

initially applied to newly established/created accounts. Similarly, one or more default linked accounts may be provided for a user by an operator of a system or another entity that is afforded such authority by the system operator and the user. Such linked accounts are effectively auto-created for the user and may be created as a result of the user requesting a particular type of linked account or a linked account for a particular purpose. In one embodiment, the account operating rules may be established and/or amended by operation of the user device.

[0014] In embodiments of the invention, the account operating rules are used to allow or disallow transactions with respect to the at least one account or one or more of the linked accounts (e.g. transactions that would effect a withdrawal from a loyalty account in the form of cash via a transfer of value to a scheme enabled account may be disallowed). In one embodiment, account operating rules are established to control intra-account transfers (i.e. transfers between accounts owned by the same user) and inter-account transfers (i.e. transfers between accounts belonging to different users). Account operating rules may also be established to control any transfer between accounts where the value of units in the respective accounts are of a different type. For example, frequent flyer points may be convertible to monetary units at a particular rate and an account operating rule may be established to determine accounts to which points can be transferred subsequent to conversion of the points to the type of value unit of the destination account. In another example, a user may be prevented from transferring loyalty scheme points into a scheme enabled account of another user.

[0015] In another embodiment, certain account operating rules (or types of rules) may be established by third parties and applied to one or more accounts. An example of the establishment and application of an account operating rule by a third party would be the instance of applying a conversion rate for loyalty scheme points that would initially be set by the loyalty scheme provider and changed from time to time in accordance with offers, or perhaps in accordance with a marketing campaign, to encourage greater patronage during a particular period of time with members of the loyalty rewards scheme. In this instance, the loyalty scheme provider would apply an account operating rule, or amend a rule applied by the user, that established the conversion rate of loyalty scheme points such that any transfer of loyalty scheme points from a particular account would occur at the conversion rate set by the loyalty scheme provider. Other types of rules can be implemented for a range of purposes such as enforcing statutory or regulatory requirements or even sophisticated rules for collecting information relating to transactions over significant periods of time for the purpose of identifying trends and highlighting the potential for future cash-flow problems for a user.

[0016] In various embodiments, the user device is any device operable to connect with, and transfer data over, a communications network. Although additional appropriate devices may be developed in the future, at this time the most likely user devices include desktop and/or laptop computers, personal digital assistants and mobile or cell phones that wirelessly connect to a communications network. Further, any appropriate form of communication with the data communications network is envisaged although the particular user interface and/or data communications network interface

is susceptible to change with improvements over time. Presently, the most relevant and readily available interfaces include user devices operable to connect with the data communications network with a web-enabled interface, an Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system, Short Messaging Service (SMS), Multimedia Messaging Service (MMS) and similar interfaces provided with present day user devices.

[0017] In one embodiment of the invention, one of the user's accounts is associated with an account identification device. An account identification device includes a swipe card, smart card or any other device operable to retain and render an account identification number to an appropriate device operably connected to a communications network that can access an electronic account. Further, in this embodiment, funds are retained in the account for transfer to other accounts or to fund purchases or payments. In this embodiment, the user can credit funds into the account for subsequent distribution to other linked accounts thus enabling the user to manage funds that are credited into any particular account (either by themselves or a third party) and to distribute those funds to the most appropriate linked accounts in view of the individual requirements of the user. For example, a user may establish a linked account for the purpose of making regular payments in accordance with a loan agreement or payment for a utility service and may elect to receive income payments into an account and regularly distribute funds from that account to the linked account from which regular deductions are made to satisfy loan repayments. Alternatively, a linked account could be established with an operating rule that transfers funds from a user's account to make a payment when the payment becomes due. In one embodiment, the value is transferred into the linked account from which a payment is made. In another embodiment, the payment is moved from another account (in accordance with the operating rule) and a record of the payment transaction is included in the account in which the payment operating rule resides. In yet another embodiment, an entity requiring payment for goods and/or services directly debits an account when a payment becomes due and the user established account operating rules may allow or disallow direct debits from external parties.

[0018] In some embodiments, a record of transactions for all accounts are retained and the method of the transaction is also recorded thus providing a user with a complete history of the transactions pertaining to any particular account. Further, in accordance with regular account keeping practices, it is preferable that an up to date balance for each account is retained for ready access by a user. In one embodiment, account balances are obtained by the user transmitting an SMS message to a system provider requesting an account balance and subsequently receiving an SMS message including the balance of the account. In an exemplary embodiment, the balance of the account could be either that of the user or a third party where third party access requirements have been satisfied. For example, access to a third party account balance could be established by appropriate account operating rules. Further, the balance of any account could be stored locally or could be determined as a result of interrogating a third party database.

[0019] In another aspect, the present invention provides a method for a user to effect account transactions wherein the user has previously established at least one transaction