

Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

Today's Forecast: O'Brien on 2020, IMR and Growing Weather Channel

2020 has been one of the busiest years in **The Weather Channel's** nearly 40-year history, and it's not just because of the public health crisis.

COVID-19 threw a wrench into the network's production processes, but CEO *Tom O'Brien* said Weather had to maintain business as usual as much as possible to keep folks informed during a particularly tough severe storm season. "It's incredible to do it with planning. It's incredible to do it when you have no time to plan," O'Brien said.

Weather expects there to have been a total of 30 named Atlantic hurricanes to hit in 2020, and everything from proper evacuation procedures to storm shelter locations have changed. Still, they are out in the field doing the best they can to inform the public.

"How do you do that when you've got COVID and social distancing? In essence, everything around the disease creates initial complications," O'Brien said. "Working and making sure we had a role in disseminating that information, storm safety in a pandemic... it's unique... a lot of what we do is protect and save lives."

After the initial wave of the COVID-19 storm had passed, O'Brien and his team were able to get back on track with plans to add more value for Weather's distribution partners as well as its viewers. The network expanded its immersive mixed reality technology in June by introducing a Reality Virtual Studio with

the ability to visualize virtual graphics live. Weather upped the game again last month, announcing its IMR Virtual Views capability. Virtual Views transports the network's on-camera meteorologists to cities in order to realistically show forecasted weather before it happens.

"Through technology and through all of the innovation that the teams have done, now we can create an opportunity where we can put our people in the middle of a snowstorm, a thunderstorm, and actually show the experience," O'Brien said.

Some IMR plans were delayed for 2-3 weeks, but O'Brien said that was tied to supply chain difficulties rather than anything on the production side.

"What's interesting for us and what's really an opportunity for us is we're really the only network that talks about the future in the news category. Our job is to tell you what's going to happen in addition to what happened," O'Brien said. "Our ability to create experiences on television is unmatched."

Streaming services and channels, including ad-supported **Local Now**, are another way in which O'Brien hopes to attract new audiences. Local Now has recently been re-designed, and the refreshed look is rolling out now. Another free ad-supported channel centered on climate change will be rolling out in the coming weeks. Weather is using its team of scientific experts to craft programming that addresses the issue and create a destination with reliable information that viewers can trust.

Plans also have long been underway to launch a new network, **The Weather Channel en Espanol**, for Spanish-speaking

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viewers. O'Brien's goal is to launch Weather En Espanol before the start of the next severe storm season.

DISH SIGNS CCI TOWER LEASING DEAL

DISH and **Crown Castle** have signed a long-term agreement through which Crown Castle will lease DISH space on up to 20K communications towers nationwide. DISH will also receive certain fiber transport services and also have the option to utilize Crown Castle for pre-construction services. Crown Castle is the first infrastructure partner DISH has announced in relation to its 5G network. "CCI accounts for 30% of the US tower market, which could suggest that DISH intends to build to 65K towers if DISH's network build is evenly distributed across the tower companies," **New Street Research** said in a note. "We suspect this announcement implies that DISH will prioritize CCI towers wherever they have a choice, which could mean that CCI captures greater share of DISH's cell sites."

BIDEN NAMES FCC TRANSITION TEAM

President-elect *Joe Biden* has announced his **FCC** agency review team, and it is filled with FCC alumni from the *Barack Obama/Tom Wheeler* era. The team will be led by current **House Judiciary Committee** senior counselor and parliamentarian *John Williams*. Williams previously served in the Office of the General Counsel focusing on privacy. Also on the squad is former FCC commish *Mignon Clyburn*, who **New Street Research** believes is a leading candidate for the job of FCC chmn if she's interested. Rounding out the team is *Edward Smith*, a former aide to previous FCC chmn *Wheeler*, and *Paul de Sa*, who twice served at the FCC as head of the Office of Strategic Planning.

FCC SEEKING COMMENT ON FOX OWNERSHIP

The **FCC's** Media Bureau is seeking comment on a **Fox Corp** request seeking a permanent waiver of the Commission's newspaper/broadcast cross-ownership rule in order to continue its common ownership of **WWOR-TV**, **WNYW-TV** and the *New York Post*. Fox has argued that the permanent waiver will preserve the status quo for viewers in the NYC television market. Fox has previously received a permanent waiver of the cross-ownership rule in relation to its ownership of **WNYW-TV** and the *New York Post*. Comments are due Nov 27 and reply comments are due Dec 4.

HULU RAISING PRICES FOR LIVE TV

Hulu is jacking up its price for its live TV offering by 18%. Beginning Dec 18, the price will raise to \$64.99 from its current cost of \$54.99. The price puts it in the same bracket as **YouTube TV**, which also raised its prices earlier this year. Hulu with Live TV currently has more than 4mIn subscribers. The increase will impact both new and existing customers. The service last raised prices last year when the company told subs they would go from paying \$44.99 to \$54.99, also on Dec 18.

PHILO'S DIAL-A-TV-SHOW

Philo is celebrating its third anniversary (Nov 14) and World Television Day (Nov 21) with the "Philo Phone Line for TV Lovers." Anyone can call 855-924-3225 between 6pm-9pm ET and reach a live human for recommendations based on whichever streaming services the caller subscribes to. It's open to everyone, not just Philo customers. During off-hours, customers can dial in to hear messages from celebs such as **ID's** "Homicide Hunter" *Joe Kenda* and **REVOLT's** *Eboni Williams*. The service

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will also be available throughout the holiday season.

FAMILY IS UNIVERSAL

NBCUniversal is debuting a platform-wide campaign to support families during the upcoming holidays. In partnership with **Progressive, Verizon** and **Walmart**, NBCU launched “Family is Universal” Monday, executing it through its Symphony platform, which brings together all the business and programming units at **Comcast**. This is the first time the platform has been used for a charity initiative, which it’s calling “Symphony for Good.” The campaign is in support of **Feeding America** and **No Kid Hungry** and will bring fans together around marquee holiday events and new programming. The company said it is transforming its entire platform into a force for good by activating all its marketing levers across all networks, digital and social. Expect new holiday content from NBCU stars, programming events such as a “Top Chef” marathon on Thanksgiving, and live airings of events like the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade and the Rockefeller Center tree lighting. In all, the companies will donate \$600K to the two non-profits.

NEW STREAMING CHANNELS

Pac-12 Networks debuted a new broadband streaming service Pac-12 Insider. The channel is now available to fans on **Samsung TV Plus, Redbox Free Live TV** and **Xumo**. The AVOD offers fans free access to football and basketball highlights, classic encores of top sports and programs across the Conference of Champions and behind-the-scenes stories. – **Litton Entertainment** created a new streaming channel **Xplore**, launching with 2.5K hours of content. Launch partners include **Samsung TV Plus, VIZIO SmartCast, The Roku Channel** and **Plex**, all of which are scheduled to launch the new channel by late November; and **Xumo**, which is scheduled to launch by first-quarter 2021.

MILITARY FRIENDLY EMPLOYERS

The official 2021 Military Friendly Employers list is out, and the telecommunications industry made a strong showing. **AT&T** received a “military friendly” ranking. **T-Mobile** was designated as “silver,” and **Comcast NBCUniversal** and **Verizon** were both ranked “gold.” **Windstream Holdings** was designated as a Top 10 company. Military Friendly, owned and operated by VIQORY, measures an organization’s commitment, effort, and success in creating sustainable and meaningful benefits for the military community.

NEXTGEN TV AWARENESS

Pearl TV and its Phoenix Model Market Partners are coordinating a multimarket consumer awareness campaign with local broadcasters that are now transmitting NEXTGEN TV. The new service is on the air in more than a dozen cities. The campaign is made up of three elements: on-air advertising with market-customized TV spots, a consumer website that highlights cities with stations already on-air and online promotions executed by individual stations.

DISTRIBUTION

HBO Max is (finally) coming to **Amazon Fire TV** streaming devices, smart TVs and tablets. The launch will begin rolling out on Tuesday. The **HBO** app on Fire TV and tablets will update

automatically to become the HBO Max app, and customers will be able to log in using their existing HBO credentials. – **CuriosityStream** partnered up with Indian content distribution and pay-TV platform **Tata Sky** to bring CuriosityStream to India. The SVOD will be available via Tata Sky Binge, as well as a linear service on TV to Tata Sky DTH subs.

RATINGS

Outdoor Sportsman Group’s digital platforms are beating the company’s expectations. October 2020 saw all the OSG websites, in aggregate, post the highest monthly pageview totals for the year, jumping 29% YOY (6.2mIn vs 4.8mIn).

ON THE (VIRTUAL) CIRCUIT

HBO Max is celebrating Transgender Awareness Week with the “TRANslation Summit,” taking place Tuesday to Thursday at 7pm, viewable through HBO’s YouTube channel. HBO Max teamed up with the Human Rights Campaign, Family Equality and PFLAG National for a three-day virtual seminar that aims to bring people together for a series of informative, open-minded sessions and discussions. Each day will feature a keynote speaker followed by three moderated panels. Themes include transitioning, growing up trans and advocacy.

PROGRAMMING

BET announced a new exclusive news special with former Pres *Barack Obama*, set to air Tuesday at 8pm on BET and **BET Her**. “An Hour with President Obama” will be hosted by *Gayle King* and feature Obama’s first on-camera sit-down interviews following the election of President-elect *Joe Biden*. – **E!** greenlit new series “For Real: The Story of Reality TV” hosted and ep’d by *Andy Cohen*, set to air in early 2021. – **Pluto TV** launched a new campaign to boost brand awareness during the holiday period. “Pluto TV by the Numbers” is working to highlight the increasing scale of the platform and leans into moments from classic **ViacomCBS** series. – **True Royalty TV** curated a special collection of documentaries and original series focussed on Princess *Diana* and other members of the Royal Family past and present, timed with the release of Season 4 of “The Crown” on **Netflix**. – **Discovery Channel** will premiere “Rocket Around the Xmas Tree” on Dec 3 at 10pm. – **CNBC** is debuting a new primetime original series “Streets of Dreams with Marcus Lemonis.” The five-episode series debuts Dec 29 at 10pm. – **Ovation TV** will host the US cable premiere of the first season of “Crossing Lines” on Dec 7 at 7pm. The US television premiere of the second season will air starting on Jan 11 at 7pm, and Season 3 will air in Feb 2021.

PEOPLE

NBC co-pres of scripted programming *Tracey Pakosta* is moving over to **Netflix** as head of comedy, reporting to *Bela Bajaria*. – **Crown Media Family Networks** promoted *Allison Bennett* to vp, corporate communications and publicity. She joined the company in 2011 as director, corporate communications and media relations. – **Warner Music Group** named *Maria Weaver* pres of WEA, Warner Recorded Music’s global artist and label services network. She previously served as CMO of **Comcast** Advertising.