5   operation of the security engines 127 on the vendor's computer 100 and on the user's computer 100 is explained with Figure 2.

In addition to general purpose computers as described above, the invention can be used with various special purpose systems incorporating microprocessors or other data processing capabilities. By way of example, a smart video disc player or Web

10   television device can have a storage area for downloaded videos. Again, by going through an entirely automatic process, the customer can download a video, then return it. As long as a form of persistent storage for access codes and blacklist or other access revoking routines is maintained, the return mechanism can be employed. The persistent storage can be maintained either locally or at the vendor site.

15   A video player implementation is particularly able to implement a high security version of the invention. If a downloaded video is coded so that it will only run on a video player with a particular burned-in serial number, it is possible to verify definitively that the return code was entered on that player. This approach is not as feasible with microcomputers, since few manufacturers supply their machines with a

20   burned-in serial number, and customers expect to be able to move their purchased software from machine to machine.

A serial number is a number generated on the user's system 100 that uniquely identifies the user's system. This number is provided to the vendor when placing an order to purchase, or to return the product, shown in Figure 2 at 200 and 202,

25   respectively. Other data may be encoded in the serial number to provide more information to the vendor. There are numerous ways to create a serial number for a machine, known to those skilled in the art. The serial number does not have to be unique, but could combine specific information about the user's system 100 with a random element.

30   An access code is a number generated on the vendor's system 100, desirably from information from the serial number, and includes information on which products and features to unlock, as well as other information to ensure its validity. This number is provided by the vendor to the user upon purchase of a product, and serves to unlock the products or features purchased. The use of such access codes for unlocking

35   products or features purchased is conventional.

A return authorization code is a number that is generated on the vendor's system 100 using information from the serial number, which in Figure 2 is supplied