

Cablefax Daily™

Friday — March 23, 2018

What the Industry Reads First

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Byron's Buy: First the Weather, then the World?

It's been three years since **Verizon** dropped **The Weather Channel** from its **Fios** lineup. Maybe the network's new owner will help it reconsider. "Verizon is a phenomenal organization. They launched me!" *Byron Allen* said in an interview with **Cablefax**, shortly after it was announced his **Entertainment Studios** had acquired the network from **Blackstone Group**, **Bain Capital** and **Comcast**. Financials weren't disclosed, but sources put it at about \$300mln. Verizon Fios was the first distributor for Entertainment Studios' portfolio of channels. "They turned on six networks in a single day. We made history—then they launched our seventh network **Justice Central**," which is now in 40mln homes, he said. "They are the first ones I want to sit down with because I consider them family. They put us in business, so we'll see. I think there's an opportunity with new ownership to have a good, healthy discussion." Comcast-Blackstone-Bain purchased Weather Channel for about \$3.5bln in 2008, selling the digital assets (including Weather.com) in 2015 to **IBM** in a deal the WSJ valued at around \$2bln. There have been a number of reported interested buyers in Weather Channel over the years, including possibly **Sinclair** (the broadcaster didn't return requests for comment). Allen said Entertainment Studios' purchase came down to a "very competitive bidding war" on the last day with a couple of other buyers, but he had no details on who else was involved. He credits **Encompass** CEO *Chris Walters*, formerly COO of **The Weather Company**, for getting him interested in the property. "It was something we've been pursuing for a while." With the deal done, the media mogul says he's just getting started. "This is the first [big acquisition], and I think you'll see more of the same. Media companies are our core competency," he said, with his Entertainment Studios prepared to invest billions in the next five years on assets primarily in the US but also around the world. In addition to Justice Central, the network suite includes **ES.TV**, **Comedy.TV**, **Cars.TV**, **MyDestination.tv**, **Pets.tv**, **Recipe.TV** and **Automotive.TV**. He paints the acquisition of Weather as a win for the industry, with it keeping the largest cable network not owned by a conglomerate in an independent's hands. "MVP-Ds... are going to need independents like us, who can bring them greater efficiency and who aren't out there with a portfolio of cable networks charging them \$5-\$10 per sub," he said. "As time goes on, we're going to become the oxygen in the room because they can't continue to pay the [broadcast] stations, sports rights and then pay the very,



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An outdoor lounge area at sunset. In the foreground, there is a concrete fire pit with a fire burning inside. To the left and right of the fire pit are several wicker armchairs with white cushions. In the background, there is a green lawn, a row of palm trees, and the ocean under a sunset sky.

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very high fees for a bundle of cable networks that aren't moving the needle for them." However, some have argued that Weather Channel is past its prime, with viewers able to turn online for the weather needs. Allen is having none of it. "The app can give you the temperature, but the app can't give you the coverage," he said. "You have one of the greatest collection of meteorologists who are in the field, giving you that information in real time." Weather Channel CEO *Dave Shull* will be staying on, with Allen not planning on making big changes—just more investment to encourage growth. "Right now, it's national and local. We're looking to invest to take it globally because the weather is worldwide."

Passing the Omnibus: The House passed the omnibus spending bill Thursday, which provides funding for the post-incentive auction repack and includes the reauthorization of the **FCC** for the first time in 28 years. The bill broken down appropriates \$600mln for the spectrum auction repack fund in 2018, with up to \$350mln headed to full-power stations' relocation, \$150mln for low-power TV station and translator relocation, up to \$50mln for radio stations' expenses and \$50mln for consumer education. Some \$400mln in funding is set aside for FY 2019. The omnibus also appropriates \$7.5mln to **NTIA** and supports the expansion of broadband, streamlining the regulatory and permit process for infrastructure deployment. "Individually, each of these bills are important, but collectively we've passed a package of bills that will empower consumers and benefit patients and families across the country," **House Energy and Commerce** chmn *Greg Walden* (R-OR) said. **NAB** and **NCTA** applauded the passing of the bill, which now awaits approval from the Senate before being signed by President *Trump*.

FCC Recap: The **FCC** voted 3-2 Thursday to adopt rules to streamline the wireless infrastructure siting review process, despite concerns raised by Dems on the environmental impact. Commish *Mignon Clyburn* said that while she strongly supports efforts to facilitated 5G deployment, she wanted the vote delayed to ensure that the environment and historic sites are protected. *Jessica Rosenworcel* said the item cuts tribal authorities from their rightful role of reviewing wireless facilities. The new rules exclude small wireless facilities deployed on non-Tribal lands from National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review, concluding that these facilities are not "undertakings" or "major federal actions." Small wireless facilities deployments continue to be subject to currently applicable state and local government approval requirements.

March For Our Lives: **MTV** is teaming up with the **NAACP** Youth & College Division and local youth organizations to send 17 buses of young people from communities affected by gun violence to DC Saturday for the March or Our Lives. The 17 buses represent the lives lost in the recent Parkland shooting. Celebrities including *Jennifer Lopez*,

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Lady Gaga and Jimmy Fallon have offered their support to the students making the journey from Atlanta, Chicago and other cities. MTV News and Social will provide live coverage from the March, which will appear on MTV throughout the day. -- **Univision** is also backing the March for Our Lives, supporting the rallies taking place in more than 800 cities across the globe. UCI is hosting a voter registration hub at Georgetown Law School in partnership with **Mi Familia Vota** and **Voto Latino**, who will also train volunteers to be stationed along the parade route and share voter education information. Messages of civic participation will be shared on UCI's digital and social media platforms.

Looking for Answers: Sens Ed Markey (D-MA) and Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) wrote a letter to **Facebook** CEO Mark Zuckerberg demanding answers to questions regarding his role in the collection of personal data by **Cambridge Analytica**. The pair specifically are looking for insight into Facebook's internal policies for the approval and governance of apps that are authorized to collect personal information, to what extent apps have accessed data regarding users and their friends and the social media network's approach to auditing those apps. Markey spoke out on the issue earlier this week, calling on the **Commerce** cmte to hold a hearing on the situation.

After Graduation: **SCTE-ISBE** launched an alumni organization to build the career success of graduates of the SCTE-ISBE Leadership Institute at Tuck Executive Education at Dartmouth. John Hewitt, svp, broadband products group and North America sales for **Alpha Technologies**, will act as the first president of the organization. He'll oversee a board of directors of SCTE-ISBE-Tuck alumni who will be tasked with executing the association's objectives and organizing alumni events at **Cable-Tec Expo 2018**.

Hitting the Green: **DirectTV** is broadcasting the upcoming **PGA Tour's** The Masters live in 4K HDR for the first time. Coverage will begin April 5-6 from 10am-6:45pm across holes, continuing April 7-8 from 12pm-6:30pm. DirectTV also announced plans to continue these efforts into the **MLB** season, airing more than 25 regular season games in 4K HDR via MLB Network Showcase, starting March 30.

Adaptive Spirit: **NBC's** Carolyn Manno is set to emcee the closing gala of **Adaptive Spirit's** 23rd Annual Event supporting the alpine, nordic, snowboard and biathletes of Paralympic Team USA. The gala follows three days of special panel discussions and meetings on adaptive technology in cable and telecom. The closing gala will be held in the Alpine Hall at the Hotel Talisa in Vail on April 7 at 7pm.

More For Fubo: **fuboTV** added six more stations to its platform, bringing its grand total to 239, including those affiliated with **CBS**, **FOX** or **NBC**. CBS additions include KCOY (San Luis Obispo-Santa Barbara-San Marcos, CA) and KION (Monterey-Salinas, CA) while WDKY (Lexington, KY), WSBT (South Bend, IN), WSMH (Flint, MI) and WVAH (Charleston-Huntington, WV) represent the FOX camp. FuboTV now has Fox coverage in 83%, NBC in 72% and CBS in 67% of US households.

Ratings: March Madness has once again caught the US by storm, with **Turner Sports** and **CBS Sports** 2018 NCAA Tournament coverage delivering an average minute audience of 8.2mln (+4%) viewers across all platforms, including **TBS**, **CBS**, **TNT**, **truTV** and **NCAA March Madness Live**. Official March Madness social accounts have been a part of the action, garnering 77mln impressions (+16%) across **Twitter** and **Facebook** with video views up 68% across Facebook, Twitter and **Instagram**. -- **BBC America's** "Premier League Darts" has found a dedicated fan base, reaching more than 1.3mln viewers a week on the linear network and online. BBCA's first tournament, "World Darts Championship" was the highest-rated darts tournament on US TV in 3 years, averaging 111K viewers across its five telecasts.

Programming: **AMC** is releasing all episodes of its latest drama "The Terror" available to AMC Premiere customers timed to its linear premiere on March 26 at 9pm. Premiere is available to all Comcast subs who get AMC for an additional \$4.99/month. AMC Premiere, which offers ad-free versions of series and exclusive footage, recently inked a deal that will make it available to **YouTube TV** customers in the coming months. -- **UP TV** has proclaimed "Easter Lives Here" by presenting a slate of classic and contemporary films from Palm Sunday on March 25 through Easter Sunday on April 1. The highlight of the festivities will be the cable television premiere of "Risen" at 7pm on March 25, telling the story of the Resurrection through the eyes of a non-believer. Other film offerings include "Heaven is For Real" (March 31, 7pm) and "Mom's Night Out" (April 1, 7pm).

People: **CMT** boosted Morgan Selzer to svp of development, effective immediately. First joining CMT in 2014, Selzer now leads all facets of the network's development strategy. She is based in L.A., but will be frequently traveling to Nashville.

PROGRAMMER'S PAGE

Doomed Expedition

When it comes to spinning a good horror tale, let history be your guide. "It's very hard to find history with happy endings," says *Soo Hugh*, who executive produced "The Terror" for **AMC** along with *David Kajganich* and *Ridley Scott*. The chilling saga behind two real ships—HMS Terror and HMS Erebus—inspired this 10-ep series based on Dan Simmons' novel of the same name (two-hour premiere on AMC, Monday at 9pm). For those unfamiliar with the Franklin expedition, the ships departed England in 1845 searching for the Northwest Passage. The entire expedition was lost, with the Erebus not located until 2014 (the Terror was found two years later). "We know that completely reasonable men went into that space, and we know there's evidence that as they tried to come out of it, they made some very complicated and upsetting decisions, including almost certainly cannibalism," Kajganich tells **Cablefax**. "It's just fascinating to wonder how normal, reasonable prepared men get so undone psychologically that they could make these decisions." And with that sort of backdrop it's not hard to mix in Arctic monsters that are allegorical. There was a time early in the development when *The Terror* was going to be a two-hour film. Thankfully, the ship(s) changed course. "What's great about having the opportunity to tell it as a 10-hour film so to speak is you can build all those great operatic moments through character rather than instead of character," Kajganich says. In the end, Hugh says 10 episodes felt just right. "It gets paced exactly the way we wanted it," she says. "It would have been hard to stretch it out longer or to have made [it shorter]." Keep that pacing in mind as you watch, with threads dropped along the way. "We don't have a zombie behind every tree... but we have the ability to really carefully craft this narrative," Kajganich says. "All of these seemingly innocuous moments of small details—many of them have quite large trajectories." Watch closely! — *Amy Maclean*

Reviews: "Billions," Season 3 premiere, 10pm, Sunday, **Showtime**. Some of the best series evolve over the years into different, sometimes even better shows. **HBO's** "Sex and the City" became deeper as it progressed, **AMC's** "Mad Men" raised its game, too, although it began at a high level. "Billions" sustains its effectiveness through excellent story lines. Stakes are raised consistently. This season, though, *Billions* faces a challenge. Over-caffeinated hedge-fund chief *Bobby Axelrod* (Damian Lewis) is on the outside looking in, banned from doing what he loves. (You didn't think he'd really sit on the sidelines, did you?) While he's allegedly not running *Axe Capital*, Taylor (the wonderful *Asia Kate Dillon*) is; the former intern now is a super-brilliant boss. Dillon's character is tremendously interesting and the actor is a scene-stealer. -- "The Americans," final season, premiere, 10pm, Wednesday, **FX**. A favorite of critics, "The Americans" is going out on top in terms of plotlines, though the initial 2 eps of its final season are leisurely. The adage "Show Don't Tell" results in wordless montages, in eps 1 and 2, though their music is their most effective part. Like "Billions," the writers have accepted a challenge by sidelining one of the protagonists. And similar to *Billions*, this character doesn't really sit idle for long. Episode 3 ramps up the tension nicely. — *Seth Arenstein*

Basic Cable P2+ Prime Rankings* (3/12/18-3/18/18)		
Mon-Sun	MC US	MC US AA
	AA%	(000)
FNC	0.760	2314
MSNBC	0.649	1978
TBSC	0.623	1898
TNT	0.546	1662
HGTV	0.481	1466
USA	0.465	1417
TRUTV	0.461	1404
CNN	0.364	1108
HIST	0.355	1082
ID	0.348	1060
DISC	0.334	1016
A&E	0.313	952
FOOD	0.301	917
AMC	0.292	890
ADSM	0.289	881
FX	0.280	851
TLC	0.275	839
HALL	0.270	823
NAN	0.267	813
NICK	0.264	804
DSNY	0.264	802
ESPN	0.246	749
TVLAND	0.231	703
BRAVO	0.211	641
DSJR	0.201	613
LIFE	0.194	590
VH1	0.185	564
APL	0.178	542
INSP	0.175	533
CRN	0.174	531
SYFY	0.172	522
TRAVEL	0.161	490
HMM	0.159	483
BET	0.146	445
GSN	0.144	440
NATGEO	0.144	438
NKJR	0.144	438
OWN	0.142	434
OXYGEN	0.140	425
MTV	0.136	414
FRFM	0.134	409

*P2+ L+SD rankers are based on national Nielsen numbers, not coverage.

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