

# Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

## Strike Out: Evoca Says Sinclair Wants Retrans Trade for Bally Sports AZ

**Evoca**, the ATSC 3.0-powered MVPD service serving Boise, Colorado Springs and Phoenix, has been cutting RSN deals, including with **Altitude Sports**, which has been off **Comcast** and **DISH** for two years. One deal it hasn't managed to get done is with **Sinclair**-owned **Bally Sports Arizona**, home to **MLB's** Diamondbacks, **NBA's** Phoenix Suns and the **NHL's** Arizona Coyotes.

Evoca launched in Phoenix on Oct. 1, but so far, no Bally Sports. That's not for lack of trying. "We've been trying for a year to give Bally Arizona our money... and we can't get a deal done," Evoca CEO **Todd Achilles** told **CFX**. The hold-up according to Achilles is retransmission consent. "They want us to pay retrans in Idaho and Boise for their free over-the-air signal so we can pay them for the sports network in Phoenix, and just refuse to do a deal with us unless there's a commitment there. Even when we signal, 'alright, this just makes no sense, but we want to carry your RSN to Phoenix,' we don't make any progress."

Sinclair declined to comment for this story. Evoca is a different type of pay TV provider. Since it uses ATSC 3.0 technology to deliver video signals, it doesn't fit under the **FCC** definition of a cable operator. The FCC adopted an item in 2014 that sought to update what qualifies as an MVPD, but it never went anywhere. Thus, internet-backed MVPDs aren't subject to the FCC's program access rules or requirements for retrans/must-

carry. For Evoca, it doesn't really need retransmission because the 1.0 tuner in its set-tops lets users get local broadcast stations over-the-air. Broadcasters have been pushing the FCC to take up the MVPD definition item again as more consumers move to virtual MVPDs and streaming, thus hurting broadcasters' retrans revenue stream.

An interesting sidenote on the Evoca situation is that Sinclair is intimately familiar with ATSC 3.0. Also known as Next Gen TV, the standard combines over-the-air broadcast signals with home internet. Sinclair has been a leader in the broadcast standard, launching 3.0 commercial broadcasts and test sites along with joining 3.0 consortium **Pearl TV**. While most broadcasters are using the voluntary 3.0 standard to deliver advanced services, such as 4K resolution, temporary flash channels and addressable advertising, Evoca's primary use is as the basis for a pay TV service. In addition to carrying free OTA channels, Evoca has carriage deals with **Hallmark Channel**, **NFL Network**, **Root Sports**, **INSP**, **GAC Living** and others.

Achilles believes sports is the killer app for Evoca's 3.0 platform. "More and more, we sort of think of ourselves as this next-gen RSN. What you can do with 3.0 is break out of that old dichotomy between teams and leagues making this decision of 'we have to go free over-the-air or we're going to go subscription behind a paywall,' he said. "The cool thing with 3.0 and how we're doing it is you can do both simultaneously. We've got the free [broadcast] channels next to channels that



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are behind a paywall, and it lets us do some kind of cool stuff.”

That “stuff” has included pop up 4K channels, including for the National Finals Rodeo (a pretty big event in Evoca’s footprint). It has the ability to throw up a pop-up channel for local universities, giving it a space in broadcast, linear TV and streaming. “You get the benefits of broadcast, the reach, the quality, and folks aren’t having to dig through six levels down on a website to try and find that specific game to stream it,” Achilles said.

Evoca’s big pitch is that it can deliver these RSNs to homes that aren’t part of the pay TV ecosystem. Achilles said **SNL Kagan** data suggests that’s 33% of Phoenix’s market. Boise’s OTA footprint is even larger, at 46%. “The RSN loves it because we get them access to a whole bunch of homes that they never had before,” said Achilles. “Now you’ve got the majority of homes that are outside the fold—there’s no way to reach them other than us. From an RSN standpoint, this is a great distribution model. Get them into more homes, more subscribers, more revenue and it’s all upside.”

Evoca sweetened the pot for sign-ups following the Altitude deal, launching a promotion so that customers could sign up for the service for \$9.50/month for life vs its regular \$49/month retail price. It’s hard to share how successful Evoca is because it’s not sharing any subscriber numbers. But Achilles said what it’s seen in the first week of Altitude’s availability in Colorado Springs “dwarfed” what’s been happening in Phoenix and Boise. There does seem to be some social media traction, with a [tweet](#) about the launch garnering nearly 1,500 likes.

Evoca isn’t the only one trying to get an RSN deal done.

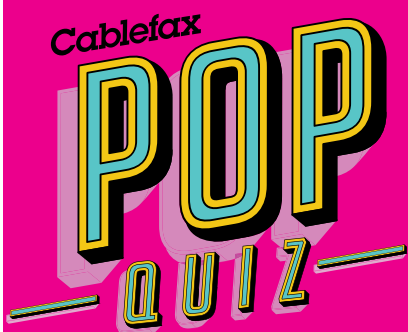
Sinclair and **DISH** are still negotiating over retrans consent for the broadcast stations, with speculation that the deal could include the Bally Sports RSNs. **Comcast** dropped **MSG Networks** on Oct. 1, and so far, no sign of a renewal. Cox’s upcoming renewal expirations include NESN, home of the Boston Red Sox and Bruins.

#### COMCAST SUFFERS NATIONWIDE OUTAGE

Tuesday didn’t kick off well for **Comcast**. The provider suffered a widespread outage that left tens of thousands across the country without broadband service. Areas that were particularly affected include Chicago, Philadelphia and San Francisco. “Please do not call 911 to ask why your Internet is out. Call your internet service provider,” the Marin County Sheriff, who serves the northwestern part of the San Francisco Bay Area, said on **Twitter**. Some customers were still reporting issues on Xfinity Support’s Twitter page as of our publication time. The account reported at noon that Comcast was working on restoring service to all customers. “Earlier, some customers experienced intermittent service disruptions as a result of a network issue. We have addressed the issue and service is now restoring for impacted customers, as we continue to investigate the root cause. We apologize to those who were affected,” Xfinity Support said in the tweet. There’s still no official word on what caused the outage.

#### XPERI SAVORING MOBITV WINS

**Xperi** celebrated a solid 3Q21 in its first full quarter since acquiring streaming video solution **Mobitv**. It expects to complete the full integration of the service into its portfolio in the fourth quarter, but it has already begun seeing the benefits of the buy.



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

Last week’s answer: Regina King got her TV start on NBC 1980s sitcom “227.”

What was the name of the fictional historically Black college featured in “A Different World”?

[CLICK HERE TO ANSWER](#)

Revenue in its pay-TV business was \$54.2 million, and while that is a 2% decline YOY, the company is seeing more of its customers adopt IPTV solutions. **Cable One**, **Service Electric Cablevision**, **Blue Ridge** and **Armstrong** are among those Xperi helped launch and begin scaling their IPTV solutions. *Jon Kirchner*, the company's CEO, said some of that was previously booked business that was delayed due to COVID and challenges in getting truck rolls to residential customers. "We've been working with our partner customers to help them, including on self-install operations that are helping operators more easily, cost-effectively get IPTV into various households," he said. "As we look ahead, we're going to see more acceleration on both counts, in the managed service offering, which we feel great about with the acquisition of **MobiTV**, and how that can address an important part of the marketplace, but also within the typical legacy traditional IPTV business that we've had for some time."

#### PARAMOUNT STRIKES GOLD WITH YELLOWSTONE

How much do people like "Yellowstone?" So much so that **Paramount** was the third most-watched cable network last week, behind only **ESPN** and **Fox News**. **Paramount** debuted back-to-back eps of Season 4 Sunday, with ep 1 drawing more than 8 million viewers. **Paramount's** average of 1.549 million viewers for the week put it ahead of **Hallmark Channel** (1.406 million) and **MSNBC** (1.136mln). **ESPN** topped the primetime ratings, with Saturday's coverage of LSU-Alabama ranking as the net's most-viewed game since 2019. With an average of 5 million viewers, the SEC match-up was the most-viewed college football game on cable this year and the audience was up 18% from the same matchup in 2020. Even with the Tigers and Tide in its corner, **ESPN** just barely edged out **Fox News** for first place in prime, 2.88 million vs 2.80 million. **Fox News** handily took the crown in total day with 1.646 million total viewers vs **ESPN's** 922,000. Notably, **Fox News** had 74 of the top 100 cable telecasts with total viewers last week.

#### CROWN SHAKES UP PROGRAMMING STRUCTURE

**Crown Media Family Networks** upped *Jennifer Kramer* and *Heather Overton* to the roles of VP, Development. The pair will specialize in the company's original holiday movies. Additionally, *Kate Redinger* has been promoted to Director, Development with a focus on series and specials. The appointments are part of a larger strategic restructuring of **Crown Media's** programming department. Physical production will be led by SVP, Programming & Development *Randy Pope*. *Darren Melameth*, SVP, Programming & Content Strategy, now oversees scheduling. The third division is devoted to content development, but is broken down into four unique programming areas: holiday movies, non-holiday movies, series and specials and Mahogany.

#### FCC ON NEXT PHASE OF TELEHEALTH PROGRAM

The **FCC** approved an additional 75 applications as part of Round 2 of its COVID-19 Telehealth Program. The funding commitments come in at \$42,163,705, bringing the total approved dollars to approximately \$166.13 million. Now that more than \$150 million has been allotted to healthcare providers in each

state, territory and the District of Columbia, the Wireline Competition Bureau issued a public notice to give all remaining applicants an opportunity to supplement their applications. Round 2 is a \$249.95 million effort, meaning more than \$80 million is still available for the remaining applicants.

#### NBCU DIVES DEEPER INTO COMMERCE

**NBCUniversal** is embracing livestream shopping. The company is gearing up for the debut of "Impulse Try with Remi Bader," an interactive show that will see Bader go live with Bravo's brightest stars and companies like Wayfair and Adore Me across Bravo's and E!'s handles on Instagram and Facebook as well as on Xfinity. Kicking off on Black Friday, each episode will allow viewers to purchase products featured in the show through **NBCUniversal Checkout**. Episodes will also be available on demand on **Peacock**. **NBCU** also launched the virtual Bravo Bazaar, an AR-driven shopping experience that allows viewers to experience rooms based on their favorite shows and purchase the latest beauty and wellness products.

#### VIACOMCBS, GRAY RENEW AFFILIATE DEAL

**ViacomCBS** and **Gray Television** signed a multi-year agreement that renews all 47 of the CBS network affiliations for **Gray Television** stations. As part of the deal, **Gray's CBS** affiliates will also continue to be locally available to subscribers on **Paramount+**.

#### FREEWHEEL TEAMS UP WITH BEESWAX

**FreeWheel** integrated technologies from **Beeswax** into its platform to allow customers to easily programmatically acquire incremental inventory and extend audience reach. Once the features are fully enabled, publisher customers will be able to easily deliver against both their own inventory and third-party inventory with the same workflow, budgeting, pacing and more. **FreeWheel** is piloting the solution with select customers with plans for a full rollout in early 2022.

#### CALL FOR ENTRIES

The **Alliance for Women in Media Foundation** opened entries for the 47th Annual Gracie Awards Monday. The program will celebrate and honor content made by, for and about women. The deadline for all entries is Jan. 20. Serving again as chairs for the 2022 Gracie Awards are **The Weiss Agency** EVP *Heather Cohen*, **Crown Media Family Networks** Chief Communications Officer *Annie Howell* and **McVay Media Consulting** President *Mike McVay*.

#### CARRIAGE

**DirectTV** is now offering **GAC Family** as part of its Choice package. The package includes more than 185 channels and starts at \$69.99/month for 12 months, plus taxes and RSN fees.

#### PROGRAMMING

"VH1 Family Reunion: Love & Hip Hop Edition" will return for a second season on **VH1** on Dec 13 at 8pm. The reunion will bring together fan favorites from across all four cities in the "Love & Hip Hop" franchise. – **HBO Max** original comedy "Search Party" will debut its fifth and final season on January 7.