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WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

## Big Dreams: Plume Funding Round to Fuel New Products, Partnerships

**Plume** closed a \$270 million minority investment from private equity firm **Insight Partners** Tuesday, and CEO *Fahri Diner* has big plans for the funds.

“It just gives us tremendous capability beyond what we already had,” Diner said of the Series E funding round, which brought Plume’s total equity funding to \$397 million. “We’re going to be able to push on all of the growth efforts—not just in R&D, not just in sales and marketing, but also partnerships.”

Plume has already gotten a start on that front, announcing a deal with intelligent edge platform **Akamai** last month that included the integration of real time threat intelligence into Plume’s Consumer Experience Management Platform.

While the company has proven itself as a leader in the in-home WiFi management space, expanding beyond the residential space has long been on Plume’s to-do list. Diner said an announcement will be coming soon that will see Plume take its product focus outside of the home to other smart spaces.

“We think there is a very exciting, equally powerful product that’s coming that will be relevant to our existing customer base and others,” he said.

Plume currently counts **Liberty Global, Comcast, Charter** and **NCTC** members among its customers. Beyond the cable operator space, Plume is interested in strengthening its relationships with mobile carriers that may want to expand

their current offerings to include smart home technologies.

“We control everything from the cloud. It’s a massively scalable control plane that has been managing wireless resources and devices in the unlicensed spectrum in WiFi,” Diner said. “As we look at mobile, also 5G coming in as a fixed wireless access technology, there are a lot of synergies that can be gained from a cloud control plane that sees the wireless resources across the licensed and unlicensed spectrum.”

Focusing on the WiFi space alone, he said the introduction and evolution of the WiFi 6 standard, which promises faster speeds across more devices and support for more simultaneous data streams, could allow Plume to do even more when it comes to cloud control of smart networks within the home.

As for the overall smart home space, Diner only sees the number of average devices in the home rising, and that means more complexity when it comes to managing in-home networks as a whole. It could also lead to more concerns when it comes to network security.

“I believe 2021 is going to be a year in which the average consumer will start to care a bit more, hear a lot more about security and device security,” Diner said. “A lot of these WiFi-connected gadgets actually are the source of a lot of risk... One of the approaches Plume has taken is the home programming to you rather than you programming the home. We need to understand, and we can and we do today in the context of security, behaviors and patterns so we can recommend rules for the home to automate itself.”

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TPG-DIRECTV DEAL CLOSE?

TPG's rumored purchase of a minority stake in DirecTV from AT&T could be announced as soon as this week, CNBC reported Tuesday. The deal, which Reuters reported was in the works last month, includes stakes in all of AT&T's video products, including AT&T TV Now and U-verse. There are still no details on what the private equity firm might pay, only that the deal would value the AT&T businesses around \$15 billion. TPG is in the process of selling Astound Broadband (RCN, Grande, Wave and enTouch) for \$8.1 billion to Stonepeak Infrastructure Partners.

O'BRIEN DECRIES ELEVATION OF LIARS IN MEDIA

As a House Commerce subcommittee gets ready to dissect misinformation in the media, one of CNN's former stars will testify that some have put ratings ahead of the news. "Media disguised as journalism has been spreading lies for years, elevating liars, and using the ensuing slugfest to chase ratings, hits, subscriptions and advertisers. Period. Fullstop. In fact, the elevation of liars has accelerated, with radio, broadcast and cable TV in particular, repeating and reenergizing lies that harm all of us," Soledad O'Brien, host of Hearst's syndicated "Matter of Fact" weekly talk show, said in her prepared testimony for Wednesday's hearing. O'Brien, who anchored CNN's "American Morning" from 2003 to 2007, also called out her former CNN colleague Lou Dobbs in her remarks, citing a piece on "Lou Dobbs Tonight" that reported the US had 7,000 new cases of leprosy in the previous three years because of unscreened illegal immigrants. In reality, there were about 7,000 cases of leprosy over the last 30 years in the US. "Much to the horror of his colleagues, this so-called mainstream journalist with a primetime show got away with lying, and even

prospered," she wrote. O'Brien calls for Congress to encourage education that helps the public discern between fact and fiction, opinion and reporting. Her suggestions for the media include not booking "liars," interviewing people from all over the country, hiring diverse staff and supporting local journalism—which she said is the place where major networks and cable news get a lot of their best stories. Fellow witness Emily Bell, director of the Tow Center for Digital Journalism at Columbia, drove home the impact COVID-19 has had on local news in her prepared testimony. The Tow Center has tracked more than 100 closures of local news outlets since the beginning of the pandemic. "It is clear that the existence of strong local news outlets is a possible line of defense against the worst excesses of disinformation, particularly when it is representative of the community it covers and rigorous in its reporting," Bell wrote.

NEXSTAR RISES ON POLITICAL LIFT

Political spending lifted Nexstar revenues to \$1.38 billion for 4Q20, a 25% increase YOY. Total ad revenue rose 37.3% to \$772 million, and political advertising accounted for \$298 million of it. Distribution fee revenue rose 18.4% YOY to \$528 million thanks to a number of renewals that were partially offset by the impact of its retrans dispute with and subsequent blackout on DISH. Nexstar is also preparing for the rebranding of WGN America to News Nation. Coming Monday, the shift will include an expansion of programming that adds additional hours to its primetime slate. A second content expansion is coming later this year. Right now, the focus is on growing awareness of the rebrand and drawing in new viewers to the network. "Approximately 85% of America does not connect the dots between WGN and News Nation, and so our job is

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to make that easier,” Nexstar CEO/chmn *Perry Sook* said on the company’s earnings call, adding that those efforts should also help draw in additional advertising revenue. “Advertisers are paying a significant premium for placement in our editorial and news content to what they did in our syndicated content.”

### FCC READIES MID-BAND 5G AUCTION

The FCC’s acting chair has put forth a draft order for 100 megahertz of mid-band spectrum in the 3.45-3.55 GHz band for flexible-use. It would be made available at an auction that would begin in October. The draft order will be released Wednesday with the FCC to vote on it at the March 17 meeting. *Jessica Rosenworcel* also circulated a proposed notice seeking comment on procedures for the auction. **New Street Research** analysts believe the spectrum will be for traditional, non-shared use, with rules more akin to C-band vs CBRS. They note that the October start date likely means the framework will need to be close to identical to a previous auction, again with C-band most likely. “While a CBRS auction has been done before, doing another one in this short time-frame would be much tougher than an auction selling flexible use, exclusive licenses,” New Street said. Congress approved the Consolidated Appropriations Act last year, which requires the FCC to commence a system of competitive bidding for licenses in the 3.45 GHz band by the end of 2021 to advance 5G.

### AT&T ALLOWS 20 SIMULTANEOUS STREAMS

If simultaneous streaming is a problem for you, **AT&T TV** may be the stream dream. Starting Thursday, the virtual MVPD offering will allow customers to have up 20 simultaneous stream on any device inside their homes. That’s a big bump from the previous limit of 3. AT&T said the change is in response to customer feedback and there’s no additional charges for the feature. Notably, **Fox** networks, including **Fox News** and **Fox Sports**, as well as **Starz**, **NHL Network**, **Showtime** and **PBS** are excluded from the in-home streams, and customers are still limited to three devices streaming out-of-home with device restrictions.

### MUSK TWEETS STARLINK GOALS

**Starlink** will aim to cover most of the Earth by the end of the year before shifting its focus to densifying coverage, **SpaceX** CEO *Elon Musk* said in response to a Twitter user Monday. “Important to note that cellular will always have the advantage in dense urban areas. Satellites are best for low to medium population density areas,” Musk wrote. He also claimed speeds will double to 300Mbps and latency will drop to approx 20 milliseconds later this year.

### MEDIA INSTITUTE SPEAKS UP

Free speech-focused group **The Media Institute** is calling a letter from two **House Commerce** members that questions distributors over their carriage of **Fox News**, **Newsmax** and **One America News** an “affront to the First Amendment.” The letter from *Anna Eshoo* (D-CA) and *Jerry McNerney* (D-CA) was sent to **AT&T**, **Comcast**, **Verizon** and others ahead of a Wednesday subcommittee hearing on misinformation in the media. “The spread of misinformation and disinformation in society is a legitimate concern. But this concern must be addressed in ways that do not run afoul of the First Amendment. It is not the place of legislators, either

by virtue of the First Amendment or the Communications Act, to attempt to control the content of media outlets,” Media Institute president *Richard Kaplar* said in a statement.

### DISTRIBUTION

**Discovery** announced a renewal with **Altice USA**, the first renewed carriage deal since the launch of SVOD **discovery+** in January. The agreement for Suddenlink and **Optimum** covers Discovery’s full portfolio, including **DIY**, which is slated to be rebranded as **Magnolia Network** in January 2022. – **VIZIO** added **Newsmax TV** to its free Smart TV platform SmartCast. The conservative-leaning news net is available to more than 100 million homes, including through **DirecTV** and **Comcast**.

### RATINGS ROUND-UP

**Fox News** was #1 in ad-supported cable last week for prime and total day, the first time it snagged first-place finishes in both dayparts since the week of Dec 14. In total day, Fox News took first with 1.325 million total viewers compared to **MSNBC**’s 1.185 million. Fox News has been first in prime for the past four weeks, with it averaging 2.486 million last week vs **MSNBC**’s 1.967 million. **CNN** took third (1.634mln) followed by **HGTV** (1.108mln) and **History** (1.023mln), according to **Nielsen**. Fox’s “Tucker Carlson Tonight” was the week’s highest-rated cable news program, delivering 3.5 million viewers. – **FS1**’s coverage of USA’s 2-0 victory over Brazil in the SheBelieves Cup Sunday goes down as the net’s most-watched USWNT match (non-Women’s World Cup) since 2018 with 568,000 viewers. It was up 103% from the 2019 SheBelieves Cup average. – **BET** notched 2.7 million total viewers in L+3 for last Tuesday’s season premiere of “Tyler Perry’s *Madea’s Farewell Play*” and “Tyler Perry’s *The Oval*” (the programs were simulcast on BET Her). BET has renewed *The Oval* for a third season, not surprising given its status as the #1 show for Black viewers on all of TV.

### DGA SAYS MORE TO BE DONE ON D&I

Of the 4,300 TV episodes produced in the 2019- 2020 season, 32% were headed by directors of color, according to the latest research from the **Directors Guild of America**. That’s up from 27% last season, but leaves plenty of room for improvement. Among content producers, **Sony** touted the highest percentage of directors of color at 33% while **Paramount** paved the way for female directors, having them lead 47% of episodes.

### PEOPLE

*Susan Fox* was promoted to svp, government relations for **Disney**, reporting to general counsel *Alan Braverman*. Fox, formerly vp of government relations, succeeds *Richard Bates*, who died in December. – Former House Commerce Republican leader *Greg Walden* (OR) is forming strategic advisory firm **Alpine Advisors** in partnership with lobbying firm the **Alpine Group**. Walden will serve as chair of **Alpine Advisors**, which will have a particular focus on clients in the energy, technology, telecommunications and health care sectors. – **Fox News** promoted former chief congressional correspondent and senior political correspondent *Mike Emanuel* to chief Washington correspondent. National reporter *Jacqui Heinrich* will transition to a congressional correspondent role on March 1.