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WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

5Qs: A Conversation with CSG's New CEO Brian Shepherd

Like many companies, CSG found itself going almost 100% virtual overnight in March as the pandemic caused lockdowns in America. Throughout the COVID-19 crisis, it has continued to manage billions of customer interactions for cable and wireless providers adapting to this new normal. But CSG also had to navigate a leadership change with Bret Griess leaving Dec 30 after almost two decades of leadership, and evp, group president Brian Shepherd stepping into the CEO role on Jan 1. We chatted with Shepherd about where the billing and revenue management firm is headed in this edited interview.

You were named to the post in August. How do you transition to a role like this during the pandemic?

We use a key phrase at CSG: we're set on driving explosive growth for the company and the industry, but we've earned that right to growth. The way we do that is by being humble servant leaders and by serving our customers better and better every day. CSG has really good people, really good values and culture. Typically, great values and culture transcend challenges and transcend things like CEO transitions.

What is CSG's key focus right now?

Our industry has never been more relevant and is playing a bigger role in people's lives, and we should all be proud of that. CSG, going on four decades of serving the cable leaders of this industry, we understand our role, which is we have to help improve the customer experience. We have to help in an

omnichannel world across any touchpoint.

What's something people don't know about CSG?

We're the number one challenger brand in wireless. Wireless is a huge focus for us, and we serve over 300 million wireless subscribers all around the world, both on the consumer side and enterprise, digital wholesale and interconnect. We've announced and will continue to announce big wins in wireless because the industry needs what we have, including cable operators rolling out their own wireless services.

How has the company helped clients during COVID?

We've seen the number of connects at a record high, and yet often, field technicians are not going into customers' houses. So, we've rolled out solutions like Visual Connect, where you can actually help the self-installer and you can do maintenance and troubleshooting all in a digital, virtual world. We've rolled out innovative solutions around kiosks that let you change service, make payments in a retail point of sale without having to have a human interaction. We processed, even in COVID, over a billion dollars in payments for the industry through solutions like that.

What role is CSG playing with video?

There is still a way to drive increased profitability and revenue around video, but it means you have to offer new packages, new bundles, new ways for customers to access video and take advantage of that. That's been one of our strengths for three-and-a-half decades. If we go back a couple of years, [direct-to-consumer] was seen initially as more of a threat, but I think what the industry has done is turn that threat into a great opportunity. We see



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what companies like **Comcast** has done with Xfinity on Campus, where they're actually enabling college students to sign up for service through their IDs in a very easy, onboard way and get basic capabilities and expand if they want to on an a la carte basis. We see media and content companies going direct, and CSG is one of the main platform providers for companies like that, like what we've done with **Formula One**. Often, it's not about the cord-cutting, it's actually about how do you become the super aggregator of video so when consumers want to watch any type of service, they can do it through their MSO with advanced search.

HOUSE DEMS QUESTION ISPS ON COVID-19 PRICING

House Commerce chairman *Frank Pallone* (D-NJ) along with Representatives *Mike Doyle* (D-PA) and *Jerry McNerney* (D-CA) sent letters to nine ISPs Monday with questions about their commitments to consumers after recent reports of price increases and the imposition of data caps during the pandemic. "This is an egregious action at a time when households and small businesses across the country need high-speed, reliable broadband more than ever but are struggling to make ends meet," they wrote in letters to **Comcast, Charter, Altice USA, Cox, AT&T, Frontier, T-Mobile, Verizon** and **CenturyLink**. As part of its oversight efforts, the committee is asking for answers to questions regarding participation in the **FCC's** Keep Americans Connected pledge, plans designed for low-income households and current steps companies are taking to assist families facing financial hardship. "As of the end of July, we had already: connected nearly 450,000 students, teachers and their families at speeds of up to 200Mbps broadband service for 60 days at no cost; kept nearly 700,000 customers connected and forgiven

\$85mln in customers' overdue balances when they had a hard time paying bills due to COVID-related hardship; and taken steps to support small businesses, including offering one month of free service, providing helpful online tools, suspending collections, and not charging late fees or terminating service for small business customers," Charter told **CFX** in a statement. "Moreover, we've done all of this without imposing data caps, usage-based pricing, or early termination fees on our customers."

COMCAST, AT&T HALT SOME POLITICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Comcast and **AT&T** have both halted political contributions to lawmakers who objected to the certification of the electoral vote last week. Comcast said it would give it a chance to review its political giving policies and practices. "The peaceful transition of power is a foundation of America's democracy. This year, that transition will take place among some of the most challenging conditions in modern history and against the backdrop of the appalling violence we witnessed at the US Capitol last week," Comcast said in a statement. "At this crucial time, our focus needs to be on working together for the good of the entire nation.

POWELL: FORGET THE LABELS

With his father *Colin Powell* making headlines this weekend after telling **CNN** he can no longer call himself a Republican, it seemed like a good time to ask his son, **NCTA** president/CEO *Michael Powell*, if he still considers himself a Republican. "Forget the labels. The obsession with tribal colors and pagan loyalty to them is part of the problem," he told **CFX**. "It is a moment that calls on all of us to tend to the work of mending the frayed threads of our constitutional democracy. What am I? I am an American." His remarks are actually similar to those of former Secretary of

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State Colin Powell, who told CNN's *Fareed Zakaria* that he's "not a fellow of anything right now. I'm just a citizen who has voted Republican, voted Democrat throughout my entire career, and right now I'm just watching my country and not concerned with parties."

T-MOBILE BOLSTERING SPECTRUM BANK

T-Mobile is raising an additional \$2 billion via three new debt offerings, the company said in a prospectus filed Monday. It intends to use the net proceeds for general corporate purposes, including financing acquisitions of additional spectrum and refinancing existing indebtedness on an ongoing basis.

SNOWDEN TO LEAD INTERNET ASSOCIATION

With controversy swirling over **Twitter** banning *Donald Trump* and **Parler** suing **Amazon**, *Dane Snowden* is going to be busy. **The Internet Association** announced Snowden, previously **NCTA's** COO, is its new CEO, effective Feb 1. IA's membership roster features virtually all the big internet names, including **Google**, **Twitter**, **Amazon**, **Facebook**, **Reddit** and **eBay**. "Working on behalf of this innovative industry, I look forward to engaging with policymakers, business leaders, and communities to tell its story as we build trust and transparency," Snowden said in a statement. He's been NCTA president/CEO *Michael Powell's* right-hand man since the former **FCC** chairman was named head of the association in 2011. Prior to joining NCTA, Snowden was vp, external & state affairs at **CTIA-The Wireless Association** and served as chief of the FCC's Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau from 2001-2005. "With his steady hand and commitment to excellence he has helped build and nurture a warm and supportive culture, while ensuring peak performance even in the midst of a pandemic," Powell said. *Michael Beckerman* exited as IA's president and CEO on Feb 29, 2020 to lead policy and government relations at **TikTok**. IA general counsel *Jon Berroya* has served as interim president & CEO since March of last year.

RETRANS BLACKOUT UPDATES

Suddenlink lost **Cox Media Group** stations Friday evening in six markets, including Spokane and Memphis. The spat meant Suddenlink lost all four major broadcasters—**ABC**, **CBS**, **FOX** and **NBC**—in Greenville, MS. "With so many households across the nation struggling, we call on Cox Media Group to stop holding our customers hostage, return the channels to our lineups, and focus on working with us to negotiate a new deal that is fair to our customers," Suddenlink parent **Altice USA** said. CMG, which had a months-long retrans spat with **DISH** earlier this year, said it has over 100 agreements in place, including those with every other major cable and satellite provider in its markets. "Suddenlink customers, who are now deprived of CMG's award-winning coverage, have options to watch our channels by switching to another satellite, cable TV or streaming provider or using an over the air antenna," the broadcaster said. Meanwhile, other retransmission consent spats continue on. **TEGNA** stations have been off **Mediacom** since Dec 31. **GCI** lost **ABC**, **FOX**, and **CW** programming from **Coastal Television** and **Vision Alaska** on Jan 1. The Alaska provider said Friday it's waiting a "serious offer." On Saturday, **Verizon Fios** and **Gray TV** announced a new deal that returned

WWBT-NBC and **WUVP-CW** after a nine-day blackout.

UNIVISION LEADERSHIP TEAM

Univision announced a number of changes to its leadership team, including the appointment of *Pierluigi Gazzolo* to the newly-created role of president, Univision Communications/chief transformation officer. *Luis Silberwasser* was named to the new position of president, Univision television networks group and will head its national TV properties. Former **WarnerMedia** exec *Donna Speciale* is now president, ad sales and marketing while *Friday Abernathy* was upped to evp, content distribution and partnerships. *Adam Shippee* was promoted to the new role of evp, corporate development, strategy and transformation, and *Amy Tenbrink* was upped to evp/associate general counsel, revenue and business development.

ASSOCIATION LEADERSHIP SHIFTS

WICT revealed the members of its 2021 global board Monday, and industry consultant *Sandy Howe* is entering her second year as board chair. **Charter** group vp, state government affairs (South) *Marva Johnson* is entering her final term as immediate past chair. **Comcast** evp, administration *Karen Buchholz* and **Discovery** svp HR, US networks *Alaka Williams* are now members of the executive committee and will serve as the governance committee chair and industry relations committee chair, respectively. New at-large members of the board are **ViacomCBS** svp, corporate social responsibility *Crystal Barnes*; **ESPN** svp, marketing and social media *Laura Gentile*; **Liberty Global** chief diversity, equity and inclusion officer *Grace Ho*; and **Comcast Cable** svp, HR, central division *Tina Simmons*. – **NBCU** svp, HR *Dave Crossen* will serve as **C2HR's** president for 2021. Joining him on the executive committee are **Discovery** evp, employee experience and HR operations *Julie Niemat* as vp; **Mediacom** group vp, HR *Judy Mills* as treasurer; **Comcast Advertising** svp *Sandy Gunn* as secretary; **Cox** vp, compensation *Michele Parks* as the immediate past president; and **ESPN** vp, compensation, HRIS and HR analysis *Kara Anderson* as the appointed executive committee member.

FCBA DIVERSITY PIPELINE

The **Federal Communications Bar Association** announced the first 19 employer participant organizations in its inaugural Diversity Pipeline Program. The participants include 10 law firms as well as **AT&T**, **Charter**, **Comcast NBCUniversal**, **T-Mobile** and **Verizon**. **ACA Connects**, **CTIA**, **NCTA** and **USTelecom** are also a part of the program, which will facilitate internship placements for diverse law students in the technology, media and telecom sector. The program remains open to commitments from interested employers in the DC metro area through January 18; students can apply through January 15.

ATLANTIC TO OFFER PLUME SOLUTION

Atlantic Broadband launched a managed home WiFi solution that promises expanded coverage with enhanced reliability and speed. Called WiFi Your Way, the offering is powered by **Plume's** cloud-based artificial intelligence technology and takes advantage of WiFi-boosting SuperPods. Customers will lease the SuperPods, which are compatible with any Atlantic Broadband gateway or modem. The service will be accessible through the WiFi Your Way app for iOS and Android devices.