

# Cablefax Daily™

Monday — July 6, 2020

What the Industry Reads First

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## Still Laughing: Ex-HBO Exec Art Bell Pens Memoir on Comedy Central's Start

Launching a comedy channel isn't all laughs, and now former media exec *Art Bell* has written the book to prove it. As an executive at **HBO** in the late 1980s, he pitched the idea for **Comedy Channel**. It launched in 1989, the same year **MTV** premiered its own comedy network, **Ha!**. The two eventually merged into one becoming **Comedy Central** and thus the star of Bell's [memoir](#), "Constant Comedy: How I Started Comedy Central and Lost My Sense of Humor" (Ulysses Press, Releases September 2020). When I caught up with Bell, who became president of **Court TV** after his comedy run, I had to ask if any media executive can really keep a sense of humor given the competitive pressures of the business. "I say I lost my sense of humor, but I just wanted to put out there were a lot of difficult times in the launching of Comedy Channel and Comedy Central," he said. "But throughout the whole process I found lots of things to laugh at—not just the comedy, but what was going on and how it was going on, certainly that was true of all the other places I worked, including Court TV. You laugh through the good times and the bad times. That makes everything easier. Even when you're up against some very stiff competition, some very crazy circumstances and maybe tough negotiations that really mean the life or death of the channel." Bell, who went on to launching a media consulting business before becoming a writer, is still finding ways to laugh at the media biz. Case in point, his [bio](#) lists his most interesting consulting project as commercializing 3D TV. It's also listed as his least successful project. Bell worked on n3D, the world's first 24-hour 3D channel. The venture from **Panasonic** and **DirectTV** lasted about two years. "It was a fascinating time. The technology was astounding, but people didn't need it to understand what was going on in TV," he said. "TV at its essence is stories. It's not the visuals." And telling stories is what Bell does with his book, which he stresses is a memoir and not a definitive history of Comedy Central. One of his funniest memories is back when Comedy Central used to have comedians cover State of the Union addresses live. During one of those telecasts, comedian *Dennis Miller* was killing it. But he was flying solo and the speech went very long. On live TV, Miller found himself need to relieve himself, but there was no one available to relieve him from hosting. He eventually walked out of the studio and went to the bathroom in a trashcan—with just his audio commentary, no video. After filming, Miller was distraught, worried he'd killed his career. "I had to tell him everyone loved it," Bell recalled. The former HBO exec had his own moment of despair when he realized COVID-19 would impact the release of his mem-



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**Advertising Contact: Olivia Murray, Account Executive**  
301.354.2010 | [omurray@accessintel.com](mailto:omurray@accessintel.com)

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# EVERY YEAR, CABLEFAX RECOGNIZES THE TOP MULTI-ETHNIC EXECUTIVES IN THE INDUSTRY

Help Cablefax celebrate the women and men who are shaping the industry and opening doors for others across all areas of business.

As always, it's free to nominate candidates for the Diversity List.

## NEW for 2020!

### INDIVIDUAL CATEGORIES

#### Diverse Executive of the Year

A diverse executive with outstanding business results over the last year. All departments and job functions are eligible.

#### D&I Champion

An executive whose contributions to diversity initiatives and overall D&I leadership has made an important impact within the cable & broadband industry and inspired others to step up their games.

#### D&I Mentor of the Year

An individual whose extraordinary mentoring effort has made a measurable impact in helping to increase the number of low- to mid-level diverse executives that have risen to senior roles.

#### LGBTQ+ Executive of the Year

An executive who identifies as an LGBTQ+ individual and embodies excellence in leadership, community service and overall business acumen.

#### The Trailblazers

This select group of diverse executives exhibits outstanding innovation, creativity and passion—all while making enormous contributions that take their companies to the next level.

#### Thrivers Under 30

These young and diverse up-and-comers represent the future of the industry, which depends on their energy, new ideas and unique perspectives to drive success.

### ORGANIZATION AWARDS

#### Advertising Campaign

Recognizing an advertising campaign for a brand, service or product that appeals to diverse customers or increases a company's outreach to minority or other diverse communities.

#### Community Outreach

Recognizing specific community outreach efforts related directly to helping underserved communities or promoting a more diverse community.

#### Diversity in Business Award

Recognizing a for-profit initiative that ties diversity objectives to a new product or service that bolstered the company's bottom line.

#### D&I Mentoring Program

Recognizing a successful diversity promotion program that has been in place for at least 2 years and has made a sustained and measurable impact on a company's ratio of diverse employees.

#### Public Affairs Campaign

Recognizing a public affairs media, lobbying or awareness campaign (local, regional or national) designed to create awareness of a company's diversity efforts, charitable contributions or other initiatives aimed at a more diverse and inclusive world.

## The DIVERSITY List

PRESENTED BY CABLEFAX



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September 29<sup>th</sup>

TO ADVERTISE, CONTACT:

Olivia Murray at

omurray@accessintel.com

#### Recruiting Program

Recognizing a successful diversity recruiting program that has made a sustained and measurable impact on a company's ratio of diverse employees across the entity or within a specific division.

## BEGIN YOUR NOMINATIONS!

[www.cablefaxdiversity.com](http://www.cablefaxdiversity.com)

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oir. "At first I sort of hung my head and said, 'Oh man. This is going to be a disaster,' because how am I going to get the book out there," he said. But now he's hopeful all this social distancing will equate to more reading time. "In conversations with my publisher, he is so enthusiastic. He said they're selling more books than ever."

**Verizon Offers Free Hulu, Disney+:** Verizon Fios is offering Hulu and Disney+ at no extra cost to new customers. Those who select a Fios 200Mbps connection will receive Disney+ for 12 months and those with a 400Mbps connection will also get Hulu for 6 month. Customers choosing to subscribe to a Fios Gigabit connection will get Hulu and Disney+ free for 12 months and a free Verizon Stream TV device.

**Republicans Fire Back Against Moving Forward Act:** House Commerce's Republican leader Greg Walden (R-OR) is urging Democrats to engage in more dialogue with Republicans following the House's passage of the Moving Forward Act. Among other things, the bill would appropriate over \$100bln to fund broadband-related programs, including efforts to connect low-income Americans. "Instead of working with Republicans to find bipartisan solutions that can actually become law and improve our nation's infrastructure, Democrats have put forth yet another partisan messaging exercise without even consulting Republicans on the Energy and Commerce Committee," Walden said. Walden's comments and those of other conservatives like Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) indicate the bill is not likely to make it through the GOP-controlled Senate.

**Charter Buildout Ahead of Schedule:** Charter continues to be on target to hit a 145K buildout requirement that is part of a settlement with the NY PSC. According to its most recent milestone report, Charter has completed 109,108 passings as of May 31, ahead of the 99,347 interim milestone set forth in the settlement agreement. The settlement relates to a dispute between the PSC and Charter over whether the MSO met buildout conditions imposed when it acquired Time Warner Cable in 2016. Last month, Charter informed the PSC that it would extend its network to 13 premises in two census blocks located in New York's Delaware and Sullivan counties. Margaretville Telephone Company had originally been awarded NY Broadband Program Office [BPO] funding for the 13 addresses. "It is Charter's understanding that these premises are currently unserved by high speed broadband and that BPO funding to Margaretville will no longer be provided for these addresses," Charter told the PSC. Charter will incur the costs for extending its network to the 13 addresses, which will count toward its merger requirement to build out to 145K additional residences and businesses in upstate NY by September 30, 2021.

**Telemundo Beats YouTube Milestone:** Telemundo surpassed 10mln subscribers on YouTube Thursday. It claims it is the only US television broadcast channel to beat the milestone. There are 11 channels under the Telemundo portfolio, eight of which have more than 1mln subscribers.

**Distribution:** The Lone Star Channel is now available on Sling TV and DistroTV. The network, which focuses on classic western film and television, is also coming soon to Sinclair streaming service STIRR.

**Programming:** Starting July 6, Conan O'Brien will begin broadcasting TBS's "Conan" from the Largo at the Coronet music venue in West Hollywood to help the theater survive through the pandemic. O'Brien will continue interviewing guests via Zoom, without an audience, and will only have a limited staff and crew on site. The remainder of the show's production staff will continue working from home. The show airs Monday-Thursday at 11pm. -- Showtime is offering the premiere episode of "Outcry" for free on streaming platforms and on demand starting at midnight on Sunday. It will also be available on YouTube. The series will air on Showtime Sunday at 10pm. -- Discovery Channel's "Shark Week" returns this year on Aug 9 and will continue through Aug 16. More than 20 hours of shark programming is set to air throughout the week, including a celebration of the 20th anniversary of "Air Jaws." -- MTV Studios is teaming up with Phil Lord, Bill Lawrence and Chris Miller to reimagine the "Clone High" TV series.

**Editor's Note:** Cablefax's offices will be closed July 3, in observance of Independence Day. Have a safe and happy Fourth of July! Your next issue of CFX Daily will arrive Monday evening. -- The deadline for nominations for Cablefax's Diversity List is July 10. New categories this year include D&I Mentor of the Year and LGTBQ+ Executive of the Year.

## Cablefax Dashboard

### Hero of the Week



**Hussein Bazzi, Comcast Business:** Bazzi, Comcast’s Heartland Region’s director of commercial field operations, facilitated service to support pandemic responses in Michigan. He coordinated with city managers and health directors in southeast and mid-Michigan to get several COVID-19 testing and government emergency sites installed with Comcast Business internet and video products. Bazzi also facilitated Metro E speed upgrades for a major Southeast Michigan health system and the regional power companies. Under normal circumstances, projects similar to these take weeks and sometimes months to plan and complete. Effectively utilizing his superb management and people skills, Bazzi was able to mobilize his team while simultaneously coordinating with numerous other departments to ensure these critical commercial jobs were completed almost instantly. While Bazzi humbly insists credit goes to the entire Comcast Business team, senior leaders within Comcast refer to him as the glue that holds everything together.

### Tweet Tweet



### Research

- When trying to address technical issues during the pandemic, 45% of customers across the US and UK were able to fix their own issues. Of those who failed, 80% contacted customer support while 20% just stopped trying.
  - Almost 3 out of 4 respondents were willing to spend 30 minutes or less to fix their issues. 17% spent up to an hour trying to fix issues, while 3% spent up to three hours.
  - 17% of successful resolutions were attributable to broadband provider self-service support tools.
- (Source: Sweep Home Broadband Support Experience Report)**

### Quotable

“Broadband has, typically, been the conversation around supply, right, and it’s been the conversation around the edges, but on the margin, not in the middle of conversations like education or energy or healthcare. But, I really think during this pandemic that we changed the equation... the bottom line is we should have been ready for this. We were designed for a moment like this, and we miserably failed when it came to ensuring connectivity for all, particularly, our most vulnerable students that were in desperate need of having a tablet alongside a textbook, versus not having anything, you know, at all.” – **Brookings director of technology innovation Nicol Turner Lee** on FCC commish Jessica Rosenworcel’s *podcast*

## We Want to Feature Your Heroes!

On Fridays, Cablefax will feature a local hero. We’re looking for stories of employees who are going above and beyond. Maybe they are volunteering in their community, sewing mask covers for hospitals, spearheading supply donations, etc.



Please send a photo and 150-200 words about the person to [amaclean@cablefax.com](mailto:amaclean@cablefax.com)

Contact Olivia Murray at [omurray@accessintel.com](mailto:omurray@accessintel.com) to sponsor this feature section