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(58) Field of search
G4A

(54) Data processing system and method

(57) A data processing system comprising means for manually recording data from respective existing individual records each requiring action at intervals, means for producing from the said data a form, letter or the like (e.g. as in Fig. 1) relevant to the required action on the corresponding individual record, mimicking forms letters or the like produced from existing records, and means operative concurrently automatically to store the said data and to produce therefrom at a subsequent said interval an appropriate action such as a reminder of the next required action on a record.

Figure 1.

PATENT RENEWAL ENQUIRY

To: <addressee>

Ref: <agent initials>/<file reference no.> Date of Enquiry: < >

Title: <title> (<inventors' names>)

Patentees: <patentees' names>

AAA plc Patents Dept.
1000, First Avenue
Newtown

Please note that the following renewal fees fall due shortly, and let us know by <deadline date> whether or not you wish them to be paid:

Country	Patent/Appin. No.	Runs from	Years to run	Approx Fee
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INSTRUCTIONS:

<Addressee's signature>

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INSTRUCTIONS:

<Addressee's signature>

Figure 2.

PATENT RENEWAL ENQUIRY FORM

AAA plc

INPUT OUTLINE DETAILS:

Addressee: < >
 Unit code of addressee: < > Attorney's initials: < >
 File reference: < > Codes of patentees: < / / >
 Title: < >
 Codes of inventors: < / / / / >

Country code	Appln/Patent No.	Filing date	Publn. date	Grant date
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More forms? Y/N: < >

SPECIFICATION

Data processing system and method

5 This invention relates to the processing of data of the kind comprising a plurality of individual records, each of which is to be examined at regular intervals, for example once a year.

10 Such records are handled in various ways, in particular manually, or by various kinds of machinery, or by computer. When a manual record system is converted to or replaced by a mechanised or automatic system, in particular

15 a computer-based record system, the transfer of the manually recorded information to the new system is a major source of cost, disruption and possible error. The object of the present invention is to simplify the transfer

20 from the manual system to a computer based or other mechanised or automated record system.

In accordance with the present invention, data input to the new system is carried out

25 over a limited period, say twelve months, as opportunity or need arises, possibly in batches of individual existing records. The data input is restricted substantially to that which appears in the customary forms or letters produced according to the manual system. In

30 response to this input, the new system produces corresponding forms or letters analogous to those hitherto produced by hand or by typewriter: at the same time, without further effort on the part of the operator, the input data are also stored as a basis for and in

35 a form processable by the mechanised or automatic new record system which, after the initial period of manual input, will require less, or no manual operation.

40 The invention is particularly applicable to systems handling records which have to be examined at relatively long regular intervals, for example once a year, so that a single such interval is long enough for entry of substantially all of the records concerned into the new system.

45 During the transfer or transition period, the user of the new system can treat it substantially as the manual system was treated since the data input and the resulting output of letters, forms and the like will substantially correspond to the manual system. Means for storing the data, and recovering and processing it in appropriate fashion at the next action interval, are completely concealed from the user. After the transfer period, the new system generates, for each record at the relevant

50 interval, a reminder relevant to the next required action and, preferably, the actual paperwork, corresponding to that produced by the manual system.

55 The invention also provides a data processing system comprising means for manually entering data relating to respective existing

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70 individual records each requiring action at predetermined regular intervals, means for generating from the entered data a form, letter or the like relevant to the required action on the corresponding individual record, and means operative automatically to store the entered data and to generate therefrom at a subsequent said interval a reminder relevant to the next required action on each said

75 record, and preferably further operative to generate forms, letters or the like relevant to such actions.

This method makes use of a feature of many record systems, namely that:

80 (i) each individual record is examined at regular intervals, e.g. once per year, on the occurrence of a particular anniversary, e.g. for the purpose of arriving at a particular annual decision.

85 (ii) such anniversaries for different records are spread fairly randomly throughout the calendar, and not just (for example) on 31st December in each year.

90 (iii) on the occurrence of an anniversary, or in preparation for it, the information on the record (or a significant part of it) is used in the completion of a form or the filling of gaps in a standard letter, e.g. to be sent to the decision-maker ("annual form").

95 Instances of such annual forms are:

	SUBJECT	ANNUAL DECISION
	Patents	Payment of renewal fees
100	Insurance	Receipt of premiums

105 During a typical year's use of a manual system, much of the contents of each manual record will be written out or typed out at least in one form or once another, a typical format being as in Fig. 1. Such formats tend customarily to be originated in monthly or weekly batches.

110 This method takes advantage of a computer's ability on the one hand to accept, verify and store information ("data") and on the other hand to output data together with standard wording in a structured printed format. It is designed to reduce to a minimum the otherwise extremely arduous and pains-taking task of transferring existing records, by making the transfer of data to the computer part of existing manual routines.

115 In a typical instance of transfer of manually-recorded data to a computer the computer presents, on a visual display unit, wording ("prompts") which indicates to the user the type of data which the computer is ready to accept. The user, using a keyboard or other

120 device, inputs the data in response to the prompts. The computer, during and/or after a session of data input, checks the input for obvious inconsistencies and inaccuracies and compares it with data already stored in the

125 computer. If the data is acceptable, it is filed

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away in fresh records or is used to up-date existing records.

In accordance with a preferred aspect of the present invention, data input of existing records (and of new records) to a computer-based system is undertaken in occasional batches during a period of twelve months. The data input is restricted substantially to that which appears in the customary annual forms of the manual system. The prompts may be similar in layout to the existing annual form, in abbreviated format, as in Fig. 2. Logically to the user, the input is used to enable the computer to organise the printing of annual forms analogous to those hitherto produced by hand or typewriter, but actually the input is also stored as a basis for a computer-based record system which (after the initial period of twelve months) will require far less human participation.

In an alternative version of the method described, some of the data is input in an abbreviated form, using codes for names which are to be used repeatedly, and the computer substitutes the full names, either from its existing records or (where it does not recognise the codes) by requesting them from the user, during the input or validation stages.

In a further alternative version, individual prompts may be selected or skipped by the computer, by reference to data input earlier.

In another version, variables which would otherwise have been input by the user are calculated by the computer.

CLAIMS

1. A data processing system comprising means for manually recording data from respective existing individual records each requiring action at intervals, means for producing from the said data a form, letter or the like relevant to the required action on the corresponding individual record, mimicking forms letters or the like produced from existing records, and means operative concurrently automatically to store the said data and to produce therefrom at a subsequent said interval an appropriate action.

2. A data processing system comprising means for manually recording data from respective existing individual records each requiring action at predetermined regular intervals, means for producing from the said data a form, letter or the like relevant to the required action on the corresponding individual record, and means operative automatically to store the said data and to produce therefrom at a subsequent said interval a reminder relevant to the next required action on each said record.

3. A data processing system as claimed in claim 1 or claim 2, arranged to produce documentation relevant to said actions.

4. A data processing system arranged and adapted to operate substantially as herein

described.

5. A method of operating a record system comprising a plurality of individual records each of which is to be examined at intervals, which method comprises operating the record system in manual form, establishing a computer-based system capable of accepting data held in said records and of producing therefrom relevant actions, inputting the data held in the manual system to the computer-based system at intervals, causing the computer-based system to generate actions mimicking and/or analogous to those previously produced by the manual system, and concurrently causing the computer-based system automatically to store the input data as a basis for and in a form processible by the computer-based record system.

6. A computer arranged and adapted to accept manually-input data, to produce actions mimicking and/or analogous to those previously produced by a manual record system and concurrently automatically to store the said data in order to generate future actions based on the stored data.

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