We Are Family: Looking Back on the SCTE/CableLabs Combination

By Sara Winegardner

It's been nine months since SCTE became a subsidiary of CableLabs, its long-term partner. SCTE President/CEO Mark Dzuban had been discussing some sort of combination with CableLabs for the past decade, but it was the COVID-19 pandemic that really emphasized the need for a stronger bond between the two organizations.

"We have now two years with Expo being virtual and that showed that there was some strain on our revenue stream. We are not-for-profit. We do reinvest everything back into the industry, and partnering with CableLabs gives us a little bit more stability," SCTE VP, Sales and Operations Matt

Aden said during an appearance at the ACA Connects virtual breakfast panel Wednesday during Cable-Tec Expo.

Beyond that, the deal was the perfect match in terms of what the cable technology community needed to bring ideas to life that much faster. CableLabs focuses on the ideation of what's next, the brainstorming of what breakthroughs and innovations can make a meaningful difference in how humanity lives, works, learns and plays. And though it may now be part of the CableLabs family, SCTE is still exactly what it has been since its creation, the standards body that guides the entire industry on how to put

those dreams to work. That includes making those technologies accessible for small- and mid-size operators.

"We are still very focused on the entire industry. CableLabs has their member base, but we work very closely with the smaller cable operators," Aden said. "One of my first jobs in my career was as the account manager for the NCTC back in 1984. I've always had a place in my heart for the mid-tier cable operators."

Though it is structured differently than it was in the past, SCTE does still retain its own board of directors. That board includes representatives from three ACA Connects

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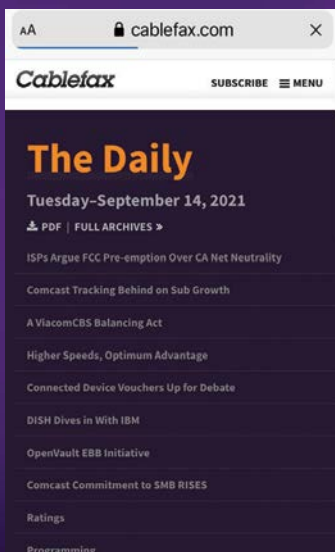
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member companies: Vyve Broadband President/COO Andy Parrott; Cable One SVP, Technology Services Ken Johnson; and GCI VP, Engineering and Architecture Victor Esposito.

SCTE's board works together with CableLabs board and the latter's engineering committee to coordinate activities and help establish the priorities of how they can best serve the industry right now. A massive area of focus moving forward for SCTE is its training programs and ensuring the cable workforce is educated on the newest technologies and that it is continuing to grow.

"In talking with some of the CEOs and CTOs in the cable industry, we have a very high percentage of people that are approaching retirement age, and we also have a high percentage of people that are not trained for the next generation technologies that we're looking at," Aden said.

Training areas that will receive additional attention in the coming months are wireless mobility, proactive network maintenance and DOCSIS 4.0. Beyond that, work has also begun on a "Cable is Cool" campaign that would hopefully attract more talent to the industry.

"How do we work with whether it's the universities, whether it's the tech schools, how do we drive more people into the cable industry?" he said. "It's all about working with the industry to bring in the talent and then to strengthen that talent through the training within our organization."

Those efforts will also include greater outreach to companies that have long had employees that have been members of SCTE. As those employees age up and out of the industry, SCTE wants to ensure the next generation of engineers is aware of what tools and capabilities it has to offer them.

"We would love to work closer with ACA and ACA member companies to get the word out," Aden said. "How do we take the great things we're doing and communicate that, particularly to the ACA member base?" ◼

Keeping Safe in an Age of Ransomware and Nation State Attacks

By Amy Maclean

With an unprecedented rise in ransomware attacks, more employees in remote work situations and the migration to the cloud, network security is front and center for operators these days.

"In the past, security was an afterthought. It was mainly an IT function that really was only talked about in IT circles. It was addressed after an incident or typically bolted on at the end," Cassandra Bowes, Comcast Program Manager for Security IAM, said during an SCTE Cable-Tec Expo session Wednesday.

Then governments, corporations and consumers were hacked and security became a top priority for everyone.

Compromised credential attacks account for about 61% of data breaches, Bowes said. This is where phishing and brute force password attacks come in to play as well as "credential stuffing," which is when details are leaked from a data breach at one place, like a retail chain, and hackers use this info to test against other accounts. Ransomware attacks have been garnering more headlines these days. "Some of the interesting 2021 statistics about ransomware is that an attack is actually happening about every 11 seconds with an estimate cost of about $20 million globally," said Bowes, who noted that common ransomware methods include emails containing malware, unpatched vulnerabilities and exposed ports and services.

One of the most effective tools for combating compromised credential attacks is

something you're probably familiar with—multi-factor authentication. "This one has been around for a while. But since it's more than 99% effective at stopping password related attacks, it's still very prevalent," said Bowes.

There's no silver bullet for ransomware, however. Bowes advises a multifaceted approach, including keeping patching up-to-date, disabling unused services, backing up systems regularly and using advanced security tools for logging, monitoring and alerting.

Of course, security these days isn't just about falling for a counterfeit Amazon email. Studies have shown nation state cybersecurity incidents have increased 100% between 2017 and 2020. Most of those are "advanced persistent threats," which means an organization is working 24/7 to obtain their goals, said Nancy Davoust, Comcast VPII of Security Architecture, Identity and Access. "Groups from North Korea, Russia, China and Iran have been in operation for more than 10 years. And not every single advanced persistent threat group is associated with a specific country or government," she said. "There are crime organizations that cross boundaries or are not associated with a specific group."

These attackers are looking to get into your systems and stay under the radar while doing reconnaissance to meet their objectives, which can include political statements, political influence, collecting military and police data, disinformation campaigns and, of course, financial gain. Earlier this year, the US, UK and EU accused China of carrying out a cyberattack targeting Microsoft Exchange servers that affected at least 30,000 organizations around the world. "That doesn't mean that they were all exploited. Let's be careful about that. But it means that they were somehow compromised, so there could have been access," said Davoust.

So, how do you prevent your organization from being compromised? Davoust called for consistency and urgency across all systems—including testing environments and cloud accounts. Patches are critical, but additional filters, firewalls, application limits, etc can also play an important role. Then there's lifecycle management. "We're really great at giving access, right? But lifecycle management includes making sure that as people change jobs, for example, that privileges are removed. As they leave the company, their privileges are removed," she said.

With Juniper Research predicting that more that 46 billion IoT devices will be attached to networks around the world by year-end, there's 46 billion potential devices that need extra care. "Those IoT devices are very small as far as processing power capability to recognize and defend against malware," Davoust said. She recommended working with IoT manufacturers as well as securing home networks and making sure open ports are shut down.

And no one should be using default passwords any more. There's movement toward a passwordless environment, but it doesn't mean passwords have completely gone away. There's a push for 16-character passphrases vs passwords, Davoust said. "It's so important that we get rid of those attack surfaces that are easy for those bots to break through," she said. ■

Cox's Adams Named SCTE Member of the Year

By Amy Maclean

Mark Adams, Cox Communications' Director of HFC/OSP Engineering & Architectures and president of SCTE's Chattahoochee chapter, was named SCTE's Member of the Year Wednesday.

Adams was instrumental in helping the Chattahoochee chapter move through virtual activity over the past year, even creating the chapter's first virtual vendor day. He also took the lead on SCTE's bylaws subcommittee. He's been a part of the cable industry for 41 years and an active SCTE member for 36.

Adams was recognized at an SCTE Awards event Wednesday that included several other accolades, including the induction of IMMCO CEO Keith Hayes into the SCTE Hall of Fame. Having held executive roles at Charter and Adelphia, he has nearly four decades of engineering and operations leadership experience. Most recently, Hayes was

principal of Broadband Advisors Group. He was the founding president and multi-term board member for the SCTE Foundation.

"My parents saw the impact SCTE had on me, watching as a summer job installing decoders… turned into a rewarding 40-plus year career," Hayes said. "We lost my mother this past Friday, along with my dad back in 2008. In honor of their memory, and because of the significant contributions of the SCTE to my career, my wife Pam and I are privileged to donate $10,000 to the SCTE Foundation in memory of George and Peggy Hayes."

The awards ceremony also included the 2021 Women in Technology Award winner Patricia Martin, SVP of the Integration Management Office at Cox Communications. The award is bestowed annually by WICT, SCTE and Cablefax to a woman who

has shown both outstanding professional achievement and offered significant contributions to the advancement of the cable telecommunications industry. "I have had a fantastic experience in this industry as a female in technology," she said. "It has been fast paced, it has continued to evolve and grow in importance, and I wouldn't change a single thing."

Also celebrated Wednesday were Comcast Cable Distinguished Engineer Dr. Yasser Syed (Excellence in Standards Award Recipient), Cox Senior Leading Advisor Bronson Beisel (Excellence in Learning & Development Award Recipient), Casa Systems' Regional VP Patricio Latini (International Engineering Professional Award Recipient) and Rama Assaf-Smith, Senior Director, Engineering Ops for Comcast Cable (Wilt J. Hildenbrand Jr. Award Recipient). ■

Cox's Mark Adams, IMMCO's Keith Hayes, & Cox's Patricia Martin

Take a Seat: Women Leaders Describe Moment They Found Their Voices

By Amy Maclean

There's plenty of focus these days on hiring and recruiting a more diverse workforce, so it was especially interesting to hear a group of female industry leaders share the moment that they felt like they really had a seat at the table.

For Charter EVP, CTO Stephanie Mitchko-Beale that milestone came when her former employer Cablevision was working on creating the first cloud DVR. It was a new concept with a lot of uncertainty. "I remember there were a lot of groups wanting to own it, but not really wanting to own it, not really wanting to take the reins. At some point, I decided that I was going to own that," she recalled during a SCTE Cable-Tec Expo discussion Wednesday on women empowerment. "I think I might have had a seat before that, but that's what really metabolized it for me. It was like, 'OK, now I have a voice. I'm making these big decisions.'"

Panel moderator and Cable Center CEO Jana Henthorn found her voice while literally sitting at an MSO's big boardroom table with a Polycom conferencing system sitting in the middle. "I was the only woman in the room and there was a question asked, and I answered it. But they couldn't hear me," she recalled. "I stood up and I leaned across the table—it probably looked horrible, but I had to get closer to the Polycom. I kind of yelled the answer because it was my right to answer that. I was just mad they couldn't hear me. That's when I think I got my voice."

Urvi Shah, Senior Director of Marketing for CommScope, has been through quite a bit of industry M&A over the years. Each time she received a spot in a new organizational structure, she felt validated. "But I don't think that I felt like I had a seat at the table until this last acquisition by CommScope, primarily because I felt that my then-boss got her seat at the table. She was reporting directly to the CEO. Then a few months later, when she was building her team, she selected me," Shah said. "I have developed such a respect for her… to have earned a seat at the table amongst other really great marketing leaders demonstrated to me that I impressed her as much as she impressed me."

Jennifer Andreoli-Fang joined Amazon in August as Senior Manager of North America Telecom Cloud Architecture, but before that she spent more than 13 years at CableLabs, most recently as a Distinguished Technologist. "So many of us came to cable by accident. When I joined CableLabs, I got hired in to lead the DOCSIS 3.0 action committee and later on DOCSIS 3.1… I felt so inadequate because not only did I not know cable technology, but I'd also really never led a team before," she said. "It was not until I started resolving complex technology conflicts that I realized people actually listened to me. That's when I felt that I had a seat at the table—owning that technology agenda, being listened to, being respected for who I am and being able to drive significant and measurable results."

So, what would they advise young women just starting their careers in technology? "You can advance through organizations by yourself, but you will grow exponentially with a support system," said Andreoli-Fang. That support system includes a mentor to cheer for you, but also a sponsor that will advocate for you. "And look at men as your support system. Many of them will welcome women as peers," she added.

Mitchko-Beale said women starting out should find their style and own it. "When you're young and get into the organization, you see all these powerful women. Some are assertive. Some are very, very visible. I was very introverted, so I had to find my own style and really be comfortable with that," she said. "I had to really work hard at becoming visible. I was very happy to stay in the background for a long time. It turned around for me when I made the decision that I needed to be more visible and I knew I needed to push myself."

Shah recommends you be the CEO of yourself. "You really need to be true to yourself and keep your priorities straight," she said. "Follow what's important to you, and you will wind up where you need to be." ■

(Clockwise from top right) CommScope's Urvi Shah, Amazon's Jennifer Andreoli-Fang, Charter's Stephanie Mitchko-Beale and Cable Center CEO Jana Henthorn

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