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(54) **METHOD, SYSTEM, AND MEDIA FOR ENCOURAGING CONSUMERS TO PARTICIPATE IN PROMOTIONS**

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

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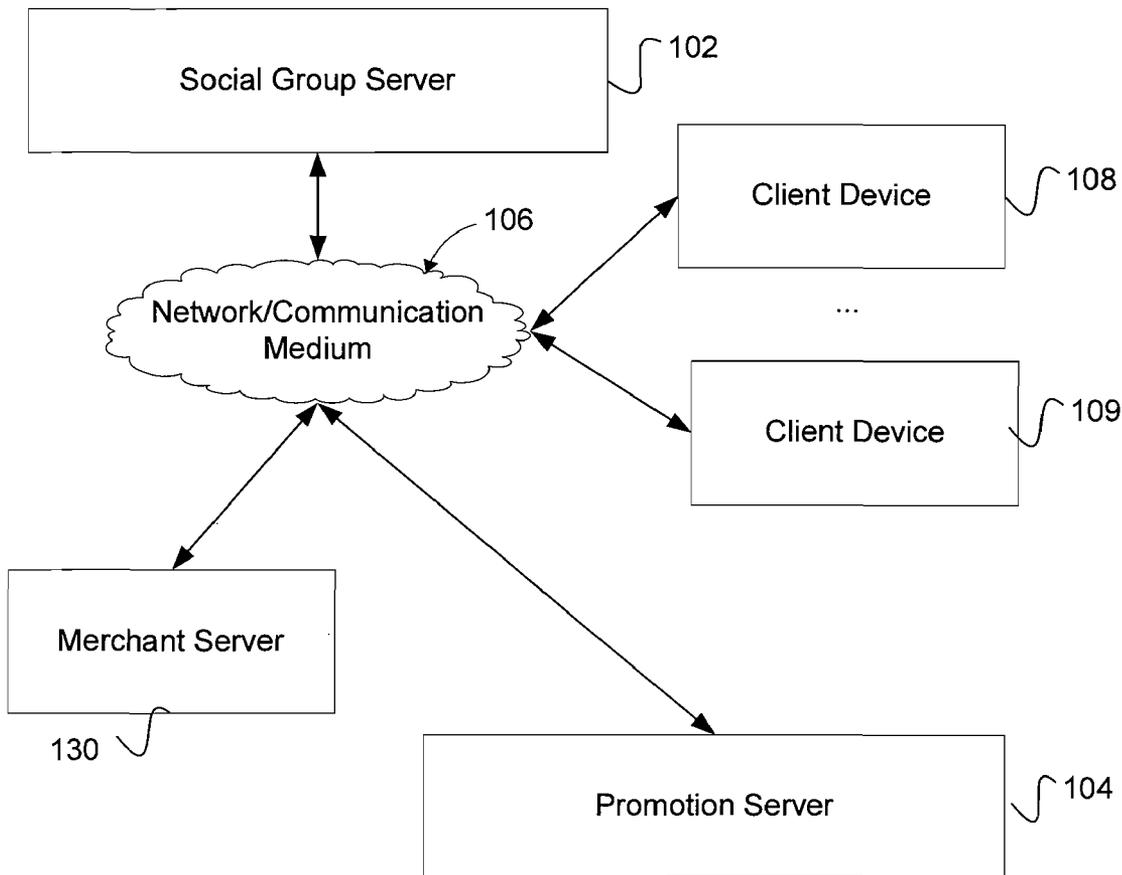
A computer-implemented method, system, apparatus, and media directed to improving user activity for an entity. A social group comprised of members is established and each member of the social group is provided with a game item that includes a unique identifier for participation in a promotion, wherein each provided member has a chance to win a first benefit based on the unique identifier. The unique identifier is associated with the promotion, the social group, and an associated participating member of the social group that participates in the promotion. A second benefit is provided to all participating members of the social group when at least one member of the social group wins the first benefit as an incentive for the members of the social group to participate in the promotion.

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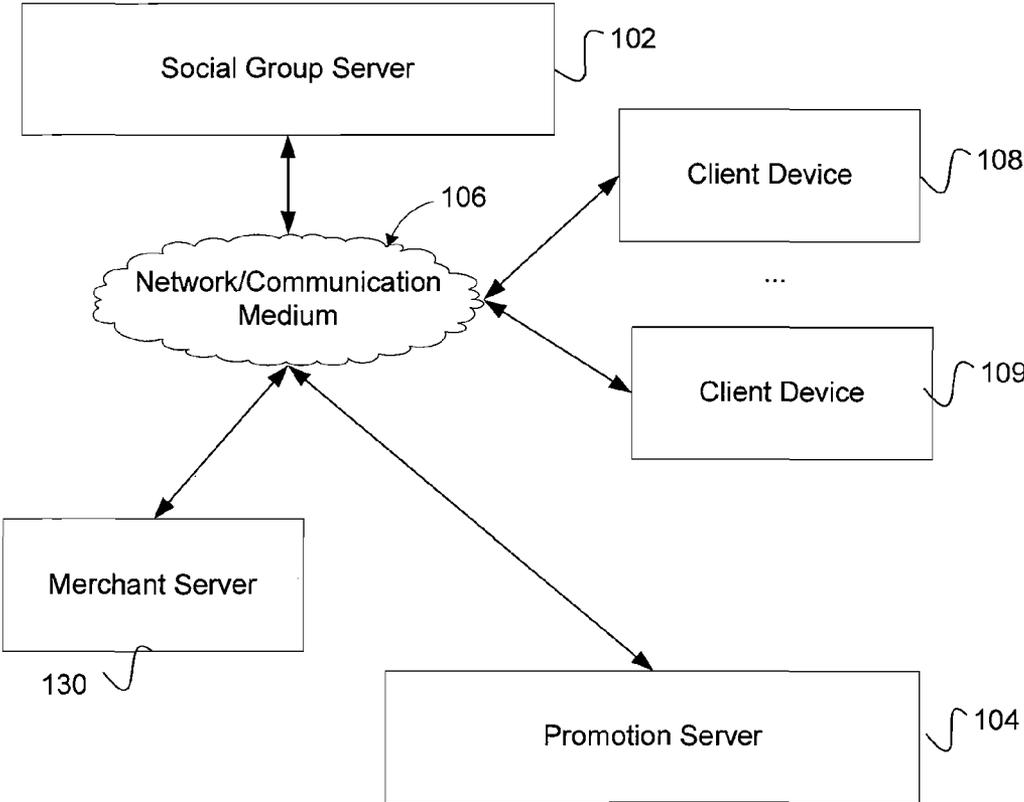


FIG. 1

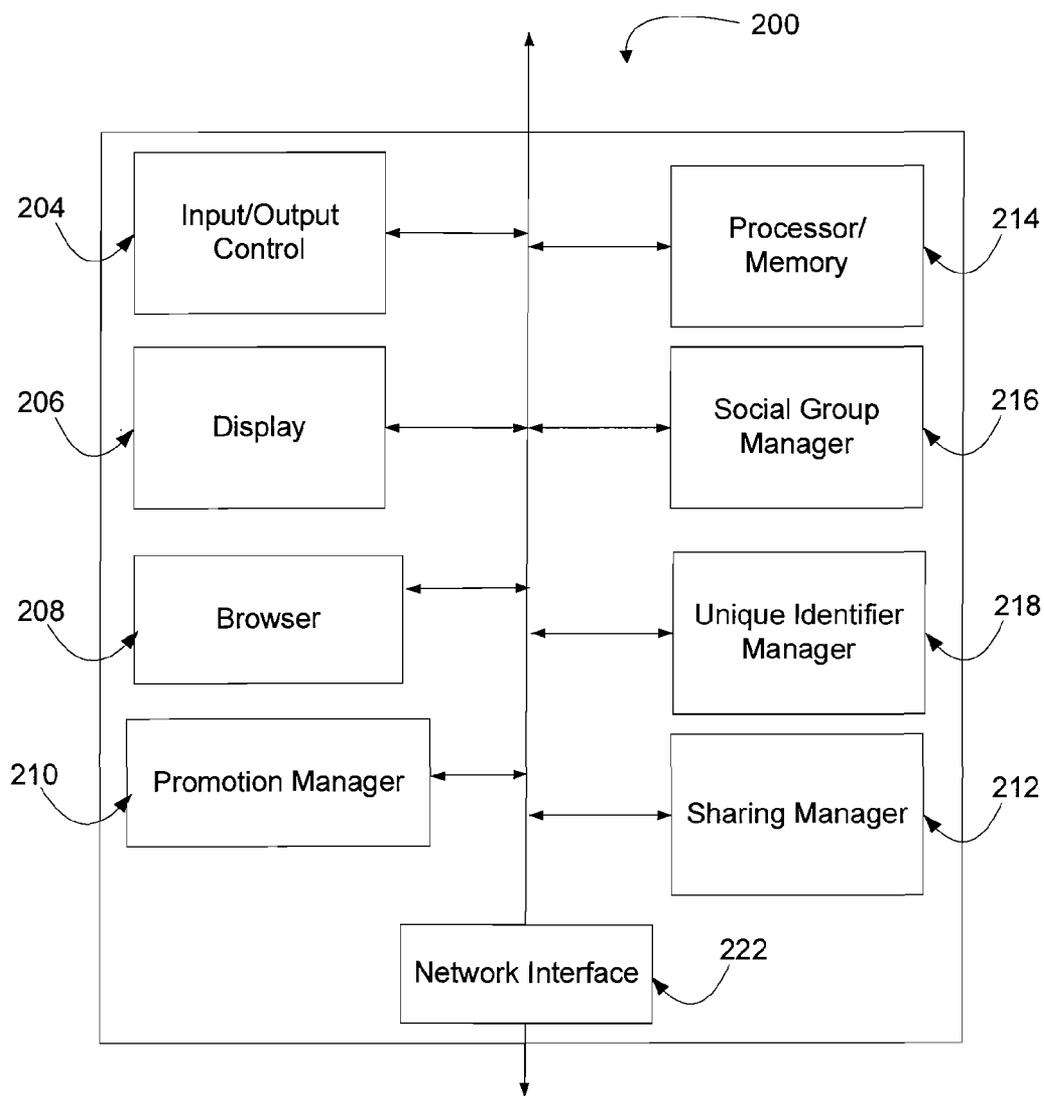


FIG. 2

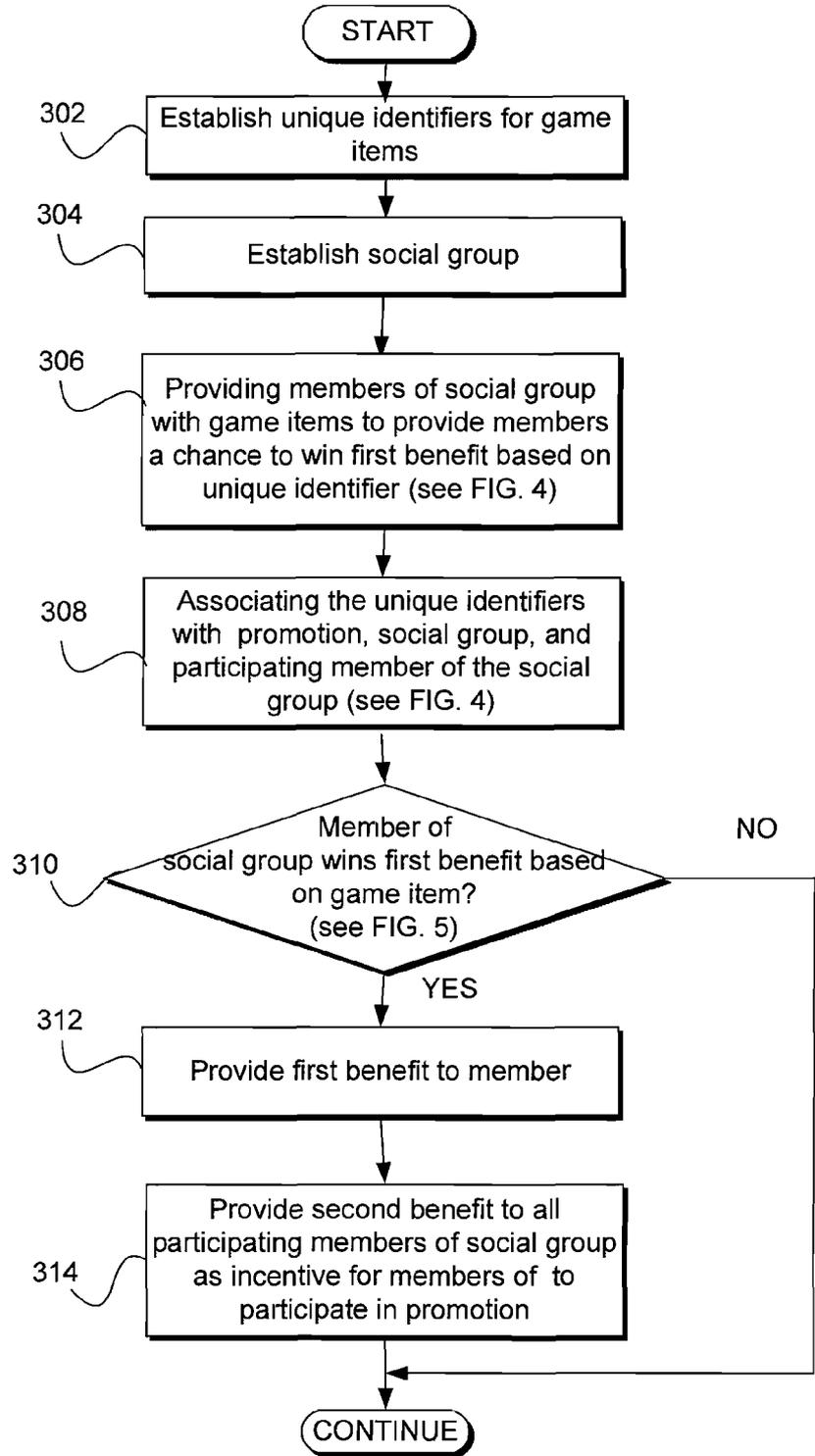


FIG. 3

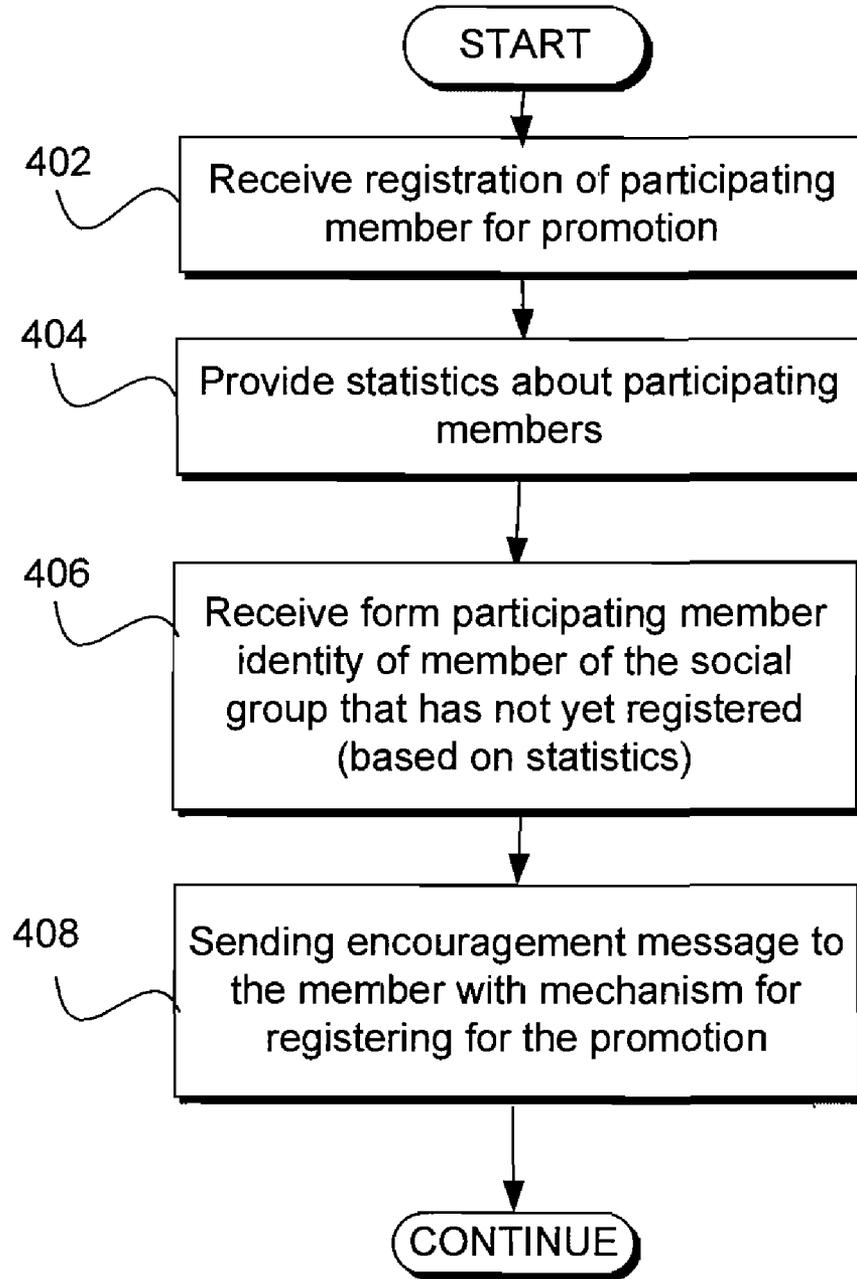


FIG. 4

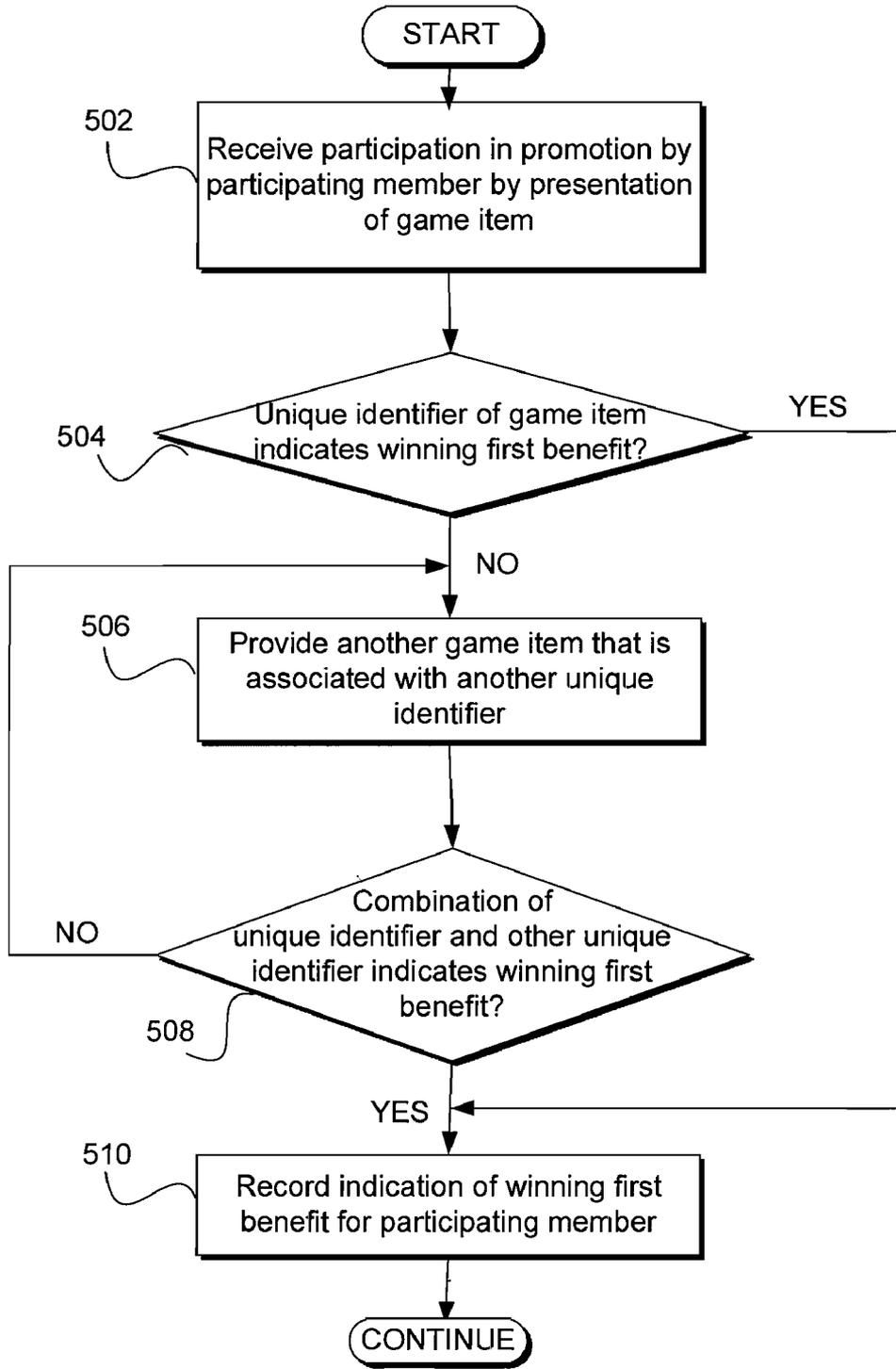


FIG. 5

METHOD, SYSTEM, AND MEDIA FOR ENCOURAGING CONSUMERS TO PARTICIPATE IN PROMOTIONS

TECHNICAL FIELD

[0001] The present invention relates to a method, system, apparatus, and media for improving user activity for an entity. More particularly, but not exclusively, the present invention relates to managing promotions including sweepstakes promotions.

BACKGROUND

[0002] Promotions provide incentives for individuals to enter a contest to win a prize. Promotions are often coupled with improving user activity for an entity, such as visiting the business to enter and/or determine whether the individual has won the prize. However, incentives for single individuals may not provide as entertaining a promotion because each individual is trying to only win for themselves. Moreover, building customer loyalty and foot traffic on an individual by individual basis may be time consuming and hit-and-miss because individuals may change geographic locations away from businesses that provide the promotions. It is with respect to these considerations and others that the present invention is directed.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0003] The invention relates to a computer implemented method for improving user activity for an entity. The method includes the steps of establishing a social group comprised of members; providing each of a plurality of the members of the social group with a game item that includes a unique identifier for participation in a promotion, wherein each provided member has a chance to win a first benefit based on the unique identifier; associating, by a computer system and in computer memory, the unique identifiers with the promotion, the social group, and an associated participating member of the social group that participates in the promotion; and providing a second benefit to all participating members of the social group when at least one member of the social group wins the first benefit as an incentive for the members of the social group to participate in the promotion.

[0004] In one embodiment, the second benefit increases as a number of members that participate in the promotion increases. The entity can include a business or a non-profit organization. The promotion can be a sweepstake promotion and the game item can be an instant win scratch off card, and wherein the promotion can be a time-limited promotion. The game items can be configured to be distributed by hand, email, postal mail, call center, text messages, within a paycheck, within an envelope, or as a perforate portion of another item. In one embodiment, the social group can include individuals associated with a physical address or an online group.

[0005] In one embodiment, providing each of a plurality of the members of the social group with the game item can include providing the game item when the members donate to the entity or pledge to donate to the entity, wherein the social group comprises donors to the entity or a subset of the donors associated with a physical address or an online group. The method may also include providing a portion of the second benefit or the first benefit to the entity.

[0006] In a preferred embodiment, the game item includes a game piece, a token, or a card carrying alphanumeric char-

acters, a computer chip that enables providing the unique identifiers, a receipt or coupon for a business that carries unique information.

[0007] In yet another embodiment, the first or second benefits each comprise an award, a gift, a prize, a coupon for use on a future purchase, an instant win prize, a discount or rebate for a current purchase, an online prize, a prize realizable within a day of winning, or a prize that is redeemed at a physical location.

[0008] The method can also include receiving a participation in the promotion by the participating members by presenting the game item to a business. In one embodiment, the presenting is performed at a business location, on a website, or at a dealer or showroom location. The method can further include providing another game item to a particular participating member when the game item of the particular participating member is presented at a physical location of the business. The other game item can include another unique identifier configured to be used in combination with the unique identifier of the presented game item to determine whether the particular participating member has won the first benefit and to provide the particular participating member (a) another chance to win the first benefit (b) an increase in the chance to win the first benefit, or (c) another increase in the first benefit.

[0009] In one embodiment, the providing of the second benefit can include receiving a registration of the participating member for the promotion using a promotion manager which comprises a web site or a point of sale system at a physical location for receiving the entry; generating a determination by the computer system in response to receiving the registration, whether the participating member is a winner based on an associated unique identifier for the participating member; providing a notification of whether the participating member is a personal winner based on the determination; and providing another notification of whether the social group is a group winner of the additional benefit based on the determination.

[0010] In yet another embodiment, the method can include receiving an identity of a member of the social group that has not yet registered for the promotion from a member of the social group that has registered for the promotion; and sending an encouragement to the member with a message, wherein the message comprises a mechanism for registering for the promotion. The method can further include providing a view of statistics about the participating members; and sharing an encouragement to participate in the promotion to members of the social group who are not part of the participating members.

[0011] The invention also relates to a system for improving user activity for an entity. The system includes a server configured to perform actions. The actions includes establishing a social group comprised of members; providing each of a plurality of the members of the social group with a game item that includes a unique identifier for participation in a promotion, wherein each provided member has a chance to win a first benefit based on the unique identifier; associating the unique identifiers with the promotion, the social group, and an associated participating member of the social group that participates in the promotion; and providing a second benefit to all participating members of the social group when at least one member of the social group wins the first benefit as an incentive for the members of the social group to participate in the promotion.

[0012] The system can include a client device configured to perform actions. The actions can include receiving a registration of a particular participating member for the promotion, wherein the registration comprises a combination of at least two of an email address, a name, a mailing address, or an Internet Protocol address of the particular participating member.

[0013] In one embodiment, associating the unique identifiers with the promotion, the social group, and the associated participating member is configured to occur before determining whether the at least one member of the social group has won the first benefit.

[0014] The system can further include a sharing manager configured to perform actions. The actions can include receiving an identity of a member of the social group that has not yet registered for the promotion from a member of the social group that has registered for the promotion; and sending an encouragement to the member with a message, wherein the message comprises a mechanism for registering for the promotion.

[0015] The invention also relates to a processor readable media for improving user activity for an entity, comprising instructions that when executed by a processor causes the processor to perform actions. The actions include establishing a social group comprised of members; providing each of a plurality of the members of the social group with a game item that includes a unique identifier for participation in a promotion, wherein each provided member has a chance to win a first benefit based on the unique identifier; associating the unique identifiers with the promotion, the social group, and an associated participating member of the social group that participates in the promotion; and providing a second benefit to all participating members of the social group when at least one member of the social group wins the benefit as an incentive for the members of the social group to participate in the promotion.

[0016] In one embodiment, the social group comprises individuals working at a business, at a geographical location or office, having an interest in common, a business, a social organization, an online social network, members of an online forum, a governmental group, associated with a domain name, or associated temporarily based on geographic proximity or group activity.

[0017] In one embodiment, the actions can include establishing the unique identifiers based on non-sequential, alphanumeric codes that reduce the chances of guessing a valid unique identifier to a threshold percentage to encourage members to participate expeditiously by limiting the unique identifiers to a finite number to increase a participant's chances of winning.

[0018] The invention also relates to a method, system, apparatus, and media for improving user activity for an entity. The method, system, apparatus, and media may be configured to perform providing each of a plurality of players with a game item that includes a unique identifier for participation in a promotion, wherein each provided player has a chance to win a first benefit based on the unique identifier; associating, by a computer system and in computer memory, the unique identifiers with the promotion and an associated participating player that participates in the promotion; and providing another game item to a particular participating player when the game item of the particular participating player is presented at a physical location of the business, wherein the other game item includes another unique identifier configured to be

used in combination with the unique identifier of the presented game item to determine whether the particular participating player has won the first benefit and to provide the particular participating player (a) another chance to win the first benefit (b) an increase in the chance to win the first benefit, or (c) another increase in the first benefit.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0019] Further features of the invention, its nature and various advantages will be more apparent from the following detailed description, taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings in which like reference characters refer to like parts throughout, and in which:

[0020] FIG. 1 shows a block diagram for system for providing for improving user activity for an entity in accordance with one embodiment of the invention;

[0021] FIG. 2 shows a block diagram for one or more apparatuses for improving user activity for an entity in accordance with one embodiment of the invention;

[0022] FIG. 3 shows an example of a process for improving user activity for an entity in accordance with one embodiment of the invention;

[0023] FIG. 4 shows an example of a process for providing management for an electronically administered promotion in accordance with one embodiment of the invention; and

[0024] FIG. 5 shows a process for determining whether participating members participate have won a benefit in accordance with one embodiment of the invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF EMBODIMENTS

[0025] As used herein, the term "component" refers to computer implemented mechanisms, including software combined with hardware such as a computer process and/or computer memory, or purely hardware mechanisms such as an application-specific integrated circuit (ASIC), or the like.

[0026] FIG. 1 shows a block diagram for system for providing for improving user activity for an entity in accordance with one embodiment of the invention. As shown, the system of FIG. 1 includes social group server 102, client devices 108-109, promotion server 104, and merchant server 130. These devices are in communication with each other over a network/communication medium 106. The network can be the Internet, a wireless network, or the like.

[0027] Promotion server 104 includes any component for managing an electronic promotion for a social group and each members of the social group. Promotion server 104 may provide a game item to provide a chance to win a first benefit over to each client devices 108-109 for a plurality of the members of the social group over network 106, associate the unique identifiers with the promotion, the social group, and an associated participating member of the social group that participates in the promotion; and/or provide over network 106 a second benefit to each of client device 108-109 associated with member of the social group when at least one member of the social group wins the first benefit as an incentive for the members of the social group to participate in the promotion.

[0028] Client devices 108-109 include any component for providing access to information about a promotion, including registering for a promotion using a game item, determining whether a person is a winner of a promotion, or the like. In one embodiment, client devices 108-109 may send messages requesting information about promotions to promotion server

104 and may receive information about the promotions. In one embodiment, the operations of promotion server **104** and/or **108-109** include the steps of FIGS. **3-5**.

[**0029**] In a preferred embodiment, promotion server **104** can register respondents (e.g., members of a social group) at a particular location to a business to business direct mailer featuring game items, including instant win scratch off cards or similar promotions. Business to business direct mail can be sent, in which a supply of game cards can be included. The mailer can be sent via email, postal mail, through a social network such as Facebook, over social group server **102**, or the like. The quantity of game cards in each mailer can be sufficient that each employee at the recipient location can receive a game card if distributed by hand, included in paycheck/pay stub envelopes, interoffice envelopes, torn from perforated supplies in a common areas such as a company lunch room/cafeteria, or the like. The return on investment (ROI) of a promotion may be increased because of the bulk mailing of the game items to an address, as opposed to sending many mailings.

[**0030**] In one embodiment, each game card can have a unique identifier (e.g., a unique alphanumeric code). The mailer can instruct the receiving party to go to a website (e.g., provided by promotion server **104** and/or merchant server **130**) and register themselves and/or their company in a sweepstakes by scratching off one of the enclosed game cards and entering that card's unique code. The sweepstakes promotion may be limited to one entry per person/email address. The recipient can also be instructed to distribute the cards to as many of their co-workers as possible (all, ideally) and to encourage them to register, e.g., by the same method. The incentive to get more people to register is that while the winning sweepstakes code entered can win the grand prize, all other registered sweepstakes entrants from the same business or location as the sweepstakes winner can equally share a cash amount from a prize pool equal to the value of the grand prize. For instance, one employee of a given firm wins a sweepstakes promotional grand prize of a trip for two to Hawaii. The retail value of that prize is \$5,000.00. Ten other people from the same firm as the grand prize winner registered in the sweepstakes each receives \$500 as a result of their co-worker winning, and because they each registered in the same promotional sweepstakes. The benefit to the merchant that is running the sweepstakes is that more people from the social group are encouraged to visit the merchant, thus increasing traffic and sales at the merchant.

[**0031**] Relatively higher value prizes in the sweepstakes, including the grand prize, can be determined to be won by selection from the pool of online registered unique codes. In one embodiment, the cards can have an instant win scratch off area, e.g., which can only be scratched by authorized personnel of the business that sent the mailer, e.g., the advertiser, when the prospect visits their business.

[**0032**] Social group server **102** includes any component configured to provide members of a social group access to a network. Server **102** can be an Internet access point for a business, a social networking website, an online database, an email server, or the like. In one embodiment, server **102** may provide web services to Members of a social group to verify their identity, receive information about promotions, or the like.

[**0033**] Merchant server **130** includes any component for providing goods or services, e.g., over a network. Merchant **130** is also configured to receiving a presentation of a game

item, such as a coupon, (e.g., over network **106**) from one of client devices **108-109** and/or from promotion server **104**. Merchant **130** may verify that the game item has been registered and/or used (e.g., as a discount). In one embodiment, promotion server **104** and merchant server **130** may provide information over a combined interface, such as a web site, a point of sale system at a physical location, or the like.

[**0034**] FIG. **2** shows a block diagram for one or more apparatuses for improving user activity for an entity in accordance with one embodiment of the invention. Device **200** of FIG. **2** can implement any of the components of FIG. **1**, and in particular, client devices **108-109** and/or promotion server **104**. As shown in FIG. **1**, client device **108** is in communication with server **104** over a communication channel. In one embodiment, client devices **108-109** and server **104** can be separate devices in communication over a computer network. The network communications can be via network interface **222**. In one embodiment, client devices **108-109** and server **104** can be combined into the components of device **200**, wherein the client device **108** and server **104** are in communication over a communication interfaces, such as a bus. There can be more or fewer components without departing from the scope of the invention. For example, there can be other processors computing different aspects of the operations of the components of device **200**. In other embodiments, the processor of the client and the server can be the same processor. Also, other communication configurations can also be used besides client-server, such as a peer-to-peer configuration with a plurality of interconnected peers, wherein any node in the peer-to-peer network can perform the actions of the client devices **108-109** or server **104**.

[**0035**] As shown, device **200** comprises components in communication with each other, including input/output control **204**, processor/memory **214**, display **206** and browser **208**. Input/output control **204** provides an interface for entering user commands and/or receiving feedback from the device. The control **204** can comprise a keyboard, mouse, sound output, haptic output, visual output, etc. Processor/memory **214** includes any computing component and/or computer memory component. For example, the processor includes any device for performing computerized operations, such as running a program based on processor-readable instructions stored within a memory such as RAM, ROM, EEPROM, hard-disk drive, etc. Browser **208** includes any component for providing a user interface. Browser **208** can provide promotion management. A user can manage the services provided in the browser and over display **206** using input/output control **204**.

[**0036**] Device **200** also includes social group manager **216**, unique identifier manager **218**, promotion manager **210**, and sharing manager **212**. These components are in communication with each other and other components of device **200**.

[**0037**] Social group manager **216** includes any component configured to manage a social group, including establishing a social group comprised of members, providing a first benefit to a winning member, and/or providing a second benefit to all participating members of the social group when at least one member of the social group wins the first benefit as an incentive for the members of the social group to participate in the promotion. Promotion manager **210** may determine the winner of the first benefit and may provide the second benefit to social group manager **216** to provide the second benefit to the participating members. In one embodiment, manager **216** may be configured for receiving a registration of the partici-

pating member for the promotion using promotion manager 210. The participating members' identities may be stored in computer memory 215 by manager 216 and used to identify the members. The members may be notified that they have won the second benefit by a message sent over network interface 222.

[0038] Unique identifier manager 218 includes any component configured to manage a unique identifier, including establishing the unique identifiers based on non-sequential, alphanumeric codes that reduce the chances of guessing a valid unique identifier to a threshold percentage to encourage members to participate expeditiously by limiting the unique identifiers to a finite number to increase a participant's chances of winning. Unique identifier manager 218 may provide the unique identifiers to promotion manager 210.

[0039] Promotion manager 210 includes any component for managing an electronic promotion based on unique identifiers, including associating, in computer memory 214, the unique identifiers with the promotion, the social group, and an associated participating member of the social group that participates in the promotion. In one embodiment, the promotion manager 210 may receive the unique identifiers from unique identifier manager 218, initiate creation of the game items with the associated unique identifier, and send information about the game items to social group manager 216 for social group manager 216 to provide such information to the members of the social group. In one embodiment, promotion manager 210's operations may include generating a determination in response to receiving a registration, whether the participating member is a winner based on an associated unique identifier for the participating member; providing a notification of whether the participating member is a personal winner (e.g., to social group manager 216) based on the determination; and providing another notification of whether the social group is a group winner of the additional benefit (e.g., to social group manager 216) based on the determination. In one embodiment, the determination may be generated in real-time and/or scheduled for determination at a later time. In one embodiment, either or both of the notifications can be provided in real-time and/or scheduled for provisioning at a later time.

[0040] Sharing manager 212 includes any component for sharing information about promotions between members of the social group, including receiving an identity of a member of the social group (e.g., through browser 208) that has not yet registered for the promotion from a member of the social group that has registered for the promotion; and sending an encouragement to the member with a message (e.g., over network interface 222), wherein the message comprises a mechanism for registering for the promotion (e.g., a link to a website provided by device 200).

[0041] In one embodiment, the promotion manager 210 and/or sharing manager 212 may provide a registration website mechanism. The website can be accessed through, for example, browser 208. In one embodiment, the website can have a page for each recipient business showing the name and email of each person registered in the promotion. For instance, ACME Company receives the promotional sweepstakes mailer. Jane Doe from ACME opens the mail, registers herself, distributes the game cards to each employee, periodically checks the website to see who and how many of her co-workers have registered, and sends out emails urging more to register. Jane has self-interest in seeing more co-workers

register, because if one of them wins, she wins a share of the matching pool of grand prize cash.

[0042] FIG. 3 shows an example of a process for improving user activity for an entity in accordance with one embodiment of the invention. In one embodiment, the process of FIG. 3 can be performed by the components of FIG.1 and/or FIG. 2.

[0043] Processing beings at step 302 where unique identifiers for game items are established. In one embodiment, each game item can include a unique identifier for participation in a promotion. Each authorized holder of the game item can be provided a chance to win a first benefit based on the unique identifier of the game item. The unique identifiers can be based on non-sequential and/or alphanumeric codes that reduce the chances of guessing a valid unique identifier. The chances can be reduced to a threshold percentage, e.g., a one in one million chance. In one embodiment, members of a social group are encouraged to participate expeditiously by limiting the unique identifiers to a finite number to increase the chances of winning, wherein the unique identifiers are. The unique identifiers can be bar codes, hash codes, or the like.

[0044] At step 304 a social group comprised of members is established. The social group can be established in computer memory, over a computer based network, and/or using a user interface, for example. In one embodiment, the social group comprises individuals associated with a physical address or an online group. The social group can include individuals working at a business, at a geographical location or office, having an interest in common, a business, a social organization, an online social network, members of an online forum, a governmental group, or associated with a domain name, or associated temporarily based on geographic proximity or group activity. In a preferred embodiment, the social group is located geographically near the merchant that is running the promotion, although in a general sense the merchant can be a countrywide or worldwide franchise and the social group can be any group of individuals having a common interest or connection. In one embodiment, the social group can include the temporary gathering of people in a sports event, for example, those people having a ticket or other access to the event or those people located within a section or set of rows, or the like. Social group data stored in computer memory can be configured to represent the social group and its attributes, members, count, size, or the like.

[0045] At step 306, each of a plurality of the members of the social group is provided with a game item that includes a unique identifier for participation in a promotion. In one embodiment, each provided member has a chance to win the first benefit based on the unique identifier. The promotion can be a sweepstake promotion and the game item is an instant win scratch off card. The promotion may be a time-limited promotion.

[0046] In one embodiment, the game item comprises a game piece, a token, or a card carrying alphanumeric characters, a computer chip that enables providing the unique identifiers, a receipt or coupon for a business that carries unique information. The game items can be configured to be distributed by hand, email, postal mail, call center, text messages, within a paycheck, within an envelope, or as a perforate portion of another item, or the like. The step of providing can include distributing the game items. The game item can be printed on media, formatted, and encoded with appropriate data to be distributed using a selected methodology (by hand, paycheck, envelope, direct mail, etc).

[0047] In one embodiment, providing each of a plurality of the members of the social group with the game item can include providing the game item when the members donate to the entity or pledge to donate to the entity, wherein the social group comprises donors to the entity or a subset of the donors associated with a physical address or an online group. The method may also include providing a portion of the second benefit or the first benefit to the entity. The entity can include a business or a non-profit organization.

[0048] For example, a soccer team can use the system, methods, apparatus, and media described herein to raise funds for the team. A donor to the soccer team can be entered into a promotion and associated with a social group. The donor can be given a chance to win the first benefit, and the social group of other donors can be given a chance to win the second benefit, as described herein. The soccer team may also share in the first and/or second benefit if there is a winner.

[0049] At step 308, a computer system associates in computer memory, the unique identifiers with the promotion, the social group, and/or an associated participating member of the social group that participates in the promotion. The associating can occur before determining whether the at least one member of the social group has won the first benefit. In one embodiment, the associating can occur before or after step 304 and/or step 306. In one embodiment, the unique identifiers can be associated with the promotion, the social group, and/or the participating member in the same step, in different steps, or the like. For example, in one embodiment, the unique identifiers can be associated with the promotion, then with the social group, then the participating members. In another embodiment, the unique identifiers can be associated with a member, then the social group for the member is identified, and the unique identifiers is associated with the social group, and then the appropriate promotion is identified for participation for the member and/or social group. Any other combination is also possible. One embodiment of the process of steps 306-308 is explained in more detail in conjunction with FIG. 4.

[0050] At step 310, it is determined whether at least one member of the social group wins the first benefit. If so, processing continues to step 312. Otherwise, processing returns to other steps. In one embodiment, the computer system generates a determination in response to receiving a registration of a member to the promotion, whether the participating member is a winner based on an associated unique identifier for the participating member. One embodiment of the process of step 310 is explained in more detail in conjunction with FIG. 6.

[0051] At step 312, the first benefit is provided to the winning member. The benefit can be provided over a network. A notification of whether the participating member is a personal winner can be provided. The benefit can be provided as an award, a gift, a prize, a coupon for use on a future purchase, an instant win prize, a discount or rebate for a current purchase, an online prize, a prize realizable within a day of winning, a prize that is redeemed at a physical location, or the like.

[0052] At step 314, a second benefit is provided to all participating members of the social group as an incentive for the members of the social group to participate in the promotion. Another notification of whether the social group is a group winner of the second benefit can be provided. In one embodiment, the second benefit is provided pro-rata, based on a function of characteristics of the participating members, or the like. The second benefit can increase as a number of

members that participate in the promotion increases. In one embodiment, the first or second benefits each comprise an award, a gift, a prize, a coupon for use on a future purchase, or a discount or rebate for a current purchase.

[0053] FIG. 4 shows an example of a process for providing management for an electronically administered promotion in accordance with one embodiment of the invention, including providing game items to members of a social group and/or associating the unique identifiers of the game items with the promotion, the social group, and/or an associated participating member. In one embodiment, the process of FIG. 4 can be performed by the components of FIG. 1 and/or FIG. 2.

[0054] Processing begins at step 402 where a registration of the participating member for the promotion is received, e.g., using a promotion mechanism which comprises a web site or a point of sale system at a physical location for receiving the entry. In one embodiment, the registration comprises a combination of at least two of an email address, a name, a mailing address, or an Internet Protocol address of the particular participating member. In one embodiment, the participating member is requested to enter a human readable visual image, such as a Captcha code, to ensure that the entry is made by a person. Based on the registration, a computer system associates in computer memory, the unique identifier of the game item of the participating member with the promotion and/or the member's social group.

[0055] At step 404, statistics about the participating members are provided. The statistics include the number of members in each social groups that are participating in a promotion, the number of members with whom the participating members have shared the promotion, the number of visits to a business (e.g., physical location or website), or the like.

[0056] At step 406, an identity of a member of the social group that has not yet registered for the promotion is received from a member of the social group that has registered for the promotion in order to share an encouragement to participate in the promotion (e.g., the participating member). In one embodiment, the identity can comprise a social network account identifier (e.g., Facebook or Twitter account), and email address, a phone number, or the like. In one embodiment, the receipt of the identity (e.g., email) to encourage is received based on the statistics data. A user interface may be provided to send the encouragement based on the statistics. For example, for promotions that are under promoted, a link might be provided or a popup window might be provided associated with the under promoted promotion to enable a user to send the encouragement. In one embodiment, the promotion is determined to be under represented based on a volume, new players, average change, acceleration in usage, or the like, being below a threshold, under a curve of an function, or the like.

[0057] At step 408, an encouragement message is sent to the member, wherein the message comprises a mechanism for registering for the promotion. In one embodiment, notifying the member with the encouragement can include sending the encouragement message through a social network (e.g., posting on a wall of a Facebook account, sending a tweet), emailing the member, calling the member, or the like. In one embodiment, the notification may be performed in a friend-to-friend fashion, wherein the member of the social group that has registered notifies the member that has not yet registered. In one embodiment, an encouragement to participate in the promotion is shared with members of the social group who are not part of the participating members. The encouragement

can also be shared with the participating members, as they will likely urge the non-participating members to join because it will increase the already participating members' chances of winning a prize. In this regard, the participating members almost act as agents for the merchant in urging others to participate. Thus, unlike other promotions or sweepstakes that favor a single entrant, the present invention not only encourages many members of the social group to participate, but it also often results in the participating members urging the non-participating members to participate. Processing then continues to other steps.

[0058] FIG. 5 shows a process for determining whether participating members participate have won a benefit in accordance with one embodiment of the invention. In one embodiment, the process of FIG. 5 can be performed by the components of FIG. 1 and/or FIG. 2.

[0059] At step 502, a participation by a participating member is received. In one embodiment, the participating members participate in the promotion by presenting the game item to a business. The presenting is performed at a business location, on a website, or at a dealer or showroom location. The game item can be a coupon that is presented to the business to give the participating members a discount on a purchase from the business.

[0060] At step 504, it is determined by a computer system whether the unique identifier associated with the game item indicates winning the first benefit. In one embodiment, the determination includes matching the unique identifier with a randomly chosen winning identifier, matching the unique identifier to be within a range of winning identifiers, or the like. In one embodiment, the determination is performed over a computer network. In another embodiment, the game item can be mystery envelope or game card. The participating members can scratch off an area of the game item to reveal whether the game item is associated with winning the first benefit. If the determination is yes, processing continues to step 510. Otherwise processing continues to step 506.

[0061] At step 506, the another game item is provided to a particular participating member when the game item of the particular participating member is presented. In one embodiment, the presentation is at a physical location of the business. The other game item includes another unique identifier configured to be used in combination with the unique identifier of the presented game item.

[0062] In one embodiment, the game item can be provided by entering information associated with the particular participating member over the Internet and receiving confirmation that the other game item should be provided. The confirmation can include the other unique identifier of the other game item.

[0063] In one embodiment, the other game item can be requested by the particular participating members by filling information on a card (e.g., the game item), such as name, email, address, or other information of the particular participating member. The card can be used to enter the information of the particular participating member over the Internet to provide the other game item to the member.

[0064] Based on the other game item, the particular participating member is provided (a) another chance to win the first benefit (b) an increase in the chance to win the first benefit, (c) another increase in the first benefit, or the like. In one embodiment, the increases can be based on the number of times the member participates in the game, the amount of money spent at a particular location, or combinations thereon. Also, the

participating member can be provided with multiple entries with one entry being used each time the member visits the business or makes a purchase. Alternatively, the user can be given a card that can be used multiple times with the card carrying the unique identifier(s) and allowing participation upon each visit to the business.

[0065] At step 508, it is determined whether the particular participating member has won the first benefit based on the combination of the unique identifier and the other unique identifier. The processing of step 508 is substantially similar to step 504, except the determination is also based on whether the unique identifier is a valid identifier and/or is associated with a previously entered game item for the participant. If the determination is yes, processing continues to step 510. Otherwise processing may loop back to step 506. In one embodiment, the particular participating member may be given a finite number of times to perform the steps of FIG. 5, e.g., based on a threshold number of times, or until the promotion expires.

[0066] At step 510, an indication of winning the first benefit for the participating member is recorded, including recording an identify of the participating member associated with the winning game item is recorded in computer memory. Processing then continues to other steps.

[0067] While process of FIG. 5 can be used in conjunction with the processes of FIGS. 3-4, the process of FIG. 5 can also be used independently, and indeed in any promotions, without departing from the scope of the invention. For example, the process of FIG. 5 can be used for a promotion sweepstake or contest that merely provides a first benefit to the participating players without providing a second benefit to the members of a social group.

[0068] It is to be understood that the invention is not to be limited to the exact configuration as illustrated and described herein. Accordingly, all expedient modifications readily attainable by one of ordinary skill in the art from the disclosure set forth herein, or by routine experimentation there from, are deemed to be within the spirit and scope of the invention as defined by the appended claims.

[0069] For the sake of brevity, it should be understood that certain structures and functionality, or aspects thereof, of embodiments of the present invention that are evident from the illustrations of the Figures have not been necessarily restated herein.

[0070] A computer or processor readable medium such as a floppy disk, CD-ROM, DVD, etc. may be use to store the processes, techniques, software, and information illustratively described herein. The media may store instructions, which when executed by a computer processor causes the processor to perform the processes described herein. The media can also be stored on devices, such as a server device, within a database, within main memory, within secondary storage, or the like.

[0071] Further still, the memory of the system may comprise a magnetic hard drive, a magnetic floppy disk, a compact disk, a ROM, a RAM, and/or any other appropriate memory. Further still, the computer of the system may comprise a stand-alone PC-type micro-computer as depicted or the computer may comprise one of a mainframe computer or a mini-computer, for example. Further still, another computer can access the software program being processed by the CPU by utilizing a local area network, a wide area network, or the Internet, for example.

[0072] The preceding description is presented to enable any person of ordinary skill in the art to practice the present invention. Various modifications to the preferred embodiment will be readily apparent to those of ordinary skill in the art, and the principles defined herein may be applied to other embodiments and applications without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention. Thus, the invention is not intended to be limited to the specific embodiments shown, but the claims are to be accorded an appropriate scope consistent with the principles and features disclosed herein as understood by skilled artisans. The figures are not necessarily to scale, some features may be exaggerated to show details of particular components. Therefore, specific structural and functional details disclosed herein are not to be interpreted as limiting, but merely as a basis for the claims and as a representative basis for teaching one skilled in the art to variously employ the present invention.

What is claimed is:

1. A computer implemented method for improving user activity for an entity, which comprises:
 - establishing a social group comprised of members;
 - providing each of a plurality of the members of the social group with a game item that includes a unique identifier for participation in a promotion, wherein each provided member has a chance to win a first benefit based on the unique identifier;
 - associating, by a computer system and in computer memory, the unique identifiers with the promotion, the social group, and an associated participating member of the social group that participates in the promotion; and
 - providing a second benefit to all participating members of the social group when at least one member of the social group wins the first benefit as an incentive for the members of the social group to participate in the promotion.
2. The method of claim 1, wherein the second benefit increases as a number of members that participate in the promotion increases, and wherein the entity comprises a business or a non-profit organization.
3. The method of claim 1, wherein the promotion is a sweepstake promotion and the game item is an instant win scratch off card, and wherein the promotion is a time-limited promotion.
4. The method of claim 1, wherein the game items are configured to be distributed by hand, email, postal mail, call center, text messages, within a paycheck, within an envelope, or as a perforate portion of another item, and wherein the game item comprises a game piece, a token, or a card carrying alphanumeric characters, a computer chip that enables providing the unique identifiers, a receipt or coupon for a business that carries unique information.
5. The method of claim 1, wherein providing each of a plurality of the members of the social group with the game item comprises:
 - providing the game item when the members donate to the entity or pledge to donate to the entity, wherein the social group comprises donors to the entity or a subset of the donors associated with a physical address or an online group.
6. The method of claim 1, further comprising:
 - providing a portion of the second benefit or the first benefit to the entity.
7. The method of claim 1, wherein the first or second benefits each comprise an award, a gift, a prize, a coupon for use on a future purchase, an instant win prize, a discount or rebate for a current purchase, an online prize, a prize realizable within a day of winning, or a prize that is redeemed at a physical location.
8. The method of claim 1, which further comprises:
 - receiving a participation in the promotion by the participating members by presenting the game item to a business.
9. The method of claim 8, wherein the presenting is performed at a business location, on a website, or at a dealer or showroom location.
10. The method of claim 8, which further comprises:
 - providing another game item to a particular participating member when the game item of the particular participating member is presented at a physical location of the business, wherein the other game item includes another unique identifier configured to be used in combination with the unique identifier of the presented game item to determine whether the particular participating member has won the first benefit and to provide the particular participating member (a) another chance to win the first benefit (b) an increase in the chance to win the first benefit, or (c) another increase in the first benefit.
11. The method of claim 1, wherein the providing of the second benefit comprises:
 - receiving a registration of the participating member for the promotion using a promotion manager which comprises a web site or a point of sale system at a physical location for receiving the entry;
 - generating a determination by the computer system in response to receiving the registration, whether the participating member is a winner based on an associated unique identifier for the participating member;
 - providing a notification of whether the participating member is a personal winner based on the determination; and
 - providing another notification of whether the social group is a group winner of the additional benefit based on the determination.
12. The method of claim 1, which further comprises:
 - providing a view of statistics about the participating members; and
 - sharing an encouragement to participate in the promotion to members of the social group who are not part of the participating members.
13. A method for improving user activity for an entity, comprising:
 - providing each of a plurality of players with a game item that includes a unique identifier for participation in a promotion, wherein each provided player has a chance to win a first benefit based on the unique identifier;
 - associating, by a computer system and in computer memory, the unique identifiers with the promotion and an associated participating player that participates in the promotion; and
 - providing another game item to a particular participating player when the game item of the particular participating player is presented at a physical location of the business, wherein the other game item includes another unique identifier configured to be used in combination with the unique identifier of the presented game item to determine whether the particular participating player has won the first benefit and to provide the particular participating player (a) another chance to win the first benefit (b) an increase in the chance to win the first benefit, or (c) another increase in the first benefit.

14. A system for improving user activity for a business, comprising: a server configured to perform actions comprising:

- establishing a social group comprised of members;
- providing each of a plurality of the members of the social group with a game item that includes a unique identifier for participation in a promotion, wherein each provided member has a chance to win a first benefit based on the unique identifier;

associating the unique identifiers with the promotion, the social group, and an associated participating member of the social group that participates in the promotion; and providing a second benefit to all participating members of the social group when at least one member of the social group wins the first benefit as an incentive for the members of the social group to participate in the promotion.

15. The system of claim **14**, which further comprises: a client device configured to perform actions that include receiving a registration of a particular participating member for the promotion, wherein the registration comprises a combination of at least two of an email address, a name, a mailing address, or an Internet Protocol address of the particular participating member.

16. The system of claim **15**, wherein associating the unique identifiers with the promotion, the social group, and the associated participating member is configured to occur before determining whether the at least one member of the social group has won the first benefit.

17. The system of claim **14**, which further comprises: a sharing manager configured to perform actions comprising:
receiving an email address of a member of the social group that has not yet registered for the promotion from a member of the social group that has registered for the promotion; and

sending a message to the email address, wherein the message comprises a mechanism for registering for the promotion.

18. A processor readable media for improving user activity for a business, comprising instructions that when executed by a processor causes the processor to perform actions that comprise:

- establishing a social group comprised of members;
- providing each of a plurality of the members of the social group with a game item that includes a unique identifier for participation in a promotion, wherein each provided member has a chance to win a first benefit based on the unique identifier;

associating the unique identifiers with the promotion, the social group, and an associated participating member of the social group that participates in the promotion; and providing a second benefit to all participating members of the social group when at least one member of the social group wins the benefit as an incentive for the members of the social group to participate in the promotion.

19. The processor readable media of claim **18**, wherein the social group comprises individuals working at a business, at a geographical location or office, having an interest in common, a business, a social organization, an online social network, members of an online forum, a governmental group, or associated with a domain name.

20. The processor readable media of claim **18**, wherein the actions comprises:

- establishing the unique identifiers based on non-sequential, alphanumeric codes that reduce the chances of guessing a valid unique identifier to a threshold percentage to encourage members to participate expeditiously by limiting the unique identifiers to a finite number to increase a participant's chances of winning.

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