(54) Title: LOYALTY AND/OR REWARDS PROGRAMS

FIGURE 1

(57) Abstract: A loyalty or rewards system which comprises a transaction card 12, a CPU 14 including a database and a communication gateway receiving and transmitting from and to the communication devices 20 of consumers 10. The database includes sub-databases of participating products or services 16 each having a unique code 18, and consumer accounts each linked to a transaction card 12. When a consumer sends identification information to the CPU, a card is limited to an account, and when that consumer communicates a product code to the CPU, the CPU assigns a value for that code to that consumer’s account.
Published:

— without international search report and to be republished upon receipt of that report (Rule 48.2(g))
LOYALTY AND/OR REWARDS PROGRAMS

TECHNICAL FIELD OF THE INVENTION

This invention relates to loyalty and/or rewards programs.

For purposes of this patent specification a transaction card includes a credit, debit or so called gift card which comprises a card adapted to receive value which can be deducted by use of a normal card transaction terminal.

BACKGROUND ART

Various types of loyalty or rewards programs are used in an effort to promote sales, especially in the credit and banking industry.

In its most common form a consumer is 'rewarded' when purchasing certain products or products of a certain value by assigning a value to the transaction which is later electronically paid back to the client.

Various further forms have been proposed in an effort to lure consumers.

An example of one of these is described in US patent number 2008235091 in the name of Holiday. This patent describes a system in which a consumer is issued with a rewards card in advance (of purchasing) and 'rewards' are earned by online-purchasing. The card is transformed into a digital token which is then passed to participating merchant websites when the consumer is rerouted to the incentive site to make an online purchase.

In another application under number WO2009051503 in the name of Garcia et al. a rewards program for users of a mobile telephone network is described. In this invention subscribers are rewarded for their loyalty by issuing
them with tokens, entries into competitions, deductions on telephone accounts and the like which are based on the consumer spending, demographics, preferences, location and the like.

In yet another well-known form of this invention consumers are rewarded by assigning travel tokens or 'voyager miles' based on their spending on a credit card.

A major disadvantage of most loyalty or rewards programs is that they focus on consumers who have credit cards, or at least the means to afford or qualify for credit cards. This excludes a significant portion of consumers who do not have or want credit cards.

It is an object of this invention to provide an alternative to the above systems.

DISCLOSURE OF THE INVENTION

According to the invention a loyalty/ rewards system comprising a transaction card, a CPU including a database and a communication gateway receiving and transmitting from and to the communication devices of consumers; the data-base containing a sub-database of participating products to each of which has been assigned a unique code; the database containing a further sub-database of consumer accounts each linked to a transaction card; each account being linked to a consumer by the CPU upon receipt of consumer identification information from the communication device of the consumer; the CPU further assigning value to the consumer account upon each receipt of a participating product code from the consumer communication device.

In the preferred form of the invention, the transaction card is activated for use upon accumulation of predetermined value in the account.
In the preferred form the communication device comprises a mobile phone which communicates the registration to the database by means of a SMS and/or USSD and/or WAP.

In this form the card is a gift card which is not connected to any account other than the user account specifically created by the consumer.

In an alternate form of the invention, the communication device comprises a computer, PDA or the like capable of linking to an internet or mobile website. Value may be accumulated in the consumer account until a predetermined threshold value is reached at which time the value will be made available on the consumer card.

The transaction card may comprise a physical card in the form of one or more of a gift card, debit card or credit card. Alternatively the card comprises a virtual card or a combination of a physical and a virtual card in the form of a cellular telephone mobile wallet, telephone airtime, paypal or similar on-line credit.

In an alternative form value is made available on predetermined dates for instance two times a month. In this form the value will only be made available if the threshold value is reached.

In a refinement of the invention the consumer is notified of the value when made available by a text message or SMS sent to the consumer's registered mobile phone number.

One of the unique features of the system is that it includes actual physical products having associated codes which result in an accumulation of value,
rather than an accumulation of value in a valued according to a monetary amount spent, as found in prior art rewards programs.

**BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS**

An embodiment of the invention is described below with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which:

Figure 1 is a schematic representation of a rewards program according to the invention.

**BEST MODE FOR CARRYING OUT THE INVENTION**

In the drawing a consumer 10 is issued with a card 12, preferably a gift card. The card includes information in the form of a code which the consumer uses to register an account on a remoter computer database 14.

This registration is carried out by means of transmitting a message 15 or a series of messages from a mobile phone using SMS and/or USSD technology. Further consumer details may be registered on the database including but not limited to the consumer mobile telephone number.

Participating products 16 or services are issued with unique codes 18 which are attached to the product and adapted to be accessed once the products are purchased. Alternatively the code may be provided on a customer receipt or the like.

The consumer communicates the code to the CPU which interprets the code and assigns a predetermined value to the specific consumer account. The value may for instance depend on the value of the purchase.
Once the consumer account reaches a predetermined threshold the CPU assigns the value to the consumer card and informs the consumer thereof, preferably by means of transmitting a message to the consumer's mobile phone.

Once the value is available on the card, the consumer may use the card to make or augment a purchase made at any vendor equipped to make card transactions.

This invention may be especially useful in micro-economies such as shopping malls or retail outlets to reward consumer loyalty.
CLAIMS:

1. A loyalty/rewards system comprising a transaction card, a CPU including a database and a communication gateway receiving and transmitting from and to the communication devices of consumers characterised in that the data-base containing a sub-database of participating products to each of which has been assigned a unique code; the database containing a further sub-database of consumer accounts each linked to a transaction card; each account being linked to a consumer by the CPU upon receipt of consumer identification information from the communication device of the consumer; the CPU further assigning value to the consumer account upon each receipt of a participating product code from the consumer communication device.

2. A loyalty/rewards system according to claim 1 characterised in that the transaction card is activated for use upon accumulation of predetermined value in the account.

3. A loyalty/rewards system according to claim 1 characterised in that the communication device comprises a mobile phone which communicates the registration to the database by means of a SMS and/or USSD and/or WAP.

4. A loyalty/rewards system according to claim 1 characterised in that the communication device comprises a computer, PDA or the like capable of linking to an internet or mobile website.
5. A loyalty/rewards system according to claim 3 in which the transaction card comprises a physical card in the form of one or more of a gift card, debit card or credit card.

6. A loyalty/rewards system according to claim 4 characterised in that the transaction card comprises a virtual card.

7. A loyalty/rewards system according to claim 4 characterised in that the transaction card comprises a combination of a virtual card and a physical card.

8. A loyalty/rewards system according to claim 6 characterised in that a virtual card comprises one or more of a cellular telephone mobile wallet, telephone airtime, paypal or similar on-line credit singly or in combination.

9. A loyalty/rewards system according to claim 1 characterised in that value is made available on predetermined dates.

10. A loyalty/rewards system according to claim 9 characterised in that the value is made available to a consumer if a predetermined threshold value is reached.

11. A loyalty-rewards system according to claim 1 characterised in that the consumer is notified of the value when made available by a text message or SMS sent to the consumer's registered mobile phone number.