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What the Industry Reads First

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Viacom Victory? Suddenlink Bringing Back At Least Some Viacom Nets

Viacom CEO *Bob Bakish* has made it clear since day one on the job that rebuilding relationships with distributors is a top priority. That seems to have paid off with **Suddenlink** relaunching **Viacom** nets nearly three years after dropping them in a heated, public fight. “Today’s news is important for many reasons. As you may recall, we lost Suddenlink distribution in 2014, so we’re thrilled to bring our brands back to many of our fans on those systems,” Bakish wrote in an internal memo to employees Thursday. “These agreements are also strong evidence that our new, client-first approach with distributors is having a meaningful impact. By working hand-in-hand with our affiliates, we can create innovative new products and packages that grow both their businesses and ours—and create great experiences for our audiences.” While the man running Viacom is different these days, so is the operator behind Suddenlink, with **Altice USA** now controlling both it and the former **Cablevision** systems. The agreement is more than a standard carriage deal, as it includes advanced advertising and additional rights for the distribution of multi-platform, digital and next-generation Viacom content, such as select virtual reality and 4K. It also marks an early carriage renewal for **Optimum** (nee Cablevision), which has had its own run-ins with the programmer over the years. An antitrust lawsuit Cablevision filed against Viacom was settled shortly before Altice closed on the purchase. That suit revolved around Viacom tying carriage of lesser-watched channels to must-have nets such as **MTV** and **Comedy Central**. Ironically, Bakish has introduced a new strategy for the programmer that has it focusing resources on six flagship nets, many of which are the same networks Cablevision dubbed must-have. No word on which channels are headed Suddenlink’s way, with Altice saying it will communicate with customers over changes in their lineups in the coming months. Thursday’s announcement says “a number” of Viacom nets will return to Suddenlink, and uses the language “premier networks” to describe the early Optimum renewal. That sort of language combined with Viacom’s focus on six flagship channels is a flag to **Bernstein Research** analysts. “It seems pretty clear the template for future Viacom renewals will be limited to a small number of linear networks,” a research note said, pointing to Charter moving those six nets—**Nick**, **MTV**, **VH1**, **Spike**, **BET** and **Comedy Central**—to a higher-priced tier for new customers. “Now Viacom seems to have proactively agreed to a narrow distribution footprint with Altice. Why, then, would Comcast or DirecTV or any of the larger MVPDs agree to

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broader distribution of networks that Viacom themselves have deemed 'non-core'? If one believes like we do that the 'non-flagship' networks generate something on the order of magnitude of \$1bn EBITDA, that will be hard (impossible?) to preserve." With neither company talking yet about what channels and packages are involved, it's too early to call whether Bakish or *Tom Gorke*, who replaced longtime distribution head *Denise Denson* late last year, will be lauded for the deal. The one certainty is that this truly is a different Viacom.

What about Viacom and Cable One?: Before **Suddenlink** dropped **Viacom** networks, there was **Cable One**. The cable operator, which was already pursuing a strategy of prioritizing higher-margin HSD and business services over video, dropped Viacom channels in April 2014. It doesn't sound like they are headed back soon. "We replaced those channels with a number of new channels our customers had been requesting—including **BBC America, Hallmark Channel, Nat Geo, Investigation Discovery, TV One, Sundance** and more—and our customers have been very happy with those new channels. As a result, we have not been in talks with Viacom to add them back into our channel line-up," a spokesperson said. Suddenlink also took the replacement channel approach, adding about 20 nets, including **OWN, Hallmark Movies & Mysteries** and **GSN**, in their place.

CEO Wanted at TiVo: **TiVo** pres/CEO *Tom Carson* plans to step down, agreeing to remain in his role until a successor is appointed. He'll then serve in an advisory capacity to the board and new CEO to help with the transition. Carson has served as pres/CEO since December 2011, when the company was then called **Rovi**. One thing he hasn't been able to secure (yet) is a new deal with **Comcast**. The two are facing off in a patent dispute that the **International Trade Commission** is considering. When asked about the ITC judgment during an investor conference this week, Carson emphasized that it isn't the "end-all be-all." "This is one step along the way. At this point it's going to be very hard for Comcast, I think, to convince a jury to say that they don't need a license. One, because they had a license before for 12 years. Two, everybody else in the US is licensed including the biggest company, which is **AT&T**, and **DISH**, who's also a very material player here." TiVo management said the company will continue the legal process until Comcast takes a license, but it's hoping to go from legal to commercial conversations. TiVo's board has retained **Spencer Stuart** to assist in the search for a new CEO.

Univision Remembers: **Univision** pres/CEO *Randy Falco* made a statement regarding *Jerry Perenchio*, who passed away May 23. Perenchio, who "founded and built Univision from the ground up" served at one time as the net's chmn/CEO. Falco described him as a "media trailblazer, true legend and inspiration to everyone who was lucky enough to meet or work with him." He added that Perenchio had incredible foresight, compassion and respect for the Hispanic American community, which "sought to be represented and that had never before been served in such a meaningful way."

Back in Time: Sports-focused virtual MVPD **fuboTV** has launched a new "Lookback" feature that allows users to view sports and entertainment programming aired over the past three days. The feature is available for most channels on the streaming service and can be found through its electronic program guide.

Programming: Aspire will launch "No Cover," a series of one-hour concert specials highlighting break-out artists that align with its brand (June 20 premiere). As part of Black Music Month in June, the net also will roll out on-air vignettes on digital companion series "Aspire Jam Sessions." -- **HBO** renewed "Silicon Valley" for a fifth season, though co-star *T.J. Miller* reportedly will not return. The premium net also reupped "Veep" for a seventh run. -- **History** greenlit original scripted drama "Blue Book," which chronicles the **US Air Force's** investigations into UFOs in the '50s and '60s, for 10 episodes. The **A+E Studios** production is the fourth original scripted series to join History's programming lineup. -- **A+E** will premiere documentary-style programs about a pair of rival hip-hop icons in late June. Three-hour doc "Biggie: The Life of Notorious B.I.G.," the first project under the relaunched "Biography" banner, will debut in two installments on June 28 and 29. The first ep in a six-part series called "Who Killed Tupac?" will debut following the conclusion of the "Biggie" series on June 29. -- **Disney** renewed "Andi Mack" for a sophomore season. Through seven original telecasts, it has rated well in several demos among girls 6-14. -- **CNBC** will premiere a new season of "Jay Leno's Garage," beginning on June 28 at 9pm ET with back-to-back eps. Celebrity guests for the 16-ep season include *George W. Bush, Wanda Sykes* and *J.B. Smoove*. -- **INSP** will premiere "The Cowboy Way: Alabama" on August 10. The docu-series, which follows three modern-day cowboys, is on board for nine eps.

PROGRAMMER'S PAGE

Close Up

What happens when you take an adventure cameraman and put him in front of the lens? That's what **Animal Planet** viewers are about to find out with six-part "Expedition Mungo," premiering Sunday at 10pm. Mungo—when you're a cool, action videographer you don't need a last name—has worked with the likes of *Bear Grylls* and spent more than 20 years traveling the world. Now he's getting the chance to explore the tales he couldn't tell while behind the camera. "In my travels, I've heard various stories about so-called mythological creatures that have attacked people. I always thought it would be fascinating to pick up on these rumors and investigate them myself," he said. Is there really a massive lizard in Liberia that looks like a dinosaur thought to be extinct? What is this dragon-like creature terrorizing a village in Borneo? Mungo's not going to spoil anything, but he did leave us with the tantalizing tease that the show "definitely got a payoff." Whether the viewers believe the various stories is up to them, he said, stressing that the people he's speaking to genuinely believe in these creatures. "I certainly went in there and gave them the benefit of the doubt, and quite often I was quite convinced they were probably telling the truth," he told **CFX**. Mungo hasn't had much trouble adjusting to being in front of the camera. After all, he's usually only about six feet away from the TV host when he's filming. "Also because I work with cameras, I don't get freaked out by them." But is it hard not to try direct the camera crew when filming? It helped that Mungo got to choose *Rob Taylor* as director of photography, someone he knows well. "Actually, I think it was stranger for him because he's worked for me before, so to effectively be filming your boss is a bit weird." — *Amy Maclean*

Reviews: "Gap Year," Friday, **Hulu**. Is it too early for a revival of the summer vacation film? Not for us. Make it a TV series, situate it in China, populate it with college-age American and British tourists, add good writing and you get the gist of "Gap Year," a delightful romp with pleasant actors, wonderful footage and *Janeane Garofalo*. The main protagonists are two Brits, who ostensibly are in China for "a lads' trip," though it's not quite that. University student Dylan has an ulterior motive for being in Asia. In ep 1 the lads meet a pair of American co-eds and a hanger-on and the group is set. Fun begins immediately. -- "Genius," 9pm, Tues, **Nat Geo**. We vowed to return to this series in our initial review four weeks ago. Glad we did. While it's still a bit thin on science content, at least there's some edification happening. And portraying *Einstein* as a person with emotions, faults and, of course, a tremendous intellect, makes the famous physicist more real than a name in a book. The production values remain excellent, as is the acting. -- "Kingdom," season 3 premiere, 8pm, Wed, **Audience**. In a drama series about mixed martial arts, the fighting has to seem real. It does. The drama surrounding the fights is less solid, but watchable. — *Seth Arenstein*

Basic Cable Rankings (05/15/17-05/21/17)			
Mon-Sun Prime			
1	TNT	1.4	3163
2	FOXN	1	2209
3	MSNB	0.8	1857
3	ESPN	0.8	1719
5	CNN	0.6	1426
5	USA	0.6	1399
5	TBSC	0.6	1310
5	HGTV	0.6	1306
9	DISC	0.5	1095
9	HIST	0.5	1053
9	NBCS	0.5	1030
12	ID	0.4	898
12	DSNY	0.4	860
12	DSE	0.4	80
15	FOOD	0.3	802
15	FX	0.3	745
15	A&E	0.3	740
15	HALL	0.3	731
15	TLC	0.3	728
15	NAN	0.3	722
15	ADSM	0.3	711
15	AMC	0.3	692
15	TVLD	0.3	652
15	LIFE	0.3	624
15	FS1	0.3	591
15	FRFM	0.3	584
15	HMM	0.3	571
15	NKJR	0.3	562
15	INSP	0.3	542
15	DSJR	0.3	540
31	VH1	0.2	545
31	BRAV	0.2	518
31	APL	0.2	490
31	SYFY	0.2	488
31	SPK	0.2	476
31	LMN	0.2	463
31	CMDY	0.2	460
31	TRAV	0.2	418
31	WETV	0.2	392
31	NGC	0.2	392
31	OWN	0.2	387
31	MTV	0.2	361
31	GSN	0.2	349
31	WGNA	0.2	349

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



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