

Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

Russian Freeze: Industry Takes Steps to Assist Ukraine

Like millions of people all over the world, the media/broadband industry is asking itself what it can do to help the people of Ukraine. Efforts range from cutting ties with Russian entities to making it easier to reach out to loved ones.

Liberty Global's companies across Europe are offering free calls and texts to and from Ukraine as well as free data to customers currently within the country's borders. The company's Polish employees are raising funds for refugees that will be doubled by **UPC Polska**, Liberty Global's telecom operation in Poland. Liberty Global is also donating essential supplies to those that have been displaced from their homes as a result of the conflict.

Verizon is waiving charges from its postpaid consumer, business wireless and residential landline customers to and from Ukraine through March 10. It is also waiving voice and text roaming charges for customers in Ukraine. Verizon wireless customers can donate \$25 to the International Rescue Committee for emergency supplies by texting UKRAINE to 25383. Similarly, **Astound Broadband** is waiving international calling charges for phone customers calling Ukraine through March 31.

On the connectivity side, **SpaceX** CEO *Elon Musk* has largely been praised on social media over the last 72 hours after he responded to pleas from *Mykhailo Fedorov*, Ukraine's Minister of Digital Transformation, for **Starlink** service within

the country. Starlink service became active on Saturday and a shipment of terminals arrived on Monday. But some space policy and security experts are warning that satellite technology can be tricky to use in times of war due to the possibility that ground receivers or satellites can be used by Russian forces to target air strikes.

It's not just corporations jumping in, with individuals also finding ways to lend a hand. *Brian Bedol*, the founder of **ESPN Classic** and current CEO of cooking livestream service **Kitch**, gave Musk props for launching Starlink in the Ukraine, but noted that those on the ground need Starlink terminals. He's made a plea on social media for anyone who has new or used Starlink servers. Bedol told **CFX** Kitch's development team is based in Ukraine and has asked that the company spread the word on the need for terminals to take advantage of Starlink. Reach out to Bedol on LinkedIn for shipping information.

With everyone on high alert for a possible Russian cyberattack, **Microsoft** published a blog post addressing cybersecurity, state-sponsored disinformation campaigns and support for humanitarian assistance. On Feb 24, Microsoft's Threat Intelligence Center detected a new round of offensive and destructive cyberattacks directed against Ukraine's digital infrastructure. It has been providing technical advice and assistance to Ukrainian officials on an ongoing basis. Longtime industry PR hand *Sal Cataldi* is providing some communications assistance to his friends at NYC's KGB bar, which has halted the sale of Russian vodka. A press statement read:

ANNOUNCING Cablefax's TOP OPS Nominations

The Top Ops categories recognize excellence in a variety of areas, including marketing, technology, finance, lifetime achievement, customer service and community involvement. Nominations are open to all operators.

Help Cablefax choose the MSO and Independent Operator of the Year!

Submit Today at: www.CablefaxTopOps.com

Questions: Contact Mary-Lou French at mfrench@accessintel.com or 301.354.1851.



It's free to enter – but you must submit your entries by April 1, 2022!

The Independent Operator of the Year Award (IOY) is presented in conjunction with ACA Connects and NCTC

our corporate name is Kraine Gallery Bar so you know where our sympathy lies.”

Days after **CFX** reported that **DirectTV** was carrying Russian state broadcast network **RT** in its lineup for satellite and IPTV service, DirecTV dropped the Kremlin-financed channel Tuesday around 1pm ET. “In line with our previous agreement with RT America, we are accelerating this year’s contract expiration timeline and will no longer offer their programming effective immediately,” a spokesperson told **CFX**.

Microsoft has removed RT news apps from its Windows app store and is de-ranking Russian state-sponsored sites’ search results on Bing so that it will only return RT and **Sputnik** links when a user clearly intends to navigate to those pages. It’s also banning all advertisements from RT and Sputnik across its ad network and will not place any ads from the Microsoft ad network on these sites. **YouTube** has also demonetized RT, which it continues to carry in the U.S., but is removing in Europe. The European Union decided this week to ban Russian-sponsored media. **Apple** removed RT News from its app store, though RT Radio was available at our deadline.

DISH Network was still offering RT on its satellite service Tuesday. “Our thoughts are with all the people of Ukraine, and particularly with our team members in the country. We are closely monitoring the situation,” DISH said in a statement.

NAB President/CEO **Curtis LeGeyt** on Tuesday urged broadcasters carrying Russian-sponsored programming to drop it, adding that the airing of such content is “extremely limited.” Broadcasters have carried content from RT over the years, prompting the **FCC** last year to require broadcasters to disclose when foreign governments or their representatives lease time on their airwaves. **NATPE** announced it would ban Russian companies from its upcoming international television sales market to be held in Budapest from June 27-30, 2022, while Realscreen parent **Brunico Communications** said it is suspending business relations with Russian-based companies, including advertising, sponsorship and attendance at our conferences and events, until the state-led campaign of aggression against Ukraine is halted.

U.S. SOCCER NEW DEAL

Turner Sports and the **United States Soccer Federation** agreed to an eight-year multimedia rights deal that makes **TNT**, **TBS** and **HBO Max** the exclusive English-language home for the U.S. men’s and women’s national soccer teams. The agreement is set to begin in 2023 and includes digital and highlight rights for **Bleacher Report** and its portfolio. According to **Sports Business Journal**, **Turner will pay an average of around \$25-27 million per year**. HBO Max will broadcast over 20 matches each year, with TNT and TBS airing around half of them.

The WHO and the WHY

CFX’s spotlight on recent new hires & promotions



JUDI Lopez
EVP, DISTRIBUTION & CONTENT STRATEGY
CROWN MEDIA FAMILY NETWORKS

3 THINGS TO KNOW

- Judi joined the Crown Media family in December after 13 years at Fuse Media heading content distribution, advocacy, government affairs and partnership marketing. She now oversees all aspects of sales, negotiations, strategic planning and marketing efforts tied to content distribution. It will be her strategic vision that will shape how Crown Media expands its carriage in the OTT and nonlinear ecosystems.
- Her first job in media was at Disney Channel in the finance department as an auditor. It was one year later when she became a distribution sales representative and found her passion. Judi has played a role in crafting and executing distribution strategies at AMC Networks, Fuse Media and Disney and ESPN Media Networks. She was part of the team that launched Disney Channel Home Satellite with DirecTV and DISH, and assisted in the launches of Toon Disney (now Disney XD) and SOAPnet (now Disney Junior).
- Judi is always seeking more inspiration to shape her playbook, and her children offer plenty of opportunity for that. She currently coaches her daughter’s AYSO youth soccer team and is learning more every day.

FCC SETS 2.5GHZ AUCTION FOR JULY

FCC Chair **Jessica Rosenworcel** used an appearance at **Mobile World Congress Barcelona** to announce that the agency will kick off its 2.5GHz spectrum auction in July. Hype around the band has existed for years. It is the single largest swath of contiguous mid-band spectrum below 3GHz and has long been targeted as prime for 5G services. Nearly 300 licenses have already been granted as part of 2020’s Rural Tribal Priority Window, an opportunity for federally-recognized tribes to submit applications to obtain unassigned spectrum to foster communications networks in rural areas. Since then, potential bidders and wireless industry associations have been battling over the proposed auction procedures, including a clock auction format and the use of intra-round bids and proxy bidding. The road forward on spectrum reallocation gets trickier once the 2.5GHz auction is completed, and Rosenworcel told the audience that more innovation and coordination will be needed to make additional spectrum available for industry use. “Greenfield spectrum—open and cleared for use—will not be as simple or easy

to find,” she said. “We will have to invest in new technologies to promote efficiency and use a range of spectrum policy tools, including shared access, priority and preemption, lightweight leasing and dynamic database coordination to ensure access to our airwaves.”

COMCAST'S RETURN TO OFFICE

It looks like April 1 may be when many **Comcast** employees return to the office. While its offices and Philly HQ are currently open, it has extended the voluntary in-office period through the end of March. As with just about anything these days, there is likely some flexibility. On Monday, **Cox Communications'** Atlanta HQ and administrative buildings nationwide welcomed employees back to the office. Cox's in-office policy is predicated on areas being at orange or lower on the COVID threat level and includes flexibility and hybrid arrangements.

FOX NEWS RATINGS REIGN CONTINUES

Nielsen's viewership numbers offer a reminder of what new **CNN** boss *Chris Licht* has ahead of him. While CNN was the second most-watched cable network in prime last week among total viewers, **Fox News** had more than double its audience (3.177 million vs 1.48 million). For the entire month of February, Fox News was the most-watched cable network in prime, averaging 2.63 million viewers, followed by **MSNBC** at 1.194 million. More Americans age 2 and up watched **USA Network**, **HGTV**, **TNT**, **ESPN**, **Hallmark Channel**, **INSP**, **History** and **TLC** than CNN in primetime in February, with the **WarnerMedia** network ranking 11th in P2+ viewers in prime with an average of 774,000, according to Nielsen Media Research. CNN fared better in its total day average for February, with 621,000 viewers, giving it fourth place. Fox News was first (1.67 million), followed by MSNBC (719,000) and USA (662,000).

COMSCORE WANTS 'PRINCIPAL CURRENCY' STATUS

Comscore is ready to shine at this year's upfront, and its executive team is confident that more folks than ever before will choose to use the company as currency. “The precision is there, and I think with the snafu that we saw with our major competitor that happened during the pandemic, there was just a point where everyone said this is not going to work any longer,” CEO *Bill Livek* said during the company's 4Q21 earnings call late Monday. “I do believe we're going to come out of this having Comscore as a principal currency... and I believe we're going to play a big role in the upfronts and newfronts.” Longtime industry leader **Nielsen** has been in hot water since the start of the pandemic with programmers and associations arguing the firm's ratings measurements were off-base. **Disney** joined the Nielsen ONE pilot program in December, but it also announced Tuesday that it has begun work with Comscore and **Omnicom** to test additional ways to give advertisers insights into its linear and digital portfolio. That will continue over the next several months. Livek also used the call to reveal his intentions to retire as CEO and transition to the role of non-executive Vice Chair following the naming of his successor. He'll remain in that role on Comscore's board through the end of his term in mid-2024.

OVBI REPORTS UNSEEN BROADBAND USAGE

For the first time, average broadband usage exceeded half a TB in 4Q21, reaching 536.3 GB according to the 4Q21 **OpenVault Broadband Insights** report. The report showed a 165% increase over 4Q17 and found the average download speed of subscribers who use more than half a TB per month is double the average speed of those who use less than half. Power users who consume over one or more TB per month grew from 2% to 16% since 2017, and nearly one in five subscribers are now provisioned for speeds of 500Mbps or higher.

PARAMOUNT+ CELEBRATES FIRST BIRTHDAY

After a year that saw **Paramount+** reach 32.8 million subscribers by the end of 2021, the streaming service is celebrating its one-year anniversary by offering new customers 80% off its monthly packages through Monday. Consumers can sign up for the “Essential Plan” for \$1 per month for three months, or the “Premium Plan” for \$2 per month for three months.

CARRIAGE

Starting today, ATSC 3.0-powered pay TV service **Evoca** will carry **AT&T SportsNet Rocky Mountain**—the regional broadcast home of the Colorado Rockies—ahead of the 2022 MLB season. The RSN will initially be available in Colorado Springs and Denver, with more markets being added in the future.

PROGRAMMING

FOX Nation signed a deal with *Kevin Costner* for a four-part series “Yellowstone: One-Fifty,” celebrating the 150th anniversary of Yellowstone National Park. The series will premiere in 4Q22, with each episode spanning one-hour. – **Disney+** is adding seven **Marvel** live-action titles to its offering: “Daredevil,” “Jessica Jones,” “Luke Cage,” “Iron Fist,” “The Defenders,” “The Punisher” and “Marvel's Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.” All seven are available in the U.S. and will expand across other Disney+ markets later this year. Disney+ is also updating parental controls in the U.S., adding an option to select content ratings restrictions and adding a pin to lock certain profiles. – **Spectrum** greenlit comedy drama “Panhandle,” an eight-episode series set in the Florida panhandle. It'll have a nine-month exclusive run for free and without ads on Spectrum, followed by a free advertising-supported window on **The Roku Channel**. – **A&E** and **WWE** agreed to a multiyear extension of their programming partnership, with over 130 hours of WWE-related content to air exclusively on A&E platforms and distributed by **A+E Networks**. The deal includes 35 new episodes of “Biography” and a new original series “WWE's Most Wanted Treasures.” Additionally, A&E ordered 40 hours of the new series “WWE Rivals” (working title).

PEOPLE

Allen Media Group promoted *Nora Zimmert* from Chief Content Officer/EVP to President of News and Original Series for Weather Group. She'll oversee live and original programming for **The Weather Channel**. Zimmert spearheaded content development and team building for **The Weather Channel en Español**, the first 24-hour Spanish weather network. – *Lauri McGarrigan* was named SVP, Business Development and Content Distribution at **Crown Media Family Networks**. She joins from **Common Sense Networks**.