

customer for his or her account for multiple uses for a renewable period and a credit limit. It will be appreciated that an account may have many master credit cards in the sense of this specification. For example, a corporation may provide many of its employees with credit cards but essentially each of these employees holds a master credit card even if there is only one customer account. Each of these master credit cards will have a unique master credit card number, which set of master credit card numbers will be linked to the account. Similarly, in families, various members of the family may hold a master credit card, all of which are paid for out of the one customer account.

[0044] Additionally, the “master credit card” account can be in some embodiments something other than a credit card account. For instance, while not otherwise affecting the formatting or processing of the limited use credit card numbers as described herein, the master card number can be a prepaid account or another type of account, such as a utility, telephone service provider or Internet Service Provider (ISP) account. The utility company, telephone company, ISP or other account holder would generate a bill, which, in possible addition to or separate from to the regular bill, would include a listing of limited use credit card transactions. An advantage of this type of arrangement is that the service provider already has information as to a pool of individual and their credit worthiness, as well as low increased overhead due to the already in place billing system. In these embodiments, the “master account” may but likely does not have the format of a standard credit card or the like.

[0045] The term “limited-use” credit card number is used to encompass at least both the embodiment in which the credit card is designated for a single use, and the embodiment in which the credit card is designated for multiple uses providing that the charges accrued do not exceed a prescribed threshold or thresholds, such a total single charge, total charges over a limited time period, total charge in a single transaction, etc. A common feature is that the limited use credit card number is deactivated upon satisfaction of a limited-use condition, and not just the expiration date of the card. Stated differently, the a limited-use credit card number is deactivated upon a use-triggered condition which occurs subsequent to assignment of said at least one credit card number.

[0046] The term “deactivated” means that new transactions cannot be initiated using the same limited-use credit card number, but the limited-use credit card number is still available for further activity related to the original transaction, such as for charge-backs where an account is credited, such as upon return of unaccepted merchandise.

[0047] The terms “card holder” and “user” are used interchangeably to refer to an entity, e.g., an individual, that has been rightfully issued a credit/debit/charge card number, e.g., through a contractual arrangement, or that has been authorized to use such card by such entity or a representative of such entity.

[0048] 1. Overview of System Features

[0049] There are at least two basic different ways of carrying out the present invention. In summary, the two ways are the allocation of additional credit card numbers for remote trade and the provision of what are effectively

disposable credit cards for remote and card present trade, both of which have the feature of in the case of single use or in the case of multiple use, protecting against the worst effects of compromised numbers fraud or skimming.

[0050] In a refinement of the invention, it is possible to control the manner in which an actual transaction is carried out as a further protection against unscrupulous providers of goods and services.

[0051] Essentially, there are certain matters that will be considered in relation to this invention. They are the operational or functional features in so far as they affect customers, and then there are the technical features, namely how the invention is implemented, how the invention is provided to the customers, and finally, how the invention is handled by the providers of goods and services and the processors of the credit cards, i.e., the financial institutions and/or their service providers.

[0052] The operational or functional features of this invention will be discussed first in the context of a standard credit card system.

[0053] One basic feature of the invention is to provide in a credit card system such that each master credit card holder could be provided with one or more of the following: 1) additional single use credit card numbers for remote transactions; 2) multiple use credit card numbers for remote transactions; 3) single use additional credit cards for remote and card present transactions; and 4) multiple use credit cards for remote and card present transactions.

[0054] It is also envisaged that in certain situations credit cards can be provided to people who do not have an account with any credit card company. This latter feature is described in more detail below. Various other features may be provided in the above situations, which will further improve the security of credit card transactions.

[0055] Dealing first with the situation where a master credit card holder has an additional credit card number allocated to him or her for a single use, it will be appreciated that since the number can only be used for one single transaction, the fact that the number is in anybody else’s hands is irrelevant as it has been deactivated and the master credit card number is not revealed to the third party. Various other features may be added to such single use credit card numbers, for example, the value of the transaction can be limited, thus the master credit card holder can have a plurality of single use credit card numbers of differing values. For example, when a remote trade is carried out, the master credit card holder will use a credit card number which has a credit card limit only marginally above or equal to that of the value of the transaction. This would reduce the chances of or prevent an unscrupulous trader using the credit card number to supply additional goods or services over those ordered or to increase the agreed charge.

[0056] A second embodiment of the invention provides the master credit card holder with an additional credit card number for use in remote trade, which credit card number could have, as in the previous example of the invention, a credit limit for each specific transaction or a credit limit such that when the aggregate amount of a series of transactions exceeded a specific credit limit that the credit card number would be canceled, invalidated or in some other way deactivated. Similarly, the multiple use credit card number could