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(54) **METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR CONDUCTING A RING-IN GAME**

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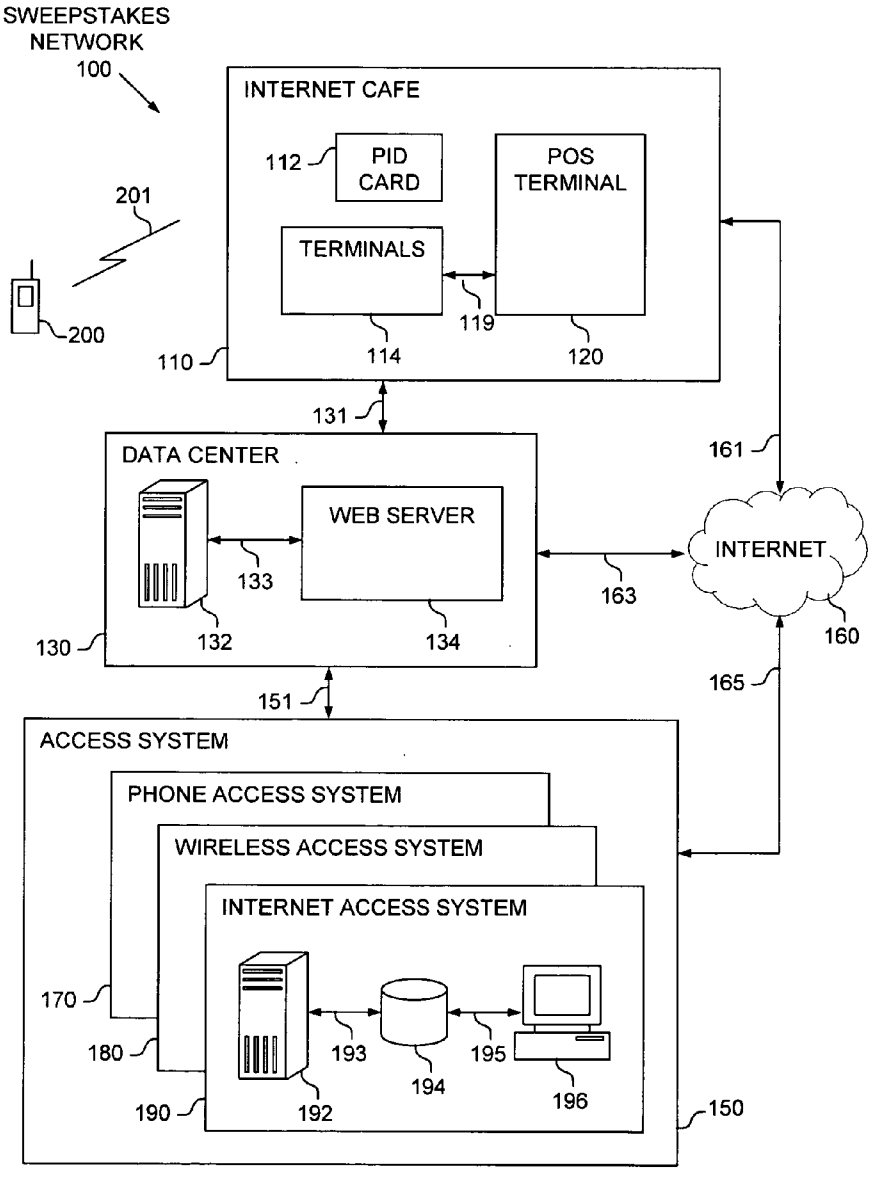
(57) **ABSTRACT**

A wireless communications device for use in a wireless network is capable of being invited to participate in a ring-in game, via the wireless network. The wireless communications device includes a memory capable of storing an electronic personal identification number associated with the ring-in game and a main processor associated with the memory capable of communicating with the wireless network, wherein the main processor receives at least a first invitation to participate in a ring-in game.



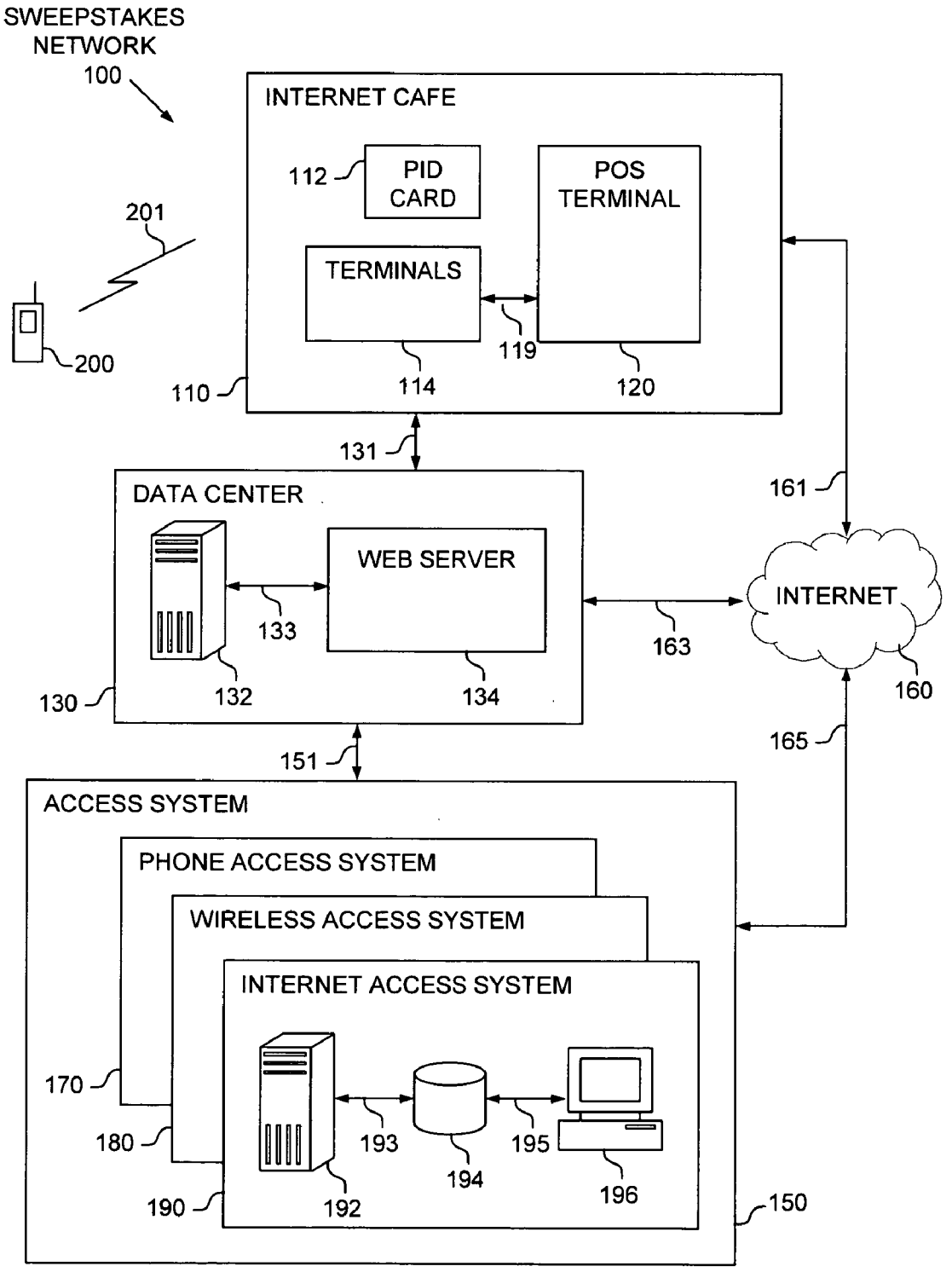

SWEEPSTAKES NETWORK
100
INTERNET CAFE
112
PID CARD
POS TERMINAL
201
TERMINALS
119
200
110
114
120
131
DATA CENTER
161
WEB SERVER
INTERNET
133
163
130
132
134
160
165
151
ACCESS SYSTEM
PHONE ACCESS SYSTEM
WIRELESS ACCESS SYSTEM
INTERNET ACCESS SYSTEM
170
180
193
195
194
196
190
192
150

FIGURE 1

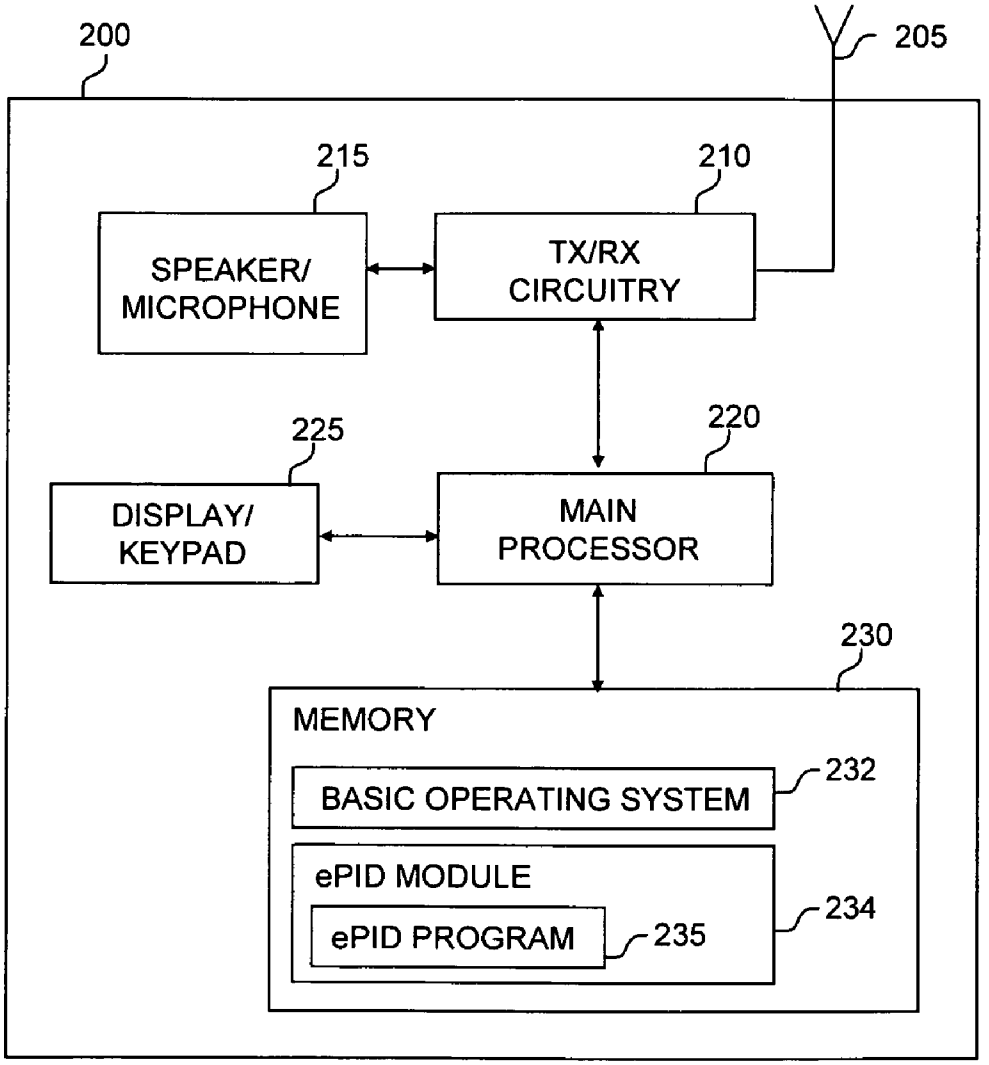

200
205
215
210
SPEAKER/
MICROPHONE
TX/RX
CIRCUITRY
225
220
DISPLAY/
KEYPAD
MAIN
PROCESSOR
230
MEMORY
BASIC OPERATING SYSTEM
232
ePID MODULE
ePID PROGRAM
235
234

FIGURE 2

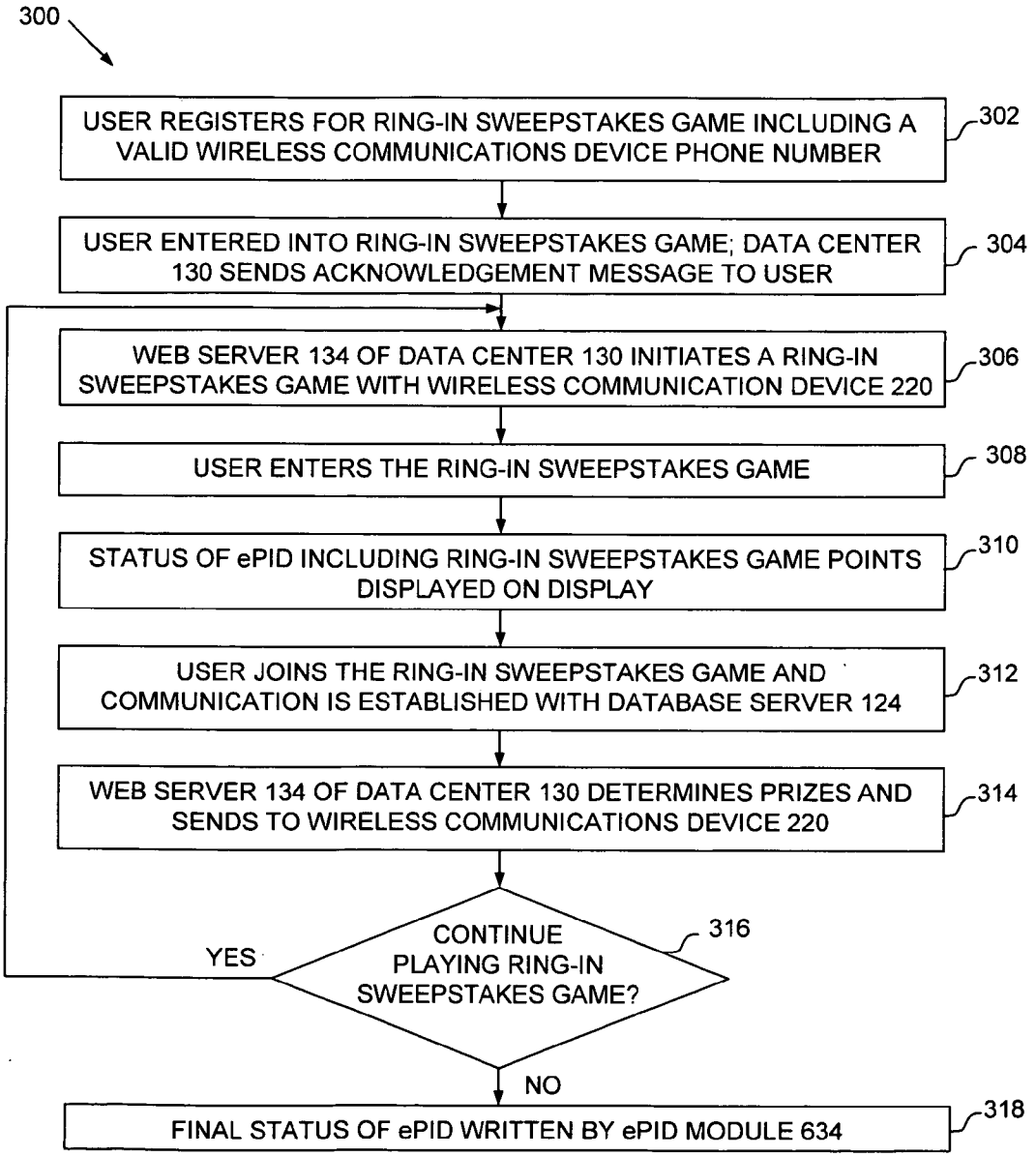

300
USER REGISTERS FOR RING-IN SWEEPSTAKES GAME INCLUDING A VALID WIRELESS COMMUNICATIONS DEVICE PHONE NUMBER
302
USER ENTERED INTO RING-IN SWEEPSTAKES GAME; DATA CENTER 130 SENDS ACKNOWLEDGEMENT MESSAGE TO USER
304
WEB SERVER 134 OF DATA CENTER 130 INITIATES A RING-IN SWEEPSTAKES GAME WITH WIRELESS COMMUNICATION DEVICE 220
306
USER ENTERS THE RING-IN SWEEPSTAKES GAME
308
STATUS OF ePID INCLUDING RING-IN SWEEPSTAKES GAME POINTS DISPLAYED ON DISPLAY
310
USER JOINS THE RING-IN SWEEPSTAKES GAME AND COMMUNICATION IS ESTABLISHED WITH DATABASE SERVER 124
312
WEB SERVER 134 OF DATA CENTER 130 DETERMINES PRIZES AND SENDS TO WIRELESS COMMUNICATIONS DEVICE 220
314
CONTINUE PLAYING RING-IN SWEEPSTAKES GAME?
316
YES
NO
FINAL STATUS OF ePID WRITTEN BY ePID MODULE 634
318

FIGURE 3

METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR CONDUCTING A RING-IN GAME

BACKGROUND

[0001] 1. Field of the Invention

[0002] This application contains technical disclosure in common with U.S. patent application Ser. No. 11/320,232, filed on 27 Dec. 2005 and entitled "METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR CONDUCTING A SWEEPSTAKES".

[0003] 2. Field of the Invention

[0004] The present invention relates to a method and apparatus for conducting a ring-in game. In particular, the present invention relates to a method and apparatus for conducting a ring-in game in which a user purchases a multi-function personal identification card for goods and services unrelated to the game, and in return, as a promotional bonus, is provided one or more entries into certain promotional sweepstakes games.

[0005] 3. Description of Related Art

[0006] Sweepstakes, raffles, and lotteries have been around for centuries. People enjoy the experience of entering a sweepstakes and hoping to win the "grand" prize. In most sweepstakes, the participant purchases a ticket, or entry, for a nominal amount of money in exchange for a chance to win prizes that are valued significantly higher than the cost of the ticket. Most often, the odds of the participant of winning the best prizes are very high. However, to entice new participants to play, to keep participants interested in playing the sweepstakes, or to entice the participants to play the sweepstakes again, prizes having nominal values close to or below the cost of the entry are often awarded. The participant's odds of winning these nominally valued prizes are typically close to 1:1.

[0007] Although the sweepstakes industry is heavy regulated, it remains very large and lucrative. Indeed, with the advent in recent years of prepaid vouchers, such as prepaid gasoline cards, prepaid credit cards, and prepaid phone cards, new games of chance and methods of conducting sweepstakes have been developed. For example, one of these new games of chance involves the purchase of a $1.00 "emergency" prepaid phone card that provides about one minute of telephone airtime and an entry in a game of chance. In this example, a person inserts currency into a game terminal and, in return, receives a corresponding number of $1.00 "emergency" prepaid phone cards.

[0008] The prepaid phone cards used in these games are typically multi-layered or folded pieces of paper or cardboard that are preprinted and stored on a roll inside the game terminal. The prepaid phone cards used in these games are "read-only" devices that can only be read by card readers in the game terminal. Once these prepaid phone cards are printed, the data cannot be changed and no more data can be added. Certain indicia is printed on each $1.00 prepaid phone card, including a personal identification number (PIN) that is required to use the prepaid phone cards from any telephone, bar codes, and other graphical indicia that instruct the game terminal on what images to display and what prizes, if any, have been won. Thus, the "winning" and "losing" prepaid phone cards are predetermined.

[0009] One problem with these games is that each game terminal is a separate stand-alone machine. Because the prepaid phone cards are preprinted, there is no need or capability to interconnect or network the game terminals together. This greatly reduces the number, type, and style of games that can be played. In other words, the participants cannot choose between different games, cannot compete against each other on different game terminals, and cannot play the game over computer networks, such as the Internet. In addition, the game terminals cannot be monitored and maintained from a remote location over a computer network.

[0010] Another problem with these types of games of chance is that most participants purchase the prepaid phone card for the sole purpose of entering the game of chance, not to use the prepaid phone cards to buy telephone airtime. When the participant purchases the prepaid phone cards, he participates in the game of chance, whether he wants to or not. Because people only purchase these "emergency" prepaid phone cards to participate in the game, the regulatory authorities in many jurisdictions have determined that these games are illegal lotteries. The reasoning is that, because the prepaid phone card has a nominal value, the participants are giving consideration merely to play a game of chance, not to buy and use the prepaid phone cards to make telephone calls. This is evidenced by the fact that these $1.00 prepaid phone cards are often found unused in trash receptacles outside of establishments that sell such prepaid phone cards and offer such games of chance.

[0011] Although there have been great strides made in the area of conducting sweepstakes, many shortcomings remain.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0012] There is a need for a game in which a user purchases a multi-function personal identification (PID) card for valuable goods and services unrelated to the game, and, in return, receives one or more free game entries that can be used to participate in one or more sweepstakes-type games.

[0013] Therefore, it is an object of the present invention to provide an apparatus and method for conducting a ring-in game in which a user purchases an electronic personal identification card for valuable goods and services unrelated to a game, and, on a transactional basis, is provided with a single optional entry into a first ring-in game and a corresponding number of optional entries into other ring-in games.

[0014] This object is achieved by providing a wireless communications device capable of being invited to participate in a ring-in game via a wireless network. The wireless communications device comprises a memory capable of storing an electronic personal identification number associated with the ring-in game and a main processor associated with the memory capable of communicating with the wireless network, wherein the main processor receives at least a first invitation to participate in a ring-in game.

[0015] It is an another object of the present invention to provide a network for conducting a ring-in game comprising a wireless communications device capable of being invited to participate in the ring-in game via the network, a memory capable of storing an electronic personal identification number associated with the ring-in game, and a main processor associated with the memory capable of communicating with the wireless network, wherein the main processor receives at least a first invitation to participate in a ring-in game.

[0016] It is still another object of the present invention to provide a method for conducting a ring-in game including providing an electronic personal identification number associated with the purchase of goods and services unrelated to the ring-in game, providing at least one wireless communi-

cations device capable of being invited to participate in the ring-in game via a wireless network, providing readable and writeable digital storage means for storing digital data related to the ring-in game and the goods and services unrelated to the ring-in game, and providing a plurality of Internet cafe sites capable of data communication with the at least one wireless communications device.

[0017] According to another embodiment of the present invention, the method for conducting a ring-in game includes providing at least one data center for storing and retrieving data associated with a website and capable of data communication with the Internet cafe and the at least one wireless communications device, providing at least one access system capable of data communication with the at least one wireless communications device, the Internet cafe, and the data center, placing the wireless communications device, the Internet cafe, the data center, the access system, and the means for activating and reactivating the electronic personal identification module in data communication, providing an entry into a corresponding number of entry units into the ring-in game, playing the ring-in game on the wireless communications device, in response to an invitation to join the ring-in game via the wireless network, and displaying the results of the ring-in game selection on a display of the wireless communications device.

[0018] These and other advantages and features of the present invention will become readily apparent to those skilled in the art upon examination of the subsequent detailed description and accompanying drawings. Accordingly additional advantages and features of the present invention and the scope thereof are pointed out with particularity in the claims and form a part hereof.

DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0019] The novel features believed characteristic of the invention are set forth in the appended claims. However, the invention itself, as well as a preferred mode of use, and further objectives and advantages thereof, will best be understood by reference to the following detailed description when read in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, wherein:

[0020] FIG. **1** is a graphical representation of an exemplary sweepstakes network, according to one embodiment of the present invention;

[0021] FIG. **2** is a graphical representation of the wireless communications device of FIG. **1**, according to one embodiment of the present invention; and

[0022] FIG. **3** is a flowchart illustrating the operation of an exemplary ring-in sweepstakes game, according to one embodiment of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

[0023] Reference will now be made to the following detailed description of the exemplary embodiments of the present invention. Those skilled in the art will recognize that the present invention provides many inventive concepts and novel features, that are merely illustrative, and are not to be construed as restrictive. Accordingly, the specific embodiments discussed herein are given by way of example and do not limit the scope of the present invention.

[0024] Referring now to FIG. **1** in the drawings, a preferred embodiment of a sweepstakes network **100** according to the present invention is illustrated. Sweepstakes network **100** comprises an Internet cafe **110**, a data center **130**, an access system **150**, an Internet **160**, and a wireless communications device **200**. Wireless communication device **200** is capable of accessing Internet cafe **110** via RF communication link **201** or via Internet **160** through communication link **161**, as described in more detail below. Internet cafe **110** comprises a plurality of terminals **114** and at least one point of sale (POS) terminal **120**, networked together via a communication link **119**. In addition, Internet cafe **110** is networked via a communication link **131** to data center **130** and networked to the Internet **160** via communication link **161**. Additionally, Internet cafe **110** further comprises at least one personal identification (PID) card **112**, which is preferably similar to a credit card, including a digital storage means, such as a magnetic strip, located, for example, on the back of PID card **112**. However, it should be understood that PID card **112** and the digital storage means may be any of a wide variety of digital storage devices, including diskettes, memory cards, memory sticks, or any other suitable digital data storage and transfer devices. Before PID card **112** can be redeemed for valuable goods and services, PID card **112** must be activated, as described in more detail below. Internet cafe **110** may be, for example, any point-of-sale retail site offering goods and/or services to users, including phone supplies, wireless access, computer use or the like.

[0025] Data center **130** comprises a database server **132** and a web server **134**, networked together via a communication link **133**. In addition, data center **130** is networked via communication link **131** to Internet cafe **110**, networked via communication link **151** to access system **150**, and networked to the Internet **160** via communication link **163**.

[0026] Access system **150** comprises one or more access systems, such as, for example, phone access system **170**, wireless access system **180**, and Internet access system **190**. The scope of the present invention, however, encompasses other additional or alternative access systems within access system **150**. In addition, access system **150** is networked via communication link **151** to data center **130** and networked to the Internet **160** via communication link **165**. In the illustrated embodiment, Internet access system **190** comprises database server **192**, database **194**, and management terminal **196**. In addition, database server **192** is networked via communication link **193** to database **194** which is networked via communication link **195** to management terminal **196**. Additionally, phone access system **170** and wireless access system **180** each may comprise a database server (not shown), a database (not shown), and a management terminal (not shown), similar to those shown and described in relation to Internet access system **190**.

[0027] In addition, Internet cafe **110** may be networked together, and may be networked to data center **130**, access system **150**, or both, by communication links **131** and **151** or communication links **161**, **163**, and **165** via Internet **160**. Communication links **119**, **131**, **133**, **151**, **161**, **163**, **165**, **193** and **195** may comprise modems, telephone lines, the Internet, satellites, wireless connections, or any combination thereof for sending and receiving digital data and signals. Communication links **119**, **131**, **133**, **151**, **161**, **163**, **165**, **193** and **195** provide a fast, efficient, reliable, and secure means for transferring digital data between Internet cafe **110**, data center **130**, access system **150** and Internet **160**.

[0028] In one embodiment of the present invention, selected data is periodically transferred back and forth

between Internet cafe **110** and data center **130** via communication link **131**. For example, the number of personal identification numbers (PINs) available for activation and the number, type, and amount of accumulated transactions may be reported by each Internet cafe **110** to at least one data center **130** at a predetermined basis, i.e. an hourly basis. If the number of PINs available at one Internet cafe **110** reaches a predetermined number, then data center **130** transfers more PINs to that Internet cafe **110**. This periodic polling of Internet cafe **110** ensures that data center **130** always has enough computing capacity to continuously conduct and control the sweepstakes games. In addition, Internet cafe **110** may be polled or alternatively may send the data periodically to at least one data center **130**.

[0029] It will be appreciated that in alternate embodiments the functions and operations of Internet cafe **110**, data center **130**, access system **150**, and Internet **160** may be combined in different configurations into one or more networks and/or one or more servers located either at Internet cafe **110** or remote from Internet cafe **110**.

[0030] Referring now to FIG. **2** in the drawings, an exemplary wireless communications device **200**, according to the present invention is illustrated in greater detail. Wireless communications device **200** comprises an antenna **205**, a transmit/receive (TX/RX) circuitry **210**, a speaker/microphone **215**, a main processor **220**, a display/keypad **225**, and a memory **230**. Memory **230** comprises a basic operating system (OS) program **232** and an electronic personal identification (ePID) module **234**. The ePID module **234** comprises an ePID program **235**, which is a subroutine that provides a digital storage means for electronically tracking and storing electronic personal identification in ePID module **234**.

[0031] TX/RX circuitry **210** receives from antenna **205** an incoming signal transmitted by for example, Internet cafe **110** or by a wireless network provider via Internet **160**. TX/RX circuitry **210** processes and sends the incoming signal to the speaker (i.e., voice data) or to main processor **220** for further processing (e.g., web browsing, interactive video game data). Likewise TX/RX circuitry **210** receives analog or digital voice data from the microphone or other outgoing data (e.g., web data, e-mail, interactive video game data) from main processor **230**. TX/RX circuitry **210** transmits a radio frequency (RF) signal that is transmitted via antenna **205**.

[0032] In one advantageous embodiment of the present invention, main processor **220** is a microprocessor or microcontroller. Memory **230** is coupled to main processor **220**. According to an advantageous embodiment of the present invention, part of memory **230** comprises a random access memory (RAM) and another part of memory **230** comprises a Flash memory, which acts as a read-only memory (ROM).

[0033] Main processor **220** executes basic operating system (OS) program **232** stored in memory **230** in order to control the overall operation of wireless communication device **200**. For example, main processor **220** controls the reception of signals and the transmission of signals by TX/RX circuitry **210**, in accordance with well-known principles. Main processor **220** is capable of executing other processes and programs resident in memory **220**; including ePID module **234** and ePID program **235**. Main processor **230** may move data into or out of memory **230**, as required by an executing process. Main processor **220** is also coupled to display/keypad **225**. The user of wireless communications device **200** uses the keypad to enter data into wireless communications device **200**. The display may be a liquid crystal display capable of rendering text and/or at least various graphics from Internet cafe **110** and/or Internet **160**. Alternate embodiments may use other types of displays.

[0034] In a preferred embodiment of the present invention, ePID module **234** is primarily responsible for establishing and maintaining an electronic personal identification number (ePIN) in memory **230**. Before ePID module **234** can be used to place telephone calls, access the Internet, or the like, ePID module **234** must be activated. Activation of ePID module **234** is performed by establishing communication with Internet cafe **110** or Internet **160** via RF communication link **201** and writing an ePIN in memory **230**. It will be appreciated that it is not necessary that ePID module **234** be used at the same Internet cafe **110** at which ePID module **234** was activated. Should the user choose to participate in a ring-in sweepstakes game, ePID module **234** may be used at any time, location, or at any Internet cafe **110**, provided the ePIN associated with ePID module **234** has not expired (for instances in which the ePIN associated with ePID module **234** includes an expiration date).

[0035] It is understood that wireless communications device **200** is given by way of example and that for simplicity and clarity, only so much of the construction and operation of wireless communications device **200** as is unique to the present invention or necessary for an understanding of the present invention is shown and described. Moreover, although wireless communications device **200** is shown as having an ePID module **234** in memory **230**, in an alternate embodiment wireless communications device **200** comprises the ability to transfer the ePIN into the random access memory associated with memory **230**. In another alternate embodiment, the ring-in sweepstakes game is capable of being loaded into the random access memory associated with memory **230** and is further capable of being displayed on the display of wireless communications device.

[0036] In an alternate embodiment of the present invention, a network provider, such as for example a wireless network provider, of wireless communications device **200**, may provide its members with ePIN's and/or recharge ePID module **234** at a predetermined time, for example at the execution of a contract for network services, upon receipt of payment for monthly services, or at any other predetermined times. In addition, or as an alternative, a wireless network provider, of wireless communications device **200**, may allow its members to redeem ePIN's and/or recharge ePID module **234** in exchange for rollover minutes or redeem for any other type of promotional offer made by the wireless network provider. In addition, a wireless network provider, of wireless communications device **200**, may provide its members with ePIN's and/or recharge ePID module **234** as a reward for access time purchased at either fixed time increments or excess time above the contractually agreed amount of time for network services. Accordingly, ePID module **234** of wireless communications device **200** may be used for: (1) prepaid access time including phone time, Internet access time, wireless network access time and other like access time; (2) purchase of products and merchandise located either at Internet cafe **110**, the network provider, or through Internet **160**; (3) generating free sweepstakes entries into the ring-in sweepstakes game; (4) awarding promo-

tional ring-in sweepstakes game points; and (5) redeeming winning points at the Internet cafe **110** location or through Internet **160**.

[0037] FIG. **3** is a high-level flow diagram **300**, illustrating the operation of an exemplary ring-in sweepstakes game according to one embodiment of the present invention. Participation in the ring-in sweepstakes game begins with an initiation step **302**, in which the user registers for the ring-in sweepstakes game. The user of wireless communications device **200** may purchase a PID card **112** for valuable goods and services and decide to enter the optional sweepstakes, such as for example, the ring-in sweepstakes game. At step **302**, the user registers for the ring-in sweepstakes game via a website, for example, "www.hello-money.com", in which the user also includes a valid wireless communications device phone number. In an alternate embodiment of the present invention, the user may register for the ring-in sweepstakes game via a website and include an email address, a text message address, a "land-line" phone number, or any other address or phone number as contact information for the ring-in sweepstakes game. The website for registering for the ring-in sweepstakes game may be maintained in web server **134** of data center **130**, or any other website hosting service, according to particular needs.

[0038] Then, at step **304**, data center **130** acknowledges the user registration for the ring-in sweepstakes game in process step **302** or, if the user is already registered for the ring-in sweepstakes game, data center **130** sends an acknowledgment message, such as for example, a text message, to the user through the Internet via communications link **163**. Although a text message is described as performing the acknowledgement of the user registration for the ring-in sweepstakes game, the present invention contemplates any suitable message or combination of messages sent to the user as an acknowledgement message.

[0039] Next, at step **306**, web server **134** of data center **130**, initiates a ring-in sweepstakes game with wireless communications device **200**, such as for example Texas Hold-em poker sweepstakes game, or any other type of sweepstakes game. Web server **134** rings wireless communications device **200** to invite the user to participate in the ring-in sweepstakes game. The ring-in may cause wireless communications device to ring and provide a pre-recorded voice message, provide a text message, initiate ePID module **234** to display an invitation message on the display, or any other type of action taken by wireless communications device **200** to invite the user of wireless communications device **200** to join the ring-in sweepstakes game. In a preferred embodiment of the present invention, the user of wireless communications device **200** may be given a predetermined time period in which to respond to the invitation to join the ring-in sweepstakes game. In addition or as an alternative, the ring-in may provide the user with information about the type of ring-in sweepstakes game, the duration of the sweepstakes game, and the odds of winning the sweepstakes game.

[0040] In an alternate embodiment of the present invention, the user of wireless communications device **200** may be provided with an option to participate in the ring-in sweepstakes game via another access terminal other than wireless communications device **200**. As an example and not by way of limitation, the user of wireless communications device **200** may participate in the ring-in sweepstakes game via a desktop computer, a laptop computer, or any other type of access terminal operable to play the ring-in sweepstakes game. Accordingly, if the user of wireless communications device **200** chooses to utilize another access terminal, then the ring-in may provide a password or code to the user of wireless communications device **200**, including a predetermined time period in which to respond to the invitation to join the ring-in sweepstakes game, via the other access terminal. For example, the user of wireless communications device **200** may utilize a desktop computer to access a website via the Internet or other network system, associated with the ring-in sweepstakes game, including logging into the ring-in sweepstakes game using the given password or code.

[0041] Next, at step **308**, the user of wireless communications device **200** responds to the invitation to join the ring-in sweepstakes game, in an appropriate time frame and enters the ring-in sweepstakes game. Then in step **310**, ePID module **234** is used by wireless communications device **200** and ePID program **235** to display the status of the quantity of promotional sweepstakes points. During step **310**, selected images are displayed at selected portions of the display of wireless communications device **200** at selected times. As set forth above, the number of minutes of access time currently available on ePID module **234** may be displayed on a first portion of the display, the number or amount of promotional sweepstakes entries available on ePID module **234** may be displayed on a second portion of the display, the number or amount of credits or "wins" currently available on ePID module **234** may be displayed on a third portion of the display, and the status of the current ring-in sweepstakes game in progress may be displayed on a fourth portion of the video display. In this manner, the function of ePID module **234** is substantially similar to the operation of PID card **112**, as described above.

[0042] Although an example sweepstakes game has been described as a Texas Hold-em poker sweepstakes game with a single user of wireless communications device **200**, the present invention contemplates any suitable type or style of ring-in sweepstakes game. For example, web server **134** of data center **130**, may initiate a ring-in sweepstakes game with multiple wireless communications devices. The ring-in sweepstakes game may be initiated with a series of qualification rounds inviting multiple users to join in the ring-in sweepstakes game. In addition or as an alternative, web server **134** of data center **130** may invite the winners of the qualification rounds to join multiple playoff rounds and even a championship round. In this manner, web server **134** of data center **130** may initiate multiple ring-in sweepstakes game involving multiple users.

[0043] In an alternate embodiment of the present invention, the ring-in sweepstakes game may be initiated by wireless communications device **200**. In this manner, wireless network device **200** initiates the ring-in sweepstakes game and may invite web server **134** of data center **130** to play (i.e. the user of wireless network device **200** plays against the computer), or any wireless communication device registered for the ring-in sweepstakes game (i.e. the user of wireless network device **200** plays against other users on a peer to peer network).

[0044] The process continues with step **312**, in which the user joins the ring-in sweepstakes game. This is done by selecting one of the designated graphical images on the display of wireless communications device **200**, depicting the desired ring-in sweepstakes game. Initiation of the game

causes main processor **220** and ePID program **235** of ePID module **234** of wireless communications device **200** to send signals and/or data over RF communication link **201** to web server **134** of data center **130**. Also, after initiating the game, either main processor **220** or ePID program **235** of ePID module **234** in communication with web server **134** of data center **130** will cause the display of wireless communications device **200** to initiate a simulation of the ring-in sweepstakes game being played. For example, if a Texas Hold-em poker sweepstakes game had been initiated; graphical images or movies may be displayed to simulate the poker game being played at preprogrammed intervals.

[0045] Then, in calculation step **314**, web server **134** of data center **130** calculates and determines how many, if any, prizes are to be awarded for that play. In a preferred embodiment of the present invention, ePID module **234** is not preprogrammed at the time of sale and registration with any winning or losing combination of data. The user must choose to participate in the optional promotional ring-in sweepstakes game and submit an entry via a website in order to play the sweepstakes game and win any prizes. Accordingly, the calculations and determinations of prizes are conducted by web server **134** of data center **130** and are promotional ring-in sweepstakes game in response to entries made by users from wireless communications devices. In an alternate embodiment of the present invention, ePID module **234** is preprogrammed at the time of sale and registration with a predetermined winning and losing combination of data. Thus, the user may choose to participate in the optional promotional ring-in sweepstakes game or the user may merely choose to communicate with instant validation terminal **115***a* to win any prizes. Accordingly, the calculations and determinations of prizes are predetermined and preprogrammed on ePID module **234** at the time of activation.

[0046] In the preferred embodiment of the present invention, after web server **134** of data center **130** calculates and determines whether a prize has been won, the process continues, in which web server **134** of data center **130** transmits selected digital signals and data to the appropriate wireless communications device **200** via RF communication link **201**. Once the data has been received by wireless communications device **200**, main processor **220** and ePID program **235** of ePID module **234** may cause corresponding audio and video messages, such as "You're a Winner!" or "You're Advanced to the Next Round!" to be displayed on the display of wireless communications device **200**. In addition, main processor **220** and ePID program **235** of ePID module **234** may activate graphics and the speaker to enhance the experience of playing the ring-in sweepstakes game. After each ring-in sweepstakes game session, the process continues with an inquiry step **316**, in which a determination is made as to whether the user may advance to the next round and if the user wishes to continue to play the next round of the ring-in sweepstakes game. If the user decides to continue to play the next round of the ring-in sweepstakes game, the process continues back to step **306**, in which the user awaits web server **134** of data center **130** to initiate the next round of the ring-in sweepstakes game. On the other hand, if the user decides not to continue playing the next round of the ring-in sweepstakes game, or if the user did not advance to the next round, the process ends with step **318**.

[0047] Finally, as represented by step **318**, when the user decides to end the ring-in sweepstakes game, the user may depress a portion of the display that is displaying a graphical image depicting end ring-in sweepstakes game or the user may use the keypad of wireless communications device **200**, thereby sending corresponding signals and data to ePID module **234** identifying that the user no longer wishes to participate in the ring-in sweepstakes game. This causes ePID program **235** on wireless communications device **200** to write the final status to ePID module **234**. ePID module **234** may then be used to access time for example to place telephone calls or access the Internet via wireless communications device **200**.

[0048] It is understood that other operations can be implemented within the scope of the invention. It is also understood that the sequence of the operation shown can be varied without departing from the scope or principles of the present invention.

[0049] It is apparent that an invention with significant advantages has been described and illustrated. Although the present invention is shown in a limited number of forms, it is not limited to just these forms, but is amenable to various changes and modifications without departing from the spirit thereof.

What is claimed is:

1. For use in a wireless network, a wireless communications device capable of being invited to participate in a ring-in game via the wireless network, the wireless communications device comprising:

a memory capable of storing an electronic personal identification number associated with the ring-in game; and

a main processor associated with the memory capable of communicating with the wireless network, wherein the main processor receives at least a first invitation to participate in a ring-in game.

2. The wireless communications device according to claim **1**, wherein the electronic personal identification number is associated with the purchase of goods and services unrelated to the ring-in game.

3. The wireless communications device according to claim **1**, wherein the memory comprises an electronic personal identification module capable of maintaining the personal identification number in the memory of the wireless communications device.

4. The wireless communications device according to claim **3**, wherein the electronic personal identification module comprises an electronic personal identification program capable of providing a digital storage means for electronically tracking and storing electronic personal identification in the electronic personal identification module.

5. The wireless communications device according to claim **3**, wherein the electronic personal identification module is capable of being activated by at least one website at one of a plurality of data centers of the wireless network.

6. The wireless communications device according to claim **3**, wherein the electronic personal identification module is capable of data communication with at least one access system of the wireless network for storing and retrieving access time associated with the electronic personal identification number.

7. The wireless communications device according to claim **1**, wherein a user of the wireless communications device responds to the invitation to join the ring-in game and the main processor of the wireless communications device initiates the ring-in game on the display of the wireless communications device.

8. The wireless communications device according to claim 1, wherein the wireless communications device is a cellular telephone.

9. A network for conducting a ring-in game comprising:

a wireless communications device capable of being invited to participate in the ring-in game via the network;

a memory capable of storing an electronic personal identification number associated with the ring-in game; and

a main processor associated with the memory capable of communicating with the wireless network, wherein the main processor receives at least a first invitation to participate in a ring-in game.

10. The network according to claim 9, further comprising:

a plurality of Internet cafe sites capable of data communication with at least one wireless communications device;

at least one data center capable of data communication with the plurality of Internet cafe sites and the at least one wireless communications device; and

at least one access system capable of data communication with the plurality of Internet cafe sites, the at least one data center, and the at least one wireless communications device.

11. The network according to claim 10, wherein at least one of the plurality of Internet cafe sites further comprises:

at least one personal identification card purchaseable for goods and services unrelated to the sweepstakes at the plurality of Internet cafe sites;

an electronic personal identification number associated with the at least one personal identification card; and

readable and writeable digital storage means for storing digital data related to the sweepstakes and the goods and services unrelated to the sweepstakes.

12. The network according to claim 10, wherein at least one of the plurality of Internet cafe sites further comprises:

at least one sweepstakes terminal capable of data communications with at least one point of sale terminal associated with the Internet cafe.

13. The network according to claim 12, wherein the at least one sweepstakes terminal comprises:

readable and writeable means for accessing digital data associated with the at least one personal identification card;

means for playing at least one sweepstakes game;

wherein, upon playing at least one sweepstakes game, the user may redeem any winnings for additional access time at any appropriate time while playing the at least one sweepstakes game.

14. The network according to claim 12, wherein the Internet cafe further comprises at least one instant validation terminal comprising:

readable and writeable means for accessing digital data associated with the at least one personal identification card;

wherein, upon accessing digital data associated with the at least one personal identification card, an instant validation is performed upon any predetermined winnings provided at the time of activation of the at least one personal identification card.

15. The network according to claim 14, wherein the at least one instant validation terminal further comprises:

communication means for accessing digital data associated with the at least one wireless communications device;

wherein, upon communication with the digital data associated with the at least one wireless communications device, an instant validation is performed upon any predetermined winnings provided at the time of activation of the electronic personal identification module in the wireless communications device.

16. The network according to claim 9, wherein the wireless communications device further comprises:

readable and writeable means for accessing digital data associated with the electronic personal identification number;

means for playing the ring-in game;

means for updating the electronic personal identification module with the sweepstakes results; and

means for data communication with at least one access system for storing and purchasing access time associated with the electronic personal identification module;

wherein upon purchase of access time from at least one of the at least one access systems, an entry is provided into the ring-in game and a corresponding number of entry units is provided for corresponding access time purchased unrelated to the ring-in game.

17. The network according to claim 9, wherein the ring-in game is a Texas Hold-em poker game.

18. A method for conducting a ring-in game comprising the steps of:

providing an electronic personal identification number associated with the purchase of goods and services unrelated to the ring-in game;

providing at least one wireless communications device capable of being invited to participate in the ring-in game via a wireless network;

providing readable and writeable digital storage means for storing digital data related to the ring-in game and the goods and services unrelated to the ring-in game;

providing a plurality of Internet cafe sites capable of data communication with the at least one wireless communications device;

providing at least one data center for storing and retrieving data associated with a website and capable of data communication with the Internet cafe and the at least one wireless communications device;

providing at least one access system capable of data communication with the at least one wireless communications device, the Internet cafe, and the data center;

placing the wireless communications device, the Internet cafe, the data center, the access system, and the means for activating and reactivating the electronic personal identification module in data communication;

providing an entry into a corresponding number of entry units into the ring-in game;

playing the ring-in game on the wireless communications device, in response to an invitation to join the ring-in game via the wireless network; and

displaying the results of the ring-in game selection on a display of the wireless communications device.

19. The method according to claim **18**, further comprising the steps of:

providing means for reactivating the electronic personal identification module via the wireless network;

reactivating the electronic personal identification module for additional goods and services unrelated to the ring-in game; and

providing a corresponding number of entry units into the ring-in game.

20. The method according to claim **18**, wherein the goods and services unrelated to the ring-in game are associated with the access system and comprise at least one of prepaid wireless phone access time, prepaid wireless network access time, or prepaid Internet access time.

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