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(54) **SECURE STREAMING CONTAINER**

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(60) Provisional application No. 60/453,950, filed on Mar. 13, 2003.

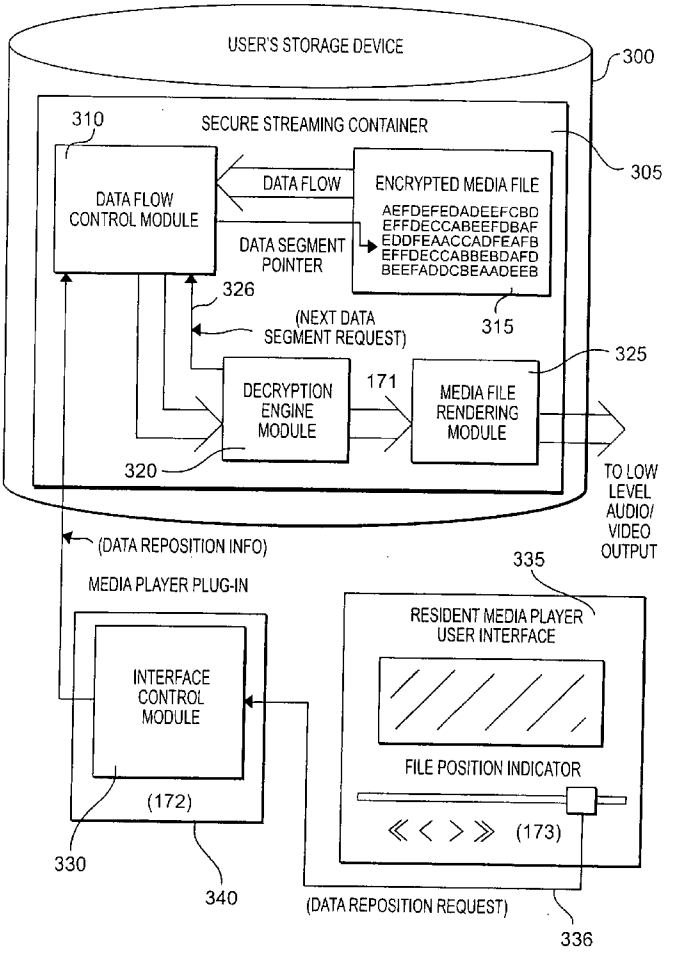
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(52) **U.S. Cl.** **713/189**; 380/273; 726/27

(57) **ABSTRACT**

A system and method for securely streaming encrypted digital media content out of a digital container to a user's media player. This streaming occurs after the digital container has been delivered to the user's machine and after the user has been authorized to access the encrypted content. The user's operating system and media player treat the data stream as if it were a being delivered over the Internet (or other network) from a streaming web server. However, no Internet connection is required after the container has been delivered to the user and the data stream suffers no quality loss due to network traffic or web server access problems. In this process of the invention, the encrypted content files are decrypted and fed to the user's media player in real time and are never written to the user's hard drive or storage device. This process makes unauthorized copying of the digital content contained in the digital container virtually impossible.



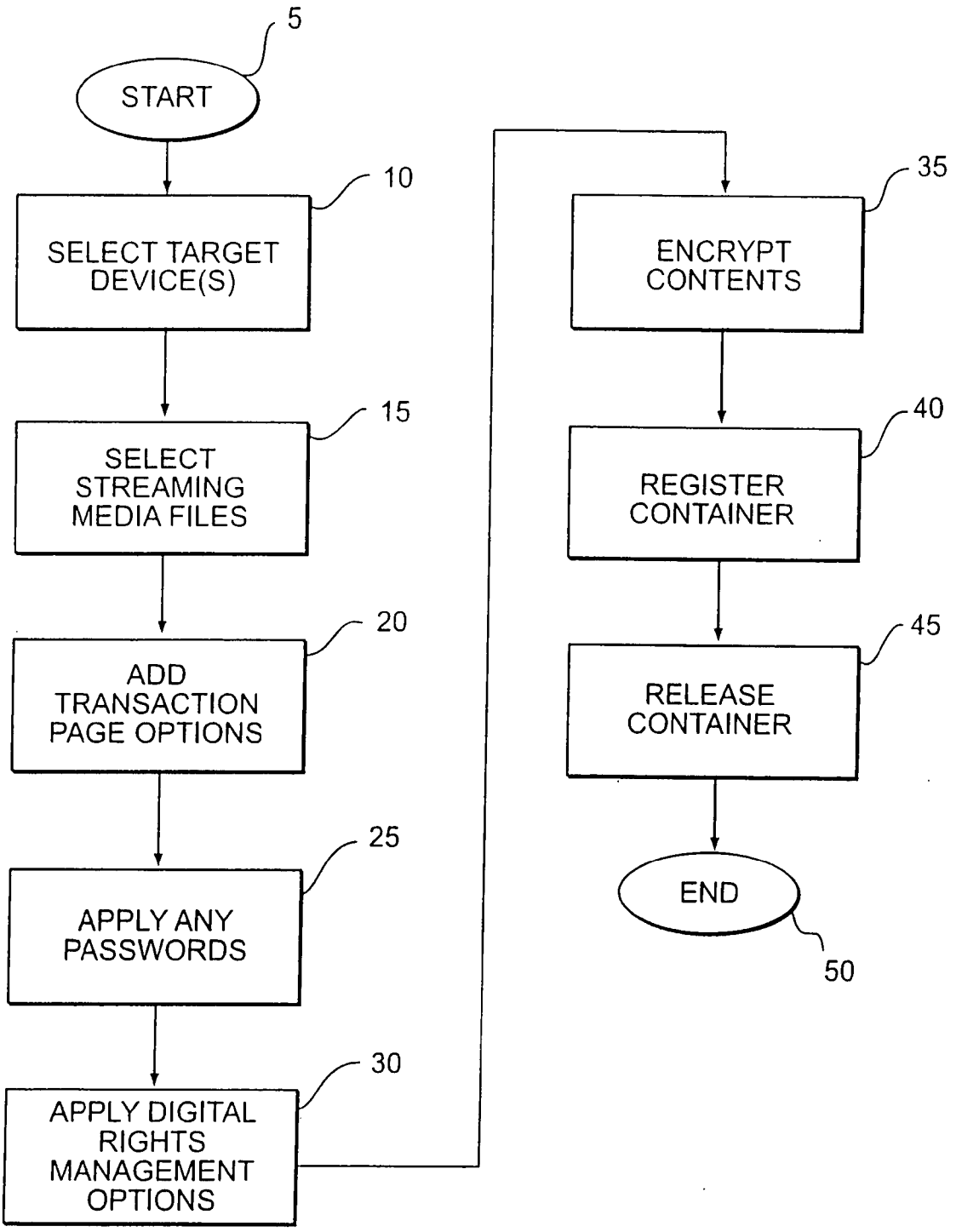

5
START
10
SELECT TARGET DEVICE(S)
15
SELECT STREAMING MEDIA FILES
20
ADD TRANSACTION PAGE OPTIONS
25
APPLY ANY PASSWORDS
30
APPLY DIGITAL RIGHTS MANAGEMENT OPTIONS
35
ENCRYPT CONTENTS
40
REGISTER CONTAINER
45
RELEASE CONTAINER
END
50

FIG. 1A

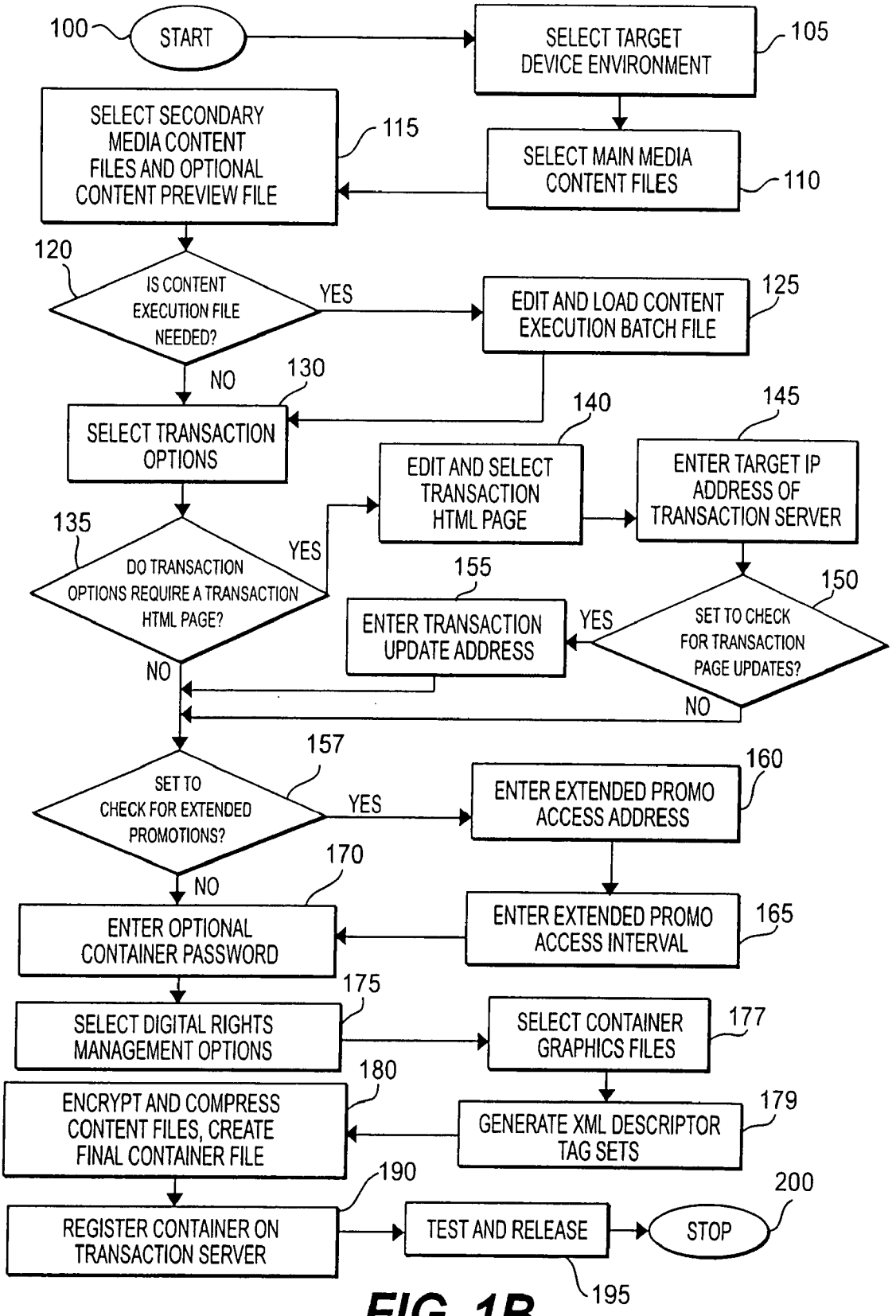

100
START
SELECT TARGET DEVICE ENVIRONMENT
105
SELECT MAIN MEDIA CONTENT FILES
110
SELECT SECONDARY MEDIA CONTENT FILES AND OPTIONAL CONTENT PREVIEW FILE
115
120
IS CONTENT EXECUTION FILE NEEDED?
YES
EDIT AND LOAD CONTENT EXECUTION BATCH FILE
125
NO
130
SELECT TRANSACTION OPTIONS
140
EDIT AND SELECT TRANSACTION HTML PAGE
145
ENTER TARGET IP ADDRESS OF TRANSACTION SERVER
135
DO TRANSACTION OPTIONS REQUIRE A TRANSACTION HTML PAGE?
YES
155
ENTER TRANSACTION UPDATE ADDRESS
150
SET TO CHECK FOR TRANSACTION PAGE UPDATES?
YES
NO
NO
157
SET TO CHECK FOR EXTENDED PROMOTIONS?
YES
160
ENTER EXTENDED PROMO ACCESS ADDRESS
NO
170
ENTER OPTIONAL CONTAINER PASSWORD
ENTER EXTENDED PROMO ACCESS INTERVAL
165
175
SELECT DIGITAL RIGHTS MANAGEMENT OPTIONS
SELECT CONTAINER GRAPHICS FILES
177
180
ENCRYPT AND COMPRESS CONTENT FILES, CREATE FINAL CONTAINER FILE
GENERATE XML DESCRIPTOR TAG SETS
179
190
REGISTER CONTAINER ON TRANSACTION SERVER
TEST AND RELEASE
200
STOP
195

FIG. 1B

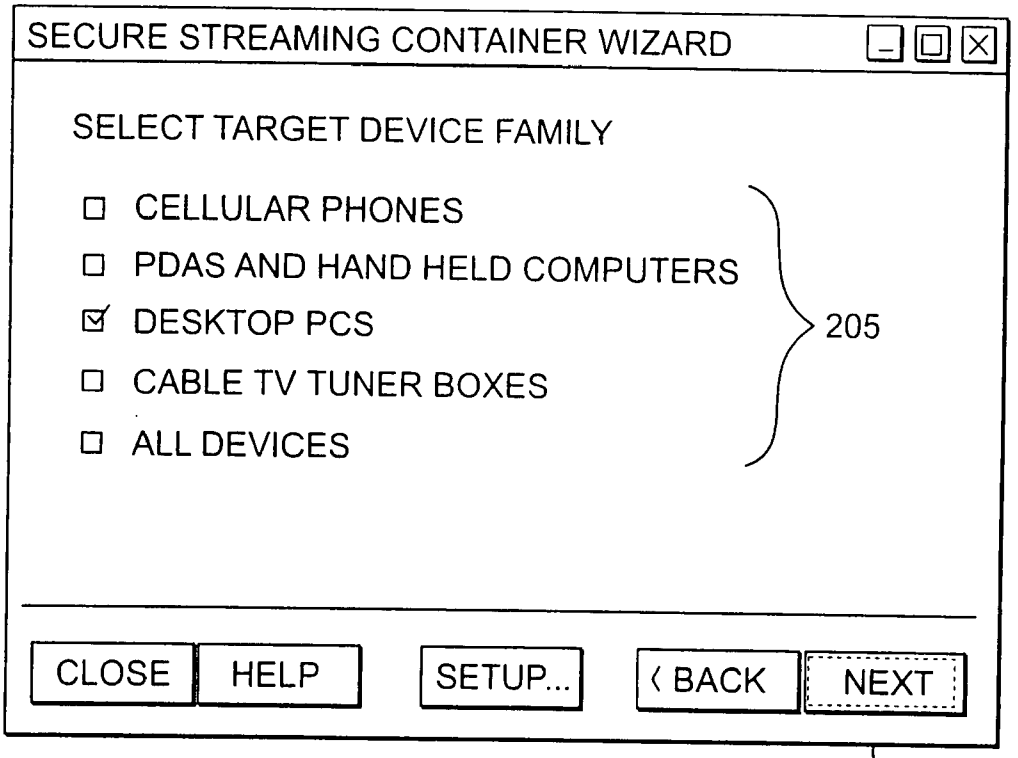

SECURE STREAMING CONTAINER WIZARD
SELECT TARGET DEVICE FAMILY
CELLULAR PHONES
PDAS AND HAND HELD COMPUTERS
DESKTOP PCS
CABLE TV TUNER BOXES
ALL DEVICES
205
CLOSE
HELP
SETUP...
BACK
NEXT
200

FIG. 2A

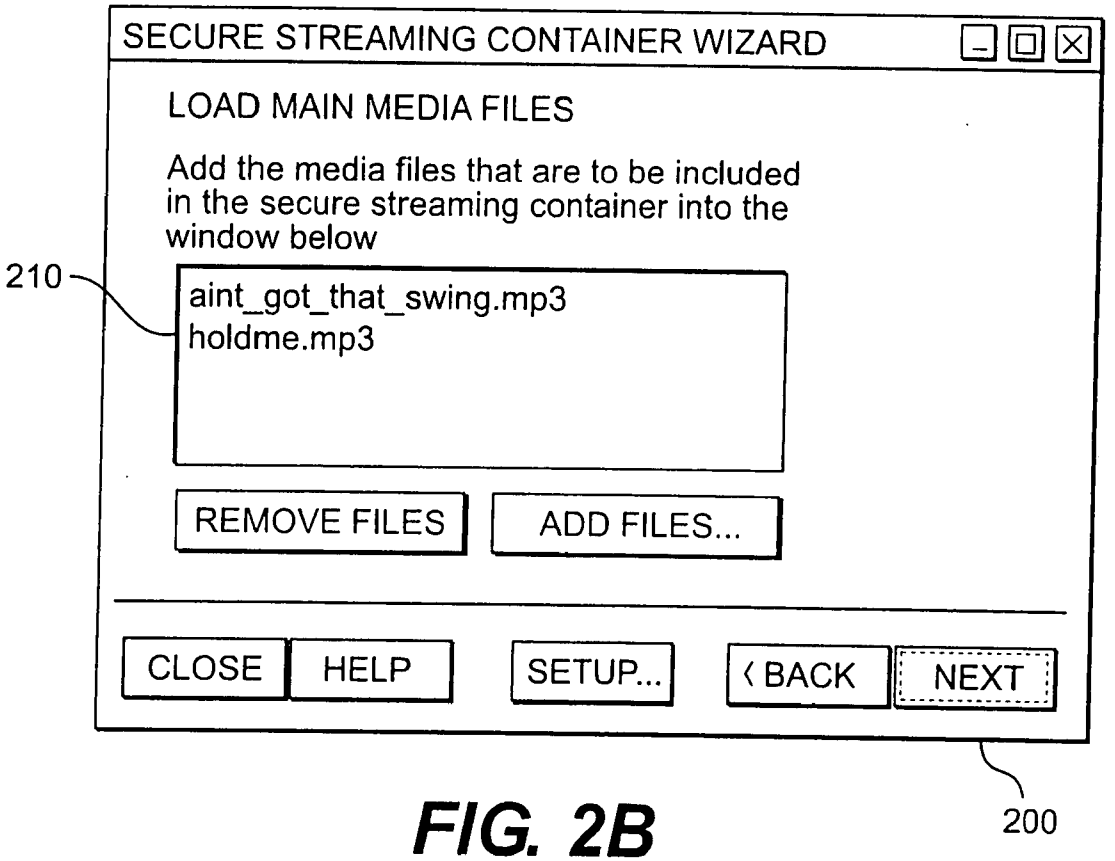

SECURE STREAMING CONTAINER WIZARD
LOAD MAIN MEDIA FILES
Add the media files that are to be included in the secure streaming container into the window below
210
aint_got_that_swing.mp3
holdme.mp3
REMOVE FILES
ADD FILES...
CLOSE
HELP
SETUP...
BACK
NEXT
200

FIG. 2B

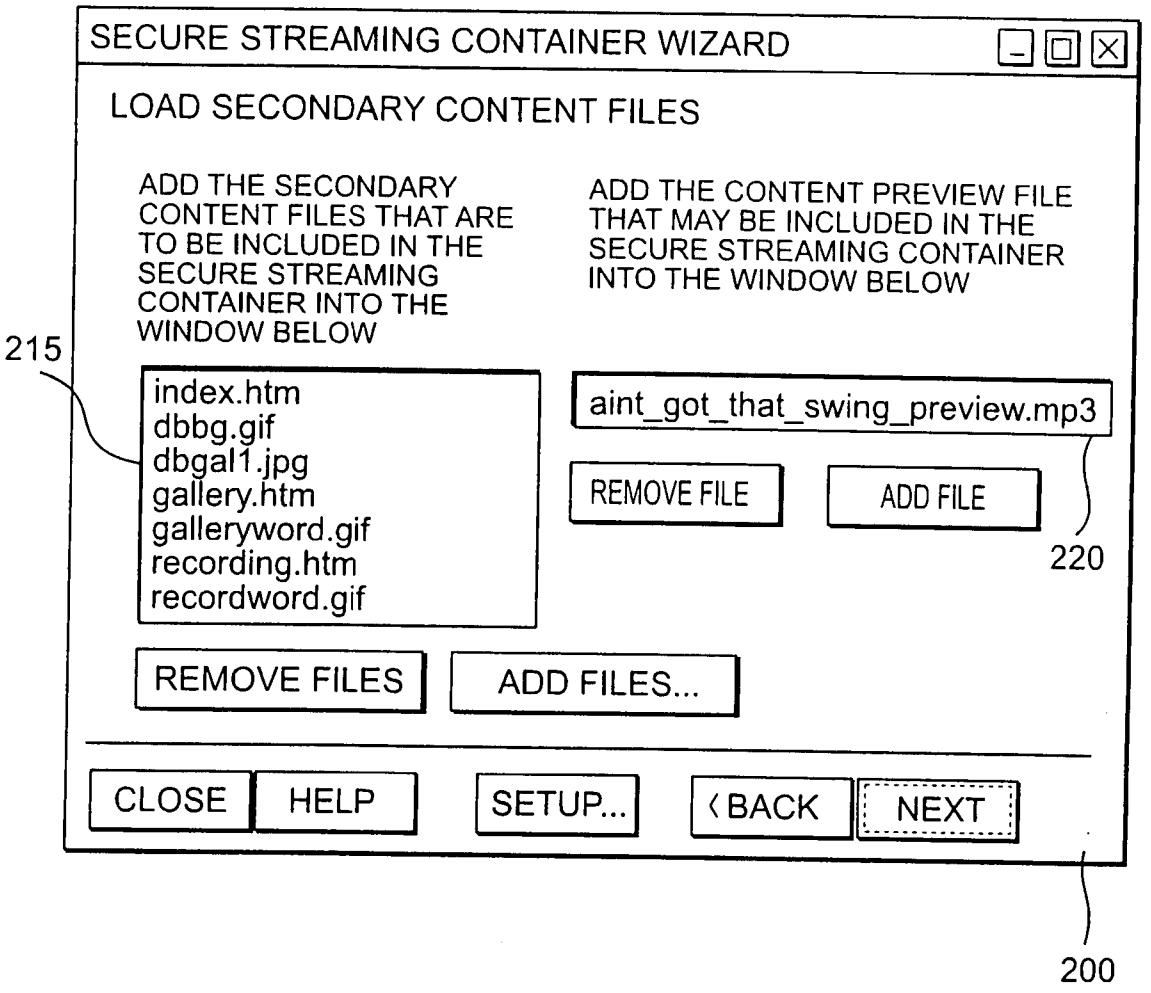

SECURE STREAMING CONTAINER WIZARD
LOAD SECONDARY CONTENT FILES
ADD THE SECONDARY CONTENT FILES THAT ARE TO BE INCLUDED IN THE SECURE STREAMING CONTAINER INTO THE WINDOW BELOW
ADD THE CONTENT PREVIEW FILE THAT MAY BE INCLUDED IN THE SECURE STREAMING CONTAINER INTO THE WINDOW BELOW
215
index.htm
dbbg.gif
dbgal1.jpg
gallery.htm
galleryword.gif
recording.htm
recordword.gif
aint_got_that_swing_preview.mp3
REMOVE FILE
ADD FILE
220
REMOVE FILES
ADD FILES...
CLOSE
HELP
SETUP...
〈BACK
NEXT
200

FIG. 2C

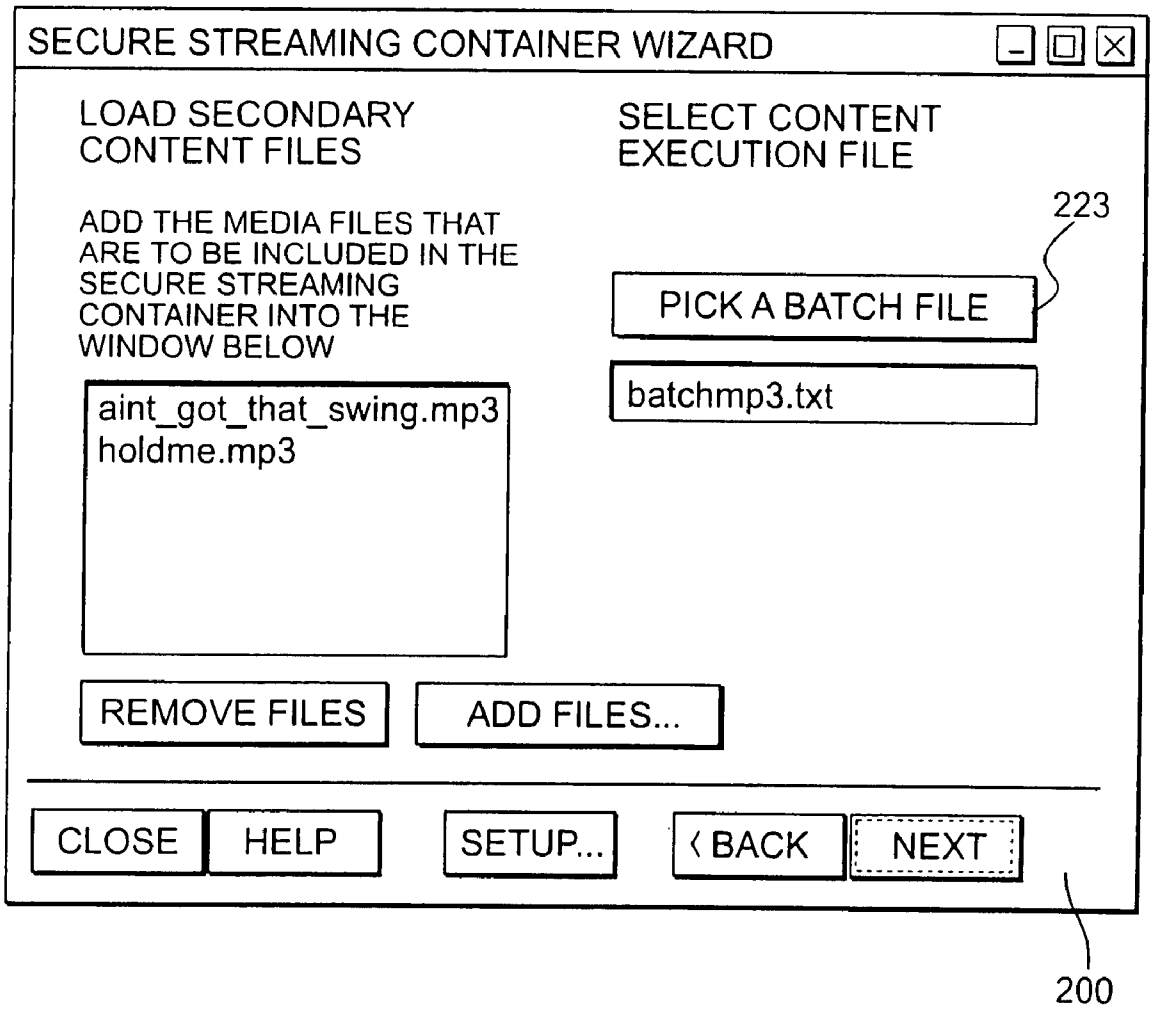

SECURE STREAMING CONTAINER WIZARD
LOAD SECONDARY CONTENT FILES
ADD THE MEDIA FILES THAT ARE TO BE INCLUDED IN THE SECURE STREAMING CONTAINER INTO THE WINDOW BELOW
aint_got_that_swing.mp3
holdme.mp3
REMOVE FILES
ADD FILES...
SELECT CONTENT EXECUTION FILE
223
PICK A BATCH FILE
batchmp3.txt
CLOSE
HELP
SETUP...
〈 BACK
NEXT
200

FIG. 2D

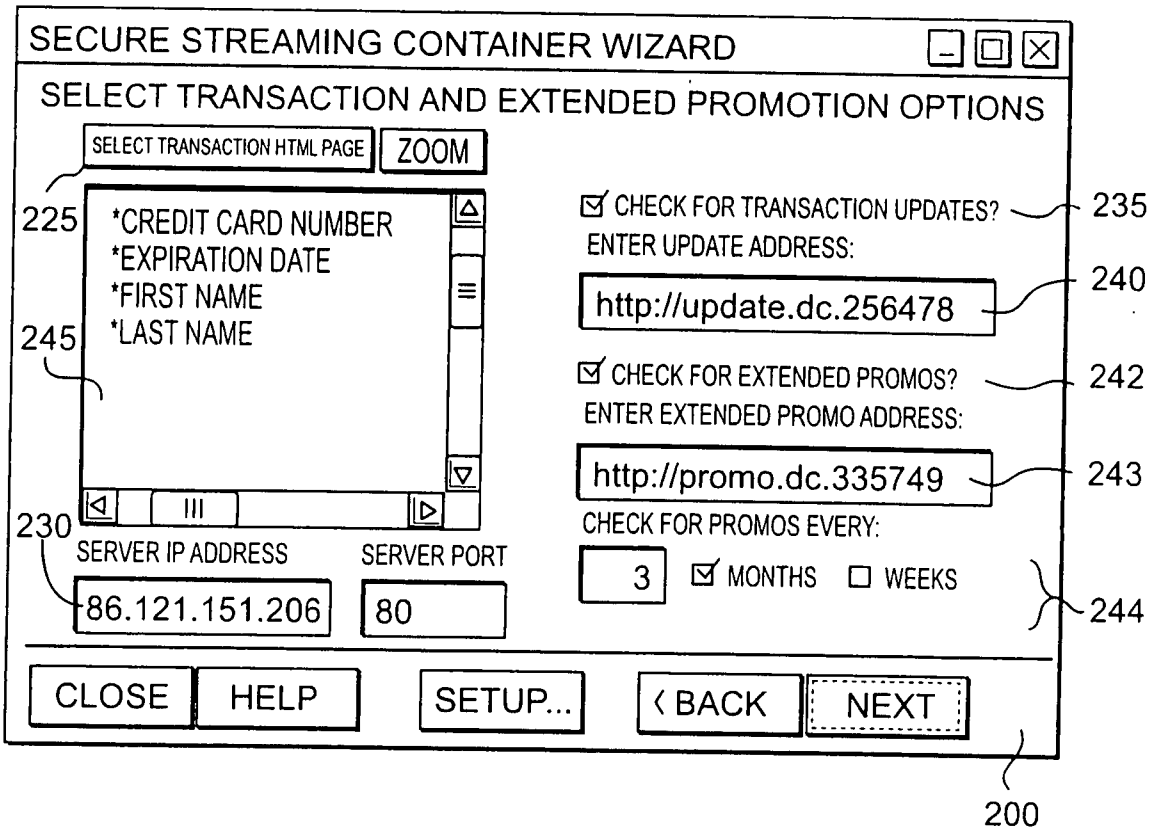

SECURE STREAMING CONTAINER WIZARD
SELECT TRANSACTION AND EXTENDED PROMOTION OPTIONS
SELECT TRANSACTION HTML PAGE
ZOOM
225
*CREDIT CARD NUMBER
*EXPIRATION DATE
*FIRST NAME
*LAST NAME
245
230
SERVER IP ADDRESS
86.121.151.206
SERVER PORT
80
CHECK FOR TRANSACTION UPDATES?
235
ENTER UPDATE ADDRESS:
http://update.dc.256478
240
CHECK FOR EXTENDED PROMOS?
242
ENTER EXTENDED PROMO ADDRESS:
http://promo.dc.335749
243
CHECK FOR PROMOS EVERY:
3
MONTHS
WEEKS
244
CLOSE
HELP
SETUP...
BACK
NEXT
200

FIG. 2E

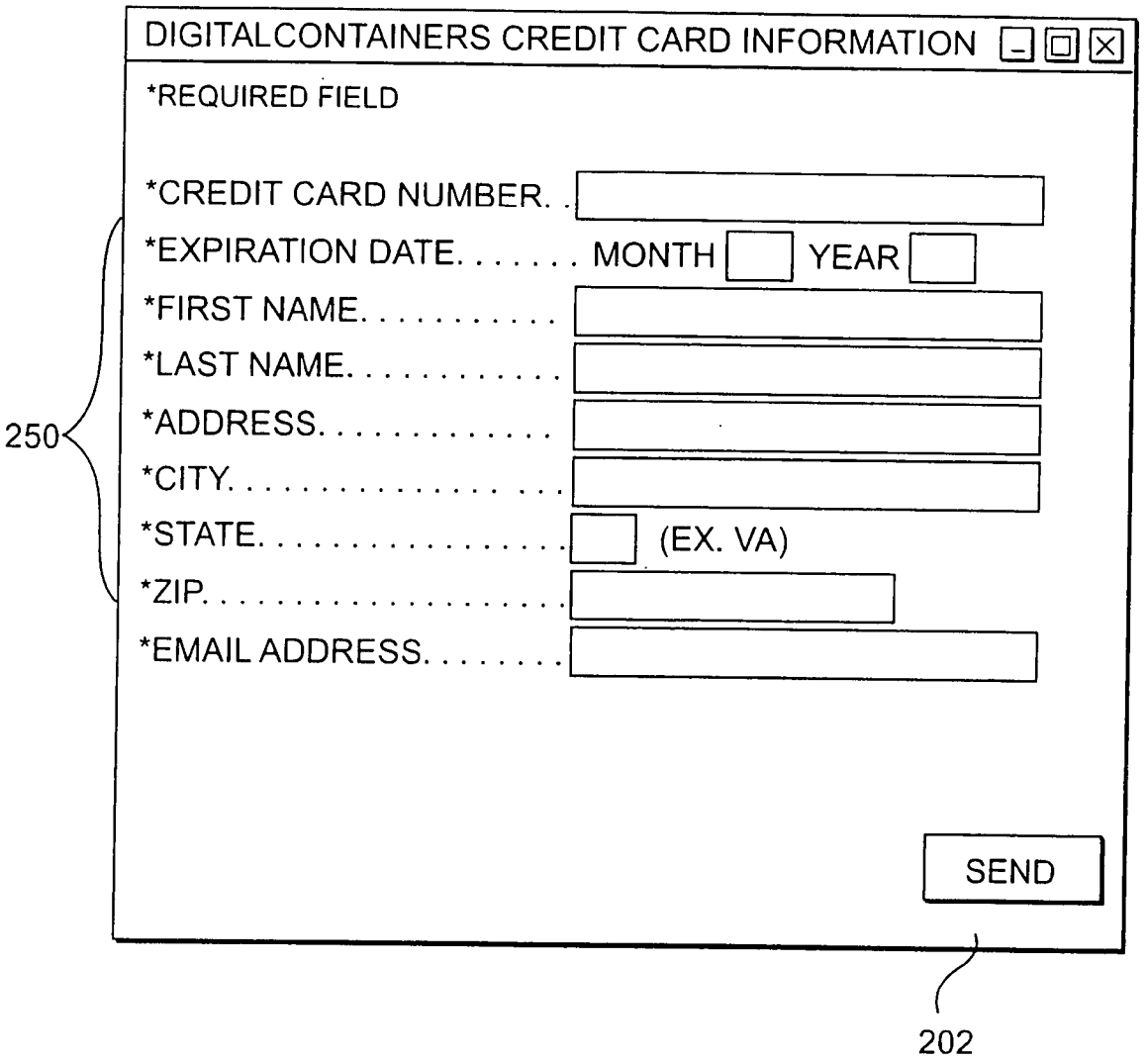

DIGITALCONTAINERS CREDIT CARD INFORMATION
*REQUIRED FIELD
*CREDIT CARD NUMBER. .
*EXPIRATION DATE. . . . . MONTH YEAR
*FIRST NAME. . . . . .
*LAST NAME. . . . . .
*ADDRESS. . . . . .
*CITY. . . . . .
*STATE. . . . . (EX. VA)
*ZIP. . . . . .
*EMAIL ADDRESS. . . . . .
SEND
250
202

FIG. 2F

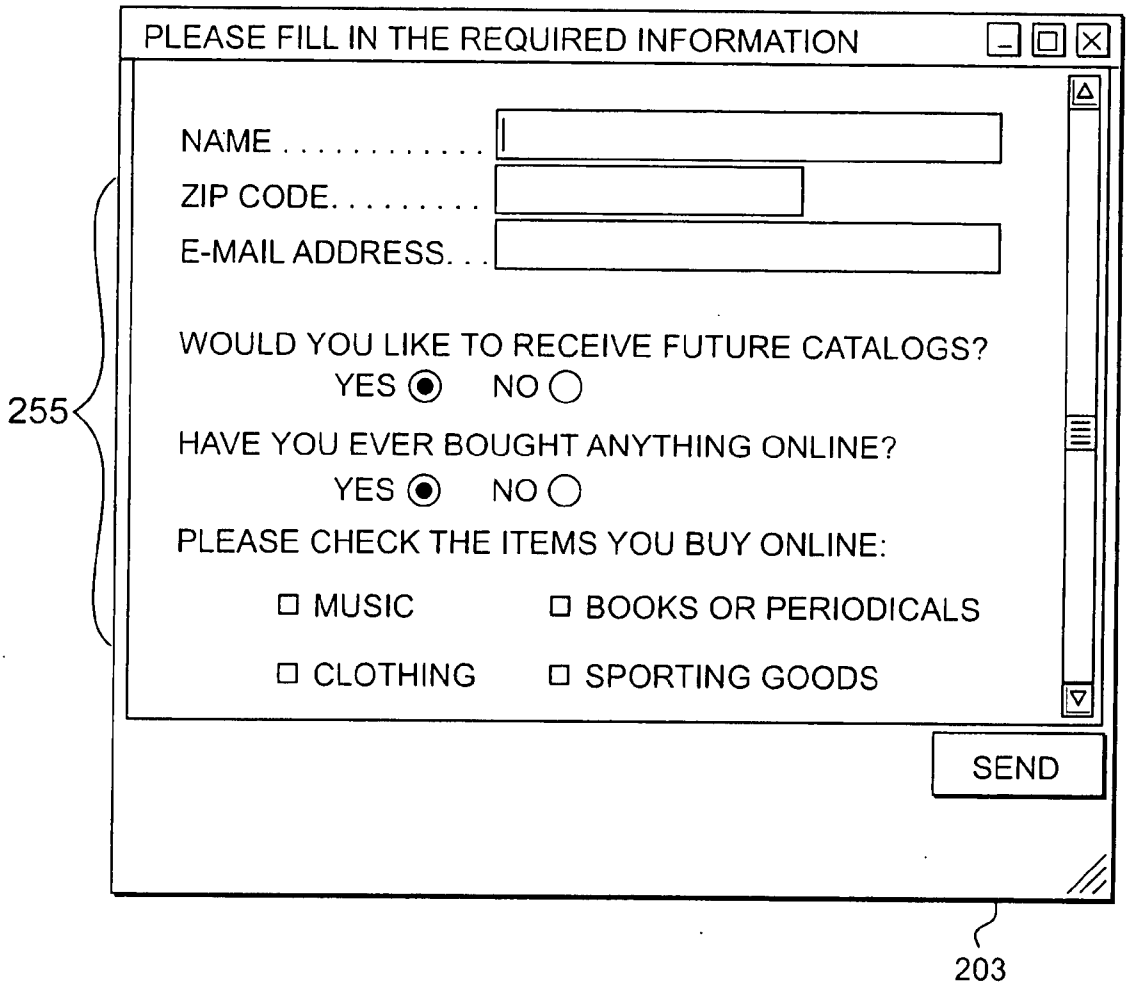

PLEASE FILL IN THE REQUIRED INFORMATION
NAME . . . . . .
ZIP CODE. . . . . .
E-MAIL ADDRESS. . .
WOULD YOU LIKE TO RECEIVE FUTURE CATALOGS?
YES NO
HAVE YOU EVER BOUGHT ANYTHING ONLINE?
YES NO
PLEASE CHECK THE ITEMS YOU BUY ONLINE:
MUSIC
BOOKS OR PERIODICALS
CLOTHING
SPORTING GOODS
SEND
255
203

FIG. 2G

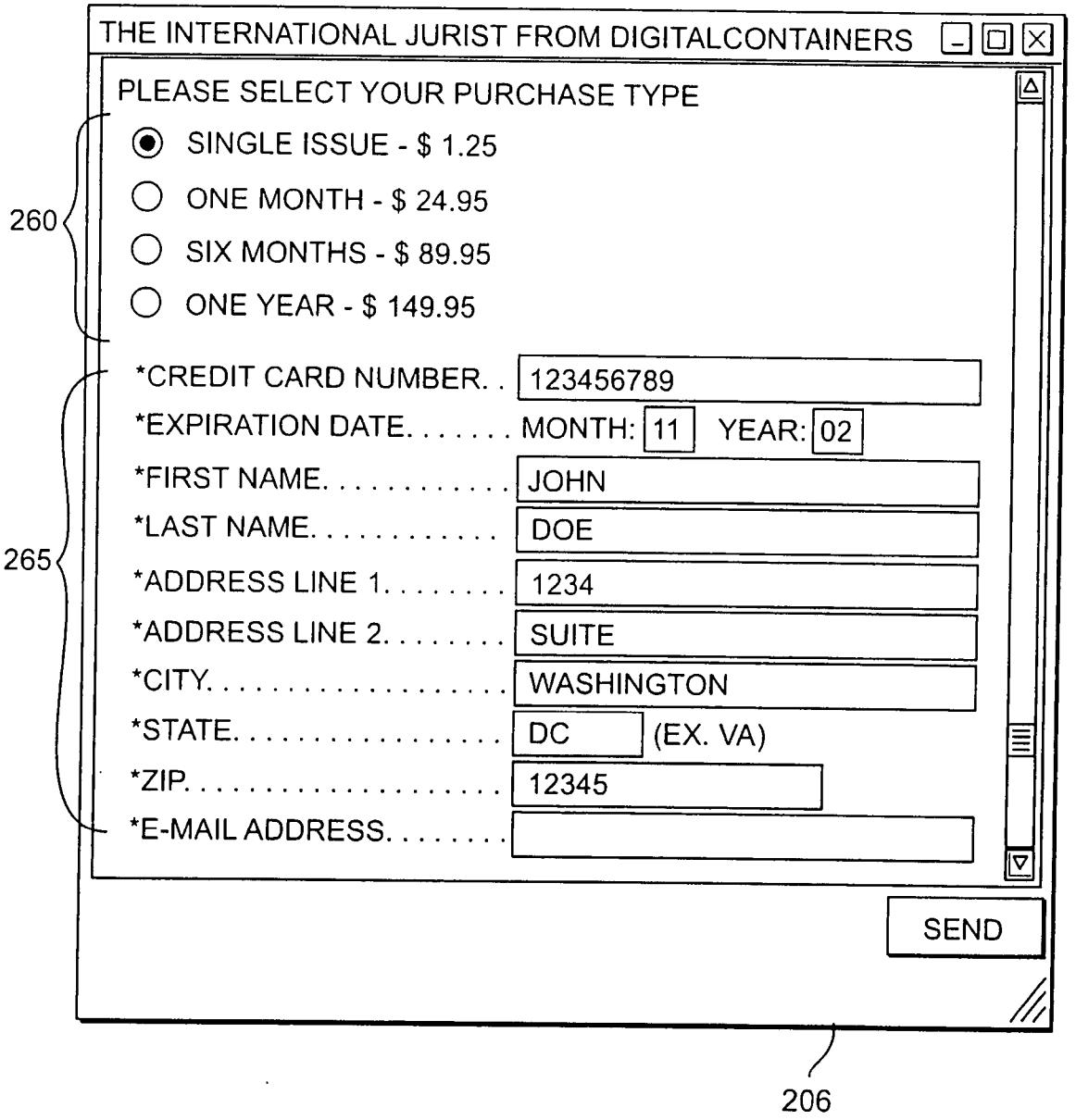

THE INTERNATIONAL JURIST FROM DIGITALCONTAINERS
PLEASE SELECT YOUR PURCHASE TYPE
SINGLE ISSUE - $ 1.25
ONE MONTH - $ 24.95
SIX MONTHS - $ 89.95
ONE YEAR - $ 149.95
260
*CREDIT CARD NUMBER. . 123456789
*EXPIRATION DATE. . . . . MONTH: 11 YEAR: 02
*FIRST NAME. . . . . JOHN
*LAST NAME. . . . . DOE
*ADDRESS LINE 1. 1234
*ADDRESS LINE 2. . . . . SUITE
*CITY. . . . . WASHINGTON
*STATE. . . . . DC (EX. VA)
*ZIP. 12345
*E-MAIL ADDRESS. . . . . .
265
SEND
206

FIG. 2H


AN OFFER FROM DIGITALCONTAINERS
GET AN APPROVAL NOW.
(NOT A MONTH FROM NOW)
Apply for Business Gold and get an online decision in less than 60 seconds.
• First year FEE-FREE*
• Save automatically at FedEx,* Kinko's,* Staples,* and more†
• No pre-set spending limit$
OPEN
CLICK HERE TO APPLY
*The fee is $75 thereafter for each Basic and Additional Card and may be tax deductable. †Terms and conditions apply. $Purchases are approved based on a variety of factors, including account history, credit records, and personal resources.
207

FIG. 2I

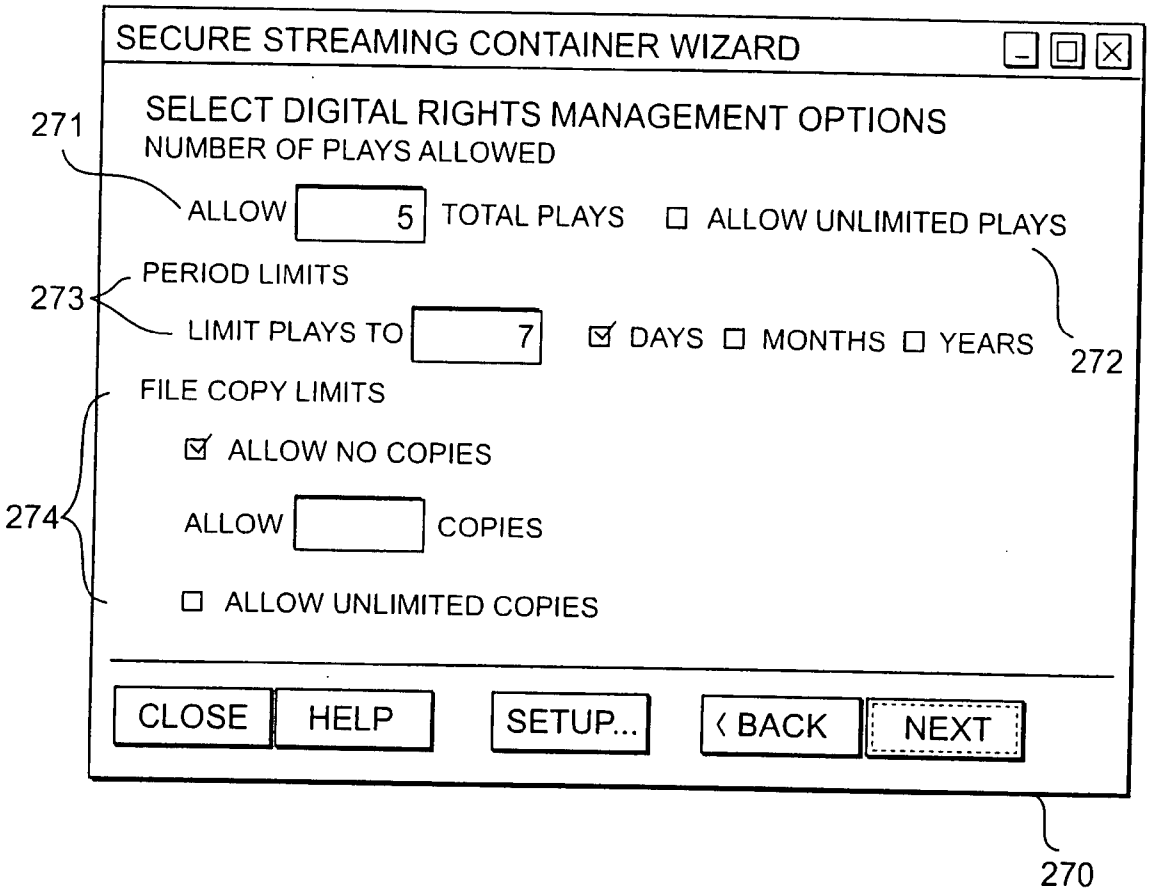

SECURE STREAMING CONTAINER WIZARD
SELECT DIGITAL RIGHTS MANAGEMENT OPTIONS
NUMBER OF PLAYS ALLOWED
ALLOW 5 TOTAL PLAYS
ALLOW UNLIMITED PLAYS
PERIOD LIMITS
LIMIT PLAYS TO 7
DAYS MONTHS YEARS
FILE COPY LIMITS
ALLOW NO COPIES
ALLOW COPIES
ALLOW UNLIMITED COPIES
CLOSE
HELP
SETUP...
BACK
NEXT
271
272
273
274
270

FIG. 2J

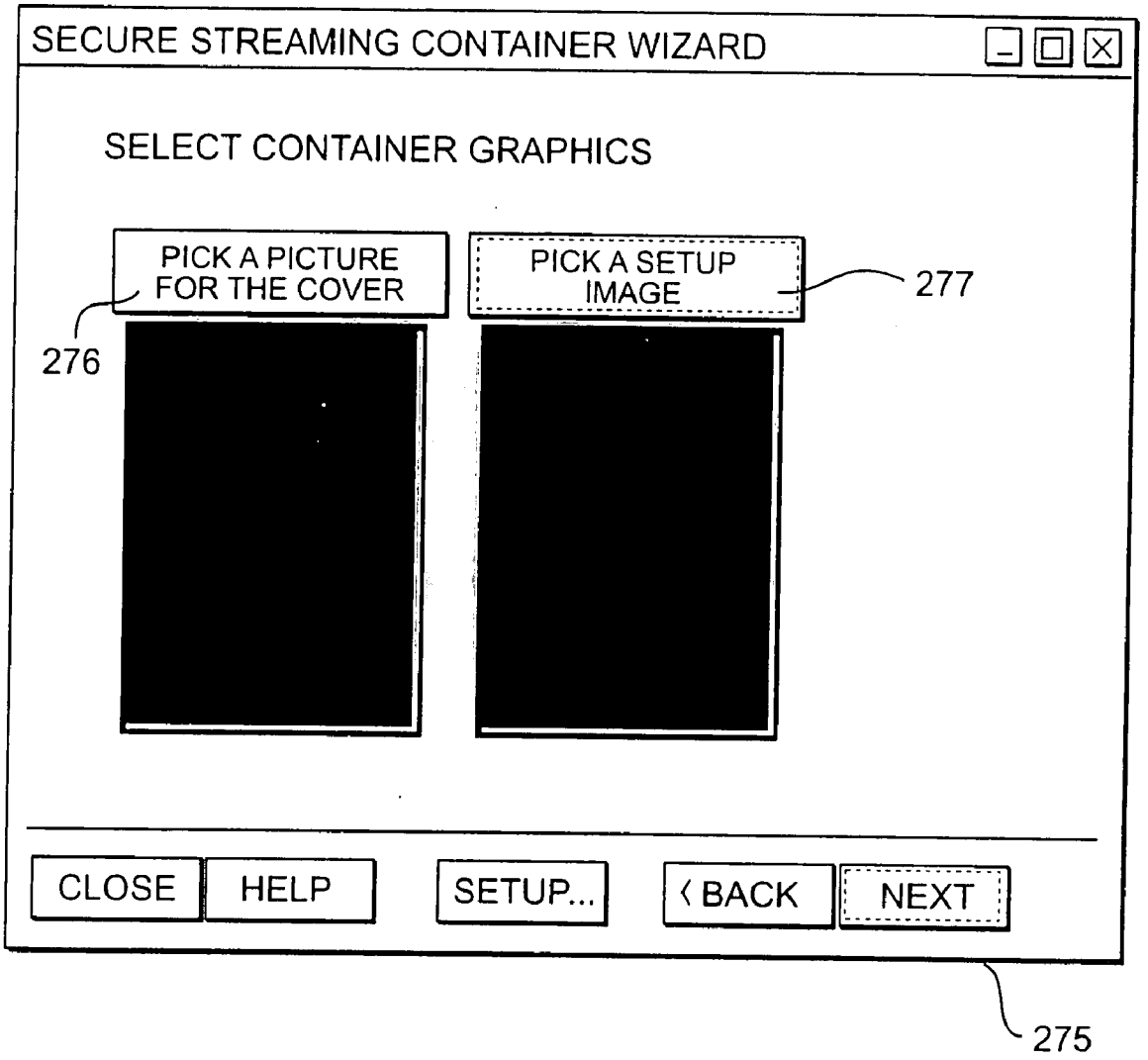

SECURE STREAMING CONTAINER WIZARD
SELECT CONTAINER GRAPHICS
PICK A PICTURE FOR THE COVER
PICK A SETUP IMAGE
277
276
CLOSE
HELP
SETUP...
〈 BACK
NEXT
275

FIG. 2K

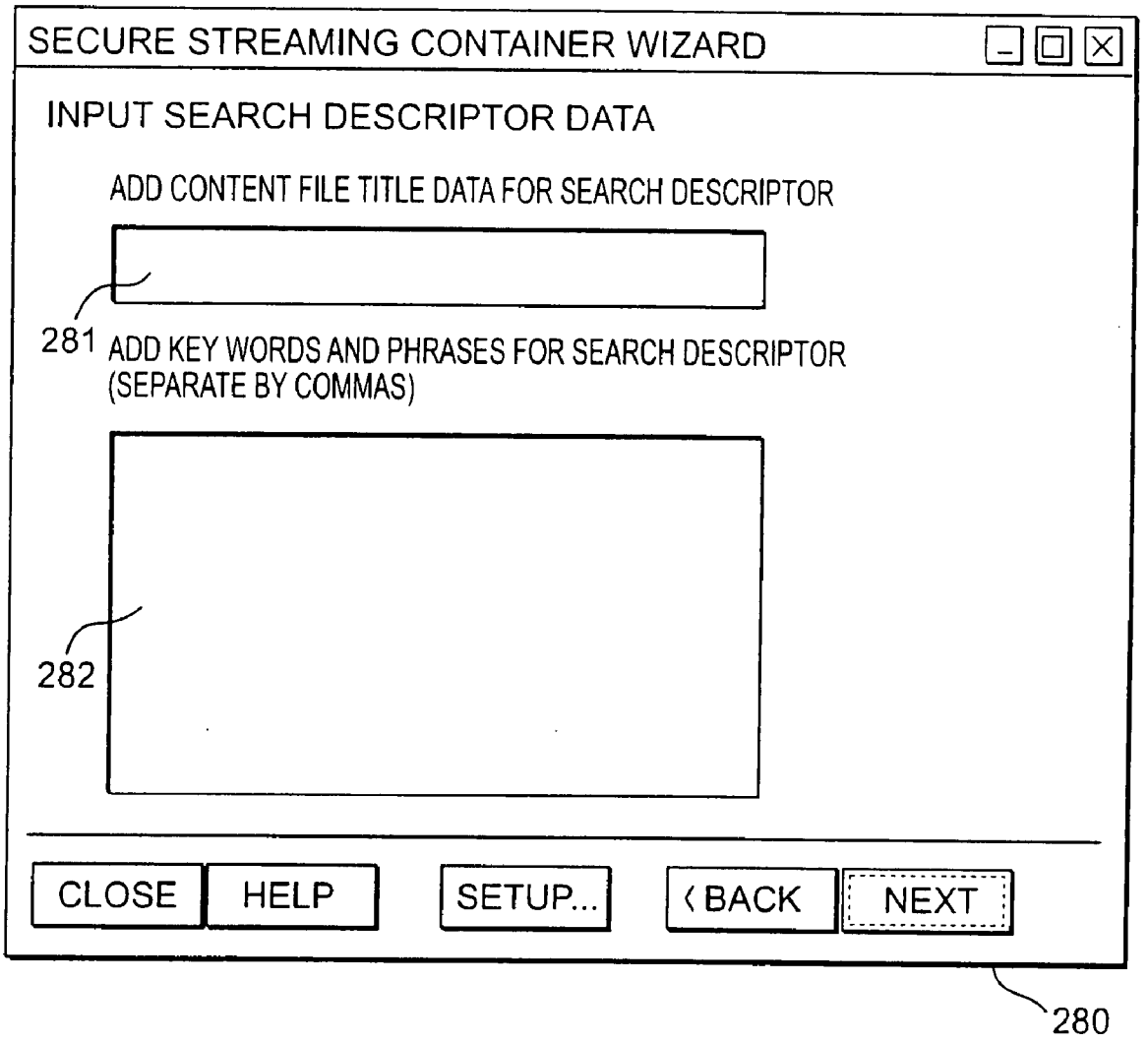

SECURE STREAMING CONTAINER WIZARD
INPUT SEARCH DESCRIPTOR DATA
ADD CONTENT FILE TITLE DATA FOR SEARCH DESCRIPTOR
281
ADD KEY WORDS AND PHRASES FOR SEARCH DESCRIPTOR
(SEPARATE BY COMMAS)
282
CLOSE
HELP
SETUP...
〈 BACK
NEXT
280

FIG. 3

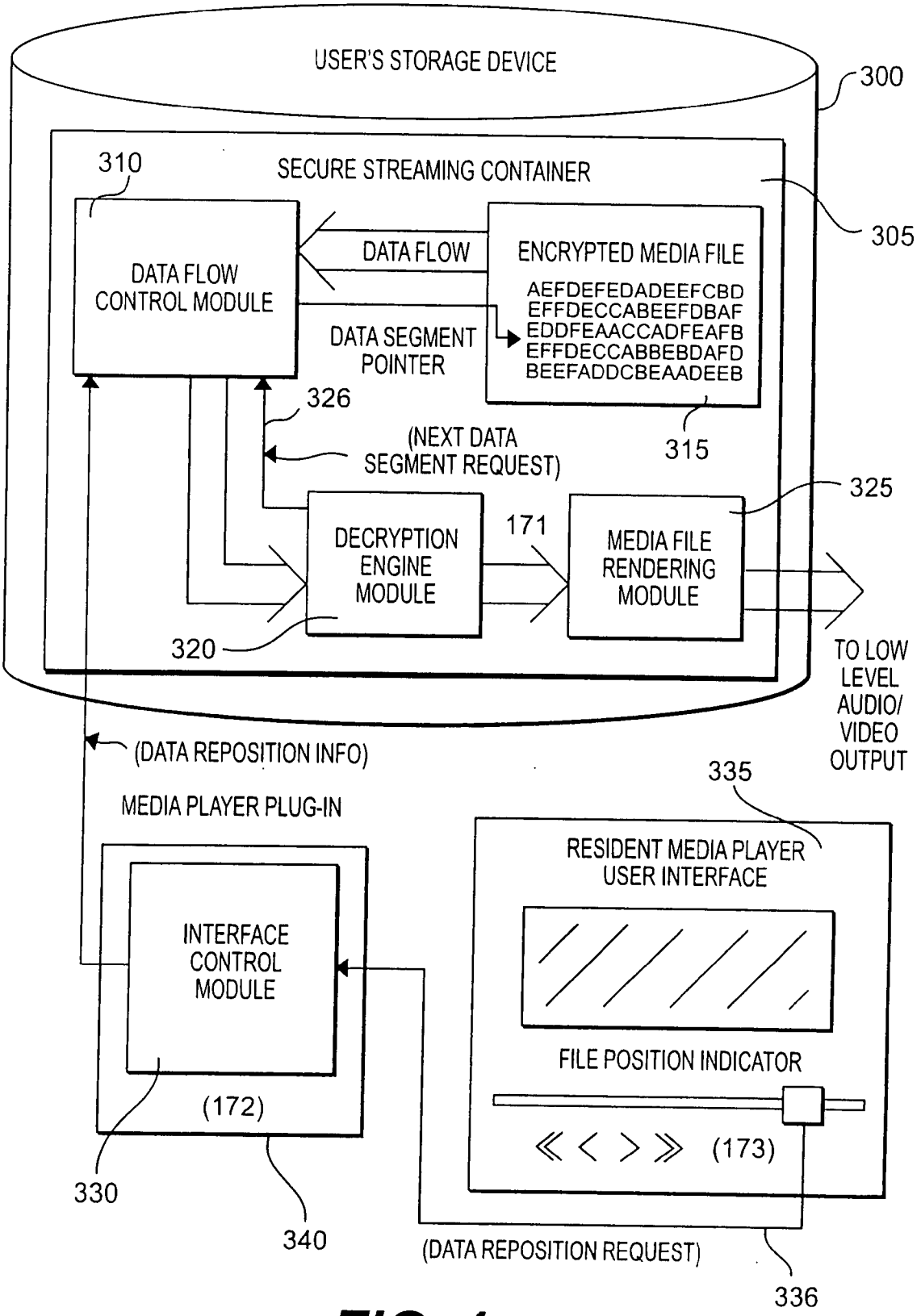

USER'S STORAGE DEVICE
300
310
SECURE STREAMING CONTAINER
305
DATA FLOW CONTROL MODULE
DATA FLOW
ENCRYPTED MEDIA FILE
AEFDEFEDADEEFCBD
EFFDECCABEEFDBAF
EDDFEAACCADFEAFB
EFFDECCABBEBDAFD
BEEFADDCBEAADEEB
DATA SEGMENT POINTER
326
(NEXT DATA SEGMENT REQUEST)
315
325
DECRYPTION ENGINE MODULE
171
MEDIA FILE RENDERING MODULE
320
TO LOW LEVEL AUDIO/ VIDEO OUTPUT
(DATA REPOSITION INFO)
335
MEDIA PLAYER PLUG-IN
RESIDENT MEDIA PLAYER USER INTERFACE
INTERFACE CONTROL MODULE
FILE POSITION INDICATOR
(172)
(173)
330
340
(DATA REPOSITION REQUEST)
336

FIG. 4

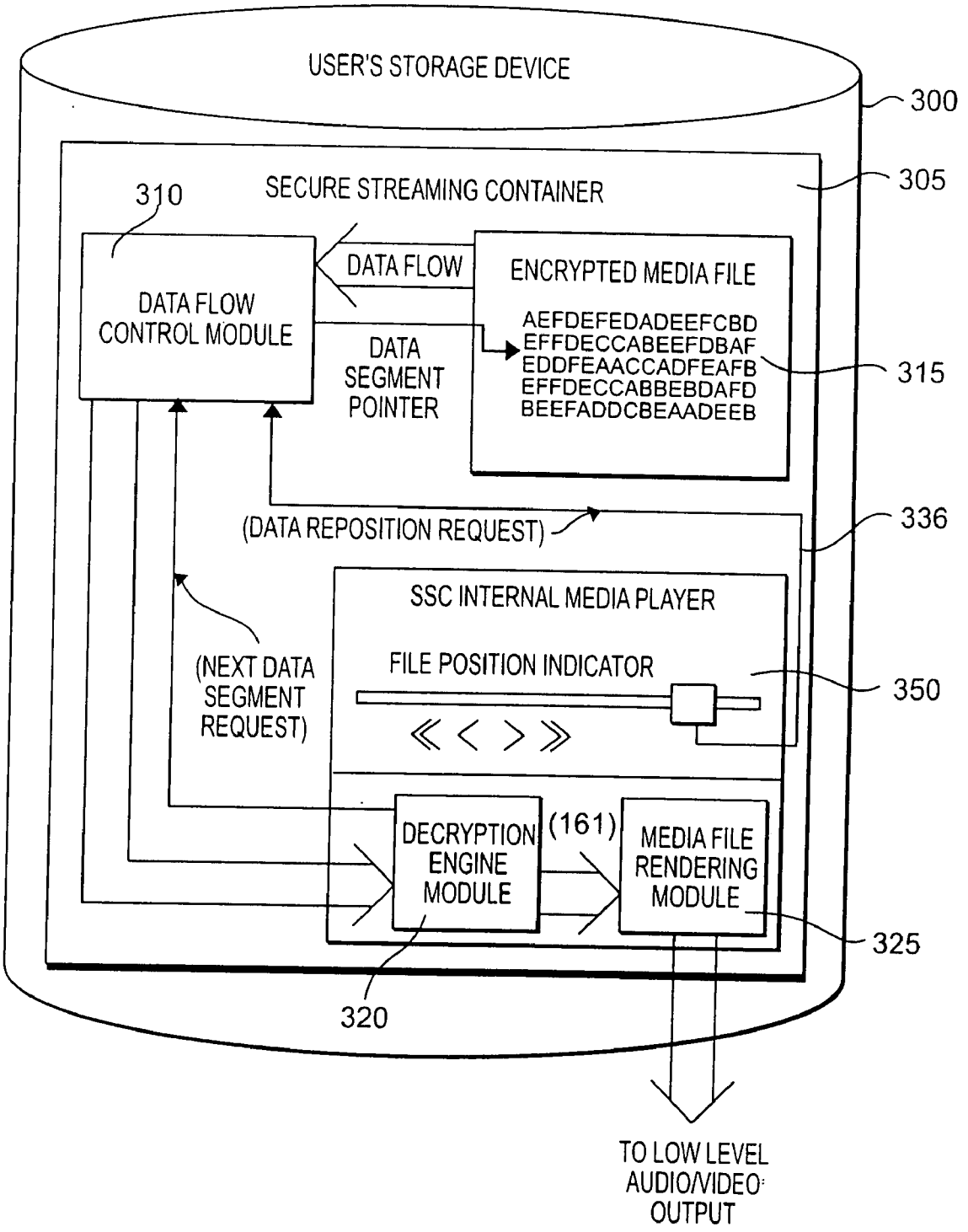

USER'S STORAGE DEVICE
300
SECURE STREAMING CONTAINER
305
310
DATA FLOW CONTROL MODULE
DATA FLOW
ENCRYPTED MEDIA FILE
AEFDEFEDADEEFCBD
EFFDECCABEEFDBAF
EDDFEAACCADFEAFB
EFFDECCABBEBDAFD
BEEFADDCBEAADEEB
315
DATA SEGMENT POINTER
(DATA REPOSITION REQUEST)
336
SSC INTERNAL MEDIA PLAYER
FILE POSITION INDICATOR
350
(NEXT DATA SEGMENT REQUEST)
DECRYPTION ENGINE MODULE
(161)
MEDIA FILE RENDERING MODULE
325
320
TO LOW LEVEL AUDIO/VIDEO OUTPUT

FIG. 5

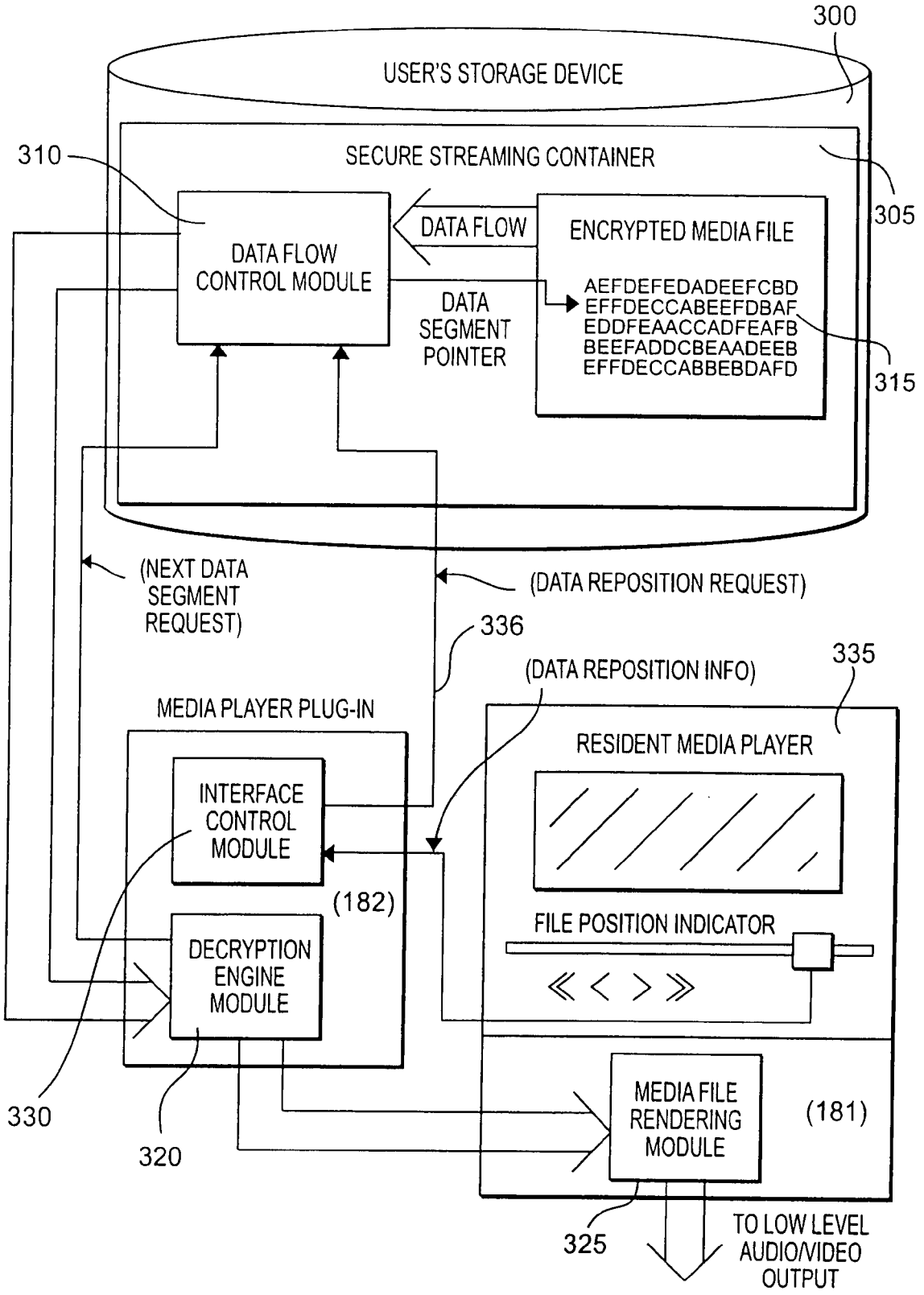

300
USER'S STORAGE DEVICE
310
SECURE STREAMING CONTAINER
305
DATA FLOW CONTROL MODULE
DATA FLOW
ENCRYPTED MEDIA FILE
AEFDEFEDADEEFCBD
EFFDECCABEEFDBAF
EDDFEAACCADFEAFB
BEEFADDCBEAADEEB
EFFDECCABBEBDAFD
DATA SEGMENT POINTER
315
(NEXT DATA SEGMENT REQUEST)
(DATA REPOSITION REQUEST)
336
(DATA REPOSITION INFO)
335
MEDIA PLAYER PLUG-IN
RESIDENT MEDIA PLAYER
INTERFACE CONTROL MODULE
(182)
FILE POSITION INDICATOR
DECRYPTION ENGINE MODULE
MEDIA FILE RENDERING MODULE
(181)
330
320
325
TO LOW LEVEL AUDIO/VIDEO OUTPUT

FIG. 6

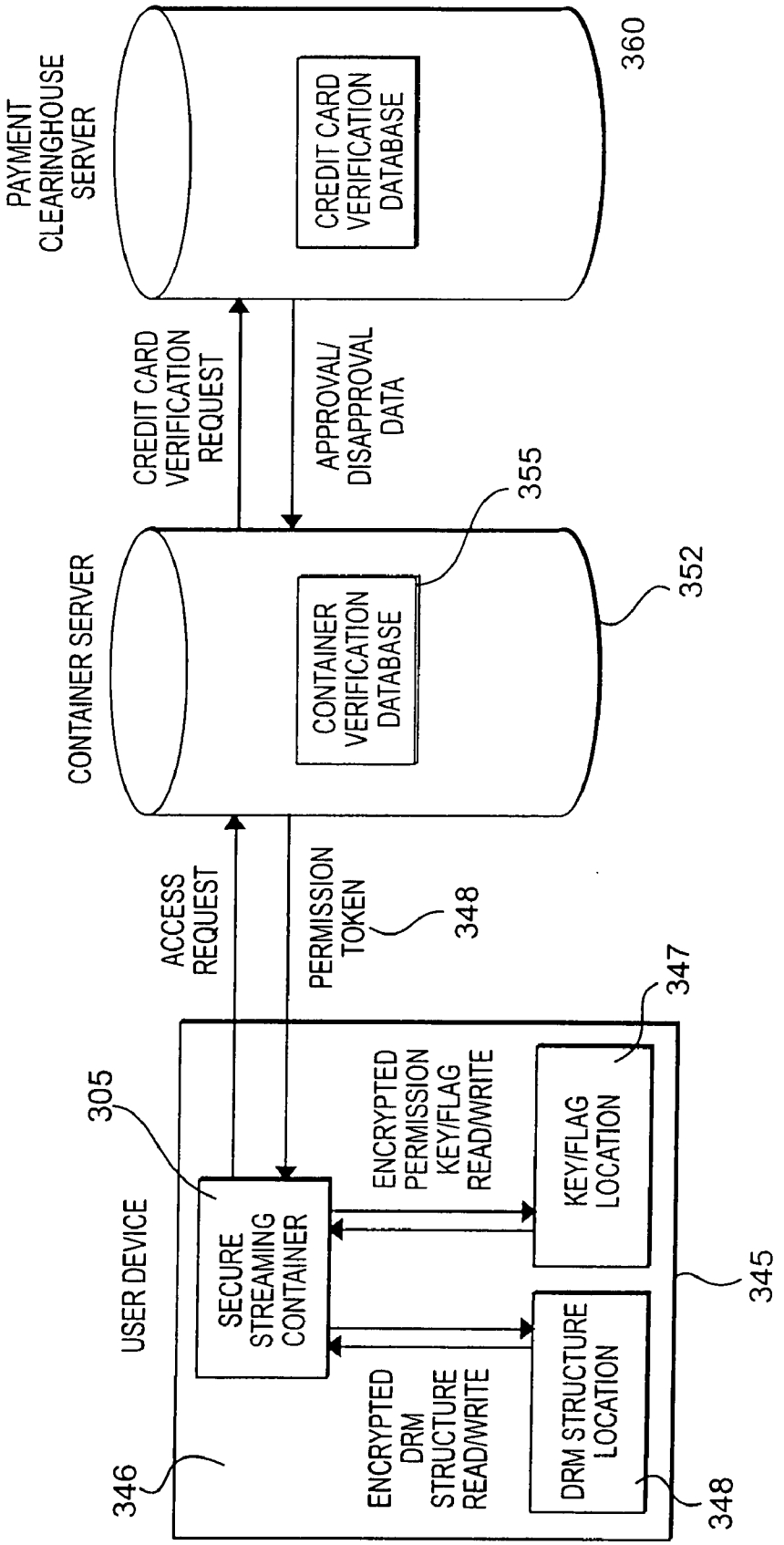

PAYMENT CLEARINGHOUSE SERVER
CREDIT CARD VERIFICATION DATABASE
360
CREDIT CARD VERIFICATION REQUEST
APPROVAL/ DISAPPROVAL DATA
CONTAINER SERVER
CONTAINER VERIFICATION DATABASE
355
352
ACCESS REQUEST
PERMISSION TOKEN
348
305
USER DEVICE
SECURE STREAMING CONTAINER
ENCRYPTED PERMISSION KEY/FLAG READ/WRITE
KEY/FLAG LOCATION
347
345
ENCRYPTED DRM STRUCTURE READ/WRITE
DRM STRUCTURE LOCATION
346
348

FIG. 7

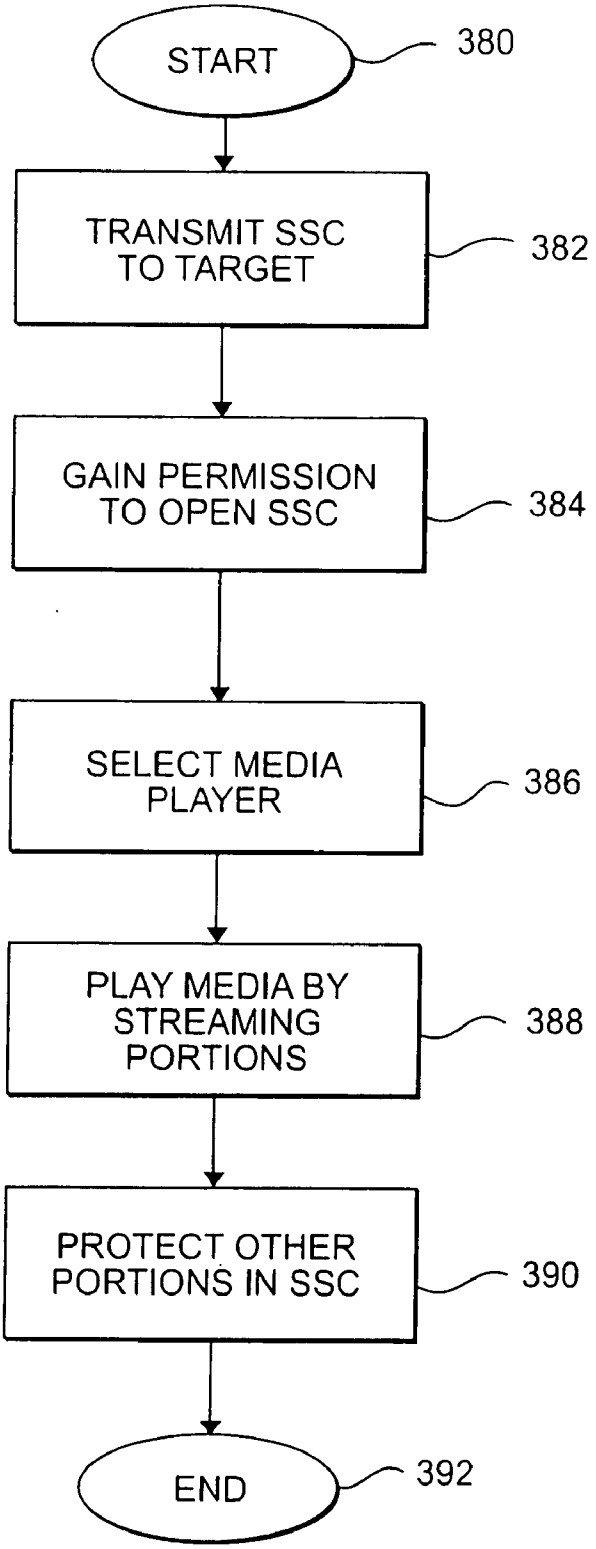

START
380
TRANSMIT SSC TO TARGET
382
GAIN PERMISSION TO OPEN SSC
384
SELECT MEDIA PLAYER
386
PLAY MEDIA BY STREAMING PORTIONS
388
PROTECT OTHER PORTIONS IN SSC
390
END
392

FIG. 8A

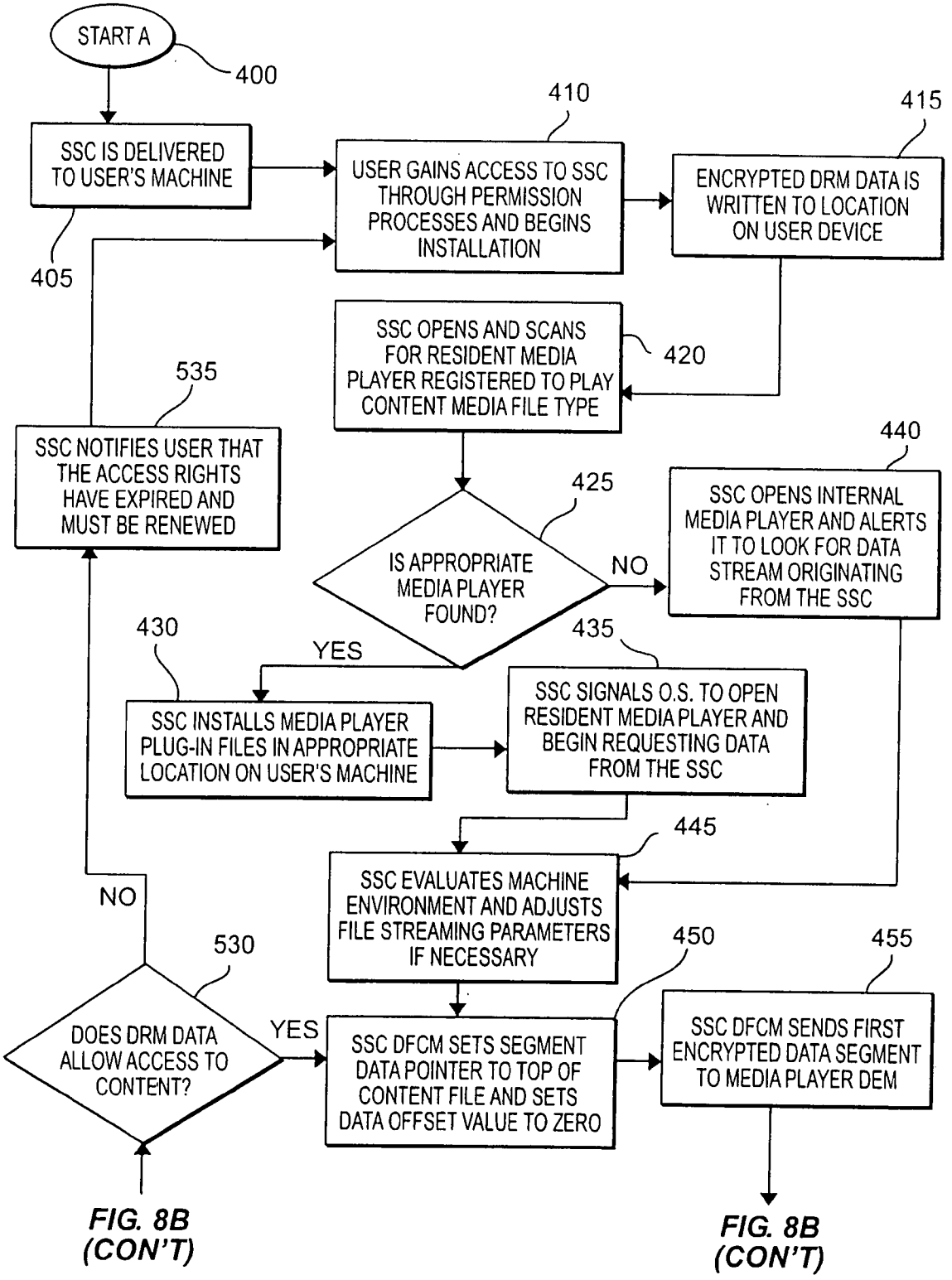

START A
400
SSC IS DELIVERED TO USER'S MACHINE
405
410
USER GAINS ACCESS TO SSC THROUGH PERMISSION PROCESSES AND BEGINS INSTALLATION
415
ENCRYPTED DRM DATA IS WRITTEN TO LOCATION ON USER DEVICE
SSC OPENS AND SCANS FOR RESIDENT MEDIA PLAYER REGISTERED TO PLAY CONTENT MEDIA FILE TYPE
420
535
SSC NOTIFIES USER THAT THE ACCESS RIGHTS HAVE EXPIRED AND MUST BE RENEWED
425
IS APPROPRIATE MEDIA PLAYER FOUND?
NO
440
SSC OPENS INTERNAL MEDIA PLAYER AND ALERTS IT TO LOOK FOR DATA STREAM ORIGINATING FROM THE SSC
YES
430
SSC INSTALLS MEDIA PLAYER PLUG-IN FILES IN APPROPRIATE LOCATION ON USER'S MACHINE
435
SSC SIGNALS O.S. TO OPEN RESIDENT MEDIA PLAYER AND BEGIN REQUESTING DATA FROM THE SSC
445
SSC EVALUATES MACHINE ENVIRONMENT AND ADJUSTS FILE STREAMING PARAMETERS IF NECESSARY
NO
530
DOES DRM DATA ALLOW ACCESS TO CONTENT?
YES
450
SSC DFCM SETS SEGMENT DATA POINTER TO TOP OF CONTENT FILE AND SETS DATA OFFSET VALUE TO ZERO
455
SSC DFCM SENDS FIRST ENCRYPTED DATA SEGMENT TO MEDIA PLAYER DEM
FIG. 8B (CON'T)
FIG. 8B (CON'T)

FIG. 8B

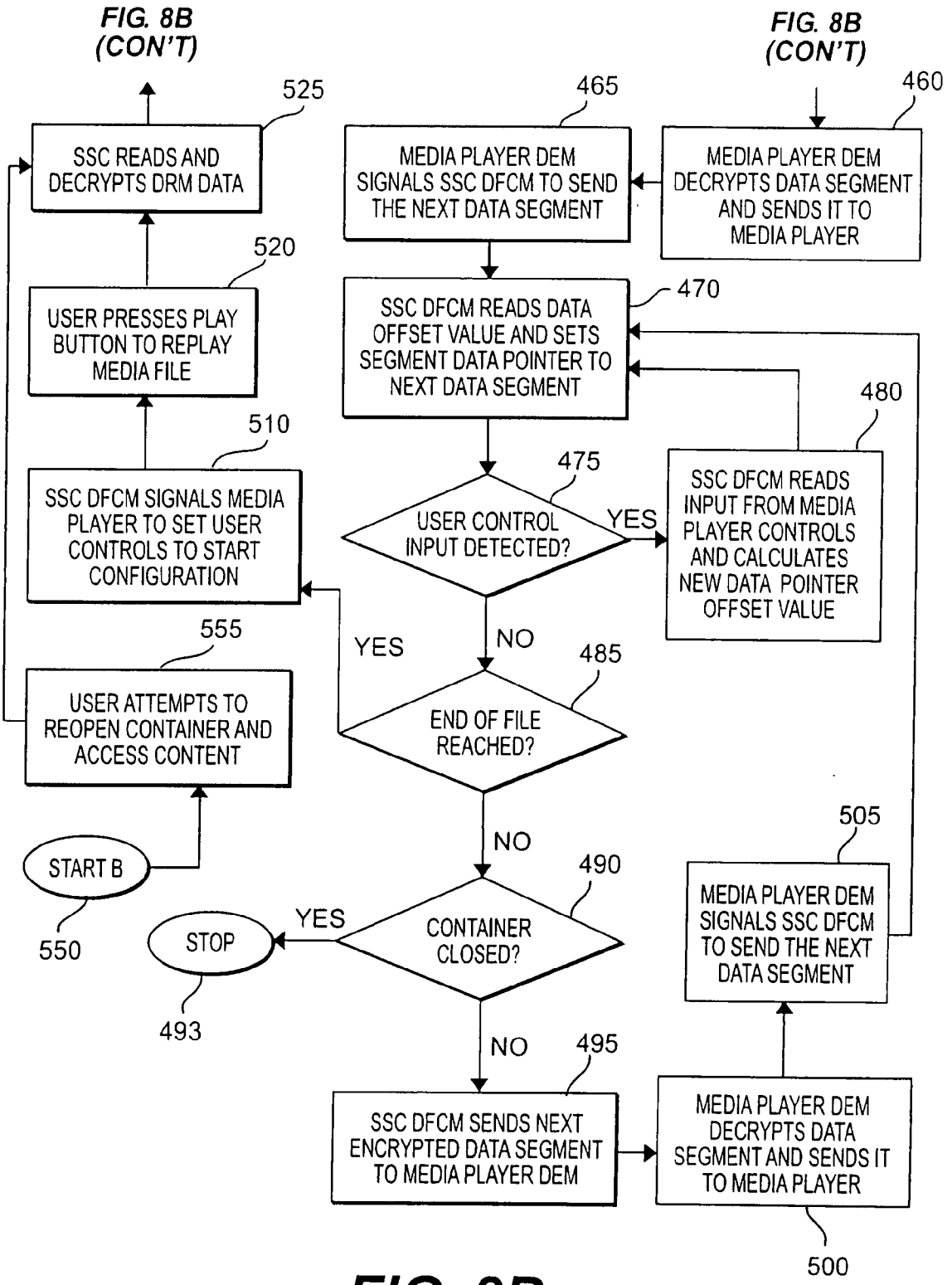

FIG. 8B (CON'T)
FIG. 8B (CON'T)
525
SSC READS AND DECRYPTS DRM DATA
520
USER PRESSES PLAY BUTTON TO REPLAY MEDIA FILE
510
SSC DFCM SIGNALS MEDIA PLAYER TO SET USER CONTROLS TO START CONFIGURATION
555
USER ATTEMPTS TO REOPEN CONTAINER AND ACCESS CONTENT
START B
550
STOP
493
465
MEDIA PLAYER DEM SIGNALS SSC DFCM TO SEND THE NEXT DATA SEGMENT
460
MEDIA PLAYER DEM DECRYPTS DATA SEGMENT AND SENDS IT TO MEDIA PLAYER
470
SSC DFCM READS DATA OFFSET VALUE AND SETS SEGMENT DATA POINTER TO NEXT DATA SEGMENT
480
475
USER CONTROL INPUT DETECTED?
YES
SSC DFCM READS INPUT FROM MEDIA PLAYER CONTROLS AND CALCULATES NEW DATA POINTER OFFSET VALUE
YES
NO
485
END OF FILE REACHED?
NO
490
CONTAINER CLOSED?
YES
NO
495
SSC DFCM SENDS NEXT ENCRYPTED DATA SEGMENT TO MEDIA PLAYER DEM
505
MEDIA PLAYER DEM SIGNALS SSC DFCM TO SEND THE NEXT DATA SEGMENT
MEDIA PLAYER DEM DECRYPTS DATA SEGMENT AND SENDS IT TO MEDIA PLAYER
500

FIG. 8B
(CON'T)

SECURE STREAMING CONTAINER

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This is a divisional of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 10/798,371, filed Mar. 12, 2004, which claims benefit of U.S. Provisional Patent Application No. 60/453,950, filed on Mar. 13, 2003, the content of which are hereby incorporated by reference in their entirety.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0002] 1. Field of the Invention

[0003] The invention generally relates to a method and apparatus for sending secured digital containers having streaming media content therein over networks to a device. The invention may also provide a method and apparatus for securely streaming the media content from the digital container to a media player residing in the device.

[0004] 2. Background Description

[0005] Distributors of digital content face a growing need to send large audio and video media files to consumers over the Internet. This distribution must be accomplished while providing both copyright protection and insuring payment is made to the content originators.

[0006] Traditionally, there have two basic methods available to content distributors and originators to accomplish this feat: a) Encrypted file downloads, and b) file streaming.

[0007] Encrypted File Download

[0008] This method allows the consumer to download the entire media file before allowing access to the contents. A payment mechanism is usually made available on the world-wide web at the point of file download and the file is typically encrypted in some fashion that provides for decryption on the user's computer upon successful payment and download. Generally, the copyright protection is accomplished by either making the file type proprietary or by utilizing public key encryption methodology.

[0009] The proprietary file type method requires the user to download and install a proprietary player prior to successfully playing the media file. In practice, requiring a proprietary media player can limit the audience and overall distribution potential of the file. The proprietary files are also vulnerable to unauthorized conversion to non-proprietary file types.

[0010] The public key encryption method requires that the content originator and distributor be part of an elaborate public key infrastructure (PKI) that must be utilized before the user gains access to the file. This PKI system requires the user's media player to successfully interact with public key servers and trusted third party servers. The complexity and costs associated with this system serve to act as inhibiting factors for both consumers and content originators. There is another drawback to this system. Since the media file type is not proprietary, it must sooner or later reside on the user's machine in its unencrypted form in order for the resident media player to successfully gain access to it. This makes it vulnerable to unauthorized copying by knowledgeable users.

[0011] File Streaming

[0012] This technique avoids unauthorized access problems by never allowing the user access to the entire media file. After successfully executing a payment transaction, the user's media player is typically provided with the Internet Protocol (IP) address of the content provider's streaming file server. Once the media player makes contact with the streaming server, the server begins sending the content file to the user's machine in packet format. This data is read into the media player's buffer, which is typically part of the resident RAM memory on the user's machine. The data is then read from the buffer by the media player, which plays the content of the file for the user. When the amount of data in the buffer becomes low, a request for more packets is sent to the streaming server. In this manner, the entire media file is played for the user as one continuous stream. In theory, the user never experiences any interruption, but in practice disruptions occur.

[0013] However, there are problems with the file streaming technique. For example, the content provider must provide the necessary telephony and server infrastructure to make the streaming data available to a large number of simultaneous users. The purchase and maintenance costs of this system can be an onerous burden on the content provider. Also, traffic problems on the network or portions of the network (e.g., local area network (LAN), wide-area network (WAN), telecommunications network, wireless network, cable network, or Internet) may easily lead to interruptions in packet flow to the user's machine and make the playing of the media file intermittent. In addition, to minimize bandwidth demands on the streaming system, the content files are generally compressed as much as possible. These factors can degrade the quality of the user experience.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0014] In an aspect of the invention, a method of providing streaming content is provided. The method comprises the steps of creating a digital container that includes contents including streaming media content and digital rights management (DRM) and selecting one or more modules for inclusion in the digital container, the selection of the modules being based on one at least one of a type of streaming media content and the DRM. The method further comprises encrypting the streaming media content of the digital container to produce a secured streaming container (SSC) and transmitting the SSC to a target device for access of the SSC from the target device.

[0015] In another aspect, a method of receiving electronic data is provided. The method comprises the steps of receiving a secured streaming container (SSC) having streaming media content and accessing the SSC to acquire portions of the streaming media content while other portions of the streaming media content remain secure in the SSC.

[0016] In another aspect, a method of creating and accessing streaming content is provided. The method comprises the steps of creating a digital container that includes contents including at least streaming media content and digital rights management (DRM). Further, the method comprises selecting one or more modules for inclusion in the digital container based on one at least one of a type of streaming media content and the DRM and encrypting the streaming media content and optionally the DRM to produce a secured

streaming container (SSC). The method also includes accessing the secured streaming container (SSC) using the one or more modules to control playback of the streaming media content.

[0017] In another aspect of the invention, a computer program product comprising a computer usable medium having readable program code embodied in the medium is provided. The computer program product includes at least one component to create a digital container that includes contents including streaming media content and digital rights management (DRM) and select one or more modules for inclusion in the digital container wherein the selection of the modules is based on one at least one of a type of streaming media content and the DRM. The component also encrypts streaming media contents of the digital container to produce a secured streaming container (SSC) and transmits the SSC to a target device for access of the SSC from the target device.

[0018] In another aspect of the invention, a computer program product comprising a computer usable medium having readable program code embodied in the medium is provided. The computer program product includes at least one component to receive a secured streaming container (SSC) having streaming media content and access the SSC to acquire portions of the streaming media content while other portions of the streaming media content remain secure in the SSC.

[0019] In another aspect of the invention, a method of receiving information is provided comprising steps of receiving a secured streaming container (SSC) having streaming media content, accessing the SSC using management controls and playing the streaming media content on a target device wherein the streaming media content by-passes non-volatile memory or persistent storage.

[0020] In another aspect of the invention, a streaming media apparatus is provided. The apparatus comprises a means for controlling access to a digital container having streaming media content, a means for securely streaming the streaming media content from the digital container once access is obtained to the digital container, and a means for playing the streaming media content such that one or more segments of the streaming media content are sequentially presented to a media player from the digital container while remaining segments of the streaming media content remain secure in the digital container until sequentially played

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0021] FIGS. **1**A and **1**B are flow diagrams of embodiments showing steps of creating a secure streaming container;

[0022] FIGS. **2**A-**2**K are embodiments of graphical user interfaces (GUI), according to the invention;

[0023] FIG. **3** is an embodiment of a GUI for input of search descriptor data, according to the invention;

[0024] FIGS. **4**-**6** are functional block diagrams of embodiments of secure container operations, according to the invention;

[0025] FIG. **7** is an embodiment of a GUI showing options for selecting container graphics, according to the invention; and

[0026] FIGS. **8**A and **8**B are flow diagrams of embodiments showing steps of using the invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF EMBODIMENTS OF THE INVENTION

[0027] The invention relates to a method and apparatus for sending secured digital media content over networks via a secured streaming container (SSC). The SSC of the invention is a digital container that is capable of allowing secure playing of streaming audio and video media files on a wide variety of computing devices and operating systems. The invention may be used to securely deliver a wide range of electronic content that may be presented to a recipient user for access and use such as, for example, music, video, financial transactions, educational materials, sales promotions, hobby information, surveys, confidential data, and the like.

[0028] The secured aspect of the invention allows the streaming content to be played without any unauthorized access, copying or other uses. By using the secured streaming container of the invention, it is now also possible to provide playback of such secure streaming media content without any concerns for disruptions or delays that typically results during playback of streaming media across networks.

[0029] The SSC combines the best of both the encrypted file download and file streaming techniques to creatively solve the problems inherent in these concepts to thus provide a flexible and secure media file delivery system. The invention provides for managed creation of the secure streaming container that enables the creator to selectively include flexible operational components within the secure streaming container and also provides for subsequent delivery and playback of the media under control of the operational components.

[0030] The creation of the secure streaming container may be accomplished with a SSC creation software application. This SSC creation software application may take the form of a "wizard" that guides the container creator through the various selection steps necessary to create a secure streaming container. As the SSC creator progresses through the container creation process by selecting various functions to be included in the streaming container, the container creation software application may select various software code modules to be included in the new container. The creation application ensures that all of the code modules that are required to carry out the selected functions of secured streaming are included in the new container, as directed by the creator of the container. This also ensures that no unnecessary modules are included in the new container in order to keep container size to a minimum. The container creation application enables the container creator to control a large number of specific settings and features of the new container.

[0031] FIG. **1**A is a flow diagram of an embodiment showing steps of creating a secure streaming container (SSC) beginning at step **5**. At step **10**, target devices are selected that may be receiving the SSC. These may include various devices including, for example, cell phones and computers and the like, as described further below. At step **15**, streaming media files are selected to be included in the SSC. These may be, for example, video, audio, text, animation files, and the like. At step **20**, transaction options are

selected to establish the type of information or data that a user may be required to perform to access the SSC. This may include payments or submission of information such as, for example, personal data, or passwords. At step **25**, any passwords to aid in protecting the SSC are applied to the SSC. At step **30**, digital rights management (DRM) options are applied to the container to control access to the SSC. The DRM options are explained further below. At step **35**, the media contents are encrypted using any known encryption technique. At step **40**, the SSC is registered with a digital container server (or service) so that it is a known object and may be correlated to future activity. At step **45**, the SSC may be released to carry streaming media content to target devices and users. The process ends at step **50**.

[**0032**] FIG. **1**B is a flow diagram of an embodiment showing steps of creating a secure streaming container (SSC), beginning at step **100**. FIGS. **2**A-**2**K are embodiments of graphical user interfaces (GUI) to illustrate various exemplary user inputs, and are explained in conjunction with the steps of FIG. **1**B. FIG. **1**A and **1**B (and **8**A and **8**B) may equally represent a high-level block diagram of components of the invention implementing the steps thereof. The steps of FIGS. **1**A and **1**B (and **8**A and **8**B) may be implemented on computer program code in combination with the appropriate hardware. This computer program code may be stored on storage media such as a diskette, hard disk, CD-ROM, DVD-ROM or tape, as well as a memory storage device or collection of memory storage devices such as read-only memory (ROM) or random access memory (RAM). Additionally, the computer program code can be transferred to a workstation over the Internet or some other type of network.

[**0033**] Continuing with FIG. **1**, at step **105**, a set of target devices is selected which may include selecting a family of devices on which the secure streaming container is intended to operate. This may be useful in situations because the media file contents of the new container may only be intended for certain devices or because the storage capacity and processing power of certain devices may not support the operation of the container.

[**0034**] An example of this selection screen is shown in the graphical user interface (GUI), generally denoted by reference numeral **200**, of FIG. **2**A. The prompts of FIG. **2**A permit selective inclusion of one or more target device families, generally denoted as reference numeral **205**. An individual target device may be selected by the creator of the streaming container for inclusion by clicking on the device family. These devices may include, but are not limited to:

[**0035**] Cellular phones—These devices typically may have the smallest storage and processing capability. They also may have unique operating systems and visual displays that may require appropriate container code modules directed to support these displays and operating systems.

[**0036**] Handheld devices—These devices include music players, Personal Data Assistants (PDAs) and tablet computers that typically have mid-range storage and processing capability. These devices also may or may not have unique operating systems and visual displays that may require appropriately constructed container code modules.

[**0037**] Desktop computers—These devices typically have large storage capacity and functional capability and usually are capable of handling large media files. A wide variety of operating systems may be encountered on these devices.

[**0038**] Cable TV tuner boxes—These devices typically handle very large media files such as large format feature films and may have distinctive operating systems that may require container code modules constructed to interact appropriately with the tuner boxes' architectures.

[**0039**] Satellite receivers—these devices may handle various types of media files with varying operating systems.

[**0040**] As seen in FIG. **2**A, the container creator may be able select the "All Devices" setting. This setting will direct the container creation application to include all the code modules needed for the container to operate on all target devices. While this may enable the container to operate on the largest number of target devices, this maximizes the container size. Conversely, selection of a subset of target families reduces the container size, which typically is more efficient to transmit and process.

[**0041**] At step **110**, the main media files to be included in the streaming container may be selected. Prior to being selected and prior to being inserted into the container, the media files may be encoded into audio and video formats that may be properly decoded and played by commercially available players, for example, Microsoft Windows Media Player™ (trademark of Microsoft Corporation), Real Media Player™ (trademark of RealNetworks, Inc.) or other publicly distributed media players, as required. Alternatively, in embodiments, the media files may be encoded after selection. The container may also be configured to access an internal media player (typically non-commercially available, except as provided by the digital containers in the course of its streaming functions but may include uniquely tailored and modified commercially available players but are only available for use by a digital container). The container may be programmed to use only the internal media player or it may be set to use the internal player if no resident media player is detected on the user's machine that can play the enclosed file. The container may be configured to carry (i.e., transport and deliver) multiple media files, if desired.

[**0042**] FIG. **2**B shows an exemplary GUI for selecting and including one or more media files into the secure container, in accordance with step **110**. The user may maintain a library of media files and search, add, or remove content media files that are to be included in the secure streaming container, as necessary. For example, FIG. **2**B also shows a "Remove Files" button and an "Add files" button to facilitate the selection process. FIG. **2**B shows two media file names in a load box **210** (e.g., "aint_got_that_swing.mp3" and "hold-me.mp3") that may be selected, however, it should be understood that this is an example and that any number of media files may be viewed and selected, as necessary.

[**0043**] At step **115**, secondary media files may be selected to be included in the streaming container of the invention. These secondary media files may include, for example, html text and images (or other supporting files typically associated with media files) that may be viewed in a browser while the media files are being played. These secondary files may also include a segment of the main media file that can be

previewed by the user before executing a purchase transaction, as discussed below. In one embodiment of the invention, a portion of the main media file may be left unencrypted for previewing instead of adding a separate preview file.

[0044] FIG. 2C shows a GUI for selecting one or more secondary files, generally denoted as reference numeral **215**. Selection of these secondary files may be associated with a main media file **220**, previously selected via load box **210** in FIG. 2B which is associated in the container and during playback. A user may select any number of secondary files to associate with a main file, and further, may navigate to other main files for associating secondary files to the other main files, as necessary. Once associations are established, these media files, and any respective associations between main and secondary files, are maintained when constructing and playing the streaming container.

[0045] At step **120**, a check is made whether a content execution file is needed. FIG. 2D shows an exemplary GUI for selecting a content execution file. If a content execution file is deemed necessary, then at step **125** content file execution options are selected. This may involve editing and adding an optional execution batch file **223** (FIG. 2D) that provides the container with content file order (i.e., sequencing and preset sequencing at various time intervals or preset relative timing between media files during playback) and timing instructions. For example, the container may be set to play an introductory content file when it first opens and then wait for a certain time interval before playing a second content media file.

[0046] At step **130**, streaming container access transaction options may be selected. Step **130** may involve determining the type of transaction(s) that must be successfully executed in order to authorize the recipient user to open the container. FIG. 2E is an exemplary GUI showing options for selecting transaction options. The options include, as discussed further below, selecting a transaction page **225**, selecting a server IP address for eventual contact, an option to select transaction updates **235**, credit card information **245**, an update address **240**, an option for extended promos (i.e., promotions), an address for extended promos, and an option to select checking for promos interval **244**. FIG. 2E further shows an IP server box **230**, as well as interfaces for extended promotions **240** and accompanying IP address box **243**. A time period may also be specified.

[0047] At step **135**, a check is made whether a transaction page is required, and if so, at step **140**, a transaction html screen (or similar screen) may be selected (e.g., **225**) to be included in the container. This html screen, when presented to a recipient user, informs the recipient user as to what type of information to input in order to process the transaction. When the recipient user attempts to open the container the first time, this transaction html page is displayed in a browser. In embodiments, this html page may be displayed in an internal browser carried within the streaming container. In other embodiments, this html page may be displayed in the user's resident browser.

[0048] At step **145**, a target IP address **230** of a container verification database server, that is accessible in order to process the transaction, may also be entered or in other setup screens provided by the container creation application. The html page may also provide a user access to various transaction screens such as, for example, the screens illustratively shown in conjunction with FIGS. **2**F and **2**G, as discussed below.

[0049] FIG. **2**F is an illustrative embodiment of a credit card transaction screen (i.e., GUI), generally denoted by reference numeral **202**, and selectable via the selection option **225** of FIG. **2**E and is equivalent to the credit card option **245**. This GUI may be included in a streaming container and used to receive user credit card information, denoted by reference numeral **250**, to validate access to streaming container contents. The credit card information may include, for example, name, address, credit card number and expiration dates, email address, or the like.

[0050] FIG. **2**G is an illustrative embodiment of demographics information transaction screen (i.e., GUI), generally denoted by reference numeral **203**, and may be included in a container via select transaction page **225**. This GUI may include prompts for acquiring different aspects of the user's interests and desires, denoted by reference numeral **255**, and may include other inquiries, as appropriate. The exemplary embodiments of FIGS. **2**F and **2**G may be included in the streaming container for presentation to a recipient user when accessing the streaming container, or may be selected for inclusion in the streaming container as transaction options (e.g., as selectable options as part of the GUI **200** of FIG. **2**E). In aspects, access to the digital contents of the streaming container may be restricted (e.g., partially or wholly) until the information (e.g., **250** and **255**) has been provided by the recipient user.

[0051] At step **150**, and still referring to FIG. **2**E, a check is made for transaction page updates **235**. The ability to dynamically access transaction updates provides for substitutions of content at any time, thereby, replacing, modifying, or adding to the content of the transaction page originally placed in the container. In other words, the streaming container when constructed may be primed to seek current promotional or substituted presentations (i.e., content) at later dates when a recipient user eventually accesses the streaming container. The substituted content may also be constructed to seek add-in content, even from other IP addresses, as necessary. In this manner, one or more add-in promotional contents may be linked into the streaming container long after the streaming container has been initially launched and already arrived on a recipient user's computer. Access to these new promotional container contents may be sold to other media creators and promoters, especially when demographic data initially gathered from the recipient user provides indication of likely candidates for the add-in content.

[0052] A variety of transaction types may be used to gain permission to open the container. These may include financial transactions such as credit or debit card transactions, or similar payment plans. These may also include the gathering of a password(s), the gathering of previously established personal or device identification information, or the gathering of generalized demographic information.

[0053] An example of the gathering of personal identification information may be any type of user or company ID numbers as well as input data from biometric measuring devices such as voice, fingerprint, physical attribute data, or retina/iris scanners. An example of the gathering of device identification information is input from secure hardware

plugged into the user's device or secure removable storage inserted into the user device's CD or floppy drives. This type of data must be established as acceptable access information and entered into the container verification database prior to the release of the container.

[0054] This information can be required in various combinations. For example, a user could be required to input a user ID number and input from a fingerprint scanner to gain access to the container. When more than one type of input is required, the container is said to be in a multi-factor authentication mode.

[0055] FIG. 2H is an illustrative embodiment of a subscription option GUI, generally denoted by reference numeral **206**, and included in the streaming container when selected as a transaction option setting (e.g., settable as an option as part of the GUI **200** of FIG. 2E). For example, the user may be prompted to purchase multiple containers at a reduced price per container. The user may also be prompted to purchase similar containers for a certain price that is related to a certain time period, for example, time periods **260**. If multiple containers are purchased in one subscription transaction, the containers included in the subscription program that are subsequently delivered to the user may be opened on the user's device without requiring an additional financial transaction. A credit card transaction screen **265** (or other financial transaction input screen) may be also included in the subscription option GUI.

[0056] At step **150**, the digital container may be configured to check to see if any transaction updates are available. For example, the content originator may decide to offer a sale on the contents associated with a streaming container. Instead of generating a new container, an updated transaction html page (or similar language) that displays the new offer and price information may be made available at a certain IP address. When the container is configured to check for transaction updates, then at step **155**, a transaction update address may be entered so that any new html page may be automatically downloaded from an IP address, when the transaction browser opens at a recipient location.

[0057] If no at step **150** or **135**, at step **157**, a decision may be made to configure a check for extended promotions. Dynamic access to extended promotional offers provides for maintaining an advertising or promotional program through dormant containers as they reside on users' devices. So, the streaming container, when constructed, may be primed to seek extended promotional or marketing presentations at timed intervals that are established when the container is created. This is accomplished by a control module, inserted into the digital container when extended promos are selected (e.g., **242**, of FIG. 2E). No recipient user action is necessary for this function to occur. Thus, the digital container may be programmed to automatically seek (once opened at the recipient users location) these extended promotions or marketing presentations when selection **242** (FIG. 2E) is selected. If yes at step **157**, at step **160**, an extended promotion address **243** may be entered which is an address from which the digital container uses to seek the extended promotions and/or marketing presentations at time intervals **244** (as selected during container construction).

[0058] At step **165**, extended promo access intervals **244** may be selected. Once the container is opened, at selected time intervals the container contacts the IP address as set in the extended promotion address **243**. If appropriate extended promotional content is available, this content is automatically downloaded and displayed in a browser window, for example, as illustrated in FIG. 2I, and generally denoted by reference numeral **207**. The extended promotional content obtained from the address **243** may also be constructed to seek add-in content, even from other IP addresses, as necessary. In this manner, one or more add-in contents may be linked into the streaming container long after the streaming container has been initially launched and already arrived on a recipient user's device. Access to these promotional container contents may be sold to other media creators and promoters, especially when demographic data initially gathered from the recipient user provides indication of likely candidates for the add-in content. In embodiments, this feature may be disabled.

[0059] At step **170**, the container may also be configured to use a password as a secondary security option. In this mode, the user may enter the proper password each time the user wishes to open a streaming container even after gaining one or more accesses to the container through a successful access transaction. This provides an added level of security to prevent unauthorized access to the streaming container, which typically may occur at the user's computer.

[0060] At step **175**, digital rights management options may be selected. These options include setting access rights to the container and digital content that the recipient user may have after access to the streaming container is successfully obtained. For example, the user may be granted unlimited access to the content file after the container is purchased or the access may be limited to a certain number of instances, a certain period of time, or a combination. Rights to other processes such as transferring the content file to another device or copying the file to a secondary storage medium may also be configured.

[0061] FIG. 2J is an illustrative embodiment of a digital rights management selection screen, generally denoted by reference numeral **270**. As shown in FIG. 2J, options may be selected for setting how many plays are permitted **271** or unlimited number of plays **272**. Also, selections may be made to limit the time period **273** (e.g., by number of days, months, and years) that plays may be made. Additionally, options to control file copying **274** may be selected and include "Allow No Copies", "Allow Unlimited Copies" or "Allow N Copies". For example, a user may be restricted to copying a content file twice.

[0062] At step **177**, graphic files for the container may be selected. These may be informational and promotional graphics that appear on the cover and inside the container after it is opened. These graphic files may be static images as well as animated images such as animated gif files or Flash™ files. FIG. 2K is an embodiment of a GUI showing options for selecting container graphics, denoted generally by reference numeral **275**. Options may include selecting a cover picture **276** and selecting a setup image **277**.

[0063] At step **179**, container creation application may automatically create, for inclusion within the finished container, informational and search metadata tags. These may be unencrypted XML tags that various devices (e.g., tags conforming to OMA wireless download specifications, or other device guidelines) and search engines use during the discovery, download and installation processes involving the

container. These tags may be created by an XML code engine that is typically resident in the container creation application.

[0064] When created, the XML tags may be organized into at least two distinct tag sets. These are called the download descriptor and the digital rights management (DRM) descriptor. Another tag set, called the search and information descriptor, may also be included in the container. The XML engine automatically reads the data for some of the tags from the container creation parameters, while the data for other tags may optionally be manually inserted by the container creator.

[0065] The download descriptor provides data such as file size and file type to target devices so that the potential streaming container download may be evaluated. For example, the device may read the file size tag and determine that the file size is too large for the resident storage and abort the download. An example of a download descriptor tag segment may include:

```
<name>digitalcontainer100</name>
<objectURI>http://www.wireless.com/s?id-100
    </objectURI>
<size>247880</size>
<type>audio/mp3</type>
<type>text/html</type>
<title>It Don't Mean a Thing </title>
```

[0066] It should be apparent that this exemplary download segment may express many other types of descriptions, as necessary, for example, other file types, sizes and titles, etc. This example provides a container name (e.g., "digitalcontainer100"), an object URI address (e.g., "http://www.wireless.com/?id-100"), size of the file (e.g., "247880"), audio type (e.g., "MP3"), text type (e.g., "html"), and a title of the content (e.g., "It Don't Mean a Thing").

[0067] The digital rights management descriptor may provide access rights data to certain devices for evaluative and operational purposes. The XML engine in the container creation application may read the input of the digital rights management selection screen and automatically create the DRM descriptor tag set. An example of a DRM tag segment may include:

```
<play>
    <constraint>
        <interval>P7D</interval>
        <constraint>
            <count>5</count>
        </constraint>
    </constraint>
</play>
```

[0068] In this example, the XML engine has read the input from the digital rights management selection screen, shown in the example of FIG. **2**D, and created properly formatted XML tag code. This tag set conveys to the target device that the content file may be played five times (e.g., "<count>5</count") in a seven day period (e.g., "<interval>P7D</interval>") beginning with the first instance of the playing of the content file, or alternately, from the date of reception. It should be apparent that other parameters may be created, as necessary, potentially complex.

[0069] The search descriptor tag set provides content file title, key word and key phrase data to web and peer-to peer search engines. FIG. **3** is an embodiment of a GUI for input of search descriptor data, denoted generally by reference numeral **280**. The search descriptor data may be manually input by the container creator by using the exemplary GUI **280**. This includes a field for entering a file title data **281** and a field to enter key words and phrases for search descriptors **282**.

[0070] The presence of the download and digital rights management XML descriptors provides that the secure streaming container, in embodiments, may be compliant with the Open Mobile Alliance (OMA) Wireless Download and DRM Specifications. The descriptors also comply with the standards and conventions of the Open Data Rights Language (ODRL).

[0071] At step **180**, the final streaming container may be encrypted and compressed, i.e., once all appropriate files and parameters are selected using the container creator application, using encryption/decryption and compression/decompression algorithms. The modular design of the container allows for continuous upgrading of the encryption and compression algorithms as these technologies progress.

[0072] The encryption/decryption process (as performed during streaming container creation and subsequently upon decryption of the SSC when a recipient user accesses a SSC) involves a decryption key handling scheme that employs a single key/hidden, key authorization system. In this technique, the encryption algorithm used to encrypt the container produces one or more decryption keys. At least one decryption key travels with the container as a "hidden" single key. Known encryption engines may be used with the invention.

[0073] At step **190**, the streaming container is registered with a transaction server by sending container identification information to a centralized container server (e.g., **352** of FIG. **7**) typically, via network communications, or the like. At step **195**, the secure container may be tested to assure proper operation as intended and then release for general propagation according to, for example, a marketing or publicity campaign. The test may involve sending a test SSC with test streaming media to a test recipient to verify all SSC components work as expected. The secure container creation process completes at step **200**.

[0074] FIGS. **4-6** are functional block diagrams of embodiments of secure container operations. FIGS. **4-6** may equally represent steps of implementing the invention. One or more components of the embodiments of FIGS. **4-6** may be included in secure streaming containers, when created, to enable the secure streaming control function when the content of the streaming container is subsequently sent to and accessed by a recipient user. The secure streaming control function controls streaming of the content media file to the user's device, depending on configurations. The one or more components include software code modules that control the data flow, content file decryption and media player functions that are mutually executed by the secure streaming container and the user's device.

[0075] Referring to FIG. **4**, the embodiment includes a user's storage device **300**, which may be a disk, memory (e.g., flash, non-volatile memory, protected RAM, or the like), CD-ROM, DVD, and similar devices. A secure streaming container **305**, maintained within the storage device **300**, contains electronic content (e.g., streaming media content). The embodiment includes a data flow control module (DFCM) **310** which typically directs the operations of all modules related to the playing of any media files (encrypted and unencrypted) and controls the data flow from the encrypted media file **315** (i.e., encrypted streaming media such as, for example, animation, video, audio or the like) in the secure streaming container **305** to the resident media player **335**. A resident media player is a player to play the media (e.g., video, audio, animation) available on the device and is typically not provided by the digital container, for example, Windows Media Player™ or Real Media Player™.

[0076] A decryption engine module (DEM) **320** provides the decryption finction for decrypting any encrypted files (e.g. **315**). This engine may use any known encryption/decryption scheme. The DEM **320** receives encrypted media file segments from the DFCM **310** and sends decrypted file segments to the audio/video file rendering module (RM) **325**. The RM **325** typically contains the appropriate codec(s) (coder/decoder) for any media to be played and turns a media bit stream into output that can be understood by appropriate operating system audio and video drivers. A media player plug-in **340** allows the secure streaming container to communicate with the resident media player and may include an interface controller module (ICM) **330** that may be called when the container uses the resident media player user interface **335**. The plug-in **340** may be supplied by the SSC, selected and initialized by the DFCM **310** for any appropriate media player being used.

[0077] The ICM **330** processes input signals from the resident media player **335** and controls and translates them into commands that can be understood by the DFCM **310**. If a user repositions a position of the streaming data (e.g., back-up or forwards within a file), this may be accommodated also via the data reposition request **336**. A next data segment request **326** is used to signal when a next segment is required for processing; this regulates the sequential flow of media segments from the encrypted media file **315** under control of the DFCM **310** and DEM **320**.

[0078] The operation of the SSC **305** provides flexibility in delivery streaming media while protecting the contents of the SSC. In this operation, streaming of the media by-passes non-volatile memory or persistent memory during the streaming process. The SSC provides continuous data to the internal media player (e.g., **335**) without disruptions (unlike streaming across networks where disruptions are common). Additionally, only segments of the encrypted media are ever in transit as decrypted data while protection of the encrypted media files **315** is maintained in the container. This makes for unauthorized access essentially impossible.

[0079] FIG. **5** is a functional block diagram of an embodiment of a secure container operation. The embodiment includes a secure streaming container internal media player (SSCMP) **350**. The SSCMP **350** may be included in secure streaming containers and may be used when the SSC carries non-proprietary media file types. These may be any type of media player as selected when the digital container is constructed. This differs from proprietary media players since proprietary players are those commercial media players such as, for example, Windows Media Player™ and Real Media Player™. The operation of the embodiment of FIG. **5** is similar to the embodiment of FIG. **4**. The internal media player **325**, supplied by the SSC is used and initialized. Since this is provided by and controlled wholly within the SSC, the security of this configuration may be even higher.

[0080] FIG. **6** is a functional block diagram of an embodiment of a secure container operation. In this embodiment, the DEM **320** and interface control module **330** are associated with the media player plug-in **320** in the target device memory and may be controlled directly by, or included within, the media player plug-in **320**. The media file rendering module **325** may be within the resident media player **335**.

[0081] FIG. **7** is a functional block diagram of an embodiment showing a streaming container authorization process. This embodiment includes a user device (e.g., personal computer, PDA, cell phone, or the like) with a streaming container **305** in the device's storage area **346** (e.g., memory, disk, DVD, CD, or the like.) A payment clearinghouse server **360** (alternatively, for example, a financial institution server, a governmental server, an educational server, or a commercial product provider server, or the like) may be accessed to authenticate a transaction.

[0082] When the user attempts to access the contents of the secure streaming container **305**, an authorization process may be initiated that is described in detail by "Regulating Access to Digital Content," U.S. Pat. No. 6,389,541; and "Tracking Electronic Content," U.S. patent application Ser. No. 09/199,150, now allowed and issued as U.S. Pat. No. _____, each of which is incorporated by reference herein, in there entirety.

[0083] When a recipient user successfully executes the container permission transaction (i.e., gains access to the contents of the container, for example, by supplying requite passwords, identification or financial credentials), a small bit of data unique to the user's device may be passed back to a container verification server **352**, shown as an "access request." This may be accomplished by a recipient user accessing an on-line communication path to gain authorization with a container verification server **352**. This small bit of data may be combined with the unique container identification data stored in the container verification database **355** to produce a packet of decryption data that becomes part of the permission token (shown as "permission token **348**") that is passed back to the streaming container **305** on the user's device **345**. An encryption algorithm uses this data to re-key the original key sent with the encrypted content data in the container. In this manner, the content is securely re-keyed in an insecure environment (such as a recipient user device) and the decryption of the content data is "locked" to that device. Transporting the streaming container, at this point, to another device, renders the streaming operation inoperative. With this process, there is no need to participate in the complex and expensive and commonly deployed Public Key Infrastructure system. The authorization process normally takes only a few seconds to complete.

[0084] Still referring to FIG. **7**, in an embodiment of the invention, the streaming container **305** may be encoded as an executable file (.exe extension) to be used by a Windows

operating system. In another version of the invention, the container may be encoded for delivery as encrypted text contained within an html file (.html or .htm, extension) that may be accessed by a variety of operating systems including MS Windows®. In this embodiment, ajava applet, for example, may be present on the user's device in order to interpret the instructions and encrypted content carried within the container. This java applet may be automatically downloaded from a web server the first time a user attempts to access the container. The java applet typically is downloaded once, unless the streaming container requires a later version than is present on the user's device. Other file types may be utilized may be utilized as appropriate.

[0085] When the streaming container **305** is initially created, it is registered within the container verification database **350**. The registration comprises entering various identification, date and e-commerce data fields in the database. This data may be entered manually or it may be entered automatically through an ODBC connection between the database and an envelope creation application when using the streaming container, creation application.

[0086] The streaming container is typically delivered to the user by email or other Internet delivery method, such as FTP download, website download, peer-to-peer file sharing service or instant messaging file transfer. The streaming container may also be delivered by wireless connectivity (e.g., cell phone or Bluetooth, or the like). The container may also be delivered by physical transport, such as floppy disc, CD-ROM or memory device.

[0087] In this process, an attempt by the user to open the secured streaming container prompts the container to look for an encrypted key or permission flag **347** that signifies that the container has been authorized to open on that particular device (e.g., **345**). If the encrypted key or permission flag **347** is not found, the user is asked to enter transaction information (e.g., as illustrated in FIGS. **2**F-**2**H) that may be passed to the container verification server in a unique and encrypted communication session (e.g., "access request" of FIG. **7**). If required, the container verification server **350** consults the appropriate credit card verification server (or equivalent server as appropriate) for approval status.

[0088] When the approval status is received, the container verification server sends a permission token (e.g., "permission token") to the secure streaming container **305**. The streaming container **305** then reads the permission token and writes an encrypted key or permission flag in the appropriate location (e.g., **347**), depending on the operating system. The streaming container **305** also writes an encrypted digital rights management data structure to a secured location **348**.

[0089] When the user attempts to reopen the container in a later session, the encrypted key or permission flag (e.g., **347**) is found and the streaming container **305** opens without prompting the user again for transaction information. The container then reads and decrypts the digital rights management (DRM) data structure and the user is allowed access to the contents as allowed by the access rights provided by the DRM data. Once access to the content is authorized, the secure streaming container begins a process that streams the media file data to the user's device (e.g., display, audio output, or the like).

[0090] FIG. **8**A is a flow chart of an embodiment showing steps of using the invention, beginning at step **380**. At step **382**, a SSC having streaming media content is transmitted to a target device. At step **384**, a user gains access to the SSC by providing transactional data such as, for example, credit card information, passwords, demographic data, personal data, or the like. At step **386**, based on the type of media files in the SSC an appropriate media player is selected for playback of the streaming media. This may be a player resident on the target device or a player supplied by the SSC. At step **388**, the streaming media is played by providing segments of the streaming media to the player. At step **390**, other portions of the media remain in the SSC, securely protected from copying or unauthorized use. This technique provides high quality playback without interruptions or delays typically associated with streaming content over networks (e.g., the Internet). At step **392**, the process ends.

[0091] FIG. **8**B is a flow chart of an embodiment showing steps of using the invention. The steps may begin either at step **400** or step **550** depending on whether it is a first time access or a subsequent access, respectively. For a first time access, the process commences at step **400**. At step **405**, a secure streaming container (SSC) is delivered to a recipient user's device or machine, for example, by transmitting the SSC over a network or physical delivery. This may be in response to the recipient user requesting the contents associated with the SSC. The SSC contents may include any type of electronic media such as audio, text, video, animation, or the like.

[0092] At step **410**, the recipient user gains access to the SSC through permission processes (e.g., passwords, a financial transaction, user IDs, company IDs, demographic information, or other identification including biometrics, including retina scans, fingerprints, physical characteristics, and the like) and begins an installation. At step **415**, an encrypted DRM data (e.g., a flag or identifier) is written to a protected, confidential, or unpublished location on the user's device or machine. At step **420**, the SSC opens and calls DFCM to scan for a resident player registered to play the content media of the SSC (e.g., by file type or other identifier). This DFCM module contains the intelligence related to the streaming process and controls other modules related to media file streaming.

[0093] At step **425**, a check is made whether an appropriate player is found. If an appropriate media player is not found, at step **440**, the DFCM opens the internal media player (i.e., sent in the SSC) and instructs it to wait for a data stream originating from the SSC. This is the most secure configuration of the secure streaming container, since all decryption and rendering takes place inside the SSC.

[0094] If, however, at step **425**, an appropriate media player is found on the user's device or machine, then at step **430**, the DFCM installs the appropriate media player plug-in file(s) in an appropriate location (either in the target device memory or maintained within the SSC environment) on the user's device or machine. The user's device or machine may include a cell phone, a personal data assistant (PDA), a personal computer, a computing device, a portable music player, a tablet computer, a cable modem, a satellite receiver, a television, and a cable television tuner. The media player plug-in allows the secure streaming container to communicate with the resident media player and is installed in one of two possible configurations. The configuration type is determined by the media file type that the SSC is carrying.

[0095] If the file type is a non-proprietary, such as mpeg or mp3, the file rendering module resident in the SSC contains the appropriate codec for that file. The file may be played with the Decryption Engine Module (DEM) and the rendering module remaining in the container (e.g., **320** and **325** of FIG. **4**). In this case, the media player plug-in includes only the Interface Control Module (ICM) (e.g., **330** of FIG. **4**). In this mode the SSC uses the resident media player only for the user control interface (e.g., **335** of FIG. **4**).

[0096] If the media file type is proprietary, such as files that can only be decoded by a commercial media player such as the Windows Media Player™ or the RealOne Player™, the container rendering module does not contain the necessary codec. This may be reflective of the embodiment of FIG. **6**, for example. The secure streaming container may then use the rendering module in the resident media player (e.g., **325** of FIG. **6**). The media player plug-in may comprise the ICM and the DEM, (e.g., **320** and **330** of FIG. **6**).

[0097] Once the media player configuration has been established, at step **435**, the DFCM signals the operating system to open the resident media player and begins requesting data. At step **445**, the DFCM evaluates the user's device and adjusts the data streaming parameters as required. (Step **445**, may result after step **430** or step **440**.) For example, since the DFCM is programmed to send the data segments to the media player in the most efficient manner possible, the DFCM evaluates parameters such as available device memory and data bus speed and calculates the data segment size that is best suited to the particular device.

[0098] To begin the streaming process, at step **450**, the DFCM sets the data segment pointer to the beginning of the encrypted content data file and sets the data offset value to zero. The data segment pointer marks the current position in the data file and tells the DFCM which data segment to send out next. The data offset value is used to change the position of the data segment marker if any input is received from the media player user controls. An example of this is when the user changes the file position indicator of the media player.

[0099] At step **455**, the DFCM then sends the first encrypted data segment to the DEM. At step **460**, the DEM decrypts it and sends it to the media player rendering module. At step **465**, the DEM then signals the DFCM that it is ready to receive the next encrypted data segment. At step **470**, the DFCM reads the data offset value and sets the segment data pointer to next data segment. At step **475**, a check is made whether there has been any user input to the player controls and increments the data segment pointer to the next data segment. If so, at step **480**, the DFCM reads input from the media player controls and calculates a new data pointer offset value corresponding to the user's input. The process then returns to step **470**

[0100] If there is no input at step **475**, at step **485**, a check is made for end-of-file. If not, then at step **490** a check is made whether the SSC is closed. If the SSC is closed, the process completes at step **493**. If the SSC is not closed, at step **495**, the DFCM sends the next encrypted segment to the media player's DEM. At step **500**, the media player DEM decrypts the data segment and sends it to the media player. At step, **505**, the media player signals the DFCM to send the next data segment. The process then returns to step **470**.

[0101] If, at step **485**, the end of the file is reached, then at step **510**, the DFCM sets the player controls to the start position and waits for the user to optionally play the file again. At step **520**, an indication is detected indicating the user is attempting to play the file again (e.g., by pressing a play button on a user interface). At step **525**, the secure streaming container reads and decrypts the digital rights management data for the container. (Alternatively, if the user closes the container, the process ends.) Access to step **525** may also be gained when a subsequent access is attempted, which, in this instance, the flow begins at step **550**. At step **555**, a user attempts to re-open a container and access the contents.

[0102] At step **530**, a check is made to determine if the access rights allow the user to replay the file, and if so, the process continues with step **450**. If, however, the access rights do not allow the file to be replayed, then at step **535**, the SSC notifies the user that the access rights have expired and, at step **410**, the user is then prompted to execute another transaction to regain access to the contents of the container.

[0103] During the streaming process, the secure streaming container acts as if it were a traditional streaming media server. But since the processing of the electronic media or data contained in the SSC is performed locally within a user's device or machine, no communication interference typically associated with traditional streaming techniques over networks are present. That is, no delays, pauses, interruptions or drop-outs occur due to delivery of electronic content streamed over networks or congestion, down-time, or overload problems with a server. These undesirable effects are avoided by the invention. Also, the user's player device is unable to differentiate between the secure streaming container of the invention and a traditional streaming server located remotely on the Internet, local or wide area network, wireless network, and the like. As a positive result, the user consistently experiences high quality, interruption free media file playback without a necessity for Internet access (or similar communication access) each time a playback is desired.

[0104] Additionally, the media file is decrypted and sent to the media player data segment by data segment, such that the file (i.e., electronic media content) is never written to the user's device hard drive in either encrypted or decrypted format and therefore is virtually completely invulnerable to unauthorized decryption or copying. In this manner, streaming media and other electronic content may be securely provided to consumers with high confidence that the delivery mechanism protects and controls access to the electronic media without compromising ownership and privacy goals of the electronic content.

[0105] While the invention has been described in terms of embodiments, those skilled in the art will recognize that the invention can be practiced with modifications and in the spirit and scope of the appended claims.

We claim:

1: A method of receiving electronic data, comprising the steps of:

receiving a secured streaming container (SSC) having streaming media content; and

accessing the SSC to acquire portions of the streaming media content while other portions of the streaming media content remain secure in the SSC.

2: The method of claim 1, further comprising playing the portions of the streaming media content while other portions remain secured in the SSC.

3: The method of claim 1, wherein the SSC includes digital rights management (DRM) which controls the access to the SSC.

4: The method of claim 1, wherein the receiving step receives the SSC on a target device.

5: The method of claim 4, wherein the target device includes at least one of a cell phone, a personal data assistant (PDA), a personal computer, a computing device, a portable music player, a tablet computer, a cable modem, a cable television tuner, and a satellite receiver.

6: The method of claim 4, wherein at least some of the contents of the SSC is configured to execute within the environment of the target device.

7: The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of obtaining permission to access the SSC.

8: The method of claim 7, wherein the obtaining permission includes at least one of (i) verifying a password, (ii) gathering demographic data, (iii) gathering personal data, (iv) gathering of the target device identification data, (v) processing a subscription transaction, and (vi) processing a financial transaction.

9: The method of claim 8, wherein the personal data includes at least one of a user identification (ID), a company ID, and a biometric data.

10: The method of claim 8, wherein the target device identification data includes at least one of an input from a removable storage media and an input provided from a secure device attached to a target device.

11: The method of claim 1, wherein in the accessing step, extensible markup language tags (XML) are read to determine at least one of a content file title, a digital rights management descriptor, a file size and a file type.

12: The method of claim 1, further including decrypting the SSC

13: The method of claim 12, wherein the decrypting includes decompressing the streaming media content

14: The method of claim 12, further including decoding the streaming media content as a hyper-text markup language (html) file.

15: The method of claim 1, further including the step of downloading a java applet in order to read the SSC content.

16: The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of supplying a password for a subsequent SSC access.

17: The method of claim 1, further comprising the steps of:

successfully gaining permission to the SSC on a target device;

sending a portion of data which is unique to the target device to a verification server;

combining the portion of data and a digital container identification data previously registered to produce a permission token;

sending the permission token to the target device; and

rekeying an original key sent with the SSC using the permission token to securely rekey the streaming media content so that decrypting the streaming media content is locked to and performed only on the target device.

18: The method of claim 1, wherein the accessing step further includes:

detecting an attempt to access the SSC;

determining if permission has been previously granted to open the SSC and, if not,

supplying transaction information;

sending the transaction information to a digital container verification server in an encrypted session;

sending a permission token back to the SSC; and

granting permission to open the SSC.

19: The method of claim 18, wherein transaction information comprises supplying at least one of a financial information, a personal data, and a demographic data.

20: The method of claim 19, wherein the financial information is credit card information.

21: The method of claim 19, wherein the personal data is at least one of a biometric data, a personal identification, and a password.

22: A computer program product comprising a computer usable medium having readable program code embodied in the medium, the computer program product includes at least one component to:

receive a secured streaming container (SSC) having streaming media content; and

access the SSC to acquire portions of the streaming media content while other portions of the streaming media content remain secure in the SSC.

23: The computer program product of claim 22, wherein the at least one component plays the portions of the streaming media content while other portions remain secure n the SSC.

24: The computer program product of claim 23, wherein the at least one component receives the SSC on a target device.

25: The computer program product of claim 24 wherein at least some of the contents of the SSC is configured to execute within the environment of the target device.

26: The computer program product of claim 25, wherein the target device includes at least one of a cell phone, a personal data assistant (PDA), a personal computer, a computing device, a portable music player, a tablet computer, a cable modem, a television, a cable television tuner, and a satellite receiver.

27: The computer program product of claim 22, wherein the at least one component obtains permission to access the SSC.

28: The computer program product of claim 27, wherein the permission is obtained using at least one of (i) verifying a password, (ii) demographic data, (iii) personal data, (iv) target device identification data, (v) processing a subscription transaction, and (vi) processing a financial transaction.

29: The computer program product of claim 28, wherein the personal data includes at least one of a user identification (ID), a company ID, and a biometric data.

30: The computer program product of claim 28, wherein the target device identification data includes at least one of an input from a removable storage media and an input provided from a secure device attached to the target device.

31: The computer program product of claim 22, wherein the at least one component reads extensible markup lan-

guage tags (XML) to determine at least one of a content file title, a digital rights management descriptor, a file size and a file type.

32: The computer program product of claim 22, wherein the at least one component decrypts the SSC.

33: The computer program product of claim 22, wherein the at least one component decompresses the streaming media content.

34: The computer program product of claim 33, the at least one component decodes the streaming media content as a hyper-text markup language (html) file.

35: The computer program product of claim 22, wherein the at least one component downloads a java applet in order to read the contents of the SSC.

36: The computer program product of claim 22, wherein the at least one component requires a password for subsequent SSC access.

37: The computer program product of claim 22, wherein the at least one component:

successfully gains permission to the SSC on a target device;

sends a portion of data uniquely associated with the target device to a verification server;

combines the portion of data and a digital container identification data previously registered with the verification server to produce a permission token,

sends the permission token to the target device; and

rekeys an original key sent with the SSC using the permission token to securely rekey the streaming media content so that decrypting the streaming media content is locked to and performed only on the target device.

38: The computer program product of claim 23, wherein the at least one component:

detects an attempt to access the SSC;

determines if permission has been previously granted to open the SSC and, if not,

supplies transaction information;

sends the transaction information to a digital container verification server in an encrypted session and the digital container verification server sends a permission token back to the SSC; and

the at least one component grants permission to open the SSC.

39: The computer program product of claim 38, wherein the transaction information includes at least one of a financial information, a personal data, and a demographic data.

40: The computer program product of claim 39, wherein the financial information is credit card information.

41: The computer program product of claim 39, wherein the personal data is biometric data.

42: The computer program product of claim 23, wherein the at least, one component plays the streaming media content from a location on a target device so that the streaming media content plays without interruption avoiding network connectivity delays and disruptions.

43: The computer program product of claim 42, wherein the at least one component requires a password to replay the streaming media content.

44: The computer program product of claim 23, wherein the streaming media content is protected and cannot be copied.

45: A method of receiving information comprising the steps of:

receiving a secured streaming container (SSC) having streaming media content;

accessing the SSC using management controls; and

playing the streaming media content on a target device wherein the streaming media content by-passes non-volatile memory or persistent storage.

46: A streaming media apparatus, comprising:

a means for controlling access to a digital container having streaming media content;

a means for securely streaming the streaming media content from the digital container once access is obtained to the digital container; and

a means for playing the streaming media content such that one or more segments of the streaming media content are sequentially presented to a media player from the digital container while remaining segments of the streaming media content remain secure in the digital container until sequentially played.

47: The streaming media apparatus of claim 46, wherein streaming media content is one or more encrypted files of streaming media content and the means for securely streaming includes a means for streaming the one or more encrypted files of streaming media content so that the one or more files are invulnerable to copying or unauthorized access.

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