

Cablefax Daily™

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What the Industry Reads First

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Full Stream Ahead: Hammer to Head NBCU OTT Play

No one had to wait long for details of an **NBCU** streaming service hinted at in CEO *Steve Burke's* holiday card message. On Monday, NBCU announced it is shaking up executive ranks to launch the service next year with *Bonnie Hammer* taking the reins. The hope is that the longtime **NBCU Cable Entertainment** chmn will work the same sort of magic she has at **USA, E!, Syfy** and the rest of the high-revenue producing cable portfolio. The ad-supported streaming service will be made available at no cost to NBCU pay TV subs in the US and major international markets (including **Sky**). An ad-free version will be made available for an undisclosed fee, and it also will be open to non-pay TV subs. NBCU pledged to continue to license content to others studios and platforms while retaining rights to some titles for the new service. That's an important sentence when you consider **Disney** is expected to gain majority control of **Hulu** once it completes its **Fox** deal. Comcast will lean on work from Sky's OTT play, **NOW TV**, with some of those execs joining Hammer. **NBCU Digital Enterprise** pres *Maggie Suniewick* will work for Hammer. "NBCU-universal has some of the world's most valuable intellectual property and top talent, both in front of and behind the camera. Many of the most-watched shows on today's popular streaming platforms come from NBCUniversal. Our new service will be different than those presently in the market and it will be built on the company's strengths, with NBCUniversal's great content and the technology expertise, broad scale and the wide distribution of Comcast Cable and Sky," Burke said in a statement. Monday's announcement follows Burke teasing the launch in the company holiday card last month. "While you all go off to relax, swim or ski, maybe, just maybe, next year we'll announce our plan for OTT," he wrote. With Hammer promoted to chmn, direct-to-consumer and digital enterprises, *Mark Lazarus'* role will expand beyond sports and the broadcast O&Os. As chmn, NBCU broadcast, cable, sports and news, he'll take over the cable operations Hammer had managed as well as NBCU's news business. Universal Filmed Entertainment head *Jeff Shell* becomes chmn, NBCU Film & Entertainment, adding oversight of NBC Entertainment, **Telemundo** and NBCU's international division alongside continued oversight of film. Hammer, Lazarus and Shell will continue to report directly to Burke. The shakeup also saw *Donna Langley* promoted to sole chairman, Universal Filmed Entertainment Group. She reports to Shell.

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Charter-NY Settlement Talks: When it comes to **Charter** and the **NY PSC** order kicking it out of the state, 2019 feels a lot like 2018. That's because the MSO was granted yet another extension in the case on Monday, moving the deadline to apply for rehearing to Feb 4. If the request hadn't been granted, Charter would have had to file for rehearing Monday (Jan 14). The PSC granted a 21-day extension, short of the 30 days Charter requested in a letter sent to the PSC Saturday. Charter's deadline for filing a six-month plan to exit the state also was extended by 21 days, giving it a new deadline of March 4. Settlement talks continue in the case, with Charter revealing that PSC staff is currently considering additional info it recently provided that is pertinent to the discussions. All of this is the result of the PSC in July revoking its approval of the 2016 merger agreement between Charter and **Time Warner Cable**, with the agency declaring that Charter hasn't met some merger conditions. The two dispute whether buildout requirements have been met.

Rovi Sues Comcast Again: The patent disputes between **Rovi/TiVo** and **Comcast** continue on, with the tech company filing a new lawsuit in federal court in CA Monday. This is for different patents, not covered by pending litigation in CA and MA that have been stayed pending resolution of appeals at the **International Trade Commission**. This newest suit cites eight Rovi patents that relate to features such as cloud-based and in-home DVR. "Virtually the entire US Pay-TV industry is licensed to Rovi's portfolio of IPG patents. And in 2015 and 2016, every major Pay-TV provider in the United States—except Comcast—renewed its license on economic terms that are generally consistent with those that Rovi has offered to Comcast, including **AT&T, Charter, DISH** and **Verizon**," Rovi told the court. "While every one of its competitors pays a fair price for Rovi's innovative technology, Comcast alone uses it for free. Rovi is forced, then, to bring this additional infringement suit asserting additional patents in order to enforce its patent rights." Comcast sounds ready to stand its ground. "Rovi has in recent years deployed its increasingly obsolete patent portfolio in an unsuccessful litigation campaign seeking to charge Comcast and our customers for technology that Rovi did not invent," the company said. "Rovi launched this campaign in April 2016 by asserting infringement of 15 patents—14 of which have been held to be invalid and/or not infringed by Comcast, or have been withdrawn by Rovi. While we haven't had an opportunity to review Rovi's latest complaint, we will continue to defend ourselves against allegations we determine to be meritless."

Old Dog, New Tricks: After 25 years, there's no better time for a change. **CTHRA** announced Monday it has changed its name to **Content and Connectivity Human Resources (C2HR)**. "The convergence of technologies, changing consumer behaviors, innovations, globalization and consolidation have dramatically transformed the marketplace, and our new name reflects the changing landscape in which our member companies operate," said *Pamela Williams*, CAE and executive director for C2HR. The professional organization has 4300 members from nearly

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50 companies across telecom, tech, media and entertainment. C2HR will continue the mission of CTHRA and will announce new programs and initiatives throughout 2019 to provide an industry-specific forum and analytics for businesses. It will kick off this month with the association releasing highlights from its annual compensation surveys.

Freebies: Roku users will now get a free experience from **Sling TV**, allowing them to watch free shows and subscribe to standalone channels without being a Sling TV subscriber, starting a free trial or entering credit card information. New users can click on “browse as guest” to access the free features. Sling also introduced an improved search feature on **Android TV**, **Amazon** and Roku devices, making it easier to find content based on category. A binge-watching feature will be available in the coming weeks.

Tennis' Grand Slam: Sinclair-owned **Tennis Channel** now reaches 61mln homes—gaining 5mln in December. Since it first subscribed to NTI **Nielsen** ratings in January 2017, the net has added 17.7mln traditional pay TV and streaming homes—bolstered undoubtedly by Sinclair's retransmission consent deals. If you looks at Nielsen Universe Estimates for January 2019 vs December 2018, Tennis is the biggest gainer among cable nets with 5.13mln new homes. Runner-up is **Investigation Discovery**, which added 1.37mln, and then **Golf Channel**, with 886K new homes. Tennis' digital streaming service also has something to crow about, with subscriptions for Tennis Channel Plus up 25% in 2018 vs 2017. Plus, it boasts of a 51% renewal rate.

No Briefing: Unhappy that **FCC** chmn *Ajit Pai* didn't brief **House Commerce** staff Monday on FCC actions around wireless carriers' disclosure of consumers' real-time data location, chmn *Frank Pallone* (D-NJ) lashed out. “In a phone conversation today, his staff asserted that these egregious actions are not a threat to the safety of human life or property that the FCC will address during the Trump shutdown,” Pallone said in a statement. “The safety of first responders and consumers should be a top priority for the Chairman and the FCC.”

Hole in One: **Topgolf** and **NBC Sports Group** announced a partnership to help bring fans closer to the sport through enhanced **PGA Tour** tournament coverage and modernized experiences at golf facilities via the Toptracer tech. Toptracer tracks the flight of a golf ball, displays its path in video and analyzes shots hit. Topgolf previously leveraged the tech to golf facilities, driving ranges and tournament directors and it is now the exclusive ball-tracking tech for the PGA Tour telecasts on **Golf Channel** and NBC.

Shutdown Solution: **Verizon** and **AT&T** launched web pages last week to help furloughed workers with flexible payments during the ongoing government shutdown. Cable operators are stepping up their efforts as well. While several, including **Comcast**, told us they'd work with customers, some have started sending out notices to let furloughed workers know what's available. **Atlantic Broadband** announced it is offering flex payment options for government employee customers within its service areas, as well as adjusted late fees to keep customers connected. **Cox** also jumped in, guiding customers to reach out to a rep to ask about “Promise to Pay” initiatives. The options will limit late payment reminders or give customers more time to pay without worrying about interruption to service.

Ratings: **UPtv** is off to a great start to 2019 already. The net saw its best New Year's Day ratings, largely due to three-part marathon of “The Librarian,” which reached 2.2mln viewers. On Jan 3 “Bring up Bates” Season 8 premiere was the strongest season premiere of the series since its first premiere, hitting 700K P2+.

Public Affairs: **Lifetime** partnered with **Western Governors University** for #SheDidThat, a campaign celebrating women changing the game in business, nursing, IT and teaching. From now through March, Lifetime will profile the stories of four WGU graduates who earned their master's degrees from WGU on MyLifetime.com and across Lifetime's social media channels.

Programming: **Hallmark Movies Now** is now available on **Comcast's** Xfinity X1 and **Cox's** Contour platforms for \$5.99 a month. -- **WE tv** announced the first-ever live TV event for its series “Growing Up Hip Hop.” The two-hour interactive special will air on Jan 17 at 8pm. -- **A&E** will premiere a six-hour documentary series diving into the life and heritage of *Donald Trump*. “Biography: The Trump Dynasty” will premiere Feb 25 at 9pm and airs over three nights. It features interviews with people such as *Ann Coulter*, *Sean Hannity* and *Anthony Scaramucci*. -- Thanks to a multi-year agreement, every game from the **Canadian Football League** will be available on **ESPN+** and **ESPN** networks in the US for the 2019 season.

People: **Altice USA** promoted *Matt Grover* to evp, head of Altice Business Services. He was previously svp, commercial sales for Altice Business Services. He reports to co-pres/COO *Hakim Boubazine*. -- Sen *John Thune* (R-SD) adviser *Frederick Hill* has stepped down from his communications director role on the **Senate Commerce** committee. He joins **FTI Consulting's** public affairs practice, focusing on the telecom, media and tech sector.

CFX TECH

The Data Gold Mine

Last week was all about three letters in the tech community: **CES**. The largest consumer electronic show was filled to the brim with acronyms, some that will likely keep popping up throughout 2019. We're talking 5G, AI and maybe even 10G.

"There wasn't a booth we didn't enter... where the acronyms 5G and AI weren't on the wall," **Cox** pres *Pat Esser* said at a breakfast Wednesday announcing cable's 10G initiative. "It seems to be the moniker you have to have on your product to get the market's attention right now."

Lacking a snazzy moniker, user experience and customer data were part of a quieter, but important conversation. With **Disney** planning the debut of its OTT product this year, new entrants and established services are looking for any help or insights in gaining new subscribers and maintaining their bases.

A company like **NAGRA** used to maintain a presence at CES through major customers like **DISH**. Now, it has evolved and partnered up with companies like **Samsung** to work at bringing TV services to the consumer in the most convenient way possible while making it accessible, secure and user-friendly. That comes from seeing what NAGRA called a fragmentation in the marketplace with the ever-growing amount of content in the ecosystem.

"The name of the game, in our opinion, for the pay TV industry in particular is to stay relevant," NAGRA senior director, product marketing *Simon Trudelle* said. "The role of super-aggregator will have to be obvious to the consumer and the operators will have to deliver on that promise. If you subscribe to a service provider, you want to be able to access pretty much all the content you want."

Those that don't figure out the formula to remain relevant will be forced out of that section of the marketplace, according to Trudelle. "Service providers will either focus

on being network providers or if they only aggregate a subset of the content available, they will find an uphill battle," he said.

There is one gold mine service providers have been sitting on that could mean their make or break: data. At a CES keynote Tuesday, **IBM** chmn/pres/CEO *Ginni Rometty* said "data will be the world's most valuable natural resource," and Trudelle couldn't agree more. While companies are taking greater advantage of the information at their fingertips, most of the "natural resource" remains untapped.

"We have realized that a lot of the service providers sit on a lot of data," Trudelle said. "They use traditional tools to analyze that data while their competitors from **Amazon** to **Netflix** manage big data in a much more dynamic way." NAGRA developed a platform for its customers that allows them to take advantage of the same tools that internet players are using every day.

With the handling of big data comes great concern. 2018 emphasized the need for greater security measures surrounding user information and privacy.

"Pay TV service providers say we sit on gold and then our gold is actually trust," Trudelle explained, saying many are reluctant to use most of it because of the risks involved. "It's data for sure, but it's trust that we will not resell it to anybody because we already charge for a subscription. If we collect data, we want to collect it, want to make sure it stays confidential, if consumers don't want a part of it we will honor that will."

Trudelle is actually thankful for the data leaks and privacy issues that plagued 2018. While **Facebook** collects and uses data differently than pay TV providers, Trudelle is still calling the social network's troubles a learning experience for the future that will allow providers to maintain their current levels of customer trust. "It will keep the market going forward, staying dynamic while being really smart about leveraging the power of data," he said.

– *Sara Winegardner*

Cablefax: What's Happening... January

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JANUARY

CES

Cablefax will cover the largest consumer technology show in the world, previewing the hottest technologies and coolest gadgets across the broadband and video landscape.

Programming Trends

January is a busy month for programmers with NATPE, Realscreen and the Golden Globes all competing for attention. Our special coverage will examine the trends shaping up for the 2019 TV season.

Winter TCA

Cablefax will cover executive sessions and programming developments at this bi-annual gathering of TV critics.

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