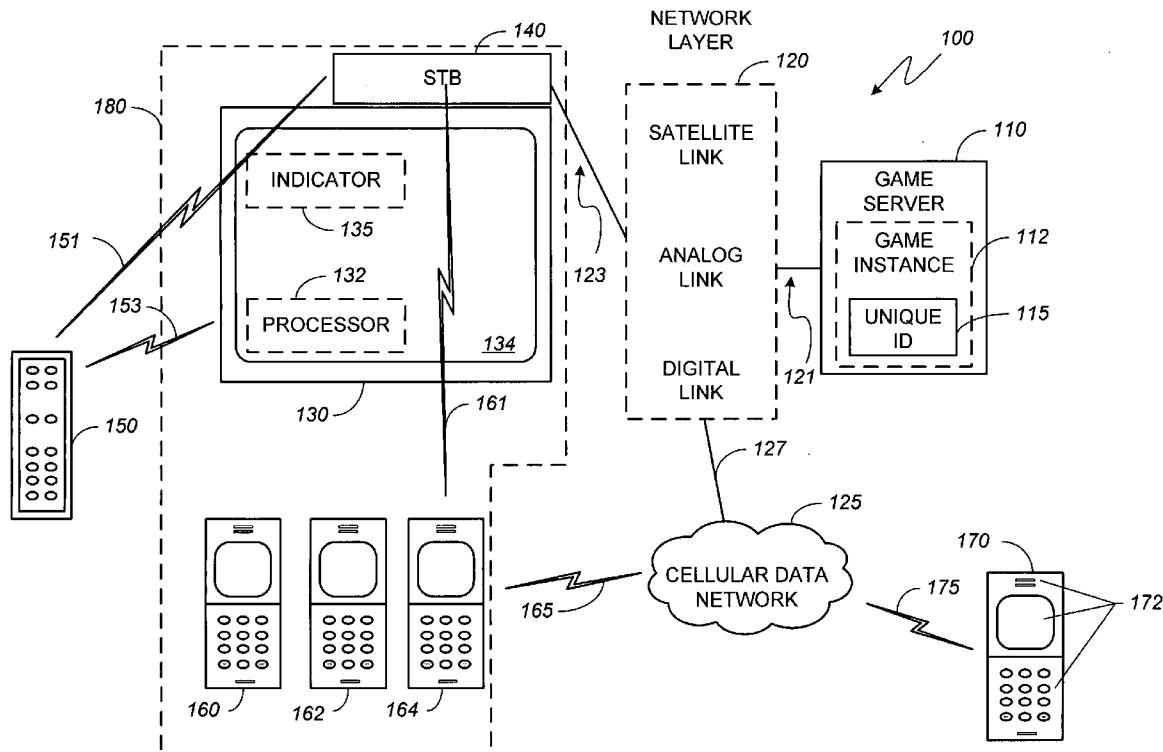


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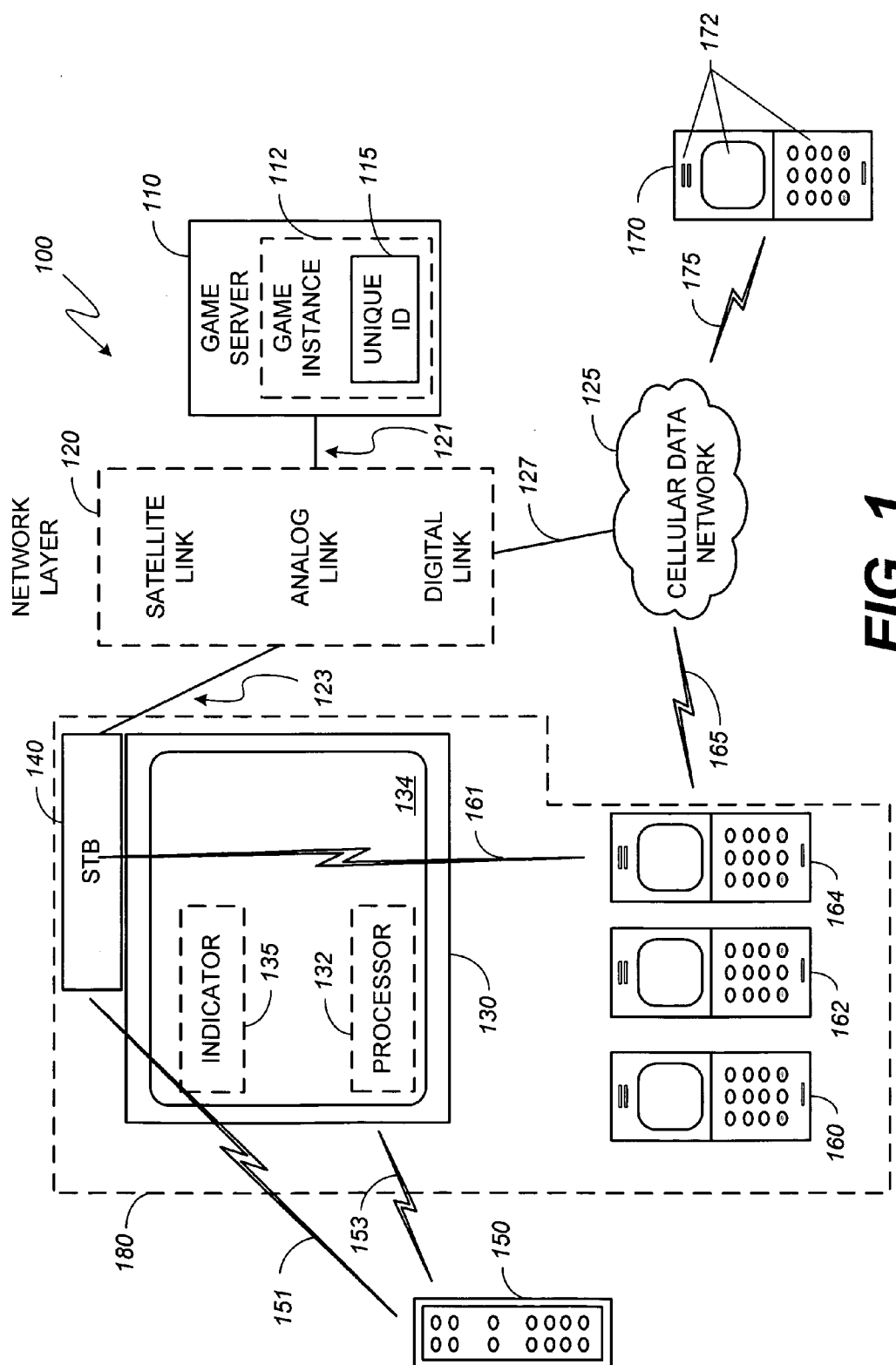
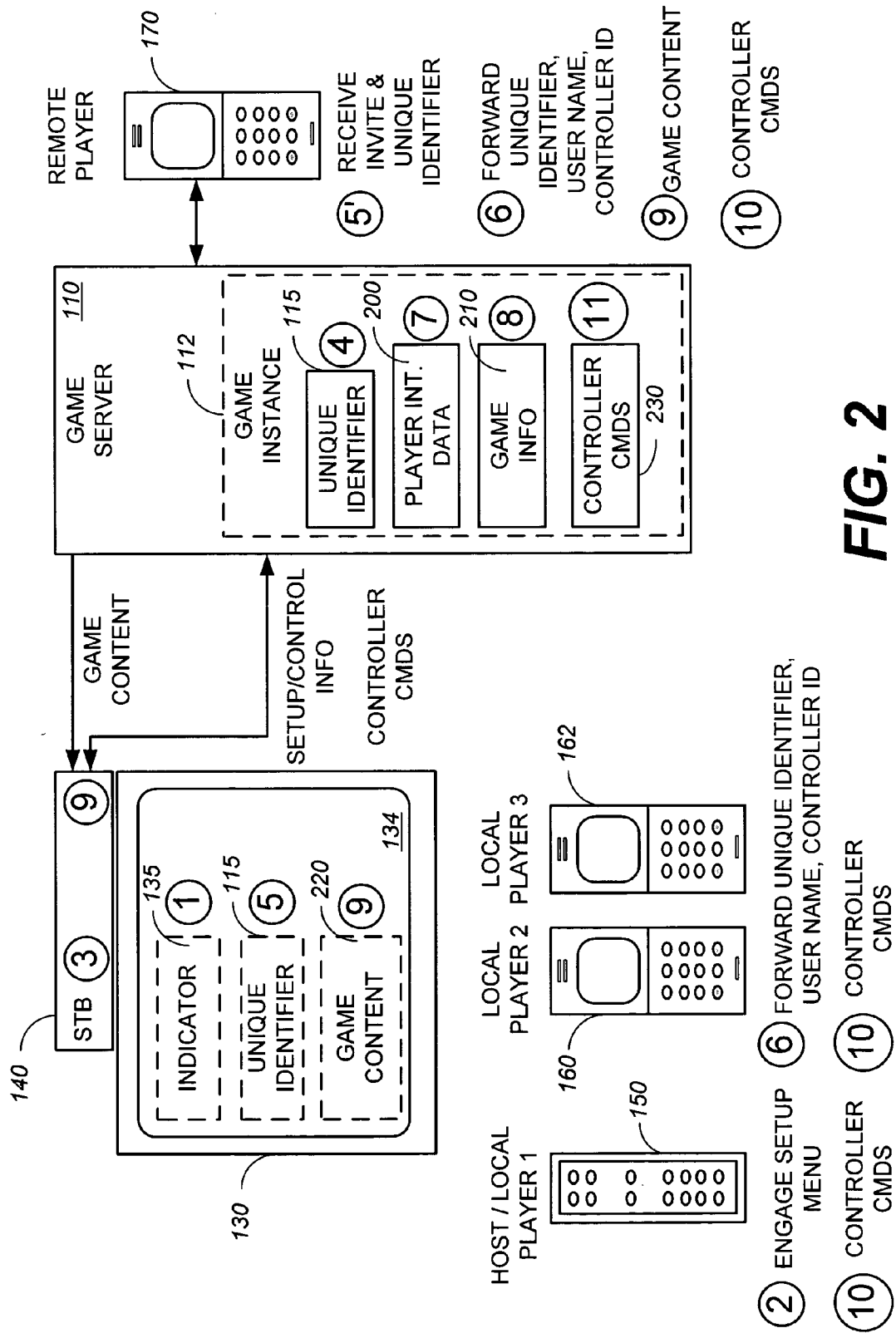


FIG. 1



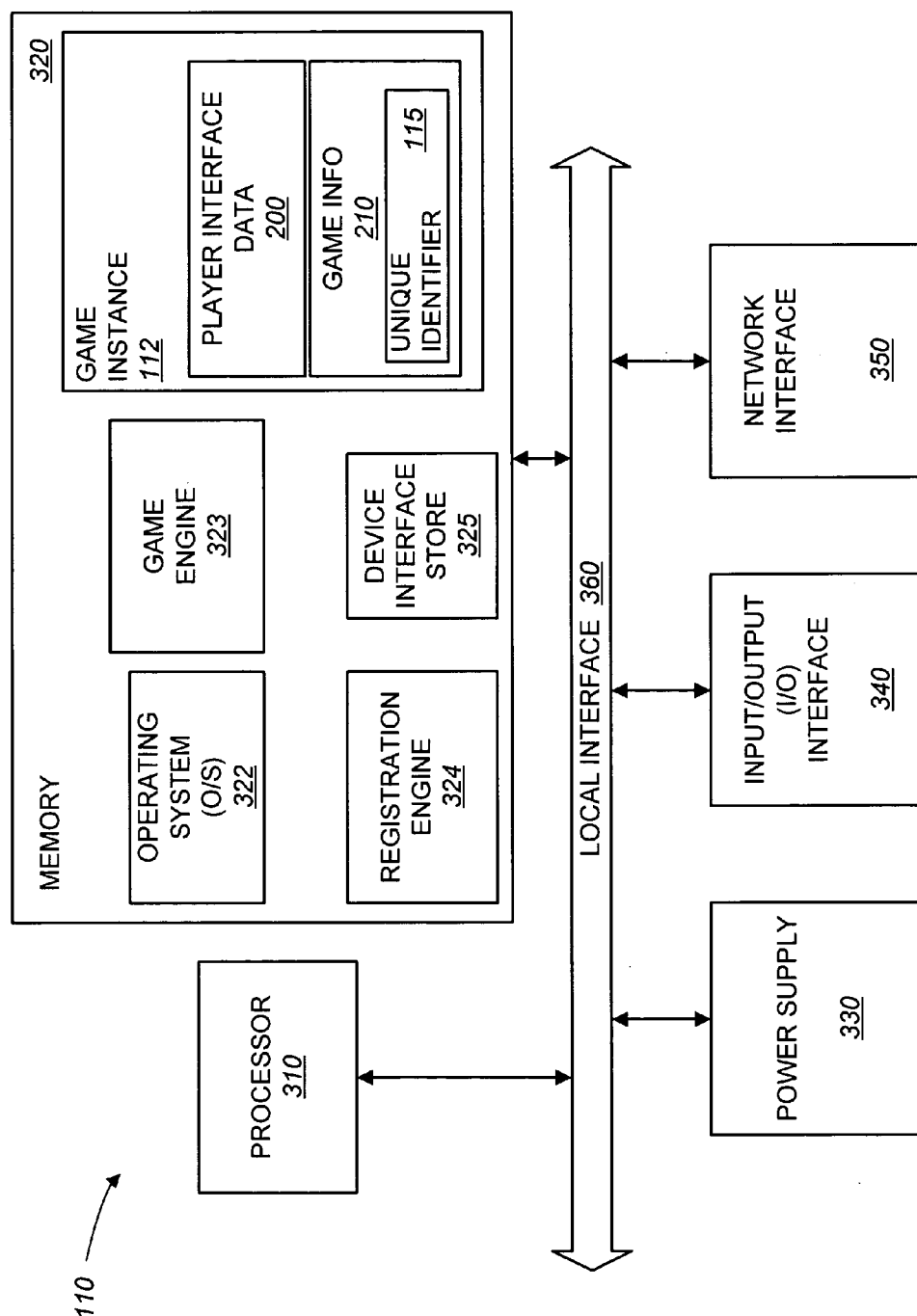


FIG. 3

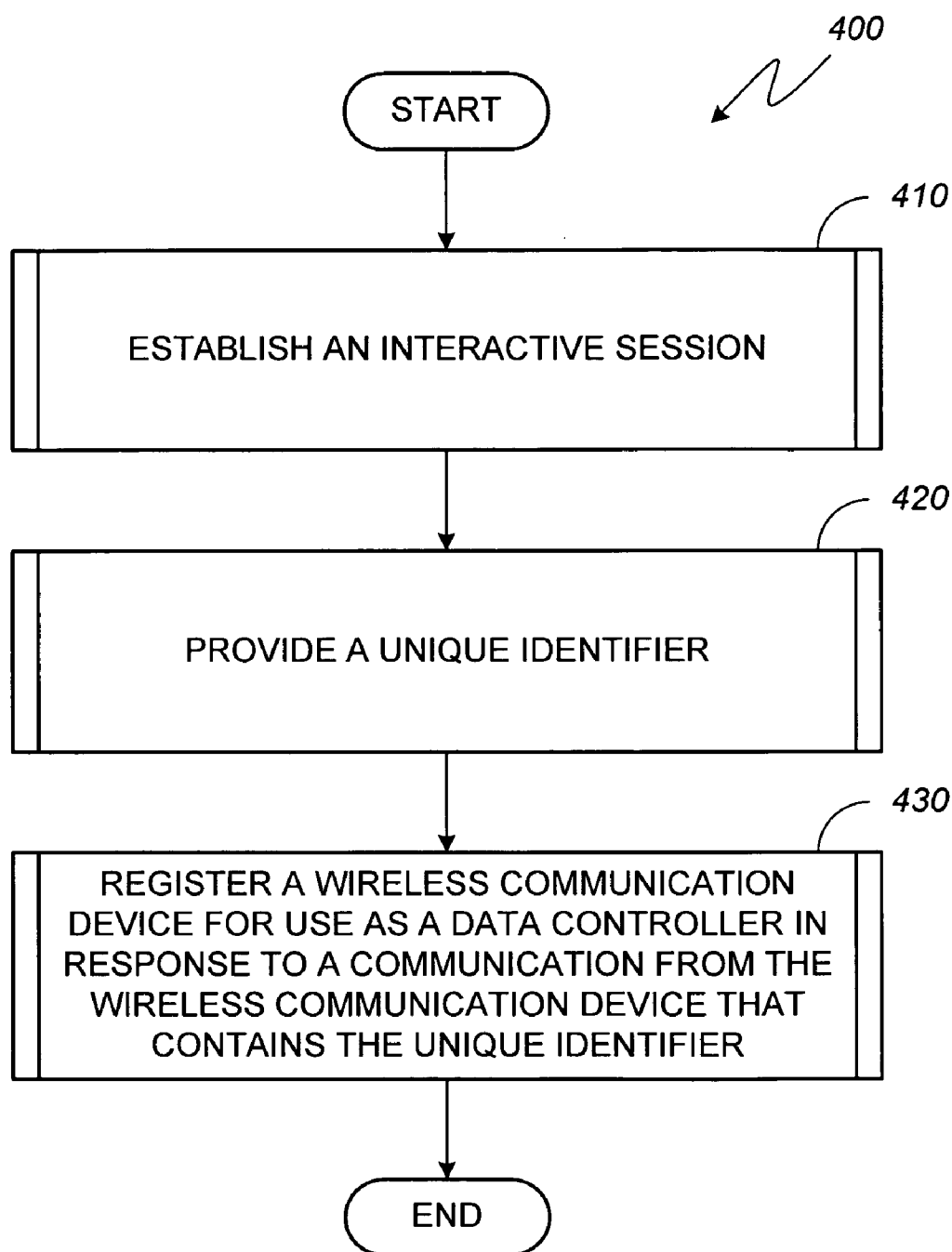


FIG. 4

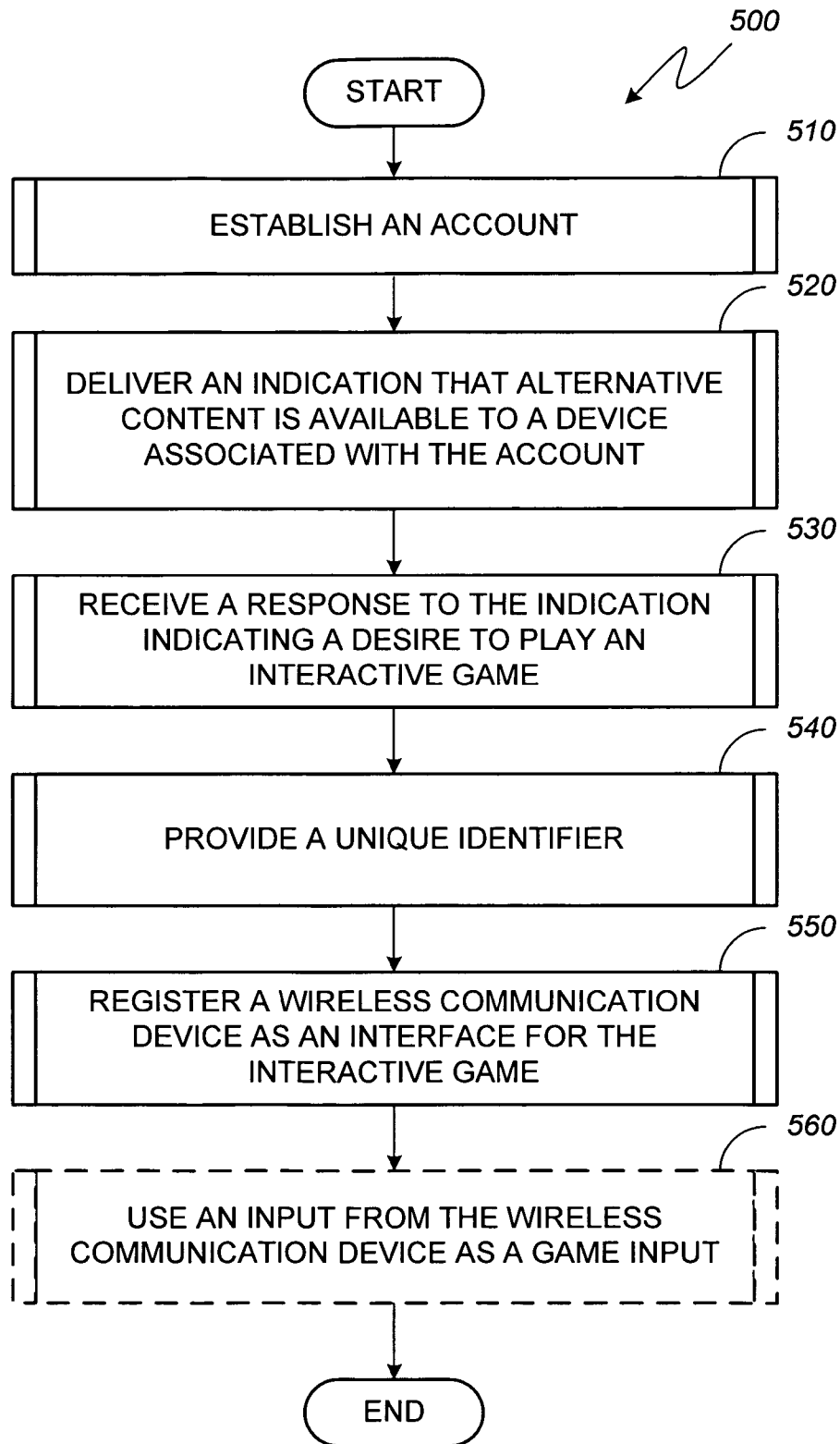


FIG. 5

SYSTEM, METHOD AND COMPUTER PROGRAM FOR ENABLING AN INTERACTIVE GAME

BACKGROUND

[0001] Computer games are a very popular form of contemporary entertainment. Many conventional computer games enable participant interaction using a pointing device, keyboard, joystick or similar input devices associated with a computer or specialized controllers which are part of a game apparatus. Often game participation is limited by the availability of a desired number of these specialized controllers and multiple use input devices.

[0002] To overcome this limitation, some conventional systems include multiple ports for coupling specialized controllers to a game apparatus. Generally, a limited number of controller ports are provided and game providers typically include no more than two specialized controllers with the game apparatus. Thus, those who wish to take advantage of the available controller ports must purchase or otherwise obtain additional controllers. Other conventional computer games permit a keyboard to be shared. These computer games designate specific keys on a keyboard for receiving input commands from respective participants.

[0003] Both of these conventional approaches have shortcomings. Systems having multiple controller ports often have no mechanism for supporting a number of participants greater than the number of controller ports. Systems that share a single keyboard coupled to a computer are problematic because the keyboard cannot always be positioned between multiple game participants in a manner that is comfortable for each participant. Moreover, each participant is limited to a specific location.

[0004] Accordingly, despite the development of multiple approaches to include more than one participant in a computer game there is still a need for improved approaches for enabling participants to play a game.

SUMMARY

[0005] Embodiments of a system comprise a monitor, a processor, a first controller, a game server and a wireless communication device. The monitor is configured to receive audio and video content having associated therewith an indicator that alternative content is available. The processor presents the audio and video content for display on the monitor. The first controller is used to establish a communication session with the game server to communicate a request to start a game. In response, the game server communicates a unique identifier. The game server then registers one or more wireless communication devices that communicate the unique identifier. The user interface of each respective wireless communication device is used thereafter as a data controller by participants of the game.

[0006] An embodiment of a method for enabling an interactive game comprises establishing an interactive session, providing a unique identifier during the interactive session and registering a wireless communication device as a data controller in response to a communication that contains the unique identifier.

[0007] An embodiment of a computer-readable medium comprises executable instructions that when executed by a processor direct a system to establish an account, deliver an

indication that alternative content is available to a set top box associated with the account, receive a response to the indication, the response indicating a desire to engage in an interactive game, provide a unique identifier and register a wireless communication device as an interface for the interactive game.

[0008] Other systems, methods, features and advantages will be or will become apparent to one with skill in the art upon examination of the following figures and detailed description. All such additional systems, methods, features and advantages are defined and protected by the accompanying claims.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE FIGURES

[0009] The systems, methods and computer programs can be better understood with reference to the following figures. The components within the figures are not necessarily to scale, emphasis instead being placed upon clearly illustrating the principles for enabling an interactive game. Moreover, in the figures, like reference numbers designate corresponding parts throughout the different views.

[0010] FIG. 1 is a block diagram illustrating an embodiment of a game environment.

[0011] FIG. 2 is a schematic diagram illustrating game setup and operation in the game environment of FIG. 1.

[0012] FIG. 3 is a block diagram illustrating an embodiment of the game server of FIG. 1.

[0013] FIG. 4 is a flow diagram illustrating an embodiment of a method for enabling an interactive game.

[0014] FIG. 5 is a flow diagram illustrating an embodiment of a computer program operative on the game server of FIG. 1.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0015] Embodiments of the present system, method and computer program enable an interactive game. A game server, in response to a user request, provides a unique identifier associated with an instance of the interactive game. The game server forwards one or more invitations to join the interactive game in accordance with the user request. Thereafter, the game server registers one or more wireless communication devices to be used as data controllers by players who elect to join the game.

[0016] The integration of available entertainment, communication and data networks is leveraged to provide select multimedia content to a specified viewing device. U.S. Pat. No. 5,818,438 (the '438 patent), the contents of which are incorporated by reference herein, discloses a system and method that provides an identifying code or interactive callback address along with information for directly invoking alternative multimedia content. A user of the system and method disclosed in the '438 patent can establish a session with a game server using the interactive callback address and other information and upon completion of the session, re-tune or select the original content for viewing.

[0017] The game server associates this identifying code or interactive callback address with a location at which the presently viewed programming or application will be stored. The identifying code or interactive callback address may be

a program-specific code that can be used by hosts or subscribers to invoke one or more programs to configure an interactive game. Alternatively, the identifying code may be a common identifying code or interactive callback address, used by all subscribing viewers to access a setup program, or an application-specific identifying code or interactive callback address, which is in turn used to invoke a setup program on the game server.

[0018] Hosts or subscribers are provided with a set top box or similar device adapted to be coupled to a multimedia-distribution network to which one or more service provider systems are also coupled and a suitable display device, such as a television monitor, a computer, etc. The set top box includes a receiving set capable of receiving broadband signals over the multimedia-distribution network. The set top box is configured to detect the presence and content of an identifying code or interactive callback address received by the receiving set either in a program signal (an in-band signal) or in an out-of-band signal. The set top box is also configured to store the identity of the source or channel on which the presently viewed programming is being received in one or more storage devices. The set top box is also configured to detect and store information accompanying the transmission of the identifying code or interactive callback address regarding an image to be displayed on the display device (such as a “key” or “icon”) or an audio message to be reproduced to indicate the availability of content, such as an interactive application, from the game server. Alternatively, such information regarding the image to be displayed or the message to be reproduced may be pre-stored in an appropriate storage device to which the set top box is coupled. The set top box is also coupled to a processor configured to generate a video image based on the received or pre-stored “key” or “icon” information, or alternatively, is programmed to generate the video signal and is coupled to the display device in such a manner as to provide such a signal to that device.

[0019] Furthermore, the set top box is adapted to establish communication over the multimedia distribution network with the game server, upon receiving a request from the host or subscribing viewer in response to seeing the “icon” or hearing the message. The processor may first store in the information storage device the identity of the channel on which the program then being viewed is being transmitted. A communication session over a network to the game server is then established by transmitting a message including the identifying code or interactive callback address. If the identification code or interactive callback address is a common identification code (for example, a “well-known callback address”) the game server returns the program- or application-specific identification code or interactive callback address, which the set top box then may use to invoke from the game server an appropriate setup or configuration program.

[0020] The game server transmits to the set top box the identity of a network service (i.e., a network address) or a channel on which the requested program and later game information will be provided, and the set top box initiates a session with the indicated network service and/or causes the receiving set to tune to the channel. The set top box then receives the program and later game information from the game server. During that session, communication between the set top box and the game server may be two-way.

[0021] A setup program directs the host in identifying the game and the participants or players. The setup program may be configured to prompt the host for information regarding each of the players and a respective wireless communication device that each player will use to communicate with the game server to play the game. Otherwise, the setup program will simply prompt the host for contact information associated with potential players. In turn, the game server generates a unique identifier that is associated with a particular instance of the game and contacts each of the players via a wireless communication device to confirm the potential player’s desire to participate and to receive information regarding the wireless communication device that will be used to communicate with the game server during the game.

[0022] One or more communication sessions or channels remain open while the players interact with the game server to play the game. Players located within view of the host’s display device may communicate with the game server via a short-range wireless network, the set top box and one or more links between the set top box and the game server. Alternatively, these local players can communicate with the game server via a wireless data network. Local players receive game content from the game server via the host’s display device or via a display device integrated with their respective wireless communication device. Local players generate game commands using the user interface of their respective wireless communication devices. Players removed from the host (not within view of the host’s display device) can be contacted and invited to join the game. Such a player forwards the unique identifier, a user name, and information identifying their wireless communication device to the game server. Game content is provided to remote players via a wireless data network. Similarly, game commands are generated using the user interface of the wireless communication device and communicated back to the game server via the wireless data network.

[0023] When the setup program is terminated and game play is not desired or when the host signals the set top box that interactive game is no longer desired, the communication session(s) with the game server associated with the particular instance of the game are terminated. The set top box then retrieves the identity of the first program from the information storage device, and causes the receiving set to re-tune to the first program to which the hosts viewing device had been tuned.

[0024] Having generally described the present system, method and computer program for enabling an interactive game, various additional embodiments will be described with respect to FIGS. 1-5. By way of example, FIG. 1 is a block diagram illustrating an embodiment of a game environment 100. Game environment 100 includes a short-range wireless or home network 180 that is communicatively coupled to game server 110 via a network layer 120. The short-range wireless network 180 is configured to support network connectivity of portable devices and complies with one or more wireless network protocols, such as but not limited to the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers 802.11 and 802.15 protocols and the Bluetooth protocol for home or local area wireless networks.

[0025] Short-range wireless network 180 includes set top box 140 and one or more wireless communication devices,

such as wireless communication device **160**, wireless communication device **162** and wireless communication device **164**. Set top box **140** communicates with one or more network layer **120** content transfer mediums via communication link **123**. In addition, short-range wireless links communicatively couple set top box **140** with wireless communication devices, such as wireless link **161**, which couples set top box **140** and wireless communication device **164**. Moreover, set top box **140** is coupled to monitor **130** and processor **132**, which converts various signals received via communication link **123** and network layer **120** to present multimedia content to viewers in close proximity to display **134**. In the illustrated embodiment, set top box **140** is a separate device. The set top box **140** could be integrated or otherwise combined with monitor **130** or some other device such as a gaming console (not shown). For that matter, the gaming console could be combined or integrated with monitor **130**. As described above and in the '438 patent, one or more indicators, such as indicator **135** is integrated within the various signals communicated via set top box **140** to indicate that game server **110** is available to provide alternative content.

[0026] As indicated in FIG. 1, controller **150** is wirelessly coupled to set top box via communication link **151** and wirelessly coupled to monitor **130** via communication link **153**. A game host or subscriber of one or more multimedia services delivered via set top box **140** directs the operation of set top box **140** and monitor **130** via multiple function controller **150**.

[0027] Game server **110** communicates with one or more network layer **120** content transfer mediums via communication link **121**. Game server **110** is configured to provide one or more interactive games to local players within home network **180**. Game instance **112** stored within game server **110** includes information that supports the generation of game content, which is communicated via network layer **120** and set top box **140** on its way to monitor **130**. Game instance **112** further includes a unique identifier **115**, which is used to bind set top box **140** and each of the wireless communication devices, such as wireless communication device **160**, wireless communication device **162**, and wireless communication device **164** to the interactive game. Upon the completion of a setup procedure that is illustrated in FIG. 2 and explained in detail below, game instance **112** includes information that maps select items of the user interface of each respective wireless communication device for use as a game input. In this way, multiple players can enjoy an interactive multi-player game without the need of specialized game controllers or being in close proximity to the host's home network.

[0028] In one alternative embodiment, one or more select items of the user interface of controller **150** are registered to enable the host or an additional player without a wireless communication device to join the game. In this mode of operation, other items of the user interface of controller **150** remain operable to communicate with set top box **140** and monitor **130** to control these devices.

[0029] As further illustrated in FIG. 1, a remote wireless communication device **170** (i.e., not within home network **180**) is communicatively coupled to network layer **120** via cellular data network **125**, communication link **127** and wireless data link **175**. User interface **172** associated with

wireless communication device **170** can also be registered or bound to game instance **112** via unique identifier **115**. In this way, an operator of remote wireless communication device **170** can be contacted, invited to join and added to the game.

[0030] Alternatively, one or more of the local wireless communication devices can be coupled to cellular data network **125** via communication link **165** to directly or indirectly contact the operator of remote wireless communication device **170**. For example, one or more of a text message, a multimedia message, a voice message or a phone call can be communicated to invite the operator of remote wireless communication device **170** to join the game. These messages will include the unique identifier and perhaps additional information that can be used by the operator to communicate with game server **110** to join the game.

[0031] While the embodiment illustrated in FIG. 1 includes wireless telephonic devices (i.e., cellular telephones), it should be understood that wireless communication devices with various user interfaces, such as personal digital assistants (PDAs), combination devices, wireless computing devices, etc. can be interchanged with one or more of the wireless communication devices to communicate with game server **110**.

[0032] FIG. 2 is a schematic diagram illustrating game setup and operation in the environment of FIG. 1. The schematic diagram includes a sequence of encircled numbers from 1 through 11 that are indicative of an example sequence of actions, events and information transfers that occur during the setup and operation of an interactive game. As described above and noted by the encircled number "1," game server **110** and/or set top box **140** are configured to work in conjunction with monitor **130** to present indicator **135** on display **134**.

[0033] In response to the indicator **135**, a host or subscriber of a game service uses a wireless controller **150** configured to communicate with monitor **130** and set top box **140** to engage a setup menu. The setup menu can be software and/or firmware stored and operative on set top box **140**. Alternatively, the setup menu can be hosted in game server **110**. The host, via the setup menu, identifies a game, a number of proposed players and provides information about controller **150**, when it is desired to have controller **150** serve as both a host controller and as a game controller. In addition, the host may provide contact information associated with one or more remote players. A remote player communicates with game server **110** via wireless communication device **170** and a wireless data network different from the short-range wireless network used by the host and local players. Moreover, the host may provide additional information via the setup menu about a first local player, a respective wireless communication device **160** and a second local player with wireless communication device **162**. The above described activities of the host communicating with game server **110** via controller **150** are noted by the encircled number "2."

[0034] The encircled number "3" indicates that game; player; contact; and controller information collected during execution of the setup menu are communicated from set top box **140** to game server **110**. Alternatively, the set top box **140** or game server **110** may have stored contact information associated with remote or local users that have been invited to previous games. Information associated with the previous

invitation or previously game instances can be used to assist the setup menu in configuring a particular game instance.

[0035] As indicated by the encircled number “4,” game server 110 in turn initiates a game instance 112, which includes unique identifier 115. Unique identifier 115 is transmitted from game server 110 to display 134 via set top box 140. As noted by the encircled number “5,” the host and local players can observe unique identifier 115 in the video information presented in display 134 and/or hear a message that includes the unique identifier. Encircled number “5” indicates that game server 110 forwards an invitation to join the game to a potential remote player via wireless communication device 170. The invitation can be made via a short-message service (SMS) or multimedia-message service (MMS) message provided over a wireless data network. The invitation includes the unique identifier 115. Alternatively, the wireless communications device 170 may also be able to initiate a request to join the game by entering a SMS, MMS, hypertext transfer protocol (HTTP), or other address associated with game instance 112 on game server 110. In this way, a remote user can attempt to join a game in progress from anywhere where the remote user, through wireless communication device 170 can be communicatively coupled to game server 110. In turn, game server 110 will communicate information about the remote user to set top box 140, which may present a notice on monitor 130 introducing the remote user or a request for the host to allow the remote user to enter the game.

[0036] Thereafter, as indicated by the encircled number “6,” each of the potential local and remote players communicates the unique identifier 115, a user name and information about their respective wireless communication devices to game server 110. The encircled number “7” indicates that game server 110 stores player interface data 200 in game instance 112. Player interface data 200 is derived from a description of the user interface on each respective player’s wireless communication device and is used throughout the existence of game instance 112 to process command inputs from each of the players. Game server 110 forwards information on game operation and navigation via each specific wireless communication device registered with game instance 112. Game server 110 communicates this information once the identity of each registered wireless communication device is determined. To assist users in configuring a particular game, game server 110 or set top box 140 is provided a database of popular wireless communication devices including photographs or graphical images representing different devices. In some embodiments, the setup menu presents images grouped by manufacturer for users to easily identify their respective wireless communication device. In return, game server 110 or set top box 140 provides one or more images describing how the various items on each user interface is used to enter specific game commands.

[0037] Having been provided with information from the setup menu as well as information about each of the respective devices that will be used to interact with game instance 112, game server generates game information 210 as shown by the encircled number “8.” Game information 210 is used by game logic to coordinate the generation and transmission of game content 220 to set top box 140 for presentation on display 134 and presentation via the user interface (i.e., a separate display) on wireless communication device 170, as

indicated by the encircled number “9.” Thereafter, as indicated by the encircled number “10,” each of the respective players transmits various controller commands 230 in accordance with play of the interactive game, which are communicated back to and temporarily buffered within game instance 112 of game server 110, as indicated by the encircled number “11.” Game server 110 or set top box 140 is further configured to pause and restart or otherwise continue an interrupted game. Game server 110 or set top box 140 has the ability to choose how each player is invited to connect to a game instance 112 that is about to be restarted or continued in accordance with a host controllable connectivity configuration. For example, game instance 112 may be paused while a remote player is in transit from a remote location to the host’s local network. If the remote player was using a cellular telephone to connect with game server 110 and desires to switch from connectivity via a wireless data network to connectivity via the host’s local network, game instance 112 retains a record of the remote player’s username and cellular telephone number to enable the remote player to continue under the new connectivity situation within the stored game. In addition, game server 110 and set top box 140 have the ability to store information identifying a number of alternative controllers and connectivity configurations for a particular player should the information be needed to configure a continuation of an interrupted game or to configure a new game.

[0038] FIG. 3 is a block diagram illustrating an embodiment of the game server 110 of FIG. 1 and FIG. 2. Generally, in terms of hardware architecture, game server 110 includes processor 310, memory 320, power supply 330, input/output (I/O) interface 340 and network interface 350. Processor 310, memory 320, power supply 330, I/O interface 340 and network interface 350 are communicatively coupled via local interface 360. Local interface 360 can be, for example but not limited to, one or more buses or other wired or wireless connections, as is known in the art. Local interface 360 may have additional elements, which are omitted for simplicity, such as controllers, buffers (caches), drivers, repeaters, and receivers, to enable communications. Further, local interface 360 may include address, control, and/or data connections to enable appropriate communications among the aforementioned components.

[0039] Power supply 330 provides power to each of the processor 310, memory 320, I/O interface 340, network interface 350 and local interface 360 in a manner understood by one of ordinary skill in the art.

[0040] Processor 310 is a hardware device for executing software, particularly that stored in memory 320. The processor 310 can be any custom made or commercially available processor, a central processing unit (CPU), an auxiliary processor among several processors associated with the game server 110, a semiconductor based microprocessor (in the form of a microchip or chip set), or generally any device for executing software instructions.

[0041] The memory 320 can include any one or combination of volatile memory elements (e.g., random-access memory (RAM), such as dynamic random-access memory (DRAM), static random-access memory (SRAM), synchronous dynamic random-access memory (SDRAM), etc.) and nonvolatile memory elements (e.g., read-only memory (ROM), hard drive, tape, compact disc read-only memory

(CDROM), etc.). Moreover, the memory 320 may incorporate electronic, magnetic, optical, and/or other types of storage media. Note that the memory 320 can have a distributed architecture, where various components are situated remote from one another, but can be accessed by the processor 310.

[0042] The software in memory 320 may include one or more separate programs, each of which comprises an ordered listing of executable instructions for implementing logical functions in addition to identified locations for data storage. In the example of FIG. 3, the software in the memory 320 includes operating system 322, game engine 323 and registration engine 324. The operating system 322 essentially controls the execution of other programs, such as game engine 323 and registration engine 324 and provides scheduling, input-output control, file and data management, memory management, and communication control and related services.

[0043] Registration engine 324 includes logic configured to complete the necessary steps to identify a desired game, initiate game instance 112, generate, associate and communicate unique identifier 115 with the game instance 112. In addition, registration engine 324 includes logic configured to generate one or more invitations, identify and associate players that communicate unique identifier 115 with game instance 112 and establish appropriate game content links. Moreover, registration engine 324 includes logic configured to work in conjunction with information in device interface store 325 to map and communicate the assignment of appropriate elements of a player's respective wireless communication device interface with game commands. Player information generated as a result of the execution of logic within registration engine 324 may be collected and stored within player interface data 200.

[0044] Game engine 323 includes logic for receiving game commands (i.e., inputs) from one or more players as identified within player interface data 200 and applying the same in accordance with the rules of an identified game. In turn, game engine 323 generates game information 210, which is stored within game instance 112. Moreover, game engine 323 includes logic for generating game content in a format or formats suitable for local and remote players. In the case of local players, game content may be in the form of audio, video or both audio and video suitable for display and presentation via monitor 130. In the case of remote players, game content will be formatted for display and presentation on the player's wireless communication device.

[0045] Game engine 323 and registration engine 324 are source programs, executable programs (object code), scripts, or any other entities comprising a set of instructions to be performed. When implemented as source programs, the programs are translated via a compiler, assembler, interpreter, or the like, which may or may not be included within the memory 320, so as to operate properly in connection with the O/S 322. Furthermore, game engine 323 and registration engine 324 can be written in one or more object-oriented programming languages, which have classes of data and methods, or procedure programming languages, which have routines, subroutines, and/or functions.

[0046] I/O interface 340 is a hardware device for communicatively coupling local input devices, for example but not limited to, a keyboard, mouse, scanner, microphone, etc.

Furthermore, I/O interface 340 communicatively couples local output devices, for example but not limited to, a printer, display, etc. These local I/O devices may be provided to configure and maintain game server 110 as desired.

[0047] Network interface 350 is a hardware device for communicatively coupling set top box 140 and one or more wireless communication devices to game server 110 via various wired and wireless networks. In this regard, network interface 350 may include devices that communicate both inputs and outputs, for instance but not limited to, a modulator/demodulator (modem; for accessing another device, system, or network), a radio frequency (RF) or other transceiver, a telephonic interface, a bridge, a router, etc.

[0048] Network interface 350 exposes game server 110 to wired and wireless data networks, including but not limited to, community access television (CATV) distribution networks, satellite broadcast networks, public switched telephone network (PSTN) based communication services, DSL, and cellular data networks. Accordingly, network interface 350 is configured to perform the signal conditioning and format conversions to communicate data through network layer 120 (FIG. 1). Under some circumstances, signal conditioning and format conversions include the performance of a variety of functions including, for example: answering a phone line; hanging-up a phone line; dialing a phone number; sending data signals; receiving data signals; generating dual tone multi-frequency (DTMF) tones; detecting DTMF tones; receiving automatic number identification—the number from which a caller initiates a call (ANI) and dialed number identification service—the number dialed by the caller (DNIS) playing voice messages; and converting voice signals between analog and digital formats. Under some other circumstances, signal conditioning and format conversions include encoding and encapsulating data in packets under one or more protocols including transmission control protocol/Internet protocol (TCP/IP), among others.

[0049] When game server 110 is in operation, the processor 310 is configured to execute software stored within the memory 320, to communicate data to and from the memory 320, and to generally control operations of the game server 110 pursuant to the software and data elements. Game engine 323, registration engine 324 and the O/S 322, in whole or in part, but typically the latter, are read by the processor 310, perhaps buffered within the processor 310, and then executed.

[0050] When game engine 323 and registration engine 324 are implemented in software, as is shown in FIG. 3, it should be noted that these software elements can be stored on any computer-readable medium for use by or in connection with any computer related system or method. In an alternative embodiment, where one or more of the game engine 323 and registration engine 324 are implemented in hardware, the game engine 323 and registration engine 324 can be implemented with any or a combination of the following technologies, which are each well known in the art: a discrete logic circuit(s) having logic gates for implementing logic functions upon data signals, an application-specific integrated circuit (ASIC) having appropriate combinational logic gates, a programmable gate array(s) (PGA), a field-programmable gate array (FPGA), etc.

[0051] FIG. 4 is a flow diagram illustrating an embodiment of a method 400 for enabling an interactive game. In

this regard, each block represents a specified step or function. When embodied in software and/or a hardware device, each block represents a module, segment, or portion of code, which comprises one or more executable instructions for implementing the specified function(s). Method 400 begins with block 410 where an interactive session is established. In block 420, a unique identifier is provided. Thereafter, as shown in block 430 a wireless communication device is registered for use as a data controller in response to a communication from the wireless communication device that contains the unique identifier.

[0052] FIG. 5 is a flow diagram illustrating an embodiment of a computer program that can be executed on the game server 110 of FIG. 1. The flow diagram of FIG. 5 shows the architecture, functionality, and operation of a possible implementation via software and or firmware associated with the game server 110 introduced in FIG. 1. In this regard, each block represents a module, segment, or portion of code, which comprises one or more executable instructions for implementing the specified function(s). Computer program 500 begins with block 510 where an account is established. In block 520, computer program 500 directs game server 110 to deliver an indication that alternative content is available to a device associated with the account. Thereafter, as shown in block 530, computer program 500 receives a response to the indication indicating a desire to initiate an interactive game. In turn, computer program 500 provides a unique identifier, as indicated in block 540. Next, as shown in block 550, game server 110 under the direction of computer program 500, registers a wireless communication device as an interface for the interactive game. As illustrated in block 560, game server 110 uses an input entered via the user interface on the wireless communication device as a game input.

[0053] Operational software programs that may be used by game server 110, as well as operational software that may be used in conjunction with controllers, browsers, monitors, computers, telephonic devices, among other devices that interface with system 100, which comprise an ordered listing of executable instructions for implementing logical functions, can be embodied in any computer-readable medium for use by or in connection with an instruction execution system, apparatus, or device, such as a computer-based system, processor-containing system, or other system that can fetch the instructions from the instruction execution system, apparatus, or device and execute the instructions.

[0054] In the context of this document, a “computer-readable medium” can be any means that can contain, store, communicate, propagate, or transport the program for use by or in connection with the instruction execution system, apparatus, or device. The computer-readable medium can be, for example but not limited to, an electronic, magnetic, optical, electromagnetic, infrared, or semiconductor system, apparatus, device, or propagation medium. More specific examples (a non-exhaustive list) of the computer-readable medium would include the following: an electrical connection (electronic) having one or more wires, a portable computer diskette (magnetic), a RAM, a ROM, an erasable programmable read-only memory (EPROM or Flash memory) (magnetic), an optical fiber (optical), and a portable CDROM (optical). Note that the computer-readable medium could even be paper or another suitable medium upon which the program is printed and the program can be

electronically captured, via for instance, optical scanning of the paper or other medium, then compiled, interpreted or otherwise processed in a suitable manner if necessary, and then stored in a computer memory.

[0055] While various embodiments of the system, method and computer program for enabling an interactive game have been described, it will be apparent to those of ordinary skill in the art that many more embodiments and implementations are possible that are within the scope of the accompanying claims. Accordingly, the system, method and computer program for enabling an interactive game are not to be restricted beyond the attached claims and their equivalents.

What is claimed is:

1. A system for use with a monitor configured to receive audio and video content, the audio and video content having associated therewith an indicator that additional content is available, the system comprising:

at least one processor configured to present for display the audio and visual content; and

a first controller configured to establish a communication session with a game server coupled to the monitor, the communication session responsive to an interactive callback address, wherein the game server is configured to communicate a unique identifier in response to a request to initiate an instance of a game;

wherein a wireless communication device has a user interface and one or more controls associated with the user interface are made operative by the game server to interact with the instance of the game.

2. The system of claim 1, wherein the indicator comprises one of an image presented to a user in the video content and a message in the audio content.

3. The system of claim 1, further comprising:

a set top box configured to communicate with the game server, the first controller and the wireless communication device.

4. The system of claim 3, wherein the set top box is configured to forward the unique identifier to the at least one processor.

5. The system of claim 3, wherein the set top box is configured to communicate with the wireless communication device via a short-range radio-frequency link.

6. The system of claim 5, wherein the short-range radio-frequency link is configured to comply with the IEEE 802.15 standard.

7. The system of claim 1, wherein the wireless communication device is configured to communicate with the game server via a wireless data network.

8. The system of claim 1, wherein the wireless communication device communicates the unique identifier to the game server to register with the game server.

9. The system of claim 8, wherein the game server is configured to apply an input from the user interface of the wireless communication device as an input from a game participant.

10. The system of claim 9, wherein the game server provides game information via at least one of the monitor and the wireless communication device.

11. A method for enabling an interactive game, comprising:

establishing an interactive session;

providing a unique identifier during the interactive session; and

registering a wireless communication device as a data controller in response to a communication from the wireless communication device that contains the unique identifier.

12. The method of claim 11, wherein establishing an interactive session comprises providing an interactive call-back address in a data stream.

13. The method of claim 11, wherein establishing an interactive session comprises receiving a command from a control device.

14. The method of claim 11, wherein the unique identifier is associated with an instance of the game.

15. The method of claim 11, wherein the wireless communication device communicates using a short-range radio-frequency communication link.

16. The method of claim 11, wherein the wireless communication device communicates using a wireless data network.

17. The method of claim 11, further comprising:

using an input from the wireless communication device as an input from a game participant.

18. A computer program product for providing content, comprising computer-readable executable instructions that when executed by a processor direct a system to perform a method of:

establishing an account;

delivering an indication that alternative content is available to a monitor associated with the account;

receiving a response to the indication, the response indicating a desire to play an interactive game;

providing a unique identifier; and

registering a wireless communication device as an interface for the interactive game.

19. The computer program product of claim 18, wherein registering a wireless communication device is responsive to a wireless communication device that communicates the unique identifier.

20. The computer program product of claim 19, further comprising:

using an input from the wireless communication device as a game input from a participant.

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