

5 prevent re-use of this access code. With credit card purchases, there is not an effective way to refuse to accept a return.

Currently, companies that sell software using this model simply write off losses due to fraudulent returns. This represents a small but significant amount of lost revenue. A need therefore exists for a system and method which will serve as a substitute for returning a packaged software product for credit.

There is a substantial body of prior art relating to various systems and methods for distribution of software and other information that involve the use of access codes to unlock the software, as well as for preventing unauthorized copying of software or other information. The use of such access codes allows demo versions of the software, which actually contain a complete copy of the software, to be made fully functionally upon entry of the access code, which is supplied to the user after payment is made, such as with a credit card. Examples of such systems and methods are disclosed in Hellman, U.S. Patent 4,658,093, issued April 14, 1987; Chernow et al., U.S. Patent 4,999,806, issued March 12, 1991; Holmes, U.S. Patent 5,287,407, issued February 15, 1994 and Chou et al., U.S. Patent 5,337,357, issued August 9, 1994.

In contrast, there appears to be no attention to the reverse problem of insuring that a user of software or other information who wishes to return the software or other information for credit no longer has full access to that software or information. When software or other information is distributed as a package containing the software or other information separately on a physical storage medium, the storage medium containing the software or other information can be returned along with any printed documentation in order to receive the credit.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

30 Accordingly, it is an object of this invention to provide a confirmed method for a user to effectively return a product that has been purchased electronically or otherwise, without requiring return of a storage medium.

It is a further object of this invention to provide a method of confirming that software that has been returned is not used unless it is repurchased.

35 It is an object of the present invention to provide a mechanism to allow customers to effectively return electronically distributed software by preventing them from using the software after it has been returned.