METHOD FOR CHARACTER SERVICE FOR DUPLEX COMMUNICATION

Technical Field

The present invention relates to a character service method for duplex communication using wire/wireless networks. More particularly, the present invention relates to character service method for duplex communication, in which predetermined points are given to a user according to the user's purchase of an item or activity relating to the character. When the points have been accumulated up to a predetermined level at which the user is regarded as having an affinity for the character, a character call including the character's voice or dynamic image proper for the user's situation is transmitted to the user, so as to enhance the user's affinity for the character.

Background Art

In general, a character service is provided through wire/wireless networks so as to allow users to decorate their cyber characters with various items, such as cloths, shoes or accessories. According to the conventional character service, the users simply decorate their cyber characters using the items so as to show their cyber characters to other users in the cyber space. Accordingly, the conventional character service has limitations to induce users to feel a strong relationship with regard to their cyber characters. In addition, the conventional character service is not suitable for continuously enhancing the user's affinity with the characters because there are limitations for developing the relationship between the users and the cyber characters. For this reason, the users may easily feel boring in use of the cyber characters.

Recently, a new character service using caricatures of entertainers or famous persons has been proposed. This new character service is mainly provided by the homepages of entertainers or famous persons, but it is not discretely different from the conventional character service, so the new character service also present above limitations when it is provided in the cyber space. In general, entertainers have their own homepages so as to improve their relationship with fans. However, the entertainer's homepages are mainly used for notifying entertainer's schedules or allowing users to write fan letters. For this reason, the entertainer's homepages also present limitations in enhancing the affinity between the users and the

entertainers.

Disclosure of the Invention

Therefore, the present invention has been made in view of the above-mentioned problems, and it is an object of the present invention to provide a character service method for duplex communication using wire/wireless networks. More particularly, it is an object of the present invention to provide a character service method for duplex communication, in which predetermined points are given to a user according to the user's purchase of an item or activity relating to the character. When the points have been accumulated up to a predetermined level at which the user is regarded as having an affinity for the character, a character call including the character's voice or dynamic image proper for the user's situation is transmitted to the user, so as to enhance the user's affinity for the character.

In order to accomplish the above object, according to one aspect of the present invention, there is provided a method for character service for duplex communication using a character service system, which is communicated with a wire/wireless network and includes a central server having a character database and a membership information database, a user terminal communicated with the wire/wireless network and a service homepage communicated with the central server so as to display at least one character, the method comprising the steps of: authenticating a user who accesses the service homepage for membership authentication; allowing the user to purchase items for specific characters selected by the user if the user passes the membership authentication; allocating predetermined points to a character account by means of the central server according to an amount of items purchased by the user; allowing the user to request a character call for the character by using the points provided to the character account; and transmitting the character call to the user terminal by the central server according to character call request conditions of the user. According to the exemplary embodiment of the present invention, the character is one selected from the group consisting of a cyber character, an entertainer character, a sports star character, an animation character and an on-line game character. In addition, the item includes at least one of a skin, a character bromide picture, cloths, accessories and cyber money. Furthermore, the user terminal includes one of a mobile communication terminal, a PDA and a computer.

The service homepage includes the user homepage and a character homepage as a sub-page thereof, and the user homepage includes a user information area, a character icon area, a character call area, and a character image area.

In addition, the point allocation step includes a substep of providing the predetermined

points to the character account according to activity of the user relating to the character.

In addition, the point allocation step includes a substep of upgrading an affinity between the user and the character according to user's points. At this time, at least two-grade affinity is provided according to the affinity between the user and the character and a text message representing a grade of the affinity is displayed in a predetermined area of the user homepage.

The character call request step includes a substep of establishing a character call request conditions of the user including a type of character calls and a transmission time for the character call. In this case, the character call includes at least one voice or dynamic image per each situation required by the user and is stored in the character database of the central server.

Contents of the character call are changed according to the grade of the affinity, and use of some contents for the character call is restricted if the affinity grade is less than a predetermined level.

In addition, if the user terminal is the mobile communication terminal or the PDA, the central server transmits the character call to the user terminal by sending a telephone call to the user terminal during the character call transmission step.

The point allocation step includes a substep of displaying the character homepage so as to display names of the user homepages in the character homepage in a sequence of user's points. When the character relates to an entertainer, the character homepage display step includes a substep of displaying a greeting letter or a voice message of the character in a predetermined area of the character homepage if the character leaves the greeting letter or the voice message in the user homepages by visiting the user homepages displayed in the character homepage.

In addition, the present invention further comprises a payment charge step, wherein the central server requests the user to pay a cost for items purchased by the user. The payment charge step includes a total payment calculation step, in which the central server finds a total payment for sales items purchased by the user per each character and stores information related to the total payment for the items in the character database.

According to another aspect of the present invention, there is provided a method for character service for duplex communication using a character service system, which is communicated with a wire/wireless network and includes a central server having a character database and a membership information database, a user terminal communicated with the wire/wireless network and a service homepage communicated with the central server so as to display at least one character, the method comprising the steps of: authenticating a user who accesses the service homepage for membership authentication; allowing the user to purchase character calls for specific characters selected by the user if the user passes the membership

authentication; allowing the user to request the character calls for the characters based on predetermined character call request conditions established by the user; and transmitting the character call to the user terminal by using the central server according to character call request conditions of the user. The method can further comprises a step of upgrading an affinity between the user and the character according to an amount of characters purchased by the user. In addition, the method can further comprises a payment charge step, wherein the central server requests the user to pay a cost for items purchased by the user. The payment charge step includes a total payment calculation step, in which the central server finds a total payment for sales items purchased by the user per each character and stores information related to the total payment for the items in the character database.

Effect of the Invention

According to the present invention, duplex communication between the character and the user can be realized so that the user can be satisfied with the character service, inducing the user to continuously participate in the character service. In particular, if the character is a famous person, such as an entertainer or a sports star, the user is provided with the voice and dynamic image of the famous person, rather than one-sided fan activity, so that the affinity between the user and the famous person can be improved.

In addition, according to the present invention, the service contents provided to the user may vary depending on the affinity between the user and the character and the user homepage name is displayed in the character homepage based on the points or level of the user, thereby inducing the user to continuously participate in the character service.

Brief Description of the Drawings

The foregoing and other objects, features and advantages of the present invention will become more apparent from the following detailed description when taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings in which:

FIG. 1 is a schematic view illustrating the structure of a service system for a character service for duplex communication according to one embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 2 is a schematic view illustrating the structure of a service homepage according to one embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 3 is a schematic view illustrating the structure of a user homepage according to one embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 4 is a schematic view illustrating the structure of a character homepage according to one embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 5 is a flowchart illustrating the procedure of the character service for duplex communication according to one embodiment of the present invention; and

FIG. 6 is a flowchart illustrating the procedure of the character service for duplex communication according to another embodiment of the present invention.

Best Mode for Carrying Out the Invention

Reference will now be made in detail to the preferred embodiments of the present invention with reference to accompanying drawings.

FIG. 1 is a schematic view illustrating a service system for a character service for duplex communication according to one embodiment of the present invention, FIG. 2 is a schematic view illustrating a service homepage according to one embodiment of the present invention, FIG. 3 is a schematic view illustrating a user homepage according to one embodiment of the present invention, FIG. 4 is a schematic view illustrating a character homepage according to one embodiment of the present invention, FIG. 5 is a flowchart illustrating the procedure of the character service for duplex communication according to one embodiment of the present invention, and FIG. 6 is a flowchart illustrating the procedure of the character service for duplex communication according to another embodiment of the present invention.

First, the service system for the character service for duplex communication according to one embodiment of the present invention will be explained.

Referring to FIG. 1, the service system for the character service for duplex communication according to one embodiment of the present invention includes a central server 10, a service homepage 20, and a user terminal 40, which operates in connection with the central server 10. In addition, the service system includes an account-settlement server 50.

The central server 10 is connected to the wire/wireless network and the service homepage 20 and includes a membership information database 12 and a character database 14. The central server 10 totally controls the procedure of the character service for duplex communication according to the present invention. In this regard, the central server 10 has functions of displaying a web page, which is required for controlling the procedure of the character service for duplex communication according to the present invention, in an Internet homepage, transmitting a character call to the user, and providing the wireless Internet service. In addition, the central server 10 can be provided with sub-servers performing the above functions, respectively.

The central server 10 can store data of the membership information database 12 and the character database 14 in a storage unit thereof or in a separate storage unit communicated

with the central server 10. If the data of the membership information database 12 and the character database 14 are stored in the storage unit of the central server 10, the central server 10 directly reads the data to be used. In contrast, if the data of the membership information database 12 and the character database 14 are stored in the separate storage unit, the central server 10 receives the data from the separate storage unit.

The central server 10 stores membership information of the users in the membership information database 12 in order to manage the membership information of the users. The central server 10 performs the member authentication procedure by using data stored in the membership information database 12.

The membership information database 12 stores not only basic information, such as a user name, a user ID and a password of a user, but also terminal information, such as the type of the user terminal 40 (that is, a mobile communication terminal 42, a personal digital assistant (PDA) 44 and a computer 46), the phone number of the PDA 44 and the IP address of the computer 46. In addition, the membership information database 12 stores information related to an E-mail account. The membership information may include account-settlement information and an account-settlement unit required for payment and settlement for the character service.

In addition, the membership information database 12 can store service information provided to the user, such as characters selected by the user, items and character rooms purchased by the user for the characters, character call requests, user's points and the affinity grade. Character use information of the user is managed while being stored in the character database 14 or a separate database.

The central server 10 manages character information by storing the character information in the character database 14 and displays the character information in the service homepage 20. In addition, the central server 10 receives information related to the character call requested by the user from the character database 14 and transmits the character call information to the user terminal 40 through the wire/wireless network.

The character database 14 stores character image information, item information for the character and character call information. In addition, the character database 14 stores character room image information for the character and item information for the character room. Also, the character database 14 can store affinity text message information representing the affinity between the character and the user. Furthermore, the character database 14 can store information related to sales items for each character and a sales result thereof.

The character image information includes various images of the character provided in the character service, such as the whole image, the upper half image, and the face image of the character. The character includes various characters created in the cyber space for the

character service and characters of famous persons, such as entertainers or sports stars. In addition, the character may include animation characters and on-line game characters. If the characters of famous persons, such as favorite entertainers or favorite sports stars of the user, are provided to the user, since these characters are connected to reality, the user may be more satisfied with the characters than the characters created in the cyber space, so the user will continuously join the character service. In addition, if favorite animation characters or favorite on-line game characters are provided to the user, since these characters are also connected to reality, the user may be more satisfied with the characters and will continuously join the character service.

The item information includes various items used for decorating the character. For instance, the items include a skin for the user homepage and an image area, in which the character is displayed, a bromide picture, cloths or accessories for the character. In addition, the items also include cyber money used for purchasing the items. That is, since it causes inconvenience if the user pays the item cost from the user's account whenever the user purchases the items, it is preferred for the user of the character service to previously purchase and accumulate the cyber money so as to purchase the items using the cyber money. Meanwhile, the items are classified into items dedicated for one character and items commonly available for at least two characters.

The character call information includes various character calls having the voice and dynamic image of the character and is stored in the character database 14. That is, the character call includes the voice message or the dynamic image of the character suitable for the user's situation. For instance, the character call includes the voice message provided to the user for attenuating the user's grief or for celebrating the user's success according to the situation of the user. In addition, the character call may include a morning call or a voice and dynamic image message required for a specific situation.

The character call information may include a character call having a relevant message prepared according to the relationship between the user of the character service and the character selected by the user. For instance, if the user sets the character as a friend or a lover, the content of the character call can be differently prepared under the same situation.

In addition, the content of the character call may vary depending on the affinity between the user and the character. According to the present invention, the user of the character service receives predetermined points according to user's purchase of an item or activity relating to the character service, and the central server upgrades the affinity between the user and the character according to the points of the user. Thus, the user can select and receive the character call having the content, which varies according to the affinity between the user and

the character even if the situation has not been changed.

Table 1 shows the contents of the character call, which are changed according to the affinity between the user and the character. As shown in Table 1, the character call has various voice contents based on the relationship and affinity between the user and the character. That is, the contents of the character call when the user sets the character as a friend are different from the contents of the character call when the user sets the character as a lover. In addition, the contents of the character call are changed according to the grade of the affinity between the user and the character. Therefore, the user can select the character call based on the relationship and affinity between the user and the character. Although Table 1 shows the 7-grade affinity when the relationship between the user and the character is a friend or a lover, respectively, the grade of the affinity and the type of the relationship may increase depending on the situation.

Table 1

Relationship / Affinity	Friend	Lover
1st grade	Let me say "hi" first!	How do I say "hi"?
2nd grade	Glad to meet you!	How do you do?
3rd grade	Let's go out together	You attract me
4th grade	I'm interested in you	You attract me more and more as time goes by
5th grade	Let's make a friendship	Why don't we fall in love?
6th grade	It's a lucky for me to meet you	I will love you until God separates us
7th grade	You are the best one for me	I wish to see you every morning
. . .	. . .	. . .

The character room image information is basic image information about the room for decorating the character in the cyber space and is stored in the character database 14. The character room image information includes basic layout information of various spaces for the

character, such as a promenade, a park, a living room and a room. In particular, when the characters relate to the entertainers or sports stars, the character room image information includes basic layout information of a concert hall and a playing field.

Thus, when the character room is provided, the items used for decorating the character room are provided. In this case, the items include a chair, a desk, a sofa, a carpet, a stand lamp and an electric light for decorating the character room. In addition, when the characters relate to the entertainers or sports stars, the items may include audiences crowded in the concert hall, acoustic equipment and lighting apparatuses.

The affinity text message information includes the text message having the content representing the grade of the affinity between the user and the character. For instance, the content of the text message includes "character is my strange friend", "character is my mere friend", "character is my favorite friend" and "character is my best friend", which represent the grade of the affinity between the character and the user.

The sales information includes sales items for each character and a sales account for the sales items. That is, the central server 10 finds the total payment for the sales items purchased by the user and the sales account for each sales item and stores it in the character database 14. In addition, if the character relates to the entertainer or the manager of the character is the entertainer, the entertainer can directly check the sales amount for the items and a gain thereof based on the sales information. Accordingly, a provider of the character service can maintain transparency in view of the gain distribution with the entertainer or the manager of the character. The entertainer or the manager of the character can check the sales information after a predetermined authentication procedure therefor.

FIG. 2 is a schematic view illustrating the service homepage 20 according to one embodiment of the present invention.

Referring to FIG. 2, the service homepage 20 is communicated with the central server 10 through the wire/wireless network and provides the character service for duplex communication according to the present invention through the Internet. The service homepage 20 discloses the contents of the character service. That is, the service homepage 20 includes a membership information input area 22, an item area 24, a character homepage area 26, and a user homepage area 28. The user who has joined the character service must input membership information into the membership information input area 22 of the service homepage 20 for the membership authentication. In addition, a user who has not yet joined the character service can join the character service through a predetermined membership join procedure. At this time, the user receives the ID and the password. The membership information of the user inputted into the membership information input area 22 of the service

homepage 20 is transmitted to the membership information database 14 through the central server 10 and is stored therein.

The user who has joined the character service must input the ID and the password into membership information input area 22 for the membership authentication. If the membership authentication is successful, the service homepage 20 displays the ID of the user, an icon for the user homepage, and character icons representing various characters selected by the user. The icon for the user homepage is linked with the user homepage so that the user can enter the user homepage by clicking the icon for the user homepage. In addition, the character icons are linked with character pages contained in the user homepage so that the user can enter the character page by clicking the corresponding character icon.

The item area 24 includes an icon for an item mall linked with a sub-item page for displaying items provided in the character service. Thus, the user can enter the sub-item page by clicking the icon for the item mall and can select the item desired by the user. As mentioned above, the items are classified into items commonly available for all characters, items dedicated for a specific character, and items available for the character room. Thus, the item area 24 includes icons linked with the item pages including the above items, respectively.

The character homepage area 26 displays at least one character provided in the character service and information including a character homepage list for the corresponding character. Accordingly, the user can enter the character homepage of the corresponding character by clicking the name of the character homepage displayed in the character area 26.

The user homepage area 28 displays the list of the user homepages and reply letters of the user. However, it is also possible to display various contents in the user homepage area 28, if necessary.

Reference numerals 29a and 29b represent areas for displaying the service-related events or public notice. However, it is also possible to display various contents in the above area, if necessary.

Meanwhile, although FIG. 2 shows the structure of the service homepage displayed in the computer through the world wide web, the service homepage may have a structure different from the structure shown in FIG. 2. In addition, if the user terminal is a wireless communication terminal, such as a mobile communication terminal or a PDA, the structure of the service homepage for the character service can be changed.

Furthermore, it is also possible to allow the user of the character service to directly enter the user homepage when the user succeeds in the membership authentication.

FIG. 3 is a schematic view illustrating the structure of the user homepage according to one embodiment of the present invention.

Referring to FIG. 3, the user homepage 30 is a homepage of the user joining the character service. The user homepage 30 displays information relating to the user, characters selected by the user and activities of the user in relation to the character service. The user homepage 30 is linked with the sub-page of the service homepage 20. The user homepage 30 includes a user homepage name area 31 for displaying the user homepage name, a user information area 32 for displaying user's information including the user's ID, and a character area 33 for displaying information of the character selected by the user. In addition, when the user selects a plurality of characters, the user homepage 30 includes a character icon area for displaying a plurality of character icons linked with the character homepages of the corresponding characters. However, the structure of the user homepage 30 can be changed depending on the type of the user terminal or embodiments of the present invention.

The character area 33 includes a character image area 33a for displaying an image of a specific character selected by the user, a point area 33b for displaying a point value of the user in the corresponding character account, and a character call area 33c for displaying the present status of use for the character call. The character call area 33c includes a character call request icon. The user can request the character call while establishing the conditions for the character call, such as the type of the character call and the transmission time for the character call, by clicking the character call request icon. It is also possible to display the character call request icon in other areas of the user homepage or in a separate area. In addition, the user homepage 30 includes an affinity display area 33d for displaying the affinity text message representing the grade of affinity between the user and the character and a character room area 33e for displaying a character room image for the character selected by the user. The user homepage 30 also includes purchase-item icons 33f linked with purchase-item pages displaying the items for the character or the character room purchased by the user. Accordingly, the user can select the desired items from the purchase-items displayed in the purchase-item pages by clicking the purchase-item icons and can decorate the character or the character room with the items purchased by the user. In addition, the purchase-item icons 33f can be linked with the item pages displaying items available for the characters. The user homepage 30 can include a separate icon allowing the user to enter the item area to purchase the item for the character.

In addition, the user homepage 30 includes a user activity area (not shown in FIG. 3) for displaying a list of fan letters, text messages and voice messages transmitted to the character from the user. Thus, if the user sends a fan letter to the character, the content of the fan letter is displayed in the user activity area of the user homepage 30. In addition, if the character leaves a text message or a voice message in the user homepage, the content of the

text message or the voice message is displayed in the user activity area of the user homepage 30.

Meanwhile, the user can select the character displayed in the first page of the user homepage 30. The character displayed in the first page of the user homepage 30 can be replaced with other characters, if necessary.

The character icon area 34 displays a plurality of character icons selected by the user and linked with the corresponding character pages provided in the user homepage. Therefore, if the user clicks the character icon, upgrade information relating to the character corresponding to the character icon is displayed in the character image area 33a, the point area 33b, the character call area 33c, the affinity display area 33d, and the character room area 33e of the character area 33. In addition, a character addition icon is displayed in the character icon area 34 so as to allow the user to add the character to the user homepage by clicking the character addition icon. It is also possible to display the character addition icon in the service homepage 20.

FIG. 4 is a schematic view illustrating the structure of the character homepage according to one embodiment of the present invention.

The character homepage 35 is a homepage of a specific character for introducing the character and displaying activity of the user who selects the character. The character homepage 35 is linked with both the sub-page of the service homepage 20 and the user homepage 20 of the user who selects the character. The character homepage 35 may include a character activity area 36 for displaying the activity of the user relating to the character and a first list area 37 for displaying user homepage names of users who are ranked in the upper class in view of the points of the character account and the grade of the affinity or the activity.

The character activity area 36 includes a statistics area 36a for collecting statistics relating to fan letters, reply letters and voice messages, which are sent to the character from the user, and a user list area 36b for displaying the user homepage names of users who have sent fan letters, greeting letters and voice messages to the character. The contents of the fan letters, greeting letters and voice messages and user IDs are also displayed in the user list area 36b.

In addition, the character activity area 36 also includes a second list area 38 for displaying the names of the user homepages where the character has dropped in. Thus, if the character or the manager of the character is a famous person, the famous person can leave a message or a greeting letter in the user homepages by visiting the user homepages displayed in the first list area from the character homepage of the famous person. At this time, the famous person can use the message or the greeting letter stored in the central server 10 or can instantly make the voice message or the greeting letter. The central server 10 can update the

second list area in order to update the names of the user homepages where the character has dropped in. In addition, the second list area can display the list and contents of the reply letters left in the user homepages by the character.

The character homepage 35 includes a dedicated item icon linked with a dedicated item page displaying dedicated item for the specific character.

As described above, the character homepage 35 is for illustrative purpose only and the structure of the user homepage 30 can be changed depending on the type of the user terminal or embodiments of the present invention.

The user terminal 40 refers to a terminal used for the character service, such as the mobile communication terminal 42, the PDA 44 and the computer 46. If the mobile communication terminal 42 is used as the user terminal, the user mainly accesses the service homepage 20 through the wireless network so as to receive/transmit information including the character call and the like from/to the central server. At this time, the mobile communication terminal 42 receives the character call transmitted from the central server 10 through the mobile communication company server and a base station 48. The PDA 44 can receive/transmit the information in the way similar to that of the mobile communication terminal 42. In addition, the computer 46 receives/transmits the information including the character call from/to the central server 10 through the wire/wireless network.

The account-settlement server 50 includes a mobile communication company server 52 and a card company server 54, to which the central server 10 requests the account-settlement for the item cost purchased by the user through the wire/wireless network. The account-settlement server 50 may include other company servers depending on account-settlement information of the user. Upon receiving the account-settlement request from the central server 10, the account-settlement server 50 checks information of the user and allows the account-settlement. The account-settlement server 50 may include other account-settlement servers such as an ARS server besides the mobile communication company server 52 and the card company server 54.

The mobile communication company server 52 is a server of a mobile communication company for the user terminal and receives the phone number and the password of the user terminal from the central server 10 so as to allow the account-settlement based on the phone number and the password of the user terminal. The mobile communication company server 52 pays the service charge of the user to the central server 10 at a relevant time.

The card company server 54 is a server of a card company dealing with a credit card, a debit card, a traffic card or a payment card for the user. The card company server 54 receives the card number of the user from the central server 10, which has been inputted into the central

server 10 when the user joins the character service, and allows the account-settlement based on the card number. The card company server 54 pays the service charge of the user to the central server 10 at a relevant time and requests the user to pay for that.

Hereinafter, description will be made in relation to the procedure of the character service for duplex communication according to one embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 5 is a flowchart illustrating the procedure of the character service for duplex communication according to one embodiment of the present invention.

Referring to FIG. 5, the procedure of the character service for duplex communication according to one embodiment of the present invention includes membership authentication step (S10), item purchase step (S20), point allocation step (S40), character call request step (S60), and character call transmission step (S70). In addition the procedure further includes payment charge step (S30), total payment calculation step (S35), character homepage display step (S45), and affinity upgrade step (S50).

In membership authentication step (S10), the user who has joined the character service accesses the service homepage 20 for the membership authentication. That is, the user accesses the service homepage 20 by using the user terminal 40, such as the mobile communication terminal 42, the PDA 44 or the computer 46 and inputs the membership information into the membership information input area 22 for the purpose of membership authentication. At this time, the central server 10 compares the membership information (the user ID and the password) inputted into the membership information input area 22 by the user with the membership information stored in the membership information database 12 and authenticates the user if the membership information inputted by the user matches the membership information stored in the membership information database 12. In this case, the user can normally accesses the service homepage 20.

Membership authentication step (S10) may include membership join step (S15). That is, if the user who tries to access the service homepage 20 has no membership for the character service, the central server 10 requests the user to join the character service and provides the membership join procedure. If the user newly joins the character service, the membership information of the user is stored in the membership information database 12.

The structure of the service homepage 20 displayed in the user terminal 40 can be changed depending on the type of the user terminal 40. Accordingly, when the user accesses the service homepage 20 through the world wide web using the computer for the membership authentication, the ID of the user authenticated as a member for the character service and the user homepage icon linked with the user homepage are displayed in the membership information input area 22. In addition, a plurality of character icons linked with character pages

of characters selected by the user can be displayed in the membership information input area 22. If the user accesses the service homepage through the wireless application protocol (wap) by using the mobile communication terminal, the image of the character selected by the user and a menu image are displayed.

In this state, if the user clicks the user homepage icon provided in the service homepage 20, the user homepage is displayed so that the user can enter the user homepage. In addition, if the user clicks the character icon, the user can enter the character page of the user homepage.

Item purchase step (S20) is a step of allowing the user to purchase the items for the character selected by the user. The user can purchase the items by selecting items provided in the item pages, which are displayed when the user clicks the item area 24 of the service homepage 20, the item icons of the user homepage 30, or the dedicated item icon of the character homepage 35. If the user requests the purchase of the item, the central server 10 may allow or reject the purchase request from the user. If the central server 10 allows the purchase request of the user, the items purchased by the user are displayed in the purchase-item page of the user homepage 30. In addition, the central server 10 stores the purchase details for the items in the membership information database 12.

Meanwhile, as mentioned above, the items include the skin, the bromide picture, the cloth, accessories, furniture, and interior decorations. In addition, the items are classified into items dedicated for a specific character and items commonly available for all characters.

Item purchase step (S20) further includes the step of purchasing the cyber money. That is, since it causes inconvenience if the user pays the item cost from the user's account whenever the user purchases the items, it is preferred for the user to previously purchase the cyber money so as to purchase the items using the cyber money later.

Payment charge step (S30) is a step of charging the payment for the purchase of the items provided in the character service. Thus, payment charge step (S30) is only available when the items are sold with charge during the character service. Upon receiving the purchase request for the item from the user, the central server 10 requests the account-settlement server 50 appointed by the user to admit the account-settlement.

Payment charge step (S30) is performed with respect to the settlement tool selected by the user, such as the mobile communication terminal or the credit card. The user can select the settlement tool when the user joins the membership for the character service and can change the settlement tool, if necessary. In addition, it is also possible to change the settlement tool whenever the user purchases the item. Furthermore, an ARS settlement tool can be used for payment charge step (S30) in addition to the mobile communication terminal and the credit

card.

If the user selects the credit card as the settlement tool, the central server 10 accesses the card company server 54 through the wire/wireless network and requests the card company server 54 to perform the settlement admission for the items purchased by the user. To this end, the central server 10 transmits the membership information of the user or the settlement information including the card number inputted by the user to the card company server 54. The card company server 54 may admit the account-settlement for the items purchased by the user when the credit card of the user is valid. Upon receiving the settlement admission from the card company server 54, the central server 10 admits the purchase of the items selected by the user.

The cards used for the account-settlement include the credit card, the debit card, the traffic card and the cash card and the card company server, which is the account-settlement server, is the server of the card company.

If the user selects the mobile communication terminal as the settlement tool, the central server 10 transmits the membership information of the user or information including the phone number of the mobile communication terminal inputted by the user to the mobile communication company server 52 and requests the mobile communication company server 52 to perform the settlement admission for the items purchased by the user. Upon receiving the settlement admission request from the central server 10, the mobile communication company server 52 checks the settlement information including the phone number of the user terminal and admits the account-settlement.

In the process of performing the account-settlement using the mobile communication terminal, the mobile communication company server 52 may send a message to the mobile communication terminal of the user to ask whether the user agrees with the account-settlement before the settlement admission. That is, the mobile communication company server 52 may admit the account-settlement requested by the central server 10 only when the user agrees with the account-settlement in order to protect the user.

If the user has accumulated a predetermined amount of cyber money provided in the character service, payment charge step (S30) can be performed using the cyber money.

Payment charge step (S30) further includes total payment calculation step (S35). The central server 10 stores sales information for the items in the character database 14. Here, the sales information includes the type of items purchased by the user per each character and the total item cost, which are obtained on the basis of the item purchase by the user and the account-settlement thereof. In addition, the central server 10 allows the character manager or the character to check the sales information after a predetermined authentication procedure

therefor. Accordingly, if the character relates to the entertainer or the manager of the character is the entertainer, the entertainer can directly check the sales amount for the items and a gain thereof. Accordingly, a provider of the character service can maintain transparency in view of the gain distribution with the entertainer or the manager of the character.

Point allocation step (S40)is a step of providing the points to the character account of the user according to the number or cost of the items purchased by the user. That is, the central server 10 provides predetermined points to the character account of the user whenever the user purchases the item, so that the points for the corresponding character may increase according to the user's purchase of the items. Preferably, the central server 10 establishes the points for each item displayed in the item page so as to allow the user to check the points for the items when purchasing the items. In addition, the central server 10 manages the points for the corresponding character of the user by storing point information in the membership information database 12 or the character database 14. The central server 10 separately manages the points for each character selected by the user. Meanwhile, the points are provided corresponding to the cost for the items.

The points are provided to the user not only when the user purchases the items, but also when the user decorates the character displayed in the character image area 33a of the user homepage or the character room area 33e by using the items. In addition, the points are provided to the user when the user performs activity relating to the corresponding character. That is, if the user decorates the character or the character room using the items, the central server 10 provides predetermined points to the user according to the status of the items being used. In addition, the central server 10 may provide predetermined points to the user according to the activity of the user for the character service, such as the number of login times of the user for the character service, an amount of access time for the character service, the number of fan letters written in the character homepage 35 by the user, the number of visits to the user homepage, and the update interval for the user homepage.

The central server 10 displays the points provided to the user in the point area 33b of the character area provided in the corresponding character page of the user homepage 30. Thus, the user can easily check the points of the user for the corresponding character.

In addition, point allocation step (S40) further includes character homepage display step (S45). Character homepage display step (S45) is a step of allowing the central server 10 to display the user homepage names in the first list area 37 of the character homepage according to predetermined conditions. That is, the central server 10 displays the user homepage names in the user character homepage in the sequence of the points (or, the grade of the affinity). It is also possible for the central server 10 to display the user homepage names

in the user character homepage in the sequence of the number of visitors or late update time. The character or the manager of the character (in the case that the character relates to the entertainer, sports star or famous person) may visit the user homepages displayed in the character homepage so as to leave a greeting letter or a voice message. In this case, the central server 10 displays the greeting letter or the voice message of the character or the manager of the character in the second list area 38 together with the user homepage names. Thus, the users who have joined the character service may actively participate in the character service so as to increase the points of the user.

Affinity upgrade step (S50) is a step of upgrading the affinity between the character and the user on the basis of the user's points. According to the character service of the present invention, the affinity between the character and the user in the cyber space can be represented with various grades. If the user selects a plurality of characters, the affinity grade is allocated to each character. The central server 10 upgrades the affinity according to the points provided to the user and displays the text message for the affinity grade in the affinity display area 33d of the user homepage. In addition, the central server 10 manages the affinity grade between the user and the corresponding character by storing the affinity grade in the membership information database 12. The central server 10 can restrict the service range including the contents of the character call based on the affinity grade.

Meanwhile, if the character service is provided regardless of the affinity between the user and the character, affinity upgrade step (S50) can be omitted.

Character call request step (S60) is a step of requesting the character call by using the user's points or available character calls, which have been previously accumulated. That is, the user selects the character call request icon from the character call area of the user homepage 30 and establishes the character call request conditions including the type of the character calls and transmission time of the character call required by the user so as to request the character call. It is also possible to display the character call request icon in other areas of the user homepage or in a separate area. Upon receiving the character call request from the user, the central server 10 stores character call request information including the character call request conditions in the membership information database 12 or the character database 14 so as to manage the character call request information.

As described above, various character calls can be provided according to the conditions of the user, such as the status of the user, the relationship between the user and the character and the reason for using the character call. The character calls are stored in the character database 14. If the user requests the character call, the central server 10 receives the character call information from the character database 14 and displays the character calls

suitable for the status of the user in the user terminal 40. Thus, the user can request the character call while checking the contents of the character calls. At this time, the central server 10 can restrict the use of some contents for the character call based on the affinity grade between the user and the character. That is, the user can request the high-grade character call if the user has the high-grade affinity for the character.

When requesting the character call, the user can select the user terminal 40 from among the mobile communication terminal 42, the PDA 44 and the computer 46 for receiving the character call.

The central server 10 displays the character call usage status including the number of accumulated character calls and usage times of the character calls in the character call area 33c of the user homepage. Thus, if the user requests the character calls, the number of accumulated character calls is reduced.

Character call transmission step (S70) is a step of transmitting the character call to the user terminal 40 according to the character call request conditions of the user. That is, the central server 10 monitors the character call request conditions of the user stored in the membership information database 12 or the character database 14. In addition, the central server 10 receives the character calls from the character database 14 according to the character call request conditions of the user and sends the character calls to the user terminal 40. Here, the user terminal 40 is one of the mobile communication terminal 42, the PDA 44 and the computer 46.

If the character call requested by the user is voice information to be transmitted to the mobile communication terminal 42, the central server 10 transmits the character call to the mobile communication terminal 42 in a way similar to a typical telephone call scheme. That is, the central server 10 sends a telephone call to the mobile communication terminal 42 through the mobile communication company server and the base station 48 so as to transmit the voice information or dynamic images to the mobile communication terminal 42. At this time, if the user operates the communication button of the mobile communication terminal 42, the user can listen to the character call as if someone talks to the user over the telephone. Thus, when the user receives the character call, the user may feel as if the character directly makes a call to the user. Similarly, even if the character call requested by the user is dynamic image information, the central server 10 transmits the dynamic image to the mobile communication terminal 42 and the user can receive the dynamic image by operating the communication button or another specific button of the mobile communication terminal 42.

In addition, if the user selects the computer 46 as the user terminal for receiving the character call, the central server 10 transmits the character call to the user homepage of the

service homepage 20 or to an E-mail address appointed by the user. Thus, if the user accesses the user homepage and clicks a specific button for confirming the character call, the character call transmitted to the user homepage may be displayed.

The central server 10 can transmit the character call to the user terminal 40 in such a manner that the character call can be stored in the user terminal 40. Thus, the user can display or reproduce the character call stored in the user terminal 40 whenever it is necessary. In this case, after transmitting the character call to the user terminal 40, the central server 10 asks the user whether the user wants to store the character call in the user terminal 40.

Meanwhile, in character call transmission step (S70), the central server 10 can transmit the character call to the user under the predetermined condition even if the user does not request the character call. That is, if the user's points or the affinity grade reaches a predetermined level, if the user selects a new character, or if there is public information for a specific character, the central server 10 transmits a relevant character call to the user terminal 40 in the form of an event message or a public notice message.

FIG. 6 is a flowchart illustrating the procedure of the character service for duplex communication according to another embodiment of the present invention.

Referring to FIG. 6, the procedure of the character service for duplex communication according to another embodiment of the present invention includes membership authentication step (S100), character call purchase step (S200), character call request step (S500), and character call transmission step (S600). In addition the procedure further includes payment charge step (S300), total payment calculation step (S350), and affinity upgrade step (S400). The procedure according to another embodiment of the present invention is similar to the procedure shown in FIG. 5, so the following description will be focused on the different parts therebetween.

It is noted that the character service according to another embodiment of the present invention can be provided in cooperation with the character service according to one embodiment of the present invention shown in FIG. 5.

In membership authentication step (S100), the user who has joined the character service accesses the service homepage 20 for the membership authentication. This step is identical to membership authentication step (S10) shown in FIG. 5.

Character call purchase step (S200) is a step of allowing the user who has been authenticated as a member through membership authentication step (S100) to purchase the character calls. That is, the user directly purchases predetermined character calls without purchasing separate items. The user can purchase the predetermined character calls by clicking a specific icon in the service homepage 20 or the user homepage 30. If the user

requests permission to purchase the character calls, the central server 10 may admit or reject the user's request. If the central server 10 admits the user's request, the central server 10 provides the character calls requested by the user to the character call account and character call information is stored in the membership information database 12.

Payment charge step (S300) is a step of charging the payment for the purchase of the items provided in the character service. Thus, payment charge step (S300) is only available when the items are sold with charge during the character service. Upon receiving the purchase request for the item from the user, the central server 10 requests the account-settlement server 50 appointed by the user to admit the account-settlement. Payment charge step (S300) is identical to payment charge step (S30) shown in FIG. 5.

Payment charge step (S300) further includes total payment calculation step (S350). The central server 10 stores sales information for the items in the character database 14. Here, the sales information includes the type of items purchased by the user per each character and the total item cost, which are obtained on the basis of the purchase of the items by the user and the account-settlement thereof. In addition, the central server 10 allows the character manager or the character to check the sales information after a predetermined authentication procedure therefor.

Affinity upgrade step (S400) is a step of upgrading the affinity between the character and the user according to the user's purchase of the character calls. The central server 10 upgrades the affinity according to the user's purchase of the character calls and displays the text message for the affinity grade in the affinity display area 33d of the user homepage. In addition, the central server 10 manages the affinity grade between the user and the corresponding character by storing the affinity grade in the membership information database 12. The central server 10 can restrict the service range including the contents of the character call based on the affinity grade.

Meanwhile, if the character service is provided regardless of the affinity between the user and the character, affinity upgrade step (S400) can be omitted.

Character call request step (S500) is a step of requesting the character call by using available character calls, which have been previously purchased by the user. That is, the user requests the character call by establishing character call request conditions including the type of the character calls and transmission time of the character call required by the user in the user homepage. Upon receiving the character call request from the user, the central server 10 stores character call request information including the character call request conditions in the membership information database 12 or the character database 14 so as to manage the character call request information. Character call request step (S500) is identical to character

call request step (S60) shown in FIG. 5.

Character call transmission step (S600) is a step of transmitting the character call to the user terminal 40 according to the character call request conditions of the user. That is, the central server 10 monitors the character call request conditions of the user stored in the membership information database 12 or the character database 14. In addition, the central server 10 receives the character calls from the character database 14 according to the character call request conditions of the user and sends the character calls to the user terminal 40. Here, the user terminal 40 is one of the mobile communication terminal 42, the PDA 44 and the computer 46. Character call transmission step (S600) is identical to character call transmission step (S70) shown in FIG. 5.

While this invention has been described in connection with what is presently considered to be the most practical and preferred embodiment, it is to be understood that the invention is not limited to the disclosed embodiment and the drawings, but, on the contrary, it is intended to cover various modifications and variations within the spirit and scope of the appended claims.

Claims

1. A method for character service for duplex communication using a character service system, which is communicated with a wire/wireless network and includes a central server having a character database and a membership information database, a user terminal communicated with the wire/wireless network and a service homepage communicated with the central server so as to display at least one character, the method comprising the steps of:

authenticating a user who accesses the service homepage for membership authentication;

allowing the user to purchase items for specific characters selected by the user if the user passes the membership authentication;

allocating predetermined points to a character account by means of the central server according to an amount of items purchased by the user;

allowing the user to request a character call for the character by using the points provided to the character account; and

transmitting the character call to the user terminal by using the central server according to character call request conditions of the user.

2. The method as claimed in claim 1, wherein the character is one selected from the group consisting of a cyber character, an entertainer character, a sports star character, an animation character and an on-line game character.

3. The method as claimed in claim 1, wherein the item includes at least one of a skin, a character bromide picture, cloths, accessories and cyber money.

4. The method as claimed in claim 1, wherein the user terminal includes one of a mobile communication terminal, a PDA and a computer.

5. The method as claimed in claim 1, wherein the service homepage includes the user homepage and a character homepage as a sub-page thereof, and the user homepage includes a user information area, a character icon area, a character call area, and a character image area.

6. The method as claimed in claim 1, wherein the point allocation step includes a substep of providing the predetermined points to the character account according to activity of the user relating to the character.

7. The method as claimed in claim 1, wherein the point allocation step includes a substep of upgrading an affinity between the user and the character according to user's points.

8. The method as claimed in claim 7, wherein at least two-grade affinity is provided according to the affinity between the user and the character and a text message representing a grade of the affinity is displayed in a predetermined area of the user homepage.

9. The method as claimed in claim 1, wherein the character call request step includes a substep of establishing a character call request conditions of the user including a type of character calls and a transmission time for the character call.

10. The method as claimed in claim 9, wherein the character call includes at least one voice or dynamic image per each situation required by the user and is stored in the character database of the central server.

11. The method as claimed in claim 9, wherein contents of the character call are changed according to the grade of the affinity, and use of some contents for the character call is restricted if the affinity grade is less than a predetermined level.

12. The method as claimed in claim 1, wherein if the user terminal is a mobile communication terminal or a PDA, the central server transmits the character call to the user terminal by sending a telephone call to the user terminal during the character call transmission step.

13. The method as claimed in claim 1, wherein the point allocation step includes a substep of displaying the character homepage so as to display names of the user homepages in the character homepage in a sequence of user's points.

14. The method as claimed in claim 13, wherein, when the character relates to an entertainer, the character homepage display step includes a substep of displaying a greeting letter or a voice message of the character in a predetermined area of the character homepage if the character leaves the greeting letter or the voice message in the user homepages by visiting the user homepages displayed in the character homepage.

15. The method as claimed in claim 1, further comprising a payment charge step, wherein the central server requests the user to pay a cost for items purchased by the user.

16. The method as claimed in claim 15, wherein the payment charge step includes a total payment calculation step, in which the central server finds a total payment for sales items purchased by the user per each character and stores information related to the total payment for the items in the character database.

17. A method for character service for duplex communication using a character service system, which is communicated with a wire/wireless network and includes a central server having a character database and a membership information database, a user terminal communicated with the wire/wireless network and a service homepage communicated with the central server so as to display at least one character, the method comprising the steps of:

authenticating a user who accesses the service homepage for membership authentication;

allowing the user to purchase character calls for specific characters selected by the user if the user passes the membership authentication;

allowing the user to request the character calls for the characters based on predetermined character call request conditions established by the user; and

transmitting the character call to the user terminal by using the central server according to character call request conditions of the user.

18. The method as claimed in claim 1, further comprising a step of upgrading an affinity between the user and the character according to an amount of characters purchased by the user.

19. The method as claimed in claim 1, further comprising a payment charge step, wherein the central server requests the user to pay a cost for items purchased by the user.

20. The method as claimed in claim 19, wherein the payment charge step includes a total payment calculation step, in which the central server finds a total payment for sales items purchased by the user per each character and stores information related to the total payment for the items in the character database.