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(54) METHOD OF FACILITATING ONLINE GROUP PLAY OF A LOTTERY GAME

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ABSTRACT

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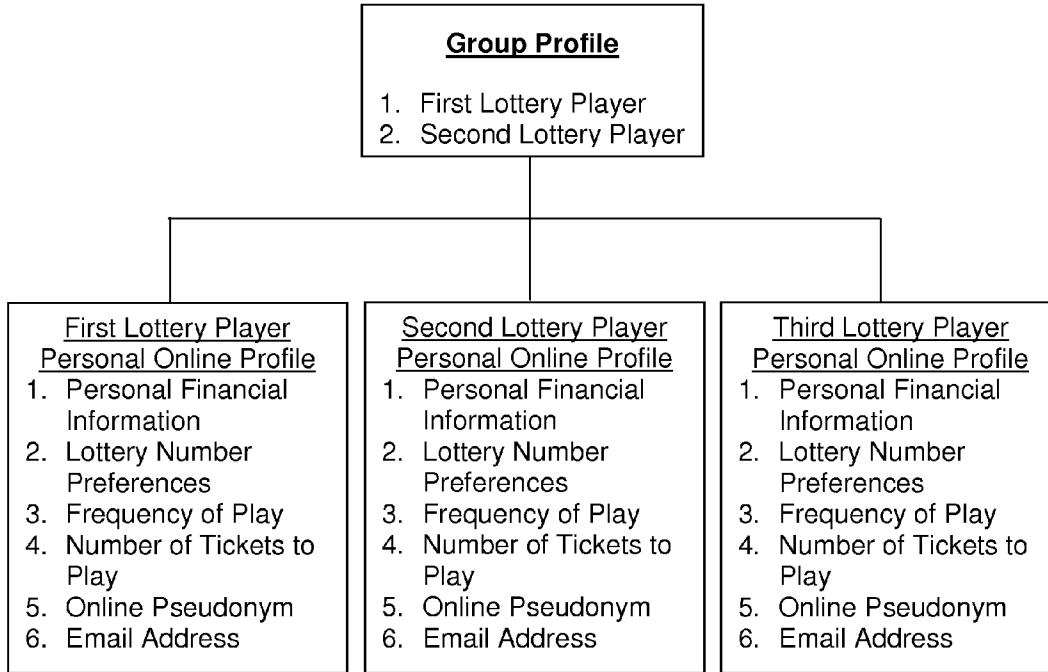
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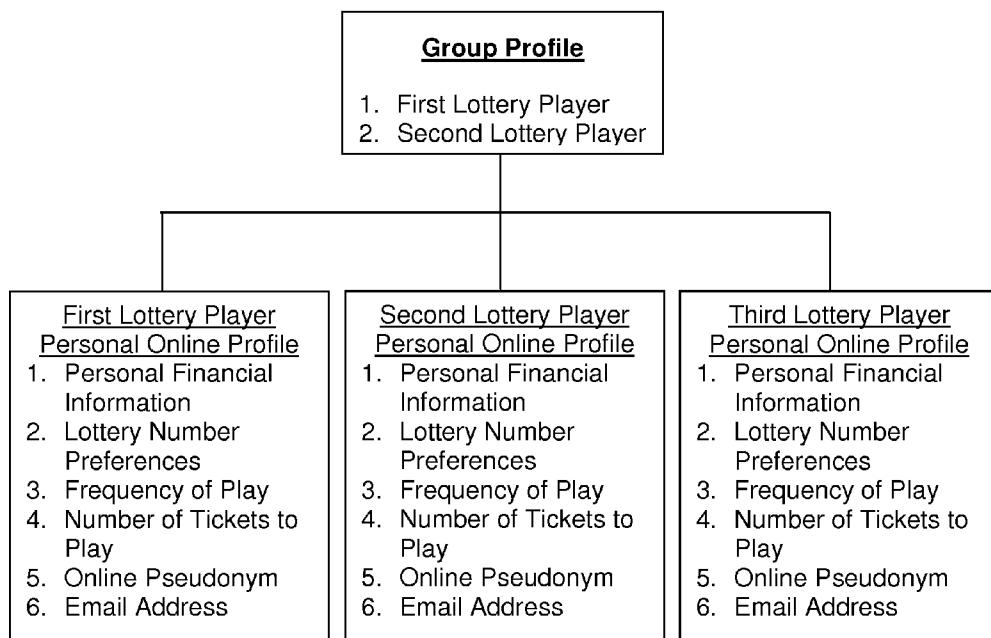
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A method of facilitating online group play of a lottery game. Lottery players each having their own personal profile are permitted to join an online lottery group by linking their personal profile with the lottery group profile. The lottery group is administered by one of the group members. Group members are able to purchase lottery tickets online using personal financial information, such as a credit card number, stored in their personal profile and are able to ascribe the purchased lottery tickets to the group. Group members are able to view the numbers of tickets ascribed to the group and are able to communicate with one another using a message posting means viewable only by group members. Group members are notified electronically in the event that one of the tickets ascribed to the group is a winning ticket. The method facilitates the keeping of electronic records of which group members are playing in any particular draw, reducing the likelihood of a future dispute over attribution of any group winnings.





METHOD OF FACILITATING ONLINE GROUP PLAY OF A LOTTERY GAME**CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS**

[0001] This application claims the benefit of U.S. patent application 60/729,199 filed Oct. 24, 2005, which is incorporated herein by reference.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0002] The invention relates to the online group play of lottery games. More particularly, the invention relates to a method of facilitating the online group play of lottery games using an online tool accessible to members of an online lottery group using the internet.

BACKGROUND

[0003] Lottery games are a form of gambling entertainment wherein a lottery player purchases a lottery ticket comprising a group of numbers, either selected from a set of available choices or randomly selected. A drawing event is held wherein a group of winning numbers is randomly determined, typically using a rotary drum containing a plurality of numbered balls, and the lottery player having a lottery ticket with at least a sub-set of the group of winning numbers wins a prize amount. This form of gambling entertainment is typically offered by governmental organizations in a regulated environment and tickets are normally available for purchase only through authorized retailers, such as convenience stores, grocery stores, mall kiosks and the like. Tickets are purchased manually from these authorized retailers.

[0004] To increase the entertainment value of the game and the odds of winning, lottery players sometimes join a lottery playing group. In a lottery group, each lottery player purchases at least one lottery ticket and commits it to the group; if one ticket held by the group is a winning ticket, then the prize is split amongst the group members. This effectively increases the groups odds of winning and provides a greater degree of social interaction and entertainment to lottery players within the group. Because of this, group play typically provides one of the most significant sources of ticket sales revenue within a particular lottery market.

[0005] Lottery groups often form around existing workplace, family or social groups. A group leader is normally appointed and the group leader is responsible for collecting money from the other group members and purchasing lottery tickets. Since certain members of the group may choose not to play in a particular draw, the group leader must keep detailed records of who is playing and who is not so that any prize won by the group can be split accordingly. A lack of proper record keeping has been known to result in legal challenges to the distribution of group winnings. The responsibilities of a group leader can therefore prove to be quite onerous and time consuming and this discourages many groups from forming and otherwise diminishes the entertainment value of group play for the group leader.

[0006] What is needed, therefore, is a way of automating the collection of money and desirably the purchasing of tickets to relieve the group leader of some or all of these responsibilities. It would be further desirable to couple the

collection of money with electronic record keeping to eliminate the potential for disputes over the attribution of group winnings due to incomplete or non-existent records of who is playing in any particular draw.

[0007] Recently, with the advent of the internet, certain governmental organizations have made lottery tickets available for purchase online using their own websites. Private corporations have also begun to create their own lotteries and offering tickets for sale (sometimes illegally, in certain jurisdictions) over the internet. In some cases, prospective lottery players are permitted to create an online personal profile that contains personal financial information, such as credit card or banking information, for use in purchasing the tickets. Prizes are paid on winning tickets by directly debiting a designated account or by sending a check. However, these websites are focused on individual lottery players and none of these websites permit the formation of online groups or online group play. As a result, the group lottery playing market segment is ignored by these websites.

[0008] Software tools are known that can be installed on an individual lottery player's computer to facilitate record keeping associated with group play. These tools are little more than an automated version of a form listing the lottery players playing in a particular draw and therefore still rely upon the group leader or the individual lottery players within the group to keep records. Also, these tools do not permit the online purchase of lottery tickets, do not record personal financial information of lottery players and do not automatically link the collection of money with a listing of who is playing in a particular draw.

[0009] The need therefore still exists for a method of facilitating online group play of a lottery game.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0010] According to an aspect of the invention, there is provided a method of facilitating online group play of a lottery game, the method comprising: providing an online tool accessible to a plurality of lottery players; permitting each lottery player to create and store an online personal profile using the online tool; permitting at least a first lottery player to create and store an online group profile using the online tool, thereby forming an online group; permitting at least a second lottery player to join the online group by linking the online personal profile of the second lottery player with the online group profile; and, permitting a purchase of at least one lottery ticket ascribed to the online group profile using the online tool.

[0011] According to another aspect of the invention, there is provided a method of playing a lottery game as part of an online lottery group, the method comprising: accessing an online tool accessible to a plurality of lottery players; creating and storing an online personal profile using the online tool; joining an online group having an online group profile by linking the online personal profile with the online group profile; and, purchasing at least one lottery ticket and ascribing the lottery ticket to the online group profile using the online tool.

[0012] The online tool may be accessible to a plurality of lottery players using a computer network and/or using the internet. The online tool may comprise a software application that resides on a computer network for access by a

plurality of lottery players and/or may comprise a website that is accessible by a plurality of lottery players using the internet.

[0013] The first lottery player creates the online group by creating and storing an online group profile. Other lottery players are permitted to join the online group by linking their online personal profiles to the online group profile. The first lottery player may be a group leader and is typically responsible for setting the maximum number of players of the group and determining who is accepted or rejected from the group. Acceptance into the group may be accomplished through approval of a request to join a personal online profile to the group profile.

[0014] A lottery player may be a member of one or more groups. Each group member may purchase a lottery ticket. Lottery tickets may be purchased online by any lottery player using personal financial information stored as part of the player's personal online profile. Personal financial information may include, for example, a credit card number, a bank account number, Paypal™ account information, a number of a personal online account that funds are periodically transferred to for online purchases (such as a Wallet™ account), or any other type of financial information suitable for conducting electronic commerce. Any number of tickets may be purchased and the tickets may be selectively attributed to one or more groups that the lottery player is a member of using the online tool. Any number of ticket purchases may be conducted by a lottery player. Tickets may be purchased in a single transaction or in multiple transactions. Lottery tickets may be purchased offline and ascribed to the group using the online tool, but are preferably purchased online using personal financial information associated with a personal online profile of at least one of the group members. One of the players may purchase tickets on behalf of other group members using personal financial information stored in the player's personal online profile. Alternatively, each group member may purchase his or her own tickets and ascribe them to the group.

[0015] The online tool may include message posting means permitting communication between lottery players. The message posting means may include a group area that permits group members to post messages that can only be viewed by other group members. This allows group members to communicate with one another using the online tool without having those communications viewed by non-group members.

[0016] The method may further comprise an email or other notification to at least one group member in the event that one of the tickets ascribed to the group is a winning ticket. Prizes may be collected by direct transfer of funds to an account designated in the personal online profile of at least one of the group members. A winning ticket may be provided to one of the group members, for example the first lottery player, for collection of prize money. For example, the winning ticket may be printed in hard copy and sent via registered mail or courier to the first lottery player.

[0017] The present invention advantageously facilitates group play of lottery games by relieving a group leader from the responsibility of collecting money, purchasing lottery tickets, and/or keeping records of who is playing in any particular game, thereby reducing the likelihood of a dispute over attribution of any winning prize. This increases the

overall enjoyment of the game for the group leader and, as a result, more group leaders are willing to form online groups. By harnessing the communication power of online play, groups are able to form comprising individuals who are not physically located near to one another; this permits people to play in a group who, for example, travel extensively for work, work at home, work in remote locations, or who otherwise do not have regular access to conventional ticket purchase locations or regular access to other group members. Since practical constraints on group size brought on by the need to collect money are alleviated in online group play, larger groups are permitted to form; this increases the group's chances of winning as compared with a smaller group. Anonymous groups are able to form online comprising lottery players who only know one another by their online pseudonyms; this permits people to join a group who otherwise would not normally find themselves in social settings that lend themselves to group play. The overall effect is an increase in the number of players who are able to participate in group play and an increased enjoyment of the game as a result of the social interaction and increased chance of winning that accompanies group play.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0018] Having summarized the invention, preferred embodiments thereof will now be described in detail with reference to the accompanying figures, in which:

[0019] FIG. 1 is an illustration of an online group according to the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0020] Referring to FIG. 1, an online group is created using an online tool comprising a website accessible to a plurality of lottery players using the internet. Each lottery player creates an online personal profile using the online tool that is accessible through a password protected login. The online personal profile preferably includes personal financial information and an online pseudonym. More preferably, the personal profile includes lottery number preferences, desired frequency of play, desired number of tickets in a particular draw and email address information. The online personal profile even more preferably includes alerting preferences that provide email notification in the event of a jackpot exceeding a pre-determined value.

[0021] An online group is created when a first lottery player, typically the group leader, creates an online group profile for the group. The online group profile preferably includes an online pseudonym for the group and more preferably includes a listing of the online pseudonyms of the lottery players who have joined the group and thereby become group members. At least a second lottery player joins the group by linking his or her online personal profile with the online group profile. Approval of a request to link a personal profile with the group profile is provided by the first lottery player. The number of lottery players who may join the group is thereby also determined by the group leader. The first lottery player typically also links his or her online personal profile with the online group profile. At least one and preferably all of the online personal profiles of group members include personal financial information permitting tickets to be purchased online. Some details of a given group member's online personal profile are viewable

by other group members, but personal financial information typically is not. The online tool includes a message posting means that allows group members to post messages that are viewable by other group members after logging in to the online tool. This allows group members to communicate with one another without concern of having those communications intercepted by other non-group members.

[0022] Lottery tickets are purchased online using the online tool according to the preferences set out in the personal online profile of each group member. Ticket purchases may occur automatically or manually. For example, if a given member's profile includes preferences for numbers to play (eg: six numbers between 1 and 49), frequency of play (eg: twice weekly) and number of tickets to purchase (eg: one ticket per draw), then those purchases are executed online automatically using the personal financial information (eg: a credit card number) stored in the group member's profile and ascribed to the group. If a given player's preferences also include an alert level that triggers an email notification to be sent when the prize for a given draw exceeds a certain threshold value, then the player may choose to manually purchase additional tickets for that draw. In the event that the group member chooses to manually purchase additional tickets for a given draw, then those tickets are purchased by logging into the online tool and completing the ticket purchase transaction online using the player's personal financial information. The manually purchased ticket may be either ascribed to the group or held personally in association with the player's online personal profile. Since a given lottery player may belong to more than one online group, the player's personal preferences indicate which group to ascribe a given ticket purchase to.

[0023] The ticket numbers of tickets that are purchased and ascribed to the group are viewable by all group members, along with the online pseudonym of the players that have purchased tickets for a particular draw. The online pseudonyms are not typically shown in association with the ticket numbers purchased, merely that those pseudonyms have purchased tickets and ascribed them to the group. The number of tickets purchased by a lottery player are usually shown in association with the player's online pseudonym. This provides an online record of the ticket numbers and the group members that are participating in any particular drawing event and reduces the likelihood of disputes over attribution of winnings should one of the tickets ascribed to the group contain at least a subset of the winning numbers and thereby become a winning ticket. The online tool facilitates group management by checking the ticket numbers ascribed to the group against the winning numbers and determining whether any of the tickets are winning tickets. In the event that at least one of the tickets ascribed to the group is a winning ticket, an email notification is sent to all group members.

[0024] The group profile includes information on the distribution of prizes to group members. Prizes below a certain value are distributed automatically online using the personal financial information stored in at least one group members personal online profile. The group profile specifies whether prizes are to be paid to one group member (typically, the first lottery player) using that player's personal financial information or whether the prizes are to be distributed automatically to all group members. The group profile specifies whether the prizes are to be distributed on a per

capita basis to all lottery players participating in a particular draw or on the basis of the number of lottery tickets purchased by a particular lottery player and attributed to the group. Prizes above a certain value typically require a winning ticket to be redeemed in order to collect the prize. In this case, the winning ticket is provided to a designated group member, typically the first lottery player, and the prize is then claimed by that player and held in-trust for distribution to other group members. The winning ticket may be provided either electronically or in hard copy delivered to an address provided for that purpose in the online group profile or in the online personal profile of the designated group member.

[0025] Other features and embodiments of the invention will be understood by persons skilled in the art. Variants or mechanical equivalents of certain of the foregoing features of the invention may be substituted for like features of the claims without having an effect on the way the invention works. The following claims are to be construed broadly with reference to the foregoing description and not in a limiting sense.

1. A method of facilitating online group play of a lottery game, the method comprising:

- a) providing an online tool accessible to a plurality of lottery players;
- b) permitting each lottery player to create and store an online personal profile using the online tool;
- c) permitting at least a first lottery player to create and store an online group profile using the online tool, thereby forming an online group;
- d) permitting at least a second lottery player to join the online group by linking the online personal profile of the second lottery player with the online group profile; and,
- e) permitting a purchase of at least one lottery ticket ascribed to the online group profile using the online tool.

2. The method according to claim 1, wherein the online tool comprises a website and wherein the website is accessible to the plurality of lottery players using the internet.

3. The method according to claim 1, wherein the first lottery player is permitted to join the online group by linking the personal profile of the first lottery player with the online group profile.

4. The method according to claim 1, wherein a plurality of online personal profiles are linked to the online group profile.

5. The method according to claim 1, wherein the first lottery player sets a finite limit to the number of lottery players able to join the online group.

6. The method according to claim 1, wherein the first lottery player is able to accept or reject any other lottery player seeking to link its online personal profile with the online group profile.

7. The method according to claim 1, wherein the online tool includes a message posting area viewable only by lottery players joined with the online group, the message posting area permitting communication between the lottery players joined with the online group.

8. The method according to claim 1, wherein the online personal profile of at least one lottery player joined to the online group comprises personal financial information for use in the purchase.

9. The method according to claim 8, wherein the purchase is conducted online using the online tool and the personal financial information.

10. The method according to claim 8, wherein the personal financial information comprises a credit card number.

11. The method according to claim 1, wherein the online personal profile of each lottery player joined to the online group comprises personal financial information for use in the purchase.

12. The method according to claim 11, wherein each lottery player joined to the online group conducts an online purchase of at least one lottery ticket using the online tool and the personal financial information.

13. The method according to claim 11, wherein the personal financial information comprises a credit card number.

14. The method according to claim 1, wherein the lottery ticket comprises lottery ticket numbers and wherein the lottery ticket numbers are viewable by all lottery players joined to the online group.

15. The method according to claim 1, wherein the method further comprises notifying at least the first lottery player if at least one lottery ticket ascribed to the online group profile is a winning ticket.

16. The method according to claim 15, wherein the method further comprises providing the winning ticket to the first lottery player.

17. The method according to claim 1, wherein the method further comprises providing online payment of a prize to at least the first lottery player in the event that at least one lottery ticket ascribed to the online lottery group profile is a winning ticket.

18. The method according to claim 1, wherein there are a plurality of purchases and a plurality of lottery tickets ascribed to the online group profile.

19. A method of playing a lottery game as part of an online lottery group, the method comprising:

- a) accessing an online tool accessible to a plurality of lottery players;
- b) creating and storing an online personal profile using the online tool;
- c) joining an online group having an online group profile by linking the online personal profile with the online group profile; and,
- d) purchasing at least one lottery ticket and ascribing the lottery ticket to the online group profile using the online tool.

20. The method according to claim 19, wherein the online personal profile comprises personal financial information and wherein at least one lottery ticket is purchased online using the personal financial information.

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