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What the Industry Reads First

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Elections Ahead: Cable News Upstarts Plan Aggressive Midterm Coverage

With midterm primaries underway, veteran cable news networks are starting to tout their coverage plans for highly anticipated races. They have name recognition on their side, but some of the newer kids on the block—players like **Newsy** and **One America News Now**—are planning to leverage this unusually hot election season to distinguish themselves in a busy field. There is an extraordinary intensity in this year’s political climate, and news operations see viewers more engrossed in the elections than ever before. With Republicans in the Senate clinging to the tiniest of margins and scores of House seats left to anyone’s guess, much is at stake. “This is probably going to be one of the most important midterm elections in generations,” said *Steve Scully*, senior political producer at **C-SPAN** and cable news pioneer. “You have Democrats who felt they were cheated out of an election in 2016. You have Republicans in power who know that history is not on their side [in winning congressional seats following a White House win].” As the veteran networks plug their election coverage approaches (**Fox News** will debut a series of debates on May 1, beginning with candidates in the West Virginia Republican Senate primary; **MSNBC’s Chris Matthews** has already floated his prediction for the overall outcome in the November House races), the up-and-comers are staking their own claims. Cincinnati-based **Newsy**, which was acquired by the **EW Scripps Co.** in 2014 and bought out independent cabler **RLTV** last fall, sees an opportunity in filling a need for more straight-forward, less-opinionated election news delivery, according to CEO *Blake Sabatinelli*. “We are a company that does not employ political analysts. We do not have folks who come in and give their opinions,” Sabatinelli said. “We are not going to sit here and be a hyper loop of each thing that *Donald Trump* tweets. We shouldn’t be influencing people; we should be informing them.” Newsy will concentrate on “the empathy side of things,” Sabatinelli said, showing viewers the impact of policy on real people rather than dwelling on the constant fighting among policy makers. The network targets older millennials, who it says are tired of partisan news and talking heads. With its headquarters in central Ohio, Newsy will leverage its Midwestern, outside-the-Beltway perspective in its midterm coverage. Many of the Senate and gubernatorial races this year are taking place within its footprint, and the company will take advantage of its geographic and cultural proximity. It is arranging partner-

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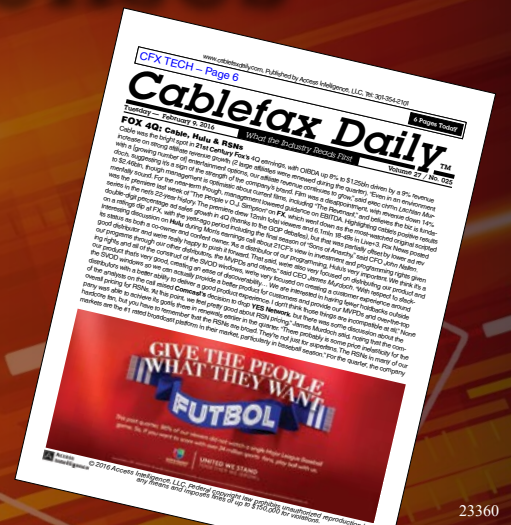
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ships with local affiliates to sponsor town hall events, and it is preparing stories that bring voters to the forefront of the news, Sabatinelli said. The approach at One America News Now (OAN) is somewhat different. The DC-based network, which launched in 2013, breaks its coverage strategy into three main parts: live field coverage, live studio coverage and talk show discussion and debate. Currently, OAN offers two political talk shows and 21 hours of live studio coverage on weekdays. The close races in battleground states will be front and center in OAN's midterm coverage, said *Charles Herring*, OAN president. "Our studio coverage will be more robust than ever," Herring said, adding that in addition to its field crews, the network has increased the number of live feeds coming into its studios. It subscribes to the **Associated Press** and **Thomson Reuters** live feeds, among others. Technology appears to be on the new players' side, particularly when it comes to live coverage. For OAN, nationwide field coverage has become easier as live transmission equipment has become more portable and less expensive, Herring said. "It's a great time to be a national cable news network. Americans are more engaged in our nation's political process than ever before, and the midterm elections will be an all-out fight for control of the House and Senate," he said. For the original cable news network, none of this changes a tried and true approach. C-SPAN will do what it does best, only more so, said Scully. There will be more live debates this year—at least 75—in part because of technological efficiencies, he said. "The thing we do best is show the national audience these debates in their entirety. No other network can do that," Scully said. "This is the only place where you can get beyond the sound bites."

Cisco Video Buyout: A company backed by global private equity firm **Permira** has agreed to acquire **Cisco's** Service Provider Video Software Solutions business. When the transaction closes, the funding will be used to create a rebranded company focused on the development and delivery of video solutions for the pay tv industry. The company's portfolio will include Cisco's business, but also cloud digital video recording, video processing, video security, middleware and services groups. Cisco is set to retain the video and media technology related to its core business activities. *Abe Peled*, former chairman and CEO of **NDS** and Permira Funds advisor, will act as chmn of the new company. The sale of the SPVSS business has been approved by Cisco's board of directors and the transaction is expected to close in Cisco's Q1 FY19. "Cisco's strategy is focusing on our five key areas of networking, multi-cloud, security, data, and collaboration. Given this strategic direction, it is the right time for the SP video group to be a stand-alone company. I believe it will be very successful, and it will be focused solely on growth in this marketplace," Yvette Kanouff, svp/gm of Cisco's service provider business, said in a blog post.

FCC Carriage Complaint: **Comcast** has asked the **FCC** for enhanced confidential treatment for certain materials related

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to its response to **beIN's** program carriage complaint against the company. The soccer-focused net filed its complaint with the FCC in March, claiming Comcast gives preferential treatment to its own channels **NBC Sports** and **NBC Universo** by placing them in better programming packages. Comcast's response is due May 14. It wants the FCC to keep internal viewership analyses, including methodologies and specific data, confidential. It's also seeking protection for set-top box data and affiliation agreements with its affiliated networks. BeIN's complaint alleges that Comcast would not give it the right to authenticate Comcast viewers for watching online via its website and app even though it authenticates for Comcast-affiliated soccer programming. Comcast, one of the first distributors to launch beIN, has said it has maintained market-based distribution of beIN Sports, consistent with how it is carried by most other cable and satellite providers.

In the Courts: Public Knowledge filed an amicus brief in support of NY's lawsuit against **Charter** over allegedly deceptive statements on speed. "As the Court considers the complex legal issues at stake, we have asked it to also consider the social importance of broadband, and how consumers rely on information from their providers to make informed decisions about their service," said PK senior counsel *John Bergmayer*.

Ride Along: Ride TV is coming to the **Xfinity X1** platform. It's the first time the horse-focused channel will be launched as an SVOD service. **Comcast** customers will be able to access the SVOD by saying "Ride TV" into their X1 voice remote or in the networks section of Xfinity On Demand. Expected to launch this summer, the equine sports and lifestyle network will be able to be added to a customer's lineup for \$4.99/month.

Integration Complete: Atlantic Broadband completed the final step in its acquisition of **MetroCast Cable Systems**, with that organization now rebranded under the Atlantic Broadband name. Atlantic Broadband is delivering automatic internet speed upgrades to all legacy MetroCast residential and business customers. All residential subscribers now have access to speeds up to 200 Mbps and businesses as high as 500 Mbps depending on the market. These increases represent the first in new enhanced services that will continue to roll out throughout the year. Business customer changes include increasing the professional tier to 500Mbps from 200Mbps in some markets and 300Mbps in others, including Berwick/Pocono, PA. The Advanced Business tier jumps to 200Mbps from 120.

In the Cloud: Sling TV's Cloud DVR capabilities have now come to **Google Chrome, Chromecast, Xbox One, Samsung** and **LG** Smart TVs, bringing it to nearly all Sling TV compatible devices. Customers can add 50 hours of Cloud DVR storage to their subscription for \$5/month.

Free Fubo: New **Roku** customers who activate a device through July 8 can get a free month of **fuboTV** under a new promo available at US retail stores.

Ratings: Season 2 of **IFC's** "Brockmire" premiered Wednesday with 506K L+3 viewers. The digital premiere scored nearly 3mln viewers on platforms such as IFC.com, **YouTube** and **Facebook**. Brockmire originally appeared as a viral short video on **Funny Or Die**. Compared to the 2017 series premiere, the season two premiere grew 15% among adults 25-54 and 11% among adults 18-49 in Nielsen live+3 ratings.



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