"Gaming System and Method"

Field of the Invention

The present invention relates to a gaming system and method. The gaming system and method is particularly relevant to a lottery.

Throughout the specification, unless the context requires otherwise, the word "comprise" or variations such as "comprises" or "comprising", will be understood to imply the inclusion of a stated integer or group of integers but not the exclusion of any other integer or group of integers.

Background Art

The following discussion of the background to the invention is intended to facilitate an understanding of the present invention. However, it should be appreciated that the discussion is not an acknowledgement or admission that any of the material referred to was published, known or part of the common general knowledge of the person skilled in the art in any jurisdiction as at the priority date of the application.

Many people enjoy participating in games, such as a lottery, where they have an opportunity to win a prize. Systems and methods have been disclosed that use modern communications technology to facilitate the participation of people in such games. However, these systems and methods may suffer from one or more of the following problems:

- participants may fraudulently claim prizes to which they are not entitled;
- participants may be limited to submitting one entry to a game at one time;
- participation in only one type of game may be facilitated – participants cannot choose the game they wish to play from a plurality of games; and

- illegal participants, for example people under eighteen years old, may not be prevented from playing.

The present invention seeks to provide a gaming system and method that alleviates some or all of these problems to some extent.

Disclosure of the Invention

In accordance with a first aspect of the invention, there is provided a gaming system comprising:

a communications network;

a games facilitator for facilitating a game, the games facilitator arranged to be coupled to the communications network and operable to receive via the communications network a communication from a player using a communications means; and

an invoicing means for invoicing the player for participating in the game, the invoicing means arranged to be coupled to the communications network and independent of the games facilitator but operable to communicate therewith via the communications network;

wherein, the games facilitator is operable to receive a first communication from the player containing a set of game entry information, the first communication being sent via the communications means via the communications network;

the communications network or the games facilitator is operable to notify the invoicing means of the first communication;

the invoicing means is operable to generate a game participation invoice having a unique invoice identifier in response to the notification and to communicate the unique invoice identifier to the games facilitator via the communications network;

the games facilitator is operable to enter the player in the game and associate the player's game entry with the unique invoice identifier; and

the games facilitator is operable to determine a winner of the game by comparing the set of game entry information with a set of winning criteria, and, if the player is determined to be the winner, to send a second communication to the player containing winning information.

This has the advantage that a unique invoice identifier, generated by an independent third party – the invoicing means – is associated with the player's game entry allowing for independent verification that a person claiming to be the winner actually is.

Preferably, the games facilitator comprises storage means for storing the set of game entry information, the unique invoice identifier, the player's game entry, and the set of winning criteria.

Preferably, the games facilitator comprises processing means operable to:

receive the set of game entry information and the unique invoice identifier;

enter the player in the game;

associate the player's game entry with the unique invoice identifier; and

compare the set of game entry information with the set of winning criteria to determine if the player is the winner.

More preferably, the processing means is further operable to send the second communication to the player determined to be the winner.

To further reduce the chance of an unentitled person successfully claiming to be the winner, it is desirable for the gaming system to further comprise registration means for registering the player to participate in the game. In this case, the registration means may allocate the player a registration identifier that is included

in the set of game entry information, and is associated with the player's game entry and the unique invoice identifier.

The registration identifier may be a password. For increased security, it is advantageous for the password to satisfy predetermined criteria. The predetermined criteria may require the password to be of at least four characters in length and comprise a combination of letters and numerals.

The second communication may be receivable via the communications means. The communications means may have a communications identifier that is associated with communications sent therefrom, and is associated with the player's game entry .

Ideally, the communications means is a mobile phone. In this case, the communications identifier may be the phone number of the mobile phone.

Games program means may be stored in storage means of the games facilitator or of the communications means to facilitate the entry of the player in the game. Preferably, the games program means is transferable to the storage means of the communications means from the storage means of the games facilitator.

Preferably, the games program means is operable to facilitate selection by the player of the game to be entered from a plurality of games. The set of winning criteria may be a set of numbers or a winner of a competition.

Preferably, the unique invoice identifier is also communicated to the player via the communications network.

In accordance with a second aspect of the invention, there is provided a gaming method comprising:

receiving a first communication from a player containing a set of game entry information;

receiving an invoice communication from an independent invoicer containing a set of invoice information having a unique invoice identifier;

entering the player in a game in association with the set of invoice information;

determining a winner of the game by comparing the set of game entry information with a set of winning criteria; and

sending a second communication message to the player containing winning information if the player is determined to be the winner.

Preferably, the gaming method further comprises storing the set of game entry information, the set of invoice information, the player's game entry, and the set of winning criteria.

Preferably, the gaming method further comprises registering the player to participate in the game. In this case, the step of registering the player may comprise:

allocating the player a registration identifier;

including the registration identifier in the set of game entry information; and

associating the registration identifier with the player's game entry.

The registration identifier may be a password. It is advantageous for the password to satisfy predetermined criteria for increased security. The predetermined criteria may require the password to be of at least four characters in length and comprise a combination of letters and numerals.

Preferably, when there is a communications identifier associated with the first communication, the gaming method further comprises associating the communications identifier with the player's game entry.

Preferably, the first communication is sent via a mobile phone. In such a case, the communications identifier may be the phone number of the mobile phone.

Preferably, the gaming method includes selecting the game to be entered from a plurality of games.

The set of winning criteria may be a set of numbers or a winner of a competition.

In accordance with a third aspect of the invention, there is provided a server for use in a gaming system, the server being arranged to be coupled to a communications network and operable to communicate thereby with a player using a communications means and with an invoicing means independent of the server, wherein the server is operable to:

receive a first communication from the player containing a set of game entry information, the first communication being sent via the communications means via the communications network; notify the invoicing means of the first communication; receive a game participation invoice having a unique invoice identifier from the invoicing means via the communications network; enter the player in the game and associate the player's game entry with the unique invoice identifier; determine a winner of the game by comparing the set of game entry information with a set of winning criteria; and, if the player is determined to be the winner, send a second communication to the player containing winning information.

Preferably, the server comprises storage means for storing the set of game entry information, the unique invoice identifier, the player's game entry, and the set of winning criteria.

Preferably, the server comprises processing means operable to:

receive the set of game entry information and the unique invoice identifier;

enter the player in the game;

associate the player's game entry with the unique invoice identifier; and

compare the set of game entry information with the set of winning criteria to determine if the player is the winner.

Preferably, the processing means is further operable to send the second communication to the player determined to be the winner.

Preferably, the server further comprises registration means for registering the player to participate in the game.

Preferably, the registration means allocates the player a registration identifier that is included in the set of game entry information, and is associated with the player's game entry and the unique invoice identifier.

Preferably, the registration identifier comprises a password.

Preferably, the password satisfies predetermined criteria.

Preferably, the predetermined criteria comprises the password being of at least four characters in length and comprising a combination of letters and numerals.

Preferably, the second communication is received via the communications means.

Preferably, the communications means has a communications identifier associated with communications sent therefrom, and the communications identifier is associated with the player's game entry.

Preferably, the communications means comprises a mobile phone.

Preferably, the communications identifier is the phone number of the mobile phone.

Preferably, the server further comprises games program means stored in storage means of the server or storage means of the communications means to facilitate the entry of the player in the game.

Preferably, the games program means is transferable to the storage means of the communications means from the storage means of the server.

Preferably, the games program means is operable to facilitate selection by the player of the game to be entered from a plurality of games.

Preferably, the set of winning criteria comprises a set of numbers or a winner of a competition.

Brief Description of the Drawings

The present invention will now be described, by way of example, with reference to the accompanying drawings, of which:

Figure 1 is a schematic of a first embodiment of a gaming system and method in accordance with an aspect of the present invention; and

Figure 2 is a network diagram of the gaming system and method of Figure 1.

Best Mode(s) for Carrying Out the Invention

In Figures 1 and 2, there is shown a first embodiment of a gaming system 10 in accordance with the present invention. The gaming system 10 comprises:

communications means in the form of a mobile phone 12;

a games program 14;

a communications network 16;

invoicing means in the form of an invoicing system 18; and

a games facilitator 20.

The mobile phone 12 is owned and operated by a player 22. The mobile phone 12 has storage means in the form of a memory, not shown, adapted to store the games program 14 after transfer or download thereto. Additionally, the mobile phone 12 has an operating system, not shown, for executing application software stored in the memory, such as the games program 14.

Please note that the communications means is not limited to being a mobile phone, however. The communications means may be any communications device capable of sending and optionally receiving messages via a communications network, including any mobile communications device, Personal Computer ("PC") 13, Personal Digital Assistant ("PDA") 15, satellite phone, landline telephone 17, wrist watch communicator, input device, or dedicated gaming device.

The communications network 16 and invoicing system 18 are owned and/or operated by a carrier, not shown. The communications network 16 facilitates global data communication between parties connected thereto, so the parties are not limited to being in particular countries or regions to communicate via the communications network 16.

The communications network 16 includes all features of known cellular radiotelephone networks – including a number of base stations BS1, BS2, and a network service centre 24. The communications network 16 comprises a number of "cells" 25 – each cell being served by a base station. Mobile stations, such as the mobile phone 12, can roam within the communications network 16, and are in communication with the base station serving the cell in which they are located – provided that they are either in an active mode or a standby or "listening" mode. Thus, the mobile stations are able to send and receive signals to and from the base stations BS1, BS2 to transmit data – such as audio, control and text data – to the network service centre 24, and from there to it's intended recipient, such as other mobile stations, or servers such as Internet servers.

In the embodiment described, the communications network 16 is a Global System for Mobile Communication ("**GSM**") network. GSM cellular radio telephone networks, the operation of such networks, and terminals using the networks are well known to persons skilled in the art, and therefore need not be described in any further detail herein, except in so far as is relevant to the present invention. Please note that the communications network 16 is not limited to being a GSM network, and alternative embodiments of the invention may use other communications protocols.

The carrier provides a Short Message Service ("**SMS**") on the communications network 16, and, in this regard, the network service centre 24 includes a short message service centre ("**SMSC**") 27 that is operable to manage the SMS functions of the communications network 16. In particular the SMSC 27 receives SMS messages from a variety of sources, identifies the sender, the content and the recipient for the message, and delivers it to that recipient.

A subscriber or user of the communications network 16 can send or receive text messages using the SMS provided on the communications network 16, for example using a mobile station such as the mobile phone 12, or using a computer such as a facilitator computer 29 of the games facilitator 20 coupled to an SMS gateway via the Internet, or any other suitable means.

The invoicing system 18 is operably associated with the SMSC 27 to generate an invoice or charge to the sender of the SMS identified by the SMSC 27. The amount of the invoice or charge generated may vary according to a number of factors which may include the identity of the sender, the identify of the recipient, and/or the content of the SMS as identified by the SMSC 27.

The mobile phone 12 is in data communication with the facilitator computer 29 of the games facilitator 20 via the communications network 16. The facilitator computer 29 of the games facilitator 20 is also in data communication with the invoicing system 18 via the communications network 16.

The invoicing system 18 has an accounts database 26. The accounts database has a plurality of records 28. Each record 28 comprises a set of account information relating to a user of the communications network 16, including:

- name;
- address;
- date of birth;
- password for confirming the user's identity; and
- identifiers for communication devices owned by the user used on the communications network 16, e.g. mobile phone numbers, email addresses, etc.

The password must satisfy predetermined criteria. In the embodiment described, the password must be of at least four characters and comprise a combination of letters and numerals.

Each record 28 is allocated to a particular user of the communications network 16. One of the records 28 is for the player 22, and hereafter shall be referred to as the player record 30. The player record 30 facilitates the invoicing of the player 22 by the carrier for the player's 22 use of the communications network 16.

The functions of the above components, and additional features of the gaming system 10, will now be described with reference to the gaming system 10 in use.

The carrier allocates a pre-designated telephone number to the games facilitator 20. The pre-designated telephone number is used to designate the games facilitator 20 as the recipient of communication messages sent via the communications network 16. The pre-designated telephone number is a global or worldwide telephone number, and may be used from a connection to the communications network 16 anywhere in the world to identify the games facilitator 20 as the recipient of a communication message sent thereby.

To participate in a game, a first time player 22 sends an SMS message 32 to the pre-designated number via the mobile phone 12.

The facilitator computer 29 of the games facilitator 20 comprises a gaming application server cluster having facilitator memory for storing a registration database 36, a game entry database 48, a facilitator program, not shown, and a facilitator operating system for executing application software stored in the facilitator memory, such as the facilitator program. Additionally, the facilitator computer 29 comprises a processor, not shown, coupled to the facilitator memory.

The facilitator computer 29 receives the SMS message 32 sent to the pre-designated number.

In response to receiving the SMS message 32, the facilitator computer 29 transmits an address of the facilitator memory at which the games program 14 is located to the mobile phone 12 and requires the player 22 to execute a download sequence to download the games program 14. Upon completion of the download sequence, the mobile phone 12 stores the games program 14 in the memory of the mobile phone 12.

Once stored in the memory of the mobile phone 12, the games program 14 is executable by the operating system on command of the player 22.

When executed for the first time, the games program 14 presents a set of registration questions to the player 22, requesting information about the player 22 that is substantially equivalent to the information recorded in the player record 30 and additionally includes the credit card account details of the player 22.

The player's 22 responses to the registration questions comprises a set of registration information. Once the player 22 has responded to all of the registration questions, the games program 14 sends the set of registration information in an SMS message 34 to the facilitator computer 29 of the games facilitator 20 via the mobile phone 12.

On receipt of the SMS message 34 containing the set of registration information, the games facilitator 20 via the facilitator computer 29 registers the player 22 for participation in the game by entering the set of registration information in the registration database 36. Additionally, the games facilitator 20 allocates the player 22 a registration number 38 corresponding to the set of registration information.

Once the registration number 38 has been allocated, the games facilitator 20 sends the player 22 an SMS message 40 confirming that the player 22 has successfully registered to participate in the game and informing the player 22 of the allocated registration number 38. The games program 14 records the allocated registration number 38 in the memory of the mobile phone 12.

In some cases, the games facilitator 20 may be unable to enter the set of registration information in the registration database 36. This may occur when, for example, there is an error in the credit card account details provided by the player 22. In such a situation, the games facilitator 20 sends the player 22 an SMS message 42 informing the player 22 that the player's 22 attempt to register to participate in the game has been unsuccessful and prompting the player 22 to repeat the registration process.

The date of birth information included in the details of the player record 30 may reveal that the player 22 is too young to legally participate in the game. In this case, the games facilitator 20 sends the player 22 an SMS message 43 informing the player 22 that the player 22 is too young to register to participate in the game and inviting the player 22 to attempt to register again once the player 22 is older.

On subsequent executions of the games program 14, the games program 14 confirms that the player 22 has been successfully registered by checking for the registration number 38 in the memory of the mobile phone 12. If the player 22 has not been successfully registered, then the registration process is repeated as described previously.

If the player 22 has been successfully registered, the games program 14 presents a set of game questions to the player, requesting information pertinent to the

game. In the first embodiment, the game is a lottery, and the pertinent information includes six numbers between 1 and 44 selected by the player 22, as well as the registration number 38. The player's 22 responses to the set of game questions comprises a set of game entry information. Once the player 22 has responded to all of the game questions, the games program 14 sends the set of game entry information in an SMS message 44 to the games facilitator 20 via the mobile phone 12.

The games facilitator 20 conducts a predetermined number of rounds of games over a particular time period, with the opportunity for the player 22 to enter a particular round ceasing at a predetermined time at the end of the period. If the player 22 attempts to enter a particular round after the predetermined time has lapsed, the player 22 is entered in the game of the following round. The procedure for game entry is described in further detail below.

In the embodiment described, the games facilitator 20 conducts two rounds of lottery each week, one on a first predetermined day, and one on a second predetermined day. The opportunity for the player 22 to enter the round conducted on the first predetermined day expires at a first predetermined time on the first predetermined day. Similarly, the opportunity for the player 22 to enter the round conducted on the second predetermined day expires at a second predetermined time on the second predetermined day.

If the player 22 attempts to enter the round conducted on the first predetermined day after the first predetermined time has expired, the player 22 is entered in the following round, conducted on the second predetermined day. In a similar manner, if the player 22 attempts to enter the round conducted on the second predetermined day after the second predetermined time has expired, the player 22 is entered in the following round, conducted on the first predetermined day.

Each round is allocated a unique round number 47 by the games facilitator 20. The unique round number 47 is used to identify the round.

When the SMS message 44 is sent, the carrier charges a game entry fee to the player record 30 via the invoicing system 18 as follows.

As discussed previously, prior to being delivered to a recipient, sent SMS messages are received by the SMSC 27 of the network service centre 24.

On receiving the SMS message 44, the SMSC 27 of the network service centre 24 identifiers the sender of the SMS message 44 as the player 22, the recipient of the SMS message 44 as the games facilitator 20, and the content of the SMS message 44 as the set of game entry information.

On identification of the content of the SMS message 44 as the set of game entry information by the SMSC 27, the invoicing system 18 generates an invoice or charge corresponding to the game entry fee to the player record 30 of the identified player 22. As the game entry fee is charged to the player record 30 of the player 22, the player 22 does not have to open a bank account to participate in the game – the existing player record 30 of the accounts database 26 is used.

Additionally, an invoice number 46, recording and containing details of this charge, is allocated by the invoicing system 18 and communicated to the SMSC 27.

The SMSC 27 then delivers the SMS message 44, and the invoice number 46, to the games facilitator 20.

On receipt of the SMS message 44 containing the set of game entry information, and the invoice number 46, the games facilitator 20, via the facilitator computer 29, records the time of receipt of the same in a time stamp 49, that is subsequently used to determine the unique round number 47 of the game the player 22 will be entered into. It is important to note that the time stamp 49 records the time of receipt of the SMS message 44 by the games facilitator 20, and not the time the SMS message 44 was sent according to the mobile phone 12.

The games facilitator 20 then enters the player 22 in the game via the facilitator computer 29. This is achieved by entering the set of game entry information including the registration number 38, the corresponding invoice number 46, and the time stamp 49 in the game entry database 48.

The set of game entry information including the registration number 38, the corresponding invoice number 46, and the time stamp 49, comprise one entry in the game entry database 48, and are allocated a unique entry number 50 by the games facilitator 20 via the facilitator computer 29.

Once the entry number 50 has been allocated, the games facilitator 20 sends the player 22 an SMS message 52 confirming that the player 22 has successfully entered the game, and informing the player 22 of the following information which is subsequently recorded by the games program 14 in the memory of the mobile phone 12:

- the entry number 50;
- the time stamp 49;
- the unique round number 47 corresponding to the time stamp 49;
- the invoice number 46; and
- the game entry fee charged.

In the event that the games facilitator 20 is unable to enter any of the set of game entry information, the corresponding invoice number 46, the time stamp 49, or the unique round number 47 in the game entry database 48, the games facilitator 20 sends the player 22 an SMS message 54 informing the player 22 that the player's 22 attempt to enter the game has been unsuccessful and prompting the player 22 to try again. This may be the case when the set of game entry information

provided by the player 22 only includes three numbers, rather than six, for example.

Subsequently, the player 22 may enter the game multiple times, with each entry being entered in the game entry database 48 as described above, and allocated a unique entry number 50 by the games facilitator 20 as described previously.

The games program 14 facilitates the player 22 saving a plurality of sets of six "lucky" numbers in the memory of the mobile phone 12. A particular set of lucky numbers from the plurality of sets of lucky numbers may be selected by the player 22 in response to the set of game questions when entering a game.

The games program 14 also facilitates the player 22 sending a plurality of entries to a game simultaneously, as an alternative to submitting one entry at a time.

In such a case:

- each set of six numbers comprising an entry of the plurality of entries selected by the player 22 in the set of game entry information is separated by a semicolon;
- the SMSC 27 of the carrier determines the number of entries in the plurality of entries by counting the number of semicolons, and a proportionate game entry fee is charged via the invoicing system 18; and
- the SMS message 52 confirming that the player 22 has successfully entered the game informs the player 22 of the entry number 50 assigned to each entry in the plurality of entries and the total game entry fee charged.

After the opportunity for the player 22 to enter the game round corresponding to the unique round number 47 expires, the games facilitator 20, via the facilitator computer 29, determines a winning entry 56 for the game round from the entries

in the game entry database 48. The facilitator computer 29 of the games facilitator 20 makes the determination by generating a set of six random numbers from 1 to 44, and comparing this with the six numbers selected in the set of game entry information for each entry in the game entry database 48. The entry for which the six numbers selected in the set of game entry information match the set of six random numbers is deemed to be the winning entry 56.

If the entry number 50 of the player 22 is determined to be the winning entry 56, then the games facilitator 20 sends the player 22 an SMS message 58 notifying the player 22 of their win. The SMS message 58 additionally instructs the player 22 to contact the games facilitator 20 within five working days by sending an SMS message via the mobile phone 12 stating the registration number 38, the player's 22 password, the invoice number 46 and the entry number 50 to claim a prize. In the embodiment described the prize is an amount of money. In an alternative embodiment, the prize is an item of value, such as a house or car.

In the event that there is no entry for which the six numbers selected in the set of game entry information match the set of six random numbers, i.e. there is no winning entry 56, the prize for the game round "jackpots" and is added to the prize for the following game round.

On receipt of the SMS message 58, to claim a prize the player 22 sends an SMS message 60 in response to the games facilitator 20 confirming that the player 22 wishes to receive the prize and stating the registration number 38, the player's 22 password, the invoice number 46 and the entry number 50.

On receipt of the SMS message 60, the facilitator computer 29 of the games facilitator 20 compares the registration number 38, the player's 22 password, the invoice number 46 and the entry number 50 contained in the SMS message 60 and the phone number of the phone used to send the SMS message 60 with:

- the set of registration information in the registration database 36 corresponding to the registration number 38; and

- the set of game entry information and the invoice number 46 in the game entry database 48 corresponding to entry number 50;

to verify that that the sender of the SMS message 60 is the player 22.

Once so verified, the games facilitator 20 provides the prize to the player 22 in an appropriate manner depending on the prize. For example, in the embodiment described where the prize is an amount of money, the games facilitator 20 posts the prize to the address of the player 22, or credits the prize to the credit card account of the player 22. Where necessary, the games facilitator 20 retrieves the necessary address or credit card account details from the set of registration information in the registration database 36 corresponding to the registration number 38.

In an alternative embodiment, where the prize is a small amount of money, for example less than $100, the games facilitator 20 may credit the prize to the player record 30 of the player 22 in the accounts database 26 of the invoicing system 18, i.e. as a credit to the player's 22 account with the carrier.

In alternative embodiments, where the prize is a large item, such as a car or boat, the game's facilitator 20 may deliver the prize to the player's 22 address. Where the prize is a house, the games facilitator 20 may organise to meet with the player 22 to arrange for transfer of ownership of the house to the player 22.

The games facilitator 20 can receive SMS messages from communications devices other than the mobile phone 12, such as a personal computer, or a different mobile phone. The games facilitator 20 will disregard any SMS messages it receives from such communications devices purporting to be the SMS message 50. In this manner, the sender of such an SMS message will not be verified as the player 22 and the prize will not be posted or credited.

If the entry number 50 of the player 22 is determined not to be the winning entry 56, then the games facilitator 20 sends the player 22 an SMS message 62

informing the player 22 that they did not win and inviting the player 22 to play again. The SMS message 62 additionally informs the player 22 of the set of six random numbers generated by the games facilitator 20, i.e. the winning numbers.

In an alternative embodiment of the present invention, the games facilitator 20 also determines a first and a second consolation prize winning entry 64 and 66 from the entries in the game entry database 48. The entry for which five of the six numbers selected in the set of game entry information match five of the numbers in the set of six random numbers is deemed to be the first consolation prize winning entry 64. The entry for which four of the six numbers selected in the set of game entry information match four of the numbers in the set of six random numbers is deemed to be the second consolation prize winning entry 66.

Players whose entries correspond to the first consolation prize winning entry 64, or the second consolation prize winning entry 66, obtain corresponding consolation prizes in a process similar to that described above in relation to the winning entry 56.

In the case where more than one player has an entry corresponding to the winning entry 56, the amount of money comprising the prize in the embodiment described is evenly distributed amongst the winning players.

The amount of money comprising the consolation prizes, if provided for, is similarly evenly distributed if more than one player has an entry corresponding to the first consolation prize winning entry 64, or the second consolation prize winning entry 66.

In an alternative embodiment where the prize is an item, such as a house, and more than one player has an entry corresponding to the winning entry 56, the item is sold, and the amount of money raised through the sale of the item is evenly distributed amongst the winning players.

Revenue generated from the player's 22 participation in the game arising from the game entry fee charged is shared between the games facilitator 20 and the carrier

according to an agreement between them. Such agreement may also include the sharing of revenue generated from communications sent by the player 22 to the games facilitator 20 via the communications network 16, such as SMS message 32.

In accordance with a second embodiment of the invention, where like numerals represent like parts, the game is a set of sporting competitions, such as a set of football matches ("**footy tipping**"), a set of boxing matches, or a set of horse races ("**horse betting**"). In this case the information pertinent to the game requested by the set of game questions includes a team or an individual selected by the player 22 to win each sporting competition in the set of sporting competitions, as well as the registration number 38.

The winning entry 56 is determined by the games facilitator 20 noting the team or individual who actually wins each sporting competition, and comparing this with the team or individual selected in the set of game entry information for each entry in the game entry database 48. The entry for which the most number of winners is picked is deemed to be the winning entry 56.

It should be appreciated that the game can be any game or competition from which a winner can be determined. In addition to the games already mentioned, the game comprise casino gaming, network gaming, and board gaming.

Indeed, in an alternative embodiment, the information pertinent to the game requested by the set of game questions includes only a notification that the player 22 wishes to participate in the game. The winning entry 56 is then determined by the games facilitator 20 randomly selecting an entry from the entries in the game entry database 48.

In a further alternative embodiment, the information pertinent to the game requested by the set of game questions includes a notification that the player 22 wishes to have a random, or "slikpik" entry. In this case, the games facilitator 20 randomly chooses the selections for the set of game entry information for the player 22, according to the game being played.

It should be appreciated by the person skilled in the art that the invention is not limited to the embodiments described. In particular, the invention as described can include the following modifications and/or additions:

- The games facilitator 20 may provide a plurality of games, such as a lottery, footy tipping and horse betting. In this case, the games program 14 is operable to allow the player 22 to select which of the plurality of games they wish to participate in. For example, the player 22 may operate the games program 14 to participate in a lottery game, and then subsequently operate the games program 14 to participate in a footy tipping game.

- The set of registration information may be stored in the memory of the mobile phone 12. In such a case, rather than presenting a set of registration questions to the player 22 to facilitate registration of the player 22, the games program 14 copies the set of registration information directly from the memory of the mobile phone 12.

- The registration number 38 may be a "blind" number that is never readable by the player 22. In this case, although the registration number 38 is still recorded in the memory of the mobile phone 12, the player 22 is not informed of what the registration number 38 is. The games program 14 automatically inserts the registration number 38 into SMS messages sent via the mobile phone 12 to the games facilitator 20.

- The games facilitator 20 may have a games website which may be accessed to initiate the transmission of the games program 14 from the games facilitator 20 to the mobile phone 12. In one embodiment of the invention, where there is such a website, the mobile phone 12 additionally comprises a Wireless Application Protocol ("**WAP**") browser. The WAP browser is operable by the player 22 via the mobile phone 12 to access the games website and download and store the games program 14 in the memory of the mobile phone 12.

- The games facilitator 20 may have a registration website facilitating the registration of the player 22. To register, the player 22 accesses the registration website. The registration website then presents the set of registration questions to the player 22. The player's 22 responses to the registration questions, namely the set of registration information, is processed by the games facilitator 20 as described previously once the player 22 has responded to all of the registration questions, with the games facilitator 20 communicating with the player 22 via the registration website.

- Once the player 22 is registered, the player may enter games without using the games program 14. To enter a game in this manner, the player 22 sends an SMS message comprising the registration number 38 and the set of game entry information to the games facilitator 20.

- Rather than the carrier determining the number of entries to a game, and charging a proportionate game entry fee via the invoicing system 18, the games facilitator 20 may determine the number of entries to a game, and inform the carrier of the fee to be charged for the same. In this case, when the SMS message 44 is sent, the carrier charges a basic fee to the players record 30 via the invoicing system 18. The details of the basic fee are recorded in the invoice number 46 and communicated to the games facilitator 20. For each game that the player 22 is entered into, the games facilitator 20 adds a game fee to the basic fee to determine a total fee. The total fee is then communicated from the games facilitator 20 to the carrier and invoiced to the players record 30 via the invoicing system 18.

- The invoicing system 18 may be owned and/or operated by an entity other than the carrier, provided that the entity is independent of the games facilitator 20.

- Although described in relation to a mobile phone 12 and SMS messages, the invention is not so limited, and any appropriate communications means and communication message format may be used.

- The player 22 may automatically be entered into a game on registration;

- The games program may be stored in a memory of a games computer such as a server operated by the games facilitator. In such a case, the player may operate the communications means to connect to the games computer and execute the games program via the communications network;

- The facilitator computer of the games facilitator may comprise security means, such as a firewall, to prevent unauthorised access thereto;

- The games facilitator may comprise identifying means for identifying a communications message sent from or via an unauthorised source. The unauthorised source may, for example, be a player who is not permitted to participate in the game because of residence in a country where participation in the game is illegal or because of committing a prohibited action, an unwelcome marketeer such as a spammer, or a communications network operated by a different carrier or service provider. In such a case, the games facilitator preferably further comprises blocking means to block communications messages identified by the identifying means as being sent from or via an unauthorised source;

- Communications sent via the communications network 16 from the mobile phone 12 such as the SMS message 44 may be encrypted. Such encryption reduces the likelihood of fraud being committed, and also reduces the likelihood of errors in communications sent.

It should be further appreciated by the person skilled in the art that variations and combinations of features described above, not being alternatives or substitutes, can be combined to form yet further embodiments falling within the intended scope of the invention.

The Claims Defining the Invention are as Follows

1. A gaming system comprising:

a communications network;

a games facilitator for facilitating a game, the games facilitator arranged to be coupled to the communications network and operable to receive via the communications network a communication from a player using a communications means; and

an invoicing means for invoicing the player for participating the game, the invoicing means arranged to be coupled to the communications network and independent of the games facilitator but operable to communicate therewith via the communications network;

wherein, the games facilitator is operable to receive a first communication from the player containing a set of game entry information, the first communication being sent via the communications means via the communications network;

the communications network or the games facilitator is operable to notify the invoicing means of the first communication;

the invoicing means is operable to generate a game participation invoice having a unique invoice identifier in response to the notification and to communicate the unique invoice identifier to the games facilitator via the communications network;

the games facilitator is operable to enter the player in the game and associate the player's game entry with the unique invoice identifier; and

the games facilitator is operable to determine a winner of the game by comparing the set of game entry information with a set of winning criteria, and, if the player is determined to be the winner, to send a second communication to the player containing winning information.

2. A gaming system as claimed in claim 1, wherein the games facilitator comprises storage means for storing the set of game entry information, the unique invoice identifier, the players game entry, and the set of winning criteria.

3. A gaming system as claimed in claim 1 or claim 2, wherein the games facilitator comprises processing means operable to:

receive the set of game entry information and the unique invoice identifier;

enter the player in the game;

associate the player's game entry with the unique invoice identifier; and

compare the set of game entry information with the set of winning criteria to determine if the player is the winner.

4. A gaming system as claimed in claim 3, wherein the processing means is further operable to send the second communication to the player determined to be the winner.

5. A gaming system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, further comprising registration means for registering the player to participate in the game.

6. A gaming system as claimed in claim 5, wherein the registration means allocates the player a registration identifier that is included in the set of

game entry information, and is associated with the player's game entry and the unique invoice identifier.

7. A gaming system as claimed in claim 6, wherein the registration identifier comprises a password.

8. A gaming system as claimed in claim 7, wherein the password satisfies predetermined criteria.

9. A gaming system as claimed in claim 8, wherein the predetermined criteria comprises the password being of at least four characters in length and comprising a combination of letters and numerals.

10. A gaming system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, wherein the second communication message is received via the communications means.

11. A gaming system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, wherein the communications means has a communications identifier associated with communications messages sent therefrom, and the communications identifier is associated with the player's game entry.

12. A gaming system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, wherein the communications means comprises a mobile phone.

13. A gaming system as claimed in claim 12 dependent on claim 11, wherein the communications identifier is the phone number of the mobile phone.

14. A gaming system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, further comprising games program means stored in the storage means of the games facilitator or storage means of the communications means to facilitate the entry of the player in the game.

15. A gaming system as claimed in claim 14, wherein the games program means is transferable to the storage means of the communications means from the storage means of the games facilitator.

16. A gaming system as claimed in claim 14 or claim 15, wherein the games program means is operable to facilitate selection by the player of the game to be entered from a plurality of games.

17. A gaming system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, wherein the set of winning criteria comprises a set of numbers or a winner of a competition.

18. A gaming system as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, wherein the unique invoice identifier is also communicated to the player via the communications network.

19. A gaming method comprising:

receiving a first communication from a player containing a set of game entry information;

receiving an invoice communication from an independent invoicer containing a set of invoice information having a unique invoice identifier;

entering the player in a game in association with the set of invoice information;

determining a winner of the game by comparing the set of game entry information with a set of winning criteria; and

sending a second communication to the player containing winning information if the player is determined to be the winner.

20. A gaming method as claimed in claim 19, further comprising storing the set of game entry information, the set of invoice information, the player's game entry, and the set of winning criteria.

21. A gaming method as claimed in claim 19 or 20, further comprising registering the player to participate in the game.

22. A gaming method as claimed in claim 21, wherein the step of registering the player comprises:

allocating the player a registration identifier;

including the registration identifier in the set of game entry information; and

associating the registration identifier with the player's game entry.

23. A gaming method as claimed in claim 22, wherein the registration identifier comprises a password.

24. A gaming method as claimed in claim 23, wherein the password satisfies predetermined criteria.

25. A gaming method as claimed in claim 24, wherein the predetermined criteria comprises the password being of at least four characters in length and comprising a combination of letters and numerals.

26. A gaming method as claimed in any one of claims 19 to 25, wherein there is a communications identifier associated with the first communications, the method further comprising associating the communications identifier with the player's game entry.

27. A gaming method as claimed in any one of claims 19 to 26, wherein the first communication is sent via a mobile phone.

28. A gaming method as claimed in claim 27 dependent on claim 26, wherein the communications identifier is the phone number of the mobile phone.

29. A gaming method as claimed in any one of claims 19 to 28, further comprising selecting the game to be entered from a plurality of games.

30. A gaming method as claimed in any one of claims 19 to 29, wherein the set of winning criteria comprises a set of numbers or a winner of a competition.

31. A server for use in a gaming system, the server being arranged to be coupled to a communications network and operable to communicate thereby with a player using a communications means and with an invoicing means independent of the server, wherein the server is operable to:

receive a first communication from the player containing a set of game entry information, the first communication being sent via the communications means via the communications network; notify the invoicing means of the first communication; receive a game participation invoice having a unique invoice identifier from the invoicing means via the communications network; enter the player in the game and associate the player's game entry with the unique invoice identifier; determine a winner of the game by comparing the set of game entry information with a set of winning criteria; and, if the player is determined to be the winner, send a second communication to the player containing winning information.

32. A server as claimed in claim 31, wherein the server comprises storage means for storing the set of game entry information, the unique invoice identifier, the player's game entry, and the set of winning criteria.

33. A server as claimed in claim 31 or claim 32, wherein the server comprises processing means operable to:

receive the set of game entry information and the unique invoice identifier;

enter the player in the game;

associate the player's game entry with the unique invoice identifier; and

compare the set of game entry information with the set of winning criteria to determine if the player is the winner.

34. A server as claimed in claim 33, wherein the processing means is further operable to send the second communication to the player determined to be the winner.

35. A server as claimed in any one of claims 31 to 34, further comprising registration means for registering the player to participate in the game.

36. A server as claimed in claim 35, wherein the registration means allocates the player a registration identifier that is included in the set of game entry information, and is associated with the player's game entry and the unique invoice identifier.

37. A server as claimed in claim 36, wherein the registration identifier comprises a password.

38. A server as claimed in claim 37, wherein the password satisfies predetermined criteria.

39. A server as claimed in claim 38, wherein the predetermined criteria comprises the password being of at least four characters in length and comprising a combination of letters and numerals.

40. A server as claimed in any one of claims 31 to 39, wherein the second communication is received via the communications means.

41. A server as claimed in any one of claims 31 to 40, wherein the communications means has a communications identifier associated with

communications sent therefrom, and the communications identifier is associated with the player's game entry.

42. A server as claimed in any one of claims 31 to 41, wherein the communications means comprises a mobile phone.

43. A server as claimed in claim 42 dependent on claim 41, wherein the communications identifier is the phone number of the mobile phone.

44. A server as claimed in any one of claims 31 to 43, further comprising games program means stored in storage means of the server or storage means of the communications means to facilitate the entry of the player in the game.

45. A gaming system as claimed in claim 44, wherein the games program means is transferable to the storage means of the communications means from the storage means of the server.

46. A gaming system as claimed in claim 44 or claim 45, wherein the games program means is operable to facilitate selection by the player of the game to be entered from a plurality of games.

47. A server as claimed in any one of claims 31 to 46, wherein the set of winning criteria comprises a set of numbers or a winner of a competition.

48. A gaming system substantially as described herein with reference to the accompanying drawings.

49. A gaming method substantially as described herein with reference to the accompanying drawings.

50. A server for use in a gaming system substantially as described herein with reference to the accompanying drawings.