

analyze the audit information in a desired manner. The audit instructions **340** can also include instructions that cause audit information to be transmitted to a remote site (e.g., the application manager **201** or a content providing system **202**). These instructions can include scheduling instructions that govern when the audit information is so communicated (e.g., after periodic time intervals), as well as instructions that identify the location (e.g., network address) of the remote site. The transfer of audit information can be accomplished, for example, using a conventional electronic mail mechanism, as known to those skilled in the art. The audit instructions **340** can also include instructions that enable the content display system **203** to display audit information. Additionally, the audit instructions **340** can include instructions that enable the user to disable the audit function entirely, or that enable the user to prevent audit information from being transmitted to the application manager **201** and/or to content providing systems **202**. These last instructions could also be accompanied by operating instructions that provide a control option or options to the user, in a manner similar to that described above with respect to FIGS. **5A**, **5B** and **6**, that enable the user to select disablement of the audit function. The audit instructions **340** can also include instructions that cause the database of audit information to be erased at an appropriate time, such as after the audit information has been communicated to a remote site.

Auditing of use of the attention manager can be useful to both users of the attention manager and content providers for a variety of reasons. Such auditing can be used, for example, to illustrate to content providers the value of the attention manager as a tool for disseminating the content provider's information, by showing the content providers how many content data display systems **203** are displaying the content provider's content data. The auditing can also give content providers insight into the interests of computer users, enabling the content providers to better target the information that the content providers provide. The auditing can also indicate to a user the amount and types of the information that the user has been receiving.

Various embodiments of the invention have been described. The descriptions are intended to be illustrative, not limitative. Thus, it will be apparent to one skilled in the art that certain modifications may be made to the invention as described without departing from the scope of the claims set out below. For example, though it is contemplated that an attention manager according to the invention will typically be used to occupy the peripheral attention of a human computer user, generally the attention manager can be used to occupy the attention of any sentient being. For example, the attention manager may be useful in occupying the attention of domesticated animals such as dogs or cats, or providing training (i.e., audio that can be repeated) for a "talking" bird such as a parrot.

We claim:

**1.** A method for engaging the peripheral attention of a person in the vicinity of a display device, comprising the steps of:

providing one or more sets of content data to a content display system associated with the display device and located entirely in the same physical location as the display device;

providing to the content display system a set of instructions for enabling the content display system to selectively display, in an unobtrusive manner that does not distract a user of the display device or an apparatus associated with the display device from a primary interaction with the display device or apparatus, an image or images generated from a set of content data; and

auditing the display of sets of content data by the content display system;

wherein the one or more sets of content data are selected from a plurality of sets of content data, each set being provided by an associated content provider, wherein each associated content provider is located in a different physical location than at least one other content provider and each content provider provides its content data to the content display system independently of each other content provider and without the content data being aggregated at a common physical location remote from the content display system prior to being provided to the content display system, and wherein for each set the respective content provider may provide scheduling instructions tailored to the set of content data to control at least one of the duration, sequencing, and timing of the display of said image or images generated from the set of content data.

**2.** A method as in claim **1**, wherein the display device comprises a television.

**3.** A computer readable medium encoded with one or more computer programs for enabling engagement of the peripheral attention of a person in the vicinity of a display device, comprising:

instructions for providing one or more sets of content data to a content display system associated with the display device and located entirely in the same physical location as the display device;

instructions for providing to the content display system a set of instructions for enabling the content display system to selectively display, in an unobtrusive manner that does not distract a user of the display device or an apparatus associated with the display device from a primary interaction with the display device or apparatus, an image or images generated from a set of content data; and

instructions for auditing the display of sets of content data by the content display system;

wherein the one or more sets of content data are selected from a plurality of sets of content data, each set being provided by an associated content provider, wherein each associated content provider is located in a different physical location than at least one other content provider and each content provider provides its content data to the content display system independently of each other content provider and without the content data being aggregated at a common physical location remote from the content display system prior to being provided to the content display system, and wherein for each set the respective content provider may provide scheduling instructions tailored to the set of content data to control at least one of the duration, sequencing, and timing of the display of said image or images generated from the set of content data.

**4.** A computer readable medium as in claim **3**, wherein the one or more computer programs enable display of an image or images on a display device comprising a television.

**5.** A computer readable medium encoded with one or more computer programs for enabling engagement of the peripheral attention of a person in the vicinity of a display device, comprising:

instructions for acquiring a set of content data from a content providing system;

instructions for detecting an idle period of predetermined duration; and

instructions for selectively displaying on the display device, after detection of the idle period and in an