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(54) **SYSTEM AND METHODS FOR OBTAINING ADVANTAGES AND TRANSACTING THE SAME IN A COMPUTER GAMING ENVIRONMENT**

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G06F 17/60 (2006.01)

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See application file for complete search history.

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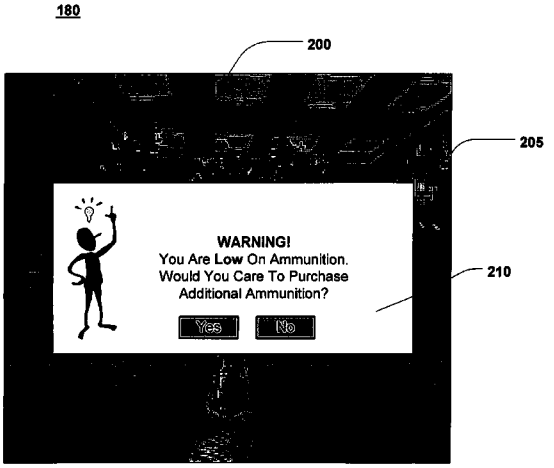
(57) **ABSTRACT**

A system and methods allowing the creation, integration, and transaction of advantages (e.g. desired environment features and/or elements). In an illustrative implementation, the system may operate partially or completely in a computing environment. Where a computing environment is employed, the computing environment may support a computing application running on a stand alone or networked computing system. The computing application may maintain a user interface portion, a processing portion, and cooperate with a database. In operation, a user may register his/her profile information with an advantages content provider such that when navigating through the computing application, the user have access to and purchase offered advantages and interact with interactive advertisements to purchase products and/or services. The advantages may be retrieved from a cooperating database and provided to the user. A record of the transaction is stored by the computing application in accordance to user profile so that the user may be properly charged for the transacted advantages or purchased products and/or services.

19 Claims, 9 Drawing Sheets



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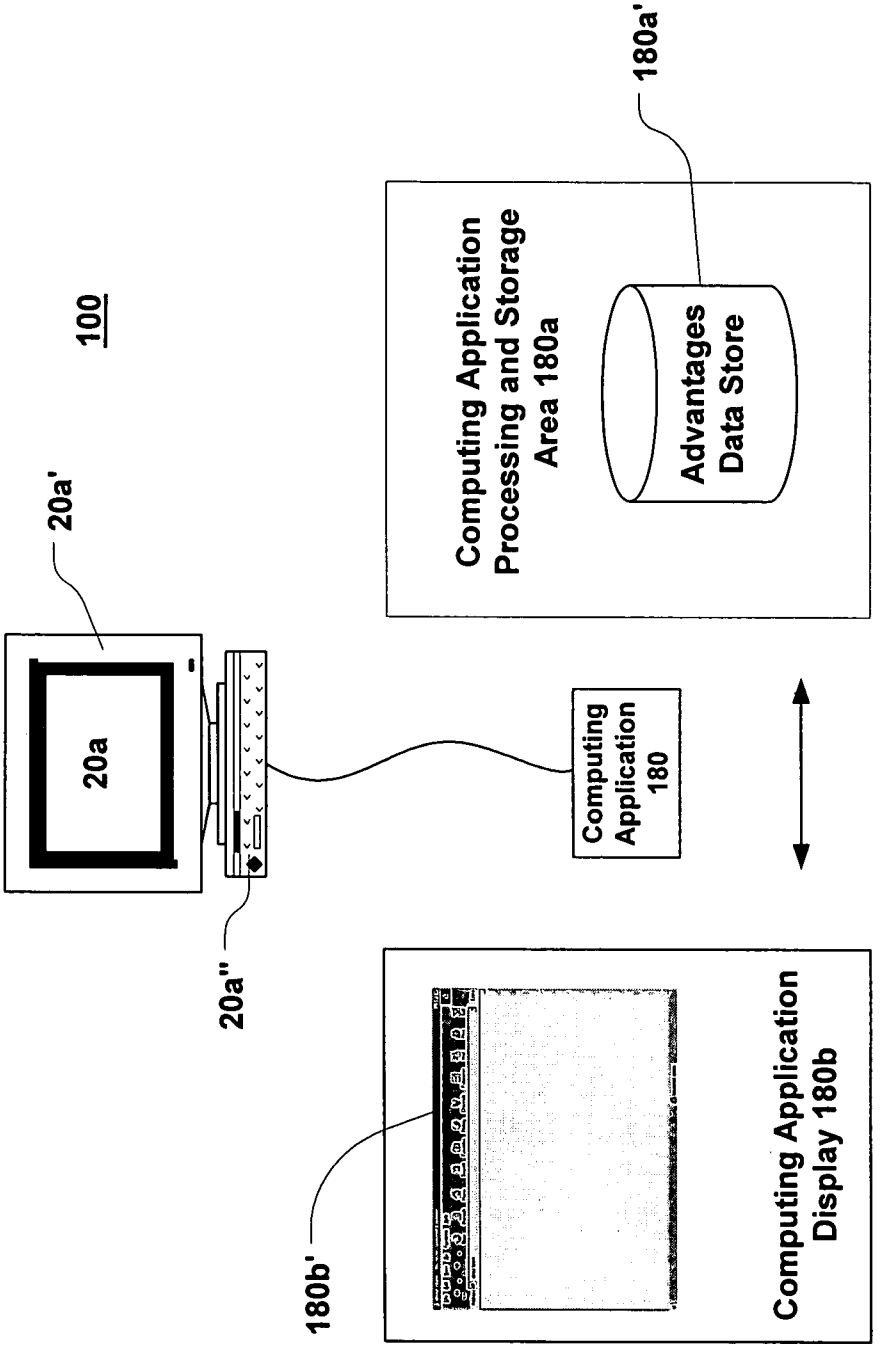
100
20a'
20a
20a''
Computing Application 180
Computing Application Processing and Storage Area 180a
180a'
Advantages Data Store
180b'
Computing Application Display 180b

Figure 1

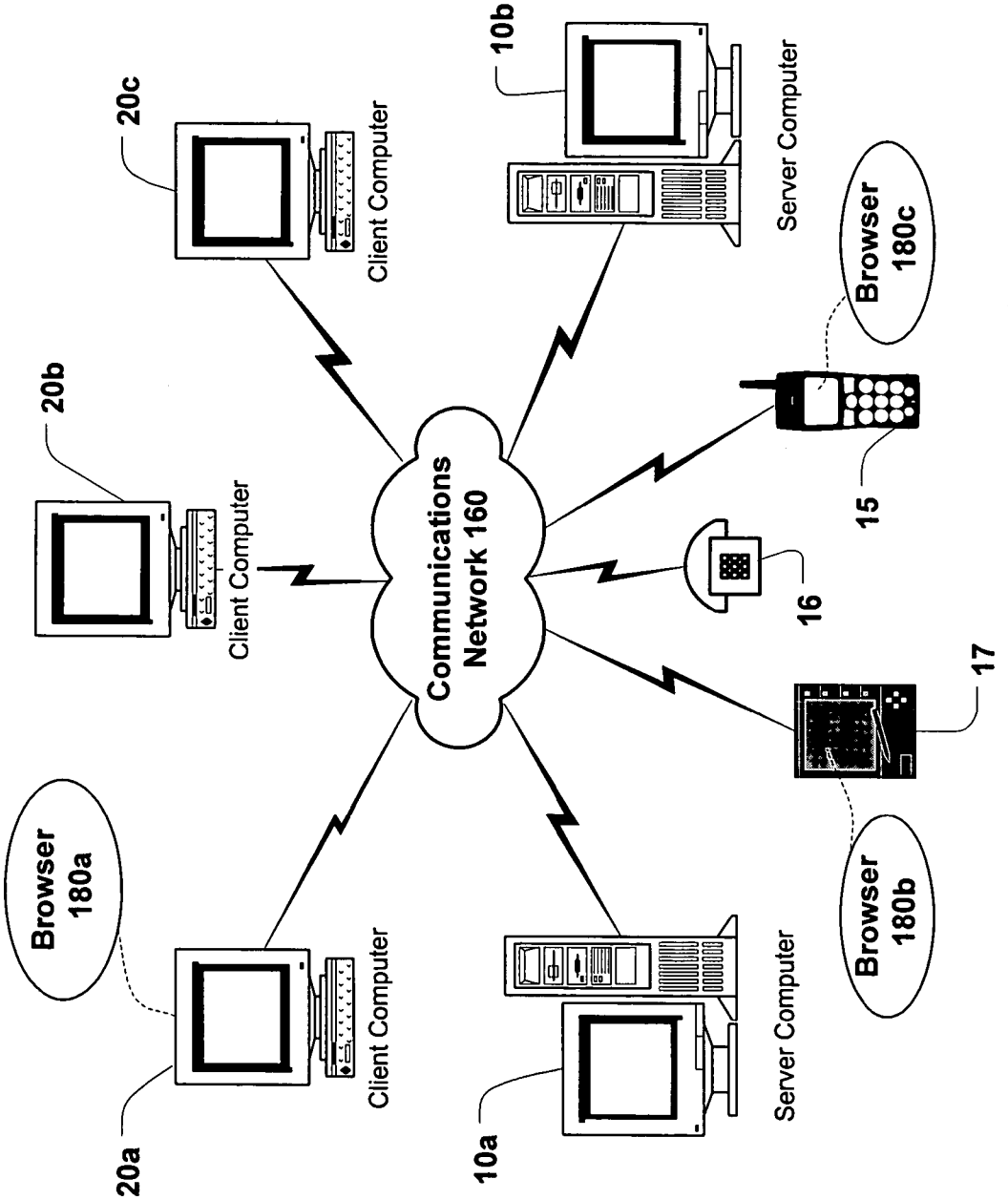
Communications Network 160
Client Computer
Client Computer
Client Computer
Server Computer
Server Computer
Browser 180a
Browser 180b
Browser 180c
20a
20b
20c
10a
10b
15
16
17

Figure 1A

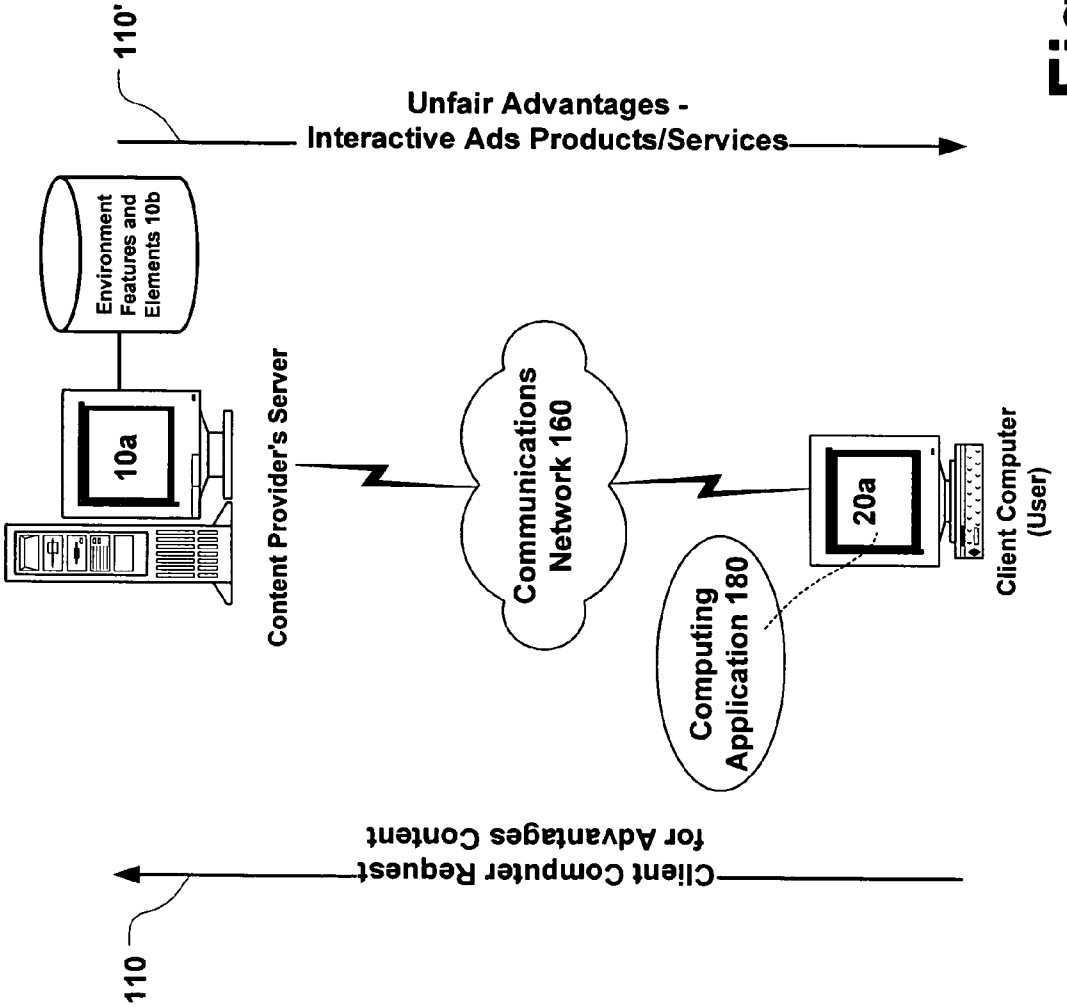
110'
Unfair Advantages -
Interactive Ads Products/Services
Environment Features and Elements 10b
10a
Content Provider's Server
Communications Network 160
20a
Client Computer (User)
Computing Application 180
Client Computer Request for Advantages Content
110

Figure 1B

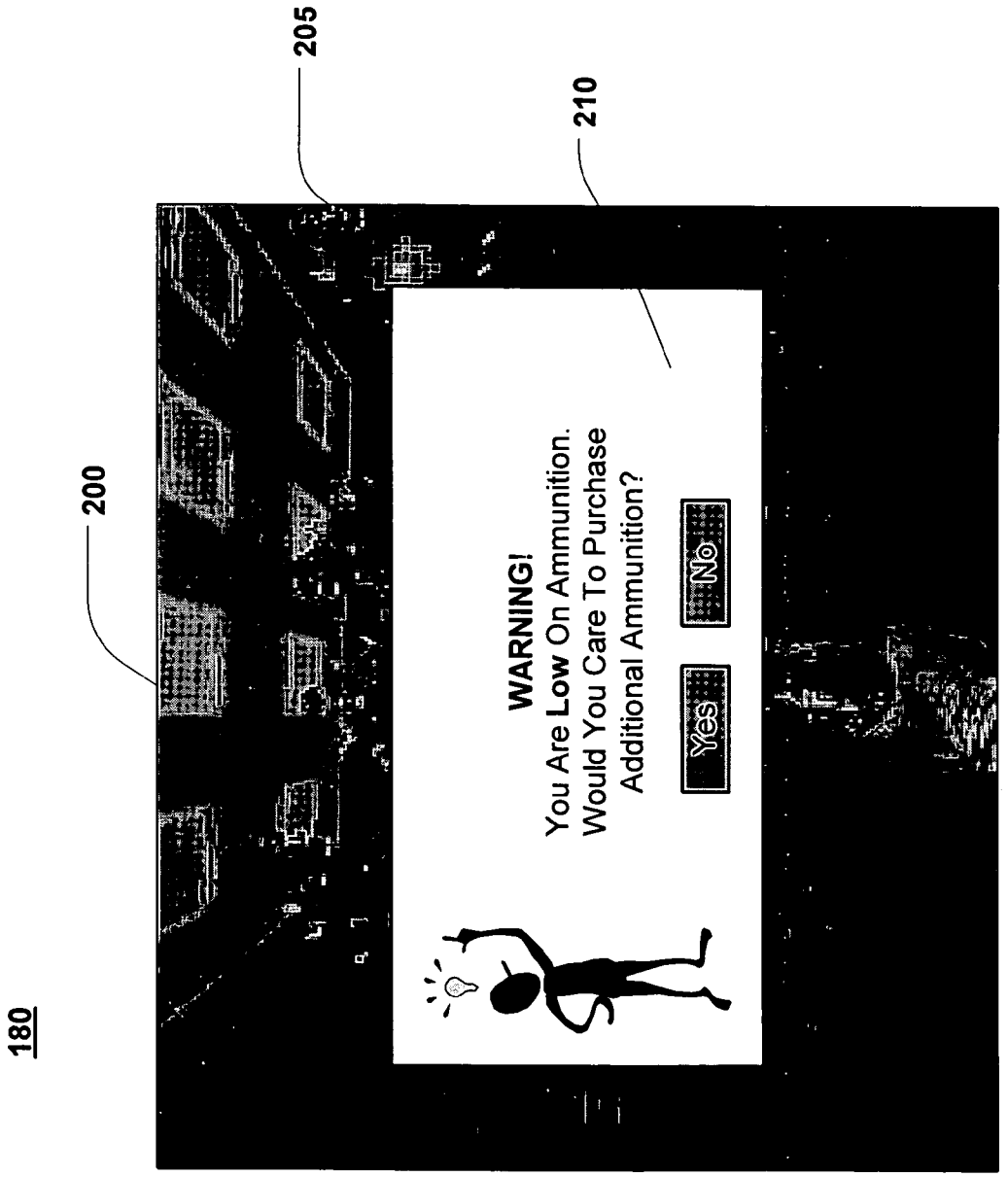
180
200
205
210
WARNING!
You Are Low On Ammunition.
Would You Care To Purchase
Additional Ammunition?
Yes
No

Figure 2

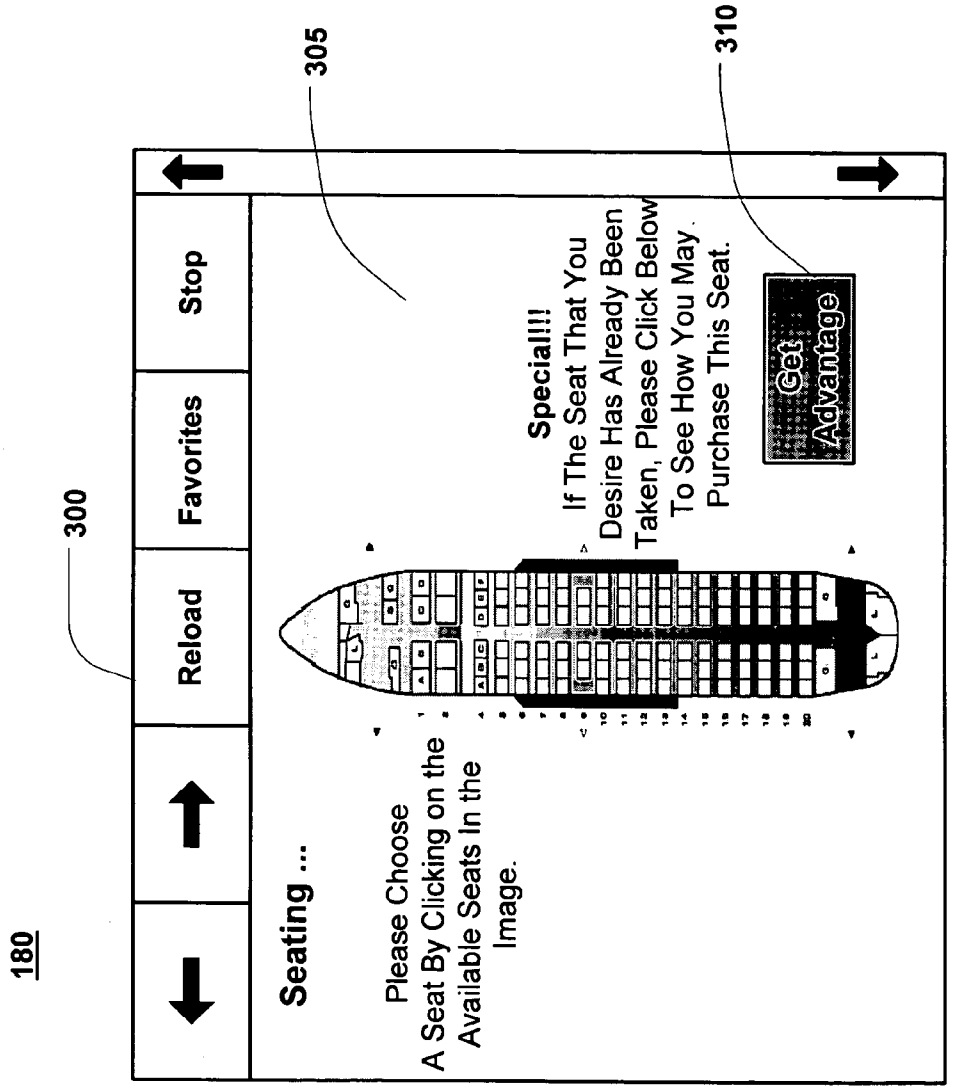
180
300
Reload
Favorites
Stop
305
310
Seating ...
Please Choose
A Seat By Clicking on the
Available Seats In the
Image.
Special!!!
If The Seat That You
Desire Has Already Been
Taken, Please Click Below
To See How You May
Purchase This Seat.
Get
Advantage

Figure 3

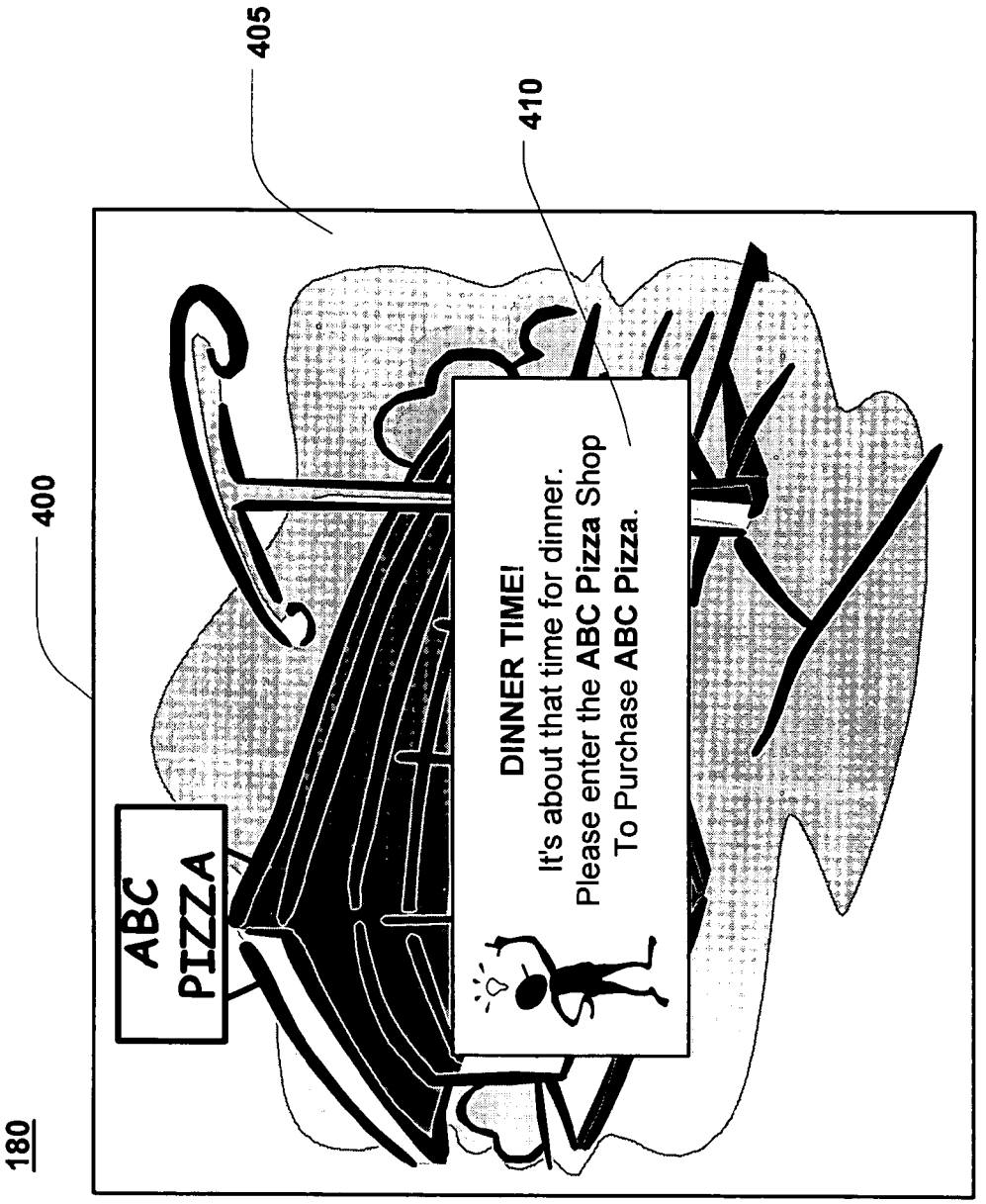
180
400
405
410
ABC PIZZA
DINNER TIME!
It's about that time for dinner.
Please enter the ABC Pizza Shop
To Purchase ABC Pizza.

Figure 4

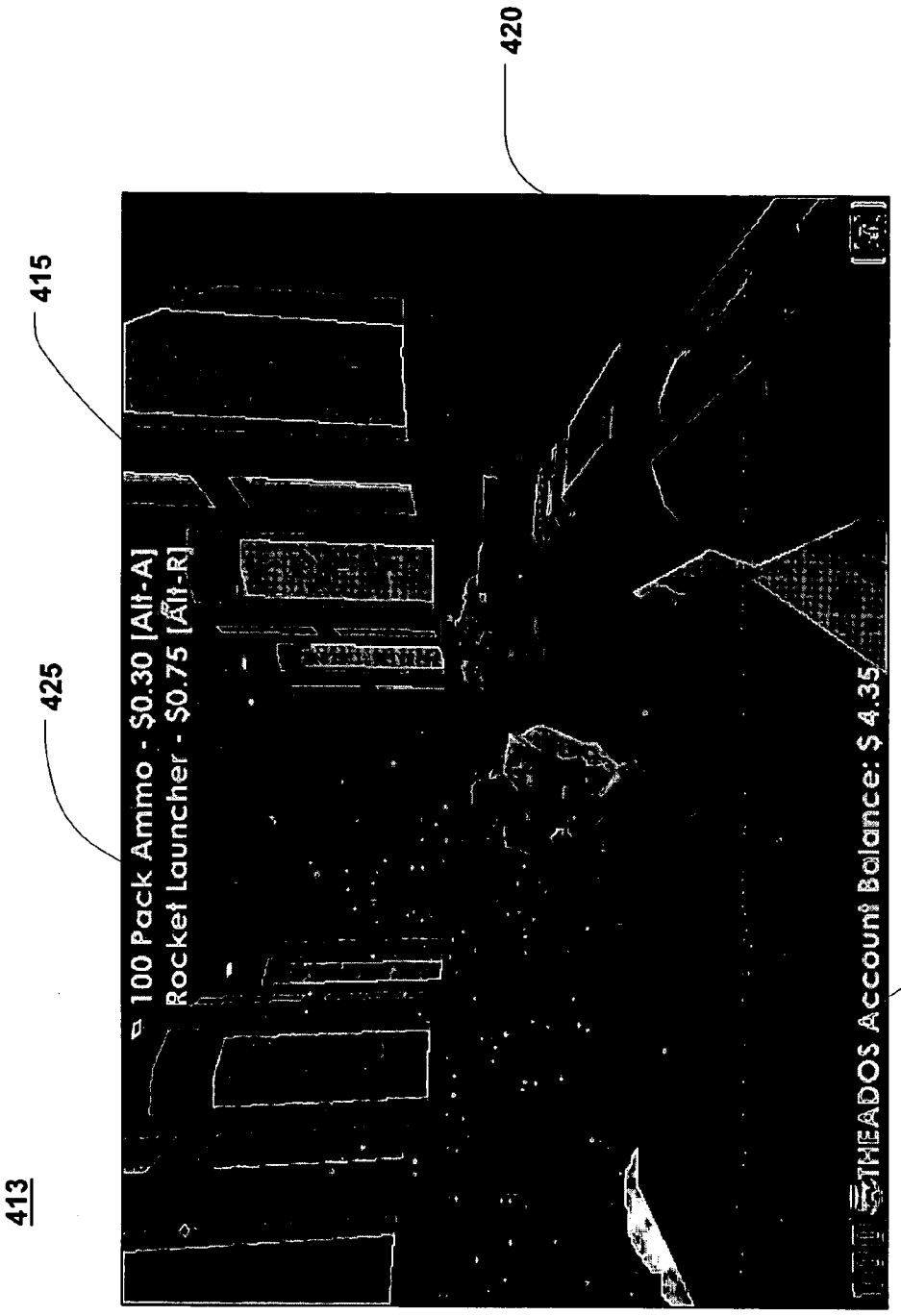
420
415
425
430
413
100 Pack Ammo - $0.30 [Alt-A]
Rocket Launcher - $0.75 [Alt-R]
THEADOS Account Balance: $ 4.35

Figure 4A

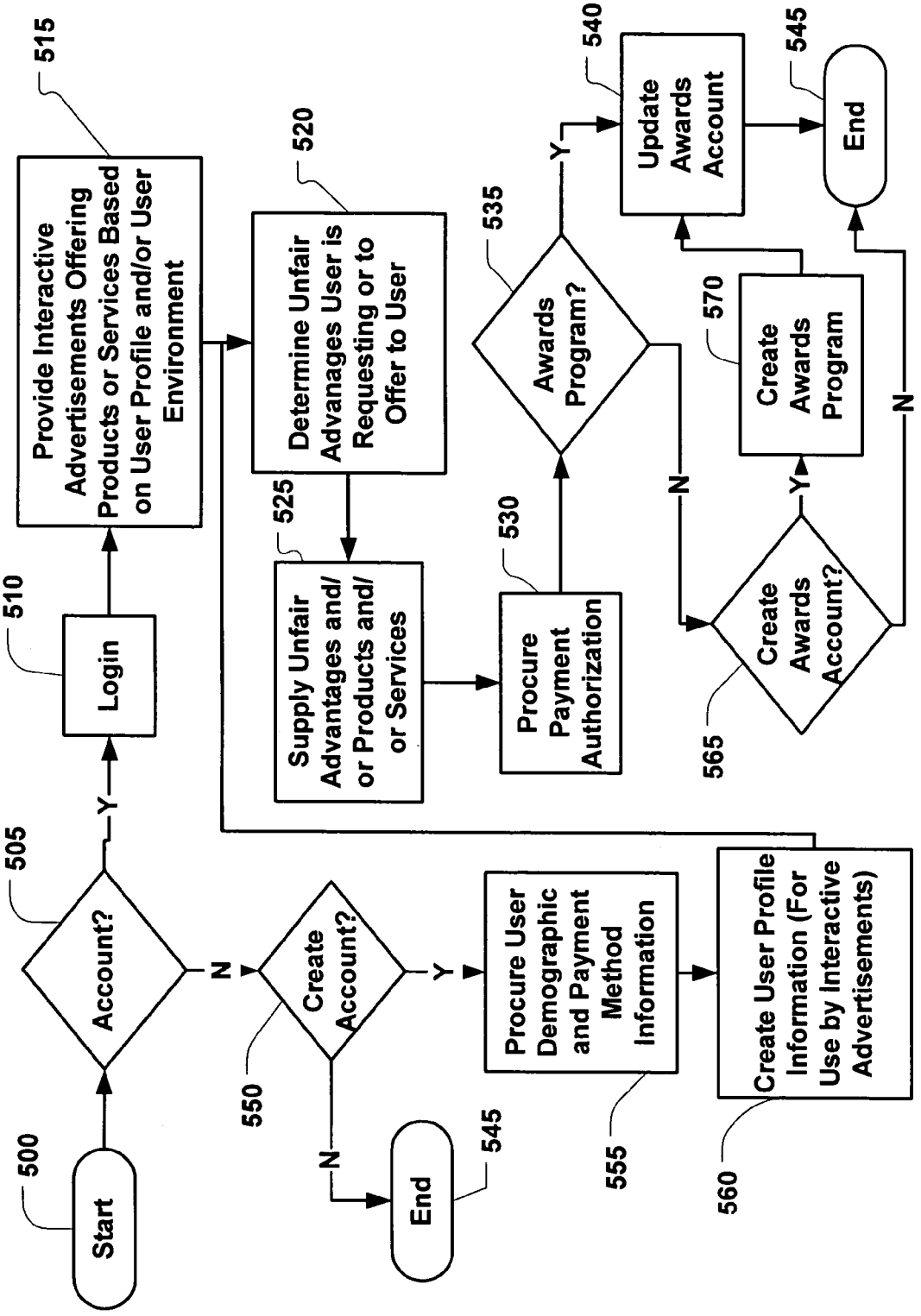
Start
500
Account?
505
Y
N
Login
510
Create Account?
550
Y
N
End
545
Procure User Demographic and Payment Method Information
555
Create User Profile Information (For Use by Interactive Advertisements)
560
Provide Interactive Advertisements Offering Products or Services Based on User Profile and/or User Environment
515
Determine Unfair Advanages User is Requesting or to Offer to User
520
Supply Unfair Advantages and/or Products and/or Services
525
Procure Payment Authorization
530
Awards Program?
535
Y
N
Update Awards Account
540
End
545
Create Awards Program
570
Create Awards Account?
565
Y
N

Figure 5

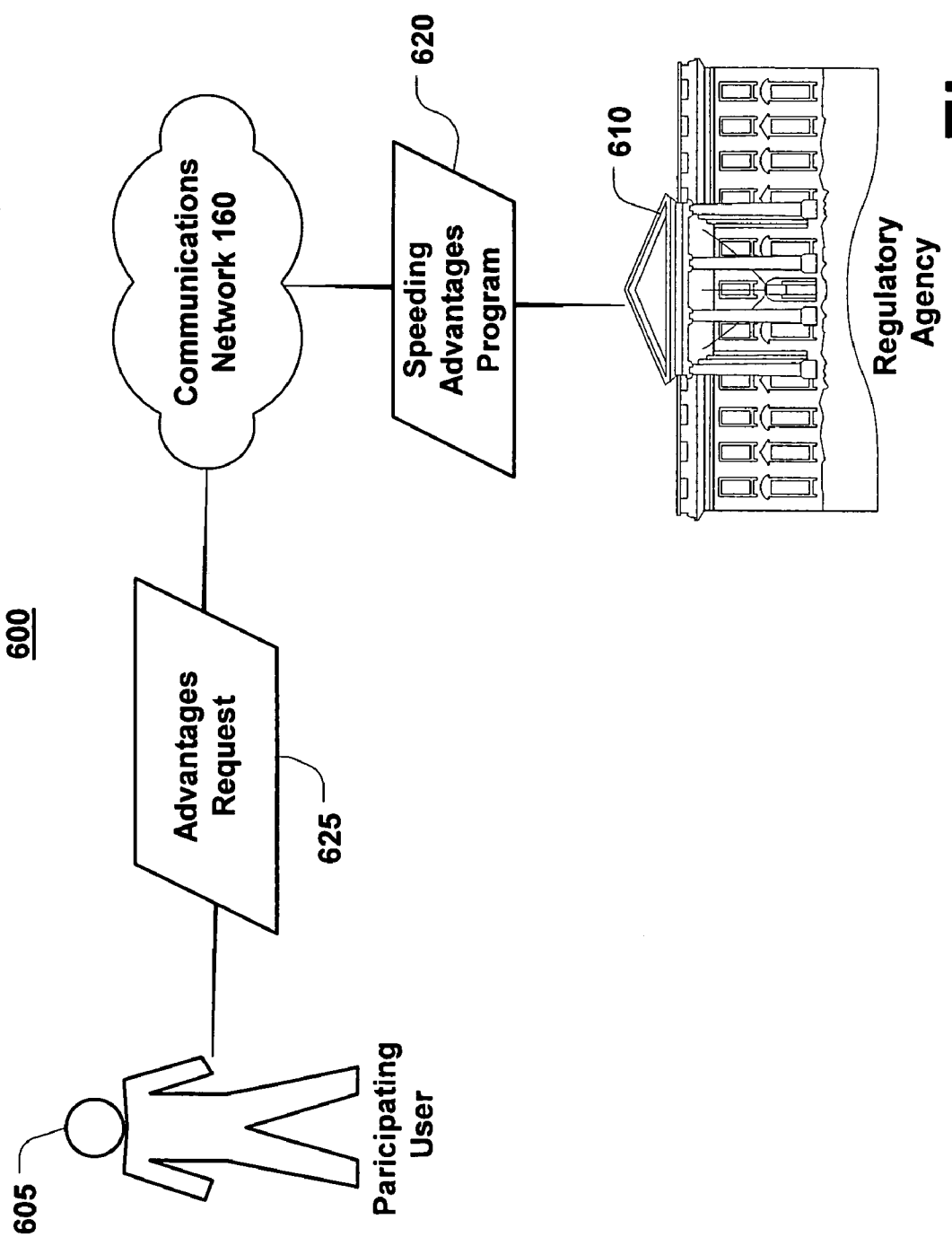
600
605
Paricipating User
625
Advantages Request
Communications Network 160
620
Speeding Advantages Program
610
Regulatory Agency

Figure 6

SYSTEM AND METHODS FOR OBTAINING ADVANTAGES AND TRANSACTING THE SAME IN A COMPUTER GAMING ENVIRONMENT

PRIORITY

This application is related to and claims priority under 35 U.S.C. § 119(e) to U.S. Provisional Patent Application Ser. No. 60/212,749, filed Jun. 20, 2000, entitled "SYSTEM AND METHODS FOR OBTAINING ADVANTAGES AND TRANSACTING THE SAME", the contents of which are hereby incorporated by reference in their entirety.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates generally to the creation, integration, and transaction of advantages. Particularly, the present invention relates to the creation, integration, and transaction of advantages in non-computing, partial-computing, and computing environments, and more particularly, to providing a system and methods for the creation, integration, and transaction of advantages in non-computing, partial-computing, and computing environments that provide participating users the ability to obtain advantages at will.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Today, we face many challenges in our daily lives that demand the expenditure of valuable resources. These challenges can be more easily disposed with the aid of advantages. Generally, an advantage is a feature or element within an environment that one is not intended to have or does not normally have access to that provides an edge in overcoming a presented challenge. In the context of an observed environment, these advantages are environment features or elements that help to better navigate and exist within the observed environment.

Advantages are conventionally realized through rigorous physical and/or mental training, by employing advanced instruments, or, for the non-scrupulous, through bribery, cheating, and deception. The latter category has allowed for some significant events in our society today. For example, some ventures, and even some governments can base their existence on the capitalization of advantages. Subscribing to social conventions, the use of these advantages is traditionally kept secret in fear of retaliation, reprimand, and rebuke from non-sanctioning parties. Considering the benefits that may be realized from the use of advantages, if given the choice, most would employ advantages in their environments to assist them with their daily challenges.

Human nature dictates our need to achieve. This is apparent in the field of gaming. Gaming enthusiasts are willing to pay for the opportunity to obtain an advantage. This is especially the case where the player has spent a significant amount of time and energy in overcoming various challenges within the game to reach the desired goal of completing the game, but is unable to overcome a particular posed challenge. In such a circumstance, the player will likely be willing to pay for the ability to obtain an advantage or advantages to overcome this posed challenge. In recent years, gaming enthusiasts have enjoyed a number of action, action-adventure, adventure, and strategy games, such as, DOOM®, QUAKE®, AGE OF EMPIRES®, ULITMA ONLINE®, etc. The object of these games is to wage battle with various beings in an effort to win a war or improve your

standing within the game and/or gaming community. These games are typically structured such that the player is given access to increasingly superior weaponry and/or skills as they advance through increasingly difficult game levels. It would be advantageous to gamers to have access to these superior weapons, or alternatively, additional ammunition for their existing weaponry, and/or superior skills earlier in the gaming experience.

The concept of obtaining advantages may be extended beyond the gaming context. For example, consumers may be willing to pay to obtain advantages, such as, procuring a more preferred seat on an airplane, train, or bus; or obtain additional golf strokes during a golf match. Further, the concept of obtaining advantages includes obtaining unfair advantages. An unfair advantage is generally a legally recognized advantage that confers an inequitable benefit to the requesting party (e.g. a person pays an additional "special" tax to a municipality and in turn receives a prime parking spot in the heart of the downtown municipality). Today, however, there are no comprehensive systems and methods for the creation, integration, and transaction of advantages. Interested participants are typically relegated to searching for free shortcuts and tricks (i.e. advantages) in on-line chat rooms and bulletin boards or to purchase and subscribe to publications. For example, in the gaming world, gamers may spend as much time and resources obtaining advantages as they do actually playing the games. Few advantages are contemplated, let alone offered to interested participants in non-computing and partial computing environments. Generally, interested participants are left to face obstacles in these environments without the aid of any advantage. For example, an interested participant, not afforded the sanctioned ability to speed in a rural community and is caught speeding, may have to pay a hefty fine and/or expend significant time and energy in challenging the speeding offense. As a result, the interested participant expends a great deal of resources to face obstacles that could otherwise be overcome.

From the foregoing it can be appreciated that there exists a need for comprehensive systems and methods that allow for the creation, integration, and transaction of advantages in computing, partial computing and non-computing environments. By providing a system and methods that allow for the creation, integration, and transaction of recognized and sanctioned advantages and unfair advantages, challenges may be more easily resolved freeing valuable resources.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention is directed to providing systems and methods used to create, integrate, and transact various advantages in non-computing, partial computing, and interactive computing environments. These advantages comprise desired environment features or elements within a participating user's environment that are integrated within the environment. By integrating advantages, the present invention operates to facilitate the leveraging of advantages to participating users and offers advantage providers ensured exposure of their advantages.

In one illustrative implementation, the present invention may be realized through interactive computer applications supporting simulation and/or display. In this capacity, the invention is directed to a system and methods for identifying, creating, integrating, and transacting advantages to users of interactive computing applications. With this implementation, a participating user may obtain, in real time and upon payment of consideration, access to content, products,

and/or services that are only offered to those users who have advanced or extended content, products, or services privileges. These advantages may be varied in form and content.

In operation, computing environment content providers may offer desired environment features or elements to participating users such that the desired environment features and/or elements are integrated within participating users' computing environments. These environment features and elements may be directly or indirectly associated with the scope of features or elements offered by the content providers. Using the present invention, participating users have the ability to "purchase" these environment features or elements using various currency means, including credit cards, e-cash, e-gold, other Internet enabled currency, and secondary monetary sources, such as, charges to phone or utility bill, transferring credit on pre-paid phone cards, or transit passes, or through conventional payment methods, such as checks, money-orders or cash. The participating user is allowed to exploit as few or all of the environment features and/or elements that are offered.

Another aspect of the illustrative implementation includes the ability to provide incentives to participating users such that the price of a desired environment feature and/or element becomes incrementally lower with increased purchase of offered environment features and/or elements. In the alternative, additional non-related environment features and/or elements may be offered to participating users with increased use. In an illustrative implementation, the participating user may receive his or her "N+1th" advantage for free with the confirmed purchase of "N" environment features and/or elements, or alternatively, the participating user may receive a real-world product, service, or securities with a significant number of environment feature and/or element purchases. Not only can advantage purchases offer increasing returns in terms of more advantages or real world products, but the purchases of real world products and services can offer increasing returns to advantages. For example, a participating user could receive a free advantage in return for purchasing a product or service. Participating users might also receive discounted advantages for revealing more information about themselves as a consumer. Conversely, the present invention contemplates offering credits to participating users for contributing already acquired environment features and/or elements.

Another aspect of the illustrative implementation includes the ability to integrate interactive advertisements that offer real world products and services to participating users navigating in a computer based environment. Stated differently, interactive advertisements are integrated within a participating user's environment such that a participating user, who is navigating in this cyber realm, may elect to purchase these products and services from the convenience of his/her computing environment without having to interface with other communication conventions. The transaction may be realized through a true two-way real time transaction system, allowing participating users to continue in their experience without the interruption of processing payment information. The computing environment may store a profile of the user so that key products and services may be offered in accordance to a user's profile. Further, the present invention contemplates a system wherein advertisers of products and services may obtain advantages over their competitors to better place their products and/or services to reach a larger audience.

Alternatively, in an illustrative non-computing application of the present invention, organizations or institutions may elect to offer and monetize non-computing environment features and/or elements (e.g. pay for the right to drive above the speed limit) by charging participating users fees for these environment features and/or elements. The implementation features are similar to those described for computer mediated environments where human interaction may replace the computer mediation in whole or in part.

Other features of the present invention are described below.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

A system and methods for the creation, integration, and transaction of advantages are further described with reference to the accompanying drawings in which:

FIG. **1** is a system diagram of an exemplary computing environment in accordance with the present invention;

FIG. **1**A is a system diagram of an exemplary computing network environment in accordance with the present invention;

FIG. **1**B is a system diagram showing the interaction between exemplary computing components in accordance with the present invention;

FIG. **2** is a screen shot of an exemplary gaming computing application offering advantages to participating users;

FIG. **3** is a screen shot of an exemplary Internet based computing application offering advantages to participating users;

FIG. **4** is a screen shot of an exemplary computing simulation application offering interactive advertisements to participating users;

FIG. **4**A is a screen shot of an exemplary computing simulation application showing the real-time transaction in accordance with the present invention;

FIG. **5** is flow diagram of the processing performed by present invention to create and transact advantages; and

FIG. **6** is a block diagram showing the interaction among various parties to realize a real-world implementation of advantages transaction in accordance with the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF ILLUSTRATIVE IMPLEMENTATION

Overview:

Obtaining advantages is the process of acquiring something that one is not otherwise entitled to have. To date, society has been structured in such a manner to prevent its members from gaining such advantages. This structure has been implemented informally in society as a result of the development of culture, ethics, mores, and religious conventions. However, as time has passed, society has evolved to recognize benefits in providing sanctioned advantages. However, today the transaction of advantages is performed piecemeal and is very fragmented. A more comprehensive systems and methods would provide a centralized solution for the procurement and transaction of advantages.

Advantages may be offered and transacted for a variety of scenarios occurring in non-computing, partial-computing, and computing environments. Examples may include: online computer games; online entertainment and information; offline computer games; regular board games; sports; gambling; sales; services and queuing; employment (e.g. promotions, hiring, etc.); issuing permits; and securities and finance. By providing a system and methods for procuring and transaction advantages, participating users may be afforded the ability to efficiently achieve sought after advan-

tages, and participating advantages providers may be afforded additional revenue streams for offering advantages.

Identifying Advantages:

The types of advantages most likely to interest users are those that help them gain status, power, provide entertainment, or give rights they would not normally be able to obtain. Advantages, however, may comprise a variety of desired environment features and/or elements. Using these exemplary criteria, environment feature and/or elements providers (e.g. a game designer) can better predict advantages (e.g. providing an extra life within a game) that would be desirable to participating users. For example, in the context of a game, ammunition, resources, information about the game environment, and numerous other items can be quantified by the game designer as suitable advantages that can be created, integrated, and transacted. In other contexts, environment feature and/or element providers can offer features and/or elements that assist participating users to overcome frequently presented challenges.

Creating Advantages:

Once identified, the advantage provider's are charged with the task of creating the advantage for transaction. Generally, there are several requirements that are considered when creating advantages. These requirements include the rights of control over the advantage (i.e. who has the authority to edit, modify, and offer the advantage) and the ability to secure the advantage (i.e. is the advantage feasible legally, ethically, and financially and how will the advantage be accessed). In the context of a game environment advantage, the game designer controls the resources of the game thereby having the ability to create and provide advantages to game participants. In this capacity the advantages offered to participating users may give some control over a game's resources (e.g. ammunition, lives, etc) for a price. The advantage provider can decide the nature and extent of such control based on any number of factors such as cost, purchase history, demographic data, etc. The ability to secure the advantage is also extremely important when creating an advantage. For example, in a non-computing environment advantage example, a city may offer its residents the ability to speed throughout the city in return for the payment of a special "city speed" tax. To realize this advantage, however, the city government should have the ability to 1) enforce the speed limit, and 2) be legally able to authorize driving faster than the speed limit. In this example, the city may show control over the advantage by choosing to limit the availability of the advantage to those drivers whose driving record meets certain requirements.

Integrating Advantages:

Once an advantage is identified and created it is integrated within an environment and coupled to a transaction system for transacting. The integration of advantages depends heavily on the environment in which the advantage is to be offered. For example, if the advantage is to be integrated in a computing environment, the identified and created advantage may be included in the source code of the computing application operating in the environment. Comparatively, if the advantage is to be offered in non-computing environments, the advantage may be integrated within a complimentary product or service that is offered to the participating user. For example, a participating user playing a round of golf may be offered the advantage of having two additional strokes per hole. This advantage may be offered to the user as a feature on the score card that the golf course provides to the participating user to keep score. If the participating user capitalizes on this offered advantage, the golf course would recognize the total score recorded minus two strokes per hole as the "official" score of the participating user. Alternatively, in the case of partial computing environments, advantages may be integrated using a combination of the aforementioned techniques.

An exemplary transaction system for use with integrated advantages may include security to protect the integrity of the transaction and the advantage being transacted and communication means to inform participating users of the availability of an advantage and information regarding the price and description of the advantage. Additionally, this system may track and store participating users' advantages information such as demographic information, buying habits, preferences or tastes. This information is subsequently used to determine the popularity of advantages and to assist in identifying and creating new advantages that can be tailored to participating users' preferences. Further, the exemplary transaction system may include inventory, sales, and tracking information for the various advantages offered and sold. Optionally, the system may include one or more pricing mechanisms that set advantages prices based on a variety of factors. These factors include: participating users' preferences, cost, supply and demand. Further pricing may be realized through auctions and reverse auctions or other methods.

Transacting Advantages:

There are three steps performed when transacting advantages: 1) transaction request, 2) transaction processing, and 3) transaction fulfillment. During the first step a participating user requests a discrete advantage (e.g. ammunition or additional lives). The request is processed by the aforementioned transaction system to determine if the request can be successfully fulfilled. This determination may involve checking the profile and account balance of the requesting participating user to see if they are qualified for the advantage and ensuring the participating user has requested a valid advantage. If the participating user qualifies, the user's account is debited and the requested advantage is provided. The transaction occurs in a real time two-way transaction. For example, a participating user navigating in a computing game environment requests more ammunition. The user is processed and if qualified, received the ammunition immediately—the accounting for which is settled latter. This permits the participating user to continue in their computing game environment (i.e. continue playing the game) without the usual interruption of transaction processing.

As will be described below with respect to FIGS. **1**–**6**, the present invention is directed to a system and methods that enable the procurement and transaction of advantages. In accordance with an illustrative implementation thereof, the present invention comprises a system and methods that couples participating users with advantages providers for the transaction of advantages.

Illustrative Computing Environment

FIG. **1** shows computing system **100** that may support the present invention. Computing system **100** comprises computer **20***a* that may comprise display device **20***a*' and interface and processing unit **20***a*". Computer **20***a* may support computing application **180**. As shown, computing application **180** may comprise computing application processing and storage area **180** and computing application display **180***b*. Computing application processing and storage area **180***a* may contain advantages data store **180***a*'. Similarly, computing application display **180***b* may comprise display content **180***b*'. In operation, a user (not shown) may interface

with computing application **180** through the use of computer **20***a*. The user (not shown) may navigate through computing application **180** to obtain various advantages. Advantages may be retrieved by computing application **180** from advantages data store **180***a*' of computing application processing and storage area **180***a* and shown to a user (not shown) as display content **180***b*' on computing application display **180***b*. The user (not shown) may choose to purchase certain advantages. Transacted advantages may be stored in advantages data store **180***a*' in user accounts that may be communicated to cooperating advantages content providers (not shown).

Illustrative Computer Network Environment

Computer **20***a*, described above, can be deployed as part of a computer network. In general, the above description for computers applies to both server computers and client computers deployed in a network environment. FIG. **1**A illustrates an exemplary network environment, with a server in communication with client computers via a network, in which the present invention may be employed. As shown in FIG. **1**A, a number of servers **10***a*, **10***b*, etc., are interconnected via a communications network **160** (which may be a LAN, WAN, intranet, the Internet, or other computer network) with a number of client computers **20***a*, **20***b*, **20***c*, or computing devices, such as, mobile phone **15**, land-line telephone **16**, and personal digital assistant **17**. In a network environment in which the communications network **160** is the Internet, for example, the servers **10** can be Web servers with which the clients **20** communicate via any of a number of known protocols, such as, hypertext transfer protocol (HTTP) or wireless application protocol (WAP). Each client computer **20** can be equipped with browser **180***a* to gain access to the servers **10**. Similarly, personal digital assistant **17** can be equipped with browser **180***b* and mobile phone **15** can be equipped with browser **180***c* to display and receive various data.

In operation, a user (not shown) may interact with a computing application running on a client computing devices to obtain a variety of advantages. The advantages may be stored on server computers and communicated to cooperating users through client computing devices over communications network **160**. A user may purchase an advantage by interfacing with computing applications on client computing devices, thereby creating an advantages transaction. These transactions may be communicated by client computing devices to server computers for processing and storage. Server computers may host computing applications for the processing of advantages transactions and advantages data stores for the storage of such transactions.

Thus, the present invention can be utilized in a computer network environment having client computing devices for accessing and interacting with the network and a server computer for interacting with client computers. However, the systems and methods providing the creation, integration, and transaction of advantages and interactive advertisement of the present invention can be implemented with a variety of network-based architectures, and thus should not be limited to the example shown. The present invention will now be described in more detail with reference to a presently illustrative implementation.

Advantages Transaction

FIG. **1**B shows the cooperation of various computing elements when transacting advantages and interactive advertisements in a computing environment. A participating user may employ computing application **180***a* operating on client computer **20***a* to send a request for advantages content **110** to content provider's server **10***a* over communications network **160**. In response, content provider's server **10***a* may process send the request and retrieve environment features and/or elements (i.e. advantages) content and/or interactive advertisements content from environment features and elements database **10***b* for communication to client computer **20***a* over communications network **160**. Further, participating user may employ computing application **180** to communicate requests to purchase advantages or products and services offered by the interactive advertisements. The advantages may be requested by participating users or alternatively may be offered to participating users based on predefined conditions (e.g. a participating user passes a rendition of cellular phone shop in a computing application game and is prompted on whether he/she would like to purchase a cellular phone or, alternatively, if already owning a cellular phone, whether he/she would like to pay their bill).

FIGS. **2**, **3**, **4**, and **4**A illustrate screen shots that display various features of the advantages and interactive advertisements system. As shown in FIG. **2**, the advantages and interactive advertisements system of the present invention may be incorporated in computing application **180** displaying an interactive game through gaming pane **200**. Gaming pane **200** may comprise gaming content **205** and advantages dialog box **210**. In operation, a user may be prompted by gaming computing application to secure a variety of advantages. In the example shown, dialog box **210** may warn the user that he/she is low in ammunition in the interactive search and destroy game **205** that is being navigated. A user may choose to purchase additional ammunition and proceed, or alternatively, proceed without securing any advantages. Conventionally, this advantage would not be offered to gamers. Rather, gamers would be forced to proceed with low ammunition using skill to advance in the game. Typically, gamers would proceed with low ammunition only to be defeated. The user maybe relegated to start the game from the very beginning, rendering all of his/her invested time moot.

FIG. **3** shows computing application **180** supporting a Web browser computing application having Internet content display pane **300**. Internet content display pane **300** may comprise Internet content **305** and controls **310**. In the example shown, the advantages and interactive advertisement system of the present invention may be employed by an airline content provider providing content over the Internet. As part of their Internet content **305**, airlines may request users to choose a seat for their travel. In the event a preferred seat has been already reserved, the user may be prompted by the Internet computing application to purchase an advantage to obtain the desired seat. The user may proceed to purchase this advantage by navigating controls **310**.

Alternatively, the present invention may offer users interactive advertisements by which users can purchase a variety of products or services. These advertisements may be integrated within a number of computing applications in accordance to the context of the computing application. For example, in a simulation role playing game, real world products and/or services advertisements may be integrated in the game's landscape such that a user may interact with the cyber world advertisements to transact real world products and/or services. As shown in FIG. **4**, the present invention may be employed by computing application **180** supporting a cyber environment having display pane **400**. Display pane **400** may comprise interactive content **405** and interactive content dialog box **410**. In operation, a user may be engrossed in a role playing computing application game

for hours not realizing that the dinner hour is soon upon him/her. In the game, the user may be required to navigate through city streets and neighborhoods having storefronts and other real world constructs. As the user passes by a cyber realm storefront, ABC Pizza, dialog box **410** may appear to the user of computing application **180** providing a friendly reminder that dinner time is approaching. The user may proceed to enter the store in the cyber world and place an order for a real world pizza. The system of the present invention would communicate the order to the appropriate parties and the real world product would be delivered to the user. The user is now given the ability to transact real world products through the cyber realm storefront.

FIG. **4**A shows a screen shot of an exemplary computing simulation application **413** describing the integration and real-time transaction features of the present invention. As shown, screen shot **415** comprises simulation content **420**, advantages information **325**, and transaction information **430**. In operation, a participating user may operate computing simulation application **413** to interact with simulation content **420**. Computing simulation application **415** may be configured that is has access to advantages content provider computer server **10***a* (of FIG. **2**) such that advantages may be offered through computing application **413** to the participating user while interacting with computing application **413**. In the example shown, the game is directed to a "shot-em up" type game where the participating user is called upon to slay unworldly beasts using a variety of weaponry. As the participating user runs low on ammunition (or some other condition), advantages information **425** is displayed to offer advantages to the participating user. As such, the advantage is integrated into computing application **413**. Advantages information **425** comprises information about the advantage and the cost of the advantage. In addition to the advantages information **425**, transaction information **430** is offered to the participating user to inform him/her of their outstanding balance. The participating user may elect to accept the offered advantage, using advantages information **425** and transaction information **430** to help him/her in their decision, to enhance his/her interaction with computing application **413**.

FIG. **5** describes the general processing performed by the advantages and interactive advertisements system and methods. Processing beings at block **500** and proceeds to block **505** where a check is performed to determine if the participating user has an account to purchase advantages or transact interactive advertisements. If the user has an account, he/she is prompted to login at block **510**. Interactive advertisements are then offered to the user at block **515**. From there, a determination of the advantages and/or desired products and services (as requested in the cyber realm) is made at block **520** to ascertain those advantages to offer to the user, or to provide to the user based on their request. The advantages and/or products and services are supplied to the user at block **525**. Payment authorization is then made at block **530**. Using the present invention, participating users have the ability to "purchase" these environment features and/or elements, products, and services using various currency means, including credit cards, e-cash, e-gold, other Internet enabled currency, and secondary monetary sources, such as, charges to phone or utility bill, transferring credit on pre-paid phone cards, or transit passes, or through conventional payment methods, such as checks, money-orders or cash. A check is then made at block **535** to determine if the participating user has an awards account. The awards account is established for frequent users to provide advantages and/or products and services at a discounted rate. This promotes the use the present system and maintains user loyalty. If the user has an awards account at block **535**, the awards account is updated at block **540** and processing ends at block **545**. If, however, the user does not have an awards account, he/she is prompted at block **565** to see if the user would like to create an awards account. If the user wants an awards account at block **565**, an account is created at block **570** and processing proceeds therefrom.

Alternatively, if at block **505**, it is determined that the user does not have an account to transact advantages and/or purchase through interactive advertisements, the user is queried to create an account at block **550**. If the user does not want an account processing proceeds to block **545** and ends. However, if the alternative proves to be true, processing proceeds to block **555** where user demographic and payment information is procured. A user profile is then created at block **560** and processing jumps to block **515** and proceeds therefrom. The profile information may be used by the system to tailor advertisement offerings to participating users, such that products and service offerings are consistent with the user's profile information.

FIG. **6** depicts a real-world implementation of the advantages procurement and transaction system and methods of the present invention. Real-world environment advantages procurement and transaction system **600** is shown comprising participating user **605**, communications network **160** and advantages provider **610**. In an illustrative implementation, the advantages provider **610** may comprise a regulatory agency providing a set of defined advantages. In operation, real-world environment advantages procurement and advantages system **600** may afford participating user **605** the ability to submit advantages request **635** to advantages provider **610** over communications network **160**. In turn, advantages provider may satisfy advantages request **625** by providing advantages **620** over communications network **160**.

In the example shown, the regulatory agency may offer a speeding advantages program **620** to participating users **605**. The speeding advantages program contemplated would offer participating users **605** the ability to drive in excess of posted speed limits upon the payment of fee. The participating user, in effect, would be offered exemptions from speeding tickets if caught speeding within the limits of the offered speeding advantages program. In operation, participating user **605** may request and transact advantages by submitting advantages request **625** to regulatory agency **610** over communications network **160** of real-world advantages procurement and transaction system **600**. In turn, regulatory agency **610** may subscribe participating user **605** to the speeding advantages program **620** employing communications network **160** to relay the subscription and payment process.

Advertisement Advantages

The present invention also contemplates an alternative embodiment where the participating user is an advertiser. In an illustrative implementation, the advertiser of products and services in computing environments, such as, interactive TV, online movies, streaming media, or video clips, may obtain advantages over their competitors, such as better placement of advertisements in the computing environment for their products and/or services. In doing so, the advantage using advertisers can better target and reach a larger audience. These participating users (i.e. advertisers) are charged for the advertisement advantage much like other advantages users according to the pricing, charging, and billing techniques described above.

CONCLUSION

In sum, the present invention provides system and methods to create, integrate, and transact advantages. It is understood, however, that the invention is susceptible to various modifications and alternative constructions. There is no intention to limit the invention to the specific constructions described herein. On the contrary, the invention is intended to cover all modifications, alternative constructions, and equivalents falling within the scope and spirit of the invention.

It should also be noted that the present invention may be implemented in a variety of computer environments (including both non-wireless and wireless computer environments), partial computing environments, and real world environments. The various techniques described herein may be implemented in hardware or software, or a combination of both. Preferably, the techniques are implemented in computer programs executing on programmable computers that each include a processor, a storage medium readable by the processor (including volatile and non-volatile memory and/or storage elements), at least one input device, and at least one output device. Program code is applied to data entered using the input device to perform the functions described above and to generate output information. The output information is applied to one or more output devices. Each program is preferably implemented in a high level procedural or object oriented programming language to communicate with a computer system. However, the programs can be implemented in assembly or machine language, if desired. In any case, the language may be a compiled or interpreted language. Each such computer program is preferably stored on a storage medium or device (e.g., ROM or magnetic disk) that is readable by a general or special purpose programmable computer for configuring and operating the computer when the storage medium or device is read by the computer to perform the procedures described above. The system may also be considered to be implemented as a computer-readable storage medium, configured with a computer program, where the storage medium so configured causes a computer to operate in a specific and predefined manner.

Although an exemplary implementation of the invention has been described in detail above, those skilled in the art will readily appreciate that many additional modifications are possible in the exemplary embodiments without materially departing from the novel teachings and advantages of the invention. Accordingly, these and all such modifications are intended to be included within the scope of this invention. The invention may be better defined by the following exemplary claims.

What is claimed is:

1. A method of managing the operation of a game which includes a game environment, and is programmed to control a gaming action for at least one of a plurality of users, said managing method using a programmed computer to effect the following steps:

a) tracking the activity of the at least one user in the course of the gaming action;

b) permitting the at least one user to create an account for receiving a consideration of the at least one user, the at least one user having a set of demographics;

c) determining the eligibility of the at least one user to purchase at least one of a plurality of game objects, said eligibility determining comprises the following sub steps:

i) permitting the at least one user to select the at least one game object,

ii) setting the purchase price of the at least one game object, and

iii) comparing the account balance of the at least one user's consideration with the set price of the at least one game object and, determining if the balance of the user's consideration is not less than the set price, determining the at least one user to be eligible to purchase the at least one game object;

d) displaying in the game environment a purchase price of the at least one game object;

e) presenting to the at least one user an offer to purchase the game object dependent upon a group of game parameters comprising the tracked activity of the at least one gaming action of the at least one user and, the one game environment or the one set of demographics of the least one user

f) permitting the at least one user to purchase the at least one game object at the set purchase price without interrupting the gaming action of the at least one user; and

g) supplying the at least one purchased game object to the at least one user without interrupting the gaming action of the at least one user and incorporating the game object into the game.

2. The method of claim **1**, wherein the gaming environment comprises a video game that generates a series of background images, and the at least one selected game object is directed to act in accordance with the gaming action of the at least one user throughout the series of background images.

3. The method of claim **2**, wherein the at least selected one game object comprises the at least one of a plurality of player images, and the at least one background image is selected from a group comprising of at least one action game, one adventure game, and/or one role-playing game.

4. The method of claim **2**, wherein the at least one background image is selected from a group comprising at least one of a plurality of battlefields, one action image, one military image, one adventure image, one sports image, one board game image, one role-play, one strategy game image, one cyber world image, one real world image, and/or one airline image.

5. The method of claim **1**, wherein the at least one game object comprises at least one of a plurality of elements and the at least one user is able to set at least one of a plurality of attributes of the at least one element and to direct the at least one element to move throughout the at least one background image.

6. The method of claim **5**, wherein the at least one attribute is selected by the at least one user from a group comprising at least one of a plurality of levels of skill, one size of ammunition, one rate of speed, one length of life, one piece of information about the game environment, one degree of access, and/or one type of weapon.

7. The method of clam **1**, wherein the at least one game object comprises at least one of a plurality of elements, the at least one element to be selected from a group comprising at least one of a plurality of ammunitions, one weaponry, one skill, one access, and/or one life.

8. The method of claim **1**, wherein the game environment includes at least one of a plurality of pieces of information describing the game environment, and permitting the at least one user to determine the at least one piece of information.

9. The method of claim 1, wherein the gaming action comprises the at least one user and the at least one game object that is programmed to give an advantage to the at least one user.

10. The method of claim 1, wherein the gaming action is selected from a group comprising at least one of a plurality of fighting engagements on a battlefield, one fighting engagement using weaponry, one engagement in a sport, at least one marketing of pizza, at least one user playing a role in a game environment, and/or at least one user firing a weapon.

11. The method of claim 1, wherein the game is selected from a group comprising of at least one of a plurality of virtual games, at least one video game, at least one of feature representation, at least one of appearance, at least one characteristic, at least one trait, and/or at least one file.

12. The method of claim 1, wherein the game object is selected from a group comprising at least one of a plurality of weapons, at least one ammunition, at least one skill, at least one access, at least one life, at least one piece of information about the game environment, at least one pizza, at least one cell phone, at least one ability to speed, and/or at least one preferred seat.

13. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of supplying provides to the one user the selected one of a plurality of game objects that will provide an advantage to the at least one user.

14. The method of claim 1, wherein the consideration is selected from the group comprising at least one of a plurality of credit cards, one e-cash, one e-gold, and one internet enabled currency, one secondary monetary source, one charge to a phone and/or a utility bill, transferring of a check, one money order, and/or one amount of cash.

15. A method of managing the operation of a game which includes a game environment, and is programmed to control a gaming action of at least one of a plurality of users, said managing method using a programmed computer to effect the following steps:

a) tracking the activity of the at least one user in the course of the gaming action;

b) creating an account for the at least one user for maintaining a balance of the at least one user;

c) enabling the at least one user to select at least one of a plurality of game objects;

d) setting the purchase price of the at least one game object;

e) comparing the account balance with the set price of the at least one game object and, determining if the user's account balance is not less than the set price, then the at least one user is eligible to purchase the one selected game object;

f) presenting to the at least one user an offer to purchase the game object dependent upon a group of game parameters comprising the tracked activity of the at least one user, and an indication of whether the at least one user has made a commitment of consideration to purchase the one selected game object;

g) ordering the at least one selected game object without interrupting the gaming action of the at least one user; and

h) supplying the selected one game object to the at least one user without interruption of the gaming action of the at least one user and incorporating the game object into the game.

16. The method of claim 15, wherein there is included the further step of offering to the at least one user an option to purchase the at least one game object dependent upon the group or game parameters comprising further the gaming action of the at least one user, the game environment, and/or the demographics of the at least one user.

17. A method of managing the operation of a game which includes a game environment and is programmed to control a gaming action of at least one of a plurality of users, said managing method using a programmed computer to effect the following steps:

a) tracking the activity of the at least one user in the course of the gaming action;

b) displaying in the game environment a plurality of game objects;

c) creating an account for storing the consideration of the at least one user;

d) permitting the at least one user to select one or more of the plurality of the displayed game objects, each game object having a set price;

e) determining if the at least one user has sufficient consideration in its account to purchase the selected one game object and to provide an indication thereof;

f) presenting to the at least one user an offer to purchase the game object dependent upon a group of game parameters comprising the tracked activity of the at least one user, and the indication that the one user has sufficient consideration in its account to purchase the selected game object at the set price;

g) permitting the at least one user to purchase the at least one game object at the set price without interrupting the gaming action of the one user; and

h) supplying at least one purchased game object to the at least one user without interrupting the gaming action of the at least one user and incorporating the game object into the game.

18. A method of claim 17, wherein there is included the further steps of:

a) testing the eligibility of the at least one user to participate in the gaming action; and

b) said eligibility testing comprises the following sub steps:

i) permitting the at least one user to select at least one of a plurality of game objects,

ii) setting the purchase price of the at least one game object, and

iii) comparing the committed consideration with the set price of the at least one game object and, if the committed consideration is not less than the set price, permitting the at least one user to participate in the gaming action.

19. The method of claim 18, wherein the at least one user has a set of demographics, and there is included the further step of offering to the at least one user an option to purchase the at least one game object dependent upon the group of game parameters further comprising at least one of the plurality of game environments, and/or at least one set of the demographics of the at least one user.

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