

[0046] Additionally, certain of the servers may be coupled to other elements, such as player tracking modules, gaming units, and personal communication units. For example, the player tracking server 142 (which may be one of the network computers 56, 76, 110, 112) is coupled, via data link 174, to player tracking modules 176. These player tracking modules 176 may be associated with the gaming units 54, 74, 75, 94, and are discussed in greater detail below. Similarly, the gaming unit download server 144 (which may be one of the network computers 56, 76, 110, 112) is coupled, via data link 178, to gaming units 180, which may be the gaming units 54, 74, 75, 94. Further, the communications server 146 (which may be one of the communications computers 60, 80) may be in communication with, via data links 182, 184, personal communication units 186, which may be the personal communication units 64, 84. A gaming unit 188 may also be coupled to the network 150 separate and apart from the servers 142, 144, 146 via a data link 190.

[0047] FIG. 2 is a perspective view of one possible embodiment of one or more of the gaming units 54. Although the following description addresses the design of the gaming units 54, it should be understood that the gaming units 74, 75, 94 may have the same design as the gaming units 54 described below. It should be understood that the design of one or more of the gaming units 54 may be different than the design of other gaming units 54, and that the design of one or more of the gaming units 74, 75, 94 may be different than the design of other gaming units 74, 75, 94. Each gaming unit 54 may be any type of casino gaming unit and may have various different structures and methods of operation. For exemplary purposes, various designs of the gaming units 54 (and 75) are described below, but it should be understood that numerous other designs may be utilized.

[0048] Referring to FIG. 2, the casino gaming unit 54 may include a housing or cabinet 250 and one or more value input devices, which may include a coin slot or acceptor 252, a paper currency acceptor 254, and a ticket reader/printer 256. The value input device may also be a card reader (not shown). A value input device may include any device that can accept value from or transfer value for a player, and may be disposed on the front of the gaming unit 54 or in any other suitable location. As used herein, the term "value" may encompass money denominations or credits, and may be in the form of coins, paper currency, gaming tokens, ticket vouchers, credit or debit cards, smart cards, electronic funds transfers (EFT) and any other object representative of value.

[0049] Some of the value input devices may also operate as value output devices. For example, if provided on the gaming unit 54, the ticket reader/printer 256 may be used to print or otherwise encode ticket vouchers 258. The ticket vouchers 258 may be composed of paper or another printable or encodable material and may have one or more of the following informational items printed or encoded thereon: the casino name, the type of ticket voucher, a validation number, a bar code with control and/or security data, the date and time of issuance of the ticket voucher, redemption instructions and restrictions, a description of an award, and any other information that may be necessary or desirable. Different types of ticket vouchers 258 could be used, such as bonus ticket vouchers, cash-redemption ticket vouchers, casino chip ticket vouchers, extra game play ticket vouchers, merchandise ticket vouchers, restaurant ticket vouchers, show ticket vouchers, etc. The ticket vouchers 258 could be

printed with an optically readable material such as ink, or data on the ticket vouchers 258 could be magnetically encoded. The ticket reader/printer 256 may be provided with the ability to both read and print ticket vouchers 258, or it may be provided with the ability to only read or only print or encode ticket vouchers 258. In the latter case, for example, some of the gaming units 54 may have ticket printers 256 that may be used to print ticket vouchers 258, which could then be used by a player in other gaming units 54 that have ticket readers 256.

[0050] As another alternative, an electronic funds transfer (EFT) device (not shown) may operate as both a value input device and a value output device. Such an EFT device may include a circuit capable of performing or a controller programmed to perform an electronic funds transfer (EFT) to the player's bank account or to a virtual account established, for example, on a PDA or a smart card (e.g., a card with an on-board processor and memory) or at a casino. Such a transfer may be performed over a hardwired, wireless, fiber optic or network connection. As such a device is capable of transferring money to and from the gaming unit 54, it may operate either as a value input device or a value output device.

[0051] Also attached to the gaming unit 54 is a player tracking module 260, which may be the player tracking module 176 referred to in FIG. 1A. The player tracking module 260 includes a card reader 262 and a display 264. The card reader 262 may include any type of card reading device, such as a magnetic card reader or an optical card reader, and may be used to read data from a card offered by a player, such as a player tracking card. The card reader 262 may be used to read data from, and/or write data to, player tracking cards that are capable of storing data representing the identity of a player, the identity of a casino, the player's gaming habits, etc. The display 264 may be a liquid crystal display (LCD), a vacuum fluorescent display (VFD), an array of light emitting diode (LED) elements, etc. The display 264 may be used to display messages particular to the player tracking system, or may be controlled by the gaming unit 54 or other servers to display messages particular to the operation of the gaming unit 54 or other systems (such as, for example, bonusing messages from a bonusing system).

[0052] The gaming unit 54 may include one or more audio speakers 270, a coin payout tray 272, a display unit 274, and an input control panel 276. The audio speakers 270 may generate audio representing sounds or sound effects such as the noise of spinning slot machine reels, a dealer's voice, music, announcements or any other audio related to a casino game. Where the gaming unit 54 is designed to facilitate play of a video casino game, such as video poker or video slots, the display unit 274 may be a color video display unit that displays images relating to the particular game or games. Where the gaming unit 54 is designed to facilitate play of a reel-type slot machine, the display unit 274 may comprise a plurality of mechanical reels that are rotatable, with each of the reels having a plurality of reel images disposed thereon. The input control panel 276 may be provided with a plurality of pushbuttons or touch-sensitive-areas that may be pressed by a player to select games, make wagers, make gaming decisions, etc.

[0053] FIG. 2A illustrates one possible embodiment of the control panel 276, which may be used where the gaming unit