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System and method to anonymize data transmitted to a destination computing device

Abstract

A method and system for anonymizing data to be transmitted to a destination computing device is disclosed. Anonymization strategy for data anonymization is provided. Data to be transmitted is received from a user computer. Selective anonymization of the data is performed, based on the anonymization strategy, using an anonymization module. The data includes a plurality of characters. A portion of the anonymized data is selected as a search ID. A cross reference between a search key indicative of a portion of the received data and the corresponding search ID is stored.

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Background/Summary

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS (1) This application is a continuation application of application Ser. No. 17/577,384 filed on Jan. 18, 2022, which is a continuation application of application Ser. No. 13/929,784 filed on Jun. 28, 2013, which is a continuation-in-part of application Ser. No. 13/844,509 filed on Mar. 15, 2013, which is a continuation-in-part of a) application Ser. No. 13/042,459 filed on Mar. 8, 2011 and b) application Ser. No. 13/323,821 filed on Dec. 13, 2011. Application Ser. Nos. 13/929,784, 13/844,509, 13/042,459, 13/323,821, and 17/577,384 are all incorporated herein by reference, in its entirety.

TECHNICAL FIELD

(1) The present invention relates generally to transmitting data to and retrieving data from a destination computing device and particularly, to anonymize data transmitted to the destination computing device and de-anonymize data retrieved from the destination computing device.

DESCRIPTION OF RELATED ART

(2) The Internet has enabled computer users all over the world to interact, communicate, store and access information electronically. One particularly popular mode for running applications over the internet is to host application on a server located in a remote location, along with data associated with the applications. The users of the application access the application and associated data over the internet. Sometimes, this mode of running applications in a remote location is referred to as cloud computing. It is not uncommon for the application to be hosted on a server owned or controlled by a third party. And, various clients or users of the application run the application hosted on the server at the third party location and store data corresponding to the application on a data storage device, for example, a database running on a computing device at the third party location.

(3) There are multiple benefits of using a third party hosted application to a client. For example, the application may be managed by subject matter experts who are familiar with the application, for example a customer relationship management (CRM) application. Sometimes, ancillary

applications and resources needed to provide best in class application may be made available to all the clients of the application. The third party may be able to allocate resources based on varying or seasonal demands of each of its customers.

(4) As more and more enterprises or customers use applications hosted at third party locations, the data associated with the enterprise may need to be protected from unauthorized access. Some of the data security requirements may be imposed by regulatory bodies. Some of the data security requirement may be client specific.

(5) As more and more applications are hosted at the third party locations and corresponding data is stored at the third party locations, there is a need to find efficient ways to provide data security to the data stored at the third party locations. With these needs in mind, the current disclosure arises. This brief summary has been provided so that the nature of the disclosure may be understood quickly. A more complete understanding of the disclosure can be obtained by reference to the following detailed description of the various embodiments thereof in connection with the attached drawings.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

(6) In one embodiment, a method for anonymizing data to be transmitted to a destination computing device is disclosed. Data to be transmitted is received from a user computer. The data includes a plurality of characters. The data is anonymized using an anonymization module, to derive an anonymized data. A portion of the anonymized data is selected as a search ID. A cross reference between a search key indicative of a portion of the received data and the corresponding search ID is stored in a data store. The anonymized data is transmitted to the destination computer over a network.

(7) In another embodiment, an anonymization system to anonymize data transmitted to a destination computing device is disclosed. The system includes an anonymization strategy module to store anonymization strategy for data anonymization, a logic to receive data to be transmitted to the destination from a user computer. An anonymization module to anonymize data based on the anonymization strategy to generate an anonymized data and select a portion of the anonymized data as a search ID. A cross reference between a search key indicative of a portion of the received data and the corresponding search ID is stored in a data store. The anonymized data is transmitted to the destination computing device over a network.

(8) This brief summary has been provided so that the nature of the disclosure may be understood quickly. A more complete understanding of the disclosure can be obtained by reference to the following detailed description of the preferred embodiments thereof in connection with the attached drawings.

Description

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

(1) The foregoing and other features of several embodiments are now described with reference to the drawings. In the drawings, the same components have the same reference numerals. The illustrated embodiments are intended to illustrate but not limit the invention. The drawings include the following Figures:

(2) FIG. 1A shows a block diagram of a system with anonymization system of the present disclosure used to process requests from a user system to an application server, according to one aspect of the present disclosure;

(3) FIG. 1B shows a block diagram of the user system of FIG. 1 configured to communicate with a server over the network, according to one aspect of the present disclosure;

(4) FIG. 2 shows a block diagram of the internal functional architecture of a user computer, according to one aspect of the present disclosure;

- (5) FIG. 2A shows a block diagram of another embodiment of a system used to service requests from a user computer, according to another aspect of the present disclosure;
- (6) FIG. 3 shows an exemplary topology of computer network coupling user computers to servers over the internet, according to one aspect of the present disclosure;
- (7) FIGS. 4 and 4A show an exemplary block diagram of an anonymization system, according to one aspect of the present disclosure;
- (8) FIG. 5 shows an exemplary anonymization strategy data table, according to one aspect of the present invention;
- (9) FIG. 6A shows an exemplary block diagram of a searchable encryption system, according to one aspect of the present disclosure;
- (10) FIG. 6B shows an exemplary table **620** showing various iterations of the encoding operation of the searchable encryption system of FIG. 6A, according to one aspect of the present disclosure.
- (11) FIG. 6C shows an exemplary table **650** showing various iterations of the decoding operation of the searchable encryption system of FIG. 6A, according to one aspect of the present disclosure.
- (12) FIG. 7A shows an exemplary crypto module, according to one aspect of the present disclosure;
- (13) FIG. 7B shows a table that describes an exemplary relationship between seed value ID, seed value and initialization vector, according to one aspect of the present disclosure;
- (14) FIG. 7C shows exemplary data fields for seed value ID and anonymized data, according to one aspect of the present disclosure;
- (15) FIG. 7D shows exemplary data fields for seed value ID, order indicator data and anonymized data, according to one aspect of the present disclosure.
- (16) FIG. 7E shows an exemplary table showing a portion of the received data, corresponding order indicator data, seed value ID and corresponding anonymized data, according to one aspect of the present disclosure.
- (17) FIG. 7F shows an exemplary order indicator generator, according to one aspect of the present disclosure.
- (18) FIG. 7G shows an exemplary table showing the received data, corresponding anonymized data and search ID field data, according to one aspect of the present disclosure.
- (19) FIG. 7H shows an exemplary table showing search keys and corresponding search IDs, according to one aspect of the present disclosure.
- (20) FIG. 7J shows an exemplary anonymized data with a search ID indicator and search ID field.
- (21) FIGS. 8A-8D shows exemplary anonymization of data transmitted to a destination computing device;
- (22) FIGS. 9A-9C shows exemplary de-anonymization of data received from the destination computing device;
- (23) FIG. 10 shows method of anonymizing data to be transmitted to a destination computing, according to one aspect of the present disclosure;
- (24) FIG. 11A shows method of processing a request for stored anonymized data by the destination computing device; and
- (25) FIG. 11B shows method of processing selectively retrieved anonymized data from the destination computing device.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

- (26) To facilitate an understanding of the adaptive aspects of the present invention, the general architecture and operation of a networked system is described. The specific architecture and operation of the adaptive aspects of the present disclosure are then described with reference to the general architecture.
- (27) FIG. 1A shows a top-level block diagram of a system **100** with anonymization system of this disclosure that is used to send data from a user system, according to one aspect of the present disclosure. System **100** includes a user system **102** that is coupled via a gateway **104** and a network connection **106** to a server **110** through another gateway **108**. In one aspect, server **110** is a web-

server. Gateway **104** in one embodiment includes an anonymization system **112** of this disclosure. Database **114** is used to store information that is accessed by the user system **102**. In one aspect, database **114** is a structured query language (SQL) based database.

(28) FIG. **1B** is a block diagram of a user system **102** according to one embodiment of the present disclosure, which is configured to communicate with the server **110** over the network. FIG. **1B** includes a user computer **116** (sometimes referred to as computer **116**) and a monitor **118**. Monitor **118** may be a CRT type, a LCD type, a plasma type, or any other type of color or monochrome display. Also provided with computer **116** is a keyboard **120** for entering text data and user commands, and a pointing device **122** (such as a mouse) for processing objects displayed on monitor **118**. In some embodiments, objects displayed on monitor **118** may be elements of a graphical user interface.

(29) Computer **116** may include a computer-readable memory medium such as a rotating disk **124** for storing readable data. Besides other programs, disk **124** can store application programs including web browsers by which computer **116** connects to a network and the systems described below, according to one aspect of the present disclosure. In some embodiments, disk **124** may be a disk system with a plurality of disk drives arranged as a Redundant Array of Inexpensive Drives (RAID) system, accessible using a storage adapter (not shown).

(30) Computer **116** can also access a computer-readable storage device **126** with removable storage media storing data files, application program files, and computer executable process steps embodying the present invention or the like. For example, the storage device **126** may be a CD-ROM or a DVD ROM. In some embodiments, the storage device **126** may support removable storage media that is read-only device (R), write once-read many (WORM), or rewriteable (RW) type. In some embodiments, the storage device **126** may also be provided with computer **116** to access application program files, audio files and data files stored on a removable storage media. In some embodiments, the removable storage media may be optical, magnetic, magneto-optic, or semiconductor based recording media.

(31) A modem, an integrated services digital network (ISDN) connection, wireless or the like also provides computer **116** with a DSL/Cable/satellite/wireless (or Internet connection) **128** to the World Wide Web (WWW). Internet connection **128** allows computer **116** to send and receive commands, data files, audio files, application program files and computer-executable process steps embodying the present invention.

(32) Computer **116** is also provided with external audio speakers **130A** and **130B** to assist a listener to listen to music either downloaded on-line from the Internet or off-line using a storage medium. It is noteworthy that a listener may use headphones instead of audio speakers **130A** and **130B** to listen to music.

(33) FIG. **2** is a block diagram showing the internal functional architecture of computer **116**. As shown in FIG. **2**, computer **116** includes a central processing unit (CPU) **201** for executing computer-executable process steps and interfaces with a computer bus **208**. Also shown in FIG. **2** are a WWW interface **202**, a display device interface **203**, a keyboard interface **204**, a pointing device interface **205**, an audio interface **209**, video interface **210**, printer interface **212**, and a disk **124**. Audio Interface **209** allows a listener to listen to music, Online (downloaded using the Internet or a private network) or offline (using a CD).

(34) As described above, disk **124** may store operating system program files, application program files, web browsers, and other files. Some of these files are stored on disk **124** using an installation program. For example, CPU **201** executes computer-executable process steps of an installation program so that CPU **201** can properly execute the application program.

(35) A random access main memory ("RAM") **206** also interfaces to computer bus **208** to provide CPU **201** with access to memory storage. When executing stored computer-executable process steps from disk **124** (or other storage device such as storage device **126** or Internet connection **128**), CPU **201** stores and executes the process steps out of RAM **206**.

(36) Read only memory (“ROM”) **207** is provided to store invariant instruction sequences such as start-up instruction sequences or basic input/output operating system (BIOS) sequences for operation of keyboard **120**.

(37) FIG. 2A shows yet another example of the overall system **100**, according to one aspect of the present disclosure. In FIG. 2A, server **110** is shown as a web server and database **114** is shown as a SQL (structured query language) database. FIG. 2A also shows the various steps that are used to access database **114**. In step **1**, a user using a browser running on the user system **102**, submits a URL, as a request. URL includes the application to which the request is directed. In step **2**, the web server **110** captures the request, and locates and executes corresponding application specific program (ASP) code for the application to which the request was directed.

(38) In step **3**, during execution of ASP code, a structured query language (SQL) code is generated and executed. Based on the executed SQL code, database **114** is accessed to fetch, add, modify or delete information in the database.

(39) In step **4**, the results are sent to the web server **110**. The web server **110** constructs a response, for example as a HTML code. In step **5**, HTML code is sent to the user system **102**. In step **6**, the HTML page is sent to the browser and displayed on the user system **102**.

(40) Although in this example, a user submits a URL as a request, in some embodiments, a user application executing on the user computer **102** may submit a request. The request may be submitted as a URL, and the user application may be configured to receive the response to the request.

(41) Now, an exemplary coupling of the computer **116** to a server over the internet will be described with reference to FIG. 3. FIG. 3 shows an exemplary topology of a computer network with computers similar to computer **116**, connected to the Internet **302**. For illustration purposes, three computers X, Y and Z are shown connected to the Internet **302** via Web interface **202** through a gateway **301**, where gateway **301** can interface N number of computers. Gateway **301** may be similar to gateway **104** with an anonymization system **112**. Web interface **202** may be a modem, network interface card or a unit for providing connectivity to other computer systems over a network using protocols such as X.25, Ethernet or TCP/IP, or any device that allows, directly or indirectly, computer-to-computer communications. Gateway **301** and computers X, Y and Z may be located or controlled within a user controlled environment. This user controlled environment may be within the user controlled enterprise or intranet. For convenience, gateway **301** and computers X, Y and Z are grouped together and referred to as user cloud **309**. Exemplary topology of a computer network may have additional groups of computers with gateway to define additional user clouds. In one embodiment, data flow outside the user cloud may need special handling.

(42) It is noteworthy that the invention is not limited to a particular number of computers. Any number of computers can be connected to the Internet **302** or any other computer network may be used.

(43) FIG. 3 further shows a second gateway **303** that connects a network of web servers **304** and **305** to the Internet **302**. Web servers **304** and **305** may be connected with each other over a computer network. Web servers **304** and **305** receive requests from the user computer and respond to the requests received from the user computer. Web server **304** is coupled to a database **306** and web server **305** is coupled to a database **307**. In one embodiment, the web server may be hosting an application for use by the user computer. As an example, web server **304** is hosting server application SA0 and web server **305** is hosting server application SA1. As one skilled in the art appreciates, server applications may be a hosted customer relationship management software (CRM) application, a website, online shop, news service, search applications, social networking applications, blog sites, webmail and the like.

(44) In one embodiment, the gateway **303**, servers **304** and **305**, and databases **306** and **307** may be hosted at a third party location. For convenience, gateway **303**, servers **304** and **305**, and databases **306** and **307** are grouped together and referred to as hosted cloud **310**. Exemplary topology of a

computer network may have additional groups of servers with gateways and databases to define additional hosted clouds.

(45) The following provides a brief description of the Internet. The Internet connects thousands of computers world wide through well-known protocols, for example, Transmission Control Protocol (TCP)/Internet Protocol (IP), into a vast network. Information on the Internet is stored world wide as computer files, mostly written in the Hypertext Mark Up Language (“HTML”). Other mark up languages, e.g., Extensible Markup Language (“XML”) as published by W3C Consortium, Version 1, Second Edition, October 2000, @W3C may also be used. The collection of all such publicly available computer files is known as the World Wide Web (WWW). The WWW is a multimedia-enabled hypertext system used for navigating the Internet and is made up of hundreds of thousands of web pages with images and text and video files, which can be displayed on a computer monitor. Each web page can have connections to other pages, which may be located on any computer connected to the Internet.

(46) A typical Internet user uses a client program called a “Web Browser” to connect to the Internet. A web browser is a software program that allows users to access the content stored in Web sites. Modern Web browsers can also create content “on the fly”, according to instructions received from a Web site. This concept is commonly referred to as “dynamic page generation”. In addition, browsers can commonly send information back to the Web site, thus enabling two-way communication of the user and the Web site. A user can connect to the Internet via a proprietary network, such as America Online, or via an Internet Service Provider, e.g., Earthlink. The web browser may run on any computer connected to the Internet. Currently, various browsers are available of which two prominent browsers are Microsoft Internet Explorer and Mozilla Firefox. The Web Browser receives and sends requests to a web server and acquires information from the WWW. A web server is a program that, upon receipt of a request, sends the requested data to the requesting user. A standard naming convention known as Uniform Resource Locator (“URL”) has been adopted to represent hypermedia links and links to network services. Most files or services can be represented with a URL.

(47) URLs enable Web Browsers to go directly to any file held on any WWW server. Information from the WWW is accessed using well-known protocols, including the Hypertext Transport Protocol (“HTTP”), the Wide Area Information Service (“WAIS”) and the File Transport Protocol (“FTP”), over TCP/IP protocol. The transfer format for standard WWW pages is Hypertext Transfer Protocol (HTTP).

(48) Web domain is an Internet address that provides connection to a Web server. Generally, URLs have three parts: the first part describes the protocol used to access the content pointed to by the URL, the second contains the directory in which the content is located, and the third contains the file that stores the content: <protocol>: <domain><directory><file>.

(49) For example:

(50) <http://www.ciphercloud.com/bios.html>

(51) <http://www.ciphercloud.com/index.html>

(52) <http://fn.cnn.com/archives/may2009/pr3.html>

(53) <ftp://user1.ciphercloud.com/software/pages.zip>

(54) Commonly, the <protocol> part may be missing. In that case, modern Web browsers access the URL as if the http://prefix was used. In addition, the <file> part may be missing. In that case, one of the convention calls for the file “index.html” to be fetched. In some cases, the request may be redirected to fetch another default file.

(55) For example, the following are legal variations of the previous example URLs:

(56) www.ciphercloud.com/bios.html

(57) www.ciphercloud.com

(58) fn.cnn.com/archives/may2009/pr3.html

(59) [ftp://user1.ciphercloud.com/software/pages.zip](http://user1.ciphercloud.com/software/pages.zip) Web Page.

(60) Web page is the content associated with a URL. In its simplest form, this content is static text, which is stored into a text file indicated by the URL. However, very often, the content contains multi-media elements (e.g. images, audio, video, etc) as well as non-static text or other elements (e.g. news tickers, frames, scripts, streaming graphics, etc). Very often, more than one file forms a Web page. However, there is only one file that is associated with the URL and which initiates or guides the Web page generation.

(61) When a Web browser receives an URL, the Web browser requests a Domain Name System (DNS) name server to decode the domain name and return the IP address for the domain name. The DNS name server returns the IP address of the domain name as stored in the DNS name server to the web browser. Web browser uses the IP address for the domain name and sends a request corresponding to the requested URL that conforms to the HTTP protocol to the IP address. In one embodiment, the request is sent using TCP/IP protocol over the internet.

(62) In one embodiment, the user computer **116** sends requests to the server using HTTP protocol. As previously described with reference to FIG. 2A, the request is processed by the web server and a response is sent to the user computer. In the exemplary topology described with reference to FIG. 3, the request is sent over the internet to the server. In some embodiment, requests may be sent using Hypertext Transfer Protocol Secure (HTTPS) protocol, which is a combination of HTTP protocol with SSL/TLS protocol to provide encrypted communication and secure identification of a network web server.

(63) Now, one embodiment of an anonymization system **402** is described with reference to FIG. 4. Anonymization system **402** may be similar to anonymization system **112**. FIG. 4 shows the anonymization system **402** as part of gateway **400** that connects to the network, but the anonymization system **402** can be provided in other ways, such as software running on a server, distributed software, or various software and hardware packages operating together. In one embodiment, the anonymization system **402** may be part of the gateway described with reference to FIG. 1A and FIG. 3. The gateway **400** is configured to communicate with the user systems within the user cloud and communicate with the hosted cloud over the network. The anonymization system **402** will be described in detail, with reference to FIG. 4A.

(64) Now referring to FIG. 4A, the anonymization system **402** includes a management console module **404**, an anonymization strategy module **406**, anonymization module **408**, de-anonymization module **410**, tokenization module **412** and one or more crypto modules, shown as crypto 1 module **416**, crypto 2 module **418** and crypto N module **420**. Additionally, a token vault **414** is also part of the anonymization system **402**. As one skilled in the art appreciates, various modules referenced in this disclosure may be implemented in hardware, software executed on a computing device or a combination of hardware and software. Additionally, various modules may be implemented as an integrated unit or may be implemented as separate functional units that interact with each other using a communication protocol.

(65) The management console module **404** is configured to communicate with various applications running on the hosted cloud, over the network. Additionally, the management console module **404** is also configured to communicate with the user computer. For example, the management console module **404** may send queries to various applications running on the hosted cloud and receive meta data (or data schema, data definitions) of each application.

(66) The management console module **404** may also present the received meta data information about the applications running on the hosted cloud to the user. The management console module **404** may additionally present the available anonymization strategies for each data field of the meta data to the user computer. The user may select one or more of the anonymization strategies to be applied to various data fields of the application, using the user computer.

(67) The selected anonymization strategy is stored by the management console module **404** in the anonymization strategy module **406**, for later use by other modules of the anonymization system **402**. The anonymization strategy may be stored as a table in the anonymization strategy module

406. The anonymization strategy in one embodiment may include schema definition for data manipulation. An exemplary selected anonymization strategy will be described later with reference to FIG. 5.

(68) The anonymization module **408** is configured to intercept any data to be transmitted from a user computer to the hosted cloud. The anonymization module **408** is also configured to communicate with the anonymization strategy module **406** and evaluate various fields of data to be transmitted against anonymization strategy stored in the anonymization strategy module **406**. Based upon this evaluation, the anonymization module **408** is configured to perform anonymization of one or more data fields using one or more of the tokenization module **412** and crypto modules, for example, crypto1 module **416** and crypto 2 module **418** and generate corresponding anonymized data field.

(69) The anonymization module **408** is also configured to reassemble the data to be transmitted to the hosted cloud, using the anonymized data fields. In one embodiment, the reassembled data includes one or more unique data pattern added to the anonymized data fields to indicate the selected anonymization strategy used to anonymize the data fields. In one embodiment, a preamble is appended to the beginning of the anonymized data field. In one embodiment, a postamble is appended to the end of the anonymized data field. The reassembled data is forwarded to the hosted cloud over the network using the gateway **400**. Various functions and features of the tokenization module **412** and crypto modules will be described later.

(70) The de-anonymization module **410** is configured to intercept any data received by the user computer from the hosted cloud. The de-anonymization module **408** is also configured to evaluate various fields of data received from the hosted cloud to detect and decode the preamble and postamble of the data fields. Based upon this evaluation, the de-anonymization module **410** is configured to perform de-anonymization of one or more data fields using one or more of the tokenization module **412** and crypto modules, for example, crypto1 module **416** and crypto 2 module **418** and generate corresponding de-anonymized data field. The de-anonymization module **410** is also configured to reassemble the data to be transmitted to the user computer, using the de-anonymized data fields. The reassembled data is forwarded to the user computer.

(71) Now, referring to FIG. 5, an exemplary anonymization strategy data table **500** for server application SA0 stored by the anonymization strategy module **406** is described. As one skilled in the art appreciates, the anonymization strategy data may be stored in other forms other than a table form. Column **502** shows various data fields of server application SA0. Each of the rows of table **500** shows the data field and their corresponding characteristics. As an example, Column **504** shows data type for each of the data fields, for example numeric, alphabetical or alpha-numeric characters. Column **506** shows the length of the data field. Column **508** shows whether any portion of the data field needs to be retained as originally provided by the user computer. Column **510** shows the selected anonymization strategy for each of the data fields.

(72) Now referring to row **512**, various attributes of DATA FIELD 1 is stored in table **500**. For example, DATA FIELD 1 is a numeric field of length 10 characters. Characters 8 through 10 of DATA FIELD 1 needs to be retained in its original form. The selected anonymization strategy for DATA FIELD 1 is TPF1. For example, DATA FIELD 1 may be a telephone number and characters 10:08 may represent the area code of the telephone number and may have to be maintained in its original form at the hosted cloud. However, characters 07:01 will be anonymized using anonymization strategy TPF1. In one embodiment, TPF1 may correspond to anonymization using tokenization module **412**. In one embodiment, TPF1 may correspond to anonymization using Crypto 1 module **416**. In one embodiment, a preamble indicative of TPF1 anonymization strategy may be appended to the anonymized DATA FIELD 1.

(73) Now referring to row **514**, various attributes of DATA FIELD 4 is stored in table **500**. For example, DATA FIELD 4 is an alphabetic field of length 8 characters. No characters need to be retained in its original form. The selected anonymization strategy for DATA FIELD 4 is TRF4. In

one embodiment, TRF4 may correspond to anonymization using crypto 2 module **418**. In one embodiment, TRF4 may correspond to anonymization using crypto N module **420**. In one embodiment, a preamble indicative of TRF4 anonymization strategy may be appended to the anonymized DATA FIELD 4.

(74) Now referring to row **516**, various attributes of DATA FIELD 8 is stored in table **500**. For example, DATA FIELD 8 is an alpha-numeric field of length 24 characters. No characters need to be retained in its original form. The selected anonymization strategy for DATA FIELD 8 is none. Based on this selection, no anonymization of DATA FIELD 8 will be performed and the data contained in DATA FIELD 8 will be sent in its original form.

(75) Now various anonymization techniques implemented in various anonymization modules like tokenization module **412** and crypto modules like crypto 1 module, crypto 2 module and the like will be described. The anonymization technique selected for a data field may be based upon multiple factors. One of the factors is level of desired security. One of the other factors is data attribute preservation for the data field. The data attribute preservation refers to retaining capabilities to perform operations on the stored data field in their anonymized form as compared to the stored data in its original or clear form. Some of the operations that may be performed on the stored data field in their anonymized form include sorting in the order of their clear data form (or original data form), searching, searching regardless of the case of the characters, searching using partial string match or wild card match. As one skilled in the art appreciates, as more data attributes are preserved in the stored data form, in some embodiments, it may lead to decreased level of data security. Clear data or original data refers to the data as present in the data field before anonymization.

(76) Anonymization techniques may be broadly divided into two categories. One, a token based anonymization. The token based anonymization may be implemented in the tokenization module **412** and may require local storage of the tokens in the token vault **414**. Another technique is to use a symmetric key encryption based anonymization. Symmetric key encryption based anonymization technique may be implemented in one or more of the crypto modules, for example, crypto module **1**, crypto module **2** and the like. Now, various anonymization techniques for each of the token based anonymization and symmetric key encryption based techniques will be described.

(77) Token based anonymization techniques:

(78) Random token anonymization: In this technique, for data contained in each data field, a corresponding token is created. The token vault **414** is used to store the relationship between the original or clear data and the corresponding token. The token is sent to the hosted cloud, after prepending a preamble indicative of the type of anonymization performed on the data field. When the data field is retrieved from the hosted cloud, based on the preamble indicative of the type of anonymization performed, the token is used to extract the corresponding clear data stored in the token vault **414**. The de-anonymized data is then forwarded to the user computer.

(79) Sortable token anonymization: In this technique, the token vault is organized in a balanced, ordered tree, with each node representing a specific token that corresponds to a specific clear data. For an input data, the tokenization module **412** looks up the tree in the token vault **414** for a node that has not been used for clear data corresponding to the input data and establish a new token that corresponds to the input data. The new token is mapped to the input data. The new token in the selected node maintains the order of the tree. In this way, the token continues to maintain the order that corresponds to the original or clear data. The order may correspond to the position, sequence, or value of the original data. For example, the order may be based on alphabetical sequence, numerical sequence, value of the characters based on an assigned value or value of the characters based on a pre-assigned value, for example, Unicode value. The new token is then sent to the hosted cloud.

(80) Token anonymization that allows case-insensitive search: In one embodiment, for each data, two tokens are generated. One, based on the original or clear form of the data and the other based

on all lower cases. In one embodiment, random token anonymization technique is used, as described above. Both of the generated tokens are sent to the hosted cloud, with the token corresponding to all lower case is stored in a hidden field in the application.

(81) When a search request is received for this field from the user computer, for example, as a keyword in clear form, search request is generated by the anonymization system **402**, for both the clear form and all lower case. For example, anonymized keywords are generated, one based on the keyword in its original form and another based on keyword with all lower cases. The search request is then sent to the host cloud, with anonymized keyword for both clear form and all lower case. In one embodiment, the search request is sent with an “OR” logic so as to receive search results for both the keywords. Any results of the search received from the host cloud for both the anonymized keyword for clear form and anonymized keyword for all lower case will then be de-anonymized by the de-anonymization module of the anonymization system. The de-anonymized results are then presented to the user computer. As one skilled in the art appreciates, a keyword received in a search request may be full data field, few characters of a data field or few characters with a wild card. Principles described herein will work for all of these cases, as the search request sent to the host cloud will be based on anonymized keyword.

(82) Symmetric key encryption techniques:

(83) AES encryption per word, with hard coded salt: In this technique, the data field values are broken down into words. Each of the word is encrypted using AES encryption using a hard coded salt. This technique will generate same encrypted data for the same input data, for each encryption cycle. The encrypted data is stored in the hosted cloud. A search word for exact match may be issued by the user computer to the hosted cloud. Corresponding encrypted data for the search word is generated by the anonymization system and sent to the hosted cloud. Any hits for exact match is returned to the anonymization system by the hosted cloud. The hits for exact match are then de-anonymized by the de-anonymization module **410** and presented to the user computer.

(84) AES encryption per word, with hard coded salt that allows case-insensitive search: In one embodiment, for each word, two encrypted data words are generated. One, based on the original or clear form of the data word and the other based on all lower case of the data word. In one embodiment, AES encryption with hardcoded salt anonymization technique is used, as described above. Both of the generated anonymized data are sent to the hosted cloud, with the anonymized data corresponding to all lower case is stored in a hidden field in the application. When a search request is received for this field from the user computer, search request is generated by the anonymization system **402**, for both the anonymized data words and sent to the host cloud. In one embodiment, the search request is sent with an “OR” logic so as to receive search results for both the encrypted words. Any results of the search received from the host cloud by the anonymization system will then be de-anonymized and presented to the user computer.

(85) Searchable encryption: In this technique, encryption algorithm is designed to encrypt words of text. The encrypted values preserve the properties of sorting and equality of the clear values. As an example, the equality can be either case-sensitive or case-insensitive. As another example, sorting may be either case-sensitive or case-insensitive. In one embodiment, accented characters may be treated as equal characters. i.e. a character “E” and “E” may be treated as equal or same. In one embodiment, accented characters may be treated as adjacent characters, with “E” positioned after “E”. Some of these techniques may permit both order preserving property for the anonymized data and case-insensitive search capability. Exemplary searchable encryption to encode words of a text will now be described with reference to FIGS. **6A-6B**.

(86) FIG. **6A** shows an exemplary block diagram of a searchable encryption system **600**. The searchable encryption system **600** may be implemented in the anonymization system **402**. The searchable encryption system **600** includes an input logic **602** to receive input word to be encrypted, an encryption engine **604**, a compare logic **606** and an encode logic **608**. Various elements of the encryption system **600** may be implemented in various functional modules of the

anonymization system **402**, for example, in the anonymization module **408**, crypto modules **416-418**, de-anonymization module **410** and the like. For example, the encryption engine **604** may be part of one of the crypto modules **416-420**.

(87) The input logic **602** is configured to receive the input word to be fed to the encryption engine **604**. In one embodiment, the encryption engine **604** receives each of the characters of the input word and generate a random character as an output. The encryption engine **604** may include a Pseudo-Random Number Generation Algorithm (PRNG) to generate a random character as an output. The PRNG is preferably secure and is fast. One exemplary PRNG may be a RC4 cipher. In one embodiment, the generated random character will be within a predefined range of characters, which narrows in subsequent iterations, as will be described later.

(88) The output of the encryption engine **604** is fed to the compare logic **606**. The compare logic **606** is also configured to receive the corresponding input character as an input. The compare logic **606** is configured to compare generated output character of the encryption engine **604** with the corresponding input character in a first range of characters and generate a binary bit, based on whether the input character is higher in position or lower in position relative to the generated output character. As an example, a bit **0** is generated if the position is lower and a bit **1** is generated, if the position is higher relative to the generated output character. The generated output character is now fed as input to the encryption engine **604** to generate a second generated output character, within a second range of characters.

(89) The second generated output character is again compared with the input character by the compare logic **606** and generate next bit of output based on the position of the input character relative to the second generated output character, within the second range of characters (which is smaller than the first range). The operation is repeated to generate additional output bits until the range is such that there are only two characters before or after the input character. Now, the next character of the input word is processed to generate second set of output bits. This operation will be further described with reference to FIG. **6B** with table **620**.

(90) Referring to FIG. **6B**, table **620** shows for each iteration in column **622**, the corresponding character range in column **624** and the output of the compare logic for each iteration in column **626**. For simplicity, only words with uppercase characters will be described. For example, if the word to be encoded is “GOLD”, initial encoding starts with encoding the first character “G”. The character G is fed to the encryption logic **604** as a first input character and the encryption logic **604** is configured to generate a random character as an output, for example, a random character between A-Z, which defines the first range of characters. Let us assume, the first generated random character output is Q.

(91) Now, the first input character “G” is compared with the first generated random character output “Q” by the compare logic **606** to see if it is higher in position or lower in position relative to the first generated random character output, within the range shown in cell **628** which corresponds to the first iteration **630**. In this case, as character G is lower in position to the first generated random character output Q, a binary value of “0” is output as the first bit of the encoded data, as shown in cell **632**. Additionally, the first generated random character output Q defines the upper bound (as character Q is higher in position relative to character G) for the range of characters to be used in the next iteration, for example, second range of characters A-Q.

(92) Next, the first generated random character output (in this case character “Q”) is input to the encryption logic **604** and the encryption logic outputs a second generated random character output, within the second range of characters, as shown in cell **634**. As one skilled in the art appreciates, the second range of characters is A-Q and the range of characters the encryption logic can output will be configured to be between A-Q. Let us assume, the second generated random character is character “C”.

(93) Now, the first input character is again compared with the second generated random character output to see if it is higher in position or lower in position relative to the second generated random

character output. In this case, as character G is higher in position to the second generated random character output C, a binary value of “1” is output as the second bit of the encoded data, as shown in cell **636**. Additionally, the second generated random character output C defines the lower bound (as character C is lower in position relative to character G) for the range of characters to be used in the next iteration, for example, third range of characters C-Q.

(94) Now, the second generated random character output C is input to the encryption engine **604** and the encryption engine **604** outputs a third generated random character output. In this case, the third range of characters the encryption engine **604** can output is be configured to be within the third range of characters C-Q. Let us assume, the third generated random character is character “E”, with a “1” assigned to the third bit of the encoded data, based on the comparison. Additionally, the third generated random character output E defines the lower bound (as character E is lower in position relative to character G) for the range of characters to be used in the next iteration, for example, fourth range of characters E-Q.

(95) Similarly, referring to iteration 4, fourth generated random character is character “J” with an output of “0” as the forth bit of the encoded data, based on the comparison. Additionally, the fourth generated random character output J defines the upper bound (as character J is higher in position relative to character G) for the range of characters to be used in the next iteration, for example, fifth range of characters E-J.

(96) Similarly, referring to iteration 5, the fifth generated random character is character “H”, with a “0” assigned to the fifth bit of the encoded data, based on the comparison. This process is repeated until there are two or less characters left before and after the first input character, at which time, the encoding stops. So, in this case, as there are only two characters E and F before and one character J after the first input character G, the encoding stops. So, the final encoded output for character “G” is “00110”.

(97) The rest of the characters “O”, “L” and “D” are similarly processed to get their corresponding encoded output. As an example, let the final encoded output for “GOLD” is 010010001010010100000110. As one skilled in the art appreciates, depending upon the random character generated by the encryption engine **604**, each character may have different number of bits as their encoded output. Now the final encoded output is transformed into a character representation, using an encode logic **608**, which will be described now.

(98) In one embodiment, the character representation of the final encoded output is done by splitting the final encoded output into a plurality of bits of data and assigning a unique character to each unique combination of a plurality of bits. As an example, four bits may be used to represent 16 different unique combinations, with each combination assigned a specific character. For example, a base-16 encoding may be used and sixteen characters, characters B-Q assigned to the base-16 encoded data. As an example, 0000 may be encoded as character B and 1111 may be encoded as character Q. With base-16 encoding, other characters may be available for assignment for special purposes or for padding. Other random assignments of characters to the base-16 encoded data are also possible. In some embodiments, dummy characters may be padded in the beginning and the end of the range, so that a lowest character in the character range will not encode as all zeros and highest character in the character range will not encode as all ones.

(99) In one embodiment, in order to provide case insensitive search capability, the encoded output is mapped into lower-case characters, for example, characters b-q. Then, specific characters of the mapped word is capitalized, based on the capitalization of the original input word. For example, if the input word was Mom, and the final output is mapped into character combination “def”, then, based on the capitalization of the original input word, the mapped character combination is modified to be “Def”. A case sensitive and a case insensitive search on “mom” would return the appropriate results.

(100) In some situations, the final encoded output may result in a mapped word that may have less characters than the original input word. As an example, for a three character input word, the

encoded output may only generate two mapped characters. In such a situation, at least one character that is not used in the output mapping (as only 16 characters are used in a base-16 encoding) may be used as a padding character. Preferably, the padding character should sort before all other used characters. As an example, if the characters B-Q are used for mapping, character A may be used as a padding character to be added to the mapped characters. Character A would sort before the characters B-Q.

(101) As an example, if the input of Mom mapped into “De”, then with the added padding, the modified mapped characters will be Dea, which will have the same number of characters as the original input character. If the original input was “moM” and the input mapped into “De”, then the modified mapped characters will be “deA”, which preserves both the number of characters of the original input and the case of the characters of the original input.

(102) In the above examples, only characters A-Z were considered. In order to expand the search and sortable encryption capabilities to characters outside the A-Z range, one or more escape characters may be pre-pended and/or post-pended to the input word. The escape character may indicate the characteristics of the word being encrypted. As an example, unique escape characters may be pre-pended to the input word to indicate if the input word is a character less than the number “0”, numbers between 0-9, numbers greater than 9 but less than A, letters A-Z, single byte character greater than “Z”, Unicode character in the range U+0080 to U+00FF, Unicode character in the range U+0100 to U+FFFF, Unicode character in the range U+10000 to U+10FFFF and the like. Additionally, a unique escape character may be post-pended to the input word to indicate “end of word”.

(103) As one skilled in the art appreciates, in one embodiment, the searchable encryption system **600** may additionally have a decode logic **612** to receive the encoded word **614** and output the decoded word character string. The decode logic **612** would receive the encoded characters of the encoded word as an input, perform the manipulation necessary to decode the encoded characters one character at a time and reassemble the encoded word as a decoded word. An exemplary decoding operation will be further described with reference to FIG. 6C with table **650**.

(104) Referring to FIG. 6C, table **650** shows for each iteration in column **652**, the input bit **654** from the encoded word, corresponding character range in column **656**. For simplicity, only decoding of character “G” of the encoded word will be described. For example, the character “G” was encoded as “00110”. Iteration 0 refers to the initial set up of the range of characters, for example, first range of characters **658**, which will be from A-Z. In iteration 1, the input bit is “0” and the input bit “0” is fed to the decode logic **612**. The decode logic **612** generates first random range character Q as an output, based on the input bit of “0”. Since input bit was a “0”, character Q defines the upper bound for the next range of characters to be used in the decoding process. Now, the second range of characters **660** is defined to be from A-Q, based on the generated first random range character “Q”.

(105) Next, in iteration 2, next input bit of “1” is input to the decode logic **612**. The decode logic **612** generates second random range character C as an output, based on the input bit of “1”. As the input bit was a “1”, character C+1 defines the lower bound for the next range of characters to be used in the decoding process. Now, the third range of characters **662** is defined to be from D-Q, based on the generated second random range character “C”.

(106) Next, in iteration 3, next input bit of “1” is input to the decode logic **612**. The decode logic **612** generates third random range character E as an output, based on the input bit of “1”. As the input bit was a “1”, character E+1 defines the lower bound for the next range of characters to be used in the decoding process. Now, the fourth range of characters **664** is defined to be from F-Q, based on the generated third random range character “E”.

(107) Next, in iteration 4, next input bit of “0” is input to the decode logic **612**. The decode logic **612** generates fourth random range character J as an output, based on the input bit of “0”. As the input bit was a “0”, character “J” defines the upper bound for the next range of characters to be

used in the decoding process. Now, the fifth range of characters **666** is defined to be from F-J, based on the generated fourth random range character “J”.

(108) Next, in iteration 5, next input bit of “0” is input to the decode logic **612**. The decode logic **612** generates fifth random range character H as an output, based on the input bit of “0”. As the input bit was a “0”, character “H” defines the upper bound for the next range of characters to be used in the decoding process. Now, the sixth range of characters **668** is defined to be from F-H, based on the generated fifth random range character “H”.

(109) Now, the fifth range of characters **668** is narrowed down to three characters, F, G and H. The middle character “G” is chosen as the decoded character for the encoded input word. Similarly, rest of the encoded input words are decoded to generate the original word “GOLD”.

(110) Randomizing anonymization:

(111) As previously discussed, in order to generate the same encrypted data, there is a need to use a fixed hard coded salt. In some embodiments, an initialization vector (IV) is used as part of the encryption scheme. As one skilled in the art appreciates, in some embodiments, the fixed hard coded salt may be similar to an initialization vector.

(112) Now, referring to FIG. 7A, an exemplary crypto module **702** is described. Crypto module **702** may be similar to crypto module **420** of anonymization system **402**. The crypto module **702** includes a crypto engine **704** that receives the initialization vector **706** from an initialization vector generator **708**. The crypto engine **704** also receives a data encryption key **710** from a data encryption key store **712**. The crypto engine is also configured to receive the input data **714**. The input data **714** is processed by the crypto engine **704**, using the data encryption key **710** and the initialization vector **706** to generate the encrypted output data **716**.

(113) The initialization vector generator **708** may include a PRNG function module **720**. As previously described, a seed **722** is fed to the PRNG function module. Seed **722** may be generated by a seed generator **724**. Based on the value of the seed **722**, the PRNG function module **720** generates the initialization vector **706**. The Initialization vector generator **708**, data encryption key store **712** and seed generator **724** may be part of the anonymization system **402**.

(114) Now, as an example, let the input data **714** be “xyz” and the encrypted output data **716** be “abc”. For example, the encrypted output data **716** is stored, say in a database. If there is a request to perform a search using the search term “xyz” and retrieve the encrypted output data, the search request sent to the database needs to be modified to include the encrypted output data “abc” as the search term. In order to convert the search term “xyz” to “abc”, the search term “xyz” is fed to the crypto engine **704**. we also need to use the same initialization vector **706** value and same data encryption key as originally used. This means, we need to use the same seed value for the seed **722** in order to generate the same initialization vector **706** value. As one skilled in the art appreciates, if the same initialization vector **706** value is used on a regular basis, there is a risk of compromising the encryption system. In order to minimize the risk of compromising the encryption system, a plurality of initialization vectors are used in the encryption system, as described below.

(115) In some embodiments, a plurality of known seed values are used to generate a plurality of initialization vectors. For example, referring to FIG. 7B, a table **730** shows the relationship between seed value and corresponding initialization vector. For example, column **732** shows the seed value ID, column **734** shows the corresponding seed value and column **736** shows the corresponding generated initialization vector. As an example, referring to row **740**, for the seed value ID of SVID-1, the corresponding seed value is SV-1 and the corresponding generated initialization vector is IV-1. Similarly, referring to row **742**, for the seed value ID of SVID-2, the corresponding seed value is SV-2 and the corresponding generated initialization vector is IV-2.

(116) During the anonymization process, the system may selectively use different seed values to generate different initialization vector values. During the deanonymization process, to deanonymize the anonymized data, there is a need to know the initialization vector that was used to anonymize the input data.

(117) In one embodiment, the seed value ID used to generate the initialization vector is stored along with the anonymized data. For example, referring to FIG. 7C, the seed value ID is stored in field **750** and anonymized data is stored in field **752**. Seed value ID along with the anonymized data is sent to the destination computing device. As one skilled in the art appreciates, one or more additional fields may also be added to the data sent to the destination computing device. For example, preamble fields and post amble fields may be added.

(118) When the anonymized data is retrieved along with the seed value ID, the seed value ID is used to determine or fetch the corresponding seed value. This seed value is then used to generate the initialization vector, which will have the same value as the initialization vector that was used to encrypt the input data. This generated initialization vector is then used to deanonymize the anonymized data.

(119) When there is a need to send a query to be performed on the stored anonymized data, for example, a search or a sort query, there is a need to modify the query such that any field representing a portion of the original data (or clear text) is modified to include a corresponding encrypted data. As an example, if there is a request to perform a search using the search term “xyz” and retrieve the encrypted output data, the search request sent to the database needs to be modified to include the encrypted output data as the search term. If different seed values are used to generate different initialization vector values, then, based on the value of the initialization vector, the encrypted output data will be different.

(120) For example, for seed value corresponding to SVID-1, for an input data of “xyz”, an encrypted output data of “abc” may be generated. And, for a seed value corresponding to SVID-2, for the same input data of “xyz”, an encrypted output data of “efg” may be generated. So, in a system where multiple seed values are used, as an example, for a search query containing input data “xyz”, all possible combination of corresponding encryption data is generated, using different seed values stored in the system.

(121) For example, if the system had only two seed values, then, using the example above, for a search query for input data “xyz”, two possible encrypted data will be generated, namely, “abc”, “efg”. Then, a modified search query is generated with all the possible encrypted data patterns for input data “xyz”. The modified search query is then sent to the database storing the encrypted data, to retrieve the encrypted data corresponding to the plurality of search terms.

(122) The retrieved encrypted data is then decrypted to derive corresponding clear data. Then, the clear data that corresponds to the original query is then sent to the user. As one skilled in the art appreciates, when the clear data is derived from the encrypted data, one or more of the clear data may not correspond to the data requested in the original query, as only one of the plurality of the seed values generated the encrypted data that corresponds to the input data in the query. Those records that do not correspond to the data requested in the original query are just discarded.

(123) As one skilled in the art appreciates, as the number of seed values used to generate the initialization vector is increased, the encryption system is less prone to be compromised. In one embodiment, a plurality of sets of seed values may be provided, with each set of seed values having a different number of seed values. In one embodiment, depending upon the characteristics of the input word, one of the plurality of sets of seed values are selected. For example, if the input word is a frequently occurring word, then a set of seed values having more number of seed values may be selected. In doing so, the initialization vector used to generate the encrypted data will less likely to repeat, thereby minimizing potential compromise of the system.

(124) As an example, let us consider a first set of seed values having eight seed values and a second set of seed values having more number of seed values, for example, sixteen seed values. If the input word is a frequently occurring word like “the”, if a seed value from the first set of seed values is used, there will be eight different possible encrypted data patterns for the input word “the”. However, if a seed value from the second set of seed values is used, there will be sixteen different possible encrypted data pattern for input word “the”. As one skilled in the art appreciates, use of the

second set of seed values for a frequently occurring input word will improve the robustness of the encryption system for possible compromise as compared to the use of the first set of seed values.

(125) In one embodiment, the encryption system may maintain a list containing frequently occurring input words. The received input word is compared against this list and if the input word is listed, then a set of seed values having more seed values may be selected. In some embodiments, a threshold value may be set for frequency of occurrence. If the input word has a frequency of occurrence greater than the threshold value, then, a set of seed values having more seed values may be selected. In some embodiments, the data going through the anonymization system may be used to determine a frequency of occurrence for various words. Then, based on a threshold value, appropriate set of seed values may be selected. As one skilled in the art appreciates, the selection of a set of seed values from a plurality of set of seed values may be made based on other criteria including using different tiers of frequency of occurrence of the input word etc.

(126) In some embodiments, it may be desirable to use a large number of initialization vectors, for example, by using a large number of seed values. As previously indicated, to perform functions like search, there is a need to generate corresponding encrypted search key words using all of the initialization vectors. In some embodiments, using large number of initialization vectors may be preferred, for example, to provide increased protection against compromising the encryption system. However, as the number of initialization vector increases, corresponding number of encrypted search key words have to be generated to retrieve corresponding encrypted data. In some embodiments, this may be less preferred, for example, due to increased network traffic.

(127) Now referring to FIG. 7D, exemplary data fields that may be used in yet another embodiment is described. The data fields may include field **750** to store seed value ID used to generate the corresponding anonymized data stored in field **752**. In some embodiments, field **754** may be used to store order indicator data that is indicative of the order of the clear data that corresponds to the anonymized data. As an example, each of the clear data “axx”, “bxx” and “cxx” would have a corresponding order indicator data whose value will be such that they preserve (or indicate) the order of the clear data “axx”, “bxx” and “cxx”. For example, if a sort command was issued to manipulate the corresponding anonymized data for “axx”, “bxx” and “cxx” in an ascending order, the value of the corresponding order indicator data will be such that the value of the order indicator data for “axx” will be lower than the value of the order indicator data for “bxx”, which will be lower than the value of the order indicator data for “cxx”. Order indicator data may be sometimes interchangeably referred to as an order ID.

(128) FIG. 7E shows an exemplary table **760**, with column **762** showing clear data, column **764** showing corresponding order indicator data for the clear data, column **766** showing the seed value ID and column **768** showing anonymized data that corresponds to the clear data, generated based on the seed value ID. For example, referring to row **769**, for clear data “bxx”, the corresponding order ID is a binary value of “10”, the seed value ID is SVID-2 and corresponding anonymized data is “enl”. As one skilled in the art appreciates, in this example, the order ID value for clear data “axx” is a binary value of “01”, which is less than the order ID value for clear data “bxx” which is a binary value of “10”. Further, the order ID value for clear data “bxx” is less than the order ID value for “cxx”, which is a binary value of “11”.

(129) As one skilled in the art appreciates, referring back to table **760**, the anonymized data that corresponds to the clear data need not have to maintain its order with reference to other anonymized data. For example, the value of clear data “axx” is lower than the value of clear data “bxx”. However, the value of the corresponding anonymized data do not maintain the same order. As an example, for clear data “axx”, the corresponding value of anonymized data “pkq” is higher than the value of the anonymized data “enl” that corresponds to the clear data “bxx”.

(130) The order ID value for the clear data may be generated using one or more order preserving anonymization techniques. Now, referring to FIG. 7F, an exemplary order indicator generator **770** is described. The order indicator generator **770** may be part of the anonymization system **402**. The

order indicator generator **770** may be configured to generate the order ID **774** for the clear data. For example, input data **714** as clear data is received by the order indicator generator **770**. The order indicator generator **770** may have one or more OID logics which may be configured to generate order ID **774** for the clear data using various techniques.

(131) For example, sortable token anonymization as previously discussed may be used to generate a token that is indicative of the order of the clear data. For example, by creating an ordered tree that corresponds to the order of the clear data and assigning a value to each of the nodes. The node value may be designated as a token to indicate the order of the clear data. The generated token is designated as the order ID for the corresponding clear data. As an example, OID logic **772-1** may be configured to generate tokens that are designated as the order ID for the corresponding clear data.

(132) In yet another embodiment, an order preserving hash may be generated by hashing the clear data with an order preserving hash function. The generated hash is designated as the order ID for the corresponding clear data. In some embodiments, the order ID value may be used only for determining the order of the encrypted data. In such embodiments, it may be preferable to use a one-way hash function to generate an order preserving hash that is indicative of the order of the clear data. In this embodiment, as one-way hash function is used, the generated hash which is used as the order indicator data cannot be used to recreate the clear data. As an example, OID logic **772-2** may be configured to generate order preserving hash by hashing the clear data with an order preserving hash function. The generated order preserving hash is designated as the order ID for the corresponding clear data.

(133) In yet another embodiment, one or more of order preserving encryption techniques may be used to generate the order ID for the clear data. As an example, OID logic **772-3** may be configured as a crypto module to generate order preserving encrypted data, based on the clear data and one or more encryption algorithms. The generated encrypted data may be designated as the order ID for the corresponding clear data.

(134) In some embodiments, based on the anonymization technique used, the anonymized data may include more number of characters or bits than the corresponding clear data. This may be sometimes referred to as expansion. When a search request is sent to retrieve corresponding anonymized data, the search key word that corresponds to the anonymized data will also be subject to expansion, thereby resulting in a longer (i.e. more number of bits or characters) search key than the corresponding search key in clear data. In yet another embodiments, as the number of seed values used to generate data encryption key increases, as previously indicated, there is a need to generate corresponding number of anonymized search keys when a search request is sent to retrieve anonymized data that corresponds to the search request. Now, yet another alternate embodiment of anonymization technique will be described, to provide improved search capability of anonymized data.

(135) In one embodiment, a cross reference between the clear data and a portion of the anonymized data is maintained in a data store. FIG. 7G shows an exemplary table **780**, with column **782** showing clear data, column **784** showing corresponding generated anonymized data and column **786** showing portion of the anonymized data. For example, referring to row **788**, clear data “abcdef” when anonymized, converts to an anonymized data of “412132423”. A portion of the anonymized data may be designated as a search ID field. For example, last three characters of the anonymized data may be designated as a search ID field. The data contained in the search ID field may be sometimes referred to as a search ID. Now referring back to row **788**, the search ID field of the anonymized data “412132423” has a search ID of “423”. The search ID of “423” is cross referenced with the corresponding clear data. Now referring to row **790**, clear data “abcdef” when anonymized, converts to an anonymized data of “451431932”, which is different than the anonymized data that is shown in row **788**. As previously articulated, for same clear data, the corresponding anonymized data may be different, based upon the seed value used during the

anonymization. Based on the anonymized data of “451431932”, the corresponding search ID will be “932”. The search ID of “932” is cross referenced with the corresponding clear data.

(136) Now, referring to FIG. 7H, an exemplary table **790** that may be constructed and stored in a data store, based on the data shown in FIG. 7G is described. The data store may be part of the anonymization system **402**. In some embodiments, the data store may be part of the token vault **414**. In this example, each clear data is assumed to consist of two portions, with each portion consisting of three letters. For example clear data in row **788** consists of two portions “abc” and “def”. Further, it is possible that search requests may be generated for each of the portions independently. In some embodiments, each portion may represent a word. In this example, each portion is referred to as a search key. For example, referring to table **790**, column **792** shows various search keys and column **794** shows various corresponding search IDs.

(137) As an example, referring to row **793-1**, for search key “abc”, the corresponding search IDs are “423”, “213” and “952”. Now, referring to row **793-2**, for search key “ghi”, the corresponding search IDs are “213”, **479** and “510”. Similarly, referring to row **793-3**, for search key “kah”, the corresponding search ID is “542”. As one skilled in the art appreciates, there may be a plurality of search ID for same search key.

(138) When a search request is received with a search term in clear data form, corresponding search key is identified from the search term. Then, one or more search IDs that correspond to the identified search key is retrieved. A search request query is formed using the retrieved search IDs as the keys to search the anonymized data. The retrieved search IDs are compared against data contained in the search ID field of the anonymized data. For example, if the last three characters of the anonymized data is designated as the search ID field, the retrieved search IDs are compared with the last three characters of the anonymized data for a match. All anonymized data with a match are retrieved as part of the response to the search request. The retrieved anonymized data is then de-anonymized to generate corresponding clear data.

(139) For example, in some embodiments, seed value IDs corresponding to each of the anonymized data is used to determine their corresponding data encryption key that was used to anonymize the clear data. In some embodiments, the de-anonymized data is then compared with the search key in clear data form and only those de-anonymized data that match with the search key is returned as a response to the received search request. De-anonymized data that do not match with search key in clear data form may be discarded.

(140) In some embodiments, one or more indicia may be used to identify the search ID field of the anonymized data. For example, one or more special characters may be used as an indicia to indicate the beginning of the search ID field. For example, one or more special characters may be inserted in the anonymized data, prior to the beginning of the search ID field. For example, the indicia to indicate the beginning of the search ID field may be referred to as a search ID field marker. In some embodiments, the search ID field marker may be characters or symbols that may be recognized as word breaks. Some possible characters may be a “space”, “semi-colon”, “comma” or a “period” etc.

(141) As one skilled in the art appreciates, during de-anonymization of the anonymized data, the characters that correspond to the search ID field marker are ignored or deleted from the retrieved anonymized data. In some embodiments, search ID field marker may be prepended to the search ID so that any match of the search ID with the corresponding anonymized data will occur with anonymized data contained in the search ID field of the anonymized data. FIG. 7J shows an exemplary anonymized data **752** with a search ID field marker **796** and search ID field **798**. For example, the data contained in the search ID field **798** may correspond to the search ID field data shown in column **786** of table **780** of FIG. 7F.

(142) Now, referring to FIG. 7H, if the table **790** is corrupted or is not accessible for any reason, the table **790** may be recreated by retrieving the anonymized data from the destination computing device and de-anonymizing the anonymized data to generate corresponding clear data. Search key

may be retrieved from the de-anonymized clear data and corresponding search ID may be retrieved from the search ID field of the anonymized data. In some embodiments, capability to recreate table **790** from the anonymized data may be a desirable feature.

(143) As one skilled in the art appreciates, one or more fields of data indicative of the type of anonymization performed and/or containing variables needed to de-anonymize the anonymized data may be transmitted to the destination computing device, along with the anonymized data. One or more of these fields may be used during the de-anonymization of the anonymized data. As an example, the seed value ID is one such variable.

(144) In some embodiments, a check code may be generated using one or more fields of data being transmitted to the destination computing device. The generated check code may also be sent along with anonymized data. The check code may be a checksum or the like. Upon retrieving the anonymized data from the destination computing device, another check code is generated and checked against the received check code to confirm received data is not corrupted or modified and the like.

(145) Now referring to FIGS. **8A-8C** and FIGS. **9A-9C** an exemplary anonymization implementation will be described. Referring to FIG. **8A**, a screen shot **800** presented on a user computer to open a new account for an application running on a hosted cloud is shown. More specifically, the data field **802** refers to the Account Name and the corresponding data for the Account Name is entered in the form field **804**. For example, the Account Name entered is “Test Account 1”.

(146) FIG. **8B** shows the “POST” action data as transmitted to the hosted cloud, without anonymization. More specifically, reference numeral **804-1** shows the post data that corresponds to the Account Name. As one skilled in the art appreciates, it is not difficult to ascertain the Account Name as “Test Account 1”.

(147) FIG. **8C** shows the “POST” data as transmitted to the host cloud, with an embodiment of the anonymization technique described in this disclosure. More specifically, reference numeral **804-2** shows the anonymized data that corresponds to the Account Name. FIG. **8D** shows various parts of the anonymized data.

(148) Referring to FIG. **8D**, the anonymized data **804-2** includes two anonymized data fields **804-21** and **804-22**. The first data field **804-21** corresponds to the word “Test” and the second data field **804-22** corresponds to the word “Account”. Additionally, the preamble **806** for the first data field is TPF1. The postamble **808** for the first data field is 1TSF. Similarly, the preamble **810** for the second data field is TPF1 and the postamble **812** for the second data field is 1TSF1.

(149) Now, referring to FIG. **9A**, a screen shot **900** presented on a user computer to view accounts set up for an application running on a hosted cloud is shown. More specifically, the screen shot **900** shows the list of account names that have been set up, for example, account name **902** referring to Test Account 1 that is received in response to a GET action initiated by the user computer to the application hosted on the hosted cloud.

(150) FIG. **9B** shows the HTML code **904** constructed by the application hosted on the hosted cloud in response to the GET action. More specifically, the anonymized values **906** of the account name is returned in the HTML code **904**. The anonymized value **906** corresponds to the anonymized data **904-2**.

(151) FIG. **9C** shows the HTML code **908** constructed after processing the received HTML code **904** from the hosted cloud and de-anonymize the anonymized data field **906**. More specifically, the HTML code **908** includes the de-anonymized value as shown in data field **910**. The HTML code **908** with de-anonymized value for Account Name data field is sent to the user computer, in response to the GET action initiated by the user computer.

(152) Now, referring to FIG. **10**, a method of anonymization of data to be transmitted to a hosted cloud is described. In block **S1002**, an anonymization strategy for data anonymization is provided. In one embodiment, the anonymization strategy is stored in a anonymization strategy module **406**.

In one embodiment, a management console module **404** may query applications running on the hosted cloud and present and receive meta data (or data schema, data definitions) of each application. The management console module **404** may present the available anonymization strategies for each data field of the meta data to the user computer. The user may select one or more of the anonymization strategies to be applied to various data fields of the application.

(153) The selected anonymization strategy is stored by the management console module **404** in the anonymization strategy module **406**, for later use by other modules of the anonymization system **402**. The anonymization strategy may be stored as a table in the anonymization strategy module **406**. The anonymization strategy in one embodiment may include schema definition for data manipulation. An exemplary selected anonymization strategy is described with reference to FIG. 5.

(154) In block **S1004** data to be transmitted to a destination is received. In one embodiment, the data to be transmitted to a destination is received by the anonymization system from the user computer.

(155) In block **S1006**, selective anonymization of data based on anonymization strategy is performed. For example, an anonymization strategy may be selected based on the data field and corresponding anonymization strategy, as shown and described with reference to FIG. 5. An exemplary anonymization of data may be performed, as described with reference to FIGS. **8A-8D**.

(156) In block **S1008**, the anonymized data is transmitted to the destination. In one embodiment, the anonymized data is transmitted to the application running on the hosted cloud. An exemplary transmission of anonymized data was at least described with reference to FIGS. **8A-8D**.

(157) In block **S1010**, the anonymized data is stored in the destination. For example, the anonymized data may be stored in a database coupled to an application server, as shown in FIG. 3.

(158) Now referring to FIG. **11A**, an exemplary method of processing a request at the destination is described. In block **S1102**, a request for the stored anonymized data is received at the destination. For example, as described with reference to FIGS. **9A-9C**, a GET action request is received at the application running on a hosted cloud.

(159) In block **S1104**, the request is executed at the destination to selectively retrieve stored anonymized data. As an example, the application server running on the hosted cloud processes the GET action and retrieve anonymized data corresponding to the GET action from a user computer.

(160) In block **S1106**, the selectively retrieved stored anonymized data is returned. As an example, the application running on the hosted cloud assembles a response to the GET action and returns the selectively retrieved stored anonymized data, as shown in FIG. **9B**.

(161) Now referring to FIG. **11B**, an exemplary method of processing a response to a request is described. In block **S1108**, a selectively retrieved anonymized data is response to a request is received. As an example, a response from the hosted cloud to a GET action is received by the anonymization system **402**. The response may be a HTTP response as shown in FIG. **9B**.

(162) In block **S1110**, the retrieved stored anonymized data is de-anonymized. For example, the retrieved anonymized data is evaluated by the de-anonymization module **410**. The selective preamble contained in the anonymized data is identified. The de-anonymization module performs the de-anonymization based on the identified preamble and generates the de-anonymized data. An exemplary de-anonymized data is shown in FIG. **9C**.

(163) In block **S1112**, the de-anonymized data is returned in response to the request. For example, an HTTP response as described with reference to FIG. **9C** is returned to the user computer.

(164) As it is apparent to one skilled in the art, data transfers from user applications are selectively anonymized using one or more anonymization techniques, based on selected anonymization strategy. The anonymization of data happens transparently to the user application.

(165) Although in some embodiments, anonymization techniques may have been described with reference to encryption of the input word, these techniques may be adapted and practiced using tokenization as well.

(166) Although in this disclosure reference is made to transmitting anonymized data to a hosted

cloud or a destination system located at a third party location, the disclosure is not limited to the disclosed embodiments. In some embodiments, anonymized data may be stored in a user cloud itself. The server application may be any type of application, including word processing applications, mail applications and the like.

(167) Although the hosted cloud has been described with one or more servers and databases, these clouds may be implemented with additional servers and databases that may act as redundant systems or cumulative systems.

(168) As one skilled in the art appreciates, various embodiments of this disclosure may provide one or more of the following benefits. For example, anonymization of transmitted data may occur transparent to the user application. Anonymized data may be sortable, based on the selected anonymization strategy. Anonymized data may be searchable, based on the selected anonymization strategy. Anonymized data may be subjected to case-insensitive search, based on the selected anonymization strategy.

(169) Portions of a data field may be anonymized, retaining other portion of the data field in its original form. Portions of the data field retained in its original form may be bypassed from the anonymization process and system, which may lead to improved overall performance of the anonymization system.

(170) While embodiments of the present invention are described above with respect to what is currently considered its preferred embodiments, it is to be understood that the invention is not limited to that described above. To the contrary, the invention is intended to cover various modifications and equivalent arrangements within the spirit and scope of the appended claims.

Claims

1. A method for anonymizing data to be transmitted to a destination computing device, comprising: receiving data to be transmitted to the destination computing device from a user computer, the data including a plurality of characters; anonymizing the received data using an anonymization module to derive an anonymized received data; dividing the received data into a plurality of portions; selecting a portion of the anonymized received data as a search ID; storing in a data store, a cross reference between a search key indicative of each of the plurality of portions of the received data and the search ID that corresponds to the associated anonymized received data such that a selective search ID can be retrieved that corresponds to the search key which matches a search request from the user computer for the portion of the received data; transmitting the anonymized received data to the destination computing device over a network and in response to receiving the search request, retrieving anonymized received data that matches with the selective search ID; de-anonymizing the retrieved anonymized received data; comparing the search key with the retrieved de-anonymized data for a match; and returning the de-anonymized data in response to the search request when there is a match.

2. The method of claim 1, further including: providing a search ID field marker to indicate the beginning of the selected portion of the anonymized received data; and transmitting the search ID field marker along with the anonymized received data to the destination computing device.

3. An anonymization system to anonymize data transmitted to a destination computing device, comprising: one or more processor devices; an anonymization strategy module to store anonymization strategy for data anonymization; a logic to receive data to be transmitted to the destination computing device, from a user computer, the data including a plurality of characters; an anonymization module to anonymize the received data based on the anonymization strategy to generate anonymized received data; the received data is divided into a plurality of portions; a portion of the anonymized received data is selected as a search ID; a cross reference between a search key indicative of each of the plurality of portions of the received data and the search ID that corresponds to the associated anonymized received data is stored in a data store such that a

selective search ID can be retrieved that corresponds to the search key which matches a search request for the portion of the received data; transmit the anonymized received data to the destination computing device over a network and in response to the received search request, retrieve the anonymized received data that matches with the selective search ID; de-anonymize retrieved anonymized received data; compare the search key with the retrieved de-anonymized data for a match; and return the de-anonymized data in response to the search request when there is a match.

4. The system of claim 3, further configured to: provide a search ID field marker to indicate the beginning of the selected portion of the anonymized received data; and transmit the search ID field marker along with the anonymized received data to the destination computing device.
