TITLE

[0001] Coupons For Subscribers

DESCRIPTION

[0002] As required, detailed embodiments of the present invention are disclosed herein; however, it is to be understood that the disclosed embodiments are merely exemplary of the invention that may be embodied in various and alternative forms. The figures are not necessarily to scale; some features may be exaggerated or minimized to show details of particular components. Therefore, specific structural and functional details disclosed herein are not to be interpreted as limiting, but merely as a representative basis for teaching one skilled in the art to variously employ the present invention.

[0003] Many membership-based companies incentivize their membership by giving members-only offers. AAA is a good example.

[0004] Cable companies can also provide similar offers. This invention provides one such way. In this, a coupon code will be provided to the subscriber, particularly while they were watching a relevant program or commercial, using their second screen application. When the user uses the coupon on a merchant site, the merchant site checks with the MSO to see if the user is indeed a subscriber.

[0005] The technique presented allows maximum flexibility for the MSO to implement the coupon validation logic, and may rely on open and oft-used techniques for the merchant to use this solution.

[0006] The process starts with the merchant creating a coupon code. The merchant shares the coupon code with the MSOs. The details of the offer are not shared, as the MSO has no use for the details.

[0007] The MSO feeds that coupon code into the EBIF stream of the associated program/commercial.

[0008]   The coupon code is received by the STB at user's home, which it then transmits to the second screen application (it is assumed that the STB and the second-screen application have a pre-established connectivity). [Also, the term STB is used to refer to any kind of device that can read the EBIF data from a video stream.]

[0009]   Actually, the coupon code itself is not transmitted to the second screen app. A second code (referred to Subscriber specific [SS] code) is generated at the MSO back-end. This is triggered by the STB making a web services call to the MSO back-end. This is shown in the following picture.

CTL 60488 PRV
60488
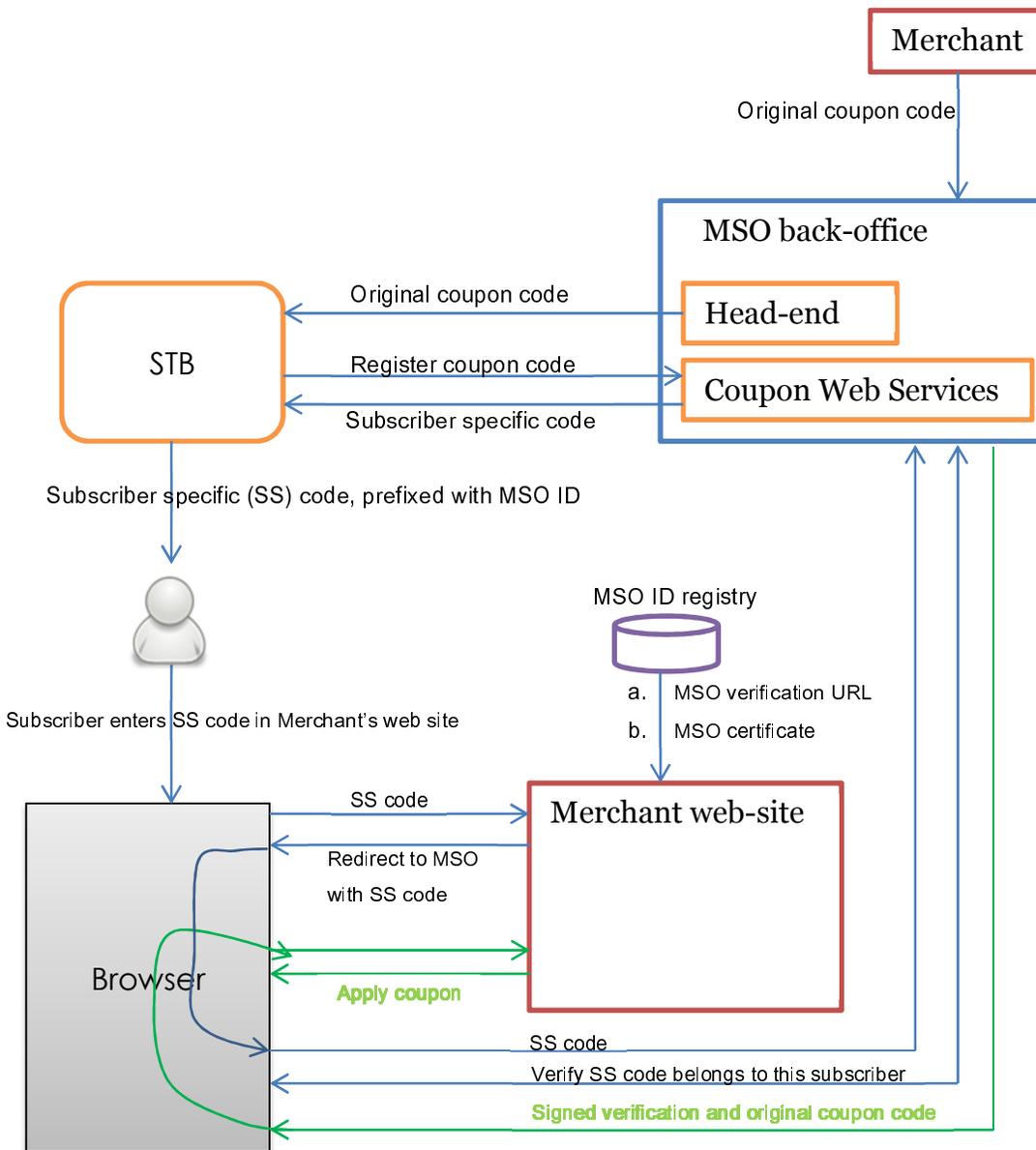
[0010] MSO back-end will generate a subscriber-specific (SS) code for the combination of actual coupon code and the subscriber ID. The MSO ID is prefixed to the SS code, to enable the merchant to identify which MSO(or outlet) this is coming from. The MSO ID is either a publicly available ID or mutually worked out between the MSO and the specific merchant. That SS code is then sent to the STB, which relays it to the second screen application, or displays on the screen. The

specific mechanisms by which the STB relays the SS code to the subscriber may vary, second screen applications are just one way.

[0011] The subscriber then enters the SS code into the merchant's web site (to be applied to a purchase). Merchant site realizes (using means not relevant to this disclosure) that before the offer can be given to the subscriber, the code needs to be validated. It identifies the MSO this code is coming from using the ID present in the SS code. Details of each MSO (as identified by their ID) could be stored within each merchant, or maintained centrally in a registry (that is secure and trusted).

[0012] Merchant web site then redirects the user (either in the main page or using a pop-up) to the MSO web site, along with the SS code entered. MSO uses any number of techniques (like IP address matching, subscriber authentication, etc.) to ensure that this SS code belongs to the subscriber attempting to use it. After successful verification, it generates a digital signature on the original coupon code (and timestamp to ensure freshness of the signature), and redirects the user back to the merchant web site with that signature.

[0013] Merchant's web site verifies that signature is valid (and timestamp is fresh enough), retrieves the original coupon code from the message, and applies that coupon to the subscriber's purchase.

[0014] In the era of multiple content sources for the consumer, incentives that are specific to cable will motivate them to choose cable. This disclosure enables cable operators to provide 'deals' only to cable subscribers. Such deals/offers will spread word-of-mouth, and others may choose to subscribe to cable in order to get or not miss-out on those offers/deals.

[0015] If the offers/deals offered compare well with a cable bill, then this could be result in a significant commercial value. Customers will be the merchants as well as the subscribers. Merchants may be motivated to use this channel for coupons, as it potentially can result in the MSO sharing with the merchant some information about the specific subscriber that the merchants cannot get otherwise. For the MSOs, it could result in the ability to glean into utilization of the coupons delivered through cable (and more specific of the purchases made by subscriber).

[0016]   Currently, cable has no means to gauge the effectiveness of commercials on subscribers. Also, currently, subscribers are not looking at cable as a source of coupons – this means to save money.

[0017]   While exemplary embodiments are described above, it is not intended that these embodiments describe all possible forms of the invention. Rather, the words used in the specification are words of description rather than limitation, and it is understood that various changes may be made without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention. Additionally, the features of various implementing embodiments may be combined to form further embodiments of the invention.