

Cablefax Daily™

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What the Industry Reads First

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Ad Week: The Future of the OTT Experience

With constant innovation, cord cutting and new players popping up left and right, the future of the industry seems uncertain. What execs at Ad Week NYC's "The 2018 OTT Experience" panel could agree on though, is that OTT is changing. "We're re-allocating budgets for next year," **Viacom** evp of distribution partnerships *Samantha Cooper* said. "Gone are the days of a 24-hour linear service, we're in the business of creating content and almost acting like a studio." **Sinclair Broadcast Group** head of OTT/connected TV ad sales *Brian Hunt* agreed. "We're seeing shifts for 2019 being planned already," he added. Cooper pointed to the past year alone as a massive time of change at Viacom. "A year ago we didn't have a Viacom Digital Studios unit," Cooper continued. "Now we have 600 people working there. 'Views' and 'ratings' feel like old-timey words, now we're focused on engagement." In this new world of a hyper-focus on OTT platforms and streaming content, is traditional, linear TV still relevant? Can the original players still keep up? Without a doubt. "We've been evolving conversations and we've really expanded advanced advertising deals. Also, the OTT platforms afford dynamic ad insertion and possibilities that suddenly flip the switch to a different game. It takes it out of the Nielsen universe, I guess," Cooper said. **Nielsen** svp of digital audience measurement *Amanda Tarpey* disagreed. "We view our job today as cross-platform comparable measurement," she explained. "Take advantage of what addressable advertising can do on top of that. We've been making investments to make sure we're partnering with some of the lead players to keep that measurement comparable and go everywhere consumers are going." Everyone agrees that **Netflix** set a precedent in delivering direct-to-consumer content, but no one is quite sure where to go next. "DTC is very interesting, and it's what the consumer wants," **Oath** vp of entertainment and Oath Studios *Alex Wallace* said. Wallace believes that consumers want to consume content with as few obstacles or layers as possible, but does not think that DTC will be the sole way people consume content in the future. "We're in a hybrid model where you have to take a little bit of everything. That mix is changing, but it's always going to be a mix." Cooper agreed that while it may be shifting towards DTC, that isn't necessarily the complete future, at least not for Viacom. "We're not looking to create this massive, one-size fits all DTC. That would be a Herculean effort," she said. One thing that certainly is going to shake up the industry is the arrival of 5G. "The trend

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is clear, folks can consume content wherever, whenever,” **OpenX** video head **Roy Firestone** said. “We’re just getting past introductory on OTT CTV.” The first commercial 5G network went live on Monday. **Verizon’s** 5G Home network is now available in parts of Houston, Indianapolis, LA and Sacramento. “I think 5G is going to revolutionize everything,” Wallace said. “I think we’re a couple years away from this all being very different.”

Joining The Fight: **USTelecom, CTIA, NCTA** and **ACA** filed a joint lawsuit Wednesday in federal court challenging California’s net neutrality bill in yet another show of opposition to the legislation. Signed into law by **Gov Jerry Brown** Sunday, the immediately drew the attention of regulators. Shortly after its passing, the **DOJ** filed a lawsuit against the state. In a joint statement, the groups said they oppose California’s action to regulate internet access, saying it threatens to negatively affect services for millions of consumers and harm new investment and economic growth. “Republican and Democratic administrations, time and again, have embraced the notion that actions like this are preempted by federal law,” the parties said. “We believe the courts will continue to uphold that fundamental principle. Meanwhile, we will continue our work to ensure Congress adopts bipartisan legislation to create a permanent framework for protecting the open internet that consumers expect and deserve.”

Growing Roku: **Needham and Co** is raising its target price on **Roku** to \$85, marking the third increase over the past year. **Needham and Co’s Laura Martin** said in a research note that Roku’s value tripling comes as a result of (amongst other things) total addressable market expansion, lowering its capital intensity and competitive risk and positioning itself as a key strategic OTT takeover target. Specifically, the June launch of Roku’s Audience Marketplace as well as the launch and expansion of the Roku Channel stood out as positives, with the latter adding an estimated \$2bln to Roku’s valuation alone. **Needham** prefers Roku to **Netflix**, pointing to its better margins, lower content risk, event upside and better competitive profile.

Ad Week Notebook: Day three of Advertising Week NYC had a strong emphasis on streaming. Several panels discussed where streaming is headed, and how best to monetize it. **Twitch** has already formed partnerships with brands such as **Old Spice**. The original partnership was for a gamified experience that directed content, but now the company has a channel and uses it to create and distribute content like any other platform. “In this case you had all the brand references within chat of people wanting to engage with this content, so once you get into that scenario there’s a lot of other things you can measure,” explained Twitch’s svp of client solutions, **Anthony Danzi**. “Like brand sentiment, such as creating custom emotes for the audience to use.” Streaming service **Vudu** is also picking up steam. “In the last year we’ve rolled out an advertiser-supported VOD platform,” said **Kyle J. Britt**, head of experi-



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ence, Vudu Advertising. “We’re owned by **Walmart**, so Walmart has matched Vudu customers one to one. We can target against those people based on what they buy at Walmart, close the loop, and then report to that.” Even European brands chimed in. “We are the **Comcast** of Europe,” said *Stephane Courble*, CEO of **RTL Adconnect**, based in Luxembourg. “We try to simplify the world of complexity by access to our inventory, in order to give access to US companies. We changed the acronym from television to Total Video, because that’s where customers are going.”

Consolidation Concerns: Media consolidation continues to be a major concern of **ACA**, as illustrated by its letter to the **Senate Subcommittee on Antitrust, Competition Policy and Consumer Rights**. Writing to committee chair *Sen Michael Lee* (R-NC) and ranking member *Sen Amy Klobuchar* (D-MN) ahead of the subcommittee’s Wednesday hearing on antitrust oversight, ACA president/CEO *Matt Polka* said that while ACA does not object to mergers, it does object to when mergers hinder its ability to offer innovative services to its customers or when mergers cause raises in subscriber bills. Focusing on one of those mergers, Polka praised the **DOJ’s** continued monitoring of **Comcast-NBCU’s** behavior, but encouraged the DOJ to go one step further, launching an investigation into Comcast-NBCU’s practices. Polka also drew attention to horizontal media consolidations, such as **Gray-Raycom**, noting that the increase in retransmission consent rates leads to ACA members having no choice but to pass that on to subs.

Storyboard To Screen: **Gracenote** made its Studio System Projects platform available Wednesday. The enterprise-level collaboration and project management suite is designed to help TV networks, studios and content creators streamline and more efficiently manage the development process. Users can create their own custom project records as a storage space for all related documents and materials tied to the project. Additionally, talent can be attached to projects and be tracked as credits or participants.

Done Deal: **Atlantic Broadband** closed its acquisition of the fiber network formerly owned by **Fiberlight, LLC** in South Florida. The deal, which was initially announced in January, marks the addition of 350 route miles to Atlantic Broadband’s existing South Florida footprint, more than doubling its existing fiber presence in the region. The deal also expands its capacity to service regional data centers by 30%.

Alexa, 4K: **Amazon** revealed the Fire TV Stick 4K as well as a revamped Alexa Voice Remote. The company said the Fire TV Stick 4K is 80% more powerful than the current product, featuring a new quad core, 1.7GHz processor of delivering faster streaming speeds, quicker load times and improved picture quality. The Fire TV Stick 4K is available for pre-order with the Alexa Voice Remote for \$49.99 and will begin shipping on Oct 31 in the US. The remote, which is also available with the recently launched Fire TV Cube, can be purchased on a standalone basis for \$29.99.

Elevating UI: **TDS** signed on to a deal with **Espial** to license its Elevate Cloud video platform. The partnership is an extension from Espial’s acquisition of **Arris’** whole-home solution product line.

Ratings: **ESPN’s** coverage of the 2018 MLB National League Wild Card Game was up 59% from last year’s show-down, according to **Nielsen**. ESPN and **ESPN2** combined to deliver a 5.1 metered market rating compared to a 3.2 last year. -- **MLB Network** saw every one of its studio shows grow in viewership during the 2018 MLB season. “High Heat with Christopher Russo” led the way with 53% growth, followed by “The Rundown” at 28% and “MLB Now” at 18%. -- ESPN scored a 9.1 overnight rating from the Monday Night Football game between the Chiefs and Broncos, according to Nielsen. This is an 8% increase over the Redskins-Chiefs Week 4 game in 2017.

Programming: Through a multi-year deal with **The C.S. Lewis Company**, **Netflix** is developing new series and film projects based on “The Chronicles of Narnia” books. All series and films produced through the deal will be Netflix productions with *Mark Gordon*, *Douglas Gresham* and *Vincent Sieber* serving as eps for the series and producers for the features. -- **USA** renewed “Queen of the South” for Season 4, returning in 2019. -- **Travel Channel** will premiere an hour-long special “Lost Amazon: Project Z” on Oct 16 at 10pm. The special follows explorers in the jungles of Peru uncovering a lost civilization. -- **TNT** gets spooky with an all-day “Supernatural” marathon on Halloween, running from 8am to 8pm.

People: **Crown Media Family Networks** is welcoming *Daryl Berg* as its vp, music strategies & licensing. He’ll report to programming and development svp *Randy Pope* in the newly-created role. Berg joins Crown Media from **Sound Canyon**, where he served as principal.

Oops!: The Oct 2 issue incorrectly stated a carriage fight was resolved between **Altice** and **Univision**. The companies renewed their agreement with no dispute.



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- > **Kristin Dolan**, 605
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Think about that for a minute...

Deja Vu Again?

Commentary by Steve Effros

I just checked. Since 2000 I've used some form of "Deja Vu" in the title of my column three different times. Interestingly, they were all dealing with different subjects. So here we are again, but let's get the language straight first.



"Deja Vu" is literally French for "already seen." Despite what most of us tend to use it to imply, that we are seeing the same thing, with the same result, over and over again, the actual definition refers to a "strange" feeling that one has when they sense they are experiencing some place or event that they have experienced before, but in fact have not. Got that? This was just for those of you who might email me suggesting that I'm misusing the term.

I'm not using the term in its technically correct form, yet. I'm channeling Yogi Berra, who famously said "...it's deja vu all over again!" As in, I've seen this craziness before. And using that interpretation, I've got to say that the last week may be, but I'm not sure, "deja vu all over again!"

Legislation was just signed into law in California. It's billed as the toughest set of "net neutrality" rules adopted in the United States, notably more restrictive of what ISPs can do than even the Wheeler FCC administration's rules before they were overturned. The theory of the California legislators, of course, was that since the feds had decided highly restrictive rules on broadband delivery were not in the public interest, they would take up the cudgel of the "public good" and write their own set.

The only problem with this, as numerous law commentaries have already pointed out, is that we've been down this road before and it's pretty well established that broadband, Internet, communications is inextricably involved in interstate commerce, and that's the realm of

the federal government, not the states.

Indeed, within one day of Governor Brown signing the California law the Department of Justice announced it was legally challenging what had been done on the basis that it has been preempted by the federal government. Some of the other oldsters reading this may remember the "Brand X" case that also came out of California. There, an FCC decision not to treat broadband as a common carrier was challenged by those who wanted to do so. That's essentially what we have here, again. The Supreme Court, 6 to 3, decided the FCC was within its authority to interpret the Communications Law statute the way it did.

So here we are again. Essentially the same question. The main difference is that we now have more "conservative" Supreme Court Justices, leaving aside the whole mess we are in now, who are not as comfortable with the "Chevron Doctrine" which was relied upon last time to say the FCC had the power to interpret the statute it was working under.

So apparently we are going to go through the entire legal dance again, with the "losers" last time hoping a different panel will arrive at a different result. Maybe, maybe not. But it certainly reinforces the idea that, unfortunately, there is very little that is "certain" about the law, and "uncertainty" is going to have to be considered the norm for doing business these days, no matter what the "established law" was last week. We're living in a literal "deja vu" world. When it comes to the Yogi Berra common misinterpretation that the "same thing" will happen each time, I have the strange feeling you can forget it.

Steve

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(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.)

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