

# Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

## 5 Questions: Frndly TV CEO Wants to Get to 20 Channels

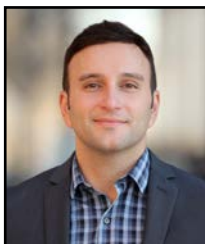
Despite increases in cord cutting, virtual MVPDs haven't taken off as much as some expected—partly because the cost of such services often mirrors that of traditional pay TV offerings. Enter Frndly TV. With plans starting at \$5.99/month, it's one of the most affordable options around. That's because it doesn't carry any of the big media conglomerates. Frndly offers 15 live channels, such as Hallmark Channel, INSP, UP TV and on demand content. It has a deal to carry CuriosityStream, meaning the SVOD's customers can pay a few dollars extra with Frndly and get the SVOD plus content from other players. It's definitely a niche audience, but 16-month-old Frndly says it has surpassed 440,000 subscribers and is profitable. We chatted with Frndly CEO Bassil El-Khatib, a former Sling TV exec, to get the lowdown on the streamer's business model.

### Just who is your target audience?

Middle America. There's really this large neglected audience that isn't the 'in thing' if you will. It really is your average, everyday American. We're not trying to go for the most tech savvy user. The UI is for that audience. It is simplistic in nature. It uses the guide as kind of that central point because people like to scroll. We're not trying to revolutionize how people watch TV.

**There's a huge concern over the lack of broadband in certain areas. Is that an issue for your customer base?**

We're fortunate that we don't seem to have a problem with that from an acquisition standpoint, but we know that as [broadband] penetration further expands that it is going to be an advantage for us. We feel very well positioned as 5G becomes more prominent, and hopefully, you know, you see broadband rates accelerating in more rural areas. It's unfortunate when people tell us that they have one option and in reality they're getting 2Mbps. It does become a challenge, and that's why we offer one of our packages, the \$5.99 package, as an SD package [HD is \$2 more a month]. That was very intentional for that audience, based on their broadband availability.



BASSIL EL-KHATIB

### How are customers finding you?

We're small, and we believe we're punching above our weight. We make sure that everything we do is very cost effective. We go where we know our audience is.

Our audience tends to be a Facebook audience, and not necessarily an Instagram audience. So we go there, and we can target quite effectively. We were doing a lot with targeting on your Roku and Amazons. But one of our biggest actual sources is now becoming word of mouth. One of my favorite things on Facebook is to see how many people in our comments tag people and say, "this is what I was talking about."

### What are some channels you'd like to add?

We're at close to 16 channels—we're about to add **Dove Channel**, which is \$4.99/month as a standalone product. So, the value proposition continues to expand. We'd love a cooking

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channel and a home style channel, similar to **HGTV**, but we know those are going to be difficult to get and maintain our price point. We're really focusing on ones that bring the same value proposition. We do want to get to over 20 channels. We are evaluating quite a few to make sure that it fits our brand promise and is financially viable for us so that we don't have to raise our prices.

**It seems like customer service would be a small part of a streaming business. But that's not the case for Frndly? What are CSRs doing?**

Out of FRNDLY's 25 employees, 12 are customer service. We don't outsource it at all. Having friendly customer service is vital to our brand promise. You get bandwidth questions, streaming questions. There's always the resetting of the router. We have a lot of customers who are 80+, and we sit there and walk them through the whole process. Our customer service team is so amazing and patient. They help build our brand, hopefully, that loyalty, they help reduce churn. It is truly something that we believe is a differentiator for us.

#### MOBITV AUCTION TIME SET

Multiple entities have eyes on **MobiTV**, so let the bidding begin. A filing with the **US Bankruptcy Court of the District of Delaware** revealed that an auction for the company's assets will be held via **Zoom** Tuesday at 10am ET "to determine the highest and best offer for substantially all of the Debtors' assets." Media technology company **Amino Technologies** has emerged as one of those interested in MobiTV, announcing Monday that it had submitted a bid through a wholly-owned subsidiary for the assets. Once the auction has been completed,

a hearing will be held before the court to request approval of all aspects of the sale to the winning bidder on May 21 at 2pm ET. The acquisition of MobiTV must close by May 31.

#### FCC MOVES FORWARD ON ECF IMPLEMENTATION

The **FCC** unanimously adopted final rules Monday to implement the \$7.17 billion Emergency Connectivity Fund program. The program, which was funded through the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, will offer funding to schools and libraries for the purchasing of laptop and tablet computers, WiFi hotspots and broadband connectivity for students, school staff and library patrons in need during the COVID-19 pandemic. "Between this Emergency Connectivity Fund Program and the Emergency Broadband Benefit Program, we are investing more than \$10 billion in American students and households," acting FCC chairwoman *Jessica Rosenworcel* said in a statement. "They will help close the Homework Gap for students nationwide and give so many more households the ability to connect, communicate, and more fully participate in modern life." The Report and Order adopted by the Commission defined eligible equipment and services, service locations, eligible uses and reasonable support amounts for funding provided. The **Universal Service Administrative Company** will serve as the program administrator with FCC oversight. Procedures were also set in place to protect the limited funding from waste, fraud and abuse.

#### NAB FIRES BACK AGAINST FCC COMPLAINT

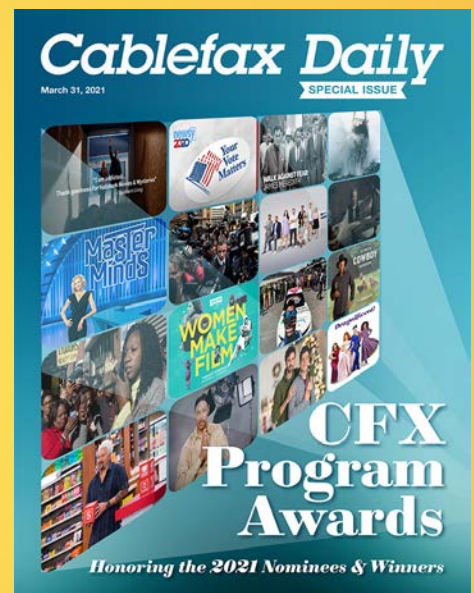
**NAB** is fighting back after the Baltimore City State's Attorney's Office filed an **FCC** complaint requesting an investigation into the content distributed by **Sinclair**-owned WBFF-TV. *Zy Richard-*

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son, the office's communication director, said in the complaint that citizens have been consistently misinformed by the station and that there appeared to be an "intentional crusade" against State's Attorney *Marilyn Mosby*. "It is concerning that some public officials—typically those whose actions have been called into question—would ask the federal government to step in and censor broadcasters in violation of the First Amendment," NAB said in a statement. "The Federal Communications Commission must reject such unconstitutional attacks on free speech. It is a slippery slope, and one that our nation's founders clearly sought to protect." Republican FCC commissioner *Brendan Carr* has already called for the complaint to be dismissed by close of business Monday, calling the complaint part of a recent surge in efforts by Democrat officials to pressure the Commission into censoring news coverage and political speech. "No journalists should have a complaint like this from their city's top prosecutor hanging over their newsroom," Carr said in a statement.

#### DISH OFFERING SENIOR NOTES

**DISH** announced plans to offer \$1.25 billion in senior notes Monday. The net proceeds of the offering are intended to be used for general corporate purposes, including the refinancing of debt. "Between cash on hand and ongoing cash generation, the Company has all the resources it needs to fund the early stages of the network buildout," **New Street Research** said in a note. "The company will need to raise more capital to fully fund the build, but they will likely do that after proving out their technology platform and its commercialization, starting with its deployment in Las Vegas later this year."

#### ATTORNEYS GENERAL AGAINST INSTAGRAM KIDS

A coalition of 44 attorneys general are the latest to try to convince **Facebook** CEO *Mark Zuckerberg* to step back from plans to launch an **Instagram** app for children under the age of 13. In a letter to Zuckerberg, the AGs expressed a number of concerns about the proposal, including research that social media can be harmful to the well-being of children and the increase in cyberbullying instances. "Not only is social media an influential tool that can be detrimental to children who are not of appropriate age, but this plan could place children who are not of appropriate age, but this plan could place children directly in the paths of predators," New York AG *Letitia James* said in the letter. "There are too many concerns to let Facebook move forward with this ill-conceived idea, which is why we are calling on the company to abandon its launch of Instagram Kids."

#### COMMSCOPE, OCC SIGN PATENT DEAL

**CommScope** and fiber manufacturer Optical Cable Corporation entered into a long-term agreement to cross-license portions of their patent portfolios. The deal relates to certain copper data communication connectivity patents of both companies as well as Optical Cable Corporation's in-building wireless patents.

#### PROGRAMMING

*Chris Berman* is sticking around. The sports commentator, who has been with **ESPN** since one month after its 1979 launch, signed a multi-year deal with the network. The contract was

announced Monday, which marked Berman's 66th birthday. Longtime ESPN personality *Kenny Mayne* announced he's leaving the network after 27 years. Mayne said on Twitter he's a salary cap casualty. Berman will continue to host "NFL PrimeTime" on **ESPN+** and will host "NFL PrimeTime" on ESPN after the Super Bowl and NFL Conference Championship games. Berman will contribute commentary, features, interviews and perspective across ESPN shows and platforms, including "SportsCenter." – Former presidential advisor *Steve Cortes* and former White House correspondent *Jenn Pellegrino* have been tapped by **Newsmax** to host its newest primetime show. "Cortes & Pellegrino" will debut Tuesday and air weeknights at 9pm ET. – **VH1**'s "Cartel Crew" will return June 7 at 9pm. True crime series "Infamy: When Fame Turns Deadly" will premiere immediately after at 10pm. – A new season of **HGTV**'s "Property Brothers: Forever Home" will kick off on May 26 at 8pm. The new episodes will be available to stream the same day on **discovery+**. – Documentary "Rise Again: Tulsa and the Red Summer" will premiere on **National Geographic** on June 18 at 9pm. The film dives into the events that led to the two-day Tulsa Massacre in 1921 and the decades-long effort by community members and descendants to find the graves of the victims.

#### CELEBRATING AAPI MONTH

In celebration of Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month, the **MTV Entertainment** portfolio will air "See Us Unite for Change," a first-of-its-kind special hosted by *Ken Jeong* and featuring notable AAPI celebrities and allies. It'll feature music and comedy performances mixed with sort films and speakers with the intent to inspire and educate viewers about the impact that the AAPI community has had in America. The event, produced in partnership with the Ford and MacArthur Foundations, will be simulcast May 21 at 8pm ET across **MTV**, **Comedy Central**, **Paramount Network**, **Smithsonian Channel**, **Pop TV**, **VH1**, **CMT**, **TV Land** and **Logo** as well as **BET** and **Nickelodeon**. It will stream exclusively on Facebook Watch. – **Fuse** is celebrating Asian Pacific History Month throughout May by honoring those who use their voice to drive positive change in their community. The Future Asian Pacific History Class of 2021 will be spotlighted through a short-form video series that will premiere this week on Fuse digital and social platforms as well as its Fuse and FM linear channels.

#### PEOPLE

**Nexstar** named *Jim Rose* vp/general manager of its San Francisco operations, including KRON-TV. He'll come over from **King 5 Media Group** where he currently serves as pres/general manager. – Entertainment company **Team Whistle** hired *Matt Koenig* as vp, programming and monetization, and *Stacey Richman* as vp, communications. Koenig previously held programming roles at **Jukin Media**, **Crown Media Family Networks** and **National Geographic**. Richman most recently served as director, consumer communications at **Group Nine Media** and has spent time at **truTV**, **Discovery** and **Animal Planet**.