US 20090197675A1

(19) United States

(12) Patent Application Publication

(10) Pub. No.: US 2009/0197675 A1

(43) Pub. Date: Aug. 6, 2009

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(54) **INTERACTIVE GAMING PLATFORM**

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(21) Appl. No.: **12/361,265**

(22) Filed: **Jan. 28, 2009**

Related U.S. Application Data

(60) Provisional application No. 61/062,652, filed on Jan. 28, 2008, provisional application No. 61/058,393, filed on Jun. 3, 2008.

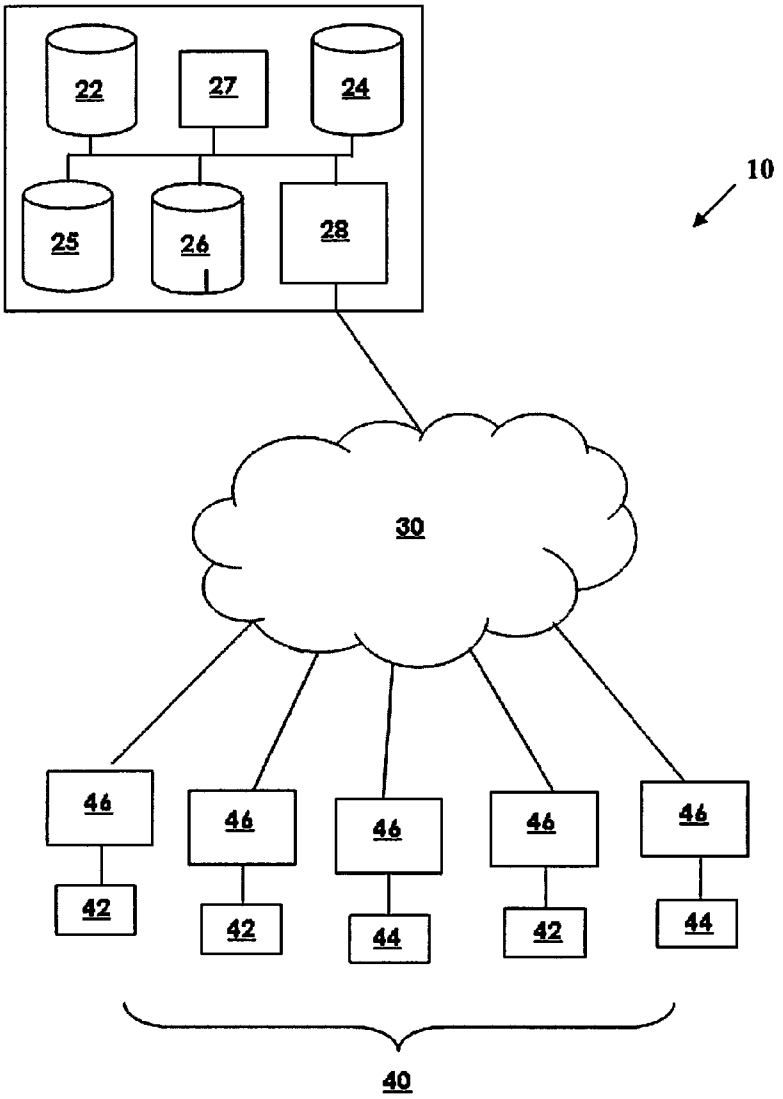
Publication Classification

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

(52) **U.S. Cl.** **463/29**; 463/42; 463/43

(57) **ABSTRACT**

Systems and methods for online marketing are disclosed. Advertising games are provided by defining a game having at least one question that is answerable by physically visiting a predetermined sponsor location. The at least one question is stored in a database of sponsored games in an advertising system. A participant enrolls in a game and receives a question clue to the predetermined sponsor location from the advertising system. The participant visits the sponsor location to determine an answer responsive to the question clue and obtains corresponding verification information. After transmitting the verification information to the advertising system, the participant receives game standing information.



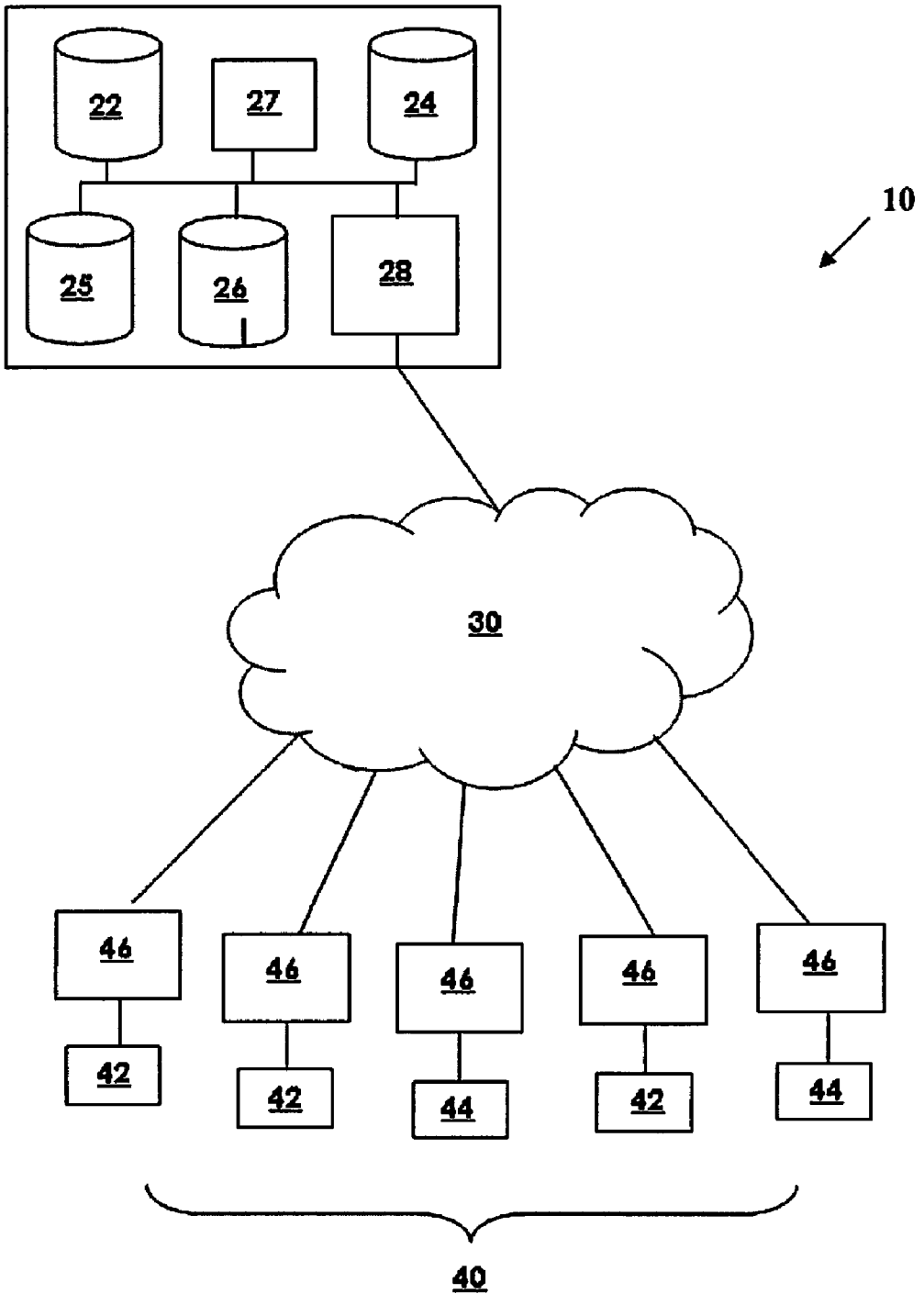


FIGURE 1

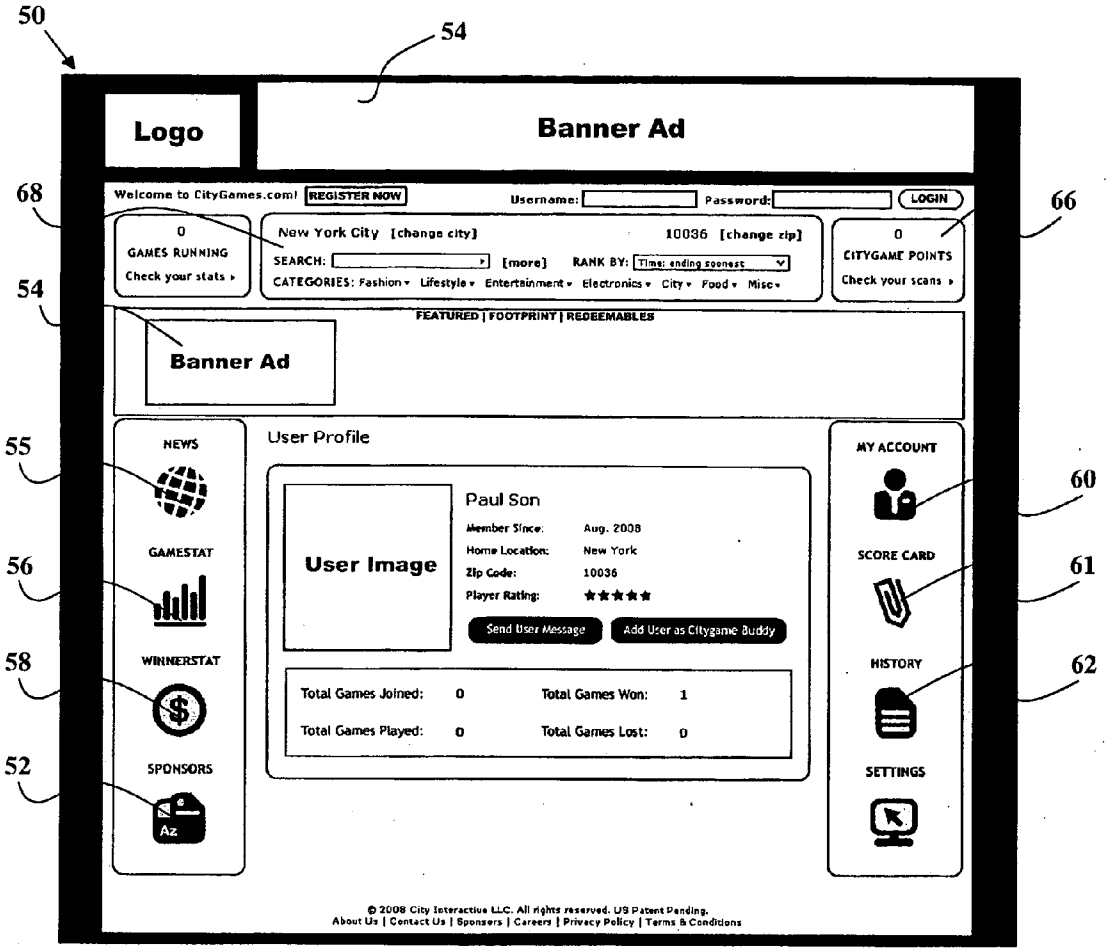

50
54
Logo
Banner Ad
68
Welcome to CityGames.com! REGISTER NOW
Username:
Password:
LOGIN
66
0
GAMES RUNNING
Check your stats
New York City [change city]
10036 [change zip]
SEARCH:
[more]
RANK BY: Time: ending soonest
CATEGORIES: Fashion Lifestyle Entertainment Electronics City Food Misc
0
CITYGAME POINTS
Check your scans
54
FEATURED | FOOTPRINT | REDEEMABLES
Banner Ad
55
NEWS
User Profile
MY ACCOUNT
60
User Image
Paul Son
Member Since: Aug. 2008
Home Location: New York
Zip Code: 10036
Player Rating:
56
GAMESTAT
SCORE CARD
61
Send User Message
Add User as Citygame Buddy
58
WINNERSTAT
HISTORY
62
Total Games Joined: 0
Total Games Won: 1
Total Games Played: 0
Total Games Lost: 0
52
SPONSORS
SETTINGS
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FIGURE 2A

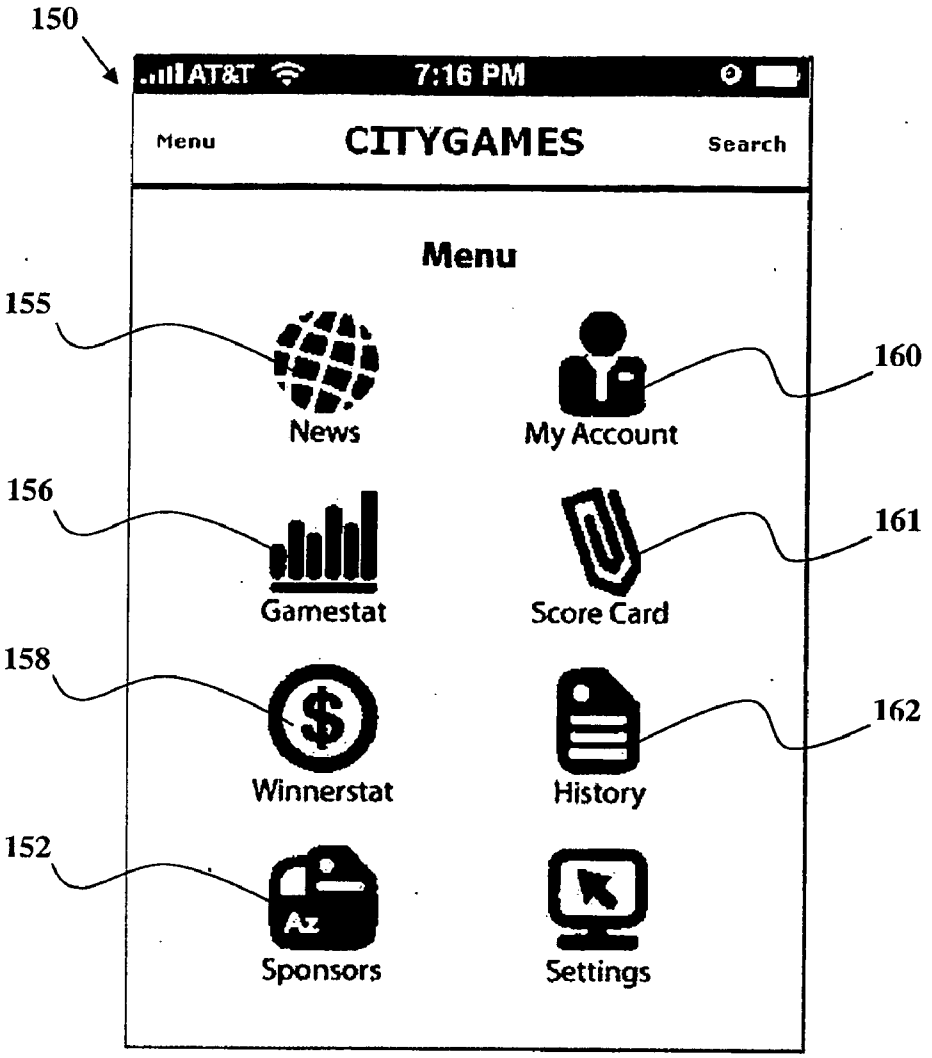

FIGURE 2B

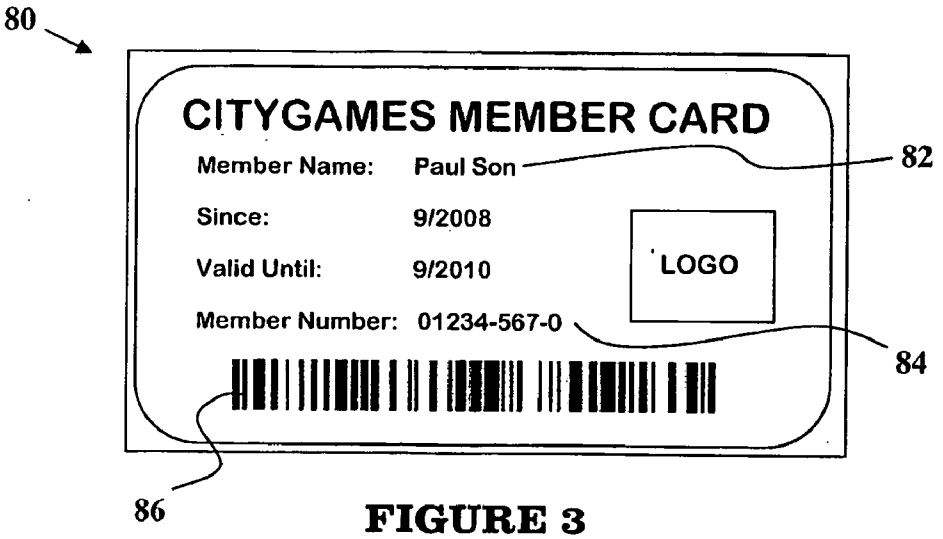

FIGURE 3

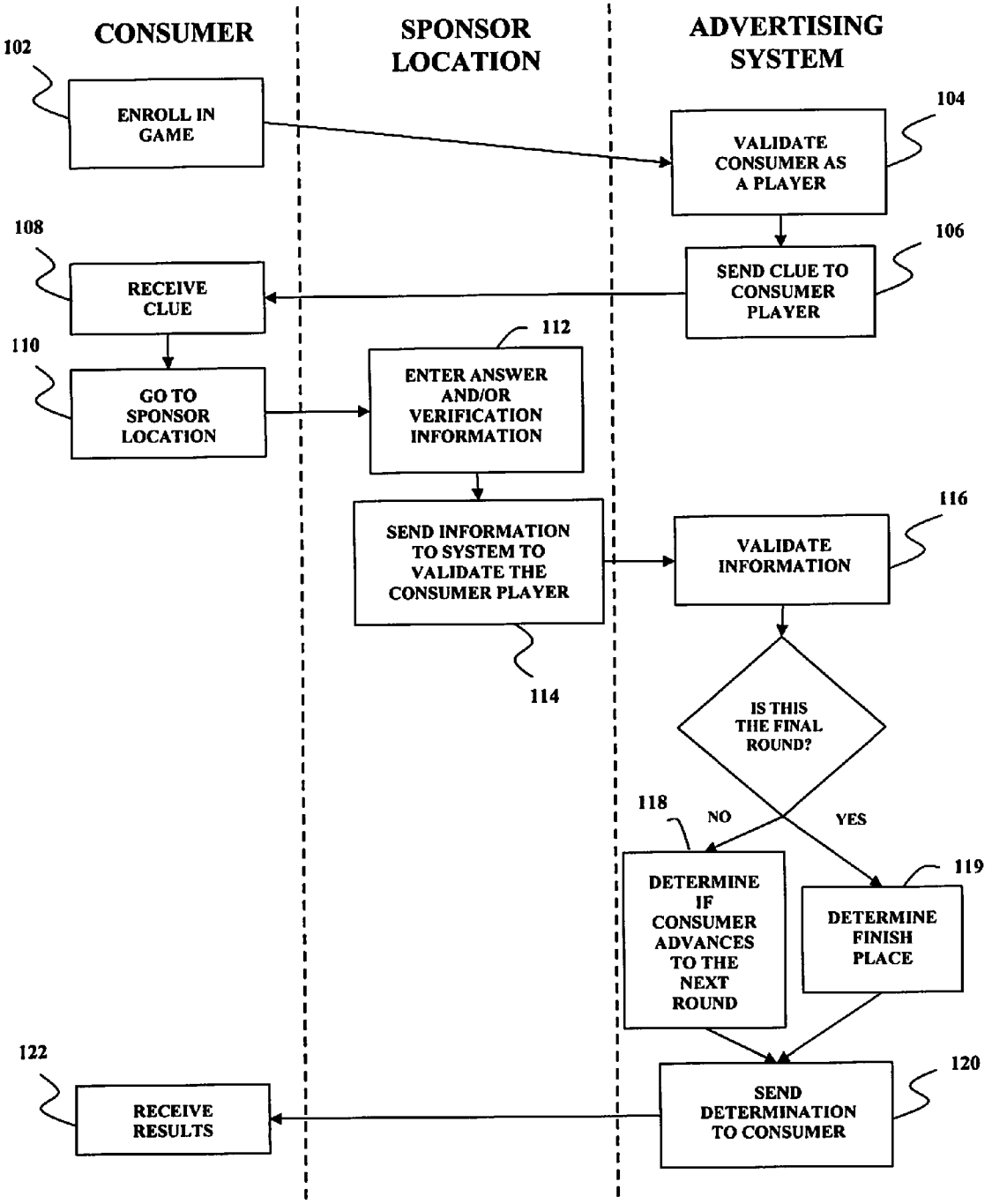
CONSUMER
SPONSOR LOCATION
ADVERTISING SYSTEM
102
ENROLL IN GAME
104
VALIDATE CONSUMER AS A PLAYER
106
SEND CLUE TO CONSUMER PLAYER
108
RECEIVE CLUE
110
GO TO SPONSOR LOCATION
112
ENTER ANSWER AND/OR VERIFICATION INFORMATION
114
SEND INFORMATION TO SYSTEM TO VALIDATE THE CONSUMER PLAYER
116
VALIDATE INFORMATION
IS THIS THE FINAL ROUND?
NO
YES
118
DETERMINE IF CONSUMER ADVANCES TO THE NEXT ROUND
119
DETERMINE FINISH PLACE
120
SEND DETERMINATION TO CONSUMER
122
RECEIVE RESULTS

FIGURE 4

INTERACTIVE GAMING PLATFORM

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This application claims the benefit of U.S. Provisional Application No. 61/062,652, filed Jan. 28, 2008, and U.S. Provisional Application No. 61/058,393, filed Jun. 3, 2008, the entire contents of which are incorporated herein by reference.

BACKGROUND

[0002] 1. Technical Field

[0003] The present disclosure relates generally to systems and methods for marketing in a gaming format, and in particular, to systems and methods for providing a centralized hub for sponsors to conduct an advertising campaign in the form of a scavenger hunt based game.

[0004] 2. Description of the Related Art

[0005] Advertising, the presentation and promotion of products and/or services by a business to its existing and potential customers, may be conducted in a myriad of ways. Traditional advertising include newspaper, television, radio, and magazine ads, as well as the use of billboards, trade shows, mailing lists, and location-based media such as taxi top and truck side signs, aerial banners, and video monitors in public spaces. More contemporary forms of advertising include internet advertising in the form of banner and display ads.

[0006] Although these methods of advertising may be effective for purposes such as brand building, there are factors, including price, infrequent message delivery, and target audience apathy which may make traditional advertising undesirable in certain scenarios. For example, in order for a business to advertise their brand or products through a television commercial, they have to pay a significant sum of money to have the commercial produced and aired, with no guarantee that the commercial will not simply be switched off or ignored by the viewer. With regard to internet display ads, while the cost may be lower than traditional media advertisement, their effectiveness is questionable as many web users regard these advertisements as a nuisance and simply ignore them.

SUMMARY

[0007] The advertising system of the present disclosure includes an interactive gaming platform which allows sponsors to advertise their brands, products, and/or services by engaging consumers in a combination of internet-based and real-world activities in a social gaming environment.

[0008] The advertising system incorporates social gaming by providing a competition to consumers in the form of a scavenger hunt game. One or more rounds of play include locating information at a physical location based on an electronically provided clue. A final round may include a rat race to a physical location to determine prize winners.

[0009] Games may be sponsored by local, regional or national businesses through a central marketing hub or advertising system. Sponsors affiliate with the hub and provide information about their goods and/or services as well as offer game opportunities related to their goods and/or services. The hub serves as a shared platform, or publishing ground, for sponsors to reach consumers, thereby creating a community of sponsors and consumers. The hub also includes a database of advertising games from which a consumer may selectively view and participate. Consumers may be given the freedom to search and browse through all of the sponsors and sponsor games thereby providing consumers with the opportunity to familiarize themselves with different sponsors and the goods and/or services they provide, which may in turn create new customers and sales opportunities, among other things.

[0010] The direct interactive marketing by sponsors ties gaming incentive to a consumer base and provides a fun, challenging experience for the consumer while bringing the consumer in direct contact with the sponsor and their products/services.

[0011] A method for online marketing includes advertising games that are provided by defining a game having at least one question that is answerable by physically visiting a predetermined sponsor location. The at least one question is stored in a database of sponsored games in an advertising system. A participant enrolls in a game and receives a question clue to the predetermined sponsor location from the advertising system. The participant visits the sponsor location to determine an answer responsive to the question clue and obtains corresponding verification information. After transmitting the verification information to the advertising system, the participant receives game standing information.

[0012] A plurality of participants may receive the question clue substantially simultaneously via a network connection. The time the question is received may be at a predetermined or a random time. In embodiments, game standing information includes information that a participant may proceed to a subsequent game round. The notification may be based, at least in part, upon the time at which the verification information is transmitted to the advertising system. In embodiments, a prize is awarded based upon the time at which verification information is transmitted to the advertising system.

[0013] The method may further include having the participant, sponsor, or both register for an account on the advertising system. In embodiments, the sponsor may upload sponsor data to the advertising system. In embodiments, at least one game token may be issued to a game participant. The token may be a member card containing a unique identifier corresponding to the game participant. The unique identifier may be a barcode or RFID tag.

[0014] An online advertising system may include a processor that is in operable communication with a network via a network interface. A game database is in operable communication with the processor and is configured to store at least one game definition. A sponsor database and a participant database are also in operable communication with the processor and are configured to store at least one sponsor profile and information corresponding to at least one game participant, respectively. The advertising system includes a software module that is executable by the processor for performing a method of online marketing online. The method includes defining a game having at least one question that is answerable by physically visiting a predetermined sponsor location, storing the at least one question in the game database, enrolling a game participant in the game, transmitting a question clue relating to the predetermined sponsor location, receiving verification information from the participant, and transmitting game standing information.

[0015] The system may include a client access terminal that is in operable communication with the processor via a network. The system may also include a sponsor access terminal in operable communication with the processor via a network.

The client access terminal and/or the sponsor access terminal may be a personal computer, a wireless device, or a set-top box, among other things.

[0016] The question clue may be transmitted substantially simultaneously to a plurality of participants via a network. In embodiments, the game standing information may include a notification that a game participant may proceed to a subsequent game round. The game standing notification may be based at least in part upon the time at which verification information is transmitted to the processor.

[0017] In embodiments, the methods of online marketing may be performed by a computer-readable medium storing a set of programmable instructions configured for being executed by at least one processor.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0018] FIG. **1** is a schematic diagram of an environment for marketing in accordance with the principles of the present disclosure;

[0019] FIG. **2**A is an exemplary screenshot of an interface in the form of a web page of the advertising system of the present disclosure showing a consumer's profile;

[0020] FIG. **2**B is an exemplary screenshot of an alternate embodiment of the interface of FIG. **2**A for use with a mobile device;

[0021] FIG. **3** is an embodiment of a member card for use with the advertising system; and

[0022] FIG. **4** is a schematic diagram of an exemplary embodiment of game selection and play in accordance with the advertising system of the present disclosure.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0023] Embodiments of the advertising system of the present disclosure will now be described in detail with reference to the drawings wherein like reference numerals identify similar or like elements throughout the several views.

[0024] FIG. **1** illustrates an advertising system **10** for connecting sponsors with consumers. The advertising system **10** includes a server **20** operably connected to at least one client **40** via a network **30**, such as without limitation, a public network, local network, or other communication protocol such as short message service. The server **20** includes one or more processors **28** operably coupled by system bus or other suitable means, to one or more modules **22** located on one or multiple machines sited in the same or several geographic locations. The modules **22** may be any type of data stores such as a game database **24**, sponsor database **25**, and consumer database **26**, as well as other devices and applications capable of providing marketing and advertising services, or additionally or alternatively, housekeeping functions for the system via the network **30**, such as, for example without limitation, payment processing modules, authentication modules, and registration modules (not explicitly shown).

[0025] Client **40** may access the server **30** through a terminal **46** such as a computer, cell phone, personal digital assistant, gaming system, set-top boxes, and other devices, now or in the future known, that are capable of connecting to the server **20** via the network **30**. The content of the server **20** may be displayed in a variety of formats, such as standard web format, mobile format, or plug-in format, for example. In embodiments, applications for providing an interface or display **27** are provided on server **20** which may be accessed by clients **40** via an internet connection **30**. Users having access to the internet may view the display **27**, such as a web page, and browse the information and content provided therein.

[0026] A community of clients **40** includes both sponsors **42** and consumers **44**. Sponsors **42** become affiliated with the system **10** by registering with the server **20**. Terms of use may be provided to define and standardize rules and regulations, as well as contractual obligations and relations between the sponsor **42** and the system **10**. For example, the terms of use may require, for example, a third-party escrow service to prevent tampering of a game, legitimacy and commitment of providing a prize, exclusivity agreements, safety policies, game token release commitments, forfeiting policies, and others to ensure legitimacy in service and operation of the system **10**.

[0027] A sponsor **42** creates a sponsor account which includes a profile. The profile includes the sponsor's name, and any identifying and/or proprietary information, for example without limitation, applicable logo(s), trademark(s), brand(s), and/or motto(s). This profile may be stored on the server **20** such that a unique URL may set the location of each sponsor. Sponsors may use the URL to promote themselves and their affiliations with the advertising system **10**, such as in other advertising mediums like television and radio commercials, ads, posters, and internet sites. In embodiments, the server **20** provides the capability of uploading sponsor profile data (e.g., the aforesaid logo(s) et al.) from the sponsor to the server.

[0028] In embodiments, the sponsors **42** become part of the community by paying a publishing fee. Once affiliated, the sponsors may offer games, such as scavenger hunts, at no cost other than their option for the game's prize. Alternatively, the sponsors may pay a fee per game or for customization and maintenance of their games and profile design.

[0029] Consumers **44** may view sponsor profiles and games, as well as be exposed to a variety of other information. As illustrated in FIG. **2**A, web pages 50 may include sponsor profiles **52**; banner ads **54**; past, current, and future scavenger hunt games **55**; the status of active games **56**; and prize notification announcements and awards **58**. Consumers **44** may register with the server **20** to have their own account **60** which allows them to become part of the community and gain access to enroll in games **61**, view their participation history **62**, contact other consumers **64**, and accumulate game points **66**, among other things. Consumer **44** may have to agree to terms for use and play upon registration. Terms may include, for example, safety policies, forfeiting policies, anti-spamming and solicitation policies, rules against tampering of the gaming environment, among others. Eligibility requirements may also be included such as, for example, an age requirement or non-affiliation requirement. With respect to non-affiliation, the consumer may be asked if he or she is an employee or in anyway affiliated with the sponsor prior to enrolling in a particular game, such as by a small pop-up window. If so, the consumer may not be eligible for play in that particular game. The consumer's account setting may also include past and present employment and/or affiliation fields so that those sponsors will not be displayed in game search results.

[0030] Mobile device applications, such as an application for the iphone® handheld mobile digital electronic device commercially available by Apple Inc., may include an interface **150** to the contents as described above. Moreover, social networking plug-ins, like an application for the Facebook®

online networking service provided by Facebook Inc., may include an interface including the contents as described above.

[0031] A game is series of one or more pre-defined questions and/or clues that are released to game players over a period of time, at the end of which one or more players may receive a prize, such as a grand prize for winning. Each question/clue is released in a round, a round being the period starting when a question is released and ending when the next question/clue in the series is released. A game starts at a defined date-time and ends when the last question/clue in its question/clue series reaches its end date-time. Questions/clues are released on a website, into an inbox within the consumer players' account, or through other communication means, such as e-mail, for game players to solve. Any registered player may answer the first question/clue in the question/clue series for a given game. Solutions may only be found by visiting a physical location indicated by the question/clue. Each game, however, only accepts a certain number of correct answers per question/clue. The game, therefore, may act as a single elimination round-based competition in which the players are reduced every round until the game ends.

[0032] Sponsors may have a significant amount of input and creative control regarding the design and details of a game and determination of which prize is provided for each sponsored game. For example, the target physical location of the question/clue of a round of the game may be selected by the sponsor to provide exposure for their products or services. In embodiments, the sponsor account may include game templates for the sponsor to design their game. The game template allows the sponsor to upload banner image(s), prize image(s), and any other resources to the appropriate module on the server. The design, advertising appeal, content, and direct interactive marketing clue dynamics may be manipulated within the game template including, for example, the color scheme, font, space allocation of ads and images, the link spaces, the background display, and multi-media insertion capabilities. Alternatively, the games may be designed for the sponsor.

[0033] The game may be customized in a variety of ways. It may be tailored to involve a specific store in a specific location or a franchise of related stores, an area surrounding a store, or a location promoted by the sponsor. It may be adapted to a particular season or time frame, or to a particular sales event, promotion, or theme. The customization may be directed towards a certain market, target demographic, or age range as a broad range of consumers from students to working individuals to retirees may participate in a game. Sponsors may cater to a specific item, store sales event, or may even educate the consumer about the history or architecture of a store or brand. By physically placing the consumer in the sponsor's environment the consumer is exposed to the sponsor's sales and becomes familiar with the sponsors goods and/or services. The sponsor's aim, then, may be to place the consumer in the sponsor's environment so as to directly market to them.

[0034] In embodiments, sponsors may join a mega game comprising multiple sponsors in which each sponsor may represent one or more rounds in the mega game. For example, a game includes five rounds in which each round is sponsored by a different sponsor for a total of five sponsors participating in the game. The collaboration of sponsors may all contribute towards prizes for the game. The mega game may prevent consumer players from loitering and gathering at an individual sponsor location before questions are sent because it may be unknown which sponsor is associated with which round. It may also prevent loiterers who wait at a particular sponsor site for the question from always being the first to answer questions. Instead, the challenge of which sponsor site to visit per round may create fairness in the answering process.

[0035] A game's life cycle includes four game modes: Disabled, Pre-signup and Signup, Pre-run and Running, and Ended. A game's life cycle begins with disabled and moves from one mode to the next in the aforementioned order.

[0036] Disabled is the default mode. Games are disabled when, for example, they are removed or are in development. Disabled games are not available for display to the consumers, and therefore, no consumer action may cause the mode of disabled game to change.

[0037] A game is released into the system on its release date. When a game is initially released into the system it may have a signup start date later than the release date. For example, the signup start date for player registration may be one day or more days after the release date. At that time the game is in a pre-signup mode indicating that it is waiting to open for signup. A game in pre-signup mode is available for consumers to view, on a web page or elsewhere, but consumers may not interact with the game.

[0038] Consumers may sign up to play a game in signup mode. A game may be updated to this mode by the system when the signup start date for the game is equal to or greater than the current local time for that game. Similarly, a game may be updated to pre-run from signup by the system when the signup enddate for that game is equal to or less than the current local time for that game. Therefore, only the system may change a game from pre-signup to signup, or from signup to pre-run. In pre-run, the game has not yet released any questions/clues, but the signup period has ended and no more consumers may sign up and register for the game.

[0039] In run mode, the game is active and at least one question/clue has been released for the game. The date-time boundaries for this mode are the start date for the first or earliest question/clue and the end date for the last or latest question/clue. Only the system may change a game mode from pre-run to run.

[0040] In the ended mode, the game is complete and consumers may view the results of the game but cannot interact with the game in any way. This is the final mode a game is place in once its life cycle is complete.

[0041] Since games are tied in with real-world locations (e.g., public, private, and commercial properties), in embodiments, games are set-up based on the location of a consumer. A consumer on the internet, for example, may convert his or her experience to a physical adventure based on the city closest to him or her. In this context, a city is a general term used to refer to a geographic location rather than a real-world city. For example, the location "New York City" may include multiple boroughs and parts of New Jersey and Connecticut, rather than following the New York City limits. Accordingly, game mode may be date dependent and utilize a program which will execute commands at specific dates-times. For example, while the server may have its own internal clock and time zone, the dates-times found in the database may be relative to the time zone of the location where a game is running. For example, two games with the same release date may not actually be active at the same time. Determination

regarding game mode and other date-time dependent operations may use the time zone of the game and therefore, the time zone for a given game may need to be defined.

[0042] As such, games may be unique to a city, or to a subset of cites containing substantially identical stores. The consumer may set-up his or her profile to recognize the city (**68** in FIG. **2**A) in which he or she lives, works, or visits. Upon searching or rank sorting, the consumers may then browse through the sponsor games by distance, time, and/or sponsor category. Each sponsor, whether private or franchise, will be able to offer a game and prize to a local demographic consumer base. Based on the location of the store, the consumer will be given the opportunity to acquaint himself or herself with a given sponsor and the sponsor's store.

[0043] Individual games may last for one or more days and include one or multiple rounds. In embodiments, there may be a maximum of one round per day. In other embodiments, there may be more than one round per day as there may or may not be a regular interval at which the rounds are released. The rounds may run in consecutive days or be intermittent, and played only on particular days or at particular times. In embodiments, a consumer may join multiple games concurrently.

[0044] Upon registration a consumer may be provided with a member card. The member card **80**, such as that illustrated in FIG. **3**, may include identifying information such as the consumer's name **82** and member number **84**, as well as a unique identification code **86**. In the current embodiment, the unique identification code **86** is a barcode. In other embodiments, the unique identification code may be a RFID tag or other read-only transponder, now or in the future known.

[0045] Consumers may directly view a sponsor's profile to learn more about the sponsor, such as the sponsor's details and statistics, and/or to see the sponsor's next game or schedule of games in a single screen. Once a consumer finds a game of interest, the consumer may enroll in the game at little to no cost. Once enrollment is validated by the server during signup, the consumer waits for the date the game is designated to begin/run. The number of consumers who may enroll in a particular game may be the number of people who join before a pre-determined time limit expires or a pre-determined number of participants enroll.

[0046] After enrolling in a game, the consumer player awaits the start of the game. At the beginning of each round a clue relating to a sponsor's physical location is posted to the enrolled consumer players at substantially the same time at a randomly selected or pre-selected time. The questions may be delivered to the consumer via notification to their user account or by e-mail, text message, and the like. The consumer player, therefore, takes it upon his or herself to determine the frequency in which he or she checks to see if clues are released. The consumer must be amongst the calculated percentage of consumer players to reach the physical location alluded to by the clue and to send an answer or verification information from the physical location before a certain percentage of other consumer players. Consequently, those who do not reply to the clue or who reply after the quota of players for the next round is met are eliminated from the game. Elimination decreases the number of players advancing to the next round in a certain proportion, determined by factors such as the number of rounds in a game or the numbers of players signed up for the current game.

[0047] For example, a game is designed to consist of one question per day for five days. Ten thousand consumers enroll and are allowed to participate in the game. On day one, eight thousand players, or 80% of the consumers enrolled in the game, are allowed to continue on to the day two. The eight thousand players are chosen based on the verification information they supply to the game database in addition to the time in which the response was logged. Day two allows for six thousand, or 60% of the originally enrolled consumers, to continue on to day three, day three allows for four thousand, or 40% of the originally enrolled consumers, to continue on to day four, and day four allows for two thousand, or 20% of the originally enrolled consumers to continue on to day five. Day five allows the remaining players to compete for the final prize.

[0048] The consumer may be required to send answer or verification information in a number of different ways. For example, the consumer may be required to swipe or scan their member card into a designated card reader which will transmit the consumer player's information to the advertising system indicating that the player has successfully reached the sponsor's location and completed the round. In other embodiments, the consumer may be required to scan a bar code which the consumer player received with the round's clue by printing the barcode or displaying it on a device, such as an LCD of a mobile phone, and scanning the barcode into a designated card reader as described above. In yet other embodiments, the consumer may be required to enter a unique code which the consumer player received with the round's clue into a designated game terminal for verifying the consumer player's successful completion of the round. In embodiments, the consumer may be required to pick up a time release token and enter information located on the token into a designated game terminal or into their game account for verification. One or more methods of verification, such as those described above, may be used one or more times per game.

[0049] A time release token may be a card, chip, coin, slip, flyer, coupon, or other physical item that is given out by the sponsor during the particular round of play. In embodiments, the time release token may look similar to the member card described in FIG. **3**. The sponsoring store may be provided with instructions for release of a specific game token on a specific day or during a specific round. In embodiments, the game cards are placed under sponsor supervision, such as behind counters or with a specific associate, in order to prevent hoarding. For example, the time release token may be a game card that includes a special code, such as under a scratch off coating, that the consumer must enter into the advertising system to complete the round.

[0050] The game token itself may include additional advertising from the sponsor or from other sponsors or businesses. Ad space may be provided on the game token as well as space for shopping incentives such as coupons, coupon codes, rewards points, and other bonuses or information within the purview of those skilled in the art. The game token may also include other incentives such as instant win offers, miscellaneous prizes, coupons, rewards points, and the like. Likewise, the use of the barcode verification may reveal incentives instantly following the barcode scan.

[0051] In embodiments, consumers may also be required to answer a question about the sponsor or sponsor location which may be figured out by scavenger hunt. Questions may be provided with multiple-choice answers or other standardized questions which may be made available to the player via their user account, e-mail, or other graphical interface. The

answers may be made available after they enter the verification information or substantially simultaneously with the verification information.

[0052] Alternatively, the consumer may be required to answer a question through a designated game terminal or via their own means, such as a handheld mobile device through which they can access the question through their user account, and only provide verification information, as described above, at least one time during a game. For example, the consumer may be required to scan their member card at least once through the duration of a game during a pre-determined window, such as after the first question but before the last question. A consumer player who does not provide verification information may continue to advance through the game, but without verification he or she will not be able to win or claim a prize. For example, if there are four rounds to a game and the consumer player qualifies for the third round in which all third round qualifiers receive a prize, the consumer player may only receive that prize if he or she has already provided verification information. This may create incentive for a consumer to visit the sponsor's location as soon as he or she advances past the first round.

[0053] In embodiments, verification is the determinative factor for advancing in the game. In other embodiments, correctly answering a follow-up question is the determinative or a co-determinative factor in advancing in the game. Because the answers to the question may be found via alternative ways, like word of mouth or discussion threads, the use of verification information at the physical location, at least once as described above, ensures that the consumer player visited the sponsor's location.

[0054] The elimination process may be repeated for the desired number of rounds leading up to a final round. The final round of play includes providing the players with a clue to a final location to which they must be the first to arrive to claim the grand prize. The winning destination may include a buzzer or other physical device or signal for indicating that the consumer player was the first to arrive. At that time, the winner may be awarded the grand prize. Along with being the first to reach the winning destination, the player may be require to provide all game tokens in order to claim the grand prize, if applicable.

[0055] Referring now to the block diagram of FIG. **4** there is illustrated an embodiment of game selection and play in accordance with the principles of the present disclosure wherein an exemplary interchange between a consumer, the sponsor location, and the advertising system is illustrated. In step **102**, the consumer enrolls in a game via their user account in the advertising system. The advertising system validates the consumer as a player in step **104** and in step **106**, sends the consumer a clue indicating the start of the game. Upon receipt of the clue in step **108**, the consumer travels to the sponsor location in step **110** and provides an answer and/or verification information at the sponsor location at step **112**. The sponsor location then sends the information to the system in step **114**. The system, in turn, validates the information in step **116**. If this is not the final round of play, the advertising system determines if the consumer may advance to the next round in step **118**, and transmits the determination back to the consumer in step **120**. The consumer receives the results of the round in step **122**. If, however, it is the final round of play, the advertising system determines the finishing order of the consumer in step **119** and sends the determination back to the consumer in step **120**. In step **122**, the consumer receives the results of the game.

[0056] It will be understood that various modifications may be made to the embodiments disclosed herein. Therefore, the above description should not be construed as limiting, but merely as an exemplification of embodiments. Those skilled in the art will envision other modifications within the scope and spirit of the present disclosure. Such modifications and variations are intended to come within the scope of the following claims.

What is claimed is:

1. An online marketing method, comprising the steps of:
- defining a game having at least one question answerable by physically visiting a predetermined sponsor location;
- storing the at least one question in a database of sponsored games in an advertising system;
- enrolling a participant in the game;
- receiving from the advertising system a question clue to the predetermined sponsor location;
- visiting the sponsor location to determine an answer responsive to the question clue and obtaining corresponding verification information;
- transmitting verification information to the advertising system; and
- receiving game standing information.

2. The method according to claim **1**, further comprising registering for an account to the advertising system.

3. The method according to claim **1**, further comprising uploading sponsor data to the advertising system.

4. The method according to claim **1**, further comprising issuing at least one game token to a game participant.

5. The method according to claim **4**, wherein the at least one game token is a member card containing a unique identifier corresponding to each game participant.

6. The method according to claim **5**, wherein the unique identifier is selected from the group consisting of a barcode, and an RFID tag.

7. The method according to claim **1**, wherein the receiving step is performed substantially simultaneously by a plurality of participants via a network connection.

8. The method according to claim **1**, wherein the receiving step is performed at a time selected from the group consisting of a predetermined time and a random time.

9. The method according to claim **1**, wherein the game standing information includes a notification that a participant may to proceed to a subsequent game round.

10. The method according to claim **9**, wherein the notification is based at least in part upon the time at which verification information is transmitted to the advertising system.

11. The method according to claim **1**, further comprising the step of awarding a prize based upon the time at which verification information is transmitted to the advertising system.

12. An online advertising system, comprising:
- a processor in operable communication with a network via a network interface;
- a game database in operable communication with the processor, the game database configured to store at least one game definition;
- a sponsor database in operable communication with the processor, the sponsor database configured to store at least one sponsor profile;

a participant database in operable communication with the processor, the participant database configured to store information corresponding to at least one game participant;

a software module executable by the processor for performing a method of online marketing online, comprising the steps of:

defining a game having at least one question answerable by physically visiting a predetermined sponsor location;

storing the at least one question in the game database;

enrolling a game participant in the game;

transmitting a question clue relating to the predetermined sponsor location;

receiving verification information from a participant; and

transmitting game standing information.

13. The system in accordance with claim **12**, further comprising a client access terminal in operable communication with the processor via a network.

14. The system in accordance with claim **13**, wherein the client access terminal is selected from the group consisting of a personal computer, a wireless device, and a set-top box.

15. The system in accordance with claim **12**, further comprising a sponsor access terminal in operable communication with the processor via a network.

16. The system in accordance with claim **15**, wherein the sponsor access terminal is selected from the group consisting of a personal computer, a wireless device, and a set-top box.

17. The system in accordance with claim **12**, wherein the question clue is transmitted substantially simultaneously to a plurality of participants via a network.

18. The system in accordance with claim **12**, wherein the game standing information includes a notification that a game participant may to proceed to a subsequent game round.

19. The system in accordance with claim **18**, wherein the notification is based at least in part upon the time at which verification information is transmitted to the processor.

20. A computer-readable medium storing a set of programmable instructions configured for being executed by at least one processor for performing a method for online marketing, comprising:

defining a game having at least one question answerable by physically visiting a predetermined sponsor location;

storing the at least one question in the game database;

enrolling a game participant in the game;

transmitting a question clue relating to the predetermined sponsor location;

receiving verification information from a participant; and

transmitting game standing information.

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