

IN THE UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE
PROVISIONAL APPLICATION FOR LETTERS PATENT

of

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For

**Methods, System, and Apparatus for Enhancing Child
Safety**

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Methods for Enhancing Child Safety

TECHNICAL FIELD

[0001] The present invention relates generally to the field of improving child safety, and is more particularly related to systems, methods, and apparatus for preventing the loss and/or abduction of children and methods for remediation therefor.

BACKGROUND

[0002] It is estimated that for every 1 million children in the United States, over ten thousand will become missing yearly and about 40% of those are never found. In fact, nearly two million children are reported missing to law enforcement agencies throughout the United States every year. Even with the enhanced interest that media stories have created, the danger to children from loss and/or abduction continues to present a serious risk to our children and our communities. While some school and community programs have been put in place to try to educate parents and the public, these “band-aid” measures have not decreased the abduction statistics, in fact, it is estimated that the number of children missing since 1982 has increased by over 482%. Also, these programs have not improved the ability of parents and/or law enforcement agencies to gain an advantage in preventing child losses or abductions and enhancing the likelihood of safe and rapid return in the event that such loss or abduction occurs. Even though legislation was passed to put in place the “Amber Alert” system, the quality of the alerts vary from community to community, and less than 1% of the lost, missing, or runaway child cases in America actually qualify to use it. Worse yet, when children are lost or abducted, parents are often stricken with panic to decide what to do first, and in the precious time immediately after the loss becomes known, unprepared parents and law enforcement agencies are often challenged to obtain important information

that is crucial in conducting an effective investigation and rescue of endangered children. FBI statistics estimate that about 44% of abducted children are dead within one hour, 75% are dead within three hours, and nearly 100% are dead within 24 hours. Therefore, it would be an advance in the art for a service to be offered to parents and/or guardians whereby a unified and comprehensive approach to preventing child loss and or abduction is presented and improvements made to the likelihood and speed at which lost or abducted children are returned to their rightful parents or guardians.

Description of Implementations

[0003] Implementations provide for a comprehensive system that stresses prevention of child loss or abduction through enhanced security and education, coupled with an organized, effective recovery system in the event that a loss or abduction occurs.

SUBSCRIPTION: ESTABLISHING PARTICIPANT RELATIONS

[0004] In one implementation of the present invention, once a parent or guardian becomes interested in utilizing services related to the present invention, they subscribe to a service providing materials regarding prevention, and receive a one-stop contact for reporting a lost child and bringing to bear all the community resources possible to effect a rapid and safe recovery of the missing child. The subscription provides child loss prevention and recovery services in exchange for a periodically charged fee.

PREVENTION: PARENT/GUARDIAN AND CHILD EDUCATION

[0005] An embodiment of the present invention addresses the presentation and review of an array of high-quality educational materials designed to make it easier for participating

parents and/or guardians to address the important issues of child safety with their children in the privacy of their own homes. Both parents and children alike may benefit from understanding the threats that exist to children, and accordingly understanding how to avoid becoming a victim of one of those threats. In one implementation, after parents review a safety guide with their children, the children are provided educational and entertaining materials for reinforcement of the safety learning experience. Such learning materials may include, but not by way of limitation, posters with key safety points, coloring books having safety-related messages, video games that present risky scenarios and characters successfully dealing with threats, and a program rewarding children for discussing with their parents possible threats they may have seen in the community around them.

[0006] In one embodiment, the following information may be provided to subscribing parents/guardians: “Guide To Safer Children”: this guide will help a participating parent learn ways to reduce their children's risks of becoming lost or missing; “Play It Safe Coloring Book”: this full-size coloring & activity book makes learning about safety fun for children of all ages; a “Safety Seven” poster specially designed to help participant’s children learn and remember the Seven Rules for safety. These items have enough information to educate a child without overwhelming or scaring them. Additional information provided includes, a “How To Video Your Child” step-by-step directions guide showing the proper way to shoot an effective identification video; “What to Do If Your Child Is Missing” pamphlet describing what to do when a child is missing and how to go about providing notification in the time-critical period directly following the abduction or loss; “Secret Identification Code Labels” providing privacy by linking a unique identifier to the video taken for the child, whereby only the participant knows the number that links the profile information such as the video to the particular participant’s child; a pre-addressed video

mailer to assist in sending video of any format of the participant's child to the service provider; "Missing Child Report" that assists participants with compiling the information needed by both the police and the service provider to help the participating parent and/or guardian search for the missing child; a "Wallet/Purse Response Packet" that provides ready access to information that activates the service provider to assist with child recovery even when the participating parent or guardian is away from home (and in one implementation, virtual contact cards are disseminated electronically to the participant for inclusion in the participant's contact management software); and a "Complete Instructions" guide detailing what a subscribing/participating parent or guardian needs to know to get the most out of the information provided.

[0007] Participating parents and guardians also benefit from periodic reinforcement of child safety information. Therefore, in one embodiment, participating parents and guardians also receive a periodical newsletter that gives them topics to discuss with their children and keep them educated on the "tricks" that child predators use. In one implementation, the parents and guardians may log into a website to review safety videos with their children, and/or to review educational materials more appropriately addressed to adults, such as how to work with children to keep them interested and motivated in safety issues. The periodical publications also remind participating parents to talk with their children and provides topics to talk about. In one implementation, the periodical also provides a pull-out page for the participant's child to learn by doing puzzles and coloring.

**PREPARATION: ASSEMBLING QUALITY IDENTIFICATION MATERIALS FOR
RAPID RESPONSE WHEN NEEDED**

[0008] When a child does become missing, the ability to positively identify that child becomes critical. In one implementation, a video registration service provides one of the most effective types of positive identification available. In one embodiment, the video information is converted to digital form and stored on a secure server for rapid distribution in the event that a loss and/or abduction occurs. Unlike a still photograph, a properly prepared Identification Video can give the authorities and concerned citizens so much more to go on when searching for a missing child. Familiarity with characteristics of voice, manner, and motion can greatly improve the likelihood that someone may remember having seen the child. Such a recollection could provide the all-important clue that leads to a reunion of child and family. In another implementation, as part of the instructions furnished to the participating parent and/or guardian, a method is described to prepare or collect an appropriate item bearing the scent of the child that is to be protected. Once the scent bearing “marker” is submitted to the service provider, the scent marker of the child can be delivered to local law enforcement the same day of a loss or abduction, where, if necessary, bloodhounds can be used to track the child.

[0009] Updates to the participating child profile are regularly scheduled and reminders automatically sent to participating parents to notify them that the child recovery profile information should be updated to reflect changes in the child’s appearance over time. In one implementation, the video and picture of the participant’s child are stored for two years, and participants automatically receive a new kit at 24 months providing instructions to update the picture and video. In one implementation, participants are encouraged to contact the service provider to update the participant’s child’s profile in the event that the child significantly changes outward appearance, such as by dramatically changing hair styles; and in one embodiment, digitized videos and/or pictures of the participant’s child may be

directly uploaded to the service provider through a secure website link, allowing the service provider to update the provider's secure identity database, and in one embodiment, security precautions may be taken by establishing a Virtual Private Network between the service provider and the subscriber/participant prior to data upload. In another implementation, time-linked records of images and pictures are maintained by the service provider and may be provided to forensic investigators to better construct "aged" depictions of the participant's children to assist in the event that a recent photo or video is unavailable. In another embodiment, to preserve privacy and security of the child's identity, the service provider links the participant's video and other data to the participant only through a unique, confidential identifier, and the child's name is not known by the service provider until linked to the unique identifier by the subscribing participant (such as in the event that the participant's child was reported missing). In yet another implementation, the child's uploaded information is first encrypted through a symmetric public key encryption system, so that the identity of the child is uniquely and securely linked to the participant/subscriber.

**RECOVERY: GUIDING PARENTS AND MARSHALLING COMMUNITY AND
LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCY RESOURCES**

[0010] Rapid and effective action in the hours immediately following the loss or abduction is crucial in successfully recovering children unharmed. Yet during this time, the panic that sets into parents and guardians impairs their ability to make fast and effective decisions in notifying authorities, raising public awareness, and furnishing crucial information to law enforcement agencies. In one implementation, participating parents and/or guardians are provided in advance with information regarding how to report a missing child, and steps to take if a child is missing. This information, in another embodiment, is always available on

the child loss and recovery service provider's website so that panicked parents may have ready access if they lose their reporting information.

[0011] In the past, while rewards have been offered in information leading to recovery of missing children, the difficulty in obtaining reward funds often delays the announcement of a reward to such an extent that it is of limited benefit in enhancing the likelihood of safe recovery. In one implementation, upon determining that a participating parent/guardian has submitted a notice of a missing child, a reward is immediately offered. In one embodiment, a proprietary database maintained by the service provider contains access information for an array of pre-screened private investigators worldwide. Through proper selection of an investigation resource from this database, the service provider can notify a private investigator to immediately proceed to the scene of the abduction to assist with recovery efforts in the most crucial time following the abduction, for instance, within an hour in most locations served by the service provider. In one implementation, a minimum amount of private investigator services is contracted by the prevention and recovery service provider, such as a minimum of \$2500 of services, per case, to help find a missing subscriber's child. This capability gives the participating parents/guardians "peace of mind" that experienced resources are coming to their aid in addition to the resources of law enforcement agencies.

[0012] Effective distribution of information is also a goal of the present invention. At least two factors contribute to effectiveness: the speed and adequacy of the dissemination of child recovery information, and the selection of the best venues for dissemination of the child recovery information. To this end, in one implementation, the present invention provides a single "one stop, one call" source for immediate assistance in distributing information that is vital to the recovery effort. When a registered child becomes missing, the ready availability

of recovery information allows the immediate contact with agencies providing local and far-reaching assistance to the child's family and the law enforcement agencies involved.

[0013] In one implementation, upon being notified of a child's disappearance, the pre-stored information is forwarded to the investigating police department, and assistance is offered by duplicating video and posters bearing the child's image and distributing them to any or all destinations included in a database of law enforcement agencies, missing children's service organizations, and national news media contacts. In one implementation, a link to law enforcement agencies that trigger an Amber Alert is immediately exercised, increasing the likelihood that the public can provide crucial tips and recovery information to law enforcement. In one implementation, a database of millions of concerned citizens nationwide is notified of the child's disappearance by both electronic and telephonic means, whereby the aid of motivated members of the public can be added to the law enforcement and subscriber's efforts to find the missing child.

[0014] In another implementation, after receiving notice of the missing child, videos, digital video files, digital photos, and/or posters to any additional destinations the investigating authorities may request, including immediate distribution to local law enforcement vehicles such as police cars, along with an announcement of a significant reward amount, such as \$50,000 for information leading to the arrest and conviction of those responsible for the child's disappearance. In yet another embodiment, upon receiving notice from a participating subscriber that the subscriber's child is missing, duplication of child recovery profile materials begins, and a distribution plan is enacted to sent the materials to the identified assistance and law enforcement agencies.

[0015] In one embodiment, digitized copies of photographs, videos, reward, and recovery information are disseminated to addresses previously identified in a database maintained by

the service provider. In one implementation, for example, a press release with accompanying reward, photo, and video information is sent to news outlets that were identified as appropriate markets for distribution of recovery data. As the search for the child is expanded, such as by law enforcement notifying the participants of a likely location to be searched, the distribution of materials may be adjusted and new information may be sent to the new search venue (such as in the case when a child has been abducted by a non-custodial parent, and the non-custodial parent's address becomes known after investigation). In one implementation, links to the service provider's website are provided, wherein members of the media, law enforcement agencies, or the community may view information related to the missing child, such as full-color, high resolution missing child posters, pictures, or videos. This allows a missing child's information to be accessed by law enforcement agencies and others across America (and the World) within minutes.

[0016] Figure 1-2 depict implementations providing participant subscription, child data information aggregation, and steps to respond in the event of a child is reported missing.

[0017] The present invention may be embodied in other specific forms without departing from its spirit or essential characteristics. The described embodiments are to be considered in all respects only as illustrative and not restrictive. The scope of the invention is, therefore, indicated by the appended claims rather than by the foregoing description. All changes which come within the meaning and range of equivalency of the claims are to be embraced within their scope.

[0018] CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. I claim each method, apparatus, device, system, and combinations thereof as illustrated, shown, implied, and described.