

[0042] A database **410** containing advertisements and SMS and MMS coupons;

[0043] A Web interface **420** for registering SMS and MMS coupons;

[0044] An advertisement **430** that promotes products and services and publicizes an SMS or MMS coupon;

[0045] One or more SMS or MMS enabled devices **440** such as, for example, mobile phones and/or PDA devices; and

[0046] An SMS processing server **450**.

[0047] A presently preferred embodiment of the invention functions in the following manner:

[0048] An advertiser inputs an advertisement, along with an SMS or MMS coupon, into the database **410** through the Web interface **420**. Each coupon is associated with an advertisement. For each SMS coupon, an advertiser specifies a coupon code **110** and a text message **120** for the coupon. For each MMS coupon, an advertiser specifies a coupon code **210** and a multimedia message **220** for the coupon. The database checks and ensures the uniqueness of the coupon code. Once a coupon is put into the database, the advertiser is responsible for honoring a legitimate coupon distributed to a consumer.

[0049] An advertisement, along with an associated coupon, is chosen from the database and is displayed in public media, an example of which is shown in FIG. 3. In the case where the advertisement is shown on a digital sign the advertisement, along with the coupon, can be transmitted electronically and displayed in real time. In the case of other printed or broadcast media, the advertisement may be prepared in advance.

[0050] A consumer sees the advertisement on a digital sign, television, billboard, newspaper, magazine, other printed media, or on the Internet. Using an SMS or MMS enabled device **440**, the consumer sends an SMS text message containing the coupon code **320** to the dialing number **310**.

[0051] The SMS text message from the consumer is routed to the SMS processing server **450**, which is preconfigured to process all incoming messages to the SMS dialing number **310**. An SMS coupon message **120** or an MMS coupon message **220** that matches the coupon code **320** is found in the database. The coupon message is then sent to the SMS or MMS enabled device **440**. For each coupon message that is sent, the action is tracked by the server. The advertiser might be charged based on the number of coupon messages that have been sent.

[0052] Referring to FIG. 5, the invention provides a method **500** for redeeming SMS and MMS coupons. A consumer enters a store to obtain products or services (**500**).

[0053] Such store can be a brick-and-mortar store or an online store. The consumer presents an SMS or MMS coupon to the store to obtain a promotion. The store may ask for additional information necessary to obtain the promotion. For example, a promotion code might be included in the coupon (**510**). The store asks the consumer for the promotion code (**530**) and uses it to look up the details of the promotion (**550**). For another example, an authentication code might be included in the coupon (**520**). The store asks the consumer for the authentication code (**540**) and uses it to validate the authenticity of the coupon (**560**). Upon verification of the information, the store provides the promotion to the consumer for the obtained products and services

(**580**). Should the coupon or the promotion be invalid, then the promotion is not provided to the consumer (**570**).

[0054] 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.

[0055] 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.

[0056] Although the invention is described herein with reference to the preferred embodiment, one skilled in the art will readily appreciate that other applications may be substituted for those set forth herein without departing from the spirit and scope of the present invention. Accordingly, the invention should only be limited by the claims included below.

1. A method for advertisers to define and distribute Short Messaging Service (SMS) and/or Multimedia Messaging Service (MMS) coupons to consumers, and for consumers to redeem received coupons, comprising the steps of:

providing an advertisement that is used to publicize SMS coupons and/or MMS coupons;

wherein said advertisement is displayed on any of digital signs, televisions, billboards, newspapers, magazines, other printed media, and Internet Web pages;

said advertisement comprising at least an SMS dialing number comprising a predetermined code that is used to retrieve a coupon, a coupon code, and advertising content that describes products, services, or/and promotions, said advertisement instructing consumers to send an SMS text message to said SMS dialing number to retrieve a coupon;

responsive to an SMS message sent by a consumer to said SMS dialing number, using said coupon code to cross reference an identity code defined in an SMS and/or MMS coupon; and

sending any of an SMS coupon comprising at least an identity code that uniquely identifies the coupon and a text message that describes details of a promotion for products and/or services and an MMS coupon comprising at least an identity code that uniquely identifies the coupon and a multimedia message that describes details of a promotion for products and/or services.

2. The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of: providing any of an SMS coupon message and/or MMS coupon message that comprises a promotion code for an advertiser to use later in identifying a promotion when the coupon is presented and an authentication code comprising a globally unique serial number that is used to verify authenticity of the coupon.

3. The method of claim 1, wherein all messages sent to the SMS dialing number are routed to a preconfigured processing server.

4. The method of claim 1, wherein an instruction for SMS messaging is shown as any of a banner on an advertisement, a call out box on said advertisement, in said advertisement as text and/or graphics, as audio instructions on how to retrieve said coupon using SMS messaging.

5. The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of: For each SMS coupon and/or MMS coupon sent, tracking subsequent actions in connection with each said SMS coupon and/or MMS coupon,