

Cablefax Daily™

Thursday — August 17, 2017

What the Industry Reads First

Volume 28 / No. 157

Earning His Pinstripes: YES Network's Litner Puts Comcast Ordeal in the Past

YES Network pres Jon Litner joined the RSN last September in the midst of a highly publicized carriage standoff with **Comcast**, his former employer, and with the Yankees nearing the end of an uncharacteristic non-playoff season. Since taking the reins, he has helped YES move past the Comcast situation, achieve carriage on every major virtual MVPD and monetize digital offerings. Plus, while the team on the field deserves credit, the 57% YOY boost in viewership for Yankees telecasts so far this season also reflects well on the new leader. In a recent sit-down with **Cablefax**, Litner discussed the state of the RSN business and takeaways from his first (almost-)year on the job. **What are the challenges for RSNs with the emergence of virtual MVPDs and smaller bundles?** RSNs are still very valuable, and I think they have great appeal. RSNs in big media markets that have a strong tradition of winning and ownership that's committed to investing back into the team with a strong, passionate fan base, great history, with seasonality—a winter team combined with a spring team—and other programming that resonates, you are better positioned than if you don't have that. We are fortunate, I would say, Exhibit A of being in a strong position. Now that the team is back to its traditional winning ways, we're captivating the city, captivating not just the baseball audience but, I would say, the sports audience, and frankly drawing in lots of casual fans as well. **By the time you got here, the Comcast standoff was well under way. What was your role as the new network president given that Fox was handling negotiations?** [Fox Networks pres of distribution] **Mike Biard** and his team were terrific. They drove the negotiations. We were, in many respects, along for the ride because of other Fox programming entities—we had been out of contract with Comcast, they were at the tail end of their agreements with Comcast. What I wanted to do was make sure that once we were back on, and once we had reached the agreement with Comcast, which I was confident we were going to do, that immediately we could talk about building value together because I felt like sports can work really well if you can build the relationship with the folks at Comcast who are responsible for offering it to their customers in their regions. Having been at Comcast for so many years, I knew all those people, and I wanted to make sure we rebuilt those relationships, that we worked hard to make sure that we brought value to them and that we could support their efforts to market the product to their customers, and we talked a lot about that. **How have you managed to monetize digital content like**

Congratulate the industry's most influential minorities and promote your brand in Cablefax's Diversity Issue

Ad Space deadline: August 30

Artwork due: September 5

Book Your Ad Placement Today! Advertising Contacts:

Rich Hauptner | 203.899.8460 | rhauptner@accessintel.com

Olivia Murray | 301.354.2010 | omurray@accessintel.com

www.Cablefax.com



30595

CABLEFAX DAILY (ISSN 1069-6644) is published daily by Access Intelligence, LLC ● www.cablefax.com ● 301.354.2101 ● Editorial Director: Amy Maclean, 301.354.1760, amaclean@accessintel.com ● Publisher: Michael Grebb, 323.380.6263, mgrebb@accessintel.com ● Community Editor: Alex Silverman, 212.621.4951, asilverman@accessintel.com ● Dir. of Bus Dev.: Rich Hauptner, 203.899.8460, rhauptner@accessintel.com ● Acct. Exec: Olivia Murray, 301.354.2010, omurray@accessintel.com ● VP Marketing: Amy Jefferies, 301.354.1699, ajefferies@accessintel.com ● Marketing Manager: Charlotte Clay, 301.354.1710, cclay@accessintel.com ● Production Manager: Joann Fato, jfato@accessintel.com ● Diane Schwartz, SVP Media Comms Group, dschwartz@accessintel.com ● Group Subs or Subscription Questions, Client Services: 301.354.2101, clientservices@accessintel.com ● Annual subscription price: \$1,699.97/year ● Access Intelligence, LLC, 9211 Corporate Blvd., 4th Floor, Rockville, MD 20850

your pre-game production meetings on Facebook Live? We've always said, 'Let's figure out ways we can connect to our audience using Facebook or using Twitter or using YouTube or whatever the social platform is.' So, we sat down and discussed different ways in which we could showcase our great content to an audience and give them access that they otherwise would never have. We thought, 'Let's give that audience the ability to lean into and attend our production meeting for every series and, on Facebook Live, have them comment based on what they are hearing, so they get a sense of what the storylines are and give us some feedback, some of which we may actually use in our telecast.' The content was so captivating, and we were seeing real numbers being generated for our audience, so we actually went to Papa John's and said, 'We'd like you to sponsor this,' and they did so. That's on top of a dozen sponsors of our [in-market] streaming product on Fox Sports Go. We've had a lot of success selling on these digital platforms because there's a real audience for them. People are leaning into that product versus the traditional audience, which is a little bit more passive. *[See much more from our discussion with Jon Litner on [Cablefax.com](#)].*

Extended Release: **CSG Systems International** and **DISH** extended their partnership for four years through the end of 2021. As a result, CSG will continue to provide DISH with revenue management services and customer care support. DISH will also expand its use of CSG's digital services platform, Ascendon.

Name Blame: Tampa-based **Spectrum Video Productions** is seeking an injunction against **Charter Communications** that would prevent the nation's second-largest cable operator from using the name "Spectrum" for its systems. The production group, which has been around for 28 years, claimed in a suit filed last Friday that it has been impacted by negative comments and reviews from Charter customers mistaking the production company for the cable company. SVP also asserted its own clients and vendors have also expressed confusion. In addition to an injunction, SVP is seeking monetary damages, the cancellation of Charter's registrations of marks that include "Spectrum" and attorneys' fees.

Discovery, Amazon Team Up: **Discovery Communications** reached a deal with **Amazon** that allows Prime members in Germany and Austria to access Discovery-owned **Eurosport's** live content, including exclusive Friday night **Bundesliga** soccer matches, for €4.99/month (\$5.83). Prime members in those countries will also be able to access Grand Slam Tennis, **MotoGP** and the 2018 PyeongChang Olympic Games live and on demand. Eurosport and Discovery channels launched on Amazon in the UK earlier this year.

Virtual Resurrection: Social VR service **AltspaceVR** on Tuesday announced it is "deep in discussions" to ensure it remains operational. The news comes weeks after the company, which was backed by a group of investors that included **Comcast Ventures**, said it would shut down after funding fell through. The company raised \$10.3mln in its Series A funding round back in 2015 and said late last month it was close to securing more funding. When that didn't materialize, the company said, previous investors were "reluctant to fund us further."

Weekly Ratings Notes: It's beginning to look a lot like football season, as **NFL Network** cracked the top five most-viewed cable nets in primetime last week with an average of 1.3mln viewers. The league-owned net averaged 1.6mln viewers for its seven live telecasts of preseason games, led by Friday night's Giants-Steelers matchup (1.9mln). -- Topping NFL Network in primetime last week were **Fox News** (2.1mln), **MSNBC** (1.8mln), **USA** (1.4mln) and **HGTV** (1.4mln). In addition to winning primetime among basic cable nets for the 12th straight week, Fox News also came in at No. 1 in total-day viewership for the 32nd straight week with an average of 1.4mln viewers. The rest of the top five in total-day audience was **Nickelodeon** (1.2mln), **MSNBC** (962K), **Disney** (849K) and **Adult Swim** (817K).

Diversity Week Guests: **Altice USA** chmn/CEO *Dexter Goei* will be a special guest at the 2017 **Cablefax** Breakfast Honoring the Most Influential Minorities in Cable on Sept 26, which kicks off the 31st annual **NAMIC** conference in New York. -- *Katie Couric* is set to speak during the opening session of the 2017 **WICT** Leadership Conference on Sept 25 in New York. The leadership development event runs through Sept 26, featuring interactive workshops and expert panels.

People: **Apple** has hired former **WGN America** pres/CEO *Matt Cherniss* to serve as its head of US programming, according to *Variety*. The *Wall Street Journal* reported the company has set a budget of about \$1bln to acquire and produce original content over the next year. -- **USTelecom** has found a new svp, cybersecurity, in *Robert Mayer*. Mayer joined the association more than ten years prior to this promotion. He is now tasked with leading cyber and national security policy as well as coordinating broadband regulatory initiatives.

Think about that for a minute...

AMP

Commentary by Steve Effros

You may not know it, but you're exposed to it all the time. That's assuming you use **Google** search. But since about 70 percent of all searches in the US (more than 90 percent in Europe) are done through the Google gateway, it's a pretty good bet that you've seen the little "lightning" symbol and "AMP" at the beginning of a lot of the sites you've selected. That's even more the case if you use Google News, where the carousel of news items is dominated by AMP-enabled stories.

So what is AMP? Well, the letters stand for Accelerated Mobile Pages, and in theory it sounds good. The idea is to set some standards, or more accurately some restrictions on how an initial page on a web story is designed so that it loads faster on a mobile device.

Now we all want our devices to work faster, right? That's what Google says it wants too, so it started pushing "AMP". The bottom line; if you adhere to the Google guidelines, which include what formats you can use and how much data on the ultimate consumer Google will give back to you, then your web story will go to the top of the list, the front of the line, be faster in delivery. In fact, it won't be delivered from your server at all. It will come directly from Google!

For those of us in the broadband delivery business, this sounds a great deal like the boogeyman some folks want to banish with the likes of "net neutrality" rules. It's a "fast lane," "priority delivery" and all those other evils. But Google is doing it every day. Just click on Google News and take a look at all the AMP-enabled publishers who have caved in to Google's enticing offer of being put at the front of the line.

It fascinates me even more that the very publications constantly writing righteous editorials in favor of net



neutrality because "everyone must be treated exactly the same" on the web are the same ones taking full advantage of AMP. The result, of course, is that they get priority.

Google allows anyone to meet its restrictions and get on the list, and Google also claims not to have anything to do with the content or the authors. But when "priority" is bestowed, it certainly appears that Google is in some way endorsing those stories over others. That's one of the ways "fake news" sites gained prominence.

So is AMP a good idea or not? Well, certainly more efficient mobile delivery is a good idea. But should it go through one company which then claims control of (gets paid with) the user data for the first page delivered? When the company is as dominant as Google, is it a good idea to let them dictate a "must use" set of requirements? Isn't this the very "priority" that's been so vociferously condemned by the likes of Susan, Gigi and Tom (reminds me of Peter, Paul and Mary, but in this case it's *Susan Crawford, Gigi Sohn and Tom Wheeler*)?

Are they going to come out and forcefully push back against the Google juggernaut that is clearly using AMP as one more tool to cement its domination (look at the numbers, no ISP comes close)? Or are they going to say that AMP stands for "ain't my problem?"

If "priority" is a real issue at all, then those pushing for net neutrality are going to have to push against Google and AMP too.

Steve

T:202-630-2099
steve@effros.com

(Steve Effros was President of CATA for 23 years and is now an advisor and consultant to the cable industry. His views do not necessarily reflect the views of Cablefax.)

SCTE • ISBE

**ENHANCE YOUR
CAREER & EXPERTISE**
UPGRADE TO EXECUTIVE MEMBERSHIP

Learn more at scte.org/membership

Benefits of Executive Membership include:

- :: LiveLearning Webinars™ for Executives – these quarterly webinars contain advanced content designed specifically for executives and feature leading business and industry experts
- :: Recognition through an executive listing in your member profile and the SCTE • ISBE member directory
- :: Invitations to national and local VIP networking events
- :: Cable-Tec Expo® – advanced access to executive benefits and invitations to VIP events
- :: Thought-leadership opportunities to author new content

Take your career to the next level. Become an SCTE • ISBE Executive Member today.

© 2017 Society of Cable Telecommunications Engineers, Inc. All rights reserved. | scte.org • isbe.org