

Cablefax Daily™

Tuesday — October 8, 2019

What the Industry Reads First

Volume 30 / No. 193

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Peacock Strut: Cable's Strauss Moves Over to NBCU Streaming Service

Every once in a while, the news manages to surprise us. That was certainly the case Monday, when NBCU announced that **Comcast Cable's Matt Strauss** will head up soon-to-launch streaming service **Peacock**, taking the reins from renowned programmer *Bonnie Hammer*. A cable guy running a streaming service? Just last month, Strauss was talking up Comcast Cable's decision to allow all internet-only customers free access to Xfinity Flex, a 4K streaming device with voice remote that offers thousands of free movies and shows on demand and makes it easy to navigate a wide range of streaming apps, including **Netflix** and **Amazon Prime Video**. But follow Strauss' career trajectory and the move is a bit less surprising. He joined Comcast after serving as gm of **Mag Rack**, the former VOD service from **Rainbow Media**. At Comcast, he cooked up a batch of proprietary VOD networks covering everything from guitar lessons to parenting to boating. In that pre-**Tinder** and **Bumble** world, there was even Comcast Dating on Demand. As an on demand pioneer, pivoting to lead OTT makes a lot of sense given that in many ways, it's the next iteration of on demand. A colleague told us that on demand seems to be in his blood, relaying a story Strauss has told where he convinced his parents to buy one of the first VCRs when he was child. He would record all sorts of shows for the neighborhood kids, essentially setting up his own VOD service. With Strauss moving over to Peacock, *Greg Butz's* role expands from president, Xfinity Mobile to president, connectivity services and customer experience. *Rebecca Heap*, previously svp, strategic initiatives for Xfinity Consumer Services, becomes svp, video. Both report to Comcast, consumer services pres *Dana Strong*. Strauss' appointment reminds us of an interview **Cablefax's Cable World** had with him 15 years ago in which he told us he was amazed at the number of programmers still pitching linear networks. "I've actually seen very few people coming forward using the same energy and focus and creativity in pitching a VOD channel. And that's what I'm most interested in," he said. "I can envision a day where everything has some form of a virtual channel, but I don't know if virtual is the best word. I think of these as enhanced channels, and to me they're a better way of watching television." Perhaps it's time to start calling Peacock, Disney+ and their peers "enhanced channels." -- Strauss heading up Peacock means that Hammer

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moves back over to the content development side, running Universal Television and Universal Content Productions. In January, NBCU had put her in charge of streaming operations, with Sports head *Mark Lazarus'* job expanding to include the cable operations. The restructure moves *George Cheeks* to vice chmn, NBCU Content Studios from co-chmn, NBC Entertainment. He will report to Hammer and keep oversight of NBC late-night programming. *Paul Telegdy* will be sole chmn, NBC Entertainment.

Fox Channels Return to DISH: DISH and Sling subs didn't have to face another Sunday potentially without football. The two announced a renewal at 6am ET Sunday that returned Fox owned & operated stations in 16 markets. **FS1, FS2, Big Ten, Fox Soccer Plus** and **Fox Deportes** also were returned to DISH. The channels had been off DISH and Sling since Sept 26. : "We appreciate our customers' patience as we worked to reach a long-term agreement that restores the Fox networks and local broadcast stations," DISH said in a statement. The deal also means Thursday Night Football should return to **NFL Network** for this week's Giants-Patriots match-up. Last week, NFL Net nixed its simulcast of the game, surprising MVPDs. -- In other carriage news, **Charter** and **Tegna** reached a renewal over the weekend. Tegna stations had warned earlier in the week of a potential blackout, but it never came to be, with the two reaching an extension to keep negotiating.

New Atlantic Broadband Chief: Cogeco subsidiary **Atlantic Broadband** completed its search for a new pres, hiring *Frank van der Post* of Dutch multi-service telecom operator **KPN**. He was a member of KPN's management board from 2015-18, serving as chief commercial operator. Before joining the telecom industry, van der Post spent several years in the airline and hospitality industries. The president role has been vacant since late April, with the departure of pres/CEO *Richard Shea* to pursue other interests. Atlantic Broadband provides residential and business service in 11 states: CT, DE, FL, ME, MD, NH, NY, PA, SC, VA and W VA.

Scripps Dives Into OTT Ad Solution: The **E.W. Scripps Company** is launching Scripps Octane, a tool designed to allow advertisers to reach audiences across a variety of premium OTT brands and platforms, as well as track impressions and optimize ad campaigns. The move puts Scripps amongst a growing number of big TV station groups in offering ad inventory on a number of OTT TV programming and/or app platforms for local/regional TV marketers. The company says Scripps Octane will help local advertisers target ideal customers, build targeted OTT campaigns that are highly customized across devices, day parts, geographies and consumer interests as well as giving advertisers an easy way to track the campaign's reach and effectiveness. Scripps has 60 television stations in 42 markets, as well as **Bounce, Grit, Laff, Court TV, Court TV Mystery** and digital TV news network **Newsy**.

FCC Auction 103: The **FCC** said it has received 29 complete applications for Auction 103, an incentive auction of upper microwave flexible use service licenses in the upper 37 GHz, 39 GHz and 47 GHz bands for next-gen wireless service. The auction is set to begin Dec 10 with 3400 MHz of spectrum up for grabs. **T-Mobile, Blue Ridge Wireless, Cordova Telephone Coop** and **US Cellular Corp** are among those with complete applications. Each of these applicants will become a qualified bidder upon receipt by the Commission of the required upfront payment by the Oct 22. The agency has received 10 incomplete applications; to be complete, those applicants will need resub-

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mit the applications and provide the upfront payment by Oct 22. **Windstream** and **W.A.T.CH. TV Company** are among those listed as incomplete.

Reach for TVSquared: **TVSquared** and **Extreme Reach** have teamed up to measure the effectiveness of impressions served across all ad-supported OTT streaming services. TVSquared said the new product will tag every ad and deliver “massive simplification” for advertisers, while also giving them the ability to track performance at scale across digital TV content. The partnership will allow TVSquared to measure ad performance across nearly every US household, instead of being limited to ACR and panel data. Approx 2.5K creative assets are uploaded to ER’s asset management program AdBridge daily, which integrates ad serving, linear TV distribution, OTT delivering and talent and rights management. The platform will add tags, allowing marketers to tie ad exposure to business outcomes. **Talkspace**, a DTC company bumping up TV ad spend, will be one of the first partners with ER and TVSquared.

Hulu Users Finally Able to Download Content: **Hulu** has caught up with competitors **Netflix** and **Amazon**, allowing its users to download TV episodes for offline viewing. iOS users subscribed to Hulu’s ad-free plan will be the first to see the change with all content available for download to be housed on the “See What’s Downloadable” screen. Subscribers will be able to download as many as 25 videos on 5 devices. Downloaded content is available for viewing for 30 days. For watched content, the download will expire two days after starting playback. Android users will have to wait a little longer for the feature, but a blog post from the streamer confirmed that it will be coming soon.

ESPN and Quibi Strike Deal: **ESPN** and **Quibi** signed an agreement for daily sports programming on the upcoming mobile-first platform, launching in April 2020. ESPN will be the exclusive US multi-sport content provider for Quibi’s curated news and info programming, Daily Essentials. The new ESPN show will only be available on Quibi and will feature daily episodes covering sports news.

Roku Expanding Sound Range with Walmart: **Roku** is bringing low-cost versions of its smart soundbar and wireless subwoofer to **Walmart** stores under the store’s own brand. Roku debuted the products last month, assigning \$180 price tags to each. The versions coming to Walmart will include a simpler Roku remote without voice controls. The wireless subwoofer will also be smaller pack less power than its Roku branded counterpart. The own versions will be arriving on store shelves and online in the coming weeks and will cost \$129 each.

BBC America Launches Micro-Net: **BBC America** is continuing its nature offerings expansion with the launch of **Wonderstruck** on Nov 2. Every Saturday BBC America will become Wonderstruck, a 24-hour “destination of wildlife and wonder.” The launch will include a special presentation of series “SevenWorlds, One Plant.”

Quibi Chief Coming to CES: **Quibi** CEO *Meg Whitman* and founder/board chair *Jeffrey Katzenberg* will present a **CES 2020** keynote. The pair leading the mobile start-up will take the stage at the Park Theater in the Park MGM Hotel in Las Vegas on Jan 8.

Ratings: **HGTV**’s “A Very Brady Renovation” has become the net’s highest-rated series in its history for L+3 among P25-54, W25-54, M25-54, P2+ and households. Overall, the series (the finale aired Sept 30 at 9pm) averaged a 1.59 L+3 rating amount P25-54, a 156% increase YOY. The series also generated a 104% lift over the prior six-week time period. -- **Hulu**’s Huluween programming event kicked off last week, and the streamer reports it already has seen a 62% increase in overall minutes YOY during the month of Oct. Total videos streamed YOY by subs jumped up 54%. Last October, Hulu’s horror & suspense genre saw a 192% increase in total minutes views. The month is good for brands as well. Partners saw a 155% lift in ad recall and a 305% jump in purchase intent.

Programming: **Showtime** picked up “Couples Therapy” for a second season. The docuseries currently airs Fridays at 10pm. -- **Disney Channel** picked up “Gabby Duran & the Unsittables” for a second season ahead of its Oct 11 premiere. The comedy stars actress and musician *Kylie Cantrall* as Gabby Duran, a 13-year-old girl who inadvertently lands a job babysitting an unruly group of VIP extraterrestrial children disguised as everyday kids.

Editor’s Note: Join **Cablefax** on Tuesday, Oct 22 for The FAXIES Awards Luncheon at the Edison Ballroom in NYC. This year’s Behind-the-Screens Executives and Teams include *Jen Neal* from **E!**, *Rosemary Mercedes* from **Univision**, *Peter Blacker* from **Telemundo**, **Crown Media Family Networks**, **WWE** and many more. During the luncheon, Cablefax will announce the 1st, 2nd & 3rd place winners in the other FAXIES categories. Individual tickets and team tables are [available now](#).

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From the Expo Floor

Everyone from engineers to Washington lobbyists made their way to the Big Easy last week to attend SCTE-ISBE Cable-Tec Expo. The crowd was abuzz about 10G's potential, but technicians had plenty more to chat about in the show's 11 workshop tracks. If you didn't have a chance to head down south, here's your snapshot of the show's top topics.

Energy 2020

Expo was yet again the venue for an annual meeting on the SCTE-ISBE Energy 2020 program. We're inching ever closer to 2020, and the session offered updates on where participating cable operators are in their journey to reduce power consumption by 20% on a per unit basis, a 25% reduction of energy costs per unit and a 10% drop in grid redundancy. And while the initiative has made its participants far more green, its greatest impact has been on their individual cultures. **Comcast Cable** svp, business and industry affairs **Mark Hess** said the program is a major reason for the company promoting **Susan Jin Davis** to chief sustainability officer in 2016. But there's still work to be done, and Hess said the next step will be in exploring renewable energy sources and continuing to identify smart ways to manage devices and save energy. "We've done some solar trials at specific headends, there's some virtual solar we can use. That leads you to evaluate the microgrids," Hess said. "That's really the next frontier, to not only continue to do what we've been doing together... but then looking into how we're managing what energy we're actually using."

WiFi 6

Existing arrangements in the 2.4GHz and 5GHz bands are getting congested by legacy devices, and all eyes are on the 6GHz band to save the day as bandwidth demand grows. Pair the 6GHz spectrum with WiFi 6 and you have a match made in traffic control heaven. There's still some finessing to do to improve how the home network manages interference. Comcast distinguished engineer **David Urban** said that "even smaller data demands like a set-top

box or a camera can chew up a significant amount of your resources." But when it comes to potential, the bandwidth that comes with 6GHz allows for greater centralization of access points in the home. Ceiling mounted access points could be a possibility, and services that typically needed a hardline Ethernet cable could run on 6GHz scheduled services. Think low latency gaming and VR.

The Importance of Midband

Conversations from the **FCC** made their way to New Orleans, but the truth is you can't have a powerful network without the best spectrum to fuel it. "Spectrum is the lifeblood of any wireless network," **Ericsson** vp, technology strategy **Steven Rayment** said at Wednesday's "The Goldilocks Band" session. "The decisions that you make about spectrum are critical in terms of the performance of the network and ultimately the services you can deliver on that network." The midbands are rich with potential, and between EBS, CBRS and the C-band, there is the potential for over 500MHz of additional network capacity. All eyes should be watching the commercial launch of CBRS and the two propositions on the table at the FCC on for freeing up C-band spectrum.

Using Machine Learning to Stop Piracy

The world of OTT video has only made it more complicated to find and take down pirated streams and those that make them available. Legal OTT streams look exactly the same on a network as their illegal cousins. But early testing with AI has shown promise that the technology could dive deeper than ever to pull out the streams that don't belong. There's still plenty to teach AI, including how to more precisely identify pirated content and the criminals supplying it to lower the number of false positives. "The end goal is how do you come up with a system where you can find the pirates so that an operator can accurately measure it... and if you want to take any action, that you don't falsely accuse someone of being a pirate," **NCTA** vp, broadband technology **Matt Tooley** said. — Sara Winegardner

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