

to, the condition of a gaming machine door being open, cash box full, machine not responding, verification failure, etc.

[0185] In addition, providing secure connections between different gaming establishments can enable alternative implementations of the invention. For example, a number of gaming establishments, each with a relatively small number of gaming machines, may be owned and/or controlled by the same entity. In such situations, having secure communications between gaming establishments makes it possible for a gaming entity to use a single SBG server as an interface between central system 1263 and the gaming establishments.

[0186] A gaming network that may be used to implement additional methods performed in accordance with embodiments of the invention is depicted in FIG. 14. Gaming establishment 1401 could be any sort of gaming establishment, such as a casino, a card room, an airport, a store, etc. In this example, gaming network 1477 includes more than one gaming establishment, all of which are networked to game server 1422.

[0187] Here, gaming machine 1402, and the other gaming machines 1430, 1432, 1434, and 1436, include a main cabinet 1406 and a top box 1404. The main cabinet 1406 houses the main gaming elements and can also house peripheral systems, such as those that utilize dedicated gaming networks. The top box 1404 may also be used to house these peripheral systems.

[0188] The master gaming controller 1408 controls the game play on the gaming machine 1402 according to instructions and/or game data from game server 1422 or stored within gaming machine 1402 and receives or sends data to various input/output devices 1411 on the gaming machine 1402. In one embodiment, master gaming controller 1408 includes processor(s) and other apparatus of the gaming machines described above in FIGS. 6 and 7. The master gaming controller 1408 may also communicate with a display 1410.

[0189] A particular gaming entity may desire to provide network gaming services that provide some operational advantage. Thus, dedicated networks may connect gaming machines to host servers that track the performance of gaming machines under the control of the entity, such as for accounting management, electronic fund transfers (EFTs), cashless ticketing, such as EZPay™, marketing management, and data tracking, such as player tracking. Therefore, master gaming controller 1408 may also communicate with EFT system 1412, EZPay™ system 1416 (a proprietary cashless ticketing system of the present assignee), and player tracking system 1420. The systems of the gaming machine 1402 communicate the data onto the network 1422 via a communication board 1418.

[0190] It will be appreciated by those of skill in the art that embodiments of the present invention could be implemented on a network with more or fewer elements than are depicted in FIG. 14. For example, player tracking system 1420 is not a necessary feature of some implementations of the present invention. However, player tracking programs may help to sustain a game player's interest in additional game play during a visit to a gaming establishment and may entice a player to visit a gaming establishment to partake in various gaming activities. Player tracking programs provide rewards

to players that typically correspond to the player's level of patronage (e.g., to the player's playing frequency and/or total amount of game plays at a given casino). Player tracking rewards may be free meals, free lodging and/or free entertainment. Moreover, player tracking information may be combined with other information that is now readily obtainable by an SBG system.

[0191] Moreover, DCU 1424 and translator 1425 are not required for all gaming establishments 1401. However, due to the sensitive nature of much of the information on a gaming network (e.g., electronic fund transfers and player tracking data) the manufacturer of a host system usually employs a particular networking language having proprietary protocols. For instance, 10-20 different companies produce player tracking host systems where each host system may use different protocols. These proprietary protocols are usually considered highly confidential and not released publicly.

[0192] Further, in the gaming industry, gaming machines are made by many different manufacturers. The communication protocols on the gaming machine are typically hardwired into the gaming machine and each gaming machine manufacturer may utilize a different proprietary communication protocol. A gaming machine manufacturer may also produce host systems, in which case their gaming machines are compatible with their own host systems. However, in a heterogeneous gaming environment, gaming machines from different manufacturers, each with its own communication protocol, may be connected to host systems from other manufacturers, each with another communication protocol. Therefore, communication compatibility issues regarding the protocols used by the gaming machines in the system and protocols used by the host systems must be considered.

[0193] A network device that links a gaming establishment with another gaming establishment and/or a central system will sometimes be referred to herein as a "site controller." Here, site controller 1442 provides this function for gaming establishment 1401. Site controller 1442 is connected to a central system and/or other gaming establishments via one or more networks, which may be public or private networks. Among other things, site controller 1442 communicates with game server 1422 to obtain game data, such as ball drop data, bingo card data, etc.

[0194] In the present illustration, gaming machines 1402, 1430, 1432, 1434 and 1436 are connected to a dedicated gaming network 1422. In general, the DCU 1424 functions as an intermediary between the different gaming machines on the network 1422 and the site controller 1442. In general, the DCU 1424 receives data transmitted from the gaming machines and sends the data to the site controller 1442 over a transmission path 1426. In some instances, when the hardware interface used by the gaming machine is not compatible with site controller 1442, a translator 1425 may be used to convert serial data from the DCU 1424 to a format accepted by site controller 1442. The translator may provide this conversion service to a plurality of DCUs.

[0195] Further, in some dedicated gaming networks, the DCU 1424 can receive data transmitted from site controller 1442 for communication to the gaming machines on the gaming network. The received data may be, for example, communicated synchronously to the gaming machines on the gaming network.