

Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

Carriage Talk: Newsmax CEO Says Focus is on Pay TV Ecosystem

Newsmax TV made headlines last month after a few smaller cable operators dropped the service, prompting the question of whether there could be some carriage battles looming.

The conservative-leaning news network quickly amassed dozens of deals with MVPDs, including **Comcast**, **DISH** and **Altice USA** as well as through OTT platforms such as **Roku** and **Amazon**, to bring it to more than 100 million homes. While Newsmax declined to comment on the nature of those deals, multiple sources have said it didn't seek a carriage fee at launch. Do these recent drops from small cable operators signal the network is now seeking compensation?

"I don't want to get into all the confidential details of these agreements. I can say that we have had discussions with the **NCTC** that we believe have been very positive about our future with them, without again revealing anything. In the middle of those negotiations, a couple of operators dropped us, the largest being **Atlantic Broadband**... They claimed to us they are reconsidering that. So we'll see," Newsmax CEO *Christopher Ruddy* told **CFX**. "There have been a number of small operators that dropped us that took us back. I think the numbers will start showing this year Newsmax getting new agreements with all the cable carriers in the next 12 to 24 months."

Conservative network **One America News** is facing a much more dire situation, with its largest distributor, **DirectTV**, announcing it will drop the channel when its contract expires in

the coming weeks. Ruddy doesn't believe there is much of a comparison between the two. "We are much more centrist... We're much more news based. We have a much bigger reach than they do—54 million cable homes. They were there only in maybe 15 million+. And our ratings—we're the fourth largest cable news channel in the United States, and a top 20 to 22 daytime cable channel."

So, does Newsmax think it should receive compensation from MVPDs that aligns with those ratings? "When we seek a fee, it will be recognition that we are a valuable channel that brings important viewership to cable operators," Ruddy said. "We are not ever going to seek an excessive fee, or make excessive demands on cable operators. It will be a win-win situation. And I think it's actually very good for the cable industry that they're not so dependent on **Fox News**."

If Newsmax does go down the road of seeking compensation, there's the issue of its current free OTT offering. It's already thinking about shifting that model, with Ruddy telling **CFX** that he expects the free channel to end by the end of this year. Instead, it's creating a new streaming service in **Newsmax Two**, which Ruddy described as similar to how **HLN** is to **CNN**.

"When Newsmax becomes fully part of the cable ecosystem, Two will be our OTT channel and available free on platforms across the country," he said. "People will tune in to get their fix on the news, but they don't tune in forever, where they could sit there for eight hours and watch a cable news channel... We'd like to have a paid channel and a free channel. A lot of

We asked the Most Powerful Women what female empowerment book they think every woman should read.

They had a ton of recommendations. Here are a few of the books on their shelves.

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the free channel will be very different than the paid channel.”

Newsmax is “definitely putting 90%” of its focus on the traditional pay TV world, according to Ruddy. “People are predicting its demise a little bit too early in my book,” he said. “I think as long as it offers very compelling live news and live sports, it’s going to remain a powerhouse for a long time.”

AVOD DRIVING INTEREST TO PAY TV NETWORKS

More programmers are diving into streaming to adapt to shifts in consumer viewing patterns, but they’re also using those services to feed interest back into their linear networks. That’s particularly true for FAST channels that often focus on shows that are nostalgic or counted as cult classics. “It’s an opportunity for companies to monetize their older library stuff, especially when we’re rebooting a bunch of stuff. It can introduce new audiences because a lot of the FAST uptake... it’s a lot of newer viewers who are outside of that [pay TV] ecosystem,” **Philo** CMO *Nii Addy* said during a panel at the **Parks Associates** Future of Video event Thursday. Much of the appeal of FAST channels comes with the convenience of using AVOD services. There’s little risk to tuning into one of the channels, they respond quickly and it certainly doesn’t hurt that the content is free. “Even at Philo, we’re starting to dip our toes into FAST even though we’re a paid service to build out your content model,” Addy said. “And again, it’s really about people getting the content they want.” AVOD platforms have also begun embracing traditional tactics used by pay TV providers for a long time to organize content and increase accessibility. That includes channel guides. “I think Pluto caught people off guard,” *Tim Cutting*, the GM of streaming guide **Reelgood**, said. “The guide is super important, and when I think the guide is simple and the content flows, you just see fast adoption.”

OLYMPICS RATINGS DOWN ON LINEAR

NBC Sports chairman *Pete Bevacqua* noted during a press call Thursday that linear ratings for the Olympics are [down across the board](#), but Peacock and streaming numbers have been “off the charts.” But that wasn’t completely unexpected. “They are about where we thought they would be in terms of our estimates,” he said. “We had a very strong weekend. It appears that last night is going to be a very strong night for us in terms of where our estimate was.” Total digital usage of the 2022 Winter Games topped 1.75 billion minutes—marking the best ever streaming performance at this point in a Winter Olympics and a 77% increase over the 2018 PyeongChang Olympics. The company has taken a flexible approach with coverage of the Beijing games. NBCU decided to have Olympics anchor *Mike Tirico* return to the U.S., citing easier coordination between anchors in

the U.S. and China. Tirico was originally stationed in Beijing with a plan to have him travel to Los Angeles for coverage of the Super Bowl, but he instead returned to the NBC Sports headquarters in Stamford, Connecticut. He’ll still be on site for the Super Bowl, but will not return to Beijing afterward. *Craig Melvin* remains in China and will continue to anchor the primetime slot. The network didn’t disclose if COVID-19

Cablefax Executive Round Up

We asked executives in our industry what 10G milestones they expect to see this year. Here’s what they had to say.



Ric Johnsen
SVP, Broadband Networks
CommScope

“The pandemic has created an environment of high demand for bandwidth and exposed significant gaps in the capability and reliability of current networks. Network Infrastructure technology is ushering in an era change to support significant bandwidth expansion and a major reduction in network latency. Adding capacity, speed and improved latency will provide the flexibility to support the next generation of applications.”



Curtis Knittle
VP, Wired Technology
CableLabs

“CableLabs hosts interoperability events to ensure components of our specifications are interoperable for operator deployment. For DOCSIS 4.0 and the recently completed Flexible MAC Architecture specifications, we have a regular cadence of interop events planned in 2022. We are also making IP network security improvements based on CableLabs’ Cable Route Engineering for Security and Trust publication. These technologies support key tenets of 10G which will deliver internet speeds 10 times faster than today’s networks.”



Stephanie Mitchko-Beale
EVP & CTO
Charter Communications

“The path to 10G is a continuous journey and we are well on our way in architecting the solutions, developing the technologies, and building out the infrastructure that will deliver a superior experience to our customers. As we recently shared in our earnings call, in 2022, we’ll increase the number of projects to deploy high splits in our service areas, bringing us one step closer to delivering multi-gig, bi-directional services across our network. We also achieved a significant milestone demonstrating greater than 8.5 Gbps downstream and 6 Gbps upstream services in our labs. This really is an exciting time for the industry and for Charter.”



JR Walden
SVP & CTO
Mediacom

“My prediction would be that customers will begin seeing wide-scale deployment of 1gig symmetrical (or better) speeds on DOCSIS/RF networks this year.”

concerns were a factor in the decision, but the move to bring Tirico home helps with communication between on-air commentators from Connecticut. The majority of NBCU's production of the Olympics has been done remotely. There are 1,600 people stationed in Connecticut with 203 HD feeds coming from China to NBC Sports HQ, and the network has worked to add more cameras to capture the drama of the Olympics.

CHARTER FIELD OPS REFRESH

Charter is updating its Field Operations structure and promoting *Noel Dempsey*, *Debi Picciolo* and *John Quigley* to SVP, Field Operations as a result. They'll each be responsible for overseeing field operations in multiple regions and report to EVP, Field Operations *Tom Managhan*. Dempsey will head the Great Lakes, Northeast and Southern Ohio regions and count regional leaders *Jeff Gehrig*, *John Higgins* and *Mark Fitchett* on his team. Fitchett was also upped to Regional VP, Northeast. The Carolinas, New York City and South regions will fall under Quigley and his regional leaders *Shannon Atkinson*, *Henry Pearl* and *Gregg Cory*. Cory has been promoted to Regional VP, New York City. Picciolo will be responsible for the Central, Northwest and West regions and manage *Wally Bakare* and *Pete Hall*.

FUBO WINS SPORTS BETTING APPROVALS

Fubo Gaming secured market access agreements for Fubo Sportsbook in Mississippi, Louisiana and Missouri through Caesars Entertainment. The agreements, which bring the company's grand total to 10, gives Fubo statewide mobile access for sports betting. The launch of Fubo Sportsbook in those states is subject to regulatory approvals and the enactment of legislation in specific jurisdictions.

BETA REVEALS RISE IN NETWORK AD SPEND

Ad execs plan to significantly increase ad spending on cable networks compared to last year, pointing to a return to pre-pandemic operations, according to a study conducted by **Beta Research**. According to a survey conducted in the fall, 42% of ad execs plan to increase ad spending on top-ranked nets **ESPN**, **HGTV**, **Food Network**, **Discovery Channel**, **CNN** and **TNT**— a 20% increase from the previous year. ESPN showed the largest increase as it grew from 33% to 60%. As for network groups that have provided flexibility on deals, pricing on streaming and online ad sales efforts, **Discovery Networks** topped the chart with 57% giving it a four or five on a five-point scale. **WarnerMedia** and **NBCU Advertising Sales** followed with 55% and 52%, respectively, while Disney **Ad Sales** checked in at 49%. NBCU Advertising Sales took the first spot when it came to the effectiveness of performance attributions of streaming and online ads with 64%, with Disney (63%) and Discovery Networks (61%) emerging as a close second and third.

DIRECTV STREAM OFFERS FIVE DAYS FREE

Starting today, **DirectTV Stream** is offering a free five-day online trial for new customers. This includes streaming of live and on-demand content and unlimited simultaneous streams on unlimited devices.

TCA NOTEBOOK

AMC Networks revealed the sixth season of "Better Call Saul" will finally premiere with back-to-back episodes on April 18 at 9pm on **AMC** and **AMC+**. The 13-episode final season will roll out in two parts, with the final six episodes beginning July 11. The announcement came alongside a number of renewals across AMC Networks' portfolio revealed during its **TCA** presentation. AMC+ crime drama "Kin" is getting a second season, while **Acorn TV** originals "Bloodlands" and "My Life is Murder" are both getting additional season orders. **Shudder's** "Creepshow" will return for a fourth season and a new installment of the "Slasher" franchise is on the way.

CHARTER SAYS COME ON DOWN

Charter is kicking off a branding campaign designed to explain the benefits of multiscreen experiences to business customers. Dubbed "Delivering Connections: The Game Show," the spots were made in the style of a traditional dating game show where a business owner has to choose a consumer to target, and learns it can target them all using **Spectrum Reach**. The 30-second spots will air in 88 markets across the company's footprint and digital, social and print ads will also be part of the campaign.

CARRIAGE

Insight TV can now be found within the Sling Free portion of **Sling TV**. This increases the number of mobile and digital platforms that carry Insight TV UHD to 112, with more to come.

BLUE RIDGE TAPS NRBY

Blue Ridge Communications is working with **Advanced Media Technologies**, a reseller of tech innovation products, to deploy **Nrby's** location intelligence platform. The Nrby platform provides insights on field service, operations, and customer service teams, helping to support construction crews and contractors as Blue Ridge completes its FTTH rebuild.

PROGRAMMING

Showtime and **Bleecker Street Films** struck a three-year output agreement, effective in March. Showtime will air Bleecker Street films across its linear, on-demand and streaming services. The deal includes up to 12 films per year, with each film made available on Showtime within five months of its initial release. Upcoming films include "Infinite Storm," "Mr. Malcolm's List" and "892." – **Apple TV+** ordered "The New Look," a series telling the story of fashion designer *Christian Dior* and his rise to fame during *Coco Chanel's* rule in the fashion world.

PEOPLE

Telemundo Studios upped *Ximena Cantuarias* to SVP, Scripted Production. She joined Telemundo in 2001 and returned to the network in 2017 after stints at **TV Azteca** and **Sony Pictures Entertainment**.

EDITOR'S NOTE

We're seeking the best in PR and Marketing for **Cablefax's** annual **FAXIES** awards. Categories include Marketing Team of the Year, Retail Store Experience and PR Stunt. Entries are due March 11 at TheFaxies.com.

PROGRAMMER'S PAGE

The Unbreakable Bonds of Sisterhood

Thrillers and horror movies haven't traditionally had the most diverse casts, and the non-white characters have rarely been the ones to survive the trials and tribulations of the plot to tell the tale. **Lifetime** is joining the movement hoping to change that narrative with "Line Sisters," premiering Saturday at 8pm ET. The film follows four sorority sisters who reunite during a Black Greek Weekend event held in the Outer Banks of North Carolina. But danger begins rearing its ugly head, and they all start thinking more about the suspicious death of the dean of pledges that occurred 15 years prior. The cast was forced to confront real fears during production that ranged from swimming to snakes. The buildup of those moments came to a head when the core four filmed a scene where they finally come face-to-face with the film's antagonist in a dark basement. "I just remember before we actually started shooting how everybody just settled into their space, everything, their character, and it was super duper quiet. And then you just heard us weeping, all of us individually," *LeToya Lockett-Walker*, who plays Valerie, said during a press junket. "I think everybody was having their own thing going on at the time, but I feel like that was one of the most emotional scenes for all of us and probably one of the darker scenes for all of us." Through all the challenges of filming, the four began developing what began to feel like a real sisterhood built on trust and building each other up. "True sisterhood is when you can sit in a circle of women who are secure within themselves, but understand that we each have something different to offer, so there was no need for a competition or a comparison," *Kierra Sheard-Kelly*, who plays Cassandra, said. "I really loved how sisterhood was defined for me in this movie because it was a life or death matter." – *Sara Winegardner*

REVIEWS

There's much more to do to make programming—in front of and behind the camera—diverse, yet some of next week's Black History Month offerings are impressive. – As regular readers of this column know well, your reviewer often recommends the **PBS** series "Frontline." Doubly so for next week's installment called "American Reckoning" (Feb 15, check listings). For viewers younger than 70, this short doc's historic footage of Natchez, Mississippi, will be an eye opener. More important, filmmakers *Brad Lichtenstein* and *Yoruba Richen* make the story of civil rights personal. They introduce us to the children of **NAACP** official *Wharlest Jackson*, who was murdered in 1967. The murderer was never found. It's a deeply moving story that helps explain today's struggle. – From the standpoint of creativity, we have to mention "Equiano," which is coming to 350 **Instagram** stories Feb. 16. Equiano also makes history personal, telling the story of *Olaudah Equiano*, who was captured from a village in Africa and sold into slavery. The creativity is that it's told as if Equiano was tracking his journey on an Instagram account. – Notable: Sure, you can watch the Super Bowl, but if you want an immersive experience, tune to **NFL Network** at 9am ET Sunday for 8 hours of related entertainment and coverage. If you can survive that, watching the game should be a breeze. – *Seth Arenstein*

BASIC CABLE P2+ PRIME RANKINGS* (01/31/22-02/06/22)		
MON-SUN	MC US AA%	MC US AA (000)
FNC	0.795	2478
MSNBC	0.391	1217
USA	0.389	1211
HGTV	0.375	1167
TLC	0.304	946
INSP	0.292	909
HALL	0.268	836
ESPN	0.262	815
HIST	0.251	782
FOOD	0.239	743
DISC	0.225	702
TNT	0.222	693
ID	0.191	595
A&E	0.187	581
HMM	0.186	581
TBSC	0.186	579
LIFE	0.185	577
TVLAND	0.182	565
CNN	0.175	546
FX	0.143	446
BRAVO	0.138	429
WETV	0.137	427
GSN	0.135	420
SYFY	0.115	358
OXYGEN	0.114	355
BET	0.113	352
AMC	0.111	345
NATGEO	0.110	341
COM	0.109	340
NAN	0.102	318
TRAVEL	0.102	318
APL	0.093	290
NICK	0.092	287
SNDCN	0.086	269

*P2+ L+SD rankers are based on national Nielsen numbers, not coverage.

Mark Your Calendars!

Cablefax 2022 Award Submission Deadlines

The FAXIES Awards	Deadline: March 11 Final Deadline: March 18
Top Ops Nominations	Deadline: April 1
The Diversity List Nominations	Deadline: June 3 Final Deadline: June 10
Most Powerful Women Nominations	Deadline: August 12 Final Deadline: August 19