

[0017] The essential difference between immediate and deferred delivery is that the former hides the network latencies from the subscriber, while the latter does not. Immediate or deferred delivery are handset dependent modes, which means that the handset manufacturer can provide the handset in one mode or the other or let the user decide his preference.

[0018] With the growth of SMS and MMS services, there exists a need to provide conventional communications metaphors, such as those attendant with advertising, in a form suited for such media. For example, it would be advantageous to provide an interactive element in an SMS or MMS environment that supported promotional activities, such as advertising and the distribution of promotional materials such as coupons. It would be advantageous to provide a method and apparatus that allows advertisers to define and distribute SMS and MMS coupons to consumers, and for consumers to redeem the received coupons.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0019] The invention comprises a method and apparatus that allows advertisers to define and distribute Short Messaging Service (SMS) and Multimedia Messaging Service (MMS) coupons to consumers, and for consumers to redeem the received coupons. The purpose of the SMS and MMS coupons are for businesses to promote their products and services to consumers.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0020] FIG. 1 is an illustration of an SMS coupon according to the invention;

[0021] FIG. 2 is an illustration of an MMS coupon according to the invention;

[0022] FIG. 3 is an illustration of an advertisement promoting a product with an SMS coupon according to the invention;

[0023] FIG. 4 is a block diagram of a system for distributing SMS and MMS coupons according to the invention;

[0024] FIG. 5 is an illustration of a process for redeeming SMS and MMS coupons according to the invention;

[0025] FIG. 6 is a screen shot showing a dialog for submitting a new SMS message or updating an existing SMS message according to the invention; and

[0026] FIG. 7A and 7B show an SMS enabled device sending an SMS to request a coupon (FIG. 7A) and receiving an SMS coupon (FIG. 7B) according to the invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0027] The invention comprises a method and apparatus that allows advertisers to define and distribute Short Messaging Service (SMS) and Multimedia Messaging Service (MMS) coupons to consumers, and for consumers to redeem the received coupons. The purpose of the SMS and MMS coupons are for businesses to promote their products and services to consumers.

[0028] Referring to FIG. 1, a presently preferred embodiment of the invention is shown which comprises an SMS coupon 100. An SMS coupon 100 comprises at least two pieces of information: a code 110 that uniquely identifies the coupon, and a text message 120 that describes the details of a promotion for products or services. For example, the SMS coupon in FIG. 1 is identified by coupon code "promotion-

abc." and the coupon message is "Come to store abc and get 10% off any products before Mar. 1, 2006."

[0029] Referring to FIG. 2, a presently preferred embodiment of the invention is shown which comprises an MMS coupon 200. An MMS coupon 200 comprises at least two pieces of information: a code 210 that uniquely identifies the coupon, and a multimedia message 220 that describes the details of a promotion for products and services. For example, the MMS coupon in FIG. 2 is identified by coupon code "promotionxyz," and the coupon message is a picture that promotes a sale in store xyz.

[0030] The SMS coupon message 120 and MMS coupon message 220 may contain information in addition to description of a promotion. For instance, a promotion code can be included in the message for an advertiser to use later in identifying the promotion when the coupon is presented. The coupon message may also contain an authentication code that is used to verify the authenticity of the coupon. One implementation of the authentication code uses a globally unique serial number. Those skilled in the art will appreciate that other authentication schemes may be used in connection with the invention. Upon presentation of the coupon, the receiving party can check the serial number against a database to ensure that the serial number is valid. The serial number can also be checked for uniqueness to prevent unauthorized duplication.

[0031] Referring to FIG. 3, the invention comprises an advertisement 300 that is used to publicize SMS coupons and/or MMS coupons. Such advertisement 300 can be displayed on digital signs, televisions, billboards, newspapers, magazines, other printed media, and Internet Web pages. The advertisement 300 includes at least three pieces of information:

[0032] 1) an SMS dialing number 310 that is used to retrieve a coupon;

[0033] 2) a coupon code 320; and

[0034] 3) advertising content 330 that describes the products, services, or/and promotions.

[0035] The SMS dialing number 310 is a predetermined code, which in the U.S. is usually a five-digit short code. Configurations are provided such that all messages sent to the SMS dialing number 310 are routed to a preconfigured processing server. The coupon code 320 is used to cross reference the coupon code 110 defined in an SMS coupon 100, or the coupon code 210 defined in an MMS coupon 200.

[0036] FIG. 3 shows an example of an advertisement on a digital sign. Consumers are instructed to send an SMS text message "promotionxyz" to the dialing number "54321" to retrieve a "10% off first time purchase"; coupon. In this example, the instruction for SMS messaging is shown as a banner on the top of the advertisement.

[0037] Other embodiments of the invention, without limitation, include:

[0038] Showing the instruction as a call out box on other parts of the advertisement;

[0039] Embodying the instruction in the advertisement as text or graphics; and/or

[0040] Providing audio instructions on how to retrieve the coupon using SMS messaging.

[0041] Referring to FIG. 4, the invention provides a system 400 for distributing SMS and MMS coupons, comprising: