

transfer other data from the remote computer 10. The dialog box also gives the user the option of verifying the credentials of the installer.

If the user exercises the option to verify the credentials of the installer, the plug-in module 23 connects to an audit server 30 maintained by an independent auditor. The plug-in module 23 links to a verification program, which simply incorporates a library of functions that make up an audit module 34, disposed on a hard disk 32 in the audit server 30. The user is then invited to enter a number displayed on the display screen of the remote computer 10 by the plug-in module 23 which is a code representing the installer. The verification program 34 then authenticates the audited installer by providing the installer's name and details regarding the nature of the audit which the auditor has performed. Alternatively, the verification program 34 could be automatically initiated by having the plug-in module 23 transmit the code to the audit server 30.

The user must then input personal information, such as name, address and phone numbers, as well as billing information, such as a credit card number for example. The billing information usually must be included to enable the transaction. In the preferred embodiment, both the billing and the user information are kept confidential and are, therefore, transmitted using secure methods.

Any of various secure methods can be used, such as encoding the information in a known manner readable only by the server module 26, for example. Other such secure methods comprise key-escrow encapsulated within an application program interface ("API") such as a Secure Socket Layer in NETSCAPE, a trademark of Netscape, Inc., or CRYPTOAPI, a trademark of Microsoft Corporation.

Once the billing information is verified and the user information is recorded in the database maintained by the server module 26, the server module 26 transmits an enabling command to the plug-in module 23 which allows transmission of the software application 20 to the remote computer 10. The software application 20 is transmitted as an installation program which is then installed locally to the remote computer 10.