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What the Industry Reads First

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Snow Stories: MSOs Go Above & Beyond as Usage Spikes during Blizzard

We're always amazed not just by all the extra work cable operators put in during a major weather event, but the personal stories that emerge. For example, in **Comcast's** Freedom Region, we're told an SUV skidded out on black ice, hitting the middle barrier and sign and flipping on its side in front of a Comcast employee. "Our employee, *Nick*, immediately pulled over and climbed onto the vehicle and helped four kids get out from the back seat to safety before going back and cutting the airbags away to help the parents get out," a spokesperson said. After a story like that, how do you ask about outages? For the most part, it sounded like things went pretty well for operators. **Cablevision** said it experienced very limited service interruptions throughout the blizzard, most all of which were commercial power-related rather than system related. Similarly, **Time Warner Cable** said the storm only produced extremely isolated outages that were not power-related. The largest impact for TWC was rescheduling appointments and cable store closures, but it resumed appointments and cable store operations Sun in all affected areas. Even with the rescheduling, TWC did not need to bring in techs from other markets. Comcast also did not see any significant network issues or outages. It prepared for the storm by having hundreds of employees work from hotels and as virtual CSRs from their homes. In addition to opening Xfinity WiFi on Fri to everyone in the impacted regions (including non-customers), Comcast sent emails in advance to let customers know how to best check the status of their services. With much of the East Coast snowed in all weekend (and some still snowed in Mon, including most of the **Cablefax** crew), there was plenty of Internet surfing and VOD watching. Time Warner Cable reported that in NYC, customer Internet usage was up 25% for the weekend, including 34% on Sat, when a travel ban was put in place as of 2:30pm. At Comcast, Xfinity on Demand set a record for concurrent views with 1.29mln people watching at the same time Sat. The spikes definitely look attributable to the blizzard, with views in Baltimore and DC up 56% for Comcast, while Philly and NJ were up 50% and the Northeast (including Boston and CT) were up 40%. What were they all watching? **NBC's** "Shades of Blue" was the most popular cable/broadcast show for the weekend, while **HBO's** "Game of Thrones" was tops among premium nets, Comcast said. Other winners: **Cartoon's** "Teen Titans Go," "Hotel Transylvania" (free movie on **FX**) and theatricals "The Intern" and "The Martian." **Cablevision** also reported record-setting usage Sat for Optimum Online as well as streaming of VOD and DVR content. More than 99% of Optimum WiFi hotspots were operational throughout

100

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the storm, a spokesperson said. It seems a safe bet that **Netflix** also saw huge spikes in usage this weekend, but as per usual, the streaming company declined to provide any stats. Of course, a lot of people also were watching the weather. Weather Channel said it reached over 37.1m viewers (P2+), ranking #1 among basic cable nets for 3 days of coverage Thurs-Sat. On Sat, Weather beat all the news nets averaging 269K 25-54s. These numbers are based on preliminary time period numbers for Sat. Cable gets a lot of heat over customer service—some of it deservedly—but it doesn't always get the credit for good service. Comcast shared with us an email 1 customer in Greensburg, PA, sent after two techs decided to try and make a service call after hearing from a customer who was alone and snowed in Sat. "I don't need to tell you how extremely dangerous, driving has been this morning, but they came," the customer wrote of techs Jason and Steve. "They were able to have me up and running all services restored. I do think this goes above and beyond probably what is part of their job description. I don't have the capability to reward them, but you do, and I hope you do so." We agree!

Retrans Watch: **Nexstar** is warning **Cox Comm** subs in 9 markets that they could lose some local broadcast nets at 11:59pm local time Fri. The broadcaster said it has been negotiating with the MSO for a new retrans agreement for more than 5 months. Cox did not immediately offer comment. Potentially impacted stations include **WFXR** (Fox affil in Roanoke, VA) and **KLAF** (NBC affil in Shreveport, LA). -- Meanwhile, **Sunbeam's** blackout on **AT&T** continues, with Miami subs missing out on Sun's NFC championship game between the Arizona Cardinals and Carolina Panthers. The broadcaster rejected AT&T's request to compensate the net for a full day of programming to carry the game.

Kolb Joins Discovery: *Suzanne Kolb* was named evp, gm for **Discovery Digital** nets. She'll oversee the company's 70+ web-native brands and series, original digital development, Discovery VR and social partnerships. For 2 years, Kolb was president of **E! Entertainment**, where she oversaw the global pop culture brand's ongoing growth across platforms until the fall of 2014. She'll split her time between L.A. and San Fran.

Top Companies for People of Color: **Bright House, Comcast, Cox, Midcontinent** and **Time Warner Cable** were identified as the top operators for employees of color in **NAMIC's** 2015 Top Companies for People of Color list. It was gleaned from findings in the joint **NAMIC/WICT** diversity survey. The top 5 programmers recognized for diversity and inclusion are **BET Nets, Discovery Comm, Disney-ABC, NBCU** and **Turner**. Twenty seven organizations, representing an estimated 65% of the cable workforce, completed the survey, which was funded by the **Kaitz Foundation** and conducted by **Mercer**.

Distribution: **One World Sports** expanded its agreement with **Verizon** to include HD programming on **FiOS** and TV Everywhere authentication. It also is now available on Verizon's mobile platform go90.

Discovery/Lionsgate Acquire Film Rights: **Discovery Comm's Animal Planet** partnered with **Lionsgate** to acquire the rights in the US, Canada and the UK to documentary film "Million Dollar Duck." The net acquired TV rights to the film while Lionsgate will distribute it on a limited basis theatrically and on digital home entertainment and packaged media. Following its theatrical run, the film will air on Animal Planet in the fall. The film centers on the world of the Federal Duck Stamp Contest. The partnership is the latest in Discovery's expanding relationship with Lionsgate. The programmer and **Liberty Global** invested in Lionsgate in 2015, and Lionsgate and Discovery also announced a home entertainment distribution agreement, allowing Lionsgate to distribute Discovery programming on packaged media platforms in the US.

Viacom/Canvs Partnership: **Viacom's** integrated marketing and creative content arm **Viacom Velocity** formed a partnership with **Canvs**, the tech platform that measures and interprets emotionality in language. The collaboration aims to help Velocity's clients measure consumers' emotional reactions to marketing campaigns. Under the agreement, Velocity's Echo Social Graph product, which measures the effectiveness and virality of custom creative marketing campaigns, will integrate Canvs' emotional analysis to offer deeper insights to marketing partners about the consumer impact of a campaign. Canvs tracks 56 unique emotions. Velocity will use Canvs' database of millions of pop culture words and phrases, which accounts for misspellings to ensure accuracy in interpreting feelings as millennials intend them.

OTT Research: More than 60% of US broadband HHs have at least 1 OTT video service subscription, said **Parks Associates**. It also found 2/3 of broadband HHs own a connected entertainment device. And more than 1/4 own a streaming media player. The research firm will discuss its findings and other trends in a webcast Tues.

Ratings: America's not tired of the *Kardashians* yet. The Jan 20 launch of talk show "Kocktails with Khloe" became **FYI's** most-watched series premiere ever. It delivered 496K total viewers in L+3 viewing and 313K 18-49s. -- Sat's

CFX TECH by Joyce Wang

CSG Talks Shift in Premium Sports Viewing

When it comes to premium sports, fans have always been passionate, though the game action is now enhanced by much more interactivity about every player, every stat, every alert, tweet or notification whether in the stadium, on TV or through mobile devices. According to *Kent Steffen*, pres of digital services at **CSG International**, “social media have really taken premium sports to the next level.” Sports nets like **ESPN** and **Fox Sports** have already created various overlays and stats to make the viewing more informative, and some pay-TV providers are extending their set-top infrastructure to include apps that can be more interactive on TV, he noted. Meanwhile, as cord cutting continues through traditional distribution channels, sports leagues and nets are enhancing their direct-to-consumer and companion apps to take control of their own destiny as well as distributing through some digital only channels like the **NFL** London game on **Yahoo!**, or **ESPN** distributing the Cricket World Cup direct to consumers, Steffen said. Another shift in recent years is through “the granularity of the presentation of content,” he said. Consumers still need a pay-TV subscription to tune in to live sports broadcasts today. As consumers demand skinny TV bundles and broadband-only options, both OTT players and traditional cable operators can cater to the new market with on-the-go sports viewing options, Steffen said. For OTT providers, the big challenge is the ability to demonstrate to sports leagues that they can attract viewers to tune in. “When a **Netflix**, **Google** or **Hulu** steps up to the plate the next time a major sports league has a contract up with a TV network, that’s when we could see them start to pose a real threat to traditional network viewing,” he said. “However, TV networks have the upper hand when it comes to the battle for sports dominance, especially if they can integrate a more cross-channel approach, which is the attractive element of streaming services.” With the current pace of technical innovation, Steffen expects even more fragmentation of premium sports

content, with leagues taking more control over windows and creating more bidders for the rights to those windows as more digital outlets become viable distribution partners. In addition, many sports aggregators will likely take their rights and offer a combination of mass market offers through traditional pay-TV providers, coupled with specialized micro sports with passionate fan bases directly to consumers. Content owners will use apps to enhance their content experience. As for operators, they will have to innovate dramatically in this area, or have to “federate the apps of their content providers seamlessly.”

Call for Papers: **SCTE** and its global brand, the **International Society of Broadband Experts (ISBE)**, recently released the Call for Papers for **SCTE/ISBE Cable-Tec Expo 2016** (Sep 26–29, in Philly). The group seeks proposals for papers and presentations for technical sessions during the event. The Expo 2016 Program Committee, chaired by *John Schanz*, evp and chief network officer of **Comcast**, will review all technical proposals, which are due March 1. SCTE is targeting papers in areas including delivery of gigabit speeds, deployment of **DOCSIS 3.1**, fiber to the home, intelligent energy management and energy innovations, connection in the home, infrastructure as a service, and proactive maintenance and advanced predictive alarming.

Vimond’s US Ambition: After scoring US customers including **Comcast**, Norway-based video delivery tech firm **Vimond** opened its new regional office in NYC to support its North America operations. Vimond’s CEO, *Helge Høibraaten*, and CTO, *Glenn Pedersen*, will both be based in New York. The company said **Comcast** and **Thomson Reuters** are among those launching online services in 2015 based on Vimond’s services, which includes the Vimond Platform that manages and delivers multi-format OTT offerings, and Vimond Highlights, a live-to-VOD solution.

Got tech news? Reach out to Cablefax Tech editor *Joyce Wang* at jwang@accessintel.com

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