

Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

Fiber Frenzy: FTTH Providers Feeling Better Than Fine

Even when **Google** is in your name, there's work to be done on brand awareness. "If you actually do an awareness of our brand '**Google Fiber**' in a lot of our markets, a couple years ago, it was really low. People certainly knew what Google was, but they had no idea what Google Fiber was at all," Google Fiber exec Melani Griffith said during a Wednesday session at Fiber Connect, the **Fiber Broadband Association's** annual conference. "In the beginning, door knockers would show up and people would say, 'Great! I have a question about my Gmail.'"

Griffith, known in cable circles for her time at **Insight, Rogers Communications** and **AMC Networks**, joined Google Fiber two years ago as vp, marketing, sales and business operations. She was just made vp, customer engagement, a role that has her focused on the customer experience.

Her advice to Fiber Broadband Association members—often FTTH providers in smaller, rural markets whose names might not be familiar—is to highlight what differentiates their company from competitors. One of those factors could be fast, symmetrical upstream speeds, and Griffith said the pandemic has helped illustrate the importance of upload. "People didn't get it. They'd say, 'No, I can get my **Netflix** or **Hulu** just fine. It downloads quick. Everything's OK.' Then when all of a sudden everyone's in the house," and they're seeing jitter and other issues during video conferences, they get it.

Google Fiber has tried to simplify all of its touchpoints—some-

thing made easier by its decision earlier this year to drop video. It also only offers one internet speed—1 Gig up and down, though it is gearing up to launch a 2 Gig option in 2021. Griffith said the company takes a mobile-first approach to customer interactions because so many are signing up for service using their phones.

Google Fiber has encountered its share of bumps over the past decade, most notably when it completely pulled out of Louisville, KY, last year after its failed attempt at nanotrenching—the process of burying fiber in shallow trenches. "We own our mistakes. We don't hide from them. We get it. We're certainly not perfect," Griffith said. "We try to do things proactively to address them." She said that includes credits for service outages without requiring a customer to report the disruption.

It's clear that FTTH providers are going to continue to expand across the country. With COVID, some are seeing more people moving into their footprints. "This is not official data, but homes are not staying on the market any time at all. They're being snapped up," said Gene Scott, general manager OSP for **Greenlight Community Broadband** in Wilson, NC. "We're having people move from large metropolitan and out-of-state areas into our community, which I guess is a good thing for us. But it's pretty rapid. I think you're going to see after the pandemic that a lot of this will not change. People and the companies they work for suddenly realize you don't have to report to an office in a large metropolitan city to do your job. If you have reliable internet, you can work about anywhere."

Allo Communications passes a population of about 400K

Cablefax Daily

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.

today, but expects that to jump to just under 600K in 2021 as it adds four communities in 2021 in northeast Nebraska and a couple of communities Colorado. “We plan on adding about 200k-250K population each year for the next several years,” said Allo pres *Brad Moline* at another Fiber Connect panel.

In the past four or so years, Allo began focusing on building up more MDU customers. It was previously an area that the company had avoided. “Now they’re very front and center because if you’re going to change to a Gigabit society, you can’t leave anybody behind,” Moline said. “We treat each living unit—whether it’s an apartment complex, a retirement home, a fraternity, sorority or other student learning—as a home. We deliver 500Mbps or Gigabit symmetric to them. We deliver fiber to them. That way, we don’t have to touch them very often.”

Allo moved its business plan ahead three years due to the pandemic. That’s included getting gigabit speeds out to businesses and hospitals. “In January and February, when I’d talk to people, they’d say cable is good enough. You know what? I don’t hear that anymore. I hear, ‘everybody’s got to get on fiber,’” Moline said. “Even markets where we had 50% market share, we’re bumping up against 60% on the rev side.”

HULU LOSES SINCLAIR’S CBS AFFILIATES

Hulu + Live TV has dropped 23 **Sinclair**-owned **CBS** affiliates after the pair were unable to reach a new deal. “We wanted to let you know that as of December 16, Hulu no longer has the rights to distribute the local CBS affiliate that was previously included with your Live TV plan,” Hulu told customers Wednesday. “You’ll still be able to watch new episodes of many popular shows like *The Amazing Race*, *48 Hours*, and *The Late Show* with Stephen

Colbert and more on-demand shortly after they air, but unfortunately live CBS broadcasts (including NFL games and local news) will be unavailable.” Hulu lost **Nexstar**-owned **ABC** affiliates in October, but the vMVPD worked around any major disruption by replacing those channels with a national ABC feed.

FUSE SUES AT&T

Fuse Media followed up on its **FCC** carriage complaint against **AT&T** by filing a legal challenge in US Bankruptcy Court. The heavily redacted complaint filed Tuesday claims AT&T breached confidentiality provisions of **DirectTV** contracts. “We treat all programmers fairly, including Fuse,” an AT&T spokesperson said. “This meritless lawsuit is nothing more than a last-ditch attempt by Fuse’s creditors to force us and our customers to pay for channels our customers don’t want or value.” The US Bankruptcy Court of Delaware has jurisdiction over the complaint because of Fuse’s Chapter 11 filing in the court in April 2019. It emerged from bankruptcy about two months later after reducing its secured debt. Last month, a group of Fuse execs purchased a controlling stake in the company. “AT&T has a well-documented history of interfering with programmer negotiations, going back to its 2017 civil antitrust settlement with the Department of Justice. Fuse Media—an independent, minority-owned and led media company—after learning of similar behavior impacting our business, had no choice but to file a complaint in court for breach of confidentiality and tortious interference with contracts,” Fuse said.

THE POWER OF THE RIGHT PARTNERSHIP

SVODs are always looking for new partnerships that will set them apart from the pack, and **Liberty Global** svp *Bob Leighton* thinks it is inevitable that they one day partner with cable providers to

V I R T U A L C E L E B R A T I O N

2020 Lustgarten Foundation

HOLIDAY BASH

The cause continues!

Raising funds for the Lustgarten Foundation for Pancreatic Cancer Research has never been more important.

Learn more, visit Lustgarten.org/HolidayBash

PRESENTED BY

MADISON SQUARE GARDEN ENTERTAINMENT MADISON SQUARE GARDEN SPORTS

AMC NETWORKS

MEDIA PARTNERS

BC Cablefax CYNOPSIS Multichannel News NEXT TV

A benefit for the Lustgarten Foundation for Pancreatic Cancer Research. 100% of your donation goes directly to research.

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, Cablefax and Synopsis: Robbie Caploe, 917.974.0640, rcaploe@accessintel.com | Senior Editor: Sara Winegardner, 301.354.1701, swinegardner@accessintel.com | Assoc Editor: Mollie Cahillane, 212.621.4951, mcahillane@accessintel.com | Exec Director, Strategic Partnerships: 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

become part of a new type of bundle. “The question is how many and what the consumer terms would be, what kind of bundling makes the most sense,” Leighton said at a **Parks Associates** panel Wednesday. This would presumably make sense for any players involved in the streaming wars that are looking to take as much share as possible before customers become overwhelmed by choice. The first step to doing that is to find carriage on as many partners as possible, including on devices like smart TVs and **Roku** media players. “Our intent is to ensure that there is a diverse mix of content offered on the platform,” **VIZIO** svp, marketing and strategy *Jodie McAfee* said. “Does everybody make it on the platform? I guess the answer to that is no, but I’m not sure that we’ve ever necessarily turned anybody away.” Before officially signing on to any partnership tied to its content and streaming platforms, **A+E Networks** looks at three major factors: scale, content alignment and aligned goals. “A stat that was really surprising and opened up conversations at my company is how many SVOD subscribers subscribe to more than one product,” A+E Networks vp, digital audience development *Jen Taylor* said. According to Parks, the demographic that has been growing the fastest in the world of streaming is the number of households that are holding four or more subscriptions. Attendees of the event voted in a poll that they believed smart TV manufacturers had the greatest opportunities ahead for strong partnerships. McAfee thinks more doors could open thanks to the shift in theatrical windows and release strategies as a result of the pandemic. “Ironically, with theaters not being open, the biggest available screen in the marketplace is the TV in the home,” McAfee said.

HBO MAX FINALLY COMING TO ROKU

HBO Max and **Roku** have finally set aside their swords and reached a deal. The streaming service will make its debut on Roku devices this Thursday. For users who have already subscribed to HBO through their Roku devices, the **HBO** app will automatically update to become the HBO Max app, and they will be able to log in using their existing HBO credentials. The deal comes nine days before the release of “Wonder Woman 1984,” which will debut in theaters and on HBO Max on Christmas Day at no extra cost to the streamer’s subscriber base. HBO Max is now also available on the new PlayStation 5. Users in the US can download the app and start streaming.

ANTITRUST LAWSUIT COMING AGAINST GOOGLE

A group of state attorneys general led by Texas have filed an antitrust lawsuit against **Google** targeting its advertising technology services. Texas AG *Ken Paxton* said while announcing the lawsuit that Google is allegedly using its monopoly power to control pricing and “engage in market collusion to rig auctions.” The lawsuit specifically points to Google’s 2018 acquisition of ad tech company **DoubleClick**, calling it a “fundamental change.” Nine Republican-led states are joining the suit, including AR, ID, IN, KY, MS, MO, ND, SD and UT.

CISCO MERGED CABLE, MOBILE SECTORS

Cisco has merged its cable access unit with its mobility business, according to *Light Reading*. The combined entity is led by Cisco vp/gm, cable and mobile business unit *Masum Mir*. *Sean Welch*,

the former vp/gm of Cisco’s cable service provider unit, recently retired as did *George Kajos*, who headed software engineering architecture for Cisco’s virtual converged cable access platform. *John Chapman*’s role is changing as a result of the shift. His title is now CTO, broadband technologies and he will continue work on DOCSIS and handle all access technologies that apply to cable operators.

IGER AS AMBASSADOR?

There’s a chance **Disney** exec chmn *Bob Iger* might land a key diplomatic role in the new Biden administration. The *Hollywood Reporter* reported that President-elect *Joe Biden* is eying Iger for a key ambassador post in China or the UK. Iger stepped down from the role of Disney CEO in Feb of this year. *Jeffery Katzenberg*, the founder of the now-shuttered **Quibi**, is reportedly also being considered for an ambassador role, as is producer *Matt Walden* for a post in a European country.

GRAHAM MOVES ON SECTION 230

Sen *Lindsay Graham* (R-SC) introduced legislation Tuesday that would sunset Section 230 protections for companies in Big Tech on Jan 1, 2023. Section 230, which was created in 1996 as part of the Communications Decency Act, provides legal immunity from liability to internet services for content posted on their platforms. “Congress will have two years to find an acceptable alternative or allow the legal liability protections to go away,” Graham said. “I’m hopeful that there will be bipartisan support for this approach.”

NEXSTAR ACQUIRING BESTREVIEWS

Nexstar announced it entered into a definitive agreement to acquire consumer product recommendations company **BestReviews** from Tribune Publishing Company for \$160m. The company independently researches, analyzes and tests products to recommend the best picks. The transaction is immediately accretive to Nexstar’s operating results. The deal is subject to customary closing conditions and is expected to close by the end of 2020.

DOING GOOD

Cable One’s family of brands (**Sparklight**, **Fidelity**, **Clearwave** and **ValueNet**) have donated more than 14 tons of food to local food banks throughout the company’s 21-state footprint this holiday season. This follows the move earlier this year where the company donated \$150K to the Meals on Wheels America COVID-19 Response Fund and \$150K to local food markets.

PROGRAMMING

The 52nd **NAACP** Image Awards will be broadcast live on **BET** on Feb 20. Additionally, the NAACP Image Awards Dinner, traditionally taking place the night before the event, will stream over six nights Feb 15-19, with the virtual ceremonies recognizing winners in more than 60 non-televised categories. – **Fox News** chief *Suzanne Scott* has shored up the newser’s lineup for years to come, signing *Laura Ingraham* to a new multi-year deal where she will continue as host of “The Ingraham Angle.” Ingraham first joined FNC in 2007 as a contributor. – **TBS** renewed “Full Frontal with Samantha Bee” for Season 6. – **Allen Media Group** tapped *April Ryan* to serve as White House correspondent and DC bureau chief for broadcast net **TheGrio.TV**, effective Jan 4. Ryan, a frequent contributor to **CNN**, began her career as a White House correspondent 24 years ago.

Think about that for a minute...

The Missing Link

Commentary by Steve Effros

We've all experienced it: reading something you've written, not just once, but several times before you send it out and find out later that you either left out, or misspelled something. How did that happen? There just seem to be blind spots that elude us no matter how hard we try to detect them. That's what's going on in telecommunications policy these days and unfortunately policy folks continue to not "see" the hole in their policy donut no matter how many times it's pointed out!

A few examples that totally frustrate most of us who deal with this stuff day in and day out should suffice. The hope here is that if those "blind spots," those "holes in the donut" are repeatedly highlighted, maybe, just maybe, the regulators and legislators will finally see what we're talking about.

The "middle mile" problem is one I've been writing about for a long time. This is a fundamental problem facing rural communities in this country, but nobody seems willing to actually address it. The "digital divide" is going to get lots of attention in the new Biden administration just as it did in the Trump administration. The "solution" always seems to be to throw more money at the "last mile." Build more systems, use "magic" fiber optics, push 5G as a solution. But none of that will work (other than to put the existing infrastructure owners out of business when they have to compete with government-funded alternatives) because no matter how much fiber you put in that small community, if the cost of the "middle mile" delivery is too high, that is, the link between that small community and a major broadband internet access point, all that local fiber still can't deliver.

For whatever reason, lots of money is being spent on the last mile, but virtually nothing on the "middle mile" problem. There is usually no competition, thus there is no rate discipline, and until that is fixed, until that blind spot is finally filled in, these efforts at dealing with the rural digital

divide are going to fail.

There's an ironic additional "hole in the donut" problem on the regulatory side as well. This is going to be even more obvious as the debate over what to do about the huge edge providers, Google, Facebook, etc., heats up. There'll be all sorts of discussion about where and how to structure regulation of them. There's already lots of regulation of the ISPs on the other end... the last mile. But ironically, no one, including the FCC, claims to have policy jurisdiction over the "middle" of the internet/broadband structure; "the cloud."

That's, in part, why we call it "the cloud." The only way folks have been able to describe how the internet and broadband works is to create these wonderful diagrams with data "going up" from, say, Amazon, and data "coming down" to your computer, delivered by your local ISP. But in the middle all those arrows representing the data just shoot into a "cloud!" That's where the term came from.

That "cloud" is the major policy "hole" I'm talking about. It contains all the myriad companies that have servers, routers, deal with transport around the country and the world, and most of us don't even know the names of those companies, let alone what they really do or how much power they have! That's not good. That's one heck of a "blind spot." If we don't finally deal with that issue, we're going

to continue to have a major missing policy link.



Steve

T:202-630-2099
steve@effros.com

(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.)

f i t in @WICTHQ

WICT helps women
and the industry
lead with more.

▲ Connect to the most powerful network of women
in cable, media and technology at www.wictnow.org.

- ▲ More **diversity**
- ▲ More **equity**
- ▲ More **inclusion**
- ▲ **More profitability**

#LeadWithMore



Women in Cable
Telecommunications™