

Cablefax Daily™

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What the Industry Reads First

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Dollars and Cents: MVPDs Want More Money From C-band Proceeding

Another day, another battle in the FCC's quest to clear the lower 300MHz of the C-band. The latest debate centers on the lump sum payment available to MVPDs using the band for video delivery that are choosing to handle their own transition responsibilities or transition to other technologies. Some MVPDs have asked the Commission to include cost of integrated receiver/decoders (IRDs) in the lump sum payment. **NAB** isn't buying the argument, and has told the FCC it should be wary of stakeholders that are using the C-band proceeding for financial benefits that have little to do with the FCC's goal of reorganizing the spectrum band. "Not only is this inconsistent with standard practice in the industry, it also introduces unnecessary risk into this process in the event that MVPDs take the lump sum with visions of transitioning to fiber and then fail to complete work in time or encounter unexpected issues," NAB said in its comments. "The only reason this dispute has emerged is the efforts of some MVPDs to drive up lump sum payments because they see an opportunity to extract additional financial benefits from the C-band transition." In a July 15 meeting with the FCC, **ACA Connects** asserted that the plain terms of the FCC's Report and Order required IRD costs to be included in the lump sum, and that any supporters of the proposal to exclude IRD costs would also be asking the Commission to revisit its decision to allow MVPDs the flexibility to replace existing earth stations with fiber-based alternatives. Should MVPD earth station operators be allowed to receive a lump sum to be spent on alternative technologies, like fiber-based solutions, more operators could be looking to providers like **MobiTV** and **Vubiquity** to deliver their video services. MobiTV has been particularly active in the FCC's C-band proceeding, filing a letter last week laying out how its service works and its readiness to serve any operator that wants to strike a deal. "It is simply not true that MVPDs that replace their earth stations with fiber-based video delivery alternatives must continue to use IRDs at their earth station locations to receive video content and services," MobiTV said in its filing. "Indeed, MobiTV's own platform allows MVPDs to receive video programming at their earth station locations without needing IRDs at those sites." MobiTV distributes programming to its customers by first receiving channel signals at its aggregation sites and then encoding, packaging, encrypting and delivering it terrestrially to MobiTV client software at customer homes through its TV-as-a-service solution. Because of that, the company argues that it can

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effectively replace MVPDs' C-band reception with fiber reception. "Moreover, because MobiTV performs the necessary processing of these signals, MVPDs that use MobiTV in place of satellite-based video delivery are not required to maintain IRDs of their own., MobiTV said. "We have the operational capability to provide our advanced IPTV service to any operator that is connected via fiber to our data center directly or through regional POPs of aggregated fiber connectivity."

Altice Updates Tiers, Programming: Altice USA has nixed plans to introduce a new line of products for its business customers. The operator was set to debut new tiered video packages for “Private Office” business customers on July 14, and had notified customers of the change on June 12. According to an Altice spokesperson, the decision to cut the new packages was not a decision related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Rather, the team found that its existing business offerings already fit the needs of those private office customers. -- Altice USA is discontinuing its Optimum Silver video tier on September 1, and will transition existing Silver customers to its Optimum Select tier. Optimum Select was launched in September 2017, at which point Altice USA stopped offering Optimum Silver to new customers. Existing customers were allowed to keep their packages ever since. Optimum Select offers a similar channel selection to Optimum Silver, and affected customers will receive channels like **HBO**, **Starz**, **Showtime** and the **Lifetime Movie Network** that are not included with the former. Impacted customers should receive notification in writing at least 30 days in advance of the change.

FCC Announces Wireless Co-Location Agreement: The FCC struck a deal with two historic preservation groups, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation and the National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers, to build out wireless infrastructure, while still protecting historic properties. The agreement amends the Nationwide Programmatic Agreement for the Collocation of Wireless Antennas that the groups first struck in 2001. The amendment updates the review process for co-location. Previously, a project that involved any excavation work outside of the current tower site wouldn't qualify for the streamlined review process. Now, excavation for co-location that is related to, but occurs outside the current tower site, does qualify. The FCC said that streamlining small site expansions is critical to the buildup of 5G and to ensuring infrastructure resiliency. "This is a vitally important agreement to ensure our infrastructure policies can meet the challenges and opportunities of 5G," said commish *Brendan Carr*, who is leading the FCC's wireless infrastructure modernization efforts.

There's No Place Like Sports: Fans are ready for sports to return, and with some leagues already back, passion and demand is already growing. In a survey conducted by **ESPN**, the company found that 78% of fans support

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.

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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? **Universal 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 distributed by **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 \$4.99. [Read more](#)

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 New York, Oregon, Washington, Arizona, Louisiana, California, Mississippi and Idaho. No word on how long

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New Normal: Companies Roll Out Contingency Plans in Face of Covid-19

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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

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Covering Covid-19: Content Companies Step Up Efforts

Covering Covid-19: Content Companies Step Up Efforts
Programmers are shifting schedules to respond to the coronavirus crisis. The Weather Channel
time during each hour of live programming at 50 minutes past the hour to share educational content
during the day due to school closures. Topics include why thunder happens, how rainbows form
ed for Friday at 2pm.

From the Commission: Another 116 broadband and telephone service providers have taken Pai's Keep Americans Connected Pledge, agreeing to take specific steps to keep American 60 days. Some notable names taking the pledge include **Hotwire Communications**, **Middle**

professional and collegiate sports leagues returning without fans in attendance, a double-digit increase from results in the first wave of survey results back in April, and three times as many as those that oppose it (22%). Of the fans surveyed, 59% say they can't wait for sports to come back and plan to watch as much as they can (up from 56%). A majority of fans (64%) agreed that prolonged suspension of live sports have driven greater appreciation for them. The net released the newest "There's No Place Like Sports: And We're Back" spot celebrating the inspiring spirit of sports while demonstrating its unifying power.

Generation Stream: Hulu launched the first installment of its "Generation Stream" study, "Unpacking the Streaming Experiences." Generation Stream is made up of the 90% of the 13-54-year-olds in the US who stream video content using one or more streaming services. The report found that in this demographic, 65% say that the networks that television and movies come from matter less, and 95% say the rise in streaming services has changed the way they watch content in at least one way.

MoffettNathanson Moves on Roku: MoffettNathanson initiated coverage of **Roku** with a "Neutral" rating and a \$145 target price. "Having spent much of the past few months researching the connected TV/advertising video-on-demand (AVOD) opportunity, we are very optimistic about future industry growth, including Roku's, but see too many long-term risks to enthusiastically recommend the shares here," MoffettNathanson said in a note. In total, MoffettNathanson is anticipating domestic AVOD spending to reach nearly \$14bln by 2024 from around \$3bln in 2019.

Fox Sports Gets a New Look: Fox Sports unveiled a redesigned app and website Monday. The revamped designs showcase its Bonus Cam experience for enhanced fan access as well as new personalization features that give users deeper access to their favorite teams and players. Real-time odds, powered by Fox Bet Sportsbook, are also integrated throughout the products.

FCC Seeks Comments on Pole Ruling Request: The FCC's Wireline Competition Bureau is asking for comments on the **NCTA**'s July 16 request that the Commission clarify pole owner's obligations in terms of replacing the poles. Initial comments are due Aug 19 and reply comments on Sept 3.

Distribution: Byron Allen's **Entertainment Studios** signed a distribution deal to bring seven of its networks to the United Arab Emirates on the **du telecom** platform. This agreement is part of an overall arrangement that will soon extend to other Middle East nations including Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Bahrain, Kuwait, Egypt, Tunis, Algeria, Morocco and their respective territories. -- **AMC Networks** is now offering **AMC+** to **DISH** and **Sling TV** customers. The \$6.99/month subscription bundle includes content from **AMC**, **SundanceTV** and **IFC** as well as access to streaming services **Shudder**, **Sundance Now** and **IFC Films Unlimited**.

Fidelity Starts Upgrade: **Fidelity Communications**, part of **Cable One**'s family of brands, began construction on a \$7.5mln upgrade this month for its fiber network in Arkansas' Saline and Pulaski Counties. The upgrade covers 520 miles and will add nearly 100 miles of fiber to the company's plant. Work is expected to last through April 2021.

Programming: All 8 "Harry Potter" films will be leaving **HBO Max** on Aug 25. The availability of the series on HBO Max was a surprise to fans at launch, and it's unclear as of now where the films will be headed next. -- **BBC America** is bringing back "Top Gear" on Aug 30 at 8pm for a Nepal special, and then new episodes on Sept 6 at 8pm. -- **HBO Max** will release its first documentary film "On The Trail: Inside the 2020 Primaries" on Aug 6. In collaboration with **CNN Films**, the doc follows a team of female journalists as they report on the upcoming presidential election. -- **EPIX** greenlit docuseries "By Whatever Means Necessary: The Times of Godfather of Harlem," set to premiere in fall 2020. The four-part series is inspired by the original series "Godfather of Harlem," and combines interviews and archival footage from the Godfather of Harlem series itself. -- **SYFY Wire**'s first original documentary "Todd McFarlane: Like Hell I Won't" will make its world premiere on Saturday at 11pm as part of SYFY Fan Fest. The doc will also be part of a panel on Thursday as part of Comic-Con@Home. SYFY is also diving into shark content, hosting "One Last Bite of Summer" beginning Aug 22. The net will marathon the "Sharknado" franchise and other shark-themed movies. -- Beginning Friday, **NBC Sports** will present more than two weeks of nightly Olympic Games programming across NBCSN and **Olympic Channel**. In all, the nets will highlight more than 100 hours of historic Olympic Games moments from the past 25+ years. On Thursday at 6:55am, Olympic Channel will present live coverage of a ceremony at the Olympic Stadium in Tokyo, Japan to mark one year to the start of the Tokyo Olympics. -- **FX** is developing "81 Words," a limited series exploring the stories of gay rights activists fighting to change the medical definition of homosexuality.

People: **NBCU** promoted *Beau Ferrari* to chmn of **NBCUniversal Telemundo Enterprises**, effective immediately. He's succeeding *Cesar Conde*, who was recently named chmn of NBCU's news group.

CFX TECH

To Lighten the Load

We've seen broadband networks performing as well as ever through the pandemic, and it's no secret that we have the foresight of cable operators and their engineering teams to thank for that. Whether that meant increasing speeds or adding additional capacity to the network, operators large and small dedicated the dollars to getting it done.

Over the past two years, **Charter** invested more than \$25bln in new technology and infrastructure. By monitoring the network constantly, it has been able to look ahead and add capacity in areas where it sees the potential for network congestion, or to provide additional support for critical services like first responders, hospitals and government agencies. **Cox** is no different, investing more than \$15bln in its communities over the last 10 years to deliver video phone and high speed broadband within its footprint, and plans to invest an additional \$10bln over the next five years.

Since 2017, **Comcast** has invested more than \$12bln in the network to stay ahead of the internet's explosive growth. But when the pandemic began, Comcast took another hard look at its network and determined not only what technology it could deploy the fastest, but what would be the most efficient in terms of unlocking additional capacity and creating an even better customer experience.

"The challenge from a network standpoint is how do you evolve the network literally on a dime to be able to meet those demands," *Elad Nafshi*, svp, next generation access networks, Comcast Xfinity told **CFX**.

Part of the difficulty that comes with running a network is in its constant change. A network is never a stagnant thing with fluctuations occurring due to outside interferences like the rising or falling of temperatures.

"Traditionally, what we've done is we were setting the modulation, the efficiency of delivery of data down to the

house, by kind of like the lowest common denominator. Very safe, very robust, but certainly not as efficient as it could be," Nafshi said.

Nafshi said the "holy grail" for his team was finding a way to detect those fluctuations, take action in real time and continuously keep that cycle going. Artificial intelligence and machine learning seemed like the obvious way to go.

That's where the Octave platform came in. The project built on a lot of what Comcast had previously done with the X1 platform. Octave checks more than 4K telemetry points on tens of millions of modems every 20 minutes, and it is trained to detect when modems aren't using all the bandwidth available to them as efficiently as possible and make necessary adjustments.

"The result of that is a much more efficient way of delivering that [service], which increased our capacity. But, more importantly, what it does is it creates a much more reliable service because as interferences come and go, we're able to manage around them and really optimize your experience throughout the usage timeframe," Nafshi said.

When COVID-19 hit, Octave had only been deployed to a part of Comcast's network. As soon as the need arose for additional capacity, a team of approximately 25 engineers worked seven-day weeks to reduce the wider deployment process from months down to weeks. As a result, Comcast was able to deliver a 36% increase in capacity right when customers needed it most.

Thus far, Comcast believes it has only seen the tip of the iceberg of what Octave can do. Scientists are now working to optimize the AI algorithms responsible for the collection and analysis of data from those telemetry points. "The intelligence and the sophistication and the action we're able to take is an ever-evolving effort," Nafshi said. "We're continuing to refine and continuing to build and continuing to optimize the decision engine as... we collect more data, as we understand cause and effect better."

— Sara Winegardner



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