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(54) **METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR LEASING OR PURCHASING DOMAIN NAMES**

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(58) **Field of Classification Search** 705/1.1,
705/307

See application file for complete search history.

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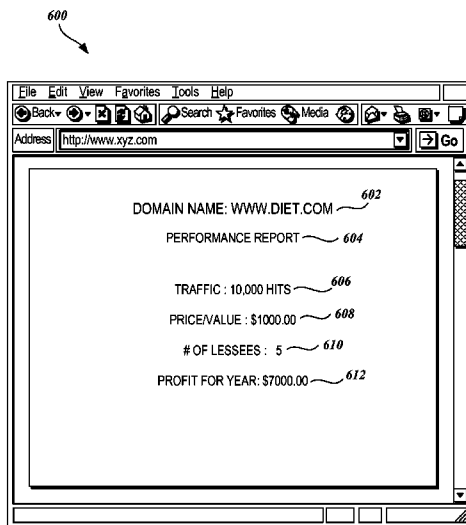
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

A method and system are described that enables a domain name owner (i.e., a "lessor") to grant a third party (i.e., a "lessee") a lease to any domain name the lessor owns. More specifically, a lessor may use a domain name service to allow a third party (i.e., a "lessee") to lease a domain name for use or to purchase the domain name outright. More specifically, the lessor may lease a domain name to the lessee so that any user who accesses the leased domain name is redirected to a network resource identified by the lessee. The lessee may also be provided the option to purchase the domain name outright from the lessor, rather than lease it.

25 Claims, 6 Drawing Sheets



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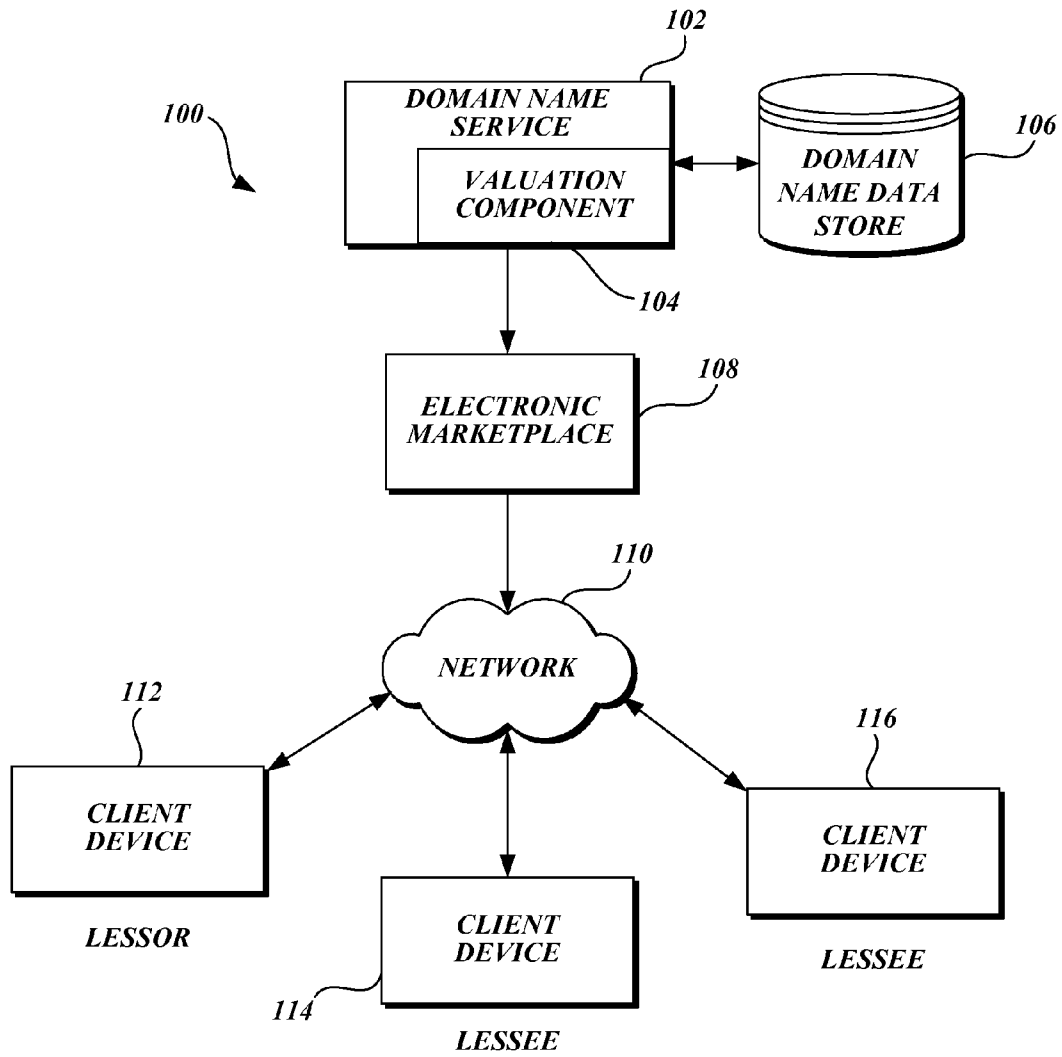


Fig. 1.

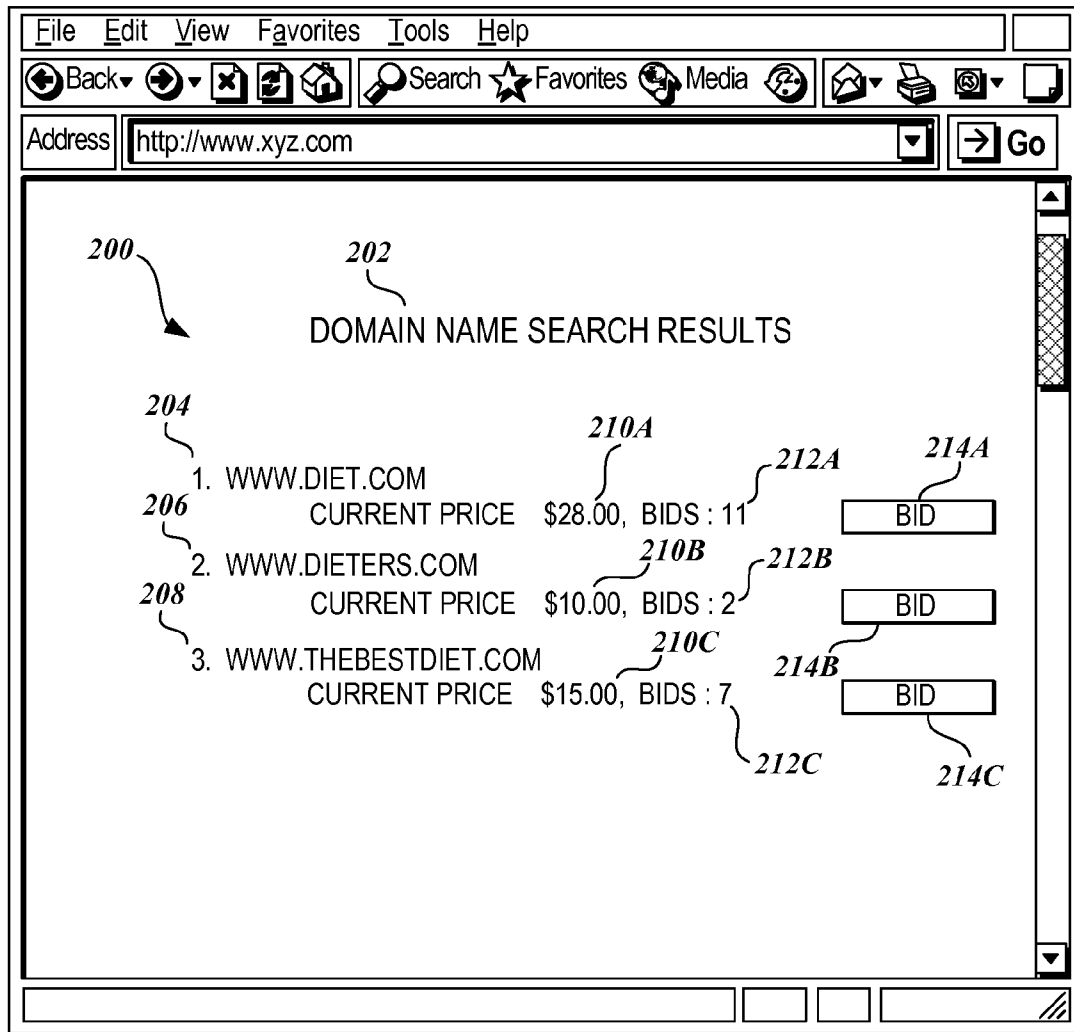


Fig.2.

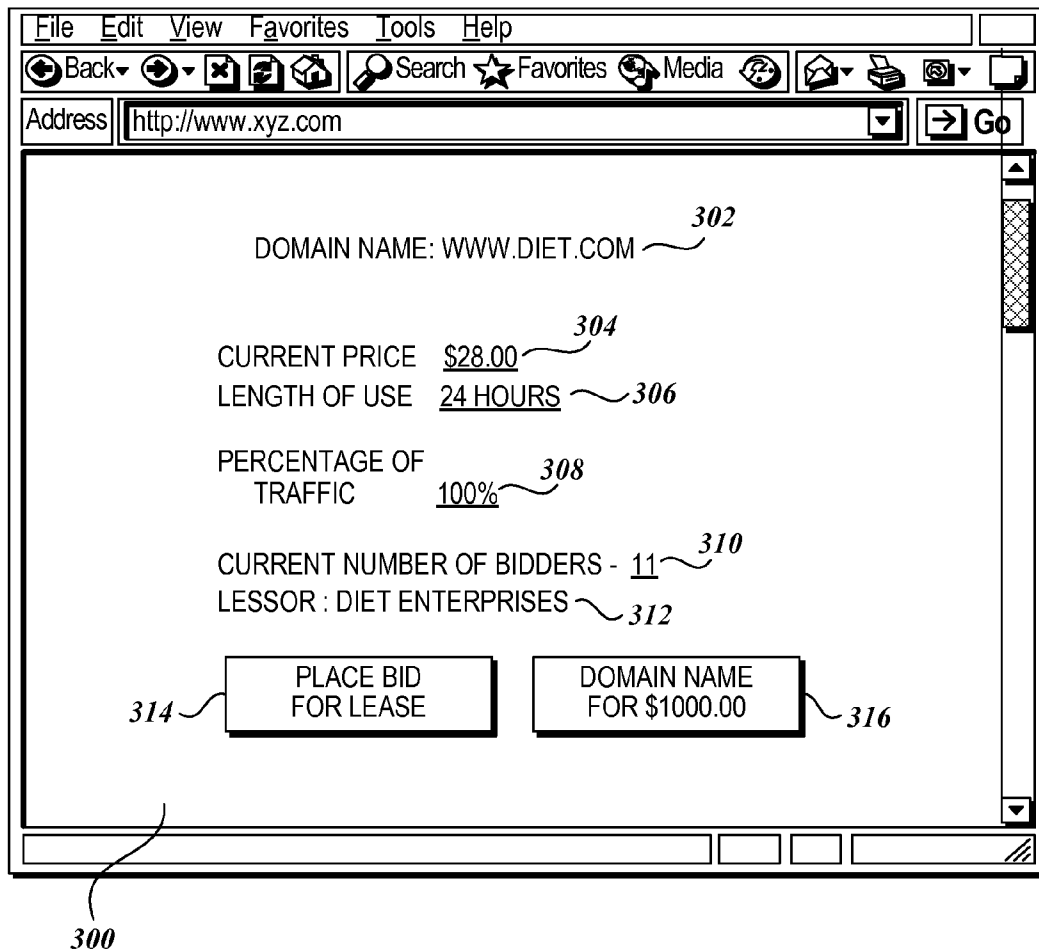


Fig.3.

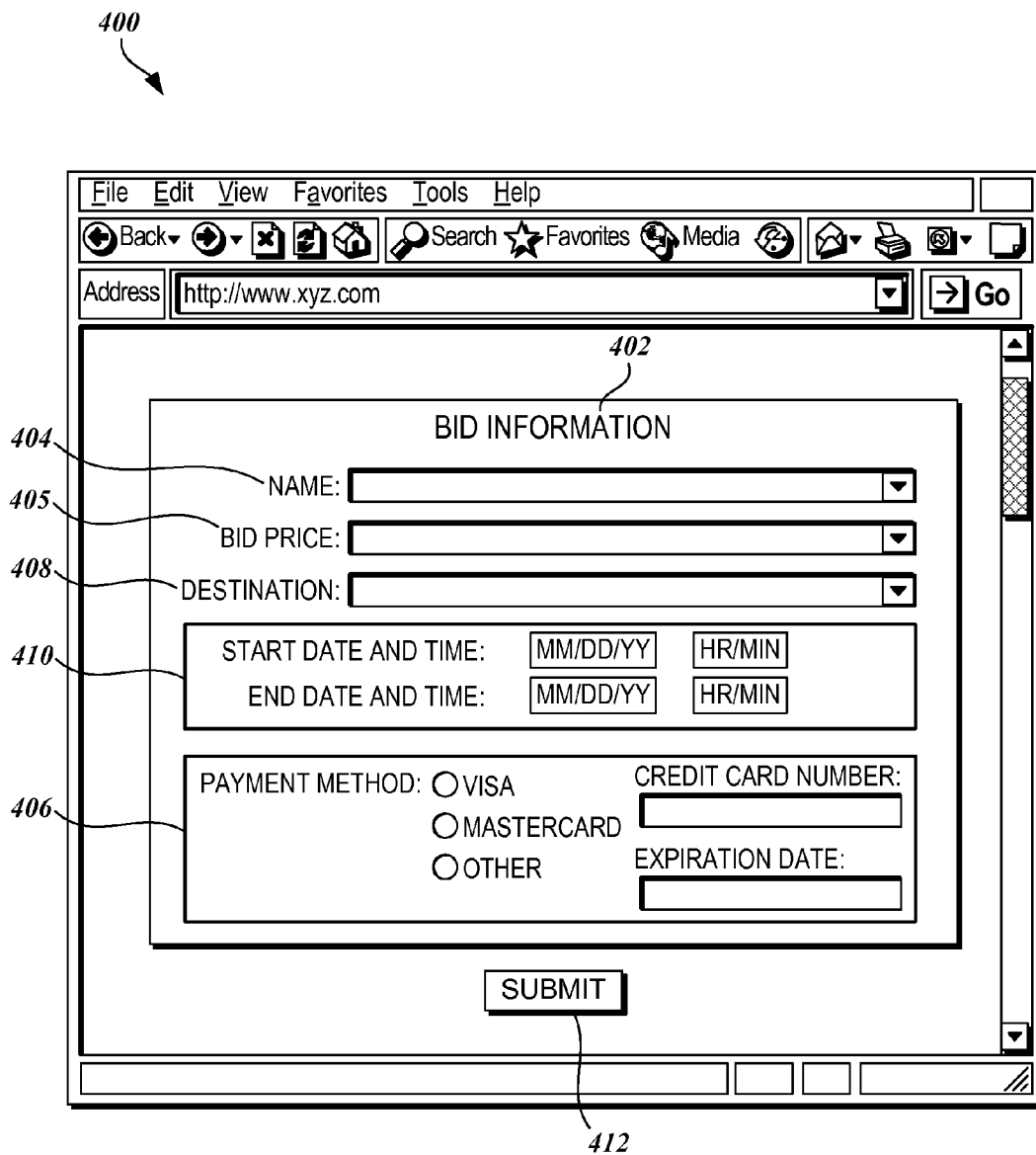


Fig. 4.

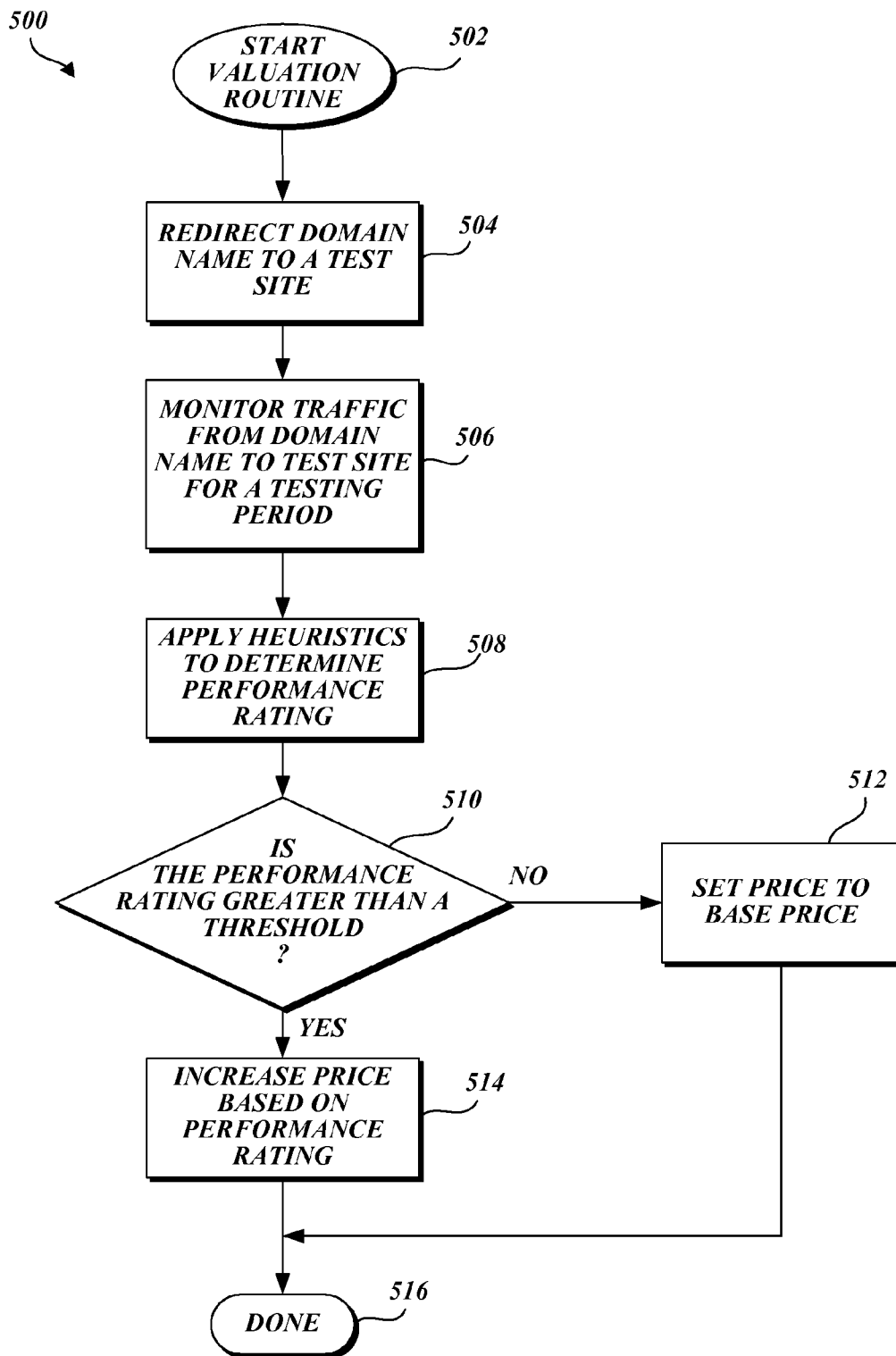


Fig.5.

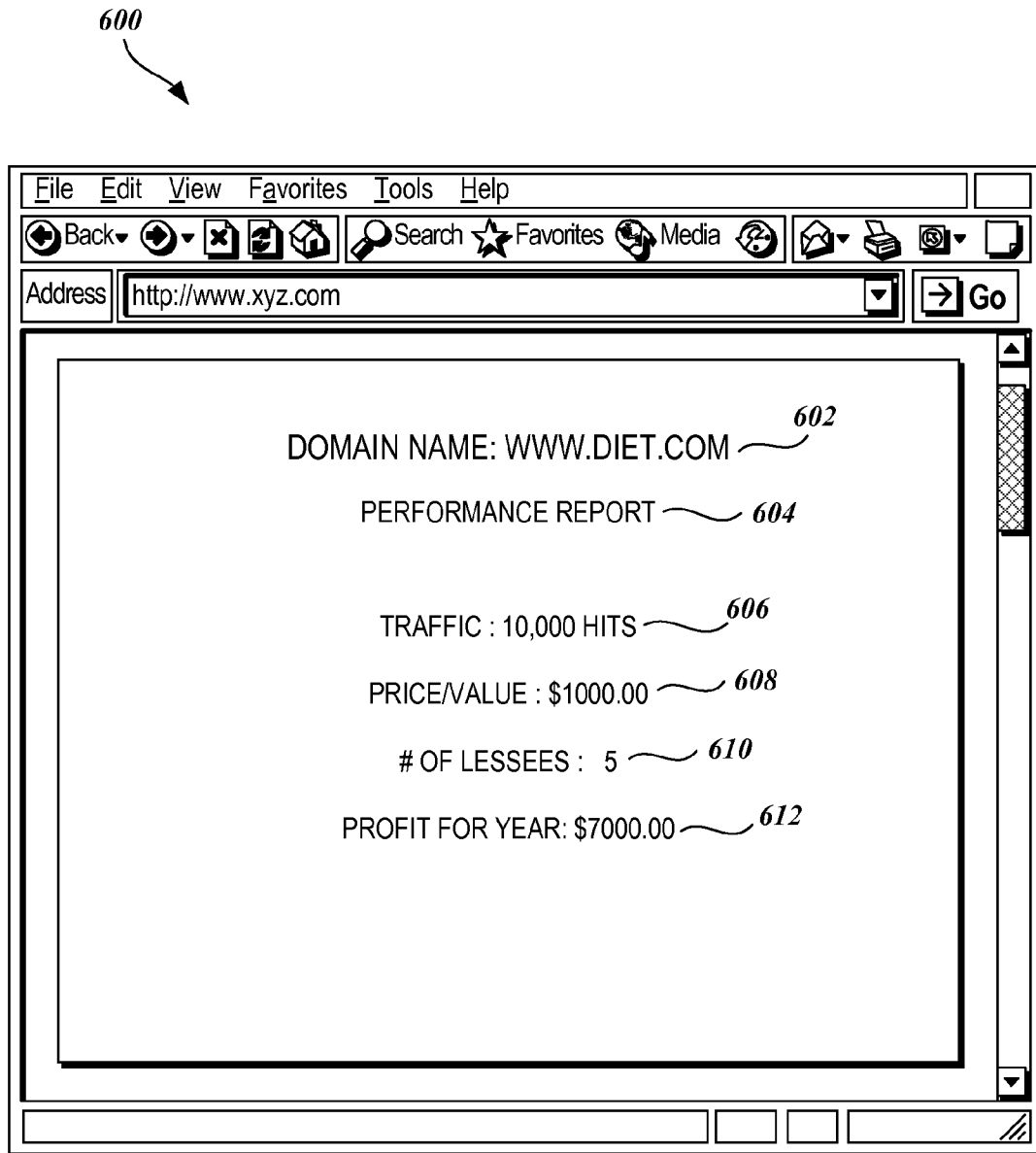


Fig. 6.

METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR LEASING OR PURCHASING DOMAIN NAMES

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION

This application claims the benefit of U.S. Provisional Patent Application No. 61/014,713, filed Dec. 18, 2007, entitled METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR LEASING OR PURCHASING DOMAIN NAMES, the disclosure of which is hereby expressly incorporated by reference, and the filing date of which is hereby claimed under 35 U.S.C. §119(e).

BACKGROUND

The Internet has become a popular information resource for even the most unsophisticated user. The popularity of the Internet is due, in part, to the ability to locate vast amounts of resources on practically any topic imaginable. However, the vast amount of resources can also hinder those who wish to use the Internet to reach users. With so many resources, it is easy for some resources to get lost in the shuffle.

Identifying an appropriate name to associate with a network resource, such as a Web site, takes on a high level of importance. Unfortunately, many of the most recognizable or intuitive domain names have already been acquired by other parties. In addition, a potential domain name owner may simply have difficulty identifying an available domain name that best fits its network resource and that will ensure the most traffic to its network resource. On the other hand, existing domain name owners can have difficulty offering their domain names for use to third parties. As a result, a party may own numerous domain names that are not being used and whose values are not being realized.

DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The foregoing aspects and many of the attendant advantages of this invention will become more readily appreciated as the same become better understood by reference to the following detailed description, when taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, wherein:

FIG. 1 is a pictorial diagram of an illustrative operating environment for implementing a domain name service to lease domain names;

FIG. 2 is a pictorial diagram of an illustrative user interface displaying results from a search for domain names available for lease;

FIG. 3 is a pictorial diagram of an illustrative user interface displaying an option to place a bid for leasing a domain name;

FIG. 4 is a pictorial diagram of an illustrative user interface displaying prompts for entering information regarding a bid placed by a potential lessee;

FIG. 5 is a flow diagram of an illustrative routine for determining a value for a domain name; and

FIG. 6 is a pictorial diagram of an illustrative user interface displaying a domain name performance report.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Computer networks are well known in the field of communications. Computer networks may include communication links that extend over a local area, a wide area, or may even be global, as is the case of computer networks forming the Internet. The method and system disclosed herein are described in the context of the Internet. However, persons skilled in the art will recognize that the method and system disclosed herein

may also be used in other interactive environments, such as local or wide area networks that connect servers storing related documents and associated files, scripts, and databases; or broadcast networks that include set top boxes or other information appliances providing access to audio or video files, documents, scripts, databases, etc. In the Internet context, such documents, files, scripts, etc., that are stored on a server are commonly referred to as a "Web site." However, in general such information can be referred to as a "network resource."

A network resource may be identified by a unique name. In some embodiments, this unique name is known as a "domain name." A domain name is typically a more memorable or human readable alphanumeric name that correlates to one or more numeric IP addresses. An IP address identifies the location in a network of a server or other network device. Multiple IP addresses may be assigned to a single domain name, or multiple domain names may be assigned to a single IP address. In some cases, domain names may be internationalized to include non-ASCII characters. Domain name registrars control the registration of domain names in order to maintain their validity. Typically, only one registrar may modify or delete information about a domain name.

Domain names typically end in a generic top level domain (gTLD) name, such as ".com" or ".biz," or in a country code top level domain (ccTLD) name such as ".de" or ".us." In addition to the top level domains, there are second level domain (SLD) names. These are the names directly to the left of ".com," ".biz," and the other top level domains. The registrars control registration of domain names including the second and top level domains. Further subdomains (i.e., names to the left of the second level domain) may be added freely by the registrant without participation by the registrar. Each domain name level may be separated by a dot or period between them. For the purposes of the present disclosure, a domain name may include at least a top level domain and a second level domain, and may further include one or more subdomains. In addition, sample domain names may be referred to herein with or without the prefix "www." Moreover, while the term domain name is used herein to describe network resources, one skilled in the art will appreciate that any type of unique identifier for a network resource (e.g., an IP address, a MAC address, etc.) may be used and not depart from the spirit and scope of the present invention.

A method and system are described that enable a domain name owner (i.e., a "lessor") to grant a third party (i.e., a "lessee") a lease to (or, in some embodiments, purchase of) any domain name the lessor owns. More specifically, a lessor may use a domain name service to allow a third party (i.e., a "lessee") to lease a domain name for use or to purchase the domain name outright. For example, a lessor may own a number of domain names including www.business.com. Another party may own the domain name www.mybusiness.com, but may wish to have access to or own the domain name www.business.com. Using the method and system described herein, the lessor may lease the domain name www.business.com to the other party so that any user who accesses www.business.com is redirected to the other party's network resource identified by www.mybusiness.com. In another embodiment, the other party may purchase the domain name outright from the lessor, e.g., via an auction for the domain name. One skilled in the relevant art will appreciate that the example described above is merely illustrative and thus should not be construed as limiting. As described in more detail below, a lease for a domain name may be for a specified period of time (e.g., minutes, hours, days, weeks, etc.), for particular times during particular days (e.g., from 12:00 p.m.-

2:00 p.m. on Monday-Friday), for a specified amount of traffic, as part of a rotational usage group (e.g., round-robin), until a specified amount of business or revenue is generated, etc.

With reference to FIG. 1, an operating environment 100 is shown including a domain name service 102 that enables a lessor to lease or sell domain names it has already registered. The operating environment may further include, but is not limited to, one or more of a domain name data store 106, an electronic marketplace 108, a network 110, and client devices 112, 114 and 116. In one embodiment, the domain name service 102 is implemented by a server. The domain name service 102 may enable a lessor to lease a domain name to another party (i.e., a "lessee") so that any user who accesses the leased domain name is redirected to a network resource identified by the lessee. The term "redirect," as used herein, refers to the redirecting of traffic from one network resource to another network resource. Returning to the example above, if the lessor leases the domain name www.business.com to a single lessee, any time a user enters the domain name www.business.com, e.g., in the address bar of a browser or by virtue of a hyperlink, the user will be taken automatically to another network resource identified by the lessee, e.g., the network resource identified by the domain name www.my-business.com.

Returning to the operating environment 100, the domain name service 102 is communicatively connected to a domain name data store 106 that stores domain names. In some embodiments, the domain name data store 106 also stores performance information, bid or purchase information, and registration information for each domain name. In addition, the domain name service 102 may include a valuation component 500. In one embodiment, the valuation component 500 is used to determine a value for a domain name, which value may be used to help determine a purchase or lease price for a domain name. The valuation component 500 will be described in greater detail below with reference to FIG. 5.

In one embodiment, a potential lessee may purchase a lease for a domain name maintained by the domain name service 102 through the electronic marketplace 108. The electronic marketplace 108 may obtain domain names available for lease or purchase from the domain name data store 106 and offer leases to those domain names, as described in more detail below.

In some embodiments, the domain name service 102 and domain name store 106 are operated independently from the electronic marketplace 108. In such cases, the electronic marketplace may retrieve available domain names from the domain name store 106 via the domain name service 102 or may retrieve available domain names from other sources, e.g., other registrars, or its own data stores. In yet other embodiments, the domain name service 102 is operated as part of the electronic marketplace 108, and thus, the electronic marketplace may retrieve available domain names directly from the domain name store 106. In one embodiment, the electronic marketplace 108 includes several computer systems that are interconnected using one or more computer networks. The systems facilitate browsing and purchasing/leasing of goods and services using various client devices such as client device 112. In one embodiment, the electronic marketplace 108 is generally responsible for providing communication with client devices 112, 114, and 116 via a network 110, such as the Internet. The front end communication provided by the electronic marketplace 110 may include generating text and/or graphics, possibly organized as a Web page or other user interface using hypertext transfer or other protocols in response to information inquiries, or requests received from

the client devices. Non-limiting examples to such user interfaces are shown in FIGS. 2, 3, 4, and 6.

The domain name service 102, electronic marketplace 108, and client devices 112, 114, and 116 may be configured for communication via a network 110. The network 110 may be a wired and/or wireless network, a cable network, a local area network ("LAN"), a larger network, such as a wide area network ("WAN"), or a collection of networks, such as the Internet, etc. Because protocols for network communications, such as TCP/IP, are well known to those skilled in the art of computer networks, these protocols and other methods used to implement the network 110 are not disclosed in further detail herein.

The operating environment 100 may also include client devices 112, 114, and 116. The client devices 112, 114, and 116 allow a lessor (e.g., using client device 112) lessee(s) (e.g., using client devices 114 and 116) access to the electronic marketplace 110 and the domain names service 102. The client devices 112, 114, and 116 may be any one of a number of computing devices, including, but not limited to, personal computers (PCs), laptop computers, personal digital assistants (PDAs), set-top boxes, mobile telephones, digital media players, electronic reader devices, two-way pagers, etc.

The operating environment 100 depicted in FIG. 1 is illustrated as a distributed computer environment, including several computer systems that are interconnected using one or more computer networks. However, it will be appreciated by those skilled in the art that the operating environment 100 could have fewer or greater components than are illustrated in FIG. 1. For example, the operating environment 100 could include various Web services, components, and peer-to-peer network configurations. Thus, the depiction of the operating environment in FIG. 1 should be taken as illustrative and not limiting to the present disclosure.

One skilled in the relevant art will also appreciate that the data and/or components described above may be stored on a computer-readable medium and loaded into a memory of the domain name service 102 and/or domain name data store 106 using a drive mechanism associated with the computer-readable medium, such as a floppy, CD-ROM, DVD-ROM, or network interface. Further, the components can be included on a single device or distributed in any manner. For example, all components could be located on the domain name service 102. Furthermore, the components shown in FIG. 1 represent an illustrative embodiment. In other embodiments, components, e.g., valuation component 104, can be removed, or their functionality can be provided by another component.

As noted above, the owner of a domain name may lease a domain name to another party so that any user who accesses the leased domain name is redirected to another network resource identified by the other party. In some cases, a potential lessee who wishes to make a network resource available may have difficulty selecting a domain name or may be interested in using a domain name registered to someone else. Accordingly, the domain name service 102 and/or the electronic marketplace 108 may be configured to enable a potential lessee to search for names available for lease and/or perhaps purchase. In one embodiment, the potential lessee may conduct a keyword search for available domain names via a search engine and search interface. Search engines and interfaces are known in the art, and thus, need not be described in further detail herein. In yet other embodiments, a potential lessee may search for available domain names by category. For example, a potential lessee may desire a domain name under the category "diets." Upon selection of the category, the domain names falling in the category are presented

via one or more user interfaces, e.g., the user interface display **200**, depicted in FIG. 2, displayed by a browser implemented by a client device, e.g., client device **114**.

Those skilled in the art will recognize that a plurality of potential lessees may be interested in the same domain name. To maximize the monetary value of the domain name, the domain name service **102** may enable multiple potential lessees to bid on the use of a domain name available for lease in an auction format. Thus, in the illustrated embodiment, the user interface **200** is configured to enable a potential lessee to select a domain name from the search results and bid against other potential lessees for a lease to the domain name. In the illustrated example, the domain name search results **202** for the search term or category “diets” are displayed in the user interface **200**. The search results include www.diet.com **204**, www.dieters.com **206**, and www.thebestdiet.com **208**. The current bid price of each domain name is displayed at **210A**, **210B**, and **210C**, respectively, providing the potential lessee with the most recent bid price on lease of the domain name. The number of bids placed on each domain name is displayed at **212A**, **212B**, and **212C**, respectively, providing the potential lessee the number of other bids that have been placed on the domain name. If a potential lessee wishes to place a bid on a domain name, they may do so by selecting the domain name’s corresponding “BID” button **214A**, **214B**, and **214C**.

For example, if a potential lessee wishes to lease one of the domain names illustrated in FIG. 2, i.e., www.diet.com **204**, www.dieters.com **206**, or www.thebestdiet.com **208**, the potential lessee may compare the prices and number of bids on each domain name and determine that www.diet.com **204** is likely the most popular of the three search results. The potential lessee may then decide to place a bid on that domain name and select its corresponding “BID” button **214A**.

In another embodiment, the user interface **200** may be configured to provide a flat or fixed lease price for a domain name for a specified period of time. In such embodiments, the user interface **200** may present the fixed price for a specified period of time (e.g., 24 hours) with the search results. The potential lessee may select the domain name in which he or she was interested and pay the fixed price as opposed to submitting a bid in an auction as described above. One skilled in the art will recognize that there are number of methods that can be used to obtain a lease to a domain name. For example, in addition to fixed price sales and auctions, third parties could lease domain names in exchange for a lease to one or more of its own domain names, in exchange for other goods and services, or in exchange for points in a points-based exchange system. Thus, the examples provided herein should not be construed as limiting. A bid, a fixed price offer, or an offer to lease in exchange for some other item of value may be considered an offer by the potential lessee to lease the domain name. If such an offer is accepted by the domain name service **102**, traffic to the domain name will be redirected as described in more detail below.

Once a potential lessee has selected a domain name for lease and selected the corresponding “BID” button **214A**, **214B**, **214C**, the potential lessee may be presented further information about the domain name and its lease terms. An illustrative user interface **300** for presenting such information is depicted in FIG. 3. More specifically, the current bid price **304** to lease the domain name www.diet.com, e.g., “\$28.00,” is displayed along with a length **306** of the domain name lease, e.g., “24 HOURS.” In the illustrated embodiment, the lease for which the potential lessee is bidding lasts for a specified period of time duration, e.g., 24 hours. Thus, any potential lessee who leases the domain name will receive the benefits of redirects from the leased domain name for 24

hours. However, those skilled in the art will appreciate that the lease may be of any length specified by the lessor, e.g., one minute, six months, one year, indefinite, etc. In some embodiments, the potential lessee may be presented an option to place a bid for a lease of longer or shorter length, and thus, may vary his or her bid accordingly. In such cases, the lessor (or domain name service **102** or electronic marketplace **108**) may determine the winning bid based on various business rules or other relevant criteria. In yet other embodiments, the start and end time of the lease length may be displayed and/or varied by the lessor/lessee. In such embodiments, the lessee may also be presented an option to place a bid for a particular lease length, e.g., one hour, with a specified start and end time, e.g., Dec. 5, 2010, at 10:00 AM PST to Dec. 5, 2010, at 11:00 AM PST.

In addition to price and lease length, a percentage of traffic being leased **308**, e.g., “100%,” is displayed in the user interface **200**. Thus, in the illustrated example, the potential lessee who leases the domain name will receive the benefit of all of the traffic the domain name receives. In other words, 100% of the traffic directed to the leased domain name will be redirected to a network resource identified by the lessee. The term “traffic,” as used herein, refers to each instance a domain name is accessed, e.g., by entering the domain name in the address bar of a browser or by virtue of a hyperlink.

In the illustrated example, because the percentage of traffic being leased is 100%, each access of the domain name www.diet.com will be redirected to a network resource specified by the lessee during the period of the lease. In another embodiment, a domain name may be leased to multiple lessees. Thus, each lessee may receive a portion of the traffic directed to the leased domain name. For instance, a domain name may have three lessees where the first lessee leases 50% of the domain name traffic; the second lessee leases 35% of the domain name traffic; and the third lessee leases the remaining 15% of the domain name traffic. Accordingly, the network resource identified by each lessee will receive only the percentage of the redirected traffic they purchased. Thus, if the leased domain name is accessed 100 times, 50 will be redirected to the network resource identified by the first lessee, 35 will be redirected to the network resource identified by the second lessee and 15 will be redirected to the network resource identified by the third lessee. In some embodiments, the traffic may be redirected serially, e.g., the first 50 accesses will be redirected, followed by the next 35, etc. In other embodiments, users are redirected randomly until the percentages are reached. In yet other embodiments, a weighted distribution is employed based on, e.g., bid price, percentage of traffic, identity of lessee, etc., or some combination thereof. In yet other embodiments, the lessor retains a portion of the traffic.

Although price, length of lease, and percentage of traffic have been described herein as parameters under which a domain name may be leased, those skilled in the art will appreciate that there may be additional parameters under which a domain name may be leased. Such parameters may be specified by the lessor and/or requested by the lessee. In some cases, such requests by the lessee may require an adjustment (i.e., increase or decrease) of the purchase price. Given the variety of parameters under which a domain name may be leased, the examples presented above should not be construed as limiting.

Returning to FIG. 2, the current number of bidders **310** for the domain name lease may also be displayed in user interface **200**. As noted above, the current number of bidders **310** may be used to gauge interest in the domain name. In addition, the identity of the lessor **312** may also be displayed. If the poten-

tial lessee wishes to place a bid for lease of the domain name, the potential lessee may do so by selecting a “PLACE BID FOR LEASE” button **314**. However, in some embodiments, a potential lessee may decide that rather than leasing the domain name, he or she would prefer to purchase the domain name outright. Accordingly, an “OPTION TO BUY” button **316** may be provided in the user interface **200** that gives the potential lessee the option to purchase all right, title and interest in the domain name for a fixed price that is generally higher than the price for obtaining a lease. In the illustrated example, the “OPTION TO BUY” button **316** includes the fixed price of the domain name, e.g., “\$1000.” In some embodiments, the fixed purchase price is set manually by the domain name owner. In yet other embodiments, the fixed purchase price is determined algorithmically by the domain name service **102**, e.g., by the valuation component **500** of the domain name service **102**. Such algorithms may determine an appropriate purchase price based on a wide variety of criteria, e.g., past performance of the domain name; number of bidders for the domain name; highest, lowest, or average (or some combination thereof) bid; prior purchase price history; current or past traffic; etc., or any combination thereof. The valuation component **500** will be described in more detail below in reference to FIG. 5.

In another embodiment, the user interface **300** may be further configured to provide recommendations to a lessee based on the domain name the lessee is placing a bid on. For example, the lessee may be bidding on a domain name for electronics. Thus, in addition to information concerning the domain name the lessee is bidding on, the user interface **300** would also display other recommended domain names for electronics. In one embodiment, the recommendation of a domain name would be based on the number of bidders for the additional domain names. However, one skilled in the art will appreciate that there are a number of methods that may be used to recommend domain names. Thus, the example provided here should not be construed as limiting.

Referring now to FIG. 4, if the potential lessee selects the “PLACE BID FOR LEASE” button **314**, a user interface **400** may be displayed that enables the potential lessee to enter information **402** for the domain name lease. For example, a “LESSEE NAME” text field **404** may be provided to prompt the potential lessee to enter his or her name. A “BID PRICE” field **405** may be provided to prompt the potential lessee to enter the bid price for the domain name lease. A “PAYMENT METHOD” field **406** may also be provided to prompt the potential lessee to enter the method by which he or she will pay to lease the domain name.

A “DESTINATION” text field **408** may also be provided to prompt the potential lessee to identify the network resource to which the leased domain name will be redirected. In some embodiments, the network resource to which the traffic is redirected is identified by another domain name. In yet other embodiments, the network resource is identified by an IP address or other unique address. Using the above example, the potential lessee may wish to redirect users who access the domain name www.diet.com to the network resource identified by the domain name www.jacksdiet.com. Accordingly, the potential lessee may enter the domain name www.jacksdiet.com or the IP address for the same in the “DESTINATION” text field **408**.

In the illustrated embodiment, a “START DATE AND TIME” and “END DATE AND TIME” field **410** is also provided to prompt the potential licensee to enter the time period of the domain name lease. For example, a potential lessee placing a bid on the domain name www.diet.com for a length of use of 24 hours may enter a start date and time of Nov. 18,

2010, at 2:00 PM PST and an end date and time of Nov. 19, 2010, at 3:00 PM PST in field **410**. When the potential lessee has entered the bid information, he or she may submit the information by selecting a “SUBMIT” button **412**. In one embodiment, the bid information is stored along with the domain name in the domain name data store **106**.

Once the bid is submitted, the electronic marketplace **108** may process the bid in accordance with its existing electronic auction functionality. The winner of the electronic auction will be notified and payment will be processed by the electronic marketplace **108** accordingly. Since electronic auctions are known in the art, such auction functionality need not be described in further detail herein. Once payment has been processed, the domain name service **102** may implement the redirect to the network resource identified by the lessee for the time period specified. In addition, the domain name service may monitor the performance of the leased domain name for reporting purposes, as will be discussed in more detail below. If the domain name is purchased outright, the domain name service **102** may facilitate transfer of the domain name to the new owner. In some instance, the domain name service **102** may itself be a registrar for domain names offered for lease or purchase. In some embodiments, the domain name service **102** and/or the electronic marketplace **108** may change a fee and/or retain a percentage of the winning bid price or purchase price for processing the auction transaction, the fixed price transaction or the transfer of ownership.

In another embodiment, the electronic marketplace **108** and/or the domain name service **102** may resolve conflicting bids for a domain name. For instance, two lessees may bid to lease a domain name for times that overlap (e.g., the first lessee wishes to lease the domain name from 12:00 to 1:00, and the second lessee wishes to lease the domain name from 12:30 to 1:30). In such embodiments, the electronic marketplace may be configured to determine use of the domain name based on the option that offers the maximum value to the domain name owner. In this example, the first lessee has the highest bid. Thus, the first lessee will receive use of the domain name for his desired time period. In turn, the second lessee may be presented with the option of leasing the domain name for the time period remaining after the first lessee’s lease period expires.

In another embodiment, the electronic marketplace **108** and/or the domain name service **102** may be configured to alert bidders to which bidder is currently “winning” the auction. In other words, each bidder may be notified of the bidder that currently has the best bid. For instance, two lessees may again be bidding on use of the same domain name. The second bidder may submit a larger bid than the first bidder. In turn, the electronic marketplace may deliver a notification to the first bidder that the second bidder has submitted a higher bid. In addition, the notification may contain recommendations to the first bidder to assist the first bidder in determining his next action. For instance, the notification may recommend that the bidder change the time of his bid or increase the value of his bid.

With reference now to FIG. 5, an illustrative valuation routine that may be implemented by the valuation component **500** of the domain name service **102** is depicted. One factor that may be used in determining a purchase price for a domain name is the amount of traffic the domain name generates since the amount of traffic may be an indication of the of the popularity of the domain name. Accordingly, in the illustrated embodiment, the valuation component monitors traffic to the domain name for a test period and sets the purchase price of the domain name based on the monitored traffic. More specifically, the valuation component **500** begins at block **502**

and proceeds to block **504** where the component **500** redirects traffic to the domain name to a test site e.g., a network resource used for testing purposes. In another embodiment, traffic may be redirected to a potential lessee site. In yet another embodiment, a test site may be configured to include a questionnaire to obtain more information from users. For example, a test site may contain a questionnaire to determine which Web site the user was attempting to access.

At block **506**, the redirected traffic is monitored for a testing period. For example, the test site implements a counter that tracks the number of times the test site is accessed from the monitored domain name. In some embodiments, this information is analyzed over time to determine, e.g., the frequency with which the domain name is accessed, the time periods during which the domain name experiences the most traffic, whether traffic is increasing, decreasing, or stable, etc. This information may then be used to determine a purchase price for the domain name. In another embodiment, the valuation component **500** may be configured to monitor a domain name on existing search engines. For example, a domain name may be one of the first to appear in response to a search on the subject matter of the domain name. This information may be used to determine a purchase price for the domain name. In yet another embodiment, other domain names that are similar to the current domain name candidate may be stored in a database. The performance of these stored domain names may be tracked over time. In turn, the historical performance of the stored domain names may be used to determine the price for the current domain name.

In yet another embodiment, the value of a domain name to a potential lessee may be used in the determination of a purchase price for the domain name. For example, a lessee may deal in office products and the domain name owner may own the domain name `www.officeproducts.com`. The domain name owner could then target that particular lessee with the domain name `www.officeproducts.com` and use the subject matter connection between the domain name and the lessee to determine the purchase price for the domain name. Those skilled in the art will recognize that such information as provided in the embodiments and examples presented above may also be used to determine bid prices for the domain name as well as or in lieu of purchase price.

In the illustrated embodiment, the total number of times the test site is accessed during the testing period, is monitored using the domain name of the test site. The monitored domain name is then used to determine the purchase price of the domain name. For instance, if the testing period is one hour and the test site is accessed via the monitored domain name one hundred times (the "access count"), the access count is used to determine the purchase price of the domain name.

Accordingly, at block **508**, heuristics may be applied to the access count to determine a performance rating for the monitored domain name. For example, if the monitored domain name is accessed a high number of times relative to other domain names in the same category (e.g., relative to the other domain names related to "diet" using the above example), then the monitored domain name may receive a higher performance rating. To the contrary, if the monitored domain name is accessed a low number of times during the test period relative to other domain names in the same category, the domain name may receive a lower performance rating. One skilled in the art will appreciate that there are numerous methods and heuristics that may be used to determine a performance rating. Thus, the examples presented above should not be construed as limiting.

At decision block **510**, a determination is made as to whether the performance rating is above a threshold. In one

embodiment, the threshold is set manually, e.g., by the domain name owner. In another embodiment, the threshold is set automatically by the domain name service **102**. For example, the domain name service **102** may set automatically set the threshold based on a median number of times domain names in the same category (e.g., "diet" using the above example) were accessed during testing. If the performance rating does not exceed the threshold, the purchase price of the domain name is set to a base price. In some embodiments, the base price is specified by the domain name owner. In other embodiments, the base price is determined algorithmically, e.g., based on the average purchase price of domain names in the same category as the monitored domain name. Those skilled in the art will recognize that the base price may be determined manually or automatically using a wide variety of methods. Thus, the examples presented above should not be construed as limiting.

If it is determined in decision block **510** that the performance rating exceeds the threshold, the purchase price of the monitored domain name is increased in block **514** based on the performance rating. In one embodiment, performance is rated on a scale from one to 100. In such an embodiment, for every 1 point increment increase in the performance rating, the purchase price may increase by \$50. While this is one possible example of how the purchase price may increase based on performance rating, those skilled in the art will appreciate that the purchase price may be determined based on a wide variety of relationships between performance and price, whether such relationships are linear (as just described) or non-linear. Once the purchase price has been determined, the component **500** then terminates in block **516**.

FIG. 6 is a pictorial diagram of an illustrative user interface **600** displaying a domain name performance report **104**. In one embodiment, the domain name service **102** tracks the performance of a domain name while leased. Tracking the performance of the domain name provides the lessor with additional information when setting the purchase price or starting/minimum bid of a domain name to ensure maximum profitability. In the user interface **600**, the domain name **602** subject to the performance report is displayed. The total traffic **606**, e.g., "10,000," since leasing began is also displayed. The value **608** of the domain name as determined by the valuation component **500**, e.g., "\$1000.00," may also be displayed. The number of lessees **610** since leasing began, e.g., "5," may also be displayed. Finally, the total profit for the year **612** obtained by leasing the domain name, e.g., "\$7000.00," may be displayed. Those skilled in the art will appreciate that by utilizing such a report, the domain name owner may further analyze the value of the domain name. Using the reported information, the domain name owner may consider, inter alia, whether to continue offering the domain name for lease, the purchase price or starting/minimum bid for a domain name, whether to retain a percentage of the traffic to the domain name, etc. Those skilled in the art will also appreciate that less, more, or different information related to the domain name may be included in the performance report without departing from the spirit and scope of the present disclosure.

In another embodiment, the lessee may also receive a performance report from the domain name service **102**. In such embodiments, the lessee performance report may contain similar information to the lessor performance report. For example, the lessee performance report may contain the traffic of the Web site during the lessee's lease period. In addition, the lessee performance report may contain information comparing the performance of the domain name between different lessees. For example, if a domain name had four lessees, each lessee may receive a report comparing and contrasting the

performance of the domain name during each lessee's respective lease terms. If one of the lessees received a more significant amount of traffic by leasing the domain name during a specific time period, the other lessees could use that information to influence future leases of the domain name. The lessee performance report may also contain recommendations of other domain names. For example, a lessee performance report could include other domain names within the same subject matter as the leased domain name and information concerning their performance. Such information could then be used by the lessee when making future leases of domain names.

Conditional language, such as, among others, "can," "could," "might," or "may," unless specifically stated otherwise, or otherwise understood within the context as used, is generally intended to convey that certain embodiments include, while other embodiments do not include, certain features, elements and/or steps. Thus, such conditional language is not generally intended to imply that features, elements and/or steps are in any way required for one or more embodiments or that one or more embodiments necessarily include logic for deciding, with or without user input or prompting, whether these features, elements and/or steps are included or are to be performed in any particular embodiment.

Any process descriptions, elements, or blocks in the flow diagrams described herein and/or depicted in the attached figures should be understood as potentially representing modules, segments, or portions of code which include one or more executable instructions for implementing specific logical functions or steps in the process. Alternate implementations are included within the scope of the embodiments described herein in which elements or functions may be deleted, executed out of order from that shown or discussed, including substantially concurrently or in reverse order, depending on the functionality involved, as would be understood by those skilled in the art.

While illustrative embodiments have been illustrated and described, it will be appreciated that various changes can be made therein without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention.

What is claimed is:

1. A method of leasing a unique domain name to a plurality of lessees, each of said plurality of lessees having a corresponding network resource, the method comprising:

identifying a unique domain name available for lease;
accepting offers from a plurality of lessees to lease the unique domain name;

concurrently leasing the unique domain name to said plurality of lessees;

assigning to each lessee a percentage of total traffic that is to be directed to the unique domain name; and

one or more computing devices interchangeably redirecting traffic to the network resource of each of said plurality of lessees in accordance with the percentage of total traffic assigned to each of said plurality of lessees.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein the unique domain name available for lease is identified in response to a submitted search request.

3. The method of claim 1, wherein at least one of the offers from said plurality of lessees to lease the unique domain name comprises a bid received in an auction.

4. The method of claim 1, wherein at least one of the offers from said plurality of lessees to lease the unique domain name comprises a fixed price offer.

5. The method of claim 1, wherein at least one of the offers from said plurality of lessees comprises identification infor-

mation for the network resource to which the assigned percentage of total traffic is to be redirected.

6. The method of claim 1, further comprising recommending a price for leasing the unique domain name.

7. The method of claim 1, wherein said traffic is interchangeably redirected to the network resource of each of said plurality of lessees on a random basis until the percentage of total traffic assigned to each of said plurality of lessees is reached.

8. The method of claim 1, wherein said traffic is interchangeably redirected to the network resource of each of said plurality of lessees on a weighted basis until the percentage of total traffic assigned to each of said plurality of lessees is reached.

9. The method of claim 1, wherein a lessor of the unique domain name retains a percentage of the total traffic that is to be directed to the unique domain name.

10. A system for leasing a unique domain name to a plurality of lessees, comprising:

one or more computing devices programmed to:

identify a unique domain name available for lease;

accept offers from a plurality of lessees to lease the unique domain name;

concurrently lease the unique domain name to said plurality of lessees;

assign to each lessee a percentage of total traffic that is to be directed to the unique domain name; and

interchangeably redirect traffic to a network resource of each of said plurality of lessees in accordance with the percentage of total traffic assigned to each of said plurality of lessees.

11. The system of claim 10, wherein the one or more computing devices is further programmed to identify the unique domain name available for lease in response to a submitted search request.

12. The system of claim 10, wherein at least one of the offers from said plurality of lessees to lease the unique domain name comprises at least one of a bid received in an auction and a fixed price offer.

13. The system of claim 10, wherein at least one of the offers from said plurality of lessees comprises identification information for the network resource to which the assigned percentage of total traffic is to be redirected.

14. The system of claim 10, wherein the one or more computing devices is further programmed to recommend a price for leasing the unique domain name.

15. The system of claim 14, wherein the price for leasing the unique domain name is recommended based on performance of the unique domain name.

16. The system of claim 10, wherein said traffic is interchangeably redirected to the network resource of each of said plurality of lessees on a random basis until the percentage of total traffic assigned to each of said plurality of lessees is reached.

17. The system of claim 10, wherein said traffic is interchangeably redirected to the network resource of each of said plurality of lessees on a weighted basis until the percentage of total traffic assigned to each of said plurality of lessees is reached.

18. The system of claim 10, wherein a lessor of the unique domain name retains a percentage of the total traffic that is to be directed to the unique domain name.

19. A computer-readable storage medium storing instructions that when executed by a computing device perform a method comprising:

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identifying a unique domain name available for lease;
accepting offers from a plurality of lessees to lease the
unique domain name;
concurrently leasing the unique domain name to said plu-
rality of lessees;
assigning to each lessee a percentage of total traffic that is
to be directed to the unique domain name; and
interchangeably redirecting traffic to a network resource of
each of said plurality of lessees in accordance with the
percentage of total traffic assigned to each of said plu-
rality of lessees.

20. The computer-readable storage medium of claim **19**,
wherein the unique domain name available for lease is iden-
tified in response to a submitted search request.

21. The computer-readable storage medium of claim **19**,
wherein at least one of the offers from said plurality of lessees
to lease the unique domain name comprises a bid received in
an auction.

22. The computer-readable storage medium of claim **19**,
further storing instructions that when executed by a comput-

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ing device perform a method further comprising recommend-
ing a lease price for the unique domain name.

23. The computer-readable storage medium of claim **19**,
wherein said traffic is interchangeably redirected to the net-
work resource of each of said plurality of lessees on a random
basis until the percentage of total traffic assigned to each of
said plurality of lessees is reached.

24. The computer-readable storage medium of claim **19**,
wherein said traffic is interchangeably redirected to the net-
work resource of each of said plurality of lessees based on a
weight associated with each of said plurality of lessees until
the percentage of total traffic assigned to each of said plurality
of lessees is reached.

25. The computer-readable storage medium of claim **19**,
wherein a lessor of the unique domain name retains a percent-
age of the total traffic that is to be directed to the unique
domain name.

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