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WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

Early Learnings: ATSC 3.0 Put to the Test by Broadcasters

Broadcasters are slowly but surely transitioning their operations to ATSC 3.0, and the **Advanced Television Systems Committee**, the nonprofit responsible for developing the standard, is getting a better idea of what features are emerging as favorites and additional use cases.

“Broadcasters are busy launching ATSC 3.0 and they’re starting with some of the features, and we imagine more and more features that the current standard provides for will come online over time,” ATSC president *Madeleine Noland* said at a **Streaming Media Connect** webinar Thursday. “In the meantime, ATSC is trying to stay ahead of the curve so when broadcasters want a feature, it’s already designed and ready to go.”

Among the features being most heavily used by those utilizing the ATSC 3.0 voluntary standard are temporary flash channels. They allow broadcasters to be flexible with their programming and greater meet the needs of individual viewers.

“The idea is that, as a broadcaster, you can spin up an extra service on-demand or dynamically and spin it down again,” Noland said. For example, if a baseball game is going into extra innings and will interrupt programming that was scheduled to air after the game, a broadcaster could offer viewers a separate, temporary channel that would offer the programming originally scheduled to air. When the baseball game ends, that temporary channel could then be taken down.

“We’ve been exercising flash channels a fair amount in our

system. We stood up a flash channel during a sporting event and we’re actually standing up a channel today for the Mars rover landing because we wanted to make that feed live to our subscribers,” said *Todd Achilles*, CEO of **Evoca**, which is offering the industry’s first ATSC 3.0 over-the-air and internet broadcasting service in Boise, Idaho. “It’s just one of the really interesting tools that’s available in the standard, particularly for live content. This is what makes 3.0 really interesting and really cool.”

News-Press & Gazette Broadcasting is also customizing flash channels to serve as extensions of severe weather alerts. Should a consumer allow a broadcaster to use their geolocation data, the broadcaster could place an indicator on the viewer’s screen alerting them of current events. Users could even customize their alerts to keep track of weather events in zip codes where loved ones are located.

“If we can geolocate you, we can provide emergency information that will get you out of harm’s way and then provide additional information in a flash channel that might get you a map, more information or how to contact your relatives,” News-Press & Gazette Broadcasting vp, technology *Jim Dechant* said. “It’s an emergency information journey.”

Conversations around 5G have posed it as another new technology that will be able to deliver a quality video experience to the home, but the panelists said it faces an uphill battle before it could serve as a strong rival to ATSC 3.0.

“When you look at the numbers on that, it’s still a really

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expensive way to deliver bits to a stationary end user,” Achilles said. “It’s going to be challenged to be a replacement and this is where broadcast TV really shines.”

Outside of the home, ATSC 3.0 could be used in educational settings to do things like broadcast live classes. Achilles said universities are extremely interested in this possibility, especially those that often operate outside of their brick-and-mortar buildings. Additional opportunities could exist in the world of post-secondary education as well.

“Fundamentally, what you want to do is find that inflection point where you’re marrying up the efficiencies of broadcast—the reach, the scale, the cost efficiencies—with the biggest audience,” he said. “We’re going to start testing with a couple of partners and see if we can find a good model that works with 3.0 that’s more than just trying to address the broadband divide, which I think is incomplete in terms of the long-term value of 3.0.”

COMMSCOPE LOOKS AT WHAT’S NEXT

The FCC’s Rural Digital Opportunity Fund auction came up a few times during **CommScope’s** 4Q20 earnings call this week. “In the US, [RDOF] has generated enormous demand across our portfolio of fiber cable, hardened connectivity and fixed wireless products,” president and CEO *Chuck Treadway* said. “We are actively investing in capacity and technologies to meet this demand.” He said there is increased demand for ubiquitous high-speed, low-latency broadband funded in part by RDOF, saying it represents a significant opportunity for the company in the back half of the year as those investments ramp up. Much of Wednesday’s earnings call was devoted to talking about CommScope NEXT,

an initiative the new CEO launched in January that’s focused on driving business growth, with the management acknowledging that CommScope’s stock has underperformed. Elements of CommScope NEXT include exploring vertical markets, investing in international expansion, cost control and a thorough evaluation of the company’s portfolio with the intention of reallocating capital to business’ with a clear winning proposition. That brings us to the company’s Home Networks segment, which includes video CPE. While execs didn’t call it out, the business has had its troubles brought on by the consumer shift to cord-cutting. Despite strong growth in broadband gateway business, Home Networks net sales for the quarter were down YOY 30.7% to \$571 million due to declines in video. Adjusted EBITDA of more than \$40 million declined 44%, again primarily due to declines in video. The Broadband Networks segment, which includes network access technologies and virtualized network architectures, saw sales jump 17.3% from the prior year to \$789.3 million. For the company as a whole, net sales dipped 7% in 4Q to \$2.13 billion.

ORBY NO MORE?

It looks like pay-as-you-go satellite service **Orby TV** is gone. The company [website](#) says it’s no longer taking new customers, something first spotted by *Phillip Swann* of **TV Answerman**. A **Reddit** user reported placing an order on Feb 10 that was then refunded on Feb 16, with the company saying it’s not taking new customers. Orby made its debut in 2019 with former **Starz** chief revenue officer *Michael Thornton* serving as CEO. The business model was to go after those who either didn’t have access to broadband or didn’t want to pay for it, offering subscription video at a \$40 price point.

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Cablefax Daily (ISSN 1069-6644) is published daily by Access Intelligence, LLC | www.cablefax.com | 301.354.2101 | Editorial Director: Amy Maclean, 301.354.1760, amaclean@accessintel.com | Publisher, Cablefax and Synopsis: Robbie Caploe, 917.974.0640, rcaploe@accessintel.com | Managing Editor: Sara Winegardner, 301.354.1701, swinegardner@accessintel.com | Executive Director, Strategic Partnerships: Albert Nassour, 917.545.3129, anassour@accessintel.com | Dir of Marketing: Kate Schaeffer, kschaeffer@accessintel.com | Production Manager: Joann Fato, jfato@accessintel.com | Kerry Smith, Divisional President, Marketing & Media Group, ksmith@accessintel.com | Group Subs/Subscription Questions, Client Services: 301.354.2101, clientservices@accessintel.com | Annual subscription price: \$1,799.00/year | Access Intelligence, LLC, 9211 Corporate Blvd., 4th Floor, Rockville, MD 20850

BIG TECH SUMMONED TO HILL

A day after announcing a hearing on extremism in media, **House Commerce** publicized a hearing with the CEOs of **Facebook, Google** and **Twitter** to discuss misinformation on online platforms. “This hearing will continue the Committee’s work of holding online platforms accountable for the growing rise of misinformation and disinformation. For far too long, big tech has failed to acknowledge the role they’ve played in fomenting and elevating blatantly false information to its online audiences,” said a statement from committee leaders. “Industry self-regulation has failed. We must begin the work of changing incentives driving social media companies to allow and even promote misinformation and disinformation.”

FREER TO HEAD SPAC

Former **Hulu** CEO *Randy Freer* has found his next gig, and it lies in the world of investments. He’ll serve as CEO for **Advancit Acquisition Group**, a special purpose acquisition company that aims to raise \$350 million for business acquisitions, the company said in an **SEC** filing. As of now, the company doesn’t have a specific industry or geography in mind when it comes to its targets. As for the rest of the leadership team, **Advancit Capital** co-founder *Jason Ostheimer* is set to serve as president. Former **AOL** head *Jonathan Miller* will act as board chmn. *Alex Kassan* will be CFO/head, corporate development and *Matt Minoff* is head of business development.

DZS CUTS DEAL WITH NCTC

NCTC reached an agreement with mobile transport firm **DZS** that will provide the co-op’s 700-plus member companies with special pricing on a range of products, including 10Gig solutions and Layer 3 switching solutions that support next-gen 100G MEF CE 2.0 rings carrying both access and wireless traffic. The deal also provides the option for NCTC members who buy DZS equipment expedited access to fiber cable, with current scheduled delivery in just 12 weeks.

CHARTER OFFERS SENIOR SECURED NOTES

Fitch Ratings assigned a “BBB-’/RR1” rating to **Charter**’s proposed benchmark-sized issuance of senior secured notes with varying maturities. Charter intends to use the net proceeds from the sale of the notes for general corporate purposes, including to fund potential buybacks of Class A common stock or to repay debt.

TCA NOTEBOOK

AMC Networks announced the signing of an exclusive multi-year deal with showrunner *Craig Silverstein* (“Nikita”) to develop and produce new series for its entertainment group and other content companies at the virtual **TCA** press tour. The programmer also greenlit “Ragdoll,” a thriller based on the novel by *Daniel Cole* and announced **AMC** premiere dates for “Gangs of London” (April 4, 10pm ET) and “The Secrets She Keeps” (April 19, 10pm ET). The final season of “Baroness von Sketch Show” will air Feb 24 at 12am ET on **IFC** and streamer **AMC+**, and the first season of the show will be available for free on **AMC+** during the month of March. Turning to the company’s targeted SVODs, **Shudder** renewed anthology series “Creepshow” for a third, six-episode season to premiere

later this year. Its sophomore season is premiering on April 1. Shudder also greenlit “The Untitled Black Horror Anthology” which will showcase horror stories from Black directors and screenwriters. **History** also had its day at TCA, announcing it greenlit two-hour doc “Tulsa Burning: The 1921 Race Massacre” (working title). The premiere is slated to coincide with the 100th anniversary of the Tulsa Race Massacre that took place May 31-June 1, 1921. The network has teamed with filmmaker *Stanley Nelson* and **NBA** star *Russell Westbrook* to produce the project. When looking at 2021, History has 20% more hours of programming on tap versus 2020, including 30 new series and specials, according to evp, head of programming *Eli Lehrer*. It’s newest series, 10-ep competition show “Assembly Required” from the “Home Improvement” duo of *Tim Allen* and *Richard Karn*, debuts Tuesday.

PROGRAMMING

Univision’s “Premio Lo Nuestro,” the longest-running music awards show on US Spanish-language television, is back for its 33rd iteration tonight at 7pm. **T-Mobile** returned as the presenting partner for the ninth consecutive year, with Ford F-150, H&R Block, McDonald’s, State Farm and Walmart on board as brand partners. – Has “Baby Shark” jumped the shark? Not in **Nickelodeon**’s opinion. The net will launch an animated preschool series based on the ubiquitous song this spring. To prime the waters, it’s debuting “Baby Shark Shorts” Feb 26 at 12:30pm. – Want to watch hip hop artists throw down on the basketball court? **REVOLT** has you covered with “The Crew League,” a basketball competition series where celebs and their crews go head-to-head against each other. The winning team at the end of 8 eps receives \$100K and will donate 50% of the price to a social good initiative. New episodes will premiere on **REVOLT**’s **YouTube** channel Fridays, beginning this week, with the linear channel airing them Monday at 10pm ET, starting Feb 22.

OBITUARY

Gustave ‘Gus’ Hauser, recognized as the father of **Nickelodeon**, died of dementia on Feb 14 at the age of 91. Hauser was the chairman and CEO of **Warner Cable Communications** from 1973 to 1983, where he led the way for niche channels with the experimental QUBE cable system and is credited with pioneering pay-per-view. After leaving Warner, he founded Hauser Communications, which was eventually sold to Southwestern Bell. Hauser was a founder of **The Paley Center for Media**, and served as a director and vice chair of the board from the Center’s inception until he retired at the close of 2018. He was a noted philanthropist with his surviving wife *Rita*. Harvard Law School’s Hauser Hall bears his name, and **The Cable Center**’s Hauser Oral History Project is named in his honor. Hauser, a longtime Cable Center board member, was inducted into the Cable Hall of Fame in 2003.

PEOPLE

Cox Media Group president/CEO *Dan York* and *RaMonna Alexander*, gm of **American Spirit Media**’s Jackson, MS, Fox affil **WDBD**, were appointed to **NAB**’s TV board of directors. – **WarnerMedia** tapped *Miranda Higham* as its svp/head of communications, international. She joins from **21st Century Fox**, where she served as svp, corporate communications across EMEA.

PROGRAMMER'S PAGE

Game Show Network Relinks 'Chain Reaction'

Game Show Network's decision to bring back "Chain Reaction," a puzzle game linking two seemingly non-similar words, was a bit of a no brainer. The show first debuted in the '80s with various iterations popping up over the years, and those replays have always performed well on Game Show. "It just stands out for consistently good ratings. The format is just solid, good game show," Game Show programming head *Fran Shea* told **CFX**. "We have an elevator bank at work. And when people stand and wait to see what the answer is because they're playing along, that's a good indication that this is a show people stick with." With this latest reboot, the network brought back *Dylan Lane*, who hosted the show's Game Show Network premiere 14 years ago. He was all in, even though it meant taking a break from his day job—as lead engineer at **GE** Renewable Energy. "He left the entertainment hosting gig 10-12 years ago and went back to school. He just has such a fun story," Shea said. As with everything else these days, filming during the pandemic was a bit different. But Game Show worked hard to make sure the viewer doesn't notice that. There obviously isn't a packed house, but there is an audience made up of contestants from other shows being shot that day so the host and contestants have someone to play to. "We were able to have our set designers design in the spacing so that it really wasn't obtrusive. We didn't want to have the 'COVID Shows' and then the 'non-COVID Shows' later," Shea said. So far, Game Show has filmed more than 260 new episodes during the pandemic, while keeping the fun, breezy atmosphere of the genre. "I think what we are to people is an escape from everything—an escape from news, escape from the stresses in their lives. People turn on game shows to just get away from all that, so you don't want to immediately remind them we're in the middle of a pandemic," said Shea. Chain Reaction makes its debut Monday at 5pm ET and will air weekdays. — *Amy Maclean*

REVIEWS

"Allen v. Farrow," premiere, 9pm, Sunday, **HBO**. Viewers who use TV as an escape from the difficult moments of our current reality (for example, winter storms, power outages, the COVID-19 death toll nearing 500K, massive unemployment and economic morass) will want to steer away from this new, four-part HBO doc series. It's a very compelling watch, but not an easy one. The story is well-known. Allegations of impropriety against comic, actor and filmmaker *Woody Allen* have existed for years. Besides his marriage to one of *Mia Farrow's* adopted children, another child, *Dylan Farrow*, now 35, accused Allen of child molestation. She made those allegations in 2013, in *Vanity Fair*. Farrow claims Allen molested her when she was 7. She re-tells her story in detail, with help from Mia Farrow, brother Ronan Farrow and several family friends. Like "Leaving Neverland," the series detailing *Michael Jackson's* alleged sexual molestation of children, it's compelling, but difficult TV. — "Stanley Tucci: Searching for Italy," 9pm, Sunday, **CNN**. Look up the word 'escape' and you might find an entry about this new food-laden series. Tucci is a subdued, but well-informed host. Appropriately, he gives Italy's food, people and scenery center stage. If last week's opener about Naples and the Amalfi Coast is an indicator, we recommend viewing this series with a full stomach. — *Seth Arenstein*

BASIC CABLE		
P2+ PRIME RANKINGS*		
(02/08/21-02/14/21)		
MON-SUN	MC	MC
	US	US AA
	AA%	(000)
MSNBC	0.859	2,644
FNC	0.816	2,514
CNN	0.638	1,966
HGTV	0.356	1,096
HALL	0.329	1,013
HIST	0.315	970
ESPN	0.274	843
TNT	0.270	831
TBSC	0.262	806
DISC	0.257	790
TLC	0.256	789
FOOD	0.252	776
INSP	0.246	758
USA	0.212	654
ID	0.206	635
LIFE	0.192	592
A&E	0.192	590
TVLAND	0.180	555
HMM	0.176	541
ADSM	0.144	444
SYFY	0.143	441
PARA	0.141	435
NATGEO	0.140	432
GSN	0.128	395
BRAVO	0.127	392
WETV	0.122	376
NAN	0.121	373
FRFM	0.114	352
APL	0.110	338
NICK	0.104	319
ESPN2	0.103	316
FX	0.101	311
AMC	0.100	309
COM	0.097	300

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

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