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Wednesday — September 25, 2019

What the Industry Reads First

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Back Again: DTC Brands Embrace TV

There had been the myth in direct-to-consumer brands (think **Peloton**, **Wayfair**, **Glossier**, etc) that television advertising was unnecessary, but the industry is seeing a major shift. Companies that usually wouldn't have associated with TV are now pouring in money after hitting a saturation point in digital. "Now that we have this performance based measurement, we're able to show that this bet pays off," said *Danielle DeLauro*, evp of the **VAB**, during a panel at Advertising Week in NYC on Tuesday. "You're seeing this snowball effect of all these DTC companies jumping on this bandwagon that TV works." And it does. According to a **TVSquared** report on DTC performance (with research from the VAB), TV led to an 83% uptick in website visits, a 206% jump in social activities and a 312% rise in search queries. "None of my DTC brands talk about GRPs or cord cuttings or ratings. They don't care as long as they get a sale," said *Jo Kinsella*, TVSquared's evp and chief revenue officer. "They're used to consuming Facebook, Instagram, social media [analytics]. They want the same type of analytics served up for TV that gives them close to real-time proof of performance, and that's what we're giving them." Linear TV isn't the only entry point into the space for DTC brands, however. "It's all about the mix of linear plus OTT plus any other acronym that you would like to use today. Essentially the DTC brands want it all," said Kinsella. **Viacom** does a lot of work with DTC brands, and not even just in TV. "When a DTC or some of the established brands come in the door they have different options and you can scale that based on wherever you are in your business cycle," said *Karen Phillips*, evp of ad solutions for Viacom. "For us, we measure success when somebody comes in the door for an influencer campaign. And then they come back for brand. And then they add in TV. Having multiple points of entry is very important for them. What we like to do for Viacom is let people know that we really are more than just TV, and that really works for DTC." Phillips used **Postmates** as an example. The food-delivery company first partnered with Viacom for a pop-up, before becoming a sponsor of **Comedy Central's Alec Baldwin** roast. "Success breeds more involvement," said Phillips. And it's not just about being on TV, it also matters when and where. Surprisingly, primetime is not the strongest timeslot. TVSquared found that by genre, children's programming performed highest (+250%), followed by talk (+200%) and Spanish-language (+177%). Morning programming drove the highest lift. "We saw that primetime, don't kill me, was

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not as great for performance as it was for longer term brand. You still need it, but it wasn't driving that immediate lift," said Kinsella. All panelists agreed that the DTC approach to TV advertising should be the wave of the future. "Anyone that's looking to reach an 18-34 year old has to start thinking this way. We have a lot of established legacy brands that come to us to use this multitouch point approach as well," said Phillips.

Sprint Under Investigation For Lifeline Violations: Sprint is in hot water with the FCC for violating the non-usage rule associated with the Lifeline program. According to the Commission, Sprint claimed monthly subsidies for serving approx 885K Lifeline subscribers, even though those subs were not using the service. The non-usage rule requires Lifeline providers to de-enroll subscribers who don't use their phones, protecting the program from wasting payments on service not provided. The 885K subs represent nearly 30% of Sprint's Lifeline subscriber base and 10% of the total Lifeline program's sub base. "It's outrageous that a company would claim millions of taxpayer dollars for doing nothing. This shows a careless disregard for program rules and American taxpayers," FCC chmn Ajit Pai said in a statement. "I have asked our Enforcement Bureau to investigate this matter to determine the full extent of the problem and to propose an appropriate remedy." The violation was originally discovered through an investigation by the Oregon Public Utility Commission. According to Sprint, an error occurred when Sprint updated how it calculates usage and eligibility of Lifeline customers in response to FCC changes to the program in 2016. "When the error was discovered, we immediately and proactively raised this issue with the FCC and appropriate state regulators. We also engaged an independent third party to review the results of our review and the effectiveness of our operational changes," Sprint said in a statement. "While immaterial to Sprint's financial results, we are committed to reimbursing federal and state governments for any subsidy payments that were collected as a result of the error." The Enforcement Bureau's investigation could have an impact on the FCC's approval of the T-Mobile/Sprint merger. Democratic commish Geoffrey Starks has called for the merger review to be put on hold until the Enforcement Bureau's investigation is completed. "How the merging parties were going to handle Lifeline was a prominent part of their merger pitch, so I am alarmed and concerned about such a massive inaccuracy in a core part of the transaction. And why was it that an outside party brought this issue to the FCC's attention—shouldn't the FCC have uncovered this?" Starks said in a statement. "Such apparent misconduct raises serious questions about the accuracy and completeness of both the company's filings in the merger proceeding and our review." While this may complicate the deal's approval, New Street Research isn't convinced that it will sway the opinions of any of the Republican commishes who are set to vote for the deal's approval. "The risk goes to timing and the risk that a court might step into a Lifeline issue in a way that affects the merger process," the firm said in a research note.

Open Web Needs Innovation: The open web has two-thirds of activity, but the walled gardens have 65% of media spend. How can the industry restore balance in digital advertising? The answer is innovation, according to panelists speaking at Advertising Week in NYC Tuesday. "Open web has been very much static this last year, we haven't seen a lot of innovation in the space compared to the walled garden. We've seen them [walled gardens] going outside of the platform and delivering DSP type of work or reach or platforms," said Karima Zmerli, chief data science officers for Wavemaker Global (part of GroupM). "We haven't seen the evolution from the product perspective coming from

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the open web to counter that.” *Tim Cadogan*, the CEO of **OpenX**, said the industry needs to come together between marketing and publishing to gather audiences and reach a relevant set of consumers. “Our job is connecting those dots to make that as scaleable, safe, easy and simple and high performing as it is in the walled gardens,” he said. *Scott Howe*, CEO of **LiveRamp**, emphasized the importance of companies having their own data. “You can’t be trapped by the data that a select few have,” he said.

Comcast Restores Remote DVR: Comcast brought back a remote DVR scheduling function Monday following the expiration of two **TiVo** patents, according to a *Light Reading* report. Both TiVo patents detailed an “interactive television program guide with remote access.” Comcast removed the feature from its Xfinity Stream app in November 2017 after the **ITC** issued a “limited exclusion order” forcing the MVPD to remove certain functionalities. The two have duked it out over Rovi’s patents since Comcast’s licensing deal with TiVo expired in March 2016. Comcast won in their most recent battle with the Federal Circuit upholding an earlier ruling by the **Patent Trial and Appeals Board** declaring Patent ‘696 invalid.

Commscope Showing Off 10G Tech: Commscope revealed three 10G innovations Tuesday designed to dramatically improve network scale, speed and latency ahead of **SCTE-ISBE** Cable-Tec Expo. First up is a DAA aggregator, an architecture designed to extend fiber deeper into the network. Next up is Commscope’s Extended Soft FDD, a combination of the software-only Frequency Division Duplex and Extended Spectrum DOCSIS to push network interface speeds beyond 1.2GHz. Finally, a new DOCSIS timing protocol is set to support applications including mobile backhaul, virtual reality and autonomous vehicle control.

Working Mother Highlights Best Companies for Families: Discovery, Viacom and Verizon secured spots on the 2019 **Working Mother** 100 Best Companies list, which highlights companies with inclusive benefits for families. The trio received nods for their childcare options, focus on the health and wellness of employees and flexible work schedules.

SSIMWAVE Brings Video Monitoring Tool to Cable Ops: SSIMWAVE made its SSIMPLUS Single-Ended HDMI-Out monitoring available for cable operators Tuesday. The product measures video quality on a pixel-by-pixel basis at the HDMI outputs of legacy and IPTV set-top boxes in hubs, scoring it on a 0-100 basis. Operators will be able to use the solution for the ongoing testing of different hubs and nodes as well as anticipation and localization of problem areas ahead of customer complaints.

New Deal for ‘Free Solo’ Directors: Jimmy Chin and Chai Vasarhelyi, the documentary team behind “Free Solo,” have entered into a first-look deal with **National Geographic**. Nat Geo received 7 of its 8 Emmy wins for the rock climbing film with the media venture ranking fourth in overall Emmy wins.

Ratings: More fans are tuning in to catch everything fashion during awards season. E!’s “Live From The Red Carpet: The 2019 Emmy Awards” was up 14% among A18-49 (201K) and 27% with total viewers P2+ (587K). The network’s “Countdown to the Red Carpet” also saw an upswing, growing 110% with viewers P2+ (229K). Rounding out the night was “After Party: The Emmy Awards,” which also saw a 46% increase among total viewers P2+ (217K).

Programming: Showtime acquired the rights to weekly newsmagazine “Vice” and ordered a 13-episode season to premiere in spring 2020. **HBO** cancelled the series after its sixth season in 2018 before cancelling the daily “Vice News Tonight” earlier this year.

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