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Timpson

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(54) **MEANS FOR DIRECTING A CALLER THROUGH AN INTERACTIVE VOICE RESPONSE SYSTEM AND OF MAKING USE OF PRERECORDED PRECATEGORIZED SCRIPTS**

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(52) **U.S. Cl.** **379/265.02; 379/88.23**

(58) **Field of Classification Search** **379/88.01–88.23, 379/265.01–266.01; 455/426.2**

See application file for complete search history.

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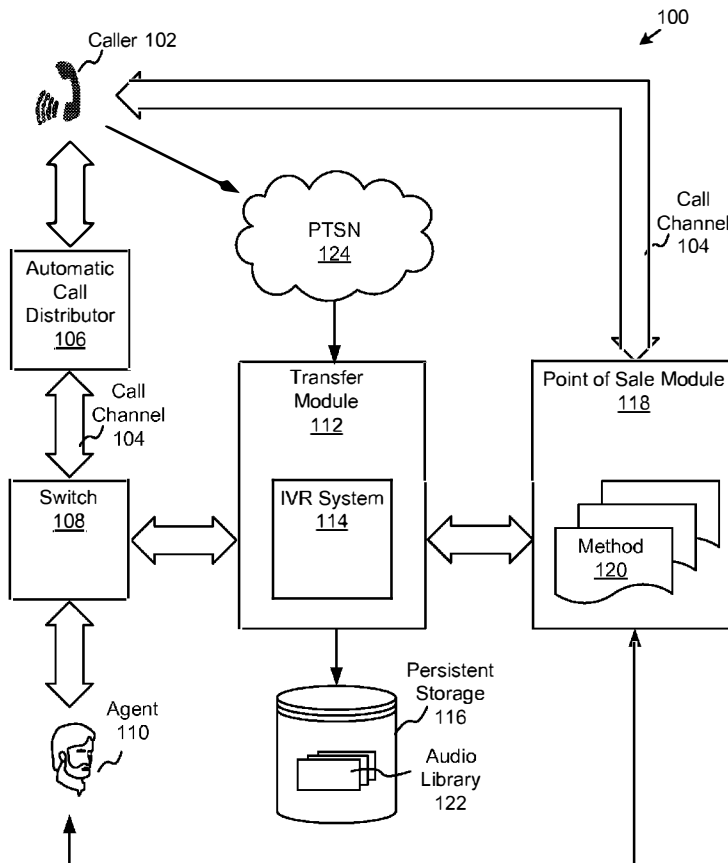
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

An apparatus, computer program product, method and system are disclosed for manually guiding inbound callers through an IVR system, then sequentially playing prerecorded, precategorized scripts, or audio dialogs, to the caller in accordance with the steps of a sales method governing the categorization of the scripts. Certain embodiments of the present invention include substitute means of collecting, conferencing, routing, and managing inbound callers in and out of IVR platforms.

24 Claims, 5 Drawing Sheets



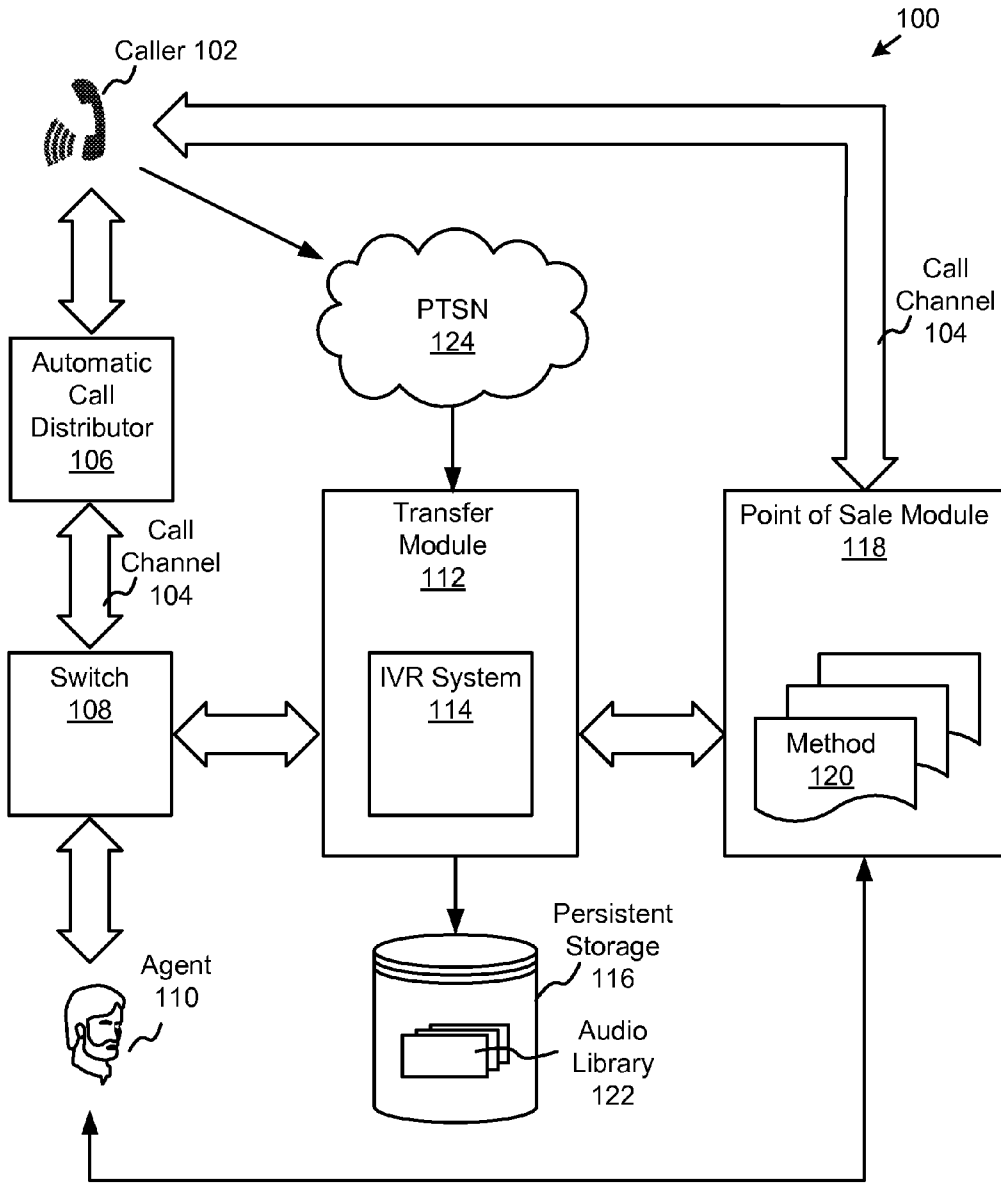


FIG. 1

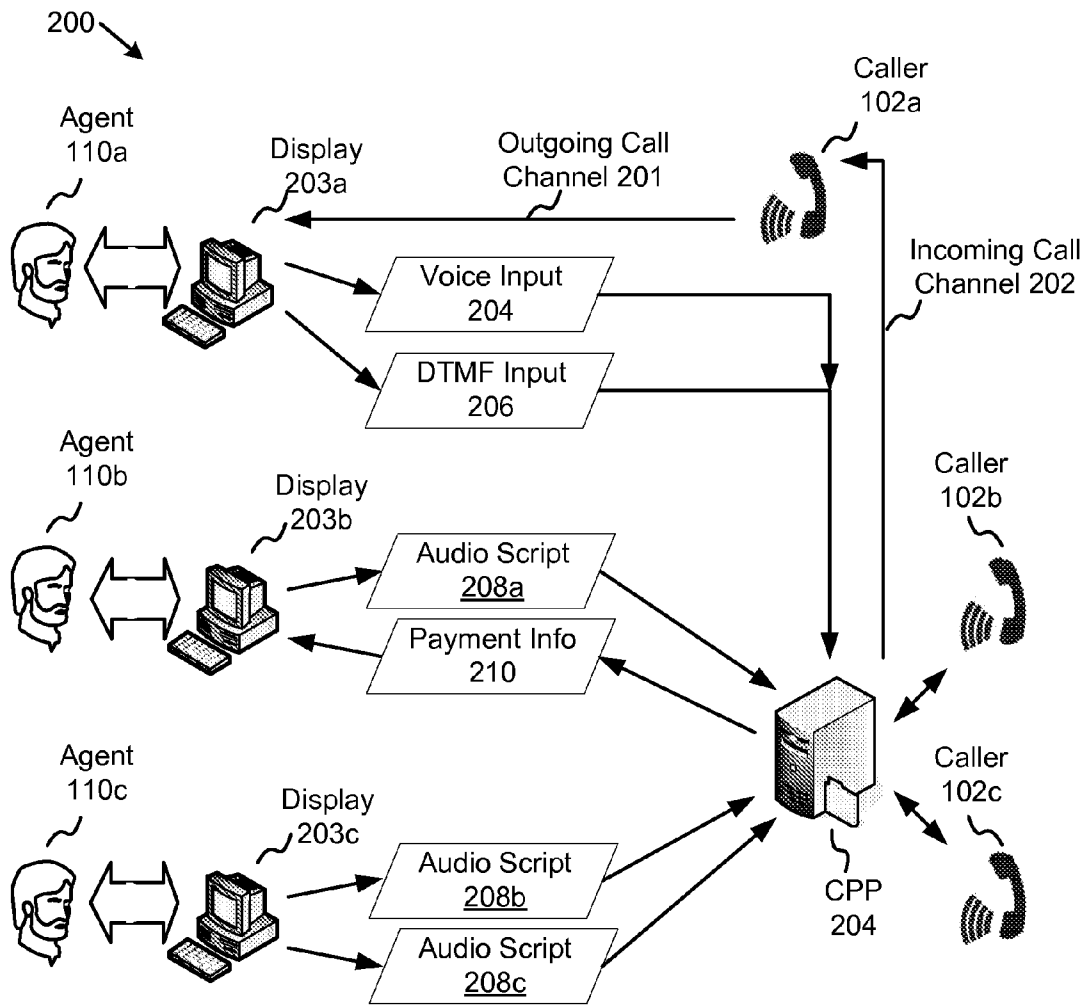


FIG. 2

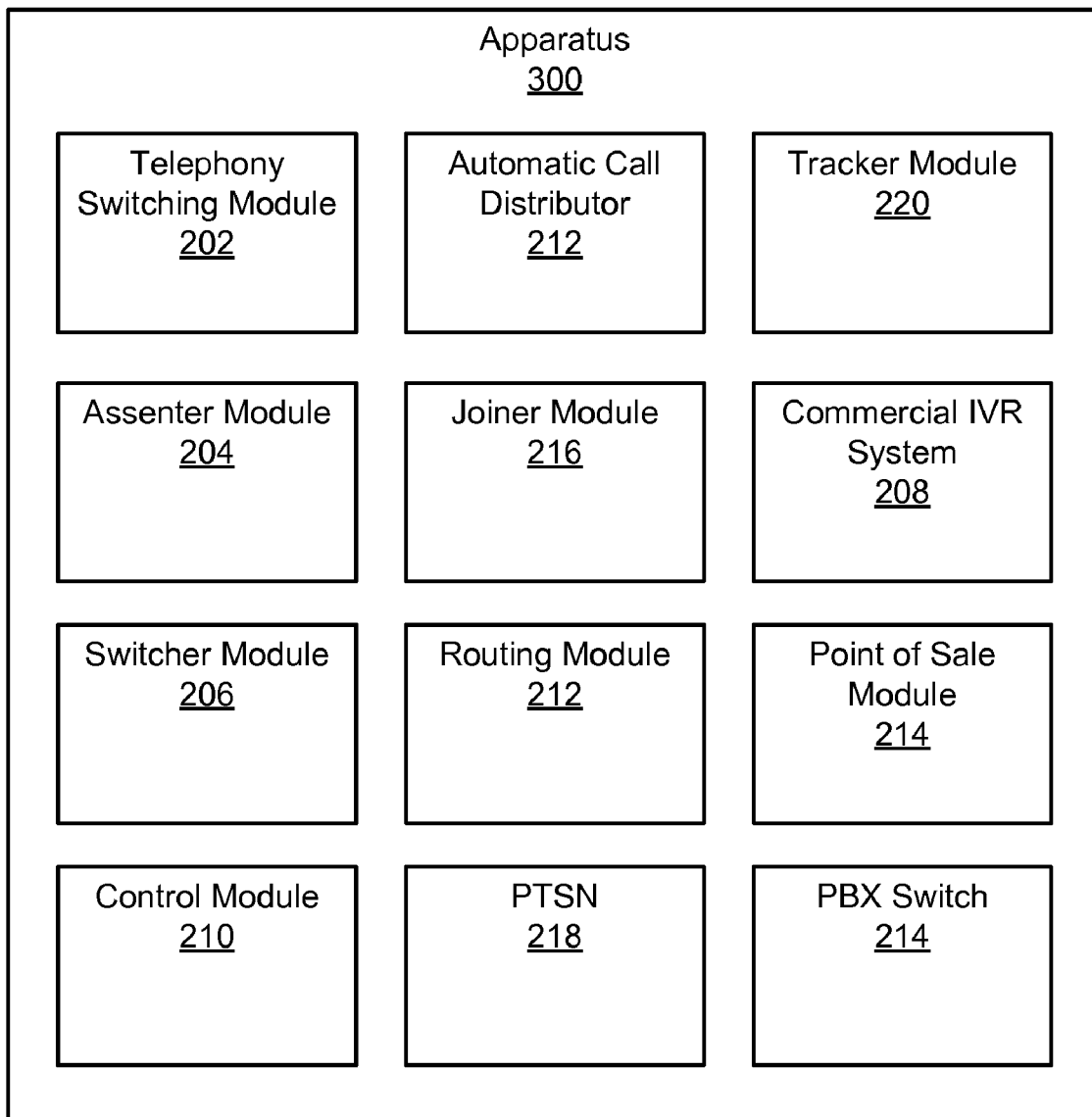


FIG. 3

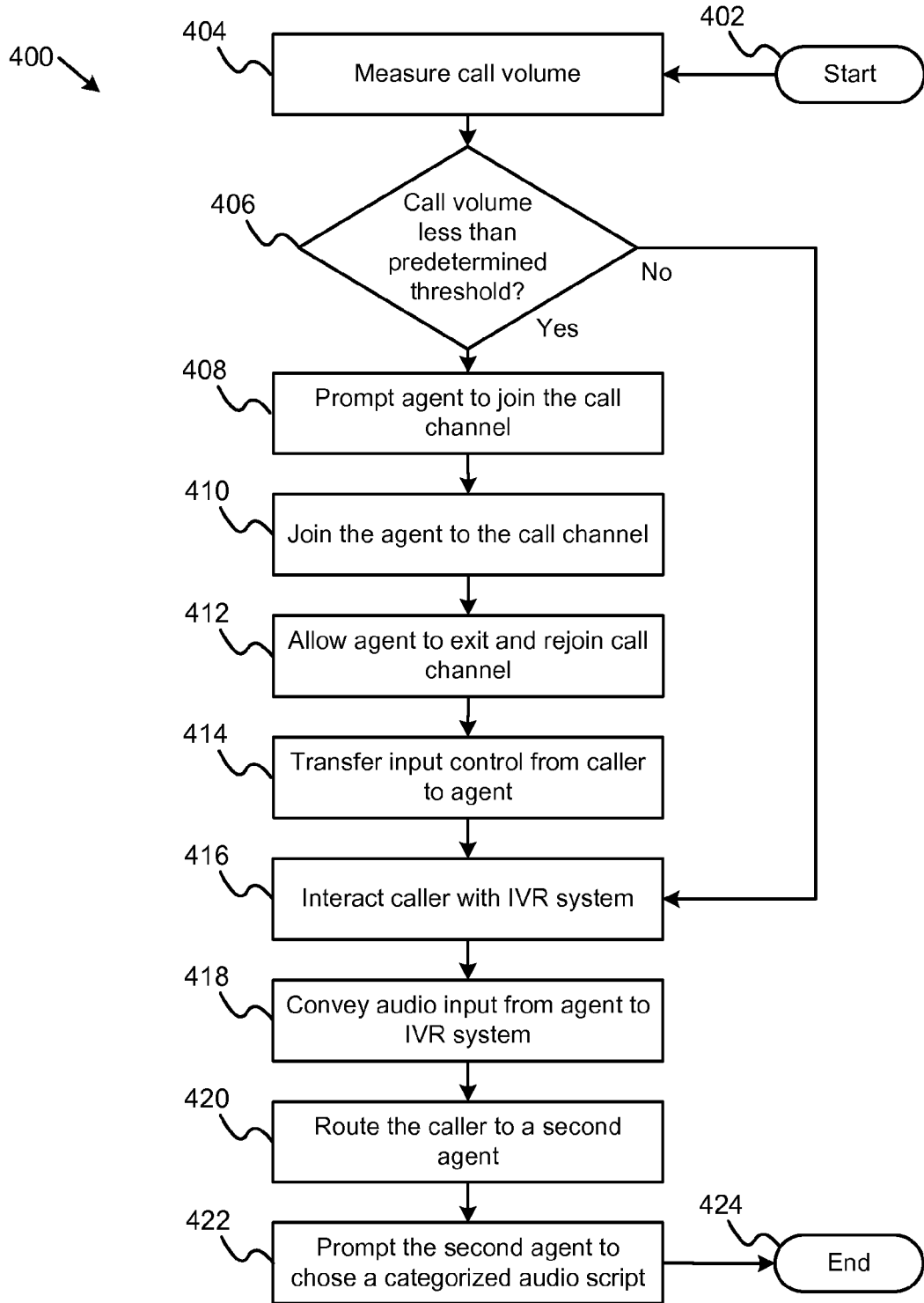


FIG. 4

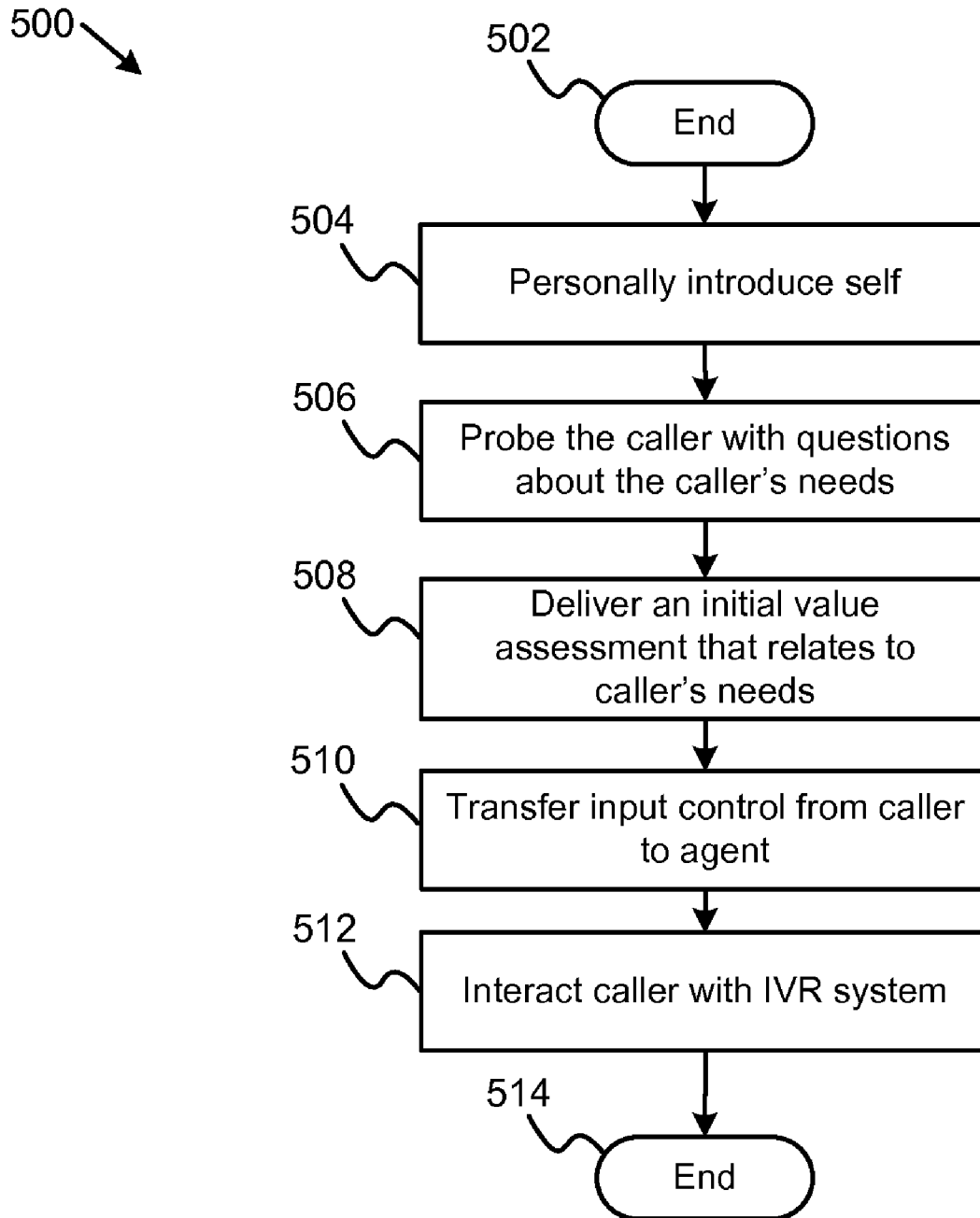


FIG. 5

**MEANS FOR DIRECTING A CALLER
THROUGH AN INTERACTIVE VOICE
RESPONSE SYSTEM AND OF MAKING USE
OF PRERECORDED PRECATEGORIZED
SCRIPTS**

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

This invention relates to interactive voice response (IVR) technologies, and more particularly relates to an apparatus, computer program product and data processing system for covertly guiding a caller through an IVR system.

2. Description of the Related Art

Business processing outsource (BPO) service provides are commercial organizations which run call centers that manage inbound and outbound telephone sales campaigns for their clients. BPO service providers have been quick to incorporate developing technological advances into their business models, including increasingly sophisticated Interactive Voice Response (IVR) technologies, which recognize verbal and keypad input from callers.

Sales teams at inbound BPO call centers are able to rely on IVR technology to collect a great deal of information from, and about, inbound callers before routing those inbound callers to live operators. IVR technologies enable customers, and potential customers, of retail business to navigate databases verbally or through the touchpad of the telephone. Through IVR systems, potential customers are able to interface with a computer that prompts callers to enter information and provides voice based-feedback. Callers to IVR systems interact with a voice browser by listening to audio output that is either pre-recorded or computer-synthesized. Callers submit audio input to the IVR system in the form of natural voice communication or DTMF keypad input.

In modern BPO business models, inbound sales representatives are required to attend to an increasingly number of incoming calls over the telephone, which calls IVR platforms help them manage. IVR technology has drastically increased the efficiency of the BPO industry, and has been used to manage billions of incoming calls across the industry over the years since IVR use became standard in the industry. IVR technology reduces operation costs and at the same time and increases customer satisfaction.

The interfacing features of IVR systems can be configured to direct potential customers through a sequence of simple menus which gather personal information using CTI (Computer Telephony Integration). The capability of the IVR technology to identify and collect personal information from callers makes IVR technology very important to the BPO industry. Call center operators are able to modify their presentation in accordance with personal information gathered by the IVR platform and digitally displayed to the operators.

IVR platforms usually run on Wintel and Cisco equipment, and usually rely on VXML, or VoiceXML, technologies to interact with callers using voice-recognition technology.

VoiceXML is designed for creating audio dialogs that feature synthesized speech and/or digitized audio. These audio dialogs are played to callers in response to IVR recognition of spoken or dual-tone multi-frequency (DTMF) signaling (keypad input). Modern IVR platforms making use of VXML or VoiceXML can be configured to carry on conversations and sales transactions with callers from the point of contact to the point of sale, by playing audio dialogs to callers.

IVR platforms can be further configured to play digitized audio scripts to callers which are so responsive to the natural verbal input of the callers that the callers do not know they are

interfacing with a machine. Some embodiments of IVR platforms prompt an operator of the BPO service provider monitoring a call to select from a list of prerecorded scripts to replay to the caller in response to questions asked by the caller.

BPO call centers employing operators with poor English skills, or exotic accents, have found that their operators can reach greater levels of sales efficiency replaying digitized scripts of skilled native English speakers then attempting to interact directly with callers.

Call Control XML (CCXML) interoperates with VXML to manage a plurality of simultaneously incoming calls. CCXML is the W3C standard markup language for controlling how phone calls are placed, answered, transferred, and conferenced. CCXML works in conjunction with VoiceXML to provide standards for telephony application, including support for multi-party conferencing and message-passing.

CCXML imparts the ability to many IVR platforms to give each active line in a voice application its own dedicated VoiceXML interpreter, and the ability to receive events and messages from systems outside of the CCXML or VoiceXML platform. Interaction with an outside call center platform, calls started asynchronously from the VoiceXML platform, and communication between multiple clustered VoiceXML or CCXML platforms all require event interaction from one platform to another. Although IVR systems often make use of the same standards, including VXML and CCXML, there exists no system or computer program product in the industry for interchanging different IVR systems within a single BPO architecture.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

From the foregoing discussion, it should be apparent that a need exists for a system, apparatus and computer program product for directing callers through an IVR system. The present invention has been developed in response to the present state of the art; and, in particular, in response to the problems and needs in the art that have not yet been fully solved by currently available methods, systems and apparatus, and that overcome many or all of the above-discussed shortcomings in the art. Accordingly, the present invention has been developed to provide an apparatus, computer program product, and system for directing a caller through an IVR system.

A system to direct a caller through any IVR system is disclosed, the system comprising: a telephony switching module configured to measure call volume to an inbound call center; an assenter module configured to prompt an operator to join a call channel in response to the call volume measured by the telephony switching module satisfying a predetermined criteria; a joiner module configured to join the operator with the call channel in response to the operator accepting the prompt of the assenter module to join the call channel, the joiner module being configured to allow the operator to exit and rejoin the call channel at will; a switcher module configured to transfer control of DTMF signaling and voice input ("input control") from the call channel to the operator upon command of the operator such that a caller on the call channel is unaware that input control has been transferred, the switcher module configured to transfer input control back to the call channel upon command; and a commercial IVR system with which the call channel interacts.

The system further comprises a control module configured to convey DTMF signals and voice input ("audio input") from the operator to an IVR system such that the IVR system receives the audio input but the audio input is not heard by the

call channel; a router module configured to route the call channel to a second operator after IVR data collection, the second operator automatically selected from a plurality of operators by the router module to have a higher likelihood than one or more other operators of closing a commercial transaction, the second operator selected by the router module in accordance with a selection criteria satisfied in part by cross-referencing historical sales data and data collected by the IVR system from the caller.

The system further comprises a point of sale module configured to prompt the second operator to select a recommended digitized audio script for replay on the call channel from one of a plurality of digitized audio scripts exclusively sorted into one of a plurality of closing categories, each closing category corresponding to one of a plurality of predetermined steps of a method of conducting a commercial transaction, wherein the recommended digitized audio script is preselected by the point of sale module to be the most efficient after cross-referencing data collected by the IVR system with historical data.

The system may further comprise an automatic call distributor (ACD) configured to bypass the telephony switcher module in response to an inbound call volume exceeding a predetermined threshold. In some embodiments, the method of closing a commercial transaction comprises the following steps: personally introducing oneself; probing the caller with questions about the caller's needs; delivering an initial value statement that ties back to the caller's needs; delivering an offer to the caller which creates a sense of urgency; and calmly requesting payment information.

In still further embodiments, the assenter module prompts an operator to join a call channel who is available. In further embodiments, the router module routes a plurality of calls to the operator who handles a plurality of calls simultaneously.

In still further embodiments, the plurality of digitized audio scripts comprise audio recordings of portions of dialogue spoken by an operator determined to be effective at closing commercial transactions. The system may also comprise a tracker module configured to track the second operator's progress through the steps of the method of closing a commercial transaction, and configured to instruct the point of sale module which category of digitized audio scripts should be used in prompting the second operator. The system may also comprise a PBX switch.

An apparatus is also disclosed, comprising a database server, processor, and a memory device, which apparatus is configured to perform operations that closely mirror the functions imparted to the system recited above. Additionally, a computer program product to direct callers through an IVR system which comprises modules functionally similar to those of the apparatus.

Reference throughout this specification to features, advantages, or similar language does not imply that all of the features and advantages that may be realized with the present invention should be or are in any single embodiment of the invention. Rather, language referring to the features and advantages is understood to mean that a specific feature, advantage, or characteristic described in connection with an embodiment is included in at least one embodiment of the present invention. Thus, discussion of the features and advantages, and similar language, throughout this specification may, but do not necessarily, refer to the same embodiment.

Furthermore, the described features, advantages, and characteristics of the invention may be combined in any suitable manner in one or more embodiments. One skilled in the relevant art will recognize that the invention may be practiced without one or more of the specific features or advantages of

a particular embodiment. In other instances, additional features and advantages may be recognized in certain embodiments that may not be present in all embodiments of the invention.

These features and advantages of the present invention will become more fully apparent from the following description and appended claims, or may be learned by the practice of the invention as set forth hereinafter.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

In order that the advantages of the invention will be readily understood, a more particular description of the invention will be rendered by reference to specific embodiments that are illustrated in the appended drawings. Understanding that these drawings depict only typical embodiments of the invention and are not therefore to be considered to be limiting of its scope, the invention will be described and explained with additional specificity and detail through the use of the accompanying drawings, in which:

FIG. 1 is an entity-relationship diagram illustrating one embodiment of a system that directs a caller through any IVR system in accordance with the present invention;

FIG. 2 is an entity-relationship diagram illustrating one embodiment of a system that directs a caller through any IVR system in accordance with the present invention;

FIG. 3 is a block diagram illustrating another embodiment of an apparatus for directing a caller through any IVR system in accordance with the present invention;

FIG. 4 is a flow chart of a method of directing a caller through any IVR system in accordance with the present invention; and

FIG. 5 is a flow chart of a method of closing a commercial transaction in accordance with the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

Reference throughout this specification to "one embodiment," "an embodiment," or similar language means that a particular feature, structure, or characteristic described in connection with the embodiment is included in at least one embodiment of the present invention. Appearances of the phrases "in one embodiment," "in an embodiment," and similar language throughout this specification may, but do not necessarily, all refer to the same embodiment.

The described features, structures, or characteristics of the invention may be combined in any suitable manner in one or more embodiments. In the following description, numerous specific details are provided. One skilled in the relevant art will recognize, however, that the invention may be practiced without one or more of the specific details, or with other methods, components, materials, and so forth. In other instances, well-known structures, materials, or operations are not shown or described in detail to avoid obscuring aspects of the invention. The apparatus modules recited in the claims may be configured to impart the recited functionality to the apparatus. For the purposes of the present invention, the systems and technologies taught and recited herein are referred to collectively as Intelligent IVR™.

FIG. 1 is an entity-relationship diagram illustrating one embodiment of a system **100** that directs a caller through any IVR system in accordance with the present invention. The system **100** comprises a call channel **104**, an automatic call distributor (ACD) **106**, a switch **108**, a transfer module **112**, an IVR system **114**, persistent storage **116**, a point of sale module **118**, a method **120**, an audio library **122**, and a public

switched telephone network (PTSN) **124**. In the shown embodiment, a caller **102** and operator **110** are interacting with the system **100**.

The caller **102** may comprise any person, company or organization that is potentially a customer of another person, company or organization. In the shown embodiment, the caller **102** comprises an individual making an outgoing call routed to the system **100** after being solicited to purchase a commercial product in an infomercial on television.

The system **100** includes one or more operators **110**. The operator **110** comprises a human beings employed by business processing outsource (BPO) service provider in the shown embodiment, but may comprise a data processing device (DPD), a third-party company or organization which solicits customers, a computing device configured to perform the functions of human being, or any combination of the above. The operator **110** may comprise a (DPD) configured to solicit callers **102** using prerecorded digitized audio scripts.

The automatic call distributor (ACD) **106** is a device or system that is well-known to those of skill in the art, and which can be configured to distribute calls to the terminal of any operator **110** who becomes available. The ACD **106** in the shown embodiment comprises additional unique functionality. The ACD **106** comprises the switches, hardware, firmware, software and the like necessary to implement routing instructions and/or a routing strategy imposed upon on the ACD **106**. In some embodiments of the present invention, a common computing device such as personal computer or server is enabled to perform the functions of the ACD **106**. In other embodiments, the ACD **106** forms part of a larger computer telephony integration (CTI) system.

In the shown embodiment, the ACD **106** comprises a computer program running on one or more data processing devices (DPDs), such as a server, computer workstation, router, mainframe computer, or the like. In various embodiments, the DPD comprises one or more processors. The processor is a computing device well-known to those in the art and may include an application-specific integrated circuit ("ASIC").

The call channel **104** comprises any telephonic connection between a caller **102** and system **100**. The call channels **104** may comprise inbound telephonic connections initiated by the caller **102**, or may comprise outbound telephonic connections initiated by one or more operators **110** acting within, or in association with, the system **100**.

In the shown embodiment, the ACD **106** is configured to route calls the switch **108** when one or more operators **110** are available to monitor the communications on the call channel **104** or when call volume to the system **100** exceeds, or fails to exceed, a predetermined threshold.

In the shown embodiment, a plurality of operators **110** are in communication with the system **100**. The ACD **106** is in communication with terminals interfacing with the operators **110**. When all operators **110** in communication with the system **100** are occupied, the ACD **106** routes incoming call channels **104** directly the IVR **114**. If an operator **110** is available to monitor an incoming call channel **104**, the ACD **106** prompts the available operator **110** to join the subject call channel **104** by messaging the operator's **110** terminal using chimes, tones and/or via mechanisms well-known to those of skill in the art.

In some embodiments of the present invention, the operator **110** chooses to join the call channel **104**. In other embodiments of the present invention, the operator **110** is automatically joined to the call channel **104** by the ACD **106** if the operator **110** is available or not preoccupied with one or more other call channels **104**. In various embodiments of the

present invention, the call channels **104** in communication with the system **100** comprise exclusively outbound calls, exclusively inbound calls, or a combination of inbound and outbound calls. Thus, the teachings of the present invention may be applied to BPO service providers offering a variety of call related services.

The switch **108** comprises the hardware, software, and/or firmware necessary to allow an operator **110** take communicative control over the call channel **104** from the caller **102**. In the shown embodiment, the switch **108** enables the operator **110** to take over voice and DTMF input control from the caller **102** during the period in which the caller **102** is in contact with the IVR **114**. Thus, in the system **100**, the caller **102** believes that he/she is communicating with the IVR **114**; but, in fact, voice and DTMF input from the caller **102** are being exclusively relayed to the operator **110** rather than to the IVR **114**, while audio output from the IVR **114** is being relayed to both the caller **102** and the operator **110** via the call channel **104**.

In various embodiments of the present invention, the switch **108** may prompt the operator **110** to take communicative control from one or more callers by activating color-coded lights or LEDs. In still further embodiments, the switch **108** may use color-coded lights or LEDs to inform the operator **110** of the status of a call channel **104** routed to the operator **110** (e.g. whether or not the operator **110** has communicative control).

In the shown embodiment, after joining the call channel **104**, the switch **108** imparts the ability to the operator **110** to switch on and off the operator's **110** exclusive control of voice and DTMF input with the IVR **114**. The operator **110** can monitor the call channel **104** while the switch **108** is switched on or off, and thus the operator **110** can return and take input control from the caller **102** through the pendency of IVR **114** call processing.

The switch **108** provides the caller **102** with no indication, either audio or otherwise, that the operator **110** is switching in and out of the call channel **104** and taking input control from the caller **102**. Thus, the caller **102** believes he/she is still communicating with the IVR **114**, when in fact the operator **110** is communicating covertly with the IVR **114** on behalf of the caller **102** in response to input the operator **110** receives from the caller **102**.

In various embodiments of the present invention, the operator **110** communicates with the IVR **114** using a different methodology than that which the caller **102** uses to communicate unknowingly with the operator **110**. For instance, the caller **102** may communicate input to the operator **102** using DTMF signaling, while the operator **110** subsequently relays that caller **102** input to the IVR **114** using variations of the Simple Mail Transfer Protocol (SMTP), Internet Message Access Protocol (IMAP), Post Office Protocol (POP), or other computer-to-computer protocols well-known to those of skill in the art. The operator **110** may additionally and/or alternatively relay the caller **102** input to the IVR **114** using human-to-computer protocols well-known to those of skill in the art, including instant messaging and the like.

This functionality imparted to the operator **110** by the switching module **108** improves the efficiency of inbound call centers by allowing operators **110** who are more familiar with the telephony menus of IVRs to correctly navigate the menus and make use of inputs calculating to meet callers' **102** needs and desires without the fear of computer recognition error.

Many IVRs are commercially available, including PACER, Prosodie®, and the like. The interactive voice response (IVR) **114** detects voice and dual-tone multi-frequency (DTMF) signaling from callers **102**. In some variations, the IVR **114** interacts with the callers **102** using prerecorded and/or

dynamically generated audio messages to lead a caller **102** through simple telephony menus. Voice and DTMF signals are communicated to the IVRs vis-à-vis the call channel **104**, but said DTMF and voice signals do not necessarily originate with the caller **102**, and may originate with the operator **110**. As previously set forth, at the option of the operator **110**, outbound communicative call control is covertly stripped from the caller **102** and transferred to the operator **110**.

The interfacing features of the IVR **114** can be configured to direct a caller **102** through a sequence of simple menus which gather personal information using CTI (Computer Telephony Integration). The personal information may comprise name, age, ethnicity, economic status, native language, residence information, purchasing preferences, and the like. The personal information may be stored in database format in the persistent storage **116**.

The IVR **114** can be configured to transfer call channels **104** to suitable operators **110** in response to the personal information gathered from a caller **102** meeting certain predefined transfer criteria, including to operators statistically shown to have a higher likelihood of closing a sale with a particular type of caller, such as a caller of a certain ethnicity.

In some embodiments, the operator **110** guiding the caller **102** through the IVR **114** may be in communication with a second operator **110** to whom the caller **102** will be routed after IVR processing using variations of the Simple Mail Transfer Protocol (SMTP), Internet Message Access Protocol (IMAP), Post Office Protocol (POP), or other protocols well-known to those of skill in the art.

In some embodiments, the operator **110** guiding the caller **102** through the IVR **112** may be assigned a unique identifier used to track the operator's **110** average time on a call, call efficiency as function of average time spent, average rate of closing sales, average number of incidental upsales made as measured by the dollar value of the upsales or gross number of incidental upsales, or success in keeping callers **102** and/or call channels **104** progressing through a predetermined sales method. Statistics relevant to tracking the operator's **110** performance over time are uniquely associated with the operator's **110** unique identifier and stored in non-volatile storage, or persistent storage **116**, for review by administrative authorities at later dates.

In this embodiment, the IVR **114** communicates personal information gathered from the caller **102** electronically to the operator **110** using variations of common protocols well known to those of skill in the art and using computer-supported telecommunications applications (CTSA). In other embodiments, contact information **116** is distributed the operator **110** over a local area network (LAN) or wide area network (WAN), or the Internet **104**.

The ACD **106** may route call channels **104** to any DPD, device, person, company, operator **110**, second caller, organization, or the like in communication with the maintenance server **102**, including the operator **110**. The operator's **110** telephone and communicative apparatus may be internal or external to the system **110**.

The persistent storage **116** provides persistent storage of data. In particular, the persistent storage **109** stores computer readable database files, including a library of prerecorded digitized scripts, i.e. an audio library **122**. In the shown embodiment, the audio library **122** comprises a plurality of playable, digitized, prerecorded audio scripts in computer readable files transmittable over a signal bearing medium. In the shown embodiment, the prerecorded digitized clues are stored in database format, and are categorized into one of a plurality of sales method steps.

The persistent storage **116** may also store historical measurements of operator **100** efficiency, including the ratio or percentage of sales made per total call volume routed to the operator, gross sales revenue, average sale amount, and one or more operators' **100** sales per total calls originated from a geographic area.

Some embodiments of the system **100** may comprise various call switching technologies such as a public switched telephone network (PTSN) **124**, providing means of seamlessly routing incoming calls **104** originating in a variety of countries to the IVR **114** or to the transfer module **112**. In other embodiments, the PTSN **124** routes calls to the ACD **106**.

After a caller **102** has interacted with the IVR **114** with the assistance of the operator **110**, and the IVR **114** has collected personal information from the caller **102**, the transfer module **112** routes the call channel **104** to the point of sale module **118** for further call processing. In some embodiments of the present invention, the caller **102** is transferred directly to the point of sale module **118** before personal information is gathered by the IVR **114**.

In some embodiments, the transfer module **112** is optimized to automatically analyze historical sales data and/or an operator's **100** time on the job in a present shift to determine whether the operator **110** has become fatigued so as to maximize profits by routing call channels **102** to non-fatigued operators.

The transfer module **112** may comprise a relational computer database managed by a relational database management system (RDBMS) or a database management system (DBMS), such as Oracle, DB2, Firebird, SQL, or other DBMSs as well-known to those of skill in the art.

In still further embodiments, the transfer module **112** is configured to recognize the area code and/or geographic location from which a call channel **104** originated, and to route that call channel **104** to an operator **110** determined from historical analysis to share the socio-economic, ethnic, linguistic or cultural identity of the caller **102**.

The point of sale module **118** interconnects the caller **102** with an operator **110**. The operator **110** may be the same operator **110** who originally covertly guided the caller **102** through the IVR **114**, or a second operator **114**.

The point of sale module **118** prompts the operator **110** interconnected with the caller **102** to pick one of a variety of prerecorded digital audio scripts saved collectively in the audio library **122** in persistent storage to play over the call channel **104** to the caller **102**.

The prerecorded digital audio scripts ("audio scripts") are categorized into one of a plurality of categories exclusively associated with one of a plurality of steps of a method **120** of closing a sale. There are many methods of closing sales of consumer goods known in the industry, and the present invention may be configured to store audio scripts exclusively associated with the steps of any of these methods.

The steps of the method **120** are stored in volatile computer readable memory, such as RAM, in the point of sale module **118**. In some embodiments of the present invention, the steps of the method **120** are stored in persistent storage **116** and transferred into Flash memory accessible by the point of sale module **118**.

The audio scripts comprise recordings of select snippets of conversations that operators **110**, who are adept at implementing the steps of the method **120**, have had on previous occasions with one or more callers **102**. In the some embodiments of the present invention, a textualized transcript of the audio recording is stored in persistent storage **116** in the audio library **122**. The textualized transcripts may be translated into

a variety of languages known the second operator **110** guiding the caller **102** through the steps of the method **120**, and displayed to the second operator **110** on a display such that the second operator **110** may choose which of a plurality of audio scripts to play from the audio library **120** to the caller **102** in response to questions and comments made by the caller **102** over the call channel **104**.

In accordance with the teachings of the present invention, the second operator **110** may orally guide a caller **102** through the purchase of a consumer good using entirely selected audio scripts comprising the voice of another operator **110** such that the caller **102** is tricked into believing that he/she is communicating in real time with the second operator **110**.

Thus, the present invention overcomes problems in the prior art by, inter alia, allowing the second operator **110** to communicate without disabilities stemming from an accent that the second operator **110** may have, and even to allow the second operator **110** to communicate in languages unknown to the second operator **110** using the audio scripts.

The point of sale module **118** is configured to sequentially guide the second operator **110** through the steps of the method **120** by displaying the textualized transcripts of only those audio scripts categorized into the step of the method **120** in which the caller **102** and second operator **110** are currently engaged. Once at least one audio script has been played for each step of the method **120** to the caller **102**, the point of sale module **118** advances the second operator **110** through the method **120** by displaying audio scripts associated with the next subsequent step in the method **120**.

The point of sale module **118**, in some embodiments, may advance the method **120** to a subsequent step in response to input from the second operator **110** that the method **120** should be advanced. Alcoholics

Referring now to FIG. 2, an entity-relationship diagram illustrating another embodiment of a system **200** that directs a caller through any IVR system in accordance with the present invention. The system **200** comprises a computer program product **202**, an outgoing call channel **202**, an incoming call channel **204**, displays **206a-c**, a voice input **208**, a DTMF input **210**, audio scripts **212a-c**, and payment info **214**. Callers **102a-c** and operators **110a-c** are interacting with the CPP **202** and system **200**.

The outgoing call channel **202** comprises the audio signal relayed from the caller **102a** to the operator **110a** after the operator **110a** has taken input control from the caller **102a**.

The incoming call channel **204** comprises the audio signal relayed from the system **200** to the caller **102a**.

The operator **110a** receives the audio sent via the outgoing call channel **202**, and sends voice input **208** and/or DTMF **210** of the operator's **110** own the CPP **202** which comprises the IVR **114**.

The displays **206a-c** comprise computer displays well-known to those of skill in the art, and may comprise liquid crystal displays (LCD), plasma displays, cathode ray, projectors, and the like.

The voice input **208** comprises spoken audio by the operator **110a**. The DTMF **210** comprises dual-tone multi-frequency (DTMF) signaling on a telephone keypad by the operator **110a**.

The audio scripts **212a-c** are substantially described above in relation to FIG. 1.

The payment info **214** comprises payment information given by the caller **102** to an operator **110**, including bank routing numbers, and/or checking account numbers, and/or credit card numbers, and/or expiration dates, and/or PayPal® account information, and/or credit information, and the like.

Referring now to FIG. 3, a block diagram illustrating an apparatus **300** for directing a caller through any IVR system in accordance with the present invention. The apparatus **300** comprises an ACD **106**, an IVR **114**, a persistent storage **116**, a telephony switching module **302**, an assessor module **304**, a switcher module **306**, a control module **310**, a router module **312**, a point of sale module **118**, a PBX switch **322**, a PTSN **124**, and a tracker module **320**.

The ACD **106** is substantially described above in relation to FIGS. 1-2.

The IVR **114** is substantially described above in relation to FIGS. 1-2.

The persistent storage **116** is substantially described above in relation to FIGS. 1-2.

The telephony switching module **302** measures call volume and routes calls

The assessor module **304** is configured to prompt an operator **110** to join a call channel **204** in response to the call volume measured by the telephony switching module **302** satisfying a predetermined criteria. In some embodiments, the operator **110** assents to the prompt to join the call channel **204** by depressing a key marked with a numeral on a standard computer keyboard. In some embodiments, the predetermined criteria is predetermined by one or more DPDs.

The switcher module **306** is configured to transfer control of DTMF signaling and voice input ("input control") from the call channel **204** to the operator **110** upon command of the operator **110** such that a caller on the call channel is unaware that input control has been transferred, the switcher module configured to transfer input control back to the call channel upon command.

The control module **210** is configured to convey DTMF signals and voice input ("audio input") from the operator **110** to an IVR **114** such that the IVR **114** receives the DTMF input **210** and voice input **208** such that neither the DTMF input **210** or voice input **208** is not heard by caller **102** on the call channel **104**.

In some embodiments of the present invention, the IVR **114** comprises a uniquely configured IVR system which is preprogrammed to recognize keywords spoken by the caller **102** and/or the operator **110**, and to then make assumptions about non-recognized oral communications of the caller **102**. The IVR **114**, in this unique embodiment, is configured to recognize keywords indicative of a caller **102** need, intent, or instruction. In some embodiments, the IVR **114** is additionally configured to recognize keywords indicative of personal information of the caller **102**.

For instance, the IVR **114** may be configured to recognize: keywords denoting the names of products the caller **102** wishes to purchase such as "silverware"; keywords denoting the city, state, country or continent where the caller **102** resides such as "San Diego"; keywords denoting an affirmative or negative response to a yes or no questions posed to the caller **102** by the IVR **114** or the operator **110** such as "yes," "no," and "yep"; keywords indicating a state of mind such "fine" or "good"; and keywords manifesting a desire, such as "need," "want" or "wish."

In some embodiments of the present invention, the IVR **114** is configured to recognize keywords spoken in a plurality of languages, such as English, Spanish, or Chinese. In other embodiments of the present invention, the IVR **114** may be switched from one mode to either, which each mode configured to recognize a finite number of keywords in a particular language exclusively associated with that mode. This mode switching functionality provides efficiency to IVR **114** sys-

tems handling calls for a variety of consumer products from a variety of callers **102** speaking multiple languages or having multiple accents.

In still further embodiments of the present invention, the IVR **114** may be configured to recognize short phrases, such as “I don’t think so,” “I would like” or “Yo no ablo Ingles.”

Upon recognition of one or more keywords, the IVR **114** may recommend that the operator **110** play one or more prerecorded digital scripts **212** to the caller **102**, which prerecorded digital scripts are associated by the IVR **114** with one or more of the recognized keywords. Prerecorded digital scripts **212** that have already been played to the caller **102** are not included by the IVR **114** in the list of recommendations, and the IVR **114** prioritizes, in some embodiments, the recommendations using an efficiency rating. Prerecorded scripts **212** that are calculated to progress the caller **102** in the conversation toward conclusion or a commercial sale may have higher efficiency ratings that prerecorded digital scripts **212** calculated only to be responsive to the caller **102** communication at hand.

The router module **212** is configured to route the call channel **104** to a second operator **110** after IVR data collection, the second operator **110** automatically selected from a plurality of operators by the router module **212** to have a higher likelihood than one or more other operators of closing a commercial transaction, the second operator **110** selected by the router module **212** in accordance with a selection criteria satisfied in part by cross-referencing historical sales data and data collected by the IVR **114** from the caller **102**.

The point of sale module **118** is described above in relation to FIGS. 1-2. The point of sale module **118** is configured to prompt the second operator **110**—to select a recommended digitized audio script **212** for replay on the call channel **104** from one of a plurality of digitized audio scripts **122** exclusively sorted into one of a plurality of closing categories, each closing category corresponding to one of a plurality of predetermined steps of a method of closing a commercial transaction, wherein the recommended digitized audio script **212** is preselected by the point of sale module **118** to be the most efficient after cross-referencing data collected by the IVR **114** with historical data.

The PBX switch **222** is well-known to those of skill in the art.

The PTSN **124** is substantially described above in relation to FIGS. 1-2, and known to those of skill in the art.

The tracker module **220** is configured to track the second operator’s **110** progress through the steps of the method of closing a commercial transaction, and configured to instruct the point of sale **118** module which category of digitized audio scripts should be used in prompting the second operator **110**.

Referring now to FIG. 4, a flow chart of a method **400** of directing a caller through any IVR system in accordance with the present invention. The method **400** substantially includes the embodiments and modules described above with regard to the apparatus, computer program product, and system depicted in FIGS. 1-3.

The method **400** begins with a measurement module measuring **404** the call volume, or number of incoming calls, to a BPO service provider. If, at **406**, the call volume does not exceed a predetermined threshold, an operator **110** is prompted **408** to join the call channel **104**.

The method **500** proceeds, and the operator **110** is allowed **412** to exit and rejoin the call channel **104**. Input control is transferred **414** from the caller **102** to the operator **110**, meaning that any audio or DTMF input that the caller **102** attempts to make to the IVR **114** is exclusively directed to the operator

110 instead, and the operator **110** assumes the place of the caller **102** for the purpose of inputting audio information to the IVR **114**.

After assuming **414** input control, the operator **110** interacts **416** with the IVR **114** and then conveys **418** audio input to the IVR **114**. The operator **110** then routes **420** the caller **102**, in some embodiments, to a second operator **110** who is prompted **422** to join the call channel **104**.

If, at **424**, there are unexecuted steps in a sales method, the second operator **110** is continuously prompted **426** to select digitized audio scripts **212** exclusively associated with the next subsequent unexecuted step in the sales method until there remain no more unexecuted steps. After each digitized audio script **212** is played in accordance with the sales method, the second operator **110** awaits **428** a response from the caller **102**. The audio library **122**, in the preferred embodiment, archives a sufficient number of digitized scripts **212** so as to provide the second operator **110** with answers and responses to almost every logically conceivable caller **102** response to any digitized script **212**. In the event that a caller **102** gives **430** a non-typical response to a digitized script **212**, the second operator **110** transfers **432** the caller **102** to a third operator who has previously demonstrated better proficiency with the caller’s **102** native language than the second operator **110**, or who has demonstrated better a better ability to close sales of consumer products or services. In some embodiments, the caller **102** plays an exit script before transferring **432** the caller **102**, informing the caller **102** that the second operator’s **110** supervisor needs to speak with the caller **102** or take control of the call channel **104**.

In the event that, at **424**, there are no more unexecuted steps in the sales method, the second operator **110** closes **434** the call with the caller **102** by playing one or more digitized scripts associated with call termination, such as digitized scripts **212** comprising farewells or thanks.

Finally, caller information gleaned by the IVR **114** is written into persistent storage **116** for future reference.

Referring now to FIG. 5, a flow chart of a method **500** of closing a commercial transaction in accordance with the present invention.

The method **500** begins **502** when a call channel **104** is transferred to the second operator **110** who personally introduces **504** himself the caller **102**. In some embodiments of the present invention, the second operator **110** personally introduces himself **504** by playing one or more prerecorded, digitized scripts **212** to the caller **104**, which digitized scripts **212** are categorized into a single category exclusively associated with step **504** of the method **500**. The digitized scripts **212** associated with step **504** may comprise statements about the second operator’s **110** background, education, likes, dislikes, time on the job, and the like. The digitized scripts **212** may also comprise questions about the caller’s **102** likes, dislikes, background, weather, family, income, how the caller **102** learned the phone number the caller **102** dialed to reach the second operator **110**, and the like.

The method **500** proceeds when the second operator **110** probes **506** the caller **102** with questions about the caller’s **102** needs. In step **506**, the second operator **110** picks digitized scripts **212** from a second group, or category, of digitized scripts exclusively associated with step **506** of method **500**. The digitized scripts **212** associated with step **506** may comprise questions about products the caller **102** likes, needs or prefers, questions about the caller’s **102**, daily activities, and the like.

The method **500** proceeds when the caller **102** delivers **508** an initial value statement that ties back to the caller’s **102** needs. As before, the second operator **110** may present an

initial value statement to the caller **102** using digitized scripts **212** exclusively associated with this step of the method **500** (step **508**). The digitized scripts **212** may comprise pre-recorded statements about the quality, durability, utility, price, efficiency, speed, weight, fitness, or size of a consumer product which the second operator **110** is attempting to sell to the caller **102**.

The method **500** proceeds when the second operator **110** calmly requests **510** payment information from the caller **102**. As with previous steps of the method **500**, the second operator **110** may calmly request the payment information from the caller **102** using digitized scripts **212** exclusively associated with this step of the method **500** (step **510**). The digitized scripts **212** may comprise prerecorded statements requesting credit card information, checking account information, billing address information, and/or PayPal® information, and/or the like.

In the final step of the Plus One Method™, a commercial transaction is consummated when the caller **102** remits money to the second operator **110** via means well-known to those of skill in the art, including PayPal®, credit card credit, debit card, eCheck, direct bank deposits, and the like.

The present invention may be embodied in other specific forms without departing from its spirit or essential characteristics. The described embodiments are to be considered in all respects only as illustrative and not restrictive. The scope of the invention is, therefore, indicated by the appended claims rather than by the foregoing description. All changes which come within the meaning and range of equivalency of the claims are to be embraced within their scope.

What is claimed is:

1. A system to direct a caller through any IVR system, the system comprising:

a telephony switching module configured to measure call volume to an inbound call center;

an assenter module configured to prompt an operator to join a call channel in response to the call volume measured by the telephony switching module satisfying a predetermined criteria;

a joiner module configured to join the operator with the call channel in response to the operator accepting the prompt of the assenter module to join the call channel, the joiner module being configured to allow the operator to exit and rejoin the call channel at will;

a switcher module configured to transfer input control from the call channel to the operator upon command of the operator such that a caller on the call channel is unaware that input control has been transferred, the switcher module configured to transfer input control back to the call channel upon command;

a commercial IVR system with which the call channel interacts;

a control module configured to convey audio input from the operator to an IVR system such that the IVR system receives the audio input but the audio input is not heard by the call channel; and

a point of sale module configured to prompt a second operator to select a recommended digitized audio script for replay on the call channel from one of a plurality of digitized audio scripts exclusively sorted into one of a plurality of closing categories, each closing category corresponding to one of a plurality of predetermined steps of a method of closing a commercial transaction, wherein the recommended digitized audio script is pre-selected by the point of sale module to be the most efficient after cross-referencing data collected by the IVR system with historical data.

2. The system of claim 1, further comprising a router module configured to route the call channel to a second operator after IVR data collection, the second operator automatically

selected from a plurality of operators by the router module to have a higher likelihood than one or more other operators of closing a commercial transaction, the second operator selected by the router module in accordance with a selection criteria satisfied in part by cross-referencing historical sales data and data collected by the IVR system from the caller.

3. The system of claim 1, further comprising an automatic call distributor (ACD) configured to bypass the telephony switcher module in response to an inbound call volume exceeding a predetermined threshold.

4. The system of claim 1, wherein the method of closing a commercial transaction comprising the following steps:

personally introducing oneself;

probing the caller with questions about the caller's needs;

delivering an initial value statement that ties back to the caller's needs;

delivering an offer to the caller which creates a sense of urgency; and

calmly requesting one or more of payment information, shipping information, and contact information.

5. The system of claim 1, wherein the assenter module prompts an operator to join a call channel who is available.

6. The system of claim 1, wherein the router module routes a plurality of calls to the operator who handles a plurality of calls simultaneously.

7. The system of claim 1, wherein the plurality of digitized audio scripts comprise audio recordings of portions of dialogue spoken by an operator determined to be effective at closing commercial transactions.

8. The system of claim 1, further comprising a tracker module configured to track the second operator's progress through the steps of the method of closing a commercial transaction, and configured to instruct the point of sale module which category of digitized audio scripts should be used in prompting the second operator.

9. The system of claim 1, further comprising a PBX switch.

10. An apparatus configured to direct a caller through any IVR system, the apparatus comprising:

a telephony switching module configured to measure call volume to an inbound call center;

an assenter module configured to prompt an operator to join a call channel in response to the call volume measured by the telephony switching module satisfying a predetermined criteria;

a joiner module configured to join the operator with the call channel in response to the operator accepting the prompt of the assenter module to join the call channel, the joiner module being configured to allow the operator to exit and rejoin the call channel at will;

a switcher module configured to transfer control of DTMF signaling and voice input ("input control") from the call channel to the operator upon command of the operator such that a caller on the call channel is unaware that input control has been transferred, the switcher module configured to transfer input control back to the call channel upon command;

a commercial IVR system with which the call channel interacts;

a control module configured to convey DTMF signals and voice input ("audio input") from the operator to an IVR system such that the IVR system receives the audio input but the audio input is not heard by the call channel;

a router module configured to route the call channel to a second operator after IVR data collection, the second operator automatically selected from a plurality of operators by the router module to have a higher likelihood than one or more other operators of closing a commercial transaction, the second operator selected by the router module in accordance with a selection criteria

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satisfied in part by cross-referencing historical sales data and data collected by the IVR system from the caller; and

a point of sale module configured to prompt the second operator to select a recommended digitized audio script for replay on the call channel from one of a plurality of digitized audio scripts exclusively sorted into one of a plurality of closing categories, each closing category corresponding to one of a plurality of predetermined steps of a method of conducting a commercial transaction, wherein the recommended digitized audio script is preselected by the point of sale module to be the most efficient after cross-referencing data collected by the IVR system with historical data.

11. The apparatus of claim 9, further comprising an automatic call distributor (ACD) configured to bypass the telephony switching module in response to an inbound call volume exceeding a predetermined threshold.

12. The apparatus of claim 9, wherein the method of closing a commercial transaction comprising the following steps: personally introducing oneself; probing the caller with questions about the caller's needs; delivering an initial value statement that ties back to the caller's needs; delivering an offer to the caller which creates a sense of urgency; and calmly requesting payment information.

13. The apparatus of claim 9, wherein the assenter module prompts an operator to join a call channel who is available.

14. The apparatus of claim 9, wherein the router module routes a plurality of calls to the operator who handles a plurality of calls simultaneously.

15. The apparatus of claim 9, wherein the plurality of digitized audio scripts comprise audio recordings of portions of dialogue spoken by an operator determined to be effective at closing commercial transactions.

16. The apparatus of claim 9, further comprising a tracker module configured to track the second operator's progress through the steps of the method of closing a commercial transaction, and configured to instruct the point of sale module which category of digitized audio scripts should be used in prompting the second operator.

17. A computer program product comprising a non-transitory computer readable medium having computer usable program code executable to direct a caller through any IVR system, the operations of the computer program product comprising:

measuring call volume to an inbound call center; prompting an operator to join a call channel in response to the measured call volume satisfying a predetermined criteria;

joining the operator with the call channel in response to the operator accepting the prompting of the computer program product to join the call channel;

allowing the operator to exit and rejoin the call channel at will;

transferring control of DTMF signaling and voice input ("input control") from the call channel to the operator upon command of the operator such that a caller on the call channel is unaware that input control has been transferred,

transferring input control back to the call channel upon command;

interacting with a commercial IVR system;

conveying DTMF signals and voice input ("audio input") from the operator to an IVR system such that the IVR system receives the audio input but the audio input is not heard by the call channel;

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routing the call channel to a second operator after IVR data collection, the second operator automatically selected from a plurality of operators to have a higher likelihood than one or more other operators of closing a commercial transaction, the second operator selected in accordance with a selection criteria satisfied in part by cross-referencing historical sales data and data collected by the IVR system from the caller; and

prompting the second operator to select a recommended digitized audio script for replay on the call channel from one of a plurality of digitized audio scripts exclusively sorted into one of a plurality of closing categories, each closing category corresponding to one of a plurality of predetermined steps of a method of conducting a commercial transaction, wherein the recommended digitized audio script is preselected to be the most efficient after cross-referencing data collected by the IVR system with historical data.

18. The computer program product of claim 16, further comprising an automatic call distributor (ACD) configured to bypass the telephony switching module in response to an inbound call volume exceeding a predetermined threshold.

19. The computer program product of claim 17, wherein the method of closing a commercial transaction comprising the following steps:

personally introducing oneself;

probing the caller with questions about the caller's needs; delivering an initial value statement that ties back to the caller's needs;

delivering an offer to the caller which creates a sense of urgency; and

calmly requesting payment information.

20. The computer program product of claim 17, wherein the assenter module prompts an operator to join a call channel who is available.

21. The computer program product of claim 17, wherein the router module routes a plurality of calls to the operator who handles a plurality of calls simultaneously.

22. The computer program product of claim 17, wherein the plurality of digitized audio scripts comprise audio recordings of portions of dialogue spoken by an operator determined to be effective at closing commercial transactions.

23. The computer program product of claim 17, further comprising a tracker module configured to track the second operator's progress through the steps of the method of closing a commercial transaction, and configured to instruct the point of sale module which category of digitized audio scripts should be used in prompting the second operator.

24. The computer program product of claim 17, wherein the IVR system is configured during IVR data collection to: recognize one or more predetermined keywords spoken by the caller over the call channel;

prompt the operator to play one or more digitized scripts predetermined to be responsive to the a caller communication made on the call channel, which digitized scripts are previously unheard by the caller, which digitized scripts are prioritized in accordance with an efficiency rating;

play a prerecorded script selected by the operator from the recommendations; and

save in persistent storage a record that the prerecorded script was played by the operator and instructional information denoted by the recognized keywords.