

Special Work Culture section Pg 4

# Cablefax Daily™

Thursday — June 18, 2020

What the Industry Reads First

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## No Sweat: Charter Writing Off Customers' COVID-19 Debt

Charter isn't too concerned about collecting on bad debt customers racked up during the COVID-19 pandemic, according to CFO *Chris Winfrey*. Charter participated in the **FCC's** Keep Americans Connected pledge, promising not to terminate service to any residential or SMB customers affected by the COVID-19 pandemic through June 30. It was an act of goodwill, but some customers have racked up fairly high bills. Speaking at an investor conference Wednesday, Winfrey said that Charter, in essence, is going to write off the billings that occurred inside of 2Q20 in order to put customers back in a position where they can pay. "Our goal here wasn't about the Q2 financial results, which I said on the 1Q call was going to be messy," Winfrey said. "Our goal was at the end of this year, how do we have the most subscribers and the best cost platform for generating free cash flow in the future. By treating customers right, that's actually the way to get there." While Winfrey wouldn't offer too much of a peek into Charter's 2Q results, he did say that it had the highest amount of transaction volume the company had ever seen. That figure includes acquisitions, upgrades and calls related to billing. A large portion of activity was tied to Charter's offer to supply free Spectrum broadband and WiFi access for 60 days to households with K-12 and/or college students who did not already have a Spectrum broadband subscription and at any service level up to 100Mbps. Over 50% of those customers also took and paid for an additional service from Charter, whether that was video, phone or mobile, according to Winfrey. But that transaction spike is likely to taper off in the middle of 3Q. "I think as we come out the back end and provided that local economies can continue to re-open, you'll see all that activity settle down. In fact, it may actually go even further below where it would have normally otherwise been as people really settle in to our products and what they have with less desire to make a move or a change to their service," Winfrey said. In terms of longer-term effects from the COVID-19 pandemic, Winfrey pointed to the amount of self-installs that have taken place and customers' willingness to engage a more digital customer service environment. Charter's customers have embraced the company's digital self-care portal, which includes chat options and bots. "I don't think a lot of that goes backwards," Winfrey said. "I think we got whether it's a year-and-a-half or two years of the adoption curve in advance that was pulled forward. That may slide back a little bit as people move back into a normal environment, but I think there was a lot of forced training that was involved because people didn't want to be making a phone call."



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**DISH and T-Mobile:** A July 1 close date for DISH's purchase of Boost from T-Mobile is sounding more likely. T-Mobile revealed in an SEC filing Wednesday that the Department of Justice has determined it complied with the requirement in the final judgment by the DC Circuit to provide DISH with the ability to cross-provision any new or existing customer of the prepaid business with a compatible handset onto the T-Mobile network. As a result, T-Mobile said it believe all conditions to closing have been satisfied and it expects the prepaid business to close on July 1. Per an SEC filing, DISH and T-Mobile entered into an amendment Wednesday in which they agreed to close the Boost Mobile transaction in accordance with the asset purchase agreement on July 1. Neither can terminate the agreement prior to July 2. In other news, T-Mobile announced Peter Osvaldik will replace Braxton Carter as CFO on July 1.

**Justice's Section 230 Recommendations:** The Department of Justice is weighing in on Section 230, a portion of law that shields social media companies from liability for content posted online. It has made a list of reform proposals that it believes would provide stronger incentives for online platforms to address illicit material on their services, while continuing to foster innovation and free speech. DOJ's specific proposals include adding a statutory definition of "good faith," which would limit immunity for content moderation decisions to those done in accordance with "plain and particular terms of service" and accompanied by a "reasonable explanation." "Clarifying the meaning of 'good faith' should encourage platforms to be more transparent and accountable to their users, rather than hide behind blanket Section 230 protections," DOJ said. Additional recommendations include clarifying that the immunity provided by Section 230 does not apply to civil enforcement by the federal government or in federal antitrust claims. DOJ also recommends denying Section 230 immunity to "truly bad actors" as well as specific categories including child exploitation and sexual abuse, terrorism and cyberstalking. Trump signed a controversial executive order this month seeking more government oversight over speech on the platforms via Section 230. DOJ said its review has lasted 10 months and arose in the context of its broader review of online platforms and their practices. "When it comes to issues of public safety, the government is the one who must act on behalf of society at large. Law enforcement cannot delegate our obligations to protect the safety of the American people purely to the judgment of profit-seeking private firms," Attorney General William Bar said in a statement. Public Knowledge said it was awaiting specific details, but has concerns. "The government of course has a role in ensuring that unlawful content is taken down, and in limiting the harms caused by content that platforms distribute. But this cannot be a cover for overriding a platform's editorial choices, however much particular policymakers might disagree with them," said legal director John Bergmayer. "People who find the editorial and content choices of major platforms objectionable should support measures that empower users, such as interoperability and competition

We are so proud of our industry and the many ways companies are responding to the pandemic. Free internet, fresh content, employee safety and much more.

The Cablefax Editorial Team is reporting on vital industry updates every day. We want to hear from you so please reach out to share your news and stories.

**Content. Community. Daily.**

Amy Maclean, Editorial Director, amaclean@accessintel.com or 301.354.1760

**The Collapse of Theatrical Windows?:** With theaters shuttering, will day-and-date releases become the norm? **sal 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. 050

**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 Maryland, Oregon, Washington, Arizona, Louisiana, California, Mississippi and Idaho. No word on how long the truce will last.

# Cablefax Daily™

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. **Netflix** is airing live programming due to school closures. Topics include why thunder happens, how rainbows form and more. The pledge is scheduled for Friday at 2pm.

**From the Commission:** Another 116 broadband and telephone service providers have taken the **Keep Americans Connected Pledge**, agreeing to take specific steps to keep Americans connected during the coronavirus pandemic. Some notable names taking the pledge include **Hotwire Communications**, **Middle**

rules that allow users, not the government, to decide what kind of platform they want to use.”

**FCC's Starks on 230:** Before the DOJ released its [recommendations](#) Wednesday, **FCC** commish *Geoffrey Starks* spoke at an Information Technology & Innovation Foundation webinar on the Commissioner's role in reforming 230. Under *Trump's* executive order, **NTIA** has until the end of July to send the FCC its petition asking the agency to make rules clarifying the relationship between Section 230's broad liability shield and its protections for “good faith” blocking and removal of user content and defining conditions when a provider's moderation is not “taken in good faith. Starks is pushing for NTIA to send the petition as quickly as possible so that the issue could be addressed and not hang around through Election Day. “If, as I suspect it will, the petition fails at the threshold legal question of authority, we should say so loud and clear, close the book on this unfortunate detour, and get back to the important work of closing the digital divide,” Starks said. “While the Chairman and I may disagree on the legal merits here I would hope he would agree that the American public deserves our answer this summer and that we should not let this linger during the height of our 2020 elections.”

**Potential COVID-19 Relief Coming for ISPs:** Congress and the **FCC** could soon be working together on a way to compensate ISPs, especially rural carriers, for their work to keep Americans connected during the COVID-19 pandemic. Sen *Jerry Moran* (R-KS) raised the idea to FCC chmn *Ajit Pai* during a Senate Appropriations subcommittee meeting Tuesday. Pai told Moran he would defer to Congress on what shape that sort of relief would take, but could offer the Commission's experts as resources to guide the appropriate legislation forward.

**Distribution:** **Philo** is adding **Epix** and **Starz** to its lineup, making them available for an additional monthly fee of \$6 and \$9, respectively. Epix is offering Philo subs a \$3/month introductory price for 3 months if they subscribe by July 13. Philo customers who subscribe during that period to Starz can get it for \$5/month for the first 3 months. Virtual MVPD Philo's standard subscription package is \$20/month and includes **A&E**, **AMC**, **Comedy Central**, **HGTV**, **MTV** and others.

**On the Hill:** **Senate Commerce** will hold an **FCC** oversight hearing Wednesday featuring all five commissioners. -- **House Commerce's** Communications and Consumer Protection subcommittees will hold a joint, remote hearing Wednesday titled, “A Country in Crisis: How Disinformation Online is Dividing the Nation.”

**Business Services:** **DISH** is offering two free months of bulk television service to new commercial business customers, including hospitals, senior living communities, student housing and apartments. The offer, which is available through Dec 31, aims to offer economic relief to businesses impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Earlier this year, DISH temporarily reduced rates and paused programming for its existing commercial business customers.

**Ratings:** **Fox News** was the most watched net in cable across total day and primetime for last week. The net brought in 3.331mln in prime, followed by **MSNBC** with 1.82mln and **CNN** with 1.603mln. In total day, Fox News had 1.72mln. **MSNBC** narrowly edged out **CNN**, pulling in 1.099mln to **CNN's** 1.007mln. -- **TLC's** “90 Day Fiancé: Before The 90 Days” was its highest-rated series in franchise history. The series grew double digits across key demos, up 24% in W25-54, 30% in P25-54, 29% in W18-49 and 45% in W18-45. The season finale on May 31 reached 5.1mln viewers in P2+, the first time the franchise broke the 5mln threshold. -- **Golf Channel** racked up record viewership for its four-day coverage of the Charles Schwab Challenge. Sunday's 1-3pm coverage was the most-watched telecast at this event on Golf, notching 1.05mln viewers per minute (+107% over 2019). Golf Channel's four-day combined viewership +78% vs. this event in 2019.

**AVOD Corner:** **Haystack TV** is rebranding its service as Haystack News. As part of the consumer rebrand, Haystack News unveiled a new logo and onscreen look featuring Newsline, the company's personalized and dynamic news TV ticker. -- **Crackle Plus** is launching a Sounds of Summer Channel on July 1. The channel will feature a wide selection of music documentaries and concert films from artists like *Katy Perry*, *Tom Petty* and more.

**Docomo Picks Adara:** **Docomo Pacific**, the largest provider of internet and cable services in Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands, has chosen to deploy **Adara Technologies's** Bandwidth Reclamation Solution suite. Adara's solution aims to quickly free up operator bandwidth so it can immediately be used for multi-gig broadband expansion using DOCSIS 3.1 or DOCSIS 4.0.

**WICT Touchstone Partners:** **WICT** announced its Touchstone Partners for the upcoming year. This year's Strategic Touchstone Partners include **Charter**, **Comcast NBCU** and the **Walter Kaitz Foundation**, all of whom will support WICT's professional development programs, research projects and advocacy initiatives. **Accenture**, **Altice USA**, **CommScope**, **Cox**, **Disney & ESPN Media Networks**, **Google Cloud** and **WarnerMedia** will serve as Catalyst Touchstone Partners. The Inspire Touchstone Partners lineup includes **A+E Networks**, **AMC Networks**, **Amazon Web Services**, **Cisco**, **Discovery** and **TV One**. Additionally, **Discovery** and **Liberty Global** have offered their resources to support WICT's international chapters.



## THE WORK CULTURE LIST PROFILE: CORNING BRIDGING THE GAP



The tech world isn't exactly known for blazing a trail when it comes to diversity and equal pay, but 169-year-old Corning has long committed itself to providing an inclusive environment for all its employees. In 1968, Corning began a Diversity & Inclusion initiative that has flourished into a program that's been recognized from organizations around the world, including four years running on the Na-

tional LGBT Chamber of Commerce and National Business Inclusion Consortium's "Best-of-the-Best" list. We chatted with Human Resources SVP Rob France about how the cable tech vendor has succeeded in making company values more than lip service.

**Pay equity has been a goal at Corning between men and women as well as among minority employee groups. It looks like you achieved that milestone in the US. Have you achieved it globally yet?**

Corning has been tracking pay equity in the US for many years now and achieved 100% pay equity, inclusive of experience and performance, in the US in early 2017. We have expanded our pay equity work globally, achieving 100% pay equity in Chinese mainland, Taiwan, and Mexico in 2019. We will continue to work on pay equity in our other major countries and expect to achieve 100% pay equity in France, Germany, and Poland later this year. Our goal is to have 100% of our salaried workforce included in our annual analyses by 2021.

**What benefits has Corning reaped by achieving 100% pay equity?**

Our company benefits when employees feel they are being treated with respect and compensated fairly. These factors motivate them to contribute fully to our success and to having long-term careers at Corning. We take pride in the exceptionally high retention rate (95% in 2019) among our salaried employees and believe pay equity is one of the reasons they choose to stay. Fun-

damentally, paying men and women equally for doing equal work, inclusive of experience and performance, is just the right thing to do. And it's consistent with Corning's values and our commitment to Diversity & Inclusion, both of which are so critical to our success.

**What is your advice to other companies seeking to achieve pay equity?**

In Corning's case, our Human Resources leaders have championed this work for many years. Likewise, our CEO is extremely supportive because maintaining pay equity is an important part of "Living our Values" and doing the right thing by our employees, all around the world.

Our advice to others is that HR needs to take responsibility for this exercise and should not view it as a compliance activity to be managed by another function, like the law department. In order to tackle the problem, you need to be able to measure gender and ethnicity bias and understand what it will take to fix pay gaps at an individual level. You must create a data model that enables you to iterate and improve your process every year. You must stay focused on it in both good financial times and bad. Do not let excuses like, "We don't have the budget to make the required salary increases!" derail you. Solving the larger societal pay equity question may be too big a problem for any single company to address on its own, but any company can and should address pay equity inside its own walls.

**How is Corning's women empowerment initiative UP2 helping to bridge the gender gap?**

Through UP2, the top women of the company mentor at least two other women, who in turn coach two other women, and so on, creating a powerful multiplier effect. They share best practices, insights, and wisdom based on experience through one-on-one communication, workshops, and networking events held around the world. These activities are supplemented with a variety of UP2 communications tools such as an internal website, a channel on Corning's internal Blue Tube video site, and a dedicated group on the Blue Line, Corning's internal discussion platform, which has approximately 500 members.

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## Think about that for a minute...

### Weak Links

Commentary by Steve Effros

It still amuses me that we continue to use the term “cloud” when referring to the vastly complicated system that makes up the “Broadband Internet” as we know it today. The integrated system of transport, servers, routers and the rest that make it up were dubbed “the cloud” primarily because graphic artists couldn’t think of any other way to diagram what was going on for the average person so they put a house at one end, a wire (presumably ours, the “last mile”) to a symbol showing a satellite dish pointing “up” and then a “cloud.” The same images represented the “downward” receipt of the data at the other end. Thus “the cloud” was born. Never mind what happened inside!



To be a little more accurate they could have drawn a whole bunch of little “clouds” up there with lightning bolts shooting back and forth between them and then, ultimately, one of those little suckers shooting the data back down to your house! Never mind. The whole thing, with transport, connectivity, public networks, private networks, uplinks, downlinks, network access points and the like is so convoluted that the average person really doesn’t need to know. All they care about is that it works. And actually, it works very well most of the time.

But sometimes it doesn’t. In any system this complicated, managed by so many different entities, there are going to be weak links. The problem is that identifying which link is weak at any given time isn’t that easy to do. Hence, we need to explain that.

It’s in our interest to do so, since we’re the ones with the direct relationship with the customer. We send them the bill for “Internet Service” even though a vast portion of that service is totally out of our control. They should know that.

The difficulties often start right at the customer’s home. Connectivity can be compromised by weak or old WiFi modem/routers being used in the house. As multiple users demand WiFi connections the service slows down. It has nothing to do with the broadband provider in that case, it has to do with the WiFi in the home. But few folks know that. It’s an easy fix.

What’s far more complicated is when, particularly in rural areas, the whole system seems to slow down at peak use periods. Why? Because the local broadband supplier cannot get adequate “middle mile” connectivity from the smaller communities to the big city where the “network access point” resides. That middle mile is often controlled by a competitor, for instance the telephone company, which has no incentive to provide decent “middle mile” service to anyone else at a reasonable cost. Maybe, someday, the FCC will figure this one out. So far they don’t seem to get it.

And then there are the different server connections themselves. I can “stream” directly to my “smart set” and it seems to require many annoying pauses in the program while the little circle thing goes ‘round and ‘round as the “stream” catches up with the picture. But that doesn’t happen when I watch the same movie on my cable box. Is the “cable guy” intentionally creating a problem? Not likely. It’s more often the case that my “smart set” is trying to get the stream from a server that’s not as efficient as alternative servers (say Roku’s, for instance) and therein often lies the “weak link.” It really would be a good idea to explain all this to our customers. They need to know.

*Steve*

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*(Steve Effros was President of CATA for 23 years and is now an advisor and consultant to the cable industry. His views do not necessarily reflect the views of Cablefax.)*

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