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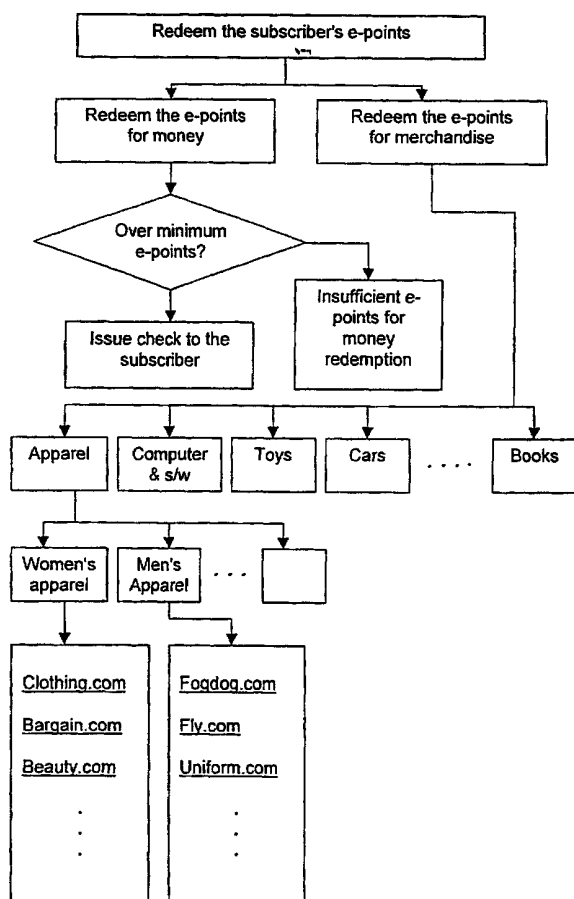
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(54) Title: **SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR FACILITATING PLAY OF ON-LINE GAMES**



(57) Abstract: The present invention discloses a system and method for facilitating participation by subscribers in on-line game play provided over an electronic network such as the Internet. A system of the present invention includes a server connected to the electronic network, for providing the subscribers with at least one on-line game via the electronic network in response to information entered by the subscribers at terminals connected to the electronic network, and for rewarding at least one of the subscribers based on each subscriber's accomplishment in the on-line game. A method of the present invention includes the steps of receiving subscriber information and game information entered by each subscriber to participate in an on-line game, identifying the subscriber with the subscriber information, providing the subscriber with the on-line game in accordance with the game information, and rewarding each subscriber at the end of the on-line games based on each subscriber's accomplishment in the on-line game.

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SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR FACILITATING PLAY OF ON-LINE GAMES

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Field of the Invention

The present invention relates to a system and a method for operating on-line game play provided over an electronic network, more particularly to a system and a method for facilitating on-line game play over an electronic network by awarding players with
10 predetermined prizes.

Background of the Invention

The advent of global electronic networks facilitates play of on-line games provided over an electronic network such as the Internet. Subscribers to the Internet can participate in
15 on-line game play by logging on to the Internet and being routed to a website providing the on-line game play. To access the Internet and play on-line games, players can use terminals, such as personal computers, local terminals specific to on-line game play, and/or any machine capable of accessing the Internet.

Since one factor in determining the worth of an Internet website is the ability of the
20 website in attracting visitors, new and old, there have been considerable efforts to develop websites that can provide customers and subscribers with features to appeal and attract visits by newcomers and more visits by repeat visitors.

Therefore, it would be advantageous to provide a system and method that can facilitate Internet subscribers' participation in on-line game play by awarding players with

predetermined prizes depending on results of the respective players in on-line games. It would also be advantageous to provide a system and method that can provide more exciting and interactive on-line game play to appeal and attract more visits by the Internet subscribers.

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Summary of the Invention

It is an object of the present invention to provide a system and method for facilitating Internet subscribers' participation in on-line game play by rewarding the subscribers with predetermined awards based on each subscriber's accomplishment in the on-line games.

It is an object of the present invention to provide a system and method for providing
10 the subscribers with on-line games that may be progressively changed in levels of difficulty.

To attain the above and other objects and advantages, a system of the present invention includes a server connected to the electronic network, for providing the subscribers with at least one on-line game via the electronic network in response to information entered by the subscribers at terminals connected to the electronic network, and for rewarding at least
15 one of the subscribers based on each subscriber's accomplishment in the on-line game.

The server preferably includes a communication unit connected to the electronic network, for receiving subscriber information and game information entered by each subscriber to participate in the on-line game play, wherein the subscriber information includes personal information of the subscriber and the game information designates at least
20 one on-line game to play, an identifier receiving the subscriber information from the communication unit, for identifying the subscriber with the received subscriber information, a game server receiving the game information from the communication unit, for providing the subscriber with the at least one on-line game in accordance with the game information, and

an award server for rewarding the subscriber based on the subscriber's accomplishment in the on-line game.

The server may also include a subscriber database having a plurality of accounts for the respective subscribers, each account storing subscriber information entered by each

5 subscriber to register the subscriber, a survey server for storing a plurality of questionnaires and for providing the subscribers with the questionnaires to which the subscribers make answers, and a bank server connected to the subscriber database and banks where a subscriber has an account, for controlling transfer of the subscriber's financial information between the subscriber database and the banks.

10 The present invention also provides a method for facilitating subscribers' participation in on-line game play provided over an electronic network. The method of the present invention includes the steps of receiving subscriber information and game information entered by each subscriber to participate in an on-line game, identifying the subscriber with the subscriber information, providing the subscriber with the on-line game in accordance with
15 the game information, and rewarding each subscriber at the end of the on-line game based on each subscriber's accomplishment in the on-line game.

The step of identifying may include the steps of receiving subscriber information entered by the subscriber to register, comparing the subscriber information to participate with the subscriber information to register, and determining the identity between the subscriber
20 information to participate and the subscriber information to register. The step of providing the subscriber with the on-line game may include performing progressive changes in levels of difficulty in playing the on-line game, and the step of rewarding may also include determining a winner of the on-line game, wherein the winner is a subscriber obtaining a

highest one of ranking and score at the time of ending the on-line game, and rewarding the winner with a highest award of the on-line game.

These and other objects, features and advantages of the present invention will become apparent from the following detailed description of illustrative embodiments thereof, which is
5 to be read in connection with the accompanying drawings.

Brief Description of the Drawings

Fig. 1 is a block diagram illustrating a preferred embodiment of an on-line game operating system according to the present invention; and

10 Fig. 2 is a flowchart describing a method for facilitating on-line game play according to the present invention;

Fig. 3 is a flowchart describing an example of registration and on-line game play according to the present invention;

15 Fig. 4 illustrates an example of a registration page of the website provided by an agent server of the present invention;

Fig. 5 illustrates an example of a home page of the website;

Figs. 6A and 6B illustrate an example of a consideration-based game provided on the website;

20 Figs. 7A and 7B illustrate an example of a skill-based game provided on the website; and

Fig. 8 is a flowchart describing an example of rewarding a subscriber according to the present invention.

Description of Preferred Embodiments

This disclosure describes a system and a method for facilitating on-line game play provided over an electronic network such as the Internet. To participate in on-line game play, subscribers to the Internet access a website using terminals capable of accessing the Internet.

5 The website operated by a website server has various contents and attractions including on-line games from which the subscribers accessing the website may choose to play. The on-line game play may include on-line lottery play, for example, governmental on-line lottery play offered by the state. In providing on-line game play, the system may provide each subscriber with an on-line game so that the subscriber can play the game alone, or the system
10 may provide multiple subscribers with the same on-line game so that the multiple subscribers can participate in the same game simultaneously. At the time of ending an on-line game, the system rewards the subscribers participating in the game with predetermined awards based on each subscriber's accomplishment in the game. To determine amount or value of the awards, the system compares each subscriber's accomplishment in the game with those of other
15 subscribers. By rewarding the subscribers for their participation in on-line game play, the present invention facilitates the subscribers' participation in on-line game play provided on a website. A detailed description of a system for facilitating on-line game play according to the present invention follows.

Referring to Fig. 1, a preferred embodiment of a system for facilitating on-line game
20 play according to the present invention includes terminals 12 capable of accessing an electronic network 14 such as the Internet, and a website server 20 that provides and operates a website having various contents and attractions including on-line game play, and rewards

subscribers participating in on-line game play with predetermined awards for their participation in the games based on each subscriber's accomplishment in the games.

Terminals 12 include personal computers, local terminals specific to on-line games, or any machine capable of accessing the electronic network 14. The local terminals may be located at places to which the subscribers can readily access, for example, retail stores and shops. Each terminal 12 has a modem (not shown) connected to the electronic network 14 and a keyboard (not shown) for entering information necessary to interact on a website providing various attractions and contents including on-line game play. A subscriber to the Internet accesses the website at a terminal 12 and enters information (i.e., keyboard entries and/or mouse clicks) requesting participation in on-line game play provided on the website. Such information entered by the subscriber is transmitted via the electronic network 14 to the website server 20 that provides the website. Upon receiving the information from the subscriber, the website server 20 provides the subscriber with on-line games in accordance with the received information. A detailed description of the website server 20 of the present invention follows.

A website server 20 preferably includes a communication unit 21 connected to the electronic network 14, for receiving information entered at the terminals 12 by the subscribers to the Internet, an identifier 22 for identifying each subscriber entering information to participate in on-line game play, a game server 23 for storing various on-line games and providing the subscribers with on-line games in accordance with the information entered by the subscribers, an award server 25 for storing predetermined prizes and rewarding the subscribers based on each subscriber's accomplishment in the on-line games, and a data process unit 29 for communicating control and data signals with the above and other

components in the website server 20. The website server 20 may also include a subscriber database 27 having accounts of the respective subscribers and storing each subscriber's information in the corresponding account, a time counter 31 for counting time for a time period set by the data process unit 29, and a survey server 35 for storing questionnaires to be provided to the subscribers and for receiving answers to the questionnaires made by the subscribers.

Upon accessing the website providing on-line game play, the subscribers may participate in on-line game play in different ways. For example, a subscriber may play on-line games alone and be rewarded based on his/her score in the games, or multiple subscribers at multiple terminals 12 may participate in an on-line game simultaneously and compete with each other and a winner takes a predetermined prize.

In case that a subscriber accessing the Internet enters information requesting on-line game play, the website server 20 may request the subscriber to enter his/her subscriber information prior to providing the on-line game play. The subscriber information includes personal information such as name, address, password, and so on. If the subscriber is a new visitor to the website, the website server 20 provides the subscriber with a registration page on which the subscriber may enter his/her subscriber information to register on the website. The subscriber information entered on the registration page is transmitted via the electronic network 14 to the subscriber database 27 and stored therein under control of the data process unit 29.

In case that the subscriber is not a new visitor (i.e., a registered subscriber), the subscriber information entered by the subscriber at a terminal 12 is transmitted to the communication unit 21 via the electronic network 14. Upon receiving the subscriber

information, the communication unit 21 transfers the subscriber information to the identifier 22 under control of the data process unit 29. The communication unit 21 may adopt TCP/IP (Transmission Control Protocol/Internet Protocol) as a communication protocol. TCP/IP uses a client-server model of communication in which a client (i.e., a terminal 12) requests and is
5 provided a service (such as sending a Web page) by another computer (i.e., the website server 20) in a network.

The identifier 22 may access information in the subscriber database 27 that stores each subscriber's subscriber information entered at the time of the registration on the website. Under control of the data process unit 29, the identifier 22 accesses and retrieves the
10 subscriber information stored in the subscriber database 27 and compares the retrieved subscriber information with the subscriber information received from the communication unit 21. That is, the identifier 22 compares the subscriber information entered by the subscriber to participate in on-line game play and the subscriber information entered by the subscriber to register on the website. Upon such comparison, the identifier 22 determines identity between
15 the two types of the subscriber information. If the two types of the subscriber information are identical (i.e., the subscriber is successfully identified), the subscriber may proceed to enter game information to play on-line games. On the contrary, if the subscriber is not successfully identified, the subscriber may be requested to enter his/her subscriber information again. If repeating failures occur in the identification of the subscriber, the identifier 22 may notify the
20 subscriber of the identification failure and request the subscriber to register on the website again.

The game information entered by the successfully identified subscriber is transmitted to the communication unit 21 via the electronic network 14. The game information may

designate a specific on-line game or request all the on-line games available on the website from which the subscriber can choose. Such game information is transmitted from the communication unit 21 to the game server 23 under control of the data process unit 29. Upon receiving the game information, the game server 23 generates one or more games in
5 accordance with the received game information.

The game server 23 stores various on-line games, for example, trivia games, match games, crossword puzzles, sports games, contests, sweepstakes, and other 'for fun' games.

The game server 23 may also provide on-line lottery play, for example, a governmental on-line lottery game offered by the state (this will be described in detail below). For example, in

10 consideration-based games such as sweepstakes, the subscriber along with other players pays to play and receives monetary or prize awards upon winning. The amount of the awards depends on the subscriber's ranking or score against those of other players in the game. In skill-based games such as crossword puzzles and sports games, the games may be progressively changed in levels of difficulty. For example, as the subscriber proceeds to
15 higher levels in playing the game, more skill is required on the part of the subscriber to play or less time is given to the subscriber to play. The levels of difficulty in playing the games may be set by the game server 23 under control of the data process unit 29 and may also be changed by the subscribers. Also, an on-line game provided by the game server 23 may have multiple features such as skill-based feature and consideration-based feature. For
20 example, the game server 23 may provide an on-line sport game in which the subscribers participating in the game may be rewarded for predicting an outcome of actual games, such as NFL football playoff games, and/or certain events, such as 'who will rush for the most yards?', 'who will pass for the most yards?', etc., within the actual games. As an award, a

winner of the on-line sport game may be provided with, for example, cash and/or discounts on merchandise during the games. The on-line sport game may also give the subscribers the ability to set up groups within the game and track the results of the group separate from the overall game. In such group play of the on-line sport game, each subscriber of the group may
5 pay and one or more subscribers of the group may receive a predetermined amount upon winning.

When a game is ended, the game server 23 determines the subscriber's accomplishment in the game, for example, the subscriber's score or ranking against other players in the game. The subscriber may be rewarded by the award server 25 for the
10 subscriber's accomplishment in the game. The award server 25 stores various types of awards, for example, monetary award, prizes, and points to be credited for future use. The subscriber's score or ranking in the game may affect the amount of award provided to the subscriber. Under control of the data process unit 29, the award sever 25 determines the type of award according to the type of on-line game provided to the subscriber, and then
15 determines the amount of award based on the subscriber's accomplishment in the game.

When providing an award to the subscriber, the award server 25 also transfers information of the award to the subscriber database 27. Under control of the data process unit 29, the award server 25 stores the award information of the subscriber in a corresponding account in the subscriber database 27. The account is established for the subscriber at the time of
20 registration on the website. Thus, whenever the subscriber receives an award, the account is updated with the received award to keep an award balance. For example, when the subscriber is rewarded with points for his/her accomplishment in a game by the award server 25, the points may be accumulated in the subscriber's account in the subscriber database 27 so

that the subscriber can check his points balance at any time. The points may be, for example, electronic points electronically provided by the award server 25.

The website server 20 may also include a survey server 35 for providing questionnaires to the subscribers at the terminals 12 via the electronic network 14. Upon the subscribers accessing the website, the survey server 35 may provide each subscriber with the questionnaires at any time before, during, and/or after the subscriber participates in on-line game play. The questionnaires are designed to profile each subscriber interacting on the website to participate in on-line game play. Upon receiving answers to the questionnaires from the subscribers, the survey server 35 stores the answers in the subscriber database 27 under the data process unit 29. The subscriber database 27 has plurality of data storages for the respective subscribers, and the answers made by each subscriber may be stored in the corresponding data storage. The survey server 35 may also provide the award server 25 with information such as the number of questionnaires answered by each subscriber. Upon receiving such information from the survey server 35, the award server 25 rewards each subscriber for his/her answering to the questionnaires under control of the data process unit 29. The amount of award may depend on, for example, the number of answers made by each subscriber. By receiving extra award for answering the questionnaires, the subscribers may have incentive to participate in another or more on-line games.

The website server 20 may further include a bank server 33 for communicating with banks where the subscribers have accounts. Alternatively, the bank server 33 may be configured outside the website server 20. Under control of the data process unit 29, the bank server 33 may access financial information of the subscribers stored in the respective bank accounts in the banks and also may access award information of the respective subscribers

stored in the subscriber database 27. Thus, the bank server 33 may transfer the subscribers' funds procured relating to on-line game play between the subscriber database 27 and the accounts in the banks. For example, when a subscriber pays to play a consideration-based game, the bank server 33, upon receiving a request from the subscriber, may access the subscriber's account in a bank and withdraw a specified amount to pay for the game. On the other hand, when a subscriber wants to deposit his/her monetary award earned from on-line game play in his/her bank account, the bank server 33 may access the subscriber's award information in the subscriber database 27 and forward the information to the bank to credit the award in the account.

Although having described the case where a subscriber is provided with on-line games from the website server 20, the system of the present invention also applies to the case where multiple subscribers participate in an on-line game to compete with each other. That is, multiple subscribers enter game information requesting the same on-line game, so that the website server 20 provides the same game to the multiple subscribers via the electronic network 14.

As described above, to participate in an on-line game and receive any award at the end of the game, each subscriber need to enter the subscriber information as well as the game information. Each subscriber's subscriber information and game information are transmitted to the identifier 22 and the game server 23, respectively, through the electronic network 14 and the communication unit 21. The identifier 22 identifies each subscriber with the subscriber information entered by the subscriber, and the game server 23 provides each subscriber with an on-line game in accordance with the game information entered by the subscriber. Assuming that multiple subscribers at the respective terminals 12 are successfully

identified by the identifier 22 and enter the game information requesting the same on-line game, the game server 23 provides the same game to the multiple subscribers so that the multiple subscribers can participate in the game simultaneously. The game is one of various on-line games stored in the game server 23 such as skill-based games and/or consideration-based games.

For example, assuming that the game is a consideration-based game, the subscribers participating in the game may separately pay and compete with each other for the winning prize. A payment of each subscriber is transmitted via the electronic network 14 and communication unit 21 to the subscriber database 27 and stored therein under control of the data process unit 29. At the end of the game, the subscribers may be rewarded by the award server 25 in different ways. For example, the award server 25 may reward a total winning prize only to a winner of the game, or reward the player with the highest score or other subscribers with winnings based on each subscriber's score or accomplishment in the game. The award server 25 may also set the award distribution in different ways.

If the game provided to the subscribers is a skill-based game, a level of difficulty in playing the game may be set by either the subscribers or the website server 20. For example, the subscribers may determine or change the level of difficulty of the game by setting a time period to play the game. The game information entered by each subscriber may include information of determining or changing the level of difficulty, for example, setting more or less time period for playing the game. Alternatively, the website server 20, preferably the game server 23, may control the level of difficulty by, for example, setting a time period for playing the game or automatically changing the time period in a predetermined way. A time period for playing the game set by either the subscribers or the game server 23 is counted by

a time counter 31. At the start of the game, the data process unit 29 enables the time counter 31 to count the time period. When the time counter 31 counts up the time period, the data process unit 29 enables the game server 23 to stop the game. The game server 23 then determines each subscriber's score and/or ranking in the game. Under control of the data process unit 29, the award server 25 determines awards for each subscriber based on the subscriber's score and/or ranking in the game. Upon rewarding the subscribers, the award information is transmitted to the subscriber database 27 and stored therein under control of the data process unit 29. The subscriber database 27 has multiple accounts for the respective multiple subscribers participating in the game, and each account stores an award received by the corresponding subscriber.

The bank server 33 may also access information of each subscriber's account in the subscriber database 27. As described above, the bank server 33 may transfer each subscriber's funds and/or financial information between the accounts in the subscriber database 27 and the banks. The survey server 35 may also provide questionnaires to the multiple subscribers simultaneously. Upon receiving answers to the questionnaires from the subscribers, the answers are stored in the subscriber database 27 through the survey server 35 and the data process unit 29 enables the award server 25 to reward the subscribers for their making the answers to the questionnaires. Such awards are also transmitted to the subscriber database 27 and accumulated in the corresponding subscriber's account under control of the data process unit 29.

As mentioned above, the game sever 23 may also provide on-line lottery play, for example, governmental lottery game offered by the state. When a subscriber enters the game information at a terminal 12, the game information may include lottery information

requesting on-line lottery play so that the subscriber can participate in on-line lottery play provided over the electronic network 14. The lottery information entered by the subscriber is transmitted to the communication unit 21 via the electronic network 14. Under control of the data process unit 29, the lottery information is transmitted from the communication unit 21 to the game server 23, and the game server 23 provides the subscriber with on-line lottery game in accordance with the lottery information.

Preferably, the game server 23 may provide the subscriber with virtual lottery tickets that are displayed on a screen of the terminal 12 at which the subscriber enters the lottery information. With the virtual lottery tickets displayed on the screen, the subscriber may participate in lottery play. For example, the subscriber can pick lottery numbers by entering the corresponding numbers in prepared boxes on each of the virtual lottery tickets, or the subscriber can pick 'quick' numbers that are randomly selected and automatically entered by the lottery server 48 in the prepared boxes of each virtual lottery ticket. Upon choosing lottery numbers for all the virtual lottery tickets displayed on the screen of the terminal 12, the subscriber enters an instruction to draw a winning number, for example, clicking a corresponding button on the screen. Upon receiving the instruction from the subscriber via the electronic network 14, the game server 23 draws a winning number that is a series of numbers randomly drawn by the game server 23. If an on-line lottery game is offered by other entity, a winning number for the lottery game is drawn by the entity offering the lottery game. For example, a winning number for a governmental lottery game is drawn by the state.

The drawn winning number is displayed on the same screen as the virtual lottery tickets are displayed. By comparing each drawn numbers of the winning number and the lottery numbers of each virtual lottery ticket, the subscriber can recognize matches between

the drawn numbers and the lottery numbers. The subscriber may also be notified of the matches by the game server 23. The prizes for the lottery game may vary depending on the number of matches between the drawn numbers and the lottery numbers. For example, if there are matches between all the drawn numbers and the lottery numbers, the subscriber is
5 rewarded with the highest prize of the lottery game.

A more detailed description of a system for playing on-line lottery games is described in a commonly assigned U.S. application, Serial no. 09/459,293 (attorney docket no. 8438-210) filed on December 10, 1999. The disclosure of which is incorporated by reference herein.

10 Referring to Fig. 2, a flowchart is a series of steps of a method for facilitating on-line game play according to the present invention. It is assumed that a website is provided by a server over an electronic network such as the Internet and has various contents and attractions including on-line game play. Subscribers to the Internet may access the website using terminals capable of accessing the electronic network. Upon accessing the website, each
15 subscriber enters his/her subscriber information to participate in on-line game play where players may be rewarded for the participation in the game (step 202). Alternatively, the subscribers may be requested to enter their subscriber information to participate in on-line game play. If a subscriber is a new visitor on the website, the subscriber is provided with a registration page on the website and requested to register by submitting his/her subscriber
20 information via the Internet. The subscriber information includes personal information, such as name, address, and password. The subscriber information entered to register is transmitted to a website server providing the website and stored therein.

The subscriber information entered by each subscriber to participate in on-line game play is also transmitted to the website server via the Internet and is used for identifying the subscriber (step 204). In the website server, the subscriber information (preferably, the personal information) entered to participate in on-line game play is compared with the
5 subscriber information entered to register, and identity between the two types of subscriber information is determined. In case that the subscriber is not successfully identified (i.e., the two types of subscriber information is not identical), the subscriber may be requested to enter the subscriber information again. If repeating failures occur in the identification of the subscriber, the subscriber may be notified of the identification failure and requested to re-
10 register on the website.

Upon being successfully identified, each subscriber may enter game information requesting one or more on-line games (step 208). The game information may specifically designate an on-line game to play or request all the on-line games available on the website from which the subscriber can choose to play. Alternatively, the game information may be
15 included in the subscriber information entered to participate in on-line game play. That is, each subscriber may enter the game information at the time of entering his/her subscriber information to participate in on-line game play.

The game information may also include information of setting levels of difficulty in playing an on-line game (209). By entering the information specifically designating the level
20 of difficulty in playing a game, each subscriber may determine a difficulty of the game for his/her preference. Preferably, the levels of difficulty of each on-line game may be initially set by the website server. Thus, if a subscriber does not enter the information of setting

difficulty of the game, the subscriber is provided with the game of which difficulty level is initially set by the website server.

Upon receiving the game information entered by a subscriber, the website server provides the subscriber with one or more on-line games via the Internet in accordance with the game information (step 210). The subscriber may enter the information of setting difficulty of a game after receiving the game from the website server, instead of at the time of entering the game information before receiving the game. Also, the subscriber may change the levels of difficulty of the game by entering the information of setting the difficulty after receiving the game.

Each subscriber then participates in an on-line game received in accordance with his/her game information (step 211). That is, each subscriber may play at a remote terminal an on-line game provided over the Internet. An on-line game may also be provided to multiple subscribers who have entered the game information requesting the same on-line game. In this case, the multiple subscribers are simultaneously provided with the same game at the respective terminals via the Internet, so that the multiple subscribers may participate in the same game simultaneously and compete with each other.

The games (especially, skill-based games) may be progressively changed in levels of difficulty (step 212). For example, when a game is progressively changed in its difficulty, more skill is required on the part of a player as the player proceeds to higher levels in playing the game. Alternatively, the levels of difficulty may be changed such that a player is given less time to play a game as the player proceeds to higher levels of the game. In a like manner, the same game in which the multiple subscribers participate simultaneously may be

progressively changed in levels of difficulty. The multiple subscribers are simultaneously subject to the progressive changes in levels of difficulty.

Preferably, an on-line game is ended after playing for a specified time period set by either a website server or subscribers participating in the game (step 213). In addition to
5 determining or changing a time period for each of levels in playing a game, the subscribers or the website server may set an overall time period to play the game. At the time of starting a game, the website server starts counting an overall time period to play the game. When the overall time period is counted up, the game is automatically ended.

At the end of the game, the website server determines a winner of the game (step
10 214). The determination of a winner is preferably performed based on each subscriber's accomplishment in the game, such as ranking and/or score earned in the game. For example, each subscriber's ranking or score is compared with those of other subscribers. In the case that multiple subscribers participate in the same game, a winner of the game may be a subscriber who has obtained the highest score or ranking in the game. In addition to
15 determining a winner of the game, the website server may also determine rankings or scores of other subscribers who have participated in the game.

Upon determining a winner of the game, the website server rewards the winner with the highest award of the game (step 216). The highest award may be set by the website server before the subscribers participate in the game. Also, in a consideration-based game,
20 the highest award may be constituted by wagers laid by each subscriber. For example, each of the subscribers participating in the game lays a certain amount of wager, and a winner who has obtained the highest score or ranking at the end of the game takes all the wagers or a certain portion of the wagers as the highest award of the game.

Preferably, the website server rewards other subscribers as well as a winner of the game for each subscriber's participation in the game (step 218). In this case, awards are provided to other subscribers than the winner based on each subscriber's accomplishment in the game, such as rankings and/or scores. For example, in the case that multiple subscribers
5 participate in the same game simultaneously, a winner of the game is rewarded with the highest award and each of the other subscribers participating in the game is also rewarded as long as the subscriber has participated in the game. The awards may be monetary or prize awards or points that may be used as credit toward future purchases of goods and services. When the points are rewarded to a subscriber as an award, the points may be accumulated so
10 that the subscriber may retain a point balance.

The series of steps above described referring to Fig. 2 is a description of the present invention from a viewpoint of a website server. Since each subscriber (or, each play station) may actively participate and play on-line games on the website, the present invention may be described from a viewpoint of a subscriber. An exemplary description of playing on-line
15 games in a subscriber's point of view follows.

Referring to Fig. 3, upon logging on to the website providing on-line games, a subscriber can access a home page of the website. The home page may have various contents including hyperlinks to jump to other pages of the website and hyperlinks to jump to other websites. The hyperlinks to other websites may be "banners" of the Internet retailers and
20 sponsors associated with the website. In order to interact with such contents on the website, the subscriber is required to register and be a member of the website. If the subscriber has not registered on the website, the subscriber can go to a registration page of the website by clicking a corresponding hyperlink. The subscriber becomes a member of the website by

electronically submitting a registration form provided on the registration page on the website.

An example of a registration page is shown in Fig. 4.

Referring to Fig. 4, a registration page of the website has a brief member questionnaire with blanks to be filled by the subscriber. The member questionnaire may request the subscriber to provide his/her information, such as e-mail address, name, date of birth, gender, address, telephone number, and so on. The subscriber may also be requested on the member questionnaire to make his/her own password. The subscriber may fill in the "password" blank with certain characters and/or numbers chosen for his/her password, and also fill in the "confirm password" blank with the same characters and/or numbers. By filling in the "password" and "confirm password" blanks, the subscriber may create his/her own password to be used on the website. The member questionnaire also includes a "password hint" blank where the subscriber may enter any words associated with the password that he/she has created. The password hint may be used to help the subscriber remember his/her password. In the member questionnaire, some information such as gender and telephone number may be optional so that the subscriber may skip the optional questionnaire. Address information may be used to confirm the subscriber's place of residence so as to determine whether the subscriber's residence is within the certain states. Telephone number information as well as the address information may be used to contact to the subscriber if he/she wins in the games provided on the website.

Referring again to Fig. 3, if the subscriber has registered on the website, he/she may log in to the website by entering user ID (identification) and password that he created at the time of registration. The subscriber's e-mail address may also be used as his/her user ID. Upon successfully logging in to the website, the subscriber is allowed to interact with

contents in a home page (or a predetermined starting page) of the website. Fig. 5 shows an example of the home page having various contents with which the subscriber interacts to play games and to receive rewards. Referring to Fig. 5, the contents on the page include hyperlinks of "games", "prizes", "e-points", and "winners" which are most frequently
5 interacted by subscribers to play games and to get rewards. The contents may have hyperlinks to jump to other interesting websites or pages and also have information pages providing description of services on the website. The contents may also include advertising banners hyperlinked to retailers and sponsors associated with the website. By clicking a banner of the contents, the subscriber may jump to a website of an advertising retailer and
10 interact with contents on the website of the retailer to purchase goods and/or services from the retailer.

Referring to Fig. 3 again, upon accessing the home page of the website, the subscriber can jump to a game page to play games by clicking the "games" hyperlink. The game page may have a game menu where various games each having a title and/or a brief description are
15 displayed. The subscriber can choose a game to play from the game menu. For example, if choosing a lotto game by clicking a corresponding hyperlink on the game menu, the subscriber jumps to a page providing the lotto game. Fig. 6A and 6B show a lotto game as an example of consideration-based games available on the game menu of the website.

Referring to Fig. 6A, the lotto game page provides a virtual lottery ticket on which the
20 subscriber can enter information such as lottery play numbers and a date of play. The subscriber may choose play numbers using a number pad (not shown) provided on the lotto game page or click "quick pick" button for a set of randomly generated numbers. The subscriber may also choose the date on which the subscriber would like to play. When the

subscriber is satisfied with the play numbers, he/she may click "submit" button so that winning numbers are drawn and announced on the date chosen. Alternatively, instead of clicking the "submit" button, the subscriber may be required to click an advertising banner on the page. In other words, the subscriber may submit his/her lottery ticket by clicking a
5 banner to jump to a hyperlinked website of a retailer or a sponsor. Referring to Fig. 6B, upon successfully submitting the lottery ticket, the subscriber receives a ticket confirmation number and ticket information. A prize for the winning may be specified on the ticket and/or the ticket information, and it may be a certain amount of e-points. Thus, the subscriber may earn e-points by winning on games provided on the website as well as by interacting with
10 contents on the website as described above.

The subscriber may also choose a skill-based game by clicking a corresponding hyperlink on the game menu. Fig. 7A shows an example of the skill-based games available on the game menu, and Fig. 7B shows an example of rewarding prizes in a skill-based game.

Referring to Fig. 7A, the subscriber has chosen "Quiz Land" from the game menu
15 having various skill-based and consideration-based games and jumps to the "Quiz Land" page providing various quiz-related game hyperlinks, such as "TV Trivia", "Music Trivia", "Sports Trivia", and so on. The subscriber may choose one of them by clicking a corresponding hyperlink. Each game has different subjects as shown in its title and provides questions within its subject to be answered by the subscriber. If the subscriber answers correctly to a
20 question, he/she receives a score calculated in a predetermined way. For example, if the subscriber enters a correct answer to a question, he/she receives a score equal to the percentage of players who have been wrong on that question. If the percentage is '48%', the score for the subscriber is '48'. This method of scoring rewards the subscriber more for

correctly answering tougher questions. As shown in Fig. 7B, the subscriber may be placed on a ranking based on his/her score, and receive an award (e.g., e-points) based on the ranking. The higher is the ranking, the more e-points the subscriber can receive.

Referring again to Fig. 3, upon successfully accessing the home page of the website,
5 the subscriber may click "e-points" hyperlink to jump to a page relating to redemption of e-points earned by the subscriber. As shown in Fig. 8, the subscriber may have choices in the redemption of his/her e-points, such as redemption for money or for merchandise. If the subscriber chooses to be redeemed with money, the subscriber may be asked for his/her confidential password and other member information and it may be determined whether the
10 amount of the subscriber's e-points is over a certain amount of redeemable minimum. If the amount of the subscriber's e-points is equal to or over the minimum, the subscriber's redemption amount is delivered to the subscriber via check in a certain time period. If the amount of the subscriber's e-points is less than the minimum, the subscriber receives a message informing insufficient e-points for the money redemption. The subscriber may also
15 choose to redeem his/her e-points for merchandise. In this case, the subscriber may receive, for example, rebate checks in accordance with his/her redemption amount on goods and services offered by the Internet retailers hyperlinked with the website. The subscriber may also choose a category of merchandise for the redemption, and further choose more specified types of merchandise within the category chosen. Each of the specified types of merchandise
20 displays URL (Uniform Resource Locator) addresses of various retailers. Since the URL addresses are hyperlinked with the website, the subscriber can directly jump to a website of his/her favorite or interesting retailer by clicking a corresponding one of the URL addresses. On the website of a retailer chosen, the subscriber may order goods or services of which

value is equal to or less than his/her redemption amount, or the subscriber may receive a discount as much as the redemption amount.

Having described preferred embodiments of the system and method for facilitating play of on-line games according to the present invention, it is noted that modifications and variations can be made by persons skilled in the art in light of the above teachings. It is therefore to be understood that the above embodiments are intended to be illustrative, and that any changes may be made in the particular embodiments disclosed, which are within the scope and spirit of the invention as outlined by the appended claims.

What is claimed is:

1. A system for facilitating participation by subscribers in on-line game play provided over an electronic network, comprising:
 - 5 a server connected to the electronic network, for providing the subscribers with at least one on-line game via the electronic network in response to information entered by the subscribers at terminals connected to the electronic network, and for rewarding at least one of the subscribers based on each subscriber's accomplishment in the on-line game.
- 10 2. The system as defined in claim 1, wherein the server includes:
 - a communication unit connected to the electronic network, for receiving subscriber information and game information entered by each subscriber to participate in the on-line game play, wherein the subscriber information includes personal information of the subscriber and the game information designates at least one on-line game to play;
 - 15 an identifier receiving the subscriber information from the communication unit, for identifying the subscriber with the received subscriber information;
 - a game server receiving the game information from the communication unit, for providing the subscriber with the at least one on-line game in accordance with the game information; and
 - 20 an award server for rewarding the subscriber based on the subscriber's accomplishment in the on-line game.

3. The system as defined in claim 2, further including a subscriber database having a plurality of accounts for the respective subscribers, each account storing subscriber information entered by each subscriber to register the subscriber.

5 4. The system as defined in claim 3, wherein the identifier compares the subscriber information entered to participate in the on-line game play with the subscriber information entered to register, and determines identity between the two types of the subscriber information.

10 5. The system as defined in claim 2, further including a survey server for storing a plurality of questionnaires and for providing the subscribers with the questionnaires to which the subscribers make answers.

6. The system as defined in claim 5, wherein the award server rewards each
15 subscriber for the subscriber's answering to the questionnaires.

7. The system as defined in claim 2, further including a bank server connected to the subscriber database and banks where the subscribers have accounts, for controlling transfer of each subscriber's financial information between the subscriber database and the
20 accounts in the banks.

8. The system as defined in claim 2, wherein the game server provides the subscribers with an on-line game that is progressively changed in levels of difficulty in playing the game.

5 9. The system as defined in claim 8, wherein the on-line game is changed such that more skill is required on the part of the subscribers as the subscribers proceed to higher levels in playing the on-line game.

10 10. The system as defined in claim 8, wherein the on-line game is changed such that less time is given to the subscribers as the subscribers proceed to higher levels in playing the on-line game.

11. The system as defined in claim 2, wherein the game server provides multiple subscribers with an on-line game in response to the game information received from the
15 communication unit, so that the multiple subscribers participate in the on-line game simultaneously, wherein the game information entered by the multiple subscribers requests the same on-line game.

12. The system as defined in claim 11, wherein the award server provides a
20 winner of the on-line game with a highest award of the on-line game, the winner of the on-line game obtaining a highest one of ranking and score at the time of ending the on-line game.

13. The system as defined in claim 11, wherein the multiple subscribers separately pay for the on-line game, at least one of the multiple subscribers being rewarded with predetermined prizes upon winning in the on-line game.

5 14. The system as defined in claim 13, wherein the at least one of the multiple subscribers is a winner of the on-line game, the winner being rewarded with a total winning prize of the game.

15 15. The system as defined in claim 13, wherein the multiple subscribers are rewarded with the predetermined prizes based on each subscriber's accomplishment in the on-line game at a specified time period.

16. The system as defined in claim 1, wherein the electronic network is the Internet.
15

17. A method for facilitating participation by subscribers in on-line game play provided over an electronic network, comprising the steps of:
receiving subscriber information and game information entered by each subscriber to participate in an on-line game;
20 identifying the subscriber with the subscriber information;
providing the subscriber with the on-line game in accordance with the game information; and

rewarding each subscriber at the end of the on-line game based on each subscriber's accomplishment in the on-line game.

18. The method as defined in claim 17, wherein the step of identifying includes
5 the steps of:
receiving subscriber information entered by the subscriber to register;
comparing the subscriber information to participate and the subscriber information to register; and
determining the identity between the subscriber information to participate and the
10 subscriber information to register.

19. The method as defined in claim 17, wherein the step of providing the
subscriber with the on-line game includes performing progressive changes in levels of
difficulty in playing the on-line game.
15

20. The method as defined in claim 17, wherein the step of rewarding includes the
steps of:
determining a winner of the on-line game, wherein the winner is a subscriber
20 obtaining a highest one of ranking and score at the time of ending the on-line game; and
rewarding the winner with a highest award of the on-line game.

21. The method as defined in claim 17, wherein the step of providing the subscriber with the on-line game includes providing multiple subscribers with the on-line game so that the multiple subscribers participate in the on-line game simultaneously, wherein the multiple subscribers enter the game information requesting the same on-line game.

5

22. The method as defined in claim 21, wherein the step of rewarding includes determining a winner of the on-line game after the multiple subscribers stop playing the on-line game simultaneously.

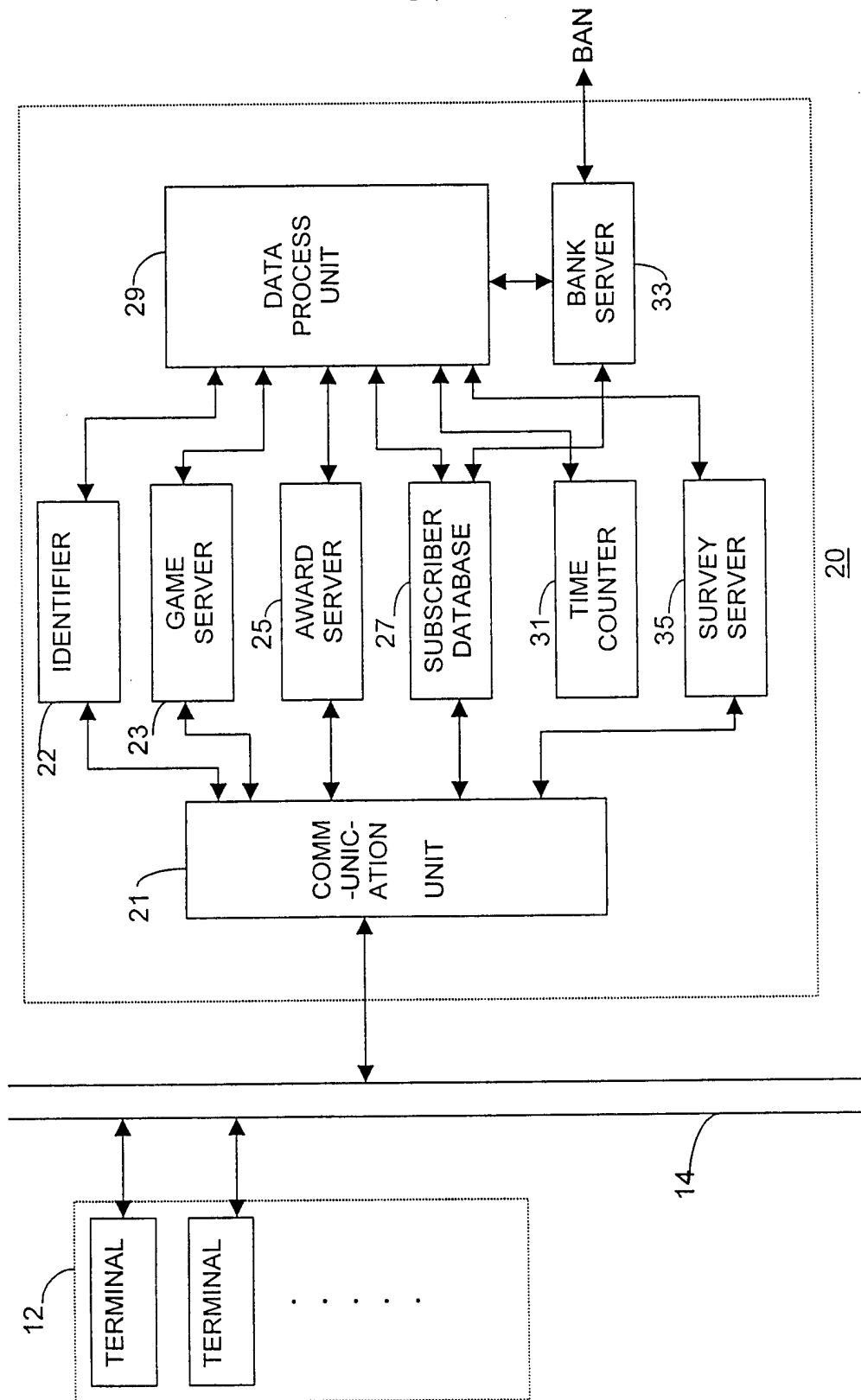


Fig. 1

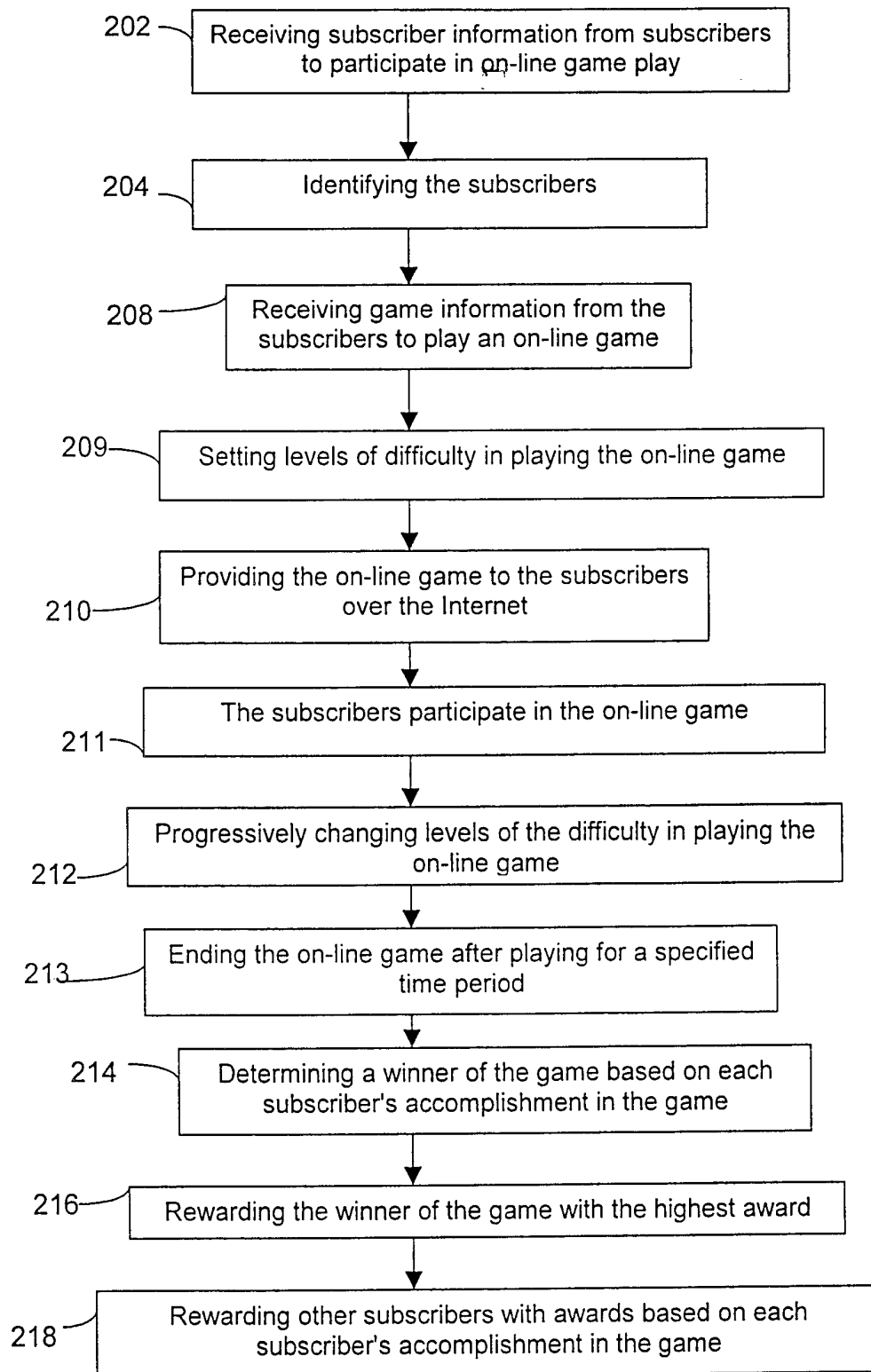


Fig. 2

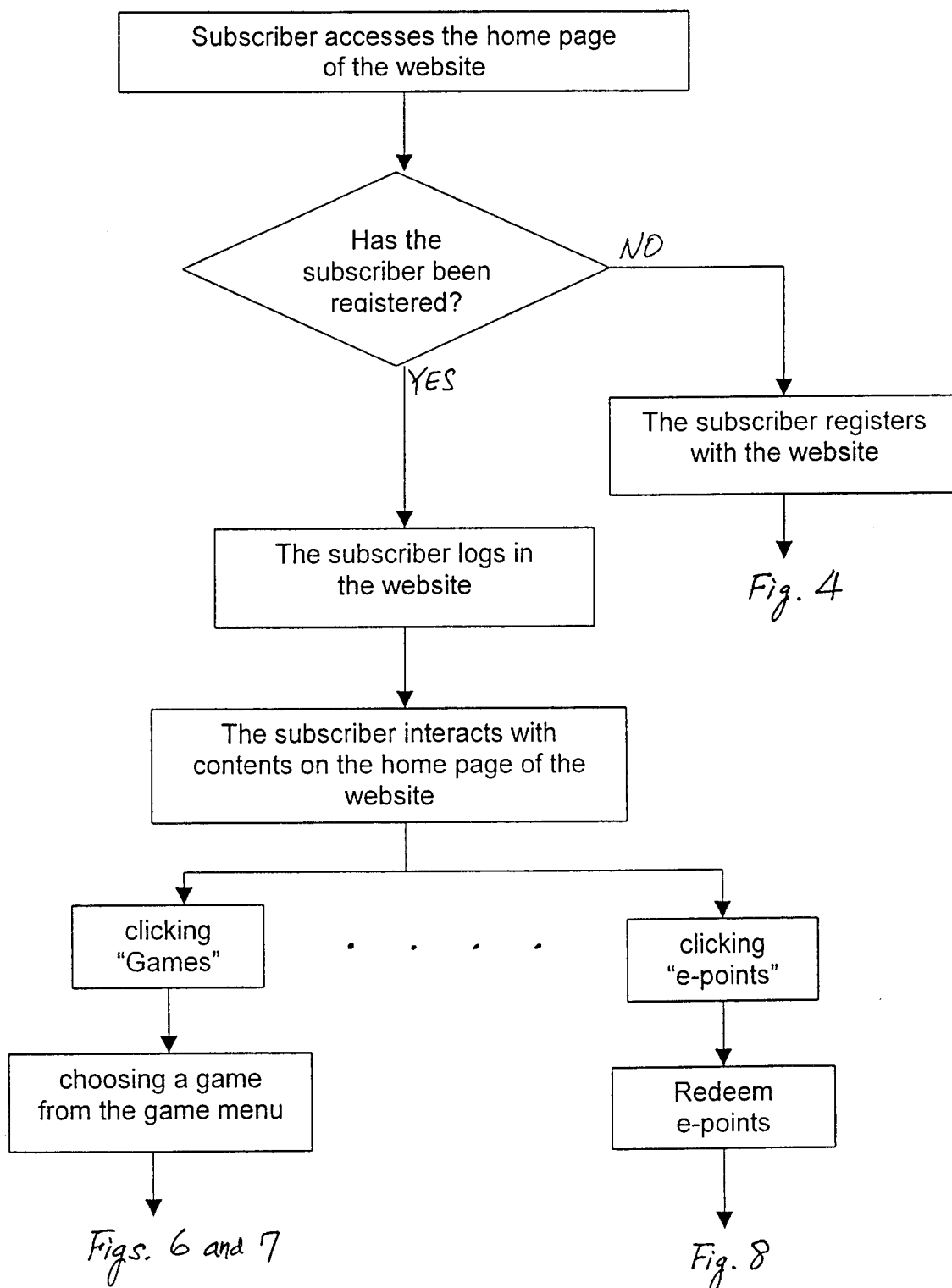


Fig. 3

WELCOME TO E-LOTTERY WEBSITE!**E-LOTTERY WEBSITE MEMBERSHIP**

(Please fill in the followings)

E-MAIL ADDRESS	<input type="text"/>
PASSWORD	<input type="text"/>
CONFIRM PASSWORD	<input type="text"/>
PASSWORD HINT	<input type="text"/>
FIRST NAME	<input type="text"/>
MIDDLE NAME	<input type="text"/>
LAST NAME	<input type="text"/>
DATE OF BIRTH	<input type="text"/>
GENDER	<input type="text"/>
ADDRESS	<input type="text"/>
TELEPHONE NO.	<input type="text"/>

Fig. 4

E-LOTTERY WEBSITE

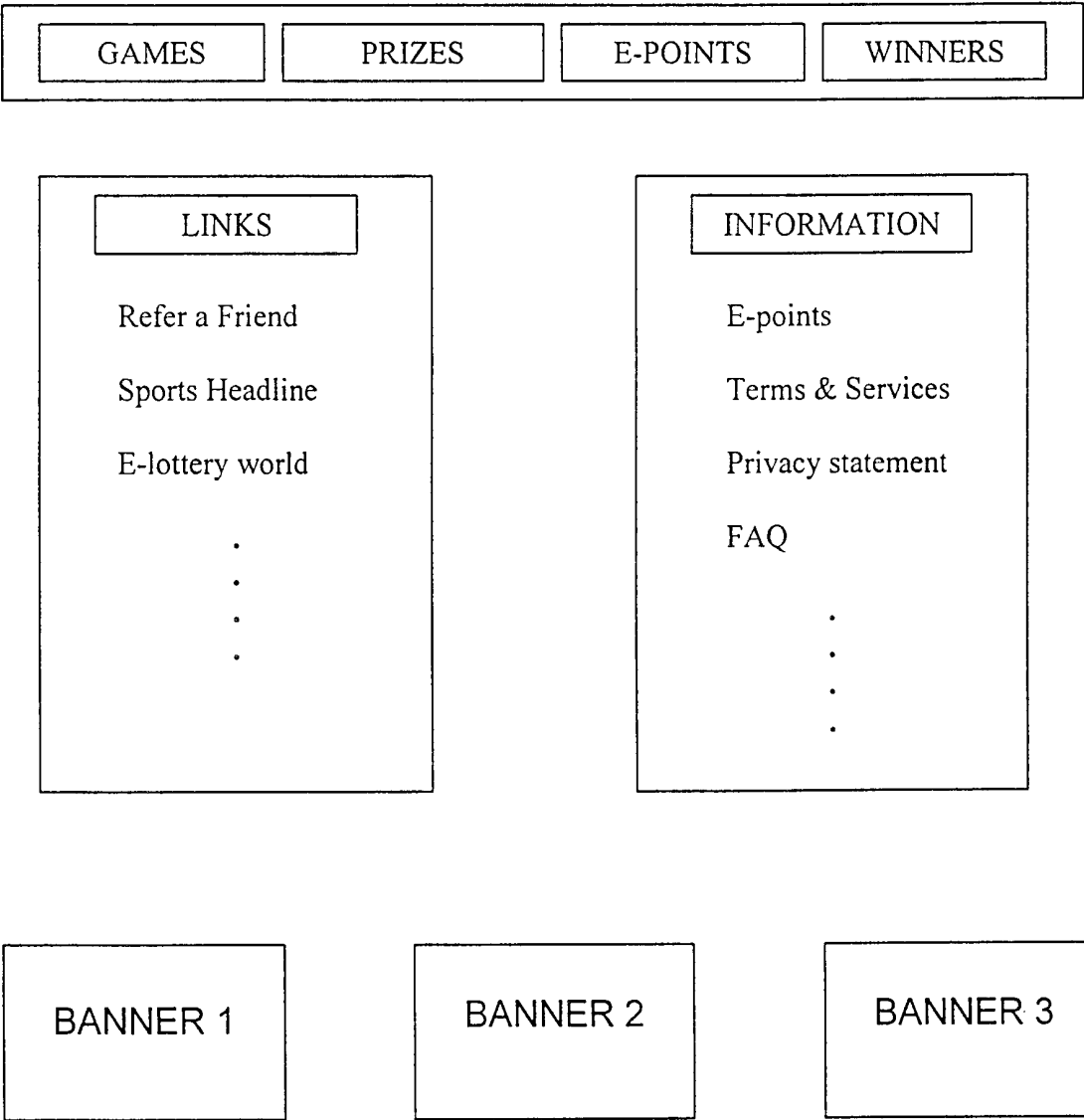


Fig. 5

PICK 3 LOTTO GAMES

Quick Pick

TYPE OF BET

PRIZE AMOUNT

5000 e-points

Submit Ticket

Choose the day on
Which you'd like to
Play:

—

MON 3-13-00

—

TUE 3-14-00

—

WED 3-15-00

—

THU 3-16-00

Fig. 6A

TICKET CONFIRMATION NUMBER 1 2 3 4 5 6

YOUR TICKET INFORMATION

Bet Type	Played No.	Winning No.	Prize
Straight	7 8 9		5000 e-points

This confirmation number is valid for the drawing to be held
on Monday 3-13-00 at 6:00 PM.

Fig. 6B

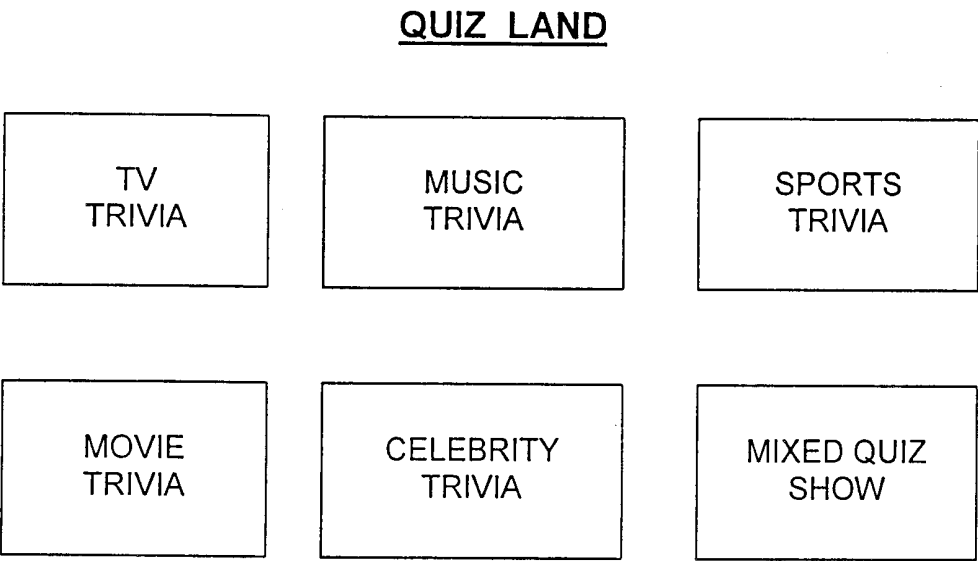


Fig. 7A

PRIZES

<u>RANKING</u>	<u>POINTS</u>
1	150
2	125
3	120
4	100
5	80
6	60
.	.
.	.

Fig. 7B

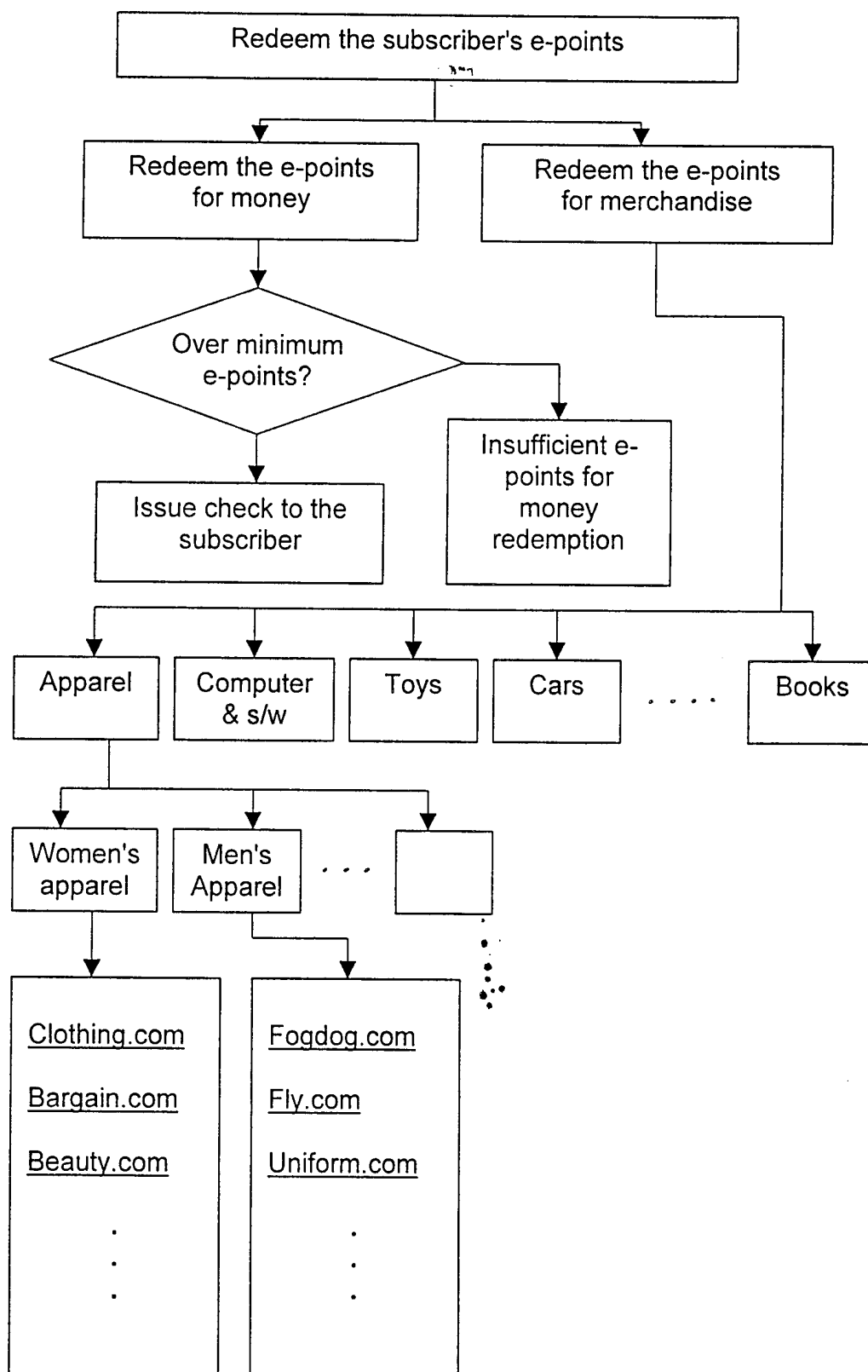


Fig. 8