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Slik et al.

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[54] **SYSTEM FOR DISTRIBUTING DIGITAL INFORMATION**

[75] Inventors: **David Slik**, Brackendale; **Shannon Byrne**, Whistler, both of Canada

[73] Assignee: **Paradata Systems Inc.**, Canada

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[52] **U.S. Cl.** **380/25**; 395/650

[58] **Field of Search** 380/4, 23, 25, 380/49, 21; 395/650, 239

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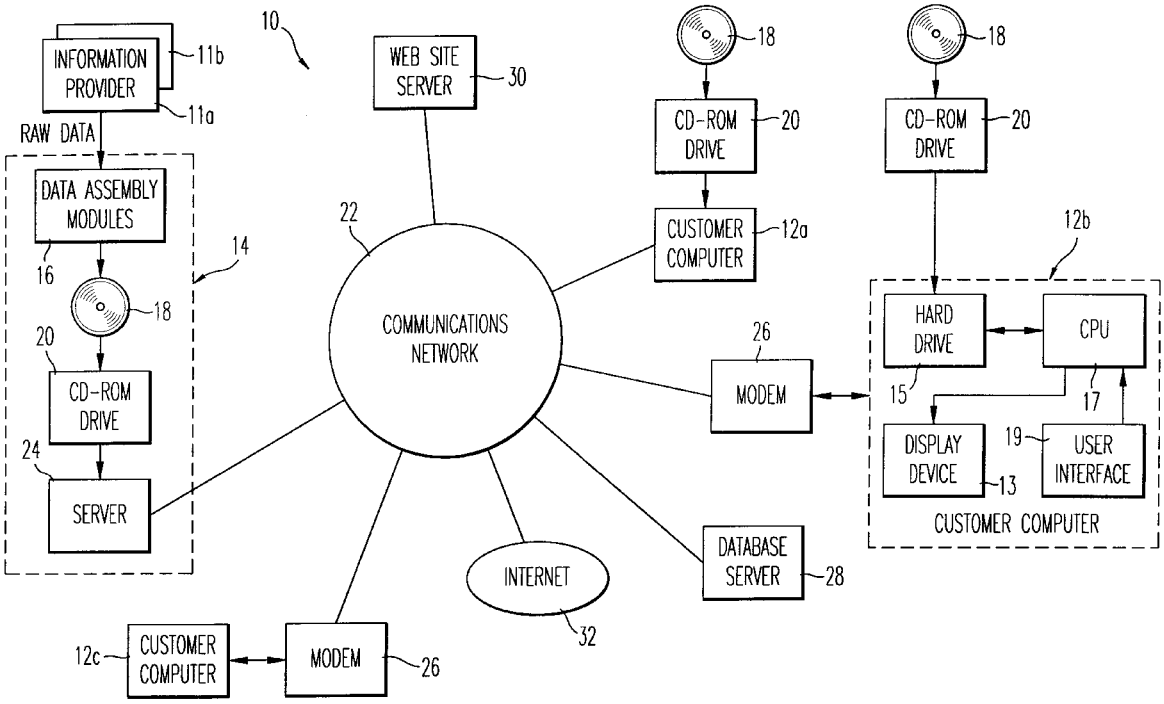
Primary Examiner—David C. Cain

Attorney, Agent, or Firm—Roylance, Abrams, Berdo & Goodman, L.L.P.

[57] **ABSTRACT**

A system for distributing digital data among a plurality of customers is provided which comprises a modular software architecture to accommodate different data preview, search, data compression and encryption functions, and different purchase transactions. A software kernel creates an operating environment in conjunction with the host operating system of a customer computer to accommodate these different services and functions and allow for the storage and retrieval of datasets from a variety of storage locations, such as portable storage devices at customer computers and shared memory devices accessible via communication networks. Computer-dependent product codes for requesting datasets and release codes for decrypting datasets are generated to protect against unauthorized use of selected datasets.

34 Claims, 27 Drawing Sheets