

5 by the user to the vendor at 204 while executing the return. Alternatively, the vendor
could obtain the serial number from a database entry created during the order to
purchase the software. The vendor supplies the return authorization code to the user
at 206. When the return authorization code number is entered into the user's system
100 at 208, the return module 130 (Figure 1) will then generate and display a
10 confirmation code at 210, described below.

The confirmation code is a number that can be generated on both the users and
vendor's systems. The confirmation code is displayed to the user only after the user
has entered the return authorization code into their system. This number ensures the
vendor that the return authorization code has really been entered into the user's
15 system. In the preferred embodiment, an encrypted portion of the serial number is
used as the confirmation code, since this number is available on both systems.

To effect a product return in one embodiment, the user would call the
customer service department of the manufacturer or other vendor and talk to a
telemarketer. The user reads the serial number to the telemarketer at 204. The
20 telemarketer uses this number to generate a return authorization code, which is then
read back to the user at 206. The user must then enter this return authorization code
into their system at 208. When this code is accepted, the user is shown a confirmation
code at 210. The user reads this code to the telemarketer, who compares it with the
code generated on the vendor's system at 212. If the confirmation codes match, the
25 user has correctly entered the return authorization code, the return module 130 enters
the current access code into a "blacklist" in a file on the user's system at 213. The
telemarketer then issues a credit at 214.

In another embodiment, the product return function is provided in an
automatic, electronic implementation. For example, the customer can click on a
30 "return product" button in the product, which causes the product to call the vendor
return server via modem or other communications medium, and do the whole return
process in an automated fashion in a return session with the vendor return server. The
return session also carries out the steps shown in Figure 2, but without requiring
human intervention at the vendor.

35 As shown in Figure 3, after the return authorization code has been entered,
when the user runs the returned software at 220, the access module 128 on the user's
system must verify that an access code is correct at 222 and 224 and check the