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(54) **SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR REGULATING THE TRANSMISSION OF MEDIA DATA**

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G06F 17/60

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705/51; 709/201; 709/217; 709/219; 370/232;
370/235

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231, 232; 711/163, 164; 705/56, 57, 51;
370/232, 235, 265, 927, 465

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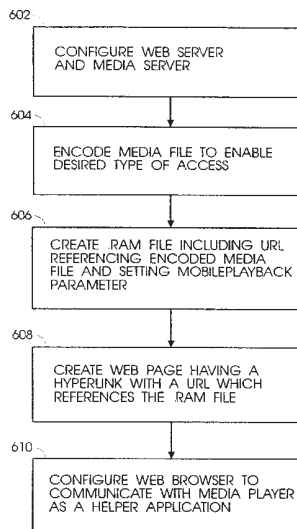
(List continued on next page.)

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

A system and method regulate the transmission of media data. In accordance with one embodiment of the invention, a header portion of a media file is encoded to include an access code. The access code corresponds to one or more permitted methods by which the media file may be transmitted over a network. In one embodiment, a user operates a web browser to access a web page including a hyperlink which references the media file and specifies a desired type of transmission. Desired types of transmission include, for example, streaming transmission and faster than real time reliable download. When the hyperlink is activated, a web server sends a URL referencing the media file to the web browser. The web browser passes the URL to the media player. The media player requests the media file from a media server. The media server transmits the header of the media file, and the media player extracts the access code to determine whether the media file may be transmitted according to the desired type of transmission. If so, the media server transmits the media file using the desired type of transmission, and the media player renders the media data into video, sound or image signals. If the media player receives the media data using a type of transmission that permits storing the media data locally, the media player may transfer the media data to a portable media player.

28 Claims, 9 Drawing Sheets



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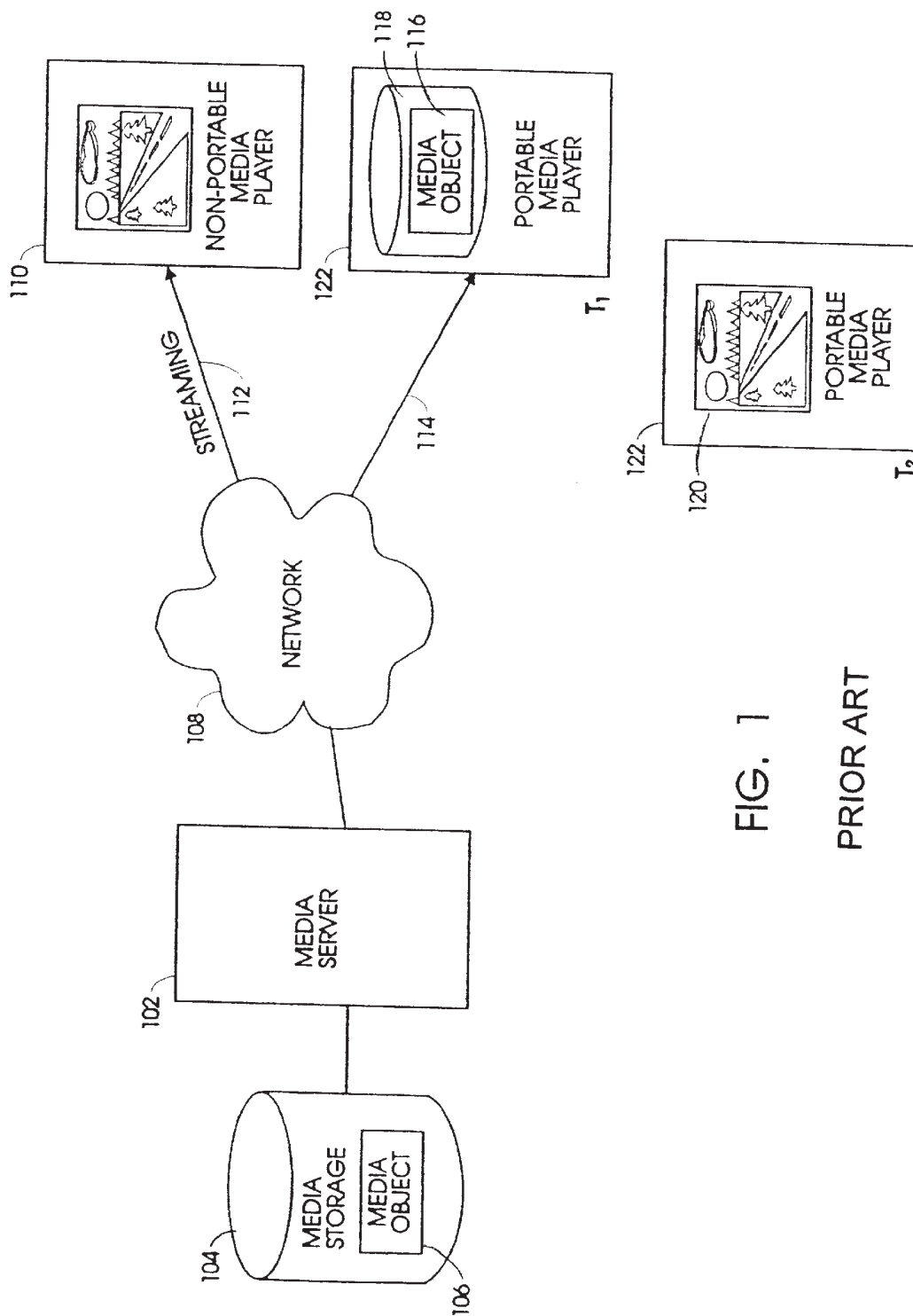


FIG. 1

PRIOR ART

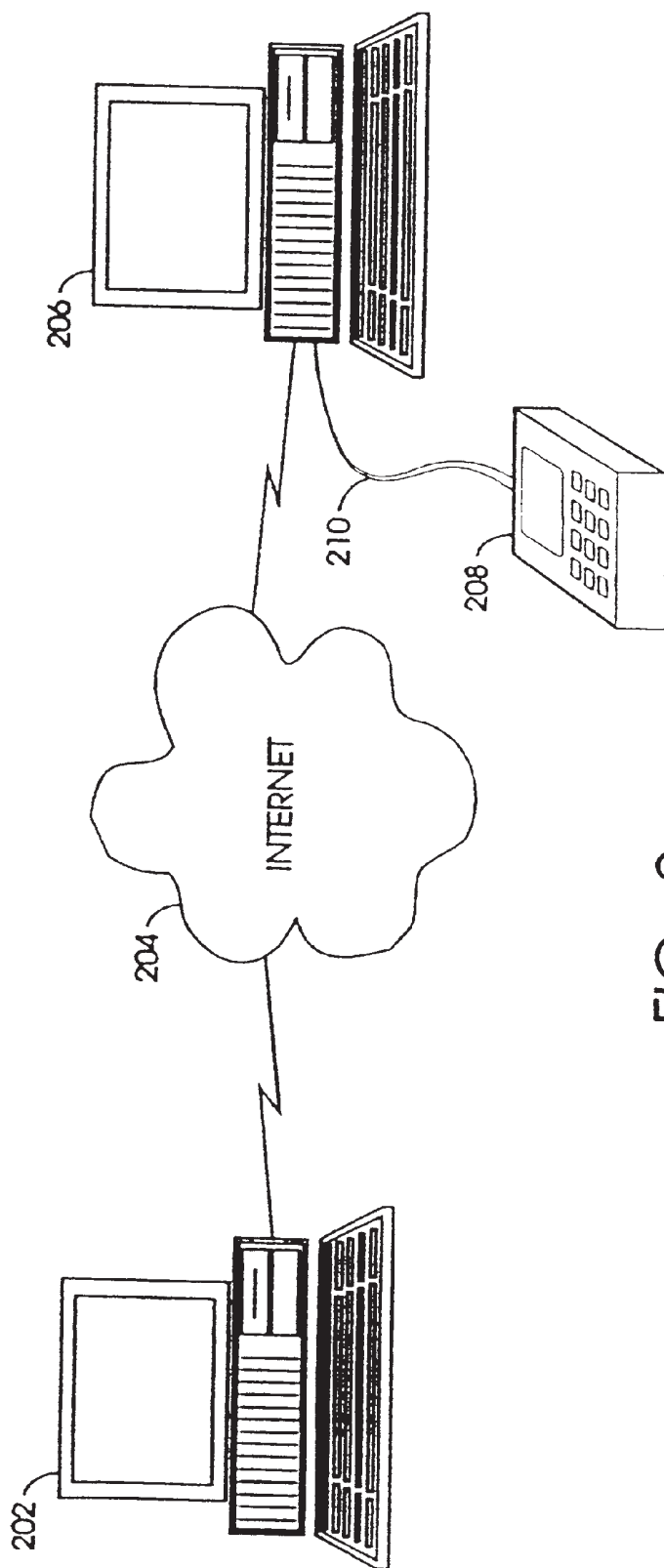


FIG. 2

PRIOR ART

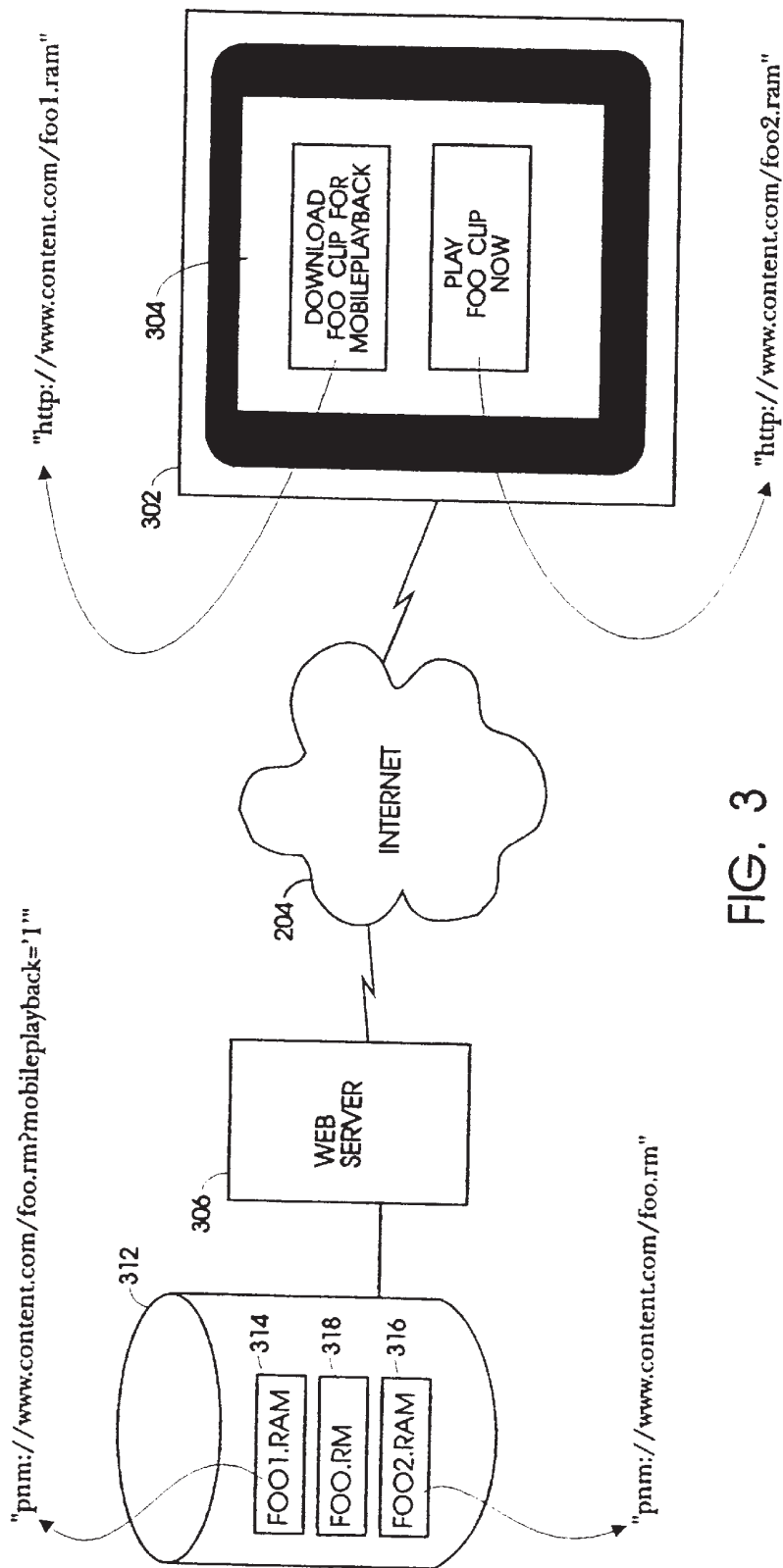


FIG. 3

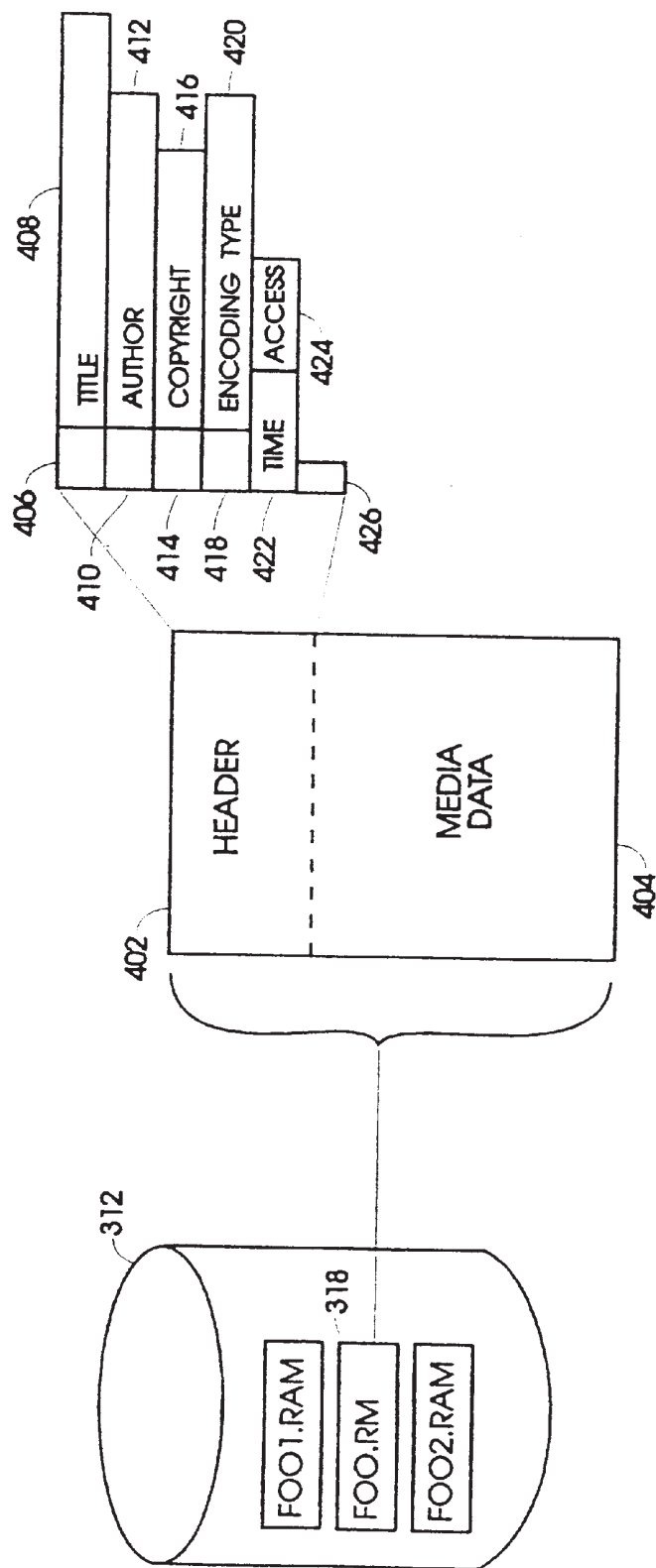


FIG. 4

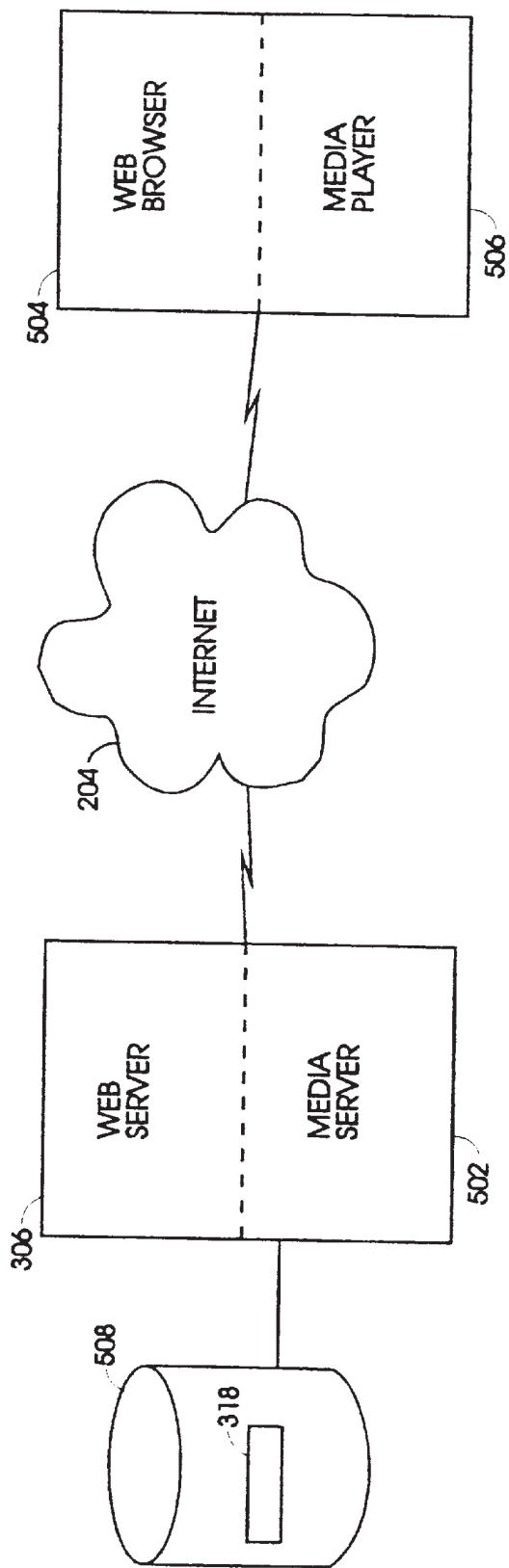


FIG. 5

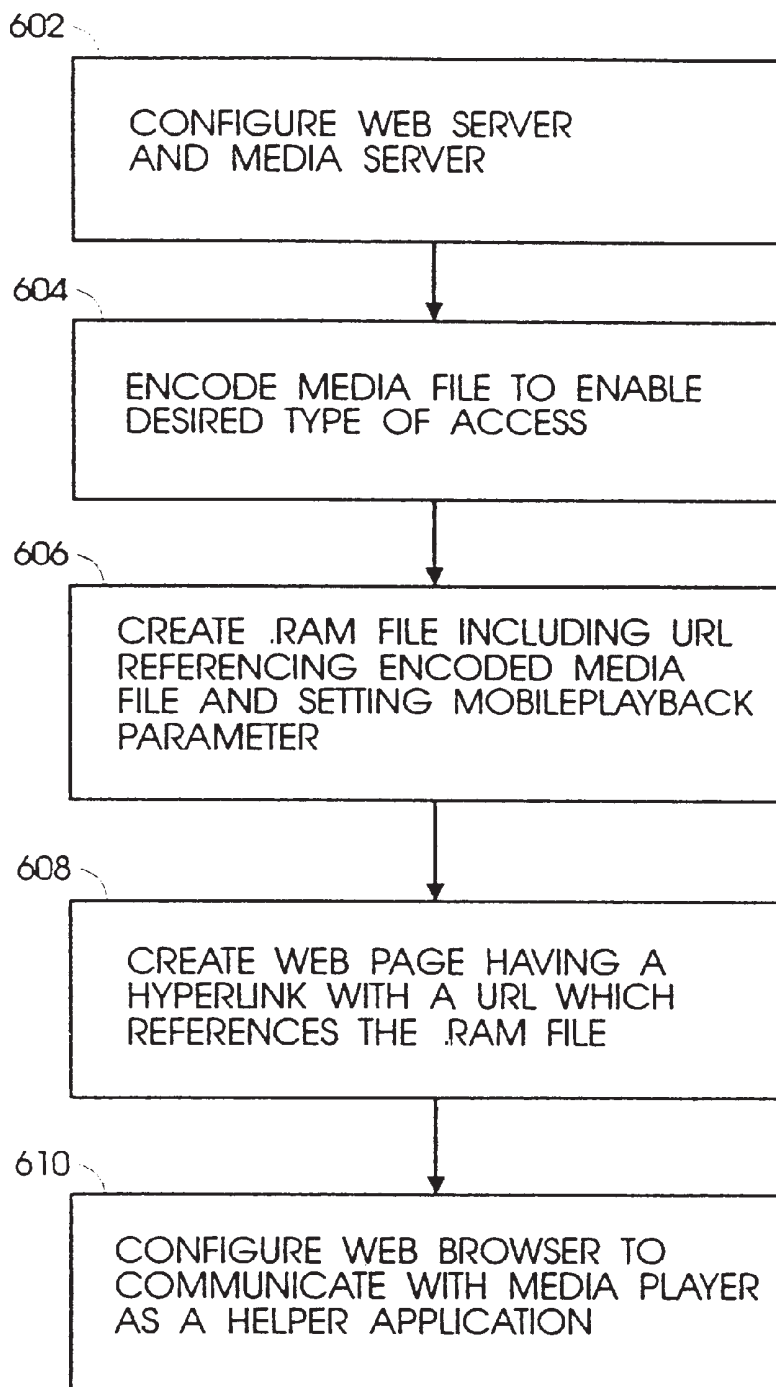


FIG. 6

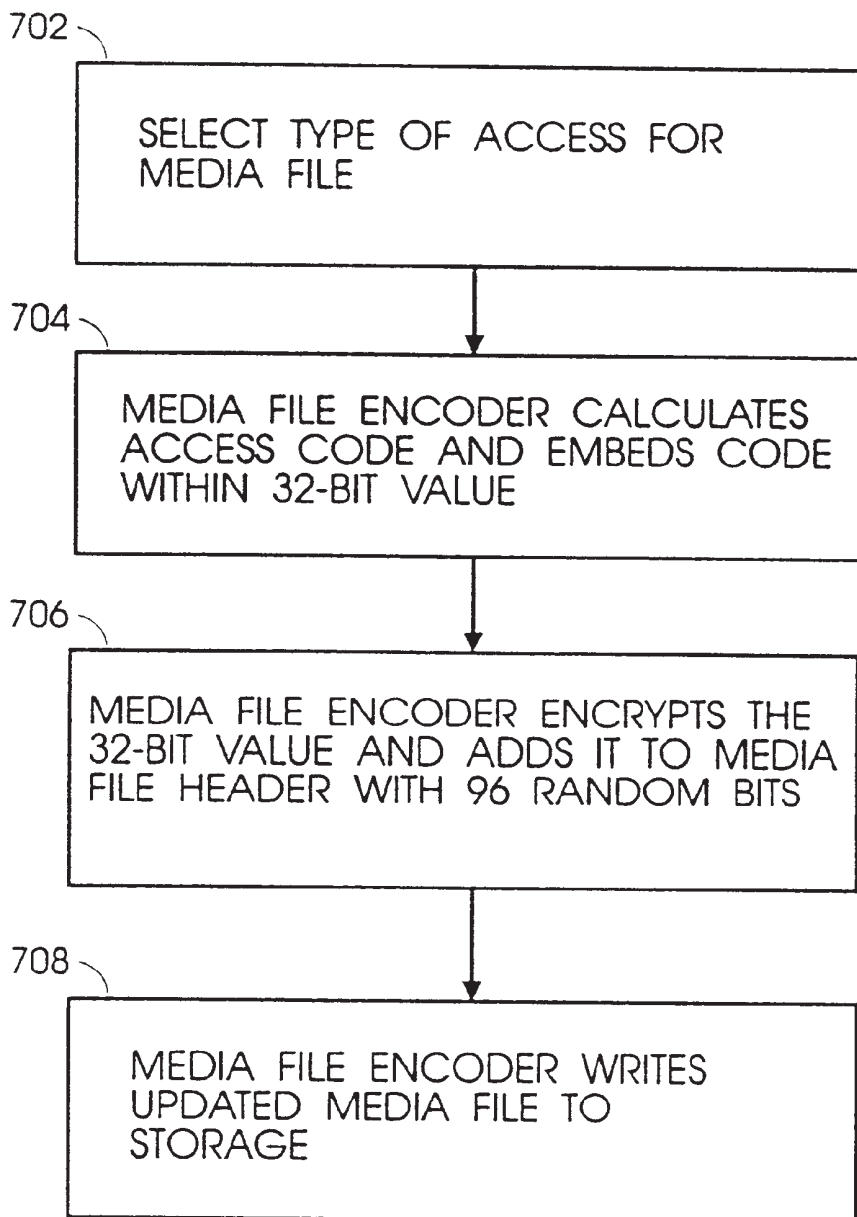


FIG. 7

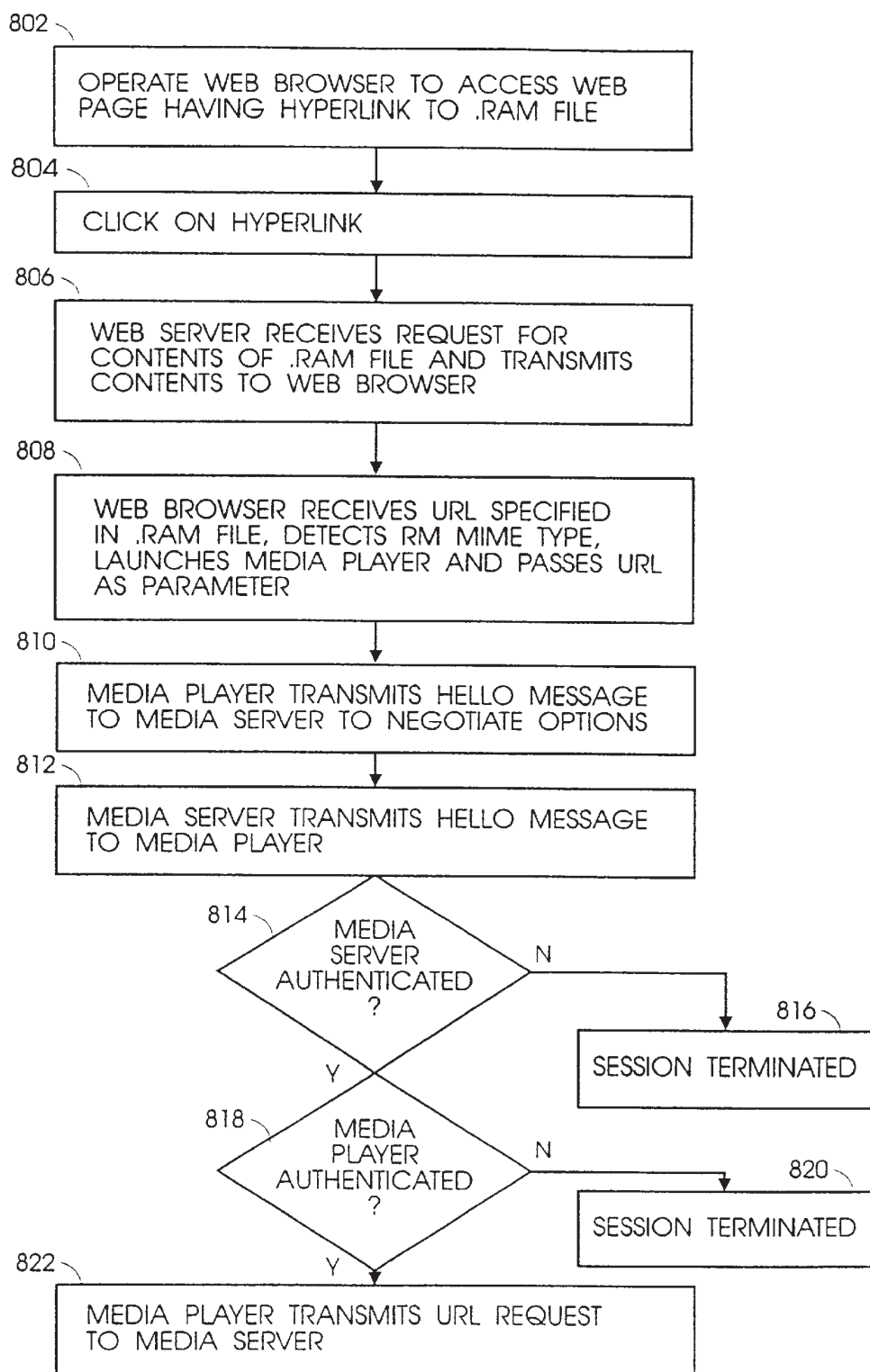


FIG. 8A

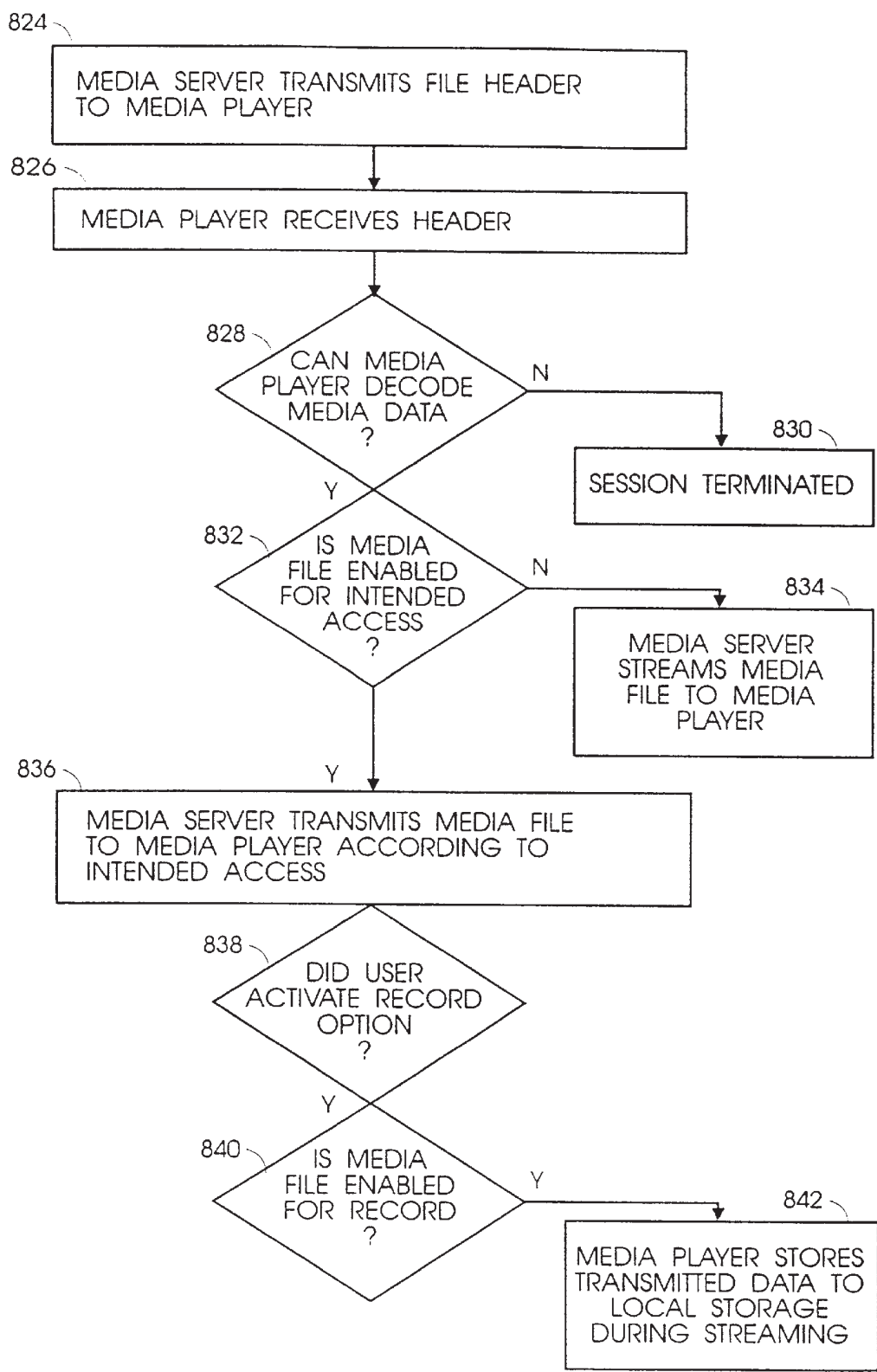


FIG. 8B

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SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR REGULATING THE TRANSMISSION OF MEDIA DATA

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

This invention relates to the transmission of media data. More specifically, the invention provides a system and method for controlling the manner in which media data may be served over a network.

2. Description of the Related Art

The production and distribution of multimedia data, including video, audio and image data, is increasing at a phenomenal rate. Factors contributing to this explosion in the production and use of multimedia data include the growing popularity and capability of the Internet, the growing affordability of personal computers capable of efficiently processing multimedia data to provide a pleasing experience for users, as well as the fact that multimedia data is far superior to text-only data in conveying content-rich information naturally and intuitively. The great demand for multimedia data will only increase.

People now access and use multimedia data in numerous ways. One way that people access multimedia data is over a network. For example, people using web browsers on personal computers now access multimedia data by surfing the World Wide Web via the Internet. Countless numbers of content providers link multimedia data to web pages accessible by people using web browsers. Today, persons using web browsers can access a web page from a web server operated by a content provider to view video clips, listen to audio clips, or view images made available by the content provider.

Sometimes, a person using a web browser and possibly a media rendering plug-in accesses a media object (e.g., video clip, audio clip, image) on a web site by viewing or listening to the media object as it is being downloaded without ever storing the media object permanently on his or her computer. Other times, a user accesses a media object by downloading it and storing it on his or her computer in its entirety before viewing or listening to the object. A user who accesses a media object by downloading it in its entirety has the advantage of being able to view or listen to the object any number of times without ever having to connect again to a network. For a number of reasons, including encouraging users to repeatedly visit a web site, content providers need to regulate the type of access that users have to one, some or all media objects provided on a web site. Yet, currently, content providers have little ability to conveniently restrict users' access.

Media objects are typically stored as computer files. Thus, one way of restricting users' access to these media objects is to set up a username/password system. Besides presenting possibly prohibitive administrative overhead, such access restriction is undesirable because many users would be unwilling to visit a web site if they were forced to enter a username and password upon every visit.

While existing computer operating systems can, on a user-by-user basis, allow access to a file or prohibit access altogether, that functionality does not help a content provider control particular types of accesses to files. A computer's file system-typically a component of the operating system-generally stores certain information about each file stored on the computer, such as, for example, file size and date and time of creation. Neither the size of a file, nor an

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associated date or time assists in controlling how a user may access a file. Thus, content providers cannot rely on functionality provided by a computer's operating system to control the ways in which a media object may be accessed.

As the demand for multimedia data grows, the multimedia content produced by content providers grows in value. Indeed, many content providers now charge a fee from users who wish to access their content. Content providers are increasingly concerned about the ways in which users are accessing the content and possible uses being made of the content. What content providers need is a convenient way of controlling the ways users can access media objects.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention advantageously provides a system and method for conveniently and effectively regulating the ways users can access media objects.

One embodiment of the present invention is an access coded media file. The access coded media file comprises media data, and a header including access code bits, the access code bits representing a value indicating that the media data may be transmitted in accordance with at least one transmission protocol. An alternative aspect of the embodiment is one wherein the access code bits represent a value indicating that the media data may not be transmitted in accordance with at least one transmission protocol. A further aspect of the embodiment is one wherein the access code bits are encrypted and wherein the value is determined by decrypting the access code bits.

Another embodiment of the present invention is a method for regulating types of access to a media file. The method comprising the steps of (1) placing an access code in a media file, the media file stored in a media storage accessible by a media server, the media server connected to a network, the access code indicating that data in the media file may be transmitted in accordance with at least one permitted transmission protocol; (2) requesting the media file with a media player, the media player connected to the network, the request specifying an intended transmission protocol to use in transmitting the media file over the network in response to the request; (3) transmitting the access code to the media player with the media server; and (4) checking the access code with the media player to determine whether the intended transmission protocol is one of the at least one permitted transmission protocols. Another aspect of the embodiment further comprises encrypting the access code within the media file, and decrypting the access code with the media player to perform the checking.

Still another embodiment of the invention is a system for regulating the transmission of media data. The system comprises (1) a media file having media data and a header, the header including an access code corresponding to at least one permitted type of access to the media file; (2) a media server connected to a network and to media storage, the media file stored on the media storage, the media server responsive to a first request for the media file by transmitting the header, the media server responsive to a second request by transmitting the media data in accordance with one of the at least one permitted type of access; and (3) a media player connected to the network, the media player responsive to user input to transmit the first request to the media server, the media player receiving the header and extracting the access code from the header, the media player determining from the access code that the media file is enabled for one of the at least one permitted type of access, the media player transmitting the second request to the media server upon the

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determination. One aspect of the embodiment is one wherein the first request specifies the one of at least one permitted type of access. Another aspect of the embodiment is one wherein the one of at least one permitted type of access is a streaming transmission access. Still another aspect of the embodiment is one wherein the one of at least one permitted type of access is a faster than real time reliable transmission access. Yet another aspect of the embodiment is one wherein the one of at least one permitted type of access is simultaneous streaming and faster than real time transmission access. A further aspect of the embodiment is one wherein the permitted type of access includes recording media data to local storage. A still further aspect of the embodiment is one wherein the access code is encrypted and wherein the media player decrypts the access code.

A further embodiment of the invention is a method for controlling access to media data over a network. The method comprising the steps of (1) requesting remotely stored media data in accordance with a preferred transmission protocol; (2) receiving an access code corresponding with permitted transmission protocols, the access code stored within the media data; (3) determining whether the preferred transmission protocol is one of the permitted transmission protocols; and (4) receiving the media data in accordance with the preferred transmission protocol if the preferred transmission protocol is one of the permitted transmission protocols. In one aspect, the embodiment comprises the further step of receiving the media data in accordance with a default transmission protocol if the preferred transmission protocol is not one of the permitted transmission protocols. In another aspect, the embodiment comprises the further step of encrypting the access code.

A still further embodiment of the invention is a system for regulating access to media data. The system comprises (1) a media file having an embedded access code, the access code corresponding to at least one permitted type of transmission of the media file; (2) a web page having a hyperlink which references a network-based file which includes a reference to the media file; (3) a web browser displaying the web page, the web browser responsive to user activation of the hyperlink to transmit a request for the contents of the network-based file; (4) a web server responsive to the request for the contents to transmit the reference to the media file to the web browser; (5) a media player in communication with the web browser to receive the reference to the media file and to responsively transmit a request to a media server for the contents of the media file; and (6) a media server responsive to the request for the contents of the media file to transmit the access code to the media player, the media player determining from the access code whether a desired type of transmission of the media file is one of the permitted types of transmission. A further aspect of the embodiment is one wherein the reference to the media file indicates the desired type of transmission. Another aspect of the embodiment is one wherein the media server transmits the contents of the media file to the media player upon the media player's determination that the desired type of transmission is one of the permitted types of transmission. Yet another aspect of the embodiment is one wherein the desired type of transmission is a streaming transmission. Further aspects of the embodiment include one wherein the desired type of transmission is a faster than real time reliable transmission and one wherein the desired type of transmission is simultaneous streaming and faster than real time transmission.

Another embodiment of the invention is a method of encoding a media file to regulate transmission of the media file. The method comprises the steps of (1) prompting a user

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to select a transmission method; (2) calculating an access code corresponding to the selected transmission method; (3) opening a media file stored on a computer-readable medium; (4) placing the access code within the media file; and (5) storing the media file having the access code on the computer-readable medium. One aspect of the embodiment further comprises the step of encrypting the access code. Another aspect of the embodiment further comprises the step of combining the access code with extra bits and placing both the access code and the extra bits in the media file.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 illustrates a representation of an existing media distribution system;

FIG. 2 illustrates an embodiment of an existing media distribution system;

FIG. 3 illustrates an embodiment of the present invention wherein a user accesses a media file via the Internet;

FIG. 4 illustrates information encoded in a media file in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 5 illustrates components of a system in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. 6 illustrates steps to configure components in one embodiment of the present invention to operate in accordance with the present invention;

FIG. 7 illustrates steps in one embodiment of the present for encoding a media file; and

FIGS. 8A and 8B illustrate steps in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention for transmitting a media object in accordance with a predefined type of access to the media object.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

FIG. 1 illustrates a representation of an existing media distribution system. A media server **102** accesses a media storage **104** to obtain media data representing a media object **106** such as, for example, a video clip, audio clip, or graphical image. The media server **102** transmits the media data via a network **108** to media receiving devices.

In some cases, a media receiving device receives media data representing a video or audio clip and plays the clip (e.g., decodes and renders audio and video information to produce video image frames as pixels on a computer screen and to produce audible sound of an accompanying soundtrack from a speaker connected to the computer) while the media data is being transmitted. This type of transmission of media data may be referred to as streaming. In a streaming transmission, media data is buffered temporarily by the media receiving device, processed by the device into video or audio information which is presented to the user, and the media data is never stored permanently on the computer.

In other cases, however, a media receiving device receives an entire video clip, audio clip, or image and stores it in a non-volatile memory. This type of transmission of media data may be referred to as "faster than real time reliable download" or FTRRD mode. Once a media object **106** has been transmitted in FTRRD mode, the user may then play the media object **106** at a later time regardless of whether the user is connected to a network. Such a user may also play the video or audio clip or view the image numerous times.

A non-portable media player **110** receives media data representing the media object **106** using a streaming trans-

mission protocol 112. The non-portable media player cannot easily or conveniently be carried from place to place by a user. In accordance with the streaming transmission protocol 112, the non-portable media player 110 interprets the media data as it is received to provide, for example, a video display for a user of the non-portable media player 110. Generally, the non-portable media player discards the media data immediately after interpreting the data to create, for example, a video display, and does not store the media data in any non-volatile memory.

A portable media player 122 receives the media data using a FTRRD transmission method 114. The portable media player 122, at a time T_1 , receives the media data and stores it in a media file 116 on a local, non-volatile memory 118. During receipt of the media data, the portable media player 122 does not interpret the media data or present it in any manner for user consumption. At a later time T_2 , a user operates the portable media player 122 to open the media file 116 and to interpret the data in the media file 116 to create a presentation 120 of the media object 106.

Thus, existing systems such as that illustrated in FIG. 1 can transmit a media object such as, for example, a video clip, an audio clip, or graphical image, in accordance with a streaming protocol 112 or a FTRRD protocol 114. The streaming protocol 112 is useful for requesting and immediately playing a media object 106. The FTRRD transmission protocol 114 is useful for acquiring the entire content of a media object 106 for later play or presentation, particularly on a portable media player 122.

FIG. 2 illustrates an embodiment of the system illustrated in FIG. 1. Thus, a computer 202, such as, for example, a personal computer running the Microsoft Windows NT Version 4.0 operating system and having a 300-MHz Intel Pentium processor, 64 MB of RAM (random access memory) and 4.8 GB of hard disk storage, executes media server 102 software such as, for example, RealServer by RealNetworks, Inc. The hard disk storage of the computer 202 includes media storage 104 and the media object 106. The computer 202 is connected to the Internet 204 and World Wide Web.

Another computer 206, having the same characteristics as the computer 202, executes media player software, such as, for example, RealPlayer by RealNetworks, Inc. operating as a plug-in or helper application of a web browser such as, for example, Netscape Communicator. Thus, the computer 206 operates as a non-portable media player 110. The computer 206 is connected to the Internet 204 by, for example, a 28.8 kbps modem using a standard telephone line.

A portable media player 208 is connected to the computer 206. The portable media player 208 has local, non-volatile storage such as, for example, a flash memory. The portable media player 208 also includes a microprocessor and user controls. In addition, the portable media player 208 includes a speaker or other mechanism for reproducing audio information and possibly a display screen for reproducing video information or a graphical image. Examples of such a portable media player include Rio by Diamond Multimedia or Audible MobilePlayer by Audible Corporation.

Generally, the computer 206 communicates through the Internet 204 with the computer 202 to request and receive media clips 106. The computer 206 may use either a streaming transmission protocol 112 or a FTRRD transmission protocol 114 to receive the media clip. Using the FTRRD transmission protocol 114, the computer 206 can store the media clip 106 and transmit it via a data communication line 210 to the portable media player 208.

A content provider operating media server software 102 on the computer 202 may not, however, wish to allow the media clip 106 to be accessed using both a streaming transmission protocol 112 and a FTRRD transmission protocol 114. A content provider may, for example, wish to have users accessing a media clip 106 view advertising information encountered each time the user accesses the content provider's web site (one example of a content providing system). Existing systems do not offer content providers a convenient way to restrict access to certain media clips 106 to only a streaming transmission protocol 112, while allowing other media clips 106 to be selectively enabled for access via a FTRRD transmission protocol 114. The present invention advantageously provides that capability to content providers.

FIG. 3 illustrates an embodiment of the present invention wherein a user accesses a media file via the Internet 204. A user operating a web browser on a computer 206 views a screen display 302 which displays a web page 304. The web page 304 is one of possibly many served to users by a web server 306. In one embodiment, the web server 306 may be the Apache Web Server running on a computer having the hardware characteristics of the computer 202 described in relation to FIG. 2.

The web page 304 includes a download hyperlink 308 and a play hyperlink 310. The download hyperlink 308 has an associated URL of "http://www.content.com/foo1.ram". As will be appreciated by those of ordinary skill in the art, the URL references a file called "foo1.ram" on a web site having a domain name "www.content.com" using the hypertext transport protocol ("http"). Similarly, the play hyperlink 310 has an associated URL of "http://www.content.com/foo2.ram". That URL references a file called "foo2.ram" on a web site "www.content.com".

A computer readable storage 312, which is accessible by the web server 306, includes a media object called "foo.rm" 318. The computer readable storage 312 also includes a foo1.ram file 314 and a foo2.ram file 316, both of which reference the foo.rm media object 318. The foo1.ram file 314 includes a URL of "pnm://www.content.com/foo.rm?mobileplayback='1'." The foo2.ram file 316 includes a reference to a URL of "pnm://www.content.com/foo.rm". As will be immediately appreciated by those of ordinary skill in the art, the "pnm:///" portion of the URL indicates a particular protocol. In one embodiment of the present invention, "pnm" refers to a flow control protocol used to transmit data of a media object 106. Further appreciated will be the use of a parameter following the '?' character in a URL string as well as the user of many parameters separated by the '&' character. For example, date and user parameters are specified in the following URL string:

```
"http://www.abc.com/webpage.htm?date='01/20/98'&user='RacerX'"
```

In one embodiment of the present invention, the "mobile-playback" parameter, when set to '1' indicates that an associated media object is being accessed for FTRRD mode transmission. Another access parameter is "streamandload" which indicates that both a stream transmission and a FTRRD transmission happen simultaneously—the stream transmission typically at a lower bit rate than the FTRRD transmission. Thus, a ".ram" file may be created whose contents include a URL string specifying a protocol (e.g., "pnm://"), a media object (e.g., "www.content.com/foo.rm"), and an access parameter (e.g., "?streamandload='1'").

It will be appreciated by those of ordinary skill in the art that files compliant with SMIL (Standardized Multimedia

Integration Language) may also be referred to by hyperlinks. It will be similarly appreciated that SMIL files (typically having the extension “.smi”) can reference a media object **318**. One example of a SMIL file has a file name of “foo.smi” and includes the following tags:

```
<smil>
  <head>
    <layout>
      <root-layout height="320" width="320"
        background-color="black"/>
      <region id="images" left="40" top="40" height="
        240" width="240"/>
    </layout>
  </head>
  <body>
    <seq>
      <par>
        
        <audio src="foo.rm" clip-end="2.25min"/>
      </par>
    </seq>
  </body>
</smil>
```

In the above example, the “src” parameter of the “<audio>” tag specifies the media object **318**, namely “foo.rm”.

FIG. 4 illustrates information encoded in a media file in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. In particular, the foo.rm media file **318** includes a header **402** and media data **404**. In one embodiment of the present invention, the header **402** is a variable length header, including multiple fields, some of variable length, some of fixed length. In one embodiment, the length (in bytes) of the variable length fields is indicated by a 2-byte length value in each such field preceding the actual data of the field. Thus, in accordance with that embodiment, a value of a two-byte field **406** indicates the length (in bytes) of a title field **408**, which specifies a title associated with the media file **318**. A value of another two-byte field **410** indicates the length of an author field **412**, which provides the name of an author associated with the media file **318**. Likewise, a value of a two-byte field **414** indicates the length of a copyright field **416**, and a value in another two-byte field **418** indicates the length of an encoding type field **420**. The encoding type field **420** specifies a particular encoder or encoding technology used to encode the media data **404**.

A 4-byte fixed length field **422** holds a value which indicates, in tenths of a second, the playing time of the media file **318**. Another fixed length field **424** of **128** bits holds a value indicating the type of accesses permitted for the media file **318**. In one embodiment, three bits represent a value from 0–4 and are encoded in a particular manner (described in more detail below) within the 128-bit fixed length field **424**.

In accordance with this embodiment, the three bits represent the value 0 (zero) to indicate that the media file **318** is enabled to be transmitted to a media player using a streaming transmission protocol **114** only. The streaming transmission protocol is the default protocol. If the value of the three bits is 1 (one), then the media file **318** is enabled for streaming transmission and also enabled for a media player to store the media file on local storage (i.e., record the media file) during the streaming transmission. If the value of the three bits is 2 (two), then the media file **318** is enabled for transmission in FTRRD mode. If the value of the three bits is 3 (three), then the media file **318** is enabled for simultaneous FTRRD and streaming transmission and is also enabled for storage during streaming (recording). If the

value of the three bits is 4 (four), then the media file **318** is enabled for simultaneous FTRRD and streaming transmission. In the simultaneous FTRRD and streaming transmission, the media server transmits the media file **318** to the media player in two different streams, namely, in a typical embodiment, a lower bit rate stream (typically played for the user) and a higher bit rate stream (typically received and stored on local storage at a rate faster than real time playback).

An end of header indicator (EOH) **426** marks the termination point of the header **402**. The end of header indicator **426** is, in one embodiment, a single byte set to the value **255**. As will be appreciated by those of ordinary skill, additional fields could be included in the header **402**.

FIG. 5 illustrates components of a system in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. The web server **306** is connected to the Internet **204**. The web server **306** communicates with a media server **502** such as, for example, RealServer by RealNetworks, Inc. The web server **306** and the media server **502** may run on a single computer or may run on different computers connected in any manner wherein a program running on one can send messages to a program running on the other. One such connection could be, for example, a LAN. The media server **502** is connected to the media storage **508**. The media storage device **508**, in one embodiment a 4.8 GB hard drive, includes the media file **318**.

A web browser **504** is connected to the Internet **204**. The web browser **504** communicates with a media player **506** such as, for example, RealPlayer by RealNetworks, Inc. As those of ordinary skill in the art will appreciate, the web browser and the media player may run on a single computer having hardware characteristics similar to those of the computer **202** described in connection with FIG. 2. The web browser **504** may, in one embodiment, be Netscape Communicator **4.07**.

FIG. 6 illustrates steps to configure the embodiment illustrated in FIG. 5 to operate in accordance with the present invention. In the first step **602**, a content provider or other user configures the web server **306** and media server. The web server **306** has an associated configuration file. Among certain options, the web server **306** configuration file includes a broadcast port specification. In one embodiment, the web server **306** configuration file specifies a broadcast port **80** through which the web server **306** transmits information to and receives information from the Internet **204**. In the context of the Internet, a port is a numerical identifier normally provided with an IP address which is used by TCP/IP (transmission control protocol/internet protocol) to direct data to a particular application. Generally, port **80** is reserved for HTTP (hypertext transport protocol).

Similarly, the media server **502** has an associated configuration file. The media server configuration file specifies a broadcast port **7070** through which the media server **502** sends information to and receives information from the Internet **204**. Those of ordinary skill will be readily familiar with broadcast port numbers and will understand that the web server **306** ignores data communicated through a broadcast port different than the one assigned to it.

In one embodiment of the present invention, a startup script specifies that both the web server **306** and the media server **502** be started as services by the Windows NT operating system when the operating system starts up.

The web server **306** is further configured to recognize a MIME (multipurpose Internet multimedia extensions) type by which it determines that responses to requests for particular media files are to be handled by the media player **506**.

In one embodiment of the present invention, the web server 502 transmits the content of a “.ram” file, the content being a URL referencing a file of MIME type RM (e.g., a file called “foo.rm”), in response to a user request, and the web server 502 expects that the media player 506 will receive and process the URL. It will be readily appreciated by those of ordinary skill that the present invention is not limited by any particular MIME type. Generally, files associated with the RM MIME type comprise audio, video, image, or text information, or some combination of those.

In a next step 604, a content provider or other user encodes a media file of MIME type RM with an access enable code. FIG. 7 illustrates steps in one embodiment of the present for encoding a media file 318. In a first step 702, a user starts a media file encoder program which displays an option menu listing types of access for a media file. The options include: stream, stream and record while streaming, faster than real time reliable download (FTRRD), simultaneous stream and FTRRD and record while streaming, and simultaneous stream and FTRRD. In one embodiment, the menu is implemented as a pull-down list box. In the step 702, the user selects one of the options from the option menu.

In a next step 704, the media file encoder calculates an access code to correspond with the selected menu option. In one embodiment, 0 (zero) corresponds to stream, 1 (one) corresponds to stream and record while streaming, 2 (two) corresponds to faster than real time reliable download (FTRRD), 3 (three) corresponds to simultaneous stream and FTRRD and record while streaming, and 4 (four) corresponds to simultaneous stream and FTRRD. The media file encoder uses three bits to encode the access code value. The media file encoder, in the step 704, places the three bits as the lowest order (least significant) bits in a 32-bit field, and generates 29 additional bits at random to fill the 29 higher order bit positions in the 32-bit field.

In another step 706, the media file encoder encrypts the 32-bit field. In one embodiment, the media file encoder uses a private key protocol such as DES (digital encryption standard) wherein both the media file encoder and a decoding entity such as, for example, the media player 506, share a private key. Once the 32-bit field is encrypted, the media file encoder, in the step 706, adds the encrypted 32 bits to an additional 96 bits generated at random to create a 128-bit field which is added to the header of the media file 318.

As those of ordinary skill in the art will appreciate, updating a variable-length header of a file is well known in the art. Thus, the media file encoder opens the media file, reads the header into application memory, generates the 128-bit field as described, and inserts the 128-bit field into the header data in the application memory. Many techniques exist for modifying and replacing information in a file, and the present invention is not limited by any such technique. In a step 708, the media file encoder writes the updated media file to storage.

With respect to FIG. 6, in a further step 606, a content provider or user creates a file having an extension of “.ram”. The “.ram” file includes a URL which references the encoded media file 318. The URL in the “.ram” file includes a specified value for the “mobileplayback” parameter. One example of the URL is “pnm://www.content.com/foo.rm?mobileplayback=‘1’”. As will be appreciated by those of ordinary skill, parameters generally follow a “?” symbol in a URL specification. The “mobileplayback” parameter, when set to 1 (one), indicates that the intended access of the media file (e.g., “foo.rm”) is by FTRRD transmission. An additional parameter that could be included

in the URL is “streamandload=‘1’” which indicates that the intended access of the media file is simultaneous stream and FTRRD transmission.

In a step 608, the content provider or other user creates a web page having a hyperlink which references the “.ram” file. As will be readily appreciated by those of ordinary skill, a hyperlink refers to a link to another Internet-based document encoded using tags defined by the HTML (hypertext markup language) standard. One example of HTML coding to specify a hyperlink is:

```
<A HREF="http://www.content.com/
foo.rm">PREVIEW OF TITANIC</A>
```

When a user of the web browser 504 accesses a web page having such a hyperlink, the browser interprets the hyperlink to display the text “PREVIEW OF TITANIC” and responds to a user’s mouse click on the text “PREVIEW OF TITANIC” by submitting a request to the Internet to access the file specified by the HREF parameter of the HTML tag: . Thus, when a user clicks on a hyperlink having a URL which references the “.ram” file, the web browser 504 submits a request that the contents of the “.ram” file be transmitted back to the web browser 504.

In a next step 610, the web browser 504 is configured to communicate with the media player 506 as a helper application or plug-in. In particular, the media player 506 is associated with the MIME type RM. Thus, when the web browser 504 detects a URL specifying a file of MIME type RM (e.g., the file has an extension “.RM”), the web browser 504 launches the media player 506, if it is not already running, and passes the specified URL to the media player 506 as a parameter. Generally, the use of plug-in applications to enhance the capabilities of web browsers via defined MIME types is well known in the art.

FIG. 8A illustrates steps in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention for transmitting a media object in accordance with a predefined type of access to the media object. In a first step 802, a user operates the web browser 504 to access a web page having a hyperlink associated with a media object, the hyperlink referencing a “.ram” file. To access the web page, the user may enter the URL associated with the web page by typing the URL in a text field of the web browser 504 using a keyboard. One example of such a URL is “http://www.content.com”. After entering the URL, the user presses the ENTER key on the keyboard to cause the web browser 504 to issue the request for the web page to the Internet. The web server 306 receives the request and begins transmitting the web page to the web browser 504.

In a next step 804, the web browser 504 displays the web page, and the user clicks on the hyperlink associated with a desired media object. In response, the web browser 504 issues a request to the Internet for the URL associated with the hyperlink.

In another step 806, the web server 306 receives the request for the contents of the “.ram” file associated with the hyperlink and transmits the contents of the “.ram” file to the web browser 504.

In a step 808, the web browser receives the URL string specified in the “.ram” file. A user agent component of the web browser 504 scans the URL string and determines that the URL string references a file having an extension of “.rm”. The user agent of the web browser 504 (1) matches the extension to one of a list of stored extensions and determines that the extension corresponds to a RM MIME type; (2) determines that the media player 506 is a plug-in associated with the RM MIME type; and (3) launches (causes the execution of) the media player 506. The web

browser **504** further passes the URL string specified in the ".ram" file to the media player **506** as a parameter.

In a further step **810**, the media player **506** begins executing and transmits a hello message to the media server **502**. The hello message includes data values for certain communication options which the media player **506** can support. Each option, in one embodiment, includes an integer identifier specified in 8 bits, followed by either a predetermined number of fixed bits corresponding to the option number or a length value in decimal bytes indicating the length of the remaining data in the option. One option identifies a protocol to use for transmitting the media object (e.g., UDP or TCP), another refers to the bandwidth of the media player's network connection, and another option specifies the media player's **506** maximum bandwidth. Another option represents an authentication challenge to the media server **502** to enable the player to determine whether the media server **502** is produced by a particular manufacturer or is somehow incompatible with the media player **506**. In the step **810**, the media player **506** also transmits a media player ID string to the media server **502**. The media player **506** ID string is an underscore-delimited ASCII string, formatted according to the following: platform_version_player_type_id_language_processor. One example of the ID string is "win95_3.2_4.1_plug32_rpla_EN_686".

In a step **812**, the media server **502** responds to the media player **506** hello message by transmitting its own hello message to the media player **506**. The media server **502** hello message includes an authentication response and also an authentication challenge to the media player **506**. In one embodiment of the present invention, the media server's **502** authentication response is indicated by initial bits corresponding to the "#" character, followed by a two-byte length field set to the value 64, followed by 64 bytes of data. In one embodiment, the 64 bytes of data indicate a particular manufacturer and version number associated with the media server **502**.

In a step **814**, the media player compares the media server's **502** authentication response to predetermined responses which the media player **506** expects to encounter. In an alternative embodiment, the server's authentication response is encrypted in accordance with a predetermined encryption scheme. In that embodiment, the media player **506** decrypts the 64-byte authentication response data in accordance with the predetermined encryption scheme and then determines whether the decrypted authentication response data matches an expected response. If, in the step **814**, the media player determines that the media server's **502** authentication response is not one of the expected responses, then, in a step **816**, the media player **506** terminates the communication session and displays a message to the user indicating that the media player **506** cannot work with the media server **502**.

If, however, in the step **814**, the media player authenticates the media server **502**, then, in a step **818**, the media player **506** transmits an authentication response to the media server **502** to comply with the media server's **502** authentication challenge to the media player **506**. In the step **818**, the media server **502** determines whether the media player's **506** authentication response matches one of a predetermined number of expected responses. If, in the step **818**, the media server **502** determines that the media player's **506** authentication response does not correspond to any expected response, then in a step **820**, the media server terminates the communication session.

If, however, in the step **818**, the media server authenticates the media player **506**, then, in a further step **822**, the

media player **506** transmits a URL request to the media server **502**. The URL corresponds to the media object (e.g., a media file) **318** stored on the media storage **508**.

In a step **824** (FIG. 8B), the media server **502** transmits a file header **402** of the media file **318** to the media player **506**. In a further step **826**, the media player **506** receives the data of the media file header and stores the header data in a buffer.

In a further step **828**, the media player **506** scans the header data stored in the buffer to determine whether the media player **506** is capable of decoding the media data **404**. In particular, the media player accesses the encoding type field **420**, in one embodiment, by referencing the associated 2-byte length field **418** and extracting the indicated number of bits from the header immediately following the length field **418**. In the step **828**, the media player **506** thus determines the encoding technology used to encode the media data **404**, and determines if it is capable of decoding the media data **404**. In one embodiment, the media player **506** compares the extracted bits of the encoding type field to values in a first column of a multiple row table, wherein each row corresponds to encoding/decoding technology supported by the media player **506**. If the extracted bits match one of the values in the first column, then the media player **506** determines, in the step **828**, that it can decode the media data **404**, otherwise the media player **506** determines that it cannot decode the media data **404**, and, in a step **830** the media player **506** terminates the session.

If, however, in the step **828**, the media player **506** determines that it can decode the media data of the media file **318**, then, in a next step **832**, the media player **506** determines whether the media file **318** is enabled for the intended type of access to the media file **318**. More particularly, the media player **506** extracts 128 bits from the buffered header data which correspond to the 128-bit fixed length field **424** of the file header **402**. The media player **506** further extracts the lower order (least significant) 32 bits of the 128 bits and uses a private key (matching that used by the media file encoder) to decrypt the 32 bits. The media player **506** then, in a step **832**, checks the lower order (least significant) three bits to determine whether the value represented by the three bits (i.e., the access code) permits the intended access to the media file **318**.

In one embodiment of the present invention, if the intended access is streaming transmission, then the media player **506** checks for an access code of 0, 1, 3 or 4. In an alternative embodiment, as illustrated in FIG. 8B, the media player **506** does not check whether the media file **318** is enabled for streaming transmission when streaming transmission is the intended type of access. In that alternative embodiment, streaming transmission is treated as a default condition.

If the intended access is FTRRD transmission, then the media player **506** checks for an access code 2, 3, or 4. If the intended access is simultaneous stream and FTRRD transmission, then the media player **506** checks for an access code of 3 or 4. If the media player **506** determines that the access code is not one which permits the intended access, then, in a step **834**, the media server **502** transmits the media data of the media file **318** in a streaming transmission, and the media player **506** begins receiving and playing the media data (rendering video or sound information).

If, however, in the step **832**, the media player **506** determines that the access code permits the intended access, then, in a step **836**, the media player **506** sends a request message to the media server requesting that the server transmit the media data of the media file **318** according to the intended access. The media server **502** begins transmitting the media

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data of the media file 318 in accordance with the desired access. In one embodiment, the media server 502 uses TCP protocol to transmit media data in response to a request for a FTRRD transmission. When the transmission of the media data is complete, and if the type of transmission resulted in the media player storing the media data locally, the media player 506 may transfer the media data to a portable media player such as that described in relation to FIG. 2.

In the case where the media server 502 transmits the media data in both streaming and FTRRD transmission protocols, the media player 506 and media server 502 use two ports, one for streaming transmission and the other for FTRRD transmission. In one embodiment, a port number 7071 is used. By default, the media player 506 and media server 502 use the port number one greater than the initially configured port when a second port is needed. Further, in one embodiment of the present invention, a second instance of the media player is launched to receive and process data received over the second port.

When the media player 506 receives media data in a streaming transmission, then, in a step 838, the media player 506 monitors the status of a user selectable record option. In one embodiment, the record option is a command button of the media player 506 user interface labelled "RECORD". If, in the step 838, the media player 506 detects that the user has clicked on the record command button, then, in a step 840, the media player 506 again checks the access code to determine whether the media file 318 is enabled for recording access. More particularly, the media player 506 checks the access code for values 1 or 3, and, if the access code is 1 (one) or 3 (three), then, in a step 842, the media player 506 begins storing the received media data on local storage during the transmission, of the media data. If the access code is not 1 or 3, then the media player 506 does not record (i.e., store) the streamed media data.

The present invention may be embodied in other specific forms without departing from the essential characteristics as described herein. The embodiments described above are to be considered in all respects as illustrative only and not restrictive in any manner. The scope of the invention is indicated by the following claims rather than by the foregoing description. Any and all changes which come within the meaning and range of equivalency of the claims are to be considered within their scope.

What is claimed is:

1. An access coded media file stored on a computer-readable medium, comprising:
 - media data; and
 - a header including access code bits, said access code bits representing a value causing the media data to be transmitted in accordance with at least one transmission protocol.
2. The access coded media file of claim 1 wherein said access code bits are encrypted and wherein said value is determined by decrypting said access code bits.
3. The access coded media file as described in claim 1, wherein said at least one transmission protocol includes a streaming protocol.
4. The access coded media file as described in claim 1, wherein said at least one transmission protocol includes a faster than real time transmission protocol.
5. An access coded media file stored on a computer-readable medium, comprising:
 - media data; and
 - a header including access code bits, said access code bits representing a value causing the media data to be transmitted in accordance with at least one transmission

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protocol, said access code bits representing a value indicating that the media data may not be transmitted in accordance with at least one transmission protocol.

6. A method for regulating types of access to a media file, the method comprising the steps of:
 - placing an access code in a media file, said media file stored in a media storage accessible by a media server, said media server connected to a network, said access code indicating that data in the media file may be transmitted in accordance with at least one permitted transmission protocol;
 - requesting said media file with a media player, said media player connected to said network, said request specifying an intended transmission protocol to use in transmitting said media file over said network in response to said request;
 - transmitting said access code to said media player with said media server; and
 - checking said access code with said media player to determine whether said intended transmission protocol is one of said at least one permitted transmission protocols.
7. A method for regulating types of access to a media file, the method comprising the steps of:
 - placing an access code in a media file, said media file stored in a media storage accessible by a media server, said media server connected to a network, said access code indicating that data in the media file may be transmitted in accordance with at least one permitted transmission protocol;
 - requesting said media file with a media player, said media player connected to said network, said request specifying an intended transmission protocol to use in transmitting said media file over said network in response to said request;
 - transmitting said access code to said media player with said media server;
 - checking said access code with said media player to determine whether said intended transmission protocol is one of said at least one permitted transmission protocols;
 - encrypting said access code within said media file; and
 - decrypting said access code with said media player to perform said checking.
8. A system for regulating the transmission of media data, the system comprising:
 - a media file having media data and a header, said header including an access code corresponding to at least one permitted type of access to said media file;
 - a media server connected to a network and to media storage, said media file stored on said media storage, said media server responsive to a first request for said media file by transmitting said header, said media server responsive to a second request by transmitting said media data in accordance with one of said at least one permitted type of access; and
 - a media player connected to said network, said media player responsive to user input to transmit said first request to said media server, said media player receiving said header and extracting said access code from said header, said media player determining from said access code that said media file is enabled for one of said at least one permitted type of access, said media player transmitting said second request to said media server upon said determination.

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9. The system of claim 8 wherein said first request specifies said one of at least one permitted type of access.

10. The system of claim 8 wherein said one of at least one permitted type of access is a streaming transmission access.

11. The system of claim 8 wherein said one of at least one permitted type of access is a faster than real time reliable transmission access.

12. The system of claim 10 wherein said permitted type of access includes recording media data to local storage.

13. The system of claim 8 wherein said access code is encrypted and wherein said media player decrypts said access code.

14. A system for regulating the transmission of media data, the system comprising:

a media file having media data and a header, said header including an access code corresponding to simultaneous streaming and faster than real time transmission access;

a media server connected to a network and to media storage, said media file stored on said media storage, said media server responsive to a first request for said media file by transmitting said header, said media server responsive to a second request by transmitting said media data in accordance with said simultaneous streaming and faster than real time transmission access; and

a media player connected to said network, said media player responsive to user input to transmit said first request to said media server, said media player receiving said header and extracting said access code from said header, said media player determining from said access code that said media file is enabled for said simultaneous streaming and faster than real time transmission access, said media player transmitting said second request to said media server upon said determination.

15. The system of claim 14 wherein said permitted type of access includes recording media data to local storage.

16. A method for controlling access to media data over a network, said method comprising the steps of:

requesting transmission of remotely stored media data in accordance with a preferred transmission protocol;

receiving an access code corresponding to permitted transmission protocols which can be used to transmit said media data, said access code stored within said media data;

determining whether said preferred transmission protocol is one of said permitted transmission protocols; and

receiving said media data in accordance with said preferred transmission protocol if said preferred transmission protocol is one of said permitted transmission protocols.

17. The method of claim 16 comprising the further step of: receiving said media data in accordance with a default transmission protocol if said preferred transmission protocol is not one of said permitted transmission protocols.

18. The method of claim 17 comprising the further steps of:

encrypting said access code; and

decrypting said access code.

19. The method of claim 17, comprising the further step of decrypting said access code, wherein said access code is encrypted.

20. A system for regulating access to media data, the system comprising:

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a media file having an embedded access code, said access code corresponding to at least one permitted type of transmission of said media file;

a web page having a hyperlink which references a network-based file which includes a reference to said media file;

a web browser displaying said web page, said web browser responsive to user activation of the hyperlink to transmit a request for the contents of the network-based file;

a web server responsive to said request for said contents to transmit said reference to said media file to said web browser;

a media player in communication with said web browser to receive said reference to said media file and to responsively transmit a request to a media server for the contents of said media file; and

a media server responsive to said request for said contents of said media file to transmit said access code to said media player, said media player determining from said access code whether a desired type of transmission of said media file is one of said permitted types of transmission.

21. The system of claim 20 wherein said reference to said media file indicates said desired type of transmission.

22. The system of claim 20 wherein said media server transmits the contents of said media file to said media player upon said media player's determination that said desired type of transmission is one of said permitted types of transmission.

23. The system of claim 22 wherein said desired type of transmission is a streaming transmission.

24. The system of claim 22 wherein said desired type of transmission is a faster than real time reliable transmission.

25. A system for regulating access to media data, the system comprising:

a media file having an embedded access code, said access code corresponding to at least one permitted type of transmission of said media file;

a web page having a hyperlink which references a network-based file which includes a reference to said media file;

a web browser displaying said web page, said web browser responsive to user activation of the hyperlink to transmit a request for the contents of the network-based file;

a web server responsive to said request for said contents to transmit said reference to said media file to said web browser;

a media player in communication with said web browser to receive said reference to said media file and to responsively transmit a request to a media server for the contents of said media file; and

a media server responsive to said request for said contents of said media file to transmit said access code to said media player, said media player determining from said access code whether simultaneous streaming and faster than real time transmission of said media file is one of said permitted types of transmission;

wherein said media server transmits the contents of said media file to said media player upon said media player's determination that simultaneous streaming and faster than real time transmission is one of said permitted types of transmission.

26. A method of encoding a media file to regulate transmission of the media file, said method comprising the steps of:

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prompting a user to select a transmission method, wherein
said transmission method corresponds to a transmission
protocol;
calculating an access code corresponding to said selected
transmission method;
opening a media file stored on a computer-readable
medium;
placing said access code within said media file; and

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storing said media file having said access code on said
computer-readable medium.
27. The method of claim **26**, further comprising the step
of encrypting said access code.
28. The method of claim **26**, further comprising the step
of combining said access code with extra bits and placing
both said access code and said extra bits in said media file.

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