

Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

Kid Migration: Comcast Moving Cartoon Network from Expanded Basic

Comcast plans to move **Cartoon Network** out of its expanded basic “Digital Starter” lineup and into its “Digital Preferred” or other “Preferred” packages come April 13. It will join networks like **Nick Jr** and **Disney XD** in those packages, while **Nickelodeon** and **Disney** continue to reside in expanded basic. Comcast has started notifying customers of Cartoon’s change on their monthly bills.

“With programming costs continuing to rise, moving Cartoon Network allows us to avoid passing these rising costs to customers, while still offering the channel for customers who value it,” Comcast said, telling those who don’t want to upgrade that there is a wide variety of cartoons available in their current packages. Cartoon Network did not return requests for comment by our deadline.

Moving children’s cable nets out of expanded basic was once unthinkable, but streaming—not to mention competing uses of time such as YouTube and online gaming—has eroded the ratings of kids’ linear cable networks. A **Bernstein Research** analysis of **Nielsen** data found kids cable down 29% YOY for 4Q20. Kids cable was down 29% in 3Q20 as well, though it improved to a 16% YOY decline in 2Q20 due to pandemic lockdowns.

“The -29% decline is tied with 3Q20, 3Q18 and 4Q18 for the biggest decline ever. The decline got progressively worse during [fourth] quarter: -26% in October, -34% in November and -35% in December,” said a Bernstein research note. “It’s

hard to envision this getting better, as this content moves more to SVOD/AVOD.”

Kids’ programming is pressured not only by new streaming entrants like **Disney+**, but existing players as well. **Netflix** has ramped up its children’s slate over the past few years. That commitment was further crystallized this month with the streamer inking a partnership with 20-year Disney veteran **Nancy Kanter** to develop and produce new original content for kids and families. Kanter’s track record includes development of shows such as “Doc McStuffins” and “High School Musical: The Musical: The Series” as well as leading **Disney Junior** to become the #1 preschool network for eight consecutive years.

Cartoon Network’s parent company **WarnerMedia** also has a slate of children and family programming available on streamer **HBO Max** that includes classic Cartoon Net fare such as “Adventure Time” and “Looney Tunes” as well as theatricals, including the just-released “Earwig and the Witch.” There’s also a large number of AVODs, including Comcast NBCU’s **Peacock**, that offer kid-friendly fare. It’s worth noting that Cartoon Network isn’t only children’s programming, with the channel converting to the more mature **Adult Swim** in the evening.

DOJ DROPS CALIFORNIA NET NEUTRALITY SUIT

The **Department of Justice** has withdrawn its lawsuit seeking to block the State of California from enacting its net neutrality law. However, the state law is still facing a challenge from **ACA Connects**, **NCTA**, **CTIA** and **USTelecom**, which have called it a “classic example of unconstitutional state regulation.” Last



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month, Democrats in California's congressional delegation asked Attorney General-designate *Merrick Garland* to withdraw the federal government's lawsuit against the state's law as one of DOJ's first actions after inauguration. The court continued a hearing slated for January 26 and ordered parties to file a statement on whether DOJ intended to pursue the case further by Feb 9. **FCC** acting chairwoman *Jessica Rosenworcel* applauded the move, saying Washington is "charting a course to once again make net neutrality the law of the land." California passed the law after the FCC's 2017 Restoring Internet Freedom Order. It prohibits ISPs from blocking lawful content and applications and from impairing or degrading lawful internet traffic. The broadband associations argue that the bill is an attempt to preempt federal law.

MORE RDOF QUESTIONS OVER STARLINK

A sample analysis conducted by consulting firm **Cartesian** estimates that **Starlink** would face a capacity shortfall by 2028 and over 56% of Starlink's Rural Digital Opportunity Fund subscribers would not be fully served. **NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association** and **The Fiber Broadband Association** submitted the technical assessment based upon current publicly available information to the **FCC** Monday as they continue to urge the agency to thoroughly vet winners of its \$9.2 billion RDOF auction. *Elon Musk's SpaceX*, with its Starlink satellite broadband tech, was awarded nearly \$900 million in RDOF funds to connect 640,000 locations across the US. "Anticipated peak broadband usage demands were calculated through the year 2030 and using optimistic network conditions the research showed that Starlink may fail to provide enough bandwidth to over half of all subscribers at peak hours," the associations said.

RETRANS ROUND-UP

Somebody blinked. **AT&T** and **Cox Media Group** signed a multi-year retransmission consent deal Sunday, hours before Super Bowl kickoff. The deal returned 26 CMG stations to the air, including five CBS affiliates. **DISH**, on the other, hand lost **WINK-TV**, a local CBS station in southwest Florida owned by **Fort Myers Broadcasting**, Saturday night. The station remained dark Monday with Fort Myers saying it has never been blacked out by any television provider except DISH. The two have been negotiating since November. And for those keeping track, yes, **TEGNA** stations are still dark on **Mediacom**. The stations, which include three CBS affiliates, have been off Mediacom's lineup since Dec 31.

TELECOM ACT 25 YEARS LATER

Rep *Anna Eshoo* (D-CA) and Sen *Ed Markey* (D-MA) marked the 25th anniversary of the 1996 Telecom Act by reintroducing the National Broadband Plan for the Future Act. It would require the **FCC** to assess the nation's progress in deploying broadband infrastructure, as well as develop a refreshed roadmap for closing the digital divide that incorporates the latest technologies and lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic. **ACA Connects** president/CEO *Matt Polka* cheered the legislation. "With so many working, learning, and socializing online for the past year, we have learned that our nation's broadband infrastructure is robust, but that we need to do better. We need to update our universal service programs to connect everyone and maximize use of limited funds," he said in a statement. "We need to remove barriers to expedite deployments. We need to streamline outdated regulations

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: November 19 Final Deadline: December 3



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and think twice about imposing new ones.” FCC acting chairwoman *Jessica Rosenworcel* celebrated the anniversary by hosting a [video](#) with telecom policy leaders such as Markey, who was the principal Democratic author of the 1996 Act, and former **FCC Reed Hundt**.

PK FILES NET NEUTRALITY PETITION

With *Biden* in the White House, **Public Knowledge** wasted no time asking the **FCC** to reconsider its approach to net neutrality. In affirming the FCC’s Restoring Internet Freedom order in 2019, the DC Circuit remanded certain portions—asking the FCC to look at how the regulations might impact public safety, pole attachment rules and the inclusion of broadband in the universal service Lifeline program. Last October, the FCC approved by a 3-2 vote an order that essentially said there are no issues and the Restoring Internet Freedom order promotes public safety, facilitates broadband infrastructure deployment and allows the FCC to continue to provide Lifeline support. With the new administration, consumer interest group Public Knowledge is petitioning the FCC to engage in a formal Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, claiming the agency failed to follow proper procedures in addressing the DC Circuit remand. “While certain major policy decisions will have to wait for a fully-staffed FCC, bureau staff can put our and other petitions out for public comment, so that advocates can begin establishing a record that shows how the FCC’s experiment in discarding its own authority to regulate broadband providers was a mistake that jeopardized consumers,” said PK policy counsel *Kathleen Burke*.

FREE LIKE TUBI WEEK

As part of its first national brand campaign, AVOD **Tubi** launched a week of giveaways branded as “Free Like Tubi Week.” Beginning Monday, Tubi is sponsoring ad-free listening on music streamer Pandora. It’s also unlocking the paywall on *Ad Age* this week. Other components include Tubi teaming with radio stations in top markets to giveaway flowers and restaurant gift cards in the lead up to Valentine’s Day as well as giveaways for Vizio TVs, Roku Express devices and more.

HONORING BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Folks across the industry are joining together and using their resources to celebrate Black History Month. “This Black History Month is possibly the most significant ever, against the backdrop of a global pandemic and an intensified focus on racial justice,” **NAMIC** president and CEO *A. Shaunise Washington* said in a statement. “Now more than ever, communities and workplaces around the nation are embracing the achievements of our predecessors and making a measurable commitment to improve diversity, equity and inclusion.” **BET** will debut two new projects during the month from its media-focused initiative “Content for Change.” Docuseries “**BET** and CBS News Present: Boiling Point” will premiere Feb 21 at 8pm and will be followed by docuseries “Disrupt & Dismantle.” **TBS** is launching social media contest “TBS HBCU Cash Out” that will award \$25,000 to three different winners who creatively share how attending a Historically Black College and University is helping

them achieve their goals. TBS is also honoring Black History Month with a slate of feature films such as “*Fences*” (Feb 12, 9pm) and “*Barbershop 3*” (Feb 28, 11am). **AMC Networks** is honoring the month with the launch of its 8th annual PSA campaign in partnership with the **NAACP** and members of the **Congressional Black Caucus**. The spots began airing last Monday with a simultaneous premiere at 6pm ET across the company’s national networks as well as on streamer **ALLBLK**. The PSAs will continue running throughout February. Exclusive social media content from the participating orgs will also be showcased throughout the month. **HBO Max** launched a “Black History Is Our History” spotlight page in honor of Black History Month. The destination showcases documentaries, biopics and original programming that focus on the Black experience. **Ovation TV** will be honoring Black artists through a curated on-demand programming lineup that will be available for free on the Ovation NOW app. Its advocacy platform Stand for The Arts will also be airing PSAs highlighting local artists who are enriching their communities with their work to showcase the importance of diversity in arts and entertainment. **MSG Networks** is airing special programming all month long to celebrate Black History Month on **MSG** and **MSG+**. The tailored lineup will spotlight influential Black athletes like *Val James*, *Willie O’Ree* and *Nat “Sweetwater” Clifton*. **NBCUniversal’s** content distribution team is offering television and film titles featuring prominent African American talent and stories for distribution partners to include in their Black History Month destinations. These titles include “*Hancock*,” “*The Green Mile*” and “*Race in America: Our Vote Counts*.”

COMCAST DEBUTING HOME FOR BLACK CONTENT

Comcast NBCU is launching Black Experience on Xfinity, a destination filled with Black content that has been curated by industry leaders. Black Experience, which is endorsed by the African American Film Critics Association, will feature content from Xfinity’s network partners at no additional cost. At launch, sample content will be available from channels like **TV One**, **CLEO**, **REVOLT**, **BET**, **OWN** and **The Africa Channel**.

PROGRAMMING

Larry Kudlow’s **Fox Business** show will debut Feb 16 and run each weekday at 4pm ET with an encore at 7pm. It will be followed at 5pm by “*Fox Business Tonight*” with rotating co-hosts for the foreseeable future. The 5pm and 7pm timeslots were previously the home of “*Lou Dobbs Tonight*,” which **Fox New Media** canceled on Friday. The cancellation came a day after a \$2.7 billion defamation suit from voting software firm Smartmatic against Fox News and three of its hosts (including Dobbs). – **Newsmax TV** tapped *Rob Finnerty* as anchor of new morning show “*Wake Up America*,” airing weekdays beginning at 6:30am ET. Prior to joining Newsmax, Rob served as an anchor and reporter on CBS’ affiliate in Tampa.

PEOPLE

Alan Spoon has retired from **Cable One’s** board. He has served as a director since 2015 and spent 18 years as an executive of The Washington Post Company.