

Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

No Question: Streaming Products a Must-Have for Media Companies

Liberty Global CEO *Mike Fries* doesn't think it's possible to continue to be a successful media company today and not have a streaming platform, regardless of where you sit in the industry ecosystem.

"Coming from the distribution angle, I've always felt that this disruption, this massive trend, was going to impact content more than distribution and I think that's right," he said during a **NATPE Miami** panel Thursday. "I think you have to have a streaming strategy. It doesn't matter where you sit... The customers have spoken. It may be painful, and it may cannibalize your business, but you better have one or I don't think you're around much longer."

While it is still committed to its linear networks, **AMC Networks** has gone all in on the streaming world. Its portfolio includes not only its four targeted, niche SVODs (**Shudder**, **Acorn TV**, **Sundance Now** and **Allblk**), but also the recently-launched **AMC+**.

"There are significant advantages to having multiple platforms on which to serve viewers and those advantages have only intensified as consumption habits have shifted with a special focus on streaming and on-demand," AMC Networks pres, original programming/co-pres, **AMC Studios** *Dan McDermott* said. "For us, as a content creator and distributor, it's really about focusing on the consumer and meeting them in every possible way."

Continuing to innovate and grow its streaming strategy is one way AMC Networks hopes to maintain its strength as an independent content producer during a time of increased vertical integration and consolidation across the industry. McDermott said that while there's a place for the Netfixes of the world, becoming one is not his company's end goal.

"The Walmarts and Costcos of the world are great companies, they superserve their communities, but that doesn't mean that the perfectly curated corner market that has only the best quality products on its shelves can't also thrive in that environment," he said. "We're bullish on what we're doing."

Fries was less optimistic about the future of independent programmers like AMC Networks, saying that the disparity between size and scale is only growing larger. "You have to wonder how they can manage through this and come out the other side independent and strong," he said. "Mergers aren't easy, let's be clear, especially in this industry. There's a lot of ego and history that make them tough, but I do think you're going to see continued consolidation... I think it's a difficult road to travel alone if you're not scale-based."

Turning to the state of today's cable business, the pair were asked whether they thought more programmers could decide to live outside of the traditional bundle and survive as standalone, a-la-carte channels and what that would mean for the industry.

"Cable operators have said different things at different

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C-BAND AUCTION HITS \$30MLN
 The FCC's C-band auction surpassed the \$30mln mark before Friday's last bidding round ended. Bidding is scheduled to continue through Round 45, which ends at noon ET on Dec 23. The auction will

an ongoing initiative made in partnership with @livingwallsatl, to help bolster the works, messages, and careers of Black artists based in the network's hometown of Atlanta. Georgia: bit.ly/AS_ATLMP



intend to get groceries at kiosks (37%), buying gift local retailers (23%) at their favorite businesses and friends (24%).

(Source: Comcast Business)

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Dark Day: Powell Describes Capitol Chaos as Unimaginable

The world watched via television networks and broadband connections as the US Capitol was breached by president Trump supporters Wednesday as the House and Senate debated a move by some Republicans to overturn election results.

"This is a sad and deeply disturbing moment for our nation," NCTA pres/CEO *Michael Powell* told CFX. "The chaos and violence that unfolded in the Capitol building is a stark reminder of the importance of our democratic institutions. We remain committed to supporting our members and the public during this time."

news networks and **Twitter**. When the House and Senate went out of session as a group broke into the Capitol, **C-SPAN** continued with live coverage from its studio (*Greta Braner* hosting) mixing in interviews with reporters inside and outside the Capitol, members of Congress, live video

RATINGS

Fox News has now officially won prime and total day for 2020, as projected. It became the first cable news net to end a year with more than 3.5mln viewers in prime. It was a pretty good year for all the news nets though. See our story - Watching **TNT** and **TBS's**

Retrans Agenda: Virtual MVPDs, ATSC 3.0's Role in Retransmission

As we head into 2021, there may not have been a huge retransmission consent blackout to ring in the year (those happened a few weeks early and involved **DISH** and **AT&T**), but there's still plenty for broadcasters and MVPDs to fret about.

Although traditional MVPD subscribers declined in the first half of 2020, retransmission consent revenue for major station groups increased in both the first and second quarters of 2020 by nearly 20% compared to the second quarters of 2019, according to **S&P Global**. The FCC's newly released Communications Market Report, broadcast retrans consent revenue jumped from

times about the future of their respective video products and the importance of the bundle they're selling, but I think it's important to remember that all of the future is delivered over broadband," McDermott said. "I think they'll continue to hold a significant position through their broadband products and the integration of their customer experience with third-party streaming services."

Fries agreed that you can't ever count cable out, and it's not likely that you'll soon see handfuls of brands breaking off from the bundle. "It has reinvented itself many times in the last 50 years and it is all about broadband. Streaming is a tailwind for cable, not a headwind... I think cable's got it all figured out," he said. "Can some guys go out on their own? **Starz** is trying to do it... and they've now got almost half of their sub base is OTT, half their revenue is OTT... it can be done as a single brand, but it's a lot of work."

ROSENWORCEL NAMED ACTING FCC CHAIR

Plenty of changes inside Washington as the *Biden* administration gets to work. As expected, President Biden named Democratic commissioner *Jessica Rosenworcel* as acting chairwoman of the **FCC**. "I thank the President for the opportunity to lead an agency with such a vital mission and talented staff. It is a privilege to serve the American people and work on their behalf to expand the reach of communications opportunity in the digital age," she said in a statement. It's not clear if she will get the permanent gig, or Biden will appoint someone else as chair. Rosenworcel is the second woman to be named acting chair, with *Mignon Clyburn* previously holding the title. If she's nominated and confirmed as chair, she

would be the agency's first non-acting chairwoman. For now, she will preside over a Commission split 2-2, meaning we shouldn't expect much in the way of controversial items. The digital divide/homework gap, accurate broadband mapping and spectrum policy are important to Rosenworcel. As for Title II, she's certainly a fan of classifying ISPs under it—but as we've seen, any such move we'll be met with a court challenge. "Because of the uncertainty about the courts, there is a possibility of legislation, particularly if it includes other provisions attractive to the Democratic base," **New Street Research** analyst *Blair Levin* recently mused.

ADMINISTRATION APPOINTMENTS

Gene Kimmelman has resigned from his role as **Public Knowledge**'s senior adviser to serve as senior counselor for President *Biden*'s Associate Attorney General at the **DOJ**. The longtime consumer advocate and sometimes foe of cable was appointed to Justice in 2009, helping guide the approval of **Comcast-NBCU**'s joint venture and the rejection of **AT&T's T-Mobile** bid. Kimmelman's new role at DOJ is a limited duration position. Over at the **FTC**, Biden named *Rebecca Kelly Slaughter* as acting chair. She has served as a commissioner since May 2018. Before joining the FTC, Slaughter served as chief counsel to Senate Majority Leader *Chuck Schumer* (D-NY). At **NTIA**, long-time staffer *Evelyn Remaley* was named acting administrator. **CTA** described her as a "champion for innovation who works to strike a balance with consumer privacy and cyber efforts." Remaley takes the reins from *Carolyn Roddy*, who was named acting chief in mid-December after the previous acting head moved to DOJ. There has been no

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permanent chief since *David Redl* resigned in May 2019.

CALIFORNIA NET NEUTRALITY

A California Court won't hold a hearing Jan 26 on **DOJ's** challenge of California's net neutrality law. The court has continued the hearing until Feb 23, citing the "overwhelming caseload" and the "complexity of the issues involved." The court ordered parties to meet and confer after Jan 20 (Inauguration Day) to file a status statement by Feb 9 on whether DOJ intends to pursue the case further. Rep *Anna Eshoo* and 13 Democrats in California's congressional delegation have asked Attorney General-designate *Merrick Garland* to withdraw the federal government's lawsuit against the state's net neutrality law as one of DOJ's first actions after inauguration.

FAMILIAR NAMES, NEW VENTURES

Isos Acquisition, led by former **WWE** co-presidents *Michelle Wilson* and *George Barrios*, filed with the SEC to raise up to \$200 million in an IPO. The blank check company intends to focus on acquisitions in the digital media and entertainment sectors. Former **DirectTV** and **NBA** China CEO *Derek Chang* and multicultural marketing firm **New Majority** CEO and ex-**Telemundo** COO *Jacqueline Hernandez* were listed as board members on the completion of the offering. If the IPO is completed, Isos will have 24 months to complete an acquisition or return shareholder capital. – Former **ESPN** president *John Skipper* and on-air personality *Dan Le Batard* have teamed to launch **Meadowlark Media**, which will focus on a variety of content projects with an initial emphasis on sports. Skipper remains exec chairman of **DAZN**.

NEW CONGRESS

With Democrats taking control of the Senate for the first time in six years, get ready for some new committee chairs. Sen *Maria Cantwell* (D-WA) is the incoming chair of **Commerce, Science & Transportation**. Universal access to high quality broadband, including in Tribal country, has been a priority for her. At the beginning of 2020, she introduced bipartisan legislation to ensure that billions from the C-band auction are invested in bridging the digital divide and enabling next-gen public safety services. She's also been critical of the **FCC's** decision to approve **Ligado Network's** deployment of a nationwide mobile broadband network, despite concerns over interference to GPS. The FCC re-affirmed the decision on a 3-2 vote Tuesday, *Ajit Pai's* last full day as chair. In the House, Commerce Republican leader *Cathy McMorris Rodgers* announced that *Bob Latta* (R-OH) would serve as the ranking member of the Communications and Technology subcommittee.

INAUGURATION RATINGS

CNN beat out **Fox News** and **MSNBC** during Wednesday's inauguration of *Joe Biden*, counting just under 10 million total viewers during the oath of office and inaugural address (11:45am-12:15pm ET). **MSNBC** had just over 6.5 million during the half hour while **Fox** drew in 2.7 million. **CNN** also came out ahead during primetime coverage with 6.6 million

total viewers and 2.37m A25-54. More than 4.4m total viewers tuned in to **MSNBC** while **Fox** counted 3.2 million.

DISTRIBUTION

Comcast is adding **Pursuit Media** in select markets, including Boston, Chicago, Houston and Philly. The hunting and fishing network recently became available to all **AT&T U-Verse** HD subs and has a linear universe of 35.7 million households. – **DishLATINO** launched Cine & Entretenimiento Pack, a Spanish-language movies and entertainment package available for \$5 more a month. It includes A3 Cine, A3Series, Cinema Dinamita, Hola TV, Star HD, Starz Encore en Español and Tarima.

MONEY FOR OPENDRIVES

OpenDrives, a NAS storage/software company that works with **HBO**, **Spotify**, **FOX** and others, raised up to \$20 million in Series B funding. The round was led by **IAG Capital Partners** bringing the company's total capital raised to \$30 million. **OpenDrives** also announced a strategic investment in **Ctrl IQ**, set to debut this month, providing the core technology stack to enable scalable, secure and hybrid orchestration of workflows.

PROGRAMMING

CBS said Super Bowl LV (Feb 7) will be available unauthenticated across **CBSsports.com** and **CBS Sports**. It's also available for free via **NFL Digital** and on NFL digital properties across devices, and on mobile via the participating teams' mobile properties, and **Yahoo Sports** and other **Verizon Media** mobile properties. The big game will also be available to stream live via the **CBS All Access** subscription service. – It's time to raise the curtain on "The Muppet Show" tonight. On Feb 18, **Disney+** will begin streaming all episodes of the classic Jim Henson variety series, including Seasons 4 and 5, which have never previously been released on home entertainment. – **TNT** premiered "Snowpiercer" during the pandemic, with the sci fi thriller becoming cable's #1 new drama. Ahead of Season 2's premiere on Jan 25, the network announced it's ordering a third season.

DOING GOOD

Nexstar has committed to donating \$2 million in television air-time and financial support to hunger relief org **Feeding America** over the next three years. **Nexstar's** 198 owned and serviced television stations will air a variety of PSAs on behalf of **Feeding America** throughout the month of September, which has been designated Hunger Awareness Month.

PEOPLE

Former **Fox Cable** PR exec *Brian Peterson* has joined **Newsmax** as svp, communications and marketing, reporting to CEO *Christopher Ruddy*. Prior to joining **Newsmax**, he was evp, communications at autonomous ocean-drone developer **Ocean Aero** and vp at tech PR agency **Bospar**. – Former **Verimatrix** president *Steve Oetegenn* was named as a non-executive director of content discovery and viewer analytics solution company **ThinkAnalytics**.

PROGRAMMER'S PAGE

Get Scared with Disney's 'Secrets of Sulphur Springs'

Disney Channel's first-ever mystery series, "Secrets of Sulphur Springs," has a little of everything—from a haunted hotel to a time travel portal. But the behind-the-scenes mystery is how the show got made. Shot in Louisiana, the first few episodes were in the can before pandemic lockdowns began. It took months before it was deemed safe to resume filming with strict COVID protocols, according to EP *Chuck Pratt*. "The kids all grew up in those six months—physically and emotionally, and I think it really helped the show," he said. "We heroically went in there and shot, and then a hurricane hit halfway through that and blew out power and everything in New Orleans... There wasn't power at our stages for six days, but our line producer saved the day bringing in a huge, industrial generator." The final result is a series that follows 12-year-old Griffin Campbell (*Preston Oliver*), who moves to the fictional town of Sulphur Springs with his family to fix up an old, abandoned hotel. Things quickly get mysterious with Griffin's dad acting shifty. And then there's the discovery of an old fallout shelter with a tunnel that leads to 1990—the same year a girl named Savannah disappeared. EP and creator *Tracey Thomson* said she drew inspiration from films such as "Goonies," "Stand By Me" and "Indiana Jones" as well as the news. "I had read an article about a hotel that had a secret bunker in the basement, and I was fascinated by this idea that there was something beneath the floor that no one knew about," she said. "Pitched it to Disney, and they were along for the ride." In fact, Disney had been looking to do more in the serialized storytelling space—which Thomson and Pratt are perfect for given their years of soap opera experience. "I think we're amazed at how well each turned out, and how we're able to keep a little of an episodic feel," said Pratt. "If [viewers] are returning for the elements they found in the first three episodes, they're going to find it in every episode right to the end, including lots of surprises and jump scares." (Series premiered Jan 15, with new episodes Fridays at 8pm). – *Amy Maclean*

REVIEWS

"Your Honor," 10pm, Sunday, **Showtime**. When a series is as enticing as "Your Honor," you take the bad with the good. The coming episode in this New Orleans-based story about a father, who also is a judge, attempting to cover up a son's accidental manslaughter, awkwardly incorporates COVID-19 into an otherwise stellar plot. While the words pandemic and coronavirus are not used, Judge Michael Desiato (*Bryan Cranston*) uses the sickness to limit his courtroom during a murder trial to family members only. Interested observers, the public and the press are banned, owing to "the virus." It's a strategic move arrived at clumsily. For example, it's odd that almost no other part of the series includes masks or social distancing, for example. Perhaps those touches are to come in later episodes. Of course, that would presumably hamper several love stories from occurring. Still, however creator *Peter Moffat* decides to move the story, he's erected some high stakes. Each episode has the judge getting in deeper. Moreover, there are several characters who could ruin Judge Desiato's cover-up, including his son—the cover-up's main beneficiary—one of several lady friends of the Desiato men and perhaps the New Orleans police. Cranston gives his usual strong performance, but the ensemble also is fine. New Orleans, usually a co-star in stories, takes a secondary role. – *Seth Arenstein*

BASIC CABLE P2+ PRIME RANKINGS* (1/11/21-01/17/21)		
MON-SUN	MC US AA%	MC US AA (000)
ESPN	1.250	3,850
CNN	0.991	3,053
MSNBC	0.890	2,740
FNC	0.783	2,411
HGTV	0.348	1,071
HALL	0.299	921
TLC	0.284	874
HIST	0.269	830
TBSC	0.266	818
DISC	0.248	763
FOOD	0.230	709
INSP	0.218	673
USA	0.217	668
LIFE	0.215	663
ID	0.211	649
TNT	0.208	639
A&E	0.174	536
TVLAND	0.169	519
HMM	0.168	517
BRAVO	0.151	464
NAN	0.149	458
AMC	0.134	412
ADSM	0.133	410
WETV	0.125	386
NWSMX	0.122	377
FX	0.120	371
GSN	0.118	364
NICK	0.117	359
FRFM	0.117	359
COM	0.112	346
NATGEO	0.110	338
MTV	0.106	325
TRAVEL	0.104	322
APL	0.101	312

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

Mark Your Calendars!

Cablefax Award Submission Deadlines:

The FAXIES Awards	Entry Deadline: March 19 Final Deadline: March 26
Cablefax 100 Nominations	April 9
Top Ops Nominations	April 23
The Diversity List Nominations	July 16
Most Powerful Women Nominations	September 10
Program Awards	Entry Deadline: Nov. 19 Final Deadline: Dec. 3

