

Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

After COVID: Where Does Nonfiction Programming Go from Here?

With the pandemic, a heated presidential election and the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement shaping programming choices in 2020, where does content go in 2021 and beyond? We've had the Golden Age of TV. Are we now headed to the Escapism Age of TV?

"I do think after such a tough year, notions of love, family, relationship, also just feeling good and being entertained—people are going to want that. We've been living a pretty harsh reality for so many reasons, and I think as you're getting your vaccine and getting back to your groove of life, that escape that unscripted provides you, people are going to want it," **OWN** president *Tina Perry* said during Monday's RealScreen Summit opening general session.

New streamer **HBO Max** is trying to tackle every kind of genre within nonfiction—docs, dating shows, competition series. "And I think with us, we have to add a twist, whatever that may be. Why is it right for us? Why does it have a little extra edge or feel special," said **Jennifer O'Connell**, evp, original nonfiction & kids for HBO Max. As a whole, she thinks audiences are looking for very authentic content. "If a celebrity wants to do a docsoap, well, they better really show it all and let the walls down, and not show us the glossy version. We want to see more things like *Amy Schumer*, who is not afraid to be seen throwing up before she goes out on stage on camera shot by her own iPhone."

No one thinks serious topics are off limits for producers. "Climate change... I think in the global society will be the most important, pressing topic by a mile when you think about it. That clock is ticking. We're working on a couple of big climate change shows, like a big Arctic polar expedition film that we're just finishing," **Fremantle International** CEO *Jens Richter* told RealScreen attendees.

PBS chief programming exec and gm *Sylvia Bugg* also identified climate change as an important topic for her network along with continuing to cover democracy and journalism. She also sees the arts as an important emphasis in the new year. "We want to see what's emerged in terms of new artists and performances, and how that's shot and displayed," Bugg said.

Viewers will want to continue to see important social issues, **O'Connell** predicted. "Especially the younger viewers. They are craving it, they're talking about it," she said. "Even though sometimes those topics are hard and not everyone will agree with perspectives, I think it's important to put that out there." **Perry** agreed, noting that **OWN** will continue to use its "OWN Spotlight" banner to present content that educates about timely issues, with it airing right after its premium scripted series on Tuesday nights.

Of course, there continues to be obstacles in producing content. "2021 is the new 2020. We're still not out of this pandemic, and obviously it's got a few more surprises to deliver us," **World of Wonder** co-founder & exec producer *Fenton Bailey* said. "2021 is going to be difficult. But in balance, I'm



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much more optimistic than I was in March of last year.”

OWN's Perry had some words of encouragement for RealScreen attendees, often nonfiction program producers, given the influx of streaming services. “When you're a seller, it doesn't matter if you're a small indie or a big player, when you come to a lot of the linear networks that have a streaming platform partner, you have two bites of apple. I'm thinking about your project for our linear net, but I'm also thinking, ‘hey, maybe this is great for discovery+,’” she said. “Also, I have an opportunity to start buying for younger audiences because now I have a streaming platform, which I think is really exciting.”

WWE, PEACOCK FORM TAG TEAM

WWE and **NBCU** have signed a multi-year deal to make **Peacock** the exclusive home of SVOD **WWE Network** in the US. The partnership will expand the reach of the service's content, including live events like *Wrestlemania*, significantly, making them available to all subscribing to Peacock's \$4.99/month tier and to **Comcast** and **Cox** customers that receive Peacock access free of charge. “WWE was one of the first to launch a SVOD service, **WWE Network**, in 2014 to super-serve our most passionate fans with WWE's most premium content as well as an incredible library of in-ring and original programming that has grown over the last seven years,” **WWE** chief brand officer *Stephanie McMahon* said in a statement. “Since launching last year, Peacock has amassed an incredible catalog of iconic movies and TV shows, along with the best of live news and sports, to which **WWE Network** will be a perfect complement.” **WWE's** C-suite has long been exploring ways to breathe new life into its streamer, which first launched back in 2014. Prior to the start of

the COVID-19 pandemic, **WWE** chairman/CEO *Vince McMahon* said the company was exploring new ways of driving revenue, including opportunities to license its content to third parties. **WWE Network** also launched a free tier in June in an effort to attract new subs. Wall Street gave the partnership a wary read, with stock dropping 2.77% by market close. “On balance, we think this is positive news and is a bullish read on the value of **WWE** content. Looking forward, we continue to like the potential for **WWE** to grow earnings meaningfully in 2022 and reiterate our OP rating and \$58 PT,” **Evercore ISI** said in a note. “We had been a bit concerned about 2021 earnings, however, this morning's preliminary guidance removes some of that risk.”

WGN AMERICA TO BECOME NEWSNATION

Nexstar-owned **WGN America** is rebranding as **NewsNation** on March 1. The net is expanding its weeknight newscast from three hours to five hours, launching “*NewsNation Early Edition*” at 6pm ET and “*The Donlon Report*” with Joe Donlon at 7pm. The new newscasts join *Ashleigh Banfield's* hour-long news and talk show announced earlier this month that will debut at 10pm on March 1.

RDOF QUESTIONS CONTINUE

Lawmakers have asked the **FCC** to scrutinize the \$9.2 billion in Rural Digital Opportunity Fund winning bids. **Free Press** has already begun its own analysis, presenting **findings** from its continuing investigation to commissioner *Geoffrey Starks' wireline* and public safety legal adviser earlier this month. **Free Press** has a lengthy list of things its questioning, including **Charter** winning RDOF support for 17 blocks that are not contiguous to its own service territory and surrounded by contiguous service areas for adjacent cable provider **Comcast**. “We suspect that the costs



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to overbuild wireline service to reach these ‘swiss cheese holes’ in coverage were not reflected in the bidding process, though it is possible (but unlikely) that cable operators would overbuild their neighboring MSOs using a different technology type, like fixed wireless service,” Free Press said. “While this type of cable-incumbent overbuilding competition would be welcome in most other contexts (and is unheard of generally), subsidizing it using funds intended to support networks in actual high-cost areas is bad policy.” Free Press has an ongoing series on its website detailing what it claims appears to be RDOF waste, including giving nearly a billion in subsidies to *Elon Musk’s Starlink* to serve what it says are urban airports, parking lots and dog parks. “This now-departed Chairman [Ajit Pai] rushed to get money out of the door so that he could take credit for it, and it appears significant sums of limited universal service funding may be going to wasteful projects and lining the pockets of those who need it least,” the organization said in a recent ex parte describing the meeting.

ROSENWORCEL CEMENTS FCC STAFF

Acting **FCC** chairwoman *Jessica Rosenworcel* has chosen *Travis Litman* as acting chief of staff at the Commission. He held the same role in then-commissioner Rosenworcel’s office and has served in the agency’s **Wireless Competition Bureau**. *Kate Black*, Rosenworcel’s policy advisor since 2017, will be upped to acting chief policy advisor. *Umair Javed*, formerly Rosenworcel’s legal advisor for wireless and international issues, will now act as chief counsel. *D’wana Terry* and *Sanford Williams* will serve as special advisors and direct the Office of Workplace Diversity and the Office of Business Communications Opportunities, respectively. *Trent Harkrader* will also be a special advisor while also acting as deputy bureau chief of the **Wireline Competition Bureau**. *Holly Saurer* has been named legal advisor, media, and *David Strickland* will hold the position of legal advisor, consumer, enforcement and international. *Ramesh Nagarajan* will become legal advisor, wireline and *Ethan Lucarelli* will hold the same role over wireless and public safety matters. *P Michele Ellison* has been named acting general counsel and *Joel Taubenblatt* as acting chief of the **Wireless Telecommunications Bureau**. Ellison, who last served as deputy general counsel, will replace *Tom Johnson*, who is stepping down and has agreed to continue to serve in the WTB. Former bureau chief *Don Stockdale* will be transitioning to the **Office of Economics and Analytics**. Taubenblatt most recently acted as deputy bureau chief at the WTB.

TECH EMMYS

Comcast, Charter, Cox, AT&T and **DISH** are among those receiving Technology & Engineering Emmys for developing and pioneering deployment of synchronized local DMA advertising capabilities for DBS/MVPDs. Also receiving the honor are **Ampersand** and **Invidi**. **CableLabs**, Comcast, Charter and **SCTE** are being awarded for the development of the event signaling and management of the API standard. Comcast, Charter, **CommScope**, **Cisco**, **MediaKind**, **Harmonic** and **RGB** are also being celebrated for pioneering deployment of the API standard. **NBCU**, Comcast, **Google**, **CommScope** and Charter are being honored for their work pioneering

the development and deployment of server-side ad manipulation and/or playout for adaptive bitrate video distribution. **Canoe** is also winning for its work on cross-MVPD dynamic ad insertion for cable network VOD content. **CBS** and **CNN** are also among this year’s winners, being celebrated for on-air touch screen for data visualization.

GCI, QUINTILLION KEEP CONNECTING ALASKA

GCI and **Quintillion** are partnering to deliver improved service to the residents of Nome and Kotzebue, Alaska. The residents of both communities will now have access to 1 Gig internet speeds. The partnership will also bring IPTV services and support GCI’s upgrade to 4G LTE wireless service in those communities.

COMSCORE TRACKING MOVIES CROSS-PLATFORM

Comscore announced a cross-screen measurement solution designed to track daily reporting of movie sales regardless of release windows and platform. Called Comscore Movies Everywhere, the solution will include a reporting system to track films’ performance across the box office, on-demand, OTT rentals and streaming views. **Nielsen** announced its own theatrical movie measurement solution earlier this month.

NBCU DOUBLING DOWN ON TWITTER

NBCU and **Twitter** agreed to a new global partnership that will bring more digital content to the social network. Planned content includes highlights from the Golden Globes in February and interviews on racial justice and equity with Black business owners for Black History Month. Twitter will also provide broader sales support for NBCU’s advertising partners as part of the expanded deal.

VERIZON ADDS 5G FOR PREPAID

Verizon’s Prepaid Unlimited customers will now have access to the provider’s 5G Ultra Wideband and 5G Nationwide networks. The plan starts at \$75/month.

ABB BEEFS UP BUSINESS SERVICES

Atlantic Broadband launched Hosted Voice 2.0, which features a new manager portal web interface providing businesses and their employees seamless access to calls, voicemails and chat. Other features include easy call transfer between mobile app, desk phone and laptop, as well as access to internal chat and company contacts.

INAUGURATION RATINGS

Nearly 33.8 million people tuned in to watch the inauguration of *Joe Biden* on Jan 20, according to **Nielsen’s** television audience estimates. Though coverage types varied, 17 networks aired live coverage of inauguration activity between 10am-4pm ET. Those numbers are up from the 30.64 million that watched *Donald Trump* be sworn in.

PROGRAMMING

“My Music Story: YOSHIKI” will debut Feb 5 on **Disney+**. The special will see the rock star perform reimagined versions of Disney classics as well as his own compositions. – **Food Network** will welcome in spring with “Easter Basket Challenge,” premiering March 1 at 10pm. *Sunny Anderson* will host the series, which will see one baker take home a \$25,000 prize. All five episodes will also be available on **discovery+** come March 1.