

Cablefax Daily™

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What the Industry Reads First

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Another Rerun: USA Gains Support for Video Description Waiver

Friday marked the final day to submit comments on **USA Network's** quest to receive a limited waiver from the **FCC Media Bureau** on rules surrounding video described programming, and many of those comments came with a thumbs up. Current rules require MVPDs that serve 50K or more subs to provide video described programming on each of the top five national non-broadcast networks that they carry (50 hours during primetime or children's programming, and 37.5 between 6am and 11:59pm local time). After exempting nets with large amount of live programming, the FCC determined that the five cable nets that must meet this obligation are **USA, TNT, TBS, History and Disney Channel**. USA parent **NBCU** has asked the FCC to allow USA to air at least 1K hours of described programming each quarter without regard to repeats, as current rules say repeat programming can't be counted more than twice toward the required hours, through June 30, 2021. Under the proposal, USA also would provide descriptions for at least 75% of any newly-produced non-live programming aired between 6am and midnight per quarter. While NBCU has supported the waiver applying to the other four nets so long as they meet the same conditions, none entered comments into the docket. Those who did speak out include the **American Council of the Blind**, which revealed it had voted unanimously to support the roughly two-year limited waiver of video description requirements for USA. But when it came to the creation of a safe harbor for the other four networks, ACB took a step back. It cited **NBCU's** commitment to collaborating with the ACB over the past year to develop the terms of USA's petition, adding that "other non-broadcast pay-TV channels have not collaborated with the disability community to understand the importance of audio description." **NCTA - The Internet & Television Association** supported the safe harbor in its comments, applauding the flexibility it would offer to non-broadcast networks without setting the bar lower for the availability of video-described programming. "Indeed, the approach—which reflects numerous conversations with, and has the support of, advocates for the blind and visually-impaired—strikes a sensible balance that will encourage the provision of more hours of video-described programming," NCTA said. The next stage in the proceeding will come with the due date for replies on July 26.

AirTV Launches Next Gen Streaming Stick: DISH's **AirTV** launched its next generation of streaming sticks, the **AirTV**

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Mini. The 4K HDR compatible stick integrates **Sling TV**, **Netflix** and other over-the-air services and is powered by Android TV. The WiFi enabled device is available for \$79.99. The company says the device is meant to complement an existing setup that already includes an OTA digital antenna and an AirTV WiFi-enabled network tuner. For a short time, new and existing Sling TV customers can get a free AirTV and antenna by subscribing and prepaying three months of Sling TV.

ACC Network Lands Founding Partner: The upcoming **ESPN-owned ACC Network** will have **New York Life** as a “founding partner.” More than an ad-buy, New York Life is committing to a multi-faceted sponsorship of the net and is the first company to be announced as taking a major position in the network. New York Life and the ACC have been partners since 2014, and the firm is the official life insurance company of the ACC. NY Life will continue as the exclusive presenting sponsor of the ACC Men’s Basketball Tournament, which will air across the ESPN nets and ACC Network. ACC Network is launching on Aug 22, but some major television providers haven’t yet reached a deal to carry the net. **Comcast** and **DISH** are in ongoing negotiations. *Jason Dennard*, **FSU’s** associate athletics director for new revenue and marketing, told the *Tallahassee Democrat* that he’s encouraging fans to contact Comcast to “make their voices known.” With under 40 days to launch, **DirecTV**, **Altice USA**, **Verizon Fios**, **Google Fiber**, **TVision**, **PlayStation Vue** and **Hulu Live** are among those who have reached an agreement for the conference net.

FCC Kicks Off Third Round of Rural Broadband Funding: The **FCC** authorized more than \$524mln in funding over the next decade to expand broadband to more than 205K unserved rural addresses in 23 states. It marks the third wave of Connect America Fund Phase II auction money, with providers to begin receiving funding this month. Thus far, the FCC has authorized \$803mln of the \$1.488bln allocated through the auction. The agency also has authorized more than \$39.2mln in federal funding over the next decade to expand broadband to more than 15K unserved rural NY addresses in partnership with the state’s New NY Broadband Program. Among those receiving funding in NY from the CAF fund are **MTC Cable**, which will get \$4.27mln over 10 years to expand broadband to 1,659 rural homes and businesses at downstream speeds of at least 100Mbps and upstream speeds of 20Mbps. **Verizon** will receive more than \$18.5mln over the next decade to expand broadband to 7,767 addresses.

Fubo Adds Discovery Nets: **FuboTV** subs now have access to **Discovery’s** networks, following last month’s announcement that the two had signed a multi-year carriage agreement. As of Monday, **Animal Planet**, **Discovery Channel**, **Investigation Discovery**, **MotorTrend**, **OWN** and **TLC** are part of the fubo Standard package (\$54.99 a month) and **American Heroes Channel**, **Destination America**, **Discovery Family**, **Discovery Life** and **Science Channel** have been added to the add-on package fubo Extra, which now includes 35 channels for \$5.99 a month.

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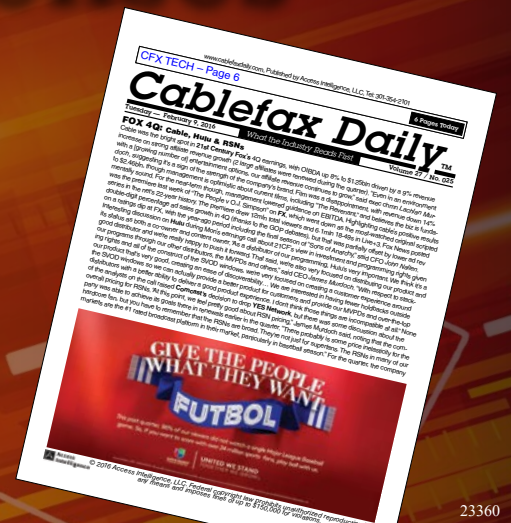
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Discovery Bites Off Shark Week Advertising: Discovery Channel's annual Shark Week programming event kicks off July 28 with more than 20 hours of original shark-themed programming. The net is also welcoming a host of new and returning sponsors across its on-air properties and digital. New sponsors include **Universal Pictures, Discover Financial Services, Maui Jim** and **Orangetheory Fitness**. Major returning sponsors include **Crest (Procter & Gamble), MillerCoors, Geico, Esurance** and **Hyundai**.

Exec Shakeups at HBO Continue: HBO's longtime evp of corporate communications *Quentin Schaeffer* will be leaving the net after 39 years. Schaeffer made the announcement in an email to staff Monday morning, styled as a promo script. Schaeffer called his 39-year tenure "the greatest temporary job," noting that after 30 days he expected to be fired when *Jerry Lee Lewis* jokingly threatened his life. Schaeffer will exit his role in August after guiding HBO through one final TCA press tour. His departure comes five months after **WarnerMedia** shook up its top execs with the departure of CEO *Richard Plepler* and appointment of *Bob Greenblatt* as content chief overseeing the net. Full of style, Schaeffer ended his email with a nod to the legendary "Sopranos" ending. "And now, when summer ends, I've decided to move onto something new. My wife has convinced me I could have just as much fun and learn new things if I spent more time with her. CUT TO BLACK (courtesy of *David Chase*)," he wrote.

Rocco & Co will be Rocking US Soccer Stadiums: If you thought the summer of soccer was over after the wrap of the Women's World Cup, Copa America and CONCACAF, you thought wrong. A series of friendlies is taking place all over the country, with several major teams headed to the US, including Barcelona, Liverpool, AC Milan, Arsenal, Chelsea and Fiorentina. With *Rocco Commisso*-owned Italian soccer club A.C.F. Fiorentina kicking off its series of US matches this week, you can bet **Mediacom** employees will be in the stands decked out in the team's distinctive purple. The MSO is busing hundreds of nearby Mediacom Midwest employees and guests to Tuesday's game in Chicago (7/23), part of the 2019 International Champions Cup. The match against Chivas de Guadalajara will be televised on **ESPN2** at 8pm. For the club's July 24 game against Portuguese team Benfica in Harrison, NJ, Mediacom expects there to be more than 4K Mediacom/NY Cosmos employees, friends, family and guests in attendance. It'll be giving out thousands of violet shirts and towels to get the crowd in the Fiorentina spirit.

Tropical Storm Barry Outage Report: The **FCC's** Communications Status report for areas impacted by Tropical Storm Barry showed 53K+ cable/wireline subs in LA without service as of 11:30am ET Monday and another 462 experiencing outages in MS. The LA outages were up from the 44K+ reported Sunday morning. The outages may include the loss of telephone, television and/or internet services. One broadcast station (**Nexstar**-owned **WNTZ**) was reported as being out of service on Sunday, but it was back on the air by 11:30am Monday. The FCC report said there were 0.5% (down from 1.7% Sunday) of the cell sites out of service in the affected area. The FCC deactivated its Disaster Information Reporting System Monday, but said it would continue to monitor the status of communications services.

Nexstar Stations Still Dark on AT&T: **AT&T/DirecTV** and **Nexstar** reps met over the weekend to discuss their retrans impasse, but the blackout continues. More than 100 Nexstar stations still are dark on U-verse and DirecTV.

Ratings: Sunday's **Wimbledon** men's final between *Roger Federer* and *Novak Djokovic* brought in the highest overnight figure of the men's final since 2012 (3.1), pulling in a 2.6 overnight rating on **ESPN**. The matchup averaged 2mln out-of-home viewers over the course of its five-hour duration on **ESPN**, according to **Tunity Analytics**. The audience skewed 58% A25-54 and 72% male.

Programming: **AMC Networks** \$4.99 month SVOD service **AMC Premiere** is still a thing. It announced Monday that all 13 eps of 2010 suspense drama "Rubicon" will be available commercial free to its subscribers. The first three eps of the series are available, with commercials, on AMC's various digital platforms including AMC.com. -- **A&E's** live original docuseries "Live Rescue" is moving to Thursday nights, with new episodes premiering on July 18 at 9pm. The series debuted in April and is averaging 1.2mln total viewers in L+3, outperforming A&E's usual Monday night time period by 150%. -- **Ovation** is heading back to France after the success of "Versailles" and "Riviera" with the premiere of crime drama "Maigret" on Aug 31 at 7pm. -- **MTV** and *Sean 'Diddy' Combs* are bringing back "Making the Band" in 2020. The reality TV competition first premiered in 2002 with Combs at the helm and discovered multiple breakout stars including *Danity Kane* and *Donnie Klang*. -- **Hallmark Movies Now** will premiere its first-ever streaming series "When Hope Calls" on Aug 30, with new episodes premiering every Friday through Oct 25.

People: **Fox** is bringing back one of its originals, naming *Jason Klarman* evp, marketing for **Fox News Media**, effective immediately. He re-joined the net last year as a consultant to help launch **Fox Nation**, and was part of the team to help launch Fox News in 1996. He most recently served as pres of **Hashtag Media Ideas**.

CFX TECH

Caller ID

Robocalls had their day at the **FCC** last week with chmn *Ajit Pai* holding a summit dedicated to the SHAKEN/STIR framework that promises to digitally validate that the call you're receiving really is from the person you think it's from.

Where the implementation of SHAKEN/STIR is likely to have the greatest impact is in improving traceability of these spoofed calls and in making it easier for those looking at the analytics to determine whether it really is your pharmacy that's calling you. As calls travel through the interconnected phone networks, their caller ID is "signed" as legitimate by both the originating carrier and other carriers before your phone begins to buzz. The carriers and their partners are then able to gather data from that traffic and note which calls aren't making the mark. Rather than becoming a silver bullet to stop all robocalls, it's one step forward in a much longer fight. "SHAKEN/STIR is definitely an essential layer in fighting bad robocalls. We use a variety of tools and this is another one to add to the toolbox, so when analytics are in on the original ID, it improves the quality of our data and accuracy and helps the consumer because we're more confident we got the call right and the label right," **Transaction Network Services** director, product management *Lavinia Kennedy* said at a panel during the summit. "We're telling you with confidence this is an illegal call or an unwanted call."

Hiya product management director *Jonathan Nelson* said the biggest goal now is to separate the legal calls from the illegal ones, allowing those businesses, including MVPDs, that use automated calls to continue utilizing those services without being penalized. "What SHAKEN/STIR does is gives you a signal that can tell them apart and bucketize this to make sure we're targeting those who are not using legitimate practices for the same techniques rather than those who aren't," Nelson said.

While many of the major providers are talking the talk when it comes to their commitment to protecting consumers, it's yet to be seen whether they'll truly walk the

walk when it comes to offering up free robocall blocking services. The summit fell one day after FCC commish *Geoffrey Starks*' deadline to hear back from a group of mobile carriers including **AT&T**, **Comcast**, **CenturyLink**, **Verizon** and **Google** on if they will offer their customers a default call blocking service on an opt-out basis, what the timeline looks like for implementation and whether they expect to offer it for free.

"Despite historically clamoring for new tools, it does not appear that all providers have acted with haste to deploy opt-out robocall blocking services," Starks recently said. "The Commission spoke clearly: we expect opt-out call blocking services to be offered to consumers for free. Reviewing the substance of these responses, by and large, carriers' plans for these services are far from clear."

Starks made it clear that this is one area in which he means business, threatening FCC action "If we find that carriers are acting contrary to our expectations, we will commence a rulemaking," Starks added. "I expect to be updated by carriers as progress is made on offering free call blocking services and recommend that carriers not stop until the job is finished. The sooner, the better." -- *Sara Winegardner*

Startups Get the Call for Comcast-headed Accelerator:

Comcast NBCU has chosen 11 startups for its second LIFT Labs Accelerator, powered by **Techstars**. Those chosen will call Philadelphia home for the duration of the 13-week program, which kicked off Monday. They'll partner with mentors and teams at the Comcast Technology Center, positioning them for possible partnerships with Comcast NBCU brands. The program will come to a close with a Demo Day, allowing the Accelerator participants to showcase their businesses to investors, Comcast NBCU leaders and outside members of the tech and startup communities. The 2019 class includes **Diana AI**, **Edisn.ai**, **GameOn**, **Messy.fm**, **NICKL**, **Pivan Interactive**, **Respeecher**, **Sporttrade**, **Struct Club**, **TakeShape** and **The GIST**.

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