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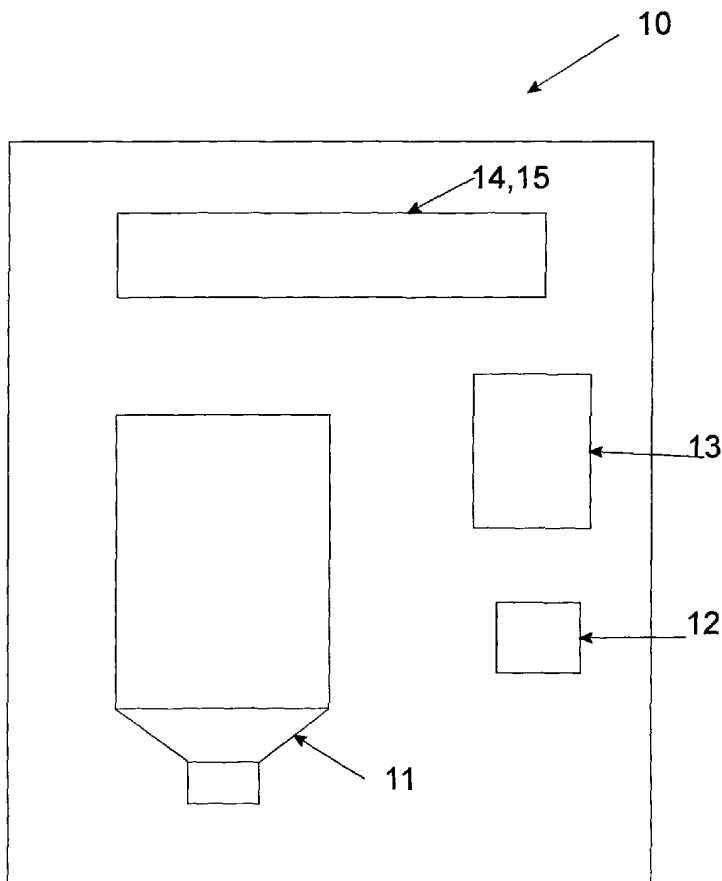
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(54) Title: VENDING MACHINES



(57) Abstract: A vending machine (10) has a payment receiving and change dispensing apparatus (12), a product storage and dispensing apparatus (11), a product selection apparatus (13), and at least one game device (14) with a display (15) associated therewith. The game device (14) is initiated by a user activated event to provide a game of chance or skill to award a predetermined prize according to the result of the game, the result of the game and/or the prize awarded being displayed by the display (15).



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VENDING MACHINES

The present invention relates to vending machines and, in particular, to a vending machine and a method of operating such a vending machine such that the vending machine offers a game of chance, skill or the like to the user of the machine whereby prizes can be awarded
5 to the user or customer operating the machine according to results of the game of chance.

BACKGROUND TO THE INVENTION

Vending machines are used widely with respect of vending products, whether they are machines for vending goods such as drinks, confectionery or the like, or for vending tickets, cash or the like.

- 10 There is currently no vending machine available to the public which has the provision of a game of chance associated with the machine suitable for awarding prizes or the like to users, whether that prize is a monetary or free product prize. Such a vending machine can therefore be used in situations previously not envisaged.

- It is therefore seen to be desirable to have a vending machine which has the provision of
15 games of chance for awarding prizes which allows the suppliers of goods and services through vending machines the opportunity to increase the use of their machines by attracting customers to the machines and their goods in particular.

OBJECT OF THE INVENTION

- It is an object of the present invention to provide a vending machine and a method of
20 operating same which has the provision of awarding prizes to users of the machine. At the very least, the object of the invention is to provide an alternative to known vending machines and their methods of operation.

DISCLOSURE OF THE INVENTION

According to one aspect of the present invention there is disclosed a vending machine having a payment receiving and change dispensing apparatus, a product storage and dispensing apparatus, a product selection means, at least one game device with display means
5 associated therewith, wherein said at least one game device is initiated by a user activated event to provide a game of chance or skill to award a predetermined prize according to the result of the game, the result of the game and/or the prize awarded being displayed by the display means.

Preferably, the game of chance or skill is played by the user following initiation. In other
10 preferred forms, the game of chance is automatically played by the game device.

Preferably the game of skill involve a reflex action or manipulation of a joystick, push buttons or the like associated with the game device, to award the prize only if a predetermined skill level is achieved. In other preferred forms, the game of skill involves application of mental skills.

15 Preferably, the game device is initiated by a user inserting payment or entering payment details into the machine to purchase a product therefrom. The game can be initiated prior to or following selection of a particular product from the machine and as such the product can be dispensed prior to or following the results of the game.

Preferably, the predetermined prize is dispensed by the vending machine. In one preferred
20 form, the prize is a product usually dispensed by the machine and therefore is dispensed by the product storage and dispensing apparatus. In another preferred form, the prize is in the form of a monetary prize and is dispensed by the change dispensing part of the payment receiving and change dispensing apparatus. In a further preferred form, the prize is in the form of a coupon, ticket, voucher or discount voucher and is dispensed by the machine by a
25 suitable means.

In further preferred forms, the prize is an entry into a further prize draw such that requisite information or data is entered into the machine via a data entry means.

Preferably, the display means of the game device provides a medium for advertising the products associated with the vending machine.

Preferably, the game provides a promotional material relationship with forthcoming events.

In preferred forms of the invention, random or mystery jackpot prizes are awarded to users
5 of the vending machine. The awarding of jackpot prizes is determined by the amount of use of the vending machine.

Preferably, the vending machine(s) is/are connected remotely to a central controller to thereby send and receive communication signals. Preferably the connection is by means of a modem or the like, but can be formed by any suitable means. The central controller is used
10 to monitor the vending machines as well as providing instructions thereto. For example, the central controller is used to change game formats, randomly issue jackpots, change any advertising and cross promotions, etc. Preferably, the central controller also monitors the operation of the games on the vending machine as well as monitoring stock levels.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

15 The present invention will be now be described with reference to the accompanying drawing in which:

Fig. 1 is a block diagram of a vending machine according to one embodiment of the present invention, and

Fig. 2 is a flow chart of the method of operation of vending machine of the Fig. 1.

20 BEST MODE OF CARRYING OUT THE INVENTION

The general arrangement of a vending machine 10 of a preferred embodiment is shown in Fig. 1 which shows the vending machine 10 having a product storage and dispensing apparatus 11, a payment receipt and change dispensing apparatus 12 and a product selection

apparatus 13 as used in the conventional manner. This vending machine further includes a game device 14 having a display monitor 15 associated therewith for displaying data associated with games played by the device 14.

The vending machine 10 of the preferred embodiment of the invention provides incentive to
5 potential customers to use the machine to purchase products which are being dispensed therefrom, by enabling the customer or user of the machine 10 to play a game of chance programmed into the gaming device 14 and be awarded prizes predetermined by the gaming device 14 according to the results of the game played thereon.

As seen in the flow chart of Fig. 2, the games to be played when a product is purchased or
10 selected are set or programmed into the device 14 in step 1. In step 2, prizes are predetermined according to the results of each game being played. It should be noted that in this embodiment, prizes are not awarded for all the results of the games being played. In step 3, after payment, if a preselected product is selected or purchased, the game is played as seen in the next step 4, while if a preselected product is not selected, the machine 10 awaits
15 the next input of payment.

In step 5, if the result of the game being played by the selection of the preselected product is that a prize is to be awarded, the prize is awarded in the next step 6, or if no prize is to be awarded, the machine 10 then awaits the next input of payment.

Once the prize has been awarded as seen in step 6, the machine either awaits the next input
20 of payment or ends its operation depending on whether further prizes as seen in step 7, are to be awarded. In such circumstances there may be a limited number of prizes to be awarded in any one promotion or use of the machine 10.

The display monitor 15 of the vending machine 10 of the preferred embodiment is used to show the game being played, as it is being played as well as providing information regarding
25 the results of the game and the prizes being awaiting according to the result. The display monitor is preferably a video display device.

The game being played could be a reel type game whereby like icons are to be aligned for a resulting win. All other types of games such as prize wheels, roulette, dice games etc can also be played, there being no or little limit to the type of game able to be played.

The above games are basically games of chance, and other games such as games of skill, 5 either reflex games such as space invaders or the like or blackjack can be played. A joystick or other forms of moving a pointer or cursor can be incorporated into the machine.

In the embodiment described above, the game is initiated by a user inserting payment and selecting a product. In other embodiments, the game can be initiated prior to or following selection of a particular product from the machine and as such the product can be dispensed 10 prior to or following the results of the game.

In a preferred arrangement, the predetermined prize is dispensed by the vending machine 10. If the prize is a product usually dispensed by the machine it is dispensed by the product storage and dispensing apparatus 11. In another preferred arrangement, the prize is in the form of a monetary prize and is therefore dispensed by the change dispensing part of the 15 payment receiving and change dispensing apparatus 12. In a further preferred arrangement the prize is in the form of a coupon, ticket, or discount voucher and is dispensed by the machine by a suitable device (not illustrated).

In further preferred forms, the prize is an entry into a further prize draw such that requisite information or data is entered into the machine via a data entry means (not illustrated).

20 The display monitor 15 of the game device 14 provides a medium for advertising the products associated with the vending machine.

Preferably, the game provides a promotional material relationship with forthcoming events.

In preferred forms of the invention, random or mystery jackpot prizes are awarded to users of the vending machine 10. The awarding of jackpot prizes is determined by the amount of 25 use of the vending machine 10.

Prizes which can be awarded by the games include, "win a further product for free", "receive your money back", "receive a collectable coupon to be redeemed for another prize", "be in a chance to win a Holiday", "receive an instant money prize", "win a movie ticket", "receive a discount coupon" and many more.

- 5 The vending machine(s) 10 is/are connected remotely to a central controller (not illustrated) to thereby send and receive communication signals. In the preferred embodiment, the connection is by means of a modem or the like (not illustrated), but can be formed by any suitable means. The central controller is used to monitor the vending machines 10 as well as providing instructions thereto. For example, the central controller is used to change game
- 10 formats, randomly issue jackpots, change any advertising and cross promotions, etc. Preferably, the central controller also monitors the operation of the games on the vending machine as well as monitoring stock levels.

The operation of the communication of the machine 10 to a central controller provides instant direct feedback. Each campaign and game format can be easily changed without

15 incurring significant costs.

The foregoing describes only some embodiments of the present invention, and modifications obvious to those skilled in the art can be made thereto without departing from the scope of the present invention.

For example, the vending machine can take the form of an Automated Teller Machine or

20 ATM which provides games to people withdrawing money from the ATM using various accounts. The games can be simple prizes awarded by random selection or can require the person withdrawing the money to "play" a game or the like. Jackpot prizes can also be awarded to users of EFTPOS machines in a similar manner.

CLAIMS

1. A vending machine having a payment receiving and change dispensing apparatus, a product storage and dispensing apparatus, a product selection means, at least one game device with display means associated therewith, wherein said at least one game device is
5 initiated by a user activated event to provide a game of chance or skill to award a predetermined prize according to the result of the game, the result of the game and/or the prize awarded being displayed by the display means.
2. The vending machine according to claim 1, wherein the game of chance or skill is played by the user following initiation.
- 10 3. The vending machine according to claim 1, wherein, the game of chance is automatically played by the game device.
4. The vending machine according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein the game of skill involve a reflex action or manipulation of a joystick, push buttons or the like associated with the game device, to award the prize only if a predetermined skill level is
15 achieved.
5. The vending machine according to any one of claims 1 to 3, wherein the game of skill involves application of mental skills.
6. The vending machine according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein the game device is initiated by a user inserting payment or entering payment details into the
20 machine to purchase a product therefrom, the game can be initiated prior to or following selection of a particular product from the machine and as such the product can be dispensed prior to or following the results of the game.
7. The vending machine according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein the predetermined prize is dispensed by the vending machine.

8. The vending machine according to claim 7, wherein the prize is a product usually dispensed by the machine and therefore is dispensed by the product storage and dispensing apparatus.
9. The vending machine according to claim 7, wherein the prize is in the form of a
5 monetary prize and is dispensed by the change dispensing part of the payment receiving and change dispensing apparatus.
10. The vending machine according to claim 7, wherein the prize is in the form of a coupon, ticket, voucher or discount voucher and is dispensed by the machine by a suitable means.
- 10 11. The vending machine according to claim 7, wherein the prize is an entry into a further prize draw such that requisite information or data is entered into the machine via a data entry means.
12. The vending machine according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein the display means of the game device provides a medium for advertising the products associated
15 with the vending machine.
13. The vending machine according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein the game provides a promotional material relationship with forthcoming events.
14. The vending machine according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein random or mystery jackpot prizes are awarded to users of the vending machine.
- 20 15. The vending machine according to claim 14, wherein the awarding of jackpot prizes is determined by the amount of use of the vending machine.
16. The vending machine according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein the vending machine(s) is/are connected remotely to a central controller to thereby send and receive communication signals.

17. The vending machine according to claim 16, wherein the connection is by means of a modem or the like.

18. The vending machine according to claims 16 or 17, wherein the central controller is used to monitor the vending machines as well as providing instructions thereto.

5 19. The vending machine according to claim 18, wherein the central controller is used to change game formats, randomly issue jackpots, change any advertising and cross promotions and the like.

20. The vending machine according to claim 18, wherein, the central controller also monitors the operation of the games on the vending machine as well as monitoring stock
10 levels.

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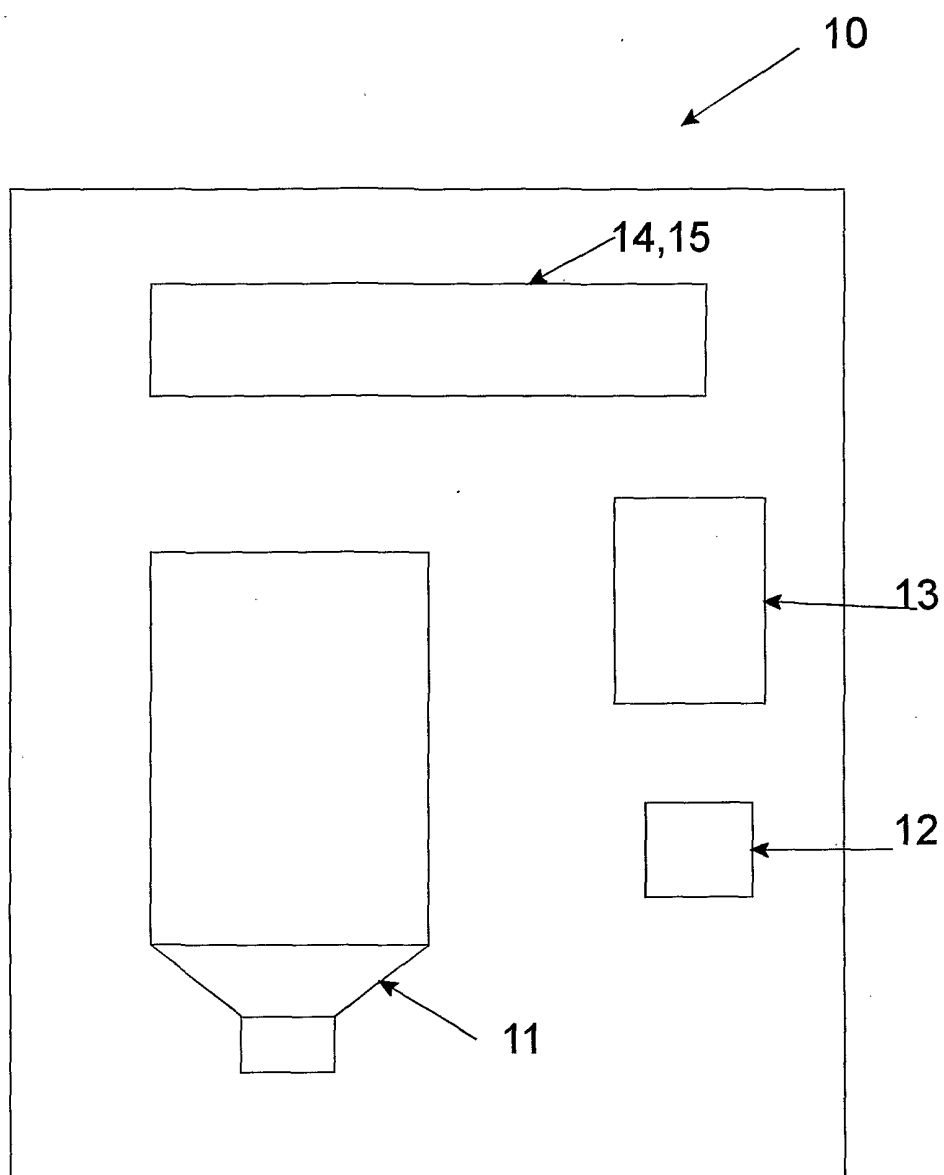


Fig. 1

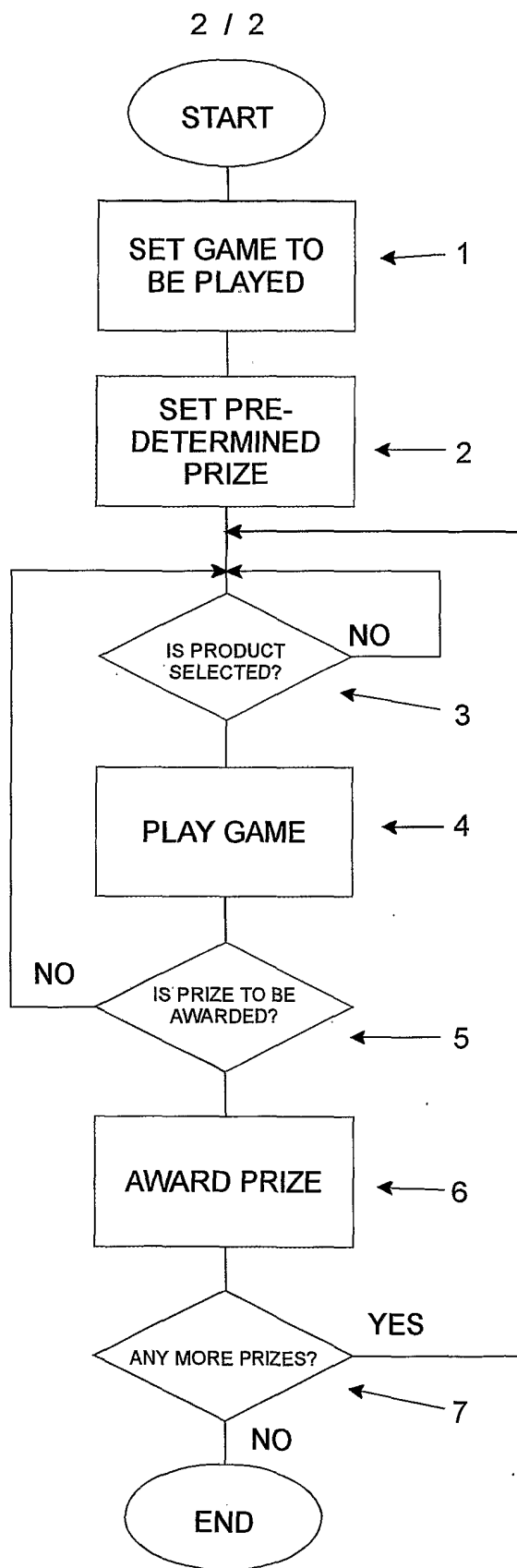


Fig. 2

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.

PCT/AU01/00574

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER		
Int. Cl. ⁷ : G07F 11/00, 17/32		
According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC		
B. FIELDS SEARCHED		
Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)		
Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched		
Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used) USPTO Web Patent Database, Esp@cenet, PAJ, Canadian Patent Database, " vending machine, game, etc."		
C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT		
Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X	US 6056289 A (CLAPPER, Jr.) 2 May 2000 Column 9 lines 31-38, column 15 lines 19-26, column 11 lines 29-37 etc	1-3,6,7,10,14,15
Y	In combination with any of the citations below	4,5,8,9,12,13,16-20
X	JP 10-076069 A (FUJI ELECTRIC CO LTD) 24 March 1998. Whole document	1-5,7,16-18
Y	In combination with any of the citations	6,8-10,12-15,19,20
X	US 4869500 A (WILLIAMS) 26 September 1989 Column 1 lines 1 to 17 and column 3 lines 4 to 50 etc	1-10,12,16-18
Y	In combination with any of the citations	13-15,19,20
Y	US 6015344 A (KELLY et al.) 18 January 2000 Column 25 lines 33 to 43 etc	4-6,8-10,12-15,16-20
Y	US 5091713 A (HORNE et al.) 25 February 1992. Column 5 lines 33 to 66, column 7 lines 20 to 28 etc	4-6,8-10,12-15,16-20
Y	US 5413357 A (SCHULZE et al.) 9 May 1995 Column 3 lines 8 to 42, column 4 lines 36 to 42, column 5 lines 10 to 14 etc	4-6,8-10,12-15,16-20
A	CA 1171652 A (COCA COLA CO) 31 July 1984. Whole document	1-20
<input type="checkbox"/> Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> See patent family annex		
* Special categories of cited documents: "A" document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance "E" earlier application or patent but published on or after the international filing date "L" document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified) "O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means "P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed "T" later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention "X" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone "Y" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art "&" document member of the same patent family		
Date of the actual completion of the international search 16 July 2001		Date of mailing of the international search report 20 July 2001
Name and mailing address of the ISA/AU AUSTRALIAN PATENT OFFICE PO BOX 200, WODEN ACT 2606, AUSTRALIA E-mail address: pct@ipaaustralia.gov.au Facsimile No. (02) 6285 3929		Authorized officer P. THONG Telephone No : (02) 6283 2128

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT
Information on patent family members

International application No.
PCT/AU01/00574

This Annex lists the known "A" publication level patent family members relating to the patent documents cited in the above-mentioned international search report. The Australian Patent Office is in no way liable for these particulars which are merely given for the purpose of information.

Patent Document Cited in Search Report		Patent Family Member			
US	6056289	US	5348299	US	5487544
		US	5377975	US	5536008
		US	5749784	US	5810664
		US	5980385	US	6056289
JP	10-076069	NIL		EP	753838
US	4869500	NIL			
US	6015344	AU	24390/97	EP	904140
		US	5816918	US	6007426
		EP	1019160	WO	9737737
US	5091713	NIL		AU	96633/98
US	5413357	DE	4222110	GB	2268670
CA	1171652	US	4454670	DE	3222682
				JP	58097791
END OF ANNEX					