

# Cablefax Daily™

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What the Industry Reads First

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## New Horizons: Integrating AI, Machine Learning into Cable Culture

Most people have spoken to at least one AI-powered chatbot by now. The virtual conversation partners have proven themselves to be powerful tools for enhancing customer care, but they're only the beginning of what's possible for cable and telco companies that take advantage of the power of AI and machine learning. "What we need to talk about now and get companies to embrace is the operationalization of it," **Vitria** vp/transformation strategist *Chris Menier* told **Cablefax**. Customer care agents are already utilizing technology in small ways, gathering data from devices in a customer's home in order to more quickly diagnose disruptions in service. "It allows that interaction to be a little bit more personalized, and it hopefully allows the end user, the consumer, to get through that troubleshooting more quickly," he said. And if the AI becomes advanced enough, customers may not even realize when it's hard at work repairing a network issue. Building a system that can manage those simple repairs when a customer loses service should be one of the ultimate goals for operators investing in AI. "You really want to have a self-healing network," Menier said. "You want the majority of the customer issues to be handled at that base. The most expensive and most frustrating part for consumers is that technician unit." A self-healing network doesn't mean taking people out of the equation. The best applications of AI come when humans are engaging with the AI, fine-tuning algorithms and stopping the technology from taking unnecessary action. If a service disruption is normal at 4pm every Friday, a human could stop the AI from sending a technician to a customer's home at 4pm every Friday. "This doesn't mean that those [customer service] people are out of a job," Menier said. "Those people are focused on turning on new services, improving speeds on a DOCSIS network. These are smart engineers who can be pointed in a different direction and add other value to a corporation." Since launching virtual assistant Molli in December, **Mediacom** has seen the benefit of taking advantage of digital solutions to better serve its customers. "When needed, there is a smooth handoff from Molli to a live agent who can focus on higher-level customer service matters because Molli resolves so many routine matters," a Mediacom rep told **CFX**. "It's a wonderfully-improved experience for our customers and our customer service agents—an experience that will keep getting better as Molli's skill set continues to expand."



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While technical barriers can hold folks back from advancing in their AI capabilities, it's not all about machinery and algorithms. Everyone from customer care agents to engineers need to be onboard and working together to develop a plan to create, deploy and properly manage an AI solution that will best serve the end consumer. "This can't just be another tool," Menier said. "Really, this is a cultural change within an organization that requires a new framework approach." It's all about deploying it in a non-disruptive way, leveraging the same technologies, people and workflows that an organization already does. Adding the additional layer of AI and machine learning is just the cherry on top.

**Out of Orbit:** Pluto TV just got a whole lot more content, with 14 free channels coming to the streamer, including **Viacom's** flagship brands. Curated versions of **BET, Comedy Central, MTV** and **Nickelodeon** will debut on May 1. Pluto is also launching "Signature Channels" (**CMT Westerns, Comedy Central Stand-Up, MTV Dating, MTV Guy Code, MTV Teen, Paramount Movie Channel, Spike Outdoors**), which include a selection of content from each brand. Pluto also will offer pop-up channels, such as **MTV's The Hills**, that are dedicated to a specific show. The company also announced a new slate of original digital programming during its NewFront event in NYC on Monday. After adding Pluto TV, Viacom said its digital video impressions will grow to 5bln monthly by 2020. The company said Pluto TV has more than 15mln monthly active users, mostly in the US. Viacom acquired the AVOD earlier this year for \$340mln. **Viacom Digital Studios** will produce new and returning original series around major events, linear franchises and digital shows from **AwesomenessTV**, **BET**, **Comedy Central**, **MTV** and **Nickelodeon**. Content includes "How to Survive: A Break-Up" from AwesomenessTV for **YouTube**, **BET's** "Black Coffee" (YouTube, **Facebook Watch, Twitter, O&O**), an original digital talk series starring **Mark Lamont Hill**, an overall talent deal on Comedy Central with **Gus Johnson** for **YouTube**, Nick's "SpongeBob Smarty Pants Game Show," a digital game show where two SpongeBob superfans compete to win the Golden Pineapple by answering trivia questions, completing stunts and competing in SpongeBob-themed games (Facebook, SpongeBob YouTube Channel) and "JoJo and BowBow Show Show" Season 2 (YouTube) with animated adventures starring **JoJo Siwa**, her dog Bow Bow and their furry friends. Viacom is also expanding "The Daily Show's" digital presence, with several new digital exclusive formats and series in development. Not to forget Awesomeness' thriller "Light as a Feather" Season 2, premiering on **Hulu** July 26, and MTV's "Wild 'N Out" is coming to **Twitch** as a live-streaming channel that will feature its personalities playing video games.

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**One Step Closer:** An update to **A+E Networks'** KeepMyChannels website Sunday may be a sign that it's moving closer to finalizing a new contract with **AT&T/DirecTV**. "AT&T-DirecTV customers, we are working to ensure you keep **A+E**, **History**, **Lifetime** and all of the A+E Networks currently available to you. Thank you for your support," the message on the site read. It's a change from Saturday, which saw A+E warning **U-verse**, DirecTV and **DirecTV Now** subscribers that they could lose their channels when the contract expires Tuesday evening. In a memo to employees over the weekend, A+E pres *Paul Bucciari* wrote that "AT&T appears intent on using their new position to gain an unfair advantage for their own channels." AT&T fought back, saying A+E was putting customers in the middle of the dispute. "We've always fought to get the best deal for our customers, delivering the content they want at a great value," a statement said. "We'll continue to fight for that here."

**Goodbye, Atlantic:** *Rich Shea* has stepped down as **Atlantic Broadband** pres/CEO to pursue personal interests, parent company **Cogeco Communications** announced. He'll remain with the company to ensure a smooth transition and CFO *Patrick Bratton* will serve as interim CEO. "On behalf of my colleagues and the entire Cogeco Communications team, I'd like to thank Rich for his contribution to Atlantic Broadband and to our company and wish him every success in his future endeavours," Cogeco CEO *Philippe Jetté* said in a statement. Shea joined Atlantic in 2003 and held positions including CIO and COO before rising to CEO in 2015.

**Supporting Speed:** Thanks to reforms to the Universal Service Fund, the 186 companies participating in the **FCC's** Alternative Connect America Cost Model program have accepted \$65.7m in additional annual support over the next decade. Those funds come with the condition that those carriers will deploy 25/3 Mbps service to more than 106K homes and small businesses across 43 states that otherwise would be served with 10/1 Mbps speeds. Providers receiving funding must deploy the faster service to 40% of locations by the end of 2022, increasing deployment by 10% annually until buildout is complete at the end of 2028. The upgrades will lead to a 31.8% increase in the number of locations that have received faster service through the A-CAM program.

**NewFront Ads:** Advertisers are expected to spend \$18m on digital video in 2019, with more than half of that budget devoted to original content, according to the "Digital Content NewFronts: 2019 Video Ad Spend Report" from **IAB**. The research showed that brands are expected to increase spend by over 25% to \$18m on digital video this year, with \$9.3m allocated to original content. In 2018, advertisers spent an average of \$14.2m on digital video ads, up from \$12.1m in 2017. It also found that eight out of 10 advertisers agreed that attendance at the NewFronts led to increased spending on original video content, and 59% of ad buyers plan to increase their advanced TV spend in the next 12 months, with half reporting increases in OTT.

**Jukin Flex:** **Jukin Media** formed a pay-TV integration with **Comcast** for its digital media brands, **FailArmy** and **The Pet Collective** via Xfinity X1. Jukin's entire catalog of short-form digital content and its live offerings will be available over the internet with Xfinity on Demand. Additionally, FailArmy, **People Are Awesome** and The Pet Collective will be available on Xfinity Flex, Comcast's new internet-only option.

**Breaking Barriers:** **NAMIC** opened registration for its 33rd annual conference, held in NYC Sept 17-18 as part of Diversity Week. The theme this year is "Breaking Barriers: The Multicultural Media Agenda," which focuses on NAMIC's goal to increase diversity in the industry.

**Draft Day:** The **NFL Draft** scored some major touchdowns in the ratings, with all telecasts combined reaching more than 47.5m television viewers over the three-day event, up 5% vs. 2018. It saw a combined 3.9 HH TV rating and average of 6.1m TV and digital viewers. With 600K fans in the streets of Nashville, it was the most attended draft ever as well. It was also the broadest ever distribution, with **NFL Network**, **ABC**, **ESPN**, **ESPN2**, and **ESPN Deportes** in addition to NFL and ESPN digital and social properties all airing it.

**Programming:** **DirecTV** will air holes 16, 17 and 18 of the 2019 **AT&T Byron Nelson** golf tournament in live 4K HDR on channel 106 May 9 and 10 from 3:30-6:30pm and from 4-7pm on May 11 and 12.

**People:** **Crown Media Family Networks** promoted *Natalie Vandergast* to vp, consumer products. She previously held the role of senior director, home entertainment. In her new role Vandergast will continue to lead physical and digital home entertainment distribution in addition to leading the expansion of the company's recently launched publishing business, **Hallmark Publishing**. -- **Discovery** promoted *Matthew Butler* to gm, **Travel Channel**, effective immediately. He most recently served as vp, programming and developing for the net. He'll be working with previous gm *Jane Latman*, who was recently named pres of **HGTV**, to refocus the line-up and schedule of the net.