

Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

Love Connection?: Pandemic Brings Kinder, Gentler Programming

The pandemic has helped accelerate cable operators' self-installs as well as consumers' use of streaming services, but what has it brought forth in terms of actual programming content? Dating shows, for one.

"I think one of the reasons is you can quarantine people. You can quarantine the cast and crew and get it all shot all at once. It's really expensive, but it's something that's doable. If you see how many of those that have cropped up in the last year, it's kind of amazing," *Amy Introcaso-Davis*, **Discovery's** evp of development & production, factual programming, said during a RealScreen panel last week.

Znak TV president *Natalka Znak*, who has created shows such as "Love Island" and "I'm a Celebrity Get Me Out of Here," believes the current programming trend is big entertainment format, "but no nasty twists." Along those lines, she's constantly hearing requests from buyers for legacy formats and familiarity. "The days where we used to think of the nasty twists to the dating show [are over]. I'm doing a very nice dating show right now where everybody is going to fall in love and be happy, hopefully," she said. "I'm sure at some point that will change, but not for a couple of years, I imagine."

While the C-suite hit investor conferences over the past couple weeks to discuss the financials and strategy, producers and network programming execs gathered virtually at RealScreen Live to talk about the state of unscripted programming and

where does it go next.

Introcaso-Davis sees a great desire by viewers for content showing the world at large and adventures—escapism from the COVID era. Over at **A+E Networks**, crime is still doing quite well. "In dark times, people like crime; in happy times, people like crime. Go figure," said **A+E** evp, head of programming *Elaine Frontain Bryant*. "This is not from an A&E programming point of view, but I tend to think that home and what makes home and people that need to stay or are moving... There's more flexibility [with remote work]. I think there's new innovative stories to tell around the home space."

Mioshi Hill, ex-**Lifetime** exec turned president of **Sirens Media** ("Real Housewives of New Jersey"), sees a place for two extremes. "It is a lot of adventure, epic, sweeping cinematic experiences that it seems like every demo is thirsty for," she said. "But we've also really been able to see our hobbies catered to, and niche programming all of the sudden doesn't feel so niche. You are having a more customized experience. And we're seeing that across—we're seeing it obviously with our linear cable partners as well as our streaming partners. You can have these big, huge, high hook, high concept shows, but you can also have these really intimate four-parters to one specific imperative."

Hill anticipates there will be more individualized, out-of-the-box content. "I've gotten so many bad ideas out of **TikTok**. I'm sure a couple of the good ideas are about to come," she said. "It's going to be kind of geeky and fun to watch what happens."

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With streamers and **Snapchat** and everyone under the sun getting into content, how do cable networks keep their relevance? “It’s harder every day, that’s the truth. I think we’ve proven year after year that when we get behind something we really get behind it,” Frontain Bryant said. “We create events. When you do something with us, especially premium, it can be the jewel in the crown of another thing. I think some of the streamers, it just goes up there and people find it or they don’t.” Linear cable is still the kind of place where creators can get “big, bold orders” with the chance of 200 episodes, she said.

“It’s still a big moneymaker, the cable networks. I think that’s a thing that people are losing sight of,” said Discovery’s Introcaso-Davis. “And there’s growth there. ‘Naked & Afraid’ had its highest rating in two years, so you can push it. For us, it’s sort of a combination of the linear channels and the streamer and how they can push to one another.”

TIVO, NCTC AGREE TO NEW MOBIVISION DEAL

TiVo signed a master services agreement with the **NCTC**. The deal centers around TiVo’s recently-acquired **MobiTV** assets and allows NCTC to continue to receive MobiTV’s IPTV service. “TiVo’s brand reputation, financial stability, and track record in the industry provides NCTC members a strong option. Over the last three months NCTC worked on a priority basis to help ensure that the MobiTV service continued in the hands of a viable, focused provider such as TiVo,” former NCTC president/CEO *Rich Fickle* said in a statement.

COMCAST UPS SPEEDS IN UTAH

Comcast celebrated its own 10G technical milestone Tuesday, announcing it was able to deliver symmetrical 1.25Gbps upload

and download speeds over a live production network. The company has also boosted overall speeds for the state’s residents. Customers subscribing to the company’s Gigabit service will begin to see speeds in excess of 1Gbps. Extreme Pro+ customers will see their download speed increase from 600Mbps to 800Mbps, and those subscribing to Performance Starter+ plans will see their download speed upped from 25Mbps to 50Mbps. The upgrades will come at no additional cost to subscribers.

LIGHTPATH ENTERS BOSTON THANKS TO M&A

Fiber provider **Lightpath** acquired **Cambridge Network Solutions**, a second area connectivity provider and fiber assets from **Hub Fiber** to enter into the Boston area market. Overall, Lightpath acquired over 80 route miles of in-place, high-count fiber network and 12 area data centers. Its network in the region will be connected to its New York Metro network, expanding on its existing 18,000 route miles of fiber. The CNS and the second acquisition have both closed while the Hub Fiber asset buy is expected to close within 30 days.

NARB: BOOST SHOULD STOP UNLIMITED DATA CLAIMS

The **National Advertising Review Board** recommended that **Boost Mobile** discontinue the claim “unlimited data” for its Go Unlimited data plans. The plan includes 35GB of 4G LTE data, followed by unlimited 2G data. The NARB panel concluded that throttling to 2G makes standard data operations virtually unusable, and no additional disclosure would justify the use of “unlimited data” to describe Boost Mobile’s plan. The advertising at issue was challenged by **AT&T Services** before the **National Advertising Division**. Boost Mobile then appealed its recommendation that the “unlimited data” claim be discontinued.



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STREAMERS FOR LESS THAN A BUCK

Amazon Prime Day is almost here, but the sales are already appearing for Prime members. A slew of SVODs are offering two-month subscriptions through Prime Video Channels for 99 cents a month, including **Paramount+**, **Discovery+**, **Showtime**, **Starz**, **Epix**, **PBS Masterpiece**, **MovieSphere**, **BET+**, **Acorn TV**, **AMC+**, **Motortrend**, **Urban Movie Channel** and **Up Faith & Family**. That's a pretty steep discount for some of these. Paramount+ typically goes for \$9.99/month, while Showtime is \$10.99/month and Starz is \$8.99/month.

HOWARD U TO SUPPORT ATSC 3.0 DEPLOYMENT

Howard University's WHUT (PBS) will serve as the host for ATSC 3.0 broadcasts for five local affiliates of national broadcast stations later this summer. The four other stations benefitting from the effort are **WJLA (ABC)**, **WUSA (CBS)**, **WTTG (FOX)** and **WRC (NBC)**. It's all part of a collaborative effort to launch NextGen TV service in Washington, DC. **America's Public Television Stations** and the **NAB** are also working with Howard University and other collaborators to develop new NextGen TV services through a learning lab. The project is being managed by the **Pearl TV** broadcaster business group, which counts **Sinclair**, **TEGNA** and **Nexstar** among its members.

CISCO UNVEILS RURAL BROADBAND CENTER

Cisco opened a Rural Broadband Innovation Center in North Carolina to showcase its commitment to connecting more people to high-speed broadband through technology solutions. The center, which was a \$20 million company investment, showcases ways to simplify the architecture and operations for network infrastructure and provides demonstrations of technologies that could make reliable connections more widely accessible. Service providers can also get a closer look at tools for automating and securing their network to reduce investment costs.

BROADBAND ADOPTION, BUNDLING POPULARITY

As of 1Q21, the percentage of US broadband households with standalone broadband service increased by 8% from 1Q18 to 41%, according to **Parks Associates'** latest Home Services Dashboard. Those consumers pay \$64/month on average for standalone broadband service, up 64% from \$39/month in 2011. More are starting to bundle their internet service or examine plans with faster speeds, with 19% of US broadband households currently bundling mobile and home internet services for an average of \$128/month and 24% of US broadband households reporting plans to upgrade their home broadband in the next six months.

HIGH-INTEREST BASIC NETWORKS

Discovery Channel is the top-ranked basic cable network among non-subscribers to cable TV and cord-cutters with 37% giving it a 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale. That's according to the latest findings from **Beta Research**. It was closely followed by **History** (31%) and **National Geographic** (31%). Discovery Channel (48%) was also the top-ranked basic cable network among non-subscribers who are heavy streaming viewers, beating out **Animal Planet** (45%) and **National Geographic** (45%). Movies are popular among Adults 18+, seeing that the top-ranked digital

basic/mid-sized networks are **FX Movie Channel** (47%), closely followed by **Hallmark Movies & Mysteries** (46%), which beat out **Cooking Channel** (45%) by only 1%. **Sony Movie Channel** (44%) rose above **Crime & Investigation Network** (43%) by the skin of its teeth as top-ranked emerging network. **Smithsonian Channel** followed with 40%. Overall, the study found that 42% of cable subscribers were extremely or very interested in dropping cable TV and watching only the TV programming available on their tablets and computers.

COMMEMORATING JUNETEENTH

Revolt and **Vice Media** are partnering to launch a special episode of "Revolt Black News" honoring Juneteenth. The exclusive episode, "Juneteenth Town Hall & Celebration," will premiere on Revolt's linear channel, **Vice TV** and both outlets' YouTube channels on Saturday at noon ET. Show segments will focus on flipping Georgia in the 2020 presidential election, generational wealth and overcoming suppressive voting rules.

CARRIAGE

Outdoor Sportsman Group's SVOD **MyOutdoorTV (MOTV)** was added to **Cox's** Contour and Contour Stream player platforms. – **Fuse Media** announced content licensing deals with AVOD **rlaxx TV** and South Africa-based telecommunications company **MTN**. As part of the agreement, rlaxx TV will carry FAST music brand **Fuse Backstage** as well as select VOD content. MTN will license 100 hours of Fuse Media content as part of its AVOD service launch.

ON THE (IN-PERSON) CIRCUIT

WICT is launching its first in-person event since the pandemic began, hosting its Signature Touchstones Luncheon in NYC on Oct 20 at the NY Marriott Marquis. It's accepting nominations through 5pm ET on July 16 for its Woman of the Year and Woman to Watch awards, which will be presented at the event. Luncheon sponsors include **Comcast NBCU**, **Charter**, **Accenture**, **AMC Networks** and **WarnerMedia**. WICT said it will continue to follow the WHO, CDC and local authorities' health and safety guidance for the event.

SCRIPPS LAUNCHES FLORIDA NETWORK

Scripps launched a statewide news network via OTT for viewers in every local TV market in Florida. The **Florida 24 Network** will air real-time reporting from Scripps' local TV stations in the Miami, Tampa, West Palm Beach, Tallahassee and Fort Myers markets. The network will be led by news director *Nicole Wolfe* at **WSFL** in Miami and senior director of digital *Matt Borek* at **WFTS** in Tampa. The Florida 24 Network will be available in linear and via its OTT app on streaming platforms **Roku**, **Amazon Fire TV**, **Apple TV** and **Android TV** as well as Scripps Florida stations' streaming apps.

PEOPLE

Former **Sling TV** president *Warren Schlichting* joined work-from-home infrastructure provider **Poly** as evp and COO, effective immediately. He will report directly to CEO *Dave Shull*, former **TIVO** CEO. – **BBC Studios-Americas** promoted *Chris Cole* to evp, strategic partnerships and appointed *Kelly Miller* svp, scripted strategy. Cole has been with **BBC** for more than 20 years. Miller most recently served at **Endeavor Content** as svp, international strategy.

Think about that for a minute...

What's In A Name?

Commentary by Steve Effros

Characterizing what we do has never been easy. That's because we do more than one thing. The "cable" industry, the one I have represented and written about for over 45 years now (!) hasn't really changed that much in terms of how we think about what we do; we deliver. But it sure has changed in the perception of our customers, regulators, legislators and the consumer press. That's creating more and more difficulties as we accommodate to new service and customer expectations. It makes it very hard to describe our businesses these days, and being able to do that is increasingly important.

Why? Because there are now multiple ways for folks to "watch television," or view programming, or "stream" or whatever other term happens to be used to convey the idea that consumers are engaged with information. It's not even easy to describe that information any more. Is it a program, a stream, data? Is it live or downloaded or cached? Are they watching on a television screen or a computer screen, tablet screen, phone screen or soon "virtual" screen?

The point is, all of that is happening now, and the folks we used to simply call "cable operators" are now program aggregators, providers of video bundles, but also broadband providers, internet and telephone service providers, and I'm sure there will be new terms coming soon. The confusion leads to all sorts of mischief. Some of it self-created and some intentionally muddying the waters for the benefit of marketers or competing technologies.

When I first ran "CATA," the acronym stood for the "Community Antenna Television Association." That's what we did; built and provided "community antennas" for local broadcast reception. We then branched out and brought in "distant" signals. Then the Ted Turners of the world showed up and we got non-broadcast "programming" like CNN and ESPN. So packaging, bundling and selling became the hallmark of "cable." CATA changed its name to the Cable Telecommunications Association in the mid-1990's. The NCTA moved away from "cable television" a while later, also using "telecommunications," and subsequently characterized itself as the "Internet and Television" Association. We all saw

that not only were we being hamstrung by the limitations of our names, but new competitors were arriving who were offering substitutable services, but were not being dealt with in the same way. Part of that has simply to do with the perception of a difference based on our names.

Why, for instance, should a "cable television" operator be subject to "must carry" rules requiring the carriage of local broadcast signals, but an "over the top" video provider of the same programming, like YouTubeTV, is not? Why are emergency alerts, the EAS system, inextricably linked with local broadcast television (and required to be passed along by cable operators) but the same is not true for some "streaming" programming on broadband?

The short answer to all this is that there are no good reasons any more. The regulations and the thinking about our business is a relic of our history and our perceived roles based on the names we were called. I still think "telecommunications" covers the waterfront, but I'm not going to lobby for it. I don't care. It's not the name, it's the types of service we offer that should be the focus. And to be sure, we offer very different types of services these days, from bundled "television" programming to broadband delivery to telephone.

Each one of those services is likely to continue to be regulated. But it's the specific service, not the "name" of the business that should dictate what's required, and whatever those requirements are, they should apply to all those, from "cable" to "satellite" to "fiber" or telephone "5G" providing that service. That's the only way to get folks to stop simply name calling.



Steve

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(Steve Effros was President of CATA for 23 years and is now an advisor and consultant to the cable industry. His views do not necessarily reflect the views of Cablefax.)

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