but each in a different direction, and menu items are selected by clicking the mouse and then pointing in the direction of the menu item.

[0014] What is needed is an interface to provide users with a definable interface that minimizes cursor commute and does not clutter the work area.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0015] The present invention relates to a user definable interface that minimizes cursor commute.

[0016] The present invention is to be implemented in a cursor-based computing environment having a display. According to the present invention a user definable interface (UDI) is displayed upon activation by a user, wherein the UDI has a plurality of buttons and is displayed in a relative position about a cursor position to reduce cursor commute. The present invention permits the user to select a visual appearance and shape of the UDI, and the number of buttons. The present invention also permits the user to assign a command to each of the plurality of buttons by dragging and dropping from one or more applications of the apparatus.

[0017] The present invention further permits the user to form a first group of buttons and at least a second group of buttons. The user is permitted to assign a first icon representing a first specific one of the one or more applications to a first given button of the first group and assign commands, associated with the first specific one of the one or more applications to the second group of buttons. The present invention further permits the user to assign a second icon representing a second specific one of the one or more applications to a second given button of the first group and assign commands, associated with the second specific one of the one or more applications to the second group of buttons. The appearance of, and commands associated with, the second group of buttons change based on which button of the first group of buttons is selected.

[0018] The present invention further permits the user to activate the UDI by the user comprises at least one of clicking a hotkey, clicking a mouse button, or turning on the apparatus.

[0019] In a data processing system having a user defined interface (UDI), an alternative a method of the present invention comprises the steps of managing the UDI in response to user commands, providing at least one template that defines position for a plurality of command regions corresponding to the UDI, and providing a theme that defines attributes and commands for the for a plurality of command regions.

[0020] The present invention is also characterized as an apparatus comprising a user defined interface (UDI) having a plurality of command regions, a command processor that manages an interactive skin (IS) and a customizer. The IS includes a template that defines position information for the plurality of command regions corresponding to the UDI and at least one of default attributes and default commands for the plurality of command regions, and a theme that defines attributes if the template only defines default commands for the plurality of command regions, or commands if the template only defines default attributes for the plurality of command regions. The customizer permits user replacing or user extending of the default attributes or the default commands of one or more of the plurality of command regions. Typically the user is an end user of the apparatus, but the invention is not so limited.

[0021] The customizer permits a user to: hide the UDI; hide a portion of the UDI; have the UDI display upon launch; launch the UDI from a system tray; and scale the size of the UDI. Moreover, the can be UDI is displayed in a relative position about a cursor position. The customizer permits a user to define that relative position.

[0022] Another aspect of the present invention is directed to a user definable interface that enables each user to control interaction with any given software package or operating system through a customized set of interactive nestable commands and functions based upon user preference with the convenience of edit functionality.

[0023] Another aspect of the present invention relates to a user definable interface that allows selection of multiple actions with a single user interaction.

[0024] It is also another aspect of the present invention to provide a user definable interface that is invisible until prompted by the user and can be set to disappear again after a user selection.

[0025] It is another aspect the present invention is directed to a user definable interface that is executable during work on an active file.

[0026] Another aspect of the present invention relates to a device, method and computer program product that provide an efficient on-screen work environment tailored to the user's needs.

[0027] It is yet another aspect of the present invention to provide a translucent executable user definable interface on a display screen that enables a user to observe the work space depicted beneath the user definable interface through a centrally positioned window in the user definable interface.

[0028] It is another aspect of the present invention to permit selection of commands or functions by "clicking" an icon from a plurality of icons that enclose or partially enclose a central window. Clicking on a button causes one or more additional interface buttons to appear, launches an application, opens a file, or opens a container.

[0029] Another aspect of the present invention is directed to an Internet browser and application launching tool.

[0030] The user definable interface of the present invention provides a number of advantages over other interface overlays known in the art. For example, it allows users to customize commands according to the user's preference. In addition, it eliminates screen clutter by being invisible until activated and disappearing once a selection is made. Further, the present invention provides the user with the ability to view the work area on a display screen while the user definable interface is activated.

[0031] These and additional features and advantages of the invention will be set forth in the detailed description that follows, and in part will be readily available to those skilled in the art from that description or recognized by practicing the invention as described herein.