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WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

Multicast Mandate: Weigel's Story Television Joins the Diginet Parade

Monday marked the launch of **Story Television**—the latest broadcast multicast station on a very crowded block. **Weigel Broadcasting**, the company behind classic TV multicast channel **MeTV**, is using the channel for history-focused, unscripted fare. The lineup incorporates a wide range of topics and includes several old **History Channel** series such as “Modern Marvels” and “The Tesla Files.”

There are more than three dozen multicast networks today with wide distribution, including **Scripps' Bounce**, **Nexstar's Rewind TV**, **Tegna's True Crime Network** and **Gray's Circle**. As with many other multicast stations, much of Story's content can be found on free AVOD services, such as **Pluto TV**. So, what's the appeal of multicast?

“As much as the landscape is changing, there's still millions upon millions of viewers who want to turn on a TV and see a network,” *Donna D'Alessandro*, Weigel's EVP, Head of Content, told **CFX**. **Nielsen** numbers bear that out. For the month of February, MeTV was the second most-watched entertainment channel choice versus ad supported cable networks, excluding news networks and broadcast networks, for P2+ in Daytime 9am-6pm. First place went to fellow multicast network **Ion**, owned by Scripps.

D'Alessandro, a former **Discovery** and **BET Networks** exec, added that viewers want to be entertained and educated, but don't always know what titles to look for. “The difference is the

fact that we're still making this a place where people feel like they're learning and watching something and it's being curated to them. Whereas on AVOD, you're on your own. You're lucky if you stumble on it,” she said. “There's the long tail content, but hands down, you're not going to weed through thousands of titles to find something. You tend to go to the first one or two rails on AVOD versus digging in.”

Some broadcasters are exploring both multicast and the AVOD space. Take Scripps, which offers **Newsy** as a multicast over-the-air [OTA] channel and as an over-the-top offering. “The multicast universe is a very broad and robust ecosystem—free OTA and free AVOD work best in tandem with each other, and Scripps Networks aggressively pursues both. Our networks gain wide distribution from our owned-and-operated footprint, and we offer free AVOD brands as additive distribution to aggregate as many eyeballs as possible on all available platforms,” Scripps Chief Distribution Officer *Jeffrey Wolfe* told **CFX**.

Research from the **Consumer Technology Association** found 32% of homes in 2021 received free TV through antennas. Scripps projects OTA homes to jump from 39.9 million in 2021 to more than 53 million in 2025. Broadcasters are betting on NextGen TV (ATSC 3.0) making over-the-air even more tantalizing since it brings better video quality, on-demand capabilities and even the potential to place sports bets through TV remotes.

“One of the reasons we are kind of bullish on the future of OTA is that we've learned that most non-owners of antennas

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just are poorly educated on the landscape and how many channels you can receive, and the fact that there tend to be different channels than you can receive with cable or satellite,” said Scripps Chief Research Officer *Jon Marks*.

Horowitz Research found only one in five non-antenna owners believe antennas receive 20 or more channels, even though they typically do. When broadcasters made the switch from analog TV to digital broadcasting more than a decade ago, it meant a more efficient use of spectrum that allows a single station to two, three, even six additional stations. Antennas also help consumers with build-it-yourself bundles, pairing an SVOD with an antenna for a growing number of free broadcast channels.

Scripps is gearing up to launch a campaign for antenna adoption, focusing on free TV. It’s also forming partnerships with key retailers, antenna manufacturers, rooftop installers, TV hardware companies and others that will benefit from a growth in over-the-air TV, with CEO *Adam Symson* promising during the company’s 4Q21 earnings call more details over the coming months.

Of course, MVPDs also often carry multicast networks. **Comcast** and **Charter** are among the operators with plans to rollout Story in some markets over the next few weeks. Virtual MVPD **Frndly TV** announced a multi-year deal for five Weigel national TV networks—Story, **Start TV**, **MeTV**, **Heroes & Icons** (H&I) and **Decades**. Frndly becomes the first live streaming TV service to carry five Weigel networks.

As for new kid on the block Story, D’Alessandro believes it offers something different from the more than three dozen

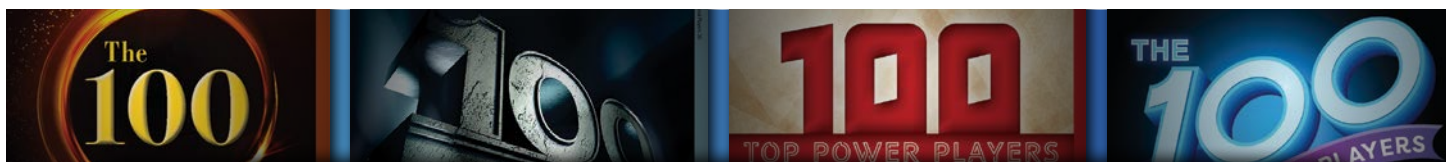
multicast nets out there today. “There’s a lot of people playing in the space, but not a lot of people doing factual. We saw that opportunity and we’re striking,” she said.

BIDEN’S BUDGET

President *Biden* released his proposed FY23 budget Monday, with even more money being allocated to broadband. Building on the \$2 billion for **USDA** broadband programs provided in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law passed last year, the budget provides \$600 million for the ReConnect program, which provides grants and loans to deploy broadband to unserved areas, especially tribal areas. The budget also provides \$25 million to help rural telecommunications cooperatives refinance their Rural Utilities Service debt and upgrade their broadband facilities. **America’s Public Television Stations** praised Biden’s recommendation of \$565 million in advance funding for public broadcasting, including a \$40 million increase in the federal investment for the **Corporation for Public Broadcasting**. Agencies have made their budget requests to Congress, with the **FCC** asking for \$526.4 million—about 2.7% more than 2022’s budget. Of that amount, it’s seeking \$390 million for activities offset by fee collection, up 4.3% from a year ago. It’s asking for \$132 million in budget authority for the spectrum auctions program, a decrease of \$2.26 million (1.7%) from 2022.

STARRY READY FOR NYSE DEBUT

Fixed wireless ISP **Starry** is expected to begin trading on the New York Stock Exchange tomorrow, with **Starry** and **SPAC FirstMark Horizon** expected to close their previously announced deal to take the entity public. The combined company will continue to operate as **Starry** and is expected to begin



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trading under the symbol “STRY.” The transaction implies a pro forma enterprise value of \$1.76 billion, with gross proceeds of \$176 million. As part of the transaction, *Rob Nabors*, Director of North America for the **Gates Foundation**, and *Elizabeth Graham*, COO of **Indigo**, will join Starry's existing board members. Board Chairman and CEO *Chet Kanojia* is slated to speak at **NewStreet Research's** investor conference tomorrow morning.

THE BIG OSCAR BANG

We know everyone is talking about that big moment during the **Oscars**. You know, when *Lady Gaga* and *Liza Minnelli* presented Best Picture together? Or that other big moment, when **Apple TV+** became the first streaming service to win Best Picture for “CODA.” Those were the major headlines of the night, right? Companies who bought ad time during Sunday's telecast on **ABC** are hoping they caught viewers' attention as well. **MediaRadar** said 38% of the commercials that aired during the Academy Awards were part of the Media & Entertainment category, up from 24% last year. Of those media and entertainment spots, 17% were commercials advertising TV shows like “The Kardashians” (**Hulu**). **CNN+** showcased its launch during the ceremony, while **Disney+**, **Discovery+** and **Peacock** also advertised their streaming services. MediaRadar found 14% of Oscars commercials were from major technology companies, including **Verizon** and **Spectrum Mobile**.

NETWORKS AND PROVIDERS MAKE FORBES LIST

Several networks as well as cable providers and vendors were named to **Forbes'** “America's Best Midsize Employers” list, with **Crown Castle** (31), **ESPN** (40), **Hawaiian Telcom** (42) and **Midcontinent Communications** (61) making the top 100. **AMC Networks** was placed No. 131 with **Hulu** following at No. 200 and **A+E Networks** at No. 461. **C Spire**, **Sparklight**, **RCN Telecom** and **Mediacom** checked in at Nos. 154, 212, 339 and 495, respectively. The full list—including an industry-specific search—can be viewed [here](#).

SEVEN STATES JOIN ROBOCALL INVESTIGATION

FCC Chairwoman *Jessica Rosenworcel* announced seven additional state and district Attorneys General are joining with the FCC in its battle against robocalls, bringing the total state-federal partnerships to 22. Connecticut, Idaho, Kentucky, Minnesota, New Jersey, Wyoming and Washington, D.C. are joining the list of partners collaborating to combat robocall scams. Rosenworcel said, “The FCC and these state leaders share a common enemy: robocall scammers targeting consumers and businesses around the country.”

COMCAST BUSINESS GETS A NEW GATEWAY

Comcast Business unveiled the Comcast Business Gateway, the company's first WiFi-6 certified device that can give multi-gigabit speeds. The gateway is designed to reduce WiFi interference and increase bandwidth. Features include higher capacity and faster speeds with 2.4 GHz and 5 GHz bands, reduced lag time, eight-hour battery backup and more.

AT&T, WARNERMEDIA UNVEIL LEARNING PLATFORM

AT&T and **WarnerMedia** launched **The Achievery**, a free

digital learning platform that features clips from popular movies and TV shows to help lessons be more engaging for K-12 students. Shows and movies include “Wonder Woman,” “Aquaman” and “Craig of the Creek.” The project is part of the AT&T Connected Learning Initiative, the company's three-year commitment to address the digital divide.

RATINGS

The U.S.-Mexico men's soccer match on **TUDN** March 24 averaged 3 million viewers P2+, making it the No. 1 rated soccer match in 2022 on any network across all demographics. It was the highest-rated match since June 2021, which was another U.S.-Mexico match.

PROGRAMMING

CBS News and the **Weather Channel** are collaborating to bring enhanced weather and climate reporting to CBS News viewers. The partnership brings the Weather Channel's Immersive Mixed Reality technology that gives the audience a virtual look into weather conditions across America. Reports from the Weather Channel will also be featured on CBS News' morning and evening newscasts and will have regular reports available on the CBS News Streaming Network. – As Financial Literacy Month kicks off in April, **CNBC's** “Invest in You: Ready. Set. Grow.” is raising awareness on financial education with its programming. On April 5, CNBC will publish results from a survey focused on how inflation is impacting Americans each day. Throughout the month, CNBC will give lessons to better understand money. Additionally, CNBC will host multiple virtual events on April 6, April 7 and April 21.

CARRIAGE

TelevisaUnivision's upcoming global streaming service **ViX** will be available on **Roku**. ViX launches March 31 and will be available on the Roku platform in the U.S. and Latin America.

TELEMUNDO AWARDS SCHOLARSHIPS

The College Board and **Telemundo** awarded over 40 students with college scholarships as part of their “Triunfadores” campaign to help Spanish-speaking families through the college planning process. The program awards scholarships based on students' actions before college and doesn't require an essay, application, standardized test score or minimum GPA. Students also had to complete any or all of key college planning steps through BigFuture. All winners qualified for College Board's fee-wavers or reported an annual family income of less than \$60,000, and scholarship amounts ranged from \$500 to \$40,000.

PEOPLE

AMC Networks promoted *Sylvia George* from SVP of Performance Marketing to EVP of Performance Marketing, and added *Brian Swarth* as SVP of Subscriber Engagement and Product Marketing. George was the GM of UMC (now **ALLBLK**) from 2018-20 and was President of U.S. Distribution for **RLJ Entertainment** prior to that, also making a stop at **Acorn Media**. Swarth was recently the Head of Podcast Marketing for **Audacy's** podcast division and spent over a decade with **Showtime** and **MTV**.