

# Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

## Spring Training: Sinclair Preps for Launch of RSN Streamer

**Sinclair** is in the final innings ahead of the launch of its **Bally Sports** RSN streaming service, but there are still plenty of questions in need of answering before investors can call it a home run.

A soft launch including five Bally Sports RSNs with **MLB** teams will come in 2Q22 with a full launch, including **NBA** and **NHL** teams, to come in 3Q22. In total, at least 33 teams will be featured on the app and Sinclair estimates the potential market for the service at approximately 83 million due to the households that reside in the territories for which it has DTC rights. “The DTC product isn’t just a way for those without linear subscriptions to access the game and content. It is the start of a new paradigm of how fans can watch and engage with their local teams,” President/CEO *Chris Ripley* said on Sinclair’s 4Q21 earnings call Wednesday, adding that NFTs and e-commerce will be integrated into the app experience.

There’s still no word on how much the service’s tiered plans will cost. Ripley is optimistic that Sinclair will be able to acquire digital rights for more MLB teams ahead of the season’s start. “Over the last two years, we’re batting a thousand in terms of renewals and we most recently just added digital rights for a team this January,” he said. “It’s a team-by-team situation, but our history would tell us that we will be successful there.

He’s also of the belief that a January deal with creditors to unlock \$635 million in new money for **Diamond Sports**

**Group** will convince MLB to embrace the RSN streaming app moving forward. MLB Commissioner Rob Manfred has [criticized](#) Sinclair in the past for not having enough digital rights to create a viable streaming service for RSNs, among other things. “Generally, this transaction and the amount of liquidity that’s going in Diamond does answer a lot of questions for people in the ecosystem. It’s a very favorable outcome and puts Diamond in a very positive financial position for years to come” Ripley added.

Total revenue fell 2% YOY to \$1.476 billion, primarily due to a lack of political advertising and lost revenues from an October ransomware attack that the company estimated resulted in approximately \$24 million in net loss. While Sinclair was able to restore much of its network from backups, disruptions to its business after the attack impacted its ability to provide local advertisements on local broadcast stations. That number also takes into account potential insurance reimbursements, but management made it clear that there is no assurance that the insurance policies will pay their full coverage or when such reimbursements could come back to the company. Ad revenues of \$383 million declined 31%, and distribution revenues of \$1.048 billion were up from the \$917 million brought in during 4Q20. That was mostly due to a drop in the amount of distributor rebates tied to minimum game guarantees partially offset by subscriber churn and dropped carriage.

Ripley doesn’t believe taking the sports RSNs direct-to-consumer will challenge Sinclair’s relationships with traditional

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# 100★

## **CONSECUTIVE QUARTERS OF REVENUE GROWTH**

As 2021 drew to a close, Mediacom Communications reached a unique and momentous milestone. Our year-end results marked Mediacom's 100th consecutive quarter of year-over-year revenue growth. This remarkable achievement, over a quarter century in the making, would not have been possible without unwavering commitment to bring the smaller cities and towns we serve better communications services than America's largest metropolitan areas.

**Thank you** to the many advisors, industry colleagues, investors, lenders and vendors that helped us grow and sustain our business for the past 27 years. Most of all, I would like to thank the current and retired members of the Mediacom Family. Their dedication to the customers and communities we serve has been the key ingredient to our success.

**Rocco B. Commisso**

Founder, Chairman and CEO  
Mediacom Communications Corporation



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MVPDs, but time will tell. It has negotiations with **Charter** coming later this year for all of its content, but Ripley wouldn't offer any comment on active negotiations.

"Today, we've renewed on the status quo basis all of our traditional MVPD relationships and with that we bring all of our content to the table. **DISH** was an outlier in that they had dropped the RSNs before we owned them and they'd been off for two years," Ripley said. On the vMVPD side, he said Sinclair is having active discussions with folks in that marketplace, but the company's guidance isn't reflecting any additional carriage from that space. **YouTube TV** and **Hulu** dropped the Bally Sports RSNs in October 2020, and **Sling TV** also lost the networks when DISH dropped the RSNs in 2019.

**FRONTIER FINALLY FINDS FIBER GROWTH**

**Frontier's** 4Q21 was one of many firsts for the company, including its first posting positive broadband customer growth in more than five years. It recorded 45,000 fiber broadband net additions and built out its fiber network to an additional 192,000 locations. This quarter also marked the first time Frontier saw positive fiber Net Promoter Scores in its history, improving more than 30 points from the -24 mark it recorded in January 2021 to the +9 it measured in December 2021. **New Street Research** highlighted that NPS improvement as a huge win for the company, saying it believes Frontier has lower fiber churn than any of its competitors. "NPS is hard to move; it requires a maniacal focus on price, product, and the customer experience," the firm said. "A move of this magnitude is impressive and that it was accomplished in a year is more impressive. This should help give investors confidence that

the momentum of the last two quarters is real and sustainable." President/CEO *Nick Jeffery* acknowledged during the company's earnings call Wednesday that they were starting from quite a low place when Frontier emerged from bankruptcy in 2021, and there remains a lot to do to ensure its long-term success. However, the massive improvements in areas like NPS have done some work to convince the leadership team that the Frontier name isn't so tarnished that it cannot be successful in the fiber marketplace. "A brand is what a brand does, so our effort is to completely focus on what the brand is doing. That would suggest from the early results that the brand is repairable and indeed is repairing quite rapidly," he said. Frontier also used the Tuesday announcement of its network-wide 2 Gig fiber service plan to test out revamped brand colors and font types that position the company as a more modern and relevant player to wider segments of the market. "We'll be monitoring that very closely as we come to the wider decision on what do we do with the brand and the name in the future, and that's a vision we'll be taking to our board in coming quarters," Jeffery said.

**MEDIACOM CELEBRATES REVENUE MILESTONE**

**Mediacom's** 4Q21 earnings results were highlighted by its announcement that it has achieved 100 consecutive quarters of YOY revenue growth. The milestone was celebrated by Chairman/CEO *Rocco Commisso* in a commemorative letter honoring the operator's history as well as the trials and tribulations it has faced since its founding. "While a successful business strategy, excellent management, bold moves and good decisions have driven Mediacom's achievements, I owe a great

# 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

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deal to the loyalty, commitment and efforts of the thousands of individuals who have worked for Mediacom over the years,” he wrote. “As I reflect on an era that saw so many long-established brands and pioneering start-ups exit our economy in one wave of consolidation after another, I realize how fortunate I have been to serve as Mediacom’s Chairman and CEO continuously since I founded the company in 1995.” 4Q21 revenues were \$561.2 million, a 2.2% increase YOY. HSD customers totaled 1.463 million, up 1.7%. Net debt continued to drop, sitting at the \$1.232 billion mark at the end of the quarter. That’s a \$482 million reduction from December 31, 2020.

#### FCC SETS BROADBAND DATA COLLECTION DATES

The **FCC** revealed the deadlines Tuesday for the Broadband Data Collection needed to complete its revamped broadband availability maps. All facilities-based providers of fixed and mobile broadband access can begin submitting broadband availability data under the new rules and procedures on June 30 with the deadline to complete those submissions set for Sept. 1. The Commission urged providers to begin uploading data into the system in the earlier part of the filing window to ensure it successfully makes it through the checks and validations put in place to prevent the submission of faulty data. All errors identified in the system must be rectified prior to submitting and certifying a filing by the Sept. 1 deadline.

#### DISCOVERY'S AD DATA PILOT

**Discovery, Inc.** and **Omnicom Media Group** announced a data trial that hopes to offer new currencies to advertisers in the upcoming TV upfront season. The trial—currently in progress—evaluates linear delivery for Omnicom clients through several measurement services, with the aim to validate measurement offerings that provide accurate audience estimates. **Comscore** and **VideoAmp** will gather audience data for the initial advertisers, which include **AT&T** and **State Farm**.

#### NIELSEN ADDS CTV STREAMING DATA

**Nielsen** will expand its “Nielsen Media Impact” coverage to include streaming data from connected television sets. The company said the move will allow advertisers, agencies and media owners to better evaluate the cross-platform audience reach of TV, digital, radio, print, out-of-home and now streaming channels. The increased coverage gives advertisers and agencies the ability to determine optimal media mixes to reach advanced and targeted audiences, find cost efficiencies and see a complete view of a plan’s footprint.

#### ROKU IMPLEMENTS AD WATERMARKS

**Roku** introduced its advertising watermark to help advertisers and publishers validate video ads on Roku’s platform. The watermark integrates with Roku’s operating system to automatically verify ad requests and impressions so advertisers know they’re reaching legitimate users. Ad tech providers like **Basis Technologies**, **Google** and **Innovid** will integrate the watermark at launch, while **Discovery**, **FOX** and others will use it to sell their own ad inventory.

#### DISCOVERY GETS GOLD WITH OLYMPICS

**Discovery, Inc.** reported record viewership and engagement of the 2022 Winter Olympics on its digital platforms. Over 156 million Europeans visited its platforms, with 19x more streaming minutes consumed compared to the 2018 Winter Olympics. This aided the increase in new, paid streaming subscribers, which out-performed the 2018 games by almost 50%. Digital wasn’t the only platform that saw success. Despite a 10% reduction in total linear TV usage since the last Winter Olympics, **Eurosport** saw significant audience growth in markets like Italy (250%), Poland (+36%) and Romania (+23%).

#### CARRIAGE

**Redbox** added **AccuWeather NOW** to its streaming lineup, giving customers access to AccuWeather forecasts and 24/7 programming. It joins Redbox’s more than 100 free streaming TV channels.

#### PROGRAMMING

**Philo** is bringing in “Boss Moves” as the platform’s first original series following a deal with **Kin**. Premiering in April, the series stars former rapper and “Love and Hip-Hop” star *Rasheeda Frost* detailing her business ventures and showcasing her homes. Boss Moves also will be available via Kin, across YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram. The library of Kin’s programs, including “Heart of the Batter” with *Jordin Sparks*, will be available as part of Philo’s base package for all subscribers. – **Crown Media Family Networks** and actress *Lacey Chabert* signed an exclusive multi-picture overall deal. She’ll headline and executive produce movies and develop other content for Hallmark Channel and other Hallmark platforms over the next two years. – **PGA Tour Live** is broadcasting “The Honda Classic” with four-feed coverage on Thursday and Friday on **ESPN+**. The feeds will follow the entire tournament field, a marquee group, featured groups and featured holes. The main feed begins Thursday at 6:45am ET, while the marquee group, featured groups and holes start at 7:45am. On Saturday and Sunday, **Golf Channel** will handle coverage from 1pm-3pm, with **NBC** finishing the days from 3pm-6pm. – **Curiosity** will bring back multiple original series on **Curiosity Stream** and **Curiosity Channel** in 2022, including “Doug to the Rescue” and “Ancient Engineering.” Curiosity is also introducing new programs such as “Tycoons,” which dissects the paths of wealthy entrepreneurs, and “Secrets of the Universe.”

#### PEOPLE

**Sinclair Broadcast Group** promoted *Rob Weisbord* to COO. He’ll also continue to serve as President of Broadcast. Weisbord will lead company operations, as well as its owned-and-operated stations, regional sports network brands, national networks, multicast networks and digital and streaming platforms. Weisbord first joined Sinclair in 1997. **Atlas Digital Group** selected *J. Schelstrate* as Chief Revenue Officer. He most recently served at **Comcast** as VP, Channel Strategy and Analytics. – *Andrew Finkelstein* joins **DZS** as SVP, North America Sales. He previously was at **Casa Systems**.

## Think about that for a minute...

### A Language Barrier

Commentary by Steve Effros

We've got a problem with language, again. I say "again" because for the cable/broadband industry this is nothing new. We've tripped over this same barrier before. What does "streaming" mean to the average viewer? Or "On Demand," or "Pay Per View?" For different folks, it means different things. And that's a problem.

I ran into this the other day when I sent out a note to some friends that my son's film, "Give or Take" had started "streaming" and they could now watch it. (I strongly suggest you take a look! No bias here.) I immediately started getting feedback from some folks who had no problem finding and watching it, and others who were confused or upset because while it may have been "available" on, say, Cox or Comcast, it was not on Roku... how could they watch it?

This led to some long explanations about the distinction between the concept of "streaming" on the internet, which the film is, and its availability as a "pay per view" or "on demand" item versus one that is offered by Netflix or Amazon Prime as part of their library versus one that is "streamed"... the technical term, on the internet and you can get on you computer, tablet or phone or on your "smart TV" if it can access the internet, or on a device like Roku or a Fire Stick etc.

Trust me, it's not easy to explain all that to someone who's not tech savvy other than knowing how to use one device or one service. So here we are again, with a generalized term, "streaming" being used in a lot of different ways and creating considerable confusion. The real solution is to integrate it all into the "cable" platform, but that creates problems too!

It reminds me of the old days when hotels and motels around the country had signs proudly proclaiming they had "hooked up" to "HBO" when in fact what they were saying was that they had cable television. At the time I gave a lot of credit to the folks at Home Box Office for marketing their service name as almost a generic. They were spending more on getting folks to think of HBO as cable than the cable industry was spending letting people know about all the other options available to

them. That finally got straightened out. I'm not sure it's going to be so easy with "streaming."

One of the problems is that the technical folks among us will point out that whether it's a subscription service, like Netflix or Amazon Prime or HBO, or an advertiser supported aggregation of programming like one form of Peacock or one that includes broadcast channels with advertising like Google TV they all use the broadband technology that "streams" data (video) to the home of those who know how to use it.

And therein lies the rub. Because if the average non-technical user has something like a "Roku" box it provides access to "streaming" services as well as some of its own channels, but you would have to access a different platform, like Google Play Movies or Amazon Prime Video to be able to rent the "streaming" pay per view version of the movie which is not currently available as part of the package offered by platforms like Netflix. Got all that? As I said, it's not really easy to explain, especially since all of the services I just mentioned, and most every other one you know about is technically "streaming."

I know the marketers in the old days didn't like "pay per view" so they changed the terminology to "on demand." But really "pay per view" is far more accurate. Maybe we should get rid of "streaming" language and get back to clear language about how you can get what you're looking for!



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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