CLAIMS:

1. A hierarchical system for transmitting a message from a sender to one or more recipients via at least one communication node (T111), wherein:

at least one communication node (T111) is connected to a parent communication node (S11) and to a number of child communication nodes (MG1112);

each communication node (T111) comprises:

means for receiving the message including information defining a message type (43) and a message origin identifier (42);

a memory (52), storing:

data identifying respective child devices each associated with one of the number of child communication nodes (MG1112);

data identifying a parent device associated with the parent communication node (S11); and

a register (55) relating each message type (43) to a number of message destinations selected from the number of child communication nodes (MG1112) and the parent communication node (S11);

and processor means (51) operable to:

determine the message type (43) of the received message;

determine one or more destinations for the received message, on the basis of the determined message type (43) and a correlation to a message destination stored in the register (55); and

forward the received message to the determined destination or destinations; and

wherein the processor (51) is further operable to:

receive from a child device associated with an associated child communication node (MG1112) an indication of a message type (43) and a message origin identifier (42);

store the specified message type (43) and the specified origin identifier (42) in the register (55);

determine, from the message origin identifier (42), if the message of the pecified message type and origin identifier will be received from the child device associated with the associated child communication node (MG1112); and

if it is determined that the message will be received from the child device associated with the associated child communication node (MG1112), send the message to the associated child communication node (MG1112) to store the specified message type (43) and the specified message origin identifier (42) in the memory, in association with an address of the associated child communication node (MG1112); and

if it is determined that the message will not be received from the child device associated with the associated child communication node (MG1112), send the message to the parent communication node (S11) to store the specified message type and the specified message origin identifier in the memory, in association with an address of the parent communication node (S11);

the system further comprises a number of message generator devices (MG1112) each connected to a communication node (T111), each message generator device (MG1112) including:

means (31) for detecting an event;

means (34) for generating the message including information defining the message type (43) and the message origin identifier (42); and

means (35) for sending the generated message in response to the detection of the event.

2. A system according to claim 1, wherein at least one message generator device (MG1112) includes means (31) for detecting a number of different events, and means (34) for generating the message including information defining a respective message type in relation to each event.

3. A system according to any preceding claim, further including a number of message consumer devices (D1111) each connected to a communication node (T1111), each message consumer device (D1111) including:

means (61) for receiving the message including information defining the message type and the message origin identifier; and

output means (64) for producing an output in response to the received message.

4. A system according to any preceding claim, wherein:

a communication node (T1111) is operable to receive the message including information defining the message type, the message origin, and a request for a response; and

the processor (51) is further operable to:

determine from the message data whether the response message is requested;

identify the parent or child device from which the message was received at the communication node (T111);

forward the message to a destination in accordance with destination information corresponding to the message type stored in the communication node (T111);

store in the memory (52) a correlation between an origin address of the message and the parent or child device from which the message was received and to which the response message is to be routed.

5. A system according to claim 4, wherein the processor (51) of the communication node (T111) is further operable, on receipt of the response message, to:

determine, from data included in the response message, that the message is a response message;

determine, from data included in the message, an origin address of the message identifying the parent device or the child device to which the response message is to be delivered;

retrieve from memory (52) the identity of the parent device or the child device to which the response message is to be routed; and

forward the response message to the identified parent device or child device.

6. A hierarchical system for transmitting a message from a sender to one or more recipients via at least one communication node (50) wherein:

each communication node has a parent communication port P and a number of child communication ports (C1, C2);

each communication node (50) comprises:

means for receiving the message including information defining a message type, response requirement data, and a message origin identifier;

a memory (52), comprising:

a first register (53) storing:

data identifying one or more child devices each associated with a respective one of the number of child communication ports (C1, C2);

data identifying one or more parent devices associated with the parent communication port (P); and

a second register (55) storing:

data relating each message type to a number of message destinations selected from the child devices each associated with an associated child communication node and from the parent device associated with a parent communication node;

and processor means (51) operable to:

determine the message type of the received message;

determine one or more destinations for the received message, on the basis of the determined message type and a correlation stored in the second register (55);

determine, from the response requirement data, whether the received message requires a reply to its source from its destination; and

forward the received message to the determined destination or destinations;

and wherein the processor (51) is further operable to:

receive at a child port (C1, C2) an indication of a message type and a message origin identifier;
store the specified message type and the specified message origin identifier in the second register (55);
determine, from the message origin identifier, if the message of the specified type and the specified message origin identifier will be received at an associated child communication port of the number of child ports (C1, C2); and
if it is determined that the message will be received at the associated child communication port (C1, C2), send the message to the child device associated with the associated child communication port (C1, C2) to store the specified message type and the specified message origin identifier in the memory (52), in association with an address of the associated child communication node (C1, C2); and
if it is determined that the message will not be received at the associated child port (C1, C2), send the message to the parent device associated with the parent communication port (P) to store the specified message type and the specified message origin identifier in the memory (52), in association with the address of the parent communication port (P);

and wherein the processor (51) is further operable, when it is determined that the received message requires the reply, to:

determine which of the child ports (C1, C2) and parent ports (P) the message was received at;
extract from the message the message origin identifier; and
add to the first register the message origin identifier in relation to a determined port;

the system further comprises a number of message generator devices (30) each connected to a communication node (50), each message generator device (30) including:

means (31) for detecting an event;
means (34) for generating the message including information defining the message type and the message origin identifier; and
means (35) for sending the generated message in response to the detection of the event.

7. A system according to claim 6, wherein the processor (51) of the communication node (50) is further operable, on receipt of the response message, to:

determine, from data included in the response message, that the message is a response message;
determine, from data included in the message, an origin address of the message identifying the device to which the response message is to be delivered;
retrieve from memory (52) the identity of the parent communication port (P) or the child communication port (C1, C2) at which the message was received; and
forward the response message via the identified parent communication port (P) or child communication port (C1, C2).

8. A gaming system including a gaming apparatus, the gaming apparatus including one or more message generator devices adapted to detect events and generate messages on the basis of that detection, the system further comprising a number of message consumer devices each including means for receiving a message and means for producing an output in response to the received message, and the system further including a hierarchical system of communication nodes according to any preceding claim for transmitting messages from message generator devices to message consumer devices, wherein each message generator device is connected to a communication node as a "child" of that node and each message consumer device is connected to a communication node as a "child" of that node;
each message generator device includes:
means for detecting an event;
means for generating a message including information defining a message type and a message origin identifier; and
means for sending the generated message in response to the detection of the event.

9. A communications node for use in a system according to any preceding claim.

10. A method of transmitting messages over a communications network, using a system of communication nodes according to any of claims 1 to 7.

11. Apparatus for transmitting messages over a communications network, comprising at least one message-generating terminal, at least one message-consuming terminal, and at least one communication node according to claim 9.