5   SYSTEM, METHOD AND ARTICLE OF MANUFACTURE FOR PRODUCT
                 RETURN OF SOFTWARE AND OTHER INFORMATION

                        BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

10   1. Field of the Invention:

         The present invention relates generally to the field of sales of computer software and other digital or analog information. More particularly, in a preferred embodiment, it relates to software that is provided other than by purchase or license of packaged software stored on a physical medium, such as electronically distributed

15   software, i.e. software that is delivered to the customer electronically, rather than through physical distribution methods. Such software can be downloaded from digital data networks such as the Internet, on CD ROM or floppy, come pre-installed on the hard drive of a computer system, or through broadcast media. Software distributed in such ways other than purchase of the particular packaged software stored on a

20   physical medium is typically provided as a demo copy which can be "unlocked" to give the customer the features of the full product. Most especially, it relates to a system, method and article of manufacture for verifying that a user has disabled software or other digital or analog information that the user wishes to return for credit.

         The system, method and article of manufacture can be applied to any type of

25   information which can be purchased using an unlock method, including, but not limited to, software, data, music and video.

         2. Description of the Prior Art:

         Increasingly, manufacturers are distributing software as unlockable demo

30   versions to cut down on distribution costs. This method of distribution causes difficulty when a product needs to be returned, since there is no physical media that can be sent back to the manufacturer to verify that the product is no longer in use.

         After a product has been purchased, the customer may decide to return the product. In the case where there is no physical media that can be returned, such as

35   when the demo copy has been unlocked, the vendor must rely on the word of the customer that the software has been removed from their machine. Furthermore, if the customer had been given an access code to unlock the software, a method is needed to