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(54) **Improvements relating to entertainment machines**

(57) An entertainment machine comprising a display arranged to display a game, the display comprising two or more zones 28, 30, 32, each with an associated identifier 34, 36, 38. The identifier may comprise for example a colour, a symbol or a pattern. According to pre-

determined conditions in the game, a zone selector 24 determines by displaying the identifier which zone is associated with the zone selector. In the preferred embodiment the identifier comprises a colour applied to a region of the display, which determines in which zone 28, 30, 32 a player is playing.

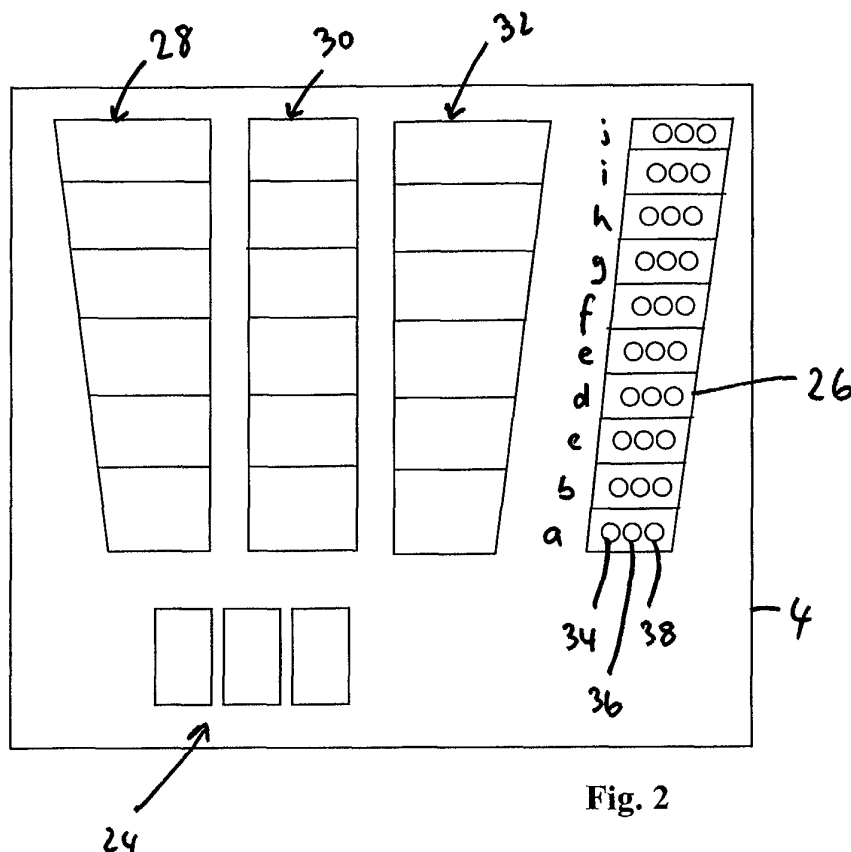


Fig. 2

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Description

[0001] This invention relates to an entertainment machine for playing games and, in particular, but not exclusively, to machines that require coins, tokens, credit or credit-cards to play.

[0002] The field of coin, token, credit, or credit card operated amusement and gaming machines, which are released for play by the introduction of one or more credits, is well developed. The outcome of a game can result in a win and the subsequent awarding of a prize in relation to the initial game credit staked by the player.

[0003] The entertainment machine market requires the constant design and development of new features to keep the players of such machines entertained. This invention provides a new entertainment machine.

[0004] According to a first aspect of the invention there is provided an entertainment machine comprising a display arranged to display a game, processing circuitry arranged to provide the game being displayed and at least one input to the processing circuitry allowing inputs to be made to the game, the display comprising two or more zones each having an identifier associated therewith and at least one zone selector capable of displaying the zone identifiers, the zone selector being arranged to display at least one of the identifiers which is selected according to predetermined conditions in the game, with the display of an identifier determining which zone is associated with the zone selector.

[0005] An advantage of such a machine is that it provides a game, which may appeal to players of such machines, and therefore may maintain a player's interest.

[0006] Each zone may have one or more prizes associated therewith, which may be awarded to the player when that zone is selected.

[0007] Preferably, the zone identifiers are unique to each zone. Such an arrangement is advantageous because it makes it readily apparent to a player which zone is associated with the zone selector.

[0008] The zone selector may comprise a plurality of segments. Such a plurality of segments is advantageous because it can be arranged to provide multiple chances of selecting a zone. At any one time one of the segments of the zone selector may be activated and that segment then determines which zone is selected by the zone selector.

[0009] In some embodiments the plurality of segments may constitute a trail. Such trails are common features of entertainment machines and thus players may readily accept such a structure. Again, the trail may be any of the known types of trail such as a ladder trail, run-around trail, or the like.

[0010] Each segment may be arranged such that it can have a zone associated therewith. Such an arrangement is convenient because it allows the zone selected by the zone selector to be altered according to the segment that is currently active. Preferably, when a segment has a zone associated therewith that segment dis-

plays the corresponding zone identifier.

[0011] The machine may be arranged such that the zone associated with a segment can be altered. This altering of the zone that is associated with a segment may be determined by the machine, may be randomly, may be after a predetermined time, or may be after a player wins a predetermined prize/bonus or the like.

[0012] The machine may be arranged to associate a zone with each segment during a game. An advantage of such an arrangement is that each game is different, which is likely to maintain a player's interest in the machine.

[0013] The machine may be arranged such that a player can cause the zone that is associated with a segment to be altered. Such an arrangement is convenient because the player may perceive that such an arrangement introduces a degree of tactics into the game and so make it more appealing.

[0014] Each zone may comprise a plurality of sections, with each section having a prize associated therewith. The machine may be arranged to activate sections of the zone on an apparently random, or on a random, basis. Activation may be by way of illumination, or highlighting the section in other appropriate manners. The machine may be further arranged to allow a player to make an input to the machine in order to select a zone. Randomly, or pseudo randomly activating a section is an advantage since it provides the players with a degree of uncertainty (they do not know which prize they are going to win since they may not be able to make an input at an appropriate time) and thus their interest may be held for longer.

[0015] Each zone may comprise a trail, which may be any of the known types of trail. For example, the trail may comprise a ladder trail, a run-around trail, or the like. Such features are well known to players of entertainment machines and players will therefore appreciate how to use such features.

[0016] The zone identifier may comprise a colour, a symbol, a pattern, or any other distinguishable feature. In the preferred embodiment, each zone selector, or segment thereof, can take on a plurality of colours, and the colour of the zone selector and/or segment determines the zone that is selected when that segment or zone selector is activated. Also in the preferred embodiment each of the zones is coloured in a distinct colour.

[0017] The display may be a CRT display, an LCD or other similar display, or may comprise a glass panel with illuminators provided behind. The illuminators may comprise bulbs, LED's, or the like.

[0018] According to a second aspect of the invention there is provided a method of increasing the player appeal of an entertainment machine comprising providing a display having two or more zones thereon, with each zone having associated therewith an identifier, providing at least one zone selector capable of displaying the zone identifiers, and the method comprising causing the zone selector to display the identifier for a zone that has been

selected according to predetermined conditions in the game with the display of the identifier indicating which zone is associated with the zone selector.

[0019] The method may cause the zone identifier displayed by the zone selector to be changed and thus change the zone that is associated with the zone selector. Such a method may be appealing to a player thereof because it leads to a varied game provided by the machine on which the method is provided.

[0020] In some embodiments the zone selector comprises a plurality of segments and the method may comprise allowing a player to activate one or more segments. Such a method allows a player to see how they are progressing in a game being provided by the machine.

[0021] Further, each of the zones may comprise a plurality of sections and the method may comprise activating one or more of the sections. The one or more sections may be activated on a random, or an apparently random basis.

[0022] The method may comprise allowing a player to make an input to the machine when a section of the zone is activated, which may win an award associated with that section should they make a predetermined input to the machine when that section of the zone is activated.

[0023] According to a third aspect of the invention there is provided a computer readable medium containing instructions which when loaded into an entertainment machine cause that entertainment machine to function as an entertainment machine according to the first aspect of the invention.

[0024] According to a fourth aspect of the invention there is provided a computer readable medium containing instructions which when loaded into an entertainment machine cause that entertainment machine to perform the method according to the second aspect of the invention.

[0025] The computer readable medium of the third and fourth aspects of the invention may be any one or more of the following: a floppy disk, a CDROM, a DVD ROM/RAM (including +RM/-RW), a hard drive, any form of magneto optical medium, a non-volatile memory, a transmitted signal (including an internet download, an ftp file transfer), or any other suitable form of computer readable medium.

[0026] According to a fifth aspect of the invention there is provided an entertainment machine comprising a display arranged to display a game, processing circuitry arranged to provide the game being displayed and at least one input to the processing circuitry allowing inputs to be made to the game, the display comprising two or more zones each having an identifier associated therewith and at least one zone selector capable of displaying the zone identifiers, the zone selector displaying a selected identifier according to predetermined conditions in the game, the display of an identifier determining which zone is associated with the zone selector.

[0027] By way of example only an embodiment of the

present invention will now be described in detail with reference to the accompanying drawings, of which:

Figure 1 is a schematic diagram of an entertainment machine according to the present invention; and

Figure 2 is a schematic diagram of a display of Figure 1.

[0028] The entertainment machine 1 of Figure 1 comprises a cabinet 2 having at top region thereof a display 4 (comprising in this case a glass panel behind which bulbs are mounted to illuminate portions of the panel) arranged to display a game. At a convenient user operable height are a range of manual switches 6, 8, 9, 10 providing user operable inputs, which a user can operate to control the action of the machine 1. On a front face 12 of the machine there is provided a pay-out slot 14 to return winnings that a user wins. Further, there is a coin input mechanism 16 as is well known in the art, having a coin input slot 18 and coin return button 20.

[0029] The entertainment machine further comprises processing circuitry 22 which includes a micro-processor, or controller, together with an associated memory arranged to provide the game, and control the display 4 in order to display the game to the user. The manual switches 6, 8, 9, 10 provide inputs to the processing circuitry 22 allowing the user to control the game being played on the machine 1.

[0030] As shown in Figure 2, the display 4 comprises a set of three reels 24, which can be spun by a player. As is known in the art the reels 24 stop on apparently random basis and their alignment in the stopped position provides points to the player.

[0031] The display 4 also comprises an accumulated points trail 26 that comprises ten segments (a to j), and provides a zone selector. Each segment (a to j) comprises an area that can be separately illuminated, by one of three bulbs 34, 36, 38 mounted behind the display 4. Each of the bulbs 34, 36, 38 is a different colour and in this embodiment bulb 34 is red, bulb 36 is green, and bulb 38 is blue. In other embodiments the number of segments or bulbs can be varied.

[0032] Further, the display 4 comprises three zones 28, 30, 32, each comprising a plurality of sections having displayed therein a prize. Each of the zones 28, 30, 32 has a colour associated therewith and in this case zone 28 is coloured red, zone 30 is coloured green, and zone 32 is coloured blue. The colour provides a zone identifier.

[0033] The prizes offered by each one of the zones 28, 30, 32 have a common theme. For example, each of the prizes in the red zone 28 may be a cash prize of varying amounts, each of the prizes in the green zone 30 may be a gamble feature and each of the prizes in the blue zone 32 may be bonus allowing a manipulation of the game in some manner. Further, it is likely that each

zone offers a plurality of prizes (generally one prize per segment) with the prizes escalating in value from a smaller to a larger value.

[0034] In use a player causes the reels 24 to spin. After a period the reels 24 come to a stopped position and the user is awarded a number of points according the position of the reels 24 in this stopped position. The points awarded to the player are recorded by the processing circuitry. As points are awarded to the player, the player moves along the accumulated points trail 26. Movement along the trail comprises activating, in this case by illuminating subsequent segments to represent the player's position along the trail 26. Each segment (a to j) of the trail 26 requires a predetermined number of points before it is illuminated. In this embodiment the colour of the segment that is illuminated is determined on a random basis, but in other embodiments the colour of the segment that is illuminated may be determined by the position in which the reels stop, the number of points that have been won in any one spin of the reels 24, or any other suitable mechanism.

[0035] It is well known for entertainment machines to have feature modes, which are triggered by predetermined occurrences within a game. Such feature modes allow a player to access aspects of the game that were not previously available.

[0036] Such a feature mode is provided by the machine described herein. Each section of a zone 28, 30, 32 has a prize associated therewith. During a feature mode the zones 28, 30, 32 are activated and the sections therein flash on an apparently random basis. Each activated segment (a to j) of the trail provides a player with a "shot" at a section of the zones 28, 30, 32. That is a player can make an input to the processing circuitry 22, in this case using switch 9, at a time they believe to correspond with the illumination of a section of the zone of interest. The processing circuitry 22 will determine which section of the zones 28, 30, 32 was illuminated when the switch 9 was pressed and award the prize associated with that zone to the player. The section determined by the processing circuitry may or may not correspond to the section at which the player wished to take a "shot". Once a player has taken a shot the number of segments of the trail 26 that are illuminated are decremented by one to represent that the player has taken one of their shots.

[0037] To illuminate a segment (a to j) one only of the three bulbs 34, 36, 38 is illuminated at any one time. The display 4 is arranged such that the colour of the bulb 34, 36, 38 illuminated determines the colour that the segment appears. For instance if bulb 34 is illuminated the segment (a to j) appears red, if bulb 36 is illuminated then the segment appears green and if bulb 38 is illuminated then the segment appears blue.

[0038] When a player takes a shot from the trail their shot has affect in the zone that corresponds to the colour of the illumination of the segment (a to j); i.e. the zone selector has been associated with a zone. Therefore, if

the top segment is coloured red (i.e. bulb 34 is illuminated) then the shot has affect in zone 28. If the top segment is coloured green (i.e. bulb 36 is illuminated) then the shot has affect in zone 30. If the top segment is coloured blue (i.e. bulb 38 is illuminated) then the shot has affect in zone 32.

[0039] As described above, the colour of the bulb that is illuminated for any particular segment (a to j) of the trail 26 is determined by some means such as the symbols displayed by the reels 24 in their stopped position and in this embodiment is determined on a random basis. The colour of the illuminated bulb may change during the course of any one particular game provided by the machine. For instance if certain features are activated then all of the segments in the trail may change to the same colour, or if other features are activated, all of the segments may be changed to an apparently random colour.

[0040] When a player takes a shot at an activated zone the topmost activated segment (a to j) of the trail affects the colour of the zone 28, 30, 32 in which the shot has effect. Once a player has taken his/her shot the segment that gave rise to the shot is un-activated (i.e. the bulb illuminating it is turned off) and the next shot that a player takes has affect in the zone having the colour of the, now, topmost activated segment (a to j). Because, adjacent segments (a to j) of the trail are likely to be of different colours then subsequent shots are likely to have effect in different zones.

[0041] This variation of the zone in which a shot has effect can lead to tactics as to which prize a player should try and win from each zone. For example, a player can see from the colouration of the trail in which zone his/her next shot will have effect. Further, the player will be able to determine from the colour of the zone in which the next shot will have effect the nature of the prize that they can expect. Therefore, his/her choice of prize on the current shot may be influenced to try and get a better shot for the next shot. The player may for example, try and obtain a bonus from the blue zone 32 that changes the colour of the next segment (a to j) so they can try and obtain a cash prize with his/her next shot (i.e. change the next segment (a to j) to a red).

[0042] Further, it is likely that the machine is arranged such that a player taking a shot in a particular zone is likely to win a prize of a lower value. Therefore, as a player takes more shots in any one zone, it is more likely that the player wins a prize of a higher value (because the prizes of lower value have already been won). This itself can lead to the tactic of a player trying to manipulate the zone identifier such that he/she can take a plurality of shots in any one zone (so that he/she has a greater chance of winning a higher prize).

[0043] The words segment and section are intended to have the same meaning but have been chosen to differentiate segments/sections of the zone selector from segments/sections of a zone.

Claims

1. An entertainment machine (1) comprising a display (4) arranged to display a game, processing circuitry (22) arranged to provide the game being displayed and at least one input (6,8,9,10) to the processing circuitry (22) allowing inputs to be made to the game, **characterised in that** the display (14) comprises two or more zones (28,30,32) each having a zone identifier, (34,36,38) associated therewith and at least one zone selector (26) capable of displaying the zone identifiers (34,36,38), the zone selector (26) being arranged to display at least one of the identifiers (34,36,38) which is selected according to predetermined conditions in the game, with the display of an identifier (34,36,38) determining which zone (28,30,32) is selected by the zone selector (26). 5
2. A machine (1) according to claim 1 in which each zone (28,30, 32) has one or more prizes associated therewith, which can be awarded to a player when that zone (28,30,32) is selected. 10
3. A machine (1) according to claim 1 or 2 in which the zone identifiers (34,36,38) are unique to each zone (28,30,32). 15
4. A machine (1) according to any preceding claim in which the zone selector (26) comprises a plurality of segments. 20
5. A machine (1) according to claim 4 which is arranged such that each of the segments of the zone selector (26) is arranged such that it can have a zone (28,30,32) associated therewith. 25
6. A machine (1) according to claim 5 in which the machine is arranged to cause a segment that has a zone (28,30,32) associated therewith to display the zone identifier (34,36,38) of the associated zone (28,30,32). 30
7. A machine (1) according to claim 6 which is arranged such that a player can cause the zone (28,30,32) that is associated with a segment to be altered, that is to cause the segment to display a different zone identifier (34,36,38). 35
8. A machine (1) according to any of claims 4 to 7 which is arranged such that at any one time one of the segments of the zone selector (26) is activated and arranged to determine which zone (28,30,32) is selected by the zone selector (26). 40
9. A machine (1) according to any preceding claim in which each zone (28,30,32) comprises a plurality of sections. 45
10. A machine (1) according to any preceding claim in which the zone identifier (34,36,38) comprises a colour, a symbol, a pattern, or any other distinguishable feature. 50
11. A machine (1) according to any preceding claims in which each zone selector, (26) or segment thereof, can take on a plurality of colours, and the colour of the zone selector (26) and/or segment determines the zone (28,30,32) that is selected when that segment or zone selector (26) is activated. 55
12. A method of increasing the player appeal of an entertainment machine (1) comprising providing a display having two or more zones (28,30,32) thereon, with each zone (28,30,32) having associated therewith a zone identifier (34,36,38), providing at least one zone selector (26) capable of displaying the zone identifiers (34,36,38), and the method comprising causing the zone selector (27) to display the identifier (34,36,38) for a zone (28,30,32) that has been selected according to predetermined conditions in the game with the display of the identifier (34,36,38) indicating which zone (28,30,32) is associated with the zone selector (26).
13. A method according to claim 12 which causes the zone identifier (30,36,38) displayed by the zone selector (26) to be changed and thus change the zone (28,30,32) that is associated with the zone selector (26).
14. A method according to claim 12 or 13 in which the zone selector (26) comprises a plurality of segments and the method may comprise allowing a player to activate one or more segments.
15. A method according to any of claims 12 to 14 in which each of the zones (28,30,32) comprises a plurality of sections and the method may comprise activating one or more of the sections.
16. A method according to any of claims 12 to 15 comprising allowing a player to make an input to the machine when a section of the zone (28,30,32) is activated.
17. A computer readable medium containing instructions which when loaded into an entertainment machine (1) cause that entertainment machine (1) to function as an entertainment machine (1) according to any of claims 1 to 14.
18. A computer readable medium containing instructions which when loaded into an entertainment machine (1) cause that entertainment machine (1) to perform the method according to any of claims 12 to 16.

