

Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

Early Innings: Ripley Not Feeling Pressure on DTC Subscriber Targets

Sinclair is soon soft launching **Bally Sports+**, its RSN-centric direct-to-consumer product, and CEO **Chris Ripley** is more than confident that he and his team will be able to achieve its subscriber targets without drastically overhauling its programming strategy.

During an appearance at the **MoffettNathanson** Media & Communications Summit, he said that the service will maximize its profitability by using the same content that's available on the RSNs right now (the games) and packaging them in a new way. Approaching the streaming landscape in that way, without huge programming costs, takes a lot of pressure off from the subscriber number.

"I often get asked about **CNN+**. Well, CNN+ was going out and trying to create an entirely different service," Ripley said. "We're taking the core of what are existing services and making it available to another core group of people, and that's a fundamentally different proposition and it's focused on profitability."

At launch, the service will be available for \$19.99/month or \$189.99/year. As for which plan Sinclair expects customers to gravitate to, Ripley was tight-lipped. He said the team's projections assume a healthy mix of subscribers across both plans.

"We certainly aren't assuming everyone is going annual or monthly. We've priced the service in a way where there's a significant discount to go on the annual," Ripley said. "But even on the monthly, you're paying less than \$1 a game. It

really is a very significant value."

There's long been chatter about what will happen to the sports ecosystem if digital players like **Amazon** and **Apple** start having a significant presence in the arena. Now it's happening, with Amazon having exclusive rights to "Thursday Night Football" and Apple offering weekly doubleheader "Friday Night Baseball." Thus far, Ripley doesn't see the new entrants as having driven up the price of sports rights or making Sinclair's negotiations with teams and leagues more challenging.

"There are significant barriers to entry, not the least of which is that in order to effectively compete, you really do need to have both a linear pay-TV product and a direct-to-consumer product. So when they come in and just offer DTC, they really can't compete directly with us, nor have they," Ripley said. "We're in a relatively uncompetitive environment today where we've renewed every team that's come up on favorable terms. That may not continue forever, but I actually think I look forward to the day when the big streamers are really ready to jump in with two feet because I think that will open up opportunities for [us]."

Liberty Broadband President/CEO **Greg Maffei** during his conference appearance fought back against the major storyline around live sports that sports rights have risen to near-astronomical levels. While it is true that distributors are handing over more and more dollars to the leagues for the rights to that programming, he believes you shouldn't single out sports as the only content area that's becoming more



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expensive to play in.

“People look at sports programming and say it’s very expensive. You could argue that point. As you’ve seen, the cost per hour on the scripted side... you’ve seen the other side go up so much that maybe these increases don’t seem as irrational,” he said. “And they still are the place with a big aggregated audience which have to be there in real time.”

He added that he doesn’t believe streaming services will be able to compete in the direct-to-consumer ecosystem long-term if their entertainment content spend continues to skyrocket by the billions. When asked whether that suggests that there is eventually going to be some resiliency in the traditional linear TV model, Maffei had a quick response: “That train has left the station.”

CARR CRIES FOUL AT NTIA’S BEAD RULES

FCC Commissioner *Brendan Carr* has no shortage of complaints with **NTIA**’s recently-released rules for the \$42 billion BEAD program. Top of the list is the program’s preferential treatment to fiber projects. “Indeed, we have a range of next-gen technologies that can offer robust, affordable, high-speed Internet services—from 5G to fixed wireless to a new generation of LEO satellites—that can reach unconnected families virtually overnight,” he said in a statement released Thursday. “But the **Commerce Department**’s rules will prevent states from funding projects that could quickly bridge the digital divide using those high-speed technologies in nearly all cases—putting too much of a thumb on the scale for fiber builds that provide robust service but can take years to build out in certain cases.” Other concerns include that the rules

laid out by NTIA, while not directly talking about rate regulation, will take the industry down that path. Additionally, he doesn’t understand why NTIA is classifying some areas as unserved when there are already ISPs that have won subsidy dollars to deliver high-speed broadband to those locations. For the BEAD program, any location that is served exclusively by satellite, services using entirely unlicensed spectrum or a technology not specified by the FCC for purposes of the upcoming broadband data maps will be considered unserved, having not met NTIA’s criteria for a reliable broadband service. “That makes no sense given that there are too many parts of the country that still have no Internet service at all,” Carr said.

FRONTIER PLANS TO EXCEED FIBER TARGET

Frontier plans to eclipse its goal of 1 million fiber locations in 2022 by an additional 100,000-200,000 locations, according to CFO *Scott Beasley*. Speaking at an investor conference Wednesday, Beasley said the company has \$4 billion of liquidity which allows it to ramp up building with cash on hand for approximately the next two years. Additionally, the company created the **Gigaboard Advisory Council**, a group of executives that’ll meet on a quarterly basis to discuss what the future of connectivity looks like. Members include **I&CO** Founding Partner *Rei Inamoto*, **Cultique** Co-Founders *Linda Ong* and *Sarah Unger*, **Genius/Steals** Co-Founder *Faris Yakob*, **Kreatr** CSO *Joel Lunenfeld*, **Fruitful** CEO *Josh McManus* and **Headspace Health** Director of DEI *Cornell Verdeja-Woodson*.

FCC EYES A-CAM REFORM

The **FCC** is seeking comment on a proposal to give additional universal service support to rural carriers in exchange for increasing



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What's the big deal with WiFi 6E?

By Bill McFarland

WiFi 6 and WiFi 6E require more management than WiFi 5, not less. Plume® Chief Technology Officer Bill McFarland explains why and what Communications Service Providers (CSP) can do to achieve the full potential of this new technology.

While WiFi 6 initially took some time to roll out, WiFi 6E has the potential to grow rapidly and be a game-changer for CSPs and their customers—especially as they incorporate more bandwidth-hungry devices into their smart homes.

WiFi 6E is a checkpoint along the path of WiFi 6—one that has the power to transform smart home connectivity. Put simply, it's WiFi 6 with the added capability of a 6 GHz frequency.

What does that 6 GHz frequency get you? Reduced network interference, better power efficiency, and support for more devices. It's no surprise, then, that WiFi 6E is already being used to manufacture new chips, devices, and applications with the promise of improved internet access and performance. In fact, of the 5.2 billion WiFi 6 products projected to ship by 2025, over 40% are expected to support WiFi 6E.

The catch is that WiFi 6E requires advanced network management—more so than WiFi 6 and certainly more than WiFi 5. Because without the right tools and setup, the WiFi 6E experience won't just fall flat. It will go completely awry, which will frustrate consumers and cause a huge headache for CSPs.

The good news is that there is a solution: a massively scalable, cloud-based platform that uses AI to adapt and update across devices in real-time. Technically speaking, this will allow CSPs to properly manage processes like topology and steering, which are crucial to deploying WiFi 6E.

Our latest whitepaper, [Maximizing WiFi 6E: How to embrace the 6 GHz spectrum—and the future—now](#), offers CSPs more actionable insights into implementing and managing WiFi 6E. Learn more about how Plume can help you leverage the ultra-wide 6 GHz spectrum and provide:

- An intelligent, cloud-based consumer experience platform that enables faster, flawless connectivity and the delivery of the latest smart services to your subscribers.
- Access to OpenSync™, which enables the deployment of new technology and services faster, using existing hardware.
- Optimized network performance management with its adaptive, AI-powered SaaS experience platform.



About Bill McFarland:

Bill McFarland is the CTO of Plume. He leads projects in data science, optimization, standards, intellectual property, and regulatory matters. Previously VP of Technology at Qualcomm, and the CTO of Atheros Communications, Bill holds over 80 patents and has authored over 35 technical papers. He received a Bachelor's Degree in Electrical Engineering from Stanford University and a Master's Degree in Electrical Engineering from the University of California. Bill was elected fellow of the IEEE in 2014.

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deployment to more locations with faster speeds. The proposal would make a number of shifts to the Alternative Connect America Cost Model program in hopes that 100/20 Mbps broadband would come to more rural areas served by those rural carriers faster. The agency is also seeking comment on how it could use the new broadband data maps to determine new deployment obligations and if there are ways it could better administer the high-cost program and protect the Universal Service Fund.

NEW TRACKS FOR CABLE-TEC EXPO

SCTE saw an unprecedented amount of papers submitted for the annual Fall Technical Forum at the Cable-Tec Expo 2022. The SCTE Cable-Tec Expo 2022 Program Committee selected 130 papers for presentation, sorted into nearly 60 sessions across 13 tracks. This year, three new tracks were added: Artificial intelligence and machine learning, developmental operations and agile and software development, automation and tooling. Registration for the Expo opens June 22, and the event will take place in Philadelphia from September 19-22.

VIAMEDIA DEVELOPS NEW AD PLATFORM

Viamedia launched the Parity ADS Platform, which enables MVPDs to regionalize streaming distribution by inserting targeted ads on linear streams. The platform uses a transitional approach to maximize live streams for IP-delivered distribution by inserting regionally targeted ads on linear streams to match the local ads running on cable TV systems. The platform also accelerates time-to-market and reduces technological risks that come with transitioning linear into digital streams.

NETFLIX MAKES ACCESSIBILITY ENHANCEMENTS

Netflix is celebrating Global Accessibility Awareness Day by expanding language availability of audio descriptions and subtitles for the deaf and hard of hearing. Starting this month and into 2023, these features will be more available across Netflix's catalog and in more languages, including Spanish, Portuguese, Korean and French.

FUBO SPORTS GET RUGBY RIGHTS

Fubo Sports Network acquired the exclusive rights to stream all major **Premier Rugby Sevens** tournaments in 2022. Fans in the U.S. and Canada can stream each tournament live for free on smart TVs or as part of **fuboTV**'s subscription packages. Details on international viewing will be unveiled in the coming weeks.

ROKU RELEASES OUTDOOR TV

Roku introduced the Outdoor Element Roku TV, a TV designed with weather-resistant metal and an operating temperature range from minus 4 to 104 F to handle all weather conditions. Its tempered-safety glass screen is 2.5x brighter than standard 4K TVs and packs an anti-glare feature. Outdoor Element is available on [Walmart.com](https://www.walmart.com) for \$1,299.99.

RATINGS

Game 1 of the Eastern Conference Finals between the Miami Heat and Boston Celtics on **ESPN** averaged 6.07 million viewers and peaked at 6.91 million, up 13% compared to last year according to **Nielsen**. The broadcast was the most-watched Eastern Conference Finals opening game since 2018.

PLUTO TV ARRIVES IN THE NORDICS

Pluto TV, Paramount Global's AVOD streamer, launched in Sweden, Denmark and Norway Wednesday. The programming lineup in the Nordic countries includes more than 70 locally curated channels. Pluto TV was launched in the countries in partnership with **Nordic Entertainment Group** and in combination with local AVOD service **Viafree**. Viafree will now be phased out as a standalone service. This launch also marks the first time Pluto TV will offer live sports internationally. **Belator MMA** will have a dedicated channel streaming all 2022 fights exclusively in the Nordics starting on June 24.

PROGRAMMING

HGTV's "Fixer to Fabulous" has been renewed for a new 16-episode season. The previous season garnered over 31 million viewers. – **Starz** is in development of "Lovesong," a drama following two Mexican American friends living in London, and is also working on an untitled romantic drama produced by *Ava DuVernay*. – **UP Faith and Family**'s "Mystic" will premiere Thursday with three episodes and one per week afterward, and "Hudson & Rex" will follow the same release format starting July 28. – "Digital Addiction," a docuseries highlighting the dependency on digital products and its mental health effects, premieres June 13 at 10pm on **A&E**. – **HBO** renewed comedy series "Barry" for a fourth season. Production will begin in June. – **Warner Bros. Discovery** is giving **Discovery Familia** a brand refresh and is expanding Hispanic content for upcoming programming. Shows include "Supervivencia al Desnudo Latinoamérica," the Latin American iteration of "Naked and Afraid" presented by **Discovery en Español**, "Remodelaciones con Celebridades" (Celebrity IOU) and "Vestido de Quinceañera" (Say Yes to the Dress Quinceañera). – **MTV Entertainment Studios** revealed a slate of more than 90 greenlights and renewals across **Paramount Media Networks** and **Paramount+** including **MTV, Comedy Central, VH1, CMT, Smithsonian Channel** and **Paramount Network** at the Paramount upfront Wednesday. Those new shows include Paramount's "George & Tammy," a chronicle of country music icons *George Jones* and *Tammy Wynette*, MTV's latest "Shore" franchise, "Buckhead Shore" (confused Atlantans are wondering where the lake is...) and **VH1**'s "Unfaithful: Caught in The Act," which goes after cheating partners.

PEOPLE

Andrew Schneider joined **Genvid Technologies** as CMO of the company and President of the Entertainment division. He'll lead the entertainment and technology divisions' marketing efforts. Schneider joins from **Fox Bet** and **PokerStars USA** and previously served as SVP of Marketing for **Disney Streaming Services**.

AWARDS

The WICT Network is on the hunt for its 2022 Women of the Year and Women to Watch, who will be recognized at its Oct. 10 Touchstones Luncheon in NYC during **Diversity Week**. The deadline for [nominations](#) is July 15.

PROGRAMMER'S PAGE

Scripps Makes the Spelling Bee F-R-E-E

It's not just **Disney** and **NBCUniversal** pulling back their IP for their own platforms. **Scripps** is taking back the iconic Scripps National Spelling Bee that has aired on **ESPN** for 27 years. The semifinals will air live-to-tape on its free, over-the-air networks **ION** and **Bounce** from 8-10pm ET on June 1. The finals, hosted by *LeVar Burton*, are live on the nets June 2 from 8-10pm. But Scripps is getting us pumped up with a "Road to the Bee" special Thursday, May 26 at 8pm on the two nets. It goes behind-the-scenes with 10 of this year's regional competitors. Media clients treated to Scripps' virtual upfront presentation this month got plenty of Bee buzz as the programmer is playing up the nearly 100-year-old competition's move to ION and Bounce, with Scripps expecting a larger audience now that its off pay TV. Did we mention Bee rhymes with free? That doesn't hurt, with Scripps gearing up to launch a nationwide campaign on digital antenna adoption and free TV. This is a major talking point for Scripps, evidenced by its upfront sizzle reel using *The Soup Dragon's* "I'm Free" as the musical accompaniment. "We believe it's so important to get the word out about digital antennas and the efficacy of them, we're going to spend \$20 million off our own air in marketing to teach consumers about the advantages of the antenna, such as the number of channels that can be received, the technology advancements, the minimal costs and the breadth of programming," Scripps Chief Revenue Officer *Michael Teicher* told **CFX**. You can get a sense of the campaign, which is set to launch this summer, by visiting TheFreeTVProject.org. "What we realized is there's just no single advocate out there for free-over-the-air, and we want to be that advocate," said Chief Research Officer *Jon Marks*. "For a minimal investment of say \$25 for an antenna, there's no monthly fee and there's dozens of channels you can receive." As for next week's Road to the Bee special, it lays out the drama of preparing for the Bee. It also features a visit with last year's champ, *Zaila Avant-garde*, who is a basketball prodigy in addition to being the first African American student to win the contest. **Newsy** will encore the special multiple times on May 29, June 3 and June 5. – *Amy Maclean*

REVIEWS

"Conversations With Friends," 12, **Hulu**. In television and many other things, nothing succeeds like success. So, what was Hulu to do after the raging success of its adaptation of "Normal People," the *Sally Rooney* coming-of-age novel about a pair of teens in Ireland who fall in love despite being badly matched (she's a rich nerd, he's a working-class rugby player)? Easy, you adapt Rooney's first novel, which also features unlikely lovers. And you keep the same creative team behind the camera, including director *Lenny Abrahamson*. And like *Normal*, you cast an unknown as a lead. Here that's *Alison Oliver*, in her first professional role. Spoiler alert, she's quite good. On its own, "Conversations" has its moments, particularly if you're not pressed for time. Still, if you're not in a hurry, you could do worse than watch *Oliver* portray a bookish young woman. – "George Carlin's American Dream," premiere, 2-part documentary, streaming from Friday, **HBO Max**. OK, sure, you can wonder what irreverent comedian *George Carlin* would think of a 2-part doc about him. Our guess is he'd like anything that perpetuates his relevance, including this excellent work from *Judd Apatow* and *Michael Bonfiglio*. Indeed, much of the humor in part one, especially its opening footage, seems pulled from today's headlines. It's that fresh. Amazing. – *Seth Arenstein*

BASIC CABLE		
P2+ PRIME RANKINGS*		
(05/09/22-05/15/22)		
MON-SUN	MC	MC
	US	US AA
	AA%	(000)
TNT	0.924	2879
FNC	0.705	2195
ESPN	0.627	1954
TBSC	0.315	982
MSNBC	0.304	947
HGTV	0.298	927
HALL	0.238	740
INSP	0.233	727
TLC	0.230	718
HIST	0.222	691
DISC	0.215	670
FOOD	0.211	657
CNN	0.191	593
TVLAND	0.169	527
ID	0.164	509
USA	0.161	502
LIFE	0.146	455
A&E	0.139	433
WETV	0.129	403
BRAVO	0.128	399
HMM	0.126	393
FX	0.125	389
AMC	0.122	380
GSN	0.115	358
ESPN2	0.106	332
TRAVEL	0.105	328
SYFY	0.103	320
NAN	0.102	319
NATGEO	0.097	302
OXY	0.093	290
TUDN	0.093	289
APL	0.091	284
PRMNT	0.083	259
FXX	0.083	257
NICK	0.082	256

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



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