

A Network System For An External Communal Game

5 TECHNICAL FIELD

The present invention relates broadly to an apparatus for implementing an external game, to a network system for implementing an external game and to a method of playing an external game.

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BACKGROUND

In the gaming industry, external games have been introduced to enhance
15 entertainment levels of players. Such external games may be executed by a server external to gaming machines being played by the players. The external games are typically not linked to the games being implemented on the gaming machines and therefore, are typically not dependent on progress of the games of the gaming machines. External games can include, but are not limited to, lottery-type games. An example of an external game is a pool/draw
20 game whereby a single pool of prizes is accumulated and an award from the pool is given to a gaming machine participating in the external game.

With the increased usage of external games, gaming operators have typically increased the execution of external games in an attempt to provide more entertainment to
25 players. However, frequent occurrences of external games can lead to players losing interest in the external games and instead, concentrating on the games on the gaming machines while the external games are being executed. As such, a counter-productive effect can arise whereby the external games are ignored and thus, cannot fulfill provision of additional entertainment to players.

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In view of the above, there exists a need for an apparatus for implementing an external game, a network system for implementing an external game and a method of playing an external game that seeks to address at least one of the above problems.

SUMMARY

5 In accordance with an aspect of the present invention, there is provided an apparatus for implementing an external game, the apparatus comprising a first communication link to a plurality of gaming machines, the apparatus capable of identifying participating gaming machines from the plurality of gaming machines via the first communication link; a second communication link to two or more prize pools, the apparatus capable of selecting via the
10 second communication link one or more prize pools for awarding prizes; and wherein the apparatus is arranged to suspend games at the participating gaming machines during implementation of the external game and further arranged to award all participating gaming machines with at least one prize each; further wherein the apparatus is arranged to award at least one participating gaming machine said at least one prize from the selected one or more
15 prize pools.

 The apparatus may be further arranged to instruct a random number generator process to select the one or more prize pools, and another random number generator process to select said at least one participating gaming machine.

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 The apparatus may be further arranged to instruct an external competing game for play by the participating gaming machines to select said at least one participating gaming machine.

25 The said at least one participating gaming machine may be selected as a main winner of the external game and a portion of the prizes from the selected one or more prize pools may be awarded to the main winner.

 All gaming machines linked to the first communication link may be identified as
30 participating gaming machines.

 Gaming machines linked to the first communication link and returning positive machine usage statuses may be identified as participating gaming machines.

The apparatus may further comprise a third communication link to a display means for displaying media contents representing progress of the external game.

5 The media contents may comprise representation of selection of said one or more prize pools, representation of selection of said at least one participating gaming machine, or both.

10 The media contents may further comprise representation of said award all participating gaming machines, representation of said award at least one participating gaming machine, or both.

15 In accordance with another aspect of the present invention, there is provided a network system for implementing an external game, the system comprising a game server; a plurality of gaming machines having communication links with the game server; two or more prize pools having communication links with the game server; wherein the game server is capable of identifying participating gaming machines from the plurality of gaming machines, the game server is further capable of selecting one or more prize pools for awarding prizes; wherein the game server is arranged to suspend games at the participating gaming machines during implementation of the external game and further arranged to award all
20 participating gaming machines with at least one prize each; and further wherein the game server is arranged to award at least one participating gaming machine said at least one prize from the selected one or more prize pools.

25 The game server may be further arranged to instruct a random number generator process to select the one or more prize pools, and another random number generator process to select said at least one participating gaming machine.

30 The game server may be further arranged to instruct an external competing game for play by the participating gaming machines to select said at least one participating gaming machine.

The said at least one participating gaming machine may be selected as a main winner of the external game and a portion of the prizes from the selected one or more prize pools may be awarded to the main winner.

All gaming machines linked to the game server may be identified as participating gaming machines.

5 Gaming machines linked to the game server and returning positive machine usage statuses may be identified as participating gaming machines.

The system may further comprise a display means for displaying media contents representing progress of the external game.

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The media contents may comprise representation of selection of said one or more prize pools, representation of selection of said at least one participating gaming machine, or both.

15 The media contents may further comprise representation of said award all participating gaming machines, representation of said award at least one participating gaming machine, or both.

20 In accordance with yet another aspect of the present invention, there is provided a method of playing an external game, the method comprising linking a game server to a plurality of gaming machines; identifying participating gaming machines from the plurality of gaming machines; linking the game server to two or more prize pools; selecting one or more prize pools for awarding prizes; suspending games at the participating gaming machines during play of the external game; awarding all participating gaming machines with at least
25 one prize each; and awarding at least one participating gaming machine with said at least one prize from the selected one or more prize pools.

30 The method may further comprise conducting a random number generator process for the step of selecting the one or more prize pools; and conducting another random number generator process for the step of selecting said at least one participating gaming machine.

The method may further comprise instructing an external competing game for play by the participating gaming machines for the step of selecting said at least one participating gaming machine.

5 The method may further comprise selecting said at least one participating gaming machine as a main winner of the external game; and awarding a portion of the prizes from the selected one or more prize pools to the main winner.

10 For the step of identifying participating gaming machines, the method may further comprise identifying all gaming machines linked to the game server as participating gaming machines.

15 For the step of identifying participating gaming machines, the method may further comprise identifying only gaming machines returning positive machine usage statuses as participating gaming machines.

The method may further comprise displaying media contents representing progress of the external game.

20 The media contents may comprise representation of selection of said one or more prize pools, representation of selection of said at least one participating gaming machine, or both.

25 The media contents may further comprise representation of said award all participating gaming machines, representation of said award at least one participating gaming machine, or both.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

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Example embodiments of the invention will be better understood and readily apparent to one of ordinary skill in the art from the following written description, by way of example only, and in conjunction with the drawings, in which:

Figure 1 is a schematic diagram illustrating a network system for an external game in an example embodiment.

Figure 2 is a schematic front view diagram of a front panel of a gaming machine
5 in an example embodiment.

Figure 3 shows a schematic drawing of an external game system 300 according to another example embodiment.

10 Figure 4 is a schematic diagram for illustrating selection of one or more prize pools in an example embodiment.

Figure 5 is a schematic diagram for illustrating random selection of a gaming machine in an example embodiment.

15 Figure 6 is a schematic top view diagram illustrating a player identification card reader for use in an example embodiment.

Figure 7 is a schematic flowchart for illustrating a method of playing an external
20 game in an example embodiment.

Figure 8 is a schematic drawing of a computer system suitable for implementing an example embodiment.

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DETAILED DESCRIPTION

In the example embodiments described herein, a method and system for providing an external game can be provided. In one embodiment, the execution of the external game
30 comprises executing at least two random number generator processes to randomly obtain two outcomes. One of the outcomes is to select from a plurality of prize pools and the second of the outcomes is to preferably select one winner from a plurality of gaming machines to award one or more prizes from the selected pool or pools. Preferably, the rest of the gaming machines included in execution of the external game receive consolation

prizes. Preferably, during execution of the external game, play at the gaming machines is suspended/paused. As an alternative to randomly selecting the one winner, an external competing game may be implemented such that the winner of the external competing game is determined as the one winner from the plurality of gaming machines. Thus, a
5 communal/community external game can be provided to enhance entertainment levels of all players.

In example embodiments, a RNG (Random Number Generator) can be used for RNG processes. A RNG can provide randomly generated numbers from which, for example,
10 the outcomes of external games are based upon. The RNG is preferably independent of external factors. The RNG may generate random numbers without any input or preferably, with a preceding/previous random number as an input to generate a subsequent random number.

As an example of a random number triggering an event, the RNG may be used to generate a first random number or random number sequence that is temporarily stored. The RNG is then used to generate a second random number or random number sequence that is used to be compared to the first random number or random number sequence. If the first and second random numbers or random number sequences match, an event is then
20 triggered. Otherwise, a third random number or random number sequence can be generated for comparison. The comparison may be between the third random number or random number sequence against the first or the second random number or random number sequence.

In an example implementation, the RNG may be in the form of a crystal oscillator that instructs a number generator processor to periodically generate new random numbers. If there is a seed (or preceding/previous random number) available, the number generator can use that seed as an input for the number generation.

30 The terms "coupled" or "connected" as used in this description are intended to cover both directly connected or connected through one or more intermediate means, unless otherwise stated.

The description herein may be, in certain portions, explicitly or implicitly described as algorithms and/or functional operations that operate on data within a computer memory or an electronic circuit. These algorithmic descriptions and/or functional operations are usually used by those skilled in the information/data processing arts for efficient description. An
5 algorithm is generally relating to a self-consistent sequence of steps leading to a desired result. The algorithmic steps can include physical manipulations of physical quantities, such as electrical, magnetic or optical signals capable of being stored, transmitted, transferred, combined, compared, and otherwise manipulated.

10 Further, unless specifically stated otherwise, and would ordinarily be apparent from the following, a person skilled in the art will appreciate that throughout the present specification, discussions utilizing terms such as "scanning", "calculating", "determining", "replacing", "generating", "initializing", "outputting", and the like, refer to action and processes of an instructing processor/computer system, or similar electronic circuit/device/component,
15 that manipulates/processes and transforms data represented as physical quantities within the described system into other data similarly represented as physical quantities within the system or other information storage, transmission or display devices etc.

The description also discloses relevant device/apparatus for performing the steps of
20 the described methods. Such apparatus may be specifically constructed for the purposes of the methods, or may comprise a general purpose computer/processor or other device selectively activated or reconfigured by a computer program stored in a storage member. The algorithms and displays described herein are not inherently related to any particular computer or other apparatus. It is understood that general purpose devices/machines may
25 be used in accordance with the teachings herein. Alternatively, the construction of a specialized device/apparatus to perform the method steps may be desired.

In addition, it is submitted that the description also implicitly covers a computer program, in that it would be clear that the steps of the methods described herein may be put
30 into effect by computer code. It will be appreciated that a large variety of programming languages and coding can be used to implement the teachings of the description herein. Moreover, the computer program if applicable is not limited to any particular control flow and can use different control flows without departing from the scope of the invention.

Furthermore, one or more of the steps of the computer program if applicable may be performed in parallel and/or sequentially. Such a computer program if applicable may be stored on any computer readable medium. The computer readable medium may include storage devices such as magnetic or optical disks, memory chips, or other storage devices
5 suitable for interfacing with a suitable reader/general purpose computer. In such instances, the computer readable storage medium is non-transitory. Such storage medium also covers all computer-readable media e.g. medium that stores data only for short periods of time and/or only in the presence of power, such as register memory, processor cache and Random Access Memory (RAM) and the like. The computer readable medium may even
10 include a wired medium such as exemplified in the Internet system, or wireless medium such as exemplified in bluetooth technology. The computer program when loaded and executed on a suitable reader effectively results in an apparatus that can implement the steps of the described methods.

15 The example embodiments may also be implemented as hardware modules. A module is a functional hardware unit designed for use with other components or modules. For example, a module may be implemented using digital or discrete electronic components, or it can form a portion of an entire electronic circuit such as an Application Specific Integrated Circuit (ASIC). A person skilled in the art will understand that the example
20 embodiments can also be implemented as a combination of hardware and software modules.

Further, in the description herein, the word "substantially" whenever used is understood to include, but not restricted to, "entirely" or "completely" and the like. In addition,
25 terms such as "comprising", "comprise", and the like whenever used, are intended to be non-restricting descriptive language in that they broadly include elements/components recited after such terms, in addition to other components not explicitly recited. Further, terms such as "about", "approximately" and the like whenever used, typically means a reasonable variation, for example a variation of +/- 5% of the disclosed value, or a variance of 4% of the
30 disclosed value, or a variance of 3% of the disclosed value, a variance of 2% of the disclosed value or a variance of 1% of the disclosed value.

Furthermore, in the description herein, certain values may be disclosed in a range. The values showing the end points of a range are intended to illustrate a preferred range.

Whenever a range has been described, it is intended that the range covers and teaches all possible sub-ranges as well as individual numerical values within that range. That is, the end points of a range should not be interpreted as inflexible limitations. For example, a description of a range of 1% to 5% is intended to have specifically disclosed sub-ranges 1% to 2%, 1% to 3%, 1% to 4%, 2% to 3% etc., as well as individually, values within that range such as 1%, 2%, 3%, 4% and 5%. The intention of the above specific disclosure is applicable to any depth/breadth of a range.

Figure 1 is a schematic diagram illustrating a network system for an external game in an example embodiment. The network system 102 comprises an apparatus, such as a game server 104, for implementing the external game. In the example embodiment, the game server 104 functions as an external game server for implementing a draw or a pool game as the external game. That is, the external game is executed external to the gaming machines of the system 102. The network system 102 links or networks a plurality of player terminals or gaming machines e.g. 106, 108 to the game server 104 such that the respective gaming machines e.g. 106, 108 can be entered into the draw game. The network links or communication links can be wired or wireless. The gaming machines e.g. 106, 108 can be in the form of arcade machines.

The network system 102 further comprises a pool group 110 of a plurality of pools. There can be four or more pools. Each pool e.g. 112, 114 each comprises prizes. The pool group 110 is coupled via a communication link to the game server 104. The game server 104 is further coupled to a random number generator (RNG) module 116 arranged to conduct random number generator processes to generate random numbers. There can preferably be a plurality of RNG modules for dedicated processes.

Preferably, the network system 102 further comprises a display means 118 such as a liquid crystal display screen disposed substantially in view of the gaming machines e.g. 106, 108. The display means 118 is preferably a communal/community display that is provided for view by a plurality of players. Preferably, the display is centralised in location within the system 102. For example, a liquid crystal display screen can be disposed in an encircling manner above the gaming machines e.g. 106, 108. Media contents can be displayed using the display means 118, on instruction by the game server 104 via a communication link, during execution of the external game. The media contents can graphically represent

progress of the external game. This may enhance the entertainment level of players at the gaming machines e.g. 106, 108.

5 In the example embodiment, the game server 104 generates a draw game activation command. This may be at periodic intervals (e.g. based on an internal clock of the server 104) or dependent on a random number generator result that matches a stored random number. Upon generation of the draw game activation command, the game server 104 transmits a signal to the RNG module 116 to instruct a first random number generator process. The first random number generator process at the RNG module 116 is to select,
10 preferably, one pool e.g. 112, 114 for discharging prizes of the selected pool for the draw game.

As an alternative, it may be provided that more than one pool is selected and accumulated to form a larger pool for awarding of prizes during the external game.

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In the example embodiment, the plurality of pools e.g. 112, 114 provide varying amounts of prizes that may be awarded during the external game. Therefore, the players may be provided with improved entertainment levels in that suspense is created because of a random chance that a large pool may be selected out of different pools.

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The game server 104 can instruct the display of media contents to be displayed using the display means 118 during selection of a pool. Thus, a graphical representation of selection of the pool is displayed. In the example embodiment, the media contents may be in the form of an arrow rapidly switching between different pools containing different amounts
25 of prizes in anticipation of selection of the pool for the external game. This can improve the entertainment level of the players.

The game server 104 also transmits an instruction signal for suspension or pausing of the local games at the gaming machines e.g. 106, 108. This can inform/alert players at the
30 gaming machines e.g. 106, 108 that the draw game is being executed. Suspension of the games at the gaming machines e.g. 106, 108 can also advantageously prevent the players from ignoring the draw game and capturing their attention towards the execution of the draw game.

In addition, the game server 104 can instruct the display of media contents to be displayed using the display means 118 to show selection of a gaming machine. In the example embodiment, the media contents may be in the form of a video of a dragon encircling the gaming machines e.g. 106, 108 in anticipation of selection of the main winner.

5 This can improve the entertainment level of the players.

The game server 104 also transmits a signal to the RNG module 116 to instruct a second random number generator process. The second random number generator process at the RNG module 116 is to select, preferably, one gaming machine e.g. 106, 108 as a
10 main winner of the draw game. Media contents may be displayed using the display means 118 to emphasise the selected main winner. Thus, a graphical representation of selection of the main winner is displayed. In the example embodiment, the media contents may be in the form of a video of a dragon merging into a bright light display above the selected gaming machine as the main winner.

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In the example embodiment, the draw game comprises compiling a list of ID numbers of the gaming machines e.g. 106, 108 and comparing the random number or random number sequence generated from the second random number generator process to the list. The main winner is the ID number of the gaming machine that corresponds to the generated
20 result of the second random number generator process.

Alternatively, instead of selecting a main winner based on a second random number generator process, it can be provided that the main winner is selected based on winning an external competing game, for example, a relatively simple and short communal external
25 game. In such an example embodiment, the game server 104 instructs the gaming machines e.g. 106, 108 to implement a communal external competing game. For example, a multiple player gaming process may be started for play by players at the gaming machines e.g. 106, 108 upon receipt of an activation signal sent from the game server 104. Command codes for the external competing game may be stored locally at the gaming machines e.g. 106, 108
30 and/or transmitted from the game server 104. Some examples of such competing games may include, but are not limited to, racing games, points-grabbing/scoring games etc. The external competing game may be played using the display means 118 and/or the screens of the respective gaming machines e.g. 106, 108. By allowing the players to play a relatively simple communal game, entertainment levels may be further enhanced. Preferably, the

external competing game is a relatively short game, e.g. lasting about one minute, such that the players are not distracted from the main/local games at the gaming machines e.g. 106, 108.

5 Upon selection of the main winner, a portion of the prizes of the selected pool e.g. 112, 114 is discharged to the main winner, e.g. as a "main winner prize". For example, 50% of the prizes may be awarded to the selected gaming machine. The remaining portion of the prizes of the selected pool e.g. 112, 114 is then discharged to all the remaining gaming machines of the system 102 as consolation prizes. The consolation prizes may be equal in
10 proportion or unequal. The respective portions of the prizes, e.g. between the main winner and consolation winners, may be predetermined or randomly assigned.

As an alternative, it may be provided that the main winner is awarded prizes from the selected pool, either the whole of the selected pool or a portion of it, e.g. a "main winner
15 prize", while the remaining gaming machines are awarded consolation prizes from outside the selected pool, for example, from a gaming operator's gifts database.

Media contents may be displayed using the display means 118 to show the awarding of prizes to the selected main winner and/or the awarding of consolation prizes to the
20 remaining gaming machines. Thus, a graphical representation of awarding to the main winner and/or awarding to the remaining gaming machines is displayed.

Thus, in the example embodiment, all participating gaming machines are awarded prizes, e.g. main winner prize or consolation prizes. The example embodiment may improve
25 the entertainment level of the players as typically, external games are not arranged to provide consolation prizes. Consolation prizes can also advantageously "compensate" the players' time taken during suspension of the local games at the gaming machines e.g. 106, 108, thus leading to greater satisfaction or fairness.

30 In the example embodiment, the draw game and the results of the draw game are independent of the entertainment games being played locally at each gaming machine e.g. 106, 108. Additional entertainment can be provided to the players at the gaming machines via the bonus prizes awarded by the draw game, regardless of the progress or results of the entertainment games being played at the gaming machines e.g. 106, 108.

In the example embodiment, the prizes may include, but are not limited to, gaming points, loyalty points, bonus points, bonus items, credits etc. Awarding of the prizes can be via a number of methods. For example, in one method, the game server 104 transmits the ID numbers to an operator and the operator presents the respective prizes to the players at the respective gaming machines e.g. 106, 108. Alternatively, bonus credits may be respectively awarded electronically by the game server 104 to the players at the gaming machines e.g. 106, 108.

In the above example embodiment, all gaming machines e.g. 106, 108 participate in the external game. Prizes discharged to the gaming machines that are inactive, i.e. not being played by a player, are returned to the selected pool. Alternatively, it may be configured such that if the main winner is an inactive gaming machine, a new draw game is conducted using the same pool. Thus, a new main winner can be selected and awarded a main winner prize.

In an alternative embodiment, it may be provided that only active gaming machines, i.e. those currently being played by players, participate in the external game. Upon completion of the external game, all active participating gaming machines are awarded with one or more prizes, e.g. consolation or main winner prizes.

In such an example embodiment, the game server 104 transmits a machine usage query to each of the linked gaming machines e.g. 106, 108. At each gaming machine e.g. 106, 108, a check is carried out to determine a machine usage status of the gaming machine e.g. whether a player is currently playing at the gaming machine. In the example embodiment, the check is based on sensing whether a game card is inserted into the player terminal via a game card reader (compare 218 of Figure 2) of the gaming machine e.g. 106, 108.

In the example embodiment, if no game card is sensed in the game card reader, the gaming machine feeds back a negative machine usage response to the game server 104. On the other hand, if a game card is sensed in the game card reader, the gaming machine feeds back a positive machine usage response to the game server 104. The machine usage responses are transmitted to the game server 104 coupled with respective identification indicia, e.g. ID numbers, of the gaming machines e.g. 106, 108. In this way, the game server

104 compiles a list of ID numbers with positive machine usage responses and conducts the draw game with the ID numbers on the list.

Figure 2 is a schematic front view diagram of a front panel of a gaming machine in an example embodiment. The gaming machine 200 comprises the front panel 201 that in turn comprises a top screen 202, a main screen 204, a player transactions panel 206 and a player interaction panel 208. The gaming machine 200 may optionally comprise a printer outlet 210, a tower light 212 and a poster display portion 214. The gaming machine 200 allows a player to play one or more games installed on, or network-implemented by, the gaming machine 200.

The gaming machine 200 further comprises a network interface such as a wireless Wi-Fi link (schematically shown at numeral 224) for establishing a communication link to an external game server (compare 104 (Figure 1)). The gaming machine 200 also comprises a memory (not shown) for storing a unique identification (ID) number corresponding to the gaming machine 200. A game module (not shown) of the gaming machine 200 is provided to implement the games locally of the gaming machine 200. In the example embodiment, during execution of the external game, a suspension/pause signal can be received at the game module (not shown) from the external game server, for the games being played at the gaming machine 200 to be suspended or paused.

In the example embodiment, the top screen 202 can be used to display game celebrations, promotional/advertising information or other information that is typically not primarily related to a progression of the games of the gaming machine. The main screen 204 is used to display the games of the gaming machine 200, for the player's attention. Typically, the main screen 204 is the screen that the player focuses on for playing the games. In an example embodiment whereby the main winner is selected based on playing an external competing game, the external competing game can be displayed on screen 204.

In the example embodiment, the game server can notify the player for being selected as a main winner of the draw game via the link 224 to the gaming machine 200, in addition to the game server announcing the main winner on a communal/community display (compare 118 (Figure 1)). For example, the notification of the win can be additionally displayed on the screen 202 of the gaming machine 200.

In the example embodiment, the player transactions panel 206 is provided for the player to transact with the gaming machine 200. The term "transactions" is taken to mean extraction of remaining points/credits that the player possesses or insertion of points/credits that the player possesses, for example, in a magnetic identification card or a radio frequency identification (RFID) card or any stored-value card. The term should not be limited to monetary transactions. The player transactions panel 206 comprises a liquid crystal display (LCD) information screen 216 and a card insert slot 218. The card insert slot 218 is used for receiving, in the case of a card insert slot, an identification card containing the points/credits and/or identification belonging to the player. The points/credits can be extracted from the card into the gaming machine 200 for playing the games installed in the gaming machine 200. Upon the player deciding to end play at the gaming machine 200, the player transactions panel 206 can store the latest/updated points/credits information in the stored-value card.

For example embodiments relating to using player identification cards, the player transactions panel 206 can retrieve points/credits information of the player from an external server or database based on player identification. The retrieved information can then be used at the gaming machine 200 for playing the games. For such embodiments, upon the player deciding to end play at the gaming machine 200, the player transactions panel 206 can transmit the latest/updated points/credits information to be stored on the external server or database based on the player identification. It will be appreciated that the card insert slot 218 can be in other forms depending on the type of identification card used by the player. For example, if the player is using a RFID card, the transactions module 218 can be a RFID reader/writer. The LCD information screen 216 is used to display e.g. the points/credits information contained in the card.

The player interaction panel 208 comprises push buttons e.g. 220 provided to allow the player to actuate the buttons e.g. 220 for interacting with the games being played on the gaming machine 200. For example, the player can use the buttons e.g. 220 to make player selections being displayed on the main screen 204. A bill validator 222 can be provided for a player to use paper money to buy credits for playing the games of the gaming machine 200. This is similar to, for example, using paper money at a vending machine to buy drinks/food.

It will be appreciated that although a card-in (using the card insert slot 218) and bill-in (using the bill validator 222) has been discussed above, the gaming machine is not limited as such and can comprise mechanisms to allow coin-in, key-in, ticket-in etc. for playing the games in the gaming machine.

It will be appreciated that the main screen 204 can be in the form of a touch-sensitive screen that may complement or replace the player interaction panel 208. The touch-sensitive screen can be a capacitive-type sensing screen, pressure-type sensing screen or the like. That is, the main screen 204 may be a touch-sensitive screen that allows the player to interact with the gaming machine 200 using touch commands.

In the example embodiment, the printer outlet 210 may be provided for the gaming machine 200 to output information in printed form to the player. For example, the gaming machine 200 may print a sticker or reward voucher for the player. The gaming machine 200 may also print a receipt or record of the points transaction for the player. The tower light 212 may be provided to light up during game celebrations. This may attract the attention of spectators or the player. The tower light 212 can also be used for highlighting technical issues, requesting assistance or service etc. The poster display portion 214 may be provided for e.g. game information to be displayed.

In the example embodiment, the front panel 201 may be opened or detached in whole or in part from the gaming machine 200 body to allow, for example, maintenance on the circuits or components encased in the gaming machine 200.

In the example embodiment, the gaming machine 200, preferably, further comprises an external game participation (EGP) module (not shown) to facilitate implementation of an external game. In the example embodiment, the EGP module is coupled to the card insert slot 218 for sensing whether the gaming machine 200 is an active gaming machine, i.e. whether there is a player playing currently at the gaming machine 200. Alternatively, the EGP module can be coupled to other components such as the player interaction panel 208 or main screen 204.

In the example embodiment, the EGP module is configured to receive a machine usage query from the game server through the link 224, upon generation of a draw game activation command at the game server. The gaming machine 200 is arranged to utilise the card insert slot 218 to determine whether an identification card is inserted into the card insert slot 218, for determining a machine usage status of the gaming machine 200.

The card insert slot 218 comprises a sensor for sensing an identification card. If the sensor returns a null result, the EGP module transmits a negative machine usage response coupled with the identification number of the gaming machine 200 to the game server. On the other hand, if the sensor senses that an identification card is inserted in the card insert slot 218, the EGP module transmits a positive machine usage response coupled with the identification number of the gaming machine 200 to the game server.

In the example embodiment, whereby only active gaming machines are participating gaming machines for the external game, the gaming machine 200 is entered into the draw game at the game server if an identification card is inserted in the card insert slot 218, i.e. it is sensed that a player is playing at the gaming machine 200. If the identification number of the gaming machine 200 is selected as a main winner in the draw game, the game server awards the player at the gaming machine 200 with a prize via the link 224.

In the above example embodiments, the gaming machines are described as being in the form of arcade machines. However, it will be appreciated that the gaming machines can include other electronic devices.

Figure 3 shows a schematic drawing of an external game system 300 according to another example embodiment. The system 300 comprises a plurality of gaming machines 302, 304, 306, each coupled to an external game server or unit 308. The gaming machines 302, 304, 306 and the game unit 308 communicate via respective network interfaces provided on the gaming machines and the game unit. The gaming machines 302, 304, 306 may be implemented in a variety of different ways. For example, one or more of the gaming machines 302 are implemented as physical gaming machines such as arcade gaming machines, slot machines, electronic gaming tables or the like. One or more other gaming machines 304 are implemented as virtual gaming machines on desktop or tablet devices. One or more other gaming machines 306 are implemented as virtual gaming machines on

portable handheld devices such as mobile phones, Personnel Digital Assistants (PDAs) or the like. The virtual gaming machines 304, 306 may be implemented via Wi-Fi, the Internet, interactive TV or other service networks. The coupling between the game unit 308 and the respective gaming machines 302, 304, 306 may be implemented in a variety of different ways, including via Wi-Fi, the Internet, or via other wired or wireless networks.

The game unit 308 comprises a database 310 for storing data for conducting an external game and other information such as information identifying the respective gaming machines 302, 304, 306. Further, the game unit 308 comprises a processor module 312 coupled to the database 310. The processor module 312 is capable of conducting the external game at periodic or random timings, for functioning as a RNG and for awarding prizes to players on the respective gaming machines 302, 304, 306, e.g. based on the information stored in the database 310.

The processor module 312 is coupled to a pool group 314 comprising a plurality of different prize pools. The processor module 312 is further coupled to a display means 316 that functions as a communal/community display that is substantially viewable by players of the plurality of gaming machines 302, 304, 306.

During execution of the external game, the processor module 312 is capable of suspending play of the games at the plurality of gaming machines 302, 304, 306. The processor module 312 is capable of randomly selecting a pool from the pool group 314. Preferably, the processor module 312 is capable of displaying a pool selection graphic or media display on the display means 316. Furthermore, the processor module 312 is capable of randomly selecting a gaming machine from the plurality of gaming machines 302, 304, 306 as a main winner of the external game. The processor module 312 is capable of instructing the gaming machines 302, 304, 306 to implement an external competing game such that a winner of the external competing game is selected as a main winner of the external game. Preferably, the processor module 312 is capable of displaying a main winner selection graphic or media display on the display means 316. The processor module 312 is capable of awarding a portion of the selected pool of prizes to the main winner and a remaining portion of the selected pool of prizes to all the remaining participating gaming machines, such that all participating gaming machines are at least awarded one or more prizes.

In the example embodiment, all gaming machines 302, 304, 306 may be participating gaming machines. Prizes awarded to gaming machines that are inactive, i.e. not currently being played by players, are returned to the selected pool. Alternatively, active gaming machines i.e. those being played currently by players, are all designated as participating gaming machines.

Thus, each of the gaming machines 302, 304, 306 preferably comprises an external game participation (EGP) module configured for receiving a machine usage query from the game unit 308; for determining a machine usage status of the gaming machine and for transmitting a machine usage response to the database 310 of the game unit 308. For example, for the virtual gaming machines 304, 306, the EGP module may be implemented as a software application installed on the gaming machines. The software application can be downloaded via the respective network interfaces provided on the gaming machines. Accordingly, information on whether the players are playing at the respective gaming machines 302, 304, 306 are transmitted to the game unit 308. Thus, the game unit 308 registers that players are playing at the gaming machines 302, 304, 306 via the respective network interfaces or communication links. Prizes awarded by the external game can be awarded to players on the respective gaming machines 302, 304, 306 based on respective machine usage responses under the control of the processor 312.

The processor 312 awards the prizes based on results of the external game and independent of the entertainment games implemented on the respective gaming machines 302, 304, 306. It will be appreciated that the external game system 300 thus provides a distributed external gaming environment with a centralized external game database for conducting an external game and awarding prizes to players on the respective gaming machines 302, 304, 306.

In the above example embodiments, the gaming machines are described as being linked to a game server or unit. Also, the example embodiments are described as having more than two gaming machines linked in a network or system.

Figure 4 is a schematic diagram for illustrating selection of one or more prize pools in an example embodiment. A selection module 402 is provided. The selection module 402 is

electronically coupled to or in a communication link with a group 404 of prize pools 406, 408, 410, 412. The selection module 402 may preferably be a RNG module. The selection module 402 may also take other forms and is provided to facilitate selection of one or more prize pools from the group 404.

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In the example embodiment, the selection module 402 receives a random selection signal from a game server (compare 104 (Figure 1)) and randomly selects a prize pool. Preferably, as a RNG module, the selection module 402 retrieves ID numbers of the prize pools 406, 408, 410, 412 and compiles the ID numbers into a list. A RNG process is performed and a RNG result is produced to compare against the ordered compiled list. The matched ID number is then selected and the corresponding prize pool is selected as the pool for the external game. To select more than one prize pool, a second RNG process is performed and a second prize pool is selected to be added to the first selected pool.

The example embodiment may further include a likelihood of trigger configuration. For example, the different pools may comprise different weighting factors. The weighting factors may be based on the current prize pool sizes or other predetermined weights. The ID numbers are replicated according to different weights and randomly compiled into a list. For example, an ID number "A1" may be replicated four times if a weighting factor of the corresponding pool is four, and the four instances of "A1" are incorporated into the list. Thus, the larger/heavier a weighting factor, the higher the likelihood of a particular pool being selected (due to more occurrences in the list). A RNG process is performed and a RNG result is produced to compare against the ordered compiled list. The matched ID number is then selected and the corresponding prize pool is selected as the pool for the external game.

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In the example embodiment, the selected pool details, e.g. ID number, are transmitted by the selection module 402 to the instructing game server for facilitating award of prizes from the selected pool. This may include the game server retrieving current prize sizes, values etc. and calculation of one or more portions etc. for the awarding of prizes.

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In the example embodiment, the prize pools 406, 408, 410, 412 can be "built up" or accumulated with prizes based on a gaming operator's contribution of prizes. Alternatively, the prizes may be accumulated based on contribution of prizes from active gaming machines etc.

Figure 5 is a schematic diagram for illustrating random selection of a gaming machine in an example embodiment. A selection module 502 is provided. The selection module 502 is electronically coupled to or in a communication link with gaming machines 504, 506, 508. The selection module 502 may preferably be a RNG module. The selection module 502 may take other forms and is provided to facilitate selection of a gaming machine from the plurality of gaming machines in the link.

In the example embodiment, the selection module 502 receives a random selection signal from a game server (compare 104 (Figure 1)) and randomly selects a gaming machine, e.g. as a main winner of the external game. Preferably, as a RNG module, the selection module 502 retrieves ID numbers of the gaming machines 504, 506, 508 and compiles the ID numbers into a list. A RNG process is performed and a RNG result is produced to compare against the ordered compiled list. The matched ID number is then selected and the corresponding gaming machine is selected.

In the example embodiment, the selected gaming machine details, e.g. ID number, are transmitted by the selection module 502 to the instructing game server for facilitating award of prizes from a selected pool. This may include the game server retrieving current machine usage status, Internet Protocol (IP) address, machine protocol format etc. and establishing a link/method to award the prize or prizes from the selected pool(s) to the gaming machine or the player at the gaming machine.

In an alternative example embodiment, the selection module 502 can be configured to retrieve ID numbers of only active gaming machines, i.e. gaming machines that are being played by players. The active gaming machines are identified based on the machine usage statuses, queried by the game server, and responded by each gaming machine. In such an embodiment, the ID numbers of the active gaming machines are compiled into a list and selection of the main winner is based on the active gaming machines.

Figure 6 is a schematic top view diagram illustrating a player identification card reader 600 for use in an example embodiment. The player identification card reader 600 may be removable from a gaming machine.

The card reader 600 comprises a card slot 602 (compare card insert slot 218 (Figure 2)), a card reading circuit 604, a network interface or connector port 606, a memory/database module 608 and a processing slot 610 having installed thereon, or coupled to, an external game participation (EGP) module. The EGP module can be a dedicated processor circuit such as an Application Specific Integrated Circuit (ASIC) or a dedicated chip such as an ASIC chip. The card reading circuit 604 comprises a card reading processor 612 and a card sensor 614. The components of the removable card reader 600 communicate via bus lines e.g. 616, 618. The card reader 600 further comprises a wireless communication module 628 coupled to a wireless reader interface 630.

The EGP module is configured for receiving a machine usage query from an external game server; for determining a machine usage status of the gaming machine and for transmitting a machine usage response to the external game server. Such communication can be via the port 606.

The card slot 602 is configured to receive player identification cards, game cards or stored-value cards.

The card slot 602 can comprise, but is not limited to, a magnetic swipe unit for reading magnetic cards. The card reading circuit 604 enables reading and writing of the game cards or stored value cards. The connector port 606 enables the card reader 600 to be connected to an electronic device such as a gaming machine. The port 606 can be in the form of a serial port or a parallel port or a USB port. The port 606 can comprise a first communication element for establishing a communication link to the gaming machine and a second communication element for establishing a communication link to the external game server. The memory/database module 608 is provided for storing information or data for use by the components of the card reader 600. The card sensor 614 is provided for sensing whether a game card or stored-value card is inserted into the card slot 602. The wireless communication module 628 comprises electronic circuitry that can enable contactless card reading via the wireless reader interface 630. For example, the wireless communication module 628 can enable Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) communication or near-field communication (NFC) with a game card. In other words, instead of inserting a game card into the card slot 602, a player can hold the game card at the wireless reader interface 630

for contactless communication. The card reader 600 is controlled in its execution by the card reading processor 612.

Figure 7 is a schematic flowchart 700 for illustrating a method of playing an external game in an example embodiment. At step 702, a game server is linked to a plurality of gaming machines. At step 704, participating gaming machines are identified from the plurality of gaming machines. At step 706, the game server is linked to two or more prize pools. At step 708, one or more prize pools is selected for awarding prizes. At step 710, games at the participating gaming machines are suspended during play of the external game. At step 712, all participating gaming machines are awarded with at least one prize each. At step 714, at least one participating gaming machine is awarded with said at least one prize that is obtained from the selected one or more prize pools.

The steps of Figure 7 are not necessarily sequential nor are they necessarily in the order presented. The steps may run in parallel and/or in a different order.

Therefore, in described example embodiments, a community-type or communal-type external game can be provided. In described example embodiments, one or more prize pools are selected from a plurality of pools. The different pools can provide varying amounts of prizes that may be awarded during an external game. Therefore, the players may advantageously be provided with improved entertainment levels in that suspense is created because of a random chance that a large pool may be selected out of different pools. Further, in described example embodiments, during the external game, the local games at the gaming machines are suspended/paused to inform/alert players at the gaming machines that the external game is being executed. Suspension of the games at the gaming machines can also advantageously prevent the players from ignoring the external game and capturing their attention towards the execution of the external game. In addition, in described example embodiments, all participating gaming machines are awarded prizes, i.e. at least one prize each. For gaming machines that are not selected as a main winner, consolation prizes awarded can advantageously "compensate" the players' time taken during suspension of the local games at the gaming machines e.g. 106, 108, thus leading to greater satisfaction or fairness. In described example embodiments, preferably, a communal/community display can be provided to graphically represent progress of the external game. This may enhance the entertainment level of players at the gaming machines.

Different example embodiments can be implemented in the context of data structure, program modules, program and computer instructions executed in a computer implemented environment. A general purpose computing environment is briefly disclosed herein. One or
5 more example embodiments may be embodied in one or more computer systems, such as is schematically illustrated in Figure 8.

One or more example embodiments may be implemented as software, such as a computer program being executed within a computer system 800, and instructing the
10 computer system 800 to conduct a method of an example embodiment, for example as a game server.

The computer system 800 comprises a computer unit 802, input modules such as a keyboard 804 and a pointing device 806 and a plurality of output devices such as a display
15 808, and printer 810. A user can interact with the computer unit 802 using the above devices. The pointing device can be implemented with a mouse, track ball, pen device or any similar device. One or more other input devices (not shown) such as a joystick, game pad, satellite dish, scanner, touch sensitive screen or the like can also be connected to the computer unit 802. The display 808 may include a cathode ray tube (CRT), liquid crystal
20 display (LCD), field emission display (FED), plasma display or any other device that produces an image that is viewable by the user.

The computer unit 802 can be connected to a computer network 812 via a suitable transceiver device 814, to enable access to e.g. the Internet or other network systems such
25 as Local Area Network (LAN) or Wide Area Network (WAN) or a personal network. The network 812 can comprise a server, a router, a network personal computer, a peer device or other common network node, a wireless telephone or wireless personal digital assistant. Networking environments may be found in offices, enterprise-wide computer networks and home computer systems etc. The transceiver device 814 can be a modem/router unit
30 located within or external to the computer unit 802, and may be any type of modem/router such as a cable modem or a satellite modem.

It will be appreciated that network connections shown are exemplary and other ways of establishing a communications link between computers can be used. The existence of any

of various protocols, such as TCP/IP, Frame Relay, Ethernet, FTP, HTTP and the like, is presumed, and the computer unit 802 can be operated in a client-server configuration to permit a user to retrieve web pages from a web-based server. Furthermore, any of various web browsers can be used to display and manipulate data on web pages.

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The computer unit 802 in the example comprises a processor 818, a Random Access Memory (RAM) 820 and a Read Only Memory (ROM) 822. The ROM 822 can be a system memory storing basic input/ output system (BIOS) information. The RAM 820 can store one or more program modules such as operating systems, application programs and program data.

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The computer unit 802 further comprises a number of Input/Output (I/O) interface units, for example I/O interface unit 824 to the display 808, and I/O interface unit 826 to the keyboard 804. The components of the computer unit 802 typically communicate and interface/couple connectedly via an interconnected system bus 828 and in a manner known to the person skilled in the relevant art. The bus 828 can be any of several types of bus structures including a memory bus or memory controller, a peripheral bus, and a local bus using any of a variety of bus architectures.

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It will be appreciated that other devices can also be connected to the system bus 828. For example, a universal serial bus (USB) interface can be used for coupling a video or digital camera to the system bus 828. An IEEE 1394 interface may be used to couple additional devices to the computer unit 802. Other manufacturer interfaces are also possible such as FireWire developed by Apple Computer and i.Link developed by Sony. Coupling of devices to the system bus 828 can also be via a parallel port, a game port, a PCI board or any other interface used to couple an input device to a computer. It will also be appreciated that, while the components are not shown in the figure, sound/audio can be recorded and reproduced with a microphone and a speaker. A sound card may be used to couple a microphone and a speaker to the system bus 828. It will be appreciated that several peripheral devices can be coupled to the system bus 828 via alternative interfaces simultaneously.

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An application program can be supplied to the user of the computer system 800 being encoded/stored on a data storage medium such as a CD-ROM or flash memory

carrier. The application program can be read using a corresponding data storage medium drive of a data storage device 830. The data storage medium is not limited to being portable and can include instances of being embedded in the computer unit 802. The data storage device 830 can comprise a hard disk interface unit and/or a removable memory interface unit (both not shown in detail) respectively coupling a hard disk drive and/or a removable memory drive to the system bus 828. This can enable reading/writing of data. Examples of removable memory drives include magnetic disk drives and optical disk drives. The drives and their associated computer-readable media, such as a floppy disk provide nonvolatile storage of computer readable instructions, data structures, program modules and other data for the computer unit 802. It will be appreciated that the computer unit 802 may include several of such drives. Furthermore, the computer unit 802 may include drives for interfacing with other types of computer readable media.

The application program is read and controlled in its execution by the processor 818. Intermediate storage of program data may be accomplished using RAM 820. The method(s) of the example embodiments can be implemented as computer readable instructions, computer executable components, or software modules. One or more software modules may alternatively be used. These can include an executable program, a data link library, a configuration file, a database, a graphical image, a binary data file, a text data file, an object file, a source code file, or the like. When one or more computer processors execute one or more of the software modules, the software modules interact to cause one or more computer systems to perform according to the teachings herein.

The operation of the computer unit 802 can be controlled by a variety of different program modules. Examples of program modules are routines, programs, objects, components, data structures, libraries, etc. that perform particular tasks or implement particular abstract data types. The example embodiments may also be practiced with other computer system configurations, including handheld devices, multiprocessor systems, microprocessor-based or programmable consumer electronics, network PCs, minicomputers, mainframe computers, personal digital assistants, mobile telephones and the like. Furthermore, the example embodiments may also be practiced in distributed computing environments where tasks are performed by remote processing devices that are linked through a wireless or wired communications network. In a distributed computing

environment, program modules may be located in both local and remote memory storage devices.

It will be appreciated by a person skilled in the art that other variations and/or
5 modifications may be made to the specific embodiments without departing from the scope of the invention as broadly described. The present embodiments are, therefore, to be considered in all respects to be illustrative and not restrictive.

For example, the gaming machines may be implemented as physical or virtual
10 gaming machines, such as via the Internet, interactive TV, Local Area Network (LAN)-based or other service networks. The virtual gaming machines may be implemented on desk top devices or portable devices. For gaming machines implemented as physical gaming machines, although touch screen keys have been described in the example embodiments, other actuators such as mechanical keys or pull/push handles may also be used to play the
15 games contained in the gaming machines.

Further, in the example embodiments, determining whether a player is playing at a gaming machine or a player terminal is described as based on whether a game card is inserted in a card reader. However, the determining is not limited as such and can include
20 e.g. checking whether the entertainment game at the gaming machine is ongoing or checking whether there are any available credits deposited at the gaming machine for playing the entertainment game. This can be achieved by installing the EGP module e.g. as an ASIC chip internal the gaming machine or by implementing the EGP module e.g. as a software application installed on the gaming machine. Thus, even for a gaming machine
25 without a card reader e.g. using a token slot for credits, it is still possible to determine whether a player is playing at a gaming machine. Therefore, the EGP module can either be external or internal to the gaming machine.

In addition, the gaming machines in the example embodiments are linked to an
30 external game server or unit. It will be appreciated that the communication links are not limited to wireless links and can include wired and/or cable links.

Further, the link in the example embodiments is described to be between a game server or unit and a gaming machine. However, it will be appreciated that the example

embodiments are not limited as such and can be modified to include a link directly from the game server or unit to the EGP module for determining whether a player is playing at a gaming machine (i.e. without further processing via the gaming machine).

- 5 Further, although RNG processes and/or one or more RNG have been described for selection of a pool of prizes and selection of a main winner, it will be appreciated that the example embodiments are not limited as such and can include any other ways or methods for selection of the one or more pools of prizes and selection of the main winner. In addition, although a main winner is described in the example embodiments, it will be appreciated that
- 10 the example embodiments are not intended to be limited as such. The example embodiments may alternatively be directed at selecting a plurality of major winners with the rest of the participating gaming machines being minor winners. It may even be provided that a selected main winner is not awarded a different proportion of prizes as compared to the remaining participating gaming machines but rather, the main winner may be provided with
- 15 e.g. a larger media display etc., while all participating gaming machines win the same number of prizes.

CLAIMS

1. An apparatus for implementing an external game, the apparatus comprising,
a first communication link to a plurality of gaming machines, the apparatus capable of
5 identifying participating gaming machines from the plurality of gaming machines via the first
communication link;
a second communication link to two or more prize pools, the apparatus capable of
selecting via the second communication link one or more prize pools for awarding prizes;
and
10 wherein the apparatus is arranged to instruct a random number generator process to
select the one or more prize pools;
wherein the apparatus is arranged to suspend games at the participating gaming
machines during implementation of the external game and further arranged to award all
participating gaming machines with at least one prize each;
15 further wherein the apparatus is arranged to award at least one participating gaming
machine said at least one prize from the selected one or more prize pools.
2. The apparatus as claimed in claim 1, wherein the apparatus is further
arranged to instruct another random number generator process to select said at least one
20 participating gaming machine.
3. The apparatus as claimed in claim 1, wherein the apparatus is further
arranged to instruct an external competing game for play by the participating gaming
machines to select said at least one participating gaming machine.
- 25 4. The apparatus as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 3, wherein the said at
least one participating gaming machine is selected as a main winner of the external game
and a portion of the prizes from the selected one or more prize pools is awarded to the main
winner.
- 30 5. The apparatus as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 4, wherein all gaming
machines linked to the first communication link are identified as participating gaming
machines.

6. The apparatus as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 4, wherein gaming machines linked to the first communication link and returning positive machine usage statuses are identified as participating gaming machines.

5 7. The apparatus as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 6, wherein the apparatus further comprises a third communication link to a display means for displaying media contents representing progress of the external game.

8. The apparatus as claimed in claim 7, wherein the media contents comprise
10 representation of selection of said one or more prize pools, representation of selection of said at least one participating gaming machine, or both.

9. The apparatus as claimed in claims 7 or 8, wherein the media contents further
15 comprise representation of said award all participating gaming machines, representation of said award at least one participating gaming machine, or both.

10. A network system for implementing an external game, the system comprising,
a game server;
a plurality of gaming machines having communication links with the game server;
20 two or more prize pools having communication links with the game server;
wherein the game server is capable of identifying participating gaming machines from the plurality of gaming machines, the game server is further capable of selecting one or more prize pools for awarding prizes;
wherein the game server is arranged to instruct a random number generator process
25 to select the one or more prize pools;
wherein the game server is arranged to suspend games at the participating gaming machines during implementation of the external game and further arranged to award all participating gaming machines with at least one prize each; and
further wherein the game server is arranged to award at least one participating
30 gaming machine said at least one prize from the selected one or more prize pools.

11. The system as claimed in claim 10, wherein the game server is further arranged to instruct another random number generator process to select said at least one participating gaming machine.

12. The system as claimed in claim 10, wherein the game server is further arranged to instruct an external competing game for play by the participating gaming machines to select said at least one participating gaming machine.

5 13. The system as claimed in any one of claims 10 to 12, wherein the said at least one participating gaming machine is selected as a main winner of the external game and a portion of the prizes from the selected one or more prize pools is awarded to the main winner.

10 14. The system as claimed in any one of claims 10 to 13, wherein all gaming machines linked to the game server are identified as participating gaming machines.

15 15. The system as claimed in any one of claims 10 to 13, wherein gaming machines linked to the game server and returning positive machine usage statuses are identified as participating gaming machines.

16. The system as claimed in any one of claims 10 to 15, further comprising a display means for displaying media contents representing progress of the external game.

20 17. The system as claimed in claim 16, wherein the media contents comprise representation of selection of said one or more prize pools, representation of selection of said at least one participating gaming machine, or both.

25 18. The system as claimed in claims 16 or 17, wherein the media contents further comprise representation of said award all participating gaming machines, representation of said award at least one participating gaming machine, or both.

30 19. A method of playing an external game, the method comprising,
linking a game server to a plurality of gaming machines;
identifying participating gaming machines from the plurality of gaming machines;
linking the game server to two or more prize pools;
selecting one or more prize pools for awarding prizes;
conducting a random number generator process for the step of selecting the one or
more prize pools;
35 suspending games at the participating gaming machines during play of the external game;

awarding all participating gaming machines with at least one prize each; and
awarding at least one participating gaming machine with said at least one prize from
the selected one or more prize pools.

5 20. The method as claimed in claim 19, further comprising conducting another
random number generator process for the step of selecting said at least one participating
gaming machine.

 21. The method as claimed in claim 19, further comprising instructing an external
10 competing game for play by the participating gaming machines for the step of selecting said
at least one participating gaming machine.

 22. The method as claimed in any one of claims 20 to 21, further comprising
selecting said at least one participating gaming machine as a main winner of the external
15 game, and awarding a portion of the prizes from the selected one or more prize pools to the
main winner.

 23. The method as claimed in any one of claims 20 to 22, for the step of
identifying participating gaming machines, the method further comprises identifying all
20 gaming machines linked to the game server as participating gaming machines.

 24. The method as claimed in any one of claims 20 to 22, for the step of
identifying participating gaming machines, the method further comprises identifying only
gaming machines returning positive machine usage statuses as participating gaming
25 machines.

 25. The method as claimed in any one of claims 20 to 24, further comprising
displaying media contents representing progress of the external game.

30 26. The method as claimed in claim 25, wherein the media contents comprise
representation of selection of said one or more prize pools, representation of selection of
said at least one participating gaming machine, or both.

27. The method as claimed in claims 25 or 26, wherein the media contents further comprise representation of said award all participating gaming machines, representation of said award at least one participating gaming machine, or both.