

Cablefax Daily™

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What the Industry Reads First

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All In: Expanding the Internet for the Future

For those people that remain unconnected, the COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated the negative effects they feel by being on the wrong side of the digital divide. Achieving ubiquitous connectivity was at the center of a virtual panel hosted by **Cisco** Tuesday with providers that are working to handle the increase in network traffic they've seen since the pandemic began and preparing for the next time they need to support first responders in such a major way. "We know healthcare in the future is really going to need to be continuous, but it can't be continuous without being continually connected," University of Texas Galveston medical branch vp/CIO *Todd Leach* said. **AT&T** FirstNet svp *Jason Porter* called the COVID-19 pandemic the perfect test case for the network being built specially for those on the front lines. "We had tested and been hardened through hurricanes, tornadoes, wildfires and all kinds of other natural disasters over the last several years... but this was like a fire, flood and tornado in every city across the country at the same time," he said. Because the federal government devoted spectrum to public safety, FirstNet hasn't had to deal with additional network traffic associated with entertainment. It has still seen huge growth in demand for FirstNet services, such as devices and applications related to the crisis. **Cox** evp/chief product and technology officer *Kevin Hart* has had to manage all that traffic from gaming, working from home and distance learning and it hasn't been easy. But luckily, Cox has a long-term growth strategy laid out that gave it extra headroom before it would run out of capacity. "We typically build our network 12-18 months ahead of demand curves," Hart said, adding that Cox also has a roadmap for offering 10G speeds. Where it needed to act quickly was in improving its self-install processes and giving its techs better virtual technology capabilities. *Andrés Imaldo*, **Verizon's** svp/pres, public policy and Verizon Connect, doesn't think the new normal we find ourselves in will stick around for the long haul, but he does believe it has offered providers a glimpse into what the future will look like in terms of network needs. "This pandemic reinforces for us that our core strategy around 5G and 5G edge services has never been more important," Imaldo said. "To have that scale and to be as ubiquitous as we all would like to be requires the horsepower of 5G." While many have chosen to withdraw their full-year guidance, Verizon has chosen to stick with many of the numbers it projected and even increased its CapEx guidance. The only area it has chosen not to guide on is revenue due to the unpredictability of the current hardware market. In order to continue moving in the right direction

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towards a world with ubiquitous internet, Hart said authorities should work to ease barriers to additional construction from permitting to pole attachments. Irnaldo added that there's a need for more subsidies and events like reverse auctions that encourage providers to expand into hard-to-reach areas. On the regulatory side, Facebook vp, connectivity Dan Rabinovitsj believes more innovation will also come on using spectrum sharing to reach rural areas where there is no business case for a provider to keep building. "There should be easy ways for you to use an incumbent operator's spectrum to just go after those remote areas so it is a win-win for everybody," he said.

Independent Show Canceled: NCTC and ACA Connects announced the in-person Independent Show set for July 26-29 in San Antonio is canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. "We have made this difficult but essential decision to redesign this year's Independent Show and hold it either in conjunction with another conference this fall or move to an online experience," organizers said, adding they expect to share more plans within the next three weeks.

Disney Channels' Kanter to Leave: Nancy Kanter, evp of content and creative strategy for Disney Channels Worldwide, is set to exit her post in January. Her tenure has included the launch of preschool net Disney Junior as well as the rollout of a slew of Disney Channel Original Movies that have launched some of today's biggest young stars. Kanter joined Disney in 2001 as vp, original programming, Playhouse Disney. "Without a doubt, paramount among her many achievements is building one of the most culturally relevant channels and brands in the global kids' television business, Disney Junior," Disney Channels pres/chief creative officer Gary Marsh wrote in a memo Tuesday. "At every turn, Disney Junior is a reflection of what matters most to Nancy—entertaining narratives driven by original characters who bring the magic and heart of classic Disney into entirely new stories."

State of Competition: Google Fiber said the COVID-19 pandemic underlines how important it is for all Americans to have access to high-speed broadband, arguing that it's clear "long-standing historical policies favoring incumbents and legacy technologies" over new entrants have caused real economic harm. The comments came in an FCC proceeding seeking input on the state of competition in communications markets. Google Fiber's list of grievances includes Section 224 of the Communication Act, which grants nondiscriminatory access to investor-owned utility poles only to telecommunications carriers and cable operators—not fiber-to-the-premises ISPs like Google Fiber that don't qualify as a telecom or cable op. The company also encouraged the FCC to examine how providers package and bundle their services. "For Google Fiber's part, market data indicates that consumers increasingly do not want expensive triple play bundles and would rather have affordable and predictably priced broadband, which gives them the flexibility to purchase whatever over-the-top service they desire, not only for voice service and linear television, but also for stream-

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ing services, gaming, educational applications, and business needs,” said Google Fiber, which recently announced it would no longer offer new linear TV subscriptions. The FCC comment request is a chance for everyone to air their regulatory wish list. **NCTA** called on the agency to improve its universal service programs by forbearing the Eligible Telecommunications Carrier requirement. It also argued against differential regulatory treatment of like services, noting that online video providers that target children, such as **YouTube** and **Netflix**, don't face the same FCC restrictions on children's advertising. **ACA Connects** painted a rosy picture of competition in the broadband marketplace, but said it's another story when it comes to video. The group wants the FCC to better calculate the “magnitude of the discrimination” that small and rural cable operators face in retrans negotiations with broadcast station groups.

Effective Competition Challenge: File this in the “Still Lingerin’” folder. The US Court of Appeals for the First Circuit has once again granted the **Massachusetts Department of Telecommunications and Cable** additional time to file its opening brief in its attempt to overturn a unanimous **FCC** decision that found OTT offering **AT&T TV Now** constitutes effective competition for **Charter** in 32 Massachusetts communities and Kauai, HI. The court granted an additional extension of 22 days, pushing the deadline to May 26. The brief was initially due March 16, but the department and Attorney General's Office said they needed more time because of the COVID-19 pandemic. At the FCC, MDTC is challenging requests by **Cox** and **Comcast** to receive effective competition status in Massachusetts communities. If an area is found to be without effective competition, local government can regulate basic cable rates and equipment rates. Most of the country already has been presumed to have effective competition due to a change in FCC rules in 2015.

Comcast CBRS Play: The **FCC** is soliciting comments on a waiver request from **Midco** and **Comcast** that would let the latter participate in the upcoming CBRS auction. Comcast is barred from participating because FCC rules prohibit an entity from having a controlling interest in more than one auction application. South Dakota-based operator Midco is 50% owned by Comcast Midcontinent, an indirectly owned subsidiary of Comcast. Comments are due May 4, with short-form filing window closing on May 7 for the auction of Priority Access Licenses in the 3.5 GHz CBRS. More than 22K licenses will be offered in Auction 105, the most to ever be up for grabs in a single auction.

COVID-19 Extensions: **Altice USA** is joining other providers including **Comcast**, **Verizon** and **Cox** to extend its Keep Americans Connected pledge through June 30 in order to provide relief to businesses and customers facing challenges from COVID-19. The company had already announced it extended its free student broadband and WiFi offers through the 2019-2020 school year. **Sparklight** (formerly **Cable One**) is extending its pledge through the end of June as well, waiving late charges and suspending the disconnection of internet services, as well as the free WiFi hotspots in public areas.

Deals: The **FTC** approved **Verizon's** acquisition of video conferencing company **BlueJeans Network**. BlueJeans' cloud-based video service serves a wide variety of business segments from small organizations to some of the world's largest multinational brands.

Ratings: It was a great month ratings-wise for news nets. **Fox News** had its highest-rated month in network history in primetime. The net drew an average 3.761mln in prime, followed by **MSNBC** with 2.038mln and **CNN** with 1.948mln. In total day, MSNBC had its highest viewership in network history, up by 40% YOY, and CNN posted its best numbers in A25-54 in 15 years, with 390K in the demo, up 180%. In total day, Fox News pulled in 3.681mln (up 66%), compared to CNN's 1.36mln (up 150%) and MSNBC's 1.284mln (up 40%). -- **WE tv's** series “Growing Up Hip Hop” hit record viewership in Season 5. Its newest episode April 23 was the highest performing ep in both W25-54 and A25-54 This season is up 21% and 19% respectively in those demos. It grew total audience by 23%

Distribution: **Anthem Sports & Entertainment** and the **NCTC** inked a multi-year renewal for **AXS TV** and **HDNET Movies**. -- **Tubi** teamed up with **LG Electronics** to have its app preloaded on LG mobile phones in the US and Canada. This is the first AVOD service to be preloaded by LG on mobile devices in the US. The phones are currently available at **T-Mobile**, and will soon be available on **MetroPCS** and **US Cellular**, and in Canada on **Rogers**, **Bell** and **Telus**.

People: **Showtime** upped *Erin Calhoun* to evp, communications, effective May 4. She replaces *Johanna Fuentes*, who is leaving to head up global communications at **WarnerMedia**. Calhoun will lead Showtime PR, reporting to chmn/CEO *David Nevins*. -- **Freeform** tapped *Kristen Andersen* as vp, communications. She began the role March 16, the first day of shelter-in-lace, and comes over from **Netflix**, and was previously director of publicity at **ABC**.

Join Cablefax for Virtual Happy Hour: Kick back and join **Cablefax's** editors Friday afternoon for an informal discussion with your favorite beverage. We'll chat about the news of the week, what we're binge watching and any anything else on your mind. Our virtual happy (half) hour will start at 4pm ET on Friday, May 1. Email *Amy Maclean* at amaclean@accessintel.com to RSVP.