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WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

Perfect Marriage: A Closer Look at Cable's Telehealth Opportunities

(The following article is Volume 10 of the 13-part Broadband Game-Changer Series, brought you by Adara Technologies)

It's no secret that the telehealth industry has boomed since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, but its success has largely, if not entirely, depended on the stability of the nation's broadband networks.

"We have reached the point where we can't have healthcare without connectivity," **Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium** CIO *Stewart Ferguson* said during **Cablefax's** Telehealth in the Virtual Age digital conference in August. "Everything ties into an electronic chart."

And while all of those visits were happening, ISPs were working diligently to maintain network quality while supporting a shift to distributed workforces and at-home schooling.

"What ended up happening is organizations started shifting their business models," *Robert Thompson*, vp of **Comcast Business'** Mountain West Region, told CFX. "You have neighborhood after neighborhood where it's the perfect storm. You don't typically build networks for situations when all of the business employees are at home... and then all the kids aren't at school, they're at home."

Comcast Business has long served businesses like medical facilities, but those customers required different levels of support once stay-at-home orders were enacted in March. Luckily, Comcast's long-term network investment paid off and allowed the teams some flexibility to offer more bandwidth when it was needed.

"The men and women that secure our network really gave us a platform by which we could then turn to organizations and healthcare facilities and say 'What do you need? We're here and are able to create flexible solutions,'" Thompson said. "They were reaching out to us because they understood

that the assets we had in the ground by way of fiber and coax cable could benefit them."

One such relationship that expanded was Comcast's relationship with The Mental Health Center of Denver, an organization offering inpatient and outpatient services with a focus on expanding access to effective treatment for mental illnesses and providing literacy to the larger community. The Mental Health Center of Denver counts 35 locations across the city.

The Mental Health Center of Denver has seen an 800% increase in telehealth services since the start of the pandemic, and Comcast Business had to increase focus on areas like circuit redundancy in larger facilities to keep all services functioning smoothly.

Comcast has also implemented measures to support patients that may not have access to a stable home internet connection. Sessions can be completed at new kiosks in the Mental Health Center of Denver facilities.

"Everyone doesn't have access at home," Thompson said. "We worked to strategize the locations of where the kiosks would be located and from there, we just ensure that we have the high-capacity access they need so the kiosks will work and the experience on the other end for the client using the kiosk as the vehicle to talk to the Mental Health Center of Denver gets a good experience."

Comcast is far from the only cable operator expanding its support of the telehealth sector. In September, **Cox Communications** announced a multi-year partnership with healthcare provider Lafayette General Health that will aim to enhance patient experiences. Future initiatives include deploying and testing additional telemedicine, digital health and patient monitoring solutions.

Diving into up-and-coming industries like telehealth have unlocked new opportunities for ISPs to further expand their already booming broadband businesses. **Cox Enterprises** was way ahead of the game when it came to telehealth, ac-

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quiring healthcare managed services provider **Trapollo** back in 2015. That investment certainly paid off when 2020 reared its head, and since the start of the pandemic, Trapollo has ramped up its efforts even further. With the support of **m.Care** technology, Trapollo launched a Bring Your Own Device solution in April that allowed physicians to remotely connect directly with COVID-positive patients.

“By having it on a BYOD device, you can talk into it or text into it, answer the questions about you, your health state, people in your family, bring all of that information together so that the doctors would be able to understand where you are... if you needed to be seen because things were getting urgent, you could use that same app for the two-way video,” Trapollo CEO **Mike Braham** told **CFX** in August.

While telehealth has certainly experienced a unique surge in demand during the COVID-19 pandemic, there are many that believe patients will continue to choose it more often when the world returns back to normal.

The most recent survey from **Health Union** of people with chronic conditions feel that telehealth is generally less preferable than in-person visits, but can still serve as an occasional alternative. Nearly $\frac{3}{4}$ of survey respondents said they have had at least one telehealth appointment, and 44% of all respondents said they were “extremely likely” to consider using telehealth after the pandemic is under control.

And telehealth is continuing to receive support at a federal level. The **FCC** just closed the application window last week on a Connected Care Pilot Program that will provide up to \$100m from the Universal Service Fund over a three-year

period to support the provision of connected care services.

“This notion of telehealth has been around... and telehealth is only going to continue,” Thompson said. “You’re at this perfect intersection where the underlying technology that enables this to happen is at a place and the equipment is also at a place where there isn’t a reason technologically why we can’t have high-quality interactions on video calls... we’re going to see more and more people over time leverage technology for the convenience aspect that’s provided.”

PAI CALLS FOR CABLE ACT REWRITE

Outgoing **FCC** chmn **Ajit Pai** urged the agency to continue to work to keep media regulations up-to-date with the-changing landscape, declaring that the days of Must-See TV are giving way to Must-Watch Internet given the proliferation of streaming. “In my view, we need a fundamental, intellectually honest re-assessment of what the media marketplace looks like now, where it’s going, and what this means for consumers,” Pai said during **The Media Institute**’s virtual forum Tuesday. He called for Congress to consider broad reforms, such as a “top-to-bottom rewrite” of the 1992 Cable Act. “This law was enacted in 1992 for an analog world of monopoly cable operators, based on the assumption of never-ending cable domination,” he said. “Today, we live in a world where subscriptions to online video distributors are soaring, cable subscriptions are falling, and streaming accounts for a quarter of all TV viewing. And there’s no reason to think this trend toward streaming is going to stop any time soon. If anything, it seems likely to accelerate.” Pai called for Congress to expand the agency’s forbearance authority to remove outdated regulations aimed at cable ops,

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NOTIFICATION REGARDING UPCOMING ISSUE DATES

Cablefax Daily will publish on Friday, December 18 and again on December 31. These will be the last two issues of 2020.

Our first issue in 2021 will publish on January 4.

But don't worry. Our editorial team will keep you updated at Cablefax.com and through any necessary Breaking News Alerts.

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broadcasters and satellite companies. He noted that the largest broadcast television group, **Nexstar** with a market capitalization of about \$4.6bln, is subject to more regulation than companies that are 50 times its size or even 250 times its size. Also on his hit list is eliminating broadcast media ownership rules, with **Pai** complaining that the parts of media that are growing the fastest aren't subject to any such limits.

SOCIAL SIMINGTON

The **FCC**'s newest commissioner has joined the **Twitter** party. **Nathan Simington** hasn't tweeted anything yet from his @SimingtonFCC handle, but he's already amassed more than 100 followers waiting to hear from him. The former **NTIA** senior adviser was sworn in Monday, meaning he'll be a part of the Jan 13 open meeting—which will be **Ajit Pai**'s last as chairman.

COMCAST TESTING NEXTGEN TV

Broadcasters are working with **Comcast** in Portland, OR, to explore how to deliver NextGen TV, or ATSC 3.0, over the cable operator's infrastructure. The work could offer up a technical example of how to transmit ATSC 3.0 over hybrid fiber-coax. "Seven local broadcasters are now on the air with NextGen TV in Portland, so it makes sense to work with a major operator in the area like Comcast to determine what's needed to distribute this new capability to cable customers," said **Anne Schelle**, managing director of **Pearl TV**, which is also managing the Phoenix Model Market implementation—a collaborative effort with a dozen Phoenix TV broadcasters who are launching ATSC 3.0 service marketwide. Those seven stations in Portland are KATU (ABC), KOIN (CBS), KGW (NBC), KPTV (Fox), KOPB-TV (PBS), KRCW-TV (CW) and KPDX (MyNet).

STREAM FOR FREE?

Remember those early weeks of the pandemic when several networks offered free previews to MVPDs to encourage Americans to stay home? Well, Sen **Angus King** (I-ME) is now asking streamers **Netflix**, **Amazon Prime Video**, **Disney**, **Apple TV** and **WarnerMedia** to do the same. "We believe that your companies are in a unique position to help families cope with the effects of this health emergency on typical holiday traditions," King wrote. "While your platforms would likely experience greater traffic as a consequence of extending service, we encourage you to provide temporary service at no cost to non-subscribers as a way to encourage people to make responsible choices and safely navigate this holiday season."

DISH RAISING MONEY

DISH plans to offer \$2bln aggregate principal amount of convertible notes and expects to grant the initial purchaser an option to purchase up to an additional \$300mln aggregate principal amount of the notes to cover over-allotments, if any. The net proceeds of the offering are intended to be used for general corporate purposes, including 5G network buildout costs.

CES 2021

It'll be a **CES** like no other before it. Audiences will experience the all-digital CES through the digital venue, the online platform created with technology partner **Microsoft**. The show kicks

off Jan 11-14 with a slate of keynotes that include **Best Buy** CEO **Corie Barry**, **Fortune** CEO **Alan Murray**, **Verizon** CEO **Hans Vestberg** and **WarnerMedia Networks and Studios** chief **Ann Sarnoff**.

DISTRIBUTION

HBO Max rolled out on **Comcast**'s Xfinity X1 and Flex platforms. Subscribers can access the app via the Xfinity Voice Remote, as well as library content integrated throughout the platform. – **Fox News**' streaming service **Fox News International** is expanding to 30 countries worldwide, set to launch in Chile, Panama and Portugal beginning Thursday.

RATINGS

Fox News was the most watched net in total day and prime for the week of Dec 7-13. In prime, the net pulled in 2.762mln viewers, followed by **ESPN** with 2.318mln, **MSNBC** with 2.155mln and **CNN** with 1.815mln. In total day, Fox News saw 1.374mln viewers, followed by MSNBC with 1.293mln and CNN with 1.22mln. – Programming events "Countdown to Christmas" on **Hallmark Channel** and "Miracles of Christmas" on **Hallmark Movies & Mysteries** have reached nearly 51mln unduplicated total viewers to-date. Hallmark Channel is currently ranking as the No 1 entertainment net on cable in 4Q to date among households, W18+, W25-54, and total viewers. Holiday movie premieres are averaging 419K viewers among W25-54, and 2.9mln total viewers.

PROGRAMMING

CBS Sports and **Nickelodeon** have teamed up for the NFL Wild Card Game on Nickelodeon, a special telecast of the game on Jan 10 at 4:30pm. The telecast will feature kid-focused content and Nick-themed elements, including a special halftime presentation. – **Bruce W. Smith** and **Ralph Farquhar** (executive producers of "The Proud Family") inked an overall deal with **Disney** to produce animated and live-action series and movies for Disney Branded Television.

PEOPLE

Vodafone UK CEO **Nick Jeffery** was tapped as **Frontier**'s next president and CEO. He'll assume the role March 1, following his expiration notice period with Vodafone. Current chief **Bernie Han** will step down at that time, but remain on the board and guide the CEO transition until emergence from Chapter 11. At that time, Jeffery will join the board. – **C-SPAN** set its board leadership during its annual meeting, electing **Cox Communications** pres/CEO **Pat Esser** as chmn. **Dave Watson**, CEO of **Comcast**, is taking the role of vice chm. Pres/CEO of **Vyve Broadband** **Phil Spencer** is joining the board for a two-year term, and **Rich Fickle**, pres/CEO of **NCTC**, and cable pioneer **Bob Miron** were re-elected. C-SPAN co-CEOs **Rob Kennedy** and **Susan Swain** will also join, serving as senior executive directors. **Brian Lamb**, longtime C-SPAN chmn, remains a member as founder director. – **CuriosityStream** named **Brandon Fong** as svp and head of North America distribution. He was most recently svp of digital business development at **STX Entertainment**.