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WHAT THE INDUSTRY READS FIRST

Digital Dive: C-SPAN's Piccorossi on Taking the Non-Profit into the Future

As the cable and media industries evolve, **C-SPAN** is trying to stay ahead of the game. The non-profit founded in 1979 as a television network that broadcast political events in their entirety is now looking to cement and enlarge its presence across digital platforms. That's where *Michael Piccorossi* steps in as C-SPAN's first Chief Digital Officer, bringing in two decades' worth of experience in online media.

Piccorossi spent over 12 years at **Pew Research Center** as Managing Director, Digital Product and Strategy, and before that was with *U.S. News & World Report* for almost 10 years as Director, Online Operations. He said Pew and C-SPAN are two organizations that share a lot of similarities like their commitment to presenting unfiltered and unbiased information to their audiences. However, just as when he originally arrived at Pew in 2009, there's work to be done for C-SPAN to further develop its digital presence.

The role was recently created to help steer the company's digital strategy and improve the overall user experience with C-SPAN's digital products. Although it's only Piccorossi's eighth day on the job, his calendar has been filled with team meet-and-greets across the organization to get a strong feel for the editorial process and the ways the company's digital products can be strengthened.

Currently, C-SPAN holds its longstanding TV presence

alongside multiple digital efforts. It has podcasts that cover topics from books, movies and of course the political events in Washington, D.C. C-SPAN Radio—which launched in 1997—still has regularly scheduled programs throughout the week, and the mobile app C-SPAN Now is nearing the one-year anniversary since its release. But for Piccorossi, it's the new directions that the organization can go that intrigue him, building on what's already at C-SPAN and spearheading it into new avenues.

"In addition to the stuff that's really Washington, D.C.-focused, I'm still really trying to get my mind around the full archive of their book franchise, as well as the stuff they have on the presidency and the Supreme Court," Piccorossi told **CFX**. "I'm just excited by the opportunity to help create some new things here, and I'm getting a lot of great vibes from the folks here that they're really interested in and committed to thinking about some things in new ways."

While Piccorossi said it's still too early for him to make any concrete decisions, he hopes to identify small things that can be tweaked that wouldn't lead to drastic repercussions. That includes making C-SPAN's 277,000+ hours of video content more visible upon search. Any potential big changes to C-SPAN's content and its structure will come once he's more ingrained in his position.

"There's been so much focus [on television], understandably. We're a TV network and I don't think that there's ever been anyone's had the mandate or the bandwidth to really give

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the digital presence as much as much care and feeding as it requires,” Piccorossi said.

The potential C-SPAN possesses lies in its already strong base. According to a [survey](#) from 2021, an estimated 85 million of U.S. adults accessed C-SPAN content across all platforms within a six-month period that included the final three months of 2020. Piccorossi said supporting the employees who are already working on C-SPAN’s digital ventures will help grow its core audience via email newsletters and social media. Further optimizing its website to be more user-friendly will also help it expand its reach, but that takes time—something that Piccorossi looks forward to as he embarks on his endeavor with C-SPAN.

“I want to ensure that C-SPAN is reaching the broadest audience via search and social as well as email,” Piccorossi said. “I think we can be an important part of people’s news ecosystem. I think people are going to get news from a lot of sources, and I think we can be one of them. I think that our voice is important.”

NO MORE BEIN ON COX

Cox is dropping **beIN Sports** at 11:59pm ET tonight. “We don’t make these decisions lightly, but after a thorough review we’ve decided to no longer carry this channel. We are proud to offer several other channels and streaming apps with similar content to our customers,” a spokesperson said. Cox began informing customers earlier this summer of the channel drop. **Comcast** removed the soccer-focused beIN Sports channels from its lineups in 2018 and they remain off today. The programmer filed an unsuccessful carriage complaint against Comcast at the **FCC**. beIN’s networks are available across several other MVPDs, including **Charter**, **DISH** and **YouTube TV**. beIN didn’t return requests for comment.

IT’S SHOWTIME FOR PARAMOUNT+

Today marked the debut of the new **Paramount+** bundle with **Showtime** with both services now being housed within the Paramount+ app. For a limited time, subscribers can get the Essential Plan for \$7.99/month or the ad-free Premium Plan for \$12.99/month. After Oct. 2, the prices increase to \$11.99 and \$14.99, respectively. In addition to no commercials, the premium plan offers an extended roster of sports and live streams of local affiliates in over 200 markets across the U.S. Showtime will continue to be available separately as a standalone service for \$10.99/month.

LOUISIANA GIVEN FIRST BEAD PLANNING GRANTS

Louisiana is the first state to receive planning and digital grants from **NTIA**’s \$42.45 billion BEAD program. It was awarded \$2.94 million from the Biden Administration Wednesday. Approximately \$2 million of those dollars will be dedi-

The WHO and the WHY

CFX’s spotlight on recent new hires & promotions



ROB

Shema

DIRECTOR - GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS & BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

ALTAFIBER

3 THINGS TO KNOW

- Rob will join the Cincinnati-based telecommunications provider in September after serving as CEO of Com Net and Independents Fiber Network. Before that, he was at ACA Connects for 16 years, where he was EVP of Member Services & Finance/Chief of Staff. As he enters his new role at altafiber, his goals include building stronger relationships with trade associations and other groups and identifying and developing partnerships to advance the company’s strategic growth.
- Rob spent nine years at Comcast Corporation and eventually became the company’s first paralegal. He told Cablefax he joined ACA Connects at a time of growth and expansion, something that goes hand-in-hand with his passion for rural broadband and ensuring all people have access to the internet.
- He describes himself as “a little bit of a foodie” and enjoys golfing as well. However, he might be spending more time planning a trip to Alabama. Once he visits the Cotton State he’ll have been in all 50 states in the U.S.

cated to infrastructure deployment and adoption programs, including the identification of unserved and underserved locations and training for employees of the state’s broadband program. It will also be used to conduct surveys of unserved, underserved and underrepresented communities to understand barriers of adoption and to support local coordination, including capacity building at the local and regional levels. The remaining \$941,542.28 will be devoted to digital equity efforts, including the development of a statewide digital equity plan, the hiring of a digital equity and inclusion specialist and to establish partnerships with a consortium of higher education institutions.

GAME OVER FOR ARONS AT G4

Deadline’s [reporting](#) that *Russell Arons* left her post as president of the recently revived **G4 TV** in July, with the exact circumstances around her departure unclear. G4 didn’t return requests for comment. Arons was named head of the G4’s linear, OTT and streaming channels last September. She previously served as GM of **Machinima** and has spent time at **Electronic Arts** and **Mattel**. *Deadline* reports that *Joe Marsh*, a **Comcast Spectacor** vet and CEO of esports venture **T1**, is assuming many of Arons’ former duties.

FCC MAKES IT RAIN FOR RDOF

The **FCC** is ready to authorize nearly \$800 million in Rural Digital Opportunity Fund to six providers for deployments covering an estimated 350,000 locations in 19 states. The broadband providers are **AMG Technology Investment Group, GeoLinks, Connect Everyone, Gigabeam Networks, Safelink Internet** and **Shentel**. The top three states receiving funding include Illinois, \$212 million, Arizona, \$140 million, and Iowa, \$113 million. To date, the program has provided more than \$6 billion in broadband deployment to 47 states.

AIKMAN, BUCK ADJUST TO NEW CHAPTER AT ESPN

Fans are going to see different faces headlining the **ESPN** Monday Night Football crew, but it's going to be unusual for the broadcasters themselves as well. *Joe Buck* and *Troy Aikman* joined the network after 20 years at **Fox**, where the two worked closely with the production teams to build a solid rapport over the years. For the two to achieve the same familiarity at ESPN, it takes time and communication. "I feel like we're good listeners and adjusters in the booth," Buck said during a call with reporters Wednesday. "We'll make it work. It's not going to be perfect in Week 1, but we'll be chewing on whatever isn't ... It'll get better every week just because of that communication." When going back to early 2022 when ESPN was still sorting what it wanted with its MNF crew, Head of Event & Studio Production *Stephanie Druley* noted the network had the duo high up its wishlist following the 2021-22 NFL season. That led to Aikman making the switch as his deal with Fox expired, with Buck following suit. Their official MNF debut is Sept. 12 between the Denver Broncos and Seattle Seahawks.

ROUGH CUTS FOR BREEZELINE

Two separate fiber cuts impacted **Breezeline** Tuesday, proving that sometimes a backup plan isn't enough. The first was due to a construction accident that cut the operator's primary facilities outside of Fredericksburg, Virginia. Customers weren't impacted as a redundant fiber path was available, Breezeline tweeted. But then the back-up fiber suffered a separate cut around 3:55pm that was caused by a truck accident in Sudlersville, Maryland. Customers in Delaware, Maryland and Virginia experienced an outage. Most were back up by 9pm, with the remaining 1,098 restored by 11pm, according to Breezeline's social media posts.

EX GOLF CHANNEL HEAD LAUNCHES NEW VENTURE

Longtime **NBC Sports** exec *Mike McCarley* has teamed up with pro golfers *Tiger Woods* and *Rory McIlroy* to form **TMRW Sports**, a company focused on "building technology-focused ventures that feature progressive approaches to sports, media, and entertainment." McCarley spent more than 20 years at NBC, serving as **NBC Sports'** president, golf, and global strategy from 2011-2021. Former NBC Sports Chairman *Dick Ebersol* is an initial investor, with more investor and early projects to be announced soon.

CARRIAGE

Vizio added four free **Scripps** channels to its **WatchFree+** service. **ION** features popular dramas such as "Law & Order SVU" and "Chicago Fire," while **ION Mystery** contains investigative programming. **Bounce XL** focuses on Black viewers with original content, dramas and more, and **Grit Xtra** carries Western movies and series.

FIBER FRENZY

Ritter Communications began construction of the new RightFiber WiFi Park in Newport, Arkansas, where residents will be able to visit and access free high-speed wireless internet for personal use. The park is being funded by the Newport Economic Development Commission in conjunction with the Southwest Planning and Development District and Arkansas Economic Development Commission. Once complete, the park will have 41 regular parking spots and four handicap spaces for residents to use while visiting. – **Surf Internet** completed the three-phase construction project to bring its fiber-optic internet service to Bourbon, Indiana.

PROGRAMMING

HGTV renewed "Lil Jon Wants to Do What?'" for an eight-episode sophomore season set to debut on the network and stream on discovery+ in spring 2023. The show attracted 12.7 million total viewers in Season 1. – **Smithsonian Channel** will premiere "Picturing the Obamas" on Sept. 19. The two-hour documentary examines the history and legacy of Barack and Michelle Obama as told through their National Portrait Gallery portraits. – Adult animated series "Harley Quinn" got the greenlight for a fourth season on **HBO Max**. Season 3's finale premieres Sept. 15. – "NFL Slimetime," the **Nickelodeon**-themed weekly NFL show, is returning for a second season Sept. 14 at 7pm. Shows will air Wednesdays through Feb. 15, and episodes will be available to stream on **Paramount+** the following day. – **ESPN+** will stream more than 500 college football games this fall starting Thursday with Eastern Illinois vs. Northern Illinois. The OTT service will have 14 SEC games—one for each school—over the course of the season and also feature teams from the Big 12, ACC and others. – Season 3 of **Bravo's** "The Real Housewives of Salt Lake City" premieres Sept. 28 at 9pm.

WICT UNVEILS BETSY MAGNESS CLASSES

The WICT Network named the two cohorts for the 2022-23 Betsy Magness Leadership Institute. The program features women in senior leadership positions across media, technology or entertainment and trains them on communication effectiveness, organizational influence driving change and results and more. Members of Class 46 include **Comcast** Executive Director, Product & Growth Insights **Reshma Bennur**, **Charter** VP, Market Expansion **Lisa Hailstone** and **Altice USA** SVP, Product & Technology **Rachel Ownes**. Class 47 includes **Warner Bros. Discovery** VP, Technology Solutions **Lisa Craig**, **Hallmark Media** VP, Ad Sales Research **Laura Heller** and **ESPN** Senior Director, Programming & Acquisitions **Stephanie Holmes**. A full list of participants can be found [here](#).

Think about that for a minute...

Compensation

Commentary by Steve Effros

In last week's column I started the tee-up for a series of columns I intend to launch after Labor Day suggesting that we take a serious re-look at what, why and how the structure of video distribution is changing, or maybe in the long run isn't changing that much. I decided to delay delving into the meat of the topic until folks were done with the end of summer activities and might want to really engage in contemplating reactions to this stuff.

The first tee-up was just to start talking about the difficulty of dealing with these telecommunications issues when the language we are using is really either not explanatory any more or is downright misleading because the industry has moved on, or actually has had to move on from where the terms originated. It's easy to see, as I noted last week, that the notion of "noncommercial" or "public" television, for instance, is simply out of date. Call it what you will, PBS now has commercials. The major one being an almost incessant din asking for compensation for its own programming.

As I noted, that's fine. They deserve the money they're getting from us, but then again, so is HBO, or Netflix or... well, you get the idea. It got me thinking about the concept of "compensation" and how that term has been used in our business, and it occurred to me that many of you may not know some of the history. So this is just a little history lesson to once again get us in the mood to re-think the whole current video distribution structure; where it came from and where it may be going.

In the television business, the original usage of the term compensation came from the perceived necessity of the newly formed television networks to get their programming distributed in as many television markets as possible. You see, when the allocations for television broadcast licenses were first distributed, back in the 1920's, there was obviously very little programming and even less organization although the National Broadcasting Company - NBC- was created in 1926, broadcasting then was primarily via radio. The first live television broadcast was in 1951. But since there were

limits on how many stations one company could hold, the new networks, as they developed, had to figure out how to get other license holders, usually in smaller markets, to carry their programming and the advertising that went along with it. That's where "compensation" comes in. The networks paid the local stations to carry their programming and some ads. The local station got both money and a certain amount of time in each program to sell its own local ads. The plan worked well. But compensation went from the network to the local station. Today, that whole flow is reversed.

How did that happen? Well, the television stations had a great deal so long as they could lock everyone else out of the "local" market. They were the only ones who could sell local TV ads. But then cable came along, it brought in "distant" signals and new programming competition. That programming, once it got a foothold with viewers, started taking some of the ad dollars away from the local stations.

Their answer: get Congress to require that cable companies pay for the right to provide local antenna service! So much for "free TV!" But the result, called "retransmission consent" put billions of dollars back in the "television" ecosystem. Now the networks were the ones who had the negotiating power, since folks were used to watching network programming. The money flow reversed. The local stations (from their retrans purse) had to pay the networks to continue to be the station in the local market carrying that favored network programming! The process was reversed in cable, but we'll get to that later.



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.)

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