An apparatus for combining in a common jackpot one or more land-based gaming terminals with one or more online gaming stations. This arrangement increases the attraction of both types of gaming devices, while keeping the operator's risk limited to a seed amount.
FIG. 2
APPARATUS FOR PROGRESSIVE JACKPOT
BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0001] 1. Field of the Invention
[0002] The present invention relates to jackpot gambling games in general, and to a method and apparatus for combining landbased and online jackpot games in particular.
[0003] 2. Discussion of the Related Art
[0004] A gambling game typically functions in a way that a player places an initial bet, which is a wager towards a certain outcome of a specific event. If the outcome is successful for the player, the wager wins him or her an amount that is either a fixed sum, or a multiple of the placed bet. In any case, the won amount is specified by the game rules. If the outcome is unsuccessful for the player, the entire bet or a part of it, depending on the game rules is lost. There can be one or more different winning amounts in a game, which are related to different possible outcomes. The term jackpot, or progressive jackpot, generally relates to winning an accumulated sum in a gambling game, such as a slot machine or a video poker machine. In jackpot games, one or more of the winning amounts, won as a result of one or more specific outcomes, are not fixed by the game rules, but vary according to the bets previously placed by players. These amounts are named jackpots and function as follows: initially, the game operator initializes the jackpot with a starting amount, called the seed. Then, a predetermined portion of each bet in the specific gaming device, is devoted to the outcome that has the jackpot as its win. This portion is called the contribution rate. Thus, the more people play, the higher bets are, and the higher the contribution rate, the larger the jackpot grows. Eventually, one or more players achieve the predetermined outcome, and hit the jackpot, i.e. win the entire amount the jackpot has grown to. If more than one player hit the jackpot, the amount will divide between them according to the game rules. Once the jackpot was hit, the operator will re-seed the jackpot with a new seed amount, or less than that if only part of the jackpot was won, and the cycle will continue. Jackpot games are attractive to operators since although a jackpot can grow to substantial sums, which can attract players, the operator’s risk is nevertheless limited to the seed amount, although a typical jackpot win is substantially higher than the seed amount. Progressive jackpot games can be played both using landbased devices, i.e., actual machines, such as those placed in a casino, and through online gaming devices, as games offered in personal computers. In order to add additional excitement and raise the jackpot win of a traditional device, a number of landbased gaming devices had been connected to a common jackpot. This arrangement offers higher winning sums, and therefore more attractive game devices, since contributions are collected from players using a number of gaming machines.
[0005] However, even devices associated with a common jackpot can still suffer from reduced attraction level resulting from few players using the devices. The same problem may hurt the operators of online games, including both downloadable games and web-based games.
[0006] There is therefore a need for a method and apparatus for connecting a multiplicity of game devices of various types in a common jackpot, in order to enable large winning when hitting a jackpot, and thus provide additional attraction to each game.

SUMMARY OF THE PRESENT INVENTION

[0007] It is an object of the present invention to provide a novel method and apparatus for combining landbased gaming terminals and online stations in a common progressive jackpot game. The common jackpot enables winning large sums, thus increasing the appeal of the game for players using both terminals and stations, while still limiting the risk of the game operator, which is limited to the seed sum.

[0008] In accordance with the present invention, there is thus provided a progressive jackpot apparatus, the apparatus comprising one or more landbased gaming terminals, one or more online stations; and one or more servers connected to the landbased gaming terminals or to the online stations, wherein the landbased gaming terminals and the online gaming stations have a common jackpot. Optionally, one or more of the landbased gaming terminals or the online gaming stations enables a player to play a slot machine game or a video poker game. Within the apparatus, one or more of the landbased gaming terminals are dedicated gaming terminals. Within the apparatus, one or more of the online gaming stations are personal computers. The apparatus can further comprise a landbase game server, the landbase game server connected to one or more landbased gaming terminal. The landbase game server can be connected to or to one or more landbased gaming terminals through any one or more of the following: local area network, wide area network, or wireless network. The apparatus can further an online game server, the online game server connected to one or more online gaming stations. Optionally, the online game server can be connected to the one or more online stations through the internet.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0010] The present invention will be understood and appreciated more fully from the following detailed description taken in conjunction with the drawings in which:

[0011] FIG. 1 is a schematic illustration of a network comprising online gaming devices and landbased gaming devices participating in a common jackpot, in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the disclosed invention; and
FIG. 2 is a schematic illustration of a jackpot gaming device, in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the disclosed invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

The present invention overcomes the disadvantages of the prior art by providing a novel method and a system which connect together in a common jackpot, online and landbased gaming devices. The disclosed invention comprises a network of one or more devices, such as personal computers in which a player can play an online casino game away from a casino, and one or more landbased gaming devices, in which players can play, for example in a casino. Thus, a player using in a landbased device, is participating in a jackpot game which is played by online players in distributed locations, in the same country or worldwide. An online player, on the other hand, is participating in a jackpot with all other online players, and with players of landbased devices. Using this scheme, the prize offered in a jackpot game, can increase in advanced pace, depending on the number and bet size of online and landbased players. Thus, the attraction of both the online and landbased devices increases, while the operator's risk remaining limited to the initially paid seed amount. Preferably, all devices in a shared jackpot share the same bet size, but this limitation is not mandatory, as long as the rules are known.

Reference is now made to FIG. 1, which is a schematic illustration of a network implementing the disclosed invention. The network, generally referenced 10 comprises one or more landbased terminals 12, 14, or 16. Terminals 12, 14 or 16 are physical gaming devices, preferably placed in a publicly accessible location, such as a casino and connected to a network. Terminals 12, 14, or 16 can be located in one location, or be distributed in a multiplicity of physical locations. In addition, terminals 12, 14, or 16 can demonstrate the same game, for example the same slot machine with the same content or pictures, similar slot machines employing the same or different rules and the same or different content or pictures, or different games. However, when different games are used, for example different slot machines, or a combination of a slot machine and a video poker, the rules have to be described in a precise manner, stating inter alia the outcomes that bring about a jackpot hit in the various games. In a typical environment terminals 12, 14, or 16 all provide the same game, or at least similar games with identical rules, including for example the coin size associated with the game. Terminals 12, 14, or 16 are typically computing platforms such as a personal computer based on PC or Windows, or a network computer. Preferably, the computing platforms associated with terminals 12, 14, or 16 are industrial PCs.

Terminals 12, 14, or 16 are connected through a communication network 20, such as a local area network (LAN), wide area network (WAN), a wireless communication network, the internet, or the like. Communication network 20 is preferably secured, for example by applying SSL protocol to the communications going through the network, or parts thereof. All landbased terminals 12, 14, or 16 are connected to a landbase game server 24. Server 24 is preferably also a computing platform, such as a personal computer, a mainframe computer, or any other type of computing platform that is provisioned with a memory device (not shown), a CPU or microprocessor device, and several I/O ports (not shown). Alternatively, server 24 can be a DSP chip, an ASIC device storing the commands and data necessary to execute the methods of the present invention. In a similar manner, stations 30, 32, or 34 are typically personal computers, but can also be mainframe computers or terminals thereof, either privately owned, or otherwise accessible by a player, for example a terminal at a internet cafe. Typically, stations 30, 32 and 34 are distributed over various geographic locations. Stations 30, 32, 34 provide access either to web-based games, played over a communication channel such as the internet, or to locally installed games, running on the local station with minimal communication with a server. While terminals 12, 14, or 16 cater to the needs of landbased devices, stations 30, 32 or 34 are intended to be used by a person at his home, office, internet cafe or the like. The differences between the two platforms include for example: landbased terminals offer the option to receive cash payment while online stations are limited to credit card, debit card or similar payment options; landbased terminals are optimized for touch-screen usage, thus eliminating the need for a keyboard or a pointing device which are likely to be used at an online station; the graphic offered at a landbased terminal is typically richer than the graphic offered by an online station; a landbased terminal is dedicated to gaming and does not enable other usages, while an online station can be used for multiple applications, including but not limited to gaming; an online station is player-oriented, catering to a recognized player, while a landbased terminal is game-oriented and does not address a specific player. Stations 30, 32 and 34 communicate through a communication media such as the internet 40 with an online game server 44. Online game server 44 is preferably a computing platform, such as a personal computer, a mainframe computer, or any other type of computing platform that is provisioned with a memory device (not shown), a CPU or microprocessor device, and several I/O ports (not shown). Alternatively, server 44 can be a DSP chip, an ASIC device storing the commands and data necessary to execute the methods of the present invention. Servers 24 and 44 are connected to a common jackpot server 50, which maintains the current status of the jackpot and updates servers 24 and 44, which in turn update the terminals 12, 14, 16, 30, 32 and 34. It will be appreciated that the functionality of each of servers 24, 44, and 50 can be distributed among one or more physical servers, whether co-located or geographically distributed. Alternatively, the functionality of two or all of servers 24, 44, and 50 can be located on the same computing platform. The number of servers and workload distribution can also vary dynamically, wherein more servers are added when the number of concurrent players increases. It will be appreciated that the disclosed architecture is exemplary only, and other architectures can be designed without departing from the spirit of the disclosed invention. Server 50 is further connected to management terminal 54, used by an operator of an apparatus of the disclosed invention Management terminal 54 provides an operator with the options required for maintaining the balance of the jackpot, including transferring seed money or betting money, withdrawing payments, collecting earnings, or the like. Alternatively, server 24 or server 44 can either comprise an application, or be connected to one or more computing platforms serving as application servers, which provide the above-mentioned functionality. The communication between the components of the system can be in various preferably secured formats, depending, for example, on factors such as the expected number of online players, the number of landbased devices, whether the online games are downloaded and installed or played over the web, or the like.

FIG. 2 is an illustration of a terminal, such as a monitor of a personal computer, running a slot machine game. The game is either downloaded and installed on the user's
computing platform prior to playing, or is run as a web-based application. Either way, if the player is playing online, and actually gambling (as opposed to "fun" mode), the computing platform is connected via a local area network, a wide area network, a wireless connection, a modem or any other medium to the internet. Thus, whenever the user hits spin button 204, BET ONE button 205 or BET MAX button 206 an existing account having a balance as displayed in balance display 212 is debited in the sum appearing on the total bet display label 214, which is calculated according to the numbers appearing in lines number display 216 and in line bet display 218. The player's win, if any, is displayed in win display 220.

As detailed above, a portion of each bet is dedicated to the progressive common jackpot, and if an outcome of a bet by a user occurs, for example five apples in row 208, the user hits the jackpot and his or her account is credited. When hitting the jackpot, the user wins all, or part of the common jackpot, as accumulated from online stations as well as land-based terminals. Optionally, the game plays an audio of falling coins on such occasion, in order to provide the user with the excitement of winning in a landbased device.

Referring now to FIG. 3, showing a similar game to the game shown in FIG. 2, as played in a landbased device. The shown device is a slot machine, comprising either physical rolling wheels, or electronic simulation of such wheels. The user can input the payment in coins, bills, voucher number, credit card, or a dedicated card into slot 306. After inputting the payment, the user selects BET ONE button 305 or BET MAX button 307, and then hits SPIN button 304. Then, an existing account having a balance as displayed in balance display 312 is debited in the sum appearing on the total bet display label 314, which is calculated according to the numbers appearing in lines number display 316 and in line bet display 318. The player's win, if any, is displayed in win display 320. If an outcome designated as a jackpot, such as five apples at line 304 occurs, the player hits the jackpot, and receives the sum that had been accumulated from all devices, including online stations and landbased terminals that participate in the common jackpot.

It will be appreciated by persons skilled in the art that the disclosed invention can be extended to additional types of devices, such as roulettes, pachinko, poker, blackjack, or the like. Furthermore, games of different types, or of the same type but different betting sums, can be connected together in a common jackpot, provided that the winning rules offer equal winning chances for equal sums. The used devices can also be extended to include all the right to participate in an automatic betting at a predetermined time, similarly to a lottery game. A person having ordinary skills in the art will appreciate that there exist multiple methods for connecting devices of different types, particularly online and landbased devices, without departing form the spirit of the disclosed invention.

It will be appreciated by persons skilled in the art that the present invention is not limited to what has been particularly shown and described hereinabove. Rather the scope of the present invention is defined only by the claims which follow.

1. A progressive jackpot apparatus, the apparatus comprising:
an at least one landbased gaming terminal;
an at least one online gaming station; and
an at least one server connected to the at least one landbased gaming terminal or to the at least one online gaming station, wherein the at least one landbased gaming terminal and the the at least one online gaming station have a common jackpot.
2. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the at least one landbased gaming terminal or the at least online gaming station enables a player to play a slot machine game.
3. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the at least one landbased gaming terminal or the at least one online gaming station enables a player to play video poker.
4. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the at least one landbased gaming terminal is a dedicated gaming terminal.
5. The apparatus of claim 1 wherein the at least one online gaming station is a personal computer.
6. The apparatus of claim 1 further comprising a landbased game server, the landbase game server connected to the at least one landbased gaming device.
7. The apparatus of claim 6 wherein the landbased game server is connected to the at least one landbased gaming device through at least one of the group consisting of: local area network, wide area network, or wireless network.
8. The apparatus of claim 1 further comprising an online game server, the online game server connected to the at least one online gaming device.
9. The apparatus of claim 8 wherein the online game server is connected to the at least one online gaming device through the internet.
10. A method of providing a progressive jackpot apparatus, the method comprising the steps of:
providing an at least one landbased gaming terminal; and
providing software to be run on an at least one online gaming station.
11. The method of claim 10 further comprising the step of providing an at least one server connected to the at least one landbased gaming terminal or to the at least one online gaming station, wherein the at least one landbased gaming terminal and the at least one online gaming station have a common jackpot.
12. The method of claim 10 wherein the at least one landbased gaming terminal or the at least one online gaming station enables a user to play a slot machine game.
13. The method of claim 10 wherein the at least one landbased gaming terminal or the at least one online gaming station enables a user to play video poker game.
14. The method of claim 10 wherein the at least one landbased gaming terminal is a dedicated gaming terminal.
15. The method of claim 10 wherein the at least one online gaming station is a personal computer.
16. The method of claim 10 further comprising a step of providing a landbased game server, the landbased game server connected to the at least one landbased gaming terminal.
17. The method of claim 16 wherein the landbased game server is connected to the at least one landbased gaming terminal through at least one of the group consisting of: local area network, wide area network, or wireless network.
18. The method of claim 10 further comprising a step of providing an at least one online game server, the online game server connected to the at least one online gaming station.
19. The method of claim 18 wherein the online game server is connected to the at least one online gaming station through the internet.

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