

# Cablefax Daily™

Wednesday — April 8, 2020

What the Industry Reads First

Volume 31 / No. 068

## Standing Strong: ISP Networks Withstanding COVID-19 Effects

It's no secret that with the coronavirus pandemic keeping folks cooped up at home, ISPs have been given the difficult task of maintaining high levels of performance while handling far more stress on the network than they would when business is as usual. But preparation is key when it comes to times like these, and while operators could never have predicted this pandemic, they've done the work necessary to give their networks the strength and capacity they need. "Network operators follow a version of the 'Wayne Gretzky' rule... they work to anticipate the demand 12-18 months out," **NCTA** wrote in a post Tuesday. "So, today's network performance reflects in part, the prudent decisions made many months ago, to keep ahead of the curve and be prepared for expected, and unexpected, spikes in demand." Operators are also prepared to move quickly to bolster their networks should traffic continue rising in the months ahead. **Atlantic Broadband** reported that internet traffic has increased by approximately 25% across its footprint, with some areas surpassing 30%. VOD usage has increased by 50% since mid-March, and **Netflix's** bandwidth usage on its network has risen by nearly 60%. The operator said that while its network does have ample capacity to meet the rise in demand, it also has the option of adding additional capacity in the future should it be necessary to maintain current performance levels. **GCI** has already taken that step, adding capacity to its fiber-optic network to ensure its customers in Alaska have enough bandwidth to work and learn from home effectively. It has seen internet usage in Alaska rise by more than 20% since March 1. While Netflix, **Disney+** and the like have limited the bandwidth they're using in Europe and other countries in order to preserve network performance, *Michael Milligan*, senior director of product management for CDN service provider **Limelight Networks**, doesn't believe similar action will occur in the US any time soon. "I don't think we're at a point where the internet is running out of capacity, but we are seeing more stress on certain bottlenecks of the internet," Milligan said. Milligan believes that ISPs need to focus on identifying where the rise in traffic is affecting network performance and finding creative solutions to maintain close to optimal levels. One may not notice if a download takes an additional few seconds, but they will notice if their online game is not instantaneously responsive. If they're lucky, network operators won't have to worry about taking additional steps beyond what they've already done. The US could be close to reaching a plateau in markets that have been quarantined to prevent corona-

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**The Collapse of Theatrical Windows?:** With theaters shuttering, will day-and-date releases become a thing? **Universal Pictures** is the first out of the gate, announcing "Trolls World Tour" will be available April 10 for a rental. Other in-release movie titles are set to be available as soon as this Friday. The movies will be available on **Comcast, Sky** and a "broad range of on-demand partners." Titles to be made available include "The Man" and "Emma" with a suggested retail price of \$19.99 in the US.

Tuesday — March 17, 2020 What the Industry Reads First Volume 31 / No. 067

**For Now: Providers Set Aside Disputes During Coronavirus Outbreak**

As they face the common enemy that is the coronavirus pandemic, **Cox Media Group** and **DISH** have set aside their retrans dispute for now so that **DISH** can resume its carriage of 10 CMG stations in New York, Oregon, Washington, Arizona, Louisiana, California, Mississippi and Idaho. No word on how long the truce will last.

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Friday — March 13, 2020 What the Industry Reads First Volume 31 / No. 050

**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 service remains uninterrupted.

Wednesday — March 18, 2020 What the Industry Reads First

**Covering Covid-19: Content Companies Step Up Efforts**

Programmers are shuffling schedules to respond to the coronavirus crisis. **The Weather Channel** is airing live programming at 50 minutes past the hour to share educational content. **Pledge** is airing live programming due to school closures. Topics include why thunder happens, how rainbows form and more. Programming is scheduled for Friday at 2pm.

**From the Commission:** Another 116 broadband and telephone service providers have taken the **Par's Keep Americans Connected Pledge**, agreeing to take specific steps to keep Americans connected for 60 days. Some notable names taking the pledge include **Hotwire Communications**, **Midwest**

Cablefax Daily (ISSN 1069-6644) is published daily by Access Intelligence, LLC ● www.cablefax.com ● 301.354.2101 ● Editorial Director: Amy Maclean, 301.354.1760, amaclean@accessintel.com ● Publisher: Michael Grebb, 323.380.6263, mgrebb@accessintel.com ● Senior Editor: Sara Winegardner, 301.354.1701, swinegardner@accessintel.com ● Associate Editor: Mollie Cahillane, 212.621.4951, mcahillane@accessintel.com ● Acct. Exec: Olivia Murray, 301.354.2010, omurray@accessintel.com ● Director of Marketing: Kate Schaeffer, kschaefter@accessintel.com ● Prod. Mgr: Joann Fato, jfato@accessintel.com ● Kerry Smith, Divisional President, Marketing & Media Group, ksmith@accessintel.com ● Group Subs or Subscription Questions, Client Services: 301.354.2101, clientservices@accessintel.com ● Annual subscription price: \$1,749.00/year ● Access Intelligence, LLC, 9211 Corporate Blvd., 4th Floor, Rockville, MD 20850

virus spread, according to **OpenVault's** most recent data. After three weeks of double-digit percentage growth, total downstream data usage in markets with shelter-at-home policies declined 5.80% during the week of March 30-April 3 from the week prior. Upstream usage grew by 2.3%. "It's too early to say that the industry has weathered the storm of additional usage, but signs point to the greatest surge of growth by far as being behind us," OpenVault CEO **Mark Trudeau** said in a statement. NCTA reported similar numbers on this week's COVID-19 dashboard, declaring that provider backbone networks have shown no signs of congestion due to their significant amount of capacity. Still, the dashboard only launched last week, and NCTA is waiting to see more data before making any conclusions. The NCTA dashboard now has eight companies providing data, up from five last week. **Mediacom, Sjoberg's** and **Vyve** joined **Charter, Comcast, Cox, GCI** and **Midco** in supplying statistics.

**AT&T Offers Financial Update:** AT&T took on a \$5.5bln loan deal with 12 banks to boost its liquidity during the COVID-19 pandemic. In a business update, AT&T said it has "a strong cash position, including a strong balance sheet and attractive liquidity." As of Dec 31, the company had about \$12bln in cash on hand. It expects to receive an addition \$2bln from the expected closing of its divestiture of its stake in **Central European Media** later this year. AT&T also expects to close the sale of its Puerto Rico and US Virgin Islands operations to **Liberty Latin America** later in 2020, and the proceeds will be used to retire an outstanding preferred interest. The company said it will continue paying dividends quarterly to shareholders. Turning to its supply chain, AT&T said that, in general, its exposure to near-term equipment shortages is limited due to the geographic diversity of its suppliers. -- AT&T has also decided to hold its 2020 annual stockholders meeting via webcast rather than an in-person meeting in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. The meeting will begin at 9am CDT on April 24.

**Pivotal Lowers Comcast Expectations:** Pivotal adjusted its '20 and '21 expectations for **Comcast** to better reflect the likely effects of COVID-19, mostly on **NBC**. The consolidated '20 revenue and EBITDA forecasts are now the low on the Street. Pivotal is assuming that its theme parks will not reopen in 2020, and all substantial movie releases will be postponed until 2021, with normalization in 2022. Alongside the Olympics delay, it's also predicting significant cuts to NBC advertising forecasts, and material cuts in net new customers and advertising at **Sky**. The group lowered its target price to \$48 from \$52. Comcast stock closed up nearly 2% to \$36.94 Tuesday.

**Ascheim Exits Freeform:** Tom Ascheim is leaving his role as pres of **Freeform** after six years at the **Disney**-owned network. *Hollywood Reporter* first reported the news. Ascheim will remain at Freeform through the end of June before heading over to Warner Bros to serve as pres, global kids, young adults and classics. Ascheim had been with

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Freeform since 2013 and oversaw the net's rebrand from **ABC Family**. Freeform did not respond to a request for comment.

**Doing Good: Cable ONE** donated \$150K to the Meals on Wheels America COVID-19 Response Fund and \$150K to local food banks across its 21-state footprint. "Meals on Wheels and local food banks are fulfilling the critical need of feeding at-risk community members who might otherwise go hungry due to impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic," Cable ONE pres/CEO *Julie Laulis* said in a statement. "We are proud to support their mission through donations that will help provide immediate aid to individuals who have been hit hardest during this unprecedented crisis." In addition to monetary donations, Cable ONE has opened more than 120 free WiFi hotspots in local office parking lots and other public areas for public use during the pandemic. Company associates have also banded together to make masks for first responders, send gift baskets and hot meals to first responders and donate books to senior centers. -- **Twitter** CEO *Jack Dorsey* announced on Twitter (natch) that he'd donate \$1bln of his equity in square to COVID-19 relief efforts. He said the figure represents 28% of his net wealth.

**Netflix Rolls Out Parental Controls:** **Netflix** is launching a number of features for parental controls on its platform, such as options to filter out titles and review what kids are watching. An additional feature can protect individual profiles to prevent children from accessing them by adding a password.

**Quibi Disappoints with Day One Numbers:** Despite months of buzz that included a **CES** keynote and a partnership with **T-Mobile**, Quibi was only able to pull in approximately 300K mobile users across the US and Canada with its Monday launch. That's according to preliminary insights from analytics firm **Sensor Tower**, which compared the mobile-first platform's first day to data from **Disney+**. The highly-anticipated Disney streamer brought in 4mln on its first day in app stores on Nov 12.

**COVID Driving Diverse Viewership:** The average TV audience jumped 33% in the week of March 18, and the much higher ratings for local stations are being driven by a broader demographic representation of viewers, according to research from **Comscore**. In households with adults 50+, homes saw increases in viewership by 29% YOY. Households A18-34 saw the largest jump, up 38%. A35-54 jumped by 35%. In terms of income, households making \$75K-\$99,999K saw the largest percent increase, up 50%. Viewing among Asian households jumped 62%, and Hispanic households up 42%.

**Pluto TV Makes Latin American Launch:** AVOD **Pluto TV** is now available in 17 Latin American countries including Chile, Mexico and Venezuela. Pluto TV Latin America currently has 24 curated channels with plans to add new channels on a monthly basis for the next year. **ViacomCBS's** goal for the end of the next 12 months is to offer more than 70 channels.

**Coronavirus Programming Offerings:** **Comcast** is making on demand programming for more than two dozen entertainment nets and SVODs available for free for its Xfinity X1 and Flex customers. Offerings include **AFRO**, **Aspire TV**, **Brown Sugar**, **Black News Channel**, **REVOLT**, **TV One** and more. -- **Insight TV** is the latest SVOD offering free access to its service during the coronavirus lockdown. The streamer is extending its free trial period to 30 days throughout the month of April, in support of those honoring shelter-in-place policies globally.

**Ratings:** **Fox News Channel** was the most watched net in primetime and total day for the week last week, bringing in 4.019mln viewers and 2.511mln viewers respectively. **CNN** came next in both, earning 2.219mln in prime and 1.533mln in total day. **MSNBC** saw 2.104mln viewers in prime, and 1.356mln in total day. -- In the two weeks since March 16, the US has seen increased demand for fantasy drama series, followed by school-age content and teen sitcoms, according to research from **Parrot Analytics**. The top three shows in the fantasy drama category were "Game of Thrones," "Roswell New Mexico" and "Motherland: Fort Salem." In Europe, Parrot looked at the two weeks after March 9, and saw the most increase in demand for action animation and children's content, while crime dramas and sitcoms decreased the most.

**Programming:** **TV One** postponed the Season 3 premiere of "Uncensored" until the fall. It was originally scheduled for April 26. -- **Syfy** will marathon every episode of "Battlestar Galactica" and "Xena: Warrior Princess" throughout April. Xena will air on Syfy every Thursday morning and afternoon beginning April 16. Battlestar Galactica will air in its entirety, including the 2-part miniseries, all 4 seasons, and the final movie in a 3-day marathon beginning April 20 at 12am.-- **AMC** will premiere three-part drama series "Quiz" May 31 at 10pm. -- **HBO** will debut "Bad Education" April 25 at 8pm, starring *Hugh Jackman* and *Allison Janney*. -- "An American Aristocrat's Guide to Great Estates" premieres on **Smithsonian Channel** May 17 at 9pm.