US 20080200241A1

(19) **United States**

(12) **Patent Application Publication**

Davies

(10) **Pub. No.: US 2008/0200241 A1**

(43) **Pub. Date: Aug. 21, 2008**

(54) **GAMING APPARATUS AND METHOD RELATING TO LINKED TERMINALS**

(75) Inventor: **Clive Evan Davies**, Oatlands (AU)

Correspondence Address:
MCANDREWS HELD & MALLOY, LTD
500 WEST MADISON STREET, SUITE 3400
CHICAGO, IL 60661

(73) Assignee: **Aristocrat Technologies Australia Pty Limited**, Lane Cove New South Wales (AU)

(21) Appl. No.: **12/032,271**

(22) Filed: **Feb. 15, 2008**

(30) **Foreign Application Priority Data**

Feb. 16, 2007 (AU) 2007900792

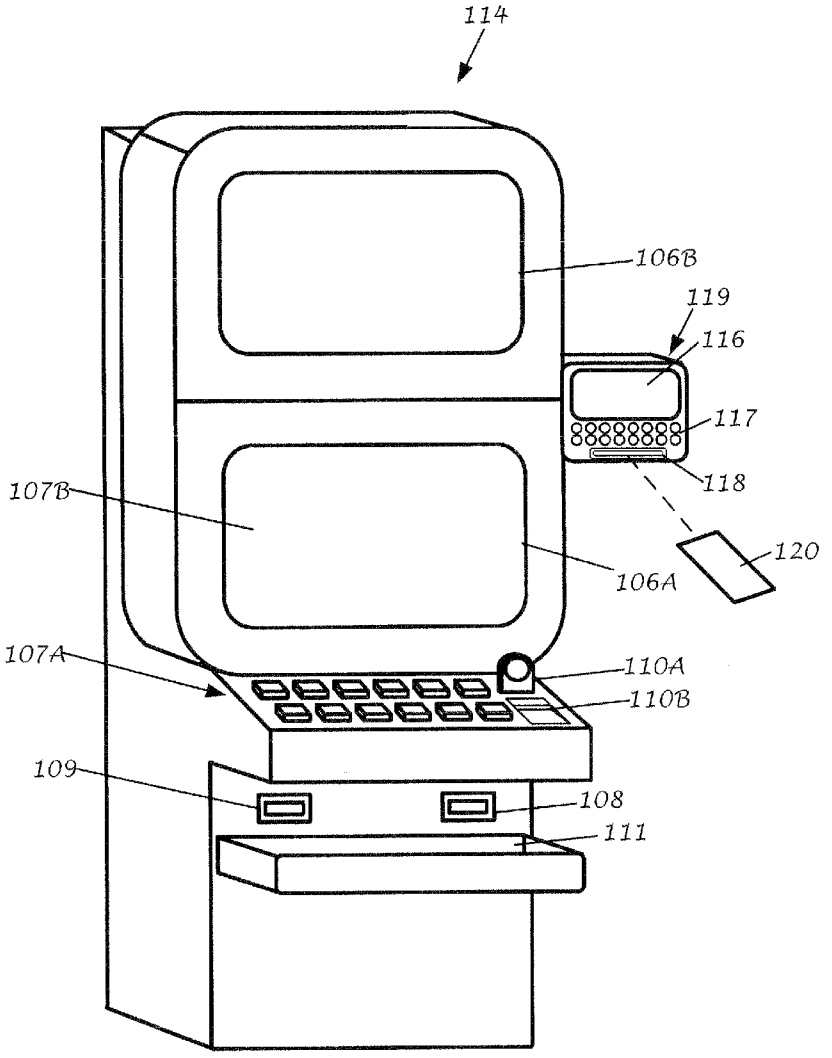
Publication Classification

(51) **Int. Cl.**
A63F 9/24 (2006.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.** **463/25**; 463/40

(57) **ABSTRACT**

Certain embodiments of the present invention relate to awards to players of linked gaming terminals and the distribution of those awards. Certain embodiments of the invention provide a method of making an award including monitoring one or more activity characteristics of a plurality of linked terminals of a gaming system; accumulating promotional credits based on the monitored activity characteristics, the promotional credits useable in a promotional award scheme to purchase one or more benefits; monitoring for the occurrence of an award event within the gaming system; and awarding a number of promotional credits to at least one user associated with the plurality of linked terminals in response to occurrence the award event, the number of promotional credits awarded to the at least one user being dependent on the accumulated promotional credits.



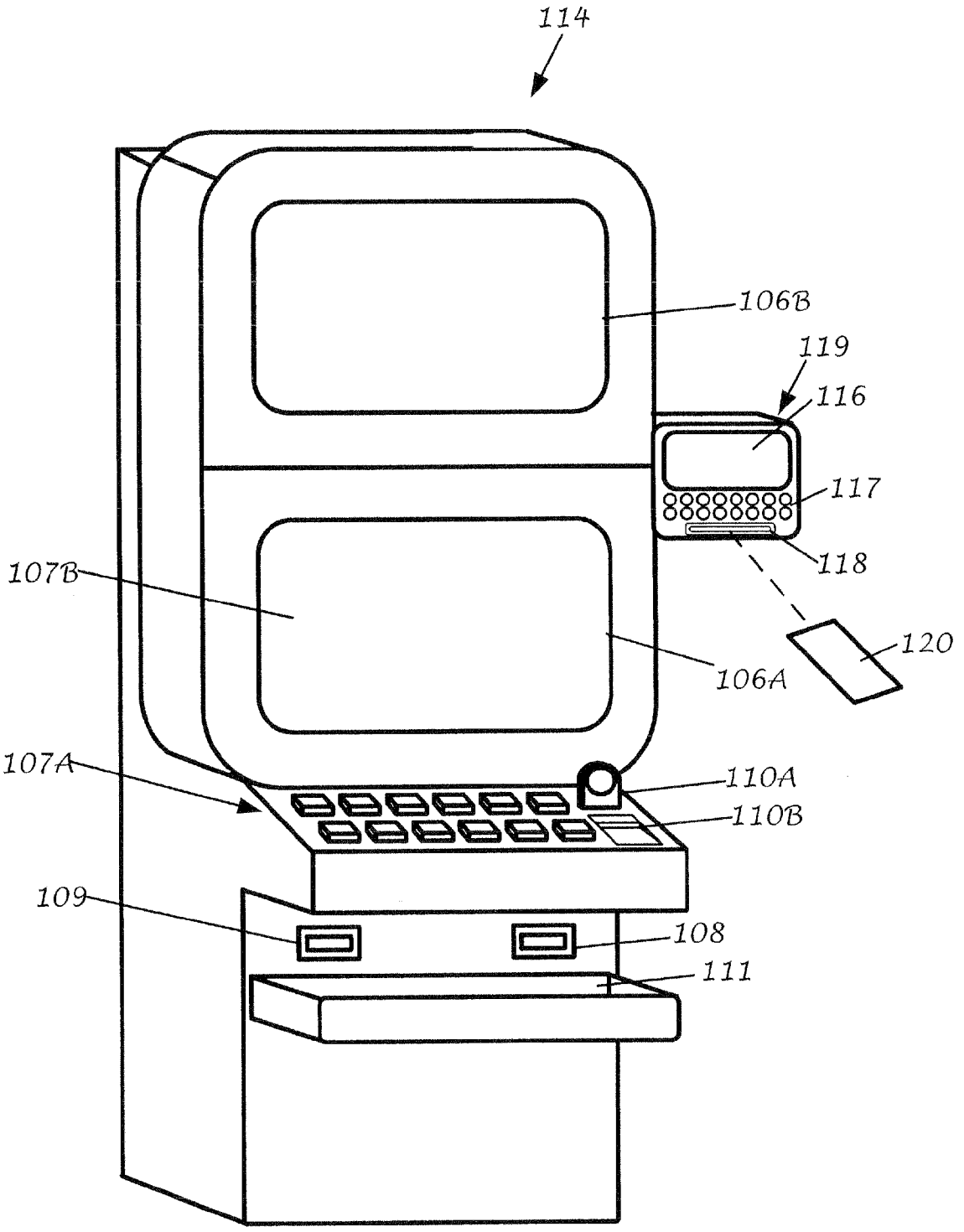

114
106B
119
116
117
118
120
107B
106A
107A
110A
110B
109
108
111

Figure 1

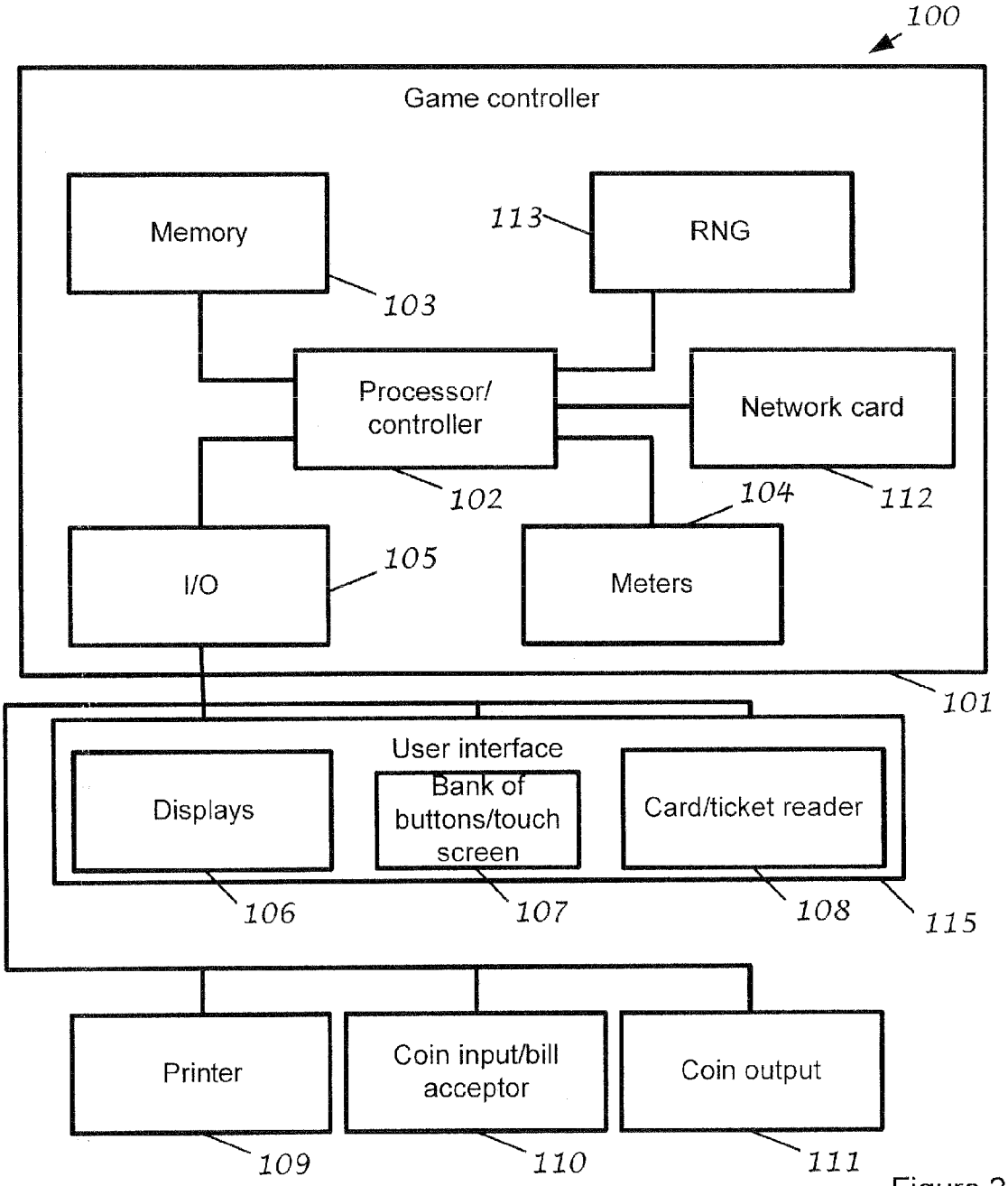


Figure 2

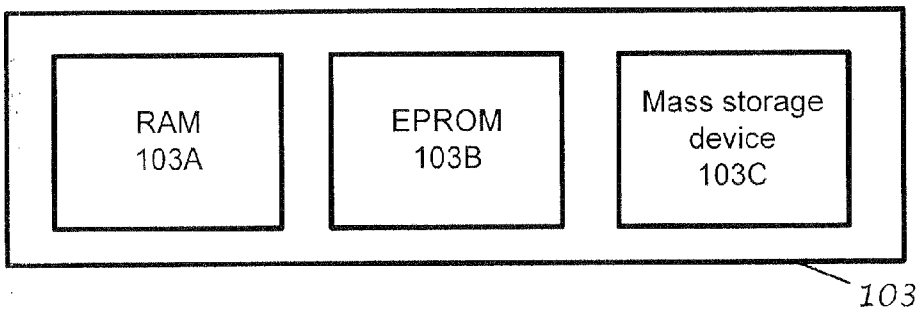


Figure 3

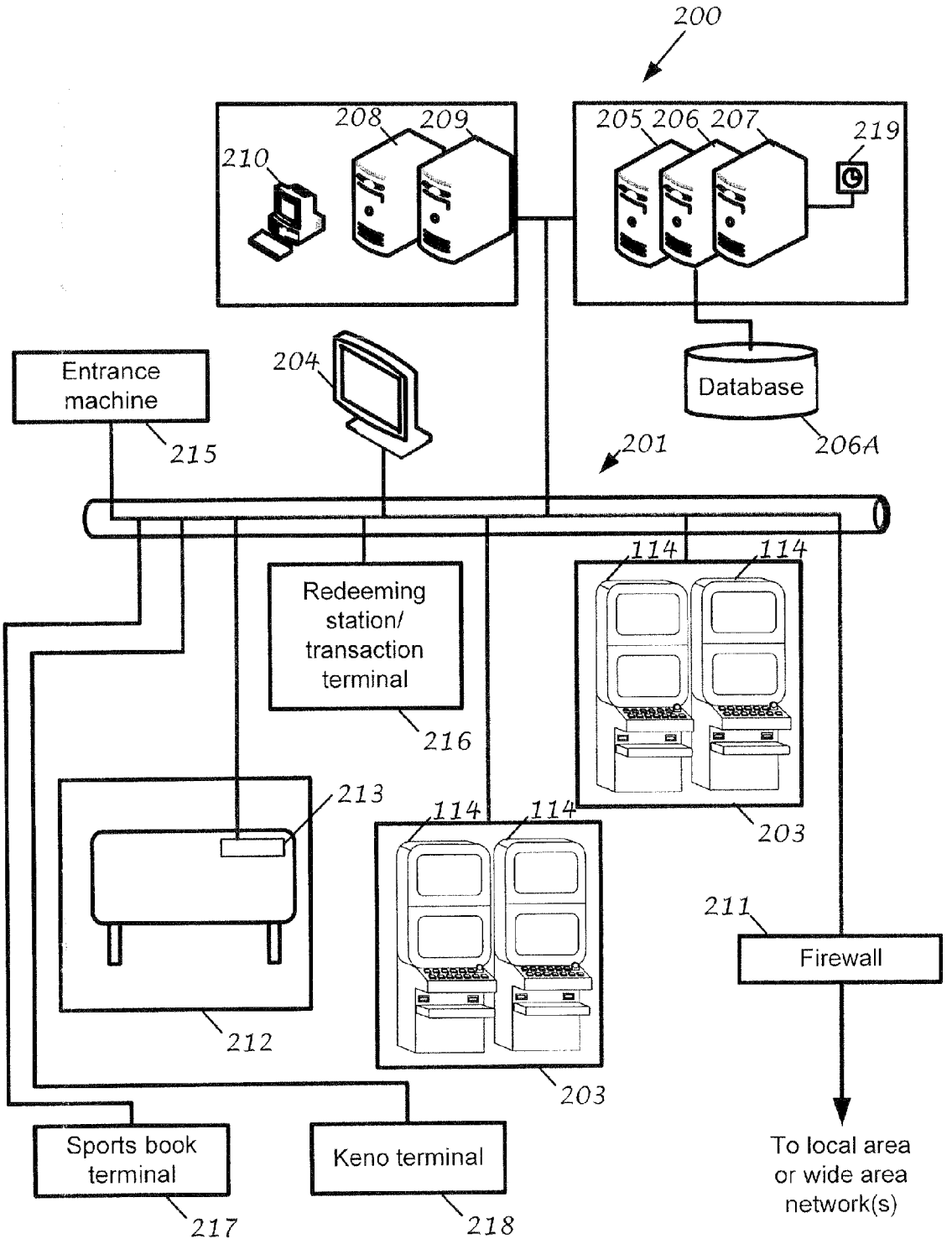

200
208
209
210
205
206
207
219
Entrance machine
215
204
Database
206A
201
Redeeming station/ transaction terminal
216
114
114
203
213
212
114
114
203
211
Firewall
Sports book terminal
217
Keno terminal
218
To local area or wide area network(s)

Figure 4

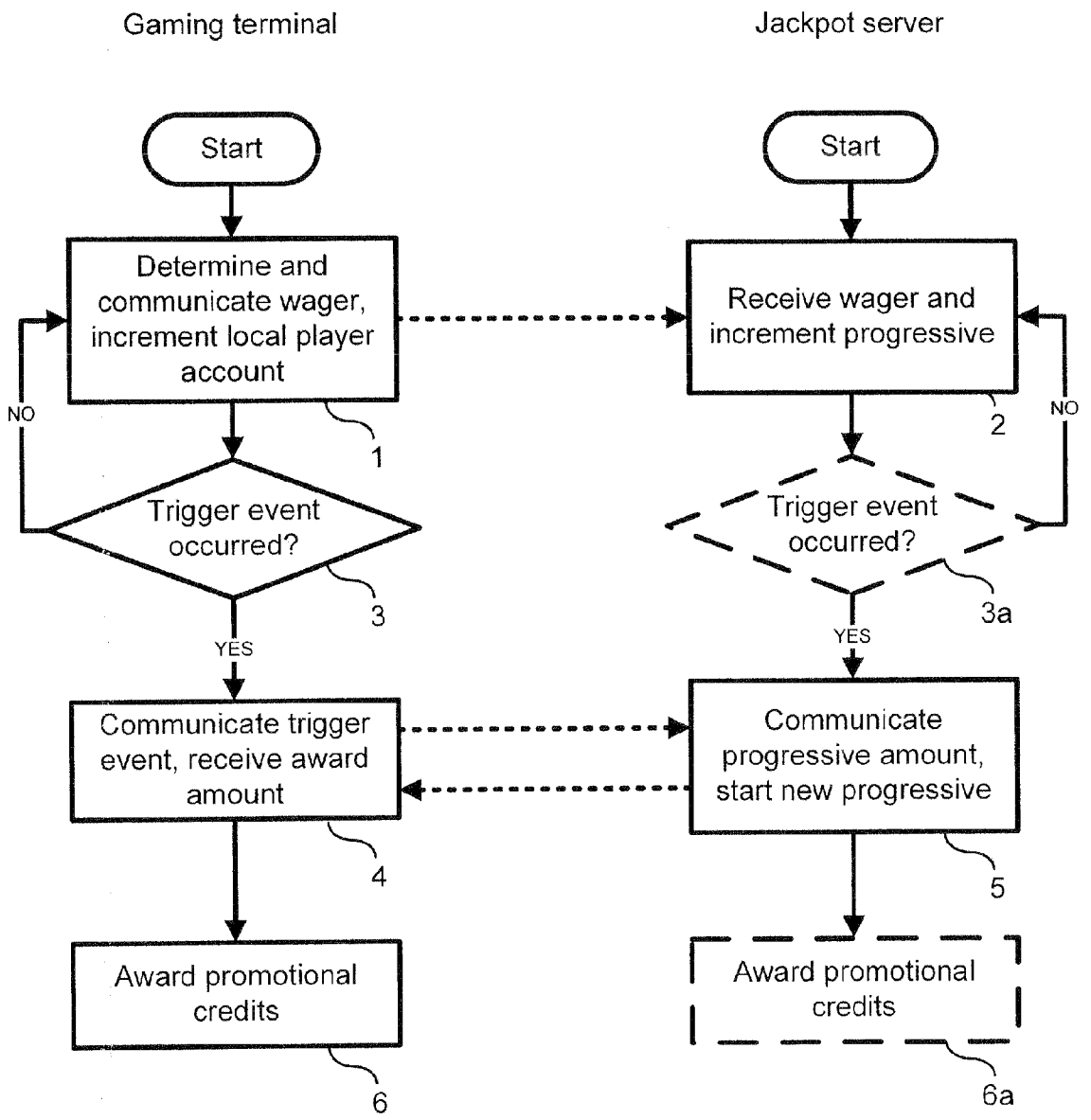

Gaming terminal
Jackpot server
Start
Start
Determine and communicate wager, increment local player account
Receive wager and increment progressive
1
2
NO
NO
Trigger event occurred?
Trigger event occurred?
3
3a
YES
YES
Communicate trigger event, receive award amount
Communicate progressive amount, start new progressive
4
5
Award promotional credits
Award promotional credits
6
6a

Figure 5

GAMING APPARATUS AND METHOD RELATING TO LINKED TERMINALS

RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This application claims priority to an Australian patent application filed on Feb. 16, 2007, with serial number 2007900792, entitled "Gaming Apparatus and Method Relating to Linked Terminals." The foregoing application is herein incorporated by reference in its entirety.

FEDERALLY SPONSORED RESEARCH OR DEVELOPMENT

[0002] [Not Applicable]

MICROFICHE/COPYRIGHT REFERENCE

[0003] [Not Applicable]

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0004] 1. Field

[0005] The present invention generally relates to linked terminals and methods involving the use of linked terminals. A particular embodiment of the present invention relates to awards to players of linked gaming terminals and the distribution of those awards.

[0006] 2. Definitions

[0007] "Terminal" means a device capable of performing a transaction in a gaming system and includes for example gaming terminals, entrance terminals and transaction terminals.

[0008] "Gaming terminal" means a device for providing a game of chance and includes for example gaming and slot machines, poker machines, sports book terminals and keno terminals.

[0009] "Linked terminals" means terminals that are connected in a general sense through a communication channel and/or one or more devices. Linked terminals therefore include networked terminals able to communicate with each other and terminals able to communicate with a common device, optionally through one or more intermediary devices, irrespective of whether or not the individual terminals share any information with each other through the connection.

[0010] "Non-gaming terminal" means a terminal which is not a gaming terminal.

[0011] "Player" is a person using a gaming terminal.

[0012] "User" is a person using a terminal and includes a player.

[0013] 3. Background of the Invention

[0014] With the increase of gambling at gaming venues has come increased competition between gaming venues. Gaming venue operators have therefore continuously looked for new variations and types of games in order to enhance the entertainment value of the games on offer.

[0015] In response to this need, suppliers of gaming devices and systems have attempted to provide the sought-after variety, while still developing games that comply with the relevant regulations in the jurisdiction of the gaming venue operator. Suppliers of gaming devices therefore are faced with restrictions on the types of games and gaming machines that are allowable, both in terms of the prevailing regulations and in terms of providing a return on investment to the gaming venue operators.

[0016] In addition, it is important that a player be able to understand the operation of a game quickly so that the player can start to quickly play the game and therefore extract maximum entertainment from the game.

[0017] Any reference in this specification to the prior art does not constitute an admission that such prior art was well known or forms part of the common general knowledge in any jurisdiction.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0018] In a first aspect, certain embodiments of the invention provide a method of making an award, the method comprising:

[0019] monitoring one or more activity characteristics of a plurality of linked terminals of a gaming system;

[0020] accumulating promotional credits based on the monitored activity characteristics, the promotional credits useable in a promotional award scheme to purchase one or more benefits;

[0021] monitoring for the occurrence of an award event within the gaming system; and

[0022] awarding a number of promotional credits to at least one user associated with the plurality of linked terminals in response to occurrence the award event, the number of promotional credits awarded to the at least one user being dependent on the accumulated promotional credits.

[0023] In an embodiment, the method comprises monitoring at least one gaming terminal.

[0024] In an embodiment, the method comprises monitoring at least one non-gaming terminal.

[0025] In an embodiment, monitoring one or more activity characteristics of the plurality of linked terminals includes monitoring the activity of at least two different types of terminals selected from the group comprising gaming machines, table games, sports book terminals, keno terminals, gaming system transaction terminals and entrance machines.

[0026] In an embodiment, the method comprises selecting the plurality of linked terminals as a subset of a set of terminals of the gaming system, such that the steps of monitoring activity characteristics, accumulating promotional credits, monitoring for the occurrence of an award event and awarding promotional credits are specific to the selected subset of terminals.

[0027] In an embodiment, the method comprises selecting a plurality of subsets of terminals and conducting the processes of monitoring activity characteristics, accumulating promotional credits, monitoring for the occurrence of an award event and awarding promotional credits for each subset.

[0028] In an embodiment, at least one of the processes of monitoring activity characteristics, accumulating promotional credits, monitoring for the occurrence of an award event and awarding promotional credits is different between different subsets.

[0029] In an embodiment, the method comprises making the award to a terminal associated with the user.

[0030] In an embodiment, the method comprises requiring receipt of a user identifier of a user of the terminal at least in order to make an award.

[0031] In an embodiment, the method comprises providing a promotional period, during which promotional credits are accumulated and a non-promotional period during which promotional credits are not accumulated.

[0032] In an embodiment, the method comprises awarding a number of promotional credits on the occurrence of the award event during the promotional period.

[0033] In an embodiment, the method comprises awarding a number of promotional during the non-promotional period if the accumulated promotional credits from a previous promotional period have not been awarded.

[0034] In an embodiment, the method comprises providing a promotional period during which the process of awarding a number of promotional credits occurs on the occurrence of the award event and a non-promotional period during which the awarding process does not occur on the occurrence of the award event.

[0035] In an embodiment, the method comprises accumulating promotional credits during both the promotional and non-promotional periods.

[0036] In an embodiment, the method comprises accumulating promotional credits only during the promotional period.

[0037] In an embodiment, the method comprises ending the promotional period when the award event occurs.

[0038] In an embodiment, the method comprises providing the promotional award scheme independently of the games playable at the one or more gaming terminals so that the promotional award scheme does not affect the average return to player of the gaming system and each gaming terminal as measured in actual credits.

[0039] In an embodiment, the one or more activity characteristics differ between at least two terminals.

[0040] In an embodiment, at least one of the terminals is a gaming terminal, and the one or more characteristics are selected from the group of: credits played at the gaming terminal; credits won at the gaming terminal; turnover of the gaming terminal; games played by the gaming terminal; and occurrence of a particular game event during play of the game at the gaming terminal.

[0041] In an embodiment, the activity characteristic comprises any transaction or combination of transactions performable by the non-gaming terminal.

[0042] In an embodiment, the method comprises making a base award of promotional credits to a user based on one or more activity characteristics attributable to that user, the base award being separate from any award of promotional credits based on the accumulated promotional credits.

[0043] In an embodiment, the accumulation of promotional credits is directly related to at least one of the base award of promotional credits to a user or the use of promotional credits by a user.

[0044] In an embodiment, the method comprises monitoring for two or more activity characteristics at least one terminal.

[0045] In an embodiment, the method comprises adding promotional credits to the accumulated promotional credits according to random criteria.

[0046] In an embodiment, the method comprises providing a feature event following the process of awarding a number of promotional credits to one or more players, the feature event including an opportunity for a player to which promotional credits have been awarded to place at least some of those promotional credits at risk, in order to win a prize.

[0047] In an embodiment, the prize comprises at least one of additional promotional credits or an award of actual credits.

[0048] In an embodiment, the method comprises defining a maximum number of promotional credits to be accumulated, wherein once the maximum number has been reached, further promotional credits are accumulated and awarded separately.

[0049] In an embodiment, the method comprises defining a minimum number of promotional credits and the process of awarding promotional credits comprises awarding the greater of the minimum number of promotional credits and the accumulated promotional credits.

[0050] In an embodiment, the method comprises displaying a value of the accumulated promotional credits on a display viewable by a user of at least one of the terminals.

[0051] In a second aspect, certain embodiments of the invention provide a gaming system comprising:

[0052] a plurality linked terminals; and

[0053] a promotional jackpot controller comprising a memory storing data defining a value of promotional credits, the promotional jackpot controller arranged to:

[0054] receive data corresponding to one or more activity characteristics of the linked terminals;

[0055] increase the value of promotional credits stored in the memory based on the activity characteristics;

[0056] monitor for the occurrence of an award event; and

[0057] make an award of promotional credits in response to occurrence of the award event.

[0058] In an embodiment, at least one of the linked terminals is a gaming terminal.

[0059] In an embodiment, at least one of the linked terminals is a non-gaming terminal.

[0060] In an embodiment, the gaming system comprises at least two different types of terminals selected from the group comprising gaming machines, table games, sports book terminals, keno terminals, gaming system transaction terminals and entrance machines.

[0061] In an embodiment, monitoring for the occurrence of an award event is performed in relation to terminals in relation to which a currently valid player identifier has been submitted.

[0062] In an embodiment, the promotional jackpot controller is provided by a jackpot controller.

[0063] In an embodiment, the gaming system comprises a timer or counter, the gaming system being arranged to initiate a promotional period when the timer or counter reaches a trigger value, and wherein it is only during the promotional period that the promotional jackpot controller increases the value of promotional credits stored in the memory.

[0064] In an embodiment, the gaming system comprises a timer or counter, the gaming system being arranged to initiate a promotional period when the timer or counter reaches a trigger value, and wherein it is only during the promotional period that the jackpot controller monitors for the occurrence of an award event and in response causes the award of promotional credits.

[0065] In an embodiment, the gaming system comprises a progressive jackpot controller maintaining a progressive jackpot that is measured in actual credits.

[0066] In an embodiment, the gaming system comprises a central display arranged to display a current value of promotional credits accumulated.

[0067] In an embodiment, one or more of the terminals is associated with a printer and the gaming system is arranged to print and dispense a ticket with indicia that indicates the number of promotional credits awarded to a player.

[0068] In an embodiment, the gaming system comprises at least one redemption terminal at which the promotional credits can be redeemed.

[0069] In an embodiment, a card reader is associated with at least one of the terminals and the gaming system is arranged to write data to a card inserted in the card reader that indicates the number of promotional credits awarded to a player.

[0070] In a third aspect, certain embodiments of the invention provide a promotional jackpot controller comprising a memory storing data defining a value of promotional credits, the promotional jackpot controller arranged to:

[0071] receive data corresponding to one or more activity characteristics of a plurality of linked terminals;

[0072] increase the value of promotional credits stored in the memory based on the activity characteristics;

[0073] monitor for the occurrence of an award event; and

[0074] make an award of promotional credits in response to occurrence of the award event.

[0075] In an embodiment, the promotional jackpot controller is constituted by a progressive jackpot controller.

[0076] In an embodiment, the promotional jackpot is arranged to monitor the activity of at least two different types of terminals selected from the group comprising gaming machines, table games, sports book terminals, keno terminals, gaming system transaction terminals and entrance machines.

[0077] In a fourth aspect, certain embodiments of the invention provide a computer program code which when executed by a processor implements the method of the first aspect.

[0078] In a fifth aspect, certain embodiments of the invention provide a computer readable medium comprising the computer program code.

[0079] In a sixth aspect, certain embodiments of the invention provide a data signal comprising the computer program code.

[0080] Further aspects of the present invention will become apparent from the following description, given by way of example and with reference to the accompanying drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF SEVERAL VIEWS OF THE DRAWINGS

[0081] FIG. **1** shows diagrammatically, a view of a gaming console suitable for implementing certain embodiments of the present invention.

[0082] FIG. **2** shows a block diagram of gaming machine suitable for implementing certain embodiments of the present invention.

[0083] FIG. **3** shows a block diagram of components of the memory of the gaming machine represented in FIG. **2**.

[0084] FIG. **4** shows diagrammatically, a network gaming system suitable for implementing certain embodiments of the present invention.

[0085] FIG. **5** shows a flow diagram of a process performed in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention.

[0086] The foregoing summary, as well as the following detailed description of certain embodiments of the present invention, will be better understood when read in conjunction with the appended drawings. For the purpose of illustrating the invention, certain embodiments are shown in the drawings. It should be understood, however, that the present invention is not limited to the arrangements and instrumentality shown in the attached drawings.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0087] In FIG. **1** of the accompanying drawings, one example of a gaming console that is suitable to implement certain embodiments of the present invention when linked to other terminals in a gaming system is generally referenced by arrow **114**.

[0088] The gaming console **114** includes two displays **106**A, **106**B on one or both of which is displayed representations of a game that can be played by a player and a bank of buttons **107**A and/or a touch screen **107**B to enable a player to play the game. The displays **106** may be a video display unit, such as a cathode ray tube display, a liquid crystal display, plasma screen, any other suitable video display unit, or the visible portion of an electromechanical device. The display **106**B may display artwork, including for example, pay tables and details of bonus awards and other information or images relating to the game. In alternative gaming consoles the display **106**B may be omitted, optionally replaced by a static display.

[0089] A credit input mechanism including a coin input **110**A and/or bill collector **1110**B allows a player to provide credit for wagering and a coin output **111** is provided for cash payouts from the gaming console **114**. A ticket reader **108** and a printer **109** may be provided to provide, cashless game play or other gaming and non-gaming related functions.

[0090] A player tracking module (PTM) **119** is attached to a side of the console **114**. The PTM **119** includes an electronic display **116** and may also include a keypad **117** and a card reader **118**. The display **116** may, for example, be a LCD display or other video display or may be a LED display. The card reader **118** allows player identification through the insertion of a player card **120** including a machine readable player identifier.

[0091] FIG. **2** shows a block diagram of a gaming machine, generally referenced by arrow **100**, suitable for implementing certain embodiments of the present invention. The gaming machine **100** may include the gaming console **114** shown in FIG. **1** and accordingly like reference numerals have been used to describe like components in FIGS. **1** and **2**.

[0092] The gaming machine **100** includes a game controller **101**, which in the illustrated example includes a computational device **102**, which may be a microprocessor, microcontroller, programmable logic device or other suitable device. Instructions and data to control operation of the computational device **102** are stored in a memory **103**, which is in data communication with, or forms part of, the computational device **102**. Typically, the gaming machine **100** will include both volatile and non-volatile memory and more than one of each type of memory, with such memories being collectively represented by the memory **103**.

[0093] The game controller **101** may include hardware credit meters **104** for the purposes of regulatory compliance and also include an input/output (I/O) interface **105** for communicating with the peripheral devices of the gaming machine **100**. The input/output interface **105** and/or the peripheral devices may be intelligent devices with their own memory for instructions and data.

[0094] In the example shown in FIG. **2**, the peripheral devices that communicate with the controller are the displays **106**, bank of buttons/touch screen **107**, the card and/or ticket reader **108**, the printer **109**, a bill acceptor and/or coin input

110 and a coin output 111. Additional devices may be included as part of the gaming machine 100, or devices omitted as required for the specific implementation.

[0095] The bank of buttons 107A and/or touch screen 107B together with one or both of the displays 106 may provide a user interface 115 through which the gaming machine 100 and player communicate. If a card/ticket reader 108 is provided, this may also form part of the user interface 115.

[0096] In some embodiments, the gaming machine 100 may include a communications interface, for example a network card 112. The network card 112, may for example, send status information, accounting information or other information to a central controller, server or database and receive data or commands from the central controller, server or database. The network card 112 may also enable communication with a central player account, allowing cashless gaming. One or more of the peripheral devices, for example the card/ticket reader 108 may be able to communicate directly with the network card 112. The network card 112 and the I/O interface 105 may be suitably implemented as a single machine communications interface.

[0097] The game controller 101 also includes a random number generator 113, which generates a series of random numbers that determine the outcome of a series of random game events played as part of a game on the gaming machine 100.

[0098] In other embodiments, the game controller 101 may have distributed hardware and software components that communicate with each other directly or through a network or other communication channel. In particular, the game controller 101 may be located in part or in its entirety remote from the user interface 115. Also, the computational device 102 may comprise a plurality of devices, which may be local or remote from each other.

[0099] FIG. 3 shows an exemplary block diagram of the main components of the memory 103. The RAM 103A typically temporarily holds instructions and data related to the execution of game programs and communication functions performed by the computational controller 102. The EPROM 103B may be a boot ROM device and/or may contain system and game related code. The mass storage device 103C may be used to store game programs, the integrity of which may be verified and/or authenticated by the computational controller 102 using protected code from the EPROM 103B or elsewhere.

[0100] FIG. 4 shows a gaming system 200 in the form of a network of devices. The gaming system 200 includes a network infrastructure 201, which for example may be an Ethernet network. Alternatively, a wireless network and/or direct communication channels, or a different type of network may be used to link the gaming machines to a server, each other and/or other devices. Gaming consoles 114, shown arranged in two banks 203 of two gaming consoles 114 in FIG. 4, are connected to the network infrastructure 201. The gaming consoles 114 may form part or all of a gaming machine 100. Single gaming consoles 114 and banks 203 containing three or more gaming devices 202 may also be connected to the network infrastructure 201, which may also include hubs, routers, bridges to other networks and other devices (not shown).

[0101] One or more displays 204 may also be connected to the network infrastructure 201. The displays 204 may, for example, be associated with a bank 203 of gaming consoles 114. The displays 204 may be used to display representations associated with game play on the gaming devices 202, and/or used to display other representations, for example promotional or informational material as described herein below.

[0102] The gaming system 200 may further include one or more table games 212, for example Black Jack, Roulette and Poker games. The table games may have a network interface 213, allowing either automatic or manual entry of game play activity characteristics, such as the placing of a wager, to be entered and communicated within the gaming system 200. In addition, one or more sports book terminals 217 and keno terminals 218 may be provided, each having a connection to the network architecture 201. Other types of gaming terminal may be provided in addition to gaming machines, table games, sports book terminals and keno terminals if required.

[0103] The gaming venue may have an entrance machine 215. Player may use a player tracking card or other player identifier to identify themselves at an entrance machine. The player may be required to pay an entrance fee and this may be notified by the entrance machine 215 together with the identity information for the player, for example to gaming floor management server 208.

[0104] The gaming venue may provide one or more redeeming stations and/or transaction terminals 216. Players may be able to redeem promotional credits and normal credits at a redeeming station and perform other transactions such as adding actual credits to a player account, cashing credits out of a player account, or cashing out a printed voucher at a redeeming station/transaction terminal 216. This terminal may therefore be provided at a cashiers station.

[0105] Servers may also be connected to the network infrastructure 201. For example, a game server 205 may generate game outcomes for games played on one or more of the gaming consoles 114, a database management server 206 may manage the storage of game programs and associated data in a database 206A so that they are available for downloading to, or access by, game controllers 101, and a jackpot server 207 may control one or more jackpots for the gaming system 200. The jackpot server 207 may control a promotional jackpot described herein below as well as a traditional progressive jackpot that awards actual credits to players at winning machines. Herein the term actual credits can be purchased for currency at a known rate. Alternatively, different servers, implemented on the same or on separate physical devices may control the promotional jackpot and the traditional progressive jackpot, if a traditional progressive jackpot is provided. A timer, counter or clock 219 may be provided to govern the start and/or end of promotional periods as described herein. A user terminal 210 connected to gaming floor management server 208 is used to configure the promotional jackpot on the jackpot server 207. In the embodiment, gaming floor management server 208 is also used to implement a player tracking system and accrue player points in a database of player records.

[0106] In the embodiment, each gaming terminal is provided with a player tracking module (PTM) 119. To obtain the benefits offered by player tracking, a player enters their player card 120 into card reader 118. The processor of PTM, processes the data from the card reader 118, and displays, for example, a greeting on display 116, as well as certain functions that the player may enable by means of buttons 117 which vary depending on implementation of the PTM 110 within the venue.

[0107] The PTM 119 is in data communication with the consoles 114 via a serial port of the input/output section 105

and in data communication with the jackpot server **207** and gaming floor management server **208** over network **201**. The PTM **119** is arranged to receive data from the gaming machine **100** indicative of wagers placed and amounts won on the gaming machine and communicate data to the jackpot server to enable the jackpot server to implement a normal progressive jackpot. If a valid player card is inserted into card reader **118** of the PTM, the PTM also communicates data to enable a promotional jackpot controller function of the jackpot controller **207** to accumulate promotional credits for accumulation in a appropriate data structure of a memory of the jackpot server.

[0108] In an alternative embodiment, the promotional credits may be determined and awarded centrally, for example by the gaming floor management server **208**, which could then communicate promotional credits to the jackpot server **207**. Similar functionality is present in non-gaming terminals which participate in the promotional jackpot such that when a player inserts a player card into such terminals and conducts a transaction, for example, a purchase, data is communicated to the jackpot server **207** to enable it to accumulate the promotional credits for the promotional jackpot. Users of non-gaming terminals may be awarded the promotional jackpot in some embodiments.

[0109] Further servers may be provided to assist in the administration of the gaming system **200**, including for example a gaming floor management server **208**, and a licensing server **209** to monitor the use of licenses to particular games. An administrator terminal **210** is provided to allow an administrator to manage the network **200**.

[0110] The gaming system **200** may communicate with other gaming systems, other local networks, for example a corporate network and/or a wide area network such as the Internet through a firewall **211**. Accordingly, the linked gaming machines that participate in the embodiments described below may include gaming machines **100** located in the gaming system **200** and gaming machines **100** located elsewhere, and communicating with the gaming system **200** through the firewall **211** or otherwise.

[0111] FIG. **5** shows a process flow diagram of a process performed in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. The process may be performed within the gaming system **200**, in which the gaming consoles **114** each include game controllers **101** to form gaming machines **100** and the following description assumes this implementation. However, those skilled in the relevant arts will appreciate that the process will also be able to be implemented by other gaming systems.

[0112] In step **1**, the game controller **101** monitors the bill acceptor and/or coin input **110** and/or information received by the card/ticket reader **108** or network card **112** for a deposit of credit and in response causes the hardware meters **104** to increment according to the denomination of the game. The game controller **101** then monitors the bank of buttons/touch screen **107** for the input of a wager.

[0113] If there are sufficient credits in the meters **104** to support the wager, a game play is commenced by the game controller **101** determining the game outcomes to result from the game, based on numbers from the RNG **113**. The game controller **101** communicates wager data to the PTM **119**. When a valid player card is inserted, PTM **119** communicates data to jackpot server **207**, which manages the promotional jackpot. PTM **119** may also determine an amount of promotional credits that is to be awarded directly to the player based on the wager. For example, where the player has established a player account, which may be maintained by the gaming floor management server **208**, then a value of promotional credits equal to 2% of the wagers may be accumulated as part of the player account. The amount of promotional credits may be stored by the PTM **119** until the end of a gaming session on that gaming machine **100** indicated by removing card **120**. Alternatively, the promotional credits may be determined and awarded centrally, for example by the gaming floor management server **208**. Either way, at the end of a session both the central user record and the player card **120** will contain the player's up to date point balance.

[0114] The displays **106** then displays representations of the outcome of the game and any award is awarded to the player as a result of the game. The game may be any game of chance playable on a gaming machine, for example, a spinning reel game, a poker style card game, or a dice game. The game may also include one or more second screen feature games provided in a manner well known in the relevant art.

[0115] In step **2**, the jackpot server **207** receives the wager amount and determines a promotional credit amount based on the wager. This amount is added to a progressive jackpot of promotional credits. For example, a value equal to 1% of the wager may be added to the current value of the progressive jackpot, which is stored within the memory of the jackpot server **207**. The jackpot server **207** communicates the value of the progressive jackpot for display to players. The jackpot server **207** may send the value to the display **204** and/or to the PTM **119** for display on display **116**. In other embodiments, the jackpot server may receive a contribution derived from the wager amount. It will be appreciated from the above that the jackpot server acts as a promotional award controller.

[0116] Therefore, promotional credits to the value of 3% of wagers placed on a gaming machine **100** are accumulated in two different pools, one of which is a progressive jackpot, which can be won based on activity at any one of a plurality of terminals in the gaming system **200**, and one of which is a pool specific to the player. Accordingly, although in the preceding description the amount of promotional credits is computed for the progressive jackpot is based on the wagers made at a gaming machine **100**, the promotional credits added to the progressive jackpot can also be viewed as a transfer of one third of a total award of promotional credits, or as an additional award equal to half the promotional credits awarded to a player, and may be computed using either of these measures if required to achieve the same effect. Promotional credits can also be added from other gaming terminals and non-gaming terminals.

[0117] The equivalent value of one promotional credit in actual currency may be any ratio required by the operator of the gaming system **200** or may not have a specific correspondence to actual currency. For example one promotional credit may be able to be used to purchase benefits to the value of one dollar. Alternatively, one promotional credit may exchange to more or less value in dollars.

[0118] The jackpot server **207** may store a seed value for the progressive jackpot, which is the starting point for the accumulation of promotional credits. The jackpot server **207** may also store a maximum value for the progressive jackpot, freezing the value of the jackpot at that point until it is won and incrementing a second progressive jackpot in the interim period before the first progressive jackpot is won. These values may be configurable, for example using the administrative terminal **210**.

[0119] The terminals may communicate the wagers to the jackpot server **207** in either currency value or in credits. If the terminals communicate wagers in credits and different terminals have different denominations, then the jackpot server **207** may store in memory information identifying a scale factor. The jackpot server **207** then may use the scale factor for each terminal to scale the contributions from the terminals, to provide an increase in the progressive jackpot proportional to the actual wager or other contribution made.

[0120] In some embodiments, the accumulation of promotional credits that are specific to a player may be omitted. The accumulation rate of the progressive jackpot of promotional credits may be able to be increased in this embodiment relative to if two pools are maintained.

[0121] In step **3**, the gaming terminal determines whether a trigger event has occurred. If not, then the process returns to step **1**. If the trigger event has occurred, then the process proceeds to step **4**. The trigger event may be any one or more of a plurality of different events. For example, the trigger event may be the occurrence of a particular outcome on the gaming terminal, the accumulation by a specific player of a plurality of like or different particular outcomes on the gaming terminal, the matching of a number or group of numbers assigned to a game play with a winning number or group of numbers, the matching of a transaction number associated with the game play (or other activity) with a winning transaction number, the next transaction after a randomly selected time period.

[0122] In an alternative embodiment, the trigger condition may be determined centrally, by the jackpot server **207**. This may be suited to trigger conditions such as mystery jackpots, where the gaming machine **100** that is awarded the progressive jackpot is the gaming machine that causes the progressive jackpot to reach a value that has been randomly selected within a defined range, which may be the range defined by the seed value and a maximum value for the jackpot. This alternative embodiment is represented in FIG. **5** by the decision box **3***a* shown in outline.

[0123] There may be a plurality of trigger events, with different events defined for different terminals and/or a plurality of events defined for a single terminal. In addition, some trigger events may be determined dependent on outcomes of games played on the gaming machines **100** and others based on activity of the gaming system, in which case both steps **3** and **3***a* shown in FIG. **5** would apply.

[0124] Single and multiple winners can be announced simultaneously. When multiple winners are involved, this may lead to a second phase of the jackpot cycle where the selected winners play against each other for the final prize. Consolation prizes may be awarded from the progressive pool, for example totaling 10% of the pool with the ultimate winner receiving 90% of the pool, or from another pool. Alternatively, the consolation prizes may be fixed in value and the winner may receive the full progressive award. In another alternative, the pool could be spit between the multiple winners equally or in other proportions dependent on other criteria.

[0125] In step **4**, the gaming machine **100** communicates the occurrence of the trigger event to the jackpot server **207**, which in step **5** returns to the gaming machine **100** the current value of the progressive jackpot. The jackpot server **207** also clears the progressive jackpot and starts a new progressive jackpot from the seed value. Light and/or sound sequences using the PTMs **119** and/or other devices in the gaming system **200** may signify the winning of the progressive jackpot, the commencement and running of a promotional period during which the progressive is active (see herein below) and/or the end of a promotional period. Sequences may also occur on other significant events, for example when a random increment of the progressive jackpot occurs.

[0126] In step **6**, the gaming machine **100** or the PTM **119** receives the amount of promotional credits that have been won and awards these to the player. The gaming machine **100** may store the promotional credits in its memory **103**A, adding it to promotional credits awarded in step **1** if applicable and award a combined amount of promotional credits when the player cashes out from the gaming machine **100**. The promotional credits may be awarded for example, by the gaming machine **100** printing a ticket on its printer **109**. Written to a card **120** using the card reader **119** or by communicating the credits to a network device such as the gaming floor management server **208** for storage in a centralised player account, or otherwise.

[0127] In an alternative embodiment, the jackpot server **207** may award the progressive directly by communicating the amount to the gaming floor management server **208** for storage in the relevant player's centralised player account. In a further alternative embodiment, the printer **109** may have a connection to the network infrastructure **201** that does not traverse the game controller **101** and the jackpot server **208** or another device in communication with the jackpot server **208** may directly control the printer **109** to award the promotional credits. These alternatives are represented by step **6***a* shown in outline.

[0128] The processes of steps **1** through **6** described in the preceding paragraphs may be applied across a plurality of different types of terminals in the gaming system **200**. The network interface **213** be part of a terminal related to the table game **212**. Wagers may be communicated to the jackpot server **207** by the network interface **213**, after input through one or more sensors (not shown) that may provide automatic operation, or by the table operator using a user interface of the network interface **213**. The sports book terminal **217** and keno terminal **218** may operate in a similar manner to the gaming machines **100**, automatically communicating wagers made. These devices may monitor for their own trigger events. The entrance machine **215** may cause an increase in the promotional credits in the progressive jackpot. If a fee is charged for entry, the increase may be in the same proportion as to if that amount had been wagered at a gaming terminal.

[0129] The progressive jackpot may be operated whenever the gaming system **200** is operated. Alternatively, the progressive jackpot may be turned on an off. For example, the promotional jackpot may operate according to a timetable, with the commencement of a promotional period during which the promotional jackpot is operational defined by the elapsing of a certain time as measured from the clock **219**. The promotional jackpot could commence based on other variables, including reaching a certain turnover across all terminals that have an identified player operating or all terminals in a venue or across multiple venues. If the trigger condition for winning the progressive jackpot is related to the size of the progressive jackpot, for example mystery progressive type arrangement, then the promotional period may end when the prize is won. Alternatively, the promotional period may have a fixed ending time or end based on another variable, such as after the

elapsing of a certain number of game plays or transactions at terminals participating in the promotional progressive jackpot.

[0130] In one embodiment, when the promotional period ends due to an event other than the winning of the progressive jackpot, contribution to the progressive jackpot may cease, but the terminals may still be eligible to win the progressive jackpot. The progressive jackpot may be awarded to the first terminal to achieve the trigger condition. Alternatively, the level of the progressive jackpot, or each jackpot if more than one is running may be saved for further accumulation during the next promotional period.

[0131] Participation in the promotional progressive jackpot may be limited to players who have identified themselves at a terminal, for example by inserting a player tracking card **120** into a PTM **119**. Participation may also be limited to specific terminals, the specific terminals being fixed by the venue operator, or determined dynamically by the jackpot server **207**, for example based on players meeting a certain level of play, using random selection criteria, and/or based on time.

[0132] Some other examples of parameters that may be used to accumulate promotional credits in the progressive jackpot include any one or combination of the number of game plays independent of wager size, the entrance of an identified player that is recorded by the entrance machine regardless of whether or not the player paid an entrance fee, wins achieved at the gaming terminals, particular results achieved at the gaming terminals, the making of a transaction at a transaction terminal regardless of whether or not the gaming venue derives direct benefit from the transaction, and random increments. Almost any transaction involving the gaming system or capable of being entered into the gaming system using a terminal may be used to increment the progressive jackpot, and may extend to activities unrelated to game play, such as the purchases at shops, restaurants or other places at a gaming venue. In one embodiment, the transactions that accumulate promotional credits in the progressive jackpot are limited to transactions involving the award or use of promotional credits by a player.

[0133] The various terminals or a selection of terminals may provide a feature in which the award of promotional credits may be supplemented with an additional award. The feature may be, for example, a double-up feature, in which the player makes a selection between two options, with the awarded promotional credits being doubled if the player chooses one option and the awarded promotional credits being lost of the player chooses the other option. The additional award need not be limited to promotional credits and could include bonus prizes, such as vouchers for products or services offered by the gaming venue.

[0134] Also, the promotional jackpot itself may be awarded from a feature game, with the monitoring of the activity characteristics leading to an event that triggers award of the feature game. The feature game may be available on particular terminals, for example a gaming machine, in which case if the event triggering the award of a feature game occurs on another type of terminal, then the award may be associated with the player's account or written to a player card so that the gaming system offers the feature game when they play a gaming machine. The player may be notified by signs, audible notices or by staff of the requirement to play a particular terminal to play the feature game.

[0135] Operation of the promotional progressive jackpot can be provided in addition to other gaming activities. For example, a progressive jackpot that awards actual credits may be provided by the gaming system in combination with the promotional progressive jackpot. The trigger events for the award of the promotional progressive jackpot and actual progressive jackpot could be the same, particularly if the terminals participating in the promotional progressive jackpot were limited to gaming machines. However, in the embodiment, the trigger events are different. In particular, the event that causes winning of the promotional progressive jackpot may advantageously be one that applies to a range of terminals, allowing more players to participate.

[0136] While the foregoing description has been provided by way of example of embodiments of the present invention as presently contemplated, which utilise gaming terminals of the type found in casinos, those skilled in the relevant arts will appreciate that the present invention also may have application to internet gaming and/or have application to gaming over a telecommunications network, where handsets are used to display game outcomes and receive player inputs.

[0137] Where in the foregoing description reference has been made to integers having known equivalents, then those equivalents are hereby incorporated herein as if individually set forth.

[0138] Those skilled in the relevant arts will appreciate that modifications and additions to the embodiments of the present invention may be made without departing from the scope of the present invention.

[0139] It will be understood that the invention disclosed and defined in this specification extends to all alternative combinations of two or more of the individual features mentioned or evident from the text or drawings. All of these different combinations constitute various alternative aspects of the invention.

[0140] It will also be understood that the term "comprises" (or its grammatical variants) as used in this specification is equivalent to the term "includes" and should not be taken as excluding the presence of other elements or features.

[0141] While the invention has been described with reference to certain embodiments, it will be understood by those skilled in the art that various changes may be made and equivalents may be substituted without departing from the scope of the invention. In addition, many modifications may be made to adapt a particular situation or material to the teachings of the invention without departing from its scope. Therefore, it is intended that the invention not be limited to the particular embodiment disclosed, but that the invention will include all embodiments falling within the scope of the appended claims.

1. A method of making an award, the method comprising:

monitoring one or more activity characteristics of a plurality of linked terminals of a gaming system;

accumulating promotional credits based on the monitored activity characteristics, the promotional credits useable in a promotional award scheme to purchase one or more benefits;

monitoring for the occurrence of an award event within the gaming system; and

awarding a number of promotional credits to at least one user associated with the plurality of linked terminals in response to occurrence the award event, the number of promotional credits awarded to the at least one user being dependent on the accumulated promotional credits.

2. A method as claimed in claim 1, comprising monitoring at least one gaming terminal.

3. A method as claimed in claim 1, comprising monitoring at least one non-gaming terminal.

4. A method as claimed in claim 1, wherein monitoring one or more activity characteristics of the plurality of linked terminals includes monitoring the activity of at least two different types of terminals selected from the group comprising gaming machines, table games, sports book terminals, keno terminals, gaming system transaction terminals and entrance machines.

5. A method as claimed in claim 1, comprising selecting the plurality of linked terminals as a subset of a set of terminals of the gaming system, such that the steps of monitoring activity characteristics, accumulating promotional credits, monitoring for the occurrence of an award event and awarding promotional credits are specific to the selected subset of terminals.

6. A method as claimed in claim 5, comprising selecting a plurality of subsets of terminals and conducting the processes of monitoring activity characteristics, accumulating promotional credits, monitoring for the occurrence of an award event and awarding promotional credits for each subset.

7. A method as claimed in claim 6, wherein at least one of the processes of monitoring activity characteristics, accumulating promotional credits, monitoring for the occurrence of an award event and awarding promotional credits is different between different subsets.

8. A method as claimed in claim 1, comprising making the award to a terminal associated with the user.

9. A method as claimed in claim 1, further comprising requiring receipt of a user identifier of a user of the terminal at least in order to make an award.

10. A method as claimed in claim 1, comprising providing a promotional period, during which promotional credits are accumulated and a non-promotional period during which promotional credits are not accumulated.

11. A method as claimed in claim 10, comprising awarding a number of promotional credits on the occurrence of the award event during the promotional period.

12. A method as claimed in claim 11, comprising awarding a number of promotional during the non-promotional period if the accumulated promotional credits from a previous promotional period have not been awarded.

13. A method as claimed in claim 1, comprising providing a promotional period during which the process of awarding a number of promotional credits occurs on the occurrence of the award event and a non-promotional period during which the awarding process does not occur on the occurrence of the award event.

14. A method as claimed in claim 13, comprising accumulating promotional credits during both the promotional and non-promotional periods.

15. A method as claimed in claim 13, comprising accumulating promotional credits only during the promotional period.

16. A method as claimed in claim 10, comprising ending the promotional period when the award event occurs.

17. A method as claimed in claim 1, comprising providing the promotional award scheme independently of the games playable at the one or more gaming terminals so that the promotional award scheme does not affect the average return to player of the gaming system and each gaming terminal as measured in actual credits.

18. A method as claimed in claim 1, wherein the one or more activity characteristics differ between at least two terminals.

19. A method as claimed in claim 1, wherein at least one of the terminals is a gaming terminal, and the one or more characteristics are selected from the group of: credits played at the gaming terminal; credits won at the gaming terminal; turnover of the gaming terminal; games played by the gaming terminal; and occurrence of a particular game event during play of the game at the gaming terminal.

20. A method as claimed in claim 3, wherein the activity characteristic comprises any transaction or combination of transactions performable by the non-gaming terminal.

21. A method as claimed in claim 1, comprising making a base award of promotional credits to a user based on one or more activity characteristics attributable to that user, the base award being separate from any award of promotional credits based on the accumulated promotional credits.

22. A method as claimed in claim 20, wherein the accumulation of promotional credits is directly related to at least one of the base award of promotional credits to a user or the use of promotional credits by a user.

23. A method as claimed in claim 1, comprising monitoring for two or more activity characteristics at least one terminal.

24. A method as claimed in claim 1, comprising adding promotional credits to the accumulated promotional credits according to random criteria.

25. A method as claimed in claim 1, comprising providing a feature event following the process of awarding a number of promotional credits to one or more players, the feature event including an opportunity for a player to which promotional credits have been awarded to place at least some of those promotional credits at risk, in order to win a prize.

26. A method as claimed in claim 25, wherein the prize comprises at least one of additional promotional credits or an award of actual credits.

27. A method as claimed in claim 1, comprising defining a maximum number of promotional credits to be accumulated, wherein once the maximum number has been reached, further promotional credits are accumulated and awarded separately.

28. A method as claimed in claim 1, comprising defining a minimum number of promotional credits and the process of awarding promotional credits comprises awarding the greater of the minimum number of promotional credits and the accumulated promotional credits.

29. A method as claimed in claim 1, comprising displaying a value of the accumulated promotional credits on a display viewable by a user of at least one of the terminals.

30. A gaming system comprising:

a plurality linked terminals; and

a promotional jackpot controller comprising a memory storing data defining a value of promotional credits, the promotional jackpot controller arranged to:

receive data corresponding to one or more activity characteristics of the linked terminals;

increase the value of promotional credits stored in the memory based on the activity characteristics;

monitor for the occurrence of an award event; and

make an award of promotional credits in response to occurrence of the award event.

31. A gaming system as claimed in claim 30, wherein at least one of the linked terminals is a gaming terminal.

32. A gaming system as claimed in claim 30, wherein at least one of the linked terminals is a non-gaming terminal.

33. A gaming system as claimed in claim **30**, comprising at least two different types of terminals selected from the group comprising gaming machines, table games, sports book terminals, keno terminals, gaming system transaction terminals and entrance machines.

34. A gaming system as claimed in claim **30**, wherein monitoring for the occurrence of an award event is performed in relation to terminals in relation to which a currently valid player identifier has been submitted.

35. A gaming system as claimed in claim **30**, wherein the promotional jackpot controller is provided by a jackpot controller.

36. A gaming system as claimed in claim **30**, comprising a timer or counter, the gaming system being arranged to initiate a promotional period when the timer or counter reaches a trigger value, and wherein it is only during the promotional period that the promotional jackpot controller increases the value of promotional credits stored in the memory.

37. A gaming system as claimed in claim **30**, comprising a timer or counter, the gaming system being arranged to initiate a promotional period when the timer or counter reaches a trigger value, and wherein it is only during the promotional period that the jackpot controller monitors for the occurrence of an award event and in response causes the award of promotional credits.

38. A gaming system as claimed in claim **30**, further comprising a progressive jackpot controller maintaining a progressive jackpot that is measured in actual credits.

39. A gaming system as claimed in claim **30**, comprising a central display arranged to display a current value of promotional credits accumulated.

40. A gaming system as claimed in claim **30**, wherein one or more of the terminals is associated with a printer and the gaming system is arranged to print and dispense a ticket with indicia that indicates the number of promotional credits awarded to a player.

41. A gaming system as claimed in claim **30**, comprising at least one redemption terminal at which the promotional credits can be redeemed.

42. A gaming system as claimed in claim **30**, wherein a card reader is associated with at least one of the terminals and the gaming system is arranged to write data to a card inserted in the card reader that indicates the number of promotional credits awarded to a player.

43. A promotional jackpot controller comprising a memory storing data defining a value of promotional credits, the promotional jackpot controller arranged to:

receive data corresponding to one or more activity characteristics of a plurality of linked terminals;

increase the value of promotional credits stored in the memory based on the activity characteristics;

monitor for the occurrence of an award event; and

make an award of promotional credits in response to occurrence of the award event.

44. A promotional jackpot controller as claimed in claim **43**, constituted by a progressive jackpot controller.

45. A promotional jackpot controller as claimed in claim **43**, arranged to monitor the activity of at least two different types of terminals selected from the group comprising gaming machines, table games, sports book terminals, keno terminals, gaming system transaction terminals and entrance machines.

46. Computer program code which when executed by a processor implements the method of claim **1**.

47. A computer readable medium comprising the computer program code of claim **46**.

48. A data signal comprising the computer program code of claim **46**.

* * * * *