A method for awarding prizes to a plurality of users each participating in a multiuser game via a user console. For each round of the multiuser game, a trivia question and at least two answer choices are electronically delivered to each user participating in the multiuser game. A selection of one of the plurality of answer choices is received from the game console service that delivered the question to the user. Upon receiving the selected answer choice from the game console service, both an electronic participation-based prize and a skill-based prize are electronically awarded to the user associated with the console.
402 Provide question with answers choices

404 Player answer question?
   yes
   406 Award participation prize to player
   no

408 Answer correct?
   yes
   410 Determine accuracy score + answer bonuses
   no
   412 Round over?
      yes
      414 Award skill-based prizes to players
      no

416 Eliminate player?
   yes
   418 Round over, award skill-based prizes to players
   no

420 Eliminate player?
   yes
   422 Determine speed bonus only
   no
**FIG. 5**

1. **502** Receive answer from player
2. **504** answered correctly?
   - **no**
   - **504** answered correctly?
     - **yes**
     - **506** Within instant bonus time?
       - **no**
       - **514** Award timer bonus
       - **yes**
       - **506** Within instant bonus time?
         - **no**
         - **508** Before timer started?
           - **no**
           - **514** Award timer bonus
           - **yes**
           - **508** Before timer started?
             - **516** Award instant answer bonus
3. **510** Award pre-timer bonus
4. **512** Award speed bonus

**FIG. 7**

1. **702** Prior question answered correctly?
   - **no**
   - **704** Streak bonus = 0
     - **yes**
     - **706** Determine number of consecutive prior questions answered correctly
     - **708** Determine streak bonus
FIG. 8

- **802** Player answers question
  - **804** Player answer question correctly?  
    - Yes: **806** Determine total # of group eliminated
    - No: **808** Determine award for player
  - **810** Player exit game?
    - Yes: **812** Deliver award to player
    - No: **814** Done

- **816** Player eliminated
  - **818** Determine total # of group eliminated
  - **820** Determine award for group
  - **822** Deliver award to group
## FIG. 9

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group Eliminated</th>
<th>Player wins (points)</th>
<th>Group players win:</th>
<th>Groupings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Nothing</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>Nothing</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>Nothing</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>Nothing</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>1 arcade game</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>1200</td>
<td>1 arcade game</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>1 arcade game + 80</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70</td>
<td>3000</td>
<td>1 arcade game + 160</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80</td>
<td>5000</td>
<td>1 arcade game + 400</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90</td>
<td>6000</td>
<td>1 arcade game + 800</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100</td>
<td>10000</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SKILL AND PARTICIPATION BASED PRIZING

BACKGROUND

[0001] The console and personal computer-based video game experience has evolved to include multiplayer online gaming. Gaming systems have evolved from one in which an isolated gaming experience was provided in one where users share a common game experience through networked systems. This provides a rich, interactive experience which may be shared in real time between friends and other gamers.

[0002] Games consoles, such as the Xbox 360™ game console, have been used for many years to allow users to play electronic games with others sharing the game console. Such games consoles can also be used to play electronic games with others over a network. As an example, the game console is connected to a game server that controls the game play. Such online game play permits users to interact with many more players than is possible when play is limited to those using the same device. Note that a personal computer (PC) could be used to play multi-player online games instead of a game console and that a PC and game console can participate in the same game session.

[0003] Some online games are designed with the intent of having a very large audience. That is, the game becomes more interesting when hundreds, thousands, or even tens of thousands of user play concurrently. Such game play is sometimes referred to as “massively multi-player online gaming.” Some online games have achieved such enormous popularity that a large online audience can be almost guaranteed for at least significant portions of each day.

SUMMARY

[0004] A method for awarding both a participation-based prize and skill-based prize based solely upon a user, participating in a multiuser game, answering a question presented during the game. In each round of the game, a trivia question and a plurality of answer choices are electronically delivered to a game console associated with a user participating in the multiuser game. Each user participating in the game selects one of the plurality of answer choices presented to them. Upon receiving a selected answer choice from a game console, a participation-based prize is automatically awarded to the user associated with the console. When the answer choice correctly answers the question, an accuracy score and at least one answer bonus is awarded to the user associated with the console. When the answer choice incorrectly answers the question, only a speed bonus is awarded to the user associated with the console. When the multiplayer game ends, users participating in the multiplayer game are awarded with one or more skill-based prizes based on a total score that includes the accuracy score and answer bonuses, and the speed bonus, awarded for each round of the multiuser game.

[0005] In some embodiments, the participation-based prize is a sweepstakes entry. Sweepstakes entries are associated with the user and saved as a sweepstakes record in the user’s account. At certain periods during the season of the game, a sweepstakes drawing is held. The drawing is based on a sweepstakes account containing a number of the user’s gamertag or the number of sweepstakes records associated with the user.

[0006] In some embodiments, skill-based prizes are based on a total score consisting of an accuracy score, speed bonus, streak bonus and prize ladder bonus awarded to the user for each round of the game. An accuracy score is awarded to a user for selecting an answer choice that correctly answers the question. A speed bonus is awarded based on the amount of time a user takes to select an answer choice. A streak bonus is awarded based on the number of consecutively correctly answered questions. A prize ladder bonus is awarded to a contestant or user within the group competing against the contestant.

[0007] This Summary is provided to introduce a selection of concepts in a simplified form that are further described below in the Detailed Description. This Summary is not intended to identify key features or essential features of the claimed subject matter, nor is it intended to be used as an aid in determining the scope of the claimed subject matter. The claimed subject matter is not limited to implementations that solve any or all disadvantages noted in the Background.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0008] FIG. 1 is an isometric view of an exemplary gaming and media system.

[0009] FIG. 2 is an exemplary functional block diagram of components of the gaming and media system shown in FIG. 1.

[0010] FIG. 3 is a block diagram of an exemplary operating environment for awarding prizes.

[0011] FIG. 4 depicts an embodiment of a flow chart of steps for awarding prizes to users participating in the game.

[0012] FIG. 5 depicts an embodiment of a flow chart of steps for determining a speed bonus.

[0013] FIG. 6 depicts a schematic diagram of a heuristic for determining the speed bonus.

[0014] FIG. 7 depicts an embodiment of a flow chart of steps for determining a streak bonus.

[0015] FIG. 8 depicts an embodiment of a flow chart of steps for determining a ladder award.

[0016] FIG. 9 depicts an embodiment of a prize ladder record stored in a database.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0017] The technology described herein relates to a system for delivering participation-based prizing and skill-based prizing to users participating in a multiplayer game based on a single trigger mechanism—the user answering a question presented during the game. A user receives a participation-based prize, i.e., a sweepstakes entry, every time the user answers a question. By awarding a participation-based prize, the user is incentivized to participate in the game. The user also competes for skill-based prizes, i.e., points, electronic games, etc., by answering questions presented in the game correctly and quickly.

[0018] FIG. 1 shows an exemplary gaming and media system 100. The following discussion of FIG. 1 is intended to provide a brief, general description of a suitable environment in which concepts presented herein may be implemented. As shown in FIG. 1, gaming and media system 100 includes a game and media console (hereinafter “console”) 102. In general, console 102 is one type of computing system, as will be further described below. Console 102 is configured to accommodate one or more wireless controllers, as represented by controllers 104(1) and 104(2). Console 102 is equipped with an internal hard disk drive (not shown) and a portable media drive 106 that support various forms of portable storage.
media, as represented by optical storage disc 108. Examples of suitable portable storage media include DVD, CD-ROM, game discs, and so forth. Console 102 also includes two memory unit card receptacles 125(1) and 125(2), for receiving removable flash-type memory units 140. A command button 135 on console 102 enables and disables wireless peripheral support.

As depicted in FIG. 1, console 102 also includes an optical port 130 for communicating wirelessly with one or more devices and two USB (Universal Serial Bus) ports 110(1) and 110(2) to support a wired connection for additional controllers, or other peripherals. In some implementations, the number and arrangement of additional ports may be modified. A power button 112 and an eject button 114 are also positioned on the front face of game console 102. Power button 112 is selected to apply power to the game console, and can also provide access to other features and controls, and eject button 114 alternately opens and closes the tray of a portable media drive 106 to enable insertion and extraction of a storage disc 108.

Console 102 connects to a television or other display (such as monitor 150) via A/V interfacing cables 120. In one implementation, console 102 is equipped with a dedicated A/V port (not shown) configured for content-secured digital communication using A/V cables 120 (e.g., A/V cables suitable for connecting to a High Definition Multimedia Interface “HDMI” port on a high definition monitor 150 or other display device). A power cable 122 provides power to the game console. Console 102 may be further configured with broadband capabilities, as represented by a cable or modem connector 124 to facilitate access to a network, such as the Internet. The broadband capabilities can also be provided wirelessly through a broadband network such as a wireless fidelity (Wi-Fi) network.

Each controller 104 is coupled to console 102 via a wired or wireless interface. In the illustrated implementation, the controllers 104 are USB-compatible and are coupled to console 102 via a wireless or USB port 110. Console 102 may be equipped with any of a wide variety of user interaction mechanisms. In an example illustrated in FIG. 1, each controller 104 is equipped with two thumbsticks 132(1) and 132(2), a D-pad 134, buttons 136, and two triggers 138. These controllers are merely representative, and other known gaming controllers may be substituted for, or added to, those shown in FIG. 1.

In one implementation, a memory unit (MU) 140 may also be inserted into controller 104 to provide additional and portable storage. Portable MUs enable users to store game parameters for use when playing on other consoles. In this implementation, each controller is configured to accommodate two MUs 140, although more or less than two MUs may also be employed.

Gaming and media system 100 is generally configured for playing games stored on a memory medium, as well as for downloading and playing games, and reproducing pre-recorded music and videos, from both electronic and hard media sources. With the different storage offerings, titles can be played from the hard disk drive, from an optical disk media (e.g., 108), from an online source, or from MU 140.

During operation, console 102 is configured to receive input from controllers 104 and display information on displays 150. For example, console 102 can display a user interface on display 150 to allow a user to select a game using controller 104 and display achievement information as discussed below.

FIG. 2 is a functional block diagram of gaming and media system 100 and shows functional components of gaming and media system 100 in more detail. Console 102 has a central processing unit (CPU) 200, and a memory controller 202 that facilitates processor access to various types of memory, including a flash Read Only Memory (ROM) 204, a Random Access Memory (RAM) 206, a hard disk drive 208, and portable media drive 106. In one implementation, CPU 200 includes a level 1 cache 210 and a level 2 cache 212, to temporarily store data and hence reduce the number of memory access cycles made to the hard drive 208, thereby improving processing speed and throughput.

CPU 200, memory controller 202, and various memory devices are interconnected via one or more buses (not shown). The details of the bus that is used in this implementation are not particularly relevant to understanding the subject matter of interest being discussed herein. However, it will be understood that such a bus might include one or more of serial and parallel buses, a memory bus, a peripheral bus, and a processor or local bus, using any of a variety of bus architectures. By way of example, such architectures can include an Industry Standard Architecture (ISA) bus, a Micro Channel Architecture (MCA) bus, an Enhanced ISA (EISA) bus, a Video Electronics Standards Association (VESA) local bus, and a Peripheral Component Interconnects (PCI) bus also known as a Mezzanine bus.

In one implementation, CPU 200, memory controller 202, ROM 204, and RAM 206 are integrated onto a common module 214. In this implementation, ROM 204 is configured as a flash ROM that is connected to memory controller 202 via a PCI bus and a ROM bus (neither of which are shown). RAM 206 is configured as multiple Double Data Rate Synchronous Dynamic RAM (DDR SDRAM) modules that are independently controlled by memory controller 202 via separate buses (not shown). Hard disk drive 208 and portable media drive 106 are shown connected to the memory controller 202 via the PCI bus and an AT Attachment (ATA) bus 216. However, in other implementations, dedicated data bus structures of different types can also be applied in the alternative.

A three-dimensional graphics processing unit 220 and a video encoder 222 form a video processing pipeline for high speed and high resolution (e.g., High Definition) graphics processing. Data are carried from graphics processing unit 220 to video encoder 222 via a digital video bus (not shown). An audio processing unit 224 and an audio codec (coder/decoder) 226 form a corresponding audio processing pipeline for multi-channel audio processing of various digital audio formats. Audio data are carried between audio processing unit 224 and audio codec 226 via a communication link (not shown). The video and audio processing pipelines output data to an A/V (audio/video) port 228 for transmission to a television or other display. In the illustrated implementation, video and audio processing components 220-228 are mounted on module 214.

Fig. 2 shows module 214 including a USB host controller 230 and a network interface 232. USB host controller 230 is shown in communication with CPU 200 and memory controller 202 via a bus (e.g., PCI bus) and serves as host for peripheral controllers 104(1)-104(4). Network interface 232 provides access to a network (e.g., Internet, home.
network, etc.) and may be any of a wide variety of various wire or wireless interface components including an Ethernet card, a modem, a wireless access card, a Bluetooth module, a cable modem, and the like.

[0030] In the implementation depicted in FIG. 2, console 102 includes a controller support subassembly 240 for supporting four controllers 104(1)-104(4). The controller support subassembly 240 includes any hardware and software components needed to support wired and wireless operation with an external control device, such as for example, a media and game controller. A front panel I/O subassembly 242 supports the multiple functionalities of power button 112, the eject button 114, as well as any LEDs (light emitting diodes) or other indicators exposed on the outer surface of console 102. Subassemblies 240 and 242 are in communication with module 214 via one or more cable assemblies 244. In other implementations, console 102 can include additional controller subassemblies. The illustrated implementation also shows an optical I/O interface 235 that is configured to send and receive signals that can be communicated to module 214.

[0031] MU's 140(1) and 140(2) are illustrated as being connectable to MU ports “A” 130(1) and “B” 130(2) respectively. Additional MU's (e.g., MU's 140(3)-140(6)) are illustrated as being connectable to controllers 104(1) and 104(3), i.e., two MU's for each controller. Controllers 104(2) and 104(4) can also be configured to receive MU's (not shown). Each MU 140 offers additional storage on which games, game parameters, and other data may be stored. In some implementations, the other data can include any of a digital game component, an executable gaming application, an instruction set for expanding a gaming application, and a media file. When inserted into console 102 or a controller, MU 140 can be accessed by memory controller 202.

[0032] A system power supply module 250 provides power to the components of gaming system 100. A fan 252 cools the circuitry within console 102.

[0033] An application comprising machine instructions is stored on hard disk drive 208. When console 102 is powered on, various portions of application 260 are loaded into RAM 206, and/or caches 210 and 212, for execution on CPU 200, wherein application 260 is one such example. Various applications can be stored on hard disk drive 208 for execution on CPU 200.

[0034] Gaming and media system 100 may be operated as a standalone system by simply connecting the system to monitor 150 (FIG. 1), a television, a video projector, or other display device. In this standalone mode, gaming and media system 100 enables one or more players to play games, or enjoy digital media, e.g., by watching movies, or listening to music. However, with the integration of broadband connectivity made available through network interface 232, gaming and media system 100 may further be operated as a participant in a larger network gaming community, as discussed below in connection with FIG. 3.

[0035] FIG. 3 provides a block diagram of an environment for implementing the present technology. In one example, multiple consoles 300A-300X are coupled to a network 306 and can communicate with a console service 302 having one or more servers through network 306. Also present and coupled to the network is a gaming service provider 350. In one embodiment, network 306 comprises the Internet, though other networks such as LAN or WAN are contemplated. Each of the devices illustrated in FIG. 3 include a communication component capable of receiving information from and transmitting information to consoles 300A-X and provide a collection of services that applications running on consoles 300A-X may invoke and utilize.

[0036] The console service 302 and the gaming service 350 may be combined and offered by a single service provider and/or on a single server. Alternatively, the service providers may be different entities. In yet another embodiment, the gaming service server may be provided as a product in the form of hardware and software included on a non-volatile storage medium.

[0037] Consoles 300A-X may invoke user login service 308, which is used to authenticate a user on consoles 300A-X. During login, login service 308 obtains a gamertag (a unique identifier associated with the user) and a password from the user as well as a console identifier that uniquely identifies the console that the user is using and a network path to the console. The gamertag and password are authenticated by comparing them to user records 310 in a database 312, which may be located on the same server as user login service 308 or may be distributed on a different server or a collection of different servers. Once authenticated, user login service 308 stores the console identifier and the network path in user records 310 so that messages and information may be sent to the console.

[0038] User records 310 can include additional information about the user such as game records and friends list. Game records 314 include information for a user identified by a gamertag and can include statistics for a particular game, achievements acquired for particular game and/or other game specific information. Records 310 may also include prize information associated with the user. As will be discussed in more detail below, the technology described herein awards participation-based prizes and skill-based prizes. When a user is awarded either a participation-based prize or a skill-based prize, a prize record is created by console service 302 and stored in records 310.

[0039] The friends list 314 includes an indication of friends of a user that are also connected to or otherwise have user account records with console service 302. The term “friend” as used herein can broadly refer to a relationship between a user and another gamer, where the user has requested that the other gamer consent to be added to the user’s friends list, and the other gamer has accepted. This may be referred to as a two-way acceptance. A two-way friend acceptance may also be created where another gamer requests the user be added to the other gamer’s friends list and the user accepts. At this point, the other gamer may also be added to the user’s friends list. While friends will typically result from a two-way acceptance, it is conceivable that another gamer be added to a user’s friends list, and be considered a “friend,” where the user has designated another gamer as a friend regardless of whether the other gamer accepts. It is also conceivable that another gamer will be added to a user’s friends list, and be considered a “friend,” where the other user has requested to be added to the user’s friends list, or where the user has requested to be added to the other gamer’s friends list, regardless of whether the user or other gamer accepts in either case.

[0040] User records 310 also include additional information about the user including games that have been downloaded by the user and licensing packages that have been issued for those downloaded games, including the permissions associated with each licensing package. Portions of user records 310 can be stored on an individual console, in database 312 or on both. If an individual console retains game
records 314 and/or friends list 316, this information can be provided to console service 302 through network 306. Additionally, the console has the ability to display information associated with game records 314 and/or friends list 316 without having a connection to console service 302.

Gameplay management services 305 manage multiplayer games by aggregating events from users, executing gameplay rules and outputting results to users involved in individual multiplayer games. Gameplay services 305 may manage a plurality of multiplayer game events concurrently.

The console service 302 also includes a message service 320 which permits one console, such as console 300A, to send a message to another console, such as console 300B. The message service 320 is known, the ability to compose and send messages from a console of a user is known, and the ability to receive and open messages at a console of a recipient is known. Mail messages can include emails, text messages, voice messages, attachments and specialized in-text messages known as invites, in which a user playing the game on one console invites a user on another console to play in the same game while using network 306 to pass gaming data between the two consoles so that the two users are playing from the same session of the game. Friends list 316 can also be used in conjunction with message service 320.

In accordance with the technology, a gaming service provider 350 may host a gaming service server 375 to allow a multitude of users on consoles 300A-300X participate in a group game environment based on programmatic content scheduled for participation between a designated start time and a designated end time. The group may be as small as two users and may include hundreds of thousands of users. The gaming service server 350 obtains game data and state information from the console service 302, which it uses to provide information to console users. It will be understood that the gaming service provider 350 and the console service 302 may be integrated into a single service and/or a single server. Alternately, the gaming service 350 may not be managed by the same administrator of the console service 302 or different administrators.

Console 300X illustrates functional components which may be present on each of the consoles 300A-300X. Each console 300A-300X may be of a type such as that illustrated in FIGS. 1 and 2, in which embodiment the functional components may comprise one or more sets of instructions or applications instructing the processor 200 to perform the functions described herein. Such functional components may be implemented in hardware, software or a combination of hardware or software. Moreover, the instructions may be embodied in a computer-readable medium. A computer-readable medium may include both volatile and nonvolatile, removable and non-removable media implemented in any method or technology for storage of information such as computer-readable instructions, data structures, program modules or other data. Computer-readable media includes, but is not limited to, RAM, ROM, EEPROM, flash memory or other memory technology, CD-ROM, digital versatile disks (DVD) or other optical disk storage, magnetic cassettes, magnetic tape, magnetic disk storage or other magnetic storage devices, or any other medium which can be used to store the desired information and which can be accessed by computer 710.

Also shown in FIG. 3 with respect to the gaming service server 350 are gaming status services 322 and game management services 330. The game status services 322 collect user game statistics and tracks which friends of a particular user on one of the consoles 300A-300X are participating or scheduled to participate in an online program game. Game management services provide the gaming environment while actual control over game play is handled by the console service. In addition, the game management services provide organization of the program game content, breaking down the games into different sections, episodes, organizing the games into different channels, and ensuring that localized content is directed to the proper console and user.

In accordance with the technology, scheduled programmatic game content is delivered to a console or other processing device at a specific time and for a specific duration. A multiplayer game is scheduled in a manner similar to a broadcast television program—the game has a fixed start and a fixed end time. Users select to participate in the game either within a pre-game window in advance of the scheduled programmatic time. When a user selects to participate in a game, the game management services and a programmatic content engine on the console ensures that the user has the necessary content and application programs in order to participate in the game.

Game status services 322 allow a user to determine which of the user's friends might be participating in an upcoming game. Also included in the gaming is a scheduling database 314 and a library of game applications 312. As discussed below, game play in a scheduled game is enabled by a game application. Game applications may comprise instructions executed on each of the consoles to allow one or more users interacting with the console to participate in the scheduled programmatic game. Application instructions necessary to enable game play an be downloaded in whole or in part when a user schedules activity in a prescheduled game, or retrieved from a storage medium in the console. Schedule database 314 tracks both the programmatic content scheduling—when particular game activities are to occur and end—as well as which users have indicated a willingness or desire to participate in the scheduled game. Information from the schedule database 314 can be used to provide status services to each console to indicate which of the user's particular friends might be participating in a programmatic game.

Console 300X illustrates functional components present on a console or other processing device in order to implement the technology discussed herein. Console 300X (as well as consoles 300A-300X) will include one or more game applications 360A-360D. The game applications may be delivered via a download from the game applications data store 312, may be present in non-volatile memory such as Flash ROM memory 204 in the console, or may be provided on a computer storage medium such as a CDROM, or other disk. A programmatic content engine 380 is also utilized on the console. The programmatic content engine provides a game selection interface (not shown), parental control functionality, game reminder functionality, and friend or game status updates. The programmatic content engine may also provide a set of foundational components such as libraries, methods, tools and data which are re-usable by programmatic content games running on the console.

When games are executed on the console, new game events 355 occur when a user provides input to the game, or as a result of other user's input to the game being returned to the console. Events caused by user activity on the console are transmitted to the console service 302 which manages the game playing function.
FIG. 4 illustrates exemplary steps for awarding participation-based prizes and skill-based prizes to the users participating in the multiplayer game. For the sole purpose of describing the technology herein, the users participating in the multiplayer game are divided into three categories of players: a contestant, a group of users competing against the contestant (the "group") and viewers. The contestant is a single user. The group consists of at least two users (e.g., that are not the contestant). Viewers consist of at least one other user that is not either the contestant or in the group. The multiplayer game includes multiple rounds, wherein a trivia question is presented in each round to the users participating in the game. The contestant, the group, and viewers all participate in answering the question presented in each round of the game. The trivia game described above is exemplary only, and is not intended to limit the scope of the technology described herein. Other types of multiplayer games, whereby a user competes against at least one other user, are within the scope of the technology described herein. The steps shown in FIG. 4 will be described with reference to a single user. However, it is understood that these steps are performed for each user participating in the multiplayer game.

At step 402, gaming service provider 350 delivers a first question with answer choices to the user’s game console 300. As will be described in more detail later, the question is presented to each player first followed by three answer choices. In some embodiments, each answer choice is presented individually to the user with a pause between answer choices (e.g., answer choice X is presented, 0.75 second pause, answer choice A is presented, 0.75 second pause, answer choice B is presented). This way, a user has the opportunity to read the questions before the answer choices are presented. The user also has a small window of time to select the answer choice just displayed before the next answer choice is presented. At step 404, console service 302 determines if the player participating in the game answered the question provided at step 402.

If the user answered the question, gaming service provider 350 awards a participation-based prize to the player, at step 406. A player receives a participation-based prize regardless of whether the user answers the questions correctly or not. The participation prize incentivizes a user to participate in the game. In some embodiments, the participation-based prize awarded at step 406 is a sweepstakes entry. In some embodiments, console service 302 creates a participation-based prize record associated with the user for every question the user answers, and stores the record in records database 314. In other embodiments, a single participation-based prize record associated with the user keeps track of a running total of the number of participation-based prizes the user has been awarded. Gaming service provider 350 conducts a sweepstakes drawing during the season. Any number of sweepstakes drawings may occur. In some embodiments, a user is limited to a predetermined number of sweepstakes entries per drawing. In other embodiments, a user receives a sweepstakes entry for every question answered.

At step 408, gaming service provider 350 determines if the answer choice selected by the user correctly answers the question provided at step 402. If the answer choice selected by the user correctly answers the question, gaming service provider 350 awards an accuracy score plus any bonuses that the user may have qualified for, at step 410. In some embodiments, the accuracy score is 400 points. Of course, the accuracy score may comprise any number of points. The bonuses a user may receive include, but are not limited to, a speed bonus, a streak bonus and, if the user is the contestant or in the group, a prize ladder bonus. These bonuses will be described in more detail later herein. The bonuses mentioned above are exemplary only, and are not intended to limit the scope of the technology described herein. It is within the scope of the technology described herein to award any type and number of bonuses to a user.

At step 412, gaming service provider 350 determines if the round of questions is completed. For example, the web-based game may consist of ten rounds of questions, where one question is provided per round. In this instance, gaming service provider 350 determines whether the last question provided at step 402 was the tenth question presented to the user. If not, the next question in the round is presented to the user participating in the game, at step 402. Steps 404-412 are then repeated.

If, however, it is determined, at step 412, that the question provided in step 402 was the tenth question, skill-based prizes are awarded to the user, if the user qualified for any skill prizes at all, at step 414. Skill-based prizes are awarded based on the total score and bonuses awarded to the user throughout the game, and will be discussed in more detail later herein.

If, at step 404, gaming service provider 350 determines that the user did not correctly answer the question, gaming service provider 350 determines if the player is the contestant, at step 416. As discussed above, the contestant is eliminated from the game upon incorrectly answering (including not answering) a single question in the game. If the user is not the contestant, gaming service provider 350 determines if the question presented at step 402 was the tenth question, at step 412. If, however, the user that incorrectly answered the question is the contestant, gaming service provider 350 determines that the game is over because the contestant has been eliminated from the game, and awards skill-based prizes to the users that qualify for the prizes, at step 418.

If a user answers the question (step 404), but did not answer the question correctly (step 408), gaming service provider 350 again determines if the user is the contestant, at step 420, to determine if the game is over. If the user that incorrectly answered the question is the contestant, gaming service provider 350 determines that the game is over because the contestant has been eliminated from the game, and awards skill-based prizes to qualifying users, at step 418. If, however, the user that incorrectly answered the question is not the contestant, gaming service provider 350 determines a speed bonus to award to the user, at step 422. FIG. 5, described later herein, provides additional detail of determining a speed bonus. Gaming service provider 350 then proceeds to determine if the game is over (e.g., last question was the tenth question), at step 412.

FIG. 5 illustrates exemplary steps for determining the speed bonus at steps 410, 422 in FIG. 4. At step 502, console service 302 receives the answer choice selected by the user. At step 504, it is determined whether the answer choice selected by the user correctly answers the question. If the answer choice selected by the user correctly answers the question, it is determined whether the user selected the correct answer within an “instant answer” bonus time, at step 506. If the user selected the correct answer choice within this time, an instant answer bonus is awarded to the user, at step 516. If the user selected the correct answer choice, but not within the instant bonus time period, the use is not awarded
the instant answer bonus. The user may still qualify for a bonus associated with answering the question however. At step 508, it is determined whether the user selected the correct answer choice prior to a question timer began. If the user selected the correct answer choice prior to the start of the question timer, the user is awarded a pre-timer bonus in addition to receiving an accuracy score (step 410 in FIG. 4). At step 512, a total speed bonus is determined. For example, the bonuses awarded to the user in FIG. 5 are cumulative. Thus, if a user is awarded an “instant answer” bonus and a pre-timer bonus, the total speed bonus equals the “instant answer” bonus plus the pre-timer bonus. If the user selects the correct answer choice, but not within the “instant answer” time period of before the answer timer started, the user is awarded only a timer bonus (in addition to the accuracy score), at step 514.

[0059] FIG. 6 provides an exemplary speed bonus timeline for determining an “instant answer” bonus, a timer bonus and a pre-timer bonus. In the FIG. 6 example, a question is first presented to a user participating in the game. Three answer choices, X, A and B, are displayed one at a time to the user. Answer choice X is displayed to the user, and remains the only displayed answer choice for 0.75 seconds. Answer choice A is then presented to the user. Answer choices X and A remain the only two answer choices available to the user for another 0.75 seconds. Answer choice B is then presented to the user. Answer choices X, A and B are displayed to the user for another 1.75 seconds until a four second timer begins. A user must select answer choice X, A or B before the four second timer expires. Otherwise, it is determined that the user did not select an answer choice. The time period mentioned above and shown in FIG. 6 are exemplary only, and are not intended to limit the scope of the technology described herein. More than (or fewer than) three answer choices may be presented to a user, answer choices may remain displayed to the user for a longer or shorter period of time, the timer may be longer than four seconds, and so on.

[0060] FIG. 6 also illustrates bonuses that a user may receive based on when the user selects an answer choice. FIG. 6 illustrates that there are several bonuses a user may receive depending on how fast the user selects an answer choice. These points are rewarded to a user regardless of whether the user selects the answer choice that correctly answers the question. In other words, these bonus points are awarded in addition to the accuracy score awarded if the user selects the answer choice that correctly answers the question. As discussed above (steps 506-508), if a user selects the answer choice that correctly answers the question within an “instant answer” time period, the user is awarded an “instant answer” bonus. The “instant answer” time period in FIG. 6 is shown as 0.75 seconds for each answer question. In other words, at step 506 in FIG. 5, it is determined whether the user selected the answer choice (e.g., answer choice X, A or B) within 0.75 seconds of the answer choice being displayed to the user.

[0061] A user may also receive a pre-timer bonus worth of 100 points if the user selects an answer choice prior to the start of the 4 second timer. FIG. 6 illustrates that a user may also receive a speed bonus of up to 100 points based on how fast the user selects an answer choice after it is displayed. As shown in FIG. 6, the speed bonus associated with answer choice X is a sliding scale that begins at 100 points when answer choice X is first displayed and declines towards 0 points when the 4 second timer begins. Thus, if a user selects answer choice X after the 0.75 second “instant answer” time period has passed (and answer choice A has been displayed), but before the 4 second timer begins, the user receives some portion of the 100 point speed bonus. The same is true for selecting answer choices A and B.

[0062] FIG. 7 illustrates exemplary steps for determining a streak bonus, which is determined at step 410 in FIG. 4 and is awarded to a user for each round of the game. A streak bonus is intended to reward a user that consecutively correctly answers more than one question. At step 702, it is determined whether the user selected the correct answer choice that correctly answers the question. If the user selected an answer choice that incorrectly answers a question, no streak bonus is awarded, at step 704. The steps in FIG. 7 will then be repeated in response to the next question. If, however, the user selected the correct answer choice that correctly answers the question, the number of question consecutively correctly answered by the user is determined at step 706. At step 708, a streak bonus is awarded to the user.

[0063] In some embodiments, a streak bonus increases with every consecutive question answered correctly. For example, a user may receive a streak bonus of 200 points for answering correctly two questions in a row, 300 points for correctly answering three questions in a row, and so on. A streak bonus is awarded in each round of the game. In some embodiments, a streak bonus of 1000 points is awarded to a user that correctly answers ten questions in a row, and 100 points for each question correctly answered after that. In other embodiments, the streak bonus does not cap out at 1000 points and keeps increasing with every correctly answered question. These point totals are exemplary only, and are not intended to limit the scope of the technology described herein. A streak bonus may also consist of something other than points. For example, a streak bonus may comprise an arcade game or other type of prizes.

[0064] FIG. 8 illustrates exemplary steps for determining a ladder bonus, which is determined at step 410 in FIG. 4. A ladder bonus consists of a pool of prizes that may be awarded only to the contestant or a user that is within the group competing against the contestant. As mentioned above, the contestant competes against the users in the group and is eliminated from the game upon incorrectly answering a question. At step 802, it is determined that the contestant answered the question. If the answer choice selected by the contestant correctly answers the question (determined at step 804), the number of users in the group that incorrectly answered the question is determined, at step 806. An award, which is based on the number of users in the group that incorrectly answered the question, is determined at step 808.

[0065] At step 810, it is determined whether the contestant has exited the game. If the contestant has not exited the game, steps 802-808 are repeated. If the contestant exited the game at step 810, the game has ended and the prizes awarded to all participants in the game (described above) are delivered to the users, at step 812. Using the trivia game example provided above, prizes awarded to the contestant, users in the group competing against the contestant and users in the crowd are delivered to each user, at step 812. At step 814, the game concludes.

[0066] If the contestant incorrectly answered the question presented at step 802 (determined at step 804), the contestant is eliminated, at step 816. At step 818, the total number of users in the group competing against the contestant is determined. At step 820, a prize is determined to award to each of the users remaining in the group after the contestant was
eliminated. As will be discussed in more detail later, the prize is based on the number of remaining users. At step 822, the prize determined at step 820 is delivered to each user in the group.

[0067] FIG. 9 illustrates an exemplary prize ladder record 900. Prize ladder records 902-922 each include a Group Eliminated field 924, a Player Wins field 926, and a Group Players field 928. Group Eliminated field 924 indicates the total number of users in the group eliminated (running total) in the game. Player Wins field 926 indicates the number of points awarded to the contestant when the number of user eliminated reaches the total in field 924. Field 928 indicates the prize awarded to each remaining user in the group when the contestant is eliminated from the game. As discussed above, if the contestant is not eliminated for a round, the number of users in the group eliminated from the round is determined. Using an example where 42 users in the group have been eliminated in the game after the last round of questions, record 910 is identified because more than 40 users in the group are eliminated, but less than 50 users in the group have been eliminated. Thus, the contestant, if they exited the game at the end of the round, would be entitled to a prize ladder bonus of 800 points. If, however, the contestant was eliminated from the game at this point, the users in the group would be awarded one arcade game according to record 908.

[0068] The foregoing detailed description of the inventive system has been presented for purposes of illustration and description. It is not intended to be exhaustive or to limit the inventive system to the precise form disclosed. Many modifications and variations are possible in light of the above teaching. The described embodiments were chosen in order to best explain the principles of the inventive system and its practical application to thereby enable others skilled in the art to best utilize the inventive system in various embodiments and with various modifications as are suited to the particular use contemplated. It is intended that the scope of the inventive system be defined by the claims appended hereto.

We claim:

1. A computer-implemented method for awarding prizes to a plurality of users participating in a multiuser game via a user console, wherein the multiuser game includes multiple rounds of trivia questions, comprising the steps of:
(a) electronically delivering a trivia question and a plurality of answer choices to a game console associated with a user participating in the multiuser game;
(b) receiving, from the game console, a selection of one of the plurality of answer choices delivered in step (a);
(c) upon receiving a selected answer choice in step (b) from the game console, automatically awarding a participation-based prize to the user associated with the console;
(d) when the answer choice received in step (b) correctly answers the question, awarding an accuracy score and at least one answer bonus to the user associated with the console;
(e) when the answer choice received in step (b) incorrectly answers the question, awarding only a speed bonus to the user associated with the console; and
(f) when the multiuser game has ended, awarding users participating in the multiuser game with one or more skill-based prizes, wherein the skill-based prizes are based on a total score that includes the accuracy score and answer bonuses awarded in step (d) and the speed bonus awarded in step (e) for each round of the multiuser game.

2. The computer-implemented method as recited in claim 1, wherein step (c) of automatically awarding a participation-based prize to the user associated with the console comprises the steps of:
(a) generating a sweepstakes record;
(b) identifying a gamertag associated with the user; and
(c) associating the sweepstakes record with the gamertag.

3. The computer-implemented method as recited in claim 1, wherein step (d) of awarding an accuracy score and at least one answer bonus to the user associated with the console comprises the steps of:
(d) determining a speed bonus;
(e) determining a streak bonus; and
(f) determining a prize ladder bonus.

4. The computer-implemented method as recited in claim 3, wherein determining a speed bonus comprises the steps of:
(a) determining a period of time that expired between the answer choice being displayed to the user and selection by the user of the answer choice;
(b) determining whether the period of time qualifies for an instant answer bonus; and
(c) awarding a streak bonus to the user on the number of consecutive answer choices previously selected by the user.

5. The computer-implemented method as recited in claim 3, wherein determining a streak bonus comprises the steps of:
(a) determining whether the answer timer began prior to the user selecting an answer choice;
(b) when the answer choice is selected prior to the start of the answer timer, awarding a pre-timer bonus; and
(c) when the answer choice is selected after the start of the answer timer, awarding a timer bonus.

6. The computer-implemented method as recited in claim 3, wherein awarding a pre-timer bonus comprises the steps of:
(a) determining whether the answer timer began prior to the user selecting an answer choice;
(b) when the answer choice is selected prior to the start of the answer timer, awarding a pre-timer bonus; and
(c) when the answer choice is selected after the start of the answer timer, awarding a timer bonus.

7. The computer-implemented method as recited in claim 3, wherein determining a streak bonus comprises the steps of:
(a) determining a period of time that expired between the answer choice being displayed to the user and selection by the user of the answer choice;
(b) determining whether the period of time qualifies for an instant answer bonus; and
(c) awarding a streak bonus to the user on the number of consecutive answer choices previously selected by the user.

8. A computer-implemented method for awarding prizes to a plurality of users participating in a multiuser game via a user console, wherein each round of the multiuser game presents a trivia question to each user, comprising the steps of:
(a) electronically delivering a trivia question and a plurality of answer choices to a game console associated with a user participating in the multiuser game;
(b) receiving, from the game console, a selection of one of the plurality of answer choices delivered in step (a); and
(c) upon receiving a selected answer choice in step (b) from the game console, automatically awarding a participation-based prize to the user associated with the console;
(d) when the answer choice received in step (b) correctly answers the question, awarding an accuracy score and at least one answer bonus to the user associated with the console;
(e) when the answer choice received in step (b) incorrectly answers the question, awarding only a speed bonus to the user associated with the console; and
(f) when the multiuser game has ended, awarding users participating in the multiuser game with one or more skill-based prizes, wherein the skill-based prizes are based on a total score that includes the accuracy score and answer bonuses awarded in step (d) and the speed bonus awarded in step (e) for each round of the multiuser game.

9. The computer-implemented method as recited in 8, further including the steps of:
(d) generating a participation-based prize record representative of the electronic participation-based prize awarded in step (c);
(e) generating a skill-based prize record representative of the electronic skill-based prize awarded in step (c);
(f) associating the participation-based record and skill-based record with the user; and
(g) storing the participation-based prize record and skill-based prize record in a database.

10. The computer-implemented method as recited in claim 8, wherein automatically awarding an electronic participation-based prize to the user associated with the console comprises the steps of:
generating a sweeps replacement record;
identifying a gamertag associated with the user; and
associating the sweeps record with the gamertag.

11. The computer-implemented method as recited in claim 8, wherein automatically awarding an electronic skill-based prize comprises the steps of:
awarding an accuracy score and at least one answer bonus to the user associated with the console.

12. The computer-implemented method as recited in claim 11, wherein awarding at least one answer bonus comprises the steps of:
determining a speed bonus; and
determining a streak bonus.

13. The computer-implemented method as recited in claim 12, wherein determining a speed bonus comprises the steps of:
determining a period of time that expired between the answer choice being displayed to the user and selection by the user of the answer choice; determining whether the period of time qualifies for an instant answer bonus; and
when an answer choice is selected before an answer timer began, awarding a pre-timer bonus.

14. The computer-implemented method as recited in claim 12, wherein determining a streak bonus comprises the steps of:
determining the number of consecutive answer choices previously selected by the user that correctly answered the question presented in the prior round; and
awarding a streak bonus to the user based on the number of consecutive answer choices previously selected by the user.

15. The computer-implemented method as recited in claim 12, wherein awarding a pre-timer bonus comprises the steps of:
determining whether the answer timer began prior to the user selecting an answer choice; when the answer choice is selected prior to the start of the answer timer, awarding a pre-timer bonus; and
when the answer choice is selected after the start of the answer timer, awarding a timer bonus.

16. A system for awarding prizes to a plurality of users each participating in a multiplayer game via a user console, wherein each round of the multiplayer game presents a trivia question to each user, comprising:
a game service server configured to,
deliver, per round of the game, a trivia question and a plurality of answer choices to a game console server associated with a user participating in the game;
receive, from the game console server, a selection of one of the plurality of answer choices delivered to the game console server;
upon receiving a selected answer choice in step (b) from the game console, automatically award an electronic participation-based prize and a skill-based prize to the user associated with the console;
the game console server configured to,
deliver the trivia question and plurality of answer choices received from the game service server to the user participating in the game;
receive, from the user participating in the game, a selection of one of the plurality of answer choices;
associate a participation-based prize record representing the participation-base prize awarded by the game service server with the user;
associate a skill-based prize record representing the skill-base prize awarded by the game service server with the user; and
store the participation-based record and skill-based record in a database.

17. The system as recited in claim 16, wherein the game console server associates a participation-based prize record representing the participation-base prize awarded by the game service server with the user by:
identifying a gamertag associated with the user; and
associating the participation-based prize record with the gamertag.

18. The system as recited in claim 16, wherein the game console server associates a skill-based prize record representing the skill-base prize awarded by the game service server with the user by:
upon receiving a selection of an answer choice, award a total score for the round to the user associated with the console, wherein the total score includes an accuracy score and at least one answer bonus;
generate a total score record; and
associate the total score record with the user's gamertag.

19. The system as recited in claim 18, wherein the at least one answer bonus includes a speed bonus, a streak bonus, and a timer bonus.

20. The system as recited in claim 19, wherein the game console service determines a speed bonus by:
determining a period of time that expired between the answer choice being displayed to the user and selection by the user of the answer choice;
determining whether the period of time qualifies for an instant answer bonus; and
when an answer choice is selected before an answer timer began, awarding a pre-timer bonus.