

CableFAX Daily™

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What the Industry Reads First

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Back to School: Public May Need Crash Course on Digital Transition

Consumer education remains the most important—and underserved—segment of the looming '09 digital TV transition, said panelists Mon at CEA's Washington summit. Amid playful barbs between **NCTA** pres/CEO *Kyle McSarrow* and **CEA** chief *Gary Shapiro* (particularly over CableCARD legislation), **Assoc of Public TV Stations** pres/CEO *John Lawson* said assn polling shows that 60% of over-the-air households (approx 22mln) have "no clue" about the impending transition. And panelists said even awareness doesn't necessarily translate to understanding, creating a sticky situation with less than 2 years until the transition date. "The message can't just be 'you're TV will go dark,'" said Lawson. "The key is to exploit the benefits and advantages." One consumer benefit: further proliferation of HD programming, which McSarrow called the "point of the spear." But **NAB** evp *Marcellus Alexander* said the best benefit is freed-up bandwidth for 1st responders. Whatever the case, panelists said education remains paramount. "We all recognize that a pretty massive PSA campaign has to be part of the mix," said McSarrow. Alexander said grassroots outreach—especially to non-tech savvy Americans such as retired persons—is also important.

Ong Leaves Nat Geo: Weeks after **Nat Geo Channel** announced that programming chief *John Ford* will resign this summer, the net has lost founding pres *Laureen Ong*. She's heading to Hong Kong to serve as COO of **News Corp** satellite subsidiary **STAR**. *David Haslingden* was tapped as CEO of the channel (he'll continue to serve as CEO of **National Geographic Channel Intl** and **Fox Intl Channels**), and 5-year vet *Steve Schiffman* was upped to acting gm. Ong said the network's in good hands, noting Nat Geo's 1Q ratings successes and her confidence that the "channel will continue to reach new heights." She expects to start her new gig in about 6 weeks. Ford is expected to stay on through Aug, and a search is underway for his replacement. -- Before leaving the building, Ong got in a parting shot at rival Discovery. When a reporter asked Ong on a conference call about the likelihood of the net airing something like Discovery's "Lost Tomb of Jesus," she responded that "something like 'The Lost Tomb' would never have made it past our standards and practices here. We have very rigorous fact checking. When it doesn't pass our standards and practices, we don't run it."

The 'Ruthless' Liberty: **EchoStar** has asked the **FCC** to deny **Liberty's** \$11bln acquisition of **News Corp's** 39% stake in **DirectTV**, warning in comments filed late Fri that a merged entity would exact "higher price and less choice... to multichannel video programming distributors and consumers." **EchoStar** pointed to Liberty's **TCI** past, saying it operated "ruthlessly" in acquiring and creating programming and in its treatment of unaffiliated video providers and programmers. "**Viacom's** *Sumner Redstone* concluded bluntly that: 'Mr [John] Malone decides what people can hear and see in the United States,' **DISH** wrote. If the **FCC** approves the deal as expected, **DISH** wants Liberty to face RSN conditions, including arbitration, for any Liberty-affiliated RSN. That would include new RSNs, not just the 3 RSNs in this transaction. It wants the conditions to apply for at least 6 years from the close of the deal. **DISH** also argues that program access



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protections should apply to intl programming, as well as domestic. The **Consumers Union** and other watchdog groups want the FCC to reject the deal unless they find that Liberty and News' financial interests are not implicitly or explicitly intertwined. **NCTC**, which is in the midst of an arbitration proceeding with **Fox Cable Nets** as it attempts to negotiate deals for members, told the FCC that the same conditions imposed on News Corp in 2004 should apply to Liberty. NCTC also argues that RSN conditions should apply to all News Corp-affiliated RSNs (not just the 3 RSNs Liberty will acquire in the deal) due to their commonality of operations.

Rainbow's Global Push: Mon's announcement by **Rainbow** of its concentrated effort to launch channels overseas was fueled by the strong intl reception to its brands' original programming and the need for global systems to fill time on broadband, VOD and mobile platforms. Overseas expansion "gives us further incentive to step up original programming, because we end up with a more significant platform against which to monetize it," Rainbow chief *Josh Sapan* said. But will Rainbow tailor its brands for foreign viewers? No. "The first responsibility is to program the channels here... domestic success will enable success overseas," new intl chief *Harold Gronenthal* said, although he acknowledged some localization may be needed when brands move into other markets (guess that means launching **WE tv** in France would require a name change to **Oui tv**).

Digital Media: Cablevision tapped *Pat Gottesman* to head its new digital marketing and commerce group. Several **Rainbow Ad Sales** execs will join her, including *Dermot McCormack*, svp, Interactive Advertising & Development; *Barry Frey*, svp, Advanced Platform Sales; and *Ben Tatta*, svp, New Business Development. One goal is an interactive shop-from-home feature that would let consumers use their remotes to order products and charge them to their credit cards.

Jim and Wayne's World: Vyvo on Mon announced that ex-**Charter** evp, engineering *Wayne Davis* will become CEO, with former **OpenTV** chmn/CEO *Jim Chiddix* becoming Vyvo's new vice chmn. Both execs will spearhead the company's efforts to accelerate industry deployment of Vyvo's 3 GHz Spectrum Overlay and business services solutions. Davis succeeds *Davidi Gilo*, who will remain Vyvo's chmn. Chiddix, whose career includes 15 years as **Time Warner Cable's** CTO, said "the ability to expand bandwidth well beyond today's limits and deliver business services over existing networks represents two of cable's most potent weapons against the telcos."

New on 360: Get the dirt on tonight's season (or series?) finale of **FX's** "Dirt" and see a video interview with *Kristanna Loken*, who stars as "Painkiller Jane" next month on **SciFi Channel**.

Pivotal: The **Sprint/Cable** jv announced at **CTIA** the branding of "Pivot," the integrated mobile service that gives consumers the ability to link their mobile phone service with their home digital phone, certain HSD services and digital cable services. **Cox, Time Warner Cable, Comcast** and **Advance/Newhouse** are using Pivot, which is expected to launch in 40 metro areas this year. The capability to program a home DVR from a mobile phone will be available to customers in select areas this year.

In the States: Smithsonian sec *Lawrence Small* resigned Mon, following scrutiny of his salary and expenses. During Small's tenure, the Institution came under fire for its semi-exclusive programming deal with **Showtime**, which includes a VOD channel that's slated to launch this spring.

On the Hill: The Hill will be rocking Tues when a slate of musicians, including punk rocker *Ted Leo*, join Rep *Ed*



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BUSINESS & FINANCE

Markey (D-MA) to announce a new campaign to recruit musicians to support the fight for net neutrality. *R.E.M.*, *Sarah McLachlan* and the *Barenaked Ladies* are already on board for "Rock the Net," which launched a Website (www.futureofmusic.org/rockthenet) that lets other musicians and music fans sign on to support the campaign. Last year, pop star *Moby* joined Markey to call for net neutrality mandates. -- The witness list for Tues' 10am Sen Commerce hearing on **MLB** and **DirectTV's** "Extra Innings" deal includes **In Demand's** *Rob Jacobson*, **MLB's** *Bob DuPuy*, **DirectTV's** *Chase Carey*, **EchoStar's** *Carl Vogel* and PA State Univ prof *Stephen Ross*. [Check out **Cable360.net** for an exclusive Q&A with *Jacobson* on why he thinks **MLB's** offer to cable is a raw deal].

Competition: **AT&T** added **Lifetime**, **LMN** and **Lifetime Real Women** to its U-verse video service. -- **AT&T** inked a deal with the **Masters** (Apr 5-8) golf tourney to provide previews, daily highlights and player interviews across its linear, broadband and mobile platforms. -- Jet-Blue's **DirectTV**-powered in-flight TV service, powered by, added soccer and rugby programming from **Sentanta Sports** to its channel lineup.

People: Retired **Liberty** COO *Gary Howard* joined satellite broadband venture **WildBlue's** board. -- **Comcast** tapped *Jerome Espy* as vp, comm for its Midwest Div.

CableFAX Daily Stockwatch

Company	03/26 Close	1-Day Ch	Company	03/26 Close	1-Day Ch
BROADCASTERS/DBS/MMDS					
ALCATEL LUCENT:	11.92	0.39	AMDOCS:	36.02	0.02
BRITISH SKY:	45.05	0.01	AMPHENOL:	65.81	(0.42)
DIRECTV:	22.68	(0.04)	ARRIS GROUP:	13.29	(0.16)
DISNEY:	35.22	0.23	AVID TECH:	34.54	(0.39)
ECHOSTAR:	43.09	(0.27)	BLNDER TONGUE:	1.84	0.05
GE:	36.00	0.18	BROADCOM:	32.64	0.32
HEARST-ARGYLE:	26.99	0.22	C-COR:	13.80	0.20
ION MEDIA:	1.33	0.03	CISCO:	26.34	0.15
NEWS CORP:	24.46	(0.1)	COMMSCOPE:	43.49	0.26
TRIBUNE:	31.12	0.59	CONCURRENT:	1.51	0.04
MSOS					
CABLEVISION:	30.40	0.15	CONVERGYS:	25.65	(0.08)
CHARTER:	2.76	(0.1)	CSG SYSTEMS:	25.31	0.38
COMCAST:	26.30	(0.21)	GEMSTAR TVG:	4.22	(0.08)
COMCAST SPCL:	25.96	(0.2)	GOOGLE:	465.00	3.17
GCI:	14.39	0.22	HARMONIC:	10.09	(0.3)
KNOLOGY:	14.70	(0.03)	JDSU:	15.44	(0.03)
LIBERTY CAPITAL:	109.14	(0.52)	LEVEL 3:	6.22	0.04
LIBERTY GLOBAL:	32.61	0.39	MICROSOFT:	28.22	0.20
LIBERTY INTERACTIVE:	24.16	0.77	MOTOROLA:	17.91	0.16
MEDIACOM:	7.99	0.02	NDS:	50.94	0.80
NTL:	28.22	0.00	NORTEL:	24.15	0.08
ROGERS COMM:	32.96	0.13	OPENTV:	2.51	(0.06)
SHAW COMM:	37.50	0.49	PHILIPS:	38.70	(0.21)
TELEWEST:	24.20	0.00	RENTRAK:	15.72	0.08
TIME WARNER CABLE:	37.80	(0.4)	SEACHANGE:	8.13	(0.06)
WASH POST:	761.97	(5.03)	SONY:	52.49	(0.6)
PROGRAMMING					
CBS:	30.56	0.10	SPRINT NEXTEL:	18.72	(0.5)
CROWN:	5.28	(0.03)	THOMAS & BETTS:	48.91	(0.01)
DISCOVERY:	18.26	(0.09)	TIVO:	6.36	0.15
EW SCRIPPS:	44.68	0.10	TOLLGRADE:	12.49	0.48
GRUPO TELEVISA:	29.46	(0.36)	UNIVERSAL ELEC:	29.20	0.49
INTERACTIVE CORP:	38.48	0.27	VONAGE:	3.38	0.38
LIBERTY:	8.32	0.06	VYYO:	6.92	(0.24)
LODGENET:	27.89	(0.22)	WEBB SYS:	0.04	(0.01)
NEW FRONTIER:	9.11	(0.03)	WORLDGATE:	0.73	(0.1)
OUTDOOR:	10.40	0.00	YAHOO:	31.66	0.30
PLAYBOY:	10.31	0.01	TELCOS		
TIME WARNER:	20.18	0.38	AT&T:	39.31	0.43
UNIVISION:	36.15	0.00	QWEST:	8.87	(0.05)
VALUEVISION:	12.11	0.00	VERIZON:	37.67	(0.45)
VIACOM:	41.23	(0.17)	MARKET INDICES		
WWE:	15.90	0.21	DOW:	12469.07	(11.94)
TECHNOLOGY					
3COM:	3.97	0.10	NASDAQ:	2455.63	6.70
ADC:	16.99	0.14			
ADVANTAGE:	3.50	(0.04)			

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M.C. Antil's CableFolks

Showtime Breathing "Life" Into Reality Television

In the interest of full disclosure I have to admit that of all my regular media fixes, the last one I would give up—and that would be only under penalty of death—is NPR. And of all the public radio shows out there, none captivates me any more than one hatched by my hometown Chicago-based NPR affiliate: "Ira Glass' This American Life."

To those of you unfamiliar with Life, it is a weekly serving of paper-thin slices of American life, dished up by writers whose knack for blending humor and pathos along a narrative arc is matched only by their ability to unearth the poetry of the human condition.

If radio is theater of the mind, This American Life is theater of the superego. It takes what is and what was, and gently reminds us of all what might someday be.

So when I heard that Showtime was buying six episodes for a TV version of the show, I was admittedly intrigued. But mostly I was terrified. I thought of other attempts to translate radio into television and instantly developed a mortal fear that, much like the old World War I adage about keeping 'em down on the farm after they'd seen Poree, the little radio show that would lose its innocence to the warm, intoxicating glow of TV.

When Mr. Glass and I caught up last week, he was up to his dark rimmed glasses in commitments, balancing a deluge of publicity interviews with his old gig as an award-winning radio producer, and his new one as the television host of a thinking man's reality show.

He told me that Showtime had originally pitched him in 2002 about taking his show to television, and that he flatly refused. But the courtship continued over the years and finally Glass told the network that if they'd provide filmmakers who could give him insight into how to take his show to television, he might be interested.



M.C. Antil

Showtime, which under Robert Greenblatt (who exec produced Six Feet Under for HBO), had become bolder, riskier and more ambitious in its original series. So when Glass made his request, Greenblatt put him in touch with Killer Films, whose credits include edgy fare like Boys Don't Cry and I Shot Andy Warhol.

What Glass said came out of that meeting was a sense Life could make the transformation, but only if it became a considerably different show, telling different stories in different ways than the radio version. "We got a sense after talking to them that this could really be something interesting," he told me.

As for all those This American Life purists, Glass said, "There are a surprising number of public radio people who still don't approve of television, and I didn't totally understand that until we started this. I always thought that was a fringe position, but there are, frankly, quite a number of people (who feel that way)."

He talked about taking the radio show on tour recently as a way of promoting the Showtime series, and having to overcome some deep-seeded anti-television sentiment, embodied by a guy in Minnesota who yelled out, perhaps not ironically, "Judas!" For the most part, Glass said he was able to turn audiences around, especially after they saw the video. He joked, "I think they thought it was going to be This American Life: Special Victims Unit."

Before hanging up we talked about things like "creative headroom" and how few but very insightful notes he got from Showtime during production. He said he's very happy with what his team has produced and, despite initially negotiating the right to kill the entire series if he thought it didn't work, is keeping the door open to additional episodes.

He said, "If Showtime would want us to do another season, I think that would be really fun. I would love to do it."

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

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