

CableFAX Daily™

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What the Industry Reads First

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Govt Assistance: NTIA Outlines Digital Converter Program

If you've got an analog TV set, you're eligible for the gov't's \$40 voucher program for digital converter boxes. Just don't procrastinate. The first \$1bln of the program (minus various expenses) will go to anyone, including cable and DBS homes with analog TVs, under **NTIA** rules revealed Mon. Should the program run out of the estimated 22.5mln vouchers, another \$500mln is available—but those vouchers (approx 11mln) will be limited to analog-only homes. House Commerce chmn *John Dingell* (D-MI) wasted no time criticizing that decision. He's among those complaining that the gov't should have allocated more money to the program. "After the Administration opposed Democratic efforts to secure sufficient funding in favor of more tax cuts, the Administration now shows newfound concern that not all households will be covered," Dingell said. "If the Administration believes additional funds are needed to prevent consumers' television sets from going dark, then it should ask Congress for such funding." Rep *Ed Markey* (D-MA) said the rules create a "fuzzy picture" for the Feb 2009 DTV transition, adding that his House Telecom subcomte will hold a hearing on them. Households can apply via phone, Web, fax or snail mail for up to 2 vouchers, which will work a lot like gift cards, beginning Jan 1. Mar 31, 2009, is the last day to make a request. There's nothing stopping a consumer from reselling the boxes on **eBay** or somewhere else. The NTIA has mandated that the coupons be used specifically on basic converter boxes (expected to cost \$50-\$70)—not a DTV set, cable subscription or DVR device. A public forum is slated for Mon on the program. NTIA head *John Kneuer* said demand for the coupons is uncertain, noting that "tens of millions of consumers are availing themselves of the transition as we speak, buying digital televisions."

CTPAA Forum: Top Execs Talk Retrans, Web

Not surprisingly, retrans was high on the minds of execs at **CTPAA's** DC conference Mon. "I don't understand how the broadcaster/distributor relationship broke down," said **Insight** CEO *Michael Willner*, who notably mentioned that the MSO has yet to pay cash for retrans rights. **Comcast** svp, strategic planning *Mark Coblitz* agreed that cable's increasingly acerbic negotiations with broadcasters will only "add to the cost of TV," but he declined to cough up any details on the MSO's recent deal with **Sinclair**. At one point, Willner threw out the notion of a federal tax to subsidize local TV stations in lieu of retrans consent fees. He said broadcasters are looking to cash in as consumer interests are changing to become more Web-centric, and he should know (remember last year's **Insight** HSD migration debacle?). "Without online [capability], customers think they are lost in an ocean with no way home," he said. **Rainbow Media's** recent focus on weaving linear and VOD content with online initiatives, especially user-generated content, drives this point home. "The Web is terribly intriguing and important," said pres/CEO *Josh Sapan*. **IFC** has invited user-generated short film submissions for some time, and **Rainbow** is looking at integrating the initiative at **AMC** and **WE**, he said. But no mission will achieve its greatest efficacy without solid corporate communication, said Willner, especially with custom-

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Rank: 1/1/07-2/25/07, M-Su 8-11pm ad-supported basic cable networks, A18-49 (coverage ratings).

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ers. Huge trouble would ensue "if we're not listening as much as we are speaking to our constituents," he said. One pivotal phenomenon within the communications segment is the expanding blogosphere, which is establishing a fresh method of interactivity of which decision-makers should be aware. "Blogging suggests a way to go about the order of communication," said Sapan. "Everyone is knowledgeable now." **Nat Geo Channel** pres *Laureen Ong* said bloggers "effectively explained" many aspects and highlights of the net's HD effort since launch.

Carriage: **Buckeye CableSystem** will launch **Al Jazeera English** on Mar 19 to subs in Toledo and Sandusky, OH. -- **ESPNU** will launch on **Charter's** digital sports package in select systems over the next few months. By the end of Aug, ESPNU is expected to be in 10mln+ homes. -- **Anime** snagged a 24/7 linear carriage deal with **Grande Comm** in TX. The net rolls out to Austin, Corpus Christi, Dallas, San Antonio and Waco this month. -- **Current TV** is launching to 10mln homes in Britain and Ireland.

Forum Notebook: After 22 years, **CTPAA** (Cable TV Public Affairs Assoc) is changing its name to the **Assoc of Cable Communicators**. The name change is to reflect the group's expanded emphasis—showing that it's geared toward all cable industry communications execs, no longer just public affairs practitioners. It's keeping the CTPAA moniker until its Forum in DC ends on Wed. -- CTPAA/**CableWorld's** Public Affairs Programming Awards ceremony was rescheduled for Tues. Check out winning shows at www.cable360.net. -- Cable is growing increasingly conscious of the blogosphere, which some 27% of US adults visit at least once/week, according to **Strategy One**. The industry is recognizing its power in communication and monitoring the space accordingly, and some, like **Comcast** and **Cox**, have even started their own blogs. "There is more conversation-based communication now than in the past," said dir, media relations *David Grabert* of Cox, which launched **Digitalstraighttalk.com** last year to insert the MSO's point-of-view on topics where needed and counter competitors' claims. Comcast's CA system now runs an internal blog where employees can receive industry and customer news, and even ask questions of Comcast execs. Providing interactivity, a key component of blogs, is achieved with both offerings.

In the States: **TVN** will produce a weekly customized barker channel for **Cox's** VOD platform. TVN already produces barkers for **Charter** and **Mediacom**, as well as non-branded versions for affiliates who choose not to customize.

Online: The **NHL's** out-of-market "Center Ice" subscription package will now be available to US and Canadian fans online at NHL.com. The service costs \$119 and features comprehensive game coverage through Apr 8, plus select games from the Stanley Cup Quarterfinal and Semifinal rounds. Those who subscribe to the package via cable or satellite can take 50% off a broadband subscription. -- **Hip Hop OnDemand** inked a content and ad revenue sharing agreement with urban music broadband video site **Blastro.com**. Blastro will immediately begin streaming H2O VOD content, with the 2 sharing money from the ads that play before each program title. -- Aspiring filmmakers can enter their own original movie shorts parodying films of the last year for the 1st ever **MTV Movie Awards** "Best Movie Spoof" category. MTV is teaming with **Yahoo!** and **Mark Burnett Productions** to launch the user-generated showcase on Apr 23. User-generated content will play throughout the 2007 MTV Movie Awards, June 3.

Programming: *Rita Cosby* leaves **MSNBC** at month's end, when her contract expires. -- **Bravo** is holding a conference call Tues (3/13) to announce its 1st-ever acquisition.



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BUSINESS & FINANCE

Advertising: Rainbow ad sales is launching a "Client Activation Team" to focus on multiplatform, integrated and cross-marketing deals. *Terry Holmstrom* will lead the team as vp, client activation. -- **Sportskool** will create a customized campaign for Jeep that includes in-program branding.

People: Devout foodie *Sergei Kuharsky* has left **In Demand** to become gm, **Food Network**. -- *David Berenson* and *John Wildhack*, who jointly oversee **ESPN's** programming dept, were each promoted to evp. They'll continue to report to **ESPN evp**, content *John Skipper*. -- **Sundance Channel** restructured its marketing dept as it evolves to a branded entertainment and sponsorship model. *Kim Gabelmann* will serve as vp, branded ent & sponsorship. *Lisa Ellenbogen* was upped to vp, consumer marketing.

Public Affairs: **National Geographic Channel** is launching "Preserve Our Planet" this fall. The conservation initiative will include special programming, PSAs, a Website and local conservation activities held with affils.

Intl: Singapore's **StarHub** selected **Vyyo's** 3Ghz spectrum overlay in its bid for the country's next-gen national broadband network project.

Business/Finance: **Credit Suisse** downgraded **EchoStar** to "neutral" from "underperform," citing valuation and the reduced possibility of an acquisition going forward.

CableFAX Daily Stockwatch

Company	00/00 Close	1-Day Ch	Company	00/00 Close	1-Day Ch
BROADCASTERS/DBS/MMDS					
ALCATEL LUCENT:	12.01	0.01	AMDOCS:	35.27	0.87
BRITISH SKY:	43.58	(0.13)	AMPHENOL:	65.47	0.77
DIRECTV:	23.09	0.22	ARRIS GROUP:	13.17	(0.28)
DISNEY:	34.20	(0.17)	AVID TECH:	33.34	(0.11)
ECHOSTAR:	44.28	0.96	BLNDER TONGUE:	1.93	0.12
GE:	34.44	0.12	BROADCOM:	33.83	0.17
HEARST-ARGYLE:	26.64	0.55	C-COR:	12.91	0.27
ION MEDIA:	1.31	0.02	CISCO:	26.17	0.09
NEWS CORP:	23.98	0.48	COMMSCOPE:	39.32	0.23
TRIBUNE:	30.33	(0.22)	CONCURRENT:	1.53	0.03
MSOS					
CABLEVISION:	30.87	0.84	CONVERGYS:	25.59	0.01
CHARTER:	2.92	0.05	CSG SYSTEMS:	24.66	0.12
COMCAST:	26.17	0.05	GEMSTAR TVG:	4.09	0.03
COMCAST SPCL:	26.00	0.00	GOOGLE:	454.75	1.79
GCI:	15.10	0.08	HARMONIC:	11.02	0.66
KNOLOGY:	14.58	0.08	JDSU:	15.28	(0.2)
LIBERTY CAPITAL:	107.60	(0.65)	LEVEL 3:	6.34	0.02
LIBERTY GLOBAL:	30.94	0.54	MICROSOFT:	27.44	0.15
LIBERTY INTERACTIVE:	22.08	(0.09)	MOTOROLA:	18.54	0.07
MEDIACOM:	7.91	0.11	NDS:	47.93	(0.49)
NTL:	28.22	0.00	NORTEL:	28.17	0.09
ROGERS COMM:	32.26	(0.02)	OPENTV:	2.58	0.02
SHAW COMM:	35.86	0.31	PHILIPS:	37.22	0.10
TELEWEST:	24.20	0.00	RENTRAK:	14.98	0.07
TIME WARNER CABLE:	36.48	(0.32)	SEACHANGE:	9.63	(0.17)
WASH POST:	746.10	(0.02)	SONY:	52.88	0.39
PROGRAMMING					
CBS:	31.29	0.62	SPRINT NEXTEL:	19.47	0.00
CROWN:	4.89	(0.03)	THOMAS & BETTS:	50.16	(0.14)
DISCOVERY:	17.21	(0.03)	TIVO:	6.04	(0.2)
EW SCRIPPS:	44.25	0.02	TOLLGRADE:	12.50	0.24
GRUPO TELEVISIA:	28.45	0.11	UNIVERSAL ELEC:	27.68	0.43
INTERACTIVE CORP:	37.35	(0.08)	VONAGE:	4.31	0.14
LIBERTY:	8.32	0.06	VYYO:	4.27	0.11
LODGENET:	26.22	1.16	WEBB SYS:	0.05	0.00
NEW FRONTIER:	8.58	(0.11)	WORLDGATE:	0.86	0.01
OUTDOOR:	10.48	0.22	YAHOO:	29.99	0.87
PLAYBOY:	10.40	0.00	TELCOS		
TIME WARNER:	19.78	(0.09)	AT&T:	37.06	0.51
UNIVISION:	36.03	0.01	QWEST:	8.74	0.04
VALUEVISION:	11.99	0.02	VERIZON:	36.58	0.13
VIACOM:	39.55	0.41	MARKET INDICES		
WWE:	16.05	0.12	DOW:	12318.62	42.30
TECHNOLOGY					
3COM:	3.72	0.10	NASDAQ:	2402.29	14.74
ADC:	16.25	(0.02)			
ADDVANTAGE:	3.48	0.01			

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M.C. Antil's CableFolks

Cox's Rooney A Man for All Seasons

Joe Rooney is not the kind of guy whose life fits neatly into a 650 word column, much less a paragraph—but let me give it a shot.

Joe's been in cable for two decades, a former Times Mirror guy who eleven years ago was acquired along with his company by Cox. He's worked in both operations and marketing.

In his career, he has been based in Jersey, in the coal mining country of western Pennsylvania, at a couple of places in the heartland, in the O.C., and now in the southeast.

He is a husband and a father.

He rides motorcycles and owns four of them.

He started chairing SkiTAM a couple of years ago and has since also become the chairman of CTAM. And, as of a couple of months ago, Joe became (by my count) one of two chief marketing officers on the distribution side of this industry.

But those are just the broad strokes, and the devil, as they say, is in the details.

When Joe and I caught up this past week we talked about a lot of those details. It was March, so as he normally does this time of year, Joe was gearing up for SkiTAM, the industry's annual fund-raiser for the U.S. Disabled Ski Team and an event for which he has developed great passion.

A few years ago, Joe had a chance meeting with one of the team's members, a young African American named Ralph Green. Ralph was a budding football star in Brooklyn, but at 16 ended up losing his leg after a blood vessel in his buttocks got severed in a drive-by shooting.

Ralph wasn't much of a skier, but he oozed energy and charisma.



M.C. Antil

Joe, who saw something special in Ralph, asked him if he had a sponsor. He didn't. So Joe offered to sponsor the young man's pursuit of Paralympic gold in exchange for his services as a motivational speaker.

Joe and Ralph now comprise a most unlikely pairing, the smooth-as-silk white guy marketer and the street smart black kid with one leg and a million dollar smile.

And for the past two years, they have visited Cox locations throughout the country giving employees what Green calls "the old one-two."

Rooney says Green leads off each speaking engagement with a first-hand account of the shooting, the loss of the leg and the unlikely but highly inspirational story of his sojourn west to learn how to ski. He then gets up and talks about competition and the things every employee is the company is going to have to do to keep Cox well ahead of its competitors.

"It's very effective," said Joe, "but I have to tell you it's no fun following someone like Ralph."

As for Joe's brand new role as the chairman of CTAM, he said he's really focusing on cooperative marketing among the MSOs.

"There are so many things the operators in this industry could and should be doing together, and we're going to be focusing on those," he said.

And as for his new gig as CMO, when I asked Joe how things have changed, he told me:

"I continue to push the marketing sciences and the more thoughtful, cause-and-effect type of marketing, as opposed to the when-in-doubt-mail-it-out approach. That, and I'm continuing to focus on Cox as a brand and trying to find new ways to get all the different parts of this company delivering on that promise."

M.C. Antil can be reached at m.c.antil@att.net.

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