

Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

Big Time: Cable Nets See Explosive Growth in 2020

The year like no other is finally on its way out. And while our list of grievances for 2020 Festivus are unusually long, one bright light has been ratings growth for multiple cable nets.

It's not a big surprise that **Fox News** is poised to take the number one spot across the board in both prime and total day for 2020. The net averaged 1.896mln viewers in total day, according to **Nielsen** data through Dec 14. That's a jump from 2019, when it saw 1.394mln viewers through a similar period. It averaged 3.619mln viewers in prime for the year. This year also became the fifth year in a row Fox News was the top-rated in all of cable news. "This ratings milestone is a testament to the incredible work of the Fox News Channel team during a pivotal year. We are immensely proud and honored to once again serve as the destination for news and opinion in America," said Fox News Media CEO *Suzanne Scott*.

MSNBC is set to finish 2020 with a record-breaking year in total viewers and six straight years of growth. In total day, the net will rank as the No 2 in for the third year in a row, increasing viewership by 253% and adding 890K viewers from 2015 to 2020, the most of any network, averaging 1.244mln viewers. It also replaced **ESPN** as the No 2 net in prime, jumping from No 31 in 2015 and No 3 in 2019, averaging 2.148mln viewers.

CNN rounded out the top three in both total day and prime, jumping up from No 7 in total day and No 9 in prime. This was the net's best year, pulling in its most-watched year in total

viewers and key demo. The net averaged 1.793mln in prime and 1.136mln in total day. While Fox News won the year, CNN has seen a ratings boost since the election. Since Nov 4, the net was No 1 in all of cable, not just news, in total day, averaging 1.64mln viewers in total day for the quarter.

2020 has definitely been the year of news. But the smaller nets have a ways to go to come close to the Big 3. **Newsmax** is set to rank 67th in prime with 129K total viewers. **Newsy** ranked 119th.

Even in a year without many sports, ESPN still managed to have a great 2020. Its streamer **ESPN+** more than tripled its subscriber count to reach 11.5mln subs. The net also had smash ratings successes, becoming the no 1 cable net in prime for M18-34, M18-49, P18-34 and P18-49, and the No 4 net in prime and No 6 in total day. It's a drop from its spots at No 2 in prime and No 3 in total day in 2019. The College Football National Championship was up over last year and cable's biggest audience of the year (up 35%) and "The Last Dance" shattered ESPN's documentary viewership records. Additionally, the WNBA Draft became the most viewed since 2004, and the NFL Draft was the most viewed ever.

And the smash hit of 2020? Lifestyle programming. **TLC** rocketed up the chart to No 6 in prime and No 15 in total day, jumping from No 11 and No 16 respectively. The gains primarily come from the fact that **Discovery's** nets were able to continue creating content during the pandemic, when production came to a grinding halt for most. "This past year was a historical one for everyone in television. TLC went all out to



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**SEASON'S GREETINGS FROM AMERICA'S FAVORITE
DESTINATION FOR HOLIDAY ENTERTAINMENT**



Source: Nielsen. 1. Reach, P2+, CMFN (HALL/HMM/HD), M-Sun 6a-6a (10/23/20-12/06/20), 2. Rank vs. all ad-supported cable nets, HH, P2+ and W18+ AA(000), Sat-Sun 8p-11p, (10/23/20 - 12/06/20), 3. Rank vs. Ad -Supported Cable and ABC, CBS, CW, FOX & NBC, W18+ AA(000), Saturdays M-Sun 8p-11p, (09/28/2020 - 12/06/2020); Strict Daypart, All data is program-based and LSD.

deliver quality, emotional and relatable programming for our viewers,” Rick Holzman, TLC svp, programming & strategy, told **Cablefax**. “We are thrilled that it so clearly resonated and they found TLC as a place to spend their time.”

In prime, **HGTV** was No 5, averaging 1.205mIn viewers, up from the 1.199mIn in 2019. The net was No 4 in total day, averaging 678K viewers. TLC, **Hallmark Channel, TBS, TNT** and **History** rounded out the top 10 in prime. In total day, Hallmark Channel, ESPN, **Nickelodeon, ID, Food Network** and TNT rounded out the top 10.

FPB INTRODUCES NEXTBAND

Kentucky’s **Frankfort Plant Board** took the wraps off its fiber overbuild project this week, introducing the **Nextband** brand. The five-year-plan will bring gigabit speed to all of FPB’s service territory, with the Nextband service expected to be available to nearly 30% of customers by spring of 2021. Its 500 Mbps and 1 Gbps download speeds are twice as fast as FPB’s current Elite internet service. Pricing, speed packages and coverage areas will be revealed next month. FPB is hoping to sign up some friendlies in January, with customers likely coming on board in February or January. The municipal utility hired Somerset, KY-based firm **KSD** to help with marketing and branding. “The idea of Nextband is that you’re not limited to what’s available today,” said KSD founder *Kirby Stephens*. The Nextband logo is a stylized fiber optic cable with a point of light and vibrant color palette and the tagline, “Frankfort’s future network... now.”

CHARTER, NY PUBLIC SERVICE WORK IT OUT

Charter agreed to remove 1,241 addresses that the company had claimed toward meeting its 145K passings requirement

and will refund 100 customers who paid a connection fee, or else remove those addresses as well. This all harkens back to the **NY PSC**’s 2016 approval of the Charter acquisition of **Time Warner Cable**. After disputes over whether buildout requirements were being met, the PSC and Charter reached a settlement in 2019 that modified the deadlines to complete the expansion of Charter’s network to pass an additional 145K unserved and underserved residential housing units and/or businesses. Things seemed to be going pretty good until last month when the Department of Public Service’s Special Counsel for Ratepayer Protection signaled his intention to seek an Order to Show Cause from the PSC compelling Charter to demonstrate why more than 1,800 addresses audited by staff should not be disqualified and declared ineligible from its buildout plan. The two sides hammered out a compromise, with Charter permanently removing 773 addresses that were not within its franchise at the time of approval order as well as 412 addresses that overlap with addresses covered by the Broadband Program Office’s grant program. Another 56 addresses are being removed that were found to have existing plant at the premises prior to the approval order. “Since 2016, Spectrum has extended connectivity to more than 120K homes and small businesses in upstate New York and we’re on track to connect 25K more to complete the project by the end of September 2021,” Charter said. “These homes and businesses have—or will soon have—access to reliable high-speed broadband, with gigabit connections and minimum download speeds of 200 Mbps throughout most of the state. This expansion is valued well in excess of \$600 million and

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.

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is funded entirely by Spectrum.” NY Public Service staff clarified that 1,148 addresses in Charter’s plan were eligible to count towards the Company’s regulatory requirement. These included 549 addresses in the Town of Scipio and the Town of Warren as well as 311 addresses awarded by the Broadband Program Office to a satellite provider offering speeds lower than 100Mbps as of April 2019. “Our staff is scrutinizing Spectrum’s compliance reports and performing field audits of their ongoing network expansion to ensure every address is eligible to count towards its regulatory obligation to serve an additional 145,000 homes and businesses in Upstate New York. If addresses are ineligible, they will be removed from the buildout plan making it possible for eligible unserved premises to be added,” Department CEO *John Rhodes* said.

GOOGLE HIT WITH ANOTHER ANTITRUST SUIT

Google is facing its second antitrust lawsuit in as many days. A bipartisan coalition of 38 attorneys general filed a suit against the tech giant for illegally maintaining its monopoly power over general search engines. The states allege that Google hinders consumers’ ability to access information provided by certain specialized vertical providers, and that its acquisition and command of consumer data is obtained because of consumers’ lack of choice. “Google’s anticompetitive actions have protected its general search monopolies and excluded rivals, depriving consumers of the benefits of competitive choices, forestalling innovation, and undermining new entry or expansion,” Colorado AG *Phil Weiser* said in a statement. “This lawsuit seeks to restore competition.”

TRUMP THREATENS VETO OVER SECTION 230

President Trump has again threatened to veto a must-pass defense bill over a number of policy issues, including Section 230. “I will Veto the Defense Bill, which will make China very unhappy. They love it. Must have Section 230 termination, protect our National Monuments and allow for removal of military from far away, and very unappreciative, lands. Thank you!” Trump tweeted Thursday. The president previously tweeted that unless amendments eliminating Section 230 were added to the \$732bn National Defense Authorization Act, he would veto the legislation. The House passed the NDAA by a vote of 335-78 last week, and the Senate subsequently approved it by a vote of 84-13, both surpassing the threshold needed to override a veto.

FREEWHEEL ACQUIRING BEESWAX

FreeWheel agreed to acquire software as a service (SaaS) advertising company **FreeWheel**, expanding the **Comcast** company’s current programmatic marketplace capabilities across all forms of TV and video advertising, including CTV and set-top box VOD. The deal is expected to close Jan 2021, pending regulatory approvals. Financial terms were not disclosed.

CHARTER SPEEDS UP INTERNET

Charter is doubling the download speed for Spectrum Internet customers to 200Mbps from 100Mbps, with the faster flagship speeds now available in nearly 75% of the communities

it serves. The company will automatically increase speeds for current residential customers with new Spectrum Internet packages in these markets during the first quarter of 2021. A small percentage of customers will need a new modem, available at no additional cost. Markets seeing speed boost include Albany, Orlando and Palm Springs.

DISH INITIATES \$2BLN OFFERING

DISH priced an offering of \$2bln aggregate principal amount of 0% convertible notes due 2025. DISH has also granted the initial purchaser a 30-day option to purchase up to an additional \$300mln in aggregate principal amount of the notes. They will mature on Dec 15, 2025. The net proceeds of the offering are intended to be used for general corporate purposes, including 5G network buildout costs.

ORGS PUSH BIDEN ON FTC APPOINTMENTS

The **Open Markets Institute** sent two letters to President-elect *Joe Biden* requesting that he appoint **FTC** commissioners that are committed to prohibiting noncompete clauses and exclusionary contracting by dominant firms. The letters also ask the Biden Administration to endorse the agency’s use of its authority to prohibit unfair methods of competition in general.

PROGRAMMING

Ahead of the premiere of “Wonder Woman 1984” in theaters and on **HBO Max**, **TNT**, **TBS** and **Cartoon Network** will air “Wonder Woman” on Dec 20 at 7pm and 10pm. Leading up to the event, Cartoon Network will air a marathon of Wonder Woman-themed episodes of “Teen Titans Go!” starting at 7am and TBS will host a marathon of DC Comics-themed episodes of “The Big Bang Theory” starting at 5pm. – **EPIX** will debut the second season of “Condor” in late 2021. – **Showtime** has given a series order to survival drama “Yellowjackets.” Production will start early next year and its debut is planned for 2021. – **Hallmark Channel’s** “When Calls the Heart” will return for its eighth season on Feb 21 at 9pm. The network will also re-air the 2019 movie “When Calls the Heart: Home for Christmas” on Dec 25th with a sneak peak of the upcoming season. The series’ seventh season will be available for streaming on **Hallmark Movies Now** starting Dec 26. – **Crackle Plus** original series “Insomnia” will launch Jan 1 on the AVOD.

PEOPLE

Heather Olander, **NBCUniversal** evp, alternative development & programming, **USA**, **Syfy** & **Peacock**, is the latest to leave the company amidst a number of restructures. She follows in the footsteps of pres, original content, NBCUniversal Entertainment Networks and Direct-to-Consumer *Bill McGoldrick*, who left the company last month. – **Scripps** upped *Jonathan Katz* to COO/head, entertainment for its national television networks business. Katz will report to *Lisa Knutson*, who Scripps has placed in charge of the newly-combined businesses of **ION Media**, the Katz networks and **Newsy**. – **Netflix** named **Econet Group** founder *Strive Masiyiwa* to its board. Econet is a telecom and technology group operating in 29 countries across Africa and Europe.

PROGRAMMER'S PAGE

A Break from the Holiday Classics

The year is coming to an end, which means it's time for some (alternative) holiday programming. While you might not think of **Nat Geo** and **Nat Geo WILD** for yuletide fare, tune into Nat Geo Wild for the festive "12 Days of Pol" marathon, with "The Incredible Dr. Pol" running from Dec 12 to Jan 3, with a new season debuting Jan 2 at 9pm. And over on Nat Geo, get in the snowy spirit with a "Best of Nat Geo" marathon running from Dec 21-Jan 3, with new episodes of "Life Below Zero" and traveling the world with "Gordon Ramsay: Uncharted." Over on **TNT** and **TBS**, AEW wrestlers are set to reenact iconic scenes from "A Christmas Story" beginning Dec 24. The scenes will air as interstitials during TNT and TBS' 24-hour "A Christmas Story" marathon, as well as online at TNT.tv and TNT's YouTube page. Streamers are getting in on the action too. **AMC Networks'** streaming service **Shudder** is debuting "A Creepshow Holiday Special" on Friday, starring *Anna Camp* and *Adam Pally*. The hour-long episode "Shapeshifters Anonymous" follows the Creepshow Halloween animated special, but this one will be live-action. It's based on a short story about a werewolf support group, but don't be surprised if Santa Claus shows up. **HBO Max** just renewed "12 Dates of Christmas" for a Season 2. The series follows single "leads" as they meet potential love interests and go on 12 dates, hoping to find someone to bring home for the holidays. All eight episodes are currently available on the streamer, and the new reunion episode debuted Thursday. But if you find yourself in more of a traditional Christmas spirit, you can always check out the iconic "Countdown to Christmas" programming event on **Hallmark Channel**. On Saturday, "A Christmas Carousel" premieres at 8pm, and "Cross Country Christmas" debuts on Sunday at 8pm. – *Mollie Cahillane*

REVIEWS

"Life Below Zero," 9pm, Friday, Jan 1, **Nat Geo**. If viewers reach a point Jan. 1 that they'd like to get off the grid, then settling back with the 150th episode of this award-winning series is an option. This ep has nothing to do with New Year's Day. Instead, it profiles people living remotely, in Alaska, a few miles south of the Arctic Circle. It's late summer and most activity revolves around finding food for the winter. One of the more interesting stories is that of *Sue Aikens*, 57, who serendipitously comes upon caribou. The emotion she displays for the animals is noteworthy. How she uses caribou to nourish her body is remarkable. Emotion also is notable in *Andy Bassich's* story. Perhaps it's years of living in Alaska, but Bassich seems super calm despite facing a crisis. – Notable: "Great Performances: From Vienna: The New Year's Celebration 2021," premiere, 9pm, Friday, Jan. 1, **PBS**. Not a classical music fan? Doesn't matter. This is as light a program as you'll find in a classical concert. Arguably the world's greatest band, the Vienna Philharmonic, performs under *Riccardo Muti*. The Vienna State Ballet provides dancing. Owing to COVID-19, the hall will be empty and Bonneville won't be there. Lord Grantham on "Downton Abbey" will host remotely, from an English country estate. How 2020. – *Seth Arenstein*

BASIC CABLE		
P2+ PRIME RANKINGS*		
(12/07/20-12/13/20)		
MON-SUN	MC	MC
	US	US AA
	AA%	(000)
FNC	0.873	2,687
MSNBC	0.700	2,155
ESPN	0.605	1,865
CNN	0.560	1,725
HALL	0.487	1,501
HGTV	0.322	992
HIST	0.298	917
FRFM	0.291	898
TBSC	0.286	879
DISC	0.278	858
HMM	0.272	837
USA	0.271	833
FOOD	0.257	792
LIFE	0.239	735
TLC	0.236	727
ID	0.222	685
AMC	0.211	649
NFL	0.205	632
INSP	0.197	607
A&E	0.174	537
TNT	0.173	534
TVLAND	0.169	520
BRAVO	0.163	501
ADSM	0.152	467
WETV	0.136	420
FX	0.133	410
BET	0.130	400
TRAVEL	0.120	369
GSN	0.117	362
SYFY	0.116	356
APL	0.115	354
NAN	0.113	347
MTV	0.112	345
NWSMX	0.107	330
NATGEO	0.101	311
NICK	0.097	299
DSNY	0.096	295
COM	0.096	294
IFC	0.092	283
NKJR	0.087	268
CRN	0.082	252

*P2+ L+SD rankers are based on national Nielsen numbers, not coverage.

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