

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