

Special Work Culture section Pg 4

# Cablefax Daily™

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What the Industry Reads First

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## New Leader: Conversation with Black News Channel's Princell Hair

Black News Channel launched Feb 10, right before a global pandemic. The net named former CNN gm and NBC Sports vet Princell Hair as its new pres/CEO this week, with interim CEO J.C. Watts returning to his role as chmn. We spoke with Hair about BNC's upcoming plans and where he's guiding the network in unprecedented times. An edited excerpt follows. **How do you view the importance of Black News Channel in this pivotal time in history, with the pandemic, race relations, everything going on?** We want to give voice to the voiceless. With the exception of really a few times in our history, the Black voice has been largely underserved or ignored. Our job at the **Black News Channel** is really to be the conduit that brings those voices to the forefront and really amplifies them through storytelling. We face some very real challenges with the pandemic and the uncertainties caused by school closures, the economic impact, the criminal justice reform issues, and these are all issues that disproportionately affect the Black community. But there are people in our community who are holding their heads up high and working hard every day to support their families and neighborhoods. So while we have to cover all of these stories that disproportionately impact us, we also want to be able to tell the inspirational stories about people in our community and not let the world forget about all of the positive things that are happening in the Black community. **In leading the network, what do you foresee as some potential challenges, especially with the world in such flux?** I wish I had the luxury of focusing on just one thing to fix, but really running a multiplatform media company requires your attention to spread across many parts of the business and chairman J.C. Watts and I are in alignment, as with any startup, the primary focus has to be on forging a path to profitability. So that's where my initial focus will be for the foreseeable future. **In terms of distribution, are there any more deals on the table? How's expansion looking?** It's certainly something that we're all paying attention to. We just recently launched **BNC 24/7**, which is an OTT channel and we'll have some announcements coming soon with regard to adding more distribution partners, including more streaming options. The partners that we currently have are great partners, and they really helped us get off the ground, but we're continuing to push and we're continuously looking for ways to expand our footprint. **How big a piece is streaming for BNC?** Streaming is hugely important. That's the way the consumer is going, so that's the way that our business has to go. Streaming is a top priority for us in really making sure that we're active and present and relative on that platform is a prior-

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ity for us. **How do you plan on reaching BNC’s audiences? What are the best strategies for that?** The Black audience, they overindex in news consumption. They are consuming news on every platform. Black audiences still read newspapers. Really to reach that audience, it’s about going where they are and being able to deliver stories that the Black news audience is interested in. And the way we do that is by differentiation and how we cover stories. Our mission is really to bring the stories to life in our community, and that I think is what’s going to attract the audience. The reality is that people watch programs, they don’t watch channels. So if we can really differentiate our content and make it indispensable, then people will watch us. **How do you differentiate yourself from the other networks? What are the stories that BNC needs to tell?** As we ramp up our content and newsgathering resources, the best way for us to really differentiate ourselves is through our guests. Many of the faces you see on the Black News Channel you will not see anywhere else. Those guests are really providing valuable context and unique perspectives to the news of the day, that’s how we really differentiate ourselves. Our storytelling and the people we bring on to help us with perspective and context on those stories. **How do you see Black News Channel growing in the next few months and years?** The network is just six months old, and we have to continue to deliver on our brand promise and we have to continue to deliver stories that reflect the Black community. It’s a multi-pronged approach to covering our community, it’s not a one-size fits all. We really have to hone in on those stories that are impacting us directly and the reasons behind the stories.

**Keeping SCOTUS Accessible:** A coalition of 16 groups sent a letter to Chief Justice *John Roberts* Wednesday urging the **Supreme Court** to continue offering live audio access of oral arguments when it reconvenes in October. The groups, which included the **Society of Professional Journalists** and the **National Press Foundation**, said that while it understood that SCOTUS had fears about the American public misunderstanding proceedings, that’s not what happened when live audio access was introduced in May. Instead, the Americans that tuned into the arguments got a “clear sense of the gravity of the deliberations and the thoughtfulness” of the justices. “Real-time broadcasts not only give the public direct access to an engaging, intellectual bench; they also diminish the ability of partisan interests to color a case in ways that serve narrow ends,” the groups wrote. “They offer civics lessons that cannot be replicated under the old rules, where only 50 to 100 members of the public gain entry to an argument and with audio released on Fridays being of limited use in the modern-day news cycle.”

**Reimagined Independent Show:** NCTC and ACA Connects announced more details for its virtual re-imagining of the **Independent Show**. The groups [previously](#) announced the virtual event would take place Aug 25-27, but they’ve changed the dates to Sept 29-Oct 1. The six-hour, invitation-only event will take place over three days and bring to-

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gether nearly 1K industry professionals. The 2020 show was originally scheduled for July 26-28 in San Antonio, TX.

**FCC to Vote on C-band Auction Procedures:** FCC chmn *Ajit Pai* circulated the final draft procedures for the December C-band auction Wednesday, which will be voted on at the Commission's August meeting. In a blog post, Pai said the FCC will continue to prioritize making C-band spectrum available for 5G as quickly as possible. "That's why we rejected calls to do literally nothing until Congress passed a law on the subject (breaking news: it still hasn't). That's why we included accelerated relocation payments to incumbent satellite operators that will make spectrum available for 5G two to four years earlier than otherwise would have been the case. And that's why we proposed an aggressive schedule for holding an auction within the calendar year," Pai said."

**ViacomCBS Working From Home Through 2021:** ViacomCBS CEO *Bob Bakish* informed employees Wednesday that he expects the majority of them to work from home through the rest of 2020. "While we were hopeful we'd be able to bring a small number of employees back to US office locations beginning in August, due to recent spikes it's clear this will not happen," Bakish said in a company memo. "Given the continued trajectory of the virus, we believe having fewer people commuting and gathering is best." Cox Enterprises recently [announced](#) most employees will work at home through January 11.

**T-band, 5G Heading to House Floor:** House Commerce advanced seven communications bills and one House resolution to the full House during a markup Wednesday. Among the legislation set to move forward is a bill that would repeal the requirement on the FCC to reallocate and auction the T-band and another that would authorize up to \$750 mln in grants to support the deployment and use of Open RAN 5G networks in the US. "America must promote the development of trusted alternatives to suspect 5G equipment so we can secure our critical networks and those of our allies in the fight against Huawei," House Commerce chmn *Frank Pallone* (D-NJ) said in a statement.

**Leadership Change at REVOLT:** REVOLT TV CEO *Roma Khanna* is stepping down, shifting into a role as an adviser to the senior team and shareholders. She joined the company in September 2017. *Colin McIntosh*, evp and head of finance and operations, and *Detavio Samuels*, COO and head of content, will take on the additional role of co-heads of Revolt and take over the day-to-day leadership of the company. They will report to *Tarik Brooks*, COO at Combs Enterprises.

**Cable Pioneers Announce 2020 Class:** The Cable TV Pioneers announced the 22 members it will induct in its Class of 2020. The Pioneers are still working on an alternative virtual ceremony to replace the group's annual banquet at the SCTE-ISBE Cable-Tec Expo. "For the past 10 years, the new class induction has been a sold-out event, and while COVID-19 will make it impossible to hold our 54th banquet, the Pioneer managing board is working hard to create a celebration worthy of honoring this outstanding class," Pioneer chmn *Dave Fellows* said in a statement. This year's list of honorees includes *Jeff Berenson* of **ITV Partners**; *Paul Broadhurst* of **Technetic Group**; *Rick Cimerman*, **NCTA**; *Robert Foote*, **KGP Co**; *Daniel Greiner*, **4th Wave Technologies**; *Steve Kaplan*, **Multilink**; *Craig Leddy*, **Interactive TV Works**; *Louise Mooney*, **JLM Partners**; *Ann Montgomery*, *John Williams* and *Ronald Wolfe* of **Charter**; *Daniel O'Brien*, **Mediashift Technologies**; *Elaine Partridge*, **Vast Broadband**; *Shane Portfolio* and *Richard Prodan* of **Comcast**; *Joe Quane*, **EdgeConneX**; *Zak Raley*, **Amphenol Broadband**; *Dick Rohm*, **Cable ONE** (Sparklight); *Jeff Ross*, **Armstrong Utilities**; *Peter Ruben*, **BMP Resources**; *Charles Segars*, **Ovation** and *Gemma Toner* of **Tone Networks**.

**Ritter Bets on Harmonic:** Ritter Communications has deployed Harmonic's CableOS virtualized cable access solution and Cable OS Central analytics service to power its data, voice and video delivery services. Harmonic's CableOS solution offers support for DOCSIS 3.1 and software-based CMTS.

**Distribution:** ViacomCBS and Cox Media Group announced a multi-year deal renewing CBS Television Network affiliation agreements for five stations. The markets include Seattle, Jacksonville, Dayton, OH, Yuma-El Centro, AZ and Eureka, CA, and combine to reach more than 3mln US households.

**Programming:** Hallmark Channel and Hallmark Movies & Mysteries unveiled their 2020-2021 programming slate, with the news coming 100 days before Christmas begins on Hallmark's channels. Programming events "Fall Harvest" and "Countdown to Christmas" kick off on Hallmark Channel this fall. Also on tap are new seasons of the net's three scripted dramas and daily lifestyle program "Home & Family." "Countdown to Christmas" will have 23 new original films. On Hallmark Movies & Mysteries, its holiday event "Miracles of Christmas" will have 17 new original movies. -- Get ready for Shark Week on **Discovery Channel!** Boxing champ *Mike Tyson* will kick off the event Aug 9 at 8pm, going head-to-head with one of the ocean's top predators in "Tyson vs. Jaws: Rumble on the Reef." -- **Fox News** will debut a one-hour special entitled "Harris Faulkner Presents: The Fight for America" Sunday at 10pm. The program will spotlight discussions surrounding the national conversation on race in America and the path forward.

## THE WORK CULTURE LIST PROFILE:

### CSG Flexible Employer

It isn't just young, upstart companies that are getting creative with benefits and work policies. CSG may be more than 35 years old, but it has put a series of progressive policies in place that appeal to the young and old.

When Christine Mellon joined the company in 2016 as SVP, Chief Human Resources Officer, there was already work being done to move CSG away from some of the old school approaches to work culture. "There is an acknowledgment that we have a workforce that is comprised of adults who have the ability to make decisions for themselves about what works for them, what they need and how to balance their lives," she says.

"We didn't want to create or recreate an archaic approach or be highly paternalistic."

Instead, CSG put into place flexible vacations, extended parental leave and eliminated the concept of requesting sick time for full-time employees in the US. More established organizations can find it difficult to shift from traditional procedures. "At our senior leadership level, there was no hesitancy at all," says Mellon. "We hit a few interesting points where we had employees who have been around for a long time who were high quality and delivering great work for us. They were definitely steeped in the notion that you earned certain things by virtue of years of service."

Still, she says it wasn't all that challenging to get them on board. "Once you sit down with someone and have a logical discussion... 'do you think it actually make sense that an employer can tell an employee how many days they are allowed to be sick in a year?' People laugh," Mellon says. "Research shows high performing employees are the least likely to take sick time to begin with. And those people you also struggle with getting them to take vacation time because they're working so hard. Once you start having those conversations, they start to appreciate the reality of the world of work vs what an old policy might have covered."

And keep in mind, CSG's workforce is getting younger, with 30-40% falling in the Gen X and Millennial categories. CSG has found that time off is tracking about where

it did before the policy shift happened in 2017. One of the ways CSG encouraged employees to take time off was to urge senior leaders to take at least three weeks off a year and be very public about it.

Before the world was working from home due to COVID-19, CSG was adopting a flexible policy for telework. "If something works really well for an employee and we can accommodate that, we want to

accommodate that—whether that's someone who needs to have Fridays where they're working from their home or they may not work on Mondays, but are working on Sundays because that's what they want to do because it works better for them," Mellon says. "Or they may not have an office in a particular building of ours because they are roaming around the world so much. We've had individuals that have had a personal need to relocate, we've been very open. If it doesn't impede the job, we're great with that. We even have an executive leadership team today that's distributed and not all at headquarters. And it's the most effective leadership team I've been a part of in my career."

Looking ahead, CSG is hoping to bring even more flexibility to the workplace. That could allow employees to have personal input on what matters most to them. "They would get the same value of investment from the company, but how they apply that investment would line up with their personal priorities," Mellon says. "Even in places like learning, we want that to be very self-directed, instead of check-the-box courses you have to complete. We are trying to modernize anything that's an employee-received aspect of their employment so it's less vanilla."



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## Think about that for a minute...

### How Much is Too Much?

Commentary by Steve Effros

Things are getting a little crazy in the effort by just about all politicians, public interest groups, regulators, commentators, businesses and virtually everyone else to “fix” the “digital divide.”



I have no argument against making sure those who currently can't access quality broadband service should be able to get it. Further, there's no argument here about the fact that such quality broadband is not available to some folks. The problem I have is that there seems to be very little awareness of what the underlying problem is regarding broadband delivery in lots of rural areas, and just throwing money at the issue isn't the answer.

Notice that list of players who have rural broadband “solutions” on the table. Many of them are nonpartisan, or at least folks from both parties are making similar proposals. Inevitably, they attach big numbers to their ideas. We're not talking millions here, we're talking billions!

What do they want to do? Well, build a whole new system to deliver high speed broadband. But if you put a list together of all the proposals, you'll see that one group wants to fund ubiquitous fiber builds, another wants money for spreading “5G” everywhere. Then there are the satellite guys who say a workable satellite broadband delivery system would be a great fix. The likelihood, unfortunately, is that we'll see money thrown at all those alleged solutions.

What's my take on this? As I've said before, IT'S THE MIDDLE MILE, STUPID! I know, I know, I've sung this song before, but I figure if I continue to sing it as loud as I can maybe other folks will pick up the tune and help explain it to the money-throwers. Wishful thinking? We've got to try.

Of course there's a lot of self-interest floating around in

all these proposals. The telcos would love the government to subsidize their rebuilds in rural areas. After all, that's not an area of high, or maybe any profit margin. The fiber makers still have that luster of being the “in” technology. Wouldn't it be great if the government essentially mandated the use of their wire? The wireless folks know that 5G is not economically viable, actually, it may not even be technically sensible in low density areas, but again, if someone's going to throw billions of dollars your way, who's to argue?

Not surprisingly, the cable folks are agog at all this. All of these proposals are to spend money to build new infrastructure to compete against the facilities they've already built! So why do it? Well, the argument is that there has to be “competition” to keep prices low, or that the “little” cable operators can't supply the really good stuff and the big guys “abandoned” rural America.

Let's take stock. In a large proportion of rural America broadband already exists. It's not as fast as it should be in some places because the cable operator cannot get “middle mile” connections at any reasonable price from suppliers. One simple regulatory change could fix that, or a very minor amount of money could be spent building out more “middle mile” availability.

If prices were still considered too high for some in need, you would have a choice; spend billions of dollars on building a second, third, or fourth “competitive” system and hope for the best with price competition, and that most of those builds didn't crater, or you could simply subsidize the cost of existing service for those who needed it. Take your pick.

*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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