A system and method for donations using online interactive games with players using social networks. Users play games wherein winning results in others donating to their selected recipient, such as a cause, charity, school, etc. A database maintains user information, recipient information, and tracks donation credits. Users play games, donate to recipients, and have players donate to their selected recipients. The system and method can automatically match users as teammates, competitors, and tournament members. The system and method facilitate game play, collection of funds, and payment of collected funds to selected recipients. The funds benefit recipients, and new supporters are identified to the recipients.
Figure 2B
Figure 3

SOCIAL NETWORK APPLICATION
[EMBEDDED IN SOCIAL NETWORK APPLICATION]
DONATION SYSTEM
HEADER GRAPHICS 204
MENU BAR AND BUTTONS 206
GAME SYSTEM [EMBEDDED]
USER STATISTICS
OPPONENT STATISTICS AND PROFILE 208
INTERACTIVE GAME DISPLAY 202
USER INTERFACE FOR GAME 302
300
Figure 4

USER LOADS APPLICATION 400

USER SELECTS CAUSE 402

USER ADDS POINTS / FUNDS TO THEIR ACCOUNT 404

THIRD PARTY PAYMENT PROCESSING 130

USER SETS DONATION PREFERENCES

OPTION TO SELECT PEOPLE WHO CAN PLAY USER (ALL MEMBERS OR USER’s CONTACTS) 414

OPTION TO SELECT CAUSES THAT USER WILL “PLAY AGAINST” AND AGREES TO DONATE IF THEY LOSE [CAN SELECT “ALL”] 416

OPTION TO SELECT MAXIMUM BET THAT USER WILL PLAY FOR (MAXIMUM CHARITY CREDITS PER GAME) 418

OPTION TO SELECT ODDS THAT USER WILL PLAY FOR (EVEN ODDS, 2:1, 5:1, ETC.) 420

USER IS READY TO PLAY GAME 422

GAME PROCESS 124

USER CREDIT ACCOUNTS DATABASE 136

USER PROFILES DATABASE 132
SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR DONATIONS USING ONLINE INTERACTIVE GAMES

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

0001  1. Field of Invention

0002  The invention relates to the field of electronic commerce over data communications networks and, more particularly, is related to a system and method for enabling donations using interactive games that operate on social networks, gaming networks, or telecommunication networks.

0003  2. Background of the Invention

0004  To facilitate donations, especially to charitable organizations, often a component of competition is introduced to encourage participation in fund raising initiatives. Traditional methods of using competitive activities to encourage donations include charitable golf tournaments with tournament ticket sales profits going to charity or a casino night sponsored by a civic association or the like. As people receive more and more donation solicitations through the phone, email, websites and other mediums, there is a need for a new donation system that provides competition, entertainment, a possibility of a micro-donation and the community experience of a social network.

0005  While the proliferation of online gaming has steadily increased recently, there has been no cross-pollination of online gaming with endeavors to raise charitable donations. Indeed, the increasing popularity of social networks such as Facebook, MySpace and others has created a ready pool of participants which has yet to be drawn upon for the purpose of encouraging donations through the use of competitive activities.

0006  Current applications on Facebook and other social networks involve games where users can play other members of the social network. For example, the Facebook game “Skiers vs. Snowboarders” allows users to take on a Skier or Snowboarder persona and then wager an amount of “gold” in a game against another Facebook member’s persona. There is no strategy involved, as the outcome is totally determined by chance and the user’s experience level. The “gold” has no cash value and is awarded to the winning player. Wins, losses and the amount of gold won or lost is tracked.

0007  Systems in which players engage in online games, win prizes and have a portion of the proceeds benefit an individual charity are known in the art. The online system at Rezililo.com, for example, is an online charity system which enables fundraising through interactive games. A charity registers and asks their members to pay an entry fee to participate in a game for a chance to win prizes. The competitive aspect of players “playing” to win donations for different charities is not included. Automatic pairing of teams and matching of players and team members by skill and other attributes is also not featured. Micro-payments are not proposed as the user must make a donation entry fee of approximately $10 each time.

0008  Systems in which digital vouchers are used to store and transfer value are also known in the art. U.S. Pat. No. 6,047,269 to Biffar, for example, describes a system for payments with digital vouchers using digital signatures and serial numbers. While Biffar describes a system for storing and transferring value across online networks, there are other methods for securing online transactions. The proposed donation system uses log files, databases and user accounts as well as standard security measures for online commerce.

0009  Systems in which online bets, rewards and charitable distributions can be managed and tracked by online servers are known in the art. U.S. Patent Application US2002002075A1 to Rowe, for example, describes a method and apparatus for facilitating monetary and reward transactions and accounting in a gaming environment. Users may bet money and possibly allocate some portion of their rewards to charity. The system enables a casino to provide loyalty rewards to players and the actual bets are being won by the player or casino. However, there are no donation credits to be purchased and won by users to donate to their designated cause. Instead users may allocate a portion of their winnings to various causes. Further, there is not the competitive feature of players vying to win money for their favorite cause.

0010  Systems in which bets can be processed with the potential payoff being allocated to a pre-determined charity are known in the art. Patent application USWO2002037345A1 allows users betting on horse races for example, to have a charity bet with a portion of a payoff going to a pre-determined charity. However, the charity bet is only for the user’s pre-determined charity and for the winning outcome. The user may or may not use a charity bet and may play for his own benefit. There is not the element that multiple users will be playing each other and the losing players will donate to the winner’s charity and potentially receive a tax deduction for their donation. There is not the focus that all players are exclusively playing on behalf of some cause, as in the proposed donation system and method.

0011  Systems in which a network is used to manage donations for multiple organizations and groups of users are also known in the prior art. Patent application US 2005004867A1 to Spector enables the creation of private donation groups where users can invite others to join the group and make donations to a given charity. However, there is not the competitive game aspect, automated pairing of players (team members and opponents), or donation credits that enable micro-donations.

0012  The prior art systems and methods fail to address, among other things, the competitive game features and team/player pairing features that allow users and teams to play for and win donation credits for their favorite cause. Users can join teams and be matched with suitable team members and against suitable teams and players (similar skill level and/or type of cause) using player pairing/team formation algorithms. In addition, instead of a fundraising game for a single charity or a general donation system that tracks money by group, the new system enables many players to compete in online or mobile games that support multiple charities. In addition, the invention allows micro-donations to charities by allowing users to purchase credits in blocks and spend them in small increments on individual games for charity.

SUMMARY AND OBJECTS OF THE INVENTION

0013  It should be apparent that there exists a need for associating fundraising activity with online gaming. Accordingly, a principal object of the present invention is to provide a system and method for enabling donations to causes through the use of interactive games that could operate on social networks, gaming networks, or telecommunication networks. Associating a component of raising funds for causes with online gaming potentially makes game-playing more "meaningful" since the player’s level of play will deter-
mine whether a favorite cause will receive funds. As opposed to standard gaming where the user plays for their own benefit, the user is playing to benefit their favorite cause.

0014 It is another object of the present invention to provide a system for donations using interactive games and social networks that allows users to play one or more opponents, with the game resulting in a donation to a cause designated by the winning player or players. Thus, players compete to have donations contributed towards their particular cause.

0015 It is still another object of the present invention to provide a system that allows users buy one or more lots of “donation credits” as a non-refundable donation to one or more causes to be determined later by the outcome of one or more interactive games. These causes could be 501(c)(3) organizations or more general causes such as a school organization. This system processes these multiple games for multiple users within a social network, gaming network, or telecommunications network and the associated databases update to process thousands or millions of transactions involving donations of any amount of credits. The unit of donation could be from less than one cent to many dollars, depending on how many credits are assigned per dollar. Individual games could be for one or more credits.

0016 It is another object of the present invention to provide a system for allowing users to invite people to compete against them or automatically match users against other users using an algorithm that determines appropriate matches. Matches may be individual vs. individual or team vs. team, where a team has one or more members. A user can challenge a member of their social network to play a game involving strategy and/or random chance. The game will have an agreed upon stake, or amount of credits. Based on the strategy chosen by the players and/or the random component, a game outcome will be determined. The losing player will have their credit account deducted by the agreed upon level. Deducted funds are then sent to a global account where they will be allocated toward the winner’s selected cause. In an alternative embodiment of the present invention, the losing player is allowed to confirm or deny a donation, before donation credits are deducted from their account and credited to the cause of the winning player.

0017 It is still another object of the present invention to provide a system with software or hardware that would be used to create player profiles, match players against one another, help find and match individuals for the purpose of team creation and team play, run the interactive games and/or update one or more databases to track the outcome of each individual game or tournament and allow users to track their total credits won (games won which resulted in the opposing player donating to the user’s selected cause) and credits donated (games lost where the user donated to the opposing player’s selected cause).

0018 It is another object of the present invention to provide a system that would provide automatic seeding of individuals and/or teams in game tournaments using user preferences and items such as skill, previous game outcomes and type of cause. For example, a tournament could include players interested in animal related causes and players of a similar skill level would be invited with the winning player(s) animal related cause(s) receiving the donation credits of all of the tournament players. An example algorithm would be a linear program that minimizes the difference in skill level and maximizes the number of players for that game type, preferred game time, and cause category.

0019 It is still another object of the present invention to provide a system and method for tracking donations by users to various entities and facilitate and/or settle the transfer of funds to those entities.

0020 It is another object of the present invention to provide a system for enabling users to track all of their donations to various causes selected by the winners of games that they lost.

0021 It is another object of the present invention to provide a system that easily and cost effectively allows micro-donations through online interactive games. While credit card transaction fees generally discourage small donations of less than $10, a system of donation credits allows for nominal donation amounts of any fractional monetary amount. Nominal donations of, for example, $.01 to larger donations of $1 or more can be made.

0022 It is another object of the present invention that the system allows charities to collect names and contact information of donors. Acquiring new donors and interested supporters can be very expensive for causes such as non-profits. Using social networks and online games can potentially generate thousands of micro-donors who can learn more about the cause that they helped with a small donation. Optional privacy features may enable the user to opt-in to opt-out of being contacted by any charities as per privacy laws and the operator’s user agreement. The operator may provide the contact information for free or charge an administrative fee to the cause for access to the list of donors.

0023 Briefly described, those and other objects and features of the present invention are accomplished, as embodied and fully described herein, by a method for providing an online interactive game and for collecting donations and a system for facilitating donations using online interactive games.

0024 The method includes the steps of: maintaining account information for a plurality of users in a storage device at a game server, including user profile information and a donation credits amount; maintaining recipient information for one or more recipients in the storage device at the game server, including a donation credits amount; pairing at the game server two or more of the plurality of users against each other for playing a game; receiving at the game server from each of the users playing the game a wagered donation credits amount and a selected recipient for receiving donation credits; hosting at the game server the game between the paired users; determining at the game server one or more winners and one or more losers of the game from among the paired users; deducting from the donation credits amount for at least one of the losers at least a portion of the wagered donation credits amount and increasing the donation credits amount of the selected recipient of at least one of the winners by at least a portion of the wagered donation credits amount.

0025 The system includes a registration module for associating one or more users with a donation credits amount and for associating one or more recipients with a donation credits amount; a game module for administering a game to be played by the one or more users, the game module determining one or more losers of the game and decreasing the donation credits amount of at least one of the one or more losers by at least a portion of a wagered credit amount; a credit module to facilitate a transfer of funds to the one or more recipients.
based on the donation credits amount associated with the respective one or more recipients.

With those and other objects, advantages, and features of the invention that may become hereinafter apparent, the nature of the invention may be more clearly understood by reference to the following detailed description of the invention, the appended claims and to the several drawings attached herein.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is drawing depicting a schematic of the client-server architecture of a donation coordinating system according to one aspect of the present invention;

FIG. 2 is a user interface diagram showing the user interface for manual player pairing according to one aspect of the present invention;

FIG. 2A is a user interface according to one aspect of the present invention embedded in a social network platform;

FIG. 2B is the user interface illustrated in FIG. 2A displaying potential opponents;

FIG. 3 is a user interface diagram showing an implementation and display of a game system within a social network environment according to one aspect of the present invention;

FIG. 3A is the user interface according to one aspect of the present invention displaying an interactive gaming display;

FIG. 4 is a process flow diagram showing game registration process flow according to one aspect of the present inventions; and

FIG. 5 is a process flow diagram showing game play process flow according to one aspect of the present inventions.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

Several preferred embodiments of the invention are described for illustrative purposes, it being understood that the invention may be embodied in other forms not specifically shown in the drawings. Note that players/users as described below can be individuals or teams composed of individuals.

1. System Architecture

Turning first to FIG. 1, shown therein is a drawing depicting a schematic of the system architecture of a donations system using interactive games that operates over a networks system according to one aspect of the present invention. For purposes of illustrating the invention, the system will be discussed in connection with a social networking platform, such as Facebook, MySpace, and other similar platforms; however, it should be noted that the system could easily be employed in any network configuration, such as an online gaming network or telecommunications network.

The system can be a network configuration or a variety of data communication network environments using software, hardware or a combination of hardware and software to provide the processing functions. All or parts of the system and processes can be stored on or read from computer-readable media. The system can include computer-readable medium having stored thereon machine executable instructions for performing the processes described. Computer readable media may include, for instance, secondary storage devices, such as hard disks, floppy disks, and CD-ROM; a carrier wave received from the Internet; or other forms of computer-readable memory such as read-only memory (ROM) or random-access memory (RAM).

In the embodiment of FIG. 1, several computing devices 102, servers 114 and 122, and other similar computing instruments are shown. The computing instruments perform various functions and operations in accordance with the invention. The computing instruments can be, for instance, a personal computer (PC), server or mainframe computer. The computing instruments can be a general purpose computer reconfigured by a computer program, or may be specially constructed to implement the features and operations of the system. The computing instruments may also be provided with one or more of a wide variety of components or subsystems including, for example, a processor, co-processor, register, data processing devices and subsystems, wired or wireless communication links, input devices, monitors, memory or storage devices such as a database.

The processes of the invention can be implemented in a variety of ways and include other modules, programs, applications, scripts, processes, threads or code sections that interrelate with each other. The program modules can be commercially available software tools using custom object oriented code written in C++ programming language, using applets written in Java programming language, or be implemented with discrete electrical components or as one or more customized wired application specific integrated circuits (ASIC).

The system allows for one or more users 100 of the system to connect to an application system 112 using a client computing device 102 over a data communications network 110. The client computing device 102 could be, for example, a personal computer, mobile phone, portable digital assistant, an in-flight entertainment system, a gaming system, or other device for computation and communication. A client computing device 102 comprised of software and hardware (e.g., a processor that implements the software) allows the user to interface with the system for donation 112 over the data network 110. A browser 106 allows the user to connect to a network 110 such as the internet (web browser) or a telecommunications network (cell network browser) or a gaming system browser (game browser). The browser 106 adapts the client computing device 102 to connect to and communicate with the network 110. In the depicted embodiment, the browser 106 provides access to the network 110 so that the client computing device 102 can communicate with the system for donation 112.

In the embodiment shown, the system for donation 112 transmits to the user interface module 104 of the client computing device 102. For purposes of illustrating the invention, the system will be discussed in connection with a social networking platform, such as Facebook, MySpace, and other similar systems; however, it should be noted that the system could easily be employed by itself as a stand-alone system or in any online interactive gaming system over a data communications network. While accessing a social networking platform, the user interface module 104 presents the user with a selection, button, bar, and the like to initiate a donation system application interface 202 (shown in FIG. 2). Referring to FIG. 2, once the user initiates the donation system application interface 202, it is embedded, framed, or otherwise integrated with the interface for the social networking platform 200. The user can interface with the system for donation 112 through controls, such as bars and buttons 206 (shown in FIG. 2),
within the donation system application interface 202. The user reviews and edits his profile, buys credits, finds one or more opponents, wagers his credits, plays against the one or more opponents, recruits others to play with or against him, and other similar functions, through the donation system application interface 202. Because the donation system application interface 202 is integrated with the social networking platform 200, the user can readily invite other players from the social networking platform 200 to play as teammates or as opponents in an interactive game. Furthermore, the ability to wager adds to the competitiveness inherent in the game. The donation system application interface 202 can also convey messages between players, present advertising, and provide other relevant information.

0043] Returning to FIG. 1, the data communications network 110 is a set of hardware, software and protocols that allow computer devices to communicate with each other. The particular connectivity of the client computing device 102 and the application system 112 to the data communications networks 110 is for illustrative purposes only. The networks may be, for example, a wireless network used by mobile computing devices like cellular telephones, the Internet, an intranet, or some other data communication system. Preferably, the networks are packet-switched networks capable of routing hypertext, extensible, or other types of markup language code and data in accordance with the standard Internet Protocol or some other protocol in order to generate web pages. The Internet Engineering Task Force is the standards body that creates and maintains the basic standards on which the Internet depends, including the Internet Protocol specification published in 1981.

0044] The application system 112 connects to the data communications network 110 and uses web servers 114, database servers 122 and third party payment processing 130 to collect and distribute donations. The web server 114 can be a computer server that uses software applications to monitor, maintain and update user records and/or run the interactive gaming application 118. A user profile application 116 can be provided to capture the initial user profile and process changes to that profile. The interactive gaming application 118 can be either a stand-alone software game or a software application that provides an interface to an outside game. The web server 114 may also implement a credit tracking application 120 that monitors and logs where each credit in the system is directed. For instance, users may buy donation credits using a third party payment process 130. Upon receipt of a successful payment transaction, the user’s donation credits account 136 is increased by the amount of donation credits purchased. In addition, after each game is played using the interactive gaming application 118, a specified or wagered number of credits may be deducted from a losing user’s account and deposited into an account for the winner’s designated cause. Optionally, the user may be asked to confirm a donation and given the choice to not donate to a given cause. The user profile application 116, the interactive gaming application 118, and the credit tracking application 120 can be subroutines of one application or separate applications.

0045] The database server 122 can be a computer server that uses software applications to monitor, update and maintain databases storing user information and credit account information for users and donation recipients. The third party payment processing 130, the client computing device 102, the web server(s) 114, and the donation recipients 126 can be processors.

0046] In one embodiment of the present invention, the interactive gaming application 118 can be associated with a gaming system 124. This application 118 is for allowing users to play for entertainment and for determining a winner of the game. The game system may be internally developed, an outside system, an online networked game, or other game that can connect to a network.

0047] Turning to FIG. 2, a user interface module 104 according to one embodiment of the present invention is shown. The user interface module 104 presents the user with a donation system application interface 202. The user with the social networking application 200. In one embodiment of the present invention, the user interface module 104 is presented to the user 100 by execution of HTML code on the client computing device 102 that is transmitted from the social networking platform 200. In another embodiment, the code for presenting the user interface module 104 may be resident on the client computing device 102. In one embodiment, integrated with the social network application 200, the donation system application interface 202 is an embedded, framed or otherwise integrated window showing the donation system application interface 202 within the social network system. The donation system application interface 202 may include header graphics 204 and/or pictures, logos and other images at the top of the display. Menu bars and buttons 206 may be included in the donation system application interface 202 to provide a user interface that allows the user to access features such as find an opponent, review/edit profile, play game, etc.

0048] In one embodiment of the present invention, the interactive gaming application 118 can be associated with a gaming system 124. This application 118 is for allowing users to play for entertainment and for determining a winner of the game. The game system may be internally developed, an outside system, an online networked game, or other game that can connect to a network.

0049] Referring to FIG. 3, an interactive gaming application is launched through a user interface, a game bar, or other control (not shown) on the donation system application interface 202. In the embodiment depicted, once the interactive gaming application is launched, the interactive gaming display 300 is embedded or framed in a window integrated with the donation system application interface 202. The interactive gaming display 300 may provide a set of buttons and/or controls or instructions that enable the user to interact with the game 304. The interactive gaming display 300 includes, at least, user statistics and profile 208, opponent statistics and profile 214, and an interactive game display 302. The user statistics and profile 208 and the opponent statistics and profile 214 provides total victories, total losses, credits remaining, skill points, rank, and other similar information about the user and opponent, respectively. The interactive game display 302 includes a user interface for the game 304. The user plays the game by using the user interface 304. An example is shown in FIG. 3A.

0050] II. System Operation

0051] FIG. 4 is a process flow diagram depicting the registration process flow steps according to one embodiment of
the present invention. In process step 400, the user loads a registration application. The registration application is required to capture user profile information and credit information. The user profile information is stored electronically in the User Profiles Database 132, and the credit information is stored electronically in the Users Credit Accounts Database 136.

[0052] In process step 402, the user selects one or more recipients to receive donation credits, such as a desired cause, charity, beneficiary, and the like, from a list of possible recipients, or the user may enter a new recipient. Recipients may include non-profits such as a local pet shelter, a homeless shelter, a church, a large national organization such as the Red Cross, a foundation, a charity, a tax deductible entity, or other like entity. Other recipients could be a Little League team, a Girl Scout Troupe, an operation for an ill child, or other individual or organization that may be associated with a larger non-profit, but is not a separate 501(c)(3) entity. Recipients need not be charitable but can be any person or entity. A recipient could be an individual spending time and resources producing a public resource such as a blog that provides information about and advocates for a particular issue like brain tumor research. Alternatively, the recipient can be a political campaign, a school, or other similar entities. An operator of the donation system may create a database of recipients and optionally allow users to enter a new recipient that is in the database. The selected recipient is stored in the User Profiles Database 132.

[0053] In process step 404, using a set exchange rate, the user purchases a given sized lot of donation credits, which are non-refundable credits that will be donated to the user's selected recipient. This increase of X credits is updated in the Users Credit Accounts Database 136. The Users Credit Accounts Database 136 stores and updates the credit balance and credit transaction history of each user. In process step 130, a third party payment processing system such as PayPal is used to validate the user's payment and upon confirmation of payment of a certain dollar amount, the user's account is credited with a number of credits according to the set exchange rate.

[0054] In process step 410, the user sets several preferences that will be used when playing interactive games. User preferences could be the user's skill level, number and type of team members if applicable, preferred game types, times to play synchronous games, recipients to play for and against, minimum and maximum donation amounts (bet amount), and other preferences. These data elements are stored in the User Profiles Database 132. The User Profiles Database 132 stores and updates the preferences and settings of each user.

[0055] Among other preferences, the user may select in advance who they are willing to play, as shown in process step 414. This allows for asynchronous games where the user gives permission in advance to play a particular user. The user may select, for example, everyone, any contact, or a specific set of contacts.

[0056] The user may also select recipients that the user will "play against," step 416. These are recipients that the user agrees to play against and will donate to if the user loses to another user that is playing for that particular recipient. Thus, if the user plays an opponent and loses, the user will already have authorized a donation in their name to that cause. The user may also select the maximum bet that the user is willing to play for, step 418. Setting the maximum betting amounts allows potential opponents to know how much a particular user is willing to play for.

[0057] The user may also select the odds that the user will play for, step 420. Some players may desire to wager higher amounts and can apply a given odds ratio, for example, "5:1 odds," meaning that the user is willing to lose five credits to their opponent's recipient if they lose and win only one credit for their own recipient if they win.

[0058] At process step 422 the user is ready to play an interactive game. At this point in the process, the user is ready to begin the Game Play Process 424, as shown in FIG. 5. Turning to FIG. 5, the registration process (FIG. 4) is completed and the user has elected to begin game play. The user's profile information may be retrieved from the database servers 122 and displayed to the user as shown in FIGS. 2A, 2B, and 3A. The user can either select process step 502 or 506. If process step 502 is chosen, the user may view potential opponents and their profile data through the interactive gaming display 300 of the donation system application interface 202. The user can examine other players to compete against and review the information in their profile 214, such as their designated recipients, bet amount and other settings in the interactive gaming display 300. In process step 504, the user may select one or more opponents, a game type and a bet amount, through the interactive gaming display 300. In a game where the user selects their opponents, they will choose their opponent or multiple opponents, identify the game they wish to play and state the bet amount to play for.

[0059] If after process step 500 is chosen, in process step 506, the interactive gaming system creates an automatic pairing or assignment of two or more players. The groupings of players may be formed through an automated pairing or assignment of players. The system examines the user profiles and finds a group of players with matching characteristics such as, for example, the same or similar recipients, bet amounts, or the like. For instance, the system can search for opponents that designate a recipient the user desires to "play against" as stored in the user profiles database 132. The system can further search for opponents that designate an odds ratio that is within the range of odds ratios specified by the user, as stored in the user profile database 132.

[0060] In process step 508, the user plays an online game against one or more players. At this step, the user initiates the Game Play Process 510, which varies depending on the game type. User information may be retrieved from the database servers 122. In the Game Play Process 510, the user and the one or more opponents play the game in the internal or external (third party) game system. The game system could be any type of electronic interactive game from conventional board games such as checkers, chess, and the like to card games such as poker, bridge, hearts, spades, etc. to other types of games such as trivia games, and video games. The game play process results in an outcome with the user either winning or losing. In a preferred embodiment, a tie is resolved by an established policy such as the defender wins if the score is tied. There may be one or more winners and one or more losers. In a preferred embodiment, there will always be at least one winner and at least one loser.

[0061] In process step 512, the user wins the game and wins a wagered amount of credits for his recipient. In this step, the game play process 510 has identified the user as a winner. The game application 118 may report the outcome to the user profile application 116 and/or the credit tracking application
for recording in the appropriate database server 122. This step is followed by several results according to the winning scenario 514. In the winning scenario 514, the user’s credit account 136 remains the same 516. No change is made to the user’s credit account 136 because the user has won. In process step 518, the user’s profile 132 is updated to reflect that the wagered credit amount has been won for a particular recipient. The User Profiles database 132 updates to show an increase in credits “won” for that recipient. Only the recipient earns credits, not the user, but the user has bragging rights and statistics for personal satisfaction which may be reflected in the profile information of the user. In another embodiment, the user’s social networking account home page may be updated to reflect credits won for a particular recipient. Files in the credit accounts database 136 may store the amount of credits won on behalf of recipients and the amount of credits lost for each user. In other embodiments, the files in the database 136 can store information about users for each recipient. In still other embodiments, prizes can be awarded to users who win certain amounts of credits for recipients.

In process step 520, the account of the user’s selected recipient 138 is updated to reflect an increase in credits representing at least a portion of the wagered credit amount. In process step 522, the losing opponent’s profile 132 is updated to reflect an increase in total number of credits donated. Accounts and profiles can be updated at the end of each game, at the end of a series of games, when the user ends play with the opponent, or when the user selects a new opponent.

In process step 524, the user loses the game and the opponent wins a wagered amount of credits for his recipient. In this step, the game play process 510 has identified an opponent as a winner. This step is followed by several steps according to the losing scenario 526. In the losing scenario 526, the user has lost in the game play process 510. In process step 528, the user’s credit account decreases by the wagered credit amount. In process step 530, the User Profile database 132 updates to reflect an increase in credits donated to the designated recipient. In one embodiment of the present invention, the user can keep a donation log for tax deduction purposes.

In process step 532, the credit account of the opponent’s designated recipient is increased by Y Credits. The account 138 of the winner’s designated recipient is increased by Y credits, the amount donated by the user. In process step 534, the opponent’s credit account is shown as remaining the same. The wagered credit amount is not deducted from the opponent’s credit account because the opponent has won the game. The user’s credit account in the User Credit Account Database 136 is updated to reflect a deduction in the wagered credit amount.

The Donation Recipient Credit Accounts Database 138 is updated to reflect the donation of at least a portion of the wagered credit amount. The Donation Recipient Credit Accounts Database 138 stores and updates the credit accounts of each donation recipient, for example a particular charity. The amount of X credits won by the user or the amount of Y credits lost by the user is stored and updated in the Donation Recipient Credit Accounts Database 138. The third party payment processing system 130, such as PayPal, enables the system to have users enter their desired number of credits to purchase, pay using a credit card or their PayPal balance, and send a confirmation message that the payment transaction has been successful. Upon receipt of the electronic confirmation message, donation credits are added to the users account and are available to use in the donation system.

In process step 538, a fundraising processing fee may be taken from the total funds collected. In a preferred embodiment, a fundraising processing fee is taken to compensate the fundraiser, game system operator and/or pay for other expenses. For example, the user can be charged $10.00 for X credits but only gives the recipient $9.00 for the same X credits. In addition, a fundraising fee can be charged on the front end when credits are purchased. A given number of credits are purchased at a price per credit and then a processing fee is added to the purchase transaction. For example, credits may be $0.10 each and 100 credits would sell for $10.00 plus a $1.00 processing fee for a total of $11.00 charged to the user. The user’s donation credits account stored in database 136 would then be increased to reflect the purchase of 100 donation credits.

In process step 540, the donation recipients receive aggregate donations made by all users of the system. In process step 542, a Game Outcomes Database 542 may store the outcome of each game for validation and auditing purposes and for tracking overall statistics. In other embodiments, the Game Outcomes Database 542 generates a receipt for the user, an optional report for submitting to the Internal Revenue Service, and other related outputs.

Although certain presently preferred embodiments of the disclosed invention have been specifically described herein, it will be apparent to those skilled in the art to which the invention pertains that variations and modifications of the various embodiments shown and described herein may be made without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention. Accordingly, it is intended that the invention be limited only to the extent required by the appended claims and the applicable rules of law.

1 claim:

1. A method for providing a game and for collecting donations, the method comprising the steps of:
   maintaining account information for a plurality of users in a storage device at a game server, including user profile information and a donation credits amount;
   maintaining recipient information for one or more recipients in the storage device at the game server, including a donation credits amount;
   pairing at the game server two or more of the plurality of users with each other for playing a game;
   receiving at the game server from each of the users playing the game a wagered donation credits amount and a selected recipient for receiving donation credits;
   hosting at the game server the game between the paired users;
   determining at the game server one or more winners and one or more losers of the game from among the paired users;
   deducting from the donation credits amount for at least one of the losers at least a portion of the wagered donation credits amount and increasing the donation credits amount of the selected recipient of at least one of the winners by at least a portion of the wagered donation credits amount.

2. The method according to claim 1, further comprising registering at the game server the plurality of users.

3. The method according to claim 2, wherein registering at the game server the plurality of users further comprises receiving at the game server for each of the plurality of users
as part of the user profile information a list of one or more preselected recipients for receiving donation credits.

4. The method according to claim 1, further comprising receiving at the game server a request to purchase one or more donation credits from the plurality of users.

5. The method according to claim 1, wherein pairing at the game server two or more of the plurality of users with each other for playing a game further comprises:
   - comparing the user profile information for two or more of the plurality of users;
   - pairing at the game server two or more of the plurality of users with each other based on the comparison of the user profile information.

6. The method according to claim 3, wherein pairing at the game server two or more of the plurality of users with each other for playing a game further comprises:
   - comparing the list of preselected recipients for two or more of the plurality of users;
   - pairing at the game server two or more of the plurality of users with each other based on the comparison of the lists of preselected recipients.

7. The method according to claim 3, wherein pairing at the game server two or more of the plurality of users with each other for playing a game further comprises:
   - comparing the selected recipient for a first user to be paired with the list of preselected recipients for one or more other users to be paired;
   - pairing at the game server the first user to be paired with one or more of the other users to be paired based on the comparison of the selected recipient of the first user to be paired with the lists of preselected recipients for the other users to be paired.

8. The method according to claim 1, wherein the recipient is any of a charitable cause, a personal cause, a political cause, an educational institution, a school club, a school activity, a civic organization or any other legitimate recipient.

9. The method according to claim 1, wherein the game server is a plurality of servers.

10. The method according to claim 1, wherein the storage device is a database.

11. The method according to claim 1, wherein one or more of the users are grouped into teams.

12. The method according to claim 1, wherein the donation credit may represent any fractional monetary amount.

13. The method according to claim 1, wherein the user profile information includes at least one of preferred game types, preferred time to play, skill level, past record of wins and losses, designated recipient, credits won for selected recipient, and total credits donated to one or more recipients.

14. The method according to claim 1, further comprising transferring to the one or more recipients funds equivalent to at least a portion of the donation credits amount for each of the recipients.

15. A computer readable medium having computer-executable instructions for performing a method for providing an online interactive game and for collecting donations comprising:
   - maintaining account information for a plurality of users in a storage device at a game server, including user profile information and a donation credits amount;
   - maintaining recipient information for one or more recipients in the storage device at the game server, including a donation credits amount;
   - pairing at the game server two or more of the plurality of users with each other for playing a game;
   - receiving at the game server from each of the users playing the game a wagered donation credits amount and a selected recipient for receiving donation credits;
   - hosting at the game server the game between the paired users;
   - determining at the game server one or more winners and one or more losers of the game from among the paired users;
   - deducting from the donation credits amount for at least one of the losers at least a portion of the wagered donation credits amount and increasing the donation credits amount of the selected recipient of at least one of the winners by at least a portion of the wagered donation credits amount.

16. The computer readable medium according to claim 15, further comprising registering at the game server the plurality of users of the game server, wherein the step of registering further comprises the step of receiving at the game server for each of the plurality of users as part of the user profile information a list of one or more preselected recipients for receiving donation credits.

17. The computer readable medium according to claim 15, wherein pairing at the game server two or more of the plurality of users with each other for playing an online interactive game further comprises:
   - comparing the user profile information for two or more of the plurality of users;
   - pairing at the game server two or more of the plurality of users with each other based on the comparison of the user profile information.

18. A system for facilitating donations, the system comprising a server having:
   - a registration module for associating one or more users with a donation credits amount and for associating one or more recipients with a donation credits amount;
   - a game module for administering a game to be played by the one or more users, the game module determining one or more winners of the game and decreasing the donation credits amount of at least one of the one or more losers by at least a portion of a wagered credit amount;
   - a credit module to facilitate a transfer of funds to the one or more recipients based on the donation credits amount associated with the respective one or more recipients.

19. A system for facilitating donations, the system comprising:
   - a game server adapted to host at least one game to be played by one or more users of the system;
   - a storage device at the game server; and
   - a user client computing device in communication with the game server to play the at least one game, the user client computing device enabling the user to select at least one recipient to receive donation credits,
   - wherein the game server hosts the game between the one or more users, determines one or more winning users and one or more losing users based on the outcome of the game, and the game server decreases a donation credit amount of at least one of the losing users and increases a donation credit amount of the selected recipient of at least one of the winning users.

20. The system of claim 19, wherein the game server is further adapted to facilitate a transfer of funds to the selected
at least one recipient of the one or more winning users in the amount of at least a portion of a wagered donation credit amount.

21. The system of claim 19, wherein the client computing device is any one of a personal computer, a mobile phone, a personal digital assistant, an in-flight entertainment system, and a gaming system.

22. The system of claim 19, wherein the game server matches a first user to a second user according to a set of matching parameters, for playing one of the plurality of online interactive games.

23. The system of claim 19, wherein the database comprises:
   a player profile database for storing user profile information including personal information, billing information, current donation credits amount, user gaming statistics, and one or more recipients;
   a recipient database for storing recipient information including recipient name, current donation credits amount, and recipient payment information.

24. The system of claim 19, wherein the system is implemented in at least one of a social networking system, an online gaming system, an Internet protocol system, and a telecommunications system.

25. The system of claim 19, wherein the game server tracks gaming statistics for the users and recipients including wins, losses and total credits won.

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