

Cablefax Daily™

Wednesday — March 18, 2020

What the Industry Reads First

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Covering Covid-19: Content Companies Step Up Efforts

Programmers are shuffling schedules to respond to the coronavirus crisis. **The Weather Channel** began dedicating time during each hour of live programming at 50 minutes past the hour to share educational content aimed at children staying home due to school closures. Topics include why thunder happens, how rainbows form and how to stay safe in severe weather. Newsrooms are continuing to deal with confirmed cases of the virus, with **CNN** NYC staffers informed Tuesday that an employee has tested positive and is currently in very good health. **CBS**, **ABC**, and **NBC** newsrooms have all reported confirmed cases. **Univision** news anchor *Enrique Acevedo* posted on Instagram Tuesday that he has been in self-quarantine for about a week since his visit to CBS News in NYC to film his show “60 in 6,” where he had possible contact with colleagues that have tested positive for Covid-19. “Despite meeting all the criteria for testing established in the revised CDC guidelines and Florida’s Department of Health, I have not been able to get tested due to supply shortages in the state,” he wrote in a post that promised to share any new information. Premium offerings are offering up free content as Americans practice social distancing. **AMC Networks’ SVOD Sundance Now** is offering a 30-day trial for new subs with special code SUNDANCENOW30. It comes as the SVOD premieres Season 3 of “The Restaurant,” billed as Sweden’s answer to “Downton Abbey.” This week, streamer **CuriosityStream** released its second special “Coronavirus: Combating the Outbreak.” The special and subsequent episodes are being made available for free to the public through the SVOD’s [YouTube channel](#). Episode three, “Race for a Vaccine” will premiere next week. “We are committed to releasing all the facts we learn about the coronavirus for free so that anyone who wants to learn more, can,” CEO *Clint Stinchcomb* said. In a time of worldwide crisis, news networks are providing critical updates. **Fox News** topped the week in total viewership, averaging 2mln viewers in total day. **CNN** brought in 1.322mln, followed by **MSNBC** with 1.295mln. In primetime, Fox again took in the most viewers, averaging 3.594mln. CNN came next with 2.849mln, followed by MSNBC with 2.346mln. On Tuesday, **Telemundo** premiered a new national weekday newscast dedicated to coronavirus and its impact on the Latino community. Univision News is airing a network-wide special, “Diario del Coronavirus” (The Coronavirus Diaries), at 3pm every day this week which will pre-empt local programming. Meanwhile, the **Ad Council** is working with the White House, CDC, HHS and major media networks and digital plat-

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forms to launch a series of PSAs and multi-channel content to provide messages to the public. **NBCU**, in partnership with the Ad Council and the White House, created digital and social graphics, in both English and Spanish, to inform high-risk populations about steps they can take to protect themselves and prevent the spread. **ViacomCBS** is launching a multiplatform campaign, led by **MTV**, to communicate the importance of social distancing. **Disney/ABC** is working on priority messaging for parents and families for distribution across channels and platforms.

Fox Buying Tubi: The year of AVOD continues. **Fox** entered into a definitive agreement to acquire AVOD service **Tubi** for approximately \$440m in net cash consideration. The acquisition bolsters Fox's DTC digital reach while also deepening its capabilities in digital advertising, DTC interfaces and personalization technology. In return, Tubi will be able to leverage Fox's advertising and distribution relationships and its national and local promotional platforms to continue the service's growth. Fox plans to continue to run Tubi as an independent service, but plans to expand its offerings by adding in national and local news and sports content. Tubi founder/CEO *Farhad Massoudi* will remain at the head of the AVOD following the closing of the deal, which is expected to come before June 30. "Fox Corporation's relationships with advertisers and distribution partners, combined with the company's dominance in news and sports programming, will help Tubi continue to grow and differentiate itself in the high-growth ad-supported streaming marketplace," Massoudi said in a statement. "I am proud of what the team has already accomplished here at Tubi and we couldn't be more excited about joining such a fast-moving, entrepreneurial company." Fox will finance the Tubi acquisition principally with the net proceeds from the completed sale of its 5% stake in **Roku**. Its stake was valued at around \$350m. Fox was an early investor in Roku and Fox Corp CEO/executive chmn *Lachlan Murdoch* said he's excited to expand Fox's partnership with Roku following the Tubi acquisition. The relationship between the two soured last month when Roku threatened to pull Fox's apps off its platform a day before the Super Bowl. Roku stock skyrocketed 8.8% on news of the stake's sale.

The Collapse of Theatrical Windows?: With theaters shuttering, will day-and-date releases become common? **Universal Pictures** is the first out of the gate, announcing "Trolls World Tour" will be available April 10 for an on demand, 48-hour rental. Other in-release movie titles are set to be available as soon as this Friday. The movies will be made available to **Comcast, Sky** and a "broad range of on-demand partners." Titles to be made available include "The Hunt," "The Invisible Man" and "Emma," with a suggested retail price of \$19.99 in the US. "Universal Pictures has a broad and diverse range of movies with 2020 being no exception. Rather than delaying these films or releasing them into a challenged distribution landscape, we wanted to provide an option for people to view these titles in the home that is both accessible and affordable," NBCU CEO *Jeff Shell* said in a statement. "We hope and believe that people will still go to the movies in theaters

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Space is selling quickly! Contact Olivia Murray at omurray@accessintel.com or 301.354.2010

where available, but we understand that for people in different areas of the world that is increasingly becoming less possible.” This isn’t the first attempt to offer day-in-date movies, with the Universal Studios and Comcast testing renting new movies to subs for three weeks for \$60 back in 2011. Other studios tried similar gambles. The experiment obviously didn’t go anywhere, but **Lightshed Partners** analysts suggest we could be a turning point. “Studios finally have their chance to experiment with windows as theaters are unable to fight back — theater owners cannot threaten to not show a movie in their theaters that utilizes PVOD, as exhibitors cannot show any movies right now,” they wrote in a blog post. Lightshed suggests watching what Universal does with “Minions,” set to release in early July.

From the Commission: In light of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, **FCC** chmn **Ajit Pai** asked broadcasters to work with cable and satellite providers to avoid service disruptions during the next 60 days during a conference call Monday. He suggested those currently negotiating consider short-term extensions to any expiring retransmission consent agreements. **ACA Connects** applauded the effort by Pai and said that it will ask its members to maintain a type of “quiet period” to avoid disruption during the national emergency. Pai also thanked broadcasters for their efforts to educate Americans on the pandemic and offered ideas on additional ways they can serve their communities. “We need this vital message to be delivered by Americans who are familiar to different segments of our society, and broadcasters are ideally situated to the task,” Pai said. He took a moment to thank **NAB** for making available a coronavirus response toolkit to radio and television stations and sharing any coronavirus-related public service announcements with them. Pai also acknowledged on the call that the Covid-19 pandemic would likely have an impact on the post-incentive auction repack and said the Commission would give broadcasters flexibility to address disruptions. -- The FCC granted special temporary authority to **US Cellular** to use additional spectrum to meet mobile broadband demand during the coronavirus pandemic. For 60 days, the company will be allowed to operate in spectrum licensed to **Advantage Spectrum** in the AWS-3 band in order to provide additional capacity to US Cellular customers in parts of California, Oregon, Washington and Wisconsin. The FCC granted a similar request to **T-Mobile** Sunday. -- The FCC’s wireline competition bureau waived the Lifeline program’s recertification and reverification requirements for participating low-income consumers for the next 60 days. It also waived the 2019 Lifeline Order’s requirement that participating carriers’ enrollment representatives register with the Lifeline program administrator. The changes are meant to ease burdens on Lifeline subscribers during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Helping in Italy: **Rocco Commisso**-owned soccer club **ACF Fiorentina** has launched a **GoFundMe** fundraiser to help hospitals on the frontlines of the coronavirus battle in Italy. The death toll in the country has topped 2500. **Mediacom** CEO **Commisso** and his wife **Catherine** and son **Giuseppe** kicked off the initiative by donating 250K Euros to two local foundations supporting hospitals dealing with the crisis in Florence. “I’ve been following the situation in Italy very closely and with a great degree of worry in recent days, albeit from afar,” said **Commisso**. “I want to offer my support, my family’s support and that of the club and all our friends to all those who are doing everything they can to save lives and stop the spread of this invisible and insidious enemy as quickly as possible. I would like to invite the extended **Viola Family** to come together even more in this difficult time and support the people and organizations fighting on the front line. I want to say a special thank you to the doctors, nurses and hospital staff that are currently fighting the toughest of battles in Tuscany.”

DISH Rides the Market Rally: As stimulus plans take shape, the market gaining a thousand points Tuesday, but not all media stocks saw gains. **AMC Networks** closed down 7.88%, **ViacomCBS** fell 6.39% and **Disney** was down 1.56%. Bucking the trend was **Discovery**, which was up 4.27%. **Netflix** shares were up 7%. On the distributor side, **DISH** soared, closing up more than 11%. **Zacks Equity Research** on Monday highlighted **DISH** as a potentially intriguing stock. “The firm has seen solid earnings estimate revision activity over the past month, suggesting analysts are becoming a bit more bullish on the firm’s prospects in both the short and long term,” **Zacks** said, noting that the cable TV space ranks 75 out of more than 250 industries on its industry rankings. **Comcast** and **AT&T** each closed up 6% Tuesday, while **Verizon** was up 6.5%. **T-Mobile** climbed 2.38%, **Charter** was up 1% and **Altice USA** 1.7%.

Frontier Defers Interest: **Frontier** has elected to defer making the interest payments due on March 16 on certain senior unsecured notes. It will now enter into a 60-day grace period with its bondholders. “We remain actively engaged in constructive discussions with our bondholders as the Company continues to evaluate its capital structure with an eye to reducing debt and interest expense,” **Frontier** said in a statement.

Distribution: **Blaze Media** has teamed up with **Pluto TV** to launch AVOD channel **Blaze Live**. The streaming channel will feature a subset of the premium programming currently available on **BlazeTV**, **Blaze Media**’s OTT platform.

More Free Internet: Eastern Ohio operator **MCTV** is among the latest ISPs to announce free internet access for families without online service in response to Covid-19. Free Internet will be provided for families who have not been a **MCTV** customer for 90 days and have current K-12 or college students in the home. The offer is available now through April 30.