

Cablefax Daily™

Thursday — October 29, 2020

What the Industry Reads First

Volume 31 / No. 210

WiFi on Steroids: Understanding the Significance of 5.9GHz Band

There's plenty of industry excitement on the FCC's vote next month on opening up the 5.9GHz band and what it could bring to WiFi. "In a nutshell, it could mean Gigabit WiFi indoors and outdoors without anyone having to pay for it at a spectrum auction or the like," FCC chmn *Ajit Pai* said during an event Wednesday hosted by **WiFiForward** and others.

With all the emphasis on the importance of a fixed broadband connection, some may not immediately see the benefit of enhanced WiFi. Here's the reason: if you don't have sufficient WiFi spectrum to allow your router to reach your device, you'll have congestion and slower speeds. That's especially important with multiple devices and in congested areas, like apartments. "NCTA's members can deliver gigabit wired broadband speeds throughout most of their footprint. We want consumers to get the benefit of those speeds all the way to their WiFi connections and not have those speeds stop at the router," explained *Danielle Piñeres*, who serves as the association's vp & associate general counsel. Higher speeds also could help power advanced technologies, including VR and diagnostic imaging.

Under Pai's plan, the lower 45Mhz of the 5.9 band would be made available for unlicensed uses, such as WiFi. Stakeholders stress that this is an immediate assist, with many existing devices able to use the wider WiFi channels via a software or firmware update. The 5.9 band is especially attractive because it's adjacent to UNII-3, the most widely used band in the world. Reallocating 45Mhz of the band creates a new high-capacity 160MHz channel for unlicensed use. In April, the FCC adopted an order to open the 6GHz band to WiFi and other unlicensed uses, but it will take longer to be made ready—requiring the deployment of new equipment.

Piñeres stressed that both bands are important and that the 6Ghz band is a huge amount of bandwidth that will be game-changing. But 6GHz usage is subject to several rules to ensure there's no interference to incumbents (part of why it will take some time to be fully utilized). With 5.9GHz, "the beauty of the chairman's plan is to split WiFi, the lower 45MHz for WiFi," she said. "What's great about is that we just have to be good neighbors to automotive safety operations next door, which really I think opens up a whole new opportunity for different use cases in 5.9 than we might see in 6."

These past several months of increased internet usage due to the pandemic further highlight the need to open up the additional spectrum. We got a sneak peek of the band's potential earlier this year when the FCC granted more



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to address the digital divide, connecting up to 10.25mln Americans,” FCC chmn *Ajit Pai* said this week.

Dems Question White House 230 Interference: FCC chmn *Ajit Pai*’s Section 230 rulemaking continues to stir up controversy, with **House Commerce** Dems *Frank Pallone* (NJ) and *Mike Doyle* (D-PA) wanting to know if there has been White House involvement. “The fact that this announcement came just weeks before the election, and that President *Trump* has pushed for this CDA 230 rulemaking, raise serious questions about the independence of the agency. The American people deserve to know what conversations, if any, have transpired between you, your office and the White House to ensure the integrity of the FCC,” Pallone and Doyle wrote Wednesday. Earlier this month, Pai announced his intention to move forward with a proceeding looking at 230, a portion of law that shields social media companies from liability for content posted online. “Not only has the Trump Administration directly pressured the FCC to do its bidding on CDA 230, it appears the Administration is willing to retaliate against those who do not get in line with its agenda,” Pallone and Doyle wrote. The two pointed to Trump abruptly pulling of *Mike O’Rielly* nomination for another FCC term after he raised concerns over the agency’s role in interpreting 230. Trump nominated *Nathan Simington*, who reportedly worked on **NTIA**’s 230 petition to the FCC. The Dems noted that Sen *Roger Wicker* (R-MS) scheduled a Nov 10 nomination hearing for Simington shortly after Trump tweeted at him to confirm the Republican.

Election Security: With less than a week until the 2020 election, there’s a lot of focus on cybersecurity. Over at **Charter**, the company is working closely with the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) to ensure that counties and states across the US have the proper controls and security in place. “We provide the communications for a lot of these state and local government agencies,” said *Mary Haynes*, network security vp, while speaking at a roundtable on cybersecurity. Haynes said that in addition to government agencies, Charter customers have also been reaching out for increased security. “Since this is so important and such a critical election, we’ve been assisting them any way we can. Whether it’s adding more fiber connections, giving them DDoS protection service for their location or that particular piece of fiber. I will say the government’s really been doing a great job being very proactive in this election. I’ve been in the communications sector a long time, and this is the first election where I’ve seen so much proactive focus on security for this election.”

Changes at Netflix: Less than two months in her role as head of global television, *Bela Bajaria* is making changes at **Netflix**. In a reorganizing of the US operation, she’s focused on streamlining around tentpole shows based around drama, comedy, event series, unscripted and overall deals. In the consolidation, *Ben Wright*, who ran the YA/family group, has been promoted to head a new overall deals department. *Jinny Howe* and *Renate Radford* will head up the drama team as head of drama, development and head of drama, current, and *Brandon Riegg* will continue to lead unscripted. A search is underway for a new comedy head, and *Andy Weil* will run the department in the interim. *Peter Friedlander*, who previously led the genre & thrillers subsection in the drama department, will now head up a new Spectacle/Event department separate from the drama and comedy areas. The head of series role is currently vacant after *Cindy Holland*, the vp of original content, departed in September. Until the role is filled, that person’s direct reports will report to Bajaria. Holland isn’t the only exec to depart from the streamer recently. Since her exit, *Channing Dungey*, vp of original series departed, as did *Jane Wiseman*, vp, original series and head of comedy.

Cox Business, Henderson Launch Smart Lighting: **Cox Business**’ IoT business line Cox2M and the city of Henderson, NV, successfully deployed the first stage of their smart community collaboration, starting with energy efficient lighting management and controls. The one-year pilot began Sept 1, 2020 and includes smart lighting controls on thirty-three decorative and non-decorative lights, which will lower energy, maintenance and operational costs.

Another Locast Launch: Nonprofit local broadcast TV streaming service **Locast** launched in Indianapolis, delivering 42 channels. The streamer is now available in 24 markets. Locast is currently involved in a legal fight with **ABC**, **CBS**, **Fox** and **NBC**, who’ve accused the service of operating with a commercial benefit in mind. Locast countersued, accusing the broadcasters of collusion. While Locast is a free streaming service, the company asks users to contribute \$5/month as a donation. Pay-TV operators don’t necessarily oppose Locast, which received a \$500K donation from **AT&T** last year.

People: **CBS** promoted *Bryon Rubin* to COO of the **CBS Entertainment Group**. He will continue to serve as the CFO of the group as well. -- **NBC Sports Group** elevated *Damon Phillips* to the newly created position of svp, strategic initiatives and head of diversity & inclusion. He’s served as svp, gm of **NBC Sports Washington** since Jan 2018.

Think about that for a minute...

Telepresence

Commentary by Steve Effros

Yaaay! A new buzzword. I've really gotten tired of constantly writing about all the old ones, like "net neutrality," "Gigablast," 3G, 4G, 5G and even 10G, oh my! So now we're hearing more and more about a new one; telepresence.



What's telepresence? Well, it's not really that clear, but essentially it's a combination of ideas like virtual reality, augmented reality (you remember those, don't you?) 3D (another golden-oldie) and teleconferencing. The idea is that, just like in all the Star Trek episodes, the person you're talking to will actually look like she is sitting right across from you. You'll be able to interact with folks around a conference table with everyone in their own, identical setting and you'll all think that you're in the same room talking to a holographic likeness that responds and moves just as though they were there. Until, that is, something goes a little screwy and their arm disappears!

You might sense that I'm a little skeptical about all this, or maybe just amused. It had to happen, so I'm not really surprised, and it's totally consistent with the way most newfangled telecom stuff is sold to the public these days: first convince them there's something wonderful and new just around the corner, get them to buy the equipment needed, and then see if you can figure out any reason anyone really wants to use it!

Think of 3D. It was just a sales pitch to sell new television sets. The programs folks were allegedly dying to watch on those 3D TVs wasn't really in production yet. The creative community tried its best. Most of the video never arrived. Why? Because the whole concept wasn't terribly well baked. There was little evidence that viewers wanted 3D in their home, and when they did get some, the execution wasn't terribly good. Indeed, a whole lot of folks got headaches or upset stomachs watching it. So

much for 3D. But a lot of sets were sold in the meantime, so from that perspective, it was a success!

So now we have gigabit broadband. Folks like Google beat the drums for years saying we all just had to have this in our homes. Some of us repeatedly said; "what for?" But, as I've noted in recent columns, it didn't really matter, the regulators, the politicians, and the marketers saw something new, flashy, sexy and more expensive than what most of us already have, that is, perfectly functional broadband, so gigabit service is now the "in" thing.

About 5 percent of broadband customers now pay for gigabit service. Almost 60 percent have from 50 to 200Mb service. 14 percent are up at 200 to 400Mb. You just don't need gigabit service to watch a movie or play a game. So what the heck do you need it for? TaDa: telepresence!

Say it isn't so. Please. Are we really going to have a new wave of bogus marketing about everyone wanting to get away from their Zoom meeting on the screen by, instead, having holographic ghosts sitting around the kitchen table? It's the bar scene from Star Wars. But the marketers and engineers and consumer geeks are having trouble figuring out what the heck would require all that bandwidth they claim we all need in the home, so they apparently have come up with "telepresence" as the answer. It's embarrassing.

Ok, I admit it, someday we may all consider telepresence and StarWars bars as standard fare. It may really be neat. But for now, can't we just laugh at this one?

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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