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What the Industry Reads First

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New Guard: EPIX Exec Moves into Comcast Gatekeeper Role

Cablefax broke the [news](#) back in June that longtime **Comcast** exec *Jen Gaiski* would be retiring before year-end. Now we know who's succeeding her in the role of svp, content acquisition. Comcast hired *Monty Sarhan*, who most recently was evp, gm at **EPIX**. Sarhan reports to Comcast Cable Content Acquisition president *Greg Rigdon*. He will work on programming negotiations and manage Content Acquisition's nationwide field operations across Comcast Cable's footprint. That includes the division's compliance and finance functions, and other content-related partnerships. Sarhan was part of the original team that launched EPIX in 2009, leaving for a stint as general counsel, svp at **WWE** before returning in 2013 and being named GM in 2017. 2017 was also the year that EPIX finally nabbed Comcast as an affiliate. The MSO had declined to carry the net since its October 2009 launch. Sarhan's hiring comes after Comcast completed an expanded carriage deal that sees EPIX added to premium packages. He officially began his work at Comcast last week after transitioning his responsibilities. EPIX is expected to announce shortly that *Laura Sher*, evp, business & legal affairs, original programming, and *Courtney Menzel*, evp, content distribution & partnerships, will serve as co-gms of the programmer. Gaiski was promoted to her role as svp, content acquisition at Comcast in 2007, but has negotiated programming agreements with the cable industry for more than 20 years.

FCC Tackles 5.9Ghz, Notifications: The **FCC's** last meeting of 2019 delivered cable a few gifts, including a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking that proposes designating the lower 45MHz in the 5.9GHz band for unlicensed uses like WiFi. The agency is proposing to dedicate the remaining 30MHz of the band for use by transportation and vehicle safety-related communication services. "As we continue to invest in and increase the performance of our gigabit broadband networks, the FCC's decision to make the 5.9 GHz band available expeditiously will ensure that the Wi-Fi capacity our customers rely on will continue to match the capabilities of our world-class broadband networks," **Comcast** said after the unanimous vote. **NCTA** piled on the praise, saying the item "demonstrates the FCC's commitment to a balanced spectrum policy which will facilitate the deployment of next-generation networks, and recognizes the massive economic benefit of unlicensed spectrum." The FCC's five commissioners also voted unanimously

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to approve an NPRM that proposes changing a requirement that cable operators give 30 days advance notice to subs of service changes due to retrans consent or program carriage negotiations that are ongoing during the last 30 days of a contract. **Charter** has led the fight for the change. Democratic commissioners *Jessica Rosenworcel* and *Geoffrey Starks* said they were pleased the final item included additional questions, such as whether there are factors that can prevent a consumer from changing providers in the event of lost programming (ie, contracts and early termination fees). Starks said he also asked the NRPM probe about consumer harms that could stem from a providing notice after a blackout has already begun. "In my mind, such a practice runs the real risk of resulting in consumers paying for services that they haven't received and depriving them of a real opportunity to mitigate any service disruptions," he said. The Commission also received praise for its unanimous approval of a proposal to assign the three-digit number 988 as a way to reach the National Suicide Prevention Hotline. Pai said during the open meeting that the FCC believes the move will not only ease access to crisis services, but also reduce the stigma surrounding mental health conditions. The proposal is now open for public comment.

AT&T TV Arriving in February: AT&T TV will go live in February, **AT&T Communications** CEO *Jeff McElfresh* revealed at an investor conference Thursday. "Our growth agenda is on fiber, in our entertainment group and on AT&T TV," McElfresh said. Acquisition costs for AT&T TV will come in at about half of what the company currently spends on its legacy satellite TV subscribers for **DirecTV**, and the content lineup will be "every bit as good" as what it offers through DirecTV or **U-verse**. AT&T TV is being beta tested in approximately 15 markets and does not require a satellite dish. While he mentioned other areas of the video business, including the upcoming streamer **HBO Max**, McElfresh did not say how AT&T TV Now fits into the future of the company. AT&T TV is housed within the same app as AT&T TV Now, but is a much different service. "AT&T TV Now is essentially exiting the business," **MoffettNathanson** said in a note, citing its recent price hikes and overall negative subscriber trends. McElfresh also shed some light on AT&T's public cloud first policy, which has been the driver behind the company's deals with **IBM** and **Microsoft**. The efforts to move operations onto the public cloud are a key part of AT&T's ongoing 5G strategy and its approach to edge computing. "As you walk through the motions and the technology that you have to integrate in order to lift and shift those applications to the public cloud, invariably there are opportunities that you bump into of how you can extend the webscale public cloud out closer to the edge with a network partner like an AT&T," McElfresh said. So look to see us continue to drive innovation with multi-access edge compute and network edge compute with IBM and Microsoft as we roll out our 5G network." He also reacted to the recent launch of **T-Mobile's** 5G network, which

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relies on 600MHz spectrum, by saying “there’s been a lot of hype and a lot of snark” in the 5G marketplace. “Our 5G Evolution network is actually the fastest network in the US, and it remains the fastest network today, regardless of any recent network launch,” McElfresh said.

NBCU and TVSquared Sign Deal for TV Stations, RSNs: NBCU’s 42 **NBC** and **Telemundo** TV stations, as well as its nine RSNs, struck a partnership with TV attribution vendor **TVSquared**. Now, the stations can provide advertisers with a same-day view into how their linear and digital TV campaigns are directly impacting business outcomes. The solution is powered by TVSquared’s always-on analytics platform that aims to tie advertising results and business outcomes, which can then use that information to help brands determine ad effectiveness. The platform can evaluate both linear and OTT advertising across 30 markets, both English and Spanish-speaking.

CBSN Minnesota Launching: **CBS Television Stations** and **CBS Interactive** are launching **CBSN Minnesota**, the fifth of CBS’ 13 local DTC streaming news services. **CBSN New York** was the first local OTT news service, debuting in Dec 2018. Next up is **CBSN Philadelphia**, scheduled for January.

Lawmakers Say Rural Deserves Urban Broadband Parity: Sens *Amy Klobuchar* (D-MN) and *John Thune* (R-SD) and 46 of their colleagues are asking the **FCC** to promote deployment of sustainable broadband networks as the agency considers adopting new rules in the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund proceeding. “If our rural communities are to survive and flourish, our rural constituents need access to services that are on par with those in urban areas. By contrast, it would be an inefficient use of resources to promote services that cannot keep pace with consumer demand and the evolution of broadband in urban areas,” the senators wrote. The RDOF will award high-cost USF support to broadband deployment in rural areas.

CenturyLink Launches Wi-Fi 6 Gateway: **CenturyLink** collaborated with **Intel** to develop a next-gen gateway that is compatible with Wi-Fi 6 while offering notable upgrades for Wi-Fi 5 users. The gateway utilizes Intel’s Wi-Fi 6 Gig+ technology to deliver gigabit speeds and improvements in latency for gaming and video-intensive applications over Wi-Fi 5. The technology also enables better performance on PCs powered by Wi-Fi 6 Gig+ by increasing data capacity. CenturyLink’s next-gen gateway will be available to consumers in early 2020.

Cox, T-Mobile Top Brand Satisfaction: **Cox** and **T-Mobile** took the top spots in their industries when it comes to customer satisfaction with contact center experiences, according to research from **Verint Systems**. In cable, Cox came in number one with a customer satisfaction (CSAT) score of 70.6. **DISH** and **Spectrum** came close behind with 70.1, followed by **DirecTV** with 68.6 and **Comcast** with 68.4. The research measured four drivers that impact customer satisfaction: agent accessibility, request resolution, representative and voice. On the telecom side, **T-Mobile** topped out with a CSAT score of 75.9. **Verizon** came in next with 75.3, followed by **U.S. Cellular** (73.6), **Sprint** (68.3) and **AT&T** (66.1).

Distribution: **A+E Networks** is launching a new OTT channel **Lively Place** on **Samsung TV Plus**. The 24/7 net curates non-fiction lifestyle programming from A+E Networks library of content. -- Good news for University of Texas fans! **Sling TV** added the **Longhorn Network** to its lineup. Sling Orange customers can subscribe to the Sports Extra package for \$10/month to access the channel.

Programming: **Disney Channel** is headed back to Zombietown with “Zombies 2,” premiering Feb 14 at 8pm. The original film was the No 1 cable TV telecast of 2018 with Kids and Girls 6-11 and Tweens and Girls 9-14. -- **Disney Junior** ordered a second season of “Mira, Royal Detective,” ahead of the series spring 2020 debut. -- **Showtime** will air the television premiere of “Pavarotti” from filmmaker Ron Howard on Dec 30 at 8pm. -- **Bravo** is bringing back “Top Chef” for Season 17 on March 19 at 10pm. “All Stars LA” will bring back 15 competitors from past seasons. -- **HGTV** picked up “Flip or Flop” for Season 9, ahead of the current season finale Dec 12. New episodes will premiere August 2020. -- **USA Network** is premiering anthology series “Briarpatch” Feb 6 at 10pm. “The Sinner” returns the same night at 9pm. -- **IFC** is premiering the fourth and final season of “Brockmire” in March 2020.

People: The **Fiber Broadband Association** named *Katie Espeseth* chair of the board for a one-year term, beginning Jan 1. Espeseth currently serves as vp of new products at **EPB**. -- **Spectrum Networks** named *Larissa Cartwright* news director, overseeing Spectrum News Texas. She most recently serves as an executive producer and content marketing strategist for KXAN-TV in Austin. -- **The Peabody Awards** have five new members: Journalist *Soledad O’Brien*, **NPR’s** *Nancy Barnes*, **Univision’s** *Jessica Herrera-Flanigan*, **ViacomCBS’** *Chris McCarthy*, **ESPN’s** *Connor Schell* and **Creative Artists Agency’s** *Steven Lafferty*. -- **WICT Southern CA** board member and former **Game Show Network** exec *Gloria Jolley* was named as the Greater L.A. regional director for literacy nonprofit Read to a Child.

PROGRAMMER'S PAGE

What's Cooking on Food Network Kitchen

Between Pinterest, Blue Apron and three zillion cookbooks, there's no shortage of recipes for the home chef. But **Discovery's** new SVOD entrant **Food Network Kitchen** turns up the heat on cooking by offering a smorgasbord of live classes with well-known personalities. The week of Dec 15's live schedule includes a mole spice rub with *Bobby Flay*, an "amped-up" snack mix with *Valerie Bertinelli* and gingerbread cornbread with *Alejandra Ramos*. "Audiences are loving Food Network Kitchen's live classes, so much so that we increased the number of live classes from 25 to 40-plus per week, and we are thrilled with the way users are interacting with the chefs during the classes," *Tyler Whitworth*, svp, gm of Discovery Direct-to-Consumer, tell us. "The breadth of their questions has been really interesting to observe and has given us a sense of the different levels of cooks using the app. And our chefs love being able to engage directly with users in a way that isn't possible on television." The SVOD has hosted live classes in NYC, L.A. and even remote locations such as Food Network star *Molly Yeh's* farm in North Dakota and *Martha Stewart's* Westchester County abode. With live classes, viewers can ask questions. There's also spontaneity, like *Duff Goldman* calling up his mom during a recent live class. Discovery's hoping more folks will sample up what it's serving. On Sunday, it will host a day-long free preview of live classes on the app, which is available now across Amazon Echo Show, Fire Tablets and Fire TV streaming media devices, as well as iOS (iPhone and iPad) and Android mobile devices (more platforms coming in 2020). "Since these digital live and on-demand cooking classes are so new, we still have more work to do to help people understand how fun and helpful the experience can be," Whitworth says. "My wife and I did a live class on flank steak with chimichurri with *Jet Tila* last weekend. It was so much fun and an unbelievably good steak! I'd recommend it." – *Amy Maclean*

Reviews: "Mel Brooks Unwrapped," premiere, 9pm, Friday, **HBO**. Indulge *Mel Brooks*. He's 93. On the other hand, he's still plenty fast. It's hard to see too much difference between today's Brooks and the younger version. He's as sarcastic as ever, appealing mostly to an older demo. This amusing doc about Brooks's life begins haltingly. That's because he and interviewer *Alan Yentob* have history. Yentob first attempted to interview Brooks nearly 40 years ago. (You don't interview Brooks. Not really. You ask questions and hope he stops joking long enough to answer them.) Fortunately, Yentob is a good straight man. In a 1981 clip, he asks Brooks about his childhood. Brooks hands Yentob a baby picture of himself. "It's very nice, but this says *Robert Redford*," Yentob says calmly. "Oh, come on," Brooks snaps. "Nobody's going to know...it's a picture of a 3- or 4-year-old kid." -- "A Very Brady Renovation: Holiday Edition," 10pm ET, Monday, **HGTV**. The ratings for the Brady renovation of their house were so good, HGTV smartly is providing a holiday version. This time the six Brady sibs spruce up the place for the holidays. Beyond good tips from *Ree Drummond* "The Pioneer Woman" and *Jasmine Roth* of "Hidden Potential," the mix of vintage "The Brady Bunch" clips is excellent. – *Seth Arenstein*

Basic Cable P2+ Prime Rankings* (12/02/19-12/08/19)		
Mon-Sun	MC US	MC US AA
	AA%	(000)
ESPN	1.045	3,210
FNC	0.902	2,772
MSNBC	0.572	1,757
HALL	0.561	1,724
TBSC	0.362	1,111
A&E	0.355	1,092
HGTV	0.314	965
HIST	0.313	963
USA	0.300	922
DISC	0.288	886
CNN	0.274	842
FOOD	0.272	837
FRFM	0.271	831
TLC	0.255	783
HMM	0.254	780
ID	0.247	759
TNT	0.243	748
LIFE	0.231	710
AMC	0.225	691
BRAVO	0.223	686
NICK	0.214	657
ADSM	0.208	638
INSP	0.184	564
TVLAND	0.176	540
NAN	0.154	473
NFL	0.146	448
FX	0.145	445
SYFY	0.136	419
CRN	0.130	399
BET	0.127	392
DSNY	0.123	377
TRAVEL	0.120	369
MTV	0.119	367
VH1	0.117	361
NKJR	0.114	351
NATGEO	0.110	339
WETV	0.110	337
GSN	0.109	336
E!	0.106	326
COM	0.105	324
TUDN	0.105	322

*P2+ L+SD rankers are based on national Nielsen numbers, not coverage.



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