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(54) SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR ALLOWING INTERCOMMUNICATION AMONG DISTRIBUTED USERS IN A GAMING ENVIRONMENT

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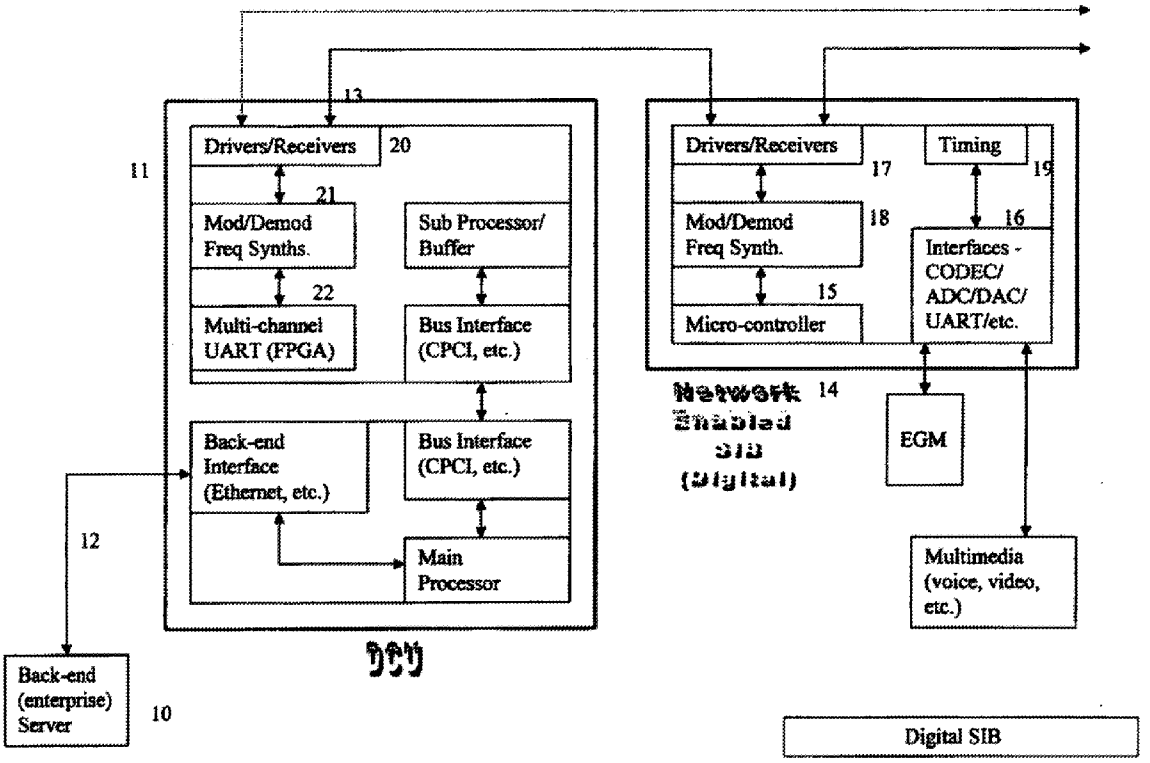
(52) **U.S. Cl.** **463/42**

(57) **ABSTRACT**

A gaming machine system and associated method are provided. Initially, a user of a gaming machine is identified, along with at least one other party. In uses, communication between the user and the at least one other party is provided. In another embodiment, first identified is a first user of a first gaming machine associated with a second user of a second gaming machine. In use, the first gaming machine is located for the second user, for various purposes.



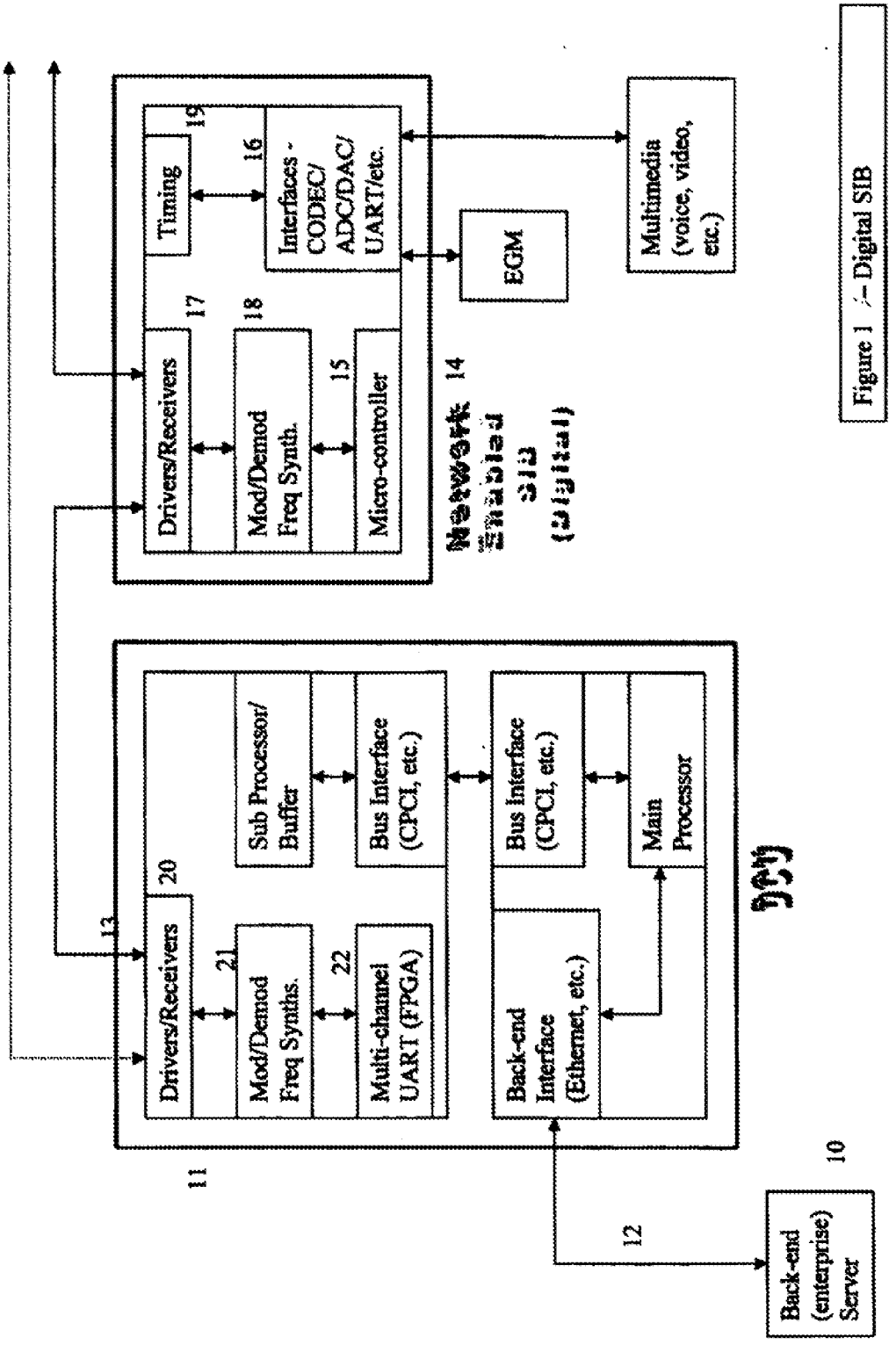


Figure 1 – Digital SIB

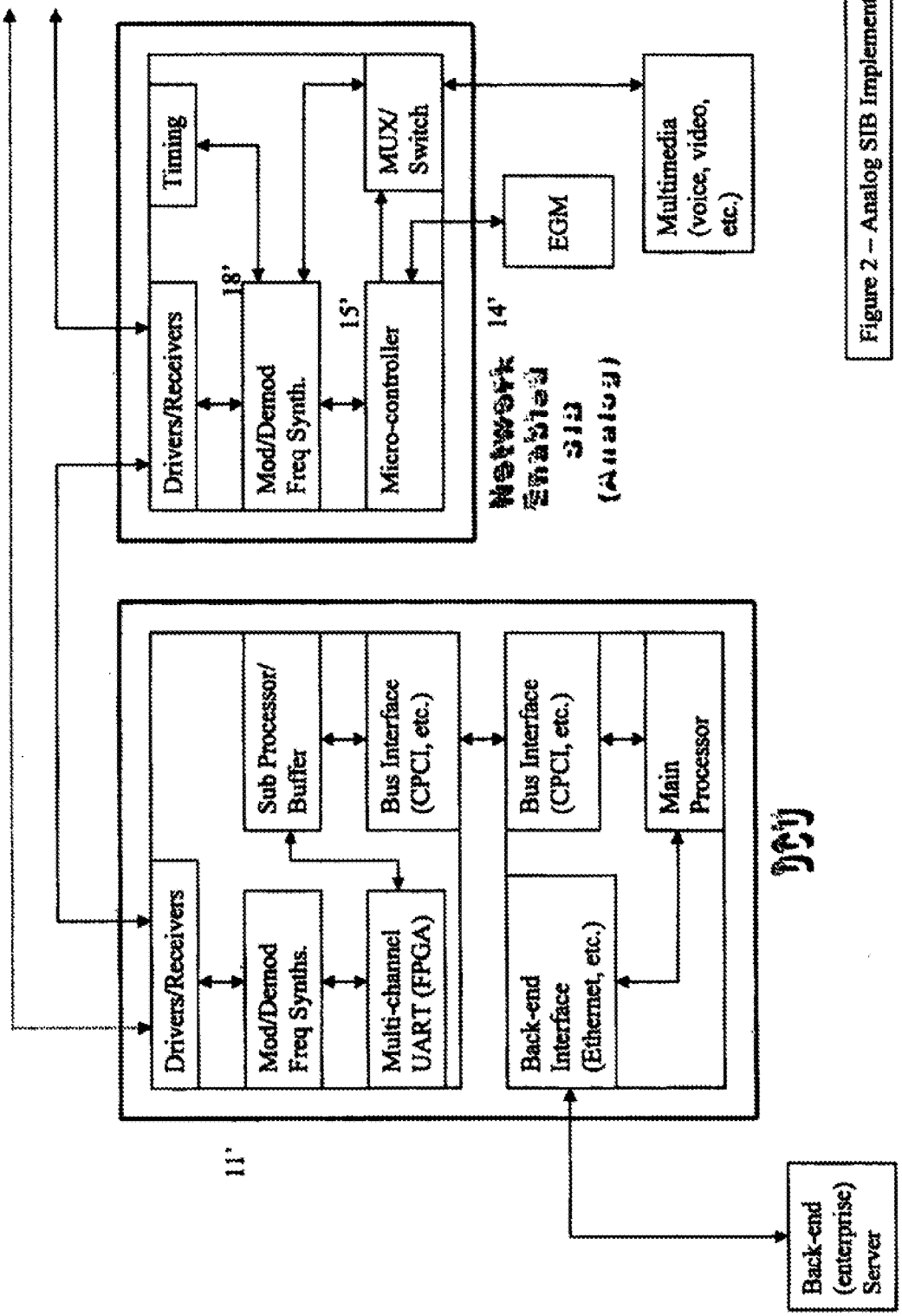


Figure 2 – Analog SIB Implementation

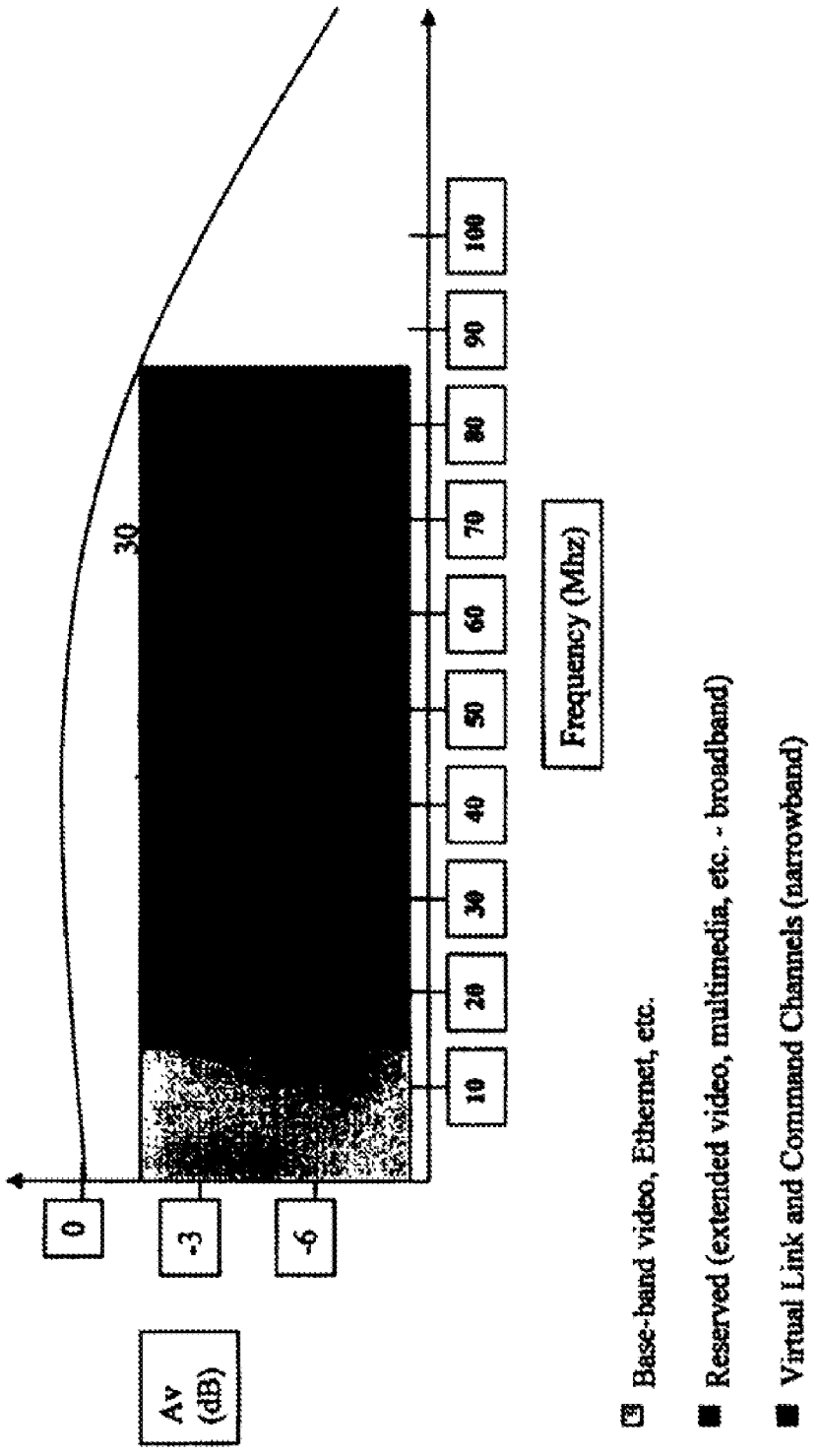

Av (dB)
0
-3
-6
30
10
20
30
40
50
60
70
80
90
100
Frequency (Mhz)
Base-band video, Ethernet, etc.
Reserved (extended video, multimedia, etc. - broadband)
Virtual Link and Command Channels (narrowband)

Figure 3

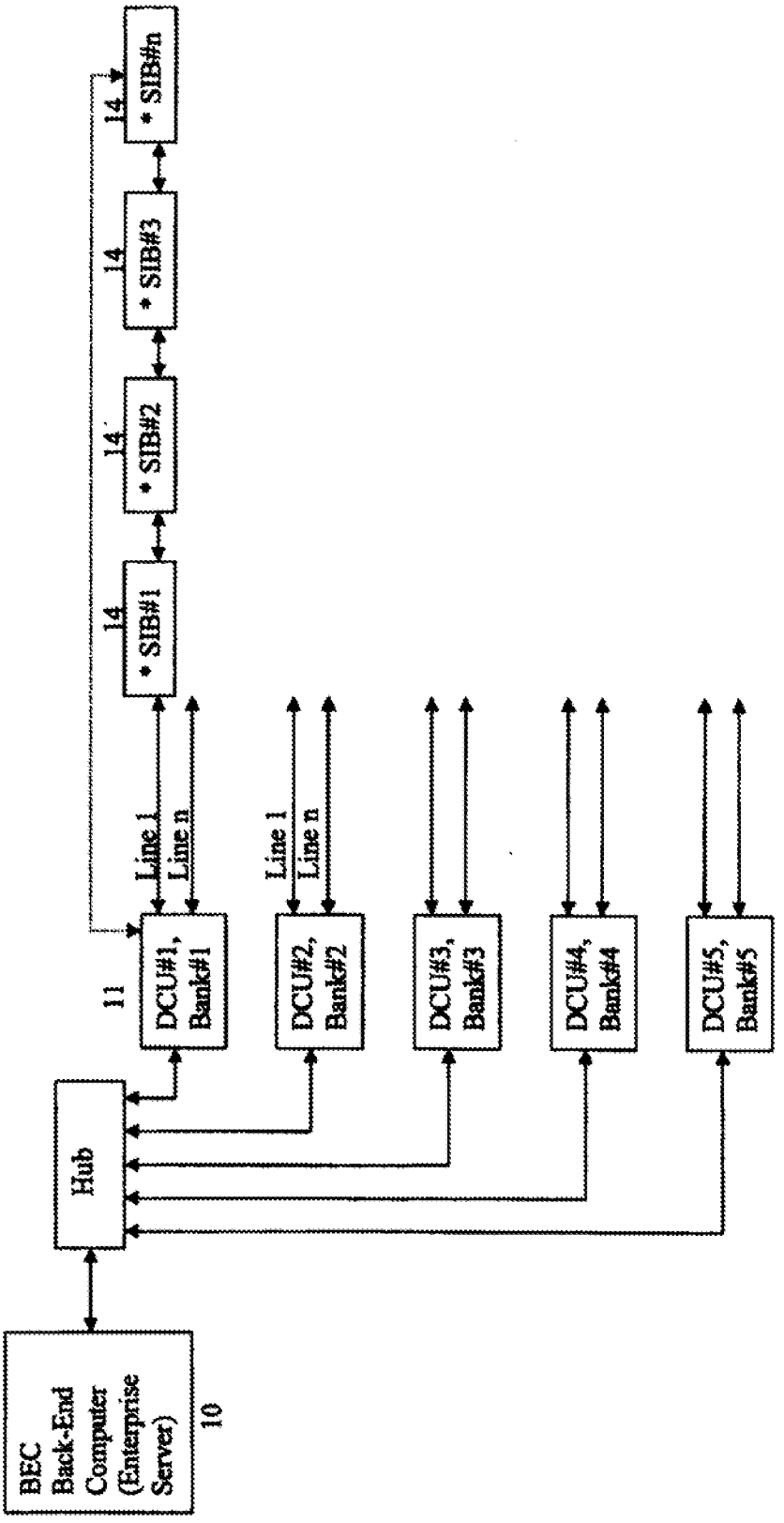

BEC Back-End Computer (Enterprise Server)
10
Hub
11
DCU#1, Bank#1
DCU#2, Bank#2
DCU#3, Bank#3
DCU#4, Bank#4
DCU#5, Bank#5
Line 1
Line n
14
* SIB#1
* SIB#2
* SIB#3
* SIB#n
* Network-enabled

Figure 4

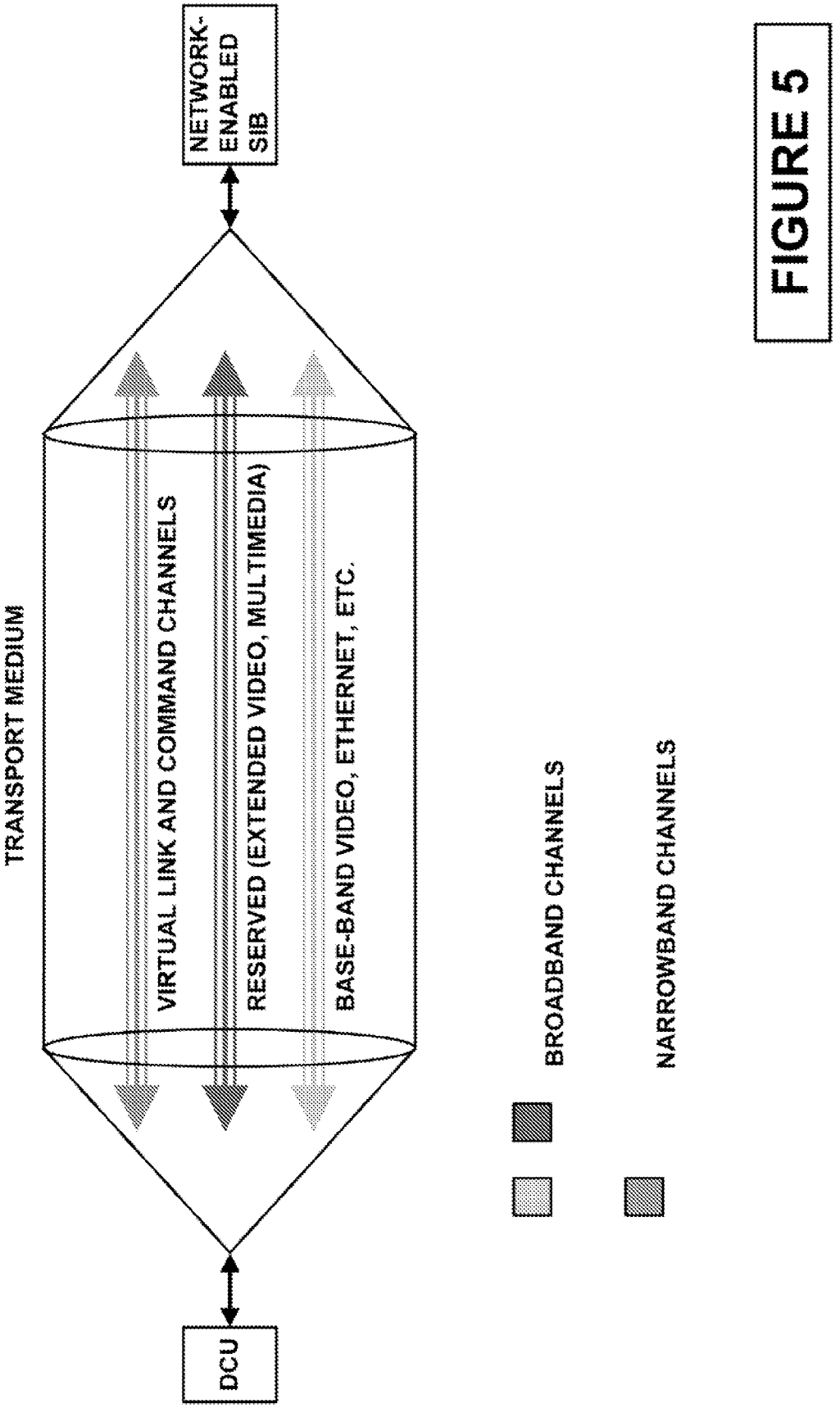

NETWORK-ENABLED SIB
TRANSPORT MEDIUM
VIRTUAL LINK AND COMMAND CHANNELS
RESERVED (EXTENDED VIDEO, MULTIMEDIA)
BASE-BAND VIDEO, ETHERNET, ETC.
DCU
BROADBAND CHANNELS
NARROWBAND CHANNELS

FIGURE 5

Figure 6

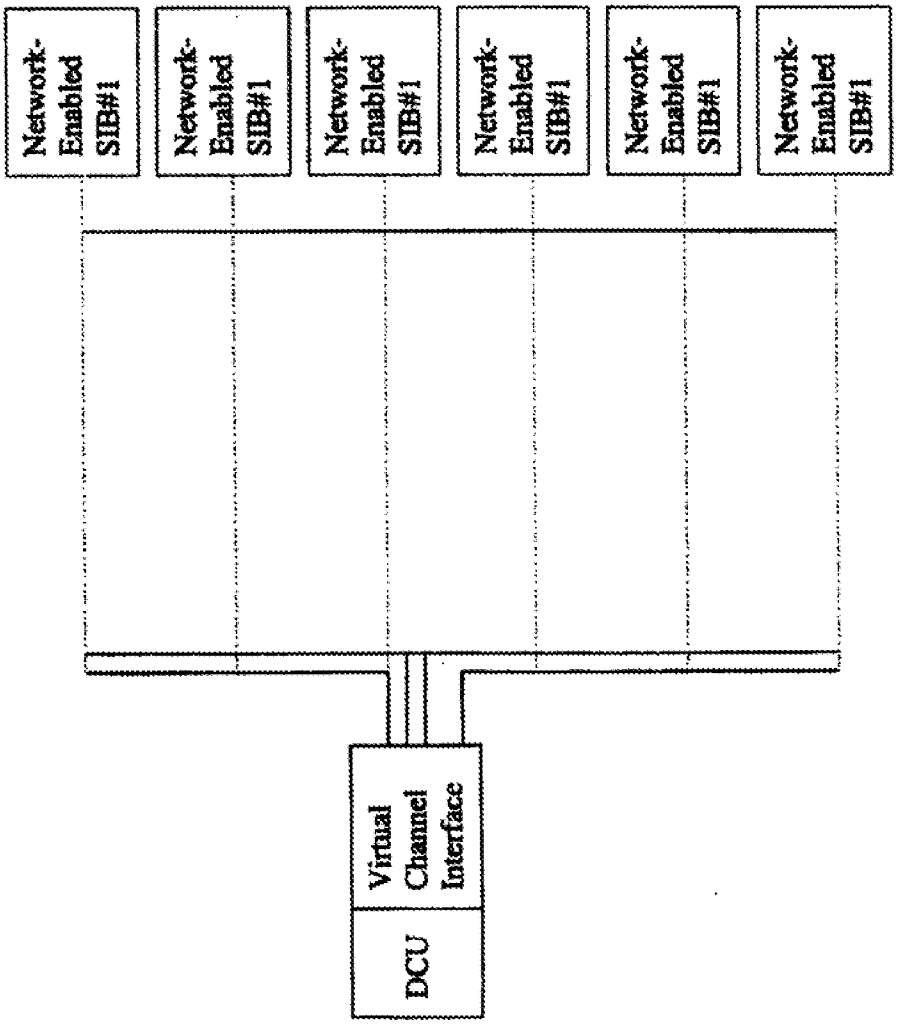
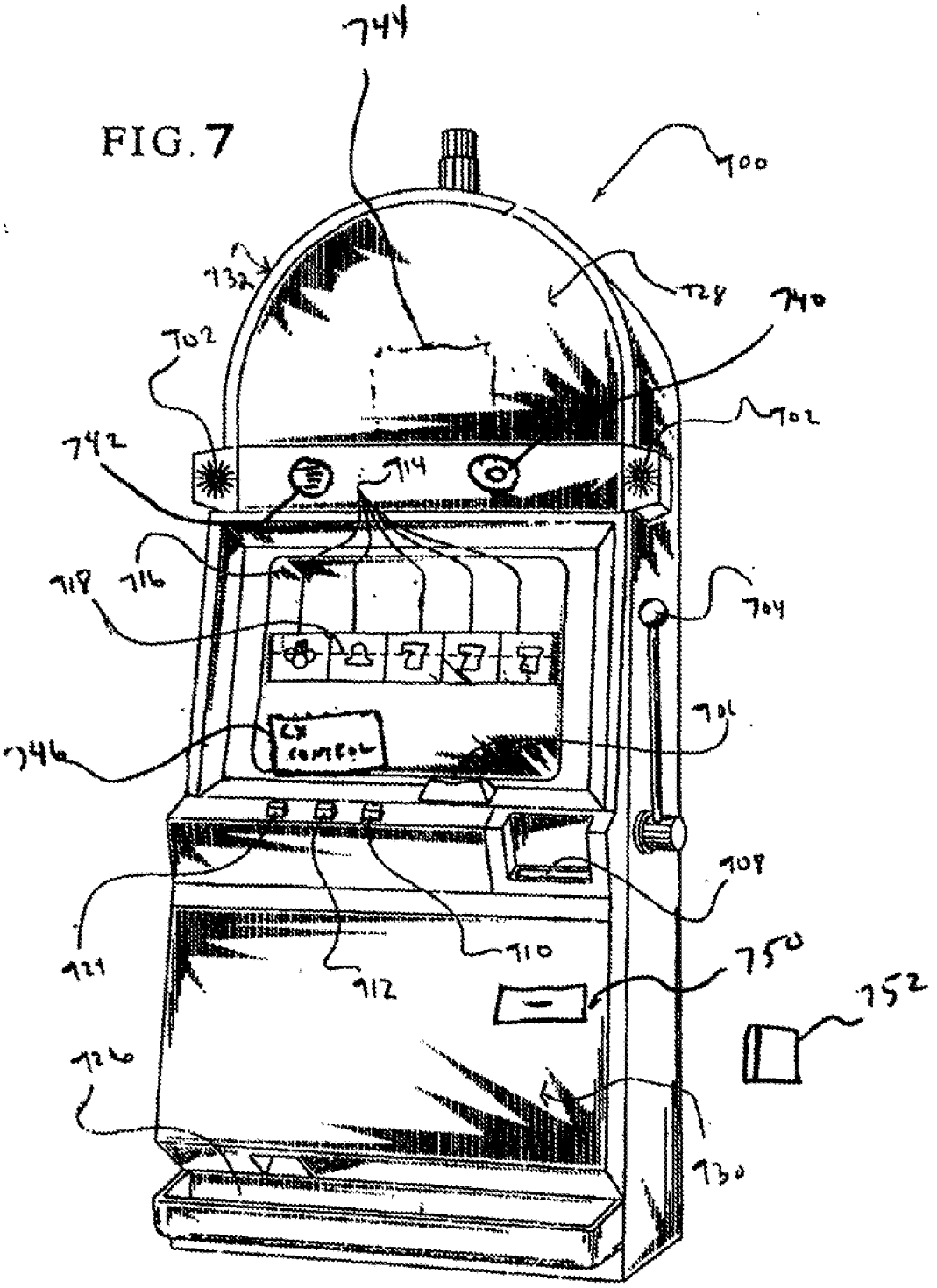

Network-Enabled SIB#1
Network-Enabled SIB#1
Network-Enabled SIB#1
Network-Enabled SIB#1
Network-Enabled SIB#1
Network-Enabled SIB#1
Virtual Channel Interface
DCU

FIG. 7


744
700
732
728
740
702
702
742
714
716
718
704
701
746
709
710
721
712
750
752
726
730

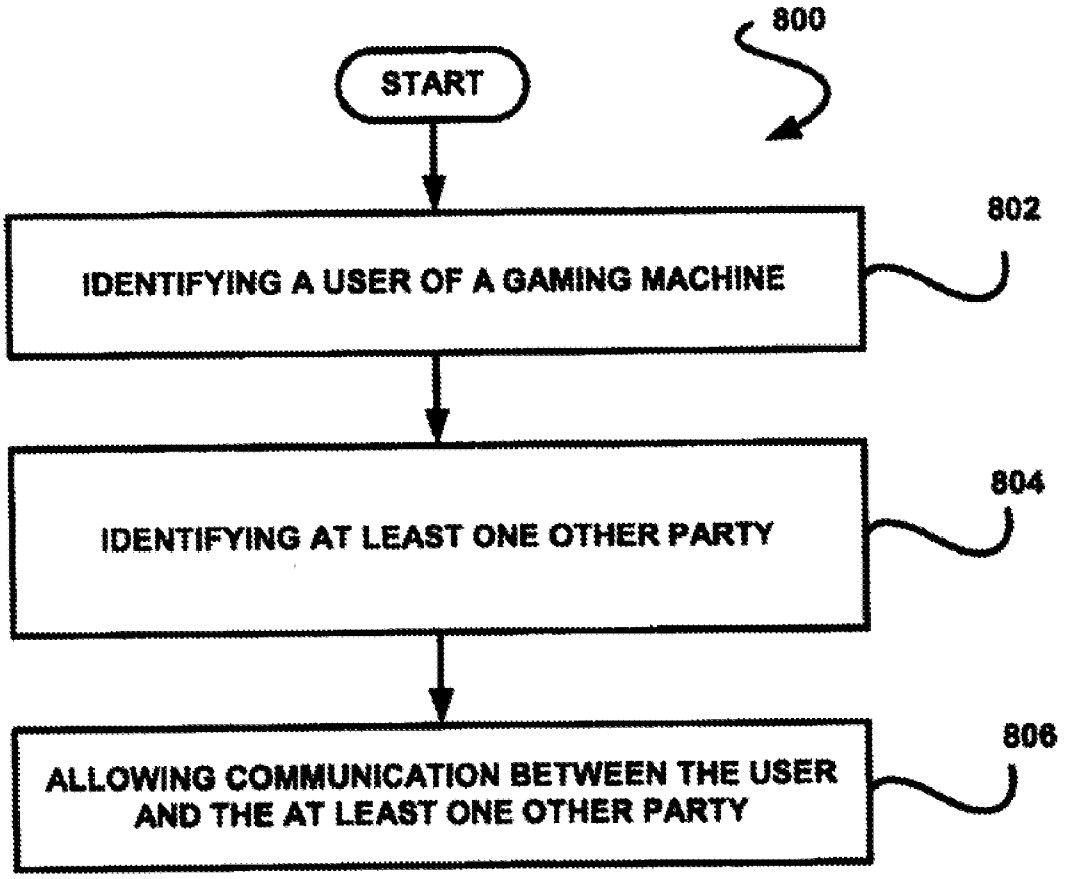
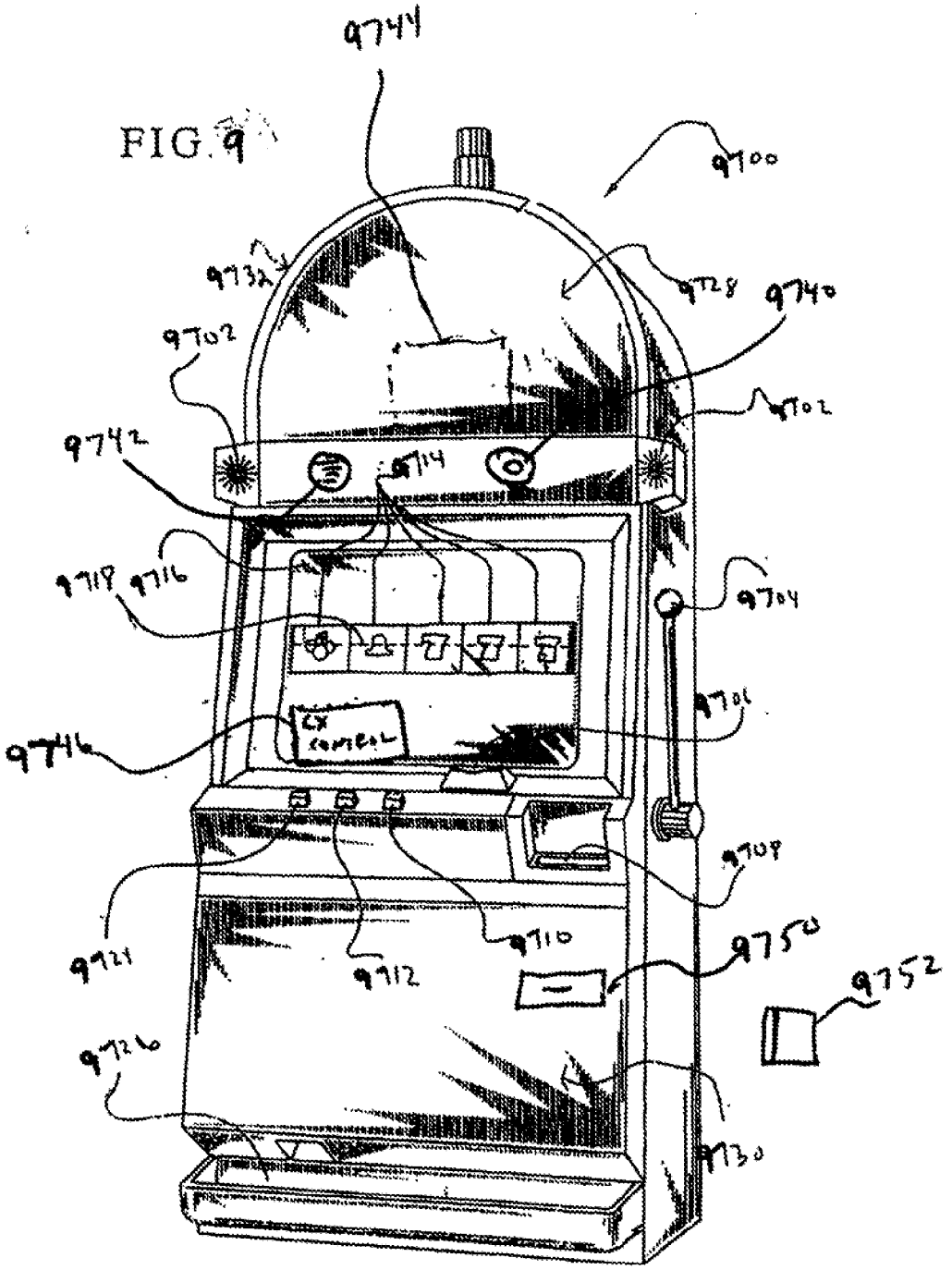

800
START
802
IDENTIFYING A USER OF A GAMING MACHINE
804
IDENTIFYING AT LEAST ONE OTHER PARTY
806
ALLOWING COMMUNICATION BETWEEN THE USER AND THE AT LEAST ONE OTHER PARTY

Fig. 8

FIG. 9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9700
9732
9728
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9752
9726
9730

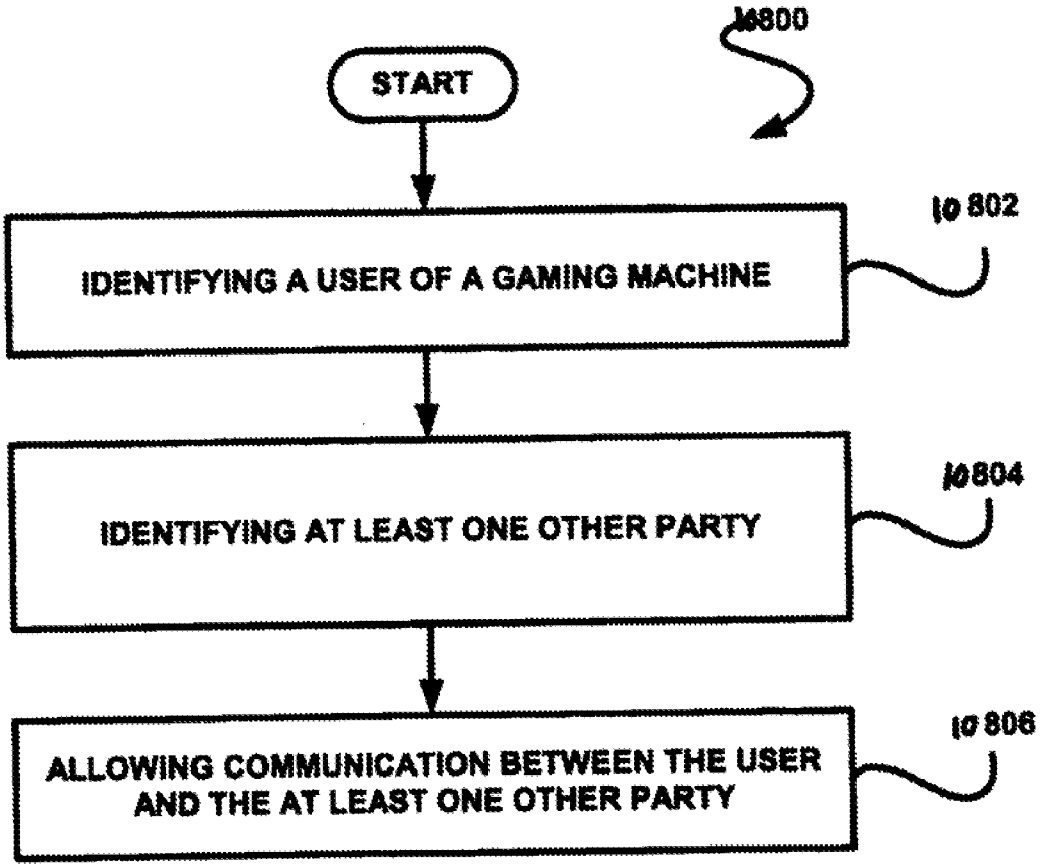

800
START
802
IDENTIFYING A USER OF A GAMING MACHINE
804
IDENTIFYING AT LEAST ONE OTHER PARTY
806
ALLOWING COMMUNICATION BETWEEN THE USER AND THE AT LEAST ONE OTHER PARTY

Fig. 10

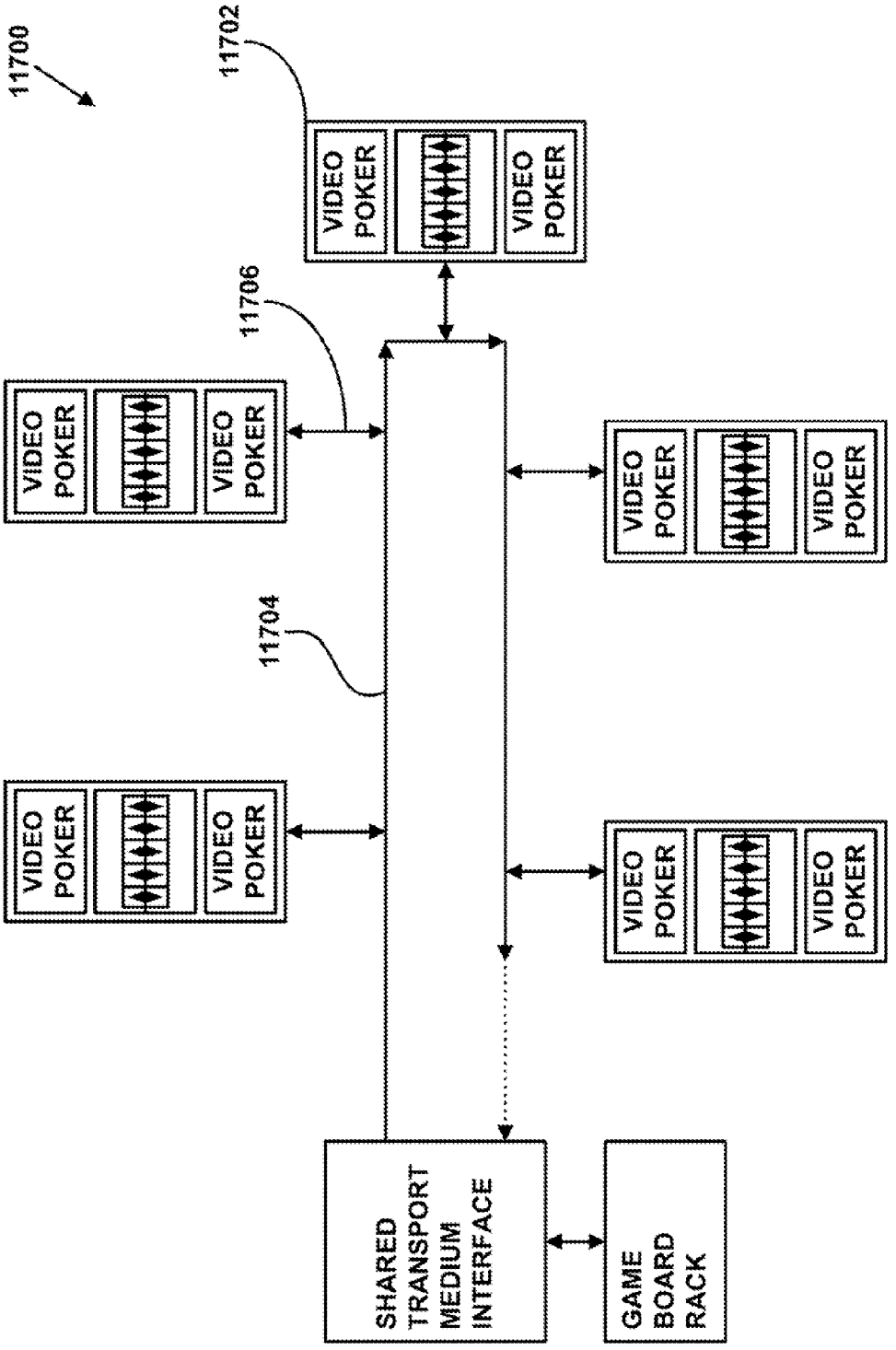
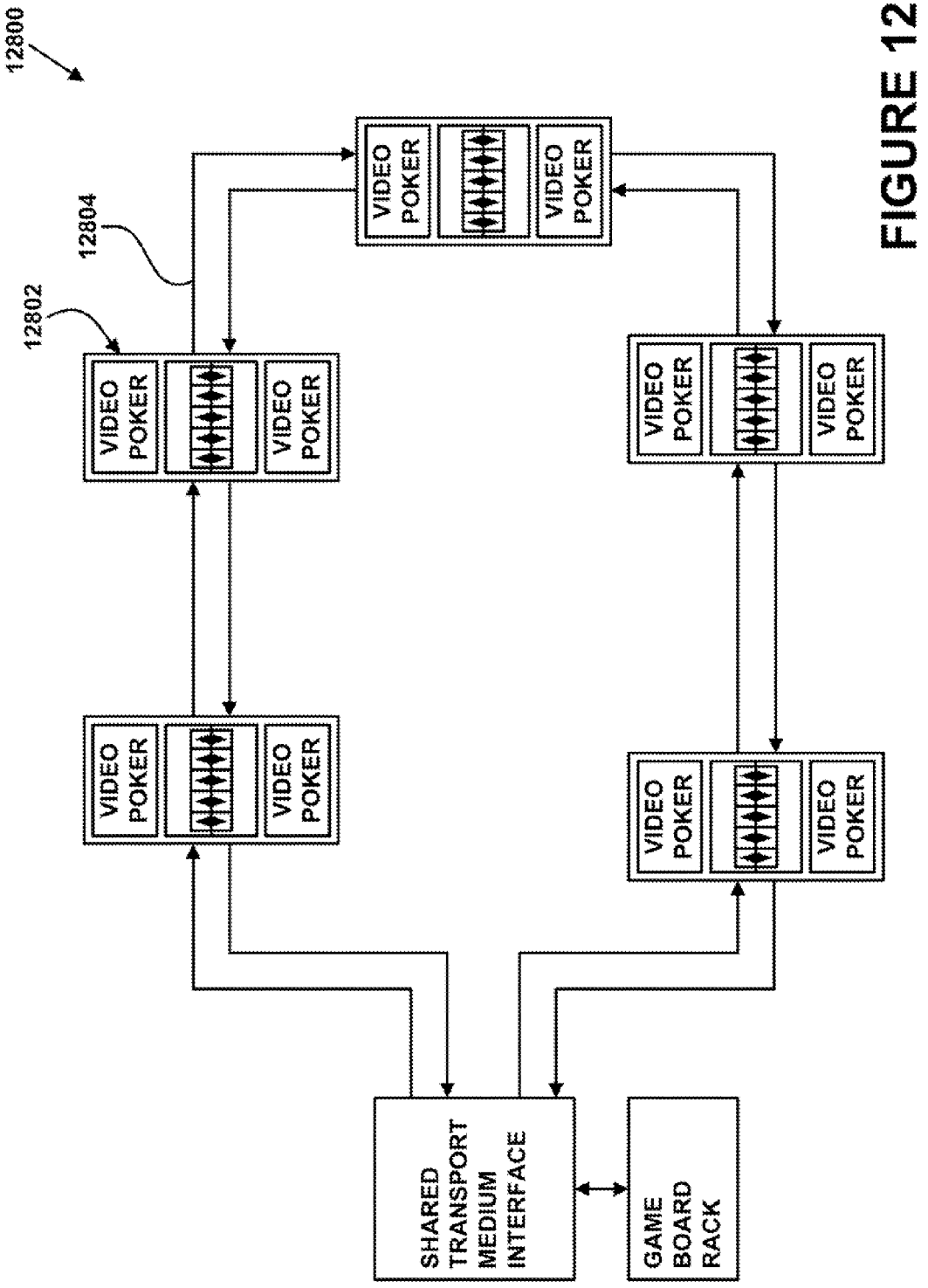

11700
11702
11704
11706
VIDEO POKER
VIDEO POKER
VIDEO POKER
VIDEO POKER
VIDEO POKER
VIDEO POKER
VIDEO POKER
VIDEO POKER
VIDEO POKER
SHARED TRANSPORT MEDIUM INTERFACE
GAME BOARD RACK

FIGURE 11


12800
12804
12802
VIDEO POKER
VIDEO POKER
VIDEO POKER
VIDEO POKER
VIDEO POKER
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VIDEO POKER
SHARED TRANSPORT MEDIUM INTERFACE
GAME BOARD RACK

FIGURE 12

FIG. 13

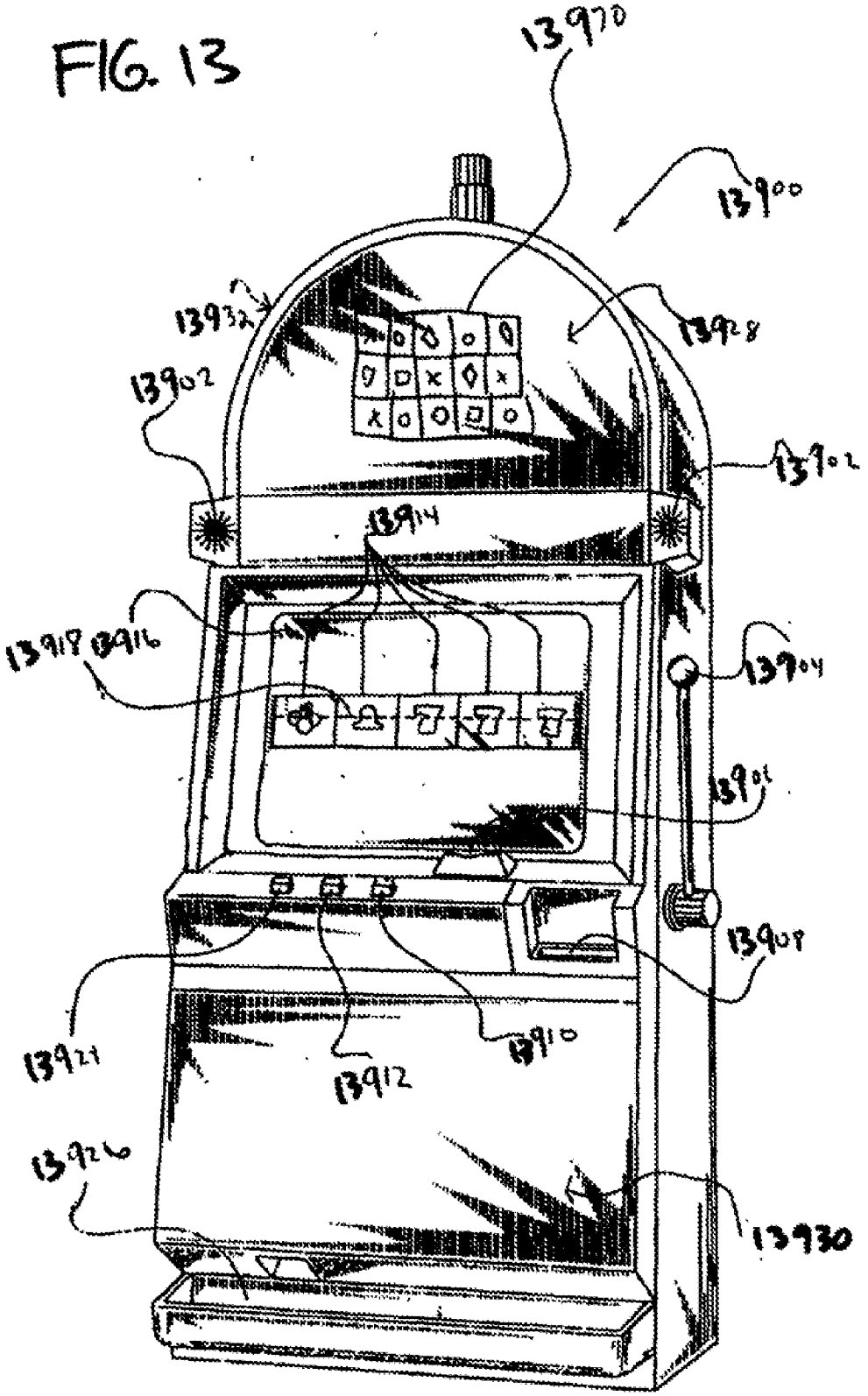
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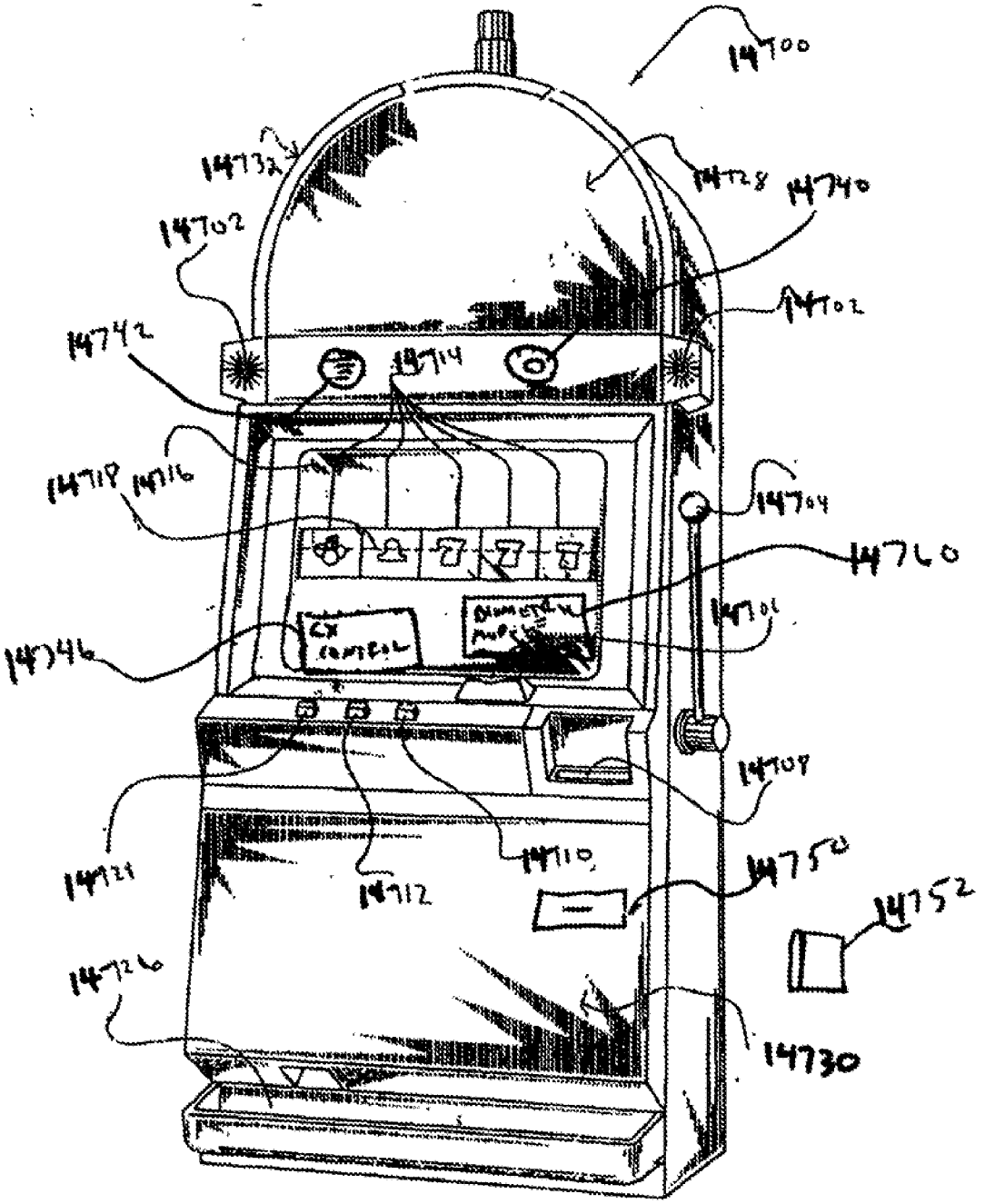
FIG. 14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14752
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14730

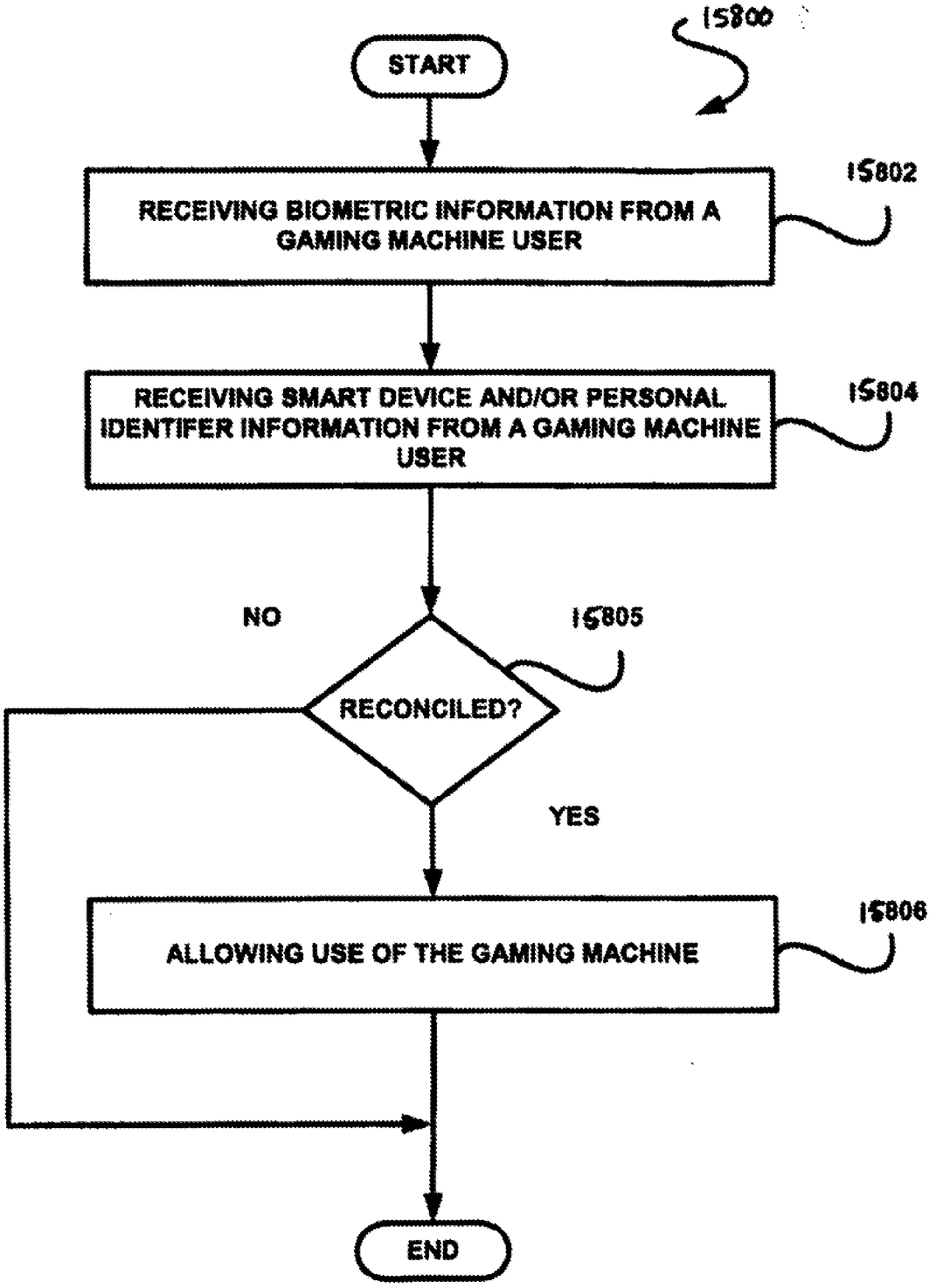
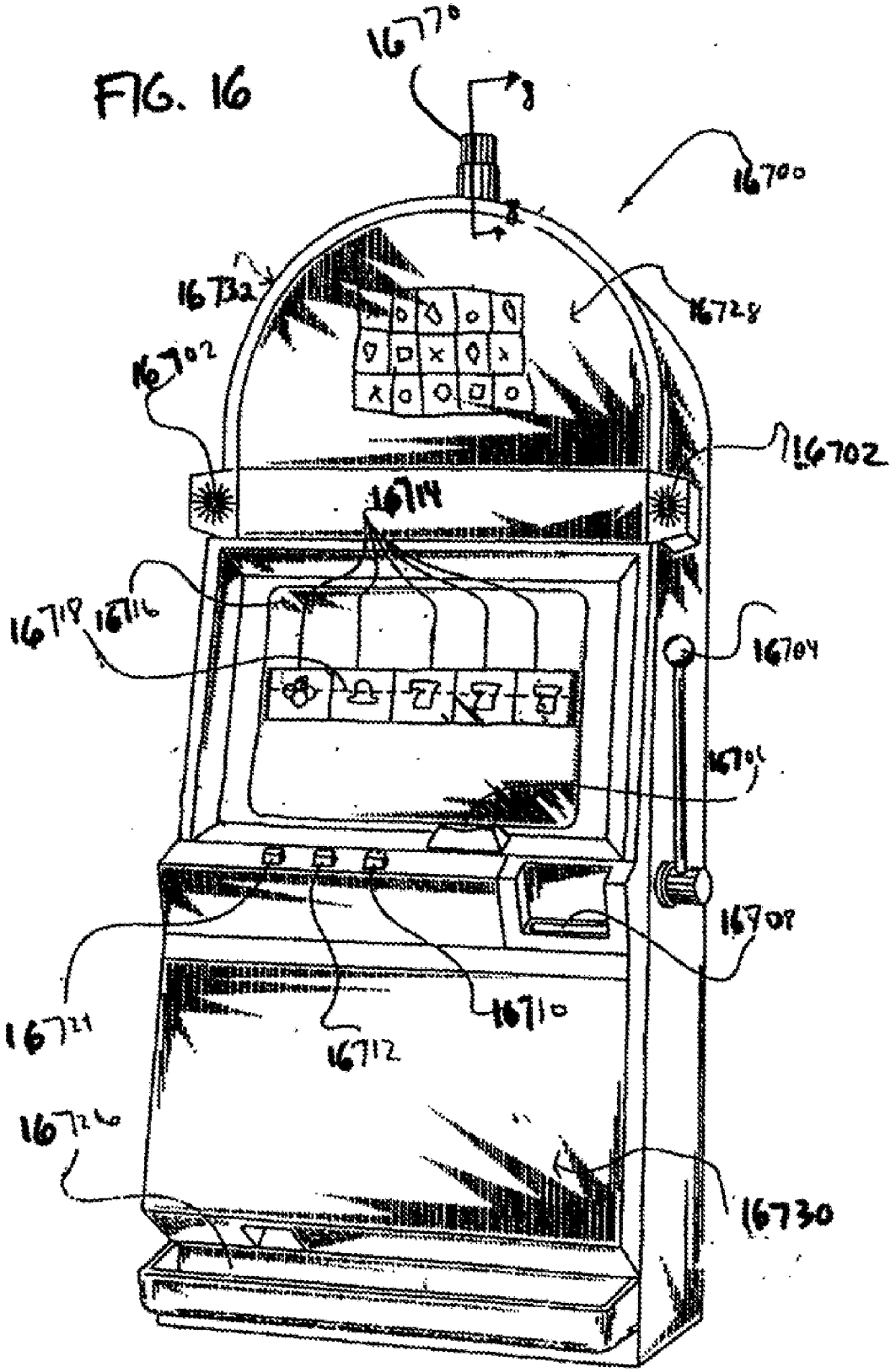

15800
START
RECEIVING BIOMETRIC INFORMATION FROM A GAMING MACHINE USER
15802
RECEIVING SMART DEVICE AND/OR PERSONAL IDENTIFER INFORMATION FROM A GAMING MACHINE USER
15804
NO
15805
RECONCILED?
YES
ALLOWING USE OF THE GAMING MACHINE
15806
END

Fig. 15

FIG. 16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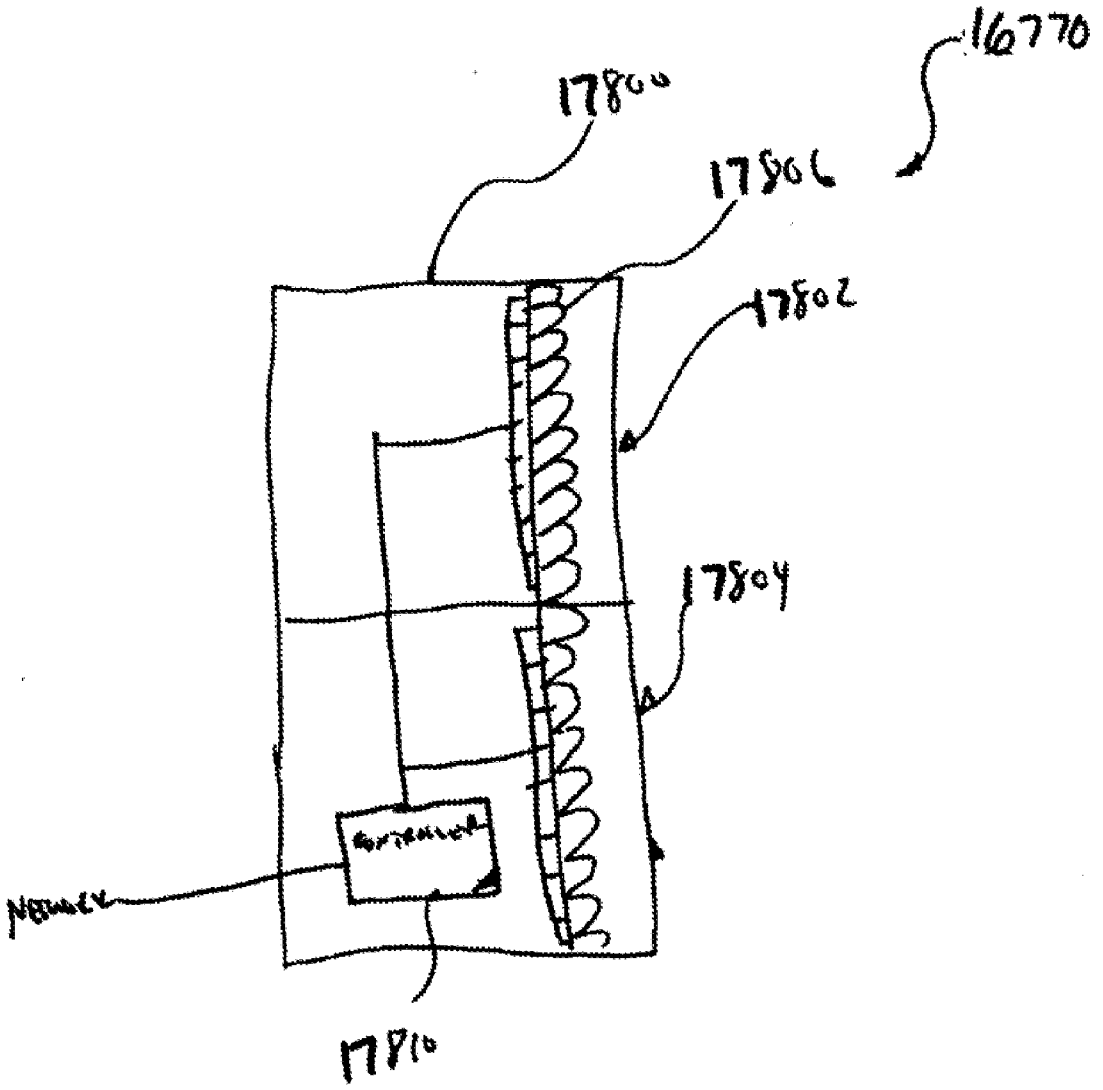

FIG. 17

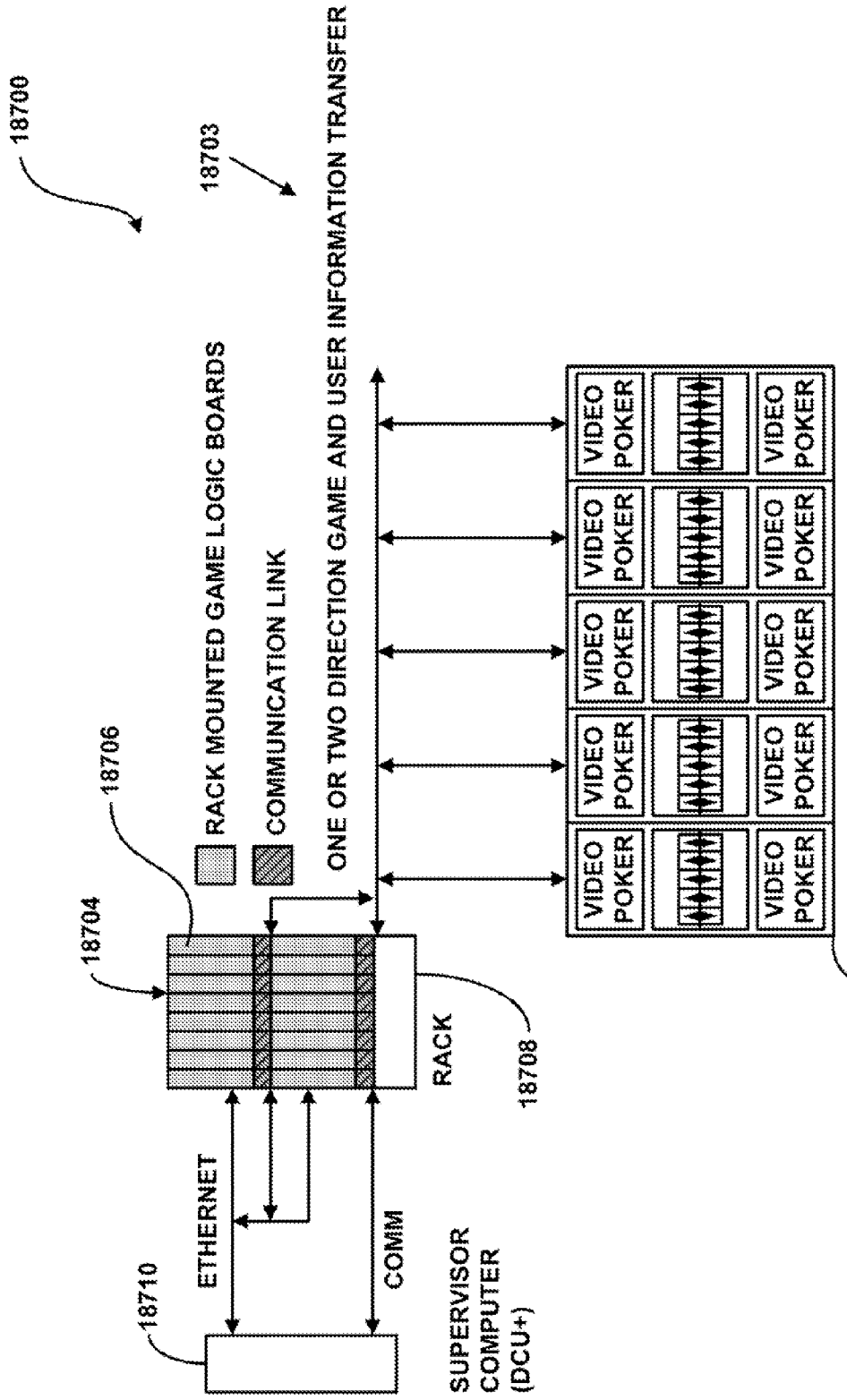
18700
18703
ONE OR TWO DIRECTION GAME AND USER INFORMATION TRANSFER
RACK MOUNTED GAME LOGIC BOARDS
COMMUNICATION LINK
18706
18704
VIDEO POKER
RACK
18708
18702
ETHERNET
COMM
18710
SUPERVISOR COMPUTER (DCU+)

FIGURE 18

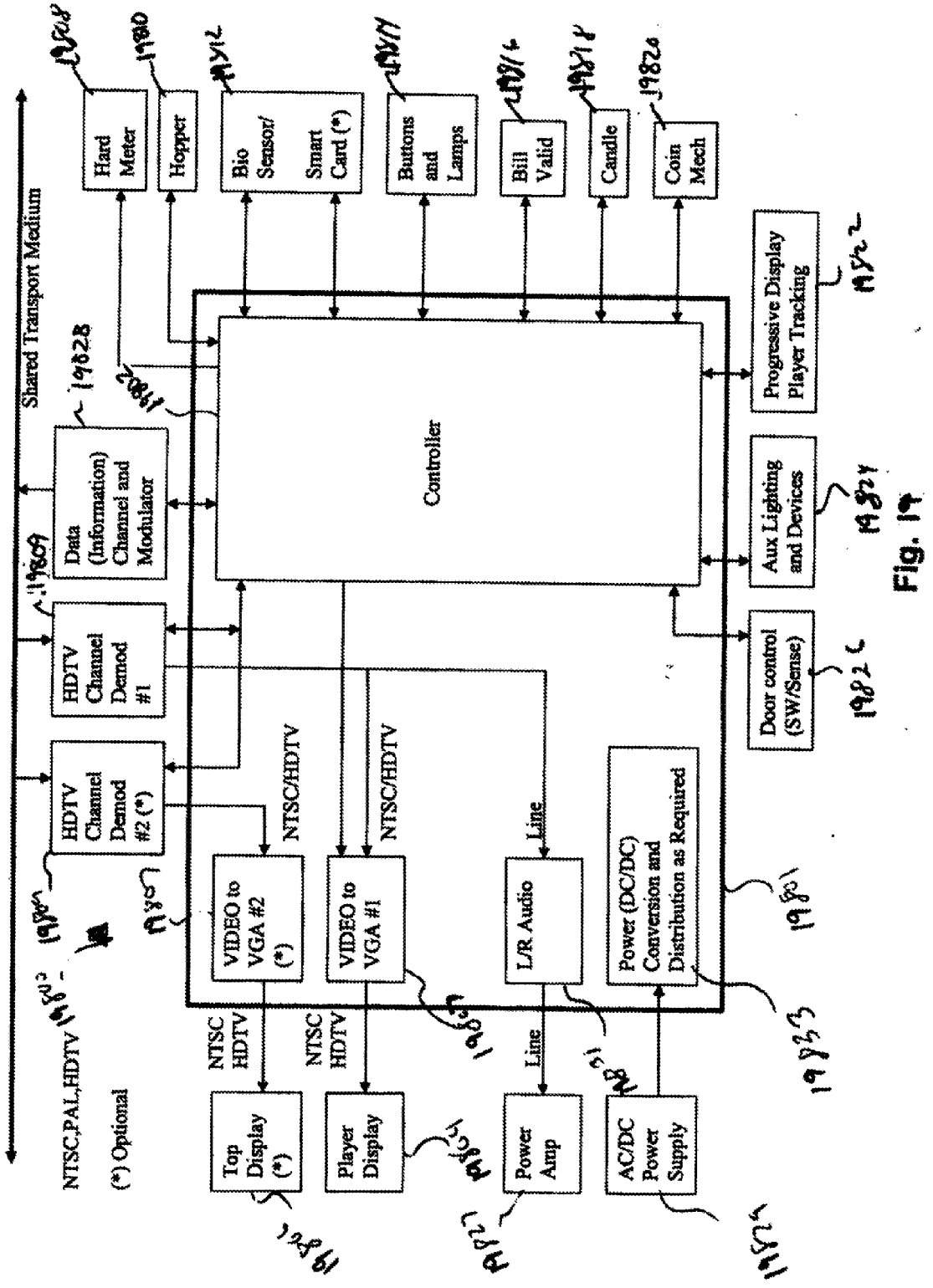
Shared Transport Medium
NTSC,PAL,HDTV
(*) Optional
Hard Meter
Hopper
Bio Season/ Smart Card (*)
Buttons and Lamps
Bill Valid
Candle
Coin Mech
Progressive Display Player Tracking
Aux Lighting and Devices
Door control (SW/Sense)
Controller
Data (Information) Channel and Modulator
HDTV Channel Demod #1
HDTV Channel Demod #2 (*)
VIDEO to VGA #2 (*)
VIDEO to VGA #1
L/R Audio
Power (DC/DC) Conversion and Distribution as Required
NTSC/HDTV
NTSC/HDTV
Line
NTSC HDTV
NTSC HDTV
Line
Top Display (*)
Player Display
Power Amp
AC/DC Power Supply

Fig. 19

FIG. 20

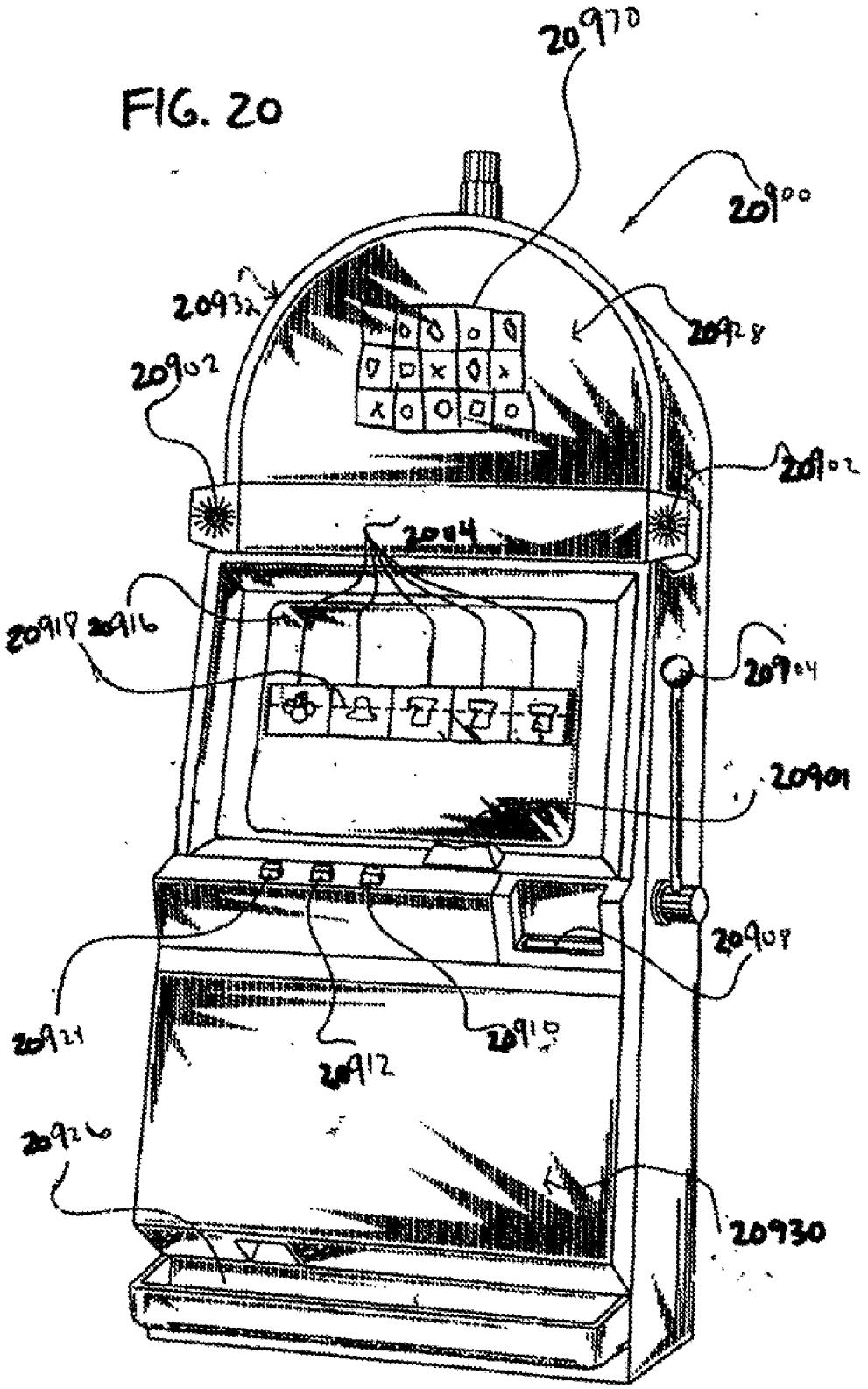
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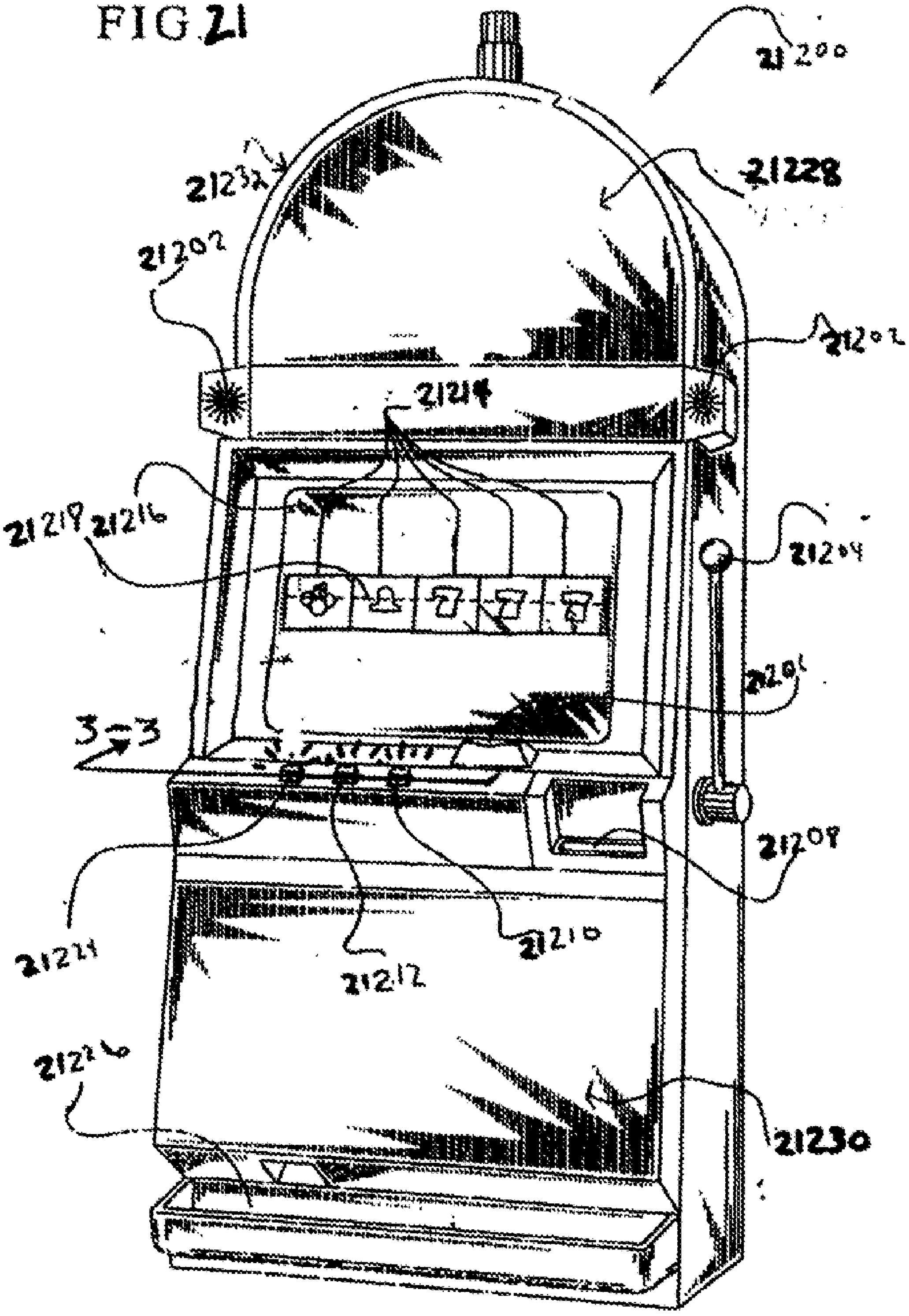
FIG.21


21200
21232
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21210
21226
21230

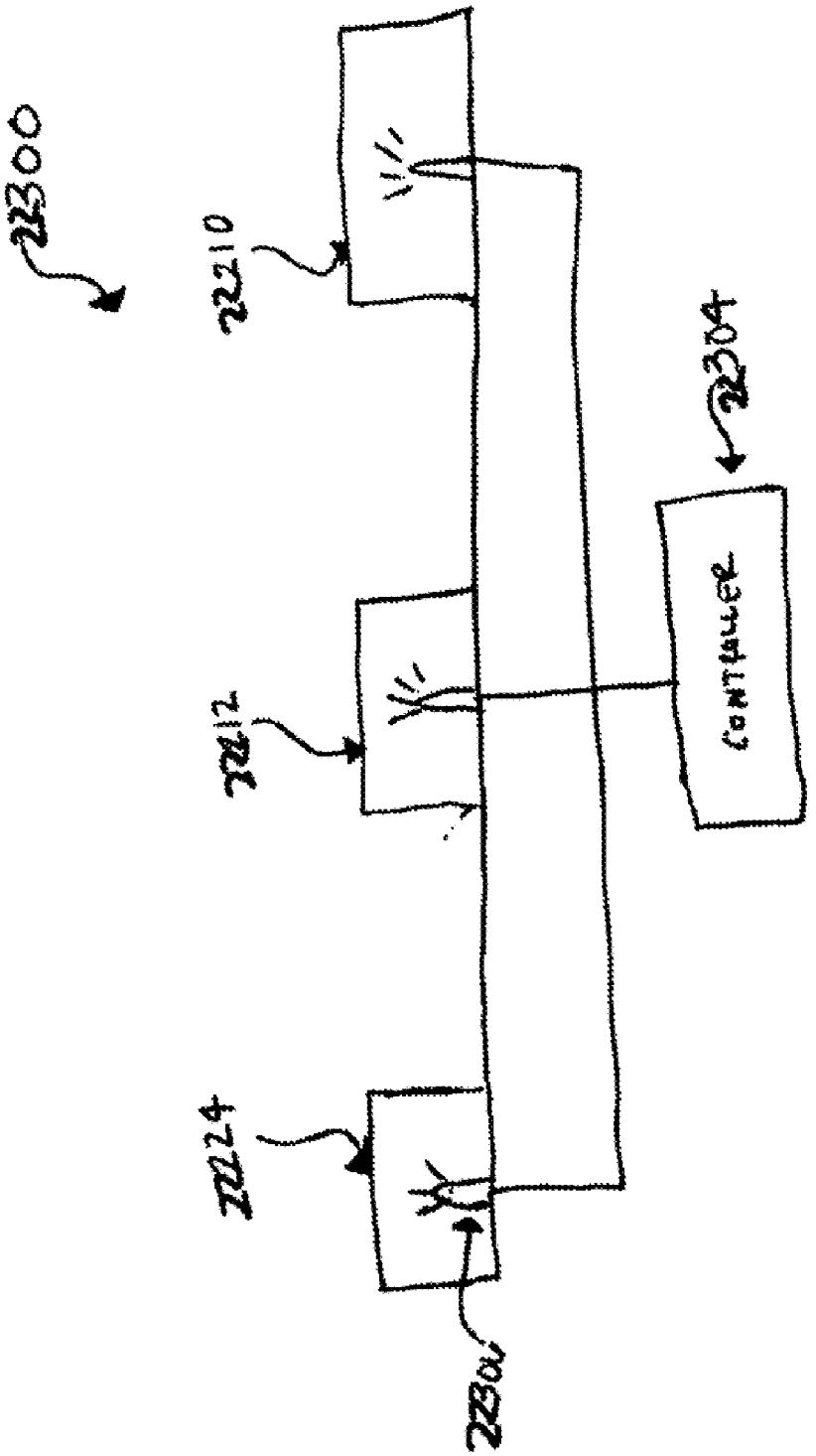

FIG. 22

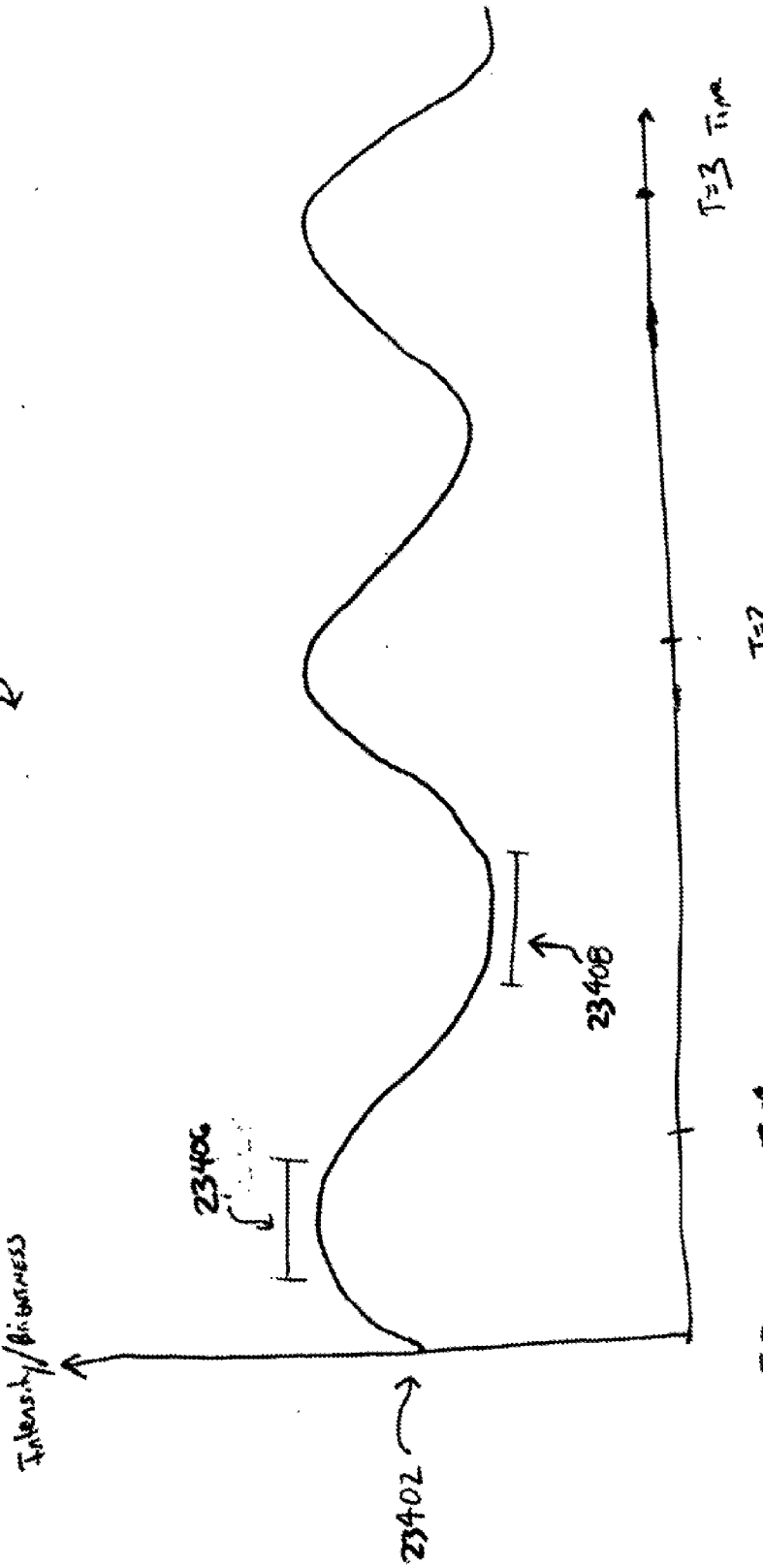
23400
Intensity/Brightness
23402
23406
23408
T=0
T=1
T=2
T=3 Time
23404

FIG. 23

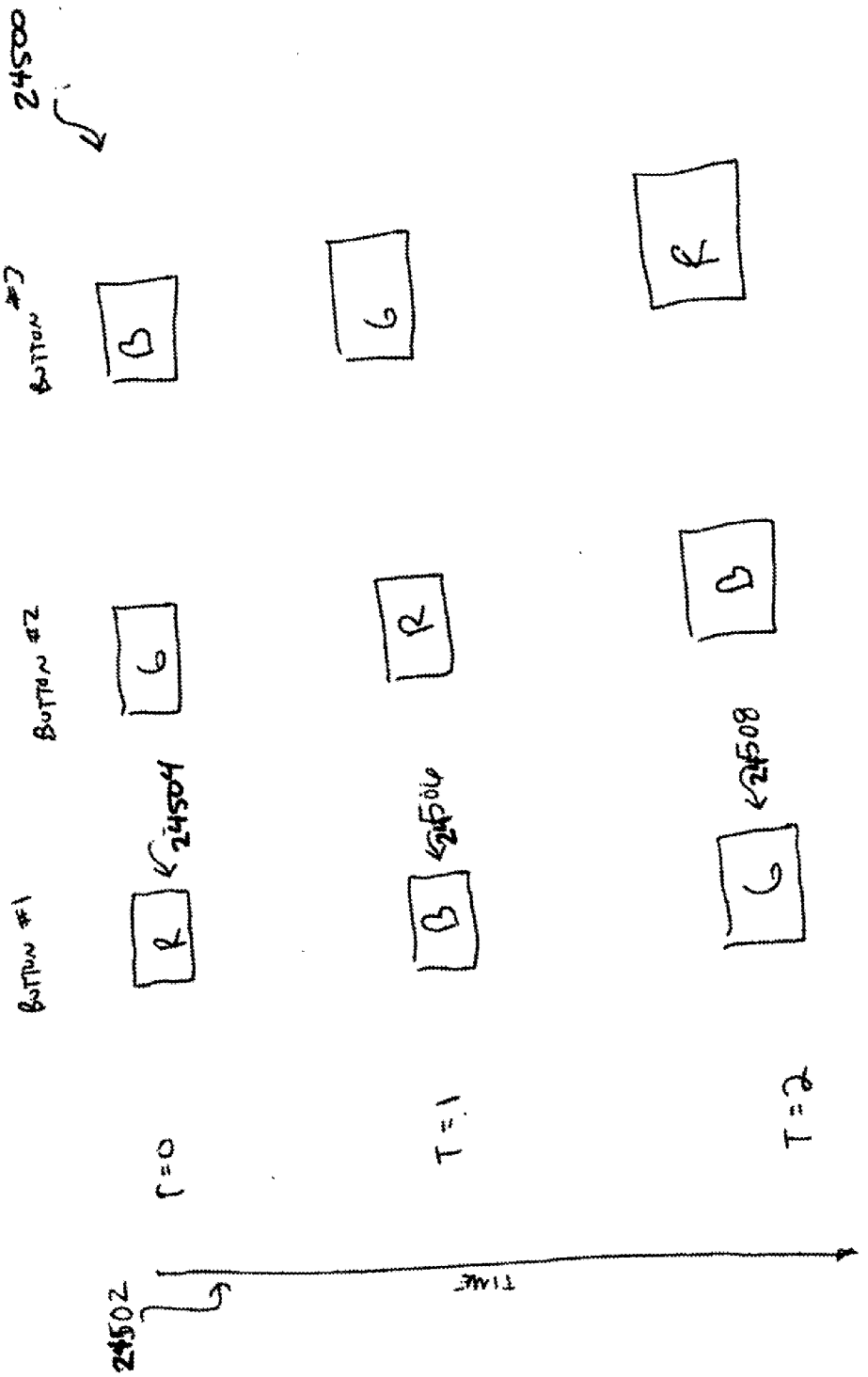
24500
BUTTON #3
BUTTON #2
BUTTON #1
24504
24506
24508
24502
TIME
T=0
T=1
T=2

FIG. 24

SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR ALLOWING INTERCOMMUNICATION AMONG DISTRIBUTED USERS IN A GAMING ENVIRONMENT

RELATED APPLICATION(S)

[0001] The present application is a Continuation of non-provisional application Ser. No. 11/373,851 filed Mar. 10, 2006; which is a Continuation-In-Part of U.S. non-provisional application Ser. No. 11/342,333 filed Jan. 26, 2006, which claims priority from a provisional application filed Jan. 31, 2005 under Ser. No. 60/648,929 and provisional application Ser. No. 60/660,870, 60/660,869, 60/660,871, 60/660,872, 60/660,868, and 60/660,896, all of which were filed on Mar. 10, 2005; and which is also a Continuation-In-Part of US non-provisional application Ser. No. 11/356,714 filed Feb. 16, 2006, which claims priority from a provisional application filed Feb. 18, 2005 under Ser. No. 60/654,647, which are each incorporated herein by reference in their entirety for all purposes.

BACKGROUND AND FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0002] The present invention relates to gaming, and more particularly to gaming machines.

SUMMARY

[0003] A gaming machine system and associated method are provided. Initially, a user of a gaming machine is identified, along with at least one other party. In use, communication between the user and the at least one other party is provided. In another embodiment, first identified is a first user if a first gaming machine associated with a second user of a second gaming machine. In use, the first gaming machine is located for the second user, for various purposes.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0004] FIG. **1** is a block diagram of a data collection unit (DCU) and fully digital network-enabled system interface board (SIB) in a casino network communication system employing a single twisted pair cabling (category **5** or the like) constructed in accordance with one embodiment.

[0005] FIG. **2** is a block diagram of a DCU and analog network-enabled SIB in a casino network communication system employing a single twisted pair cabling (category **5** or the like) constructed in accordance with another embodiment.

[0006] FIG. **3** is an example of a frequency response for category **5** twisted pair cabling, along with a frequency allocation partition for the DCU and network-enabled SIBs depicted in FIGS. **1** and **2**, in accordance with one embodiment.

[0007] FIG. **4** illustrates a back-end server connected to multiple DCUs, where the DCUs have multiple network lines connected to non-adjacent network-enabled SIB clusters.

[0008] FIG. **5** illustrates shared characteristics of a DCU and network-enabled SIB interface, in accordance with one embodiment.

[0009] FIG. **6** further illustrates a virtual link, in accordance with one embodiment.

[0010] FIG. **7** illustrates a gaming machine that may be utilized for providing user communication, in accordance with one embodiment.

[0011] FIG. **8** shows a method for allowing communication between a gaming machine user and at least one other party, in accordance with one embodiment.

[0012] FIG. **9** illustrates a gaming machine that may be utilized for providing user communication, in accordance with one embodiment.

[0013] FIG. **10** shows a method for allowing communication between a gaming machine user and at least one other party, in accordance with one embodiment.

[0014] FIG. **11** illustrates a gaming machine network configured in a tapped configuration, in accordance with one embodiment.

[0015] FIG. **12** illustrates a gaming machine network configured in a daisy-chain configuration , in accordance with another embodiment.

[0016] FIG. **13** illustrates a gaming machine in accordance with one embodiment.

[0017] FIG. **14** illustrates a gaming machine that may be utilized, in accordance with one embodiment.

[0018] FIG. **15** shows a method for reconciling received biometric information, and smart device information and/or personal identifier information, in accordance with one embodiment.

[0019] FIG. **16** illustrates a gaming machine, in accordance with one embodiment.

[0020] FIG. **17** is a cross-section of line **8-8** shown in FIG. **16**, showing an exemplary gaming machine candle, in accordance with one embodiment.

[0021] FIG. **18** illustrates a centralized game board architecture, in accordance with one embodiment.

[0022] FIG. **19** illustrates one exemplary game board, in accordance with another embodiment.

[0023] FIG. **20** illustrates a gaming machine, in accordance with one embodiment.

[0024] FIG. **21** illustrates a gaming machine, in accordance with one embodiment.

[0025] FIG. **22** is a cross-sectional view taken along line **3-3** of FIG. **21**, showing the player buttons and associated lights, in accordance with one embodiment.

[0026] FIG. **23** is a graph showing the continuous variation in light intensity over time with respect to a light of each player button, in accordance with another embodiment.

[0027] FIG. **24** is a graph showing the continuous variation of light color over time with respect to a light of each player button, in accordance with yet another embodiment.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0028] An example high-speed transport medium will be described in the context of FIGS. **1-6**, as one illustrative (but not limiting) example of a network. It should be noted, of course, that any desired network may be employed which is capable of any desired functionality.

[0029] Still yet, in the figures subsequent FIG. **6**, additional details will be described regarding an exemplary gaming machine, the features of which may or may not be used in the context of any other embodiment. Further, additional illustrative functional information will be set forth.

[0030] Optional High-Speed Network Environment

[0031] With reference to FIG. **1** of the illustrated embodiment, a casino environment back-end computer (BEC) **10** is connected to a data collection unit (DCU) **11** via an external high-speed communication link **12** (e.g., Gigabit Ethernet, SONET, etc.). Further, the DCU **11** is, in turn, connected to at least one system interface board (SIB) **14** via similar, or same, high-speed transport medium **13**.

[0032] It is to be understood that the transport medium **13** for any of the aforementioned connections [e.g. BEC/DCU, DCU/SIB, etc.] can be any of a number of different types (e.g. T-1 line, coaxial cable, fiber optic cable, wireless, and so on) and can support protocols and services such as Ethernet, Internet Protocol, asynchronous transfer mode (ATM), among any others desired. In the context of the present description, the DCU **11** may include a server, personal computer, workstation, and/or any other type of computing device. Further, the DCU **11** may be provided with one or more external transport medium connectors (e.g. a category **5** twisted pair, power line interface, fiber optic link, coaxial cable, wireless, among any others desired). In accordance with one of many embodiments disclosed herein, a number of network-enabled devices may share one (or more) of the transport medium connectors. Network-enabling elections may further be either built into or attached to the SIB **14**. This connection may provide access to the network via the DCU **11**.

[0033] The DCU **11** and the network-enabled SIBs **14** operate in accordance with one embodiment to allow multiple multimedia devices (e.g. cameras, microphones, etc.), electronic gaming machines (EGMS), entertainment devices, personal digital assistants (PDAs), and/or any other network-enabled devices, etc., to, once initialized, communicate independently with respect to each other over the transport medium **13**. Of course, each SIB **14** may or may not be built into the associated network-enabled device. In use, the DCU **11** and the network-enabling SIBs **14** of the present embodiment may be advantageous because they are simple, reliable, scalable, and inexpensive.

[0034] The DCU **11** may be configured to be a stand-alone unit, but may also be interfaces to the BEC **10** and/or other computer(s). The DCU **11** may also perform various function, such as the following: (1) establishing communication with connected network-enabled devices via the SIBs **14**; (2) assigning each newly connected network-enabled device a unique address (including a channel); and/or (3) processing and arbitrating data traffic. The DCU **11** may further be in continuous communication with the network-enabled devices via the SIBs **14**.

[0035] Similarly, the network-enabled devices are in continuous communication with the DCU **11** via the SIBs **14**. Signaling between the DCU **11** and the network-enabled devices may occur in frequency bands conforming to a frequency response of transport medium **13**. The transport medium frequency spectrum may further be allocated to different information data types (e.g. voice, video, data, etc.).

[0036] For example, FIG. **3** shows a frequency spectra example of the aforementioned, exemplary communication platforms. The DCU **11** may transmit messages to the network-enabled devices via the SIBs **14** on individual frequency channels, as indicated at item **30**, shown in FIG. **3**. The DCU **11** assigns an operational, or frequency, channel on the transport medium **13** to each network-enabled device as indicated at item **30**. The DCU **11** and the network-enabled devices may be further configured to coexist with other media, such as base-band video, etc.

[0037] Network-enabling electronics may include small, inexpensive modules which may be built into each SIB **14**, and/or any network-enabled device (camera, etc.) to provide an interface with the transport medium **13**. Such network interface may uses common and inexpensive connectors (e.g. RJ-45 phone style jack for category **5** cabling, a fiber optic connector for optical networking, and antenna for wireless, etc.), or any other desired connectors, for that matter.

[0038] Each fully digital SIB **14** may be configured with a microcontroller **15**, converters **16**[i.e. coder/decoder (CODEC)/analog-to-digital converter (ADC)/ digital-to-analog converter (DAC)/universal asynchronous receiver/transceiver (UART), etc for multimedia], a driver/receiver unit **17**, a frequency synthesizer and modulator/demodulator unit **18** and/or associated support circuitry for timing **19**, power control, and so on.

[0039] In use, the network-enabled SIB **14** may perform the following optional functions (among others, if desired): (1) monitoring network-enabled device (e.g. EGM, etc.) activity (e.g. polling EGMs, accepting EGM output, etc.); (2) performing requests from the DCU **11** (e.g. getting EGM meter readings, etc.); and/or (3) performing digital-to-analog and/or analog-to-digital conversions (DAC/ADC) as required for digital data/voice transmission, if configured as in FIG. **1**.

[0040] Data may modulate a carrier, which is transmitted to the DCU **11**. In a similar fashion, the DCU **11** may modulate a corresponding carrier with data that is sent to one of the SIBs **14**. In one embodiment, the carrier may be used as the local oscillator in the driver/receiver unit **17**.

[0041] Network-enabling device (e.g. EGM, etc.) data transmissions to and from the associated network-enabled SIB **14** may be asynchronous using a UART. An associated data rate may be limited only by the baud rate if such network-enabled device. The network-enabled SIB **14**, in turn, may be connected directly to the transport medium **13** via a transport medium connector. Likewise, the DCU **11** in FIG. **1** may be connected directly to the transport medium **13** via a transport medium connector.

[0042] As shown in FIG. **1**, the DCU **11** may include a driver/receiver unit **20**, a multiple-frequency generator unit **21** having a modulator/demodulator for each of the network-enabled devices and associated SIBs **14**, and a multi-channel UART **22**, which may be provided using a field programmable gate array (FPGA).

[0043] As stated previously, the DCU **11** and network-enabled SIBS **14** communicate over frequency channels within the frequency response range of the transport medium **13** (e.g. 0-100 Mhz for category **5** cabling). These frequency channels may be useful for the embodiment in FIG **1**.

Modulation techniques such as frequency shift keying (FSK), quadrature amplitude modulation (QAM), pulse amplitude modulation (PAM), etc may be used to maximize a bits/Hertz ratio, thereby maximizing the number of network-enabled devices and associated SIBs **14** that can be supported on a single link.

[**0044**] FIG. **1** thus depicts components in the DCU **11**, and network-enabled devices interfaced via associated SIBs **14**. As shown, the configuration in FIG. **1** provides for bi-directional communication between the DCU **11** and each network-enabled device via the corresponding SIB **14**, in a digital format.

[**0045**] FIG. **2**, on the other hand, depicts another embodiment of the DCU **11** and SIB **14** which allows bi-directional communication in an analog format. With reference to FIG. **2**, the network-enabled device and associated SIB **14** are configured for analog transmissions generated by the (e.g. frequency modulation), as opposed to digital transmissions generated by the network-enabling device depicted in FIG. **1**. FIG. **2** depicts the network-enabled SIB **14'** to include a micro-controller **15'**, and a frequency synthesizer modulator/demodulator **18'** that uses analog data (e.g. voice, video, etc.) to modulate a carriers. The modulated carrier may be demodulated and converted as necessary into digital data at and by the DCU **11'**.

[**0046**] A combination of digital and analog transmissions may be implemented in network-enabling electronics as needed to enhanced performance and/or decrease cost. Such resultant system would, in such embodiment, result in a merger of some component blocks mentioned herein above.

[**0047**] As stated previously, the DCU **11** may be provided with a plurality of data/communication media. For example, casino devices such as slot machines, EGMs, security cameras, hand-held PDA-type devices, etc., and any other controllable and/ or information device may be connected to the transport medium **13** within a casino, allowing information exchange between such devices.

[**0048**] FIG. **4** illustrates a back-end server **10** connected to multiple DCUs **11**, where the DCUs **11** have multiple network lines connected to non-adjacent network-enabled SIB **14** clusters. With continuing reference to FIG. **4**, the BEC **10** is shown configured to interface with one or more DCU(s) **11**. The DCU(s) may manage both narrowband and/or broadband communications with various network-enabled devices via SIBs **14** connected to the transport medium **13**.

[**0049**] An application example of a broadband requirement would involve having the BEC **10** provided with a broadband communication link (e.g. a coaxial cable, DSL, and/or fiber optic cable) to receive information destined for a network-enabled device on a casino floor via satellite. The BEC **10** may be configured to communicate with different DCUs **11** through different transmission media [such as a hybrid fiber optic coaxial cable, radio frequency (RF) link, among others], and may uses different signal protocols.

[**0050**] With continued reference to FIG. **4**, each DCU **11** may support multiple transport medium lines for (non-adjacent) SIB **14** clusters. In this way, multiple DCUs **11** do not have to be used, unless such a situation is desired.

[**0051**] Thus, data may be multiplexed onto a single set of wires or similar medium, and may be potentially available for all the devices connected to the medium.

[**0052**] Using logic in or near the network-enabled devices and/or associated SIB **14**, each device may decide whether it is the appropriate destination for incoming information. In a distributed embodiment, the transmission medium **13** may be partitioned into a set of virtual links and, optionally, virtual command channels. The virtual links may carry data, and may be narrowband and/or broadband, while the virtual command channels may carry switching protocols and be narrowband, as indicated in FIG. **5**. FIG. **6** further illustrates a virtual link, in accordance with one embodiment.

[**0053**] For device-device or BEC-device communication, a switching protocol may mark each connect request with various information such as the: (1) initiating device; (2) recipient identifier requirements; (3) progress information (e.g. request answered); and/or (5) any synchronization and/or arbitration information. An exemplary data routing sequence using the distributes processing method of the present embodiment will now be set forth. First, the BEC **10** receives a request to play a table game from a legitimate Internet gambler. The request is routed to the DCU **11**, and a copy of the relevant information about the connection attaches a player identifier.

[**0054**] Each network-enabled device and associated SIB **14** connected to the transport medium **13** then examines the packet (being broadcast over a virtual command channel) using the enclosed connect information, to determine if it is an appropriate destination. If so, the device constructs a synchronization packet from the incoming player identifier and a unique device identifier, and transmits such synchronization packet on the virtual data channel. The DCU **11** receives the transmitted device identifier and sends a device connect packet back to the BEC **10**. This device connect packet may include the virtual link address where the connection may be made. When the device and associated SIB **14** is ready to connect, the device/SIB **14** acknowledges by re-transmitting a synchronization packet. The device/SIB **14** then connect to the virtual link.

[**0055**] In subsequent figures, additional details will be described regarding an exemplary gaming machine, the features of which may or may not be uses in the context of the present embodiment. Further, additional illustrative functional information will be set forth. It is again strongly noted that the following information is set forth for illustrative purposes and should not be constructed as limiting in any manner.

Additional Exemplary Options

[**0056**] FIG. **7** illustrates a gaming machine **700** that may be utilized for providing user communication, in accordance with one embodiment. While not shown, the gaming machine **700** may be coupled to other similar gaming machines **700** via a network (not shown), for reasons that will soon become apparent.

[**0057**] In one embodiment, such network may, optionally, take the form if the transport medium **13** of FIGS. **1** or **2**, wherein the gaming machine **700** includes an electronic gaming machine (EGM) that interfaces such transport medium **13**. Of course, however, the gaming machines **700** may be interconnected via any desired network capable of allowing user communication.

[**0058**] As shown, the gaming machine **700** includes a conventional reel-type slot gaming machine **700**. The gam-

ing machine **700** includes an exterior housing **732** and a front face including a primary gaming machine main display **716**, and a belly glass **730**.

[**0059**] While the gaming machine **700** is shown to include a conventional reel-type slot gaming machine **700**, it should be noted that the gaming machine **700** may take the form of absolutely any game of chance. Thus, the present reel-type slot gaming machine embodiment is set forth for illustrative purposes only and should not be construed as limiting in any manner. To this end, any (or none) of the following features of the reel-type slot gaming machine embodiment may be incorporated into the gaming machine, and still fall within the scope of the claims.

[**0060**] As shown, the primary gaming machine main display **716** includes windows **714** each of which displays a single reel assembly of the slot gaming machine **700**. Horizontal pay lines **718** span the windows and allow for a single winning combination. The main display **716** may, in one embodiment, include a cathode ray tube (CRT), liquid crystal display (LCD), organic light emitting diode (OLED) display, etc., with a touch screen layer positioned over the display which may be used to allow user input in lieu of and/or in addition to mechanical manual control.

[**0061**] Player buttons **710**, **712**, and **724** are further provided between the belly glass **730** and main display **716** and allow the player to control operation of the gaming machine **700** in combination with/instead of the associated touch screen. In addition, a lever **704** may be included on one side of the exterior housing **732** to allow a player alternative control of the gaming machine **700**. A coin acceptor **706** and a bill acceptor **708** are provided near the play buttons as shown. Further, a coin tray **726** is provided near the bottom of slot gaming machine **700** to collect coin pay outs from winning plays.

[**0062**] Strictly as an option, a secondary gaming machine **728** may be positioned on a top portion of the gaming machine **700**. Such secondary gaming machine **728** may include any of the desired features set forth earlier during the description of the main display **716**.

[**0063**] For reasons that will soon become apparent, the gaming machine **700** may be equipped with a microphone **742** and one or more cameras **740** positioned at a height on the gaming machine **700**, such that at least a face or a user is directed thereinto, during use of the gaming machine **700**. Still yet, speakers **702** are provided.

[**0064**] In use, the microphone **742**, camera **740**, speakers **702**, and main display **716** may be used by a user of the gaming machine **700** to communicate with at least one other party. Such other party may include, but is not limited to another user(s), a concierge, a bartender, a cocktail waitress, and/or any other party with whom two-way communication is desired.

[**0065**] While not shown, an alphanumeric key pad may also be provided for facilitating communication. Of course, such alphanumeric keypad may include a mechanical alphanumeric keypad, and/or a virtual alphanumeric keypad displayed via the main display **716**.

[**0066**] Optionally, a separate display **744** may be positioned on the gaming machine **700** for dedicated uses during such two-way communication. Of course, both the main display **716** and the separate display **744** may be used in combination (i.e. for two-way communication with multiple parties, etc.), as appropriate. This may be particularly, beneficial when the gaming machine **700** is not in play.

[**0067**] As an additional option, video conferencing, real-time or near real-time game-related or non-game related gaming machine user interaction, as well as various other features beyond (and/or in addition to) mere security monitoring functions may be carried out utilizing the gaming machine **700**. Of course, non-real-time two-way communication may further be provided.

[**0068**] In order to control the aforementioned two-way communication, a communication control interface **746** may be utilized. As an option, such communication control interface **746** may simply be displayed on the main display **716** (or the separate display **744**, if desired). In uses, the communication control interface **746** may be used for allowing a user to initiate the two-way communication, control with whom the two-way communication is initiated, as well as terminate two-way communication. For example, a plurality of buttons may be depicted on the communication control interface **746**, each corresponding to a concierge, a bartender, another, a cocktail waitress, etc. for initiating communication therewith.

[**0069**] As an option, the two-way communication may or may not be carried out during play of a game on the gaming machine **700**. For example, the game being played on the gaming machine **700** may be continued during the two-way communication. In one embodiment, this may be accomplished by ensuring that the separate display **716** or only a portion of the main display **716** is utilized for the two-way communication. Of course, only audible two-way communication may be allowed, as an option. To this end, service may be requested during play and/or two-way communication among gaming machine users may be allowed to enhance a multiple-user experience (e.g. allowing users to monitor each other's score, play, etc. and comment thereon in real-time, etc.). Still yet, in the alternative, the game may be paused, or at least a portion (e.g. audible portions, visual portions, etc.) be suppressed to accommodate the two way communication.

[**0070**] In one optional embodiment, to facilitate tow-way communication with other gaming machine users, the gaming machine **700** may be equipped with a gaming card reader/processor **750**. In such embodiment, a plurality of the gaming machine users are each provided with gaming cards **752**. Such gaming cards **752** may include a player identifier and an account tracking identifier for tracking a monetary account associated with the player.

[**0071**] It should be noted that, in the context of the present description, any substitute mechanism [i.e. biometric identifier and associated database, jewelry-mounted radio-frequency identifier (RFID), personal identifier number (PIN), etc.] may be used as a substitute for the gaming card **752** and associated gaming card reader/processor **750**.

[**0072**] As an option, for reasons that will soon be come apparent, the gaming card **750** may include a plurality of additional player identifiers associated with the player identifier. One sample data structure that may be situated on each gaming card **750** is set forth in Table 1.

TABLE 1

Player Identifier	Account Information	Associated Player Identifiers
Player ID1	Player Balance	Player ID2
	Player Credit	Player ID3
	Player Local Residence	Player ID4

[0073] This data structure may be established upon obtaining the card when the user first enters and/or re-enters a casino. For example, the user may arrive with a group (e.g. family, a party of friends, part of an organization attending a seminar, etc.), and may manually associate the other players of the group with his/her player identifier, as set forth in Table 1. Of course, this may be done automatically based on reservations, predetermined lists, etc. As a further option, a player may have multiple groups associated therewith. In such case, the user may have multiple lists of player identifiers each associated with a different group.

[0074] To this end, in the present embodiment, a user may insert the associated gaming card **752** into the gaming card reader/processor **750** of the corresponding gaming machine **700**, during play, for allowing the user to communicate with players associated therewith by way of any one or more of the communication devices associated with the gaming machine **700**.

[0075] More information associated with one exemplary embodiment of such specific two-way communication will be set forth in FIG. **8**.

[0076] FIG. **8** shows a method **800** for allowing communication between a gaming machine user and at least one other party, in accordance with one embodiment. As an option, the method **800** may be implemented in the context of the architecture and environment of the previous figures. Of course, however, the method **800** may be carried out in any desired environment.

[0077] Initially, in operation **802**, at least one first user of a gaming machine is identified. As an option, this may be accomplished by reading a data structure (e.g. Table 1 hereinabove, etc.) from a gaming card associated with the first user positioned and playing at a first gaming machine. As a further option, such operation **802** may include identifying a player identifier associated with the first user. Of course, any other available identifying technique may be used to accomplish this operation.

[0078] Next, in operation **804**, at least one other party is identified. Such other party may include, but is not limited to another gaming machine user (who may be identified similar to operation **802**), a concierge, a bartender, a cocktail waitress, and/or any other party who desires to communicate with the at least one user. To this end, communication may be provided between the at least one user and the at least one other party. See operation **806**. Thus, communication is facilitated between a plurality of gaming machine users. Further, paging may be performed in a more personal manner by avoiding use of a public address system by paging a user directly at an associated gamine machine.

[0079] Of course, the communication of operation **806** may be initiated and controlled in any desired manner. For example, prior to operation **806**, it may be determined whether the at least one user is authorized to communicate with the at least one other party. Further, such determination may be provided in any desired manner [i.e. reading a data structure (e.g. Table 1 hereinabove, etc.)]. Thus, the communication may be provided based on the foregoing determination.

[0080] Further, communication may even be provided between more than two parties simultaneously. For instance, split-screens, etc may be used to allow multiple users to simultaneously communicate form the remote locations in the casino environment.

[0081] Still yet, a "presence" of all other users associated therewith may be displayed by the gaming machine during play. To this end, each of the users may select with whom communication is desired, form a set of available users.

[0082] Even still, in combination with and/or instead of operation **806** (in the context of an example where the at least one other party is a second gaming machine user), the first gaming machine may be located for the second gaming machine user. Of course, the present embodiment may have numerous applications.

[0083] Just by way of example, a map of all gaming machines (and an associated area of the casino or gaming environment) may be stored. Upon locating the gaming machine being used by the first user, a map may be presented (to the second user at the second gaming machine, for example), in order to thereby locate the first user. Since the location of the second user is also known, walking directions may also be provided. Thus, users may thus more easily locate each other (as well as communicate with each other), during use of the present embodiment.

[0084] More illustrative information will now be set forth regarding various optional architectures and features with which the foregoing technique may or may not be implemented with the present embodiment, per the desires of the user. It should be strongly noted that the following information is set forth for illustrative purposes and should not be construed as limiting in any manner. Any of the following features (and previous, for the matter) may be optionally incorporated with or without the exclusion of other features described during the description of the present embodiment.

Additional Exemplary Options

[0085] FIG. **9** illustrates a gaming machine **9700** that may be utilized for providing user communication, in accordance with one embodiment. While not shown, the gaming machine **9700** may be coupled to other similar gaming machines **9700** via a network (not shown), for reasons that will soon become apparent.

[0086] In one embodiment, such network may, optionally, take the form of the transport medium **13** of FIGS. **1** or **2**, wherein the gaming machine **9700** includes an electronic gaming machine (EGM) that interfaces such transport medium **13**. Of course, however, the gaming machines **9700** may be interconnected via any desired network capable of allowing user communication.

[0087] As shown, the gaming machine **9700** includes a conventional reel-type slot gaming machine **9700**. The gaming machine **9700** includes an exterior housing **9732** and a front face including a primary gaming machine main display **9716**, and a belly glass **9730**.

[0088] While the gaming machine **9700** is shown to include a conventional reel-type slot gaming machine **9700**, it should be noted that the gaming machine **9700** may take the form of absolutely any game of chance. Thus, the present reel-type slot gaming machine embodiment is set forth for illustrative purposes only and should not be construed as limiting in any manner. To this end, any (or none) of the following features of the reel-type slot gaming machine embodiment may be incorporated into the gaming machine, and still fall within the scope of the claims.

[0089] As shown, the primary gaming machine main display **9716** includes windows **9714** each if which displays a single reel assembly of the slot gaming machine **9700**. Horizontal pay lines **9718** span the windows and allow for a single winning combination. The main display **9716** may, in one embodiment, include a cathode ray tube (CRT), liquid crystal display (LCD), organic light emitting diode (OLED) display, etc., with a touch screen layer positioned over the display which may be used to allow user input in lieu of and/or in addition to mechanical manual control.

[0090] Player buttons **9710**, **9712**, and **9724** are further provided between the belly glass **9730** and main display **9716** and allow the player to control operation of the gaming machine **9700** in combination with/instead of the associated touch screen. IN addition, a lever **9704** may be included on one side of the exterior housing **9732** to allow a player alternative control of the gaming machine **9700**. A coin acceptor **9706** and a bill acceptor **9708** are provided near the play buttons as shown. Further, a coin tray **9726** is provided near the bottom of slot gaming machine **9700** to collect coin pay outs from winning plays.

[0091] Strictly as an option, a secondary gaming machine **9728** may be positioned on a top portion of the gaming machine **9700**. Such secondary gaming machine **9728** may include any of the desired features set forth earlier during the description of the main display **9716**.

[0092] For reasons that will soon become apparent, the gaming machine **9700** may be equipped with a microphone **9742** and one or more cameras **9740** positioned at a height on the gaming machine **9700**, such that at least a face of a user is directed thereinto, during use of the gaming machine **9700**. Still yet, speakers **9702** are provided.

[0093] In use, the microphone **9742**, camera **9740**, speakers **9702**, and main display **9716** may be used by a user of the gaming machine **9700** to communicate with at least one other party. As mentioned previously, such other party may include, but is not limited to another user(s), a concierge, a bartender, a cocktail waitress, and/or any other party with whom two-way communication is desired.

[0094] While not shown, an alphanumeric keypad may also be provided for facilitating communication. Of course, such alphanumeric keypad may include a mechanical alphanumeric keypad, and/or a virtual alphanumeric keypad displayed via the main display **9716**.

[0095] Optionally, a separate display **9744** may be positioned on the gaming machine **9700** for dedicated use during such two-way communication. Of course, both the main display **9716** and the separate display **9744** may be used in combination (i.e. for two-way communication with multiple parties, etc.), as appropriate. This may be particularly beneficial when the gaming machine **9700** is not in play.

[0096] As an additional option, video conferencing, real-time or near real-time game-related or non-game related gaming machine user interaction, as well as various other features beyond (and/or in addition to) mere security monitoring functions may be carried out utilizing the gaming machine **9700**. Of course, non-real-time two-way communication may further be provided.

[0097] In order to control the aforementioned two-way communication, a communication control interface **9746** may be utilized. As an option, such communication control interface **9746** may simply be displayed in the main display **9716** (or separate display **9744**, if desired). In use, the communication control interface **9746** may be used for allowing a user to initiate the two-way communication, control with whom the two-way communication is initiated, as well as terminate two-way communication. For example, a plurality of buttons may be depicted on the communication control interface **9746**, each corresponding to a concierge, a bartender, another user, a cocktail waitress, etc. for initiating communication therewith.

[0098] As an option, the two-way communication may or may not be carried out during play of a game on the gaming machine **9700**. For example, the game being played on the gaming machine **9700** may be continued during the two-way communication. In one embodiment, this may be accomplished by ensuring that the separate display **9716** or only a portion of the main display **9716** is utilized for the two-way communication. Of course, only audible two-way communication may be allowed, as an option. TO this end, service may be requested during play and/or two-way communication among gaming machine users may be allowed to enhance a multiple-user experience (e.g. allowing users to monitor each other's score, play, etc. and comment thereon in real-time, etc.). Still yet, in the alternative, the game may be paused, or at least a portion (e.g. audible portions, visual portions, etc.) be suppressed to accommodate the two-way communication.

[0099] In one optional embodiment, to facilitate two-way communication with other gaming machine users, the gaming machine **9700** may be equipped with a gaming card reader/processor **9750**. In such embodiment, a plurality of the gaming machine users are each provided with the gaming cards **9752**. Such gaming cards **9752** may include a player identifier and an account tracking identifier for tracking a monetary account associated with the player.

[0100] It should be noted that, in the context of the present description, any substitute mechanism [i.e. biometric identifier and associated database, jewelry-mounted radio frequency identifier (RFID), personal identifier number (PIN), etc.] may be used as a substitute for the gaming card **9752** and associated gaming card reader/processor **9750**.

[0101] As an option, for reasons that will soon be come apparent, the gaming card **9750** may include a plurality of additional player identifiers associated with the player identifier. One sample data structure that may be situated on each gaming card **9750** is set forth in Table 2.

TABLE 2

Player Identifier	Account Information	Associated Player Identifiers
Player ID1	Player Balance	Player ID2
	Player Credit	Player ID3
	Player Local Residence	Player ID4

[0102] This data structure may be established upon obtaining the card when the user first enters and/or re-enters a casino. For example, the user may arrive with a group (e.g. family, a party of friends, part of an organization attending a seminar, etc.), and may manually associate the other players of the group with his/her player identifier, as set forth in Table 2. Of course, this may be done automatically based on reservations, predetermined lists, etc. As a further option, a player may have multiple groups associated therewith. In such case, the user may have multiple lists of player identifiers each associated with a different group.

[0103] To this end, in the present embodiment, a user may insert the associated gaming card **9752** into the gaming card reader/processor **9750** of the corresponding gaming machine **9700**, during play, for allowing the user to communicate with players associated therewith by way of any one or more of the communication devices associated with the gaming machine **9700**.

[0104] More information associated with one exemplary embodiment of such specific two-way communication will be set forth in FIG. **10**.

[0105] FIG. **10** shows a method **10800** for allowing communication between a gaming machine user and at least one other party, in accordance with one embodiment. As an option, the method **10800** may be implemented in the context of the architecture and environment of the previous figures. Of course, however, the method **10800** may be carried out in any desired environment.

[0106] Initially, in operation **10802**, at least one first user of a gaming machine is identified. As an option, this may be accomplished by reading a data structure (e.g. Table 2 hereinabove, etc.) from a gaming card associated with the first user positioned and playing at a first gaming machine. As a further option, such operation **10802** may include identifying a player identifier associated with the first user. Of course, any other available identifying technique may be used to accomplish this operation.

[0107] Next, in operation **10804**, at least one other party is identified. Such other party may include, but is not limited to another gaming machine user (who may be identified similar to operation **10802**), a concierge, a bartender, a cocktail waitress, and/or any other party who desires to communicate with the at least one user.

[0108] To this end, communication may be provided between the at least one user and the at least one other party. See operation **10806**. Thus, communication is facilitated between a plurality of gaming machine users. Further, paging may be performed in a more personal manner by avoiding use of a public address system by paging a user directly at an associated gaming machine.

[0109] Of course, the communication of operation **10806** may be initiated and controlled in any desired manner. For example, prior to operation **10806**, it may be determined whether the at least one user is authorized to communicate with the at least one other party. Further, such determination may be provided in any desired manner [i.e. reading a data structure (e.g. Table 2 hereinabove, etc)]. Thus, the communication may be provided based on the foregoing determination.

[0110] Further, communication may even be provided between more than two parties simultaneously. For instance, split-screens, etc may be used to allow multiple users to simultaneously communicate from remote locations in the casino environment.

[0111] Still yet, a "presence" of all other users associated therewith may be displayed by the gaming machine during play. TO this end, each of the users may select with whom communication is desired, from a set of available users.

[0112] Even still, in combination with and/or instead of operation **10806** (in the context of an example where the at least one other party is a second gaming machine user), the first gaming machine may be located for the second machine user. Of course, the present embodiment may have numerous applications.

[0113] Just by way of example, a map of all gaming machines (and an associated area of the casino or gaming environment) may be stored. Upon locating the gaming machine being used by the first user, a map may be presented (to the second user at the second gaming machine, for example), in order to thereby locate the first user. Since the location of the second user is also know, walking directions may also be provided. Thus, users may thus more easily locate each other (as well as communicate with each other), during use of the present embodiment.

[0114] More illustrative information will now be set forth regarding various optional architectures and features with which the foregoing technique may or may not be implemented with the present embodiment, per the desires of the user. It should be strongly noted that the following information is set forth for illustrative purposes and should not be construed as limiting in any manner. Any of the following features (and previous, for that matter) may be optionally incorporated with or without the exclusion of other features described during the description of the present embodiment.

Additional Exemplary Options

[0115] FIG. **11** illustrates a gaming machine network **11700** configured in a tapped configuration. As shown, the gaming machine network **11700** includes a plurality of gaming machines **11702** that are each coupled to a line **11704**. Such line **11704** may optionally be configured in a single-ended, or closed-loop configuration (see dashed lines), either of which communicate data to and from a back-end computer (e.g. BEC **10** from FIGS. **1** and **2**, for example, etc.) via any desired interface. Coupling each gaming machine **11702** to the line **11704** is a bidirectional interface **11706**.

[0116] In one embodiment, such line **11704** may, optionally, take the form of the transport medium **13** of FIG. **1** et al. that supports proprietary physical and protocol information exchanges as well as multiple physical and data protocols (Ethernet, DSL, etc.). Of course, however, the gaming

machines **11702** may be interconnected via any desired line **11704** capable of providing a tapped configuration.

[**0117**] FIG. **12** illustrates a gaming machine network **12800** configured in a daisy-chain configuration. AS shown, the gaming machine network**12800** includes a plurality of gaming machines **12802** that are each coupled to at least one line **12804**.

[**0118**] In one embodiment, the gaming machines **12802** are serially coupled via a pair of bidirectional lines **12804** which communicate data to and from a back-end computer (e.g. BEC **10** from FIGS. **1** and **2**, for example, etc.) via any desired interface. As an option, the wires associated with the bidirectional lines **12804** may be contained in the same bundle.

[**0119**] Again, in one embodiment, the bidirectional lines **12804** may, optionally, take the form of the transport medium **13** of FIG. **1** et al. that supports proprietary physical and protocol information exchanges as well as multiple physical and data protocols (Ethernet, DSL, etc.). Of course, however, the gaming machines **12802** may be interconnected via any desired line **12804** capable of providing a daisy-chain configuration.

[**0120**] FIG. **13** illustrates a gaming machine **13900**, in accordance with one embodiment. It should be noted that the present gaming machine **13900** may or ma y not be used in context of the previous figures. Most importantly, it should be understood that the present gaming machine **13900** is set forth for illustrative purposes only, and should not be construed as limiting in any manner.

[**0121**] As shown, the gaming machine **13900** includes a conventional reel-type slot gaming machine **13900**. The gaming machine **13900** includes an exterior housing **13932** and a front face including a primary gaming machine main display **13916**, and a belly glass **13930**.

[**0122**] While the gaming machine **13900** is shown to include a conventional reel-type slot gaming machine **13900**, it should be noted that the gaming machine **13900** may take the form of absolutely any game of chance. Thus, the present reel-type slot gaming machine embodiment is set forth for illustrative purposes only and should not be construed as limiting in any manner. To this end, any (or none) of the following features of the reel-type slot gaming machine embodiment may be incorporated into the gaming machine, and still fall within the scope of the claims.

[**0123**] As shown , the primary gaming machine main display **13916** includes windows **13914** each of which displays a single reel assembly of the slot gaming machine **13900**. Horizontal pay lines **13918** span the windows and allow for a single winning combination. The main display **13916** includes a cathode ray tube (CRT), liquid crystal display (LCD), organic light emitting diode (OLED) display, etc., with a touch screen layer positioned over the display which may be used to allow user input in lieu of mechanical manual control.

[**0124**] Player buttons **13910**, **13912**, and **13924** are further provided between the belly glass **13930** and main display **13916** and allow the player to control operation of the gaming machine **13900** in combination with the associated touch screen. In addition, a lever **13904** may be included on one side of the exterior housing **13932** to allow a player alternative control of the gaming machine **13900**. A coin acceptor **13906** and a bill acceptor **13908** are provided near the play buttons as shown. Further, a coin tray **13926** is provided near the bottom of slot gaming machine **13900** to collect coin pay outs from winning plays.

[**0125**] Strictly as an option, a secondary gaming machine **13928** may be positioned on a top portion of the gaming machine **13900**. Such secondary gaming machine **13928** may include any of the desired features set forth earlier during the description of the main display **13916**. Further, other optional features such as speakers **13902** may be includes, as desired.

[**0126**] More illustrative information will now be set forth regarding various optional architectures and features with which the foregoing technique may or may not be implemented with the present embodiment, per the desires of the user. It should be strongly noted that the following information is set forth for illustrative purposes and should not be construed as limiting in any manner. Any of the following features (and previous, for that matter) may be optionally incorporated with or without the exclusion of other features described during the description of the present embodiment.

Additional Exemplary Options

[**0127**] FIG. **14** illustrates a gaming machine **14700** that may be utilized for reconciling biometric information, and smart device and or personal identifier information, in accordance with one embodiment. While not shown, the gaming machine **14700** may optionally be coupled to other similar gaming machines **14700** via a network (not shown).

[**0128**] In one embodiment, such network may. optionally, take the form of the transport medium **13** of FIGS. **1** or **2**, wherein the gaming machine **14700** includes an electronic gaming machine that interfaces such transport medium **13**. Of course, however, the gaming machines **14700** may be interconnected via any desired network capable of allowing network communication.

[**0129**] As shown, the gaming machine **14700** includes a conventional reel-type slot gaming machine **14700**. The gaming machine **14700** includes an exterior housing **14732** and a front face including a primary gaming machine main display **14716**, and a belly glass **14730**.

[**0130**] While the gaming machine **14700** is shown to include a conventional reel-type slot gaming machine **14700**, it should be noted that the gaming machine **14700** may take the form of absolutely any game of chance. Thus, the present reel-type slot not be construed as limiting in any manner. For example, a gaming-relate cash machine, a gaming-related registration machine, a table-game, etc. may incorporate any desired features of the present description for reconciling biometric information, and smart device and/or personal identifier information. To this end, any (or none) of the following features of the reel-type slot gaming machine embodiment may be incorporated into the gaming machine, and still fall within the scope of the claims.

[**0131**] As shown, the primary gaming machine main display **14716** includes windows **14714** each of which displays a single reel assemble of the slot gaming machine **14700**. Horizontal pay lines **14718** span windows and allow for a single winning combination. The main display **14716** may, in one embodiment, include a cathode ray tube (CRT),

liquid crystal display (LCD), organic light emitting diode (OLED) display, etc., with a touch screen layer positioned over the display which may be used to allow user input in lieu of and/or in addition to mechanical manual control.

[0132] Player buttons **14710**, **14712**, and **14724** are further between the belly glass **14730** and main display **14716** and allow the player to control operation of the gaming machine **14700** in combination with the associated touch screen. In addition, a lever **14704** may be included on one side of the exterior housing **14732** to allow a player alternative control of the gaming machine **14700**. A coin acceptor **14706** and a bill acceptor **14708** are provided near the play buttons as shown. Further, a coin tray **14726** is provided near the bottom of slot gaming machine **14700** to collect coin pay outs from winning plays.

[0133] Strictly as an option, a secondary gaming machine **14728** may be positioned on a top portion of the gaming machine **14700**. Such secondary gaming machine **14728** may include any of the desired features set forth earlier during the description of the main display **14716**.

[0134] As yet another option, the gaming machine **14700** may be equipped with a microphone **14742** and a camera **14740** positioned at a height in the gaming machine **14700**, such that at least a face of a user is directed thereinto, during use of the gaming machine **14700**. Still yet, speakers **14702** may be provided. In use, the microphone **14742**, camera **14740**, speakers **14702**, and main display **14716** may be used by a user of the gaming machine **14700** to communicate with at least one other party.

[0135] For example, such other party may include, but is not limited to another user(s), a concierge, a bartender, a cocktail waitress, and/or any other party with whom two-way communication is desired. As an additional option, video conferencing, real-time or near real-time game-related or non-game related gaming machine user interaction, as well as various other features may be carried out utilizing the gaming machine **14700**.

[0136] In order to control the aforementioned two-way communication, a communication control interface **14746** may be utilized. Such communication control interface **14746** may simply be displayed on the main display **14716**. In use, the communication control interface **14746** may be used for allowing a user to initiate the two-way communication, control with whom the two-way communication is initiated, as well as terminate two-way communication. For example, a plurality of buttons may be depicted on the communication control interface **14746**, each corresponding to a concierge, a bartender, a cocktail waitress, etc. for initiating communication therewith.

[0137] In another embodiment, the gaming machine **14700** may be equipped with a smart device reader/processor **14750**. In such embodiment, a plurality of the gaming machine users are each provided with a smart device **14752**. Such smart device **14752** may include a player identifier and an account tracking identifier for tracking an account associated with the player, where the account is capable of accounting for available funds as well as accumulated wards. As an option, the smart device **14752** may include a plurality of additional player identifiers associated with the player identifier, for facilitating the aforementioned communication between associated gaming machine users.

[0138] For reasons that will soon become apparent, in one embodiment, the smart device **14752** may further include smart device information in the form of a biometric identifier associated with the appropriate owner of the smart device **14752**. Such biometric identifier may include any information relating to any biological aspect (e.g. fingerprint, retina, iris, DNA, etc.) associated with the gaming machine user. It should be further noted that, in the context of the present description, any mechanism (i.e. smart card, jewelry-mounted radio-frequency identifier, etc.) may be used as the smart device **14752**.

[0139] In yet another embodiment, the smart device reader/processor **14750** may be excluded in favor of and/or supplemented with a personal identification number (PIN) input device/processor. TO this end, a physical smart device may not be required, and a user need only memorize an identifier capable of being input by any desired input device (e.g. keypad, keyboard, etc.).

[0140] Further provided is a biometric identifier module **14760** positioned at an appropriate location in the gaming machine **14700**, for receiving biometric information from the user. As an option, the biometric identifier module **14760** may be positioned at eye-level for receiving retina and/or iris information, at waist-level for receiving fingerprint information, etc.

[0141] To this end, in the present embodiment, a user may insert the associated smart device **14752** into the smart device reader/processor **14750** of the corresponding gaming machine **14700** for receiving smart device information and the appropriate biometric identifier. Further, the user may engage the biometric identifier module **14760** so that the biometric information of the user may be received.

[0142] In use, such received biometric information and the smart device information (e.g. biometric identifier etc.) are then reconciled, so that the user may be conditionally allowed to use the gaming machine, based on the reconciliation. Such reconciliation may involve any desired processing that determined whether the biometric information and smart device information identify the same gaming machine user or group of users.

[0143] In one embodiment, such processing may be carried out utilizing a processor (not shown) located at the gaming machine **14700**, which is, in turn, coupled to the biometric identifier module **14760** and the smart device reader/processor **14750**. It should be noted that any of the foregoing components may be located at the gaming machine **14700** and/or at a server [in a network environment (e.g. see environment of FIGS. **1-2**, etc.)]. Of course, the aforementioned components and/or information may be distributed in any desired manner.

[0144] More exemplary details associated with one optional embodiment of the aforementioned reconciliation will now be set forth in FIG. **15**.

[0145] FIG. **15** shows a method **15800** for reconciling received biometric information, and smart device information and/or personal identifier information, in accordance with one embodiment. As an option, the method **15800** may be implemented in the context of the architecture and environment of the previous figures. Of course, however, the method **15800** may be carried out in any desired environment.

[0146] Initially, in operations **15802-15804**, biometric information, and smart device and/or personal identifier information are received from a gaming machine user.

[0147] Again, in the context of the present description, such biometric information may include any information relating to any biological aspect (e.g. fingerprint, retina, iris, DNA, etc.) associated with the gaming machine user. Still yet, the smart device information may include information that identifies the gaming machine user utilizing a device including, but not limited to a card, RFTID device, jewelry, ornament, pin and/or any other device capable of storing the identifying information. As an option, such identifying information may include a biometric identifier. Of course, the personal identifier information (e.g. PIN number, etc.) may be received, which is associated with the biometric identifier.

[0148] Next, in decision **15805**, such received biometric information, and smart device and/or personal identifier information are then reconciled. This may be accomplished in any desired manner. For example, the biometric identifier of the smart device or associated with the personal identifier information may simply be compared with the biometric information.

[0149] While one technique of carrying out decision **15805** is set forth above, it should be noted that any processing may be used that determines whether the biometric information, and smart device and/or personal identifier information identify the same gaming machine user or group of users. Foe example, the smart device information may simply include a player identifier that is used to look-up a biometric identifier in a local and/or remote database, which is then, in turn, compared to the biometric information received from the user.

[0150] Next, in operation **15806**, use of the gaming machine (and/or any gaming-related transaction, for that matter) is then conditionally allowed based on the reconciliation. To this end, a more secure technique is provided for authenticating gaming machine users. Thus, a true cashless gaming environment may be established.

[0151] Numerous ancillary applications may be used in combination with the present embodiment. For example. sine a location of a user may be verified upon a user entering their smart device information and/or personal identifier information, communication between associated users may be established via a speaker, display, camera, microphone, etc. Further, paging may be performed in a more personal manner by avoiding user of a public address system by paging a user directly at an associated gaming machine.

[0152] An example of use in the context of the method **15800** of FIG. **15** will now be set forth. It should be noted that such example is set forth for illustrative purposes only, and should not be construed as limiting in any manner. During registration at a gaming establishment or the like, biometric information may be collected and stored on a smart device in the form if the aforementioned biometric identifier, along with any other information of interest or need (e.g. user name, account information, etc.). This biometric information may also be secured on a server computer. Encryption may optionally be used to further secure the biometric information.

[0153] In use, a user may contribute money to their account for use during play of one or more gaming machines. This account may be stored and tracked utilizing a server computer of an establishment. In order to play a gaming machine and/or initiating a gaming-related transaction, the user may insert or assert the smart device (e.g. at a game verification unit, etc.), and submit their biometric information.

[0154] Such information is then compared for reconciliation purposes. A match may enable play, and the user may wager against their account tracked on the server computer. Whether or not the user is verified, some user information may be sent back to the server at the time of verification.

[0155] To this end, a user does not have to wait for verification. Further, low-cost verification typically runs 1 error in 100,000 against a database. In the present embodiment, one needs only to verify against on card (i.e. one-to-one). Further, a lost smart device has no value, and credits may be held on a server computer.

[0156] More illustrative information will now be set forth regarding various optional architectures and features with which the foregoing technique may or may not be implemented with the present embodiment, per the desires of the user. It should be strongly noted that the following information is set forth for illustrative purposes and should not be construed as limiting in any manner. Any of the following features (and previous, for that matter) may be optionally incorporated with or without the exclusion of other features described during the description of the present embodiment.

Additional Exemplary Options

[0157] FIG. **16** illustrates a gaming machine **16700**, in accordance with one embodiment. It should be noted that the present gaming machine **16700** may or may not be used in the context of the previous figures. Most importantly, it should be understood that the present gaming machine **16700** is set forth for illustrative purposes only, and should not be construed as limiting in any manner.

[0158] As shown, the gaming machine **16700** includes a conventional reel-type slot gaming machine **16700**. The gaming machine **16700** includes an exterior housing **16732** and a front face including a primary gaming machine main display **16716**, and a belly glass **16730**.

[0159] While the gaming machine **16700** is shown to include a conventional reel-type slot gaming machine **16700**, it should be noted that the gaming machine **16700** may take the form of absolutely any game of chance. Thus, the present reel-type slot gaming machine embodiment is set forth for illustrative purposes only and should not be construed as limiting in any manner. TO this end, any (or none) of the following features of the reel-type slot gaming machine embodiment may be incorporated into the gaming machine, and still fall within the scope of the claims.

[0160] As shown, the primary gaming machine main display **16716** includes windows **16714** each of which displays a single reel assembly of the slot gaming machine **16700**. Horizontal pay lines **16718** span the windows and allow for a single winning combination. The main display **16716** may, in one embodiment, include a cathode ray tube)CRT), liquid crystal display (LCD), organic light emitting diode (OLED) display, etc., with a touch screen layer positioned over the display which may be used to allow user input in lieu of manual control.

[0161] Player buttons **16710**, **16712**, and **16724** are further provided between the belly glass **16730** and main display **16716** and allow the player to control operation of the gaming machine **16700** in combination with the associated touch screen. In addition, a lever **16704** may be included in one side of the exterior housing **16732** to allow a player alternative control of the gaming machine **16700**. A coin acceptor **16706** and a bill acceptor **16708** are provided near the play buttons as shown. Further, a coin tray **16726** is provided near the bottom of slot gaming machine **16700** to collect coin pay outs form winning plays.

[0162] Strictly as an option, a secondary gaming machine **16728** may be positioned on a top portion of the gaming machine **16700**. Such secondary gaming machine **16728** may include any of the desired features set forth earlier during the description of the main display **16716**. Further, other optional features such as speakers **16702** may be included, as desired.

[0163] With continuing reference to FIG. **16**, a gaming machine candle **16770** is shown to be vertically mounted to an apex of the secondary gaming machine **16728** of the gaming machine **16700**. As mentioned previously, however, the candle may include anything mounted on or in the vicinity of a top portion of the gaming machine, where the candle is capable of displaying different indicators (e.g. lights, colors, combinations thereof, etc.) to indicate a mode of use in which the associated gaming machine is current operating. More information will be set forth hereinafter regarding one exemplary gaming machine candle **16770** during reference to FIG. **17**.

[0164] While not shown, the gaming machine **16700** may optionally be coupled to other similar gaming machines **16700** via a network (not shown), for reasons that will soon become apparent. In one embodiment, such network may, optionally, take the form of the transport medium **13** of FIGS. **1** or **2**, wherein the gaming machine **16700** includes an electronic gaming machine that interfaces such transport medium **13**. Of course, however, the gaming machines **16700** may be interconnected via any desired network capable of allowing network communication.

[0165] In use, a status of a gaming machine may be identified. Such status may relate to an aspect of gaming such as a jurisdictional requirement, a cashless gaming mode, and/or an enhanced entertainment experience mode. Further, the status may be identified utilizing a local controller, etc. that may be adjusted manually and/or automatically in a local matter. In yet another embodiment, the status may be identified utilizing a server computer, etc. that may be used to adjust the status of the machine via the aforementioned network.

[0166] To this end, such status of the gaming machine is indicated by the gaming machine candle. Further, in the network-enabled environment embodiment, the candles of a plurality of gaming machines may be controlled via the network by a remote administrator. Still yet, a status of the gaming machine candle may be monitored from afar. Just by way of example, a gaming machine candle failure may be communicated from the gaming machine to the server computer and/or a remote administrator, in order to initiate a prompt repair.

[0167] Even still, in the network-enabled environment embodiment, sequential gaming machine candle firing (i.e. similar to a "wave" at football games, etc.) may be initiated by a server computer. Also, multi-player and/or multi-player-bonus play may be indicated by candle color, candle light chasing, and/or light popping.

[0168] FIG. **17** is a cross-section of line **8-8** shown in FIG. **16**, showing an exemplary gaming machine candle **16770**, in accordance with one embodiment. As an option, the gaming machine candle **16770** may be constructed with a housing **17800** having a top portion **17802** and a lower portion **17804**. Of course, while two portions are shown in FIG. **17**, it should be noted that nay number of portions (**1**-n) may be included. Just by way of example, additional portions of the gaming machine candle **16770** may be used to indicate machine conditions.

[0169] Further included is at least one light **17806** mounted in each portion of the gaming machine candle **16770**. While an incandescent light may be utilized in various embodiments, it should be noted that a plurality of light emitting diodes (LEDs) may be used to improve operability and life expectancy. In one embodiment, the LEDs may include multi-colored LEDs each capable of illuminating with a plurality of colors.

[0170] For example, tri-colored LEDs may be driven to display four denomination colors, and may also display any other colors that may be required. For instance, a color may be designated to indicate a machine is multi-denominational before play. Further, the LEDs may be programmed to "pop" (i.e. as opposed to blinking, etc.), as well as other lighting features (i.e. color fade, color change, etc.) to further enhance a machine attract mode, a bonus mode, etc.

[0171] With continuing reference to FIG. **17**, the at least one light **17806** may, in turn, be coupled to a controller/driver **17810** which may reside in the housing **17800** and/or elsewhere in the gaming machine **16700**. Further, in a network-enabled environment embodiment, the controller/driver **17810** may be located at a central server and/or may be coupled thereto via a network, as shown.

[0172] In use, the controller/driver **17810** may be adapted to receiving control signals for controlling the at least one light **17806** of each portion to indicate a current play denomination, a machine condition code, an attract mode, etc. Still yet, the controller/driver **17810** may provide status information (i.e. failure information, etc.), in order to provide a local and/or remote indication if the same.

[0173] Thus, cashless gaming environments (as well as traditional environments) are more effectively served with gaming machine candles that may be changed "on the fly". It should be noted that, in a cashless gaming environment, change service would not necessarily be required, thus eliminating the need for a top change (white) portion of the candle. Of course, however, such top portion of the candle may still be used as a general purpose service call light, etc.

[0174] More illustrative information will now be set forth regarding various optional architectures and features with which the foregoing technique may or may not be implemented with the present embodiment, per the desires of the user. It should be strongly noted that the following information is set forth for illustrative purposes and should not be construed as limiting in any manner. Any of the following features (and previous, for that matter) may be optionally

incorporated with or without the exclusion of other features described during the description of the present embodiment.

Additional Exemplary Options

[0175] FIG. **18** illustrates a centralized game board architecture **18700**, in accordance with one embodiment. Such centralized game board architecture **18700** may, in one embodiment, be implemented in the context of the network architecture of the previous features. Of course, however, the centralized game board architecture **18700** may be implemented in any desired context.

[0176] As shown, a plurality of gaming clients **18702** (e.g. see EGMs in FIGS. **1-2**, etc, for example) are provided. In the context of the present description, each gaming client **18702** includes at least a display and at least one input device. While, in one embodiment, each gaming client **18702** includes only a display and at least one input device (along with the necessary interface(s)), it should be noted that additional componentry may be included (even some processing and/or storage capabilities, etc.), as desired. AS an option, the gaming clients **18702** may be positioned on a casino floor, hotel room, arcade room, etc.

[0177] Further included is a centralized repository **18704** of computer processing units **18706**. Each of the computer processing units **18706** is connected to at least one of the game clients **18702** for executing a gaming application by a user utilizing the gaming client **18702**, via a network **18703** (e.g. see transport medium **13** in FIGS. **1-2**, etc., for example). In one embodiment, each of the computer processing units **18796** is dedicated to one of the game clients **18702**, in a one-to-one exclusive relationship. As a further option, the network may include a daisy chain, a tapped configuration, star-type, and/or any other configuration and/or protocol (e.g. Ethernet, Internet, etc.) that is desired.

[0178] In one embodiment, the centralized repository **18704** is located in a centralized location separate form the gaming clients **18702**. Further, centralized repository **18704** may include a rack **18708** for stacking computer boards associated with the computer processing units **18706** in an organized manner. Such rack **18708** may further include interfaces for interfacing the computer processing units **18706** with other components in communication therewith. Still yet, the rack **189708** may be situated in an impenetrable housing with a security door or the like, to prevent access to the computer processing units **18706** and associated componentry.

[0179] At yet another option, the computer processing units **18706** may be further in communication with a server computer **18710** via the network **18703** and/or any other desired network, for that matter. In one embodiment, in the context of the architecture of FIG. **1-2**, etc., the server computer **18710** may take the form of the DCU **11** and/or back-end server **10**. Of course, however, any desired server computer **18710** may be utilized, which communicates with the computer processing units **18706**, as desired.

[0180] By positioning the computer processing units **18706** associated with the gaming clients **18702** in the centralized repository **18704** thereto (and the information stored therein) is limited. Enhanced security is thereby provided.

[0181] More illustrative information will now be set forth regarding various optional architectures and features with which the aforementioned computer processing units **18706** and associated board, architecture, etc. may or may not be implemented, per the desires of the user. Its should be strongly noted that the following information is set forth for illustrative purposes and should not be construed as limiting in any manner. Any of the following features may be optionally incorporated with or without the exclusion of other features described.

[0182] FIG. **19** illustrates on exemplary central processing unit **19800** and associated game board, in accordance with another embodiment. Such exemplary central processing unit **19800** may, in one embodiment, be implemented in the context of the previous computer processing units **18706** of FIG. **18**. Of course, however, the exemplary central processing unit **19800** may be implemented in any desired context.

[0183] As shown, the central processing unit **19800** is mounted on a game board **19801** and includes a controller **19802**. The controller **19802** is further connected to a display **18904** (and optionally a secondary display **19806**) mounted in a corresponding gaming client (e.g. see gaming client **18702** in FIG. **18**, etc., for example). This connection may be facilitated via at least one video-to-VGA module **19807** that is also mounted on the game board **19801**. In use, at laser one HDTV channel demodulator **19809** interfaces the video-to-VGA module(s) **19807**, controller **19802**, and a network (e.g. see transport medium **13** in FIGS. **1-2**, etc., for example).

[0184] With continuing reference to FIG. **19**, a power amplifier **19827** and AC/DC power supply **19829** are further mounted in the associated gaming client. Such power amplifier **19827** and AC/DC power supple **19829** interface a left/right audio module **19831** and power conversion/distribution module **19833**, as shown. The left/right audio module **19831**, in turn, interfaces at least one of the HDTV channel demodulators **19809** for feeding audio to the corresponding gaming client.

[0185] Further, the controller **18902** may also be coupled to various additional input/output devices mounted in the corresponding gaming client including, but not limited to a hard meter **19808**, a hopper **19810**, a biometric sensor and/or smart card reader **19812** (for player authentication), buttons and lamps **19814**, bill validator **19816**, candle **19818**, coin mechanism **19820**, progressive display player tracking mechanism **19822**, auxiliary lighting device **19824**, and door controller **19826**. The controller **19802** may further interface such input/output devices to a server computer via a channeled information modulator **19828**.

[0186] FIG. **20** illustrates a gaming machine **20900**, in accordance with one embodiment. It should be noted that the present gaming machine **20900** may or may not be used in the context of the previous figures (e.g. see gaming client **18702** in FIG. **18**, etc., for example). Most importantly, it should be understood that the present gaming machine **20900** is set forth for illustrative purposes only, and should not be constructed as limiting in any manner.

[0187] As shown, the gaming machine **20900** includes a conventional reel-type slot gaming machine **20900**. The gaming machine **20900** includes an exterior housing **20932** and a front face including a primary gaming machine main display **20916**, and a belly glass **20930**.

[0188] While the gaming machine **20900** is shown to include a conventional reel-type slot gaming machine **20900**, it should be noted that the gaming machine **20900** may take the form of absolutely any game of chance. Thus, the present reel-type slot gaming machine embodiment is set forth for illustrative purposes only and should not be construed as limiting in any manner. To this end, any (or none) of the following features of the reel-type slot gaming machine embodiment may be incorporated into the gaming machine, and still fall within the scope of the claims.

[0189] As shown, the primary gaming machine main display **20916** includes windows **20914** each of which displays a single reel assembly of the slot gaming machine **20900**. Horizontal pay lines **20918** span the windows and allow for a single winning combination. The main display **20916** may, in one embodiment, include a cathode ray tube (CRT), liquid crystal display (LCD), organic light emitting diode (OLED) display, etc., with a touch screen layer positioned over the display which may be used to allow user input in lieu of manual control.

[0190] Player buttons **20910**, **20912**, and **20924** are further provided between the belly glass **20930** and main display **20916** and allow the player to control operation of the gaming machine **20900** in combination with the associated touch screen. In addition, a lever **20904** may be included on one side of the exterior housing **20932** to allow a player alternative control of the gaming machine **20900**. A coin acceptor **20906** and a bill acceptor **20908** are provided near the play buttons as shown. Further, a coin tray **20926** is provided near the bottom of slot gaming machine **20900** to collect coin pay outs from winning plays.

[0191] Strictly as an option, a secondary gaming machine **20928** may be positioned on a top portion of the gaming machine **20900**. Such secondary gaming machine **20928** may include any of the desired features set forth earlier during the description of the main display **20916**. Further, other optional features such as speakers **20902** may be included, as desired with the various input/output devices discussed hereinabove in the context of FIG. **19**.

[0192] Thus, whereas prior art gaming device operation has gaming logic contained within a gaming client and any networking takes place over RS-xxx or Ethernet connections, the present system, in accordance with one embodiment, may have the game logic located remote from the associated gaming client, with game and user information (e.g. audio, video, data, etc.) exchanges taking place over a network.

[0193] Enhanced security is thus provided along with the convenient game changes, an inexpensive server for competitive and/or cooperative gaming, high scalability, easy service and support, wide and inexpensive bandwidth, etc. Further, built-in repeaters may be provided for long medium lengths, and redundant data traffic on opposing data flows.

[0194] FIG. **21** illustrates a gaming machine **21200**, in accordance with one embodiment. As shown, the gaming machine **21200** includes a conventional reel-type slot gaming machine **21200**. It includes an exterior housing **21232** and a front face including a gaming machine main display **21216**, and a belly glass **21230**.

[0195] The gaming machine **21200** includes a conventional reel-type slot gaming machine **21200**. It should be noted, however, that the gaming machine **21200** may take form of absolutely any game of chance. Thus, gaming machine, in the context of the present description, may refer to slot machines, automatic roulettes, blackjack, and/or any type of game of chance.

[0196] Thus, the present reel-type slot gaming machine embodiment is set forth for illustrative purposes only and should not be construed as limiting in any manner. To this end, any (or none) of the features of the present reel-type slot gaming machine embodiment may be incorporated into the gaming machine, and still fall within the scope of the claims.

[0197] As shown, the gaming machine main display **21216** includes windows **21214** each of witch displays a single reel assembly of the slot gaming machine **21200**. Horizontal pay lines **21218** span the windows and allow for a single winning combination. The main display **21216** includes a cathode ray tube (CRT), liquid crystal display (LCD), etc., with an optional touch screen layer positioned over the display which may be used to allow user input in lieu of an/or in combination with mechanical control.

[0198] For mechanical control, player buttons **21210**, **21212**, and **21224** are provided between the belly glass **21230** and main display **21216** and allow the player to control operation of the gaming machine **21200**. In addition, a lever **21204** may be included on one side of the exterior housing **21232** to allow a player alternative control of the gaming machine **21200**. A coin acceptor **21206** and a bill acceptor **21208** are further provided near the play buttons, as shown. Finally, a coin tray **21226** is provided near the bottom of slot gaming machine **21200** to collect coin pay outs from winning plays. Other options may include speakers **21202**, etc. to enhance play.

[0199] FIG. **22** is cross-sectional view taken along line **3-3** of FIG. **21**, showing the player buttons **21210**, **21212**, and **21224** and associated lights **22306**, in accordance with one embodiment. Again, the present buttons **21210**, **21212**, and **21224** and associated lights **22306** may be implemented in the context of the gaming machine **21200** of FIG. **21** or, in other embodiments, implemented in any desired context.

[0200] As shown, the player buttons **21210**, **21212**, and **21224** each include a light **22306** capable of emitting light. In one embodiment, the light may include a light emitting diode (LED), LED-alternatives such an electroluminescent light, incandescent light, etc. and/or any other type of light capable of emitting light. It should further be noted that the lights **22306** may take the form of single-colored, multiple-colored, and/or colorless lights **22306**. Still yet, the player buttons **21210**, **21212**, and **21224** may each include multiple lights. Thus, the use of a single light associated with each player button, in the manner shown in FIG. **22**, should not be construed as limiting in any way.

[0201] With continuing reference to FIG. **22**, the player buttons **21210**, **21212**, and **21224** (and the associated lights **22306**) are shown to be coupled to a controller **22304** (i.e. a computer, microprocessor, integrated circuit, circuit board, button board, analog or digital circuitry, and/or any desired type of logic or the like) for controlling the lights **22306** such that at least one aspect of the lights **22306** is modulated.

[0202] In the context of the present description, the at least one aspect of the lights **22306** that is modulated may include intensity, color, and/or any other aspect capable of being

modulated. Further, such modulation, in the present description, may refer to any modulating, changing, altering, varying, adjusting, etc. of the at least one aspect.

[0203] Optionally, the light intensity may be controlled by way of pulse-width modulation techniques, which are capable of controlling the brightness of LED's. Further, in another embodiment, analog to digital (A/D) converter technology may be utilized in the present context. Of course any technique may be used that is capable of controlling the intensity, brightness, color, or any other aspect of the light.

[0204] To this end, more attractive and functionally superior player buttons **21210**, **21212**, and **21224** (and associated lights **22306**) are provided. More information on optional features associated with the aforementioned lights **22306** will now be set forth. Such additional details are set forth for illustrative purposes only, and should not be construed as limiting in any manner.

[0205] FIG. **23** is a graph showing the continuous variation in light intensity over time with respect to a light (e.g. light **22306** of FIG. **22**, etc.) of each player button (e.g. player button **22210**, **22212**, **22224** of FIG. **22**, etc.), in accordance with another embodiment. The light associated with each player button is capable of varying in intensity **23402** as time **23404** progress. As shown, the light intensity may change at a constant rate, such that the change in intensity is gradual. Of course, the light intensity may change at any rate, or may not even change at all.

[0206] Further, the intensity **23402** of the light is capable of changing by increasing to a maximum intensity **23406** and then decreasing to a minimum intensity **23408** in a continuous, cyclical (i.e. sinusoidal, etc.) manner. Still yet, the intensity of the light associated with each player button may change individually or collectively with the other player buttons.

[0207] For example, the intensity variations may be random and uncoordinated for each player button. In the alternative, such intensity variations may be synchronized so that the intensity of each player bottom out at the same time. The intensity variations may even be a predetermined amount out-of-phase, in order to provide a "rippling" effect among the player buttons. Just by way of example, the intensities may be 60 degrees out-of-phase among three player buttons, in order to maximize this effect.

[0208] These options allow for a continuous pattern of change in light intensity that is attractive to prospective players of the gaming machine. More information on optional techniques of color modulation will not be set forth. Such additional details may or may not be used in conjunction with the foregoing intensity modulation. Further, it should be noted the foregoing intensity-related features may be applied in the context of color. In a similar manner, the following color-related features may used to modulate intensity in the manner described.

[0209] FIG. **24** is a graph showing the continuous variation of light color over time with respect to a light (e.g. light **22306** of FIG. **22**, etc.) of each player button (e.g. player button **22210**, **22212**, **22224** of FIG. **22**, etc.), in accordance with yet another embodiment. As shown, the light associated with each player button is capable of changing color as time progresses.

[0210] In particular, in one embodiment, the light associated with each player button may change from red **24504** to blue **24506** to green **24508** as time progresses, in a continuous manner. As shown in FIG. **24**, each of three player buttons may show a different color (i.e. red, green, blue) at each instant in time. Further, the change from each color to the next may either be abrupt (i.e. instantly), or gradual (i.e. in a sinusoidal, etc.).

[0211] Of course, it should be understood that any pattern that any pattern of color change, or even no color change may be used with respect to each of the player buttons.

[0212] As an option, the color and intensity variations may be either independently or dependently modulated. For example, any color changes (i.e. from one color to the next, etc.) may occur when the intensity of the associated button is at a lowest level.

[0213] As yet another option, the foregoing color and/or intensity modulation may operate in a first mode when the corresponding gaming machine is not in use. In such first mode, any of the foregoing modulations may occur in an automatic manner to attract play.

[0214] The color and/or intensity modulation may also operate in a second mode, during play of the gaming machine by a user. In the second mode, the color and/or intensity modulation may vary as a function of player input and any win accomplished on the gaming machine, in order to maintain play. For example, upon depression of one of the player buttons, such button may peak in intensity and/or change color, and/or may even deviate from coordination with respect to the remaining player buttons. Further, there may be special third mode, whereby the lights modulate in a specific manner to indicate a win.

[0215] Again, it should be strongly noted that the various features of all the embodiments set forth herein may or may not be combined, per the desires of the user.

[0216] While various embodiments have been described above, it should be understood that they have been presented by way of example only, and not limitation. Thus, the breadth and scope of a preferred embodiment should not be limited by any of the above-described exemplary embodiments, but should be defined only in accordance with the following claims and their equivalents.

What is claimed is:

1. A method, comprising:

identifying a user of a gaming machine;

identifying at least one other party; and

allowing communication between the user and the at least one other party.

2. The method of Claim 1, wherein the gaming machine includes a reel-type slot gaming machine.

3. The method of Claim 1, wherein the gaming machine is coupled to a second gaming machine via a network.

4. The method of Claim 3, wherein the network utilizes a wireless transport medium.

5. The method of Claim 3, wherein the network utilizes a fiber optic cable transport medium.

6. The method of Claim 1, wherein the user is identified utilizing a player identifier associated with the user.

7. The method of Claim 6, wherein the player identifier associated with the user is read from a gaming card of the user via a gaming card processor of the gaming machine.

8. A the method of Claim 1, wherein the at least one other party includes another user of a second gaming machine.

9. The method of Claim 1, wherein the at least one other party is identified utilizing a player identifier associated with the at least one other party.

10. The method of Claim 9, wherein the player identifier associated with the at least one other party is read from a gaming card of the at least one other party via a gaming card processor of a gaming machine utilized by the at least one other party.

11. The method of Claim 9, wherein the player identifier associated with the at least one other party is read from a gaming card of the user via a gaming card processor of the gaming machine.

12. The method of Claim 1, wherein prior to allowing communication between the user and the at least one other party, it is determined whether the user is authorized to communicate with the at least one other party.

13. The method of Claim 12, wherein the determination is made utilizing a data structure of a plurality of player identifiers.

14. The method of claim 13, wherein the data structure is included on a gaming card of the user.

15. The method of Claim 12, wherein communication between the user and the at least on other party is allowed based on the determination.

16. The method of Claim 1, wherein communication is provided between the user and at least tow other parties simultaneously.

17. The method of Claim 1, wherein the at least one other party is identified based on a selection by the user from a displayed set of available parties.

18. The method of Claim 1, further comprising locating a second gaming machine utilized by the at least one other party, and providing to the user directions from the gaming machine to the second machine.

19. A network gaming machine system, comprising:

a gaming machine associated with a user;

wherein communication between the user at least one other party is allowed, utilizing the gaming machine.

20. A method, comprising:

identifying a first user of a first gaming machine associated with a second user of a second gaming machine; and

locating the first gaming machine for the second user if the second gaming machine.

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