

Cablefax Daily™

Tuesday — August 4, 2020

What the Industry Reads First


Volume 31 / No. 149

COVID Check-In: Virus Still Raging, But Broadband Network Keeps Up

National downstream and upstream broadband traffic has declined in recent weeks, but as the virus rages on and life doesn't get back to normal, could that change? School resumes in some counties this week, and many districts are turning once again to virtual classrooms. A growing number of employers have announced work-from-home plans through the end of the year, and some even into next summer. And the warmer weather that has people spending more time outside will wane. Still, most ISPs seem to think the types of broadband usage surge seen in the first few months of the COVID-19 crisis are behind us—though there will be some blips. “Our downstream utilization has fallen back in line with our pre-COVID utilization forecast. We are still seeing a slight uptick in upstream utilization, but for all practical purposes both upstream and downstream utilization at peak has fallen back in line with historical growth curves. However, we continue to see an elevated level of per customer consumption which we expect is reflective of the new normal,” **Cable One** technology services svp *Ken Johnson* told **CFX**. Spikes in traffic have leveled off at **WOW!** as well, but it's still seeing usage up about 25% over this same time last year. At one point, **Hotwire Communications** was seeing a 40% increase in broadband usage. “While remaining higher than pre-COVID, the overall usage consumption has now leveled off without any observed spikes,” operations svp *Mandy Esposito* said heading into August. **Atlantic Broadband** reports that a 25% YOY increase in usage has pretty much been sustained through the summer months. “If there's anything I've learned about the impacts of COVID-19, it's that this virus and everything about it, is unpredictable,” said *Blair Day*, **WOW!**'s svp, network and product engineering. “I do believe the pandemic and the ways it's compelling us to view our world differently, will result in changed habits. A certain number of businesses will remain in a remote work environment, homeschooling and online learning may become typical options, and streaming as a way to get more customized entertainment and informational content will almost certainly result in continued high traffic across the **WOW!** network.” With increased broadband traffic here to stay, operators are continuing to make investments in the network. At **Comcast**, the company responded to the surge by tripling the number of network enhancements made in March in April compared to the same period a year ago, adding 1700 new 100-gigabit links. In the first half of the year, **WOW!** completed more than double the service group segmentations it had originally planned for all of 2020. It's also accelerating its transformation to all IP-based services, freeing up more bandwidth for enhanced products and services. **Atlantic Broadband's** improvements have included adding nodes, increasing DOCSIS 3.1 penetration (already at over 90% of its footprint) and other upgrades. **Charter** reported that data usage and traffic remained elevated during 2Q, but peak traffic was still well below maximum capacity. June saw residential data usage for Internet-only customers averaging 600 gigabytes per month—down 10% from the April peak, but up nearly 20% from 4Q. “Our network continued to perform well because of the capacity that our recent investments, including all-digital and DOCSIS 3.1, created and because we continue to invest significantly to stay ahead of that usage curve,” CEO *Tom Rutledge* said during Friday's 2Q earnings call. Monitoring the network during all this uncertainty

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Cablefax Daily (ISSN 1069-6644) is published daily by Access Intelligence, LLC ● www.cablefax.com ● 301.354.2101 ● Editorial Director: Amy Maclean, 301.354.1760, amaclean@accessintel.com ● Publisher, Synopsis: Robbie Caploe, 917.974.0640, rcaploe@accessintel.com ● Senior Editor: Sara Winegardner, 301.354.1701, swinegardner@accessintel.com ● Associate Editor: Mollie Cahillane, 212.621.4951, mcahillane@accessintel.com ● VP, Sales: Mike Farina, 203.218.6480, mfarina@accessintel.com ● Sales Exec: Albert Nassour, 917.545.3129, anassour@accessintel.com ● Dir of Marketing: Kate Schaeffer, kschaeffer@accessintel.com ● Prod. Mgr: Joann Fato, jfato@accessintel.com ● Kerry Smith, Divisional President, Marketing & Media Group, ksmith@accessintel.com ● Group Subs/Subscription Questions, Client Services: 301.354.2101, clientservices@accessintel.com ● Annual subscription price: \$1,749.00/year ● Access Intelligence, LLC, 9211 Corporate Blvd., 4th Floor, Rockville, MD 20850

is extremely critical. "Our network has weathered this challenge exceedingly well, but the COVID crisis has demonstrated that we need better real time reporting and alerting to manage our network during times of extended crisis," Cable One's Johnson noted. As far as futureproofing goes, those plans were in the works long before coronavirus hit the US. Operators have been laying more fiber and working toward 10G, following a framework by **CableLabs**. "We do not believe this will put long-term stress on the network as we've built the network to be able to adapt to changes in bandwidth usage, with ample capacity to handle peak periods and extended traffic increases like those that we are experiencing," said Atlantic Broadband spokesperson *Andrew Walton*. The network is designed to scale up with traffic demands. "Additionally, we have specific content management strategies in place that allow us to push content closer to the edge of our network," Day said. "This means we can localize the distribution of this content and deliver an incredible customer experience even during times of extreme demand on our network." Looking ahead, Charter will continue with its 10G plan, but also use and develop small wireless cells powered by its network together with its MVNO to connect customers beyond the home. "Innovation requires a commitment to advancements, there is always a need to focus on future proofing the network and invest in network infrastructure that exceeds the capacity needs of the current normal," says Esposito.

XFL Gets Second Chance: *Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson* and **RedBird Capital** teamed up to buy the XFL in a deal that came just hours before the bankrupt league was set to go to auction. The group paid \$15mln for the football league, which was forced to cancel the majority of its inaugural season due to COVID-19. Johnson's ex-wife *Dany Garcia* will be an equal stakeholder with him. The XFL was founded by **WWE's Vince McMahon**, who spent more than \$200mln over the past three years in his attempt to relaunch the league. According to a court filing, the Red-Bird/Johnson group was the only qualified bidder. "With gratitude & passion I've built a career with my own two hands and will apply these callouses to our @xfl2020 brand," Johnson said on Twitter. "Excited to create something special for the fans!"

DISH Nabs Tucows Partnership, Ting Customers: DISH has chosen mobile technology service provider **Tucows** as a partner for its retail wireless business. As part of the agreement, DISH acquired **Ting Mobile** assets, including approximately 270K customer relationships. As with DISH's recently acquired **Boost** customers, the Ting Mobile customers will be able to retain their devices and have access to the new T-Mobile network. "DISH is likely bringing in Tucows to help manage aspects of the retail wireless business so that management can focus more time and resources on the far more important development of the network and the wholesale wireless business that will ride on it," **New Street Research** said in a note.

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Carina Edwards
CEO, Quil



Quil is the joint venture between ComcastNBCU & Independence Blue Cross. Quil's digital health companion empowers users from the first point of intervention through recovery delivering information where and when they need it, on their smartphone, computer, and TV.

Previously, Carina served in executive positions at *Imprivata*, *Nuance*, *Zynx Health*, and *Philips Healthcare*. She has served on Board of CHIME (The College of Healthcare Information Management Executives) & recognized as "Female Health IT Leaders to Know."

Lifetime Adds LGBT Christmas Film: Lifetime is set to air its first holiday movie with an LGBTQ storyline as the lead. Head of programming *Amy Winter* announced the film, “The Christmas Set Up” during the virtual Summer CTAM tour. The net will air 30 new movies during its annual “It’s a Wonderful Lifetime” block. The announcement comes after **Hallmark Channel** faced criticism for the lack of diverse stories in its original Christmas slate, and CEO *Bill Abbott*’s exit following Hallmark’s removal, then reversal, of a commercial featuring an LGBT couple.

At the Commission: The Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau is inviting public input on the *Trump* Administration’s request that the **FCC** re-examine Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act. Section 230 grants sites like **Facebook** and **Twitter** immunity from liability for most content posted by users. “I strongly disagree with those who demand that we ignore the law and deny the public and all stakeholders the opportunity to weigh in on this important issue,” FCC chmn *Ajit Pai* said in a statement. “We should welcome vigorous debate—not foreclose it.” *Pai* said the comment window will remain open for 45 days. -- The FCC released an updated version of its FCC Speed Test app Monday that is compatible with the latest versions of the iOS and Android operating systems. Like its predecessor, the updated app allows users to test their cellular and WiFi network performance for download and upload speed, latency, jitter and packet loss. -- The **FCC**’s Wireless Telecommunications Bureau is seeking comment on whether RSM, the relocation coordinator selected by eligible space station operators in the C-band, satisfies criteria established in the Commission’s initial Report and Order. The 3.7GHz Band Report and Order required that the relocation coordinator have the requisite expertise to perform the necessary duties, including coordinating the schedule for clearing the band and assigning obligations for earth station migrations and filtering. The deadline for comments is Aug 18, and reply comments are due Aug 28.

NewWave to Become Sparklight: **NewWave Communications** is beginning its **Sparklight** rebrand this month, one year after parent company **Cable One** underwent its own Sparklight transformation. According to Cable One pres/CEO *Julie Laulis*, the NewWave rebrand reflects the company’s transformation from its origins as a traditional cable company to a full-service connectivity provider. “This is not simply about rebranding our products under a new name and a new look,” *Laulis* said in a statement. “We are enhancing the way we do business so that our customers feel like every interaction with us is effortless.” Ahead of the rebrand, the company streamlined its residential internet service plan and pricing, offering speeds up to 1 Gig and the ability to include unlimited data on any plan.

Distribution: **Charter** announced it surpassed 30mln subscribers within the first half of 2020, a major milestone for the MSO. Since its merger with **Time Warner Cable** and acquisition of **Bright House Networks** in 2016, Charter has added nearly 5mln customers and invested approx \$40bln in network infrastructure and technology. -- Linear net Hallmark Drama saw a 46% distribution jump in two months. The net has now surpassed 42mln homes, an increase over the June 26.7mln number.

AT&T Tender Offers Expire: **AT&T** announced the expiration of its offers to purchase for cash any and all of the 18 series of outstanding notes, made in the offer to purchase on July 27. The settlement date is expected to be on Wednesday. AT&T also announced the upsizing of its previously announced offers to purchase for cash three series of notes, increasing the maximum aggregate principal amount of notes that may be tendered.

Doing Good: Fiber wireless provider **Starry** announced debt forgiveness program Fresh Start. The initiative is for subs who were unable to pay their broadband subscription fee due to the impacts of COVID-19. The program will wipe away any debt owed to Starry through July 31, and enable subs to start with a zero dollar balance Aug 1. It also applies to any subs who opted into the ISP’s COVID-19 relief program during the **FCC**’s Keep Americans Connected pledge period. -- **GSBA**, Washington State’s LGBTQ & Allied Chamber of Commerce, and **Comcast** Washington launched the Ready for Business Fund Monday. The relief effort aims to provide \$2500 grants to 20 small businesses with diverse owners in need of financial assistance. In the first round of funding, priority will be given to businesses located in the most adversely impacted commercial districts in the Seattle metro area.

NewsGuard Offers News Literacy Tool For Free: **NewsGuard** and Communications provider **BT** teamed up to provide a complementary online news literacy tool to millions of UK households. As part of the partnership, NewsGuard will give free access to its browser extension and mobile app for BT customers and employees in the UK through Oct 31. NewsGuard’s product provides credibility ratings that allow internet users to access information about the news websites in their social media feeds and search results.

Ratings: The **MLB** is off to a strong start, with Opening Weekend drawing more than twice the viewers YOY. On **ESPN**, the first 12 games it aired through Thursday averaged 1.16mln viewers, up 34% YOY.