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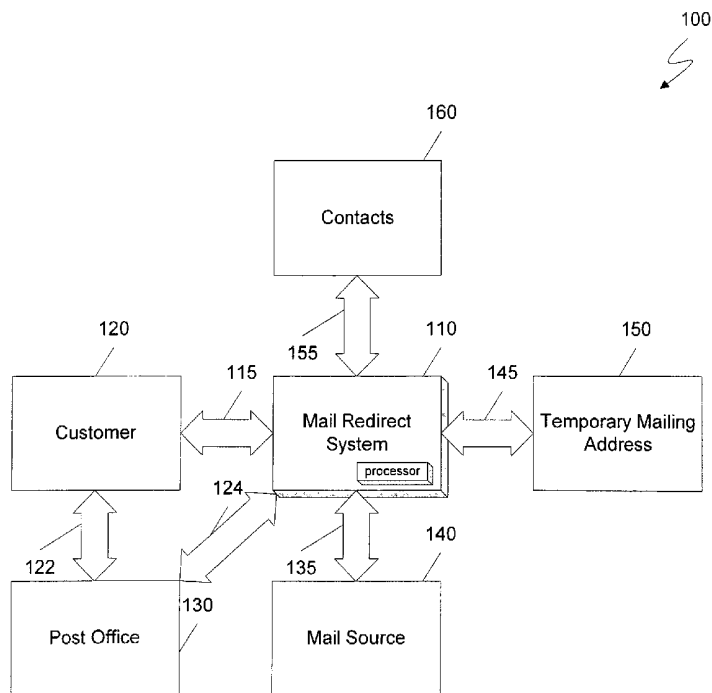
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(54) Title: SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR REDIRECTING MAIL



(57) Abstract: To temporarily redirect a customer's mail from a current mailing address to a temporary mailing address a request to temporarily redirect the customer's mail is received. The request specifies at least one type of mail to redirect, the temporary mailing address, how to redirect the mail, and when to redirect the mail. The customer's mail is directed to the temporary mailing address according to the request.

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SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR REDIRECTING MAIL

DESCRIPTION**Cross-Reference to Related Application**

This application claims the priority benefit of U.S. Provisional Application No. 60/280,156, filed on April 2, 2001, which is incorporated herein by reference.

Field

The present invention relates generally to systems and methods for temporarily redirecting mail.

Background

Travelers often need or desire to receive their mail while they are temporarily away from their current mailing address. Current systems limit the type of mail and the time period that a customer may temporarily redirect mail. These systems further limit how and when the customer's mail is redirected. Generally, these systems offer the customer limited flexibility in temporarily redirecting the customer's mail. Accordingly, there is a need for a flexible system and method for temporarily redirecting mail.

SUMMARY

A method for temporarily redirecting a customer's mail from a current mailing address to a temporary mailing address is provided. The method comprises receiving a request to temporarily redirect the customer's mail. The request specifies at least one type of mail to redirect, the temporary

mailing address, how to redirect the mail, and when to redirect the mail. The method further comprises redirecting the customer's mail to the temporary mailing address according to the request.

Further, there is provided a computer readable medium containing instructions for controlling a computer system to perform a method. The method comprise receiving a request to temporarily redirect the customer's mail, wherein the request specifies at least one type of mail to redirect, the temporary mailing address, how to redirect the mail, and when to redirect the mail.

Still further, there is provided a system for temporarily redirecting a customer's mail from a current mailing address to a temporary mailing address is provided. The system comprises means for receiving a request to temporarily redirect the customer's mail. The request specifies at least one type of mail to redirect, the temporary mailing address, how to redirect the mail, and when to redirect the mail. The system further comprises means for redirecting the customer's mail to the temporary mailing address according to the request.

Additional advantages of the invention will be set forth in part in the description which follows, and in part will be obvious from the description, or may be learned by practice of the invention. The advantages of the invention will be realized and attained by means of the elements and combinations particularly pointed out in the appended claims.

It is to be understood that both the foregoing general description and the following detailed description are exemplary and explanatory only and are not restrictive of the invention, as claimed.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

In the drawings:

Fig. 1 illustrates an environment for temporarily redirecting a customer's mail from a current mailing address to a temporary mailing address for a period a time.

Fig. 2 illustrates an environment for temporarily redirecting a customer's mail from a current mailing address to a temporary mailing address for a period a time.

Fig. 3 illustrates a method consistent with the present invention for redirecting a customer's mail from a current mailing address to a temporary mailing address for a period a time.

DESCRIPTION OF THE EMBODIMENTS

Referring now to the drawings, Figs. 1 and 2 illustrate an environment 100, 200 for temporarily redirecting a customer's mail from a current mailing address to a temporary mailing address for a period a time. Environment 100 comprises a mail redirect system 110, a customer 120, a post office 130, a mail source 140, a temporary mailing address 150, and one or more contacts 160.

Customer 120 may be any person, business, organization, or any other entity that desires to redirect all or a portion of its mail to temporary mailing

address 150. Mail redirect system 110 may facilitate the redirection of customer's 120 mail. Mail redirect system 110 may include a processor containing computer instructions for implementing methods consistent with the present invention. Customer 120 and mail redirect system 110 may communicate via a communication link 115.

Mail redirect system 110 may communicate with post office 130, 210 to redirect customer's 120 mail. Alternatively, customer 120 may communicate with post office 130, 210 to redirect customer's 120 mail. Mail redirect system 110 and post office 130, 210 may communicate via a communication link 124. Accordingly, a mail redirection system for redirecting the customer's mail may comprise mail redirect system 110, communication link 124, and post office 130. Customer 120 and post office 130, 210 may communicate via a communication link 122.

As shown in Fig. 2, post office 210 may redirect 214 customer's mail from current mailing address 220 to temporary mailing address 230. If customer 120 specifies that only a portion of its mail is to be redirected, then the remaining mail may be delivered 212 to current mailing address 220. Alternatively, the remaining mail may be held at post office 210. Post office 210 may redirect the customer's mail by informing a carrier/clerk not to deliver the customer's mail to the current mailing address 220. The carrier/clerk may instead repackage the customer's mail for delivery to the temporary mailing address 230, in accordance with customer's request. Alternatively, an automated system may be used to repackage the customer's mail for delivery to the temporary mailing address 230.

Mail source 140, 240 may be any person, business, organization, or any other entity that sends mail to customer 120. Mail redirect system 110 may communicate with mail source 140, 240 to redirect customer's 120 mail. As shown in Fig. 2, instead of post office 210 redirecting 216 mail from mail source 240 to temporary mailing address 230, mail source 240 may deliver 218 the mail directly to temporary mailing address 230. As shown in Fig. 1, mail redirect system 110 and mail source 140, 240 may communicate via a communication link 135. In addition, post office 130 may communicate with mail source 140, 240 to redirect customer's 120 mail directly to temporary mailing address 230.

Temporary mailing address 150, 230 may be any mailing address other than customer's 120 current mailing address 220. For example, temporary mailing address 150 may be an address corresponding to a hotel, business, residence, or post office box. Temporary mailing address 150, 230 and mail redirect system 110 may communicate via a communication link 145.

One or more contacts 160 may be any person, business, organization, or any other entity that customer 120 desires mail redirect system 110 to contact, as described in greater detail below. One or more contacts 160 and mail redirect system 110 may communicate via a communication link 155.

Each of communication links 115, 122, 124, 135, 145, 155 may be any system, network, or device that facilitates communication (e.g., data communication or telecommunication) using any appropriate communication protocol (e.g., TCP/IP, HTTP, HTTPS or any other security protocol, FTP, SMTP, or any other proprietary protocol). Each of communication links 115,

122, 124, 135, 145, 155 may comprise a local area network (LAN) connection, a wide area network (WAN) connection, an Internet connection, or a combination of the foregoing. Each of communication links 115, 122, 124, 135, 145, 155 may comprise a telephone line, optical fiber, coaxial cable, twisted wire pair, or a combination of the foregoing. Each of communication links 115, 122, 124, 135, 145, 155 may be wireless using any appropriate technique to provide wireless transmission including infrared line of sight, cellular, microwave, satellite, packet radio, spread spectrum, or a combination of the foregoing.

Fig. 3 illustrates a method consistent with the present invention for redirecting a customer's mail from a current mailing address to a temporary mailing address for a period a time. At stage 310, mail redirect system 110 receives a request to temporarily redirect customer's 120 mail from current mailing address 220 to temporary mailing address 230.

The request may specify customer's 120 current mailing address 220 and temporary mailing address 230. Mail redirect system 110 may confirm that current mailing address 220 and temporary mailing address 230 are valid mailing addresses. The request may further specify a date customer 120 will arrive at temporary mailing address 230 and a date customer 120 will depart from temporary mailing address 230. The request may also specify a date customer 120 will arrive back at current mailing address 220. Still further, the request may specify a date customer 120 desires its mail to be redirected and a date customer 120 desires mail redirection to be cancelled. Alternatively, mail redirect system 110 may determine the date to begin mail redirection and

the date to cancel mail redirection based on the arrival date to and the departure date from the temporary mailing address 230 received.

The request may specify that all mail is to be redirected. Alternatively, the request may specify that one or more types of mail are to be redirected. For example, the request may specify that bills, periodicals (e.g., newspapers, magazines), and/or letters are to be redirected. The request may specify that advertisements and/or bulk mail are to be delivered to current mailing address 220 or held at post office 130, 210, for example.

The request may specify how the mail is to be redirected. For example, the request may specify that the mail is to be redirected using an expedited mailing process such as Priority Mail™ or Express Mail™. The request may specify how often (e.g., daily or weekly) the mail is to be redirected.

The request may be received via communication link 115. The request may be received when a form is completed and submitted via the Internet, for example. As an alternative, the request may be received when a form is completed and delivered to post office 130, 210. Post office 130, 210 may communicate the form to mail redirect system 110 via communication link 124. As another alternative, the request may be received via the telephone.

At stage 315, mail redirect system 110 determines when to redirect the mail based on the request. If the request specifies a date mail redirection is to begin, then the date specified may control. Alternatively, mail redirect system 110 may determine the date to begin mail redirection. Once mail redirection has begun, mail redirect system 110 may determine when to redirect mail

based on the frequency specified in the request. The determination made at stage 315 may be communicated to post office 130, 210 via communication link 124. Alternatively, if the request was received by post office 130, 210, then post office 130, 210 may make the determination at stage 315.

At stage 320, mail redirect system 110 creates a trust account to be funded by customer 120 to cover a cost or fee charged to redirect customer's 120 mail. The amount funded by customer 120 may be an estimated cost, including postage, to redirect customer's 120 mail. The cost may be based on how, how often, and where the mail is being redirected. Each time the mail is redirected, the trust account may be electronically debited an amount by mail redirect system 110 to cover the cost or fee to redirect the mail.

At stage 325, mail redirect system 110 informs at least one mail source 140, 240 of the request so that mail source 140, 240 may redirect the mail from the mail source 140, 240 to the temporary mailing address 230. For example, once the mail source 140, 240 is informed of the request, mail source 140, 240 may change customer's 120 mailing address from current mailing address 220 to temporary mailing address 230 so that customer's 120 mail is delivered to temporary mailing address 230 directly 218. Mail redirect system 110 may inform mail source 140, 240 via communication link 135.

At stage 330, mail redirect system 110 receives notification that customer 120 has arrived at temporary mailing address 230. For example, if temporary mailing address 230 is a hotel, then mail redirect system 110 may receive notification from the hotel that customer 120 has arrived when

customer 120 checks-in at the hotel. Mail redirect system 110 may receive notification via communication link 145.

Mail redirect system 110 may provide a package to customer 120 when customer 120 arrives at temporary mailing address 230. The package may be based on profile information on customer 120 received via communication link 155. The profile information may be received at the time the request is received at stage 310 or before the request is received, for example when customer 120 registers with mail redirect system 110. The profile information may include information on customer's 120 needs and interests. For example, if the profile information indicates that customer's 120 needs or interests include jogging, then the package may include a map of jogging trails near temporary mailing address 230. The packages may also include coupons for services or goods. The package may also include contact information for restaurants, grocery stores, malls, or medical facilities near temporary mailing address 230. The package may also include a confirmation that customer's 120 mail will be redirected to temporary mailing address 230.

At stage 335, mail redirect system 110 informs one or more contacts 160 of customer's 120 arrival at temporary mailing address 230. Mail redirect system 110 may inform contacts 160 via communication link 155. For example, mail redirect system 110 may inform the contacts 160 by emailing the contacts based on email addresses received. The email addresses may be received by mail redirect system 110 at the time the request is received at stage 310 or before the request is received, for example when customer 120 registers with mail redirect system 110. Mail redirect system 110 may further

provide the contacts 160 with contact information to contact customer 120, such as a contact address or telephone number.

At stage 340, post office 130, 210 redirects customer's 120 mail to temporary mailing address 230 according to the request received at stage 310. In one embodiment, temporary mailing address 230 comprises a post office box. In that case, mail is redirected to the post office box. Mail redirect system 110 may provide information on the contents of the post office box to customer 120 via communication link 115. For example, the information on the contents of the post office box may be provided via the Internet. The information on the contents of the post office box may comprise a number of mail pieces in the post office box. In this way, customer 120 will know whether a trip to the post office box is necessary.

At stage 345, mail redirect system 110 cancels mail redirection a predetermined amount of time before customer 120 departs from temporary mailing address 230. This prevents mail from arriving at temporary mailing address 230 after customer 120 has departed. The predetermined amount of time may depend on a time required to redirect mail to temporary mailing address 230. For example, if it takes three days to deliver mail to temporary mailing address 230, then mail redirection may be cancelled four days before customer is scheduled to depart from temporary mailing address. Alternatively, a set period may be determined for all cases. For example, the mail redirection may be cancelled one week before customer 120 is scheduled to depart from temporary mailing address 230. As yet another

alternative, if the request received at stage 310 specifies a date mail redirection is to be cancelled, then the date specified may control.

Once mail redirection is cancelled, customer's 120 mail may be held at post office 210 until customer 120 arrives at current mailing address 220. Post office 210 may hold the customer's mail by informing a carrier/clerk not to deliver the customer's mail to the current mailing address 220 or repackage the customer's mail for delivery to the temporary mailing address 230. Alternatively, an automated system may be used to hold the customer's mail.

Once customer 120 arrives at current mailing address 220, post office 210 may deliver customer's 120 accumulated mail during the next scheduled delivery. Alternatively, post office 210 may deliver customer's 120 accumulated mail on demand. That is, once customer 120 arrives at the current mailing address 220, customer's 120 accumulated mail may be delivered to customer 120 before the next scheduled delivery based on customer's request.

Other embodiments consistent with the invention will be apparent to those skilled in the art from consideration of the specification and practice of the invention disclosed herein. It is intended that the specification and examples be considered as exemplary only, with a true scope and spirit of the invention being indicated by the following claims.

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method for temporarily redirecting a customer's mail from a current mailing address to a temporary mailing address, the method comprising:

receiving a request to temporarily redirect the customer's mail, wherein the request specifies at least one type of mail to redirect, the temporary mailing address, how to redirect the mail, and when to redirect the mail; and

redirecting the customer's mail to the temporary mailing address according to the request.

2. The method according to claim 1, wherein the request is received via the Internet.

3. The method according to claim 1, wherein the one type of mail to redirect consists of at least one of: all mail, bills, or periodicals.

4. The method according to claim 1, wherein the request specifies that the mail is to be redirected using an expedited mailing process.

5. The method according to claim 4, wherein the expedited mailing process is Priority Mail™ or Express Mail™.

6. The method according to claim 1, wherein when to redirect the mail is determined based on an arrival date and a departure date received,

wherein the arrival date is the date the customer will arrive at the temporary mailing address and the departure date is the date the customer will depart from the temporary mailing address.

7. The method according to claim 1, further comprising:
creating a trust account to be debited an amount for redirecting the customer's mail.

8. The method according to claim 1, further comprising:
informing at least one mail source of the request to redirect the mail from that mail source to the temporary mailing address.

9. The method according to claim 1, further comprising:
receiving a notification that the customer has arrived at the temporary mailing address; and
informing at least one contact of the customer's arrival.

10. The method according to claim 9, wherein the temporary mailing address is a hotel and the notification is received when the customer checks in at the hotel.

11. The method according to claim 9, wherein informing at least one contact of the customer's arrival comprises:

emailing the at least one contact based on at least one email address received.

12. The method according to claim 9, further comprising:
informing the at least one contact of the customer's contact information.

13. The method according to claim 1, further comprising:
providing information on the contents of a post office box to the customer, wherein the mail is redirected to the post office box.

14. The method according to claim 13, wherein information on the contents of the post office box comprises a number of mail pieces in the post office box.

15. The method according to claim 13, wherein the information on the contents of the post office box is provided to the customer via the Internet.

16. The method according to claim 1, further comprising:
providing a package to the customer when the customer arrives at the temporary mailing address, wherein the package is based on profile information received from the customer.

17. The method according to claim 16, wherein the package includes coupons for services or goods or at least one map.

18. The method according to claim 1, further comprising:
canceling mail redirection a predetermined amount of time before the customer departs from the temporary mailing address; and
holding the mail until the customer arrives at the current mailing address.

19. The method according to claim 18, wherein the mail is delivered on demand when the customer arrives at the current mailing address.

20. A computer readable medium containing instructions for controlling a computer system to perform a method, the method comprising:
receiving a request to temporarily redirect the customer's mail, wherein the request specifies at least one type of mail to redirect, the temporary mailing address, how to redirect the mail, and when to redirect the mail.

21. The computer readable medium according to claim 20, wherein the request is received via the Internet.

22. The computer readable medium according to claim 20, wherein the one type of mail to redirect consists of at least one of: all mail, bills, or periodicals.

23. The computer readable medium according to claim 20, wherein the request specifies that the mail is to be redirected using an expedited mailing process.

24. The computer readable medium according to claim 23, wherein the expedited mailing process is Priority Mail™ or Express Mail™.

25. The computer readable medium according to claim 20, wherein when to redirect the mail is determined based on an arrival date and a departure date received, wherein the arrival date is the date the customer will arrive at the temporary mailing address and the departure date is the date the customer will depart from the temporary mailing address.

26. The computer readable medium according to claim 20, the method further comprising:

creating a trust account to be debited an amount for redirecting the customer's mail.

27. The computer readable medium according to claim 20, the method further comprising:

informing at least one mail source of the request to redirect the mail from that mail source to the temporary mailing address.

28. The computer readable medium according to claim 20, the method further comprising:

receiving a notification that the customer has arrived at the temporary mailing address; and

informing at least one contact of the customer's arrival.

29. The computer readable medium according to claim 28, wherein the temporary mailing address is a hotel and the notification is received when the customer checks in at the hotel.

30. The computer readable medium according to claim 28, wherein informing at least one contact of the customer's arrival comprises:

emailing the at least one contact based on at least one email address received.

31. The computer readable medium according to claim 28, the method further comprising:

informing the at least one contact of the customer's contact information.

32. The computer readable medium according to claim 20, the method further comprising:

providing information on the contents of a post office box to the customer, wherein the mail is redirected to the post office box.

33. The computer readable medium according to claim 32, wherein information on the contents of the post office box comprises a number of mail pieces in the post office box.

34. The computer readable medium according to claim 32, wherein the information on the contents of the post office box is provided to the customer via the Internet.

35. The computer readable medium according to claim 20, the method further comprising:

canceling mail redirection a predetermined amount of time before the customer departs from the temporary mailing address.

36. The computer readable medium according to claim 35, the method further comprising:

receiving a request to deliver the mail on demand when the customer arrives at the current mailing address.

37. A system for temporarily redirecting a customer's mail from a current mailing address to a temporary mailing address, the method comprising:

a processor for receiving a request to temporary redirect the customer's mail, wherein the request specifies at least one type of mail to

redirect, the temporary mailing address, how to redirect the mail, and when to redirect the mail; and

a mail redirection system for redirecting the customer's mail to the temporary mailing address according to the request.

38. The system according to claim 37, wherein the request is received via a communication link.

39. The system according to claim 38, wherein the communication link is the Internet.

40. The system according to claim 37, further comprising an expedited mailing system for redirecting the customer's mail.

41. The system according to claim 37, wherein the processor determines when to redirect the mail based on an arrival date and a departure date received, wherein the arrival date is the date the customer will arrive at the temporary mailing address and the departure date is the date the customer will depart from the temporary mailing address.

42. The system according to claim 37, further comprising:
an electric trust account.

43. The system according to claim 37, further comprising:

a communication link for informing at least one mail source of the request to redirect the mail from that mail source to the temporary mailing address.

44. The system according to claim 37, further comprising:

a communication link for receiving a notification that the customer has arrived at the temporary mailing address; and

a message informing at least one contact of the customer's arrival.

45. The system according to claim 44, wherein the communication link is to a hotel .

46. The system according to claim 44, wherein the message is an email message informing the at least one contact of the customer's arrival.

47. The system according to claim 46, wherein the message includes contact information.

48. The system according to claim 37, further comprises:

means for providing information on the contents of a post office box to the customer, wherein the mail is redirected to the post office box.

49. The system according to claim 48, wherein a communication link provides information on the contents of the post office box.

50. The system according to claim 49, wherein the communication link is the Internet.

51. The system according to claim 37, further comprising:
a package, wherein the package is based on profile information received from the customer and wherein the package is provided to the customer when the customer arrives at the temporary mailing address.

52. The system according to claim 51, wherein the package includes coupons for services or goods or at least one map.

53. The system according to claim 37, further comprising:
for a processor for canceling mail redirection a predetermined amount of time before the customer departs from the temporary mailing address; and
means for holding the mail until the customer arrives at the current mailing address.

54. The system according to claim 53, further comprising:
means for delivering the mail on demand when the customer arrives at the current mailing address.

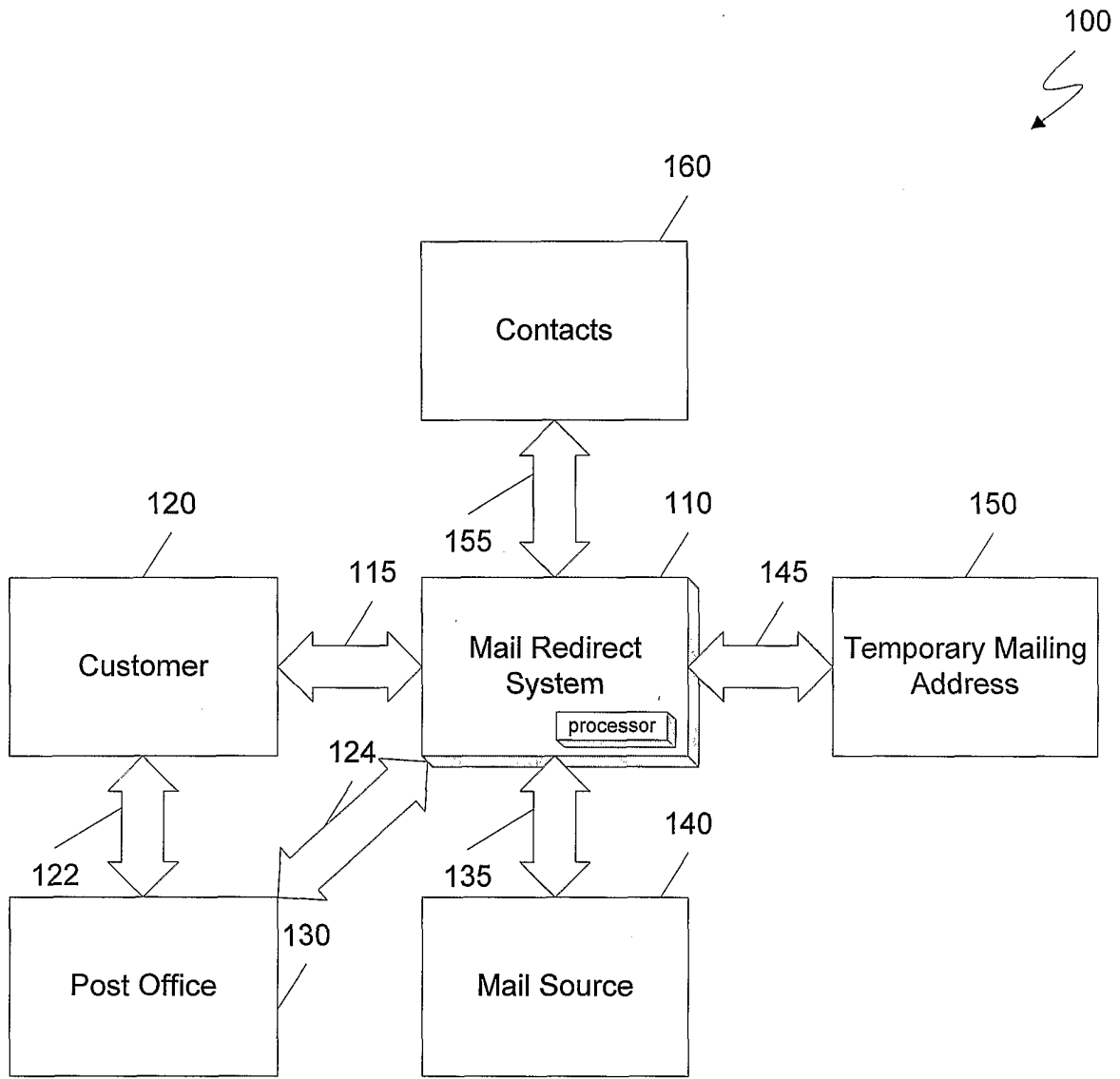


Fig. 1

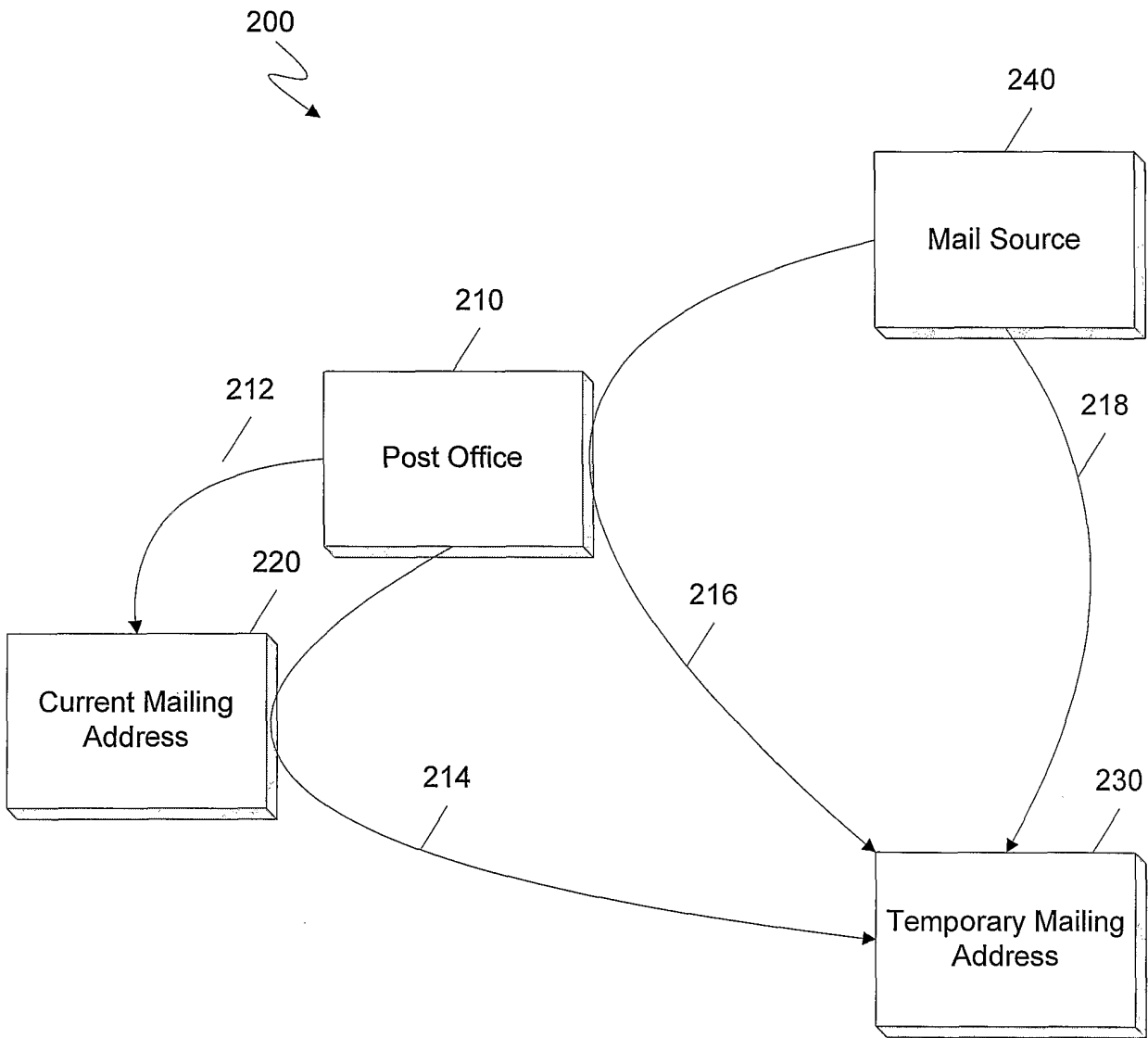


Fig. 2

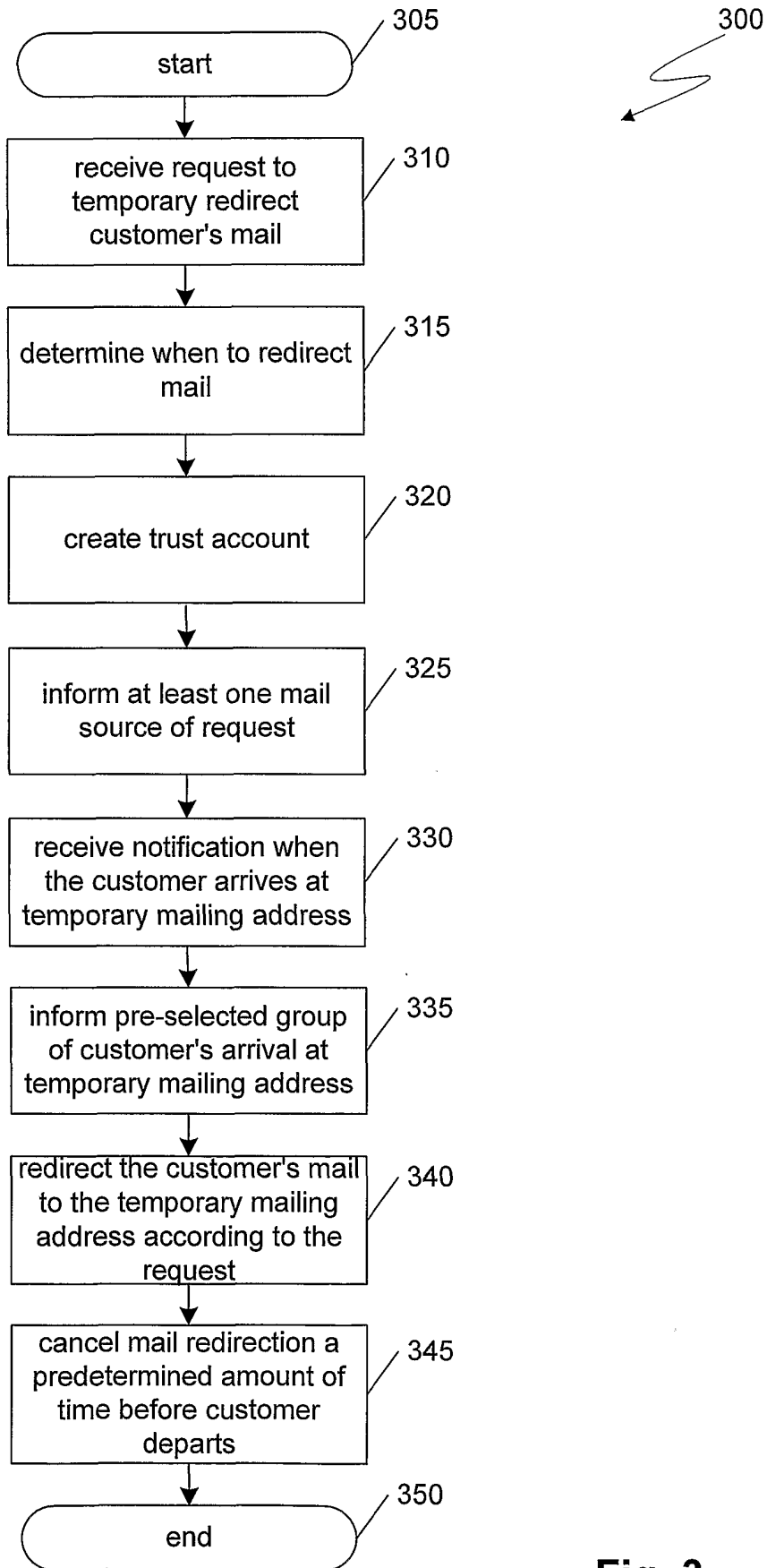


Fig. 3