ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

Various methods and associated apparatuses are provided for communicating data from a central station to a remote station over some form of communications path. The data, which together form at least one title, are stored on at least one storage device. The data forming that title are then retrieved as data blocks, independently of other data blocks, from storage. Each data block is a sequential segment of the data. Finally, the retrieved data blocks are transmitted from the central station to the remote station. According to preferred embodiments, two types of storage devices are provided. The first type, preferably formed as an array of playback units, allows the data to be stored as data blocks and distributed accordingly over a plurality of storage devices. The second type, preferably formed as ring structures composed of solid state elements, provides a plurality of access points coupled to the storage medium, each of which is able to retrieve the data independently of other access points. For further versatility in the system, the data blocks can also be transmitted independently of one another from the central station. Preferably, the step of retrieving the data is performed in response to receiving a request for a given title. The various systems disclosed allow a wide assortment of titles (e.g., movies, educational-, entertainment-, consumer-, and business-related information, and any information that can be converted into a stream of data) to be transmitted to a wide audience with great flexibility and minimal contention between users for the titles offered.

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