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Claims

What is claimed is:

1. A method for managing distribution of assessment documents over a wide area comprising: (a) providing an assessment instrument for completion by respondents; (b) assigning a password for an entity having a level of rights; (c) initializing permissions relative to the password based on the level of rights for the entity, said permissions including at least one respondent password having permissions based on the level of rights for a respondent; (d) allowing the entity access to a web site on a global computer network and enabling the initialized permissions for the entity; (e) providing an assessment instrument to the respondent which gauges an individual potential employee's suitability with regards to a particular job, an individual existing employee's suitability or performance with regards to a particular job, or an individual boss's performance with regards to a particular job; (f) receiving responses from the respondent to the assessment instrument; (g) processing the responses into an assessment report; (h) sending the assessment report to one or more locations authorized by the permissions.
2. The method of claim 1 wherein the permissions associated with a master distributor level of rights include (a) ability to create response links and passwords, (b) ability to set up new accounts, (c) ability to manage reports, (d) ability to change its own and others' account options.
3. The method of claim 1 wherein the permissions associated with a distributor level of rights include (a) ability to create response links and passwords, (b) ability to set up new accounts, (c) ability to manage reports, (d) ability to change its own account options.
4. The method of claim 1 wherein the permissions associated with a client level of rights include (a) ability to create response links and passwords, (b) ability to manage reports, (c) ability to change account options.
5. The method of claim 1 wherein the permissions associated with a respondent level of rights include (a) respond to an assigned assessment instrument.
6. A system for managing assessments comprising: (a) a plurality of terminals each adapted to access a wide area network; (b) a central server; (c) software associated with the central server which administers a web site and which provides permissions; (d) a password having a set of permissions correlated to a respondent for an

do purchase also are often not utilized efficiently as many forms are lost before ever being filled out by an employee or are lost after an employee fills out the form.

Employee evaluation firms also face risk by embodying their forms in a paper form and having a sales staff sell these forms. There is a risk that a sales person or staff will use the information embodied in the forms to develop a competing business. In addition, when an independent contractor is employed to sell the employee evaluation forms to businesses, the employee evaluation firm often has little or no direct interaction with the business that is actually using its forms. There is a need in the art for a method which allows an employee evaluation firm to sell its employee evaluation forms to businesses while eliminating the costs associated with putting these forms on paper. In addition, there is a need in the art for a method which allows employee evaluation firms greater control over their proprietary forms. Similar problems exist for any system or method using documents or forms that need to be processed at a remote location.

Therefore, it is a primary object of the present invention to provide a network based document distribution method that solves problems and deficiencies in the art.

It is a further object of the present invention to provide a document distribution method, which reduces the cost associated with distributing the documents in a tangible paper form.

It is a further object of the present invention to provide a method of document distribution, which enables an employee evaluation firm to retain more control over its forms.

Yet another object of the present invention is to provide a method of document distribution which assures that more forms are completed by employees and not lost before the forms ever get to the employee to be filled out.

It is a further object of the present invention to provide a document distribution method which allows an employee evaluation firm more direct interaction with the businesses that purchase its services.

These, as well as the other objects and features of the present invention, will be apparent from the following detailed description and claims in conjunction with the accompanying drawings.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

A method of distributing documents includes the step of displaying the documents on a web site. Responses to the documents are accepted on the web site. After the responses have been accepted, they are processed into a report and the report is returned to an interested party. It is to be understood that the surveys or other forms to be completed by users could be filled out on paper manually and the results could then be entered into a computer and sent to the web site. The reports could be electronically transmitted, and/or hard copies sent via mail, overnight, or through other modes.

An optional feature of the invention is control over access and/or distribution to and/or from a web site. This access or distribution of documents and forms is performed by administration of passwords or similar access restrictions. The present invention can also include a method of providing employee evaluation services. The method of providing employee evaluation services includes providing employee evaluation forms on a web site. Responses to the evaluation forms are also accepted on a web site. After the responses have been accepted, the responses, or reports based on the responses are returned to an employer of the employee.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a block diagram, which illustrates various entities connected to an employee evaluation firm's web site through the Internet.

FIG. 2 is a block diagram, which illustrates the hierarchy of entities that can access the employee evaluation firm's web site.

FIG. 3 is a diagrammatic view of a sign-on screen to access an employee evaluation firm's web site.

FIG. 4 is a diagrammatic representation of a screen display that would be seen upon logging-on to the employee evaluation firm's web site.

FIGS. 5-12 are block diagrams, which show in greater detail the menus and sub-menus associated with the links in FIG. 4.

FIG. 13 is a flowchart, which illustrates the creation of a master distributor account.

FIG. 14 is a flowchart, which illustrates the steps in creating a link to a survey.

FIG. 15 is a flowchart, which illustrates the steps in responding to an instrument or survey.

FIG. 16 is a block diagram which illustrates the functions available when selecting response link type.

FIG. 17 is a block diagram depicting the options available to an administrator when the response link is closed.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF AN EXEMPLARY EMBODIMENT

FIG. 1 is a block diagram, which illustrates a connection over the Internet 10 to a web server 12. An employee evaluation firm's web server 12 has employee evaluation questions and surveys on the web server 12. Note, while one application of the system is taking surveys to probe performance relative to jobs, other applications are possible. Various entities are able to access web server 12 and perform different functions on web server 12. A master distributor 14, a distributor 16, a client 18, and a respondent 20 are all able to access the web server 12. The functions that each one of these entities can perform on web server 12 is limited through password access to the web server 12. There can be an unlimited number of master distributors 14, distributors 16, clients 18, and respondents 20.

The tools used to implement the system described herein include the well-known DELPHI software and WEBHUB software (from HREF Tools, Corp.). The web server included a PENTIUM processor and a WINDOWS NT operating system. The users can access the web site using most standard web browsers, for example, NETSCAPE version 2.0 or above. Processing of the documents/surveys can be performed by a PC using a WINDOWS NT operating system. A T1 communications line was also used.

FIG. 2 shows a block diagram of the hierarchy of entities that can access web server 12. The highest level access belongs to master distributor 14. Master distributor 14 can create response links, set up new accounts, manage reports, and change all account options. These functions will be discussed in more detail later. Master distributor 14 can view of all the sub-accounts it created.

The second level in the system is distributor 16. Distributor 16 can create response links, set up new accounts, manage reports, and change its personal account options. Distributor 16 can also see all of its sub-accounts.

The third level in the system is the client 18 level. Client 18 has the ability to create response links, manage reports, and change its personal account options. Client 18 can only see respondents and links it created.

The fourth level in the system is the respondent 20 level. The respondent 20 level is designed to allow an employee to respond to an instrument assigned to the respondent 20 level.

FIG. 3 is a diagrammatic representation of a login screen 30. The employee evaluation firm's web server 12 is accessed through the login screen 30. A user name 32 and a password 34 must be entered to gain access to the web server 12. The functions that an individual who logs onto the web server 12 can perform will be controlled by the permissions that are associated with the user name 32 and the password 34.

FIG. 4 shows a diagrammatic representation of a screen display of the web administration screen 36. The web administration screen 36 would be seen after logging in. There are a number of hypertext links on the web administration page. All of these links will take a user somewhere else within the employee evaluation firm's web site. The links that the user can choose from the web administration screen 36 are: response links 38,

accounts 40, manage reports 42, enable/disable account 44, and change account options 46. Each of these links will lead to a different screen that will ask the user to enter certain information.

FIG. 5 shows a block diagram of the functions that can be performed, or the information that will be asked for, after selecting response links 38. Response links 38 has two sub-menus, create response link 48 and edit response link 50. These sub-menus may be in the form of pull-down menus from clicking on response link 38, or they could be on separate screens reached after clicking on response link 38. Master distributor 14, distributor 16, and client 18 will all be able to set up response links. By selecting creates response link 48, a user will be able to assign a report(s) to a response link 52, set the link type 53, change the response link setup options 54, alter the response link reporting options 56, and view a summary 58 of the information that has been entered. Assign reports to response link 52, allows an administrator to assign multiple reports for a respondent to complete.

Response link type 53 allows administrator to set the link type. FIG. 16 shows a block diagram of the functions that can be performed by selecting link type 53. The administrator can make assigned reports required 234 or grant optional 236, allowing respondents the ability to randomly complete assigned reports. The response link can be password protected by selecting close 238 or open access to all respondents by selecting open 240. If the administrator selects closed 238, FIG. 17 shows a block diagram of the options available to the administrator. The administrator can assign to the link an initial number of passwords 242. When editing a response link 50, the administrator can assign additional passwords 244 to the closed 238.

A report could be one that is designed to gauge an existing employee's aptitude for a present job or for a different job. The report could be one that is designed for an existing employee to evaluate a boss. The report could be one that is designed to evaluate a potential employee's suitability for a particular job. An example of the type of surveys or reports that could be presented to respondents can be found in incorporated U.S. Pat. No. 5,551,880. An example of how these surveys can be processed may be found in U.S. Pat. No. 5,551,880.

Response link setup options 54 allows the administrator to perform a number of different functions. FIG. 6 shows a block diagram of the functions that can be reformed by selecting response link setup options 54. The administrator can assign a link name 60 to the link. The administrator can assign a link description 62 and generate a note to respondent 64, which will be viewed by respondents when they answer the survey. In addition, an administrator can assign a return URL 66. The URL will take a respondent to a different site or a return web site. In addition, an administrator can assign a report tag 68 to the report. The report tag is usually some survey identifying information, which is attached to the bottom of each report generated from the link.

In addition, the response links setup options 54 also allows the administrator to establish a start date, end date, and number of respondents 70. Start and end dates establish when a link will first be available for respondents and when it will no longer be available. The approximate number of respondents identifies how many respondents will be responding to the link. Therefore, options attach to the number of respondents. First, an administrator can select "no limit or notification". In this case, if the number of respondents exceeds the number entered in block 70, the administrator will not be notified. Second, the administrator can select "notified only". If the number of respondents exceeds the number of respondents specified in block 70, the administrator will be notified the following day by e-mail. By selecting the "notified only option", the link will remain active. Third, the administrator may choose "deactivate link". If the number of respondents exceeds the number entered by the administrator, the administrator will be notified by e-mail the following day and the link will be deactivated. Finally, if the administrator selects required 234, then the number of initial passwords 242, and additional passwords 244, will determine the number of respondents allowed to respond before the link ID deactivated.

Create response link 48 menu also has a response link reporting options 56 submenu. FIG. 7 shows a block diagram of the response link reporting options 56. Response link reporting options 56 enables an administrator to control who will receive a report and when it will be received. The screen also allows the administrator to set up automated activity reports to keep track of who has responded to the link. An administrator could choose to e-mail a report to respondent 72, or allow respondents to view report online 74, or carbon copy the report to others 76. These options are not mutually exclusive, so the administrator could select all three options.

In addition, an administrator can choose the automated activity report 78. An administrator can choose report

