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(54) **DISTRIBUTED RECORDING OF CONTENT**

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See application file for complete search history.

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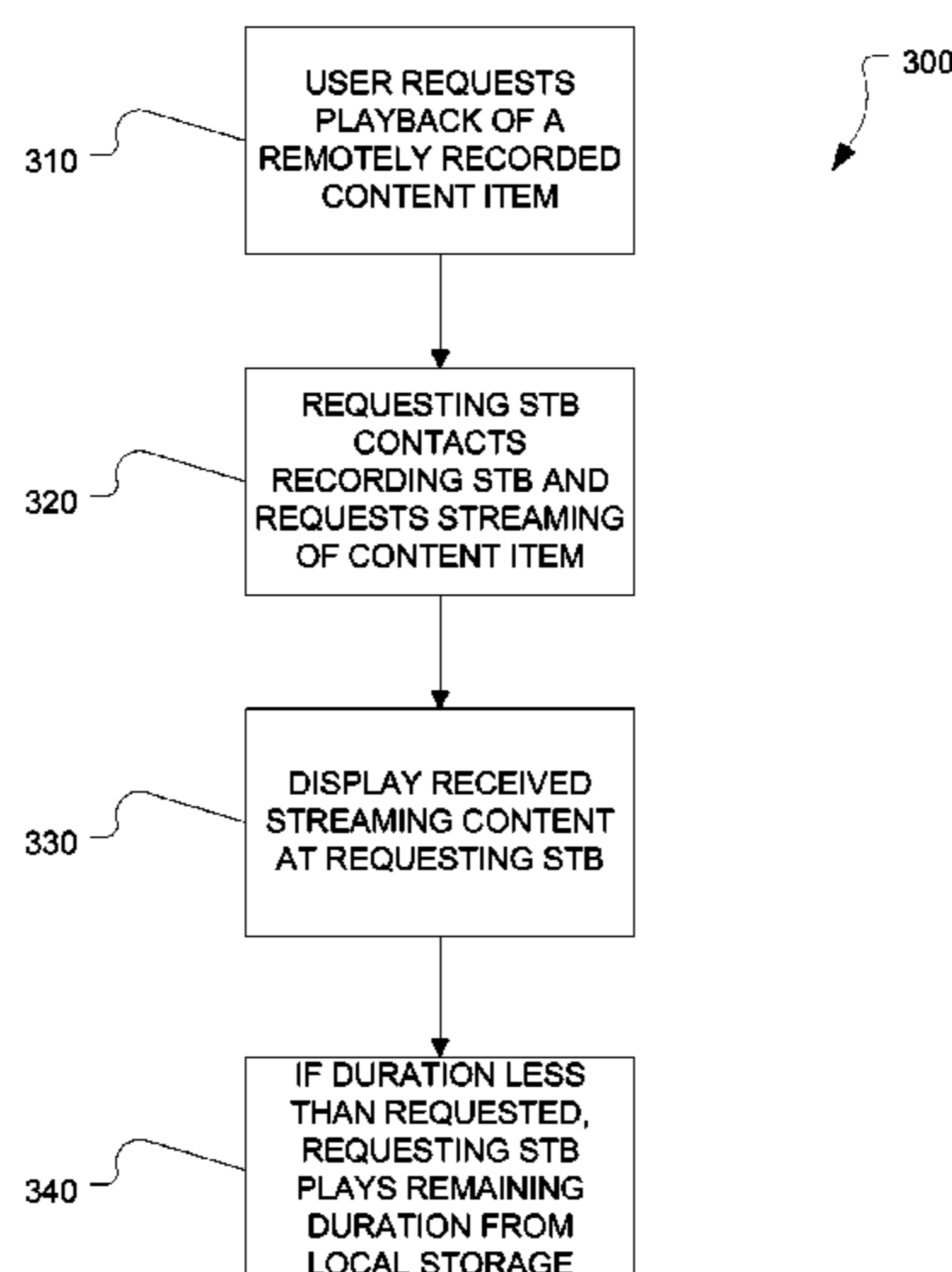
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

A method is disclosed for distributed recording of content in a client system having a home network connecting a content broker and a plurality of set-top boxes (STBs) with digital video recording capability. In a requesting STB, a command is received from a user to begin recording a content item. A query is sent from the requesting STB to the content broker to determine whether the content item is being recorded by any other STB of the plurality of STBs. A response is received from the content broker. If the response indicates that none of the plurality of STBs is then currently recording the content item, the content item is recorded in the requesting STB. If the response identifies a recording STB that is then currently recording the requested content, an internal content list is updated in the requesting STB to identify the recording STB.

**20 Claims, 3 Drawing Sheets**



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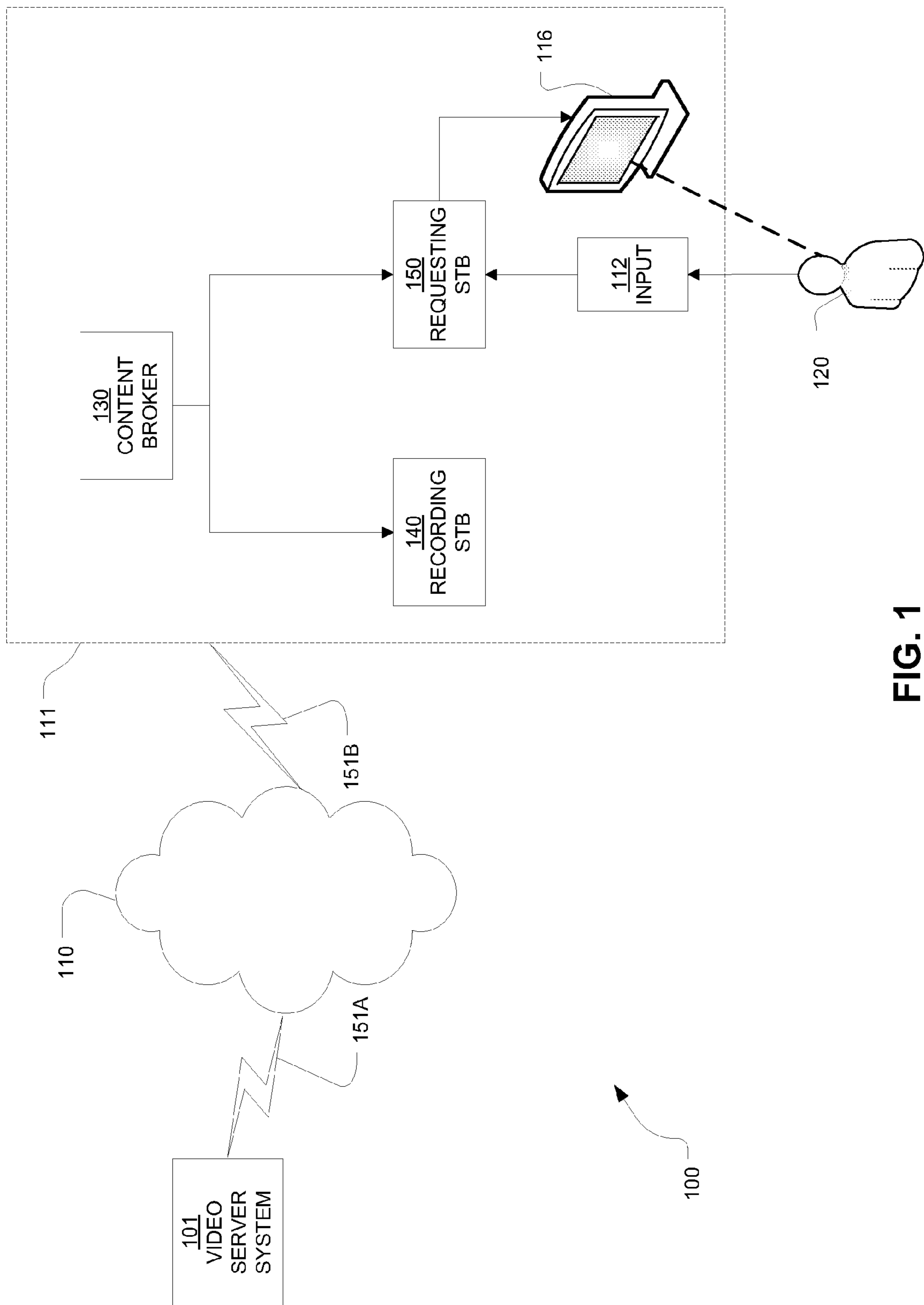


FIG. 1

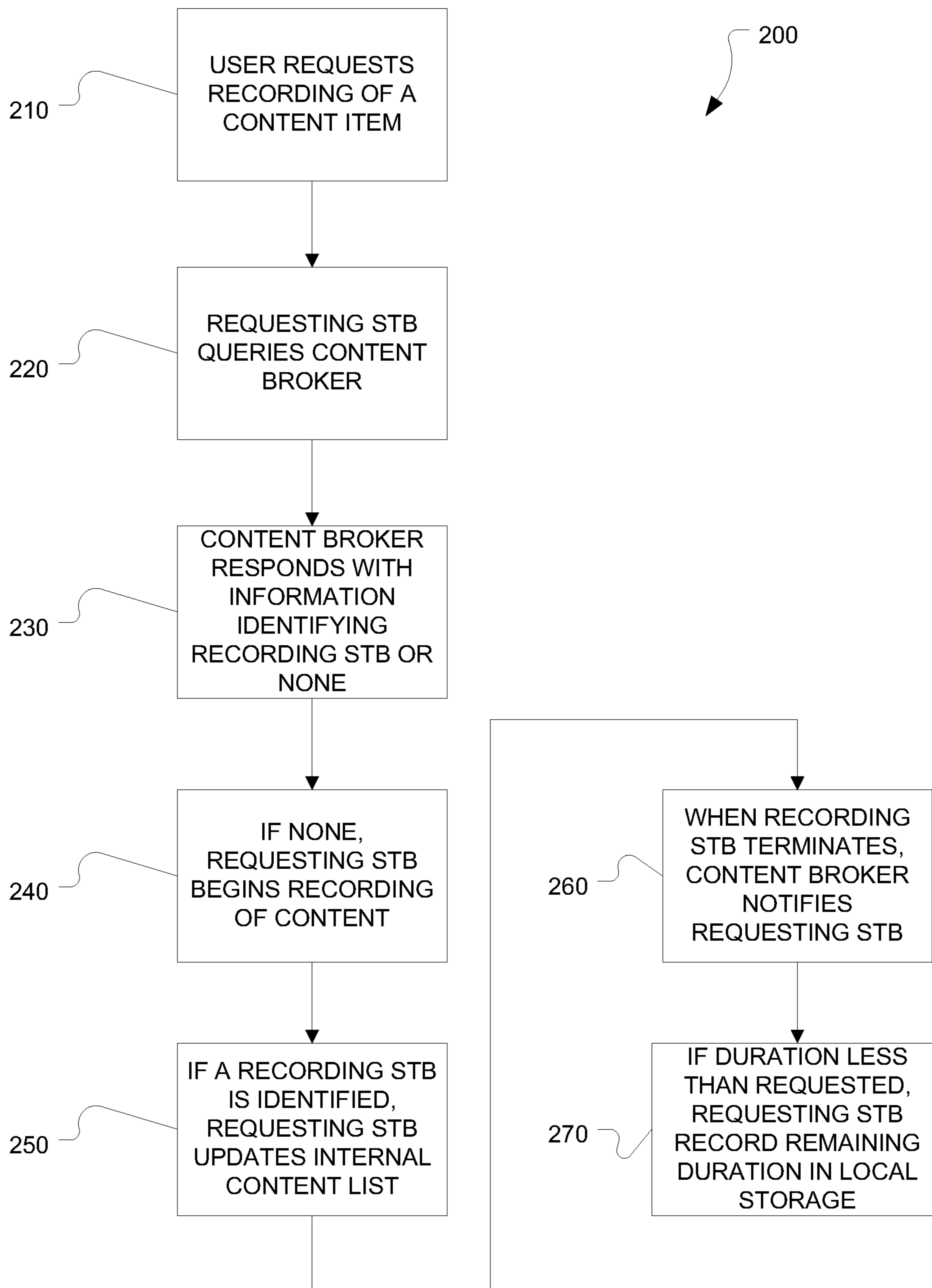


FIG. 2

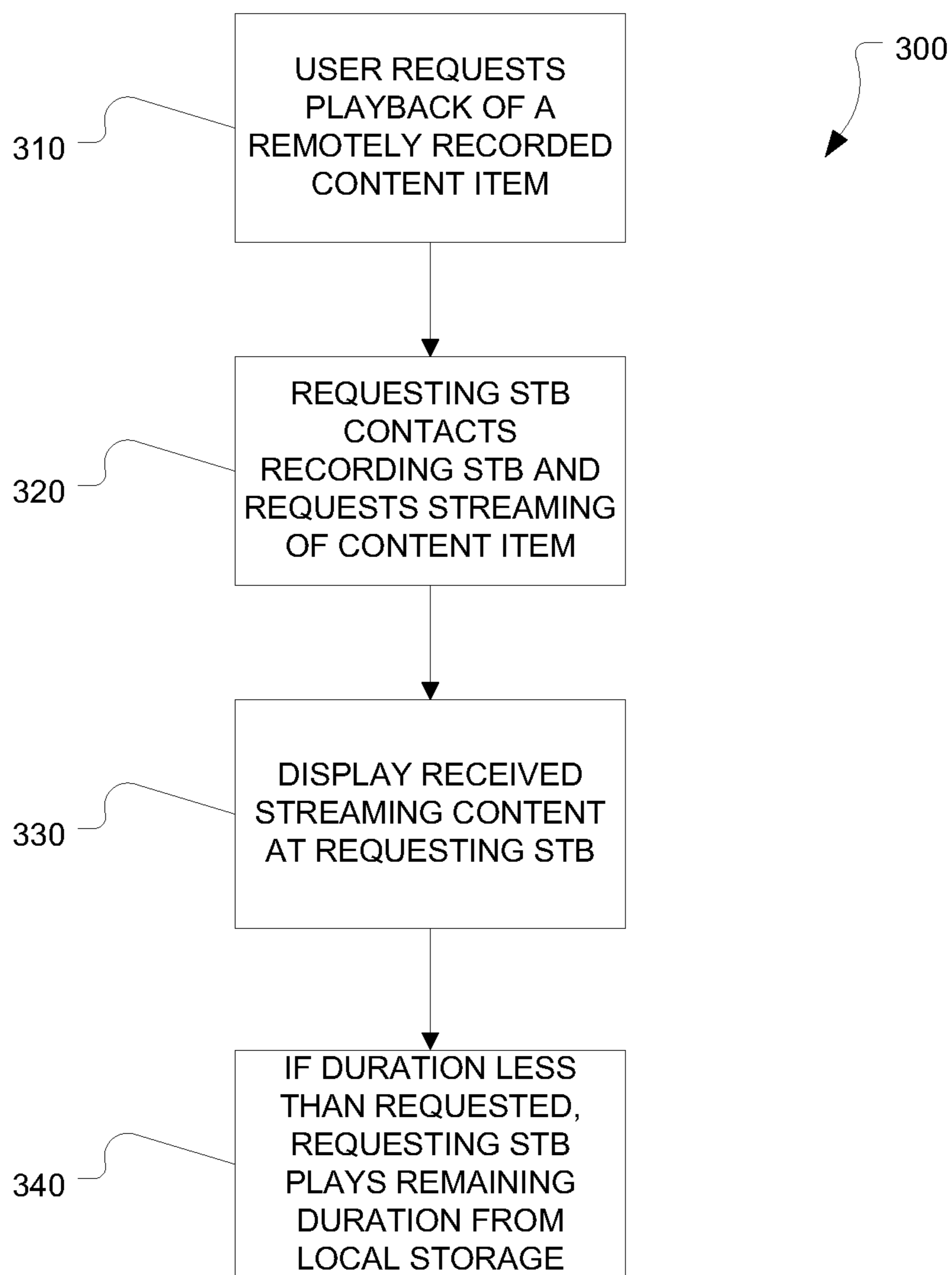


FIG. 3

**DISTRIBUTED RECORDING OF CONTENT****CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS**

This application is a continuation application of and claims the benefit of priority to U.S. application Ser. No. 13/619,156, filed on Sep. 14, 2012, now issued as U.S. Pat. No. 8,973,084, which is a continuation of U.S. application Serial No. 12/982,935, filed on Dec. 31, 2010, now issued as U.S. Pat. No. 8,272,024, the contents of which are hereby incorporated by reference.

**BACKGROUND**

A system for distributing video content is typically maintained by a service provider, which can be, for example, a television service provider (e.g., a national or local television network), a cable television service provider or multiple system operator (MSO), an Internet service provider, a satellite broadcast system service provider, or other suitable service provider.

High definition (HD) video content is becoming increasingly prevalent. In a conventional system, HD content and standard definition (SD) content can be streamed to media players/servers, such as a set-top box (STB), which may include personal video recorder (PVR) or digital video recorder (DVR) functionality.

Conventional PVR/DVR-enabled devices are able to store the streamed content, e.g., by recording the streamed content to a local disk or other persistent storage within or connected to the STB. Such PVR/DVR-enabled devices are limited by their local storage capacity; and if streamed content is HD, then the disk space requirement can be critical, as HD content requires more disk space than SD content.

PVR/DVR-enabled devices can be connected in a network, such as a multi-room DVR (MR-DVR) implementation. For example, in an illustrative MR-DVR implementation, a media server, such as a Multimedia over Coax Alliance (MoCA) enabled DVR set-top box, can deliver DVR content to other MoCA-enabled client set-top boxes in other rooms throughout a home.

If more than one PVR/DVR-enabled device wants to record the same content, then each one of those devices may create a copy of the same content in its local storage. This creates redundancy in a network, such as a MR-DVR implementation, where content can be shared between connected devices.

**SUMMARY**

In one embodiment of the present invention, a method is provided for distributed recording of content in a client system having a home network connecting a content broker and a plurality of set-top boxes (STBs) with digital video recording capability. In a requesting STB, a command is received from a user to begin recording a content item. A query is sent from the requesting STB to the content broker to determine whether the content item is being recorded by any other STB of the plurality of STBs. A response is received from the content broker. If the response indicates that none of the plurality of STBs is then currently recording the content item, the content item is recorded in the requesting STB. If the response identifies a recording STB that is then currently recording the requested content, an internal content list is updated in the requesting STB to identify the recording STB.

In another embodiment of the present invention, a method is provided for playback of distributed content in a client system having a home network connecting a content broker and a plurality of set-top boxes (STBs) with digital video recording capability. In a requesting STB, a command is received from a user to begin playback of a content item. A determination is made of whether the content item was remotely recorded in a recording STB. If the content item was remotely recorded in a recording STB, the recording STB is contacted through the home network to request streaming of the content item from the recording STB to the requesting STB. The content is received from the recording STB, and the received content is displayed to the user.

In a further embodiment of the present invention, a method is provided for distributed recording of content in a client system having a home network connecting a content broker and a plurality of set-top boxes (STBs) with digital video recording capability. In the content broker, a query is received from a requesting STB to determine whether a content item is being recorded by any other STB of the plurality of STBs. If none of the plurality of STBs is then currently recording the content item, a response is sent from the content broker to the requesting STB so that the content item can be recorded in the requesting STB. If a recording STB is then currently recording the requested content, a response is sent from the content broker to the requesting STB comprising a device identifier associated with the recording STB.

**BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS**

FIG. 1 is a block diagram that illustrates an exemplary content distribution system in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 2 is a flow diagram that illustrates a method for distributed recording of content according to an embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 3 is a flow diagram that illustrates a method for playback of distributed content according to a further embodiment of the present invention.

**DETAILED DESCRIPTION**

Aspects of the present invention provide a method for distributed recording of streamed content in PVR/DVR-enabled devices, making use of the networked device architecture for efficient use of storage.

Before describing in detail embodiments that are in accordance with the present invention, it should be observed that the embodiments reside primarily in combinations of method steps and apparatus components related to a system and method for distributed recording of content. Accordingly, the apparatus components and method steps have been represented where appropriate by conventional symbols in the drawings, showing only those specific details that are pertinent to understanding the embodiments of the present invention so as not to obscure the disclosure with details that will be readily apparent to those of ordinary skill in the art having the benefit of the description herein.

In this document, relational terms such as first and second, top and bottom, and the like may be used solely to distinguish one entity or action from another entity or action without necessarily requiring or implying any actual such relationship or order between such entities or actions. The terms "comprises," "comprising," or any other variation thereof, are intended to cover a non-exclusive inclusion, such that a process, method, article, or apparatus that comprises a list of elements does not include only those elements but may

include other elements not expressly listed or inherent to such process, method, article, or apparatus. An element preceded by “comprises . . . a” does not, without more constraints, preclude the existence of additional identical elements in the process, method, article, or apparatus that comprises the element.

FIG. 1 illustrates an exemplary content distribution system **100** in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. However, it will be understood by a person having ordinary skill in the art that aspects of the invention can be practiced using a system having other than the specific features or limitations of the illustrative content distribution system **100** described herein.

Content distribution system **100** includes a video server system **101** and at least one client system **111**, the two of which are connected by an access network **110**. For example, communication link **151A** connects the server system **101** to the access network **110**, and communication link **151B** connects the client system **111** to the access network **110**. Conventional content distribution systems typically include a plurality of client systems **111**, not shown. The server system **101** stores, manages and delivers video content requested by a client system **111** via the access network **110**. Access network **110** and communication links **151A**, **151B** can include, for example, a transmission medium such as an optical fiber, a coaxial cable, a hybrid fiber coaxial (HFC) network, or other suitable transmission media or wireless telecommunications.

The server system **101** typically is located in a headend (not shown) or other suitable location within the content distribution system **100**. The headend typically is a regional or local hub that is part of a larger service provider distribution system, such as a cable television distribution system. The content distribution system **100** typically is based on a central server architecture. In such an architecture, the server system **101** typically is centrally located with respect to a plurality of client systems **111**, and connects to each client system **111** directly via a dedicated transmission medium (in some embodiments, communication link **151B**) of access network **110**. In other embodiments, the content distribution system **100** can be distributed; for example, content distribution system **100** can comprise a plurality of server systems **101** located in one or more headends. In further embodiments, an exemplary server system **101** can include a plurality of servers, controllers, and/or processors, e.g., for encoding and distributing video content.

Server system **101** receives, through access network **110**, requests from a client system **111**. Server system **101** and client system **111** exchange information with one another through access network **110**; for example, a user interface (UI) server (not shown) of server system **101** can send information for presentation to a user **120**, and the client system **111** can send to the server system **101** information, commands, and the like, received in a set-top box (such as requesting STB **150**) via an input device **112** from user **120**. In an embodiment, each client system **111** can be associated with one or more users **120**.

In an illustrative embodiment, server system **101** can receive requests for content (e.g., from client system **111**), interpret the requests, pull requested content (e.g., from a database), and deliver to client system **111** a content package corresponding to the requested content. For example, the content package can be delivered via a video processor (not shown) in server system **101** that prepares and sends the data through access network **110** following proper protocols.

Client system **111** includes a content broker **130** and a plurality of set-top boxes, each connected to access network **110** and to one another by a home network, such as a network

of coaxial cables. In an embodiment, at least two of the set-top boxes are PVR/DVR-enabled. For illustrative purposes, a first one of the PVR/DVR-enabled set-top boxes is designated as a requesting STB **150**, and a second one of the PVR/DVR-enabled set-top boxes is designated as a recording STB **140**. The designation of a requesting STB **150** and a recording STB **140** in FIG. 1 does not mean that each STB has a dedicated function; rather, any of the STBs in client system **111** can become either a requesting STB or a recording STB, if and when such functionality is required by a user **120**.

The content broker **130** is a designated server in the home network that includes the plurality of set-top boxes. In an embodiment, content broker **130** can be included in one of the set-top boxes of client system **111**, such as receiving STB **140** or requesting STB **150**, or another STB. In a further embodiment, content broker **130** can be included in a residential gateway device, or in a separate computing device.

The content broker **130** is able to store information such as metadata related to the ongoing recording of content in the network. Examples of such metadata can include, for each item of content, a content identifier (e.g., a unique numeric value), a content name (e.g., an ASCII string representing a name for the content, such as a program name or episode title), a list of one or more device identifiers for identifying the device (e.g., an STB) in which the recorded content is stored, and for each device identifier one or more duration values (e.g., indicating the duration of recorded content stored in each device, or a beginning and ending byte offset or time offset for the recorded content).

In some embodiments, the content broker **130** can periodically broadcast some or all of the metadata related to the ongoing recording of content in the network. In other embodiments, metadata related to the ongoing recording of content in the network can be queried by a requesting STB **150** before the requesting STB **150** attempts to record the content.

For further illustrative purposes, the requesting STB **150** is shown to be connected to an input device **112**, and a display **116**. Examples of display **116** include a television or a monitor. For ease of illustration, only one input device **112** and one display **116** are depicted in FIG. 1; however, in a typical configuration, each of the set-top boxes in client system **111** is similarly connected to a corresponding input device **112** and display **116**.

It will be understood by a person having ordinary skill in the art that the terminology “set-top” does not in any way limit the physical placement of a set-top box such as STBs **140**, **150**. That is, a set-top box need not be positioned on top of a television set. Each set-top box is any suitable signal processing device or system for processing video signals, such as any signal converter or decoder (set-top) box, or other suitable computing device or video device with set-top box and/or cable modem capabilities, including a residential gateway, an internet protocol (IP), satellite or cable digital video recorder, a digital video disk (DVD) recorder, a computer, or a home media server system. In further embodiments, a set-top box can be a laptop, notebook, or tablet computer, or a mobile device, or can be built into the display **116**. An exemplary set-top box comprises a computing device that connects the display **116** and an external signal source, turning the signal into a content stream that the display **116** is able to render and display. For example, an exemplary set-top box can convert data signals to audio/video content and output the data to display **116**, and is communicatively coupled to the display **116** via a wired or wireless connection.

A set-top box and/or content server **130** can be completely or partially configured in the form of hardware circuitry and/or other hardware components within a larger device or group

of components. Alternatively, a set-top box and/or content server **130** can be completely or partially configured in the form of software, e.g., as processing instructions or one or more sets of logic or computer code. In such configuration, the logic or processing instructions typically are stored in a data storage device, which typically is coupled to a processor or controller. Both the data storage device and the processor or controller can be included as part of a set-top box, although such is not necessary. The processor or controller accesses the necessary instructions from the data storage device and executes the instructions or transfers the instructions to the appropriate location within the set-top box.

An exemplary set-top box is able to receive input commands from a corresponding input device **112** and send requests embodied in the input commands through access network **110** to server system **101**. As depicted in FIG. 1, a user **120** can operate input device **112** to send commands to a requesting STB **150**. For example, user **120** can use input device **112** to control a user interface (UI) application of requesting STB **150** (e.g., for navigation and selection of content items from menus). Input device **112** is communicatively coupled to the requesting STB **150** either via a wired or wireless connection. In some embodiments, input device **112** can be a remote control device. In further embodiments, input device **112** can be a computer (e.g., a desktop, laptop, notebook, or tablet computer), or a mobile device or smartphone, and/or can be completely or partially configured in the form of software running on a computer. In still further embodiments, input device **112** can be built into the requesting STB **150**. In an exemplary embodiment, upon receipt of input commands, such as changing to a new channel, the UI application causes the requesting STB **150** to send corresponding instructions upstream through access network **110** to server system **101**. Other set-top boxes in client system **111**, such as recording STB **140**, are similarly able to receive commands from a corresponding input device **112**.

FIG. 2 is a flow diagram that illustrates a method **200** for distributed recording of content according to an embodiment of the present invention.

In step **210**, any PVR/DVR-enabled set-top box in client system **111** attempts to begin recording a content item. For example, user **120** of requesting STB **150** uses input device **112** to request recording of a content item (e.g., a movie or a television program) delivered from the server system **101**.

In step **220**, the requesting STB **150** queries the content broker **130** to determine whether the same content item is being recorded by any other STB in the client system **111**. The request includes a device identifier uniquely identifying the requesting STB **150**.

In step **230**, the content broker **130** responds with information, such as a device identifier that identifies a set-top box that is then currently recording the requested content (i.e., recording STB **140**); or, in the alternative, responds with information indicating that none of the set-top boxes in client system **111** is then currently recording the requested content.

In step **240**, if the content broker **130** responds with information indicating that none of the set-top boxes in client system **111** is then currently recording the requested content, then requesting STB **150** begins recording the requested content, and notifies the content broker **130** that it is doing so.

In step **250**, if the content broker **130** responds with information identifying a set-top box that is then currently recording the requested content (i.e., recording STB **140**), then the requesting STB **150** does not start recording, but instead updates an internal content list to identify the remote recording. The internal content list stores the information received from content broker **130**, such as the device identifier that

identifies a set-top box that is then currently recording the requested content (e.g., recording STB **140**).

In step **260**, when recording is terminated in the recording STB **140** (either by completion, or by a termination event such as a command received from user **120**), the content broker **130** notifies the requesting STB **150** of the termination.

In step **270**, if the requesting STB **150** determines that the duration of the recording in the recording STB **140** is less than the requested recording duration, then the requesting STB **150** begins recording the remaining duration of the content in its local storage.

FIG. 3 is a flow diagram that illustrates a method **300** for playback of distributed content according to an embodiment of the present invention.

In step **310**, any PVR/DVR-enabled set-top box in client system **111** attempts to begin playing a remotely recorded content item. For example, user **120** of requesting STB **150** uses input device **112** to request playback of a content item (e.g., a movie or a television program) which was previously requested by the requesting STB **150**. It is noted that at step **250**, the requesting STB **150** internally stored information received from content broker **130**, such as the device identifier that identifies a set-top box that was then-currently recording the requested content (e.g., recording STB **140**). Accordingly, the requesting STB **150** does not need to contact the content broker **130** to obtain this information at the time the user **120** requests playback of the content item.

In step **320**, the requesting STB **150** contacts the recording STB **140** through the home network and requests streaming of the content from the recording STB **140** to the requesting STB **150**.

In step **330**, the streaming content from the recording STB **140** is displayed by the requesting STB **150** to the user **120** (e.g., on display **116**).

In step **340**, if the requesting STB **150** determines that the duration of the recording in the recording STB **140** was less than the requested recording duration, then the requesting STB **150** begins playing back the remaining duration of the content from its local storage and displays the remaining duration of the content to the user **120** (e.g., on display **116**).

In the foregoing specification, specific embodiments of the present invention have been described. However, one of ordinary skill in the art appreciates that various modifications and changes can be made without departing from the scope of the present invention as set forth in the claims below. Accordingly, the specification and figures are to be regarded in an illustrative rather than a restrictive sense, and all such modifications are intended to be included within the scope of present invention. The benefits, advantages, solutions to problems, and any element(s) that may cause any benefit, advantage, or solution to occur or become more pronounced are not to be construed as a critical, required, or essential features or elements of any or all the claims. The invention is defined solely by the appended claims including any amendments made during the pendency of this application and all equivalents of those claims as issued.

What is claimed is:

1. A computer-implemented method executed by one or more processors, the method comprising:

identifying, by a first set-top box (STB) of a plurality of STBs connected by a first network, a request for a particular content item available from a content server, wherein the first STB is connected to the content server by a second network different than the first network;



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in response to identifying the request for the particular content item, determining, by the first STB, that the particular content item is available from a second STB of the plurality of STBs; and

in response to determining that the particular content item is available from the second STB, transferring, by the first STB, the particular content item from the second STB over the first network.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein determining that the particular content item is available from the second STB includes querying a content broker for STBs of the plurality of STBs from which the particular content item is available.

3. The method of claim 1, further comprising storing the particular content item at the first STB after transferring the particular content item from the second STB.

4. The method of claim 1, wherein the request for the particular content item is a request to record the particular content item, the method further comprising:

in response to transferring the particular content item from the second STB, storing, by the first STB, the particular content item.

5. The method of claim 1, wherein the request for the particular content item is a request to play the particular content item, and transferring, by the first STB, the particular content item from the second STB includes streaming the particular content item from the second STB over the first network for presentation on a display device associated with the first STB.

6. The method of claim 1, wherein the request for the particular content item includes a user command received by the first STB.

7. The method of claim 1, wherein the request to record the particular content item represents a scheduled recording of the particular content item.

8. The method of claim 1, wherein determining that the particular content item is available from the second STB includes determining that the second STB is currently recording the particular content item.

9. The method of claim 1, wherein determining that the particular content item is available from the second STB includes determining that the second STB has previously recorded the particular content item.

10. A non-transitory, computer-readable medium storing instructions operable when executed to cause at least one processor to perform operations comprising:

identifying, by a first set-top box (STB) of a plurality of STBs connected by a first network, a request for a particular content item available from a content server, wherein the first STB is connected to the content server by a second network different than the first network;

in response to identifying the request for the particular content item, determining, by the first STB, that the particular content item is available from a second STB of the plurality of STBs; and

in response to determining that the particular content item is available from the second STB, transferring, by the first STB, the particular content item from the second STB over the first network.

11. The computer-readable medium of claim 10, wherein determining that the particular content item is available from

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the second STB includes querying a content broker for STBs of the plurality of STBs from which the particular content item is available.

12. The computer-readable medium of claim 10, the operations further comprising storing the particular content item at the first STB after transferring the particular content item from the second STB.

13. The computer-readable medium of claim 10, wherein the request for the particular content item is a request to record the particular content item, the computer-readable medium further comprising:

in response to transferring the particular content item from the second STB, storing, by the first STB, the particular content item.

14. The computer-readable medium of claim 10, wherein the request for the particular content item is a request to play the particular content item, and transferring, by the first STB, the particular content item from the second STB includes streaming the particular content item from the second STB over the first network for presentation on a display device associated with the first STB.

15. The computer-readable medium of claim 10, wherein the request for the particular content item includes a user command received by the first STB.

16. The computer-readable medium of claim 10, wherein the request to record the particular content item represents a scheduled recording of the particular content item.

17. The computer-readable medium of claim 10, wherein determining that the particular content item is available from the second STB includes determining that the second STB is currently recording the particular content item.

18. The computer-readable medium of claim 10, wherein determining that the particular content item is available from the second STB includes determining that the second STB has previously recorded the particular content item.

19. A system comprising:

memory for storing data; and

one or more processors operable to perform operations comprising:

identifying, by a first set-top box (STB) of a plurality of STBs connected by a first network, a request for a particular content item available from a content server, wherein the first STB is connected to the content server by a second network different than the first network;

in response to identifying the request for the particular content item, determining, by the first STB, that the particular content item is available from a second STB of the plurality of STBs; and

in response to determining that the particular content item is available from the second STB, transferring, by the first STB, the particular content item from the second STB over the first network.

20. The system of claim 19, wherein determining that the particular content item is available from the second STB includes querying a content broker for STBs of the plurality of STBs from which the particular content item is available.

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