

# Cablefax Daily™

WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

## Party of Two: Evoca Nabs Sling Partnership, Eyes RSN Growth

**Evoca**, the ATSC 3.0-powered MVPD service, is partnering with **Sling TV** to allow its customers to add Sling Blue, Sling Orange or both to their subscriptions. Customers that take advantage of the bundle will receive a \$5 discount. Evoca subscribers that add either Sling package will receive service for \$55/month plus the receiver while those that subscribe to both Sling packages will be billed \$70/month plus the receiver.

While Evoca has struck some of its own carriage deals with programmers, CEO **Todd Achilles** told **CFX** that it made sense to team up with **DISH's** vMVPD offering because it would bring additional programming choices to subscribers. Sling's lineup includes networks such as **CNN, ESPN, HGTV, Disney Channel, AMC** and **A&E**.

"Our focus is on local content and regional sports. That's the part of the bundle that the big boys are exiting now as they drop RSNs and everything else. So we're leading there, but nobody does the national channels better than Sling," he said. "All of this is just about choice and flexibility, of which there is none in the pay TV space. You get a bundle of channels and it's so difficult to carve off what you don't want and focus on what you do."

DISH and Sling no longer offer any RSNs on their lineups, with Sling dropping the **NBC Sports** nets as well as **MASN** last spring. In July 2019, Sling and DISH dropped what are now known as the **Bally Sports** RSNs.

The Sling and Evoca integration has been incredibly simple because Evoca is an MVPD service powered by ATSC 3.0, and everything it does is in the IP domain. Sling operates in the IP domain as well, and Achilles said that commonality made it much easier to create a great user experience from the start of the integration.

"We've got the Sling app up and running on our device. It's a single bill for Evoca subscribers. And what we'll do is... for example, if you sign up for Sling Orange, we'll pull those Sling Orange channels into the channel guide so they will sit there next to our channels," he said. "If the subscriber wants to include the local channels they can receive with their antenna, those are also part of the guide. So we just really aggregate everything together and it's super clean."

The door remains open for Evoca to do similar partnerships with other vMVPDs or video services. Achilles added that Evoca's Android TV third-generation set-top box does offer consumers access to an app store where they can access other streaming services.

Evoca has had a strong 2022 thus far, announcing launches in both Denver and Traverse City, Michigan. It's also available in Boise and Twin Falls, Idaho, Phoenix and Colorado Springs. Achilles said he expects more to come in the second half of the year, particularly as small regional broadcasters seek something different they can offer to compete with their larger competitors. It wants to scale as quickly as it can, but it is also choosing its next markets carefully.

## NEWSMAX #1 Median Household Income!



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- 91% Own Home

Source: Nielsen Media Research, NPower time period report, 1Q 2022, M-F 9a-4p

“We’re selecting markets where our content lineup, particularly our local and regional content lineup, is the strongest,” he said. “We’ll continue to focus on those markets where RSNs have poor distribution and they need some help.”

Speaking of RSNs, Evoca still hasn’t been able to strike a deal with **Bally Sports** to distribute **Bally Sports Arizona**. The network is the home of the Arizona Diamondbacks, the Phoenix Suns and the Arizona Coyotes, and Evoca has been fighting to get carriage of the network since it launched in Phoenix in October. There’s no promise of a deal on the horizon, but Achilles remains hopeful.

“They’ve been more willing to have conversations with us now than they have in the past,” he said. “Phoenix is a really expensive broadband market with little competition. The only viable way to reach those homes is us... We can bring back a lot of subscribers they’ve lost and expand to these whole new segments that were cord-nevers.”

But Evoca isn’t sitting around and waiting for the Bally’s deal. Instead, it has been fielding calls directly from sports teams that are fed up with the traditional RSN model, the lack of existing reach and the economics of those deals.

“It’s a slow process, but I think we’ll probably see more direct team deals here for us if not in the back half of this year, than certainly in 2023,” Achilles said. “That’s super exciting because you just use all of the value of broadcast in terms of its massive reach and then with [ATSC 3.0], the ability to monetize both behind the paywall or keep games free or mix and match... there’s just so many more tools available for teams to be able to reach their fans and be right in the middle of it.”

### LUMEN NAVIGATING QUANTUM BUILDOUT

As **Lumen** works toward its goal of 12 million locations for its Quantum Fiber service, CFO *Chris Stansbury* noted at Wednesday’s J.P. Morgan Global Technology, Media and Communication Conference that the next couple of years need to be delicately managed. The company will hit 1 million this year before ramping up the pace of new builds to as high as 2 million per each following year. “Once we get the permitting approvals, we can get to that 1 million enablements this year, which we will,” Stansbury said. “So that’s going to be very backend loaded just given the nature of the funnel. But really by the time we exit this year, we’re going to be in great shape for 2023 just in terms of the permitting process and having that funnel full.” Stansbury added Quantum is on its way to the 40% penetration target, saying the biggest challenge is getting the enablement to scale.

### NFL MOVING TOWARD STREAMING SERVICE

The **NFL** is moving forward with its own streaming service for live games on mobile phones and tablets, according to the [Sports Business Journal](#). The report says the **NFL Plus** ser-

## The WHO and the WHY

CFX’s spotlight on recent new hires & promotions



**MICHAEL  
Schneider**  
COO AND GM  
BALLY SPORTS+

### 3 THINGS TO KNOW

- Michael was appointed to the newly created role of COO and GM of Bally Sports+, Diamond Sports Group’s direct-to-consumer sports offering, effective today. In this position, he’ll oversee the platform that encompasses Bally Sports programming from across the country, including its RSNs.
- Throughout his career, Michael has enjoyed building things from the ground up. He’s passionate about team building and collaboration when it comes to fostering a successful business. He was on the crew that founded PlayStation Vue and later played a role in launching Hulu+Live TV. He’ll get that opportunity again with Bally Sports+. “There is something really challenging, but exhilarating about launching a service from scratch,” he told CFX. “The sweat and tears that goes into a launch is totally all paid off once you see all the fruits of your labor go live in the world.”
- Outside of work, you might find Michael being the DJ at a friend’s wedding or party. He has international aspirations for his DJ career, but points to his usual 10pm bedtime as a roadblock for that goal. However, that gives him time to train for another bucket list item: get a one-day contract to try out for the New York Rangers. He’s also a proud owner of English bulldogs for the last eight years.

vice is expected to launch in July and will come with games and possibly radio, podcasts and other team-created content. Game broadcasts will be limited to what viewers can see in their local TV markets. The service would replace the live games previously available via mobile carriers and **Yahoo**. NFL Plus will start at \$5/month, but a source told the pub that the pricing structure may change. SBJ noted that if **Apple** or **Amazon** buy an equity stake in NFL Media Properties, NFL Plus could be shifted into their respective package.

### CHARTER SEEING GIGABIT COMPETITION

**Charter** CFO *Jessica Fischer* told attendees at an investor conference Wednesday that the MVPD is seeing increased competition in markets where other operators are offering gigabit service. Charter reported record low churn in 1Q22, and in areas where another gigabit product is available, she said gross additions and churn are trending down. But she’s hesitant to call the slowdown in growth in those markets a

purely competition-fueled problem. “Because we tend to be a sharetaker, movement in our markets is what generates net adds for us and there was just extraordinarily low movement in our markets and there continues to be,” Fischer said. She added that low household growth rates are impacting the opportunities Charter and other operators are seeing in the marketplace, and those growth rates are impacted by larger economic factors like supply chain disruptions.

#### COMCAST EVALUATES RUSSIAN OFFERINGS

When Russia invaded Ukraine in late February, **Comcast** quickly suspended carriage of all of its Russian channels to evaluate Russian government ownership/influence. It has gradually been returning some of those channels to its lineup, and it's also made the decision to make the removal of some of the networks permanent. Comcast notified customers that the subscription-only Russian language channels **Channel One Russia**, **RTR Planeta**, and **Rossiya 24**, which have been suspended for months, will no longer be available through Xfinity and will be permanently removed from all Russian language packages on June 14. Comcast has not charged customers for programming not received.

#### CABLE PIONEERS REVEALS 2022 CLASS

The **Cable TV Pioneers** are set to welcome 21 new members to its ranks as part of its 2022 class. This year's honorees includes **Inspiration Network's** Dale Ardizzone; **Allen Media Group's** Janice Arouh; **Advance Newhouse's** Nomi Bergman; **Charter's** John Bickham; **HBO's** (retired) Shelly Brindle; **Brown Wolf Consulting's** Ralph Brown; **Comcast Cable's** Bill Connors, Joseph Guariglia and Richard Rioboli; **C-SPAN's** Matthew Deprey; **Dycom Industries' John Dowd**; **Cox's** Jeffrey Finklestein; **Midcontinent Media's** Joe Floyd; **NCTI's** Camilla Formica; **Comcast's** Charlie Herrin; **Viamedia's** Randy Lykes; **Wegner Communications' Ned Mountain**; **Comcast Technology Solutions' Allison Olien**; **Greyfox Services' John Piazza**; **TV One's** Michelle Rice and **Radiant Communications' Theresa Sauerwein**. The organization's 56th annual induction ceremony will be held Sept. 19 in Philadelphia, one night prior to the start of **SCTE's** Cable-Tec Expo.

#### STARLINK GOES MOBILE

**Starlink** launched a plan for RVs Tuesday, but the plan comes with a number of caveats. **SpaceX's** satellite broadband service said the offering is ideal for customers travelling to locations where connection is unreliable to completely unavailable. But the service is not designed to be used while a vehicle is in motion and customers will experience notably lower speeds during hours of peak usage in areas marked as “Waitlist” or during events where there are many collocated users. The hardware for Starlink for RVs is available for \$599/month and the monthly plan costs \$135/month.

#### WARNER BROS. DISCOVERY UPS AD GAME

**Warner Bros. Discovery** is launching Click-to-Contact and Viewer's Choice, two new streaming advertising products created with connected TV technology company **BrightLine**. The two products will be available on **discovery+** in 4Q22 and offered to clients in the 2022-23 upfront season. Click-to-Contact enables

CTV ad-lite viewers to click on an ad and receive an email from discovery+ on behalf of the advertiser, making it easier to learn about brands and make purchases. Viewer's Choice offers consumers the option to choose their path at the beginning of an ad.

#### NEXSTAR GROWS IN DMV

**Nexstar** is expanding local news operations in the Washington D.C., Maryland and northern Virginia area. The company plans to bring **WDVM-TV** and **WDCW-TV** together at one location in D.C. under the name **DC News Now**. Both TV stations will broadcast from a new newsroom and studio currently under construction. Three satellite bureaus will be established in Hagerstown and Frederick, Maryland, and Chantilly, Virginia.

#### STARZ PUSHES CONGRESS ON REPRESENTATION

**Starz** is calling for lawmakers in D.C. to establish September as National Leading Entertainment and Arts through Diversity (LEAD) Month. U.S. Reps. Yvette Clarke (D-NY), Hakeem Jeffries (D-NY), Nanette Barragán (D-CA), Judy Chu (D-CA) and Grace Meng (D-NY) introduced the resolution, which underscores the need for more representation of women and underrepresented groups in entertainment.

#### AWARDS

The winners of the 43rd Annual Sports Emmy Awards were unveiled with **ESPN** leading network groups with 11 winners. The categories the sports network won include the Outstanding Live Series for “Monday Night Football with Peyton & Eli” on **ESPN2** and **ESPN+** as well as Outstanding Documentary Series for “Man in the Arena” on **ESPN+** and Outstanding Journalism for E60's “Alive: The Drew Robinson Story.” **CBS Sports**, **NBC Sports** and **NFL Network** garnered six winners across its groups, followed by **Turner Sports' five** and **Fox Sports' three**.

#### PROGRAMMING

**Telemundo Deportes** will broadcast the Indianapolis 500 on Sunday, beginning at 11am on Universo, [TelemundoDeportes.com](https://www.telemundodeportes.com) and the Telemundo Deportes app. This marks the first time that the Indy 500 will broadcast on a domestic Spanish-language network.

#### PEOPLE

**Xperi** named Paul Davis as CEO of **Adeia**, the intellectual property business of Xperi. He'll move into the role once it's separated into a standalone company this fall. Until then, Davis will be President of Adeia and continue as Chief Legal Officer of Xperi. – **Allen Media Group** hired Matthew Lipson as EVP of Marketing for Digital Platforms and Content. In this role, he'll oversee marketing strategies, creative development, social media, paid media and optimization for AMG's digital TV networks, motion pictures, content and streaming platforms. Lipson was recently EVP, Marketing and Digital at **101 Studios** and **Sports Illustrated Studios**. – **TDS** appointed Dr. John N. Greene Jr. as VP of Enterprise Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. He'll report to SVP of HR Daniel J. DeWitt. Dr. Greene will be responsible for the TDS and OneNeck IT Solutions DE&I program and work with TDS business units to coordinate DE&I activities.

## Think about that for a minute...

### Situational Awareness

Commentary by Steve Effros

I live in a very small town in Virginia on the outskirts of Washington DC. It's on the national historic trust because it was a pre-civil war railroad town. The railroad still goes through town. I live in the Station Master's house, built in 1890, right by the tracks. Yes, the trains blow their whistles going through one of the only remaining grade crossings in Northern Virginia. Yes, they come through in the middle of the night. No, we don't notice the sound. So long, that is, that it's the right sound.

You see, there's a railroad rule that says trains have to blow "two longs, a short and a long" when they come toward a grade crossing. So long as they do that, we're so accustomed to the sound it doesn't register any more. But if some engineer isn't following the rules, and hangs on the whistle, everyone notices, no matter what time of day or night. That engineer is not situationally aware of what he's doing and he'll hear about it when complaints arrive on his boss's phone.

Recently they did something that just reminded me of how bad a corporate reputation can be ruined by employees not being situationally aware. As I said, my town has a Main Street that goes across the tracks. It's also a principal route for traffic from this part of Fairfax County heading for DC. Two weeks ago the railroad, in the process of maintaining the tracks, tore up the crossing to lay down a new roadbed. The only problem: they didn't let anyone know they were going to do it! The Town Council wasn't informed, the police didn't know, the Fire Department (the station is on the south side of the tracks) couldn't get to houses on the north side of the tracks! And the school bus routes? Disaster. The railroad folks just closed Main Street for the day, starting just before rush hour, no prior notice, and put up "detour" signs sending thousands of cars through back country roads to a traffic light at another major artery which only let about five cars through at a time! It was chaos.

Why do I tell you all this? Because it's obvious that just a little "situational awareness" could have avoided a major mess and a major black eye for a company that needs to maintain

good local and customer relationships. It was totally unnecessary. A little forethought, a little early planning, a little notice would have gone a long way toward keeping both the peace and goodwill.

I see this around me all the time. A lack of consideration, a lack of situational awareness. You've seen it too; the folks who stop to greet their friends right at the bottom of the escalator at the airport coming off a flight. The driver who decides to leave three car lengths between his car and the one in front of him in the turning lane, thus blocking most of the cars behind him from being able to get in the lane.

I'm sure everyone has examples and experiences of people and companies just simply not being situationally aware. A classic in cable around here was the decision, many years ago, of the local company to do system repairs at midnight on a Sunday. They were situationally unaware that a local NFL game was running long and went past midnight. They shut down the system! That went over real well.

I tell you all this because all of our employees should be asked about their experiences with situationally unaware and inconsiderate actions that they have noticed... especially those that could be easily avoided or remedied without any significant effort. Then ask them all to protect our companies and fellow workers by staying, and keeping management, situationally aware.



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.)*

## Nominate for The Diversity List.

Help Cablefax recognize the top multi-ethnic executives based on their influence and power within the industry plus nominate for Cablefax's inaugural Pride List, honoring top LGBTQ+ execs who are making their mark on the industry.

Other nomination categories include D&I Mentor of the Year, Public Affairs Campaign and Thrivers Under 30, the industry's rising stars under 30.

**Deadline:** Friday, June 3 to submit three entries for free. [www.CablefaxDiversity.com](http://www.CablefaxDiversity.com)

