

# Cablefax Daily

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WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

## Sales Pitch: NCTC Pushing for More Group Purchases

**NCTC** wants to become a power purchaser. That was one of the undercurrents during Day 1 of the NCTC and **ACA Connects' Independent Show**.

"All of our members are purchasing something through the co-op. Most of it's programming, a lot of it is fiber and other connectivity products. But what we really need for the co-op to be fully sustainable going forward is a bigger commitment to purchasing as a group," NCTC President & CEO Lou Borrelli said during the virtual show's kickoff Tuesday.

To that end, NCTC is readying a strategic plan that will be presented this month. "It will demonstrate our ability to deliver a shortlist of essential products at the best prices available with good availability," said Borrelli, who joined the co-op in June. "Just like we did with programming... we can do the same thing with purchasing if we're in this together. It doesn't matter whether you're a small system or a large system, if we have the stuff you need, and we can deliver it at the lowest possible cost, you should be buying through us."

For years, the cooperative has negotiated programming contracts for its members—and with legislation passed in late 2019, it got the OK to negotiate some retransmission consent deals with broadcasters. "How do we take that to the next level with group purchasing?" asked NCTC chairman and **Buckeye Broadband** Chief Administrative Officer Brad Mefferd. "What if we could really get commitments for systems

representing millions of customers or thousands of miles or hundreds of thousands of devices? Could we get good deals that really benefit all of us much better than what we could get on our own?"

As more federal dollars go to support broadband deployment, access to fiber will be important, with Mefferd giving NCTC kudos for its fiber fulfillment program. The co-op touts that the program gets fiber to participants 15x faster than the current marketplace. It features **Power & Tel**, **Walker and Associates** and **CATV Services** as supply partners.

**NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association** was pushing the same "group purchase" mentality at its conference in Nashville last month, encouraging members to work with national supplier **Communications Supply Service Association** to avoid any potential slowdowns tied to materials.

With broadband, there is the opportunity to layer products on that service. One example is NCTC's deal with **Plume** for managed WiFi. The organization is clearly looking for more partners. "We all have fiber out there to these homes and these massive pipes. What's going to ride on that pipe and how can we facilitate that?" Mefferd said.

NCTC's role as chief negotiator on many programming contracts isn't going away any time soon though as members still say video is an important part of their product mix. "Video is just part of the service platform," **ALLO Communications** President Brad Moline said during one of Tuesday's Indy Show sessions. "I don't like to bifurcate the revenue stream and

## WICT Signature Touchstones Luncheon



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say, 'I make money off of broadband; I don't make money off of video. Well, without both, I wouldn't make any money from that customer. I look at it as it's just an arrow in the quiver, and let's do a great job with it."

Stacey Slaughter, CEO of training provider **NCTI**, said her operator customers are distinguishing less and less between video and data. "They just want the connection into the home. That's what they are focusing their employees on," she said.

ALLO didn't start offering video until 2012. It has an IPTV video solution and is kicking the tires on some OTT options. Other operators are looking at upgrading their video options.

**Murray Electric System** has HFC plant and is contemplating moving to fiber. "That will change the way we deliver video. How that will be received by our customers, our older customers especially, will be a challenge for us to overcome," said Murray Broadband Superintendent *Chad Lawson*.

#### WHAT ABOUT THAT INFRASTRUCTURE BILL?

With the House still to vote on a bipartisan infrastructure package that includes \$65 billion aimed at broadband, the biggest concern among small- to mid-size operators is that the money might be used in ways that hurt them. "One of my biggest fears is people who don't know what they're doing getting access to the money and largely breaking what I think is a nice process of incumbents upgrading, competitors providing fiber or upgrading," said **ALLO Communications** President *Brad Moline* during an **Independent Show** session Tuesday. "I think we have to be very nimble and careful because sometimes free money is a little too expensive." **ACA Connects** President & CEO *Matt Polka* stressed that his organization will be carefully following

that money and ensuring states follow all rules in divvying it up. "We're focused on that infrastructure piece and making sure that with whatever happens, your investments are protected, to be safe from other government-funded competitors," he said. With the bill targeting \$42 billion+ for broadband deployment at the state level, it's a "game changer" for an operator like **Boycom Cablevision**. "It's the difference between building it and not building it, and that's the difference between being served and underserved," said ACAC chairman and Boycom president *Patricia Boyers*.

#### THE TENETS OF MALE ALLYSHIP

Efforts to make workplaces more equitable for women have existed for quite some time, but everyone has to buy into the idea if long-term cultural shifts are going to occur. Women have left the workforce in droves since the start of the pandemic, and while it is incredibly easy to blame the COVID-19 for a number of issues, **Cox Communications** President *Pat Esser* said this is a situation where everyone should avoid using it as a scapegoat. "I think this is the time for self inspection about your policies and practices," he said during a panel on male allyship at **WICT**'s Leadership Conference Tuesday. "The conversation we're having today about models of creating an environment where women can see other women at senior levels in our companies will help us attract and retain the best and brightest, and women will see that the career path for them is here in this industry." For **Altice USA** CEO *Dexter Goei*, a huge focus has been placed on ensuring that the company's policies provide a foundation that promises to support people from all backgrounds. That includes paid parental leave policies, surrogacy assistance, fertility assistance programs

**Before he flipped houses on HGTV, this singer had a hit with "Ice, Ice Baby"?**

One winner will be selected each week for a Starbucks gift card

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Last week's answer: "The Simpsons" originally was a short on "The Tracey Ullman Show."

Kudos to last week's winner: Patrick McOwen, Effectv

and gender reassignment surgery benefits. "These are things that had not been spoken about a lot as we were growing up in our careers but are front and center in terms of equalizing not only gender, but diversity in recognizing all walks of our social statuses. And recognizing that people have different needs out there and require different safety measures to help them grow in their careers," he said. **Chris Winfrey**, CFO at **Charter Communications**, said that he doesn't believe that this is a problem women should have to solve. He did encourage them, however, not to settle for anything less than the same constructive criticism that a leader would give to a male co-worker. "I was taught chivalry at a very young age, and while I am a big fan of that in my personal life, I think what that can lead to is people thinking that you need to have soft gloves in the workplace," he said. "I don't think that's good and I don't think it's right, and I don't think it provides the same coaching opportunities for somebody to understand where things aren't going in the right direction." Companies that fall behind in their efforts to support women risk losing key members of their workforce, and there are others waiting to offer those powerhouses the opportunities they deserve. **Urban One** CEO **Alfred Liggins III** has been looking for those women since he started at his organization, and opening new doors for them has only been beneficial for both parties. "In order to grow it, we needed to bring in talent from outside with expertise that we didn't have, and I quickly found that women who didn't have the clearest path up the ladder were ideal sources for us to go to. If we created a unique opportunity for them to expand their horizons in our organization above where they were at at other organizations, they would take that chance," he said. "Those women became the basis of our brain trust, and it's been a very successful formula."

#### BIDDING BEGINS ON 3.45GHZ

The **FCC** kicked off Auction 110 Tuesday, which will make available 100MHz of midband spectrum in the 3.45GHz band for commercial use. **T-Mobile**, **AT&T** and **Verizon** are all participating as is **DISH**, and they're all hoping to add more 5G-capable spectrum to their portfolios. Early demand in the auction seems high. While 100MHz are up for grabs, bidders have requested 185MHz at the close of the first round of bidding. "With demand at 185MHz (on a national average basis), it looks like four national carriers are each bidding for 40MHz, with some additional demand from regional players and financial bidders," **New Street Research** said in a note. "Though it appears all four carriers are bidding, we don't know whether Verizon will drop out (which is our base case). If they don't, prices may land at \$35BN, rather than the \$25BN we and consensus expect."

#### COX FINALIZES SEGRA BUY

**Cox Communications** completed its acquisition of the commercial services segment of fiber infrastructure provider **Segra**. The buy reflects the operator's ongoing focus on infrastructure investments and business services. Segra's existing management team will continue to lead the company's enterprise and carrier organization. It will retain the Segra brand and operate as a stand-alone business within the Cox portfolio.

#### HBO MAX REVEALS EUROPEAN LAUNCH DETAILS

**HBO Max** is coming to Europe. The service will launch in 27 territories overall, and will arrive first in Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Finland, Spain and Andorra on October 26. Portugal, Turkey, Iceland, Greece, the Netherlands, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Central and Eastern Europe will receive the service in 2022. New customers will be able to receive 12 months of the service for the price of eight, and additional offers will be announced closer to its launch dates in those territories.

#### MOVIEPASS, FTC SETTLE

The **FTC** voted 4-1 to give the final OK to a settlement with the operators of theater subscription service **MoviePass** over allegations they took steps to block subscribers from using the service as advertised, while also failing to secure customers' personal data. Under the settlement, first announced in June, MoviePass, its parent company **Helios** and **Matheson Analytics**, and principals *Mitchell Lowe* and *Theodore Farnsworth* will be barred from misrepresenting their business and data security practices. Any businesses controlled by MoviePass, Helios, or Lowe must implement comprehensive security programs. The order does not include monetary relief for consumers. MoviePass's operators also are required to notify the FTC of any future data breaches. If they violate the order, they could face monetary penalties of up to \$43,792 per violation, per day.

#### FORD TO OFFER HEALTH-FOCUSED CES KEYNOTE

*Robert Ford*, President/CEO of medical device and healthcare company **Abbott Laboratories**, will deliver a keynote at **CES** 2022. This marks the first time a healthcare-focused company will be at the center of a CES keynote. Ford will be joined by the company's scientists and partners to discuss the latest and greatest in health technology. This is the third of CES's announced keynotes, with previous speaker reveals including **GM's Mary Barra** and **T-Mobile's Mike Sievert**. The conference is scheduled to take place in-person and virtually from Jan 5-8.

#### PBS ARRIVING ON DIRECTV STREAM

**DirectTV** and **PBS** struck a deal that will see local PBS member stations become available on **DirectTV Stream** later this year. Participating stations will begin arriving on the service over the next few months, with the full launch planned for 2022. Recently, **PBS Kids** rejoined the DirecTV and DirecTV Stream lineups.

#### DOING GOOD

**Telemundo Enterprises** struck a two-year partnership with **Susan G. Komen** in support of breast cancer awareness. As part of Breast Cancer Awareness Month, Telemundo will host a day of programming Thursday dedicated to highlighting the impact of the disease in the U.S. Hispanic community and share breast health resources. Experts from Susan G. Komen will also participate in a Telemundo-hosted social media chat on October 21 to encourage Hispanic women to adopt healthy habits and raise awareness of early signs. Additionally, Telemundo will match all donations made to Susan G. Komen through its linear and social platforms, up to \$10,000, on both Oct 7 and Oct 21.