

Cablefax Daily™

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What the Industry Reads First

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Company Clarity: ESPN Pres Jimmy Pitaro's Vision

In his six months as **ESPN's** pres, *Jimmy Pitaro* has been busy. "When I got here I decided I needed to provide the team with clarity," Pitaro explained at the brand's Media Day in Bristol, CT on Friday. "Clarity in terms of our mission, but just as importantly, what are our core business drivers going to be going forward?" Pitaro left competitor **Yahoo** in 2010, and then spent eight years at **Disney** before jumping into his role at ESPN. He said his long stint at Disney getting to know the ESPN brand helped him identify his four priorities for the company. The first is the direct-to-consumer business. "As *Bob Iger* said in the earnings call, we're very heartened by the conversion rates we're seeing on the ESPN+ side. We're enthused by the number of people that are trying the service and subscribing, and the amount of people converting from the free service," Pitaro said. College football is incredibly important for ESPN+. ESPN itself has the rights to 900 college football games this upcoming season, with at least 200 airing on ESPN+ in its first season. The subscription service also has access to games from at least nine conferences that may not be as popular on a linear net, such as Ivy League or Sun Belt games. "We show you the biggest games across our linear networks, but we recognize the fact that a fan of Dartmouth football will be just as passionate as a fan of Alabama football. We want to serve every sports fan," Pitaro explained. The second priority is audience expansion. "The most important part is appealing to, speaking to, attracting to a younger audience. We've signed deals with **UFC**, top-ranked boxing, really leaned into e-sports, expanding our presence on social media, specifically **Snapchat** and **Twitter**. And of course our app, which we launched in April of this year," Pitaro said. Third on his list is quality, which he said remains "our primary focus, and that will not change." Finally, Pitaro promised to prioritize innovation. "People typically think about innovation as ones and zeros, and yes we take a lot of pride in the new app and ESPN+ but we think about innovation in every area, whether it's marketing, highlights, or what we're doing on field," Pitaro explained. And how has it been going so far? "We've provided that clarity to the team, and it seems to be resonating thus far," Pitaro said. He also provided an update on the brand's upcoming **ACC Network**, on schedule to be launched in 2019. The net will carry 40 games, with multiple distribution deals already in place and more in the works.

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Request Denied: A California federal judge threw out most sections of a nearly \$4bln **FTC** lawsuit alleging that **DirecTV's** advertising misled customers. The lawsuit, filed in 2015, alleged that DirecTV did not properly communicate that the promotional prices it was advertising only lasted for the first year of a two-year contract. The FTC also found DirecTV at fault for offering premium channels for free for a period of time without telling customers that they needed to cancel those channels at the end of the promotion if they didn't want to find additional charges on their bill. DirecTV fired back at a bench trial last year by saying it shouldn't have to put up a defense in order to receive a positive ruling. US district judge *Haywood Gilliam* found that the FTC failed to meet the burden of proof on most of its claims.

Oh, Canada: **Cogeco Connexion**, a subsidiary of **Cogeco Communications**, is partnering with **MediaKind** to offer the Mediafirst next-gen IPTV platform in Canada. The solution allows viewers to customize their video content while utilizing wireless receivers and voice-activated controls. Viewers will also have access to Android **Google Mobile Services**.

Expanding the League: Toronto will likely be the next city to receive an Overwatch League esports team. **Activision Blizzard**, the developer/publisher of the video game "Overwatch," is in the final negotiations with a group headed by entrepreneur *Michael Kimel*. The team will be operated by esports organization **Splyce** with the funding for the purchase coming from Kimel and his family as well as Splyce investor **OverActive Media**. Activision Blizzard previously announced plans to add two teams to the League during the current offseason, with Atlanta already being announced as the home of the first. Overwatch League achieved its first TV live distribution deals in July with **Disney/ESPN**.

Best Place to Work: **Boingo Wireless** was named one of the "Best Places to Work in Los Angeles" by the *Los Angeles Business Journal* for the fourth year in a row. The wireless provider ranked eighth on this year's list, scoring highly in categories including leadership, corporate culture, pay and benefits and training and development. At its headquarters, Boingo holds annual pool, dart and tennis tournaments; hackathons; summer picnics and bowling nights.

Here to Stay: **MCTV** pres *Robert Gessner* and **BOYCOM** pres *Patricia Jo Boyers* were re-elected to their leadership positions for two-year terms on the **ACA's** board of directors. Gessner serves as chmn and Boyers acts as vice chairwoman. Elected to new three-year terms were: **Vyve Broadband** svp/general counsel *Marie Censo-plano*, **Comporium** COO/evp *Matt Dosch*, **Patriot Media Consulting** CAO/evp *John Gdovin*, **Vast Broadband** CEO/pres *Jim Gleason* and **GCI** general counsel/svp of governmental affairs/chief compliance officer *Tina Pidgeon*.

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Ratings: The UEFA Super Cup on Univision/UDN Wednesday delivered 698K total viewers and 347K A18-49, making it the most-viewed Super Cup ever on any network.

Programming: Netflix is developing an original drama from Mike Kelley (“Revenge”) on the ripple effects that occur when do-gooders begin acting indecently. The first season of “What/If” is set to star Renée Zellweger. -- The antics of middle-school siblings Coop and Cami Wrather are at the center of Disney Channel’s latest original series. “Coop & Cami Ask the World” sees the siblings co-hosting a popular online show while balancing their day-to-day lives and family. The series premieres on October 12 at 8:30pm. -- The force is with Disney Channel. Upcoming animated series “Star Wars Resistance” tells the story of the events occurring prior to the film “The Force Awakens.” The series debuts on October 7 at 10pm on Disney Channel and DisneyNow.

People: ESPN came to an agreement with Snapchat host Andrew Hawkins for increased duties on multiple platforms. He’ll continue hosting the Monday and Tuesday morning editions of “SportsCenter” on Snapchat during the NFL season and co-hosting “Operation Football.” His new duties will have him contributing to “NFL Live,” “The Will Cain Show” and more.

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Research

- Nearly all vMVPD viewing is on streaming boxes or sticks.
- Total hours spent viewing content on vMVPD platforms has increased 53% YOY.
- In OTT households with a vMVPD service, time spent with the service has grown by 49% over last year.
- 58% more households have a vMVPD service compared to last year.

(Source: comScore’s “When Linear TV and Digital Collide: The Rise of the Virtual MVPD”)

Up Ahead

- August 19-20:** 2018 Technology Policy Institute [Aspen Forum](#)
- August 24:** Cablefax’s People to Watch [Call for Entries](#)
- September 12-14:** [Mobile World Congress Americas](#); LA
- October 15-16:** [WICT Leadership Conference](#); New York
- October 16-17:** [NAMIC Annual Conference](#); New York
- October 17:** [Kaitz Dinner](#), New York

Quotable

“We are in a worldwide race to lead the future of wireless. We are making progress, but other nations are moving further, faster.... We have a blitz of bands under consideration... But we only have one auction scheduled. What we need now is something simple: a calendar. We need to tell the wireless ecosystem - from carriers to equipment manufacturers to consumers - just how and when the FCC will auction new airwaves to support 5G services.”

- FCC commish Jessica Rosenworcel at the Aug 16 FCC Oversight Senate subcommittee hearing.



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