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What the Industry Reads First

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Relationship Advice: How Fire TV Builds Partnerships Based on Customers

Amazon Fire TV has come a long way since its launch in 2014. The tech is no longer seen simply as a piece of hardware, but now connects a variety of services across multiple platforms. The service has 30m+ plus monthly active users with over 500K TV episodes and movies available to stream from thousands of channels and apps. “I do think it’s changing how customers understand their experiences. Today, think of all the ways the device and media partners can work together,” said *Matt Clark*, Fire TV’s director of business development, at a panel at the **NAB Show** Tuesday. “Can you acquire customers, can you retain customers, can you monetize customers? The partnerships need to be deeper by definition, particularly in an environment where we’re all learning.” A huge part of Fire TV’s growth has been in its integration with Alexa. According to Clark, customers that use voice open an Alexa-enabled app 150% more than those who don’t, and engagement is 250% higher. “The challenge for both parties now is how do we remind customers that voice exists, [and] make it easy for them to use it,” Clark explained. “Alexa in some respects now is creating these small moments of delight. When we started with **Netflix**, we worked with them to get their metadata in our catalog search. With Alexa and some other foundational work you can start to really simplify the customer experience and give them the benefits of the golden age of content without all this frustration.” And that experience is only going to keep improving with the Amazon Echo Show, which Clark believes will allow for new discovery for video, and not just for Amazon content. “People watch as much device on the Show device as they do on Fire TV, believe it or not,” Clark said. “Now with a Show and Alexa, you’ve got this new way to think about how you can tie discovery to viewership. There’s new ways that our program partners and media partners can re-engage customers by using Alexa in ways they haven’t before.” Over 30 apps on Fire TV offer in-app voice control with Alexa, with **Hulu** being the first to sign on. “We feel great about the work we’ve done with Hulu, we’re giving them enormous credit. They were the first to adopt Alexa for Fire TV, the first to give their service for the Echo Show,” said Clark. According to Hulu, viewers who use Alexa are watching two times the hours of content compared to those who don’t. Another way Amazon is focusing on aggregating content and creating partnerships is through single sign-on (SSO), which is now available on over 20 apps on Fire TV. “One thing I’d say is we’re kind of distribu-

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tion agnostic. We released the Fire TV Recast recently, because there's a segment of the population that's getting some level of TV through over the air," said Clark. "Ultimately we'll go as fast as the SSO ecosystem can evolve. We think it's good for the customers and we're going to go forward." Over 80mln households have paid-TV through a traditional provider, and through SSO there is no need to sign-in on each of these individual apps. "I often think of aggregation as happening at multiple levels. There's a way to have certain channels accessible inside your Prime Video app, and I think that's a great way for customers to enjoy those channels. You can also aggregate those DTC offerings at a device level," said Clark. "Customers are still in the early stages at figuring out all these arrangements, from the Amazon devices side we have to do our job to find the best aggregation possible, then simplify."

Save the Internet?: Debate began in the House on the Save the Internet Act Tuesday afternoon, the Democrats' latest effort to reverse the **FCC's** Restoring Internet Freedom Order. "Today's going to be a good day for consumers! The House is going to debate my Save The Internet Act to restore strong, commonsense #NetNeutrality protections," *Rep Mike Doyle* (D-PA) said on **Twitter**. "Let's get this bill passed and #SaveTheNet!" Not everyone shared his enthusiasm, with debate continuing for hours and final votes on remaining amendments and the bill set for Wednesday morning. **House Commerce** chmn *Frank Pallone* (D-NJ) urged all members on the floor to vote yes on the act, calling it "a carefully crafted bill that balances the need to put a cop on the beat without weighing the industry down." Ahead of the debate, **NCTA** pres/CEO *Michael Powell*, **USTelecom** pres/CEO *Jonathan Spalter* and **CTIA** pres/CEO *Meredith Attwell Baker* sent a letter to *Reps Nancy Pelosi* (D-CA), *Kevin McCarthy* (R-CA), *Pallone* and *Greg Walden* (R-OR) asking them not to pass the latest effort to restore Title II regulations. The associations continued their call for a bipartisan resolution that would deliver consumer protections while also allowing for network investment and innovation. "Congress has the clear authority to establish bright-line, modern and enforceable net neutrality rules without burdening the internet with other Title II requirements and regulations," the associations said in the letter. "By doing so, Congress would resolve this issue once and for all, ending the fifteen-year counterproductive and anti-consumer tug-of-war."

NAB Notebook: **FuboTV** wants you to know it is, first and foremost, a cable company. The streamer raised its prices last week by \$10 to \$54.99 a month, largely due to increased content and the addition of channels. "We license content in exactly the same model as any other cable company does, and we have the same troubles that any other company does with the content owners. We are looking to create content, but that's very early days for us," said fubo TV CTO *Geir Magnusson Jr* at a panel at **NAB** in Las Vegas. "The entire company was formed around this idea of using software to deliver this experience in a way that is on-par with a conventional delivery mechanism. All this is done in software that

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we built and deployed and manage.” Magnusson also hit on how fubo is heavily focusing efforts on search and recommendations to increase personalization. “We know an awful lot about what [our customers] are doing and what they like, and we’re focusing on those areas.” -- Sports, sports, and more sports! Much of NAB’s Streaming Summit focused on live and streaming sports. **NBC Sports Group Digital, Playmaker Media** svp & CTO *Eric Black* sat down at NAB to talk about building a live sports streaming platform. “Within NBC, we do try to standardize in terms of quality. But it’s also about tailoring and encoding to the content that you’re delivering,” Black explained. “It’s really hyper-tailoring the encoding to what looks good. We’re starting to look at things like 4K, more importantly things like HDR. There’s a lot of visual impact to HDR. HDR has a tremendous amount of visual impact, and depending on the device it could be a game changer.” Black also touched on content rights and cable unbundling, predicting that the industry may see rebundling begin to occur. “The content rights keep going up, and I think that’s part of the unbundling of the cable package and the potential rebundling, and I think customers are going to get fatigued with [paying] \$10 here, \$20 here,” he explained. “I think the experimentation you’re seeing in the industry right now is probably healthy, and I think it’s going to come together at some point and figure out a model.” -- **Amazon** had a heavy presence at NAB, with *Alex Kravis*, head of product for **X-Ray** on Prime Video, demonstrating the tech’s new abilities. X-Ray, powered by **IMDb**, is able to enhance viewer experience by providing real-time trivia, relevant information including cast, music and curated bonus material. Now, X-Ray is expanding into live content, including sports. “How do we extend this X-Ray deep learning experience to a new type of content, to a new type of fan experience?” Kravis asked the audience. “It’s live, customers may not have an experience to pause the video, you’ve only got one chance to get it right as it’s happening. We built an entirely new CX around this, just around live sports. We worked backwards from a desire to create something so useful and simple that customers might always want to leave it on. One is simplicity, is the game front and center. Second is relevance, and third is timing,” she said.

7-City Stud: **AT&T’s** mobile 5G service is live in parts of seven additional cities, bringing the company’s grand total to 19 cities. Sections of Austin, TX; Los Angeles, CA; Nashville, TN; Orlando, FL; San Diego, CA; San Francisco, CA; and San Jose, CA, now have access to the network. By the end of 2019, AT&T plans to offer at least three 5G mobile devices, the first of which will be the **Samsung** Galaxy S10 5G smartphone this spring.

Going Local: **FreeWheel’s** advertising division has released enhancements to its Strata platform allowing for additional automation to advertising on local TV. The Strata platform will automatically provide agencies with ratings estimates for proposals submitted by TV sellers. Buyers will also be able to evaluate various scenarios by building schedules against an advertiser’s audience goals and budgets. When they’re ready to make a deal, buyers and sellers will be able to use the software for two-way communication. FreeWheel will make the automated capabilities available to the 1200 agencies already using Strata and all US TV stations.

Partner Up: Video advertising and monetization platform **SpotX** is expanding its partnership with enhanced TV advertiser **Brightline** to offer premium inventory to advertisers as well as Brightline’s suite of personalized and interactive ad formats. The new solution streamlines the executive of enhanced ads at scale across OTT inventory. SpotX will now also launch support for programmatic as well as more inventory from OTT media owners.

Through the Fire and Flames: In preparation for Sunday’s return to Westeros with **HBO’s** “Game of Thrones” premiere, **Comcast** launched an immersive show destination on the X1 platform. It includes every episode of the drama as well as character recaps, season wrap-ups, behind-the-scenes interviews and extra web content. Customers will also be able to vote for which character they believe will claim the Iron Throne throughout the season by saying “For the Throne” into the X1 voice remote. Every episode of the show, including the Season 8 premiere on Sunday at 9pm, is available for free during this week’s Watchathon.

Ratings: **CBS Sports** and **Turner Sports’** coverage of the **NCAA** Tournament Men’s National Championship Game Monday night on **CBS** scored a 12.4/22 household rating/share, based on Nielsen metered market ratings. It’s up 20% over last year, peaking with a 15.0/30 from 11:30-11:45pm. Overall, 2019 NCAA Tournament coverage across **TBS**, **CBS**, **TNT** and **truTV** was up 11% YOY, averaging a 7.1/15. NCAA March Madness Live set all-time tournament records in live streams (over 100mln) and live hours consumed (over 24mln). Social engagement saw a 94% increase across **Facebook**, **Twitter** and **Instagram** while videos across the three platforms generated over 135mln views (+74%).

People: *Ryan Powers* is joining **CTAM** as the organization’s svp, communications and marketing. He’ll succeed *Anne Cowan*, who is retiring this month. Powers most recently served as svp, communications, marketing and membership for the **National Council of Behavioral Health** and has held senior roles at **United Way Worldwide** and **Fannie Mae**.