

Cablefax Daily™

Friday — April 17, 2020

What the Industry Reads First

Volume 31 / No. 075

Unified Message: NCTA Rolls Out COVID-19 PSA

Get ready to see a TV spot highlighting the cable industry's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The [30-second ad](#) from **NCTA** is being provided to the association's member companies to air on cross channel and available ad inventory. NCTA is also doing a minor paid media buy on connected TV services, including **Hulu**, **Roku** and **Philo**. TV is a bit of a departure, as in recent years most of NCTA's paid media efforts have relied on digital media placements. During this time of social distancing, it's kind of amazing to see that the ad features footage filmed last month of employees from **Mediacom** in Gulf Breeze, FL, and **Cox** in Las Vegas. "At the beginning of 2020, we began scheduling video shoots and fortunately were able to get to Las Vegas and Florida to capture crews working on broadband projects, essentially right before all travel and the country started shutting down. NCTA in fact had halted all non-essential travel around this same time but we deemed these projects as essential," said *Brian Dietz*, NCTA's svp, strategic communications. With the presidential election looming, NCTA had already planned to create some digital and video content for 2020 about the work cable ISPs are doing to build out the digital infrastructure. But once it was clear that the country would be forced to stay home and rely on broadband like never before, NCTA pivoted to a spot showcasing the industry's commitment to keeping consumers connected. "Along with our other COVID response efforts, including the internet dashboard, we are both informing the public about what we are doing to keep people connected plus reassuring them that this is our top priority," Dietz said. **MI** is the creative agency behind the spot (NCTA has used the firm for years) and Baltimore-based **Mozell Films** is the video production company that managed the field shooting, production, etc. The spot shows people connecting through technology, with a voice declaring, "It's how you get to work. It's how you get to school. It's how you stay fit, how you stay informed. It's how you say I love you." The ad is part of NCTA's continued efforts to show what the industry has done to build a national infrastructure—and to fight back against calls for utility style regulation. The cable association launched a digital story and three videos in 2018-19 that featured **Eagle Communications** broadband construction project in St. Francis, KS. NCTA has had topical campaigns focusing on the digital TV transition, net neutrality and parental controls among other issues. In 2006, NCTA worked with political consultant Fred Davis for a multi-media campaign called "Cable: A Great American

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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, kschaeffer@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

Success” story that included TV spots. As for the industry’s broadband networks, companies continue to report that they are holding up well. **Comcast** released updated stats this week showing that the initial rapid rise in network use has plateaued in most markets. On Xfinity Mobile devices, WiFi use is up 49% and dependence on LTE data has declined 19% since March 1. Comcast previously reported a 24% increase in WiFi and 10% decline in LTE on March 30. NCTA’s most recent weekly dashboard shows that downstream peak growth was flat for the second week, up 0.65% for the week of April 4, while upstream peak growth decelerated for the second consecutive week (up 0.71% for the week of April 4, compared to increases of 7% and 4% the previous two weeks).

Verizon Joins the Videoconference: Verizon Business is jumping into the world of videoconferencing with its acquisition of **BlueJeans Network**. Unlike popular video meeting service **Zoom**, BlueJeans is a cloud-based B2B offering with encrypted video options. The company currently claims approximately 15K customers in all shapes and sizes. The transaction, which has an estimated value under \$500K, will see BlueJeans immediately integrated into Verizon’s communications as a service business. Verizon is also looking to fit the video platform into its 5G product roadmap. Priority will be given to secure engagement solutions for areas like telemedicine, distance learning and field service work that have become more important now than ever before. “As the way we work continues to change, it is absolutely critical for businesses and public sector customers to have access to a comprehensive suite of offerings that are enterprise ready, secure, frictionless and that integrate with existing tools,” Verizon Business CEO *Tami Erwin* said in a statement. The acquisition comes at a time when many are scrambling to transform everything from large conferences to shareholder meetings into alternative or virtual events. The special home edition of **TCM’s Classic Film Festival** is set to kick off Thursday with an 8pm showing of 1954’s “A Star is Born.” **MFM’s** board voted unanimously to transform the 60th annual Media Finance Focus 2020 into a virtual event beginning the week of June 15 and continuing into August. Some 40 virtual sessions will be held over the course of 10 weeks. And in a precautionary move, **Facebook** CEO *Mark Zuckerberg* announced Thursday that the company will cancel any large physical events planned with 50 or more people through June 2021. Some of those will be held as virtual events, and Facebook would share additional details on that soon. It will also require the vast majority of its employees to work from home through at least May and extend its policy of no business travel through at least June. “I hope this helps contain the spread of Covid-19 so we can keep our communities safe and get back up and running again soon,” Zuckerberg said.

ATVA Pushes Back Against NAB Small Business Plan: The **American Television Alliance** on Thursday urged Congress to reject a proposal from the **NAB** to allow stations in large broadcast groups to qualify as independent,

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small businesses under the federal government's Paycheck Protection Program guidelines. The subsidies are reserved for small businesses with fewer than 500 employees that have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. ATVA is arguing that the vast majority of individual television stations are owned and controlled by large station groups like **Sinclair**, **TEGNA** and **Nexstar**. "The PPP was designed by Congress to provide relief to small businesses in need, and is already stretched beyond its initial funding limitations," ATVA spokesperson *Jessica Kendust* said in a statement. "For NAB to suggest that even its very largest members be eligible for these funds once replenished, is not only misguided, but harmful to those who need it most."

Pai Presses Forward With Ligado 5G Network: FCC chmn *Ajit Pai* circulated a draft order that would approve **Ligado Networks's** application to deploy a low-power terrestrial nationwide network in the L-band that would primarily support 5G and IoT services. A number of federal agencies have pushed back against Ligado's proposal, arguing that it would interfere with GPS reception. "I appreciate concerns raised by certain agencies, but we must make an independent decision based on our staff's technical analysis. And based on the painstaking technical analysis done by our expert staff, I am convinced that the conditions outlined in this draft order would permit Ligado to move forward without causing harmful interference," Pai said in a statement. He isn't fully without government support. Attorney general *William Barr* said in a statement that he hopes the full Commission moves forward quickly in approving Ligado's application. "Freeing up L-band spectrum for use in tandem with the C-band, as the Chairman proposes, should greatly reduce the cost and time it will take to deploy 5G throughout the country and would be a major step toward preserving our economic future," Barr said.

Volunteers Wanted: Want to help in addressing the broadband response to the COVID-19 pandemic? The **FCC** is seeking nominations for the Broadband Deployment Advisory Committee's disaster response and recovery working group. Nominations are due April 27. The group will assist in documenting strategies and solutions that stakeholders are developing to address deployment-related challenges. The working group also will help formulate a report on best practices and lessons learned from the pandemic. Info on nominations can be found [here](#).

Pole Position Part II: The Coalition of Concerned Utilities, which includes **FirstEnergy** and **Minnesota Power**, wants the **FCC** to reject **ACA Connects'** [request](#) to allow operators to perform "customer drop" pole attachments without providing advance notice to investor-owned utilities. The utilities claim the group is using "customer drops" in a way that might easily be confused with "service drops." The coalition argues that ACA's "vague" description has the effect of asking the Commission "to permit attaching entities to install attachments from mainline pole to mainline pole without going through the permitting process at all, apparently using J-hooks as the primary method to affix those attachments." The utilities maintain that new attachments to mainline distribution poles need to be reviewed in advance for safety.

Upfronts Update: AMC Networks canceled its scheduled March 18 Upfront event due to the coronavirus, but now the company is launching "Upfront Connect." The online sales hub is designed to help clients and brands work with the AMCN sales organization. "The Screening Room" launched Thursday, a digital library of AMCN originals that includes full series and previews of new content. The new branded content studio "The Content Room" is offering creative and production capabilities for free to brands that come on board.

CSG Gets Conversational: **CSG** has developed a strategic partnership with AI firm **Artificial Solutions** to launch a conversational AI solution that allows companies to rapidly develop, deploy and analyze artificially intelligent conversational applications across a variety of use cases and channels. The CSG Conversational AI interface can be built in 35 languages and delivers more humanlike interactions—including the ability to change the course of the conversation, seamlessly switch between platforms (chat, IVR, SMS, social and smart home devices) and act upon more than one customer intent.

FCC Approves First Telehealth Projects: The **FCC's** Wireline Bureau approved six funding applications for the COVID-19 Telehealth program, which Congress appropriated \$200mln to. The agency began accepting applications at noon on Monday. The first projects to get approval are: \$727,747 to Atlanta's Grady Memorial Hospital; \$753,367 to Peekskill, NY's Hudson River Healthcare; \$312,500 to NYC's Mount Sinai Health System; \$244, 282 to Cleveland's Neighborhood Health Care; \$1mln to the Ochsner Clinic Foundation in New Orleans; and \$192,500 to UPMC Children's Hospital in Pittsburgh. The funding is geared toward expanding telehealth visits and remote patient monitoring with several recipients serving low-income and uninsured/underinsured populations.

Grain Management Closes Hunter Stake: Investment firm **Grain Management** completed its acquisition of a majority interest in **Hunter Communications** Thursday. Hunter Communications offers fiber connectivity services to businesses in southern Oregon and northern California. Terms of the deal, which was originally announced in August, were not disclosed.

PROGRAMMER'S PAGE

'90 Day Fiancé' Goes Self-Shot

With productions closed down across the world, networks are getting creative. **TLC** is expanding its iconic "90 Day Fiancé" franchise with the limited series "90 Day Fiancé: Self-Quarantined," premiering Monday at 9pm. The network is combining self-shot footage and remote video interviews with producers to check in with current and former couples. "Our 90 Day couples are used to granting us access to the most personal aspects of their lives and this was a natural extension of that and in some ways some of the most intimate content we've ever been able to capture," said *Gabriela Tavakoli Bailey*, vp of production for TLC. The franchise has been on the air since 2014, and the limited series will feature people from over 20 countries. The series came together in just a few short weeks, and naturally posed some technical challenges. "Coordinating filming of self-shot footage with participants all over the world naturally posed some unique logistical and technical challenges for us," said Bailey. "We like to hang our hats on the fact that our 90 day shows are very raw and fly on the wall. But this production is definitely taking things to a whole other level—often getting content from our participants within just a 24-hour time period, and relying on them entirely to do the filming." Nearly 40 cast members are appearing on the newest spinoff in the five one-hour episodes. And while there are more remotely produced shows popping up, Bailey promises 90 Day stands out. "Yes, it's speaking to how people are managing the life-changing consequences of the pandemic. But it's also very much about how these couples are continuing to navigate their relationships under truly unprecedented circumstances and just the day-to-day realities of living life under self-quarantine," she explained. "And like any 90 Day Fiancé series, there will definitely be surprises along the way." — *Mollie Cahillane*

Reviews: "The Longest War," premiere, 10pm, **Showtime**. Have you noticed how "Homeland" seems ripped from the headlines? In the hit series, unconventional CIA agent Carrie Matheson (*Claire Danes*) and her sometime-ally Saul Berenson (*Mandy Patinkin*) are making a last-ditch effort to conclude a peace deal between the Taliban, the US and Pakistan. In the real world, on the last day of February, as the novel coronavirus was beckoning, US and Taliban representatives were signing an accord in Qatar aimed at ending the nearly 20-year conflict. The US invaded Afghanistan in September 2001, not long after the 9-11 attacks. The similarity between Homeland and reality is only partly coincidental. That's because its exec producers know their stuff. Viewers can see evidence of *Alex Gansa* and *Howard Gordon's* acumen after Sunday's penultimate Homeland. Showtime will premiere their doc about Afghanistan. Like parts of Homeland, it is lean-in television, with a lot of details and perspectives. While it might have benefited from explanatory graphics, it's an engaging 90-minute retelling of this sad, deadly excursion. — "Frontline: Coronavirus Pandemic," premiere, 9pm ET, Tuesday, **PBS**. While many viewers are reaching their saturation point about pandemic news, this reasonable, 34-minute special that begins in Seattle, WA, with Patient 1 and then moves to DC, offers a good first look at this bit of fresh history. — *Seth Arenstein*

Basic Cable P2+ Prime Rankings* (04/06/20-04/12/20)		
Mon-Sun	MC US	MC US AA
	AA%	(000)
FNC	1.127	3,462
MSNBC	0.631	1,940
CNN	0.578	1,776
HGTV	0.399	1,226
HIST	0.381	1,171
TLC	0.372	1,143
TBSC	0.351	1,078
A&E	0.319	981
HALL	0.312	960
FOOD	0.304	933
LIFE	0.280	861
DISC	0.278	853
USA	0.259	795
TNT	0.242	743
ID	0.217	665
INSP	0.216	663
TVLAND	0.185	568
GSN	0.183	563
BRAVO	0.181	557
HMM	0.170	524
NICK	0.169	520
ADSM	0.168	517
FX	0.165	509
AMC	0.154	473
NAN	0.147	451
VH1	0.144	441
WETV	0.143	438
MTV	0.135	416
SYFY	0.129	397
CRN	0.129	396
NKJR	0.126	387
TRAVEL	0.126	386
FRFM	0.125	385
NATGEO	0.125	383
ESPN	0.122	376
COM	0.115	354
OXY	0.114	350
LMN	0.114	349
PARA	0.114	349
APL	0.111	340
BET	0.109	335

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



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