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What the Industry Reads First

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Covering Harvey: Five Questions with Weather Channel Live Programming Chief

The images and stories coming out of Southeast Texas from Harvey are heartbreaking. Cable networks and broadcasters have shown countless dramatic rescues, with journalists even participating in several themselves. We spoke with Weather Channel svp, live programming Nora Zimmett about covering a storm like this. "The stress and fear that all these folks are going through is something I can't imagine," she said. "That's something news networks are seeing all across America. I have to take my hat off to some of the affiliates there, like KHOU whose own broadcast centers went underwater and yet struggled to stay on the air. That's just journalism at its best." Here are some edited excerpts from our conversation.

What are your steps to prepare and get everyone positioned when you see an epic storm like this coming? Our meteorologists drive the train of what they think is going to happen and where. We started working right away to shore up our field crews and work out logistics on the ground in Texas.

Then we start scheduling here back at the headquarters—how long do we need to go for programming, what does that look like, what are we going to preempt, how many hours should we be doing, should we be going overnight.

With live programming, do you have guidelines for a storm like this? Absolutely. We have very strict protocol about the do's and don'ts of being not only in a storm, but in floodwaters. Floodwaters can be just as dangerous as a storm coming ashore. Every rule we give to the public, such as not driving through floodwaters, we make sure our crews maintain. We sent an advance team in to set up supply stations for them to make sure they didn't run out of food or gas or water. And they have mandatory check-ins at certain times of the day with us. We want to make sure we know where everyone is at all times.

With some of the things they are dealing with, do you provide any sort of counseling? We provide counseling for all our teams in the field when they return. I myself was in the field for Hurricane Katrina for quite a long time, and nothing really prepares you for seeing your first dead body. I was with Fox News at the time, and they were wonderful about providing that kind of counseling. I strongly recommend any reporter, producer or cameraman in the field who has seen what these folks have been seeing that often doesn't make it on camera—some of the most horrific images don't make it to the public—I strongly urge them to seek counseling. That kind of post traumatic syndrome may not show up until you least expect it.



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any things with distributors to reach out to the community? We have been in close contact with the distributors in the community to help them get the message out of how people can access them online and with streaming. When they have community care initiatives, we make sure to add them to our banners in broadcast and on to the live ticker. We're doing everything we can from a public service perspective to make sure that people who are impacted, who are out of their homes and can't get cable, that there are other ways they can get news and information. **Any idea of how long you may have folks in Texas?** To be honest, we're looking at some slightly nerve-wracking forecasts coming in. As Harvey is making his exit up the Mississippi valley, we're looking at another storm potentially developing in the Gulf by early next week... And that does not include tropical storm Irma, which is most certainly to become a hurricane [since our interview, it was upgraded to a hurricane]. The question there is not how strong Irma is going to be, but whether or not the steering patterns will bring it to the US. We're very concerned and what we're trying to do is rest teams now to basically go back into Texas and other parts of the coastal US next week.

Retrans Update: Heading into the weekend, **AT&T** and **Dispatch** extended retrans talks. **AT&T U-verse** and **DirecTV's** contract with the broadcaster expired Friday (**CFX**, 9/1). **Raycom** also has extended negotiations with DirecTV after their current retrans deal expired on Thursday.

FCC Doings: September's **FCC** Open Meeting, the first with five commissioners seated, was changed from Sept 28 to Sept 26 to accommodate a commissioner's schedule. Because of the timing of the change, the commissioners have agreed to publicly release the meeting items on the originally scheduled date of Thursday, Sept 7. -- FCC chmn **Ajit Pai** added Valdosta, GA, city manager **Larry Hanson** to the Broadband Deployment Advisory Committee. Hanson was already a member of a BDAC working group. **NARUC** has urged the Pai to add more local govt representation to the committee. Pai also announced that BDAC member **Elizabeth Bowles**, pres of AR-based wireless ISP **Aristotle**, will chair the committee going forward. She replaces **Quintillion** CEO Elizabeth Pierce, who the FCC said resigned from the committee for personal reasons.

Harvey Help: **Charter** announced a \$350K additional cash contribution to **Rebuilding Together** to support relief and home repairs needed because of Hurricane Harvey. Rebuilding Together is Charter's partner in its Spectrum Housing Assist philanthropic program, which has the goal of improving 25K homes by 2020 to ensure Americans live in safe and healthy homes. "Following a natural disaster, our low-income and disadvantaged neighbors are all too often omitted from long-term recovery efforts. With the support of Charter, we can ensure people in the Gulf Coast who need our help the most are back on their feet in a timely manner," said Rebuilding Together pres/CEO **Caroline Blakely** in Friday's announcement. Charter is also offering \$1mln in PSAs to air at no cost to assist organizations with fundraising and awareness efforts in their work to help residents in Southeast Texas. -- **Univision**, whose roots trace back to San Antonio, TX, has committed \$500K in support, including a \$250K cash pledge to the **American Red Cross, Catholic Charities USA** and **Texas Diaper Bank**. It also will donate a portion of proceeds from the Oct 8 "Amor a La Música" live concert in Miami to benefit victims of Harvey. -- **Tribune** will give \$100K to the Hurricane Harvey Relief Fund. Additionally, Tribune stations across the country have raised nearly \$400K in cash donations.

Editor's Note: Have a safe and happy Labor Day weekend! Your next issue will arrive Tuesday evening.

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