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What the Industry Reads First

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New Normal: Companies Roll Out Contingency Plans in Face of Covid-19

With a growing number of students and employees working from home, it's mission critical for the nation's broadband providers during the Covid-19 pandemic. Operators big and small are up-ending their day-to-day operations to ensure the safety of their employees while continuing to service their customers. On Thursday, **Cox** began remotely managing its network operations center—a first for the MSO. Cox, which closed down a Rhode Island facility last week for a deep clean after an employee's family member tested positive for the virus, has also increased teleworking and is sending regular communications of CDC guidelines to customer-facing employees. **Hotwire Communications**, a midsize provider that's footprint includes Florida, Georgia, SC and NC, has 10 network operations center engineers identified as critical who are being voluntarily quarantined in offsite housing for seven-day periods. The NOC/engineering/IT area is open only to authorized personnel, with a dedicated entrance and restrooms. Like many other companies, **Mediacom** has been increasing its remote work capacity at a larger scale and for a longer period of time. **WOW!** has developed pandemic plans over the last several weeks. "Although many of our workers already have the ability to work from home, we are currently exploring contingency plans for essential workers who don't typically have a work-from-home option," the company said. It's a similar story for **Cable ONE**, which already has a subset of call center personnel positioned to work from home. "We're looking at additional options and making plans as needed to expand that capability if it becomes necessary in the coming days and weeks," a rep said. Industry HR association **C2HR** has curated a collection of resources from employers in its online Knowledge Center, and will update articles regularly. C2HR said that many of its members are implementing work-from-home policies, with one industry employer to soon announce a company-wide work-from-home policy. In addition to suspending non-essential business travel, employers are requiring employees to report all personal travel plans. Employees who have/will travel to high-risk countries are being instructed to stay home for 14 days upon their return to the US. As for concerns over internet overload, the **Internet Society** posted a recent [blog](#) reassuring folks that core internet infrastructure providers should be able to easily absorb an increase in traffic and demand, especially if the growth is gradual over a period of days, weeks or months. **NCTA** said that to date, its members in areas most affected by the outbreak have reported "modest, but manageable changes" in consumer

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internet usage. “We remain vigilant in monitoring and managing network performance around the clock and are confident that our networks will perform well in adapting to any changes in consumer behavior that may result as a consequence of a community’s response to Covid-19,” the cable group said. That aligns with what **Charter** is seeing. “Our network is built to sustain maximum capacity during peak usage, which is typically in the evenings, so a surge during the day would be well within our capabilities to manage,” a Charter spokesperson said. “We also offer a low-cost, high-speed broadband program for low-income households to help them get online. Charter continues to closely monitor the situation and has business and workforce continuity plans in place and will adjust these plans as appropriate to best serve all our customers.” **Verizon** said it has not seen a measurable increase in data usage, adding that its networks are designed and built to meet future demand and are ready should demand increase or usage patterns change significantly. On Thursday, Verizon announced that it is increasing its capital guidance range from \$17bln-\$18bln to \$17.5bln-\$18.5bln in 2020 to accelerate its transition to 5G and “help support the economy during this period of disruption.”

Altice USA said it understands the importance of keeping people connected. “We have been investing in technology and increasing network capacity to meet the growing demands of our ‘always online’ culture, and this includes having in place proper contingency plans to ensure service continuity for our customers,” an Altice USA spokesperson said.

Sports Take a Hit: The dominoes began to fall in the sports world Wednesday evening when the **NBA** announced it is suspending the season due to coronavirus. The **MLB** and **NHL** followed on Thursday, with the NHL announcing a “pause” and the MLB canceling the remainder of spring training and postponing Opening Day by at least two weeks. The NHL pointed to Utah Jazz player *Rudy Gobert* testing positive for the virus, saying “given that our leagues share so many facilities and locker rooms and it now seems likely that some member of the NHL community would test positive at some point—it is no longer appropriate to try and continue to play games at this time.” The **NCAA** canceled March Madness after all major athletic conferences canceled their basketball tournaments (the Big East played the first half before canceling at Madison Square Garden). “We are fully supportive of the NCAA’s decision to cancel this year’s NCAA Division I Men’s Basketball Championship. We’ll continue to work closely with the NCAA and all of our partners as we prioritize the health and well-being of everyone involved,” **Turner Sports** and **CBS Sports** said in a joint statement. **MLS** also has suspended its season for 30 days, and **US Soccer** canceled April friendlies for the men’s and women’s teams. Notably, the **XFL** plays on for now, with just LA vs Seattle scheduled to play without fans. Regarding league cancellations, **ESPN** said in a statement, “This is an unprecedented situation. We have great relationships with our league partners and are confident that we can address all issues constructively going forward. Our immediate focus is on everyone’s safety and well-being.”

ANNOUNCING Cablefax’s TOP OPS Nominations

For the Executive(s) of the Year: Tout your best execs! We’re looking for MSO and independent operator executives who drive success in all areas of the business, including finance, legal, marketing, operations, business development, sales and beyond. These are the top performers exceeding company goals, advancing new initiatives and innovations, and pushing through unique marketplace challenges. Tell our editors who we should be recognizing in 2020!

Submit Today at: www.CablefaxTopOps.com

Questions: Contact Mary-Lou French at mfrench@accessintel.com or 301.354.1851.

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WWE's "Friday Night Smackdown" is going ahead, but with no live audience. The event has also been moved from Detroit to WWE's training facility in Orlando. "We are putting contingency plans in place in the event that upcoming WWE shows are canceled by government officials, civil authorities and/or local venues. We are monitoring the situation closely and as always we will take the necessary precautions to protect the health and wellness of our fans, performers and employees," said a spokesperson from WWE. Programmers are looking to fill sudden schedule gaps. With the NBA suspending its season, TNT is replacing Thursday's scheduled NBA doubleheader with "Inside the NBA" and then encores of the 2020 All-Star Game and the Dec 19 matchup between the Lakers and Bucks.

Comcast Boosts Internet Essentials: Comcast is responding to the Covid-19 crisis by increasing access and speeds of its low-income Internet Essentials service. New customers can sign up for 60 days of complimentary service, which is normally available to qualified low-income households for \$9.95/month. It's also permanently increasing the service's speed from 15/2 Mbps to 25/3 Mbps. The changes go into effect Monday. "A hallmark of this program has been our flexibility in adjusting Internet Essentials to meet the needs of low-income residents in our footprint," Comcast Cable consumer services pres *Dana Strong* said in a statement.

More Event Cancellations: The calendar changes continue to pile up as organizations look to limit non-essential gatherings. The **Broadband Cable Association of Pennsylvania (BCAP)** and the **Pennsylvania Cable & Telecommunications Foundation** have opted to cancel their 2020 Cable Academy, scheduled for May 6-7 at Kalahari Poconos Resort. The event has been around for more than 30 years. While there are no plans to hold it this year, organizers said they will announce details for Cable Academy 2021 as soon as possible. No word at our deadline on the fate of **VCTA's Virginia Cable Summit**, which is scheduled for April 28-29 in Williamsburg, VA. *Multichannel* and *B&C's NY Spring TV Week* has been moved from March 24-26 to the week of June 22. Wondering about Wonder Women? It was originally scheduled for March 26, but has been moved to June 8.

The Hill's Response: Congress decided Thursday to shut down the Capitol to the public until April. Congressional office buildings and the Congressional Visitor Center has also been closed with only lawmakers, staff, journalists and visitors with official business being allowed entry. The US Courts for the DC Circuit has limited entry to only judges, court staff, the media and visitors with business. Oral arguments and hearings before the Court of Appeals, the District Court or the Bankruptcy Court will continue, but attorneys must show a bar membership card upon entry. The **US Supreme Court** is closed to the public, with **C-SPAN** encouraging the high court to livestream oral arguments. The **FCC** has also banned visitors to its facilities, absent special permission from the Office of the Managing Director. The Commission has also advised employees that unless it is absolutely necessary for them to work from the office, they should telework beginning tomorrow morning until further notice. The Chairman's Office will continue to monitor developments and will implement additional precautions or relax current precautions. FCC commish *Jessica Rosenworcel* said the Commission should immediately convene the country's broadband providers to discuss what they're doing to offer service to Americans. "We need to explore how we can facilitate public-private partnerships and consumer education campaigns to expand the reach of connectivity as quickly as possible at little or no-cost to Americans who are impacted by the coronavirus," Rosenworcel said. She also said the FCC should be asking about how data caps can be eliminated for the time being and how providers are balancing the safety of workers with the need to keep services running.

Upfronts are Out: **NBCU, ViacomCBS, Fox** and **WarnerMedia/Xandr** have all canceled their NYC upfronts slated for May, with all companies announcing digital presentations instead. They join **A+E Networks** and **AMC Networks**, which had pulled the plug earlier this week.

Shows Film to Empty Crowd: Late night shows in NYC and LA are taping with no studio audience. **TBS'** "Full-Frontal with Samantha Bee" was the first to film, taping Wednesday night's show with no crowd. Bee joked that writers had included jokes she hadn't seen before to liven it up, saying "I'm Samantha Bee, and I'm responsible for 20 unsolved murders along the Florida panhandle." Bee added, trying not to laugh, "Guys, I told you that in confidence." **HBO's** "Last Week Tonight With John Oliver" and **Bravo's** "Watch What Happens Live With Andy Cohen" begin taping live without an audience Sunday. **ViacomCBS** shows will also film without an audience. **Comedy Central's** "Lights Out with David Spade" and "Tosh.0" will start Monday, and **MTV's** "Ridiculousness" began filming empty today. "Our top priority is the safety of our guests and staff," said a rep. "There have been no developments at Lights Out or Tosh.0 to cause concern for audience members who have plans to attend tonight's tapings. These decisions have been made out of an abundance of caution."

Allen Latest to Offer Tegna Bid: *Byron Allen's Allen Media Group* has made an all-cash offer for **Tegna**. He is believed to have offered \$20/share, putting the bid at \$8.5bln. The station group has also drawn offers from **Gray** and **Apollo** in recent weeks that have been estimated to be in that range.

PROGRAMMER'S PAGE

Brockmire to the Rescue...

As the coronavirus destroys everything in its path, the situation got real this week when it even infected sporting events, leading to postponements of the **NBA** and **NHL** seasons and who knows what else by this weekend. Sure, we're sad to miss conferences and business functions, but sports? Now this is getting serious! And with this week bringing news that the **MLB** will postpone Opening Day by at least two weeks, it's not a moment too soon for the return of **IFC's** baseball-adjacent series "Brockmire," whose title character played by *Hank Azaria* has been working his way back from baseball announcer obscurity for three seasons now. And with the fourth and final season set to premiere on March 18, get ready for a comedic examination of personal dysfunction set against the backdrop of iconoclastic nostalgia for simpler times. Interestingly, the final season jumps ahead 10 years to the 2030s when baseball is dying a slow death—so the guardians of game call upon now-sober icon Jim Brockmire to save it. "They desperately turn to Brockmire to be commissioner because they don't know what else to do," says Azaria. His partner in crime, Jules James (*Amanda Peet*), attempts to help with marketing—but it doesn't go well, so they team up with a sentient operating system called Limon to bring baseball back from the brink. "By the end, it's kind of a full-blown 'Black Mirror' episode," says Azaria. "They partner with it because the Limon device finds there's a reason to save baseball for its own interests." Ultimately, this is a show about how we all stumble through our own vices and sometimes even slink back into relevance whether we intend to or not (In S1, Azaria's initial comeback stems from a viral video of him on a drunken rampage). And who knows? Perhaps Siri or Alexa will save us from the coronavirus by encouraging us to stay home and order things online. As long as those things aren't sold out face masks or Purell. — *Michael Grebb*

Reviews: "The Trade," 9pm, Friday, **Showtime**. In what has become difficult times, cable content may offer subscribers a welcome distraction. While episode two of this docu-series is far from easy viewing, the stories it relates, and does so wonderfully, will take many viewers out of their orbit. Moreover, the sagas of immigrants, mostly from Honduras, will help some viewers appreciate their lot in life, however bleak it might seem. The stories won't surprise many, though some details will. Yet the simple act of showing people struggling to make their way 3,000 miles on foot, to the US, puts a face on something that has seemed abstract to most of us. — "The Plot Against America," series premiere, 9pm, Monday, **HBO**. At least the initial moments of this new, six-part series, based on Philip Roth's hit novel of the same name, is escapist. That's thanks to the production values re-creating a section of post-WWII NJ suburbia. After not too long, though, the meat of the story begins, and as the series' title implies, it's not very pleasant. In particular, times are difficult for Roth's partially fictional family (the family in the novel is based, in part, on his own). "The Wire" creator *David Simon* makes like *Neil Simon* here, adapting Roth's story of a Jewish family in a changed America. — *Seth Arenstein*

Basic Cable P2+ Prime Rankings* (03/02/20-03/08/20)		
Mon-Sun	MC US	MC US AA
	AA%	(000)
FNC	1.033	3,175
MSNBC	0.589	1809
CNN	0.428	1,315
ESPN	0.377	1,160
HGTV	0.374	1,149
DISC	0.363	1,114
A&E	0.356	1,094
TLC	0.329	1,012
HIST	0.329	1,012
TBSC	0.311	957
USA	0.293	900
FOOD	0.267	820
TNT	0.262	804
HALL	0.260	799
INSP	0.223	687
ID	0.223	686
BRAVO	0.199	610
NICK	0.193	593
AMC	0.186	572
TVLAND	0.178	546
NAN	0.161	496
FX	0.161	493
ADSM	0.157	481
LIFE	0.147	452
HMM	0.144	444
GSN	0.142	435
WETV	0.133	410
MTV	0.126	387
TRAVEL	0.124	381
HBO	0.124	380
NKJR	0.123	378
BET	0.122	375
VH1	0.120	367
SYFY	0.119	365
APL	0.118	363
DSNY	0.117	361
COM	0.114	350
DSJR	0.109	336
OXY	0.107	328
FRFM	0.106	327
NATGEO	0.105	323

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




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