

Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

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

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 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.

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"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?"

BROADBAND BRINGING IN THE MONEY

The broadband industry's organic revenue growth continues to rise, with **Moody's** expecting it to average at about 2.3% over the next 12-18 months. That can be largely attributed to the ongoing and consistent demand for greater network capacity and faster speeds at higher price tiers as well as higher device counts and enhanced services. The firm also expects capital spending to rise to over 18% of revenue by year-end 2022, up more than 200 basis points from 2020. That's primarily due to the need for investments in both fiber and spectrum. "The industry needs the capacity of these critical assets to both deploy faster wireless broadband (5G) and expand the geographic reach and penetration of wireline broadband networks," **Moody's** said in a report released Wednesday. Two primary risks exist to **Moody's** outlook: competition and 5G delays.

"There are emergent broadband satellite operators angling to compete for share, offering services with broadband speeds and national and global coverage," the report said. "Extended delays in monetizing 5G and other advanced services could also slow the top-line and or profits."

MEDIACOM, WEST DES MOINES ASK FOR MORE TIME

Mediacom and the City of West Des Moines have asked an Iowa court to extend the stay in the operator's lawsuit over the city's construction of a \$50 million conduit network. The court originally granted a stay until Oct. 11 as the two were working toward a settlement. Now, they're asking to pause the case until Nov. 29, saying they've arrived at a "mutually acceptable set of high-level terms for resolving key business issues." They told the court in a joint filing Tuesday that they need more time to translate that into detailed terms, including a license agreement and obtaining third-party consents for certain matters. Despite the progress, they warned that there's no guarantee the parties will reach agreement. Meanwhile, comments were due at the **FCC** last week on a related petition **Mediacom** filed, asking the agency to review the city's rights-of-way management practices to determine if it's in violation of Section 253. **Mediacom** claims the whole situation unfairly benefits **Google Fiber**. The City told the FCC last week **Mediacom's** petition "is nothing more than an entrenched incumbent's attempt to stifle competition from new entrants and the availability of new high-speed broadband services in West Des Moines, in direct conflict with the fundamental purpose of Section 253 and, indeed, of the entire Telecommunications Act of 1996."



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RETRANS SPATS STILL GOING

It's been seven days since **DISH** lost **Tegna** stations nationwide in a retransmission dispute blackout. But that's nothing! **Mediacom** still doesn't have 16 Tegna-owned stations that went dark Dec. 31, 2020. There's no sign of a deal on the horizon in either spat. For those updating their retrans scorecards, Mediacom also has been without **Paxton's** NBC affiliate in the Paducah, Kentucky, area since June 1. **DirectTV's** blackout with **Heritage Broadcasting** also continues. It lost WWTW, a CBS affiliate out of Cadillac, Michigan, in early September.

VIACOMCBS DIVES INTO NFTS

ViacomCBS is partnering with non-fungible token company **RECUR** to create a fan-centric platform that includes the programmer's IP and franchises. In the environment to be created by the two companies, fans will be able to buy, collect and trade NFTs as digital products and collectibles from ViacomCBS' brand portfolio, including **BET**, **Comedy Central**, **Nickelodeon** and **Showtime**. The environment will launch this spring.

ESPN SCORES MONDAY NIGHT WILD CARD

The **Walt Disney Company** and the **NFL** have agreed on a five-year rights deal that will see **ESPN** present the Monday night Wild Card game from the 2021 season through the 2025 season. The inaugural Monday night NFL Wild Card game will be played on Jan. 17 at 8:15pm ET. In celebration of the new initiative, the game will be made available in a number of different ways across ESPN platforms. **ABC** and ESPN will air the traditional telecast while **ESPN2** and **ESPN+** will offer "Monday Night Football with Peyton and Eli." **ESPN Deportes** will air a Spanish-language telecast. Other MegaCast production offerings will be announced at a later date.

VIDEOAMP PARTNERS ON AUDIENCE INSIGHTS

Software and data platform **VideoAmp** partnered with **HyphaMetrics** to offer cross-screen audience measurement solutions for its clients. HyphaMetrics' omni-channel cross-device panel measurement will be integrated with VideoAmp's commingled TV viewership data to drive enhanced audience insights. Specific measurement applications of the partnership include personification of VideoAmp household viewing to create persons ratings.

DISH ENABLES AUTONOMOUS TESTING

DISH tapped **Spirent Communications** to autonomously test its 5G network core and validate its performance. The tools provided by Spirent will allow the provider to verify 5G functionality, measure system performance and accelerate overall deployment efforts.

CARRIAGE

discovery+ is now available on **LG** Smart TVs in the U.S. Smart TV owners can now access the service on the TV's webOS platform through the discovery+ app or by saying "discovery+" directly into their LG Magic Remote.

PROGRAMMING

The Scripps National Spelling Bee has a new television home. The 2022 national competition will kick off on June 2 and make

its primetime debut on **ION** and **Bounce**. **Scripps Networks** will announce full broadcast schedules and streaming plans in early 2022. The competition has aired on **ESPN** platforms since 1994. – **Fox Nation** is getting into the holiday spirit. The streamer is dropping two exclusive Christmas movies onto its platform on Thanksgiving (Nov 25): "Christmas in the Wilds" and "Romance in the Wilds." Additional holiday titles, including 2014 film "An Evergreen Christmas," will also be made available on the same day. Fox Nation is also introducing a special holiday promotion, offering 35% off of all one-year subscriptions with the promo code "Celebration." The service is currently priced at \$5.99/month or \$64.99/year.

PEOPLE

Former **El Rey Network** GM *Daniel Tibbets* was tapped as the first CEO of **Smooosh**, a supplier of **YouTube** comedy videos. *Deadline* first reported the news. El Rey shut down at the end of 2020. Tibbets led the venture from filmmaker *Robert Rodriguez* for four years, stepping down in February 2020. – **NBCUniversal** elevated *Monica Williams* and *Matt Farina* to SVP, Digital Products & Operations and SVP, Digital Product Partnerships & Programming, respectively. Both will continue to report to NBCU Content Distribution Chair *Matt Bond*. – **Charter** promoted *Jim Dove* to SVP, Business Intelligence. He joined the company in 2009 and helped integrate operational data from nearly 100 **Time Warner Cable**, **Bright House Networks** and legacy Charter systems to produce today's unified Business Intelligence platform.

SCTE HONORS

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. 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 was recognized that 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. 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**. The award is bestowed annually by **WICT**, **SCTE** and **Cablefax**. "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."

Think about that for a minute...

The Crumbling Cookie

Commentary by Steve Effros

A short piece in Axios recently reminded me that the day is coming when “cookies,” those embedded identifiers that allow web sites to tag users, are soon going to essentially be a thing of the past. Two of the biggest browsers, Apple’s Safari and Mozilla’s Firefox, stopped third party cookies some time ago. But the big kahuna, Google’s Chrome, decided to do things more slowly and its third party cookie phase-out is now scheduled to be completed in the next several months.

Why is this important? Well, it has a lot of implications, and few of them have been fully explored. The use of cookies was and still is the primary way that web sites get the opportunity to interact with folks on the web. If you search for a toilet seat, for instance, you have gotten used to the fact that the next thing you can be sure of is that ads for toilet seats will inevitably start showing up in any ad-supported site you subsequently visit! This goes on for an annoying length of time, well beyond the point where you actually bought what you were looking for. Sound familiar?

That’s the power, and the weakness of third party cookies. A third party “tag” allowed marketers from sites you did not visit to know what had been “searched” by browser users, but it doesn’t let them know that a transaction had subsequently been completed, so there really is no reason to continue sending out ineffectual ads. That’s a lose-lose proposition.

But the advantage of cookies is that they represent important data for web sites that you actually sign on to. For instance if you go to a specific web site and start shopping, an embedded cookie can tell that website whether you have left things in your cart, or whether you were interested in a specific product. That’s useful to both of you. The problem arises from third party cookies that are simply tracking your searches, and with whom you have no direct relationship. The advertising marketer doesn’t get direct information about you, your name, or credit card number for instance. But they do get generalized information. Even that raises lots of privacy concerns, and the decision was made some time ago that third party cookies had to go.

What hasn’t really been resolved, however, is what takes the place of third party cookies. Apple in particular wants to simply get rid of them completely. But Google, which, after all, is the largest purveyor of online advertising information, doesn’t. It just claims that it wants to make the successor safer; avoiding encouraging things like potential “fingerprinting” of each individual computer, for instance. Their substitute would be far less invasive of your privacy.

The Google solution being tried is designed to place searches in large, algorithmically created groups and then sell ad information to marketers based on those cohorts. Thousands of folks would be combined in a group displaying similarities, say, of those interested in birds. Then marketers looking for birdwatchers could send ads to that large, anonymous group. Google would not create the groups, the algorithms would. Google is calling this FloC which stands for Federated Learning of Cohorts.. But we won’t go there.

Some think that even FloC is too invasive. But the alternative has to concern us as well. Think of the next political season. Now, with cookies, political ads are, to some degree, targeted. But if those tags are eliminated totally and there is no successor such as what Google is suggesting, anonymously putting searchers in similar groupings, then the only alternative for the advertisers is to simply spam or spy on everyone! Do we really want that?



Privacy on the web is a very complex issue but as the cookie crumbles, the result may be even messier.

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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