

Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

Familiar Face: New Viamedia CEO Sees Dynamic Year Ahead

Ad sales firm **Viamedia** has a new CEO, with chief revenue officer *David Solomon* stepping into the role, effective immediately. *Mark Lieberman* has served as pres/CEO since 2014, and will remain a director on Viamedia's board.

The reason for the change has nothing to do with economics or the current environment. "Viamedia has always been at the forefront of innovation, delivering advanced solutions that make advertising simpler, more effective, and more profitable," said *Terence Graunke*, co-founder of **Lake Capital**, Viamedia's primary investor. "We are grateful for Mark's many contributions over the years and are happy that he will be continuing as an active director on our board."

Solomon's been with the company for 17 years, and is ready to hit the ground running. He described 2020 as "incredible" for Viamedia, saying the company is finishing the year at almost twice what it expected, largely thanks to political advertising. "We're getting extra gifts from the Georgia runoffs and closing out the year far better than expected," he said. "Core business has really picked up post-pandemic mid-year, we're pacing a lot better than we predicted. Things are coming back and we're having some success."

The new boss is proud of how the company has weathered the pandemic. "It's forced us to look at our processes, our procedures and what we knew and what we believed was a must may not actually be a must," he said. "If you'd asked

me two years ago 'can we do this, can we do that,' I would've really challenged it."

One thing looming on the horizon is Viamedia's four-year-long antitrust lawsuit against **Comcast**. Viamedia alleges that Comcast is engaging in exclusionary conduct and monopolizing the spot cable market. "We're very optimistic about the outcome and continue to get good news," he said. The case was reinstated by the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals in February, with Comcast punting it up to the Supreme Court.

"The Seventh Circuit's reversal of the district court's careful and well-reasoned decision dismissing Viamedia's claims is inconsistent with longstanding antitrust law, including decisions by the Supreme Court and other circuit courts. We're asking the Supreme Court to correct this error," Comcast said in a statement.

Looking ahead to 2021, Solomon hopes to build off the success of 2020, mainly by investing in his people. "If you keep a good culture and you keep people happy and they live and breathe the culture of our company, then they'll take care of the advertisers," he said. "And as long as the advertisers are taken care of, all of our partners who entrust us with their business then they're happy."

Throughout his 17-year tenure, Solomon was responsible for nearly all of Viamedia's deals with MVPDs. Viamedia has over 50 products in its ad sales suite, operating across 70 markets. Coming up in '21, expect to see an increased focus on digital media, particularly when it comes to dynamic ad in-

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sertion. Viamedia partnered with **Google Fiber** six years ago, which Solomon said the company learned a lot from. Viamedia has seen a lot of its operators converting their QAM-based business to dynamic.

"I feel like we're more prepared from a technology, from a process and from a people level to attack that evolving sector better than anyone," Solomon said. "We're already set for a year of increasing change and increasing opportunity, because that's where the industry's moving. So our team's ready for it, our technology's ready for it and we're running into '21 very excited."

VERIZON FIOS OFFERING SPORTS REFUNDS

Verizon is offering Fios TV customers refunds tied to the lack of live sporting events during the COVID-19 pandemic. The amount of rebates will vary by market and RSNs. For example, a Verizon customer in the DC area received a \$13.91 RSN credit, while a Comcast customer in Georgia received an \$11.54 credit. "We at Verizon remain resolute in our plan to pass on the COVID-related refunds that we receive from Regional Sports Networks to impacted Fios TV customers," Verizon said in a statement. "We are pleased to begin issuing bill credits to these customers next month." Impacted customers will see a credit on their December 2020 bill statement labeled as "RSN credit." Verizon anticipates that additional refunds may come in 2021. Verizon isn't alone in its effort to pass along the credit to customers. **Comcast** began applying courtesy adjustments to customers' accounts in their October billing statements, and **Charter** has said its customers should expect to see similar credits on their accounts early next year.

FRONTIER DROPS EL REY

El Rey is no longer available on **Frontier TV**, with the two unable to agree to terms for a new contract. Their most recent agreement expired Nov 30. "Frontier worked hard to negotiate a fair deal. We offer a selection of diverse content across our lineup," the pay TV provider said. Earlier this month, **Univision** exited its minority position in El Rey, the English-language entertainment cable network and production studio created by Mexican-American filmmaker *Robert Rodriguez* and **FactoryMade Ventures**. It's now 100% independently owned, with Univision continuing to provide sales and distribution services.

NO UPDATE ON TEGNA-AT&T

At our deadline, still no word of a deal (or an impasse) between **AT&T** and **TEGNA**. The two extended retransmission consent negotiations by 24 hours, until tonight at 7pm ET. TEGNA owns 64 stations and is the largest owner of Big Four affiliates in the top 25 markets among independent station groups

RIDE TV VS WARNERMEDIA RIDE

The folks over at **RIDE TV** are a bit uncomfortable with **AT&T's** recently unveiled **WarnerMedia RIDE**, which offers video content on phones or tablets connected to in-car WiFi hotspots. We hear RIDE TV feels the name is too similar to its own, particularly given that both companies have video streaming offerings. The 24/7 equestrian-focused network has been trying to work the issue out with AT&T. If an agreement cannot be reached, RIDE could opt to formally challenge the trademark filings at the US Patent and Trademark Office and/or file suit against AT&T for infringement.

REORG AT DISNEY

Walt Disney Television's chmn of entertainment *Dana Walden*

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The Collapse of Theatrical Windows?: With theaters shuttering, will day-and-date releases become **Saunders 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 **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 \$19.99 in the US. **Volume 31 / No. 050**

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 the dispute will last.

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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

Covering Covid-19: Content Companies Step Up Efforts
Programmers are shuffling 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. **Pledge** due to school closure. Topics include why thunder happens, how rainbows form. scheduled for Friday at 2pm.

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

is majorly restructuring the TV production and original content businesses. **Hulu's** SVP of content *Craig Erwich* is adding oversight of **ABC** original content, with the new title pres of Hulu Originals and ABC Entertainment. ABC Entertainment pres *Karey Burke* will now serve as pres of **20th Television**, the combined operation of 20th Television and **Touchstone Television**, sunsetting the Touchstone Television banner. This means the Disney TV Studios division is now down to two divisions. *Bert Salke*, the pres of Touchstone TV, is moving to a multi-year overall producing deal with Disney Television Studios. *Craig Hunegs* will transition from his role as pres of Disney Television Studios to pres of entertainment, Walt Disney Television.

TENNIS CHANNEL OFF YOUTUBE TV

YouTube TV entered December without **Sinclair-owned Tennis Channel**. Last month, the vMVPD platform dropped the former **Fox** RSNs that **Sinclair** had purchased from **Disney**. The drop comes ahead of the Australian Open—which there is still no date for (usually it takes place in January, some reports suggest it may be pushed to February).

TELEMUNDO REALIGNS CONTENT STRUCTURE

NBCUniversal Telemundo Enterprises realigned the structure of a number of its divisions to maximize the company's content capabilities and strengthen collaboration between creators and distribution teams. *Ronald Day* was elevated to pres, entertainment and content strategy, effective immediately. Reporting to Day is *Romina Rosado*, who now serves as evp, entertainment and content strategy. Both will lead the company's omnichannel strategy and ensure content is made available on all Telemundo platforms including **Universo** and **Peacock**. A redesigned revenue strategy and distribution unit will be led by *Peter Blacker*, who will assume the broader role of evp, chief commercial officer, head of DTC licensing. He will focus exclusively on the commercialization, monetization and distribution of Telemundo content.

ALTICE USA CLOSES LIGHTPATH SALE

Altice USA closed the previously announced sale of 49.99% of its **Lightpath** fiber enterprise business to **Morgan Stanley Infrastructure** for an implied enterprise value of \$3.2bln. Altice USA will retain a 50.01% interest in Lightpath and maintain control of the company. As of Sept 30, Lightpath's fiber network powered 11.7K connected buildings across more than 18.6K route miles.

WGN AMERICA ON YOUTUBE TV

Nexstar and **YouTube TV** have struck a multi-year carriage deal for the cable network **WGN America** that will see it placed on the vMVPD on Jan 19. The agreement will allow WGN America to add more than 3mln new subscribers to the national reach of the cable network, which is currently available in approximately 75mln US television households. Meanwhile, Nexstar and **DISH** face a deadline of 7pm ET Wednesday for a new carriage deal.

HAWAIIAN TELCOM BUYS FIBER

Hawaiian Telecom has entered into a definitive purchase agreement to acquire inter-island submarine and middle-mile terrestrial fiber infrastructure assets owned by the bankruptcy estate of the **Paniolo Cable**. Hawaiian Telecom will acquire the

assets for a total purchase price of \$50mln, which the company will pay through a combination of \$25mln in cash and \$25mln in committed purchase money financing. The deal will increase the company's total submarine and terrestrial fiber footprint by more than 400 miles. The deal is expected to close in 3Q21.

FCC RENEWS CONSUMER ADVISORY COMMITTEE

FCC chmn *Ajit Pai* renewed the charter of its Consumer Advisory Committee for an 11th two-year term, selecting 29 members for the group. **American Consumer Institute's** *Stephen Pociask* will serve as chair, with **Project GOAL's** *Debra Berlyn* in the vice chair role. Familiar industry names tapped for the committee include **NCTA** associate gen counsel *Radhika Bhat*, **ACA Connects'** vp, regulatory affairs *Brian Hurley* and **NAB** associate gen counsel *Larry Walke*.

FUBOTV MOVES INTO ONLINE SPORTS WAGERING

fuboTV acquired **Balto Sports**, the company's first move into online sports wagering. Terms of the deal were not disclosed. Balto Sports will join fubo to help drive the company's expansion into both free to play gaming and online sports betting.

COMCAST CYBERSECURITY NUMBERS

Comcast's xFi Advanced Security service blocked 6bln cybersecurity threats in customers' homes between January and August of this year, according to a newly-released cyber health report. Comcast began offering the product for free in January to customers with eligible gateways. Threats increased 12% during the early part of the pandemic as hackers attempted to take advantage of the increase in online activity in connected homes. The threats ranged from phishing attacks to hackers trying to use connected home devices to gain entry onto customer networks.

OVATION, CHARTER TEAM UP AGAIN

Ovation is again partnering with **Charter** on its Stand for the Arts Awards initiative, and will recognize local arts, cultural and educational organizations and programs in five of Charter's Spectrum markets. The initiative is part of Ovation's Stand for the Arts advocacy platform, which will commit \$50K to support arts education in those Spectrum markets.

RATINGS

HBO's "The Undoing" drew 3mln viewers across all platforms for its series conclusion Sunday night, making it the most-watched night for an original series on HBO since the "Big Little Lies" finale in 2019.

OBITUARY

Charter engineer *Ron Wolfe* passed away Nov 25 after a month-long battle with COVID-19, according to his [obituary](#). Wolfe was senior director of engineering & architecture for Charter in Denver. He will be inducted Friday into the **Cable TV Pioneers**, which is being televised on C-SPAN 3 at 9pm ET. Before Charter, Wolfe spent 18 years at **Time Warner Cable** and did stints at **@Home Network**, **BigBand Networks** and **Aurora Networks**. He was a member of **SCTE** for more than 30 years, receiving Member of the Year honors in 1992. His family requests that in lieu of flowers donations are made to **Feeding America**.