A method for forwarding an e-mail message from a disfavored e-mail address to a forwarding e-mail address via a remote e-mail forwarding computer having a unique e-mail address. An e-mail message is sent from a user to the remote e-mail forwarding computer. The remote e-mail forwarding computer parses the intended e-mail address from the e-mail message to determine if there is a disfavored e-mail address associated with the intended e-mail address. The e-mail message is sent from the remote computer to the computers associated with the forwarding address(es) if there is determined at least one disfavored e-mail address is associated with the intended e-mail address.

6 Claims, 6 Drawing Sheets
Sender Transmits e-mail message to recipient

E-mail message is received by e-mail server

Is there a valid e-mail account?

Yes

E-mail is delivered to recipient

No

Intended e-mail server rejects e-mail

Intended e-mail server transmits message to sender indicating e-mail is undeliverable

Sender is notified that e-mail is undeliverable
FIG. 3

Sender transmits e-mail to e-mail forwarding service

E-mail forwarding service receives e-mail from sender

E-mail forwarding service extracts the e-mail address for the intended recipient

Is there a forwarding e-mail address?

NO
Transmit message to sender that there is no forwarding e-mail address available

YES

Send e-mail to intended recipient at the forwarding e-mail address associated with the e-mail address of the intended recipient

Transmit message to sender indicating that e-mail has been sent to the intended recipient at a forwarding e-mail address
Fig. 4

Disfavored E-Mail Address

Subscriber@oldaccount.com

Forwarding E-mail Address

subscriber@newaccount.com
TO: DQuine@luv-npi.com

RE: Hello

I have not communicated with you in a long time - how is everything?

Fig. 5A

Delivery Failure Report
Your document: Hello
was not delivered to: dquine@luv-npi.com
because: The specified address contains a host or domain name that could not be found by the Domain Name Server or local hosts file.

TO: DQuine@luv-npi.com

RE: Hello

I have not communicated with you in a long time - how is everything?

Fig. 5B
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disfavored E-Mail Address</th>
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</thead>
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</table>

Fig. 6
DYNAMIC ELECTRONIC FORWARDING SYSTEM

FIELD OF THE INVENTION
The present invention relates to a system and method for forwarding electronic messages, and more particularly, relates to a system and method for use of a dynamic e-mail forwarding system capable of forwarding e-mail transmitted to one or more e-mail addresses to one or more prescribed e-mail forwarding addresses.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION
Recent advances in telecommunications networks have drastically altered the manner in which people interact and conduct business. These advances promote efficiency and convenience in one’s ability to receive important information. With this in mind, individuals and businesses today find that their physical and electronic addresses are changing faster than ever with increased mobility and competing message delivery services. Deregulation and privatization of the global postal systems, competing package delivery services, and rapid growth of multiple competing electronic mail (e-mail) systems are creating an environment in which there is no single point of contact for address correction as there was when the sole messaging provider was the national postal service.

Users who enjoy the benefit of sending and receiving e-mail messages typically subscribe to an Internet Service Provider (ISP) offering such e-mail capabilities (e.g., America Online (AOL), Netcom, and Redconnect) and/or may subscribe to an internet based e-mail service (e.g., juno, rocketmail, yahoo) which each is associated with a particular e-mail address. Thus, the e-mail address is unique to the e-mail service provider. The uniqueness of an address to a selected provider is often apparent on the face of the address, e.g., DQuine@aol.com, Quine@juno.com or DouglasQuine@yahoo.com. A user or subscriber to a particular e-mail service may from time to time desire or need to change service providers (e.g., from DQuine@aol.com to QuineDo@ph.com). Exemplary motivation for these changes may derive from the fact that an alternative service provider charges lower rates, or the existing provider’s inability to upgrade its service.

A user who desires to change from one e-mail service provider to another suddenly faces the reality of being bound to the old service provider because the user’s address is unique to that one provider. A sudden and complete changeover is in many circumstances impossible because the community of people who wish to send electronic messages to the user are only aware that the old address exists. For example, an e-mail address may be published in an industry directory that is only published once every year or two years. Alternatively, the e-mail address may be printed on a business card which cannot be retracted and corrected. Thus, the user incurs a potentially significant loss of prospective business by abandoning the old address.

Currently, there is no effective means in place for address correction of e-mail addresses. Even if the e-mail sender is highly diligent, there are no resources or processes available to identify corrected electronic address information. The problem is further accentuated by the fact that extreme competition in internet service providers, and likewise e-mail service providers, results in extremely high obsolescence of e-mail addresses with no means for e-mail forwarding (e.g., closing an AOL e-mail account provides no option for forwarding e-mail intended for that account to a new e-mail address).

Further, today’s web savvy users may have multiple e-mail addresses which periodically change as new features develop or are lost. Entire domain names can be lost (e.g., leedomain.com) and all mail directed there may be lost as well. In either case, typically the MAIL DAEMON message is returned to the sender, notifying the sender that the e-mail address cannot be found and e-mail message is being returned to the sender.

Some service providers offer their user-subscribers the option of a message forwarding service. These forwarding services operate by receiving the incoming message, retrieving the portion of the incoming message that identifies a selected user who subscribes to the forwarding service, associating the selected user with a forwarding address through the use of a lookup table, and transmitting the message to the forwarding address. The forwarding services differ from the normal message delivery service that the central service provider offers because a portion of the forwarding address belongs to another central service provider. Thus, the forwarded message is actually delivered to its intended recipient by the other or second service provider, i.e., the forwarded message passes through two central service providers, as opposed to just one provider. The intended message recipient is free to change the second provider with regularity provided that the recipient always informs the forwarding service of each change in the second provider. However, this message forwarding system only works with viable e-mail address, that is, the e-mail address associated with the first service provider must still be active and not obsolete. In fact, few e-mail services offer forwarding services and few, if any, offer to forward e-mail after the account is closed. Otherwise, the first service provider is only enabled to send the later mentioned MAIL DAEMON message back to the original sender of the e-mail message.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION
Accordingly, the present invention relates to a method and system for forwarding an e-mail message intended to be delivered to an intended e-mail address to a remote forwarding e-mail computer in the event the e-mail address is disfavored. The remote e-mail forwarding computer is located at a unique e-mail address that is programmable to associate disfavored e-mail addresses with forwarding e-mail addresses.

In use a subscriber of the remote e-mail forwarding computer subscribes at least one disfavored e-mail address and at least one forwarding e-mail address in the remote e-mail forwarding computer. A user of the e-mail forwarding service then sends the e-mail message to the remote e-mail forwarding computer when the intended address is disfavored.

Upon receipt of the e-mail message at the remote e-mail forwarding computer, the e-mail forwarding computer parses the intended e-mail address from the e-mail message to determine if there is a disfavored e-mail address associated with the intended e-mail address. The parsing of the e-mail message includes the step of comparing the intended e-mail address to a look-up table to determine if the intended e-mail address is included as a disfavored e-mail address in the look-up table. If there is a match, the remote e-mail forwarding computer sends the e-mail message from the remote computer to the computer associated with the forwarding address(es) if there is determined at least one disfavored e-mail address associated with the intended e-mail address(es).

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS
The above and other objects and advantages of the present invention will become more readily apparent upon consid-
In accordance with the present invention, telecommunications system 10 additional includes a messaging forwarding system 44, which as will be further discussed below, enables e-mail messages to be automatically forwarded to a forwarding address, which forwarding address is associated with a currently undeliverable e-mail address. Messaging forwarding system 44 preferably includes a PC 46 connected to an internet service provider 48, which PC 46 is provided with a unique e-mail address (corrections@emailangel.com) and software programmed to perform the below described steps necessary to operate the present invention e-mail forwarding system 44. Internet service provider 48 is preferably connected to INTERNET 22 via router 50.

As shown in FIG. 4, system 44 includes a software program that includes a look-up table 50, which is programmable by users to provide an e-mail forwarding address 52 associated with pre-programmed defunct (undeliverable) e-mail address(es) 54. It is to be appreciated that users of the present invention e-mail forwarding system 44 may access and program the look-up table 50 of system 44 through any conventional known means, including via the internet 22 in which a user at PC site 28 accesses the look-up table 50 in system 44, via the internet 22, via routers 24 and 50, and internet service providers 26 and 48. Look-up table 50 may include a plurality of defunct subscriber addresses (54+N), with each defunct address being associated with one or more forwarding addresses (52+M).

It is to be appreciated that in this description of the present invention system 44, mention is made to both a “user” and “subscriber” of system 44. It is to be understood that a “user” of system 44 refers to anyone who is capable of transmitting an e-mail message and accesses system 44 when it is desired to forward the message to a forwarding address, which forwarding address the sender is unaware of. A “subscriber” of system 44 refers to anyone who subscribes to the e-mail forwarding service of system 44 in which the subscriber registers both a defunct e-mail address 54 and at least one e-mail forwarding address 52 with system 44. And of course e-mail forwarding system 44 is accessible by any user.

In illustration, if a subscriber of system 44 closes an e-mail account (e.g., user@oldaccount.com) for whatever reason, the subscriber may however still desire to continue to receive messages sent to that address (e.g., user@oldaccount.com), but now wants to receive those messages at a different account (e.g., subscriber@newaccount.com). In the prior art, to accomplish this the subscriber had to resort to informing everyone who had the old e-mail address (e.g., user@oldaccount.com) of the new e-mail address (e.g., subscriber@newaccount.com). In accordance with the present invention, the subscriber now merely accesses the subscriber’s designated account in system 44, via any known means such as the internet, registers the defunct e-mail address (e.g., user@oldaccount.com) and associates it with a desired forwarding e-mail address (e.g., subscriber@newaccount.com). Thus when a sender of an e-mail desires to transmit a message to a subscriber of system 44 but only knows the subscribers old e-mail address (e.g., user@oldaccount.com), which account is no longer active, the user now merely looks to system 44 to forward the message to an active account (e.g., subscriber@newaccount.com), as will be discussed further below.

As indicated above, FIG. 1 is exemplary in nature, and those skilled in the art understand that equivalent substitutions of system components can be made. For example, electrical communications over conductive telephone lines,
optical communications over optical fibers, radio communications, and microwave communications are substantially equivalent for purposes of the invention. Likewise, messages could be relayed through e-mail, facsimile, pager, PDA device or other capable communications system.

The method of use of system 44 will now be described with reference to FIGS. 2, 3 and 5 in conjunction with FIG. 1. Referring now to FIG. 2, when an email sender 14 desires to transmit a message to a recipient 30 having a known e-mail address (e.g., quine@luv-npi.com) of the recipient, the sender 14 transmits the e-mail message 500 (FIG. 5a) through conventional e-mail protocol, whereby the message is delivered to the identified mail server 26 (e.g., luv-npi) of the recipient 30, via the senders ISP server 18 (step 100).

The recipient’s 30 mail server 26 then receives the e-mail message (step 102), and if the e-mail account is valid (e.g., quine@luv-npi.com) (step 104), the e-mail message is then forwarded to the recipient 30 (step 106). If the account is not a valid account (e.g., quine@luv-npi.com) then the identified mail server 26 (e.g., luv-npi) rejects the request (step 108) and sends a MAIL-DAEMON message 510 (FIG. 5b) to the senders 14 e-mail server 18 indicating that the message is not deliverable (step 110). The sender’s e-mail server 18 then sends a message to the sender 14 that the attached e-mail message is undeliverable.

Since the sender 14 cannot contact the recipient (e.g., quine) via the now defunct e-mail address 54 (e.g., quine@luv-npi.com), the sender 14 is presented with the problem of how to contact the recipient. In order to overcome this problem, the present invention e-mail forwarding system 44 provides a solution by forwarding the e-mail message to a new address so long as the recipient 30 (e.g., quine) subscribes to the forwarding service of the system 44. In the current illustrative example, the recipient (e.g., quine) registers the defunct e-mail address 54 (e.g., quine@luv-npi.com) with the system 44 and instructs the system to forward all messages to a specified forwarding e-mail address 52 (e.g., quine@docsense.com), as depicted in the look-up table of FIG. 4.

Returning now to the sender’s 14 situation in which the sender 14 still desires to transmit the e-mail message 500 but does not know the correct e-mail address. In accordance with the present invention, the sender 14 now forwards the entire message 510 that was previously sent to the intended recipient’s defunct e-mail address (e.g., quine@luv-npi.com), and rejected, to the e-mail address (e.g., corrections@emailangel.com) assigned to the e-mail forwarding system 44 (step 200). The e-mail server 48 (e.g., emailangel.com) that received the message then informs the forwarding system 44 of the receipt of this message and afterwards the system 44 receives the message from the e-mail server 48 (step 202). The forwarding system 44 then parses message 510 and extracts the intended address for the recipient (e.g., quine@luv-npi.com) from the message (step 204). The forwarding service 44 then does a look-up in table 50 for the intended address (e.g., quine@luv-npi.com) to determine if this address has been registered by a subscriber in the forwarding system 44 (step 206). If no, system 44 sends an e-mail message back to the sender 14 informing the sender 14 that the defunct address of the recipient 30 (e.g., quine@luv-npi.com) is not registered with the forwarding system 44 (step 208). If yes, forwarding system 44, sends the e-mail message 510 addressed to the recipients defunct address 54 (e.g., quine@luv-npi.com) to the recipient subscriber’s new e-mail address 52 (e.g., quine@docsense.com) as prescribed in the look-up table 50 of the forwarding system 44.

Preferably, forwarding system 44 then sends an e-mail to the sender 14 indicating that the message original addressed to a defunct e-mail address has now been properly forwarded.

Thus, a clear advantage of the present invention e-mail forwarding system 44 is that a sender merely forwards a rejected e-mail message to the e-mail address (e.g., corrections@emailangel.com) associated with the forwarding system 44 to determine if the previously rejected message can be forwarded to a proper e-mail address. And if it can, the forwarding system automatically forwards the message to an e-mail address as prescribed by the recipient. Thus, a user of system merely has to forward a rejected e-mail message to forwarding system 44 to utilize its forwarding services. Therefore, no internet access is required, only access to an e-mail server is required which is quite advantageous since many e-mail users only have access to an e-mail server and not an internet server, such as staff employees in corporations and home users who utilize free, or inexpensive e-mail services. Furthermore, in contrast to directory services, the system design preserves recipient privacy by not providing the new e-mail address to the sender.

In an alternative embodiment of the present invention, the look-up table of the e-mail forwarding system 44 may preferably have dynamic parameters in which a subscriber of system may have an account including one or more disfavored e-mail addresses that are associated with one or more forwarding e-mail addresses. For example, and with reference to FIG. 6, look-up table 60 is shown having three subscriber accounts 62, 64 and 66. In account 62, a subscriber is shown to have listed three disfavored e-mail addresses (e.g., doug@yahoo.com, doug@hotmail.com and doug@obsolete.com) in association with a single forwarding e-mail address (e.g., doug@current.com). Thus, when a user of system 44 uses it to forward e-mail to anyone of the listed disfavored e-mail addresses (e.g., doug@yahoo.com, doug@hotmail.com and doug@obsolete.com) the system 44 automatically forwards the e-mail to the single prescribed forwarding e-mail address (e.g., doug@current.com) regardless of which one the disfavored e-mail addresses (e.g., doug@yahoo.com, doug@hotmail.com and doug@obsolete.com) the e-mail message was intended for.

With reference to account 64, a subscriber is shown to have listed a single disfavored e-mail address (e.g., doug@obsolete.com) in association with three forwarding e-mail addresses (e.g., doug@work.com, doug@home.com and doug@wireless.com). Now, when a user of system 44 uses it to forward e-mail intended for the single disfavored e-mail address (e.g., doug@obsolete.com), the system 44 automatically forwards the e-mail message to each one of the prescribed e-mail addresses (e.g., doug@work.com, doug@home.com and doug@wireless.com).

Referring now to account 66, a subscriber is shown to have listed three disfavored e-mail addresses (e.g., doug@yahoo.com, doug@hotmail.com and doug@obsolete.com) in association with three forwarding e-mail addresses (e.g., doug@work.com, doug@home.com and doug@wireless.com). Thus, when a user of system 44 uses it to forward e-mail to anyone of the listed disfavored e-mail addresses (e.g., doug@yahoo.com, doug@hotmail.com and doug@obsolete.com), the system 44 automatically forwards the e-mail message to each one of the prescribed e-mail addresses (e.g., doug@work.com, doug@home.com and doug@wireless.com).

Of course it is to be appreciated that a subscriber of system 44 may maintain multiple accounts whereby a single
subscriber may maintain each of the previous described accounts 62, 64 and 66.

In summary, an e-mail forwarding system having a dedicated e-mail address for automatically forwarding e-mail has been described. Although the present invention has been described with emphasis on particular embodiments, it should be understood that the figures are for illustration of the exemplary embodiment of the invention and should not be taken as limitations or thought to be the only means of carrying out the invention. Further, it is contemplated that many changes and modifications may be made to the invention without departing from the scope and spirit of the invention as disclosed.

What is claimed is:

1. A method for forwarding an e-mail message from a disfavored e-mail address to a forwarding e-mail address via a remote e-mail forwarding computer having a unique e-mail address, the method comprising the steps of:

   prescribing at least one disfavored e-mail address in the remote e-mail forwarding computer by a subscriber;
   prescribing at least one forwarding e-mail address in the remote e-mail forwarding computer by the subscriber;
   sending from a user to the remote computer an e-mail message addressed to an intended e-mail address;
   receiving at the remote computer the e-mail message addressed to the intended e-mail address;
   parsing the intended e-mail address from the e-mail message in the remote computer to determine if there is a disfavored e-mail address associated with the intended e-mail address; and
   sending the e-mail message from the remote computer to a computer associated with at least one forwarding address if there is determined at least one disfavored e-mail address associated with the intended e-mail address.

2. A method as recited in claim 1 further including the step of sending an e-mail message to the user from the remote computer indicating that the e-mail has been sent to a forwarding e-mail address.

3. A method as recited in claim 1 further including the step of sending an e-mail message to the user from the remote computer indicating that the e-mail message was not forwarded to a forwarding e-mail address if a disfavored e-mail address is determined not associated with the intended e-mail address.

4. A method as recited in claim 1 wherein the parsing step includes the step of comparing the intended e-mail address to a look-up table to determine if the intended e-mail address is included as a said disfavored e-mail address in the look-up table.

5. A method as recited in claim 1 further including the steps of:

   sending the e-mail message from a user’s computer to a computer associated with the intended e-mail address;
   receiving the e-mail message at the user’s computer with a message indicating that the e-mail message was not delivered to the computer associated with the intended e-mail address.

6. A method as recited in claim 1 wherein the sending step further includes the step of:

   sending the e-mail message from the remote computer to a plurality of computers each having an forwarding address associated with a disfavored e-mail address if there is determined at least one disfavored e-mail address associated with the intended e-mail address.

* * * * *