

Cablefax Daily™

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What the Industry Reads First

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Founders Circle: The Year Was 1979...

Ah, 1979. The end of a decade. The year McDonald's introduced the Happy Meal, the year President *Jimmy Carter* was attacked by a swamp rabbit, the year *Michael Jackson* released "Off the Wall." But most importantly, 1979 was a revolutionary year for the cable industry with the launches of **WICT**, **C-SPAN**, **ESPN** and other familiar names coming soon after. "Nobody in 1979 was forecasting huge success for ESPN, certainly no one was envisioning multiple networks, nobody was envisioning the internet," *Mike Soltys*, vp, corporate communications, for ESPN told **Cablefax**. Soltys was hired in 1980 as a college intern by ESPN founder *Bill Rasmussen*, and has been with the company ever since. Rasmussen was originally interested in regional sports broadcasting, but after meeting with **RCA** rep *Al Parnello*, the company purchased a transponder for a continuous 24-hour satellite feed, which was actually less expensive than regionally broadcasting in Connecticut. "I think that's why 1979 was so pivotal, the ability to distribute content nationwide at a low cost was now open," said Soltys. WICT pres/CEO *Maria Brennan* believes cable exploded in 1979 due to tech innovations. "I think the biggest game changer was probably this little thing we call the internet. That was in its infancy, so that is I think certainly a big game changer. And then I think because of that the way we distribute and consume content has changed along with the times," Brennan said. She also emphasized the importance of organizations that came before WICT. "When you look at groups like **NCTA**, they were an important organization. Back in the day when they were formed, they were the disruptors. Along comes cable and suddenly four channels went to 40 and then became 80, then they became thousands," she said. "I think NCTA helped create the inroad. I think you also saw really important things happening in 1979. That's when ESPN launched and that's when C-SPAN was formed, that's when WICT formed. I believe what was happening was that the cable landscape really appealed to the consumer population, and whenever you have subscribers, whenever you have people wanting and believing in something that you're offering, then the ground is just going to swell." Not everyone was confident that 24-hour networks, or even cable, would take off back then. "Suddenly the thought of 24-hour a day programming was just a new wealth of opportunity for people. My early days here, one of the things I had to spend a lot of time on talking to writers around the country about why the idea of 24-hour sports was a good idea," said Soltys. "Even when **ESPN2** launched in 1993, it was still a

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Dana Strong, Comcast Cable
- Creative Thinking
Charter Communications
- Evolution Award
RCN/Grande/Wave Executive Team
- Customer Service Award
Sparklight (Cable ONE)

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INDEPENDENT OPERATOR OF THE YEAR



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Vicki Villacrez, TDS Telecom
- Marketing Executive of the Year
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April Eades, Bristol Tennessee Essential Services
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tough sale for us to say that people want more options. As the internet evolved, even **ESPN Radio** made a resurgence. **ESPN Audio** is a very successful thing today, but in the 1980s people thought radio was a dying medium. Today ESPN Radio in the traditional sense does very well, but streaming and podcasts have just made it a boom business for us. With **ESPN+**, you're now bringing substantially more sports content into the marketplace than existed a year and a half ago. The content explosion that really started in 1979 has not slowed down." And while no one quite knows where the future is headed in the next 40 years, Brennan has a couple thoughts. "I've been around long enough to remember a time where you watched television and you had like four or five channels to choose from, and even in my lifetime up until now the idea of having thousands of choices and dozens of devices to view it on is just a pretty short amount of time," she said. "When I think about what might happen, given the baseline of technology now that could happen in another one of my lifetimes, it's hard to imagine how far we can come," she said.

AT&T's Retrans Ruckus: **DirectTV**, **U-verse** and **DirectTV NOW** customers lost various broadcast stations Thursday night, with stations from **Deerfield Media**, **MPS Media**, **GoCom Media** of Illinois, **Howard Stirk Holdings**, **Roberts Media**, **Second Generation of Iowa**, and **Waitt Broadcasting** all dark on the providers' lineups. All told, the **AT&T** blackout encompasses 17 stations in 14 cities (16 stations in 14 cities for **DirectTV**; 9 stations in 6 cities for **U-verse** and 4 stations in 4 cities for **DirectTV NOW**), with the same agent negotiating retrans for all the broadcasters. "We want to get these local stations back into our customers' channel lineups as soon as possible. But by law, each of their owners, who are represented collectively, has exclusive control over their carriage rights," **AT&T** said. The broadcasters involved said **AT&T** has been granted several extensions with the two unable to agree on terms at this point. Stations involved in the dispute include Rochester, NY, **ABC** affil **WHAM**, **CBS** affil **KMEG** of Sioux City, IA, and Cincinnati-based **MyNetwork TV** affil **WSTR**. This latest blackout hit the same date that **AT&T** announced its adding Locast's interactive app on its **DirectTV** and **U-verse** platforms. Locast lets viewers with broadband-connected receivers access to their local **ABC**, **CBS**, **NBC**, **FOX** and other broadcast stations streamed via the Internet for free. It's currently available in NYC, Chicago, Philly, Dallas, Washington, Houston, Boston, Denver and Baltimore (none of the markets involved in Thursday's blackout). MVPDs are increasingly showing interest in Locast. **Charter** pointed out Locast's availability earlier this year during its blackout with **Tribune**. "AT&T continues to offer consumers new ways to access the video content they want. We believe Locast's public service offering will make sense for many of them," the company said. **AT&T** also offers a complimentary Local Channel Connector service when a local station is otherwise unavailable. The service captures stations'



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over-the-air digital signals via a free digital broadcast antenna and enables customers to select channels using the program guide. AT&T recently provided more than 10K free Local Channel Connectors to Salt Lake City customers who went without the local NBC affiliate.

STELAR: Things are heating up with next week's hearings on the expiring Satellite Television Extension and Localism Act Reauthorization (STELAR) legislation. STELAR allows satellite TV providers to pipe in distant broadcast signals into a local market. Independent programmers **RIDE TV**, **MAVTV**, **Revolt**, and **Cinémoi** are joining retrans reform water carrier **American TV Alliance** to call on Congress to address retrans fees with the bill. "If federal spending rose as quickly as retransmission consent has over the last 10 years, Washington would be spending \$131.4 trillion per year," said RIDE TV pres *Craig Morris* said in a statement. "It's no wonder why MVPDs can no longer afford to carry independent networks." On the other side of the debate, broadcasters are hoping Congress will force **AT&T** to carry local TV signals in all 210 DMAs. It currently has 12 markets where it's importing distant broadcast signals. "There is no technological reason for this slight as **DISH Network** offers local into local in all 210 markets," House Commerce member *Dave Loebsack* (D-IA) wrote in a letter to committee leadership Thursday.

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Up Ahead

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June 4-6: [ANGACOM](#); Cologne, Germany

June 4-6: [Promax Conference](#); L.A.

June 6: [Cablefax Celebration of Leadership](#); NYC

June 13: [Videoscape Europe](#); London

June 17-19: [SCTE-ISBE DOCSIS 3.1 Boot Camp](#); Denver

July 18-21: [Comic Con](#); San Diego

Research

➤ Over one-third (36%) of advertisers said identity resolution was one of the top three barriers preventing them from using data to build audience profiles.

➤ 54% of advertisers are concerned about competitive leaks when sharing information with media partners, and only 5% had no concerns about sharing data with media partners.

➤ Among advertisers, 79% said protecting consumer privacy was a top concern in 2019, up 10% over 2018.

(Source: *FreeWheel's Blockgraph*)

Quotable

"To align with market realities and future developments, the [Federal Trade Commission] should apply relevant market definitions that encompass all broadband Internet access platforms, regardless of their differing delivery technologies. And it should apply a forward-looking analysis that factors in the market's technological dynamism."

- [Comments submitted to FTC by Free State Foundation](#) pres *Randolph May* & sr fellow/policy studies dir *Seth Cooper* on the Commission's broadband proceeding

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