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What the Industry Reads First

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A New Frontier: 'Wild West' of VR Could Uncover Gold in Them Thar Hills

With virtual reality, the medium of television stands roughly where cinema did when audiences got their first glimpse of the Lumiere Brothers' short film of a train rushing toward the camera—and seemingly straight at them. The scene completely reordered their perspective and created a sensation. Before long they were lining up to pay a nickel in the first nickelodeons to have that same sensation again and again. The year was 1895. "It's the Wild West right now," said *Maureen Fan*, CEO of **Baobab Studios**, a producer of popular VR experiences like *Invasion!* and *Asteroid!* "Most things right now are geared toward hardcore gamers whose VR experiences are on the Oculus Rift, PlayStation and so on. Then you have documentaries about Syria. So in between, there is a huge opportunity to attract people with other stories. But there is no set structure yet. So there is still a lot of experimentation going on." Hulu is one of the companies committed to being part of the VR vanguard. "We're still in such early days with this medium," said *Noah Heller*, the company's vp, business development, emerging technology and virtual reality, a speaker at **Cablefax's** TV Innovation Summit on June 8 in NYC (www.cfxtvsummit.com). "That's what's exciting. The rules are being written now and we're able to be out in front helping to write them. And yet the sense of uncertainty and trial and error is not stopping companies from pouring many millions into the effort to crack VR and its many cousins—360 video and augmented reality. They know that consumers have started gravitating to VR systems at a time when traditional video subscriptions are eroding along with live ratings. One recent report from **CCS Insights** projects \$14.5 billion in spending on VR gear and content by 2020. Many programmers (among them **ESPN**, **Discovery Communications** and **Warner Bros.**) have been placing bets on VR. Fan's company, Baobab, drew \$31 million in initial funding from investors such as *Peter Chernin*, *Elisabeth Murdoch* and *Shari Redstone*. The trick, many in the VR game say, is not to just be a "me-too" player. "Every single idea that comes in the door here," Hulu's Heller says, "we ask a single test question: Could it be made in traditional 2D television? If the answer is yes, we don't do it." Fan describes many VR efforts as "tech demos that show off the sexiness of VR, but not a lot of story... Technology is there to service the art, not the other way around." In terms of how to structure and finance all of this blue-sky development, different companies have hit on different models. While Hulu does a range of projects, many initial VR outings have been co-productions with the likes of **LiveNation** and **National Geographic**. Discovery Communications sees potential in VR ads. The company was early



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to market with its VR app in 2015. Now featuring some 150 unique experiences, it has now been downloaded 3.6 million times, generating 127 million views. In this spring's upfront media buying marketplace, Discovery is seeing signs of a return on investment. Brands such as **Gillette**, **Toyota**, **Marriott** and **Dunkin' Donuts** have partnered with Discovery on branded VR content. Enough of those blue-chip advertisers in recent weeks have expressed support for the new platform that the company expects "TV-style" ads to be rotated into VR app programming by the fourth quarter. Technology enabling the same spots to play in VR and also on two-dimensional platforms will help companies tap that new revenue stream. "More and more clients are asking about VR, wanting to use VR in their campaigns. What we tell them is, 'We were early to this, and we feel we know what we're doing,'" says *Paul Guyardo*, the company's chief commercial officer. "We see it in the data. Purchase intent is growing after a consumer views our clients' content in VR content." - *Dade Hayes*

FCC April Meeting: FCC chmn *Ajit Pai* put several items on the April Open Meeting tentative agenda aimed at improving the nation's infrastructure. One such item is an NPRM geared toward facilitating the construction of wire networks and includes provisions such as seeking lower costs for pole attachments. A Notice of Inquiry questions whether state and local regulations are stifling network deployment. A similar NPRM focuses on wireless networks that aims to make it easier for the private sector to build 5G networks and seeks to expedite state and local approval of infrastructure deployment applications. Business data or special access is on the agenda in the form of a Report & Order, something former chmn *Tom Wheeler* tried to tackle but didn't get to. Pai's approach is likely to be more pleasing than Wheeler's plan to regulate competitive BDS players. "The extensive record compiled by the Commission's excellent staff shows substantial and growing competition in many areas of the country, thanks to new market entrants like cable companies. Where this competition exists, we will relax unnecessary regulation, thereby creating greater incentives for the private sector to invest in next-generation networks. But where competition is still lacking, we'll preserve regulations necessary to prevent anti-competitive price increases," Pai wrote in a blog Thursday. Non infrastructure items on the docket include considering an order on reconsideration to reinstate the UHF Discount, which the agency voted 3-4 to eliminate in September. Pai believes the agency eliminated the discount in the wrong way and is likely to lose litigation related to it. "I'm proposing that we hit the reset button, returning the rule to the way it was up until last fall. And then we'll launch a comprehensive review of the national ownership cap, including the UHF discount, later this year," he said.

Spectrum Auction Ends: The FCC announced the end of the assignment phase of the broadcast spectrum incentive auction, which brought in \$19.8bln. This is up from the \$19.6bln the forward auction brought, with the extra money coming as bidders placed more bids for specific spectrum blocks. All of this means we're getting closer to the Commission revealing bidder identities and the 39-month clock starting on the repacking process. *Gary Epstein*, chair of the FCC's Incentive Auction Task Force, said in a statement to expect results and info on the post-auction transition "in the next few weeks."

Pay as You Go Internet: Comcast has opened up its prepaid Internet service to customers across its footprint. Xfinity Prepaid Internet, which requires no credit check or annual contract, lets consumer refill service for either 7 or 30 days. Payments can be made online or at select Xfinity stores and participating **Boost Mobile** retail locations. The news expands a prepaid partnership with Boost, which currently has 800 stores in states such as PA, MI and TX participating in the program. Prepaid services are expected to be available in more than 4,000 Boost Mobile stores across Comcast's footprint by the end of the year.

Cartoon Upfront: Cartoon announced a new slate of content including six new series and seven returning hits, as well as more than 20 original mobile and console games. On tap is "Apple & Onion," another friendship comedy from "The Amazing World of Gumball" creator *George Gendi*. Cartoon also announced animated series "Summer Camp Island" based on an original short on the network featuring Oscar and his best friend Hedgehog.

Sports Emmys: ESPN Networks had the most Sports Emmy nominations of any network group, with 50, of which 33 went to the flagship network. ESPN's "SC Featured" got 10, second only to the 14 **NBC** received for the Rio Olympics. **NBC Sports Group** had 41 total noms, followed by 39 for **Fox Sports** and 20 for **Turner Sports**. *Brent Musburger* will be recognized for his almost 50 years in sports television with a Lifetime Achievement award at the May 9th awards show.

People: *Carrie Seifer*, most recently of **Mediavest**, joined **The Weather Company** as vp, CRO. In this new post, she'll lead all revenue efforts for the company, packaging B2B and B2C sales offering together.

PROGRAMMER'S PAGE

Power Couple

There are lot of docuseries on TV these days, but **TV One** thinks it has found something special with "The Manns," starring *David and Tamela Mann*, a couple best known for their work on *Tyler Perry* plays and movies as well as the TV series "Meet the Browns." "There are some moments that will have you crying. Of course, there are also some moments that will have you crying laughing," David told reporters recently. Based on that press call and constant jabs between family members, laughter is probably more likely. "Are you trying to say the Manns put the fun in dysfunction?" David joked. Maybe. In the premiere ep (Tuesday, 8pm ET), the family has to face their fears, which opens the door for plenty of emotions. It's not the first docuseries for the couple, who previously starred in **BET's** "It's a Mann's World." TV One has been running promos to let viewers know the family, who also juggles recording careers, is making the move to the network. "The Manns are coming to TV One," Tamela belts out in one spot before David interrupts to tell her she's a little flat. She responds in the ad similar to how she does on the press call and in real life: "Those in the room who've won a Grammy raise their hand? Oh, that would be me." Executive producer *Roger Bobb*, who also worked on "Meet the Browns," says he knew the couple had something as they worked on several non-reality projects. "We're doing a sitcom and the funniest stuff is happening with the cameras aren't rolling. Our thought was we have to show the world who the Manns really are," he said. David and Tamela have been married for 26 years, which Tamela attributes to being best friends who support one another 100%. "We're not trying to paint a picture here that we have the perfect family because we have issues just like everyone else," she said. "We just handle them a little different, without cutting each other's throat." — *Amy Maclean*

Reviews: "The Kennedys After Camelot," 9pm, Sunday, **Reelz**. Shortly after the incident at Chappaquiddick is portrayed during Reelz's "The Kennedys After Camelot," *Jackie Kennedy-Onassis (Katie Holmes)* confronts Sen *Ted Kennedy* (a horribly miscast *Matthew Perry*), slapping him across the face. "Jack would be so disappointed," she says to him. Yes, and it's likely Jack would also be disappointed in this soap opera-like, shallow, follow-on to "The Kennedys." At least Holmes, at times, looks like Jackie. At times is the important phrase here; Holmes's accent comes and goes, as does her portrayal of Jackie. In fairness, the dialogue is so weak, you feel for Holmes and the others who attempt to inject life into one-dimensional characters. Perry chooses to avoid affecting an accent, which is only one of many issues with his work in this sadly farcical flop. -- "Brockmire," series premiere, 10pm ET, Wednesday, **IFC**. Just in time for baseball season, *Hank Azaria* brings his *Funny or Die* announcer *Jim Brockmire* to TV in an all-star-caliber performance. The series is not quite at the level of excellent dark comedies like **FX's** "Baskets" or "Louie," but it's very strong. That's due mostly to Azaria's turn as an irreverent blowhard, an almost-pathetic soul surviving, barely, on baseball's lowest rung. Things improve quickly, though, when baseball-loving *Amanda Peet* sashays into the picture. — *Seth Arenstein*

Basic Cable Rankings (3/20/17-3/26/17)			
Mon-Sun Prime			
1	TBSC	1.4	3172
2	FOXN	1.1	2580
3	MSNB	0.8	1815
4	HGTV	0.7	1623
4	USA	0.7	1594
6	AMC	0.6	1461
7	CNN	0.5	1246
7	HIST	0.5	1207
7	TNT	0.5	1084
7	ID	0.5	1070
7	DISC	0.5	1062
7	DSE	0.5	96
13	FOOD	0.4	920
13	DSNY	0.4	916
13	A&E	0.4	853
13	TLC	0.4	811
13	HMM	0.4	629
18	FX	0.3	750
18	LIFE	0.3	744
18	HALL	0.3	742
18	NAN	0.3	732
18	TVLD	0.3	726
18	ADSM	0.3	705
18	ESPN	0.3	703
18	VH1	0.3	657
18	NKJR	0.3	620
18	BRAV	0.3	606
18	SYFY	0.3	606
18	SPK	0.3	584
18	INSP	0.3	534
18	DSJR	0.3	523
18	MLBN	0.3	476
33	APL	0.2	547
33	FRFM	0.2	504
33	WETV	0.2	494
33	MTV	0.2	491
33	TRAV	0.2	482
33	OWN	0.2	460
33	LMN	0.2	442
33	NGC	0.2	422
33	BET	0.2	404
33	CMDY	0.2	399
33	GSN	0.2	388
33	TRU	0.2	371

*Nielsen data, supplied by ABC/Disney, is based on coverage area of individual networks



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