

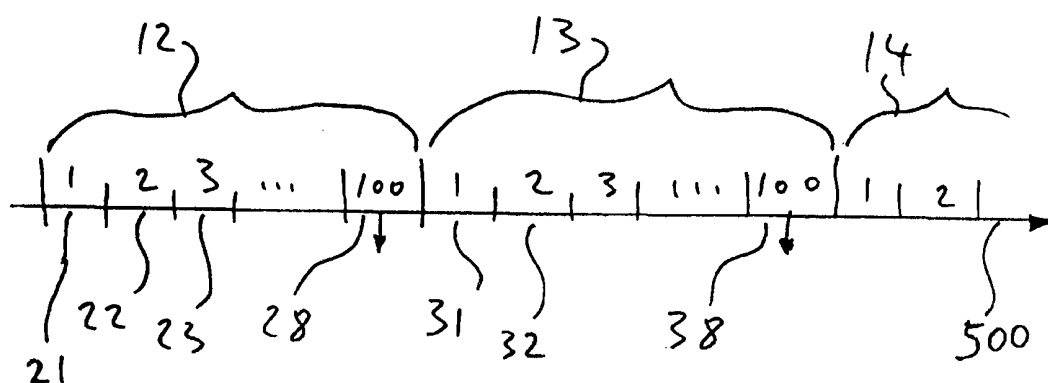


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(54) Title: LOTTERY SYSTEM AND METHOD



(57) Abstract

A lottery method wherein, for each caller, a lottery system performs the following steps: A. Arranging the payment for the lottery; B. If the payment was settled, go to step (C); else reject the caller; C. The caller is assigned a serial number, wherein consecutive numbers are assigned to callers; D. The lottery system decides whether the caller won or not, according to his serial number and a parameter in the system; E. If the present caller did not win, then the lottery system announces this. Go to step (G). F. If the present caller wins, then the lottery system immediately announces a "win" result.

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Lottery System and Method

Technical Field

This invention concerns lottery systems and methods and their applications. The invention relates in particular to such systems where the participant receives an immediate answer regarding his/her winnings.

Background Art

In present lottery systems, a user has to buy a ticket and then wait for the lottery to be performed and the winning numbers to be declared. Thus, a participant will not receive an immediate answer regarding his/her winnings, as many a participant may desire.

An immediate answer is also desirable for the firm that is running the lottery, since a win will encourage a participant in the lottery. Moreover, a win will stimulate the participant, as well as others, to play again the lottery.

There are other methods where the lottery result is immediate, for example where the result is written on the ticket and a user has to uncover it by scratching a layer of paint, for example. Among the disadvantages of this method are that the winning chances are low, and that a user has to buy a ticket from a store. The store may be closed, or it may be inconvenient to go there. It would be so more easier to do it from home.

In regular lottery as performed today, the prize is very high, however the chance of winning it are very low. The majority of participants win nothing. There are participants that may prefer to win less, but with a higher chance of winning.

Today, a person desiring to participate in lottery has to leave home and go to a store to buy a ticket there. This requires an effort and is inconvenient. Sometimes the weather is unfavorable, for example when it is raining. The lottery store is not open all the time. Maybe a lottery store is not available nearby. Some people may desire to participate in a lottery in the middle of the night, for example.

The inconvenient access and the limited hours of the lottery store may reduce the quantity of people that participate in lottery. Thus, the lottery companies may not benefit from the whole market potential.

There are systems in prior art that teach of a lottery system using the telephone, for example:

Reese, US Patent 4,969,183 , discloses a telephone lotto number system and service. The telephone system comprises a touchtone phone which is connected via telephone lines to a telephone company central office. The touchtone telephone allows said lotto player from an office, home, car, pay phone or any other location to dial an inward calling conventional 213-type phone number or an enhanced inward calling 900-type service to access and interact with the telephone system. A user can then select a lotto game and the system charges the dollar amount accordingly.

Moreover, the system generates a random number for randomly selecting each lotto selection, if the user desires that the number played be chosen at random. A confirmation number is generated and is sent to the user. A user may also enter lotto numbers manually.

Thus, the abovedetailed system allows to connect through a telephone to a phone lottery system. The customer arranges the payment, then he/she either can give a number for the lottery, or the system can choose a random number for him. The lottery-related information is kept in the system, presumably for the lottery that is performed at a later date.

Reese does not relate to the lottery system and method itself. The system will not tell a user whether he won or not.

In regular lottery as performed today, the prize is very high, however the chance of winning it are very low. The majority of participants win nothing. There are participants that may prefer to win less, but with a higher chance of winning.

Moreover, a participant may desire to receive an immediate answer regarding his/her winnings.

In the method in Reese, and according to the accepted practice in lottery games, a significant amount of time may pass from the time a participant joined the lottery, until the lottery itself takes place and a winning is declared. Afterwards, it may take additional time for a participant to get and examine the results, until the participant finally knows whether he won or not.

The above problems are not addressed in Reese.

Walker et al., US Patent 5,083,272 , discloses an interactive telephone lottery system with a verification code. The system for playing a lottery game includes a telephone with a touchtone keypad, switching means connected to the telephone to interface with the telephone and a telephone communication network. Moreover, the system includes money access means with a user's account having a pre-established source of funds.

A lottery game processor is connected to the switching means and the account processor through the communication network and includes a program for receiving a lottery transaction from the user and for debiting the amount of said lottery transaction from the user's account. A status signal indicative of the status of the lottery transaction is generated and is sent to the user.

Moreover, the system includes means for verifying data associated with the lottery transaction entered by the user, with means for checking the data entered by the user and for generating a validation code accordingly. The above means include means for prompting the user during the transaction.

The system in Walker et al. allows a participant to call by phone the telephone lottery system to participate in a lottery game. The participant has to have an account, that is used to pay for the instant game.

The user may then participate in the lottery. The system will give an indication to the user that he is participating in the lottery.

Walker et al. does not relate to the lottery system and method itself.

The system will not tell a user whether he won or not.

Thus, apparently Walker does not disclose a novelty regarding the lottery method itself.

In regular lottery as performed today, the prize is very high, however the chance of winning it are very low. The majority of participants win nothing. There are participants that may prefer to win less, but with a higher chance of winning.

Moreover, a participant may desire to receive an immediate answer regarding his/her winnings.

In the method in Walker, and according to the accepted practice in lottery games, a significant amount of time may pass from the time a participant joined the lottery, until the lottery itself takes place and a winning is declared. Afterwards, it may take additional time for a participant to get and examine the results, until the participant finally knows whether he won or not.

The above problems are not addressed in Walker et al.

Guttman et al., US Patent 5,354,069 , discloses a lottery simulation system for playing a lottery by signals from a telephone, for use with a lottery computer that ordinarily accepts digital input in proper from staffed remote terminals as bet transactions.

The system records the bet transactions that have been completed, and provides a digital output confirming that a bet transaction has been completed. Furthermore, the system includes confirmation means with error detection and correction means for detecting and correcting aborted bet transactions while a telephone better is on the line.

Thus, the system in Guttman allows a user with a telephone to contact directly, by phone, the lottery computer that usually accepts inputs from staffed remote terminals. The system acknowledges the user's participation in the lottery.

Guttman et al. does not relate to the lottery system and method itself. The system will not tell a user whether he won or not. There is no novelty regarding the lottery method itself.

In prior art lottery , the prize is very high, however the chance of winning it are very low. The majority of participants win nothing. There are participants that may prefer to win less, but with a higher chance of winning. Moreover, a participant may desire to receive an immediate answer regarding his/her winnings.

In the method in Guttman, and according to the accepted practice in lottery games, a significant amount of time may pass from the time a participant joined the lottery, until the lottery itself takes place and a winning is declared.

The above problems are not addressed in Guttman et al.

Entenmann et al., US Patent 5,403,999 , discloses a telecommunications system for lotteries. A lottery customer dials a telephone number to enter the lottery. The customer has his eligibility verified by a credit card number or the telephone number of the calling station. The customer is then prompted to speak or key a lottery entry which may be a full number, partial number or an indication that a lottery comparison number is to be generated by a lottery processor.

From the customer's lottery entry, a lottery comparison number is generated. This is compared with a random lottery target number generated by the lottery processor. If the comparison number and target number match, the customer is informed of his winning.

Thus, Entenmann requires that a user enters a number for the lottery, either by speaking it or dialing it. It may not be convenient for a user to enter that number. The numbers entered by user may also be inconvenient to the system, that has to recognize those numbers and to store them. There is a cumbersome records keeping, especially if a large number of participants is involved.

Moreover, in Enternmann the system generates a random winning number. Thus, the chance of winning is not controlled. As the number of participants may vary, the chance of winning will change as well. Entenmann cannot commit to a specific winning probability.

It is an objective of the present invention to provide for a lottery system and method, with means for overcoming the abovedetailed deficiencies.

Disclosure of Invention

It is an object of the present invention to provide for a lottery system and method that allows a user to participate in a lottery with no need to visit a lottery store. Thus the participation in lottery is more convenient to user.

A user may participate from home or other convenient location.

This object is achieved by a method of lottery as disclosed in claim 1.

Moreover, the lottery system accepts a user and gives an instant answer, whether that user won or not.

The system uses a novel lottery method, wherein each user is given a serial number according to the time he/she contacted the lottery system. The win decision is done automatically, based on that serial number. This is a novel method, that is different than the prior art method using balls.

The winning serial number may be openly declared and known to people. Each participant may know that, for example, each time the 100th caller will win the lottery. This may be an attraction feature of the lottery.

Thus, the novel lottery method has various advantages. For example, a participant will be announced immediately of a win. The chance of winning may be higher, and may be known to all. The chance of winning may be set by the lottery manager as desired.

Participation in the lottery may be used to stimulate various commercial activities, to increase sales or encourage the public to perform various activities as desired by a promoter.

Further objects, advantages and other features of the present invention will become obvious to those skilled in the art upon reading the disclosure set forth hereinafter.

Brief Description of Drawings

Fig. 1 illustrates a lottery method with an immediate win decision.

Fig. 2 illustrates another embodiment of a lottery method with an immediate win decision.

Fig. 3 details a computer-controlled lottery system with a communication channel to participants.

Modes for Carrying out the Invention

A preferred embodiment of the present invention will now be described by way of example and with reference to the accompanying drawings.

Referring to Fig. 1, a lottery method with an immediate win decision, the system decides on a win based on the time order of users calling the lottery center. For example, it may be decided that each 100th participant will win. In each group of 100 people calling the lottery center, the first 99 will not win, whereas the 100th caller will win.

A lottery parameter N may be set to 100 or to any other number, as desired, for example 50, 200, 1000 etc.

A typical example of the operation of the method versus time is detailed with reference to the time axis 500.

During a time period 12 there are N calls to the lottery system. Each caller is assigned a serial number: caller 21 is assigned serial number 1, caller 22 that calls immediately after caller 21 is assigned the number 2 with caller 23 being assigned the number 3. The callers 21, 22 and 23 will not win. The reason is their serial number during the time period 12: these participants were assigned the serial numbers 1, 2 and 3 respectively, whereas the winning serial number is 100.

Caller 28 will win, since he/she is the 100th caller and was thus assigned the serial number 100. N is 100 in this example.

With the 100th caller (the winner) the time interval 12 ends, and a new time interval 13 begins. This is a new time interval, wherein callers are again assigned serial numbers 1 to 100.

Callers 31 and 32 will not win, since they were assigned serial numbers 1 and 2 respectively. Caller 38 will win, since he/she is the 100th caller and was thus assigned the serial number 100, and since 100 is the winning number in the example.

Immediately after the call from user 38, a new time interval 14 of N callers will begin, and so on, the lottery method continues all the time.

Advantages:

1. In the new lottery method of the present invention, a participant needs not give any number. Therefore the method is easier for the participants. The very order of participants calling the lottery system (the serial number assigned to each participant) is used as the deciding factor regarding a winning.
2. This is a fast and easy to implement method, with no cumbersome records to keep. There is no danger of misunderstanding between a user and the lottery system. The method is automatic.
3. A participant receives an immediate answer, indicating whether he won or not.

4. There is no danger of a loss for the lottery system. In prior art methods, there is a chance of several successive wins, that may cause a large deficit to the lottery system. Alternately, to prevent such a loss, prior art systems may set a low chance of winning.

In the novel method, a winner is declared only after a predefined number of participants have paid already, so there is no possibility of a loss for the lottery system.

5. In prior art lottery, the chance of winning is small, since the method compares two random numbers – the number chosen by the system and the number presented by a user. In prior art lottery, the chance of winning is very small. The majority of the people win nothing. It may be possible that no one wins, if no one presented the number that is found to be the winning number. This is an unsolved problem in prior art.

In the novel method, the chance of winning is higher. If, for example, one in a hundred wins, then the winning chance is 1% or a probability of 0.01 . The operator of the lottery system may set any winning probability, as desired, and without a chance of losing.

6. Participants in the lottery know that the chance of winning is higher, and may also know the exact probability of winning. This may be an attraction feature of the novel lottery method.

Method of handling callers

For each caller, the lottery system will perform a method with the following steps:

A. Arranging the payment for the lottery and choosing the type of lottery and/or the amount of the bet. There are various methods of payment, as detailed below. It is also possible that a participant will not pay for the lottery at all. Rather, a customer may be given rights to play the lottery as a prize for performing a desired activity, as detailed below.

For a simple system, where the price is fixed, the payment may be arranged first. Where the lottery system is complex and there are various possibilities at various prices, the caller may be allowed to first choose the desired lottery game; this defines the participation cost. The caller has then to arrange payment for the participation to the amount defined according to the chosen game.

B. If the method of payment for participation in the lottery was settled, for example using one of the possibilities in step (A), then go to step (C), else reject caller. In another embodiment, if the payment was not settled OK, the caller may be given another opportunity to do it right by returning to step (A) above.

C. The caller is assigned a serial number. Consecutive numbers are assigned in this step to callers, starting from a first number (1 for example) and up to the last number N, that is the winning number in the lottery.

After the last number N, subsequent callers are again assigned numbers starting from the first number (1 for example).

D. The lottery system decides whether the caller won or not, according to his/her serial number. If the serial number for the present caller is smaller than N, then the caller does not win. If the serial number is N, the winning number in the lottery, then a win is declared.

E. If the present caller did not win, then the lottery system announces a "no win" result. The system may also give the caller his/her serial number or a number derived therefrom, for control purposes for example. A caller may use that number for checking the lottery decisions at a later time. This ends the treatment stage for the present caller. Go to step (G).

F. If the present caller did win, then the lottery system immediately announces a "win" result. The system may transfer the caller to an employee at the lottery center to immediately arrange the payment of the prize. Various methods of payment may be used, for example the lottery system may transfer the prize to the customer's bank account, send a check or invite the customer to receive the prize personally. The customer may give his/her personal details and the chosen method of payment.

Alternately, the prize or part thereof may be held at the lottery center in a customer's account. This money may be later used by that customer for subsequent participation in the lottery, without an additional payment. Furthermore, the lottery system resets the serial numbers of participants, so that the next caller will receive the first number. It then starts a new lottery time period.

G. End session with present caller. The communication line with the caller is disconnected. Go to step (A), to wait for the next caller. The lottery system thus automatically receives callers and performs the lottery method continuously, all the time.

The lottery system may implement at the same time several lottery games. In each game, the system assigns serial numbers to callers. The serial numbers are independent in each lottery games from those in the other games. Each game may have a different winning number N . Each game has a different, separate lottery time period. In each lottery type the system assigns separate serial numbers to participants and declares as winner each N th caller.

There are various methods to arrange the payment for the lottery in step (A) above. There may be various methods of payment, for example:

A1. The user dials on his phone the number of a credit card to be used for payment. The lottery system may automatically check that credit card and approve participation in the lottery if the payment is approved.

A2. The user has a lottery participation ticket with a specific serial number. The user enters that number to be accepted in the lottery.

A3. The user has a secret number that was given to him/her as an indication of their right to participate in the lottery. The user presents that number and, if the number indeed corresponds to a right to participate in the lottery, then the system grants permission to participate in the lottery to that caller.

In step (A), the participant chooses the type of lottery and/or the amount of the bet. The same lottery system may offer various types of bets, having different chances of winning and different prizes.

Payment is settled using a method chosen in step (A) or other similar method .

It is possible to implement the lottery system of the present invention in an Internet site. In this case, the communication channel is the Internet network, and the lottery center will be an Internet site.

Various communication methods with a lottery center may be used. These may include for example the Internet, an Intranet, the telephone network, a cellular telephone, a computer local net etc.

It is possible that a participant will not pay for participation in the lottery. Rather, a customer may receive a lottery ticket or rights to participate in a lottery when the customer performs a predefined activity. This may be used to stimulate the public to do specific activities as desired by the promoters. The prize is the right to participate in the lottery.

Examples of customer's activities that a promoter may desire to stimulate:

1. The customer buys a promoted, advertised product . The lottery participation is presented as a stimulant to sales of that product.
2. The customer buys a promoted, advertised service .
3. The customer buys in a store or commercial center, wherein the promoter desires to attract people to that location.
4. The customer connects to a specific Internet site, wherein a promoter desires to increase the public participation in that site.
5. The customer connects to an Internet site of commercials or advertisements.
6. The customer listens to a specific radio station or program, or the customer views a television program or station as desired by the promoter.

7. The customer subscribes to specific cable TV channels or to satellite channels that are being promoted.
8. Stimulate participation in market research programs, public opinion research etc.
9. Buy products from a remote location by telephone, mail order firms, Internet or other means.
10. The customer uses a credit card for payment. This may encourage users to pay with credit cards, or to use a specific credit card.
11. The customer is required to participate in a club, like a customer's club. The customer has to present a secret number relating to his/her membership in the club.

The above relates to giving the customer rights to participate in the lottery for free. Alternately, the customer may be given a reduction in the price of a lottery ticket.

Various methods may be used to actually give the user the rights to participate in the lottery. These may include, for example:

1. When a user receives the products that were ordered by phone, mail order or Internet for example, attached to the products is a participation ticket in the lottery. Alternately, a letter with a secret participation number is included therein.
2. If the customer buys through the Internet, then the participation ticket or the secret participation number may be sent by E-mail.
3. If a customer buys in a store or a commercial center, then he/she may receive there the lottery ticket or secret participation number.
4. If the customer subscribes to a television channel or other service, he/she may receive the lottery ticket by mail or by phone call.

The customer may receive the lottery participation ticket from the lottery firm or from another party. When the participation ticket is issued as a prize for buying a specific product or service, then the supplier of that product or service may issue the lottery participation ticket to the customer. Thus, the lottery ticket may be issued by a party that is not directly related to the lottery company itself.

Thus, participation in the lottery may be used to stimulate various commercial activities, to increase sales or encourage the public to perform various activities as desired by a promoter.

In another embodiment of the lottery method, a customer is given a serial number in the lottery according to the time of his/her buying in a certain store or connecting to a specific Internet site. The win decision is performed as detailed above, that is the winner is he who has a serial number that equals the N number, the winning serial number.

In this embodiment as well, the participation in the lottery may be for free, provided the customer contacted that Internet site or bought at that store.

In this case, the lottery center may be the Internet site, the orders receiving center of an electronic commerce firm, the orders taking center of a direct mail firm or stores in a commercial center.

Thus, the present lottery method may be used to stimulate sales of products and services.

Various communication methods may be used to connect to a lottery center, for example:

1. Regular telephone
2. Wireless or cellular telephone
3. Fax
4. E-mail
5. Internet network
6. Various networks or means for remote access
7. Personal by the user, when the user actually buys in a store or a commercial center.

Fig. 2 illustrates another embodiment of a lottery method with an immediate win decision. In the above method it may happen that a person first contacts the lottery system and is given a serial number. If that serial number is close to the win number N , that person may decide to immediately call again the lottery system, as his chance of winning are improved. Thus, a user may abuse the information received from the lottery system to improve his/her chances of winning.

A possible method to solve the above problem is to announce to participants a control number that does not disclose their serial number.

The following method indicates activities on the time axis 500. During each time interval 12 or 13 of 100 participants, each participant receives both a serial number (consecutive numbers in an increasing sequence) and a control number that does not disclose the serial number. For example, during a time interval 12 there are N participants. From the above participants, caller 21 receives the serial number 1 and a control number 611 whose value is 119. Caller 22 that immediately follows caller 21 will receive the serial number 2 and a control number 612 whose value is 147.

Callers 21 and 22 do not win, because of their serial numbers that are too small (1 and 2). The lottery system announces to caller 21 the value of his control number 611, that is it will present the number 119. The lottery system will announce the number 147 to caller 22.

The winning number is 100, therefore the caller 28 that received that serial number wins. The system announces to the winner the value of the control number 618, that is the number 912.

Each time interval 12, 13, 14 etc. here includes 100 calls, since N has the value 100 in this example. Each time interval may span a different time period, according to the timing of the calls.

During the time interval 13, the lottery system gives to each of the callers 31, 32, 34 the serial numbers 1, 2, 100 respectively, and the control numbers 631, 632, 634 respectively. The 100th caller, that is caller 34, is the winner in time interval 13.

The system announces to callers 31, 32, 34 the numbers 314, 220, 417 respectively.

Fig. 3 details a computer-controlled lottery system with a communication channel 41 to participants. The channel 41 may be implemented with a telephone line that is used by callers to connect to the lottery system.

An electronic switch 42 connects the caller to an automatic handling unit that includes the units 43, 44 and 45, or to a telephone 48 to allow the caller to speak with an employee at the lottery center.

When a new caller calls the lottery system through channel 41, the switch 42 is in a position as illustrated in Fig. 3. The audio information unit 44 is activated to issue prearranged sentences, for example:

1. "Welcome to the lottery center of ... " to affirm to the caller that indeed he/she reached the lottery center as desired.
2. "Please dial or enter your credit card number" to arrange the payment for participation in the lottery
3. "The payment with the credit card was not authorized" in case there is a payment problem with the credit card.
4. "Please dial the participation amount" to allow the user to choose the amount of gambling in the lottery and the corresponding prize. For example, a further sentence may be "For a \$10 lottery dial 1, for a \$50 dial 2 " etc.
5. "You win!" or "No win this time ... good luck next time" , according to the result of the lottery.

The above or other announcements are issued by unit 44 under control of controller 46, according to a predefined program and according to the advancement of the deal with the caller.

In another embodiment of the invention, controller 46 may be a personal computer, and the audio information system may be an audio board in the computer, for example a Sound Blaster (tm).

Each audio message may be a file in the computer memory. Thus, the computer may issue any message as desired.

The audio message may be sent as an analog signal over the telephone line, or as a digital signal over the Internet for example. The annunciation in any case will be adapted to the communication medium in use.

In another embodiment, the message is not audio but text or a picture with the desired message or other means for presenting various annunciation to participants in the lottery.

The data receiving unit 43 includes means for receiving information regarding the method of payment, the choice of the lottery type to play, the amount of the gamble and/or other relevant information. The unit may include means for decoding dual tone signals issued while dialing with a regular tone dialing phone, for example. For example, the caller may dial his/her credit card number on their phone.

Unit 43 may also include means for detecting signals issuing from a pulse dialing phone, as a caller may use this type of telephone.

Unit 43 may also include a modem, in case a caller connects to the lottery system using a computer. In this case, all the information between user and lottery system may be exchanged using modems on both sides.

The information exchanged may also include the announcements that were detailed above as being issued by unit 44.

Unit 43 transfers the received information to controller 46. The controller 46 can confirm the payment with a credit card by connecting to the credit card center through channel 52.

Controller 46 decides whether the present caller won, and issues control signals to unit 44 to announce that decision to the caller, that is whether he won or not. If the caller wins, controller 46 issues a signal 461 to a lottery center employee, to indicate that there is a winner. Controller 46 may also activate the switch 42 into its other state, to connect the winning caller to the lottery center employee.

Thus, a winning caller is immediately connected to the lottery center employee, to arrange the immediate payment of the lottery prize. For example, a caller may give his/her identification and their bank account details, to allow immediate transfer of the winnings to that account.

Alternately, a winner may ask that the prize will be kept at the lottery center on his name or in an account controlled by that winner, to be used as payment for participation in future lottery games. In this case, the participant may receive confirmation of that account deposit, together with a secret number to be used in lieu of payment in future lottery games.

The lottery system may also include a printer 52 connected to the controller (or computer) 46, to allow printing all the transactions going on in the lottery system. The recorded activities may include all the calls, regardless of who won. The printout or log may be used to supervise and control the operation of the system. This may be used to ensure the lottery system operates OK. Defects or bugs may be detected, as well as deliberate attacks on the system.

An additional supervision means in the system may include a recording unit 45 that is connected to the communication channel 41 and records all the activities there.

Moreover, controller 46 may include output means 462 like computer display means, to display in real time the various activities and status to an operator. Furthermore, the controller 46 may include input means like a keyboard or a mouse, to allow entering commands to the system and/or to change the parameters of the lottery.

In another embodiment, channel 41 is not a phone line but a wireless link or a cellular phone or an Internet link or any other communication means. Of special interest is the Internet link, that allows fast and easy communications worldwide.

The channel 41 may include a plurality of communication links, to allow a simultaneous connection to a plurality of users. These links may include different media, as detailed above.

In any case, the computer or controller will assign an unique serial number to each caller in these links. Thus, the system can handle many concurrent callers. The callers are arranged according to their calling order, even if there is just a few milliseconds time difference between the calls.

It is possible that the controller scans sequentially the various channels. In that case, the actual calling order may not be the deciding factor. Rather, the order in which these calls arrive in the controller determines the serial number of each caller.

There are various payment means, as detailed above. A caller may either pay for participation in the lottery, or may be granted the right of a free participation in the lottery if that customer performed specific tasks. Otherwise, a customer may be given a reduction in the price of participation in the lottery.

A user may hold a secret number that can be presented to participate in the lottery.

Memory means in the controller may store a list of legitimate secret numbers that are acceptable to allow participation in the lottery.

To prevent a user from presenting the same number several times, the controller may also keep a list of used secret numbers.

A customer may make a subscription that allows him a certain number of participation in the lottery per month. In this case, a participant calls the lottery system, presents a secret number and is allowed to play a specific number of times per month.

In another embodiment, the lottery system has a special number that is assigned to special services, and that allows the lottery system to charge extra payment for connecting to that system. In that case, payment is performed by charging the usual customer's phone bill.

One of the advantages of the system is the high chance of winning. The lottery operator can undertake that, for example, each 50th caller or each 100th caller will win.

In prior art lottery systems, all the existing tickets participate in the lottery, even those that have not been sold. It is possible that the winner in those prior art systems is a number that has not been chosen by anyone.

In the present system, the method allows to achieve a high chance of winning, but without endangering the lottery center with a possible loss. The chance of winning is precisely set, as well as the size of the prize. The lottery system can only win.

The method is automatic, only a winning caller needs the personal attention of a lottery system employee. If the details of a winner are known to the system or are entered by dialing, then no human intervention is necessary at all.

The new lottery system is flexible and can be adapted to various conditions: the winning number N is programmable, as well as the size of the prize, the acceptable method of payment by a customer, the participation fee, the method of paying the prize and more.

The above detailed lottery method and system may be used to advance sales of various products and/or services. For example, when a customer buys in a supermarket or another store, he/she receives a receipt or ticket to allow participation in the lottery.

The amount of participation in the lottery, or the number of plays allowed therein, may be set according to the amount of that user's spending in a specific store.

The lottery amount may be a specific percentage of the customer's spending. For example, if a 5% participation in the lottery is agreed upon and a customer spent \$400 in the supermarket, then he/she may be granted rights to play the lottery for the amount of \$20.

The customer may be issued a secret number to present while connecting the lottery system, as detailed above.

For the store this is a sales promotion method, since customers may agree to buy more to participate in the lottery.

The lottery system has a governing parameter, that is the winning number N , that is the serial number that wins the lottery.

In another embodiment, the number N may be replaced with the winning probability P . These parameters are related, as a win in 100 callers corresponds to a winning probability of 0.01 or 1% .

Other parameters may be used that are related to N or P above.

The system may perform a specific predefined calculation between a caller's serial number and the governing parameter to decide whether a caller won or not.

It will be recognized that the foregoing is but one example of an apparatus and method within the scope of the present invention and that various modifications will occur to those skilled in the art upon reading the disclosure set forth hereinbefore.

Claims

What is claimed is:

1. A lottery method wherein, for each caller, a lottery system performs the following steps:

A. Arranging the payment for the lottery;

B. If the method of payment for participation in the lottery was settled then go to step (C), else reject the present caller;

C. The caller is assigned a serial number, wherein consecutive numbers are assigned in this step to callers, starting from a first number and up to the last number N, that is the winning number in the lottery.

After the last number N, subsequent callers are again assigned numbers starting from the first number;

D. The lottery system decides whether the caller won or not, according to his/her serial number and a parameter in the system;

E. If the present caller did not win, then the lottery system announces a "no win" result. This ends the treatment stage for the present caller.

Go to step (G).

F. If the present caller did win, then the lottery system immediately announces a "win" result. The system arranges the payment of the prize.

G. End session with present caller. The communication line with the caller is disconnected.

2. The lottery method of claim 1, wherein in step (D) the parameter in the system N is related to the serial number of each caller, and wherein if the serial number for the present caller is smaller than N, then the caller does not win. If the serial number is N, the winning number in the lottery, then a win is declared.

3. The lottery method of claim 1, wherein in step (A) the system allows a user to choose the type of lottery and/or the amount of the bet.

4. The lottery method of claim 1, wherein after step (G) the lottery system automatically return to step (A), to receive more callers and perform the lottery method continuously, all the time.

5. The lottery method of claim 1, wherein in step (F) the lottery system further resets the serial numbers of participants so that the next caller will receive the first number, and starts a new lottery time period.

6. The lottery method of claim 1, wherein the lottery system concurrently handles several types of lottery, and wherein for each lottery type the system assigns separate serial numbers to participants and declares as winner each Nth caller.

7. The lottery method of claim 1, wherein the lottery system announces to each participant his serial number or a control number.

8. The lottery method of claim 1, wherein the lottery system further performs a recording or printing or log of all transactions in the system.

9. The lottery method of claim 1, wherein callers may connect to the lottery system using a telephone line, a wireless link, a cellular phone, a fax machine, a modem or the Internet.

10. The lottery method of claim 1, wherein the steps (A) to (G) are performed automatically using a programmed machine.

11. The lottery method of claim 1, further including, before step (A), the step of setting up the parameters of the lottery including the winning number, the sum of the prize and other parameters.

12. The lottery method of claim 1, wherein the lottery system is an Internet site, an order receiving center of electronic commerce, an order receiving center for direct mail orders or an order taking center for subscribers to television channels.

13. The lottery method of claim 1, wherein the caller is a buyer of products or services in a store, a commercial center, a direct mail program, electronic commerce, through the Internet, through a television channel or the radio.

14. The lottery method of claim 1, wherein the payment means include a credit card, or the presentation of a lottery ticket or a secret number or a subscriber-related information.

15. The lottery method of claim 1, wherein the payment means include a telephone number charging an extra amount for special services and wherein the payment is collected through the telephone bill.

16. The lottery method of claim 1, wherein the participation in the lottery is for free but is conditional upon the performance of specific activities by the participant as defined by a promoter.

17. The lottery method of claim 1, wherein a secret number to allow participation in the lottery is given to a person that pays for participation in the lottery.

18. The lottery method of claim 1, wherein a serial number is given that indicates the order of customers buying in a store.

18. The lottery method of claim 1, wherein a serial number is given that indicates the order of customers connecting to an Internet site or for accessing a promotional activity or another activity.

19. A lottery system comprising:

A. a communication channel used by participants to connect to the lottery system;

B. an electronic switch that connects a participant to an automatic handling unit or to an employee of the lottery center;

C. an audio information unit included in the automatic handling unit and comprising means for issuing various sentences regarding payment or winning the lottery or choosing the lottery type and fee responsive to input commands;

D. an information input unit included in the automatic handling unit and comprising means for receiving user commands regarding the lottery type and fee and/or other lottery-related information, and means for receiving the caller answers and for transferring the information to a controller;

E. a system controller including means for controlling the electronic switch, the audio information unit and the information input unit, and means for deciding on a winner in the lottery according to a program in the controller, wherein the deciding means include means for assigning a serial number to each caller and for deciding on a winner responsive to the serial number and a winning parameter in the system.

20. The lottery system of claim 19, wherein the communication channel includes a telephone line, a wireless link, a cellular phone, a fax machine, a modem or the Internet.

21. The lottery system of claim 19, wherein for each new caller, the controller sets the electronic switch to connect that caller to the automatic handling unit.

22. The lottery system of claim 19, wherein the controller comprises a personal computer.

23. The lottery system of claim 19, wherein the audio information unit is a card in the personal computer.

24. The lottery system of claim 19, wherein the information input unit includes means for receiving from the user information regarding the chosen options for a lottery play.

25. The lottery system of claim 19, wherein the information input unit includes means for decoding signals from a tone dialing phone or a pulse dialing phone.

26. The lottery system of claim 19, wherein the information input unit includes a modem.

27. The lottery system of claim 19, wherein the controller includes means for communication with a caller to receive information regarding the lottery choices of the caller and for announcing the lottery results, and for transferring a winning caller to an employee.

28. The lottery system of claim 19, further including recording or printing or logging means.

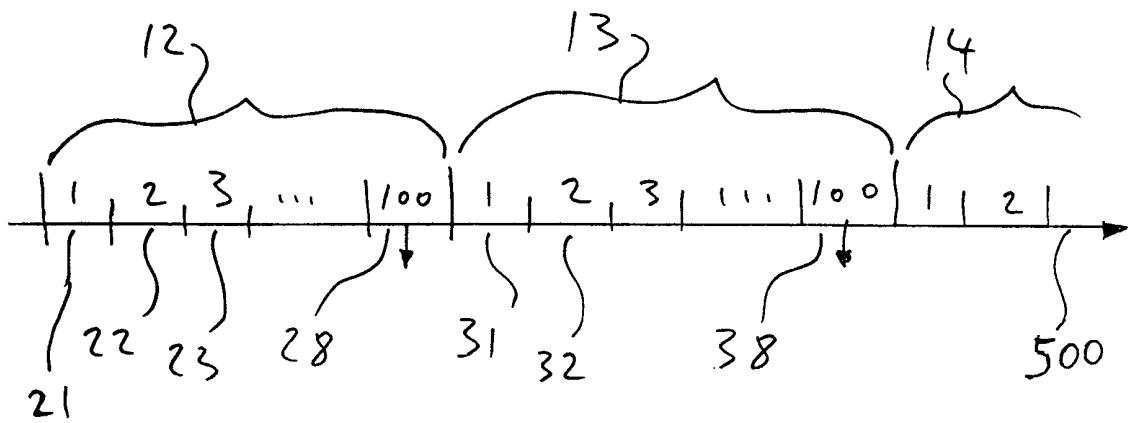


Fig. 1

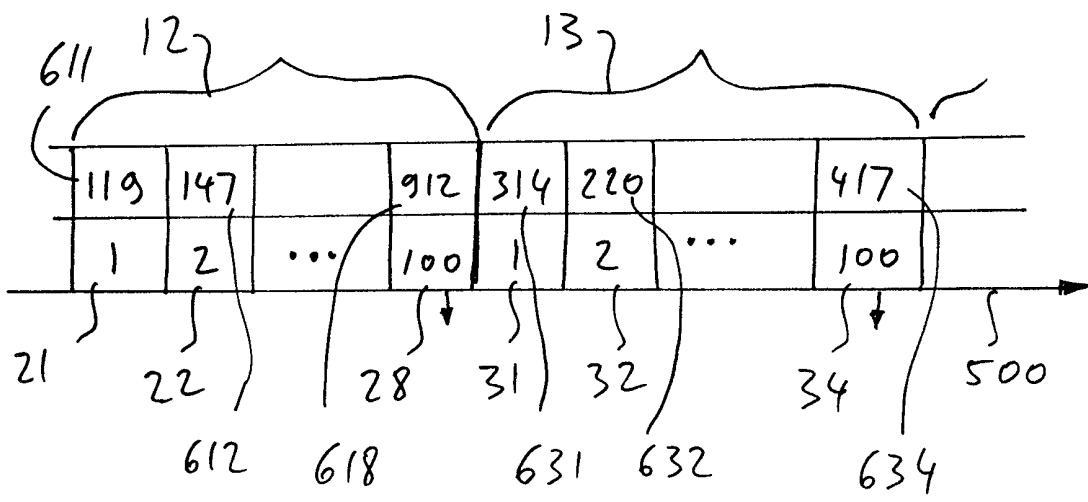


Fig. 2

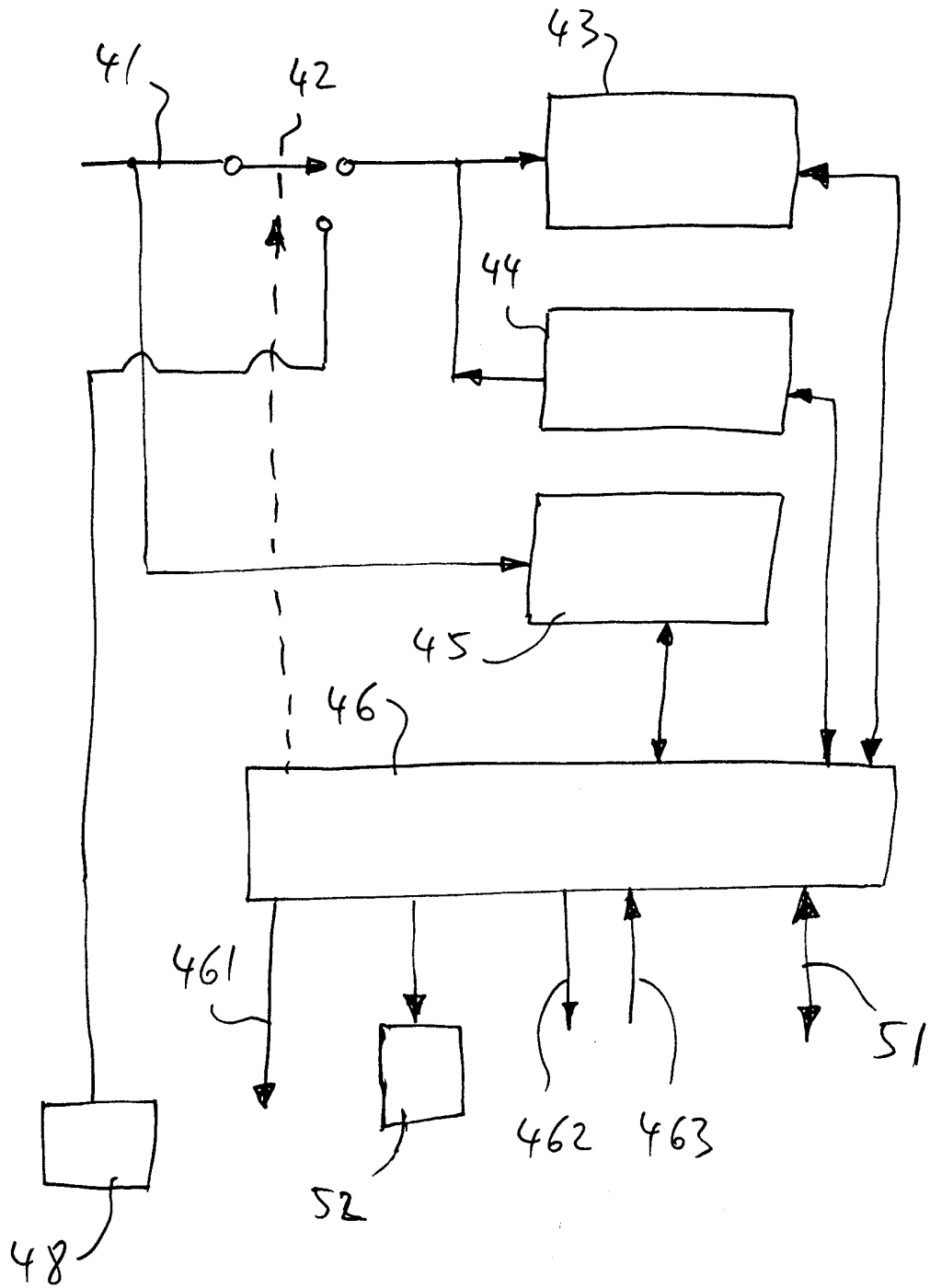


Fig. 3

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.
PCT/IL99/00493

<p>A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER IPC(6) : H04M 11/00; A63F 9/22 US CL : 463/17, 25, 41; 379/93.13 According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC</p>																																
<p>B. FIELDS SEARCHED Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols) U.S. : 463/16-19, 22, 25, 29, 41-42; 379/93.13; 705/14; 379/902,917; 273/139</p> <p>Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched</p> <p>Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used) Derwent, US, EP</p>																																
<p>C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Category*</th> <th>Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages</th> <th>Relevant to claim No.</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>X ---- Y</td> <td>US 5,415,416 A (SCAGNELLI et al.) 16 May 1995, See entire document</td> <td>1-19 ----- 20-29</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Y</td> <td>US 4,669,730 A (SMALL) 02 June 1987, See entire document</td> <td>1-19</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Y</td> <td>US 5,354,069 A (GUTTMAN et al.) 11 October 1994, See entire document</td> <td>1-19</td> </tr> <tr> <td>A</td> <td>US 4,494,197 A (TROY et al.) 15 January 1985, See entire document</td> <td>1-29</td> </tr> <tr> <td>A,P</td> <td>US 6,004,206 A (FABRI) 21 December 1999, See entire document</td> <td>1-29</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C. <input type="checkbox"/> See patent family annex.</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td>* Special categories of cited documents:</td> <td>"T" later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention</td> </tr> <tr> <td>"A" document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance</td> <td>"X" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone</td> </tr> <tr> <td>"E" earlier document published on or after the international filing date</td> <td>"Y" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art</td> </tr> <tr> <td>"L" document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)</td> <td>"&" document member of the same patent family</td> </tr> <tr> <td>"O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>"P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>			Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.	X ---- Y	US 5,415,416 A (SCAGNELLI et al.) 16 May 1995, See entire document	1-19 ----- 20-29	Y	US 4,669,730 A (SMALL) 02 June 1987, See entire document	1-19	Y	US 5,354,069 A (GUTTMAN et al.) 11 October 1994, See entire document	1-19	A	US 4,494,197 A (TROY et al.) 15 January 1985, See entire document	1-29	A,P	US 6,004,206 A (FABRI) 21 December 1999, See entire document	1-29	* Special categories of cited documents:	"T" later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention	"A" document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance	"X" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone	"E" earlier document published on or after the international filing date	"Y" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art	"L" document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)	"&" document member of the same patent family	"O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means		"P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed	
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<p>Name and mailing address of the ISA/US Commissioner of Patents and Trademarks Box PCT Washington, D.C. 20231 Facsimile No. (703) 305-3230</p>		<p>Authorized officer JOHN M. HOTALING II Telephone No. (703) 305-4119</p> <p><i>Sheila Venev</i> Sheila Venev Paralegal Specialist Technology Center 3700</p>																														