

Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

At the Top: Pillai Tapped to Lead Tech, Operations for Altice USA

Pragash Pillai was elevated to EVP, Chief Technology & Information Officer for **Altice USA**—the latest exec change-up for an operator in the midst of a reinvention.

Pillai will continue to lead the operations organization as well, giving him a dual role. “As we look to accelerate our fiber deployment over the next several years to millions of additional homes, having both the CTIO and Field Operations organizations under Pragash’s leadership will streamline our fiber build and enable us to meet that goal efficiently,” CEO Dexter Goei wrote in a memo to employees obtained by CFX.

Philippe Le May has stepped down as Altice USA’s CTO after four years. He is now serving as Special Advisor and will return to Europe in July. Goei praised Le May’s tenure. “During Philippe’s time at Altice USA, he has been instrumental in the execution of our network and technology strategy, including the expansion of our fiber network, enabling 1 gigabit speeds across most of our footprint, and the integration of **Morris** and **Service Electric** infrastructure into our network, among other accomplishments,” he wrote.

Pillai is a familiar name in cable technology circles. He has served as Altice’s EVP, Operations since December 2020 and has been with the company since it closed its 2016 acquisition of **Cablevision**, where he worked for five years. Before that, he spent time at **Bresnan** and **Charter**. The past year saw him lead the Altice teams responsible for bringing FTTH

to more than 1.5 million homes, with an additional 1 million on tap by then end of 2022. A past **NAMIC** Next Generation Leader honoree, Pillai has helped set new protocols to keep employees and customers safe during the pandemic.

In September, Altice USA surprised the industry by announcing the abrupt resignation of COO and Telecommunications President *Hakim Boubazine*. His departure came after Altice reported flat broadband sub growth while its peers were still adding subs. Speaking at an investor conference later that month, Goei praised Boubazine for his years of service to the company, but said a change was necessary to get Altice back on the track to long-term success.

More recently, Goei has [spoke](#) about returning to broadband growth through a multi-pronged approach that includes multi-gig speeds, bidding for government subsidies and going head-to-head with **Verizon Fios** on promotional offers in the New York tri-state area.

The company has seen a few other high-profile resignations in recent months. *Jon Steinberg* left his role in January as President of Altice USA News and Advertising, which included the news operation he founded, Cheddar. Keith Bowen was promoted to the post. Altice EVP, Government & Community Affairs and Chief Diversity Officer *Lee Schroeder* announced at the end of 2021 that she would exit the company in July, with the company to appoint a new head of government affairs. Communications EVP *Lisa Gonzalez* is taking on the Community Affairs and Chief Diversity Officer roles.

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

BLACK NEWS CHANNEL SHUTS DOWN

Black News Channel is ceasing operations shortly after celebrating its two-year anniversary in February. Employees were notified Friday would be the last day of live programming. “Unfortunately, due to challenging market conditions and global financial pressures, we have been unable to meet our financial goals, and the timeline afforded to us has run out,” BNC President and CEO *Princell Hair* sent in a memo to employees that was obtained by **CFX**. “It’s with a broken heart that I am letting you all know that, effective immediately, BNC will cease live production and file for bankruptcy.” The channel had been dealing with controversies in recent months. Former and then-current female employees filed a lawsuit against BNC alleging gender discrimination, and according to *The Wrap*, [over 120 staffers](#) had been laid off since Christmas. However, things took a drastic turn when the March 25 payroll was delayed, and a resolution wasn’t clear. Employees close to the situation told **CFX** funding became an issue, but the timeline didn’t cause major concern when looking at how other networks fared in their respective early days. It was the payroll delay that raised immediate worry. Hair noted in the memo “I understand that this surprising and unfortunate news will naturally generate a lot of questions surrounding next steps. Our leadership team and human resources will be in touch to address them over the coming days and weeks.” BNC, which had carriage with **Comcast**, **Charter** and other MVPDs, faced its share of challenges from the start. It twice delayed its launch and only weeks after it began broadcasting, the world shut down due to the pandemic.

BEHIND THE LABEL

NCTA, **CTIA** and other ISP organizations urged the **FCC** to reject calls to mandate broadband consumer labels cover topics such as network reliability, service level guarantees and privacy practices and keep the gist of the voluntary consumer labels created in 2016. “A broadband consumer label reflecting even a fraction of this additional information would transform a simple and easy-to-understand label into a lengthy, complex, and confusing document of limited value. Taking this approach could complicate, rather than facilitate, the purchasing process for consumers,” NCTA said in reply comments due to the FCC this week. The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act passed by Congress late last year directs the FCC to adopt rules requiring broadband providers to display consumer broadband labels. Many commenters are urging the Commission to keep those labels in line with the voluntary broadband consumer labels adopted by the agency in 2016 in connection with the Open Internet order. Those labels were developed by the Consumer Advisory Committee. They closely resemble nutrition labels and include info such as the monthly service plan charge as well as typical speed and latency. There’s pretty broad consensus that the FCC should use the 2016 labels as a baseline for the Congressionally mandated labels, but some

do want to see additional info added. For example, a joint filing from local governments, including the City of Boston, recommend the FCC add jitter and the existence of any exclusive marketing agreements to the label, which they argue can make it difficult for MDU tenants to select a competing provider. More info on the labels can defeat their purpose, argued **Tech Freedom**. “These ‘must haves’ may comprise an irresistible smorgasbord for policy wonks inside the Beltway, but each addition makes the labels harder to read and understand,” the group said. “Beyond the few hundred people who are experts in all aspects of broadband network engineering and broadband policy, no one will either read the labels, or be able to understand all the elements.”

AVODS STRUGGLE WITH AD REPEATS, UNFILLED TIME

AVOD platforms are only growing in popularity, but they are still finding their sea legs when it comes to advertising mix and filling their inventory. That’s according to an [audit](#) of five top FAST-live platforms performed by **One Touch Intelligence** in January and February. **Pluto TV** had the most unfilled time, clocking in with 463.08 minutes over the course of the two-month audit period, followed by **Tubi** (263.25 minutes), **The Roku Channel** (239.25 minutes) and **Xumo** (139.75 minutes). **Peacock** stood in stark contrast, only producing six minutes of dead air across 60 hours, but the firm did note it had to stream the service via a **Roku** box and that may have skewed its results. The average ad breaks across the five services was relatively similar during the audit period, averaging between four to five ad breaks per hour. Peacock and Pluto TV filled the most ad spots within the audit window with 739 and 615, respectively. A large portion of Peacock’s ads, however, promoted other **NBCU** segments and content. Xumo lagged far behind with only 179 ad spots, but some additional clarity is needed to determine whether **Bloomberg TV** mini-news segments that ran between some programming was sponsored content or designed to fill time gaps. Across the board, repetition of ads across programming blocks on these services is high. The surveyed companies all had at least 43% of ads repeated during the audit.

ROGERS-SHAW INCH TOWARD FINISH LINE

Rogers’ \$16 billion acquisition of fellow Canadian operator **Shaw** is closer to completion, with the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission approving the transfer of licenses held by Shaw. The deal still needs the blessing of the Competition Bureau and the Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, with some suggesting it will be a tough road to convince regulators the elimination of a wireless competitor is a good idea. The companies expect the transaction to close in 2Q22.

NICK’S BIG YEAR

Nickelodeon outlined its strategy with new content for 2022-23 at its upfront late Thursday, focusing on kids genres and finding ways to capitalize on popular shows. Over 40 Nick proj-

ects are in active production, with new series and movies premiering throughout the year. “SpongeBob SquarePants” and “PAW Patrol” were picked up for their 14th and 10th seasons, respectively. The network is also beginning production on a live-action series “The Loud House” for Paramount+. “Transformers: EarthSpark,” an animated series, will premiere on **Paramount+** globally in November ahead of a Transformers movie in 2023.

FOX NEWS' HALL BACK IN U.S.

FOX News Media CEO *Suzanne Scott* updated employees on the status of correspondent *Benjamin Hall*, who was hospitalized after Russian soldiers opened fire on his vehicle. After some difficulties with Hall leaving Ukraine, he left the country and was at the Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany. Scott said in a memo he's been transferred to Brooke Army Medical Center at Joint Base San Antonio-Fort Sam Houston, Texas, where he's receiving care following multiple surgeries.

FCC OKS RDOF ROUND

The **FCC** is authorizing an additional \$313 million in RDOF fund support for projects deploying broadband to more than 130,000 locations across 19 states. This marks the eighth round of funding for the program and brings the total awarded to date over \$5 billion. The Commission also denied **RHMD, LLC's** petition for waiver of the deadline to obtain ETC status due to its lack of effort to earn the designation.

PEOPLE

fuboTV appointed former **Univision** and **Scripps Networks Interactive** exec *Henry Ahn* as Chief Business Officer, transitioning from the streamer's board to a newly-created in-house role. *Julie Had-don*, owner of the **NWSL's** Chicago Red Stars, will immediately join the board and be added to its audit committee. – **Yahoo** named *Alicin Reidy-Williamson* to the post of Chief Diversity & Culture Officer. Reidy-Williamson spent 13 years at **Viacom** and **MTV Networks**, launching the company's efforts in corporate responsibility, diversity and inclusion, and public affairs, while managing their growth. She most recently was Chief Inclusion Officer at talent and media agency firm **Endeavor**.

CABLEFAX DASHBOARD

Twitter Hits

Comcast @comcast

We are taking steps to power our Georgia operations with clean, renewable energy. It's all part of our goal to be carbon neutral by 2035: comca.st/3tvTXlv

We're going solar in Georgia

Comcast will subscribe to **13MW** of renewable energy for 10 years.

Covering nearly **20%** of Comcast Cable's operations in GA.

Equating to one year's worth of electricity for **3,600** homes.

ARDA Öcal @Arda

I might be the first ESPN host in VR! Definitely one of the first. I'm the @SportsCenter anchor in the ESPN Edge Virtual Innovation Center.

So freaking awesome. This is the coolest thing to me.

@ESPN | @ESPNPR

Sparklight @sparklightcares

Pictured: Storm damage in Goodman, Mississippi

Research

(Source: MediaRadar)

- Nearly \$53 million has been spent in “For Your Consideration” advertising to date, nearly a 7% increase in total spend for the 2022 Oscars season.
- Approximately \$45 million of that total has been spent on print advertising. Periodicals like The Hollywood Reporter, The Los Angeles Times and Variety are popular picks.
- The top five spenders for the 2022 season thus far make up 73% of total spend: AT&T, Amazon, MGM, Netflix and The Walt Disney Company.

Up Ahead

- APRIL 1:** [Cablefax Top Ops Nomination Deadline](#)
- APRIL 4-6:** [MIPTV](#); Cannes, France
- APRIL 23-27:** [NAB Show](#), Las Vegas
- APRIL 24-26:** [NTCA Legislative + Policy Conference](#); Washington, DC
- APRIL 28:** [Interactive Case Competition Meet the Judges Webinar](#)
- MAY 6:** [Free State Foundation 14th Annual Policy Conference](#); Washington, DC

Quotable

“[Former T-Mobile CEO John Legere] and I have been close for many years. I've been at this company as the #1 or #2 person for a decade now and I just have so much to thank him for, for the mentorship, for the partnership and friendship. For us, this was long thought out by our board and planned for, and that obviously is a great thing for our shareholders. You've seen in the two years since we made the transition and the new company was created, our stock is up 50%. We had the best year ever in our company's history in 2021, and that's to the credit of the tens of thousands of people in this company.”

– T-Mobile CEO Mike Sievert [appearing](#) on CNBC's “Mad Money” about the transition from the company's previous leadership team and the T-Mobile/Sprint combination