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What the Industry Reads First

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Passing the Torch: Watson to Take Comcast Cable Reins from Smit

Comcast employees got the news early Monday morning via a memo from CEO *Brian Roberts*. *Neil Smit* would be stepping down on April 1, with familiar face *Dave Watson* stepping into the role as pres/CEO of Comcast Cable. Watson has been Smit's #2 as the company rolled out the X1 platform—now deployed to about half of Comcast's residential video customers. Insiders believe Watson will be able to continue where Smit left off without missing a beat. The incoming cable chief is well-known in the industry, having been with Comcast since 1991. Watson has served as COO of Comcast Cable since 2010, but previously spent time as evp of operations and evp, marketing/customer service. He's been around the industry circuit, chairing the now-defunct **CTAM** Summit during a record attendance year in 2005 and as recipient of the Vanguard for Marketing in 2006. Watson has long had Roberts' admiration, who has praised his work over the years in convincing the consumer that Comcast is the company to choose in a world where every one of its products has competition. As COO, Watson is responsible for virtually every operational aspect of the company—from field operations to customer service to marketing and advertising. He can take pride in stats such as Comcast's 3Q16 video results, which were the company's best in a third quarter in 10 years. Before joining Comcast, Watson spent seven years with Comcast Cellular (before it was sold to SBC Communications). Smit will not completely step away from Comcast; he'll continue on a part-time basis with Comcast leaders to help develop future business opportunities and assume the role as vice chmn of Comcast. He joined the company in 2010 from Charter, where he had served as CEO for five years. The ex-Navy SEAL also spent time at **AOL**, where he was president of its access business, and **Nabisco**. "Leading Comcast Cable has been a wonderful experience. Brian has been a terrific partner and I have the utmost respect and admiration for his vision, leadership, and drive," Smit said in a news release announcing the changes. "It has been an honor and privilege leading this team. I know I am leaving Comcast Cable in great hands with Dave Watson as its new leader. As I approach 60, and for reasons related to the injuries I sustained in my previous career, I am looking forward to spending more time with my family while also helping Comcast find new growth opportunities."

Netflix Stamp of Approval: Netflix isn't just dishing up content recommendations to customers. On Monday, it released its first batch of "Netflix Recommended TVs" for 2017. Making the cut are the **LG** 4K UHD TVs with WebOS 3.5; **Samsung** 7,8,9 and Q-series Smart TVs; and **Sony** Android TVs (all 2017 models). Criteria for getting the Netflix thumbs up included speed to use Netflix after powering on the TV and being able to switch from apps to live TV and back.

Eshoo Steps Into DISH-Hearst: Rep *Anna Eshoo* (D-CA) has urged **Hearst** and **DISH** to work quickly to return stations to the satcaster's lineup. "As a longtime advocate for reforming existing law to put an end to broadcast television blackouts, I'm always disturbed when consumer lose access to programming they have paid for," she wrote. Eshoo's congressional district is among the 26 markets impacted by the retrans spat, with her constituents losing **KSBW**. The Hearst stations

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have been dark on DISH since March 2. DISH, a fellow advocate for retrans reform, quickly answered Eshoo by rattling off that there have been more than 750 broadcast blackouts since 2010. DISH said it would be willing to participate in binding, baseball-style arbitration to determine the fair market value of the channels. Alternatively, it argued it should be allowed to import an out-of-market station of the same network affiliation until a deal is reached. Hearst is running a clock showing how long it's been off DISH, and is claiming the satellite company is misguiding customers on negotiations.

EPIX Carriage: Centurylink signed on to carry EPIX on its Prism TV service. Both the East and West Coast feeds will be available along with EPIX 2 and EPIX Hits on the Prism Premium package.

Ad Research: MediaRadar has launched its "TV Share of Market Report," a new report that provides tracking and total ad spend comparison's by national TV network as well as tracking and comparisons for total advertiser minutes and total unique advertisers by network. MediaRadar collects data from more than 125 national broadcast and cable networks, categorizing every single advertisement and advertiser.

Arris at Retail: Arris is offering up its SURFboard SVG2482AC Voice Gateway at Amazon and Surfboard.com, declaring it the first retail gateway with embedded RDK-B technology approved for use on Comcast's Xfinity network. The gateway offers ultra-fast broadband and WiFi as well as enhanced telephone functionality.

A+E Networks Sees the Beauty: A+E Networks joined Main Street Advisors and Live Nation in a \$9mIn Series A funding round for Beautycon Media, a digital media company in the fashion and beauty space. A+E pres/CEO Nancy Dubuc said the company looks forward to exploring a number of synergies, particularly with its Lifetime brand.

Programming: BBC America greenlit "Top Gear America," which will feature 3 new presenters, including actor William Fichtner. -- Bravo's new digital series features "Top Chef" fan fave Isaac Toups as he travels through the Caribbean on a Celebrity Cruise vacation. "Isaac Take On" is available now at bravotv.com. Celebrity has partnered with "Top Chef" since 2013, including for a "Top Chef at Sea" cruise experience. -- INSP Films "Savannah Sunrise," which debuted on INSP last year, will arrive in Walmart stores May 16. It will also be available via digital HD and on demand through Anchor Bay Ent. -- A+E ordered nonfiction series "The Lowe Files," following Rob Lowe and his two sons exploring unsolved mysteries.

People: Rita Lewis will step down as svp, govt relations for NCTA come June 1 to spend more time with her family. She will continue to work with the group in a part-time capacity as senior adviser of govt relations. Prior to joining NCTA, Lewis worked at The Washington Group for a decade, serving as partner and as the top Senate Democratic lobbyist for the firm. NCTA has enlisted Korn Ferry to conduct a search for a new SVP beginning immediately. -- Altice selected Bruno Zerbib as Altice Group CTO, responsible for leading global tech and infrastructure. He joins from Hewlett Packard. -- Univision's Beau Ferrari has joined NBCU Telemundo Enterprises. He will serve as evp, reporting to chmn Cesar Conde and overseeing finance, operations, corporate strategy and development. He's support the broadcast and cable nets along with digital, sports, news and partner across NBCU platforms to identify new opportunities in the marketplace. Ferrari was evp, corporate strategy and development at Univision. -- Discovery Comm appointed Joseph Ambeault as svp, product and technology. He previously was exec dir, consumer video product management at Verizon. -- BBC Worldwide North America promoted Sergei Kuharsky to evp, franchise and digital enterprises. He was most recently svp, strategy and business development.



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CFX TECH

Road to Better Performance

Last month, **Comcast** introduced Tech ETA, an app that provides a 30-minute window for technicians' arrival, ID information and a photo. That's a small example of ongoing efforts to upgrade MSOs' field services. Operators have spent the better part of the past two decades living down the legacy of missed service calls and generally poor and inefficient field practices. These efforts—aimed at cutting fuel use, identifying vehicle issues before they become serious problems and monitoring driver behavior alongside subscriber happiness—are benefiting from the emergence of the IoT and other high tech advances.

Tools available to operators include alerts that are sent if a driver consistently accelerates or decelerates quickly—behavior that is a sign of wasteful and/or dangerous driving. Geofencing can create alerts if a vehicle leaves a pre-defined area. Another can be sounded if the vehicle idles for a long period, which often indicates that the truck is left running during a call. Vehicle health can be monitored as well. IoT sensors can gauge when the truck is overweight or significantly underweight (which suggests that trips to the warehouse could be avoided with more careful planning). Sensors can “speak up” if systems are operating outside parameters and therefore on the road to failure. Less dramatically, gauging system performance can signal that a tune-up is needed. Doing so can wring fuel-wasting inefficiencies out of operations.

Susan Beardslee, **ABI Research's** senior analyst for Intelligent Transportation & eFreight, told **Cablefax** that useful tools include **Omnitracs** Intelligent Vehicle Gateway (for wireless connectivity, voice commands and linkage to back offices); **Noregon's** JPRO (for real time vehicle health, prognostics and safety monitoring); **Geotab** (a solution marketplace and platform for innovation); **Telogis' Spotlight** (an app that automatically curates analytics into dashboards and scorecards). “There are additional technology trends including critical event video linked to both back-office and the cloud as well as emerging biometrics like

wearable technologies,” she said. “Finally, mapping from providers such as HERE are rapidly evolving to support innovative location technologies.”

Another tool helping the fleet is smart parking—the ability to reserve parking spaces in urban areas, said **SCTE's** SVP/CTO *Chris Bastian*. Those services, he said, are launching in NY, Chicago, DC and perhaps other cities. It frees techs from looking for spaces—and cuts down on the parking tickets that are a cost of doing business in some systems. And **Derek DiGiacomo**, SCTE's senior director for Energy Management Programs and Business Continuity, noted that even battery technology is evolving. Advances will include enabling heavier vehicles to be powered in this way and for trucks to go farther between recharges. Ways to cut fuel use—which is both a pocketbook and PR winner—extend to routing. Advanced capabilities strategically dispatch field service personnel in such a way that returns to the warehouse are minimized. Indeed, routing capabilities are so sophisticated that techs can pick up needed parts from other techs if they are nearby—if sensors are placed on equipment so what is onboard is precisely known and proper communications channels are set up. — *Carl Weinschenk*

WEC Wrap-Up: **NCTC** hosted its Winter Educational Conference in New Orleans last week, boasting record attendance of nearly 800 operators, suppliers and tech partners. Now in its 16th year, the conference expanded from its tech focus to include a marketing component. NCTC announced two major initiatives at the conference: 1) An RFI/RFP process for scalable advanced video platforms to enable competitive features at much lower costs than existing delivery systems; 2) A business plan for a cloud-based VOD service that will enable more content, better quality, improved advertising revenues and lower costs—benefiting both content providers and operators. Both initiatives are key areas of focus for NCTC's technology division for 2017. Expect an update at NCTC and **ACA's** Independent Show, slated for July 23-26 in Indianapolis.

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