system for placeshifting digital media content in conjunction with a digital network and a remote display, the computer system comprising:

- a first interface to the digital network;

- a second interface to a local display; and

- a processor operatively coupled to the first interface and to the second interface, the processor configured to selectively execute at least one media player application to render digital media content on the local display and obtained from a digital versatile disc (DVD), the processor further configured to: (i) capture at least a portion of the digital media content while rendered on the local display, (ii) convert the captured digital media content to a media stream in a network-transmittable format, (iii) transmit the media stream over the network for presentation on the remote display, (iv) determine whether the media player application is accessing a copy protected digital media file stored on the DVD, and (v) block transmission of the media stream if the media player application is accessing copy protected digital media content;

- wherein the processor is configured to determine whether the media player application is accessing a copy protected digital media file stored on the DVD by parsing the DVD to find information regarding titles contained within the DVD; by selecting at least one title based, at least in part, upon title duration; and by searching the selected title to determine if the selected title contains instructions to activate analog copy protection.

15. A computer system according to Claim 14 wherein the processor is configured to block transmission of the media stream if the digital media content currently accessed by media player application comprises a digital media file supported by the media player application and containing digital media rights protected content.